

Myth, the Marvelous, the Exotic, and the Hero in the Roman d'Alexandre

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Abstract

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Under the direction of Dr. Edward D. Montgomery

In the Roman d'Alexandre, Alexandre de Paris generates new myth by depicting Alexander the Great as willfully seeking to inscribe himself and his deeds within the extant mythical tradition, and as deliberately rivaling the divine authority. The contemporary literary tradition based on Quintus Curtius's Gesta Alexandri Magni of which Alexandre de Paris may have been aware eliminates many of the marvelous episodes of the king's life but focuses instead on Alexander's conquests and drive to compete with the gods' accomplishments. The depiction of his premature death within this work and the Roman raises the question of whether or not an individual can *actively* seek deification. Heroic figures are at the origin of divinity and myth, and the Roman d'Alexandre portrays Alexander as an essentially very human character who is nevertheless dispossessed of the powerful attributes normally associated with heroic protagonists. His encounters with the marvelous repeatedly demonstrate his inability to overcome the fears and weaknesses afflicting common mortals; Alexandre de Paris fills his text with elaborate descriptions of exotic tents, horses, palaces, tombs and terrifying marvels in order to project his work into the realm of legendary myth, but either the sharp contrast with his protagonist's decidedly un-heroic demeanor or ambiguous elements within the marvelous and exotic features themselves ultimately

undermine Alexander's self-avowed objective of entering the ranks of demigods and powerful death-dealers. Fundamentally, the character of Alexander within the Roman is quite unlike the traditional heroes of both Antiquity and the contemporary literature of the time. He is not a one-dimensional champion like a Roland or an Achilles; indeed Alexander may be one of the first instances of a recognizably human character within the medieval literary corpus. Remarkably identifiable motivations drive him, not the least important of which is a natural curiosity to uncover the earth's secrets, and as a result the young king's fears and triumphs are closer to the human experience, than to the many impassive heroes who came before him.

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Introduction

Definition of problem and questions

It is impossible to consider an individual such as Alexander the Great without taking into account the models that constitute the basis for the Greek king's identity from both a historical as well as literary perspective. The story of the man's life, as recorded by his personal historian and faithful followers, is inextricably entwined with the concepts of mythology and hero worship. Callisthenes, Alexander's official court historian until the rash young king had him executed in the eighth year of the journey, provides us with the clearest image of how Alexander may actually have seen himself. According to Callisthenes, Alexander truly believed that he was the descendant of both Achilles and Heracles. It is therefore not surprising that the Hellenic ideal of heroism and *le merveilleux* dominate the medieval narratives relating to the life of Alexander.

Although the goal here will not be to seek to identify historical authenticity in studying the Roman d'Alexandre, regardless of the myths surrounding him, one must acknowledge that Alexander was a powerful figure. The historians and pseudo-historians such as Arrian, the Roman chronicler of the 1st and 2nd centuries, Ptolemy the successor king of the Egyptian territories, or Nearchus Alexander's fleet admiral, generally only wrote about him in glowing terms. They laud his ability to lead men and to incite them to carry out his will in a terrifyingly effective manner. Whether out of fear or driven by the king's overwhelming charisma, his soldiers abandoned their homes and families in Greece and followed him to the ends of the earth. His lightning conquest of the Middle East and part of

India by his early thirties is in and of itself a feat that no one else may claim to have accomplished. He may simply have been a megalomaniac, consumed by an uncontrollable drive to conquer and submit lands and peoples to his will, or there may have been some events or traumatic occurrences during his upbringing that pushed him to outdo his ancestors and risk life and limb to elevate his own stature. Perhaps a desire to punish the Persians, led by Darius, for the injustices they committed towards the inhabitants of the Peloponnesian peninsula fueled a powerful instinct for vengeance in Alexander. Maybe the medieval *auctores* of the Greek king's biography were correct: his insatiable curiosity and hunger for power were fundamentally revealing of his all-consuming desire to rival God's *toute puissance*. It is impossible to determine Alexander's true motivations, and yet his accomplishments were so incredible, that driven by fascination, the medieval writers focused their attention upon him. Starting in the late tenth century, numerous scribes sought repeatedly to translate the Alexander saga from Latin and Greek sources. Undoubtedly, this interest in understanding the identity of the enigmatic tyrant has also been a source of motivation for the present study, but to try and grasp the complete nature of such a powerful figure in one work would be folly. The entire saga of the Roman d'Alexandre is essentially a series of encounters with *le fantastique* interspersed among formulaic descriptions of battle. As Alexandre de Paris weaves his tale, he incorporates such strange elements in order to tell his readers something about the heroic protagonist at its heart. The fantastic and frightening elements of the medieval versions of Alexander's life story in effect, are a virtual reflection of the mysterious man himself. Within the Roman these references to the marvelous, to lavish, exotic wealth, and the creation of new myth in the context of old legends are essential narrative components, and serve to define Alexander as a man of great means, striving to be

a god, but ultimately falling short. Thus, understanding the exact function of these fantastic components within the framework of Alexander's character development is of paramount importance. Given this focus, some sort of definition of *le merveilleux/le fantastique* is essential for this project¹. Examining the textual evidence for the presence of emotions in the characterization process is an important part of comprehending Alexandre de Paris's method for defining the epic hero's nature. This includes an analysis of the emotive *champs lexicaux* employed throughout the text in reference to the protagonists, and specifically, Alexander. This method of investigation allows the reader to identify the fantastic elements, because references to the characters' fear, amazement, surprise, or delight when faced with certain events or creatures, and the nature of their response to such events determine whether or not the event is an example of an occurrence of the *merveilleux*, a fantastic occurrence, or not. As Tzvetan Todorov indicates in his work Introduction à la littérature fantastique, the second of the three principal characteristics of *le fantastique* is that the characters as well as the readers must hesitate when faced with the inexplicable, as they struggle with determining whether or not it is an event or creature that belongs to the real world. Todorov's analysis coincides with this study's approach:

La seconde condition est plus complexe: elle se rattache d'une part à l'aspect *syntactique*, dans la mesure où elle implique l'existence d'un type formel d'unités qui se réfèrent à l'appréciation portée par les personnages sur les événements du récit; on pourrait appeler ces unités les <<réactions>>, par opposition aux <<actions>> qui forment habituellement la trame de l'histoire. (38)

Christine Ferlampin-Archer's definition of *le fantastique* in her works, Fées, bestes et luitons: croyances et merveilles and Merveilles et topique merveilleuse dans les romans médiévaux

¹For the purposes of simplicity, this dissertation will use the terms *le merveilleux/le fantastique* and *marvelous / fantastic* interchangeably. Scholars mark a difference between the two concepts, but to be fair, this distinction is only relevant when discussing texts wherein both words can be found, in particular with more contemporary works.

also provides a method of identifying such elements in a literary text. As she indicates, one must certainly not seek to apply an anachronous contemporary definition of these terms, but it may be possible to determine indirectly what medieval man may have considered to be "fantastic" or "out of the ordinary" by examining the nature of the text's language itself:

Si le lecteur médiéval est un être inexistant, survivant pendant plus de trois siècles, historiquement et socialement indéfini, il a un double idéal, inscrit dans le texte, dont les réactions sont imposées par les auteurs et dans la psychologie duquel chaque lecteur, sous peine d'anachronismes voyants, doit humblement se fondre. Les interventions du narrateur, le jeu sur les indéfinis et les tournures passives, ainsi que le travail sur les focalisations et les points de vue imposent au lecteur telle ou telle réaction face à la *merveille*, indépendamment de ses croyances personnelles. (11)

For example, here is one such a example of the presence of this medieval reader. When Alexander hears the neighing of his monstrous horse, Bucephalus, for the first time, Alexandre de Paris writes:

A tous ciaux qui l'oïrent covint le sanc müer,
Ainc n'i ot si hardi qui n'esteüt trambler.
Alixandres les lui vit un sien maistre ester,
Du cri qu'il ot oï li prist demander,
Car n'a soing qu'il li doive grant merveille celer. (v. 400-404,I)²

The reader's intended reaction to the *merveilleux* is incorporated within the text itself; so terrifying was the sound of the strange horse's cries that even the strongest of men would tremble out of fear. Throughout the narrative, Alexandre de Paris essentially informs the readers when they should be frightened or surprised by a specific wondrous sight he is describing. This method of analysis provides a reliable means of defining the *merveilleux*.

One must also distinguish here between the fantastic elements that can be found in the

²"Un cri qui résonait de par toute la ville, / et qui glaçait le sang à ceux qui l'entendaient: / le plus hardi ne pouvait s'empêcher de trembler. / Alexandre, voyant près de lui l'un de ses maîtres, s'enquiert du cri qu'il a entendu, / car il ne veut pas qu'on lui dissimule ce prodige." This study makes use of Laurence Harf-Lancner's excellent translations of the Anglo-Norman found within her facing page edition of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, manuscript BN fr. 25517.

