

THE GREEKS

AGAMEMNON TO ALEXANDER THE GREAT

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POINT-À-CALLIÈRE, MONTRÉAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY COMPLEX
December 12, 2014 – April 26, 2015

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY, GATINEAU
June 5, 2015 – October 12, 2015

THE FIELD MUSEUM, CHICAGO
November 24, 2015 – April 10, 2016

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, DC
May 26, 2015 – October 9, 2016



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS



ALEXANDER THE GREAT
AND
THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

Page 420: The Battle of Issus.
Alexander. Mosaic, detail. Pompeii.
2nd century BC. Naples, National
Archaeological Museum.

As commander and representative of all the Greeks, Alexander marched against the Persians, bringing a new dimension to the old confrontation between East and West. Eventually, however, through his political action as universal ruler he abolished the contrast and prepared the way that led to the most creative synthesis of cultures that the world had ever seen: the Hellenistic world, the most open and tolerant, multiethnic and multicultural society in human history.

Invincible warrior and inspired visionary, Alexander accepted “the other” to a point that many of his own found scandalous. By sacrificing to their gods, respecting their customs, and honouring their traditions he won the hearts of his subjects and became a hero in the legends of the peoples of the world. The fruitful fusion of opposites—the dream of universal ruler that inspired the Susa weddings and sealed the worldview of the enlightened Hellenistic hegemony—is today more vital than ever, makes of its initiator the precursor and father of globalization in its most noble expression.

Thanks to Alexander, Greek culture reached the Far East and was transformed into the Hellenistic culture, and the Hellenistic *koine* became a common reference point among the people from Europe to Egypt and India. A new worldview was born with the Ecumene rather than individual nations as the main axis of reference. The inexhaustible reserve of Hellenistic culture, scattered across three continents, becomes a starting point for dialogue, a source of ideas and ideologies, a matrix of a new world that generates empires, influences art, develops science, and shapes the modern worldview.

Centres of commerce and cultural exchange, the Hellenistic cities defined the network of cultural roads, and Alexander, unbeaten general and horned god, haunts Persian miniature painting, fights against spirits and monsters before his glorious ascension in the cathedrals of Europe, and reappears undaunted in photographic palimpsests by Andy Warhol or in the epic conflicts of Oliver Stone, retaining his unparalleled charm which transcends the limits of space and time.

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434. HEAD OF ALEXANDER

Early Hellenistic period

Marble

H. 0.30 m, w. 0.27 m

Found in the broader region of Pella
Pella, Archaeological Museum, ΓΛ 15

Head of a life-size marble statue of a young, unbearded man. The face recalls Alexander the Great, whose portrait is known from

several ancient works of art. Characteristic features include the soft rendering of the skin, the deep eyes, which, combined with the head's slight leftward tilt, give the impression that he is gazing towards the sky, and the rich curly hair with its upswung quiff (*anastole*) over the forehead, the main attribute of the Macedonian general's iconography.

The rendering of the hair—with its thick

plastic volumes that generate a strong interplay of light and shadow—indicates an early 3rd century BC date, placing this work among the earliest extant portraits of Alexander. The schematic rendering of the back suggests that the statue originally stood inside a niche or against a wall, so that only its front side was visible.

Several artists created images of Alexander while he was still alive, including the famous Leochares. Alexander, however, who was very conscious of his public image, preferred Lysippos among sculptors and Apelles among painters. According to Plutarch: “The outward appearance [of Alexander] is best represented by the statues of him which Lysippos made, and it was by this artist alone that Alexander himself thought it fit that he should be modelled. For those peculiarities which many of his successors and friends afterwards tried to imitate, namely, the poise of the neck, which was bent slightly to the left, and the melting glance of his eyes, this artist has accurately observed” (Plutarch, *Alexander* IV.1; English translation by Bernadotte Perrin, Cambridge, MA and London, 1919). Equal of the gods, source of dynastic legitimacy for all leaders of the Hellenistic world, timeless model of a ruler, Alexander inspired sculptors, painters, miniature artists, even jewellers, who crafted masterful portraits until the end of the Imperial period, repeating, with slight variations, the traditional Hellenistic types. Many of these portraits survive to this day, irrefutable witnesses of the great popularity enjoyed over time by the initiator of a world without frontiers.

