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Alexander the Great and the Rise of Christianity

An Honor's Paper for the Department of the Classics

By Stephen M. Girard

Bowdoin College, 2021

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Introduction:

The connection between Alexander the Great and Jesus Christ may not be immediately apparent to the reader. One figure was born a Greek king who, in a shockingly minimal amount of time, blazed a trail of fire from Macedon to India, carving out an empire for himself and his army with his talent in the art of war and politics. The other was a wandering preacher from the poor town of Nazareth, who, through his lessons, prophecies, and claimed miracles, would one day be hailed as the savior of mankind, the establisher of a kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom not on this earth. Where is one to find similarity? Superficial similarities, of course, can immediately be drawn out between the two figures. One can be found in the fact that they were both incredibly influential individuals on the world stage, whose lives impacted countless generations to come far after their own deaths. A second similarity could come with the fact that they were both hailed as great kings; surely different types of kings, but kings nonetheless. A third might be stated in their lives inspiring countless stories, artwork, and other monuments of culture. These are, perhaps, the characteristics of any great historical figure; the true connection between Alexander and Jesus Christ goes much deeper, and revolves around the ideas of the philosophic unification of man, divine sonship, and semi-divine nature. This project will endeavour to show that Alexander influenced the figure of Jesus Christ and the religion of Christianity through an array of historical, cultural, and mythical influences.

I first began to investigate the topic of Alexander the Great's connection with Christ and Christianity when studying the process of Hellenization, the transmission and blending of Greek cultural ideas with local traditions that occurred following the reign of Alexander the Great. It occurred to me, in these studies, that the regions which gave birth to Christianity, one of the largest and most influential religions in the world, were also the regions in which Alexander

made his grand campaigns, fighting against the Persian emperor Darius and winning his great victories. I began to ask myself: how would Alexander's legendary and unprecedented conquest have influenced the areas which encountered him? How would the people who lived in these places remember him? How would their cultures have changed under Hellenistic rule? I wondered if Alexander spread with him Greek ideas that found their way into the Bible, even into the teachings of Christ himself.

This inclination prompted an investigation of Greek influence on the New Testament. I asked myself: if this influence were present, where would it be found? I soon arrived at a figure named Philo Judaeus, a Jewish scholar who wrote from Alexandria, in whom I found a Jewish theological writer who showed clear familiarity with the writings of classical philosophers and their ideas. Through an analysis of Philo, I believed I would be able to find Grecian origins in at least some of the teachings of the New Testament. I also wished to find the source of this influence, both the beginnings of Alexandrian Judaism and how Alexandrian Judaism was related to Christianity. This led me to Ory Amitay's book *From Alexander to Jesus*. *From Alexander to Jesus* presents Amitay's argument that the figure and myth of Alexander played an important role in crafting the mythical conceptions of Jesus Christ. This was an interesting concept in my investigation that I had not yet considered. He labored in his work to demonstrate Alexander's connection with his mythical ancestor Herakles, and Alexander's pursuit of self-divinization. This self-divinization, he concluded, allowed the world to be more familiar with the concept of a demi-god king, which helped pave the way for the messianic Jesus Christ. Amitay's book serves as the inspiration for much of the first chapter of this text, as well as a source which pointed me in many different directions to explore in my understanding of the influence of Alexander the Great.

This led me to analyze the Old Testament prophecies of which Alexander was said to be present in, those in the Book of Daniel. As a classics student who was familiar with Alexander the Great, it came to me as a great surprise that Alexander was featured in these apocalyptic prophecies. As I investigated further, I found that there were stories of Alexander the Great coming to Jerusalem and reading these prophecies, an account recorded in Josephus Flavius' histories. As I read them myself, they appeared almost too accurate to be true—they exactly depicted the events of the fall of the Persian empire at Alexander's hand, which should tip-off any historian that retroactive writing may have occurred. I saw in these prophecies that Alexander was deeply related in Jewish thought to the beginning of the end times, which sparked in my mind a memory of a Quran verse which featured a figure named Dulcarnain, which my professor had said was the name in Islam for Alexander the Great. I wondered: what is the role that Alexander plays in these religious texts? Where did these stories come from? Why did people view Alexander in this way? It was here that I found the fabled story of the Alexandrian Gates, which in turn led me to the *Greek Alexander Romance*.

The *Greek Alexander Romance* is a charming collection of stories about Alexander that serves a critical part of the background of this project. It presented to me a resource from which I could find what stories of Alexander persisted throughout history, stories passed down from one person to another and finding their way into a single text. The *Romance* also provided a way for me to see the way Alexander's actual military exploits were remembered culturally, as well as what grand actions were attributed to him that he may or may not have actually performed. It was here that I found the recurring theme of Alexander's relationship with the one God and divine Providence, which made me question whether later monotheistic religions like Christianity and Islam influenced these stories through their own perception of Alexander. If so,

why would these religions wish to claim Alexander for their own? Why was it important that Alexander was perceived as having a connection to God?

Alexander's reception by the early Christian thinkers was my next area of study for this paper, a subject in which I was greatly aided by Christian Djurslev's *Alexander the Great in the Early Christian Tradition: Classical Reception and Patristic Literature*. This text focused primarily on Alexander's presence in the writings of early Christian thinkers, and the role that classical education played in the formation of the philosophies of the great apologists, or defenders, of early Christianity. It was here that I again encountered the importance of the city of Alexandria as a center for religious and philosophical thought, this time for the Christians as well as the Jews. The study of Alexandria would be a critical component to the understanding of Hellenistic influence on early Christianity.

The structure of this project roughly fits these general areas of study in the relationship between Alexander the Great and early Christianity. The first chapter "Portraits of Alexander," focuses primarily upon the vast array of perceptions that many nations, cultures, and traditions formed of king Alexander of Macedon, and how these "portraits" could have impacted "mythical" conceptions of Jesus Christ. The word "mythical" is used here in relation to Jesus to refer to his religious conception in Christianity and is not meant to denote any lack of truth about the identity that he is ascribed in the Bible. Myths are central to cultural understandings of peoples, places, and events—and their truth, many times, goes beyond the facts of history. This chapter shows concepts of the Alexandrian myth that have carried over into the Christian myth, namely, the ideas of cosmopolitanism, divine sonship, and self-divinization. These ideas will be shown through an analysis of writings about Alexander compared with the writings on Jesus present in the New Testament to show a clear similarity and potential influence.

The second chapter of this project, "Alexander and the Jews," describes the role of Alexander and his myth in the culture and traditions of the Jewish people. It investigates the accounts of Josephus Flavius which describe his visit to Jerusalem, as well as the origins of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel in which he is featured. This section goes into depth on the important place Alexander has in the prophecies of Daniel as a harbinger of the apocalypse, and a precursor to the Messiah, or the savior of mankind. It will be shown how this idea of the end times and the savior were deeply connected to the suffering dealt by the hand of one of the descendants of Alexander's successors, Antiochus IV, king of the Seleucid empire, and the Maccabean revolt which occurred as a result of his rule. The purpose of this chapter is to show how Alexander both prophetically and politically set the stage for a messianic expectation to form amongst the Jewish people, an expectation that would be fulfilled, for some, by Jesus Christ.

The third chapter of this text, "Alexander the Great and Early Christianity," explores the impact of Alexander's life on the life of Christ himself and the thinkers of early Christianity. It discusses how the campaigns of Alexander in the regions of Galilee and greater Jerusalem led to a great provincial instability which laid the groundwork for recurring Jewish revolutionaries to appear, of whom Jesus would be associated with at the time of his trial before Roman officials. It also discusses the importance of Alexandrian Judaism in relation to Christianity as a critical point of blending between Greek and Jewish culture, which resulted in several prolific works of the time period like the Septuagint. This chapter goes into depth on a particular example of Alexandrian Jewish influence on the New Testament itself in an analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews looked at in relation to the philosophical works of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria. Lastly, this chapter shows the presence of Alexander in the writings of early Christians and the place he

possessed in their religious conception of the world. Through a study of these three areas, this project will show Alexander the Great's remarkable impact on the religion of Christianity and its founder, Jesus Christ, as a perceived precursor to Christian ideals, as a possessor of the status as a "Son of God," and as a fundamental component in the spread of Greek culture and ideas.

Chapter One: Portraits of Alexander

Who was Alexander? To this question, in the Socratic fashion, a question must be asked in response: Which Alexander? There are many Alexanders to understand: the Alexander of Islam, the Alexander of Judaism, the Alexander of the Persian tradition, the Alexander of the Hebrew tradition, the Alexander of Medieval Europe—each Alexander is different, though they share similar characteristics, and they all have lessons to teach a person who is willing to understand them. The questioner may implore us again: but who was the *real* Alexander? The “real” Alexander might just be impossible to attain; alas, we can never truly know the man who, at the age of thirty-three, conquered the known world, spreading an empire farther than any eye could see. Such a figure was destined to find himself in the countless stories, myths, and legends of the people who encountered him, and in the thoughts of those who passed down these stories from generation to generation until they became a deeply rooted aspect of their culture. We have histories of Alexander, of course, that provide us with accounts of his military and political exploits; but of equal, if not more importance for understanding his impact on the world are the many “portraits” of Alexander that were created through myth and legend. These portraits of Alexander are crucial to understanding the Macedonian king’s influence on the many different cultures that observed him on his blinding rise to unprecedented power in the ancient world, and the image he imparted on them.

In order to understand the relationship between Alexander, Jesus, and the rise of early Christianity, one must first understand the nature of the many cultural perspectives of Alexander the Great by the nations and people who encountered him. Following this, it must be directly examined how Alexander’s life and myth were interpreted by the Jewish populations who lived under his rule in the regions which would one day spawn Christ and Christianity. Through an

understanding of the myth of Alexander and the legends about him that were spread all across the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world, it will be shown how, in many ways, the figure and myth of Alexander the Great was a prototype for the figure of and myth of Jesus Christ that would rise in the centuries following Alexander's death. The characteristics that would define this myth are primarily his cosmopolitanism, his divine sonship, and his semi-divine status he achieved amongst those who observed him by the end of his life.

A General History:

In order to understand the relationship between Alexander, Jesus, and the rise of early Christianity, one must first ground oneself in an understanding of the historical Alexander, however elusive he may be. One of our best sources on the political and military history of Alexander is *The Anabasis of Alexander* by Arrian, which recounts Alexander's campaigns through Asia Minor and into India. Though Arrian writes his work during the second century AD, he has been held by historians as one of the most reliable sources on Alexander's career due to his attempts to incorporate only the most authoritative sources on Alexander's life into his work, and to avoid fictionalizing the life of the Macedonian king.¹ This means that for military records he primarily cites the writings of Aristobulus, a military engineer in Alexander's army, and Ptolemy, one of Alexander's commanders, while frequently cross-referencing and comparing their accounts with those of other sources.² Arrian takes a positive view of Alexander and his virtues but does not hesitate to criticize some of his faults with the intent to "provide an object-lesson of general use to the public" so that people might learn from his life.³ We are left

¹ Atkinson, 2013, xiii.

² Atkinson, 2013, xxx.

³ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.30.3.

with a text that is able to provide primary source accounts of the life of Alexander the Great that are not overly fictionalized and mythical, and thus, allows us to lay the foundation of our historical understanding of Alexander.

According to Arrian, Alexander III of Macedon, who would later be known as “the Great,” ascended to the throne of Macedon after the death of his father king Philip in 336 BC when he was twenty years old.⁴ After reasserting the Macedonian dominance his father had established over the other kingdoms of Greece during his reign, in 334 BC Alexander marched to the Hellespont and began his legendary campaign against king Darius of Persia. Alexander won three major victories against the Persian king at Granicus (334 BC), Issus (333 BC), and Gaugamela (331 BC), with the result of this final battle leading to the total capitulation of the Persian empire and Alexander’s crowning as the “Lord of Asia.” Outnumbered in all three of these battles, Alexander won a reputation as a shrewd general and an inspiring leader.⁵ After a brutal campaign in India and the temporary mutiny of his Macedonian soldiers, who wanted to go home after campaigning for almost a decade, in 323 BC Alexander died at age thirty-three of unknown causes.⁶ Arrian describes Alexander before his death as a handsome young man, “possessed of exceptional endurance and energy,” who had an intuitive understanding of military tactics and the burdens of leadership, and who was “scrupulous [in] religious observance.”⁷ He characterizes him as “supremely bold” in direct confrontation but also exceedingly cunning at seizing preemptive opportunities for gain, understanding exactly what a circumstance called for—and for this reason as well as from the many stories of Alexander’s intuition pulling him to follow oracles and other natural signs, Arrian states he believes Alexander was born with “divine

⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I.1.1.

⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I.13.1, II.7.1, III.8.7.

⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.28.1-2.

⁷ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.28.1-2.

agency.”⁸ Regardless of his potential divine guidance, Arrian declares that during Alexander’s time, “there was no nation on earth, no city, no individual unfamiliar with the name of Alexander,” and that even in Arrian’s time, second century A.D., he was given “more than human honour and remembrance in which men hold him.”⁹ The nature of this remembrance, both in Alexander’s time and to this day, is the subject of this chapter.

The Unifier of Mankind:

Scholars such as W.W. Tarn have labeled Alexander as “the pioneer of one of the supreme revolutions in the world’s outlook, the first man known to us who contemplated the brotherhood of man or the unity of mankind,” a philosopher-king whose purpose in beginning his great conquest was forging a cosmopolitan world.¹⁰ This opinion is not new to modernity; Plutarch, in his declamatory oration *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*, extolls Alexander’s virtues as a philosopher-king.¹¹

At first glance, this may seem like a strange claim to make; Alexander was a *warrior* king who wrote no great treatises or books, and who was not prone to idle behavior, nor the leisure of a philosophical life. Plutarch, in his declamatory work *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*, argues on behalf of these criticisms, stating that “of course it is obvious that Alexander wrote nothing on the subject of either syllogisms or axioms, nor did he have the opportunity of sharing the walks in the Lyceum, or of discussion propositions in the Academy,” but that these are not the things which make a man a philosopher.¹² He brings attention to the

⁸ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.30.2.

⁹ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.30.2.

¹⁰ Amitay, 2010, 15.

¹¹ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*.

¹² Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328A.

fact that neither Pythagoras, nor Socrates, nor Arcesilaüs, nor Carneades, wrote anything down, and they were “all most notable among philosophers.”¹³ No, Plutarch implores us, their claim to the title of “true philosopher” comes “from what they said, or from the manner of life which they led, or from the principles which they taught,” and judging by these criteria, Alexander “was indeed a philosopher.”¹⁴

In this declamation, Plutarch argues further that Alexander was more of a philosopher than some of the greatest philosophers of the past because of his effectual implementation of philosophical ideas on a cosmopolitan scale. He looks first at the success of the teachings of Plato and Socrates, who he states, “did not win over many,” but the few that they did were oft to speak justly and truly, and behave in a manner that befit their teaching. Alexander’s students, on the other hand, Plutarch claims, were the “savage nations,” and the “lawless and ignorant tribes” of the barbarian world.¹⁵ Where Socrates’ students were Critias and Alcibiades and Cleitophon, Alexander’s students were the Hyrcanians, who he taught “to respect the marriage bond,” the Arachosians “to till the soil,” and the Sogdians “to support their parents, not to kill them,” and all the many others he brought under his jurisdiction during his reign.¹⁶ For these reasons, Plutarch explains, Alexander was a great philosopher because he was a great civilizing force on the world; and “although few of us read Plato’s *Laws*, yet hundreds of thousands have made use of Alexander’s laws, and continue to use them.”¹⁷ “If,” Plutarch concludes, “philosophers take the greatest pride in civilizing and rendering adaptable the intractable and untutored elements in human character, and if Alexander has been shown to have changed the savage natures of

¹³ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328 A.