Roman and those that one might encounter in texts drawing upon the *matière de Bretagne*, such as Marie de France's Lais. Indeed, it is clear that Alexandre de Paris's work represents an entirely different form of imaginative artistry from the Romans courtois of Chrétien de Troyes: the Roman d'Alexandre draws much of its fanciful passages from Oriental tradition, and from texts such as the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem (a fictitious letter describing India's wondrous creatures that can be found in the original Greek manuscript).

In this work, the reader is witness to the protagonist's efforts at self-deification. Alexander's life is certainly extraordinary. Starting with his birth under dramatic circumstances in which "bouches mesdisans" and "garçon plain d'envie" accuse his mother of having betrayed her husband Philip and sleeping with an enchanter, Alexander's relatively short lifespan (he died at age 32) is filled with mysterious events, encounters with creatures of myth and legend, instances of extraordinary luck, and awe-inspiring feats. One cannot escape the comparison of Alexander with mythic adventuring heroes such as Odysseus, Heracles or Jason. Alexander journeys across the wilds of Anatolia, Egypt and the Middle East pushed by the all-consuming obsession of becoming the master of the world. He truly seeks to challenge the power of the gods in his accomplishments and victories, and yet as the eloquently spun tale insists, he can never escape his own mortality. This mortality surges up continuously throughout the narrative to remind the reader that, though Alexander's power is considerable, it is fundamentally precarious and governed by the harsh dictates of fate. In this sense, Alexander conforms much more to the medieval conception of the heroic figure, decisively inferior to God in power and subject to his will, and much less to the classical heroic archetype who, by means of his earthly accomplishments, would gain access even on occasion to the realm of the gods by becoming a god himself.

Yet Alexander truly is a self-aware mythical figure: throughout the narrative of the Roman, by hurling himself at other-worldly dangers, he deliberately seeks to inscribe himself into the mythological tradition as a hero worthy of the likes of Odysseus or Heracles. With this in mind, this study examines these defining exotic, mythical and marvelous elements and seeks to determine their role in the characterization of Alexander as a "godlike" protagonist. Finally, it will examine how the author portrays Alexander as an extraordinary, but mortal man; essentially, this study investigates those feats and salient characteristics that reveal Alexander's humanity.

Origin of the Roman d'Alexandre:

Much like the *renouveau* that was to occur in the sixteenth century, the renaissance that gave rise to the Roman d'Alexandre was characterized by a renewed interest in the wisdom of the ancients. This intellectual rebirth was principally limited to the clergy, who had managed to protect the knowledge of the Romans and Greeks within the monasteries and centers of learning of Paris and Orleans. In their eager attempts to imitate and translate classical writers like Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, Horace and Ovid, the medieval clerics created a new genre, the French romance which wrought changes to these stories.

The oldest of these romances, the Roman de Thèbes, was written by a Norman cleric around 1150. Based on an original composed by P. Papinius Statius sometime in the mid- to late first century. Although the work preserves the principal story line of the tragic war between the two sons of Oedipus, its numerous transformations and embellishments suited the tastes of its medieval audience. The Roman de Thèbes is filled with vivid and wonderfully detailed descriptions of exotic objects and creatures, coupled with easily recognizable formulaic battle descriptions and council scenes that borrowed from *chansons*

de geste like the Chanson de Roland. In contrast to the epic genre the Roman de Thèbes has a noticeably more developed love story, perhaps one of the most noteworthy features of the Romans antiques.

The Roman d'Enéas, written somewhat later, probably around 1160, is a good example of this shift in emphasis. Again, the unknown author closely followed the story of Vergil's Aeneid, but he also adapted his work to the nobility's budding taste for literary representations of courtly love by giving a much more important role to the romantic drama between Aeneas and his two lovers Dido and Lavinia.

Some time between 1154 and 1173, Benoît de Sainte-More wrote the Roman de Troie, basing his colossal text of over 30,000 verses on two brief pseudo-historical texts, the Historia de excidio Trojae by Dares the Phrygian, and the Ephemeris belli Trojani of Dictys the Cretan. As in the other Romans antiques the medieval author does much more than simply translate the Latin originals. The Roman de Troie includes over twenty *chanson de geste*-like descriptions of battles, and Benoît elaborates on the tale's numerous and convoluted love intrigues. The Roman d'Eneas, the Roman de Thèbes, and the Roman de Troie, commonly referred to as examples of the *matière de Rome*, constitute some of the earliest examples of the romance form.

Finally, the source text of this study, the Roman d'Alexandre, is essentially an amalgam of several texts written by different authors, which, by their existence, prove that Alexander the Great's adventures were quite popular in the twelfth century. The life of the Macedonian conqueror was a source of fascination for medieval writers and rulers alike, and it seems that his deeds served both as a model for the conduct of kings as well as a moralizing lesson on the dangers of unbridled ambition.

Quintus Curtius, Julius Valerius, Justin, and Orosius were the principal Roman chroniclers whose works served as the basis for the historical Alexander texts in the Middle Ages. Gautier de Châtillon's Alexandreis, written between 1178 and 1182, was without a doubt the most popular epic to come out of these Latin historical sources, and this in turn generated Alexander sagas in Middle High German, Old Spanish, and Middle Dutch. Among these translations, perhaps one of the most interesting is the Spanish Libro de Alexandre, a fourteenth-century work of considerable poetic value that stands apart from the other permutations as a somewhat more original work because of its inclusion of elements from several romance tradition sources.

The first true romance of the Alexander saga is the fragment in Franco-Provençal of a poem by Alberich de Pisançon, a minstrel who probably composed the poem in the early years of the twelfth century. Unfortunately only 105 lines remain of this original piece.³ Around 1130, however, the priest Lamprecht completed a German-language translation of the entire Alberich work, that is extant. Between 1165 and 1175, an anonymous poet from Poitou also translated a good portion of Alberich's poem into decasyllabic verse, commonly referred to as the Decasyllabic Alexander. Another poet, Lambert le Tort continued the work of the Decasyllabic Alexander, recounting the adventures up to and including the plot of Divinuspater and Antipater to poison the young king.

Finally in about 1180, in an effort to create a unified narrative, the compiler of the Roman d'Alexandre, Alexandre de Paris (of whom little is known, other than that he was born in the town of Bernay in Normandy)⁴, adapted each of the previously mentioned

³A transcription of this fragment is included in the Förster and Koschwitz *Altfranzösisches Übungsbuch*.

⁴Several works refer to Alexandre de Paris as Alexandre de Bernai. For the sake of consistency this study will only refer to the author as Alexandre de Paris.

independent tales and modified them to suit his purpose. In the end, his efforts produced a lengthy epic romance or poem of 16,000 dodecasyllabic lines (all assonanced stanzas). It is from this text that the term “alexandrine” arose to indicate dodecasyllabic verses.

The principal component texts of the Roman are the following: (1) The Decasyllabic Alexander, (2) The Fuerre de Gadres poem, which embellishes upon the siege of Tyre episode, was written independently by a man named Eustache, and two other independent texts, (3) the Mort Alixandre, recounting the end of the king's life, and the Alixandre en Orient, detailing his adventures in the Far East. The Roman d'Alexandre was thus just one of many literary productions of the twelfth century based on the life story of Alexander the Grea; there were several other works that emerged in Europe at about the same time. In England, at about the same time as the Roman's composition, Thomas de Kent wrote another massive poem (12,000 verses) in Anglo-Norman about Alexander, the Roman de toute chevalerie. This text follows much less the forms of the *chansons de geste* but focuses more on the fantastic elements of the conqueror's journey than Alexandre de Paris' Roman⁵.

Toward the end of the twelfth century, Jean le Névelon, the *bailli* of Arras, wrote the Venjeance Alexandre, a continuation of the Roman d'Alexandre. Simultaneously, Gui de

⁵There is some evidence to indicate that Alexander the Great was a source of interest for the kings of England as early as the 9th century. King Alfred the Great of Wessex (871-899) ordered that a translation into vernacular be made of Orosius' Historiae adversum paganos which includes significant accounts of Alexander's campaigns. In addition, the Nowell Codex, a collection of manuscripts which dates to the late 10th century, contains a vernacular translation of the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem, where Alexander's Indian adventures and encounters with Porus are recounted. These texts constitute, according to Gerrit H.V. Bunt, author of Alexander the Great in the Literature of Great Britain, "the earliest vernacular Alexander texts of Western Europe" (18). From the time of the Norman Conquest to the 13th century, however, no more English language texts concerning Alexander appeared. The first important text to appear in Middle English was the early 14th century King Alisaunder based primarily on Thomas de Kent's twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Roman de Toute Chevalerie. This 14th century text is thus the first Alexander romance in English. In and of itself the King Alisaunder is quite unique, because it represents one of the earliest attempts to examine the Alexander tale with a critical eye; its author may have used a variety of sources, including versions of Châtillon's Alexandreis or even Julius Valerius's work to supplement his work and clarify ambiguous passages.

