

## Alexander's Friends in the *Alexander Romance*

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In most of the Greco-Roman historical writings about Alexander an important place is given to the question of Alexander's friends. A first reason for the historians' interest in the friendship theme may be due to the institutional role played by the king's companions in Macedonian kingship;<sup>1</sup> precursors of the "friends" of the Hellenistic sovereigns, the men who formed Alexander's personal council are sometimes referred to not as *hetairoi*, but as *philoï* – for instance by Diodorus of Sicily, who always uses this anachronistic designation to name the king's companions, and sometimes by Plutarch too, although less frequently.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of this terminological confusion is to increase the weight of the friendship theme as it were mechanically. Secondly, the influence of the epic motif of heroic friendship, and the fame of the exemplary couple Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*, encouraged authors anxious to magnify Alexander to add a Homeric touch to the picture of the Macedonian king's relations with his friends.<sup>3</sup> Arrian, who has a special fondness for epic references, several times assimilates Alexander and his closest friend Hephaestion to Achilles and Patroclus.<sup>4</sup> The Homeric verses in which Achilles said he honoured his dead friend 'even as [his] own self' (ἴσον ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ)<sup>5</sup> afford the first occurrence of a motif – unity of soul (μία ψυχή), with one's friend as an *alter ego* (ἄλλος ἐγώ) — much exploited in ancient theories about *philia*.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise to find it reused in one of the most famous anecdotes concerning Alexander and Hephaestion: the story of the Persian queen Sisygambis mistaking Hephaestion for Alexander, and thus giving rise to the king's reply that there was nothing wrong in such a confusion, for Hephaestion too was Alexander.<sup>7</sup> A third, and most important reason for the historians' interest in the friendship theme is the high rank friendship occupied in the moral values of Antiquity. Ludovic Dugas (1914:2) argues that *philia* was the very core of moral life in the Greco-Roman world. The question of friendship has indeed received much attention from Greek and Roman philosophers such as Aristotle, Plutarch, Cicero and Seneca, who all agree in defining friendship as positive

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Heckel (2003), 205.

<sup>2</sup> Only Arrian always uses *hetairoi*; cf. Konstan (1997), 96. On the Hellenistic *philoï*, see Herman (1980-1981), 111-112, about the ambiguity of a term which could be used in a technical or in a personal, informal way. About *hetairoi* and *philoï*, see also Savalli-Lestrade (1998), esp. 327 and 342-343, for the main differences between both categories.

<sup>3</sup> On Homeric friendship, see Fitzgerald (1996), 15-26. Examples of topical references to Achilles-Patroclus as a couple of exemplary friends can be found in Plutarch, *On having many friends* 93 e, or in Chariton 1.5.2.

<sup>4</sup> *Anab.* 1.12.1; 7.14.4; 7.16.8.

<sup>5</sup> *Il.* 18.81-82.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Arist. *Mag. Mor.* 2.11, 49; *EN* 9.4.5 (ὁ φίλος ἄλλος αὐτός); 9.9.1 and 10 (ἕτερος αὐτός); 9.12.10.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Diod 17.37.5-6 and 114.2 (summary); Arr. *Anab.* 2.12.6-8; Curtius 3.12.15-17.

and essential to human life. What is peculiar to ancient theories about friendship is the link that philosophers usually made between friendship and excellence (*aretē*), justice or *sophrosyne*:

1. in Plato's *Lysis*, Socrates remarks that bad persons are unable to experience true friendship, because they lack inner harmony, as a kind of 'affinity with oneself' is necessary, if one is to feel affinity with someone else, to borrow Fraisse's terminology (214 c-d).<sup>8</sup>

2. Cicero (*Amic.* 83) calls friendship a *virtutum adiutrix* ('hand-maid of virtue'), a help for moral improvement

Special attention was paid to friendship in ancient political thought as well. Greco-Roman philosophers wondered about the compatibility of friendship and rulership, and Plutarch remarks how difficult it is for the mighty men and the kings to have not only flatterers but real friends, for friendship needs trust and freedom of speech.<sup>9</sup> Thus ancient writers considered the capacity for friendship a dividing line between kings and tyrants: it was a widespread *topos* that the tyrant is friendless, and famous passages in Plato (*Resp.* 8, 566d-569c; 9, 577c-579c), Xenophon (*Hiero* 3) and Aristotle (*EN* 8.11.6-8) did much to establish the image of the tyrant as a man unable to feel and inspire friendship while living in fear and distrust.