¹⁴ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328 B.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328 A-B.

¹⁶ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328 C-D.

¹⁷ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328 E.

countless tribes, it is with good reason that he should be regarded as a very great philosopher”; in short, Alexander’s ability to unify the world culturally as a cosmopolitan presence made him a great teacher of philosophy.¹⁸

Plutarch’s perspective on Alexander as a philosopher-king whose aim was to bring “civilization” to non-Greek cultures through conquest is as xenophobic as it is, most likely, untrue. A letter from Alexander to Darius in the winter of 333-332 BC that Arrian records shows Alexander’s motivations for war with Persia; as listed, they were, primarily, revenge for the Persian Wars against Greece of the past, anger over Persian support for Macedonian enemies, and justice for Philip’s assassination by conspirators sent by Darius.¹⁹ It is nowhere mentioned that Alexander, as an agent of the “wondrous power of Philosophic Instruction,” wished to teach the Persians “to revere their mothers and not to take them in wedlock” as Plutarch describes; but before we dismiss the entirety of Plutarch’s depiction of Alexander in the *Moralia*, it is important to note that regardless of whether these claims about him being a philosopher-king were true, it seems likely that educated people, either close contemporaries with Christ or those living in the centuries before his birth, could have held this belief to be true, or at least could have held Alexander in this respect mythically.²⁰

Another important stylization of Alexander in Plutarch’s declamation is that of him as a believer in a cosmopolitan government. Plutarch explains how the concept of a unified world government had been introduced theoretically in past writings, namely the *Republic* by Zeno, “the founder of the stoic sect,” but had never been truly realized.²¹ His teaching was “that all the inhabitants of this world of ours should not live differentiated by their respective rules of justice

¹⁸ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 329 A.

¹⁹ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II.14.4-6.

²⁰ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 328 C-D.

²¹ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 329 B.

into separate cities and communities, but that we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity, and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all, even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field.”²² Though Zeno wrote down this idea, Plutarch continues, Alexander gave effect to it by bringing “together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup, as it were, men’s lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life.”²³

We find some evidence in support of this description of Alexander by Plutarch in Arrian as well as other sources on Alexander’s life. At Susa, Alexander was said to have married “some eighty daughters of the most distinguished Persian and Median families” to his Companions, while he himself married king Darius’ eldest daughter Barsine, as well as Parysatis, another Persian, following the Persian custom of marrying many wives, most likely with hopes of forming comradeship and stability between his Macedonian followers and his Persian subjects.²⁴ He is reported by Arrian, as wearing Persian dress, arming and teaching Persians to fight in the Macedonian fashion, and introducing Persian cavalry into the “ranks of the Companions.”²⁵ His soldiers even complain to him that he has made the Persians his kinsmen.²⁶ This most compelling example of Alexander’s potential belief in a unity of mankind comes following the mutiny of his soldiers at Opis, who are angry at Alexander’s growing affinity for the eastern customs. In response to this, Alexander holds a feast at Opis with Macedonians, Persians, and “after them men of other nationalities who were distinguished by rank or claim to precedence” with ceremonies performed in both Persian and Greek fashion, with Alexander stating in his prayer

²² Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 329 B.

²³ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 329 C-D.

²⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.4.4-6.

²⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.8.2.

²⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.11.6.

that “chief among their blessings should be a unity of purpose between Macedonians and Persians and a partnership in empire.”²⁷ This meeting and celebration of the many different nationalities, peoples, and cultures of Alexander shows his desire to form a kinship between all of his subjects under his rule. It is entirely possible that this desire was stemming from both a practical and philosophical position; that Alexander at once recognized the need for political stability in his newly acquired empire, but also truly desired a melding of the greater aspects of Greek and Persian culture. Hugh Liebert argues that the “Alexander of globalization,” or the cosmopolitan Alexander, was a “humanist willing to transcend his own boundaries of nation and cult,” who was “eager to effect a similar transformation in the spirits of his subjects.”²⁸ The stories of Alexander’s efforts to transcend these boundaries certainly speak to this theory. Liebert takes this argument further, claiming that Alexander can be looked at as “the founder of globalization.”²⁹ Though W.W. Tarn’s belief that Alexander was the first to contemplate a universal brotherhood of mankind may not necessarily be true, it seems in all likelihood his reign as king, in establishing an empire of unprecedented magnitude and treating his multi-cultural and multi-racial subjects as relative equals, established a firm and influential model of this concept to all those who interacted with him, through both personal encounters with him as well as tales of his legendary exploits.³⁰

The last area of relevance in Plutarch’s *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander* for our study of Alexander exists in his statement that Alexander believed he was “a heaven-sent governor to all,” an agent of God’s (or the gods’) will on earth.³¹ Many legends have Alexander

²⁷ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 7.11.8-9.

²⁸ Liebert, 2011, 535.

²⁹ Liebert, 2011, 536.

³⁰ Amitay, 2010, 15.

³¹ Plutarch, *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander*, 329 C.

stating things of this nature. In one such legend, a man named Dandamis, leader of the naked philosophers, asks Alexander why he makes so many wars, if he is only a mortal. Alexander responds that “it is ordained by Providence above. . .that we shall all be slaves and servants of the divine will. The sea does not move unless the wind blows it, and the trees do not tremble unless the breeze disturbs them; and likewise man does nothing except by motions of divine Providence.”³² In another tale, he claims that Providence has urged his victory over the Persians, without whose “goodwill” he would not have succeeded.³³ In our more reliable sources, such as Arrian’s history, it is also reported that Alexander “attributed his birth to a god,” namely Ammon, and was vocal in doing so.³⁴ After this remark, however, Arrian immediately adds that these statements could have been “nothing more than a political device to elevate his status in the minds of his subjects,” an argument that is perhaps obvious to the more cynical reader of Alexander’s life.³⁵ Though it is difficult to assess Alexander’s own beliefs on his role in the world, when looking at Alexander’s emphasis on the constant practice of rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies during times of great stress and war, it seems possible that Alexander was a deeply religious man, or that he was skilled in associating the divine with himself; either way, he accomplished feats that no known figure of the past had ever performed, and he was eager to make others know that divine Providence was on his side and acting through him.

Though this area of Alexander’s life bears less influential significance to Jesus in that it was already established in Jewish culture and many others that a prophet was, by nature, sent by Providence and God, Alexander’s adoption of religious beliefs is of vital importance to the creation of the mythical figure that he became. These religious beliefs and practices, as well as

³² *Alexander Romance*, 133.

³³ *Alexander Romance*, 110.

³⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 7.29.3.

³⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 7.29.3.

Alexander's remarkable success as a military leader and king, led to Alexander's perception by others as a potential divinity; an aspect of his myth critical in relation to the myth of Jesus, which begins with his ancestral connection to the legendary Greek hero Herakles.

Alexander and Herakles:

Understanding the connection between Alexander and Herakles, as well as their relationship to divine sonship and semi-divinity, is critical to understanding the connection between Alexander and Jesus. As Arrian informs us, Alexander, as a member of the Macedonian royalty, claimed direct descendancy from Herakles, the greatest hero of Greece and the fabled demi-god son of Zeus.³⁶ The ancestral line of the Macedonian king would be as follows: Philip, his father, whose father was Amyntas, another king of Macedon, whose father was Arrhidaios, whose father was Amyntas, whose father was Alexander, a Argonian Greek, whose father was Amyntas, whose father was Alketes, whose father was Aeropos, whose father was Phillipos, whose father was Argaios, whose father was Perdikkas, who was descended from Temenos, whose father was Aristomachos, whose father was Kleadates, who was the son of the Heraclidae Hyllos, whose father was Herakles, the son of Zeus.³⁷ Alexander, through his connection with Herakles and the great deeds he performed during his life, would eventually be equated to and then viewed as surpassing the Greek hero during his career, allowing him to share in the status of "divine son," as Ory Amitay argues in his text *From Alexander to Jesus*.³⁸ The divine sonship of Alexander, Herakles, and Jesus is an essential part of understanding their relationship to each other, and as such, their connection to Christianity, and in this chapter it will be shown how

³⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.7.4.

³⁷ Amitay, 2010, 23-24.

³⁸ Amitay, 2010, 57.

Alexander spread the concept of divine-sonship across the world in all of the places his myth was heard.³⁹

Treading on Familiar Ground:

“And after doing these things, he put up the so-called pillars of Herakles—a trophy over the barbarians and a memorial to his *arete* and the dangers he had undertaken—a border to the lands of the Greeks.”- Isokrates to King Philip of Macedon⁴⁰

With these words as a reminder of the glory of the great hero, Alexander’s father Philip had been called on by Isokrates to follow in the path of Herakles, to bring honor both to his ancestor and to himself.⁴¹ For Philip, this path was found and followed in the total subjugation of Greece by his armies in the mid fourth-century B.C., and heightened with his ambition to eventually wage war with Persia “for their crimes” against Greece.⁴² With Philip’s death, the burden then fell on Alexander, a youth of only twenty years, to rise to the task of doing justice to his own claims as a descendant of Herakles.⁴³ Alexander was more than ready to undertake this mighty task; indeed, he had already fought in battles under his father’s command, showing himself to be filled with “martial spirit and forceful energy,” as Diodorus describes him.⁴⁴ Throughout Alexander’s career, through both his cultural, political, and military actions, he sought to cultivate the ancestral connection between himself and Herakles in any way that he could.

³⁹ Amitay, 2010, 21.

⁴⁰ Amitay, 2010, 27, from *Isokrates To Philip*, 112.

⁴¹ Amitay, 2010, 27.

⁴² Diodorus, *The Library*, 89.

⁴³ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I.1.1.

⁴⁴ Diodorus, *The Library*, 16.86.

When Alexander first crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor, beginning his campaign against Persia, he erected two altars in worship of the gods Zeus the “Protector of Landings,” Trojan Athena, and Herakles.⁴⁵ The importance of these three gods to the Alexandrian campaign in this moment ought to be noted. Amitay argues that Alexander most likely made offerings to Zeus to ensure the safety of his army disembarking from the Hellespont onto new land, a new land that he tried to gain favor in by appealing to the local “Goddess of Ilion,” Athena, who he states had strong connections with Troy.⁴⁶ His sacrifice to Herakles had twofold significance; first, as the due honor a Macedonian king owed to his ancestor, and second as an appeal to Herakles as the breaker of barbarians and the conqueror of foreign lands.⁴⁷ Though over time Athena would eventually be less frequent in depictions of Alexander, Zeus and Herakles would be continually associated with the Macedonian king in both thought and art.

Following his major victory against King Darius himself at Issus, Alexander used the funds he captured from the enemy army to mint new coins in the Attic standard for use by his soldiers and areas under his dominion.⁴⁸ These new coins featured the tripartite union of the same three gods he had prayed to when he began his campaign: Zeus, Athena, and Herakles, with Alexander’s own name included. As Ori Amitay notes, the coins which depict the club and encased bow of Herakles with Alexander’s name between them “[created] an opportunity for fruitful ambiguity—the club and the bow belong not only to Herakles, whose face appears on the obverse side, but also to Alexander, whose own name lies parallel to them.”⁴⁹ This Herakles was depicted in the Macedonian fashion, without beard as he is usually presented.⁵⁰ The creation of

⁴⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, I.11.7.

⁴⁶ Amitay, 2010, 28.

⁴⁷ Amitay, 2010, 28.

⁴⁸ Amitay, 2010, 30.

⁴⁹ Amitay, 2010, 32.

⁵⁰ Amitay, 2010, 33.

an image of the Macedonian Herakles on the “most widely used [coin] in the Hellenistic world” began to bring to fruition what Alexander may have had in mind, namely the blending of his identity with that of his hallowed ancestor; it certainly, at least, emphasized their association with each other.⁵¹

The association between Alexander and Herakles was solidified into a definite bond when Alexander consulted the oracle of Ammon in Libya. Arrian reports that he did this with the intention of consulting the god, because “the oracle of Ammon was regarded as infallible,” and because “Alexander was keen to emulate Perseus and Herakles,” both of whom had consulted the oracle during their lives, the former hero when he was “sent against the Gorgon by Polydectes,” and the latter when he went on a mission to “confront Antaeus in Libya and Busiris in Egypt.”⁵² Alexander claimed descendancy not only from these two heroes, but, as Arrian notes, at this time he “was beginning to attribute part of his paternity to Ammon, just as the legends have Zeus as a father of both Heracles and Perseus.”⁵³ When Alexander consulted the oracle, he received “all the answers he had hoped for;” he was the son of Ammon (who was frequently seen as a manifestation of Zeus), and now not merely in kinship with Herakles, but in direct, divine, brotherhood.⁵⁴ Through his military dominance in Egypt and the blessings of the oracle, in some stories Alexander was elevated to the status of Pharaoh, which placed him in “the succession of god-kings of Egypt,” tying him not only to Herakles but to the great Egyptian god-hero Horus as well.⁵⁵ As Amitay explains in his work on Alexander, this is evidenced by the description of a papyrus from “the third year of his reign” which “styles him unambiguously as ‘Pharaoh,’ while

⁵¹ Amitay, 2010, 30.

⁵² Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, III.3.1.

⁵³ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, III.3.2.

⁵⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, III.4.5.

⁵⁵ Amitay, 2010, 43, 96.

hieroglyphic inscriptions from the temple of Amenhotep III at Luxor and from the grand temple at Karnak openly recognize him as the son of Ammon-Ra.”⁵⁶

The Greek Alexander Romance, a collection of myths and stories about Alexander collected over many historical periods beginning in the third century AD, elaborates upon Alexander’s ancestral connection to Egypt. Though the *Romance* cannot be relied upon as a historical document, as it is filled with fantastical stories with little to no historical evidence to back them, it can be viewed as a source on what people may have perceived Alexander to be, and the legends that were told about him. In this sense, the *Greek Alexander Romance* is a useful tool for examining cultural perspectives about Alexander, specifically in relation to Alexander’s status as a divine son, a crucial aspect of his myth in relation to the respective myths of Herakles and Jesus Christ.

The very beginning of the *Alexander Romance* contradicts the beginning of this paper, and the generally accepted history of Alexander’s fatherhood in order to emphasize Alexander’s divine birth. It states, “Many say that he was the son of King Philip, but they are deceivers. This is untrue: he was not Philip’s son, but the wisest of the Egyptians say that he was the son of Nectanebo, after the latter had fallen from his royal state.”⁵⁷ In the *Romance*, Nectanebo is described as an Egyptian king skilled in the arts of magic, who leaves Egypt because he has a vision of the imminent end of the Egyptian kingdom at the hands of the Persian Empire.⁵⁸ When he leaves, an oracle states that “this king who has fled will return to Egypt not as an old man but as a youth, and he will overcome our enemies the Persians.”⁵⁹ Nectanebo flees to the Macedonian court, where he conducts an affair with Alexander’s mother Olympias under the

⁵⁶ Amitay, 2010, 44.

⁵⁷ *Alexander Romance*, 35.

⁵⁸ *Alexander Romance*, 36.

⁵⁹ *Alexander Romance*, 37.

guise of the god Ammon.⁶⁰ Olympias becomes pregnant, and gives birth to Alexander during the horoscope of Jupiter, who is, in Nectanebo's words, "turning into horned Ammon...and designating an Egyptian as world-ruler."⁶¹ The baby, Alexander, is delivered, and there are "great claps of thunder and flashes of lightning, so that all the world [is] shaken."⁶² Alexander eventually returns to Egypt, and, in doing so, he completes the prophecy; he has returned as the youth form of Nectanebo, an Egyptian king to rule in Egypt as Pharaoh.