Cambrai, a cleric at Saint-Nicholas d'Arrouaise wrote a poem about the same topic of Alexander the Great's successorship, which Urban Tigner Holmes refers to as the Vengement Alixandre⁶.

The Manuscript Tradition

Most of the medieval Alexander romances are based at least in part on a Greek text, commonly referred to as Pseudo-Callisthenes, probably composed around 200 BC but perhaps much later, by an inhabitant of Alexandria. According to George Cary, who provides a detailed analysis of the original foundation material for Alexander in the Middle Ages in his work The Medieval Alexander, the sources for Pseudo-Callisthenes "were partly literary and partly the oral legends which were even then widely told of Alexander" (9). Although no one has yet found an extant version of the manuscript that would be very close to the actual original work, there are numerous translations, the best of which constitute the α -recension. Most notable among the manuscripts in this group is the translation by Julius Valerius made around AD 320 and commonly referred to as the Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis. An abridged version of this manuscript, the Zacher Epitome, became very popular starting in the 9th century.

The other group of manuscripts derived from Pseudo-Callisthenes considered valuable by medieval scholars constitutes the δ -recension. These manuscripts, one in Syriac and one in Ethiopic, were probably based on a good α -type version. In around 950 AD, Archbishop Leo of Naples made a Latin translation of a good δ -type manuscript he discovered in Constantinople. This Historia de Preliis was also one of the primary sources in

⁶Holmes, Urban Tigner. A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300. New York, NY: Russell & Russell, Inc, 1938.

the twelfth century, and throughout medieval times for knowledge on Alexander. It is also one of the principal base texts for the Roman⁷.

The sources for the present study on the nature of Alexander the Great tend to be divisible into two distinct categories: (1) works that examine Alexander from a historical perspective and (2) texts that provide a means of studying the young king as a literary figure. Since the focus of this study is primarily literary, it will not extend to much of a discussion of the more historically accurate accounts of the events of the king's life, as Callisthenes, Alexander's personal historian, and other companions such as Ptolemy and the admiral Nearchus, recorded them in their journals, other than to provide the reader with an alternate perspective of this enigmatic figure's life, solely for the purposes of comparison. Yet, in order to grasp the medieval conception of Alexander, it is important to understand the legacy of the full range of sources available to medieval man. These include the Zacher Epitome and the component texts of the Roman, but also sources that were not necessarily directly used by Alexandre de Paris, including Quintus Curtius and Julius Valerius.

Sources that examine the depth of the Alexander saga's legacy in medieval literature, however, are invaluable in that they provide a powerful perspective for understanding the creative transformations wrought by Alexandre de Paris. George Cary's The Medieval Alexander, written in 1956, is the only relatively current work that deals specifically with the perception of Alexander the Great in the Middle Ages. His book is a precious resource for tracing the manuscript origins of the Roman d'Alexandre and thereby understanding

⁷The base text used for this study is the modern French, facing-page edition of The Roman d'Alexandre translated by Laurence Harf-Lancner. She in turn based her edition on E.C. Armstrong et al's The Medieval French Roman d'Alexandre published in 1965 at Princeton University as part of the Elliot Monographs. Harf-Lancner's edition consists of almost the entirety of Manuscript G (BN fr 25517) with the exception of just a few passages she chose to eliminate on the basis of their lack of relevance to the main plot line.

medieval man's view of the Greek king. In addition, the journalist Michael Wood's entertaining account of his own journey across the Middle East in an attempt to copy Alexander the Great's voyage of conquest is also an excellent source of information. In order to determine which path to take in his own trek, Wood consulted a wide range of accounts of the journey as well as the medieval sagas. From the perspective of the present study, Wood's descriptions of the various locales that Alexander visited is fascinating because it allows one to see to what extent the medieval author transformed actual geography in his own rendition of the events.

Very few authors have conducted detailed literary analyses of the Roman d'Alexandre or of Thomas de Kent's Roman de toute chevalerie. The most recent work, written by Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas in 1998, Les Romans d'Alexandre: aux frontières de l'épique et du romanesque, is a very complete comparative study of the two works from numerous different perspectives; i.e. Gaullier-Bougassas examines both the structural and stylistic variation in both works, as well as the presence of certain themes such as orientalism, or political commentary. Although it constitutes a rather exhaustive summary of the differences between the two epic sagas, this recent piece of scholarship does not treat the theme of the *marvelous* in any detail.

Secondary Source Material

In any of the narratives that existed in the Middle Ages, it is safe to say that the character of Alexander operates between the dream world and the real world. Therefore a comparison of the two literary traditions, that is to say the romance tradition based on Pseudo-Callisthenes, predominantly fictional, and the accounts that are closer to the actual events, the less *merveilleux*-fraught tales recorded by Quintus Curtius Valerius and Arrian, is productive.

These latter accounts stand in stark contrast to the romance simply on the basis of a wide divergence between the tales themselves. The texts themselves are evidence that the medieval writers were very much aware of both dimensions of the Alexander story, for it is clear that each medieval writer picks and chooses the components of the tales that suit his literary needs. For example, The Roman de Toute chevalerie favors the wonders of East while The Roman d'Alexandre prefers a consistent blend of *chanson de geste* motifs and marvelous events. Thus, in Alexandre de Paris's retelling of the epic journey, the young Macedonian conqueror regularly transitions between encounters with the marvelous and predictable real-world conflicts with foreign kings.

In order to better understand the character of Alexander in the Roman, one must begin by studying what constitutes the definition of an epic hero. Joseph Campbell and Dean Miller both examine the epic hero, but from two slightly different perspectives. Campbell's work, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, describes the hero's journey as an example of a universal monomyth, common to all cultures. In Campbell's view, the hero undergoes three phases in his adventures: 1. *separation* from the gods/ or the source of his power, 2. *initiation* to new knowledge or powers, and finally, 3. a *return* to the origin, whereby the hero is enhanced with new capabilities and means, and goes home, fundamentally changed. Campbell provides numerous examples from cultures across the world of how all heroic figures undergo similar, archetypal trials. Alexander undergoes a similar transformational journey in the Roman. A more detailed analysis of Campbell's schema reveals that before crossing the boundary into the realm of adventure, the hero often receives help of some sort from often unexpected characters that serve to guide him on his journey and confront the perils ahead. For instance, the vanquished monarch of India, Porus, at one point serves as his

guide for Alexander and his men across the dangerous deserts of the East. Once the hero has crossed the boundary into the realm of adventure, he must pass a series of tests, but in the case of Alexander, it is not always clear that he succeeds in overcoming them. Superficially, he seems to emerge victorious from these conflicts, but he does so only by defying the will of the gods. For example, he manages to escape the *Val Périlleux* by enlisting the aid of a demon, who, as Alexandre de Paris describes, if freed, will eventually destroy the world, and this ambiguity in the ethical orientation of Alexander's deeds extends throughout the entire narrative. The purpose of Alexander's journey is superficially self-centered: to uncover the earth's secrets and achieve mastery of the world, and at first glance this drive does not correspond to any of the most typical heroic impulses. Campbell envisages four possible goals of the mythic hero's adventure: 1. atonement with the father figure 2. marrying the goddess 3. retrieving/ stealing an elixir or powerful item, and 4. **apotheosis**. It would seem that Alexander the Great's objective is indeed to rival the power of the gods, or to become one himself, but his death, at the end of the work thwarts his attempt to achieve immortality. In his comparison of other mythical heroes and heroines, Campbell provides examples of successful heroic struggles: Jason's acquisition of the Golden Fleece and safe return, or the spiritual journeys of Buddha as he initiates his voyage of self-discovery are just two examples. By comparing Alexander to these examples of the heroic monomyth, one can determine to what extent it is possible to consider the young, brash king as a successful heroic figure and to what extent he falls short of expectations. On the one hand, in many instances, Alexander behaves like a true heroic protagonist, defeating enemies, passing tests of strength, and uncovering items of power, but from another perspective his ambition and greed prevent him from achieving his ultimate goal: deification.

Like Campbell, Dean Miller describes the characteristics of the hero. In his view, a successful epic hero must

1. be a great combatant
2. generally be isolated, independently-minded
3. be swift, and does not hesitate in the course of his adventuring
4. does not function in the typical societal context; he has an “indomitable sense of self.”
5. lack of any fear of death/ recognition of his own mortality.

Certainly, Alexander seems to fit within this mold. His valor in war is unquestionable, he does not tarry as he hurtles across the fantastic wilds of the Orient, he acts almost always alone (the inclusion of the *geste* of the *douze pairs* seems almost to be an afterthought), and his tyrannical method of decision-making does not allow him to function properly in a cooperative societal context. But when Miller describes the purpose of the champion's archetypal features in the human psyche's need for such figures, the Alexander-hero does not appear to function as well as before.

