

Angelos Chaniotis

OLD WINE IN A NEW SKIN:  
TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE CULT FOUNDATION OF  
ALEXANDER OF ABONOUTEICHOS

An important feature of both public worship and private religiosity in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire is the strong competition among the cults. The competition among the polis communities for the propagation of local deities, for the organisation of impressive festivals and the recognition of privileges of their sanctuaries by the Roman authorities can be clearly recognized in the various means of local self-representation (inscriptions, coins, iconography, public monuments).<sup>1</sup> Religious competition existed also within a community, as the public worship of the traditional gods was confronted not only with the competition of the emperor cult with its spectacular processions and magnificent agons, but also with the individual religious preferences of the members of cult associations, of the initiates in mysteries, or the followers of cults with a philosophical, intellectual or eschatological background. Every new cult entered the field of religious competition, and this applies also to the cult of 'Glykon Neos Asklepios' introduced in the mid-second century A.D. (c. 140–145 A.D.) by Alexander of Abonouteichos. The extraordinary success of the new cult not only impressed the alert intellectuals of the period, but has also attracted the interest of modern research.<sup>2</sup> This success has plausibly been attributed by U. VICTOR and G. SFAMENI GASPARRO to the adoption, modification and extension of existing religious traditions.<sup>3</sup> This paper explores further the conscious combination of traditional and innovative elements in the cult foundation of Alexander. It will be argued that if the exploitation of traditional cultic elements made the new cult seem familiar to potential followers, it was the construction of a distinctive profile that enabled the worshippers to establish a close relationship to the new cult and to acquire thereby to a certain extent a new

---

<sup>1</sup> The bibliography is immense. See, e.g., Weiss 1984: 189–208; Mitchell 1993, I: 206–210; Scheer 1993; Lindner 1994; Elsner 1997: 178–199; for privileges of sanctuaries see, e.g., Rigsby 1996.

<sup>2</sup> I only mention the most important recent studies on this cult, where the reader can find the earlier bibliography: Robert 1980: 393–421; Jones 1986: 133–148; Le Glay 1989: 35–41; Miron 1996: 153–188; Victor 1997; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 275–305. The study of G. Sfameni Gasparro, 'Alessandro di Abonutico, lo "pseudo-profeta" ovvero come costruirsi un'identità religiosa. I. Il profeta, "croce" e "uomo divino"', *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 62 (1996) [1998] 565–590, has, unfortunately been inaccessible to me.

<sup>3</sup> Victor 1997: 38; Sfameni Gasparro 1999. Cf. Caster 1938: 8f.

religious identity. These efforts should be seen within the context of religious competition in the second century A.D.

We know next to nothing about the background of the man from Abonouteichos, a small and unimportant city on the south coast of the Black Sea, who returned to his place of birth sometime between 140 and 145 A.D. in order to found a sanctuary.<sup>4</sup> The most comprehensive source is Lucian's work *Alexander* or *The false prophet*. The fact that Lucian, who had known Alexander personally, regarded him a confidence trickster, a criminal and a crook, does not help us establish an objective picture. Lucian was one of Alexander's worst enemies; he had tried in vain to mobilise the provincial governor against the cult founder; and he even claims that Alexander had planned his assassination; his work – published after Alexander's death – sketches a completely negative picture. But despite Lucian's exaggerations, perhaps even the occasional distortion of truth dictated by dramaturgical considerations, his work still contains accurate information about the cult praxis and its organisation which can be corroborated by other evidence.<sup>5</sup> The historicity of Lucian's assertions is of course a significant issue for any study on Alexander of Abonouteichos, but it is not of decisive importance for the objective of this paper. The question to be discussed here is how a new cult could gain such an enormous popularity within a very short period of time, in spite of the strong competition of other oracular sites, healing sanctuaries and centers of mystery cults, despite the open attacks of enlightened Epicurean philosophers and the Christians of Pontos alike, and despite the lack of the direct support by a central political power – as was the case, e.g., with the cult of Sarapis.<sup>6</sup> Even if one should regard Lucian's information to some extent fictitious, his treatment reveals how an alert observer of the religious tendencies of his time explained and presented to contemporary readership the enormous appeal of a newly founded cult. The recipe of Alexander's success, whether in all details accurately described or to some extent retrospectively reconstructed by Lucian, can serve as a paradigm for the role of both tradition (recursion to existing rituals) and innovation (a new and unique combination of cultic elements and a new ritual performance) in the establishment of a new cult. It is Lucian himself who invites us to read his work in this way, when he presents the introduction of the cult as a well planned scheme, as the result of skillful and cunning staging. Alexander and his collaborators are presented as a group of crooks looking for the best method of gaining money and power (*Alexander* 8f.): after careful consideration of the matter, and realizing that human life is governed by hope and fear, and consequently by the desire to foretell the future, they concluded that the foundation of an oracular shrine, if successful, would make them rich and prosperous. "Then they began planning, first about the place, and next, what should be the commencement and the character of the venture."

<sup>4</sup> A useful summary of the biographical elements and the history of the foundation in Jones 1986: 134–147; Victor 1997: 6f.; cf. Miron 1996: 162 and 168. On Abonouteichos see Marek 1993: 82–88.

<sup>5</sup> Victor 1997: vii and 8–26 and Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 278–282, plausibly endorse the historicity of most of Lucian's statements, although some doubt remains in questions of detail. A good review of the archaeological, numismatic and epigraphic evidence: Victor 1997: 1–3; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 278–281; see also Caster 1938: 94–98; Robert 1980: 395–399, 406–408; Ameling 1985: 34–36; Jones 1986: 136–148; Šašel Kos 1991: 187–189; Miron 1996: 155 and 173–176; Jones 1998: 107–109. On the possible background of Lucian's enmity with Alexander see also Victor 1997: 26–37; on his visit to the sanctuary see Flinterman 1997: 280–282 (c. 161/162); on Lucian's critical disposition towards oracles see Jones 1986: 33–45. On Alexander as a 'holy man' of the Imperial period see Anderson 1994: esp. 5, 12, 24–37, 43–55, 66–68, 70f, 76–79, 87f., 93f., 120–122, 202–204, 209.

<sup>6</sup> For the support of influential Romans, esp. the senator Rutilianus see Caster 1938: 52–56; Le Glay 1989: 36f.; Anderson 1994: 120–122; Miron 1996: 168; Victor 1997: 7.

Alexander had certainly been influenced by an anonymous disciple of Apollonios of Tyana, the famous *theios aner* of the Flavian period.<sup>7</sup> His teacher must have introduced him to Pythagorean or Neopythagorean ideas, to the doctrine of metempsychosis and to the belief that a correct and pure way of life can release an individual from the cycle of rebirths.<sup>8</sup> Alexander's devotion to the god of healing suggests that he had a training as a medical doctor.<sup>9</sup> But no matter how strong the influence of (Neo)pythagorean doctrines on Alexander were, no matter how strong and genuine his religious feelings, there can be no doubt that, as many other priests of this period, he likewise operated with tricks, illusions and staged performances (see below, note 37).

These elements are apparent in the official introduction of the new cult (LUCIAN, *Alexander* 13f.). A bronze tablet was found in the sanctuary of Apollo in Kalchedon – probably because it had been deposited there earlier by Alexander. It contained an oracle with which Apollo announced that Asklepios would shortly arrive to Pontos, along with his father Apollo, and that he would take the city of Abonouteichos into his possession. Immediately after the discovery of the oracle the inhabitants of Abonouteichos decreed the construction of a new temple, in expectation of the gods' arrival. When Alexander discovered in the temple's foundation an egg, out of which a snake emerged – all this in front of a surprised audience –, this was regarded as the god's epiphany. Lucian's speculations of how this epiphany was staged is a hilarious narrative, albeit not necessarily accurate in every detail (*Alexander* 13f.). He presents Alexander going at night to the foundations of the temple and burying there, in the mud, a goose-egg in which he had enclosed a newly born snake. "In the morning he ran out into the market-place naked, wearing a loin-cloth (this too was gilded), carrying his falchion, and tossing his unconfined mane like a devotee of the Great Mother in the frenzy. Addressing the people from a high altar upon which he had climbed, he congratulated the city because it was at once to receive the god in visible presence. The assembly – for almost the whole city, including women, old men, and boys, had come running – marvelled, prayed and made obeisance. Uttering a few meaningless words like Hebrew or Phoenician, he dazed the creatures, who did not know what he was saying save only that he everywhere brought in Apollo and Asklepios. Then he ran at full speed to the future temple, went to the excavation and the previously improvised fountain-head of the oracle, entered the water, sang hymns in honour of Asclepios and Apollo at the top of his voice, and besought the god, under the blessing of Heaven, to come to the city. Then he asked for a libation-saucer, and when somebody handed him one, deftly slipped it underneath and brought up, along with water and mud, that egg in which he had immured the god; the joint about the plug had been closed with wax and white lead. Taking it in his hands, he asserted that in that moment he held Asklepios! They gazed unwaveringly to see what in the world was going to happen; indeed, they had already marvelled at the discovery of the egg in the water. But when he broke it and received the tiny snake into his hollowed hand, and the crowd saw it moving and twisting about his fingers, they at once raised a shout, welcomed the god, congratulated their city, and began each of them to sate himself greedily with prayers, craving treasures, riches, health, and every other blessing from him" (transl. A.M. HARMON). The snake-god was given the name

<sup>7</sup> Recent studies on Apollonios (with the earlier bibliography): Anderson 1994: passim; Flintcrman 1995; Swain 1999: 157–196.