Other stories about Alexander's birth share similarities in their focus on the divine. Eratosthenes says in his history of Alexander that before his first campaign, Alexander's mother Olympias came to him and told him the divine secret of his birth, encouraging him to "behave himself with courage suitable to his divine extraction."⁶³ Plutarch reports that some, on the contrary, say that Olympias "wholly disclaimed" the notion of a divine union between herself and a god, "and was wont to say, 'When will Alexander leave off slandering me to Juno?'" He also includes stories of how before the night of the consummation of Olympias and Philip's marriage, Olympias dreamed "that a thunderbolt fell upon her body, which kindled a great fire, whose divided flames dispersed themselves all about, and then were extinguished," and how "a serpent was found lying by Olympias as she slept" one night, which was viewed by many as an omen from the gods.⁶⁴ A further omen is reported to occur on the day that Alexander was born. On that day, the Ephesian temple of Diana burned down because the mistress who was meant to attend to the temple was nursing Alexander.⁶⁵ The Eastern soothsayers "ran about the town,

⁶⁰ *Alexander Romance*, 40.

⁶¹ *Alexander Romance*, 44.

⁶² *Alexander Romance*, 44.

⁶³ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 140.

⁶⁴ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 140.

⁶⁵ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 141.

beating their faces, and crying that this day had brought forth something that would prove fatal and destructive to all Asia.”⁶⁶

My purpose in including these stories about Alexander’s miraculous birth is to highlight the mixing of the divine and human natures of Alexander in the way that the world perceived him. Alexander, in the records of ancient historians and storytellers, was already being viewed as a descendant of Herakles, a god in his own right, by most Greeks, and with the explanations of the oracle and his elevation to leader of Egypt he was now placed in a continuum of figures that merged the line between god and man. This continuum would eventually arrive in later years at the prophet Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ, and proclaimed by his followers to be the one, and only, “Son of God.”⁶⁷ The spread of this “Son of God” concept was greatly influenced by the life of Alexander and his relation to Herakles, and this association would only be emphasized as Alexander’s campaigns continued through Anatolia and into India.

Surpassing Herakles:

“‘Alexander,’ he said, ‘do not become too proud of the glory of your kingship. Even if what you achieved is godlike, and you are ready now to grasp heaven with both hands, have a thought for the future. Fate recognizes no kings, however powerful they are, and swerves hither and thither, quite without reason. You have seen what I have become.’” - Darius’ last words to Alexander, according to the *Alexander Romance*.⁶⁸

Alexander’s relationship to Herakles would be greatly complicated by the view that he had perhaps surpassed his legendary ancestor. This idea would emphasize the perceptions of his semi-divine nature amongst those around him. When Alexander marched through the Hindu Kush to reach India, he and his men found a “cavern where they saw the aerie of a huge bird and

⁶⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 141.

⁶⁷ Luke 1:35 (NRSV).

⁶⁸ *Alexander Romance*, 199.

signs of a chain.”⁶⁹ Through discussions with the locals and the pressing thought of Herakles, the great trailblazer of the past, still in their minds, they determined that this location must be the location where Herakles freed Prometheus from his torments.⁷⁰ Alexander, it seems, was following his ancestor’s path, first through Greece and Egypt, and now to the end of the world. Where Prometheus had been chained was said to be “the ends of the earth,” the farthest that Herakles had travelled.⁷¹ This location was only a brief stop, however, on the campaign into India, and Alexander marched onwards to defeat the upstart Bactrian king Bessus who was calling himself the “King of Asia.”⁷²

The great achievements of Alexander at this point had not gone unnoticed by his men. Alexander had defeated every opponent that he had come across, and carved a Greek empire out of both known and unknown lands of the like the world had never seen—who could be his equal? This was the question on the mind of some “flatterers” (or, more specifically, “the sort of flatterers who always have and always will corrupt and ruin the best interests of any king” as Arrian calls them⁷³), in Alexander’s courtroom shortly after his victory over Bessus. Usually, every year on this day, Alexander would make sacrifice to Dionysus, as was the Macedonian custom.⁷⁴ On this particular day, for some reason, he chose to make a sacrifice to the Dioscuri instead, the mortal and demi-god half-brothers Castor and Polydeuces. The reason why Alexander would pray to these figures instead of Dionysus, a much more powerful deity, is uncertain; regardless, Alexander made sacrifice to the Dioscuri, which prompted a conversation in his courtroom. In this conversation, Alexander’s flatterers, trying to ingratiate themselves with

⁶⁹ Amitay, 2010, 50.

⁷⁰ Amitay, 2010, 51.

⁷¹ Strabo, *Geography*, 11.5.5.

⁷² Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, III.25.3.

⁷³ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.8.3.

⁷⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.8.2.

him, boasted that Polydeuces and Castor “bore no comparison to Alexander and his achievements.”⁷⁵ It seems, however, that this minor act of irreverence was not enough to start conflict in Alexander’s courtroom, for one reason or another—but when Herakles was brought into the conversation, there were higher stakes at play. The flatterers then said that “it was only jealousy. . . which prevented living men from receiving the honours they deserved from their contemporaries,” and that Alexander’s achievements surpassed even those of Herakles.⁷⁶ This comment was a blasphemy that could not be ignored by Kleitus, a loyal Macedonian soldier who had served in Philip’s campaign and had saved Alexander’s life at Granicus, who felt the need to speak up.⁷⁷ He explained, in indignant anger, that “he would not have them cheapen divinity or belittle the achievements of the heroes of old,” that “what Alexander had achieved was not as great and remarkable as they puffed it” and that most of his achievements were not his alone but rather were the achievements of “the Macedonians at large,” without whom he would be lost.⁷⁸ The flatterers did not stop at this argument, however, and went on further boasting Alexander’s achievements to the point of denigrating the achievements of his father Philip, claiming that King Philip “had achieved nothing great or remarkable.” At this comment disparaging his former king, the veteran Kleitus, who had been drinking heavily as was the growing norm in Alexander’s camp, “went on to pile contempt on Alexander,” explaining how he saved his life at the battle of Granicus to all those who would listen. Alexander’s anger was steadily growing, influenced in no small part by the amount of alcohol he had ingested, and when Kleitus showed

⁷⁵ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.8.3.

⁷⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.8.3.

⁷⁷ Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, VIII.1.18.

⁷⁸ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.8.5.

his right arm, declaring, “This is the very hand, Alexander, which saved you then!” Alexander leaped up and killed his friend.⁷⁹

This tragic episode shows much about the perception of Alexander in his world, told through the accounts of Quintus Curtius and Arrian. The conversation in Alexander’s courtroom shows that the subject of his potential divinity and relationship with Herakles was not an unfamiliar subject with those in his closest company, and not just those who he conquered. It is difficult to determine in what way Alexander at this time was perceived by his own men; likely, it varied from rank to rank and soldier to soldier. He was still their beloved king, who had united Greece under their rule and defeated Persia; but he was also a man declared to be the son of a god, whose actions had possibly surpassed those of the greatest hero of all of history.

Those outside of Alexander’s immediate circle in the greater Mediterranean area into the East would have no doubt heard of him at this point, and they likely heard that he considered himself the son of Ammon-Zeus.⁸⁰ After defeating the Mallians in the Battle of the Hydaspes, Alexander was approached by envoys suing for peace.⁸¹ They stated that “they were surrendering to Alexander their cities and lands along with their persons” and “were entrusting to his protection and authority an independence that they had preserved intact for many generations.”⁸² The reason for their doing this was not fear, they continued, but having heard that he was of divine descent and seeing these claims supported by his actions, their gods urged them to surrender to him.⁸³ In doing so, they said what the apostles said to Jesus upon his walking on water: “Truly you are the Son of God.”⁸⁴ This was an act of great religious significance;

⁷⁹ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, IV.8.7-8.

⁸⁰ Amitay, 2010, 68.

⁸¹ Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 9.7.12.

⁸² Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 9.7.13.

⁸³ Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 9.7.13; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VI.14.2.

⁸⁴ Matthew 14:33 (NRSV).

Alexander was accepted as having a divine kingship over the Mallians, and their gods bowed to him.

Conclusion: The Death of the King:

“The anger of the gods can devise no tragedy to equal this with which we have been afflicted; and yet, considering the greatness of Alexander’s achievements, one could believe that such a great man was merely on loan from the gods to the world so that, when his duty to it was complete, they might swiftly reclaim him for their family. [7] Accordingly, since nothing remains of him apart from the material which is excluded from immortality, let us perform the due ceremonies to his corpse and his name, bearing in mind the city we are in, the people we are among and the qualities of the leader and king of whom we have been deprived.” - Perdicas, *Funeral Oration for Alexander*.⁸⁵

By the time of Alexander’s death he had established an empire of three kingdoms stretching from Greece to the Hydapses, founding many cities that bore his own name. His empire was the first of its kind, larger than any the world had seen before—and in his ten years of conquest he had never lost a battle. This man had been declared a god-king by the Siwah, and it was said that he had surpassed the deeds of the greatest heroes of old. He was said to possess a great spirit that was intuitive and bold, and was handsome and inspiring—some even said that his body exuded “an agreeable odour” that perfumed his clothes and the area around him.⁸⁶ A figure of such temporal and mythical magnitude could not help but influence the world around him; thus, it is no surprise that we hear accounts from Marco Polo, written more than one thousand years after Alexander’s death, that in Badakhshan there were horse traders who claimed their

⁸⁵ Curtius, *The History of Alexander*, 10.6.6.

⁸⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 141.

horses had “direct line of descent from Alexander’s horse Bucephalus”—Alexander’s presence had touched the world, and it was forever changed.⁸⁷

Alexander’s life reverberated in the regions over which he reigned far after his death. His spread of the ideas of philosopher kingship, cosmopolitanism, divine sonship, and god-hero worship around the world, especially in the places he conquered, is critical for understanding his impact on the figure of Jesus and early Christianity. His myth, which began with descentance from Herakles and ending with his own widely perceived godhood, would become present in a wide range of cultures and nations, must have influenced the way in which Jesus, the widely declared “Son of God,” would be perceived, if only in comparison to a fellow “Son of God.” As Ory Amitay notes, “the Heroic concept was a cornerstone of Greek religion,” and as Alexander’s empire grew, much of these Greek cultural ideas must have spread with him, including to the Jewish people, whom he directly encountered, from whom Jesus would one day emerge.⁸⁸ The third chapter of this text will directly address how the ideas of cosmopolitanism, divine sonship, and self-divinization manifested themselves in the myth of Jesus Christ, but first, it is important to understand the place the Alexander myth found in Judaism. The Alexander myth’s presence in Jewish culture is critical to understanding his connection to the Jewish Jesus and Christianity, a religion which finds its origins in Judaism. Thus, the next subject of study in order to understand Alexander’s relationship with Christianity is to understand Alexander's relationship with the Jewish people.

⁸⁷ Atkinson, 2013, i.

⁸⁸ Amitay, 2010, 83-84.

Chapter Two: Alexander and the Jews

Judaism served as an important cultural force in transmitting and developing the myth of Alexander before the advent of Christianity several hundred years after his death. His presence in apocalyptic texts as well as myths about him relating to biblical forces in the world emphasize his role for the many who perceived him as a world-shaker, and a man who permanently altered history by his actions. Alexander's influence on the Jewish people is inescapable; as Ori Amitay has noted, he is a "frequent guest in Jewish literature," appearing in many non-biblical Jewish texts, and the popularity of the name Alexander amongst Jews remained strong long after the "demise of Greek as lingua franca."⁸⁹ Alexander's presence in the histories of Josephus Flavius as well as the Bible, specifically the Book of Daniel, show the extent of his importance to the Jewish people. Josephus describes Alexander's legendary entrance to Jerusalem and his relations not only to the Jews but to the Jewish God. The Book of Daniel depicts the circumstances before the end of the world, in which Alexander's kingdom is the last kingdom before the coming of the kingdom of God and the Messiah, and it is one of the most important apocalyptic texts of the Old Testament. Further, many Alexander myths involve him fighting the ancient enemies of Israel, Gog and Magog, who are also viewed as eschatological forces on the earth. The purpose of this chapter will be to show how Alexander the Great influenced the Jewish people and their messianic expectation and helped build the framework from which a figure like Jesus could emerge.

⁸⁹ Amitay, 2010, 145.

Alexander in Jerusalem:

“Then they brought quantities of gold and silver to Alexander. He was reluctant to accept it. ‘Let these gifts, as well as the tribute I decreed, be dedicated to the Lord God. I myself will take nothing from you.’” - Alexander to the Jewish priests, as told by the *Alexander Romance*.⁹⁰

The supposed arrival of Alexander the Great in Jerusalem is a key starting point to understanding the relationship between Alexander and the messianic expectation of the Jewish people. Josephus Flavius, a Jewish writer from the first century A.D.,⁹¹ records in his *Jewish Antiquities* the arrival of King Alexander III of Macedon in Jerusalem shortly after the siege of Tyre, which Arrian records as taking place in 332 B.C.⁹² The events that Josephus describes about Alexander’s communications with the Jewish people are not recorded by Arrian, who describes Alexander moving from Tyre immediately to Gaza and then Egypt, without mentioning the Jews.⁹³ Josephus, however, states that during the siege of Tyre, Alexander sent a message to the high priest of Jerusalem to send him soldiers and provisions for his army, as well as the tribute that Jerusalem usually gave to Darius as their lord.⁹⁴ The priest, however, refused, fearful of Darius’ power and the oath he had sworn to him, prompting Alexander to send a message back that he would be coming to make an expedition personally against this priest, and “through him teach all men to whom they must keep their oaths.”⁹⁵

Upon finding out that Alexander had successfully taken both Tyre and Gaza, Josephus records, the high priest was terrified at the king’s rapid approach and was at a loss of what to do. It was at this moment that the high priest was struck by a dream in which God told him

⁹⁰ *Alexander Romance*, 170.

⁹¹ Whiston, 2004, 10.

⁹² Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II.24.4.

⁹³ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, II.25.4.

⁹⁴ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.3

⁹⁵ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.3.

“that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest should appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in the habits proper to their order, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent.”⁹⁶

The priest made the arrangements which God had prescribed for him and his city, and greeted a shocked Alexander with a multitude of priests in stark white clothes and a golden plate with the name of God engraved upon it.⁹⁷ Josephus states that Alexander, seeing this impressive display before him, made obeisance to the name of God and then acknowledged the high priest, causing the Jews all together to “salute Alexander, and encompass him about.”⁹⁸ Alexander’s soldiers and generals were surprised at his behavior towards this priest, and Josephus records Parmenio as asking him, “how it came to pass that, when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews?” Alexander is said to have replied: “I do not adore him, but that God who hath honored him.”⁹⁹ He then entered the temple and was shown the Book of Daniel, one of the chief apocalyptic texts of the Old Testament. In this book, Alexander saw the prophecies in which Daniel stated that there would be a Greek king who would conquer the Persian empire, and “he supposed that himself was the person intended.”¹⁰⁰ Pleased, he granted favors to the Jewish people, allowing them to keep their sacred laws and “pay no tribute on the seventh year”—and after bestowing these gifts, he mobilized his army once more, and left the city.¹⁰¹

Josephus’ account of Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem reveals his perceived importance in Jewish culture. The record Josephus offers of Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem is plausible, even though Arrian writes of no such visit, except for the fact that it records Alexander as reading the

⁹⁶ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.3.