The question of Alexander's friends was therefore a controversial matter and it seems hardly surprising that ancient historians paid much attention to the subject and dealt with it in contrasting ways, depending on whether they were favourable or hostile to the Macedonian king. Adopting a somewhat apologetic viewpoint in his *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch insists on Alexander's generosity towards his friends, on their devotion to the king, even reserving a substantial section for developing Alexander's φιλοφροσύνη, his friendly disposition to kindness, thoughtfulness, and magnanimity (39-42).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, being conscious of his duties as an historian, Plutarch does not leave Alexander's praise uncorrected: he repeatedly deplores the presence of flatterers at the king's side, and shows how their pernicious influence led to a progressive deterioration of Alexander's character and his relationship with his entourage.<sup>11</sup> In Curtius' history,

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fraisse (1974), 134 (he uses the term "affinity" in the sense of resemblance with and affection for).

<sup>9</sup> *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* 12.56 f, 22.62 f-63 b. On the problem of flattery, see also Cic. *Amic.* 88-100; Max. Tyr., *Or.* 14 (*By what Means One May Separate a Flatterer from a Friend*); Them. *Or.* 22. (*On Friendship*). The interest given to this theme goes back to the Hellenistic period: cf. Konstan (1996) and (1997), 103-105.

<sup>10</sup> In the even more encomiastic treatise on *Alexander's Fortune*, Plutarch stresses the Companions' heroic fight to protect Alexander during the attack on the Malli citadel: he says they 'were a bulwark of Virtue, exposing their bodies in the face of the foe and even their lives for the goodwill and love they bore their king', and concludes: 'Surely it is not due to Fortune that the companions of good kings risk their lives and willingly die for them: but this they do through a passion of Virtue, even as bees, as if under the spell of love-charm, approach and closely surround their sovereign' (second treatise, 344 d-e).

<sup>11</sup> *Alex.* 20.12; 23.7; 52; 54-55. See also *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* 18.60 b-c and 24.65 c-d, where Plutarch denounces the misdeeds occasioned by flatterers: 'In fact it was such scars, or rather such gangrenes and cancers, that Alexander was consumed so that he destroyed Callisthenes, Parmenion, and Philotas, and put himself without reserve into the

which offers a much more critical version of Alexander's reign, heavily influenced by Stoic condemnation of the king, much is made of the motif of debased friendship: Alexander's attitude towards his friends becomes a symptom of his transformation from a just king, smiling at Sisygambis' mistake about Hephaestion (3.12.15-17), into a tyrant whose uncontrolled passions led him to 'murder his friends at banquets' (3.12.19). His remorse after Cleitos' death shows him aware of becoming the kind of ferocious monster that Seneca (*de ira* 3.17.1-2 and 3.23.1-2) stigmatized: 'But the king, Curtius (8.2.7) says, was still more disturbed because he saw that the minds of all his friends were terror-stricken, that no one would dare converse with him hereafter, but that he must live in solitude like a savage beast which now inspires terror in other beasts and at other times is in fear of them itself'. Justin, who also blames Alexander for staining himself with his friends' blood (9.8.15-17), evokes another theme with philosophical resonance when he denounces the king's excessive marks of sorrow at Hephaestion's death, stating that he shed more tears than was proper to the decorum of his rank (12.12.11-12).<sup>12</sup> The rhetorical cautiousness with which Arrian (7.14.2-10) — himself an enthusiastic admirer of Alexander — introduces various testimonies concerning the king's grief on that occasion shows that it was indeed a very critical issue.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the anonymous redactor of the *Alexander Romance* — a fictional biography of a somewhat encomiastic nature, possibly compiled in the third century AD — has reserved a very contrasting treatment for the topic of Alexander's friends by alternately reducing or amplifying the heterogeneous material available to him on the subject. He censored all the episodes where Alexander was likely to appear as a tyrant and eliminated the motif of the murder of his friends, much exploited by the king's detractors: Cleitos is named only once, as brother of Alexander's nurse Lanike (1.13); the sole mention of Philotas is to be found at the end of the *Romance* in the list of men involved in Alexander's assassination; Parmenion is consistently blackened throughout the narrative, and presented as a traitor (2. 8) or a second-rate officer (2.17); as for Callisthenes, he has been erased from the story completely. Hephaestion, Alexander's closest friend in our historical sources, also has his role considerably reduced in the *Romance*, where he features only twice, as a boyhood friend in the episode of the Olympic games (1.18), and as a thoughtful companion in the fictional episode of the whale-like island (3.17). He was suspected of entertaining a homoerotic relationship with Alexander,<sup>13</sup> and that is certainly why the redactor of the *Romance*, anxious to normalize his protagonist's life, says so little about him, and does not even mention his death, sparing himself the trouble of giving embarrassing details about Alexander's excessive grief.