<sup>8</sup> For Pythagorean and Neopythagorean influence on Alexander see Cumont 1922: 202–210; Victor 1997: 5, 20, 41; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 292–294.

<sup>9</sup> Jones 1986: 135; Victor 1997: 4f. and 135; cf. Lucian, *Alexander* 22.

*Glykon* (the Sweet one).<sup>10</sup> He is represented with features reminiscent of both a human and an animal and with distinctively long hair.<sup>11</sup>

In this narrative Lucian assembles various traditional elements of cultic foundations, known from similar narratives (official holy stories, not their parodies). The discovery of a sacred text (oracle, divine command or sacred law) that announces or demands the foundation of a cult place is a central element in the narratives of the re-introduction of the mysteries of the Great Gods in Andania (c. 369 B.C.), the introduction of the cult of Sarapis in Opous (second century B.C.), and the foundation of a mystery cult in Philadelphieia (first century B.C.), to mention only three examples.<sup>12</sup> In Andania, the sacred regulation of the mysteries of the Great Gods was discovered, written on lead tablets, in a bronze hydria that was excavated at a site revealed to a certain Epiteles in a dream (PAUSANIAS 4.26.6–8). A worshipper of Sarapis in Thessalonike discovered a letter placed under his cushion during his sleep, with which the god asked him to found a Sarapeion in Opous.<sup>13</sup> In Philadelphieia, a certain Dionysios received the sacred regulation of a mystery cult in his dream.<sup>14</sup> It is, therefore, very probable that the discovery of an oracle at Kalchedon is an authentic element in Lucian's narrative; in this point Alexander followed the traditions of other cult foundations, preparing the potential worshippers for the god's epiphany with the help of a 'heavenly letter'. If the inhabitants of Abonouteichos were willing to accept the new god, this was not because of their stupidity and their low cultural level, as Lucian repeatedly claims, but simply because they were confronted with a very familiar process. Also the 'speaking in tongues' is a common element in the life of 'holy men'.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of familiarity for the acceptability of a new cult is evident in another detail of Lucian's narrative, which also seems trustworthy. Alexander makes his first 'staged appearance' in Abonouteichos with a long, unconfined mane. The way he tosses his hair reminds the spectators of the worshippers of Cybele, familiar to them (*Alexander* 13; see above).<sup>16</sup> Alexander's long hair (cf. also *Alexander* 10) associates him, however, also with another familiar group of this period: with the philosophers and intellectuals (Pythagoras in particular), whose distinctive feature is the long unconfined hair.<sup>17</sup> We encounter the same feature – and this makes Lucian's narrative trustworthy, at least as far as this point goes – also in the cultic image of the new snake-god, that can easily be distinguished from the images of other sacred snakes through its long hair.<sup>18</sup> U. VICTOR has also pointed out that Alexander's appearance corresponds exactly to Eusebius' narrative of the first public appearance of Montanos in Ardabau (on the border between Phrygia and Mysia) and the foundation of Montanism in 156 A.D. (EUSEBIUS, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.16.6f.), i.e. exactly in the same period. We are not dealing with the similarity of two literary narratives, but with the parallelism of two contemporary cult foundations.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On the possible implications of the name see Castor 1938: 35; Victor 1997: 144; cf. Miron 1996: 174f.

<sup>11</sup> For the iconography of Glykon and its development see the excellent study of Miron 1996: 162–168, 170f., and 179–185. Miron has demonstrated that Glykon was never represented with a beard, as it was sometimes thought.

<sup>12</sup> For further parallels: Weinreich 1921: 139f.; Baumgarten 1998. Cf. narratives of the 'miraculous' discovery of literary texts: Speyer 1970: esp. 99–110.

<sup>13</sup> *JG X* 2, 255; cf. Chaniotis 1988: 68f. (with further bibliography); Bricault 1997: 118.

<sup>14</sup> Sokolowski 1955: 53–58 no. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Betz 1961: 141–143; Anderson 1994: 76f.

<sup>16</sup> For the popularity of the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor in this period see Roller 1999: 327–343.

<sup>17</sup> Zanker 1995: 242–251; cf. Betz 1961: 132 note 6. Long hair as an attribute of Pythagoras: Victor 1997: 42; cf. Castor 1938: 9. For the portraits of Pythagoras see Smith 1991: 159–167.

<sup>18</sup> On the images of Glykon and on this particular detail see Miron 1996: 162–168, esp. 166.

<sup>19</sup> Victor 1997: 140f.

The miraculous appearance of a snake, a central feature of the cult foundation, is a traditional element in narratives concerning the foundation of a sanctuary of Asklepios.<sup>20</sup> Finally, under the guise of Lucian's reference to "mud" in the foundation of the new temple, where the egg with the snake was discovered, we may suspect the existence of a source of 'holy water', very important for sanctuaries of both oracular and healing gods.<sup>21</sup>

The new temple became the center of oracular activities, of miraculous healing and of a mystery cult. The attractivity and popularity of Glykon's cult grew fast, to the extent that people from many regions of Asia Minor, the west coast of the Black Sea and even Rome came to Abonouteichos, which at the initiative of Alexander was renamed to Ionopolis (c. 165 A.D.).<sup>22</sup> The influence of the cult founder was so big that even Severianus, governor of Kappadokia, consulted the oracle before (a disastrous) military enterprise (*Alexander 27*), the provincial governor refused to take action when Alexander was accused of criminal activities (*Alexander 57*), and an influential senator, P. Mummius Sisenna Rutilianus, married Alexander's daughter (cf. note 6). All this would have seemed entirely unbelievable if narrated only by Lucian. However, there is supporting evidence (coins, statuettes, and inscriptions) which confirms the cult's significant diffusion in Asia Minor and in the west Pontic region as well as its persistence until the early fourth century A.D.<sup>23</sup>

An essential element of Alexander's success is the fact that his sanctuary provided in a 'package' everything worshippers usually had to seek in separate holy places: healing of disease, foretelling of the future, and liberation from the anxiety of death through initiation in a mystery cult. This has already been observed and treated in some detail by U. VICTOR,<sup>24</sup> who very aptly describes Alexander as a creative theologian who offered the worshippers of his sanctuary more than what the traditional sanctuaries had to offer. But it should be noted that this combination of functions is not entirely unique in Abonouteichos and may not be regarded as Alexander's innovation; divination was part of the activities of other Asklepieia as well,<sup>25</sup> and also sanctuaries of Sarapis may have served as a model.<sup>26</sup> Closer to Abonouteichos, several rural sanctuaries in Lydia and Phrygia seem to have combined healing, prophecy and mysteries, to judge from references to all these three activities in 'confession inscriptions', and there is also evidence for 'mysteries' in the oracles of Didyma and Klaros.<sup>27</sup>

Alexander formed each one of the individual elements of his sanctuary (oracle, healing sanctuary, center of a mystery cult) operating according to the same model: he always exploited

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Edelstein/Edelstein 1945, I: 227 T423 XXXIII, 363 T695, 390 T757, 431 T846. Herzog 1931: 39; Victor 1997: 38 note 148. It should be noted that the traditional view of the arrival of Asklepios' cult statue in Athens was accompanied by a snake is based on an incorrect reading of the 'Chronicle of Telemachos' (*JG II*<sup>2</sup> 4960-4961); see Clinton 1994: 23f. For the role of the snake in Asklepios' cult see also Girone 1998: 91 note 35.

<sup>21</sup> Victor 1997: 141; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 277f. For the importance of water in the sanctuaries of Asklepios see Debord 1982: 28-33; Graf 1992: 159-199; in oracular sanctuaries: Georgoudi 1998: 320-325.

<sup>22</sup> Robert 1980: 400-402, 408-412; Jones 1986: 146; Marek 1993: 85; Miron 1996: 173; Victor 1997: 169f.

<sup>23</sup> On the diffusion and persistence of the cult see Robert 1980: 395-399; Miron 1996: 164-169, 174f., 179-187; Victor 1997: 171; Jones 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Victor 1997: 38-52, esp. 38-40 and 51.

<sup>25</sup> For divinatory elements in some of the healing miracles of Epidauros see Herzog 1931: 112-123.

<sup>26</sup> For divination, religious healing and initiation in connection with the cult of Sarapis see, e.g., Witt 1971: 189f.; Merkelbach 1995: 84f.