⁹⁷ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.3.

⁹⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.3.

⁹⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.3.

¹⁰⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.5.

¹⁰¹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XI.8.5.

Book of Daniel which was written almost two centuries later than when he supposedly arrived in Jerusalem.¹⁰² Thus, it makes sense that Alexander would see himself in these Jewish prophecies—they were written about him, and the events of his life, after they occurred. It appears then, that Josephus recorded falsehood in his text. The *Alexander Romance* does, however, record a similar story, except without references to the prophecies of Daniel.¹⁰³ Christian Djurslev offers a potential explanation for this phenomenon, arguing that the “absence of standard sources for Alexander history” made the Biblical books a source of knowledge about Alexander in the East before the formalization of the *Romance*; perhaps Josephus focused his brief history of Alexander based on what he knew of him from the Bible and other stories.¹⁰⁴ It is also possible that Josephus included these stories of Alexander to show how one of the most legendary figures of antiquity, a semi-divine king who was said to act through the will of Providence, showed favor to his own people, those who claimed to be God’s people,¹⁰⁵ the Jews. This episode shows evidence of the impact Alexander had on general regions he went through, even if he did not visit them directly. In order to understand Alexander’s relationship with the Jews and his presence in the Book of Daniel, one must first understand the environment in which the Book of Daniel was written; Jerusalem under the rule of the Seleucid Empire.

Jewish Rebellion under the Seleucid Empire:

“But destiny was already bringing civil war upon the Macedonian nation; for a throne is not to be shared and several men were aspiring to it” - Quintus Curtius Rufus, on the *Diadochi*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Matthews, 1919, 222.

¹⁰³ *Alexander Romance*, 170.

¹⁰⁴ Djurslev, 2020, 113.

¹⁰⁵ Exodus 19:5 (NRSV).

¹⁰⁶ Curtius, *History of Alexander*, X.9.1.

The harsh rule of the Seleucid empire over Jerusalem created the conditions for which apocalyptic prophecies like those in the Book of Daniel were desired by the Jewish people as symbols of hope for God's assistance. When Alexander died in June of 323 BC, his generals were faced with the daunting task of choosing a successor for the king, a man who would inherit his unprecedented power over the known world.¹⁰⁷ Alexander's son by his wife Roxane was the logical choice for the inheritance of a kingdom run previously by primogeniture, but the child was not yet born at the time of Alexander's death.¹⁰⁸ As such, Perdiccas, who had been given the king's signet ring at the moment of his passing, assumed the role of regent until the boy could come of age.¹⁰⁹ However, as the temptation of absolute power is oft to precipitate, Alexander's generals began to turn against one another, rallying their soldiers to try and maintain as much power and authority as they could. Open war began thereafter between the Macedonian factions, beginning a conflict which would become known as the "Successor Wars" or the *Diadochi*, in which the empire the Macedonians had fought so tirelessly to claim would be split violently into several pieces.¹¹⁰

One of the kingdoms which emerged from this conflict was the Seleucid Empire, the political descendant of the successor faction led by Alexander's general and satrap of Babylonia, Seleucus.¹¹¹ The Seleucid Empire was the largest and, as many scholars like C. Fischer-Bovet and Michael J. Taylor have argued, the most ethnically diverse of the successor kingdoms of Alexander the Great,¹¹² populated by Persians, Babylonians, Bactrians, Greeks, and Jews.¹¹³ The

¹⁰⁷ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, VII.28.1.

¹⁰⁸ Curtius, *History of Alexander*, X.6.8.

¹⁰⁹ Diodorus, *The Library*, XVIII.2.4.

¹¹⁰ Diodorus, *The Library*, XVIII-XIX.

¹¹¹ Fischer-Bovet, 2015, 12.

¹¹² Taylor, 2014, 222.

¹¹³ Fischer-Bovet, 2015, 3.

Jewish people of this Seleucid kingdom composed the Book of Daniel in 165 BC, as most scholars such as I.G. Matthews have argued, in response to the tyrannical rule of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV.¹¹⁴ These events are described in the first and second Book of Maccabees, which tell of the Jewish rebellion against the Hellenistic Seleucid empire, and the revolutionary scene therein described lays the background for the eschatological texts in which Alexander appears.

1 Maccabees begins with an explanation of the circumstances of the fall of Alexander's empire, and the shattering of his dominion upon his death. In this chaos, each of Alexander's officers had claimed a crown, insuring power for themselves and for their progeny.¹¹⁵ From the line of one of these officers, Seleucus, comes the principal villain of the Book of Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanes, who began his rule "in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks" or around 175 BC.¹¹⁶ Both the books of Maccabees describe how this Antiochus, upon his return from conquests in Ptolemaic Egypt, came to Jerusalem with a massive army in 168 BC, intending to intervene in a priestly conflict in the city; but upon arrival, Antiochus sacked the city and plundered the holy Temple of Yahweh.¹¹⁷ According to 1 Maccabees, he looted all of the treasures of this temple, including cups, crowns, censers, and the bread of the "Presence," then afterwards despoiled "the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls," taking women and children as slaves in the process.¹¹⁸ Following this bloody episode, he established a firm rule in Jerusalem, banning many Jewish customs like circumcision and the burning of offerings in the temple, and encouraged the people of the city to

¹¹⁴ Matthews, 1919, 222.

¹¹⁵ 1 Maccabees 8-9 (NRSV).

¹¹⁶ 1 Maccabees 10 (NRSV).

¹¹⁷ Taylor, 2014, 232.

¹¹⁸ 1 Maccabees 20-32 (NRSV).

build “shrines for idols” and “make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane,” under the threat of death from the king.¹¹⁹

Taylor argues in his article *Sacred Plunder and the Seleucid Near East* that “temple despoliation was standard procedure for Seleucid rulers facing fiscal problems,” and that the looting of the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem was most likely motivated by concerns about the diminishment of the king’s treasury from his many wars.¹²⁰ Taylor also suggests that another underlying motive for the sacking of Jerusalem was “the serious diplomatic setback” the king suffered at the hands of a Roman ambassador in Eleusis, where he was publicly humiliated in front of his entire court and politically forced into removing his troops from Egypt.¹²¹ Thus, Taylor argues, sacking Jerusalem and looting the temple would have been “an opportunity for the king to reassert his military authority” and restore his coffers.¹²² Regardless of the Seleucid king’s motivations for this violent attack against the Jewish people, his tyrannical actions and rule provided the spark that lit the fire of Jewish rebellion in Israel. After Antiochus’ death due to disease, the Jewish people rallied under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus and retook Jerusalem after defeating the Seleucid general Nicanor in the field of battle.¹²³

It is in these circumstances that the Book of Daniel was composed, a time of great danger and uncertainty for the Jewish people.¹²⁴ The result of these uncertain times, as Amitay has argued, was “an outbreak of apocalyptic, eschatological, and messianic activity” which began the process in which Alexander the Great became viewed as the catalyst to the last portion of

¹¹⁹ 1 Maccabees 45-50 (NRSV).

¹²⁰ Taylor, 2014, 222.

¹²¹ Taylor, 2014, 233.

¹²² Taylor, 2014, 233.

¹²³ 2 Maccabees 15-20 (NRSV).

¹²⁴ Matthews, 1919, 222.

history, the “messianic age,” or the end times.¹²⁵ Matthews discusses the apocalypticism phenomenon in more depth, arguing that the eschatological prophecies of the Book of Daniel bear a marked difference from the prophecies of the earlier Jewish texts.¹²⁶ These earlier prophecies, Matthews elaborates, “saw the forces of nature and the various nations as servants of the divine,” and promised that the natural processes of the world would save and reward the Jewish people for their faith.¹²⁷ The situation of Seleucid occupation of Jerusalem demanded new religious solutions, however, as a feeling of overwhelming despair at their present circumstances grew. Under these conditions, Matthews postulates, the writers of these texts lost faith in the “natural and national” forces of the world to make things right, and put their faith wholly in God’s direct intervention in world affairs; that “He must overthrow the present world-order by some supernatural catastrophe before the earth could be purified for the kingdom.”¹²⁸ The result of this was a moving of focus from the matters of the current world to the life to come, a shift which would eventually become a crucial aspect of the early Christian faith.¹²⁹ For the moment, however, the apocalypse was focused on the salvation of the Jews by the coming of their messiah, which would be described in the Book of Daniel.

It is worth analyzing the value of a text that says it was written earlier than it actually was, as the Book of Daniel plainly does, with its proposed author being a man who wrote four hundred years before the events that he describes while in reality being written by a writer of the late Jewish tradition.¹³⁰ Why were these prophecies retroactively placed in the mouths of ancestors by later writers? Matthews argues that the purpose of these prophecies was not to

¹²⁵ Amitay, 2010, 155.

¹²⁶ Matthews, 1919, 217.

¹²⁷ Matthews, 1919, 217.

¹²⁸ Matthews, 1919, 217.

¹²⁹ Matthews, 1919, 217.

¹³⁰ Matthews, 1919, 222.

demonstrate prophetic legitimacy, but rather “to hearten and encourage the afflicted people,” and remind them that God had not abandoned them in their struggles.¹³¹ Thus, in his view as well as my own, there is value in understanding this text as an object of inspiration and hope, a reflection of the spirit “which thrilled the valiant Maccabees” in their nigh-hopeless rebellion.¹³² The Book of Daniel and its apocalyptic prophecies place Alexander in a central role as a harbinger of the end times, an agent of Providence who brings forth the apocalypse and with it, the Messiah.

Alexander in the Apocalyptic Prophecies of Daniel:

“Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man’s voice between *the banks of* the Ulai, who called, and said, “Gabriel, make this *man* understand the vision.” So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, ‘Understand, son of man, that the vision *refers* to the time of the end.’” - Daniel 8 5:16.

The Book of Daniel delivers three apocalyptic prophecies to the Jewish people, as described in Daniel 2, 7, and 8. Each of these prophecies addresses the rise and fall of empires and their correspondence to the beginnings of different ages of mankind, told through different metaphors which Daniel interprets for the reader. The person and empire of Alexander the Great is alluded to in all three of these prophecies, most specifically in Daniel 8, as most scholars would agree, based on an understanding of when this text was written and of the matters to which it refers.¹³³ As will be seen through an analysis of these prophecies, Alexander the Great was depicted by the writers of Daniel as a critical actor on the world stage in God’s plans for humanity, and a crucial component of the beginning of the end times.

¹³¹ Matthews, 1919, 222.

¹³² Matthews, 1919, 223.

¹³³ Matthews, 1919, 222; Amitay, 2010, 155.

The first prophecy, recorded in Daniel 2, is delivered as an interpretation of the dreams of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar by Daniel.¹³⁴ In the book, King Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream with which he is greatly troubled, and thus his wise men step forward to interpret his dream; however, he states that he will only believe his wise men are worthy of interpreting this dream if they can divine what his dream was about without him telling them.¹³⁵ The wise men claim that this is impossible, and the king reacts to this protest with great anger, threatening to execute every wise man in Babylonia. Before this is accomplished, however, Daniel, a Jewish man living under Nebuchadnezzar, appears before the king and claims that God has revealed to him the contents of his dream, as well as its meaning.¹³⁶ Daniel states:

“You were looking, O king, and lo! there was a great statue. This statue was huge, its brilliance extraordinary; it was standing before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of that statue was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked on, a stone was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, were all broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”¹³⁷

He continues by interpreting the dream, stating that King Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom represents the head of gold, and that his kingdom will be followed by a lesser kingdom of silver, then an even lesser kingdom of bronze, and finally be succeeded by an iron kingdom which would destroy all the others.¹³⁸ The iron kingdom would become a divided kingdom however, partially strong and partially brittle, as represented by the iron and clay mixing, and then, eventually, this kingdom too would be destroyed when God would finally establish his kingdom

¹³⁴ Daniel 2:28 (NRSV).

¹³⁵ Daniel 2:3-9 (NRSV).

¹³⁶ Daniel 2:28 (NRSV).

¹³⁷ Daniel 2:31-35 (NRSV).

¹³⁸ Daniel 2:36-40 (NRSV).

on earth which would reign forever.¹³⁹ The king is pleased by this, and acknowledges the one true God as he bows before Daniel.¹⁴⁰

Scholars mostly agree that the intended identity of the four kingdoms by the writers of Daniel was probably gold for Babylon, silver for Media, bronze for Persia, and iron for Macedonia, which would eventually become the mixed and divided Hellenistic successor kingdoms of clay and iron.¹⁴¹ The last kingdom, represented by the great falling stone, is the Kingdom of God, which will wipe the others from the face of the earth in an instant, and will stand forever. There is no mention yet of the savior of mankind emerging in these last days, but the later prophecies in Daniel 7 and 8 introduce the concept of the coming messiah.

In Daniel 7, Daniel is lying in bed when he is struck by a divine vision in his dreams.¹⁴² In this vision, Daniel sees four great beasts rise up from the sea. The first beast is a lion with eagle's wings who has its wings torn off and is forced to walk the earth on legs like a human, and with a human mind.¹⁴³ The second is a beast like a bear with three great tusks in its mouth, and is instructed to "devour many bodies."¹⁴⁴ The third beast, who is said to have been given "dominion," looks like a leopard with four wings and four heads.¹⁴⁵ The last of the four great beasts is the most terrifying of all, an incredibly strong creature with powerful iron teeth that destroys everything that passes beneath its feet. It has ten horns, and another, smaller horn, which appears and starts speaking with arrogance about the end times.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Daniel 2:41-45 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁰ Daniel 2:46 (NRSV).

¹⁴¹ Both Djurslev (107), and Amitay (154) agree on this.

¹⁴² Daniel 7:1 (NRSV).

¹⁴³ Daniel 7:4 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁴ Daniel 7:5 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁵ Daniel 7:6 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁶ Daniel 7:7-8 (NRSV).

As the horn is speaking, Daniel witnesses God's judgement occur on the beasts, and the great beast is destroyed while the other beasts are stripped of their dominion over the earth.

Following this, Daniel has his first glimpse of the messiah. He states:

“I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed.”¹⁴⁷

Daniel is uncertain of the meaning of this vision, and asks someone nearby to explain it to him.¹⁴⁸ The bystander explains that the four beasts represent four kings and their kingdoms which will appear on earth, and the last beast's ten horns represent the smaller kingdoms that will arise from the original.¹⁴⁹ The last horn which makes “war against the saints,” is the last, and worst, kingdom before the coming of judgement and the end times.¹⁵⁰ Just as in Daniel 2, the prophecy concludes with assurances that in the last days God's kingdom would be permanently established on earth after the enemies of God's people are destroyed.¹⁵¹

The prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 are very similar in message if not in content; they both depict the four great kingdoms that will rule the earth before the end times. The beasts of Daniel 7 correlate with the kingdoms described in Daniel 2: the lion for Babylon, the bear for Medea,

¹⁴⁷ Daniel 7:13-14 (NKJV). *I switch to the New King James Version here for its use of the phrase “Son of Man,” which is a label I explore in my argument.

¹⁴⁸ Daniel 7:16 (NKJV).

¹⁴⁹ Daniel 7:17-24 (NKJV).

¹⁵⁰ Daniel 7:21-22 (NKJV).