According to Miller, the creation of the hero-king corresponds to a need within the human consciousness for the development of a powerful, protective, father-figure to defend society from external aggression. The epic hero is ever trapped between two worlds, the divine and the human. He contends with powerful divine forces, but must ultimately obey the rules laid out in the human realm and die a mere mortal's death. Miller states that instead of balancing the two forces (as does the normal human mind), of *thanatos* (death wielding energy) and *eros* (productive energy), the epic hero favors *thanatos*, and therefore he kills, much like a god, and hurls himself violently at his own perdition without fear for his own

safety. He does so because he is assured of some form of 'eternal life' by the heroic and mythical legacy that his deeds will leave behind in people's minds. In sum, in terms of the human psyche, the epic hero functions as a means of dealing with the fear of death or dying, for if the epic hero does not fear his own mortality, why should the reader? Thus, when one attempts to ascertain whether or not Alexander is a successful epic hero in the light of Miller's analysis, the Macedonian warrior king seems to come up short. Throughout Alexandre de Paris' narrative, the brash young king expresses fear, especially when confronting the animals of the Orient's *bestiaire fantastique* or the strange manifestations of the marvelous that appear in the deserts or the cities of his opponents. Neither does he achieve the 'good death' on the field of battle, in the paroxysm of glory so sought after by epic heroes. Instead, he passes away, trapped in his palace, poisoned by two traitors. The collective human mind will remember his great deeds, but Alexander's actions do nothing to assuage its fundamental fear of death.

The Marvelous

The topic of *le merveilleux* in the literature of the Middle Ages has been the subject of considerable treatment of late. In 1991, Francis Dubost published a tome analyzing the convoluted and often interwoven notions of *le merveilleux* and *le fantastique*: Aspects fantastiques de la littérature narrative médiévale (XIIème-XIIIème siècles): L'Autre, l'Ailleurs, l'Autrefois. Dubost provides definitions of these concepts as well as numerous examples to illustrate his arguments. Dubost's examination of the correlation between *la peur* and *le merveilleux* is also significant, in particular if one seeks to understand the relationship between *le merveilleux* and an author's portrayal of certain heroic types. The exotic and fantastic creatures and events of the Roman d'Alexandre are one of the examples Dubost

chooses to study, although he provides only a rather cursory examination of the function of these elements in the work as a whole.

Dubost provides an excellent history for the origins of the terms and ideas associated with *le merveilleux* and *le fantastique*. He points out that Saint Augustine was one of the first to distinguish between two notions, *phantasia* and *phantastica*. Saint Augustine describes how it is possible to create an image in one's mind of a place after having been there. For example, he could create a picture of Carthage in his mind's eye because he had lived in the city in the past. This is *phantasia*, an essentially God-created image, because it is based on real-world experience. However, it is also possible for one to generate an image of a place that one has never seen before, based on what one might have heard of such a locale.

Augustine could thus create an image of Alexandria in his head, even though he had never been there before. This is an example of *phantastica*, a solely mind-generated image. In Augustine's view, if the human mind created the image without the aid of God, the image could potentially be evil. This is the notion that Dubost seems to favor in his work. In Dubost's view, the *miraculeux*, a divine manifestation of supernatural power, stands in sharp contrast with *le fantastique*, which has two principal defining traits: (1.) it causes **fear** and (2) it is essentially **evil**. In his redaction of the Roman d'Alexandre, Alexandre de Paris seems to favor this type of explanation. There are very few instances of a positive manifestation of the marvelous. The griffons that carry Alexander into to the sky are evil creatures, for they seek to kill the soldiers in his army, as are the wild, fantastic animals Alexander that his men encounter around the oasis in the desert, like the *nyctoryx*, the frightening nocturnal birds that hurl themselves with great destructive energy at the terrified knights, and slaughter a

great number of them⁸. Even Alexander's marvelous undersea journey is filled with danger. He barely survives his ordeal and returns to the water's surface. In defining the specific characteristics of *le fantastique*, Dubost explains that it appears to be such a powerful creative energy in the Middle Ages because it resists comprehension by the mindsets of the time on two levels. *Le fantastique*, by its very nature, defies **reason's** attempts to understand it, and also because it was often considered evil in nature, it also defies Christian acceptance of its presence within the literature of the time. The Church did not condone such divergent creative manifestations of the imagination.

Christine Ferlampin-Archer's work, Merveilles et topique merveilleuse dans les romans médiévaux analyzes the marvelous elements in a great number of medieval French narrative works, and provides us with a workable context-based approach to defining *le merveilleux*. Susanne Friede work's, Die Wahrnehmung des Wunderbaren: Der Roman d'Alexandre im Kontext der französischen Literatur des 12. Jahrhunderts, catalogs and classifies instances of the marvelous in the Roman and then systematically cross-references them with similar marvelous occurrences in other twelfth century works. None of these scholars, however, has sought to make the connection between the extensive fantastic and supernatural creations present in the Roman d'Alexandre and the author's depiction of the king himself. As yet no one has examined the entire work with an eye to understanding the narrative purpose and *fonctionnement* of its marvelous components

⁸See also the passage describing this animal in Philippe de Thaon's Bestiaire, written in the second half of the 12th century.

I. Variations in the Medieval Alexander Tradition

There were essentially two versions of Alexander the Great's life of which medieval scholars were aware. The Roman d'Alexandre is based on the romance drawn from Pseudo-Callisthenes, with its numerous marvelous episodes, but other contemporary works such as that of Gautier de Châtillon, his Alexandreis, used Quintus Curtius's much less fanciful and down-to-earth Historiae Alexandri Magni to come up with the young Macedonian prodigy's life story. The events of Alexander's life, as they are recounted within Curtius's work, represent a truer biographical account in the present-day conception of the term. In order to fully appreciate the extent of the transformations wrought by Alexandre de Paris in his depiction of the young king, it is important to consider as much of the source material to which he may have had access as possible. Furthermore, since the Roman's hero consistently travels between the realm of the *merveilleux* and a world of much more tangible deeds and conquests, it may be useful for this reader to do so as well: a plunge into Alexander the Great's rich and compelling legacy of accomplishments and misdeeds as recounted by Curtius and the 2nd-century Roman historian Arrian, before entering the marvel-filled world of the Roman will provide the reader a more complete understanding of Alexandre de Paris's depiction of this hero.

On about the 20th of July in 356 BC, Olympias, daughter of the king of the Molossian realm of Epirus and fourth wife of Philip II of Macedon, gave birth to Alexander in the city of Pella. As a young boy, he had two tutors: one was a family member of Olympias, from Epirus, and the other came from Acarnania. These two men instructed him in the basics of

literacy and gave him a foundation in physical exercise. The first incident that stands out in the boy's life, and that is recounted with some accuracy within the tradition of the Roman d'Alexandre, is his skillful mastery at the age of 12 of the prize Thessalian hunting horse, Bucephalus. Where many before him had been thwarted in their attempts at taming the magnificent beast, Alexander was successful (Cartledge 81-84).

He spent much of his youth engaged in hunting activities near the palace in Pella and enjoyed the company of his mother and his sister, Cleopatra⁹. In 343, Philip selected Aristotle, one of the most talented students from Plato's Academy in Athens, to be the personal tutor of his son. Aristotle instilled in the young man an interest in the natural world, specifically in the domains of botany and zoology, as well as a love of Homeric literature. It is evident that Homer's tales must have marked Alexander, because throughout the rest of his life, it seems that he derived inspiration for many of his actions from the deeds of Greece's heroes as depicted by Homer¹⁰.

Alexander had his first taste of power when Philip chose him as regent during his absence from the throne in 340-39. At the young age of 16, Alexander seized this opportunity to demonstrate his leadership talents. He launched an attack upon the Maedi, a tribe of barbarians settled in Thrace to the northeast of Pella. They capitulated swiftly in the face of

⁹According to custom in Macedonia, in order for a man to be able to recline at a feast or celebration, he had to have confronted and killed, one-on-one, both a boar and a man. Otherwise, he would be required to remain seated upright in a chair during such celebrations. It's an interesting historical tidbit, but it's also revealing of the brutality of the practices in place in Macedonian society, and how competitive the warrior culture must have been. Amidst such an atmosphere of deadly rivalry, how could a man allow himself to show weakness by engaging in acts of kindness? This type of information also fuels the theory that Alexander plotted to have his own father assassinated, and certainly provides an explanation for some of the horrifically cruel acts he committed later in life, among these, the razing of Thebes and the grisly torture and execution of Batis, Persian governor of Gaza.