<sup>27</sup> On the confession inscriptions, in general, see Petzl 1994. Healing: Chaniotis 1995, II: 323-344. Prophecy and oracles: Petzl 1994: xv-xvi; Paz de Hoz 1999: 122f.; e.g., *TAM V* I, 535. Mysteries: *MAMA IV*, 281 = Petzl 1994: 126 no. 108. 'Mysteries' in Didyma and Klaros: Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 303f.

and adapted material he knew from other cults or sanctuaries, but presented it with slight, but distinct modifications in a unique and new form. This becomes clear when we study these particular elements.

Ancient oracles owed their fame to the particular method with which the divinity gave the oracular responses, no less than to their reliability. In the period in which Alexander founded his sanctuary, oracles were flourishing in Asia Minor,<sup>28</sup> consequently, the competition was strong. One would expect that in a sanctuary of Asklepios (albeit a 'New' Asclepios) the divinity would come into contact with the pilgrims during their incubation in the sanctuary – a widespread practice among healing cult places.<sup>29</sup> A variant of this practice is attested in Thyateira: an inscription (*TAM V.2*, 1055, Imperial period) records the dedication of an altar for a dead priestess by the association of *mystai*; the deceased priestess was believed to have had divinatory powers; people seeking the truth should pray in front of her altar, in order to receive an answer by means of visions either by day or night. There is no evidence for incubation at Abonouteichos,<sup>30</sup> and it is probable that in this point Alexander may have deviated from the tradition of other Asklepieia. The practice he introduced presents a characteristic reversal of a ritual: instead of letting the worshippers sleep in the sanctuary and await the god's epiphany and oracles, Alexander himself sleep in the temple and received oracles (*Alexander 49*).<sup>31</sup>

In other respects Alexander adapted the oracular practices of other oracles. Many oracular responses were in metrical form, and this corresponds to contemporary practice.<sup>32</sup> But the speciality of Alexander's oracle was a practice otherwise known only from the oracle of Amphilochos in Mallos: the answering not of standardised questions (that could easily be answered either affirmatively or negatively), but of questions that had been individually formulated and submitted in closed and sealed rolls of paper.<sup>33</sup> Unless one is willing to believe that Alexander had supernatural powers that enabled him to read through the closed rolls, we have to follow Lucian and assume that Alexander cheated on the visitors of the sanctuary, secretly opened their letters and read their questions in advance (*Alexander 21*).<sup>34</sup>

The other peculiarity of the new oracle was, however, a genuine innovation: oracles were given by the snake-god with human voice. The oracular divinity was regarded as physically (and probably continually) present in the sanctuary.<sup>35</sup> Lucian reconstructs the trick applied by Alexander for the so-called *autophonoi chresmoi* as follows (*Alexander 15*): Alexander seated himself on a couch in a dark chamber, with majestic clothes, holding in his bosom a snake of

<sup>28</sup> Weinreich 1921: 137f.; Caster 1937: 225–227; Lanc Fox 1986: 241–243; Mitchell 1993, II: 13f.; Anderson 1994: 37; Victor 1997: 40; Nollé 1998: 167–182.

<sup>29</sup> Incubation in the Asklepion of Epidauros: Herzog 1931: 140f.; Edelstein/Edelstein 1945, II: 145–158; in Sarapcia: Witt 1971: 189; Merckelbach 1995: 200.

<sup>30</sup> Victor 1997: 4f., assumes that incubation took place at Abonouteichos as in other Asklepieia.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Victor 1997: 165, with references to oracles given in the night in other sanctuaries.

<sup>32</sup> For the metrical quality of these oracles see Victor 1997: 150f. For metrical oracles in the Imperial period see, e.g., Merckelbach/Stauber 1998: 27, 76–93, 116–121, 174, 201, 259–264, 277, 296–298, 362, 396–399, 575–579, 583. For the correspondence between the oracular practice at Abonouteichos and that in other oracles in Asia Minor see Lanc Fox 1986: 241–249.

<sup>33</sup> Miron 1996: 177; Victor 1997: 29–35; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 284f. The submission of questions in sealed scrolls is also attested for Apollo's oracle at Koropce in Thessaly: Sokolovski 1969: no. 83; Victor 1997: 27.

<sup>34</sup> For reference to such tricks in Greek literature see Jones 1986: 139 note 33.

<sup>35</sup> Victor 1997: 35 and 39, with discussion of the importance of this innovative idea had.

uncommon size and beauty that he had brought from Pella. Coiling the snake about his neck and letting the long tail stream over his lap and drag on the floor, he kept the snake's head hidden under his arm; instead he showed a linen head to which cranes' windpipes were attached. A collaborator spoke into this tube from the outside, answering the questions and giving the impression that the snake was speaking. Whichever imaginative and innovative trick Alexander really applied,<sup>36</sup> the staging of such a 'sacred drama' was, again, not entirely new. Cultic dramas in which priests impersonated gods and miracles were staged<sup>37</sup> are well attested for many cults of the Imperial period. M. CASTER has also observed that the description of the snake streaming over Alexander's lap recalls texts concerning the cult of Sabazios.<sup>38</sup>

The continual epiphany of Glykon in the sanctuary had an important consequence for the god's relation to his worshippers: he was presented as continually concerned with their worries and attentive to their requests; he was the *epekoos theos* par excellence. As R. LANE FOX and U. VICTOR have pointed out in this context,<sup>39</sup> if Glykon is represented with distinctively big ears in statues and amulets, this is an allusion to his willingness to respond to prayers. It should be added that the representation of ears as symbols of a god's responsiveness to human requests is a well-known feature of the cult of Egyptian divinities, attested in many places outside Egypt;<sup>40</sup> whether the Egyptian cults were a source of inspiration for this iconographical detail cannot be determined, since representation of ears are attested in the cult of many other deities as well (e.g., the Nymphs, Apollo Karios, and Zeus Olybris).<sup>41</sup>

A particular group of oracles given by Glykon contained revelations of his divine nature: "I am Glykon, the grandson of Zeus, light to mortals" (*Alexander* 18), "I am the latter-day Asklepios" (*Alexander* 43). These oracular responses are inspired both by the so-called 'aretalogies' of Isis, in which the goddess speaks in the first person and reveals her power, and by 'theosophical' oracles that inform the worshippers about the nature of god; such an oracle is known, e.g., from Oinoanda in Lykia (*SEG* XXVII 933, third century A.D.).<sup>42</sup> In all the aforementioned elements we recognize Alexander's effort to exploit elements familiar to potential worshippers.

Alexander was surrounded by a legion of cult personnel that fulfilled various tasks (*Alexander* 19 and 24): his assistants collected information, composed metrical oracles, took care of public order in the sanctuary, and registered the questions and the responses. Their titles

<sup>36</sup> See Jones 1986: 137.

<sup>37</sup> Impersonation of gods: Merkelbach 1995: 114, 348f. For 'cult-theater' in Imperial times see, e.g., MacMullen 1981: 18–27. For priests impersonating gods see e.g. Despinis/Stefanidou–Tiveriou/Voutiras 1997: 141–143 no. 111 fig. 330 (a priest impersonating Anubis). Cf. also Petzl 1994: 10f. and Petzl 1988: 163–165; Miron 1996: 177. Staged miracles: Merkelbach 1995: 55, 153–155, 159f., 175f., 178–181, 373.

<sup>38</sup> Caster 1938: 28–30.

<sup>39</sup> Lane Fox 1986: 246; Victor 1997: 35f.

<sup>40</sup> Kayser 1992: 207–217; for several examples from Thessalonike see Despinis/Stefanidou–Tiveriou/Voutiras 1997: 69–71 nos. 49–51.

<sup>41</sup> Nymphs: *SEG* XLVII 1094 (Thrace); Apollo Karios: *SEG* XLVII 1734 (Hierapolis); Artemis Lochia: *SEG* XLVII 902 (Macedonia); Zeus Olybris: *SEG* XLVII 2062 (Kilikia?).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Victor 1997: 144 and 162. 'Aretalogies': Merkelbach 1995: 112–119 (cf. *ibid.* 214–224 for a discussion of the proper use of the term *aretalogy*). 'Theological' oracles: Robert 1980: 399; Jones 1986: 143f.; Livrea 1998: 90–96; Mitchell 1998: 62f.; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 282–284. For Alexander's efforts to show the *arete* of Glykon to the worshippers see *Alexander* 55 and Victor 1997: 168f. For the expression φάος ἀνθρώποισι and analogous expressions in Christian texts see Weinreich 1921: 145f.; Caster 1938: 35.