¹⁵¹ Daniel 7:26-27 (NRSV).

the leopard for Persia, and the many horned beast as Alexander's kingdom. The horns on Alexander's kingdom, then, most likely represent his successors, as Matthews has argued.¹⁵² Daniel 7 also adds this image of "One like the Son of Man" coming down from Heaven with God's glory into its depiction of the end times. This, of course, has relevance to Christianity, as well as the figure of Christ, who, according to the Gospels, called himself the "Son of Man."¹⁵³ It is difficult to know the intended meaning of the phrase "the Son of Man" or, in other translations, "one like a human being," by its Jewish authors, as well as the way the verse it is contained within was interpreted by its Jewish audience.¹⁵⁴

Daniel Boyarin aptly points out in his writings on Daniel 7 that the interpretations of the phrase "One like the Son of Man" have been split by ancient and modern readers alike into two main understandings; the first being that "the One like a Son of Man is a symbol of a collective, namely, the faithful Israelites at the time of the Maccabean revolt," and the other being that the "One like a Son of Man" is a divine being, or as he suggests, "a second God, a son of God, or an archangel."¹⁵⁵ Julian Morgenstern takes issue with this first line of interpretation among modern scholars, stating that it is regarded by most biblical scholars as "highly hypothetical" due to a lack of any "definitive evidence" in favor of this understanding.¹⁵⁶ He further argues that this former interpretation offers, in his words, "a complete rejection of the eschatological interpretation current in Jewish pseudepigraphic writings of the late second and the first centuries B.C.," and ignores the crucial implications of the dominant interpretations of I Enoch and IV Ezra at the time that assert "the 'son of man' is the Messiah."¹⁵⁷ Morgenstern asserts that the

¹⁵² Matthews, 1919, 222.

¹⁵³ Mark 2:10 (NKJV).

¹⁵⁴ Daniel 7:13 (NRSV).

¹⁵⁵ Boyarin, 2012, 139.

¹⁵⁶ Morgenstern, 1961, 65.

¹⁵⁷ Morgenstern, 1961, 65.

meaning of “One like the Son of Man,” must, necessarily, be of a divine savior figure, especially because he is not directly labeled a human being, and said to come “with the clouds of Heaven.”; Boyarin shares this view.¹⁵⁸ Thus, it seems most likely that the “Son of Man” depicted in Daniel 7 is meant to be a promise of a coming messiah in the end times following the destruction of the four kingdoms.

Where Daniel 7 presents a general overview of human history, Daniel 8 presents a clear depiction of the last ages of man. Daniel 8 presents Alexander the Great most clearly out of all the prophecies in the Book of Daniel and relates him through his actions to the end times. In this vision, Daniel finds himself in Susa, by the river Ulai.¹⁵⁹ As he is standing there, he looks over to the river and sees a ram standing there with a strange characteristic; it has two horns, and one horn is longer than the other.¹⁶⁰ The ram proceeds to travel “westward and northward and southward,” and all the other animals are powerless to stop it.¹⁶¹ As Daniel continues to watch, however, he sees a male goat, with one great horn between its eyes, charge at the ram with rage, shattering the ram’s horns upon collision and trampling it to the ground.¹⁶² Daniel sees this goat grow very strong, but at the height of the goat’s power, its one great horn breaks into four different, smaller, horns; one small horn rises from one of these four, and it commits many acts of “wickedness.”¹⁶³ Daniel hears a voice that says that the “sanctuary” will soon be restored from this evil and violence, and that it is only a matter of time before this happens.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ Daniel 7:13 (NKJV), Morgenstern, 1961, 66; Boyarin, 2012, 139.

¹⁵⁹ Daniel 8:2 (NRSV).

¹⁶⁰ Daniel 8:3 (NRSV).

¹⁶¹ Daniel 8:4 (NRSV).

¹⁶² Daniel 8:7 (NRSV).

¹⁶³ Daniel 8:12 (NRSV).

¹⁶⁴ Daniel 8:14 (NRSV).

The archangel Gabriel explains to Daniel the meaning of this dream, which provides an explanation and identity for each of the animals in the prophecy. He explains to Daniel that the vision depicts the end times, and the kingdoms that will precede them.¹⁶⁵ Gabriel tells Daniel that the ram with two horns represents Media and Persia, and that the goat represents the kingdom of Greece, with its one great horn symbolizing its first ruler.¹⁶⁶ The horn breaking up into four different pieces represents the kingdoms that will follow from this original, lesser in power and stature. The last, small horn, which acts out against God, represents the last of these kings, who will perform violence against the people of God until he is “broken, and not by human hands.”¹⁶⁷

This last prophecy of Daniel continues with the main theme of the previous two prophecies: the kingdoms and events which will precede the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. Daniel 8 does not include Babylon in the discussion of kingdoms, but instead points the reader to the conflict between the last three kingdoms described in Daniel 2, Media, Persia, and Greece. It depicts Alexander’s defeat of the Persian empire, and his subsequent domination of the known world. The four smaller horns are stated to represent Alexander’s successor kingdoms which emerged after his death, and the last, smallest horn, which stems from one of these four pieces, most likely must represent the reign of King Antiochus IV, who was from the line of Seleucus.¹⁶⁸ This would explain the repeated theme in Daniel 7 and 8 of the smallest horn blaspheming against God and God’s people, as Antiochus the IV, as we have discussed, was said to have caused great distress and struggle to the Jewish people, and was the former antagonist of the Maccabean Revolt around the time of which the Book of Daniel was written.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Daniel 8:17 (NRSV).

¹⁶⁶ Daniel 8:20-21 (NRSV).

¹⁶⁷ Daniel 8:23-25 (NRSV).

¹⁶⁸ Fischer-Bovet, 2015, 12.

¹⁶⁹ Matthews, 1919, 222.

In the three prophecies of Daniel, Alexander and his kingdom are seen as critical components of the history of the world, a history that will end with the coming of the end times. Alexander's kingdom is not just one of the four great kingdoms mentioned in Daniel, but it is also the *last* kingdom before the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus, Alexander's actions, signified by the male-goat in Daniel 8, are seen in these prophecies as a catalyst to the last era of mankind, the era in which the "Son of Man" will appear, a mantle which was, according to the Gospels, explicitly taken up by Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁰

Gog and Magog:

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." - Revelation 20:7-10.¹⁷¹

Alexander's relationship with biblical phenomena and the end times does not end with the Book of Daniel; there is a version of the *Alexander Romance* that includes a story which tells of Alexander journeying to the farthest reaches of civilization to hold back the ancient biblical invaders of Israel, Gog and Magog (or Goth and Magoth).¹⁷² This story begins with Alexander and his generals preparing themselves for a grand battle against a large coalition of enemy nations: the "Anougeis, Aigis, Exenach, Diphar, Photinaioi, Pharzizaioi, Zarmatianoï, Chachonioi, Agrimardoï, Anouphagoi, Tharbaioi, Alans, Physolonikaioi, Saltarioi," and Gog and

¹⁷⁰ Mark 2:10 (NRSV).

¹⁷¹ Revelation 20:7-10 (NKJV).

¹⁷² *Alexander Romance*, 184.

Magog.¹⁷³ The Macedonian army, under the leadership of Alexander and Seluecus, routes the enemy forces swiftly, causing many of their soldiers to flee in terror towards the north. They chase these soldiers for fifty days, until they finally reach a mountain pass “in the unseen world,” known as “the Breasts of the North.”¹⁷⁴ After Alexander’s army drives them through this mountain pass, he comes up with a plan to seal them away from the rest of humanity forever. He prays to the one God to aid him in this plan, beseeching him as follows:

“God of gods, lord of all creation, who made all things by your Word, both heaven and earth. Nothing is impossible for you, all things are slaves to the word of your command. You spoke and they were created, you commanded and it was done. You alone are eternal, supreme, invisible, sole god, and there is no other but you. Through your name and your will I have done what you wished, and you have placed the whole world in my hands. I call now upon your name that is so often praised: fulfil this request of mine and cause these two mountains to come together, as I have asked of you, and do not look askance at me, wretched as I am, who have been so bold as to speak in this way. I know you care for me and your supreme goodness.”¹⁷⁵

Immediately, God answers Alexander’s prayer, and the massive mountains before Alexander and his army slowly move together. Alexander praises God for this miracle, and then makes haste to construct a massive bronze wall between the mountains which eventually would become known as the Caspian Gates. The Caspian Gates, so it is said in the *Romance*, are so strong that they are impervious to fire and are resistant to pressure from iron, making them resistant to any form of siege.¹⁷⁶ This story concludes by stating Alexander’s reason for sealing off these many nations behind this bronze fortress from the rest of humanity; the *Romance* describes the peoples which he shuts out as disgusting creatures, humans who ate worms, “dogs, flies, snakes, aborted foetuses, dead bodies and unformed human embryos,” as well as human corpses, and seeking to

¹⁷³ *Alexander Romance*, 186.

¹⁷⁴ *Alexander Romance*, 186.

¹⁷⁵ *Alexander Romance*, 186.

¹⁷⁶ *Alexander Romance*, 186.

protect humanity from this great barbarian horde and their twisted practices, Alexander locked them away behind the impenetrable Caspian Gates forever.¹⁷⁷

There are several possible historical locations for the Caspian or Alexandrian Gates that could have served as the inspiration for this story. Andrew Runni Anderson posits that there are three locations that the Caspian Gates could refer to when mentioned by historians: “The Caspian Gates proper, a set of defiles between Media and Parthia beginning about fifty miles southeast of Rhagae (modern Rai, about five miles south of Teheran) cleaving Mount Caspius, a range projected from the Taurus (Elburz) Mountains...the pass of Dariel (Darial, Daryal) through the central Caucasus...[and] the pass of Derbend (Derbent) between the eastern end of a spur of the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea.”¹⁷⁸ Alexander the Great, Anderson continues, is understood by the majority of historians as being factually associated with the first area, the mountain pass near the Taurus Mountains at Mount Caspius, as it is the location where Arrian describes Darius fleeing from Alexander’s pursuit after the Battle of Gaugamela in 331-330 B.C..¹⁷⁹ It is possible that this event is where this legend of Alexander driving a great enemy army behind a mountain pass originated. Arrian describes Alexander’s relentless pursuit of the Persian king Darius in the *Anabasis*. He states “Alexander took with him the cavalry—the Companions, the light cavalry, and the mercenaries under Erigyus—the Macedonian phalanx other than those detailed to guard the treasure, the archers, and the Agrianians. He marched at speed, with men falling behind from exhaustion and horses dying.”¹⁸⁰ In short, Alexander is described as being willing to stop at nothing to capture Darius—this could certainly be the behavior of a king who would pursue an enemy for fifty days without rest.

¹⁷⁷ *Alexander Romance*, 187.

¹⁷⁸ Anderson, 1928, 130.

¹⁷⁹ Anderson, 1928, 131.

¹⁸⁰ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, III.19.2; III.20.2-4.

Alexander's relationship to Gog and Magog as their mortal enemy is further emphasized in the later stories in which he appears in the Muslim tradition. The Caspian Gates mentioned in the *Romance* are generally accepted in the scholarly community as most likely referring to the pass of Derbend in the Caucasus, a region in which Alexander never travelled.¹⁸¹ In this location once, as recorded by both Persian and Arabic sources, was the Iron Gate of Derbend, a set of walls in the mountain pass built by the Persian kings Kavadh I and Khosro I Anushirvan.¹⁸² Anderson suggests that after Daghestan was conquered by the caliphate in the early eighth century, a Muslim tradition of "Iskandar," or Alexander the Great began to develop there;¹⁸³ another example of Alexander's presence appearing in another cultures' traditions and mythical corpus. Alexander the Great had already possessed a significant role in Islam at this time as the figure Dulcarnain (Zul-Qarnain), as is recorded in sura Al-Kahf. This title for Alexander, Dulcarnain, or "the two horned one" is a title for the Macedonian king which is traceable back to Jewish, Egyptian, Ethiopic, Greek, and Coptic traditions of Alexander the Great, and seems to be clearly related to Alexander's mythical role as the demi-god son of Zeus-Ammon, the two-horned god.¹⁸⁴

The appearance of the Alexander myth in the Qur'an shows his role as a defender of the world against the forces of evil, as well as a harbinger of the end times. Under the name of Dulcarnain in sura Al-Kahf of the Qur'an, Alexander comes across a group of people living in a mountain pass who are being harassed by the forces of Gog and Magog from the other side.¹⁸⁵ These people beseech Alexander, saying;

¹⁸¹ Anderson, 1928, 130.

¹⁸² Anderson, 1928, 154.

¹⁸³ Anderson, 1928, 154.

¹⁸⁴ Van Donzel, Schmidt, 2010, 57; *Alexander Romance*, 38.

¹⁸⁵ Sura 18:94.

“O Zul-Qarnain! Surely Gog and Magog¹ are spreading corruption throughout the land. Should we pay you tribute, provided that you build a wall between us and them?”¹⁸⁶

Alexander agrees, then begins construction of a great set of iron gates that would fill the gap between the two mountains and save the people from the forces of evil. The iron gates Alexander constructs are impenetrable to siege or scaling, and after he finishes their construction he praises God, similar to his actions in the *Romance*.¹⁸⁷ Following this verse, however, in contrast to the *Romance* Alexander makes reference to the end of the world when he speaks to the people. He states:

“This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will level it to the ground. And my Lord’s promise is ever true. On that Day, We will let them surge [like waves] over one another. Later, the Trumpet will be blown, and We will gather all [people] together.”

He declares that at the end of days, when the Trumpet is blown (a biblical sign of the apocalypse), the gates that he has constructed will be torn down by God and Gog and Magog will be allowed to rampage over the earth before the Judgement of mankind.¹⁸⁸ Here, Alexander is again given the role as a harbinger of the end times, laying the foundation of God’s plan for His people when the time should come for the end of the world.

This Qur’an passage, Anderson suggests, was the inspiration for Muslim thinkers to label the Iron Gate of Derbend as Alexander’s creation, as they were trying to find worldly evidence for the holy scripture.¹⁸⁹ However, as this story is in the Qur’an it seems that this story of Alexander and the Caspian Gates existed in some form before the creation of Islam, and possibly before the creation of Christianity. Anderson argues that Alexander’s continuous association

¹⁸⁶ Sura 18:94.

¹⁸⁷ Sura 18:97-98.

¹⁸⁸ Matthew 24:31 (NRSV).

¹⁸⁹ Anderson, 1928, 154.

with Herakles, and further, “his Babylonian prototype Gilgamesh,” allowed people to eventually view Alexander as filling the role of these demi-god heroes and performing their duties as “the natural protector” of the homeland against barbarian hordes.¹⁹⁰ Thus, he concludes, “it was natural to represent Alexander as the builder of the Gate and the protecting genius of the Caucasus,” a barrier which kept many peoples safe from raiding neighboring forces.¹⁹¹

But who are the forces of evil which Alexander seals out from humanity in these stories, Gog and Magog? Gog and Magog appear in the Bible several times as the enemy of Israel and God’s people.¹⁹² The Book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament tells of Gog and Magog’s prophesied conflict with Israel;

“The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him and say: Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; I will turn you around and put hooks into your jaws, and I will lead you out with all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great company, all of them with shield and buckler, wielding swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Put are with them, all of them with buckler and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remotest parts of the north with all its troops—many peoples are with you.”¹⁹³

The forces of Gog, “of the land of Magog,” Ezekiel prophesies, will one day attack Israel with “a great horde, a mighty army,” which God will use as an example of his power when he defeats them for His people.¹⁹⁴ In doing so, God will make the entire army and people of Gog “fall on the mountains of Israel,” and will feed them to birds of prey and every kind of wild animal.¹⁹⁵ To the land of Magog He promises divine fire to destroy Israel’s enemies.¹⁹⁶ In the Book of Revelation, a later Christian text, it is said that in the end times, Satan will be released, and Gog

¹⁹⁰ Anderson, 1928, 141.