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hands of men like Hagno, Bagoas, Agesias, and Demetrius, to be brought low, by submitting to be worshipped, bedecked and fantastically tricked out by them, after the manner of a barbaric idol'.

<sup>12</sup> See also Diod. 17.114-115; Plut. *Alex.* 72. About the philosophers' reserve against excessive friendships, see Vansteenberghe (1937: col. 511), who says that such friendships were suspected for giving too much place to the senses, and for failing to keep imagination and feelings under the control of reason,

<sup>13</sup> On the controversial nature of Alexander's relationship with Hephaestion, see Ogden (2011), 155-167 ('The enigma of Hephaestion').

But we can also find several passages in the *Romance* where Alexander appears as a φιλικός ('friendly') king, surrounded by faithful friends whose love he warmly reciprocates. Some of these episodes are borrowed from the historical tradition — such as the edifying story of Philip the doctor, whose medicine Alexander drinks fearlessly, notwithstanding a slanderous letter accusing the doctor of attempted poisoning, so great a trust he places in Philip's loyalty (2.8).<sup>14</sup> The same theme is also developed in several fictional episodes: for instance in the story of Alexander's visit to Darius' camp (2.14), where the narrator shows Alexander's companion, the so-called Eumeles, anxious to accompany the king in his risky embassy (2.14) and greatly worried about the success of the enterprise (2.15). The most impressive anecdote intentionally constructed in order to illustrate Alexander's gift for friendship is doubtless the story of the whale-like island (3.17): when the king says that he wants to explore what he thinks to be an island and what is in fact the emerging part of a whale, Hephaestion, Craterus and Pheidon do not allow the king to undertake the exploration. Pheidon insists on risking his own life instead of Alexander, whose death would be irreparable; he dies in carrying out this mission, and the narrator points out that the king was 'much afflicted' with the disappearance of his most faithful friend.

But in spite of the various passages mentioned above, it would be improper to maintain that the friendship theme is really put to the fore in the oldest version of the *Alexander Romance*, the so-called *alpha* recension, where the censoring of inconvenient elements is in fact more prominent than the amplifying of positive ones: while surrounded by affectionate friends, the hero of the *alpha* recension has a somewhat solitary nature<sup>15</sup> appearing closer to the Odysseus type than to that of Achilles,<sup>16</sup> which, apart from any moralizing considerations, probably explains why no one in the story plays the part of Hephaestion.

The treatment of the friendship motif is not very different in the earliest rewritings of the *Alexander Romance*: the  $\beta$  recension (fifth century) and the  $\lambda$  recension (eighth century), where, as far as Alexander's friends are concerned, changes are few. In the  $\beta$  recension, the most notable innovation is a certain emphasis on the Odyssean character of the protagonist, whose curiosity is put to the fore, sometimes arousing expressions of warning or even reluctance from his friends: when he displays his intention of going to Darius' camp under the disguise of a messenger, his friends first try to dissuade him, but he refuses to listen to their prudent advice (2.13). The same scenario recurs in the section devoted to Alexander's travels to the margins of the world, where he reacts to the anxiety

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 19; Arr. *Anab.* 2.4.7-11; Curtius 3.5-6. On the fortune of this anecdote, see Sisti (1982). The devotion Peucestas and Ptolemy show during the attack on the Malli citadel, where they prove more anxious to protect the king than save their own life, is another episode borrowed from the historical tradition by the redactor of the *Romance* (3.4: see Plut. *Alex.* 63. 2-14; Curtius 9.4.26-5.30).