(*exegetes, keryx, theologos, hypophetes*, etc.) correspond to those known from other sanctuaries,<sup>43</sup> although the concentration of all these officials in a single sanctuary is unusual. Alexander showed great care in the propagation of the new cult by dispatching several of his men to other places in order to report of the oracles' success (*Alexander* 24). This activity, again, corresponds to that of the *theoroi* sent by cities and sanctuaries in order to announce a new festival.<sup>44</sup> One of the best documented cases of propagation of a new festival, that of Artemis Leukophryene in Magnesia on the Maeander (late third century B.C.), involved the dispatching of envoys who took with them and presented to the recipients of their embassy a large dossier of documents, oracles, and historiographical texts, including the narrative of the epiphany of the goddesses.<sup>45</sup>

Most major cult centers develop in the course of their history their own distinctive iconography which is reflected in the monuments of their self-representation: in statuettes sold to pilgrims, in amulets, and in the coins minted by the city that controls the sanctuary. The Delphic omphalos, the statues of the Ephesian Artemis, of Aphroditis of Aphrodisias or of Zeus of Olympia were immediately recognizable and contributed to the fame and attraction of the sanctuary.<sup>46</sup> Alexander exploited this medium as well (*Alexander* 18: "next came paintings and statues and cult-images, some made of bronze, some of silver") following a widespread praxis. Here, again, we can be certain that Lucian's narrative is accurate: statues and amulets of Glykon have been discovered, and the image of Glykon on the coins of Abonouteichos/Ionopolis certainly reproduce the cult-image.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to iconography we may observe how the cautious adaptation of familiar elements known from Asklepios' cult enabled Alexander to win the confidence of potential worshippers, while at the same time the introduction of subtle variations distinguished his sanctuary from other traditional Asklepieia. The snake had always been present in the cult and the iconography of Asklepios (cf. above note 20). Alexander isolated this particular element and elevated it to the central element of worship. In appearance, Glykon recalls the snake traditionally associated with Asklepios, but in this case the snake is not just an attendant or an iconographical attribute, but the god himself: Glykon, the New Asklepios. In addition to this, Alexander's snake-god distinguishes himself, with its long hair and the almost human features, from the snake traditionally represented in Asklepios' imagery (cf. note 18). Alexander's industrious efforts to construct a distinctive profile is also evident in the development of a new 'healing' medium made from bear's fat to which Alexander gave a new name of intentionally obscure meaning: *kytmides* (*Alexander* 22).

Besides the oracular responses and the healing there was a third cultic element in the new sanctuary: the eschatological ideas, and in connection with these, the initiation into a mystery cult. We lack a coherent and complete representation of Alexander's religious teaching and doctrines. From the few, rather allusive and often ironical remarks of Lucian one can assume that their most prominent aspect seems to have been the doctrine of reincarnation, inspired by

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Robert 1980: 419; Victor 1997: 146 and 149; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 286f. On the personnel of oracular sanctuaries see Georgoudi 1998: 315–365.

<sup>44</sup> On *theoroi* see, e.g., Perlman 2000: 13–29.

<sup>45</sup> On this *theoria* see Chaniotis 1988: 34–40; Rigsby 1996: 179–279; Chaniotis 1999: 51–69.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Elsner 1997.

<sup>47</sup> For this evidence see Robert 1981: 513–535; Mitchell 1993, II: 13 note 24; Miron 1996: 162–168, 170f., and 179–185; Victor 1997: 144.



(Neo)pythagorean beliefs.<sup>48</sup> Alexander associated himself with Pythagoras (*Alexander 4*) and even insinuated that he was the ancient philosopher's reincarnation (*Alexander 40*). According to Alexander's doctrines the way of life and the moral qualities of an individual determine the fate of his or her soul after death, i.e. rebirth in the body of an animal, a king or a slave, or the liberation from the cycle of rebirths and the joining of the blessed and the gods (possibly joining of the heavenly bodies).<sup>49</sup> Alexander foretold, e.g., his father-in-law, the senator Rutilianus that he would turn into a sunbeam (*Alexander 34*). In this respect Alexander chose to follow the current religious trends and the Pythagorean traditions. The literary sources and epigraphic testimonies suggest that Pythagorean and Neopythagorean ideas were, if not popular, at least very familiar to Alexander's contemporaries, in intellectual circles in particular.<sup>50</sup>

The clients of the new sanctuary were, however, not only educated persons receptive to Pythagorean eschatology. For the masses of the worshippers Alexander established a new mystery cult. It is not clear if there is a close connection between the eschatological doctrines and the initiation into the mysteries of Abonouteichos, i.e. whether the initiation obliged the initiates to follow a new way of life, promising them a better afterlife.<sup>51</sup> We cannot expect Lucian's polemic treatise to give us any information about the sanctuary's moral instructions, but it seems that Alexander propagated elementary moral principles. E.g., he forbade sexual intercourse with children (*Alexander 41*) – of course Lucian does not neglect to claim that Alexander himself was the first to break the rule. Leaving aside the question whether the major mystery cults were connected with moral doctrines, we will probably find closer parallels for the propagation of ethical and religious principles in the enforcement of moral ideas through the cult of Asklepios, in general,<sup>52</sup> but also in the contemporary epigraphical evidence of Asia Minor: in sacred regulations, in the confession inscriptions, and in the 'alphabetical' and 'dice oracles'. The sacred regulation of a certain Dionysios, who founded a mystery cult in Philadelphia in the first century B.C.<sup>53</sup> gives a long list of moral observances that includes, among many other prohibitions, the following command: "apart from his own wife, a man is not to have sexual relations with another married woman, whether free or slave, nor with a boy nor a virgin girl; nor shall he recommend it to another" (transl. S. C. BARTON and G.H.R. HORSLEY). It was not at all unusual in the Imperial period that local sanctuaries gave the worshippers religious and moral instructions – such as, e.g., the rigid condemnation of perjury and above all the warning not to disregard the power of the gods in the 'confession inscriptions' in Lydia

<sup>48</sup> Miron 1996: 164; Victor 1997: 6, 44–48, with a tentative reconstruction of Alexander's theology. Victor recognizes 'monotheistic' tendencies in this cult (pp. 44f.), but the evidence is not conclusive. For 'pagan monotheism' in the Imperial period see most recently Athanasiadi/Frede 1999, esp. the article by Mitchell 1999: 81–148. I think that the term 'henotheism' is more apt to describe these tendencies; cf. Versnel 1990.

<sup>49</sup> For the importance of the Sun and the Moon in Alexander's theology see Victor 1997: 43. It should be added that the idea that the pious dead joined the heavenly bodies (esp. the stars) is well attested in the epitaphs of the Imperial period. For examples see Lattimore 1942: 28–35; Chaniotis 2000: 176 note 16, 181 note 42.

<sup>50</sup> Literary sources: Flinterman 1995. Inscriptions: Petzl 1992: 1–5; Merkelbach/Stauber 1998: 315; cf. Victor 1997: 42 and 153; Chaniotis 2000: 175 note 8.

<sup>51</sup> This is assumed by Victor 1997: 46, but the evidence is meager. MacMullen 1981: 106, characterizes these mysteries as a 'hoax'.

<sup>52</sup> Edelstein/Edelstein 1945, II: 125–131; see also Chaniotis 1997: 152–154.

<sup>53</sup> Sokolowski 1955: 53–58 no. 20 (with the early bibliography); see more recently Barton/Horsley 1981: 7–41; Chaniotis 1997: 159–162. There may have been some Pythagorean influence in this cult association: Chaniotis 1997: 161 note 30.

and Phrygia.<sup>54</sup> A certain parallelity can be recognized between the moral instructions of Glykon and some of the oracular responses included in the collections of 'alphabetical' or 'dice oracles', again in Asia Minor.<sup>55</sup> The alphabetical oracles, e.g., contain elements of popular wisdom and, occasionally, they also reflect moral values. They advise their users that burdensome work will be rewarded; no deed escapes the Sun; men ought to fulfill the vows they make; to trust the gods; to avoid bad friends, troubles, and vain pursuits;<sup>56</sup> a person should show courage and take his fortune into his own hands.<sup>57</sup> They remind that besides the ritual purity of the body, one should be concerned with the purity of the thoughts as well – an idea oftentimes propagated by the sanctuaries of Asklepios.<sup>58</sup>

A very interesting feature of the cult at Abonouteichos is the rôle played by hymnody.<sup>59</sup> As Lucian reports, Alexander (through the oracle) asked the cities of Paphlagonia and Pontos to send choruses of boys for a period of three years; these choruses were to sing hymns of praise of the new god (*Alexander* 41). Their members were to be the descendants of the best families and of great beauty. The singing of hymns (paians in particular) is intrinsically connected with the cult of Apollo and Asklepios, and, therefore, it is not surprising to find it in a prominent position in the cult of Glykon as well. Already at the 'discovery' of the egg with the snake-god in the temple fundaments Alexander himself was singing hymns to Asklepios and Apollo (*Alexander* 14).<sup>60</sup> Of course, the regular sending of choruses had a more important function: it was one of those media that strengthened the close connection between a sanctuary and a civic community. This demand guaranteed a somehow official recognition of the new sanctuary by the cities of Paphlagonia and Pontos and an institutionalized and regular involvement of their best families in the cultic service. The Pythaists, boy singers sent to Delphi by Athens,<sup>61</sup> or rather the hymnodoi sent by various cities to the oracle of Apollo at Klaros<sup>62</sup> may have served as Alexander's models. But in the context of the Imperial period perhaps it would

<sup>54</sup> E.g., Petzl 1994: 35 no. 27: 'hc commands not to take an oath or make others take an oath or administer an oath in an unjust way (or for an unjust cause)'; *ibid.* 16f. no. 9: 'hc commands all humans not to disregard the power of god'. For these moral instructions see also Pcttazoni 1936: 64; Versnel (1991) : 75 and 92 with note 147; Petzl 1991: 143 note 43; Petzl 1994: 17 and 124; Chaniotis 2002. For the role of sanctuaries for the morality in rural areas see also Mitchell 1993, I: 187–195.