¹⁹¹ Anderson, 1928, 141.

¹⁹² Ezekiel 38-39, 1 Chronicles 5:4, Revelation 20:7-10.

¹⁹³ Ezekiel 38:1-6.

¹⁹⁴ Ezekiel 38:15.

¹⁹⁵ Ezekiel 39:4.

¹⁹⁶ Ezekiel 39:6.

and Magog will become his servants through manipulation, and will attack “the saints and the beloved city,” until, like in the Book of Ezekiel, they are destroyed by God’s divine wrath and cast into brimstone with “the beast and the false prophet” to be tormented forever.¹⁹⁷

In this story, Alexander opposes Gog and Magog, the enemies of God’s people; Alexander’s opposition to these forces shows his allegiance and friendship to the forces of God. It is difficult to determine the exact historical identity of Gog and Magog, though it appears this enmity and evil is their defining characteristic. Scholars Emeri van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt have traced the name Gog to Gyges of Lydia, a king in western Asia minor in 676 B.C., as well as a country to the north of Syria once referred to as Gaga, and a land known as Gagu, said to be located near Assyria.¹⁹⁸ There are also similarities between the word “Gog” and the Sumerian term for darkness, “gug,” and though the etymology of Magog is contested, van Donzel and Schmidt argue that Magog “may originally have been a derivation of Gog, meaning “from the land of Gog,” possibly labelling Magog as those “from the land of darkness.”¹⁹⁹ Gog and Magog are the quintessential forces of darkness against civilization in many myths and scriptural texts; van Donzel and Schmidt suggest that any great threat to the world or society could be construed as a personification of Gog and Magog, be they Napoleon and the Nazis or the Romans and the Huns.²⁰⁰ Their defining role as Gog and Magog is that of the enemy, the foreign invader who seeks to destroy a way of life. In the Jewish tradition in the second century B.C., this role takes on that of the enemy of the Messiah.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Revelation 20:7-10.

¹⁹⁸ Van Donzel, Schmidt, 2010, 3.

¹⁹⁹ Van Donzel, Schmidt, 2010, 3.

²⁰⁰ Van Donzel and Schmidt, 2010, 4.

²⁰¹ Van Donzel and Schmidt, 2010, 6.

Thus, Alexander, through the stories told about him that found themselves in the Qur'an and the *Romance*, became a figure viewed by many as a hero who held back the forces of darkness from the civilized world. Amitay argues that, in the formation of the idea of Alexander defending the world against the ancient enemies of Israel at God's command, he became for many "the defender of humanity in general and of Monotheism in particular."²⁰² Alexander was viewed by many as a figure intrinsically tied to the holding back of the biblical forces of darkness which would one day be released and return at the end times to oppose the Messiah. Through his myth, he is depicted as an instrument of God's will, and as a figure connected to the coming of the end of the world, and as such, intrinsically connected to the coming Messiah, whose presence he helped to bring forth, and whose enemies he worked to repel.

Conclusion:

We are left with a portrait of Alexander in which the Macedonian king signifies, for the Jewish writers who allude to him in the Book of Daniel, the "end of an era," as Amitay aptly describes it.²⁰³ Alexander is seen as representing the catalyst for the events of the coming of the Son of Man, the destruction of the earthly kingdoms by God, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He, as an instrument of God, creates the environment in which the Messiah will appear. In a prophetic sense, Alexander's kingdom is the last of the four great and terrible kingdoms of the earth which precede the coming of the Kingdom of God; his era will end with the coming of the Son of Man. In a literal sense, the descendants of Alexander's successors, the Seleucids, created a period of immense turmoil and violence for the Jewish people, and, in doing so, spurred them to write the Book of Daniel which promised the coming of a messiah

²⁰² Amitay, 2010, 151.

²⁰³ Amitay, 2010, 158.

which would deliver them, and thus created a messianic expectation. Both of these perceptions of Alexander were critical for laying the groundwork for the coming of Christ and his reception by his followers. The myths of Gog and Magog further this cause, in that in them Alexander represents the force holding the armies of evil back from ravaging humanity and God's people. When Alexander is gone and the gates are destroyed, the forces of Gog and Magog will be freed, and this is said to coincide with the end times, the period of the coming of the Messiah. Thus, Alexander again appears mythically as a figure acting in the world at the last stages of human history before the coming of the Kingdom of God.

It is difficult to assess directly how much of a messianic expectation there was amongst the Jewish people at the time of the coming of Jesus. Shailer Mathews argues that in this period, Jewish messianic expectation was concentrated in a particular school of Pharisaism, where "the hope was very intense that God would one day send a deliverer who should reinstate Israel among the nations and make the new nation the lord of the earth."²⁰⁴ He suggests that the popular view amongst the Jewish people at this time was, most likely, similar to that of the Pharisees, but perhaps "lacking its better, or at least its transcendental elements," concentrating on a revolutionary view rather than a religious one.²⁰⁵ Amitay argues that Alexander's popularization of self-divination, explored in the previous chapter, coupled with a favorable memory of him by the Jews, could also have tipped "the scale toward a more literal understanding of the notion of Divine sonship," and made the "idea of a Messiah who was also a son of God and a Divinity in His own right," a more reasonable concept to believe in.²⁰⁶ Regardless of the particular aspects of the view of a potential messiah, it seems there was a belief in the population that soon *he*

²⁰⁴ Mathews, 1898, 437.

²⁰⁵ Mathews, 1898, 437.

²⁰⁶ Amitay, 2010, 175.

would come--for the catalyst Alexander had already passed through the world, and he had triggered the last era of history where God would send his Son to earth for the salvation of mankind.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ John 1.

Chapter Three: Alexander the Great and Early Christianity

In the first chapter of this text, it is demonstrated how Alexander spread the concept of divine sonship to the areas of the world he encountered through his great achievements and association with his mythical ancestor Herakles. In the second chapter, Alexander's fostering of an environment for the Jewish people to write about the end times and the coming of the Messiah, an event he was said to have triggered, is explained. This third and final chapter focuses on how these ideas synthesize in both the figure of Jesus and the religion of Christianity, understood through an analysis of the life of Jesus Christ, his political background, and the religious and cultural background from which the religion which stemmed from him, Christianity, emerged.

As in the case of Alexander, the historical Jesus is a difficult man to uncover; all aspects of his history are touched by beliefs about him. He is written about by some as a mere preacher, some as a "proto-pharisaic rabbi nationalist,"²⁰⁸ some by many other titles, and some, of course, as the Messiah. The greatest body of the knowledge of Christ's life comes from the Christian scriptures, contained in the New Testament. These books, called the Gospels, or the "good news," contain the story of Christ's ministry to the people of Judea. The Gospels are not a perfect text for the use of historical analysis however, as is noted by scholars like Donald W. Riddle; he aptly points out that "the central problem of the gospels" is that they must be studied "for their own purposes and messages" as a religious text, but also be weaned for their information about what historically "can be known of Jesus."²⁰⁹ These two messages, of course, may not always align. Be that as it may, the Gospels rest definitively as the greatest source of

²⁰⁸ Garber, 2015, 385.

²⁰⁹ Riddle, 1941, 97.

knowledge about the life of Christ, and thus rest as our starting point for the foundation of our understanding of this historical figure's life. Through an understanding of Jesus' life and myth, we will see how themes from the Alexander myth have found themselves in Christ, including the concepts of cosmopolitanism, divine sonship, and semi-divine nature.

The Life of Christ:

“In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’” - Luke 2:8-14 (NRSV).

According to the Christian scriptures, Jesus Christ was born in the town of Nazareth in Galilee, the son of a Jewish woman named Mary and the almighty God.²¹⁰ Mary had a husband named Joseph, but Christ is held by the Christian texts to not be his son, despite the many cases in which he is referred to as such.²¹¹ Here, perhaps, we see the beginnings of a parallel with the myth of Alexander who was also said to have two fathers: one human and illegitimate, and one true and divine. Jesus is heralded in the Gospels as the Son of God, conceived by divine conception which was heralded by the angel Gabriel.²¹² Again similarly in the case of Alexander, great prophecies are made of Jesus before his birth, that he will be “a Savior, who is the Messiah,

²¹⁰ Luke 2:4-6.

²¹¹ Mark 10:47, Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55, Luke 4:22, John 1:45.

²¹² Luke 2:11.

the Lord,” a man destined to change the world by God.²¹³ In his adulthood, he began a ministry to the people of greater Jerusalem, traveling from town to town and preaching the word of God. This word of God contained several teachings that are said to have shocked its recipients in their originality and world-changing truth, emphasizing the importance of the other world over this one and Christ’s role in attaining what he called the kingdom of Heaven.²¹⁴ These new teachings did not go unnoticed by the greater authorities in the area, however, and according to the Gospels, at the end of his ministry, Jesus is tried by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate for charges of claiming to be King of the Jews, purposefully disturbing the peace in Judea, and subverting Rome’s interests.²¹⁵ For these crimes, he is crucified then placed in a tomb, where he is later said to be resurrected.²¹⁶

Though little can be confirmed of the truth of the Gospels in telling the life of the historical Jesus, this last narrative about his crucifixion is confirmed by another source, that of Tacitus’ *Annals*, a text written in the early second century.²¹⁷ Mention of Jesus first appears in the *Annals*’ account of the reign of Emperor Nero, and his name is used primarily to explain the identity of the Christians, who Tacitus describes as “a class hated for their abominations” by the Roman people.²¹⁸ It is here that Tacitus provides some of the only non-Gospel evidence for the crucifixion described in the Gospels. He states:

“Christus, for whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”²¹⁹

²¹³ Luke 2:11.

²¹⁴ Matthew 13:53, Mark 1:15, John 6:50-71.

²¹⁵ Luke 23 (NRSV).

²¹⁶ Matthew 27:28

²¹⁷ Hadas, 1942, xxv.

²¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

²¹⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

One can assume that this “superstition” was possibly the belief in the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the kingdom of Heaven. In order to understand the charges brought before Jesus and their gravity for the Roman government, as well as Alexander’s influence upon them, one must first look to the contemporary political climate of Judea at the time of Jesus’ ministry.

Revolution in Jewish Provinces

“Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to live there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? Her temple has become like a person without honor; her glorious vessels have been carried into exile. Her infants have been killed in her streets, her youths by the sword of the foe. What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave. And see, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned them. Why should we live any longer?” - Mattathias, father of Judas Maccabeus, 1 Maccabees 2:7-13 (NRSV).

The provincial instability caused by the wars of Alexander and his successors directly impacted Jesus’ life and the perception of his messianic mission. By the time of Jesus’ ministry, the Romans were well familiar with the problems with managing the Jewish provinces under their control. The revolution started by Judas Maccabeus against Antiochus IV in the second century B.C. had several descendants in the years leading to Jesus’ ministry, especially in a location of modern Palestine known as Galilee. As scholars such as Andrew C. Skinner have noted, the province of Galilee had seen the wars of Alexander himself, those of his successors like Antiochus IV, and Cleopatra VII of the Ptolemaic dynasty; indeed, the central conflict over the region of Palestine had several campaigns that went through Galilee frequently in the the third century B.C.²²⁰ When the Maccabean revolt occurred, it was the Galileans who paid the

²²⁰ Skinner, 1996, 114-116.

price for the heroism of the Judeans, when in an act of vengeance the Seleucid general Bacchides performed great violence against the people of this region.²²¹ Jonathan Maccabeus, one of the leaders of the Maccabean revolt after the passing of his elder brother Judas, was said to have died in this region on campaign against the Seleucids.²²² Then, after the Maccabean revolt, the inhabitants of Galilee witnessed also the wars of the Romans, including Pompey, of the first triumvirate, Marc Antony, Vespasian, and Titus.²²³ Pompey's war resulted in the annexation of Judea and Galilee to Rome in 63 B.C., stripping the Jews of their hard-fought independence.²²⁴

In the following years, the Roman Senate installed King Herod as a client leader of the Jews.²²⁵ Herod ruled over the people of Galilee with an iron fist, campaigning in the region in 44 B.C. where he defeated and captured an "arch-robber" known as Hezekiah as well as other bandit leaders.²²⁶ In 43 B.C. the Jews were late for sending in their taxes to Rome, and the result was the enslavement of many Jewish city officials as well as their citizens.²²⁷ Herod made every effort to consolidate his rule, and his people grew greatly embittered. When his death occurred in 4 B.C., a revolution in Galilee was started by Judas, the son of Hezekiah whom Herod killed, boldly claiming to the people that the taxation of the Jews at the hands of the Romans "was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty."²²⁸ He argued that no man could rule the Jews, only God, and with this as his banner he began his campaign against the Romans.²²⁹ At around the same time, Josephus reports that in the region of

²²¹ Skinner, 1996, 116.

²²² Skinner, 1996, 116.

²²³ Skinner, 1996, 114.

²²⁴ Skinner, 1996, 117.

²²⁵ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 1.20.1.

²²⁶ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.4.1; Skinner, 1996, 118.

²²⁷ Skinner, 1996, 117.

²²⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.1.1.

²²⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.1.1-6.

Perea a man named Simon declared himself king of the Jews, and in Judea a shepherd named Athrongeus “ventured to set himself up” as the king of the Jews, leading a “troop of armed men” against the Roman government.²³⁰ The Romans were swift in their response to these rebellions, sending a general named Varus with two legions to quell the insurrection.²³¹ He made quick work of these revolts, scattering the Jewish forces and, according to Josephus, crucifying two thousand of the most guilty “authors of this commotion.”²³²

This is the Galilee in which Jesus was said to be hailed from, a Galilee which still had strong memories of not just the great revolt of Judas Maccabeus, spurred on by the prophecies of Daniel, but also the revolts of Judas of Galilee and others. It was a Galilee that had faced immense hardship and death. If there was a contingent of Jews who had believed that the reign of the Seleucids was the beginning of the end times, one can only imagine that these apocalyptic feelings must have been heightened in a world ravaged by war. Alexander, in this view, had triggered these events, starting the beginning of the end; all that was left was the appearance of a Messiah. As Josephus notes, many men declared themselves king of the Jews, possibly attempting to anoint themselves the Messiah described in the Book of Daniel. It would be Jesus of Galilee, however, who would be remembered as this figure by the Christians who came after him.

Sean Freyne has argued that it is quite possible that “the Galilean crowds” which formed around Jesus “did in fact respond politically to Jesus’ ministry among them,” perhaps hoping that he would be the political leader that finally set them free.²³³ Indeed, after the crucifixion takes place, and Jesus has entered the tomb, the apostles lament his death, saying that they “had hoped

²³⁰ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.4.2-3.

²³¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.5.1.

²³² Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2.5.2.

²³³ Freyne, 1980, 228.

that he was the one to redeem Israel.”²³⁴ Jesus, however, throughout his whole ministry made it clear that he would not be this figure for the Galileans, or the Jewish people in general; he instead states that his kingdom “is not of this world,”²³⁵ and he chastises his apostles for focusing on human and earthly affairs rather than the divine.²³⁶ It seems likely when Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about taxation that they had many of the political ideas present in the previous revolutions of Galilee on their mind. They state: “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?”²³⁷ Here, one cannot help but think of the “fourth sect of Jewish philosophy” authored by the rebel Judas of Galilee who, as has been previously noted, stated that paying taxes to a pagan government violated the rule of God.²³⁸ Jesus marks himself as different from Judas and separate from the Zealot movement when he states his famous line, “give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s,” a line of direct opposition to the philosophy of Judas.²³⁹

Despite this, however, as Freyne notes, “a wandering prophet-like figure such as Jesus, was likely to draw together many such disparate strands, and the religious-apocalyptic tone of his language could easily have been interpreted in political terms by those with such hopes and expectations.”²⁴⁰ Though Jesus may have himself emphasized the other-worldly nature of his ministry, the revolutionary expectations of his character by those who followed him were enough

²³⁴ Luke 24:2.