<sup>15</sup> Cizek (1982: 174) rightly points out that Alexander is the only character in the *Romance* who can be considered as an 'actant'.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander's relationship with his men, so easily frightened in front of the danger, recalls that of Odysseus with his own crew (see for instance the episode of starvation in 1.44, or the crossing of the Euphrates in 2. 9 — to be compared with the episode of Circe in *Od.* 10, or the story of the Sun's cattle in *Od.* 12).

of his friends with an equal obstinacy when asked to turn back: ‘But I refused — he said — for I wanted to see the boundary of the world’ (2.37).

In the  $\lambda$  recension, the narrator has interpolated into the encounter of Alexander and Dandamis, leader of the Gymnosophists, one of the most famous sayings ascribed to the Macedonian king in anecdotal tradition: when Dandamis asks him what he made of Poros’ treasures, he answers ‘Here they are’, pointing towards his own friends, and the sage shows himself highly pleased with the reply: ‘You spoke well, man — he says — for the better one treats one’s friends, the more he acts for his own benefit’. As early as the first century AD, Alexander’s apophthegm about his ‘treasure’ of friends had entered the field of school rhetoric: featuring in Theon’s *Progymnasmata* as an example of *chreia*,<sup>17</sup> the king’s saying was subsequently much cited by authors as different as Libanius, Gregory of Nyssa and Simplicius,<sup>18</sup> also finding its way into collections of sentences (*gnomologia*).<sup>19</sup> The  $\lambda$  redactor must have borrowed it from a collection such as this, in order to stress the high value placed on friendship by Alexander.

Unlike the  $\beta$  and  $\lambda$  recensions, which did not introduce major changes to the original content of the *Alexander Romance*, the  $\epsilon$  recension, a Byzantine christianized version of Alexander’s adventures composed during the eighth or at the beginning of the ninth century, is indeed a very fresh rewriting, offering a great number of new elements. In this version, the treatment of the friendship motif has been profoundly transformed and much amplified. The first point to be noted is the disappearance of almost all the historical friends mentioned in the former versions of the *Romance* — not only those ill-treated by the Macedonian king, such as Cleitos, Philotas or Parmenion, but also close companions, such as Hephaistion, Ptolemy or Antigonos. They are replaced by new characters, some of which are historical figures, anachronistically introduced into Alexander’s story, like Antiochos,<sup>20</sup> whereas others are entirely fictional, such as Charmides, who bears the name of an eponymous character in Plato’s dialogues. The many friends surrounding Alexander in the former recensions — sometimes very elusive figures — are replaced in  $\epsilon$  by a reduced team of four close friends, who are twice explicitly presented as a quartet,

<sup>17</sup> Theon, ch. 3 (ed. Patillon) = chap. 5 (ed. Spengel).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lib. *Prog.*, ed. Foerster, vol. 8, 65 (first *chreia*); *Or.* 8. 8-9; Them. *Or.* 16.203 b-c; Amm. Marcell. 25.4.15; Gregory of Nyssa, *Ep.* 8.1 (SC 363); Simp. in *Epict.* 37, ed. Hadot, 355. The apophthegm relating to the treasure of friends remained famous throughout the Byzantine period, and can be read, among others, in two mirrors for princes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: cf. Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Basilikos Andrias*, PG 142, col. 664 C; Thomas Magister, *De regis officiiis*, PG 145, col. 473 B.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ps. Maximus 6.137 (PG 91, col. 764-1244); *Patmos*, 11, 129, ed. Sargologos (1990); *Gnom. Vind.*, 20 et 30, ed. Wachsmuth (1882); *Gnom. Vat.*, 86, ed. Sternbach (1963); *Ariston*, 8, ed. Schenkl (1889); *Gnom. Monac.*, ed. Walz (1832), 498; Arsenius, *ibid.* 93; in the *Pal. Gr.* 356 florilegium, a thematic collection where only one of the 161 sentences of the volume is attributed to Alexander, this sole sentence is precisely that relating to the treasure of friends: n° 122, ed. Wachsmuth (1879).