<sup>55</sup> On this group of oracles see more recently Nollé 1988: 167–182. On alphabetical oracles in particular see, e.g., Brihac/Hodot 1988: 133–164 (*SEG XXXVIII* 1328 and 1338); Corsten 1997: 41–49; Petzl 1997: 127–128 (*SEG XLVII* 1808).

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., some verses in the alphabetical oracle of Kibyra (Corsten 1997, with further parallels): γῆ σοι τέλειον καρπὸν ἀποδώσει πόνων; δεινῶν ἀπόσχου πραγμάτων μή τι καὶ βλαβῆς; ζάλην μεγίστην φεύγε, μή τι καὶ βαρῆς; Ἥλιός σε εἰσορᾷ ὁ λανπρός, ὃς τὰ πάντα ὄρᾷ; κύμασι μάχεσθαι χαλεπὸν· ἀλλὰ ἀνάμεινον βραχύ; ξηρῶν ἀπὸ κλάδων καρπὸν οὐκ ἔσται λαβεῖν; τιμῶν τὸ θεῖον τὴν συνείδησιν τρέφεις; φαύλους φεύγε φίλους, πιστεψε δε τοῖσιν ἀρίστοις. Similar ideas are found sometimes in dice oracles as well; cf., e.g., *TAM* II, 1222: ἔχθραν καὶ κακότητα φυγῶν ἤξεις ποτ' ἐς ἅλλα; δαίμονι ἦντιν' ἔχεις εὐχὴν ἀποδόντι σοὶ ἔσται βέλτιον; οὐκ ἔστι μὴ σπειράντα θερῆσαι καρπὸν; εἰ δὲ κενοσπούδως χρήση, σεαυτὸν μέγα βλάψεις, ἐπιμείναντι δὲ καιρὸς κατὰ πάντ' ἐπιτεύξη.

<sup>57</sup> Nollé 1988: 47.

<sup>58</sup> *SEG XXXVIII* 1328: ψυχῆς καθαρὸν σώματός τε προσδέχου. For this thought and its connection with the cult of Asklepios, see Chaniotis 1997: 142–179, esp. 152–154.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Victor 1997: 49f. and 159f.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Victor 1997: 143.

<sup>61</sup> Boethius 1918; Tracy 1982.

<sup>62</sup> Robert/Robert 1954: 115–119; see more recently *SEG XXXVII* 961–980; cf. Victor 1997: 159.

be wrong to regard this cultic element simply as another of Alexander's tricks in his efforts to increase his personal power (or his harem of beautiful boys, as Lucian insinuates).

In the Imperial period the singing of hymns becomes more than a accompaniment of sacrifice. It is an important cultic element that shifts the focus of worship from the mechanical performance of rituals (libations, animal sacrifice) to the praise of the power of god, from action to word. If I insist on this point it is because it adds another facet to Alexander's religious strategies. A more or less contemporary initiative in Stratonikeia may illucidate this point:<sup>63</sup> In this city a member of the social and political elite, Sosandros, the secretary of the council, proposed that every month thirty boys should come to the bouleuterion and sing a hymn; the boys were to be selected every year by the priest of Hekate, according to an old tradition which had been neglected (L. 17). As he argues, "it is appropriate that we express our piety towards the gods also with the *prosodos* (the prayer, the request) and the *threskeia* (the proper conduct of worship) which is expressed through the singing of hymns" (LL. 6–7). A decree of Teos (first century A.D.)<sup>64</sup> has a similar content, concerning the daily singing of hymns to Dionysos by the youth of the city. Hymnody and the composition of new hymns were very popular in the Imperial period. Particularly in the second century, the singing of hymns was regarded as a powerful and effective means of addressing, imploring, and appeasing the gods. Several of the metrical oracles of Klaros recommend the singing of hymns.<sup>65</sup> One of them, found recently in Ephesos, but concerning a city in Maonia (Koloe or Sardes) which was suffering under pestilence (c. 165 A.D.), recommends the erection of a statue of Artemis: "Her form bring in from Ephesus, brilliant with gold. Put her up in a temple, full of joy; she will provide deliverance from your affliction and will dissolve the poison (or: magic) of pestilence, which destroys men, and will melt down with her flame-bearing torches in nightly fire the kneaded works of wax, the signs of the evil art of a sorcerer. But when you have performed for the goddess my decrees, worship with hymns the shooter of arrows, the irresistible, straight shooting one, and with sacrifices, her, the renowned and vigilant virgin" (transl. F. Graf).<sup>66</sup> Groups which pursued a higher spirituality practiced hymnody as a form of 'spiritual sacrifice', a tendency which culminates in Late Antiquity.<sup>67</sup> Daily religious service, employing the singing of hymns and bloodless sacrifices, is attested, e.g., in the worship of Asklepios in Epidauros.<sup>68</sup> With these parallels in mind, we may presuppose a religious (rather than a paederastic) motivation in Alexander's efforts to introduce hymnody in the cult of his sanctuary.

The adaptation and transformation of existing traditions is particularly clear in the description of Alexander's new mystery cult, for which we, unfortunately, do not have any other evidence than Lucian's ironical remarks (*Alexander*: 38). Many details and terms were directly

<sup>63</sup> Editions of the text: Sokolowski 1955: 162–165, no. 69 (= *I. Stratonikeia* 1101); Victor 1997: 160, also refers to this text as a parallel, but with no further discussion.

<sup>64</sup> Sokolowski 1955: 83f., no. 28.

<sup>65</sup> Merkelbach/Staubcr 1996: 1–54, nos. 2 (Pergamon), 4 (Hicrapolis), and 11 (Sardes or Koloe). Cf. another oracle (of Apollo Didymeus ?) found at Didyma: *I. Didyma* 217 = Merkelbach/Stauber 1998: 76f.; cf. Victor 1997: 50 note 201.

<sup>66</sup> *SEG* XLI 981; for a detailed discussion, see Graf 1992b: 267–279.

<sup>67</sup> See Bradbury 1995: 331–356.

<sup>68</sup> Sokolowski 1962: no. 25 (second/third century A.D.). See also Edelstein/Edelstein 1945, II: 199–202; Wagman 1995.

taken from the mysteries of Eleusis,<sup>69</sup> which were not only the oldest and most prestigious of Greek mystery cults, but also already associated with the cult of Asklepios in Classical Athens.<sup>70</sup> The first correspondence between the mysteries of Eleusis and those of Abonouteichos can be seen in the reference to the offices of the *dadouchos* and the *hierophantes* immediately before the description of the ritual of *prorrhesis*, i.e. the expulsion of the cult's adversaries. The atheists, the Christians, and the Epicureans were symbolically expelled with acclamations. Alexander, who assumed the role of both a *hierophantes* and a *dadouchos*, exclaimed "Away with the Christians", and the worshippers responded "Away with the Epicureans". This ritual corresponds – in form, not in content – exactly to the *prorrhesis* of the Eleusinian mysteries. Some days before the celebration of the mysteries, the *hierophantes* and the *dadouchos* performed in the Poikile Stoa in Athens a *prorrhesis* directed against barbarians and slayers.<sup>71</sup> Alexander's ritualised aggression and enmity towards two other distinctive and influential groups in this region (Christians and Epicureans)<sup>72</sup> was an excellent medium for the construction of an identity among his worshippers. This ritual (cf. also *Alexander* 25 and 47) separated the worshippers of Glykon from 'the others' and strengthened their sense of solidarity. Another medium for the establishment of close relationship between worshippers and cult founder was the introduction of a strict hierarchy and the separation of a small circle from the mass of the worshippers.<sup>73</sup>

A ritual drama that lasted for three days followed next in Alexander's mysteries. It included, on the first day the representation of the birth of Apollo, the seduction of Koronis, and Asclepius' birth; on the second day the birth of Glykon; on the third day, the sacred weddings of Podaleirios and Alexander's mother and that of Selene and Alexander.<sup>74</sup> This is a *dromenon* apparently modelled according to the *dromena* of the Eleusinian mysteries, which included a representation of Demeter's search for Persephone, the sacred wedding of Zeus and Demeter, and probably the birth of a divine child;<sup>75</sup> in Eleusis as in Abonouteichos the role of torches and light effects were instrumental for the ritual performance.<sup>76</sup> Lucian scorns the Paphlagonian audience of this ritual (*Alexander* 39), "with brogans on their feet and breaths that reeked of garlic;" the mention of garlic is possibly a ritual detail, for it is known that the worshippers at Eleusis ate garlic,<sup>77</sup> but it is more probable that we are dealing with a literary topos.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Caster 1938: 61–64; Deubner 1966: 85, with reference to the *prorrhesis* and the sacred wedding; Jones 1986: 142f.; Miron 1996: 156; Victor 1997: 40f.; Sfameni Gasparro 1999: 299–302.