²³⁵ John 18:36 (NRSV).

²³⁶ John 18:36, Mark 8:33 (NRSV).

²³⁷ Matthew 22:16-17 (NRSV).

²³⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.1.6.

²³⁹ Matthew 22:21 (NRSV).

²⁴⁰ Freyne, 1980, 228.

to condemn him before Pontius Pilate, and some scholars, such as Zev Garber, have even argued that Christ was the revolutionary anti-Roman Zealot he was accused of being.²⁴¹ Thus, when Jesus is brought before Pilate by the Jews with charges of subverting Rome's interests, declaring himself the King of the Jews, and encouraging others to not pay taxes, Pontius Pilate is faced with a type of figure he may have believed he had seen before; another Jewish revolutionary who posed risk of creating provincial instability.²⁴² Though the Jesus of the Gospels is not one of these rebels, his fate is the same as those revolutionaries before him: crucifixion.

Thus, we see that the world in which Jesus' ministry was performed was significantly impacted by the life and legacy of Alexander the Great. Alexander's presence in the eschatology of the Jewish people and his successors' treatment of the regions of Galilee and Judaea encouraged a revolutionary ethos with political and theological ideas at the forefront of their peoples' lives. The provincial instability in these areas caused by both his own campaigns and those who came after him as well as the Messianic expectations developed by the Book of Daniel in which he is one of the principal characters in triggering its prophesied events set the Jewish world on a path of revolution and change, a widespread discontent with the current state of the world and its rulers. Jesus, hailing from the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, was no doubt influenced by this state of affairs, both from the conversations going on around him, and the revolts occurring as he was growing up. When Jesus speaks to the people in his adulthood, both he and his audience are informed by this revolutionary background of the regions in which he is preaching—and when he is brought before Pilate, his fate is sealed.

²⁴¹ Freyne, 1980, 228; Garber, 2015, 390.

²⁴² Luke 23 (NRSV).

Alexander Son of Ammon and Christ Son of God

Several of the central characteristics of the Alexander myth, as has been noted in the first chapter of this text, share similarities and parallels with the story and figure of Jesus Christ. Both figures are said to have one real father and one claimed father; for Alexander, Philip and Zeus-Ammon, and for Jesus, Joseph and God the Father. Where Alexander's lineage was traced to the legendary hero Herakles and his mighty divine father Zeus, in the Gospels Jesus' lineage would be related to the legendary Abraham, the first of the covenant with God, and Adam, the first man created by God, before the declaration that he is the Son of God.²⁴³ Both Alexander and Jesus were said to have, and have been commonly depicted with, a mother who cared deeply for them; a mother who would raise her son as royalty, though in Jesus' case his throne was in Heaven, and not on earth.²⁴⁴ With the spreading and implementation of Greek myths, especially those of Alexander and legendary Greek heroes like Herakles or Perseus, into the local areas in which Jesus performed his ministry, one could see how the concept of divine sonship and divinization of a mortal being could be more easily accepted by the Jews who would become Christians.²⁴⁵ The Roman emperors themselves, following Alexander and his tradition, also absorbed this divinization concept into their public image, leading to a long line of rulers who claimed that they were the vicar of the gods, or of God.²⁴⁶

Further, Alexander's descriptions as a cosmopolitan philosopher-king bear would bear striking similarities to the way Jesus is described in the New Testament. At once Jesus is "the Word" (the *logos*, or wisdom, and reason) made flesh as well as the "King of kings, and Lord of

²⁴³ Luke 3:23-38, Matthew 1:1-16 (KJV).

²⁴⁴ Amitay, 2010, 194.

²⁴⁵ Amitay, 2010, 199.

²⁴⁶ Amitay, 2010, 170.

lords” over all creation.²⁴⁷ Jesus’ mission, like the mission of the philosopher-king Alexander, is to bring salvation to mankind, “that the world through him might be saved”²⁴⁸—but Jesus’ method of bringing about this salvation differs greatly from Alexander’s, in any depiction of the Macedonian king. Where the philosopher-king Alexander tried to bring about salvation and right behavior “by force of arms,” Jesus would try to do so through preaching and non-violence, by martyrdom and “turning the other cheek.”²⁴⁹ If Jesus did come to be viewed as a representation of the philosopher-king, when the concept had manifested in him it is clear that it was fundamentally changed from its prior form in Alexander; where strength and conquest used to rule, meekness and forgiveness would triumph—and in place of an earthly kingdom, there would be a kingdom of heaven.²⁵⁰

Thus, we see the arrival of many of the mythical ideas of Alexander the Great appear in the myth of Jesus Christ. Ory Amitay has claimed that the Alexander myth’s “theological framework” of “Divine Sonship, dual paternity, and Deification,” bridged the gap between monotheistic and polytheistic religion by providing a way in which a mortal man could be (or could become) God’s Son, even if there was only one God.²⁵¹ This concept must have influenced the divinization of Jesus Christ by the religion of his followers which emerged after his death. In order to understand the incorporation of Greek cultural ideas like the semi-divine hero into the culture of the Jewish people, and how these ideas influenced early Christianity, one must first understand the process of Hellenization that occurred in the Middle East after the events of Alexander’s campaigns.

²⁴⁷ John 1:14, Revelation 19:16 (KJV).

²⁴⁸ John 3:17 (KJV).

²⁴⁹ Matthew 5:39 (KJV).

²⁵⁰ Matthew 7:21 (KJV)

²⁵¹ Amitay, 2010, 200.

Hellenization:

Hellenization is an important topic in the study of the relationship between Alexander the Great and Christianity because its process encouraged the cultural amalgamation of Greek ideas with those of local populations which, in turn, encouraged important religious precursors to Christianity like Alexandrian Judaism. The Hellenization of the Middle East after the life of Alexander allowed for a great flourishing of cultural interaction and dialogue between the conquering Greeks and the peoples they conquered, one of which was the Jews. Eric Meyers and Mark Chancey have argued that when the cultures of Greece and Jerusalem met with one another, there was not “a clash of civilizations,” as some would liken it, where the two peoples stood at odds apart from one another, but rather a “confluence or convergence of cultures” over hundreds of years which allowed Jewish culture “to develop in new ways and to absorb aspects of Greek culture without sacrificing its independence of thinking and beliefs.”²⁵² Meyers and Chancey argue further that Hellenism, and the Greek language, “became a vehicle by which Jewish culture could effectively express itself and preserve its ways,” a fact which can be seen in the great cultural touchstones of Hellenistic Jewish culture like the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek.²⁵³

It has been noted in the second chapter of this text how Hellenistic practices were enforced by the Seleucids on the people of Jerusalem, both in the realms of religion and cultural practice.²⁵⁴ The Book of Maccabees attests to this, stating that King Antiochus IV desired that “his whole kingdom...should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs,”

²⁵² Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 11-12.

²⁵³ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 12.

²⁵⁴ 1 Maccabees 1:41-44.

encouraging them “to follow customs strange to the land.”²⁵⁵ These were far different living conditions for the Jews from those of Persian rule, which, for the most part, did not seek to impose language or culture on them.²⁵⁶ Though the Hellenistic pressure in Jerusalem later led to a revolt, 1 Maccabees *does* note that many in Jerusalem, Gentile and Jew alike, were quick and eager to follow the king’s new cultural guidelines for his kingdom.²⁵⁷ One must imagine that the implementation of Greek as the *lingua franca* of the region as well as encouragement towards Greek religion must have made an impact on the culture of the Jews living in Jerusalem.

Not all mixing of Greek and other cultures was as forcibly implemented as that which Antiochus IV decreed. Another major way in which Greek culture spread in the Middle East was through the creation of new cities in the Greek fashion both by Alexander himself and his successors.²⁵⁸ In many cases, cities that previously existed were refounded as Greek *poleis*, like in the case of the Egyptian city of Beth Shean founded in the sixteenth century B.C. which was refounded in the Hellenistic period as Scythopolis.²⁵⁹ When these new Greek cities were founded, they would usually have been given a boule or legislative body to manage internal affairs, as well as typical Greek institutional buildings like gymnasia, stadiums, theaters, and schools.²⁶⁰ This was part of a project of urbanization that began during Alexander’s rule but continued after his death.²⁶¹ These cities, designed in similar fashion, tended to have a “walled area in the center with smaller satellite settlements nearby that provided food and other necessities to the city.”²⁶² On top of this, as Meyers and Chancey have suggested, the creations

²⁵⁵ 1 Maccabees 1:41-44.

²⁵⁶ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 16.

²⁵⁷ 1 Maccabees 1:43.

²⁵⁸ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 13.

²⁵⁹ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 13.

²⁶⁰ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 14.

²⁶¹ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 14.

²⁶² Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 14.

of not only new Greek cities but their networks with each other enabled great commercial enterprise and with it, the rapid spread of Hellenistic culture²⁶³, and with it, Greek mythical and religious ideas like the heroic divinization of Alexander and Herakles.

Alexandrian Judaism, Philo, and the New Testament:

“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one” - Paul, Epistle to the Romans 3:29-30 (NRSV).

Alexandrian Judaism forms an essential part of the cultural background from which Christianity would emerge. The most important city founded by Alexander during his campaigns was Alexandria in Egypt. In the Hellenistic period, Alexandria would serve as a thriving cultural center for Jewish thinkers engaging with the ideas of Greek philosophy and the Greek language; scholars such as Ronald H. Nash have labelled the city the “chief center of Hellenistic thought.”²⁶⁴ One of the greatest achievements of the Alexandrian Jewish population in this period was the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek.²⁶⁵ Written during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the descendant of one of Alexander’s generals, the Septuagint was said to be written with the assistance of seventy-two Greek speaking Jewish elders and was requested by the king himself, according to Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*.²⁶⁶ Ptolemy, Josephus reports, “had been informed that there were many books of laws among the Jews worthy of inquiring after,” and desired the works of the Hebrew Bible for part of his royal collection.²⁶⁷ In this inclination, Ptolemy wrote to Eleazer, a high priest of the Jews, explaining how he had freed a hundred thousand Jewish slaves in the areas under his control, and appointed

²⁶³ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 14.

²⁶⁴ Nash, 1984, 82.

²⁶⁵ Meyers and Chancey, 2012, 20.

²⁶⁶ Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 12.2.1.

²⁶⁷ Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 12.2.1.

them to positions in his armies and in his court, and being “desirous to do what will be grateful to these, and to all the other Jews in the habitable earth,” how he would like to procure a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek produced by the most skillful and fluent elders of the tribes of Israel.²⁶⁸ According to Josephus, the high priest agreed to this request and the Septuagint was produced for the Hellenistic king.²⁶⁹

This episode of the creation of the Septuagint demonstrates several interesting aspects of interplay between Jews and Greeks in Alexandria. Ptolemy reveals in his letter that he has appointed several Jews not only to positions in his army, as Alexander was said to have offered the Jews,²⁷⁰ but also to positions in his court where they would likely hold sway with the highest aspects of Hellenistic society. It seems that it was only a matter of time before, in this setting, many high positioned Jews would be engaging with the works of Greek philosophy occupying high-positioned Greeks, and vice versa. Surely the Greek inclination towards Jewish works was present, as can be seen in the translation of many important Jewish works like the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* into Greek by the second century B.C.²⁷¹ As Nash has noted, another influential piece of writing to emerge from Alexandria was the *Wisdom of Solomon* in the first century B.C., which, he argues, “is a synthesis of Old Testament religion (primarily Moses and the Prophets) and the pagan Hellenistic philosophy of the day.”²⁷² This text, he argues, sought to reconcile concepts from the Greek philosophies of Platonism and Stoicism with “the personification of Wisdom found in Proverbs 8,” leading to a depiction of the creation of the world similar to the one described in Plato’s *Timaeus*.²⁷³ With these works, and many others as evidence, Nash concludes

²⁶⁸ Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 12.2.5.

²⁶⁹ Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 12.2.6.

²⁷⁰ Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities*, 11.8.5.

²⁷¹ Chancey, Meyers, 2012, 20.

²⁷² Nash, 1984, 82.

²⁷³ Nash, 1984, 83.

that Hellenistic Judaism stands distinct from the religion of the Old Testament which preceded it due to its strong cultural and philosophical change.²⁷⁴

Alexandria in the Hellenistic period was thus filled with a range of philosophies and beliefs which were constantly reacting to one another, be they Platonism, Stoicism, Judaism, or another system occupying the minds of the higher classes of Hellenistic society. Such an environment was ripe for philosophical and theological development, and there is no Alexandrian Jewish philosopher or theologian greater in the Hellenistic period than Philo Judaeus. Philo Judaeus was an Alexandrian Jew “of the priestly class,” as Josephus and St. Jerome report him.²⁷⁵ Said to have lived approximately from 26 B.C. to 50 A.D., he was known for having written numerous works, including commentaries on biblical passages and theological treatises which directly address philosophical questions and the way men ought live their lives.²⁷⁶ Philo has been labelled as strongly Platonic in his thought by many thinkers, and Jerome reports that “there is a proverb among the Greeks ‘Either Plato philonized, or Philo platonized,’ that is, either Plato followed Philo or Philo, Plato,” because “so great is the similarity of ideas and language” in their texts.²⁷⁷ Nash argues that Philo’s work strongly represents not just the ideas of Platonism but also those of Stoicism, especially in his use of the Greek word *logos*.²⁷⁸

The concept of the *logos* is first known to have been used by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus in the sixth century B.C., then to have found common usage in the writings of the Stoics.²⁷⁹ Philo, who most likely engaged with the works of these thinkers, found an important place for the *logos* in his philosophy as the intermediary through which God directly affects the

²⁷⁴ Nash, 1984, 82.

²⁷⁵ Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 11; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.8.1.

²⁷⁶ Nash, 1984, 81.

²⁷⁷ Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 11.

²⁷⁸ Nash, 1984, 81-83.

²⁷⁹ Nash, 1984, 81.

world.²⁸⁰ In his philosophy, God is greatly transcendent, far beyond the reach of human reason; thus, it was necessary for Him to create intermediaries like the *logos* through which His will could be made manifest on earth. Philo used the word *logos* to refer to “Plato’s ideal world, to the mind of God,” and to any of the ambassadors between God and men including angels, priests, and prophets.²⁸¹

To any scholar of Christianity and the New Testament, the use of the word *logos* must immediately jump out in relation to the use of the *Logos* in the Gospel of John. John’s gospel begins;

“In the beginning was the [Logos], and the [Logos] was with God, and the [Logos] was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”²⁸²

The *Logos*, personified in John’s gospel, is in the Christian view Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Son of God.²⁸³ One might draw a connection here between the personified intermediary *logos* of Philo with that of Johannine Christian writing; however, as Nash has noted, “most contemporary New Testament scholars see no need to postulate a conscious relationship between Alexandrian Judaism and the New Testament use of *logos*” because there were many separate ideas of personified wisdom in play “in the Judaism of the time.”²⁸⁴ These scholars argue that the writer of this gospel did not necessarily read and absorb the ideas of Philo Judaeus when he crafted his own work and view of the *logos*.²⁸⁵ Regardless, it is clear that in the Hellenistic period the *logos* was a topic of great interest in the metaphysical battleground between the many philosophies and

²⁸⁰ Nash, 1984, 84.

²⁸¹ Nash, 1984, 84.