¹⁰Alexander loved the Homeric legends so much that Aristotle gifted his pupil with his own annotated copy of the *Iliad*. He took this long papyrus scroll with him on his journey east and purportedly kept it by his bedside every night (Cartledge 227). This may be an exaggeration, but if even a fraction of the anecdote is true, this provides an even better insight into some of the Macedonian prodigy's motivations.

his furious attack, and in imitation of his father who had founded the cities of Philippi and Philippopolis (modern-day Plovdiv in Bulgaria), Alexander established a new city on the site of the Maedian capital, and named it Alexandroupolis. He would maintain this tradition throughout his entire life, and over the course of his conquests throughout Asia Minor and India, he left more than a dozen *Alexandrias* in his wake.

In 338, Alexander accompanied his father on a campaign against Demosthenes' allied Greek forces; and at Chaeronea, in the fall of that year he distinguished himself so admirably in combat against the united Theban and Athenian forces that Philip placed him in command of the elite Companion Cavalry¹¹. Alexander was a mere 18 years old. Following the battle, Philip once again bestowed great honor upon his son when he entrusted him with the task of returning the funerary urns of Athens's heroes to their final resting place within the city's walls (Cartledge 86).

Philip's assassination in 338 at the celebrations for his daughter Cleopatra's marriage took place on the eve of his embarking on a campaign to punish the Persians. His untimely demise at the age of forty-six allowed Alexander to seize the reigns of power. Officially, Pausanias, a member of the king's close entourage, murdered the king in order to avenge a personal insult involving some sort of homosexual humiliation. Although it is to this day still not completely clear whether or not Alexander played a part in his father's murder, it is

¹¹The Companions were the highly-trained soldiers that served to a certain degree as a bodyguard for the Macedonian leader. They were hand-picked soldiers, some of Alexander's most faithful comrades-in-arms, and they would often deliver the coup-de-grace on the battlefield. Olivier Battistini and Pascal Charvet give us a more complete picture of these *Hetaroi*: "Les *hétaires*, par le rang et par le sang, hommes libres par excellence, sont presque les égaux du roi des Macédoniens. Ce dernier, certes, les mène en chef de combat, et exige d'eux fidélité, mais une fidélité dont ils sont les maîtres: le roi ne peut punir un coupable sans le jugement et l'accord de leur Assemblée... Il existe ainsi une véritable et rude *camaraderie* guerrière entre le roi et ses *hétaires*, susceptible de renforcer l'idée d'un *Etat* macédonien, d'enrichir le sentiment d'appartenir à un seul et même peuple, l'armée étant le peuple des Macédoniens en armes, le signe même d'une unité politique essentielle à la guerre et à la conquête" (731).

certain that Philip's death worked marvelously to his son's advantage, and for this reason, historians tend to intuit that the 46-year-old king's demise may indeed have been a parricide (Cartledge 94). It is quite possible that Alexander felt that his father sought deliberately to prevent him from one day inheriting the throne. The following abridged tale is a bit complicated, but it demonstrates the brutal intricacies of Macedonian power struggles of the time.

The Macedonian nobleman Attalus offered his niece Cleopatra to Philip in marriage (this would be Philip's seventh wife). During the wedding ceremony, Attalus proclaimed that he hoped their union would produce a worthy successor to the Macedonian throne, thereby implying that Alexander was not a legitimate heir, since he was born of a non-Macedonian woman, Olympias of Epirus. Apparently, Alexander's fury was so intense that that his father banished him from the court in Pella. Some historians believe he chose to exile himself to prevent himself from committing a foolish deed. Alexander subsequently secretly planned to wed a Persian satrap's daughter that Philip had originally hoped to have Alexander's only half-brother, Arrhidaeus, marry. This marriage, had it taken place, would have represented yet another threat to Alexander's succession. When Philip uncovered the prince's plot, he sent five of Alexander's best friends into exile. These five men would one day become some of the pillars of Alexander's entourage: Ptolemy, Harpalus, Nearchus of Crete, Erigyius, and Laomedon (Cartledge 95).

In addition, immediately after Philip's murder, instead of putting his father's killer on trial, Alexander had three of his closest companions murder the man at the scene of the crime. Two of these men would later become highly-placed officers in the service of the young Macedonian king. Thus, there is considerable evidence that Alexander, concerned that

his father would cut him out of the succession to the kingdom's throne, may have taken matters into his own hands and orchestrated the parricide. In any case, he certainly had sufficient reason to do so. Yet, as Paul Cartledge points out:

It could as easily be argued that the assassination occurred coincidentally at an opportune moment for Alexander. He was feeling isolated at court and rattled about the succession, and by taking immediate advantage of what he saw as the enemy's temporary weakness he displayed the same sort of cool opportunism that would characterize his generalship. Especially noteworthy, and a recurrent feature of his career, is the way that Alexander rewarded friends who showed themselves conspicuously loyal to him personally. (96)

This last comment is significant, because, whatever his possible involvement in his father's death may have been, his behavior in the wake of the assassination reveals a character trait that dominates the tale woven in the Roman: that is to say, Alexander's most distinctive defining quality is his generosity toward those who are loyal to him. This aspect of his nature does not belong to the realm of myth; however heartless he may have been, he knew how to reward faithfulness.

It is naturally very difficult for us to imagine what might have been the young Macedonian king's motivations as he set out to dismantle the Persian Empire and then pushed into the unknown lands of Bactria, Sogdia, and the Indian kingdom of Paurava. Historians confirm that in large part the will to defeat Darius stemmed purely from a desire for vengeance, the Persians, for centuries having relentlessly sought to undo both the Athenian city-states and the Macedonian kingdom¹². In fact, at the time of his murder, Philip II of Macedon was on the verge of leading a Panhellenic coalition against the Persian Empire, the

¹²"Dès le départ, il s'affirmait donc comme le vengeur de l'antique injure du Barbare. Il se fit solennellement reconnaître par la Ligue de Corinthe général en chef des forces grecques en vue de l'expédition qui devait punir les Perses des crimes dont ils s'étaient rendus coupables envers les Grecs" (Pédech 42). Xerxes invaded and savaged Greece in 480-479, and this invasion was still very present in the minds of both Greeks and Macedonians alike, at the time of Philip and Alexander's reigns.

League of Corinth having made the decision at the Isthmian Games in 338 of exacting retribution for the Persian Empire's past belligerence. Their mission included the objective of freeing the Greek cities of Asia Minor that Sparta had ceded to the Persians in 386.

With Philip's murder, the Macedonian army elected his son king, and the young Alexander found himself at the head of the host that was preparing to cross the Hellespont. His first actions as king, though, are indicative of his wisdom as a leader. In several swift and decisive campaigns, he crushed the barbarian Thracian tribes to the east of Macedon and the troublesome Illyrians to the west. In the fall of 335, based on the rumor of Alexander's death in battle, the Greek city of Thebes revolted. In record time, the king descended upon the upstart city and captured it. He then ordered that Thebes be burnt to the ground, a cruelly efficient method of suppressing dissent that he would employ throughout his life. It is perhaps significant, however, that Alexander ordered his men to spare several key sacred buildings within the town, the most notable one being the house of the lyric poet Pindar (Cartledge 90). This gesture may reveal more than just his innate sense for political manipulation. It certainly might also be indicative of the importance of literature in Alexander's life, as well as the driving obsession with symbolism that seems to have dictated much of his behavior.

This preoccupation with symbolism is present in his first actions upon disembarking in Asia Minor at the head of his army. Reportedly, he insisted on being the first soldier to leap from the boats when the fleet made landfall at the Troad, in northwestern Anatolia. Before jumping from the ship wearing his armor, his first action was to hurl a spear into the Asian soil, a symbolic gesture to show his followers that he intended to subjugate any and all before him. His subsequent deeds are also rich in symbolic import. Traveling to what was

then believed to be the site of Troy, he placed a wreath upon the grave of his idol, Achilles (Cartledge 137).

Without entering into excessive detail concerning his military accomplishments, what follows is a brief, but selectively focused account of Alexander's actual *périple* across Asia Minor and into the heart of the Persian Empire. Acquiring an understanding of the real man's deeds may provide us with some insight into the transformations that time wrought into his legend.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Alexander's journey is the terrific speed with which he descended upon the city-states of Asia Minor. After landing at Abydus, he began to move inland, encountering the Persian army for the first time along the banks of the river Granicus. His victory here was due mostly to daring and luck, and he came close to losing his life. In typical reckless fashion, he charged across the river with his Companions and quickly found himself in the midst of a frantic battle with the cream of the Persian military. Plutarch tells us that had Cleitus the Black not intervened at the last moment, the Persian leader Spithridates might have lopped off Alexander's head (Battistini and Charvet 25).