Selected Bibliography

Lilibaki-Akamati *et al.* 2011, 16.

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435. STATUETTE OF ALEXANDER-PAN

Early Hellenistic period

Marble

H. 0.38 m

Pella

Pella, Archaeological Museum, ΓΑ 453

Exquisite marble statuette of a standing young male figure. The robust modeling of the naked body, the comfortable posture, the way the body and head turn towards the raised right arm in a three-dimensional movement, all incorporate the principles of the art of Lysippos: an impression reinforced by the youth's head with its deep eyes and the upswept locks of hair (*anastole*), a characteristic feature of Alexander the Great's portraits.

Were it not for the traces of the tiny horns growing above the centre of the forehead one could confidently identify this small masterpiece as a replica of the early Hellenistic statues of Alexander by Lysippos. The presence of horns, however, and despite the lack of a tail and goat legs, suggests it represents Pan, the goat-like god of wildlife: here he is humanized and fully idealized according to the spirit of the times, following the model of male beauty, which was none other than the image of Alexander the Great himself.

Selected Bibliography

Lilibaki-Akamati 2011, 162, 165.

Angeliki Kottaridi





**436. RELIEF REPRESENTATION OF
A VEGETAL DEMON**

320–310 BC

Ivory

H. 0.075 m, w. max. 0.116 m

Aigai, Archaeological Museum, BO 1697

Ivory inlay for a bed. A similar but slightly smaller tomb was built next to Philip's in the late 4th century BC, as suggested by the ceramic finds, for another member of the royal family, a youth approximately 13–15 years old. Although the youth was cremated, no traces of the funerary pyre were found in the tomb. This suggests that he died and was cremated elsewhere, and that his remains were brought to Aigai to be buried in the royal mound. The youth is thus identified as Alexander IV (323–310 BC), son of Alexander the Great and Roxanne, an adolescent king born after his father's death. He passed his life in captivity at Amphipolis and was murdered with his mother before reaching adulthood according to

Macedonian law, to give way to the ambitious usurper to the throne. Obviously, the murderer himself, Cassander, the youth's uncle by marriage, buried the last Temenid king in the city that gave birth to his dynasty, as was required by custom, in an attempt to appease Macedonian suspicions. Alexander IV's chryselephantine bed resembles that of Philip II, but is less well preserved. It featured a truly masterful relief frieze, which illustrates in a unique manner the gentleness and refinement of the art of the Early Hellenistic period. The frieze depicts a bearded Dionysos with a gold wreath holding a torch and embracing gently his charming companion, while making his way towards a feast, led by a young satyr playing the flute. Satyrs and maenads sway ecstatically on either side of the divine couple in a sacred grove defined by choragic tripods.

An interesting innovation is the presence, between the volutes of the capitals on the bed's feet, of two relief figures with open

arms, which, being half-men and half-plants, might be identified as vegetal demons. These bearded figures sport the characteristic garments of the East, namely a Phrygian cap and long-sleeved chiton; they recall Sabazius, a Thracian deity identified with Dionysos. Being both plants and humans, these Hellenized easterners can rightfully be called "hybrids" and are among the earliest artistic expressions of a tendency that was most characteristic of the Hellenistic Ecumene: the co-existence and synthesis of opposites in a new unity, the unity that Alexander the Great initiated with the Susa weddings, the unity that the prematurely cut-down Alexander IV himself incarnated—Greek by his father, Bactrian by his mother.

Selected Bibliography

Andronikos 1984, 208; Kottaridi – Walker. 2011, 138, fig. 154, cat. no. 486 (A. Kottaridi).

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ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S MILITARY CAMPAIGN
(spring of 334 B.C. - spring of 324 B.C.)

- The state of Alexander the Great
- Greek states allied to or dependent from Alexander the Great
- Independent Greek states
- Route of Alexander the Great
- Route of Craterus' return
- Nearchus' voyage
- Major battles
- Cities - key points of the campaign
- Cities founded by Alexander and named after him