<sup>70</sup> Victor 1997: 40. On the relations between Eleusis and the Athenian cult of Asklepios see also Clinton 1994: 17–34.

<sup>71</sup> *Scholia in Aristoph. Ranae* 369; Isocrates 4.157. See Deubner 1966: 72. On the *hierophantes* and the *dadouchos* see Clinton 1974: 10–68. On the ritual of *prorrhesis* in other mystery cults see Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 3.59; cf. Victor 1997: 156.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Jones 1986: 140; Marek 1993: 108 (Epicureans); Mitchell 1993, II: 37–43 (Christians).

<sup>73</sup> Victor 1997: 49 and 160f.

<sup>74</sup> For the representation of the *hieros gamos* of gods in Greek rituals see Avagianou 1991. For a reconstruction of the *dromenon* at Abonouteichos see Victor 1997: 156f.

<sup>75</sup> Deubner 1966: 83–87; Victor 1997: 40f. suggests that similar sacred dramas with representations of myths related to Asklepios were staged in other Asklepia, but there is no direct evidence for this. But dramatic representations of myths played an important part in the Egyptian mysteries and probably in other mystery cults as well (see above note 37).

<sup>76</sup> *Alexander* 38–40; for Eleusis see Deubner 1966: 87.

<sup>77</sup> Deubner 1966: 49; Victor 1997: 158.

<sup>78</sup> Marek 1993: 65 note 446 with reference to Aristophanes, *Equites* 199.

The correspondence to the Eleusinian rituals is finally evident in Alexander's ceremonial entrance (*Alexander* 39). Dressed as an hierophantes (ἱεροφαντικῶς ἔσκευασμένος) and while everyone remained silent (ἐν πολλῇ τῇ σιωπῇ), Alexander exclaimed with a loud voice (ἔλεγε μεγάλη τῇ φωνῇ) the ritual cry "hail, Glykon", and other officials, designated by Lucian again with the Eleusinian terms Εὐμολπίδες and Κήρυκες, responded "hail, Alexander". I would like to draw attention to two interesting details. Alexander's loud voice (μεγάλη τῇ φωνῇ) is not just an element of dramatic performance (that reappears in the description of his discovery of the egg from which Glykon was 'borne'; *Alexander* 14: ἦδεν μεγάλη τῇ φωνῇ), but probably a ritual element. HIPPOLYTOS (*Refutatio omnium haeresium* 5.8) reports that the *hierophantes* announced the birth of the sacred child with loud voice (βοᾶ καὶ κέκραγε λέγων).<sup>79</sup> The second detail concerns the ritual cry ἰὴ Γλύκων and ἰὴ Ἀλέξανδρε (*Alexander* 39), an exclamation of joy related this time not to the mysteries, but to the cult of Apollo. The exclamation ἰὴ παιῶν or παίων was so closely associated with this god that it became an epithet of Apollo (*Homeric hymn on Apollo* 272); at Abonouteichos it is rendered to Apollo's descendants, Glykon and Alexander.

Finally, Alexander's claim to a divine descent – as the son of Podaleirios and, therefore, Asklepios' grandson – is typical for the way this inventive cult founder adapted existing practices. As U. VICTOR has pointed out,<sup>80</sup> priestly families are known to have regarded gods as their ancestors in the remote past; he mentions as an example the family of the Telmessoi, responsible for the oracle of Apollo at Telmessos, who claimed to be descendants of Apollo's son Telmessos.<sup>81</sup> Victor correctly underlines the difference between this mythical ancestry and Alexander's direct descent from a god, which could strengthen his position as priest of the new sanctuary. With this claim he could compete with the traditional sanctuaries, the priestly families of which could point to a long and prestigious lineage. From the earliest times extraordinary personalities (victorious athletes, charismatic intellectuals and rulers alike) were regarded the sons of gods – even when their mortal parents were known.<sup>82</sup> To fully understand Alexander's claim to divine descent we should also take into consideration the fact that he also attempted to associate his family with Achaemenid royalty as well, presenting his mother as a descendant of Perseus.<sup>83</sup> Exactly in this part of Asia Minor, where sanctuaries were often administered by members of old royal families,<sup>84</sup> Alexander's fictitious lineage must have contributed to his authority as a priest, but also to the establishment of the new cult. While other priests associated with royalty could only refer to remote divine ancestors, Alexander was the son of Podaleirios; while other physicians were 'Asklepiadai' only through the claim that Asklepios was the ancestor of all doctors, Alexander was not a remote descendant of

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Lysias 6.51: "he [sc. Andokides] said the unspoken secrets aloud" (εἶπε τῇ φωνῇ τὰ ἀπόρητα). For the translation of this passage (jwn = aloud) see LSJ, s.v.

<sup>80</sup> Victor 1997: 37.

<sup>81</sup> For examples from Athens see Parker 1996: 290 and 304: the Eteoboutadai claimed descent from Boutes, son of Hephaistos and Ge, the Kynnidai from Apollo.

<sup>82</sup> Victor 1997: 139 (with reference to Plato, Alexander the Great, and Pythagoras). One may add, e.g., the athletes Euthymos of Lokroi, regarded as the son of the river-god Kaikinos (Pausanias 6.6.4), and Theagenes of Thasos, believed to be the son of Herakles (Pausanias 6.9.2), as well as king Selcukos I who was regarded as the son of Apollo (*I. Erythrai* 205 = Sokolowski 1955: no. 24B).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Victor 1997: 15 and 37.

<sup>84</sup> Debord 1982: 53–55.

Asklepios, but his grandson. The construction of a family-tree by Alexander can, therefore, be seen as part of his efforts to overcome the competition of the traditional sanctuaries of Asia Minor and of other Asklepieia.<sup>85</sup>

This brief overview of Alexander's foundation has revealed the importance he attached to the direct or indirect association of his cult to already existing cultic elements, myths, rituals, and divinities, cult centers, and holy men: to Pythagoras und Apollonios of Tyana, Asklepios and his family, Cybele and her ecstatic priests, possibly Sabazios, Amphilochos' oracle in Mallos and the oracular practice in Klaros and Didyma (*Alexander* 29), the mysteries of Eleusis and possibly Egyptian religion. Lucian asserts that Alexander's relation to the Platonic and Neopythagorean philosophers of the time was of the best order (*Alexander* 25). With the exception of the irreconcilable Christians and Epicureans, any person with some religiosity could easily identify himself with the new cult. Despite Alexander's obvious debt to existing religious traditions, the cult of Glykon Neos Asklepios was *new*.<sup>86</sup> It had its own individual profile, even if this profile resulted basically from a unique amalgamation of elements adapted from a variety of sources, and to a lesser extent from innovations. Alexander was successful not because his cult foundation was coherent and homogenous, but because its individual elements were familiar to the worshippers. Nonetheless, these elements were put together in such a way as to permit the new cult to appear as an innovation. The cult foundation of Alexander recalls, somehow, the founder's words when he discovered the goose-egg out of which the snake-god appeared (*Alexander* 13): "uttering a few meaningless words like Hebrew or Phoenician, he dazed the creatures, who did not know what he was saying save only that he everywhere brought in Apollo and Asclepius." In his foundation, exactly as in his verbal performance, Alexander aptly established confidence through the exploitation of the familiar (cf. "he everywhere brought in Apollo and Asclepius"); by introducing the unknown and incomprehensible as well (cf. "uttering a few meaningless words like Hebrew or Phoenician") he not only attracted the attention and the interest to the new sanctuary but also presented it as somehow strange and new.