Sardis, Miletus, Halicarnassus, Xanthus, Phaselis, and others: all these towns fell or willingly capitulated without offering much of a struggle to Alexander's advancing army. On the edge of the Pontus, in Gordion, birthplace of the mythical king Midas, Quintus Curtius recounts that the now-famous incident of the Gordion knot took place. Alexander, upon entering the city's temple of Zeus, discovered the chariot of Gordios, father of Midas, the yoke of which was tied up, "par une infinité de noeuds imbriqués les uns dans les autres, dans un entrelacement sans logique apparente" (Battistini and Charvet 34). According to the city's inhabitants, he who would be able to undo the knot would become the uncontested ruler of

all of Asia. Naturally, Alexander could not resist the challenge; in particular, he simply did not want to miss an opportunity to integrate the world of myth, following in the footsteps of his famous ancestors. How better to do so than to accomplish the impossible? Yet concerning this anecdote historians disagree; did he use his wits to untie the knots? Or did he, as befitting his fiery temperament, simply cleave the ropes with one swift sword stroke? Either way, with this story, Alexander himself once again becomes intimately tied into events shaping history and legend, and this seems to be a response to a powerful desire within his nature (Battistini and Charvet 306-07). The Roman historian Arrian repeatedly employs the Greek term *pothos*, defined as a powerful yearning, longing, or desire, throughout his biography of Alexander (Cartledge 221). This incident corresponds precisely to this type of motivation. He is a man driven by an all-consuming need to leave an indelible mark on the physical world, and in the hearts and minds of men.

After passing unscathed through the Cilician Gates, a narrow mountain pass ideal for an ambush and where good fortune again smiled on the Macedonian king, he arrived outside the Persian city of Tarsus, on the Mediterranean coast. Here he decided to go for a swim in the inviting waters of the Cydnos River. History and the fiction of the Roman coincide yet again¹³. After bathing in the frigid river waters Alexander fell immediately ill, his body ravaged and wracked by chills. Such was the severity of his sickness that his followers were convinced he would die, and began wondering who would pick up the sword in his stead to lead them safely in their flight back to Greece. Without their charismatic leader, his men did not even consider that victory would be possible! Yet the Acarnanian doctor Philip concocted

¹³In the Roman, Darius tries attempts to have the stricken king assassinated by sending a messenger to try and convince his physician to poison Alexander. Recognizing that to kill Alexander would be a horrible sin; the doctor refuses, and instead provides him with an efficacious remedy.

a potion to combat the malady, and within a short time Alexander recovered his health.

Quintus Curtius writes that, during his illness, the fear of death was not as present in his mind as much as feeling of frustration that his advance into Persia was stalled (Battistini and Charvet 41-42).

At Issus further down the coast from Tarsus, although his army was vastly outnumbered by the battalions brought up by Darius, Alexander somehow managed to come away with a victory. One of the principal reasons for Darius' crushing defeat here, and for his subsequent failures to overcome the Macedonians, was that although in almost every battle, the Persian Empire had access to many more men than Alexander, their army was much less cohesive than the Macedonian host. The soldiers came from all over Darius's far-flung empire, and never had the opportunity to work together as a unit, unlike the rigorously trained Macedonian phalanxes that made up the backbone of Alexander's army. The Persian military was more concerned with appearing flashy on parade, than with actually being able to defeat an enemy. Darius himself brought a vast baggage train of servants, entertainers, courtesans, and even his family everywhere with him on campaign. In fact, at Issus, Darius fled so precipitously that he abandoned his wife, his children, and his mother in the hands of the victorious Macedonians. Alexander was extremely respectful of them, however, and in his care they received treatment befitting their station. A brief anecdote here will provide another glimpse of Alexander's character. Curtius writes that when Alexander picked up the five-year old son of Darius, not in the least bit scared, the child threw his arms around the victorious king. The king turned to Hephaestion and said: "Ah, si Darius avait pu avoir quelque chose de ce caractère!" (Battistini and Charvet 56). This then is how Alexander measures a man, the yardstick being valor in the face of one's enemy. After the victory at

Issue, it is also significant to point out that Alexander, ever conscious of his Olympian benefactors, had three altars built on the banks of the Pinaros River: one to Zeus, one to Heracles, and one to Athena (Battistini and Charvet 56).

Darius, very much aware of the precarious nature of his grip on his kingdom, fled and sent a messenger back to Alexander, offering peace, but the terms of his letter were so arrogant that the Macedonian rejected them outright and pursued his advance. The next city in his path was Tyr, situated on an island 500 meters from the mainland. Tyr's inhabitants were confident that they could successfully withstand a prolonged siege if the Macedonians tried to take the city's walls. Not only was the stretch of water separating the town from the mainland notorious for its high winds, but it was also quite deep, and any attempt at bridging the waterway seemed nigh impossible. This is why Alexander's victory here was perhaps the best example of his generalship and perseverance. A delegation sent by the city told him that Tyr would willingly become an ally of Macedon, but would not submit. In addition, in response to Alexander's request to make offerings to Heracles at his temple within the city's walls, the inhabitants of Tyr told him that he could make his sacrifice at a temple, but it would have to be outside the city's gates. This defiance enraged Alexander, and he decided to bring the island town to its knees. After many failures and setbacks, he finally managed to link the city with the mainland by constructing a makeshift bridge of stones and trees trunks. Tyr fell after six months of siege, and Alexander led the way in the final battle, exposing himself at one point at the top of a siege tower to the spears and arrows of the desperate defenders (Battistini and Charvet 62-71).

The next significant town that he took, Gaza, was the site of one of the most horrific displays of Alexander's cruelty. The siege was difficult, and Alexander was injured twice

during the fighting. Batis, the Persian governor, fought with particular valiance, but in the end his men abandoned him. Brought before Alexander, he remained stoically silent when the king addressed him. This further enraged the by now furious young leader, who could not accept the idea that he had been injured twice in one siege (after all, do true heroes ever succumb to injury?). Quintus Curtius's rendition of the events that followed Batis's capture gives us another insight into the Macedonian's mind. Alexander reportedly looked at his men and asked them, concerning the stony silence of Batis: "Vous le voyez, entêté dans son silence? A-t-il fléchi les genoux? A-t-il émis une parole de supplication? Mais ce silence, j'en viendrai à bout, et, à défaut d'autre moyen, c'est par des gémissements que je le briserai" (Battistini and Charvet 75). Images of the death of Hector in the *Iliad* come to mind when one reads the following description of Batis's execution: "On fit donc passer des courroies à travers les talons de Batis qui respirait encore, et des chevaux le traînèrent, attaché à un char autour de la ville: et le roi, en appliquant ce châtiment à un ennemi, se faisait une gloire d'avoir imité Achille dont il descendait" (Battistini and Charvet 75-76). Here, Alexander openly derives the inspiration for his actions from the epic tradition of his legendary forebears.

From Gaza, Alexander's army traveled to Egypt, where his main objective became the oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwah, in the middle of the Sahara Desert. Quintus Curtius's viewpoint in this instance seems to correspond to Alexandre de Paris's vision of the young conqueror: "Un irrésistible désir d'aller consulter Jupiter stimulait Alexandre, à qui ne suffisait plus d'avoir atteint le faite des grandeurs humaines, mais qui croyait ou voulait faire croire que sa famille tirait de Jupiter son origine" (Battistini and Charvet 76-77). A pressing need for heavenly validation of his exploits and of his claims of godly ancestry seems to take

over here and surpass all military concerns in importance. The trek through the desert to the Siwah oasis was not an easy one, but when Alexander and his hand-picked group of soldiers approached the oracle, Quintus Curtius writes that a flight of crows flapped up to them and showed them the route to take¹⁴.

It will probably never be known exactly what transpired at the Siwah oracle. What is certain however is that Alexander received some sort of confirmation from the priests there that he was indeed the living son of Zeus-Ammon, and therefore immortal, and that he would one day have mastery of the world, because he left the oasis in high spirits¹⁵. This event is remarkably similar to his quest for the Trees of the Sun and Moon in the Third Branch of the Roman to learn about his future. The oracle of the Trees does not tell him what he wants to hear, though. According to the prophecy laid out by the disembodied voice within the trees' branches, Alexander's imminent and wholly inescapable demise will take place in the city of Babylon one year and seven months hence, and needless to say his spirits are not high when he departs to continue his adventures and conquests.

Arriving at Lake Mariout near the island of Pharos, just off of Egypt's coast, Alexander decided to found a city; originally his intention was to build the town on the island, but this would have been too small, so he drew up plans to include the Lake and surrounding land as well. This became Alexandria. Here is yet another noteworthy tidbit from Quintus Curtius. Apparently, Alexander would readily have forestalled his Persian

¹⁴It is interesting to note that Arrian, basing his history of Alexander on Ptolemy's journal, says that serpents, not crows showed him the way (Battistini and Charvet 77).