<sup>20</sup> Name of several kings of the Seleucid dynasty — the most famous being Antiochos I Soter (281-261 BC), Antiochos III the Great (223-187 BC), and Antiochos IV Epiphanos (187-175 BC).

consisting of Philip the doctor, Seleucos, Philon, and Antiochos (41.4; 46.1).<sup>21</sup> In the last chapter of the  $\epsilon$  recension, they are presented as the sole heirs of the king who, before dying, divides his kingdom into four geographical parts to be ruled by his four companions. We are thus given a clue to understanding the emergence of this friendly quartet, which is an indirect mark of the christianization of Alexander's adventures: the four friends of the  $\epsilon$  recension are avatars of the four successors of Alexander alluded to in the famous vision of the *Book of Daniel*, where the confrontation between Darius and Alexander is prophesied metaphorically as a fight between a ram and a he-goat: 'Then the he-goat grew exceedingly great, Daniel says; and when he was strong, his great horn was broken; and four other horns rose up in its place toward the four winds of heaven'.<sup>22</sup>

The  $\epsilon$  redactor has given Alexander's four friends a role incomparably greater than that played by the king's companions in earlier versions of the *Romance*: Philip appears in five of the forty six chapters of the  $\epsilon$  recension, Philon in six chapters,<sup>23</sup> Seleucos, *archistratēgos* of Alexander (14.1), plays a military role in nine episodes of the narrative;<sup>24</sup> as for Antiochos, who is presented as Alexander's main collaborator and occasional substitute, he is the most present of the four, and appears in no less than thirteen chapters.<sup>25</sup> The rewriting of two episodes which, in the first version of the *Romance*, served as highlights of the friendship theme — the story of Philip the doctor and that of the whale-like island — is marked by a strong tendency to amplification and dramatization. In both passages the  $\epsilon$  redactor has greatly increased the part devoted to expression of friendly feelings allowing Alexander, Philip, and Philon to vie with each other in declarations of mutual affection. Otherwise the  $\epsilon$  redactor has modified the

<sup>21</sup> Two of these four friends, Philip and Philon, have been borrowed from the former versions of the *Romance*, where they feature in the episode of Alexander's illness (Philip the doctor) and in the story of the whale-like island (Philon : the historical name of Pheidon, used in the Greek text of the *alpha* recension, seems to have been transformed rather soon into the expressive name of Philon, already present in Julius Valerius' Latin translation). As for Seleucos and Antiochos, they may have been borrowed by the  $\epsilon$  redactor from the account of a Byzantine chronicler dealing with Alexander's successors.

<sup>22</sup> LXX Daniel 8.8. In the numerous commentaries inspired by this passage of the *Book of Daniel*, references to Alexander's four successors occur again and again (see for instance Origen. *Comm. in Genesim*, PG 12, col. 60 B-C; Eus. *PE* 6.11.25; John Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.* 5.7; Theodoretus, *In Daniele* 8.8). The same exegetical version of Alexander's succession can also be traced in Pseudo-Methodius' *Revelations* (ch. 9) and in some Byzantine chronicles (see for instance Malalas, *Chronographia* 8.5-10).

<sup>23</sup> Philip appears in chapters 21 (Alexander's illness), 24 (sojourn in Alexandria), 34 (letter to Olympias), 41 (list of Alexander's friends), 46 (testament) ; Philon appears in chapters 30-31 (Gymnosophists), 32 (land of darkness), 36 (sedition), 41 (Candaules' episode, list of Alexander's friends), 46 (testament).