Lucian wants us to believe that all this was not the result of deep religiosity, but a scheme, a carefully staged plan in which Alexander is not only the tragic poet and director, but also the protagonist. The presentation of Alexander as the director and actor of a play is skillfully underscored by Lucian by means of a theatrical vocabulary and theatrical associations: Alexander's return to his native city is described as an invasion with dramatic pomp (τραγωδία); his tricks are described as staged performances (ἐπίδειξις). The importance of staging is clear in the description of the house where the snake and the priest were visited by the pilgrims (*Alexander* 16): "Now then, please imagine a little room, not very bright and not admitting too much daylight; also, a crowd of heterogeneous humanity, excited, wonder-struck in advance, agog with hopes. When they went in, the thing, of course, seemed to them a miracle, that the formerly tiny snake within a few days had turned into so great a serpent, with a human face, moreover, and tame! They were immediately crowded towards the exit, and before they could look closely were forced out by those who kept coming in, for another door had been opened on the opposite side as an exit." At the end, Alexander's death is described as the end of

<sup>85</sup> Anderson 1994: 51, interprets the divine ancestry of Alexander as a feature of revelatory holy men of this period.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Victor 1997: 38. On the epithet *neos* see Robert 1980: 400.

a theatrical play (*Alexander* 60): “such was the conclusion of Alexander’s spectacle (*tragodia*), and such the dénouement of the whole play (*katastrophe*).”<sup>87</sup>

Lucian’s narrative evokes a carefully planned cult foundation based on a thoughtful combination of heterogeneous elements and formed into a new construct. Even if we allow for occasional exaggerations, the independent sources (iconography, epigraphic testimonia) confirm the literary account. It should also be underlined that Alexander’s method in the final arrangement of the new cult is not unparalleled. Many innovations in religious practices have often adapted traditional elements: the Hellenistic and imperial ruler cult exploited the traditional rituals of the worship of the gods and the heroes;<sup>88</sup> the commemorative anniversary for the dead of the battle at Plataia was modelled on funerary rituals;<sup>89</sup> the cult of Sarapis included besides the indigenous Egyptian elements deliberate allusions to the cult of Zeus, Asclepius and Pluton as well as to the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter and Kore;<sup>90</sup> and it is needless to recall the debt of Christianity to Jewish and pagan elements.

We best understand Alexander’s cautious plan if we take into consideration the religious background into which his new cult was introduced, the religious competition in particular. The integration of the Greek poleis into the Roman Empire had facilitated in the previous centuries the diffusion of non-Greek (Egyptian, Anatolian and Oriental) cults and led to the syncretistic tendencies that modern scholarship – from the time of Franz Cumont onwards – has correctly observed.<sup>91</sup> A close study of the evidence also reveals alongside syncretism and henotheism<sup>92</sup> an increased rivalry amongst cult communities. We may recognize it in the conflicts between cities for the propagation of local cult, in the diffusion of theophoric names that express the intimate relationship between the follower of a cult and a particular deity,<sup>93</sup> in the pilgrimages, and in the revival of old mystery cults. Also epithets of gods in the superlative – such as “the greatest” (*megistos/megiste*), “the most sacred” (*hagiotatos*), “the god with the most evident power” (*epiphanestatos*), or “the highest” (*hypsistos*)<sup>94</sup> – indicate this competition. Because of the fascination of modern scholarship with the phenomenon of religious syncretism, sometimes an equally important phenomenon has been overlooked: the effort to create a religious identity through differentiation. Alexander’s foundation presents an instructive paradigm in this regard. The exploitation and adaptation of traditional – therefore, familiar – cultic elements facilitated the propagation of the cult and increased both attraction and trustworthiness. On the other hand, the unique combination of these elements into an entirely new construct and to a lesser extent the careful introduction of new elements gave *his* cult a unique profile and *his* followers a distinctive identity.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. also *Alexander* 25.

<sup>88</sup> Habicht 1970: 195–205.

<sup>89</sup> Chaniotis 1991: 131–134.

<sup>90</sup> Merkelbach 1995: 73–86.

<sup>91</sup> E.g., Lebrun 1994: 145–157; Cancik/Rüpke 1997; for F. Cumont see Motte 1999: 21–42.

<sup>92</sup> On the notion of henotheism see above, note 48.

<sup>93</sup> On theophoric names see most recently Mora 1994: 177–186; Parker 2000: 53–79.

<sup>94</sup> E.g., *epiphanestate* Aphrodite (*MAMA* VII 413 A); *megiste*: Hekate (*SEG* XLVII 1575). For *hypsistos* see most recently Mitchell 1998: 55–64; Mitchell 1999: 81–148.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ameling, W. (1985): Ein Altar für Alexander von Abonuteichos, *EA* 6: 34–36.
- Anderson, G. (1994): *Sage, Saint, and Sophist. Holy Men and their Associates in the Early Roman Empire*. London–New York.
- Athanasiadi, P., Frede, M. (eds.) (1999): *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford.
- Avagianou, A. (1991): *Sacred Marriage in the Rituals of Greek Religion*. Bern–Berlin–Frankfurt–New York.
- Barton, S.C., Horsley, G.H.R. (1981): A Hellenistic Cult Group and the New Testament Church, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 24: 7–41.
- Baumgarten, R. (1998): *Heiliges Wort und Heilige Schrift bei den Griechen. Hieroi Logoi und verwandte Erscheinungen*. Tübingen.
- Betz, H.D. (1961): *Lukian von Samosata und das neue Testament. Religionsgeschichtliche und paränetische Parallelen*. Berlin.
- Boethius, A. (1918): *Die Pythais. Studien zur Geschichte der Verbindungen zwischen Athen und Delphi*. Uppsala.
- Bradbury, S. (1995): Julian's Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice, *Phoenix* 49 (1995) 331–356.
- Bricault, L. (1997): Les cultes *isiaques en Grèce centrale et occidentale*, *ZPE* 119: 118.
- Brixhe, C., Hodot, R. (1988): *L'Asie Mineure du Nord au Sud. Inscriptions inédites*. Nancy.
- Cancik, H., Rüpke, J. (eds.) (1997): *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*. Tübingen.
- Caster, M. (1937): *Lucien et la pensée religieuse de son temps*. Paris.
- Caster, M. (1938): *Études sur Alexandre ou le faux prophète*. Paris.
- Chaniotis, A. (1988): *Historie und Historiker in den griechischen Inschriften*. Stuttgart.
- Chaniotis, A. (1991): Gedenktage der Griechen: Ihre Bedeutung für das Geschichtsbewußtsein griechischer Poleis, in: J. Assmann (ed.), *Das Fest und das Heilige. Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt*. Gütersloh: 131–134.
- Chaniotis, A. (1995): Illness and Cures in the Greek Propitiatory Inscriptions and Dedications of Lydia and Phrygia, in H.F.J. Horstmanshoff, Ph.J. van der Eijk, and P.H. Schrijvers (eds.), *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context. Papers Read at the Congress Held at Leiden University, 13–15 April 1992*, vol. II. Amsterdam–Atlanta: 323–344.
- Chaniotis, A. (1997): Reinheit des Körpers – Reinheit der Seele in den griechischen Kultgesetzen, in J. Assmann and Th. Sundermeier (eds.), *Schuld, Gewissen und Person*. Gütersloh: 142–179.
- Chaniotis, A. (1999): Empfängerformular und Urkundenfälschung: Bemerkungen zum Inschriftendossier von Magnesia am Mäander, in R.G. Khoury (ed.), *Urkunden und Urkundenformulare im Klassischen Altertum und in den orientalischen Kulturen*. Heidelberg: 51–69.
- Chaniotis, A. (2000): Das Jenseits – eine Gegenwelt?, in T. Hölscher (ed.), *Gegenwelten zu den Kulturen der Griechen und der Römer in der Antike*. München–Leipzig: 159–181.
- Chaniotis, A. (2002): Under the Watchful Eyes of the Gods: Aspects of Divine Justice in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor, *YCPH* 31 (forthcoming).
- Clinton, K. (1974): *The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Philadelphia.
- Clinton, K. (1994): The Epidauria and the Arrival of Asclepius in Athens, in R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence*. Stockholm: 17–34.
- Corsten, Th. (1997): Ein neues Buchstabenorakel aus Kibyra, *EA* 28: 41–49.
- Cumont, F. (1922): Alexandre d' Abonotichos et le Néo-Pythagorisme, *Revue de l'histoire des Religions* 86: 202–210.
- Debord, P. (1982): *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l'Anatolie gréco-romaine*. Leiden.