¹⁵Ernst Badian, editor of the 1976 Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies, The Deification of Alexander the Great, intuits, based on the fact that Alexander ardently respects the wishes of the Oracle of Siwah on so many issues (their indication that Hephaestion could be honored as a hero and not a god at his death) that Alexander must have been told by the priests of Ammon that he would be recognized as a god during his lifetime. How else could one explain his wish, blasphemous without Ammon's authorization, to be honored as such? (17).

campaign in order to see the famous royal palace of Memnon and Tithon in Egypt's interior near the Ethiopian border, but the need to resume his attack on Darius's strongholds grew pressing; and he quickly turned back east, and began leading his men toward Babylon, and the heart of the Persian Empire (Battistini and Charvet 79).

One might stop here to ask why Alexander insisted on making the detour to visit the oracle of the Siwah oasis. From a strategic point of view, such a journey was not rational; this deviation from the Panhellenic Coalition's professed ultimate goal of defeating the Persian Empire gave Darius plenty of time to regroup his forces and better prepare a stand. Two thousand years after the event, it is impossible to have a conclusive answer to such a question; but whatever his actual motivations may have been for making the journey, a powerful spiritual urge must have played a part in Alexander's resolution to travel to the oracle. Once again, here is confirmation that the young Macedonian king was driven by more than just the thrill of combat and a desire for vengeance. It would appear that multiple agendas were at work in the young man's mind, not the least of which was a sort of obsessive fascination with the realm of the gods and their decisions.

Gaugamela in Assyria, just beyond the Tigris, was the site of Darius's definitive defeat in 331. The Macedonian army once again tore the Persian lines to shreds, and the Great King fled for his life. Alexander sped after him, but before he could reach him, Darius was betrayed and murdered by his lieutenant, Bessus, the satrap of Bactria, who then took the royal tiara for himself. When Alexander came upon Darius's body abandoned off to the side of a road heading east, he buried him with all the honors due the last descendant of the Achaemenid Dynasty. This may have been a political move on his part to gain the confidence of Darius's subjects, or it may also reveal the onset of Alexander's somewhat mysterious

adoption of the Persian customs and social structures. To punish the traitor, he sent Ptolemy with a group of men after Bessus; when he finally captured the usurper, Alexander had him tortured and executed on exactly the same spot where he had assassinated Darius (Battistini and Charvet 177). Symbolism yet again dominates Alexander's deeds.

Shortly after Gaugamela, the Macedonian host entered Babylon. They were greeted as victors, and Alexander spent longer in this city than in any other. Babylon is where the events of the Roman end. It also marks a shift in Alexander's attitude, according to historians. After taking Babylon, Alexander began embracing the Persian customs to a greater and greater extent, as well as engaging in increasingly excessive feasting and revelry. It would seem that from this point on, the young king's obsession with power and with rivaling the gods' accomplishments began to take over. Once he received reinforcements from Greece, he continued his journey east.

After Susa, his men seized the city of Persepolis in 330; and doubtless following a night of drunken revelry, Alexander and his followers burned the ceremonial palace of the Achaemenid kings to the ground. This might have been, as some historians confirm, the final act of vengeance of the Panhellenic coalition against the Persians for their crimes, or it might also have been a calculated gesture on the part of Alexander to wipe any traces of the Persian power base definitively from the face of the earth (Cartledge 128-130). Nonetheless, if the burning of Persepolis was also a result of a frenzied evening of partying, it is also revealing of a growing tendency towards irresponsibility within the Macedonian leadership.

The descent into decadence and unchained debauchery which followed the taking of Persepolis was punctuated by several dramatic events. Rumor of an assassination plot reached Alexander's ears, and he ordered the torture and public execution of Philotas, the

commander of his own elite Companions. Philotas apparently knew of the plot but neglected to report it (Battistini and Charvet 146-64). It will probably never be known for certain whether or not the young man was actually guilty of actively or passively conspiring to kill his king, but Alexander must have considered the threat to be real enough to believe that the infection of dissent had spread even to one of his most valuable generals, the boy's father, Parmenion¹⁶. The hotheaded young king sent Polydamas and Cleandrus back to Ecbatana, the region in which Parmenion was campaigning, where, feigning a friendly mission from the king, they struck the man down with their swords as he unsuspectingly read letters they bore from Alexander. Again, though, one must not forget that these executions may just have been examples of Alexander's ruthless skill at consolidating his power base.

Desirous of expanding his newly conquered kingdom and consolidating his grip on the region, Alexander led his expedition further east. As his men entered Sogdia, nature became as daunting an obstacle as any hostile people they might encounter. Here, embedded within Quintus Curtius's description of the army's difficult advance, are more striking parallels with the Roman. Terrifying storms cause the Macedonians to question the wisdom of advancing further, just as violent weather saps their morale before the army encounters the *ichthyophages* and the seductive *filles-fleurs*:

Le troisième jour, quand des éclairs se mirent à embraser le ciel, de tous côtés, le caractère erratique et alternatif de cet embrasement commença, parmi l'armée en marche, à affoler les regards, mais aussi les esprits. Le ciel était plein de fracas presque ininterrompu et l'on pouvait suivre la trajectoire de la foudre qui tombait de place en place. Etourdie par ce bruit assourdissant, médusée, la troupe ne savait plus

¹⁶It is also entirely possible that Alexander had planned for some time to eliminate Parmenion, who had been one of his father's most trusted generals. Paul Cartledge explains Alexander's possible motivations for having the man eliminated: "If anything is clear about Alexander's personality and character... it is that he was not the sort of man to be willing to bask in the reflected glory of an old soldier more than three times his age (in 336 Parmenion was about sixty-four). Especially not when that old soldier had won his rank and position from Philip, not from himself, and was an individual whose cautious temperament and narrowly Macedonian outlook would soon clash with the mercurial temper and broad outlook of the young king" (98-99).

ni avancer ni stationner. Puis, tout à coup, s'abattit une pluie torrentielle, mêlée de grêlons... Il est vrai que beaucoup, morts de peur avant que de fatigue, s'étaient laissés choir sur le sol, malgré le froid rigoureux qui avait converti l'eau de pluie en une glace compacte... Le fléau s'acharnait sur eux avec une violence qui ne diminuait ni en intensité ni en durée, et l'obscurité des bois s'était conjuguée à celle de la tempête, sombre comme la nuit, pour supprimer la lumière du jour qui est un réconfort naturel. (Battistini and Charvet 202)

Alexander, apparently not in the least bit intimidated by nature's fury, urged his men on and helped them up if they fell, revealing that despite his faults, another note of the Roman rings true here as well. That is to say, he does genuinely appear to care for the well-being of his soldiers, in particular, the common phalangist who left homeland and family to follow his king on a wild campaign of conquest and exploration.

In 327, just before plunging into the heart of India, Alexander wed Roxane, the daughter of a Sogdian baron, Oxyartes, once again imitating the deeds of his heroic ancestors. Indeed, mighty Achilles also slept with one of his captives. This marriage also had a political orientation, though, and worked nicely toward Alexander's goal of uniting the Persian and Macedonian peoples. Word of the untold riches of India, ripe for the taking, had reached Alexander's ears, though, and he did not spend much time celebrating his wedding. Before the army resumed its advance, however, an incident worthy of note took place that once again illustrates the extent of Alexander's fixation with deification.

Quintus Curtius writes that, spurred on by two pure sycophants, Agis and Cleon, Alexander decided to adopt the Persian royal practice of *proskynesis*¹⁷. This angered Macedonians and Greeks alike, and in particular, Alexander's personal historian, Callisthenes, who, although he was prepared to acknowledge his lord's divine origins as confirmed by the oracle at Siwah, rejected outright such a barbaric practice of groveling

¹⁷Cartledge gives us a description of this Persian custom: "Commoners alone were obliged to grovel on hands on knees, whereas the elite honorary Royal kinsmen needed only to bow stiffly from a standing position" (103).

before another living man (Cartledge 245-46). Callisthenes's speech (according to Quintus Curtius) at the banquet where Cleon put forth the idea of adopting *proskynesis*, is telling of the vehemence of his reaction:

Un laps de temps, en effet, est nécessaire pour que l'on croie en la divinité d'un mortel, et c'est toujours la postérité qui rend cette grâce aux grands hommes... L'apothéose suit, parfois, la vie de l'homme, elle ne l'accompagne jamais... Tu [Cleon] prenais tout à l'heure comme exemples d'immortalité octroyée Hercule et Liber le Vénérable: crois-tu que ce soit parce qu'on l'a décrété une fois, au cours d'un festin, qu'ils sont devenus dieux? (Battistini 206)

Needless to say, the king did not take too kindly to this type of criticism. Shortly thereafter, he had the much-respected Callisthenes imprisoned and eventually put to death along with several other courtiers who he accused of conspiring against him. The execution of Callisthenes deeply upset the Greeks. Coupled with Alexander's drunken murder in 328 of Cleitus the Black (Cleitus had saved Alexander's life at the Granicus river crossing), who had also unwisely voiced his disapproval of the young king's increasingly arrogant behavior, these signs of excessive brutality widened the rift between him and his men.