<sup>24</sup> Seleucos appears in chapters 14 (arrival in Asia), 18 (military embassy to the Persians after Darius' death), 20 (census of the Persian troops), 24 (sojourn in Alexandria), 34 (letter to Olympias), 39 (expedition against Eurymithres), 41 (Candaules' episode, list of Alexander's friends), 44 (return to Persia), 46 (testament).

<sup>25</sup> Antiochos appears in chapters 10 (Darius' ambassadors), 14 (arrival in Asia), 17 (Poros' spies), 21 (Alexander's illness), 24 (sojourn in Alexandria), 30 (Gymnosophists), 32 (land of darkness), 34 (letter to Olympias), 40-43 (Candaules' episode and visit to Candace), 46 (testament).

ending of the whale-like episode, and lets Philon survive his exploratory mission: this “loving” friend (true to his significant name) can thus reappear subsequently, to show his attachment to the king once more by disclosing the troops’ conspiracy (chap. 36).

Three other characters make more occasional appearances in the narrative in the role of foreign friends of Alexander:

1. Laomedon in the Roman chapters of the *Romance* (as the Western partner of Alexander in the Hippodrome race);
2. Candaules, son of queen Candake, in a deeply transformed version of the Candake novella;
3. Charmides, son of the tyrant of Thessalonike, in the last chapter of the *Romance*, devoted to Alexander’s agony.

Just as the four main companions of the king, these three additional friends are profuse in passionate declarations of friendship and affectionate gestures towards Alexander, and greatly contribute to the description of the  $\epsilon$  version’s protagonist as a king beloved by the whole world, just as was the Byzantine emperor according to acclamations recorded by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his book *On Ceremonies*: being the hero of a story which could be called a hymn to friendship, the charismatic Alexander of the  $\epsilon$  recension is also pictured as an image of the ideal emperor.

In various passages of the  $\epsilon$  recension dealing with Alexander and his friends, a rather striking element is the emphasis put by the narrator upon physical expression of love: evocations of affectionate kisses and warm embraces are very frequent in this new version of the *Romance*.<sup>26</sup> Its narrator describes scenes of sentimental effusion in a repetitive and stereotyped way, using expressions such as περιπλέκομαι, καταφιλεῖν, τῷ τραχήλῳ ἐφάπτομαι, τοῦ τραχήλου λάβομαι. The vocabulary employed in these passages, and the disconcerting specification of the neck as a focus of affection, suggest the influence of Biblical models; for it is the neck which, in the Bible, symbolizes what John Chrysostom calls ‘the yoke of fraternal love’.<sup>27</sup>

In the final chapter of the  $\epsilon$  recension, the same terms recur to describe the close bond between Alexander and Charmides. Sent as a hostage to the Macedonian king at an early stage of the *Romance* (11.4), the young man unexpectedly reappears at the end of the story to assist Alexander during the agony episode. Distressed by the king’s imminent

<sup>26</sup> Cured by Philip the doctor, Alexander holds him by the neck and kisses him (21.5): λαβόμενος αὐτὸν τοῦ τραχήλου κατεφίλησε; rescued from the tyrant Evagrides, Candaules embraces Alexander and kisses him thankfully (41.4): Περιπλέκετο Κανδαύλης ὡς Ἀντίοχον τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον. Καταφιλῶν καὶ ἐπαινῶν ἔλεγεν ...; when Alexander goes out from the gods’ caves, Candaules holds him by the neck and kisses him (42.4): Καταδραμῶν τῷ τραχήλῳ αὐτοῦ περιπλέκετο καὶ καταφιλῶν ἔλεγε ...