²⁸² John 1.1-5 (NRSV).

²⁸³ John 1:14 (NRSV).

²⁸⁴ Nash, 1984, 85.

²⁸⁵ Nash, 1984, 85.

religions of Alexandria. Though Philo's and Alexandrian Judaism's influence on Christianity may not be seen directly in the Gospel of John, it can be best identified in another section of the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews as having a role in crafting the background of many of the author's religious ideas.

Alexandrian Judaism in the New Testament:

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” - Epistle to the Hebrews, 1.1-4 (NRSV)

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a letter in the New Testament written by an unknown author who writes in great depth and remarkable eloquence about Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God. As Nash and many other scholars have noted, the writer of Hebrews “demonstrates a familiarity with the tenets of Hellenistic Judaism” and Platonic philosophy.²⁸⁶ Ceslas Spicq in his frequently cited commentary on Hebrews notes that the author's application of the concept of the divine *logos* in relation to man as the reflection of God to the Son of God is based strongly in his Alexandrian education.²⁸⁷ Nash argues further that the author's elaborations on *sophia* or “Divine Wisdom” and *logos*, demonstrate “familiarity with the Alexandrian work The Wisdom of Solomon,” leading him to the conclusion that the extent of Philo's influence on the writer of Hebrews is uncertain, but “at the very least the writer of Hebrews and Philo shared a common education in Alexandrian thought.”²⁸⁸ Spicq settles on a similar conclusion, except he

²⁸⁶ Nash, 1984, 90.

²⁸⁷ Spicq, 1952, 50.

²⁸⁸ Nash, 1984, 90.

adds that the first line of Hebrews' use of descriptions of the Son of God "like the *logos*," as "the inheritor of creation," "the one and the other, like God himself, the ruler," and as "the bringer/bearer" of the divine is an interesting accumulation of Philonic ideas in a single sentence, which he believes indicates "a probable influence of [Philo] from a literary point of view."²⁸⁹ If this is the case, then there is direct evidence that Greek cultural ideas, mixed and adapted with Jewish theology and transformed into Alexandrian Jewish ideas found their way into the New Testament and the writings of early Christians. This influence on the perception of Christ must also be noted.

As Nash suggests, the Epistle to the Hebrews "assigns mediatorial functions to Jesus that are similar to the functions of Alexandrian mediators," including Jesus' role in revealing God's truth to mankind, creating and sustaining the universe, and redeeming the sins of man.²⁹⁰ The difference that is most evident between Hebrews and the earlier teachings of Alexandrian Judaism is revealed in the dominant and superior *Logos* Jesus is held to assert over the other figures commonly held by Alexandrian Judaism to be called *logos*.²⁹¹ The angels, priests, and prophets are shown clearly in this book to be inferior to God the Son, evident in lines like: "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you'?" and "when he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."²⁹² As such, the writings of Jesus in the Epistle of the Hebrews as the *Logos* seems to be an adapted form of the *logos* described in Alexandrian Jewish writing, clearly influenced by the convergence of Greek and Jewish culture found in Alexander's most prolific city.

²⁸⁹ Spicq, 1952, 50.

²⁹⁰ Nash, 1984, 95.

²⁹¹ Nash, 1984, 96.

²⁹² Epistle to the Hebrews 1.3-5 (NRSV).

In many ways, the Epistle to the Hebrews represents a response to many of the assertions of Alexandrian Judaism, including the role of mediators, *sophia*, and the *logos*. Though it is impossible to identify a direct Philonic influence on the text, it certainly seems that the ideas Philo engaged with are present in this work, and in order to respond to the claims of Alexandrian Judaism, the author would have had to have some familiarity with them. Jesus Christ as Logos formed man superseded all previous notions of *logos* that Philo or any other Alexandrian Jewish writer had to offer, and his role as *the* divine Mediator between God and man was a new concept.²⁹³ The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews would not be the only Christian with relations to the philosophical and theological writings of Alexandria, however, as Alexandria would go on to become one of the most important cities for the development of early Christianity.

Early Christianity in Alexandria:

Early Christianity had great ties to Alexandria which served as the location of a great cultural convergence of Greek and Jewish ideas that would help define Christianity through the works of many of the great early Christian thinkers who lived there.²⁹⁴ Much like the Alexandrian Jews of the past, the Alexandrian Christians would be introduced to the many schools of Greek philosophy still present in the culture of the city. An example of this can be found in the life of Titus Flavius Clemens, or Clement as he came to be known, who has been labelled “one of the most brilliant apologists of the late second century.”²⁹⁵ In his earlier life, Clement travelled around Greece and the Mediterranean Sea in pursuit of knowledge, and finally

²⁹³ Nash, 1984, 105.

²⁹⁴ Djurslev, 2020, 3.

²⁹⁵ Djurslev, 2020, 22.

settled in Alexandria finding a teacher there named Pantaenus.²⁹⁶ There he composed the “Exhortation to the Greeks,” the “Pedagogue,” and the “Stromata,” which “are famous for bridging Hellenistic Judaism, Greek philosophy, and Christianity in the most profound way.”²⁹⁷ Another influential Christian thinker to rise from this area can be found in Origen of Alexandria, who was born in approximately 185 A.D.²⁹⁸ Growing up in Alexandria as a Christian, Origen was said to have been schooled in Greek philosophy by Ammonias Saccas, and he was also said to have visited Athens and Rome.²⁹⁹ Throughout his life he composed many works defending the Christian faith, and he no doubt utilized his knowledge of Greek philosophy to form compelling arguments to those more traditional thinkers who confronted him.³⁰⁰ Scholar Christian Djurslev has noted that though “Christians and non-Christians readily locked horns in intellectual battles” over many philosophical and theological issues, “the training they had was the same” as influential figures schooled in the education of the Hellenistic past.³⁰¹

Alexander the Great himself played a prominent role in this education, as “[he] was so popular at every level of society that virtually any person with basic training in rhetoric would have encountered a certain set of ideas revolving around him,” as Djurslev has argued.³⁰² Both Christians and Romans alike studied Alexander and his conquests, as they “were on the standard curricula in the schools of the Roman empire.”³⁰³ With the Greek Alexander Romance being a part of this imperial literature, one wonders whether the early Christians saw parallels between the Greek king and their own savior, who lived a life marked by divinization not unlike Christ’s

²⁹⁶ Djurslev, 2020, 22.

²⁹⁷ Djurslev, 2020, 22-23.

²⁹⁸ Djurslev, 2020, 6.

²⁹⁹ Djurslev, 2020, 9.

³⁰⁰ Djurslev, 2020, 7.

³⁰¹ Djurslev, 2020, 9.

³⁰² Djurslev, 2020, 9-10.

³⁰³ Djurslev, 2020, 1.

own.³⁰⁴ Alexander is mentioned in both the works of Origen and Clement, and he is discussed by Clement in all of his major texts.³⁰⁵ He also appears in the works of Hippolytus, and Jerome, both of whom frequently reference him in their works.³⁰⁶ Jerome's analysis of Alexander revolves around one of his most important roles in Christianity, that of the harbinger of the end times in the Book of Daniel.³⁰⁷ As discussed in chapter two of this essay, the Book of Daniel is the prophecy that most cements the coming of the Messiah, so it makes intuitive sense that Christians would place great interest in all of the characters present in the prophecy, especially the figure who was said to be the king of the last kingdom of men.

Alexandria stands as one of the most influential cities for the theological development of early Christianity both through the presence of Alexandrian Jewish ideas in the New Testament and the works of the early Christian thinkers who lived there. The city is truly remarkable in the amount of influential works it produced and the types of thinkers it attracted. The interaction between Jewish theology and Greek philosophy that occurred in Alexandria had consequences for the discourse of the Mediterranean world at large, touching Greeks, Romans, Jews and many other people alike; a fitting trait for a city founded by a man who was said to have hosted many nations at his dinner table, as he held court and planned for times to come.

Conclusion:

Alexander the Great's influence on early Christianity is, in large part, reminiscent of his influence on the vast swathe of the world he touched. He not only spread the concept of semi-divine sonship to Jerusalem, but to India, and Egypt, and others. He created the environment in

³⁰⁴ Djurslev, 2020, 14.

³⁰⁵ Djurslev, 2020, 23.

³⁰⁶ Djurslev, 2020, 36.

³⁰⁷ Djurslev, 2020, 36.

which Christianity could grow; from the rumblings of the apocalypse and the Messiah composed by the Jews under the rule of his successors, to the down-trodden people of Galilee, tired from war. He created the city in which an important precursor to Christianity, Hellenistic Judaism, would thrive, a precursor which would find its way into the New Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews—the same city that would also serve as a center for Christian thought when it was still in the age of its infancy. It is no doubt that the early Christian writers were fascinated with Alexander; how could a person living in that period not be, when all around him, signs of Alexander’s presence were still apparent in the world, be they in shrines dedicated to him as a son of God, in the sites of his great victories, in the stories that were told of him, or in simply the cities he created? Alexander touched the world, and it was forever changed.

Following true to their parallel paths, one might say the same thing about Jesus Christ. Where would one have to go in the world to find people who have never heard his name, even if they do not know exactly who he is? Jesus shook the world on a massive scale, albeit far after his own death. He may not have founded cities, but cities have been founded in his name, and one does not even need to mention the dominance Christianity has influenced in the religious sphere of the world for a thousand years. Alexander and Jesus are two divine sons who will never be forgotten by the world that perceived them, and their influence will touch mankind for a long time to come.

Conclusion:

Alexander the Great's impact on Christianity and the figure of Christ is undeniable. Its extent may be justly debated, but its influence is clear. Alexander spread the Greek religious archetype of the "Son of God" across the known world, including to the Jews, who, seemingly admiring this king as Josephus reports, could have become more receptive to this idea by their appreciation of him. Along with this idea, he introduced a conception of universal brotherhood of all mankind, a cause in which he may or may not have believed in; but his belief in this cause is not the principal matter, as he created a kingdom that captured his entire known world filled with men of all races, cultures, and nationalities. Alexander's campaigns, and those of his successors destabilized much of the Middle East, leading to the poverty and spirit of revolution that laid the background of the Maccabean Revolt, then early Christianity and the figure of Christ. The city of Alexandria captured the incredible blend of cultures that occurred under Alexander's rule in its mixing of Greek and Jewish ideas which culminated in Alexandrian Judaism, an influential sect of philosophical thought which carried over many of its ideas into Christianity. The writers of early Christianity themselves acknowledged Alexander's influence on the world around them and the prophecies of Daniel, if only to better describe the religious and political background of their hero, the Messiah.

A potential angle of this project could have been the change in this cultural idea of the hero, from the myths of early Greece to those of the Hellenistic period and finally those of the Christian era; what virtues he is said to possess, and what he is praised for by writers and normal people alike at a current time. I chose to focus instead on the figures of Alexander and Jesus because I wished to extend my research further into Christianity than into the early classical religious past of Greece, though a discussion of the three heroes warrants discussion, especially

in their unique aspects of shared commonality. The myth of Herakles, which survived in Alexander's myth, lives on in Jesus in a fundamentally altered form. Herakles, Alexander, and Jesus are all fundamentally quite different figures united by several common threads of praised virtue, semi-divinity and hero worship that follow a pattern of transformation from warrior to philosopher by the time they arrive in Christ. Herakles was clearly a warrior, and this was his role and virtue as hero. Alexander was the philosopher king, a man who had the virtues of a warrior but also a philosophical mind that could see the highest aspects of the world, even God. This transformation from warrior to philosopher culminates in Jesus, as Christ, a hero who abandons physical conflict in favor of the *spiritual* war and leads his people as a divinely inspired philosopher who conquers not with the sword, but with *ideas*. It seems intuitive that the transformation of values of the hero from warrior to philosopher reflects the change in the values of the age, but the reason for this change, well worthy of study in and of itself, is beyond the scope of this paper.

The conflict between Greek and Jewish ideals in Christianity is another pressing matter introduced by a study of Alexandrian influence on the Jewish-born religion of Christianity. A central argument of this project is that Alexander asserted some measure of Greek influence on the Jews, and that this Greek influence found its way into Christianity. Evidence of Greek influence on the Jews is readily apparent not only in the books of Maccabees saying as much, but also by the architectural evidence of Middle Eastern Greek *poleis* as well as the writings of Alexandrian Judaism like the work of the Septuagint, the first translation of the Jewish Bible into Greek. However, one of the central conflicts in the books of Maccabees is this Greek influence on the Jewish people exerted by the reign of Antiochus IV:

“In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them

many disasters have come upon us.’ This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.’³⁰⁸

The gap between Jew and Greek, or Jew and Gentile, carried over well into Christianity, as can be seen in the writings of St. Paul who attempts to bridge this large cultural gap between the two peoples.³⁰⁹ Some of the problems mentioned in Maccabees are directly addressed in his letters, especially the matter of circumcision which seemed to be an area of intense conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles.³¹⁰ This is understandable, as the Jews are told in the book of Genesis by God that circumcision is the mark of their covenant with Him, an aspect of their religion central to their faith.³¹¹ The Gentile hesitation to partake in this cultural practice can easily be attributed to physical aversion to it, for obvious reasons. The extent of this cultural conflict and exchange between the Greeks and the Jews would be fascinating to explore in its relationship to Christianity. How far did Greek influence extend into the religion? Can one find traces of Greek philosophy in the writings of the Gospels? These would all be excellent questions to explore for any classical religious scholar.

In my study of the Greek and Alexandrian influence on Jewish and Christian culture, it has become increasingly apparent to me that each of these nations and people were constantly involved in an intense cultural exchange of ideas, beliefs, and practices. When writers like St. Jerome are asking questions of whether Philo “platonized” or Plato “philonized” in their writings, it becomes clear that classical thinkers saw the interplay between the philosophical

³⁰⁸ 1 Maccabees 1:11 (NRSV).

³⁰⁹ Colossians 3:11.

³¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 7:18 (NRSV).

³¹¹ Genesis 17:10.

ideas of the Greeks and the theological ideas of the Jews.³¹² This leads me to a central question of this conclusion: why are these writings and the histories of Jews, Christians, and other cultures not included in the academic study of the classics? Ignoring merely the writing of the language of Greek itself in the New Testament, as well as the clear archaeological evidence of Greek architecture in the Middle East, one must be struck by the fact that Alexander the Great, a central figure of classical study, is featured in two out of three of the major Abrahamic religious texts. Alexander's presence in the Book of Daniel in the Bible and sura al-kahf in the Qur'an provide incredible resources for understanding the cultural perception of Alexander after his reign and his immense influence on the Middle East, which I am certain is still felt today. The Greeks were not insulated from the rest of the world, nor did they think they were; Alexander himself is evidence enough for this.

The relationship between Alexander the Great and early Christianity is clear. I would argue that this relationship demonstrates a strong transmission of ideas about Alexander the Great and his myth into the budding religion of Christianity, which could not help but be influenced by the legendary king who had fundamentally shaken up the Middle East and introduced a milieu of cultural ideas therein. These ideas of divine sonship and Greek ideals were made present in the regions of Galilee and greater Jerusalem by Alexander's campaigns and the works of his successors, ideas that must have been, at least, subconsciously on the minds of the many people, Jews and Gentiles alike, who encountered Jesus and his prophetic message. I argue, further, that the mythical conception of Jesus was influenced by the mythical conception of Alexander. This occurred not as an aspect of character that Jesus may have acknowledged about himself, but as an essential association that early Christians would naturally have made

³¹² Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 11.

between their own god-king, Jesus the Christ, and the most famous god-king of the recent past, Alexander the Great of Macedon.

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