- Despinis, G., Stefanidou-Tiveriou, Th., Voutiras, E. (1997): *Catalogue of Sculpture in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki*, vol. I. Thessaloniki.
- Deubner, L. (1966): *Attische Feste*, 2nd edition, Berlin.
- Edelstein, E. J., Edelstein, L. (1945): *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, vol. I–II. Baltimore.
- Elsner, J. (1997): The Origins of the Icon: Pilgrimage, Religion and Visual Culture in the Roman East as 'Resistance' to the Centre, in S.E. Alcock (ed.), *The Early Roman Empire in the East*. Oxford: 178–199.
- Flinterman, J.-J. (1997): The Date of Lucian's Visit to Abonouteichos, *ZPE* 119: 280–282.
- Flinterman, J.-J. (1995): *Power, Paideia, and Pythagoreanism. Greek Identity, Conceptions of the Relationship between Philosophers and Monarchs, and Political Ideas in Philostratus' Life of Apollonius*. Amsterdam.
- Georgoudi, S. (1998): Les porte-parole des dieux: réflexions sur le personnel des oracles grecs, in I. Chirassi Colombo and T. Seppilli (eds.), *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari. Mito, storia, tradizione. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Macerata – Norcia, 20–24 settembre 1994*. Macerata: 320–325.
- Girone, M. (1998): *Ἱάματα. Guarigioni miracolose di Asclepio in testi epigrafici*. Bari.
- Graf, F. (1992a): Heiligtum und Ritual. Das Beispiel der griechisch-römischen Asklepieia, in A. Schachter (ed.), *Le sanctuaire grec. Huit exposés suivis de discussions, Vandoevres–Genève, 20–25 août 1990*. Genève: 159–199.
- Graf, F. (1992b): An Oracle Against Pestilence from a Western Anatolian Town, *ZPE* 92: 267–279.
- Habicht, C. (1970): *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte*, 2nd edition. München.
- Herzog, R. (1931): *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros*. Leipzig.
- Jones, C.P. (1986): *Culture and Society in Lucian*. Cambridge Mass.
- Jones, C. P. (1998): A Follower of the God Glykon?, *EA* 30: 107–109.
- Kayser, F. (1992): *Oreilles et couronnes. À propos des cultes de Canope, BIFAO* 91: 207–217.
- Lane Fox, R. (1986): *Pagans and Christians*. London.
- Lattimore, R. (1942): *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*. Baltimore.
- Lebrun, R. (1994): Syncrétismes et cultes indigènes en Asie Mineure méridionale, *Kernos* 7:145–157.
- Le Glay, M. (1989): D'Abônouteichos à Sabratha, les déviations de la religion romaine au temps de Marc Aurèle, in A. Mastino (ed.), *L'Africa romana. Atti del VI convegno di studio, Sassari, 16–18 dicembre 1988* (Sassari 1989): 35–41.
- Lindner, R. (1994): *Mythos und Identität. Studien zur Selbstdarstellung kleinasiatischer Städte in der römischen Kaiserzeit*. Stuttgart.
- Livrea, E. (1998): Sull'iscrizione teosofica di Enonda, *ZPE* 122: 90–96.
- MacMullen, R. (1981): *Paganism in the Roman Empire*. New Haven–London.
- Marek, Chr. (1993): *Stadt, Ara und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nord-Galatia*. Tübingen.
- Merkelbach, R. (1995): *Isis regina – Zeus Sarapis. Die griechisch-Ägyptische Religion nach den Quellen dargestellt*. Stuttgart–Leipzig.
- Merkelbach, R., Stauber, J. (1996): Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros, *EA* 27: 1–54.
- Merkelbach, R., Stauber, J. (1998): *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten. Band 1. Die Westküste Kleinasiens von Knidos bis Ilion*. Stuttgart–Leipzig.
- Miron, A.V.B. (1996): Alexander von Abonouteichos. Zur Geschichte des Orakels des Neos Asklepios Glykon, in W. Leschhorn, A.V.B. Miron, and A. Miron (eds.), *Hellas und der griechische Osten. Studien zur Geschichte und Numismatik der griechischen Welt. Festschrift für Peter Robert Franke zum 70. Geburtstag*. Saarbrücken: 153–188.
- Mitchell, S. (1993): *Anatolia: Land, Men and Gods in Roman Asia Minor*, vol. I–II. Oxford.
- Mitchell, S. (1998): Wer waren die Gottesfürchtigen?, *Chiron* 28 : 55–64.
- Mitchell, S. (1999): The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians, in Athanasiadi/Frede 1999: 61–148.

- Mora, F. (1994): Nomi teofori e politeismo greco: Prospettive di ricerca, in G. Sfameni Gasparro (ed.), *Ἀγαθὴ Ἑλπίς. Studi storico-religiosi in onore di Ugo Bianchi*. Roma: 177–186
- Motte, A. (1999): La notion de syncrétisme dans l'oeuvre de Franz Cumont, in C. Bonnet and A. Motte (eds.), *Les syncrétismes religieux dans le monde méditerranéen antique. Actes du colloque international en l'honneur de Franz Cumont*. Bruxelles–Rome: 21–46.
- Nollé, J. (1998): Medien, Sprüche, Astragale. Zum Orakelwesen im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien, *Nürnberg-Blätter zur Archäologie* 13 (1996/97) [1998]: 167–182.
- Parker, P. (2000): Theophoric Names and the History of Greek Religion, in S. Hornblower and E. Matthews (eds.), *Greek Personal Names. Their Value as Evidence*. Oxford: 53–79.
- Parker, R. (1996): *Athenian Religion: A History*. Oxford.
- Paz de Hoz, M. (1999): *Die lydischen Kulte im Lichte der griechischen Inschriften (Asia Minor. Studien 36)*. Bonn.
- Perlman, P. (2000): *City and Sanctuary in Ancient Greece. The Theorodokia in the Peloponnese*. Göttingen.
- Pettazzoni, R. (1936): *La confessione dei peccati. III. Siria, Hittiti, Asia Minore, Grecia*. Bologna.
- Petzl, G. (1988): Sünde, Strafe, Wiedergutmachung, *EA* 12: 163–165.
- Petzl, G. (1991): Lukians Podagra und die Beichtinschriften Kleinasiens, *Méris* 6: 131–145.
- Petzl, G. (1992): Zum neupythagoreischen Monument aus Philadelphiea, *EA* 20: 1–5.
- Petzl, G. (1994): *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens, (EA 22)*. Bonn.
- Petzl, G. (1997): Nochmals zum neuen Buchstabenorakel, *EA* 29: 127–128.
- Rigsby, K.J. (1996): *Asyilia. Territorial Inviolability in the Hellenistic World*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London.
- Robert, L. (1980): *A travers l'Asie Mineure*. Paris.
- Robert, L. (1981): Le serpent Glycon d'Abōnouteichos à Athènes et Artémis d'Ephèse à Rome, *CRAI*: 513–535.
- Robert, L., Robert, J. (1954): *La Carie. Histoire et géographie historique avec le recueil des inscriptions antiques*. Tome II. *Le plateau de Tabai et ses environs*. Paris.
- Roller, L.E. (1999): *In Search of God the Mother. The Cult of Anatolian Cybele*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London.
- Scheer, T.S. (1993): *Mythische Vorväter. Zur Bedeutung griechischer Heroenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte*. München.
- Sfameni Gasparro, G. (1999): Alessandro di Abonutico, lo “pseudo-profeta” ovvero come costruirsi un'identità religiosa. II. L'oracolo e i misteri, in C. Bonnet and A. Motte (eds.), *Les syncrétismes religieux dans le monde méditerranéen antique. Actes du colloque international en l'honneur de Franz Cumont*. Bruxelles–Rome: 275–305.
- Smith, R.R.R. (1991): An New Portrait of Pythagoras, in R.R.R. Smith and K.T. Erim (eds.), *Aphrodisias Papers 2. The theatre, a sculptor's workshop, philosophers, and coin-types*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: 159–167.
- Sokolowski, F. (1955): *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*. Paris.
- Sokolowski, F. (1962): *Lois sacrées des cités grecques. Supplement*. Paris.
- Sokolowski, F. (1969): *Lois sacrées des cités grecques*. Paris.
- Speyer, W. (1970): *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike*. Göttingen.
- Swain, S. (1999): Defending Hellenism: Philostratus, *In Honour of Apollonius*, in M. Edwards et alii (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire*. Oxford: 157–196.
- Šašel Kos, M. (1991): Draco and the Survival of the Serpent Cult in the Central Balkans, *Tyche* 6: 187–189.
- Tracy, S.V. (1982): *I.G. II<sup>2</sup> 2336. Contributors of First Fruits for the Pythais*. Meisenheim.
- Versnel, H.S. (1990): *Insconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion. I. Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: Three Studies in Henotheism*. Leiden.

- Versnel, H.S. (1991): Beyond cursing: The appeal to justice in judicial prayers, in Chr.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*. New York–Oxford: 60–106.
- Victor, U. (1997): *Lukian von Samosata, Alexander oder Der Lügenprophet. Eingeleitet, herausgegeben, übersetzt und erklärt*. Leiden–New York–Köln.
- Wagman, R. (1995): *Inni di Epidauro*. Pisa.
- Weinreich, O. (1921): Alexander der Lügenprophet und seine Stellung in der Religiosität des zweiten Jahrhunderts, *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum* 47: 129–151.
- Weiss, P. (1984): Lebendiger Mythos. Gründerheroen und städtische Gründungstraditionen im griechisch-römischen Osten, *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 10: 189–208.
- Witt, R.E. (1971): *Isis in the Ancient World*. Baltimore–London.
- Zanker, P. (1995): *Die Maske des Sokrates. Das Bild des Intellektuellen in der antiken Kunst*. München.