<sup>27</sup> Commentary on the reunion of Josephus and his brothers in Gen. 45:14 (‘And he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept on him; and Benjamin wept on his neck’): Διὰ τί δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον, οὐχὶ δὲ ἐπὶ ἄλλο μέρος; Ἀναγκαίως ἐπὶ τοὺς τραχήλους αὐτῶν ἔκλαυσε, τοὺς ἀποβαλόντας τὸν ζυγὸν τῆς φιλαδελφίας (John Chrysostom, *Spuria* 833, *De jejuniō, de Davide et de presbyteris, de Josepho et de novato*, PG 62, col. 763). The same physical manifestations of affection are to be found in the New Testament (see for instance the return of the prodigal son in *Luc* 15. 20-21: Εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπλαγχνίσθη, καὶ δραμῶν ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν), as well as in many hagiographical narratives: cf. Boulhol (1996), 26.

death, he embraces him, and refuses to part from him again, so that Alexander keeps resting on his neck till death comes.<sup>28</sup> The ε redactor even conceived the idea of immortalizing this intimate embrace on the brink of death: for Alexander's subjects decide to honor his memory by erecting a statue of the king with Charmides in his arms (46. 6), so that the image of the Macedonian conqueror to be left to posterity should no longer be that of a solitary warrior, but that of a hero of shared friendship.

Here too the influence of the Bible may have played a part leading to the invention of a character who replaces the historical figure of Hephaestion in the role of Alexander's bosom friend: the ε redactor may have found it convenient to model his portrayal of Alexander on that of David, whose friendship with Jonathan was as famous a paradigm among Christian writers as Achilles and Patroclus had been in Antiquity among pagan writers.<sup>29</sup> Such a similitude between the protagonist of the *Romance* and the Biblical king, mythical model of all Byzantine emperors, was well fit to favour the transformation of Alexander's story into a mirror for princes.<sup>30</sup>

To be sure, a modern reader could be perplexed by the high degree of physical proximity shared by Alexander and Charmides in the final chapter of the ε recension, and think it casts upon the relationship of the king and his young friend a suspicion of homoeroticism inconsistent with the moralizing tendency of this christianized recension. However, one must be cautious not to be misled by a linguistic code different from ours: David Konstan points out the appearance of extravagant expressions of devotion between friends in Late Antiquity, which contrast with the more restrained and chaste code that prevailed throughout the classical period.<sup>31</sup> It is tempting to apply to the ε recension what Charles Stephen Jaeger says about the language of passionate male friendship frequently used in twelfth-century Western sources to express the relationship between the king and his favourites — a language whose real meaning cannot be dissociated from the publicity given to the relationship. In the Middle Ages, the king's friendship was experienced within a public emotional structure, and gestures were to be interpreted as visible guarantees of the king's favour according to a "charismatic rule", which suppressed the scandalizing power the same gestures would have had if privately performed, because they were transposed into a sphere of invulnerability, where everything was noble and deserved veneration.<sup>32</sup> The transformation of Alexander's and Charmides' male embrace into a public statue (46.6) can be interpreted as an example of the sublimating effect produced by this "charismatic rule". It reminds us of the

<sup>28</sup> ε 46. 2-3: Περιπλακείς τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ οὐκ ἐβούλετο ἐξ αὐτοῦ διελθεῖν; Ἀλέξανδρος τὸν παῖδα ἀπολύσαι οὐκ ᾔθελεν, ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ ἐπέκειτο τῷ τραχήλῳ; Alexander stays ἐπὶ τῷ Χαριμίδους ἐπικείμενος τραχήλῳ.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. LXX 1 Regn. 18.1-4 (where it is said that 'the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul'); 19.1-7; 20.1-24, 27-34, 41-42; 23.16-18; 2 Regn. 1.11-27 (lament of David over Jonathan's death).

<sup>30</sup> For other possible parallels between the two stories of Alexander and David, see Amitay (2010), 151-153: in the ε recension, it seems possible that similitudes are not 'purely coincidental'. For the ε recension as a mirror for princes, see Jouanno (2002), 374-377.

<sup>31</sup> Konstan (1997), 173. MacGuire (1988), 291, notes that in twelfth-century Western sources, it was possible to address friends by using a sensual language directly borrowed from the Song of Songs.

<sup>32</sup> Jaeger (1991), 552-554 and 563.



“Absonderung” which in Byzantium was the first and foremost aim of imperial ceremonial<sup>33</sup> — a ceremonial which surrounds the protagonist of the ε recension, as it surrounded the Byzantine *basileis*.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Treitinger (1938), 49-123.

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### *The Alexander Romance*

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