Alexander's expedition into India did not get very far, before a generalized mutiny forced him to turn back to the west. Quintus Curtius writes that when the Macedonian army crossed into the lands of the Indians, a group of minor nobles greeted them and told him that he was the third son of Zeus to enter these lands, after Dionysus and Heracles (Battistini and Charvet 216). His army easily seized several minor cities, the inhabitants of which were terrified most notably by the appearance of the Macedonians' siege towers. The denizens of the town of Bazira, seeing the Macedonian host descending upon them, took refuge in a stronghold on top of the craggy mount known as Aornus. Arrian tells us that Alexander's desire to overcome the defenders on top of Aornus stemmed from the fact that Heracles himself had been unable to reach the top of the mountain and take the stronghold (Battistini

and Charvet 365-67). Where the demigod purportedly failed, Alexander succeeded, however, at great risk to life and limb; once again, driven by egomania or by the courage of a true leader of men, he led the way as his followers essentially rock-climbed their way to the top of the vertiginous outcropping, dodging the boulders hurled at them from above and the arrows that the defenders fired mercilessly at them. The Macedonians were driven back, though, and Quintus Curtius tells us that it was only because the defenders panicked and fled that Alexander and his men were able to eventually seize the top of the mountain. Arrian recounts a different version, in which Alexander did manage to win by force of arms; in his account, a valorous but costly Macedonian charge finally drove Aornus's defenders from their perch.

The events as described by Curtius from this point onward are perhaps the source of many of the strange and fantastic components of the Alexander romance tradition: the army's march into India, beyond the known world, and into territory that was considered to be close to the ends of the world. On the opposite bank of the Hydaspes River, Alexander's Macedonians faced off against the much larger army of the Rajah of the Pauravas, or Porus as the Greeks referred to him. Cartledge summarizes Alexander's probable motivations for seeking the submission of this ruler of the lands just to the west of the Indus River. These were, as one might expect, "the sheer desire to conquer and extend his dominion as far as the world could be known and tamed; greed for fabled Indian wealth; and the need to establish some sort of defensible southeastern frontier by eliminating hostile native rulers and/or co-opting friendly ones" (182). Under cover of darkness, Alexander and his cavalry flanked the Indian ruler's army and fear-inspiring war elephants, and came away once again with a decisive victory. To commemorate his triumph here, Alexander had a series of silver medallions minted. The pictures thereon are worthy of commentary. One of the images is of

a horseman, and historians agree that this is most likely Alexander himself, astride his loyal Bucephalus, challenging an elephant. On the reverse, a victorious Alexander is depicted, crowned with a wreath by the goddess Nike, and holding, as befits the son of Zeus, a bundle of borrowed lightning bolts in one hand (Cartledge 184). If there ever was any doubt before, this bold and almost sacrilegious image is truly evidence that Alexander sought, above all else to leave a definitive mark in the minds of men: he was a shaper of worlds, a denizen not of the world of mortal men, but of the hallowed realm of myth and legend.

Alexander's hooped companion of many years most likely suffered a fatal injury during the course of this battle, and it is a touching historical side-note that the aggrieved king named a city in the honor of Bucephalus, Alexandria Bucephala, at the heart of the Indus River valley. It is touching, yes, but it also is also another indication of Alexander's aspirations to divinity. Only demigods and heroes have steeds that attain such levels of renown.

After the Hydaspes, Alexander befriended Porus, whose great courage he admired and wished to reward. Thus, he made sure the wounded Indian ruler received proper healing, he honored him with a position in his close entourage, and finally he placed him at the head of a larger kingdom than he had previously possessed¹⁸. Quintus Curtius puts this unusual treatment of Porus in perspective, and reminds us of one of the recurring themes of the Roman concerning Alexander's prodigious generosity towards nobles:

Sans doute n'y eut-il pas, chez Alexandre, de trait de caractère plus affirmé et plus constant que son admiration pour le mérite et la gloire véritables: toutefois il en appréciait le retentissement plus franchement chez un ennemi que chez un concitoyen; car il croyait que la grandeur chez l'un des siens pouvait obscurcir la

¹⁸It is true that in the Roman as well, Porus temporarily becomes an ally of Alexander, although he will eventually betray and attack him, when he detects Alexander's weakness following the episode of the Trees of the Sun and Moon.

sienne, qui, elle, gagnerait d'autant plus en éclat qu'il aurait vaincu des ennemis plus grands. (Battistini and Charvet 230)

Though his men grumbled, Alexander pursued his march into India, founding Alexandrias left and right, as was his wont. At the Hyphasis River in 325, his men eventually convinced him to turn back, though in all probability, only the fear of outright mutiny kept him from blindly pursuing his course east. Perhaps frustrated by his men's refusal to go any further, Alexander led his retreating army from one bloody massacre to another on the route out of India. Before turning back though, he had twelve large altars built on the river's banks to mark the furthest extent of his conquests and the boundaries of his vast empire. Perhaps still driven by a very real interest in charting the unknown, he sent his friend Nearchus back by river to the coast of the Red Sea, while he would lead the army over land to a meeting point along the coast. This decision proved to be folly. The army's route took it through the brutally parched lands of the Gedrosia desert, and many of his men, and the women who accompanied them, perished from dehydration.

This desert journey is the context for what Arrian refers to as the greatest deed of Alexander's life. Essentially dying of thirst, one of his soldiers came upon a small amount of water during their march, and he offered it to his king in a helmet. Alexander promptly dumped the water on the ground without taking a sip, demonstrating once again that he preferred to share the suffering of his men, rather than lead from a position of superiority. Whether initiated with self-seeking intentions or not, it is precisely this type of gesture that elevated him to heroic status at the very least in the eyes of his men, and it certainly helped to repair the damage he caused by some of his brutal purges and executions. It also leaves us with a confusing portrait of the young king; he was capable it seems, of tremendous kindness just as he was of horrible cruelty (Battistini and Charvet 400-01).

Another anecdote recorded by Quintus Curtius tells of a grievous injury which Ptolemy incurred from a poison-tipped arrow during a barbarian uprising. Although Alexander was himself wounded, he was terribly distraught over the seriousness of his friend's condition; to such an extent that the king insisted on having a bed placed alongside that of Ptolemy. When he awoke from his slumber, he told his men that in a dream a serpent had shown him what herb to use as an antidote, and that he would recognize it if only his followers would seek it out in the surrounding jungle and bring it to him. Sure enough, his men found the plant he described, and Alexander himself pressed it to Ptolemy's wound. In record time, Alexander's half-brother was well again. This may be evidence of Aristotle's influence. Surely among the subjects that the Greek philosopher would have taught his pupil, it is possible to include at least a cursory exposure to botany¹⁹. Needless to say, this incident is revealing of the Macedonian leader's interest in the natural world, of his curiosity for uncovering the earth's mysteries that also comes through when one thinks of episodes in the Roman such as his descent to the ocean floor or his flight into the sky with the griffons.

The death of his boyhood friend and lover, Hephaestion, at Ecbatana in October 324, drove Alexander to despair, and he organized an extravagant funeral ceremony in honor of his deceased companion. In fact the luxuriously decorated memorial he ordered constructed for Hephaestion must surely have resembled some of the most magnificent tombs described in the Romans d'antiquité. Just as the demise of Patroclus foreshadowed the death of Achilles, so too did Alexander pass away not long after his friend. Of course, the exact cause

¹⁹Over the course of his journey, Alexander is purported to have maintained a regular correspondence with his former preceptor, and he regularly sent him samples of some of the unusual plants that he found during his travels. This correspondence almost certainly took place, perhaps even after Alexander's execution of Aristotle's nephew, Callisthenes. It is doubtless from the tradition of these letters that the fanciful Letter of Alexander to Aristotle detailing the marvels of India has its origins. This text, which was probably written around 1 AD, at about the same time as the romanticized history of Alexander (commonly referred to as Pseudo-Callisthenes), was one of the first texts translated from Greek into Arabic by Arab scholars in the 8th century.

of his death will never be known for certain. Historians waffle among multiple theories, ranging from poisoning by strychnine to liver failure from excessive drinking, but based on all the evidence available, it is most likely that, following a boat ride in the mosquito-infested marshes south of Babylon, on the 11th of June, 323 Alexander contracted malaria and succumbed to its ravages shortly thereafter (Chugg 21-25).

Where his body may have ended up following his death is still a mystery, although Michael Chugg makes a powerful case for his entombed body ending up in Alexandria, sequestered away from Babylon by Ptolemy. Regardless, the idealized version of the events following his demise most certainly did not take place. Almost immediately, one of his other lieutenants Perdiccas and Ptolemy began squabbling over who would succeed him at the head of his vast and far-flung empire. As might be expected, violence ensued, and his kingdom fragmented into several separate entities.

Faced with the numerous contradictions in his character that the preceding historical summary reveals, it is quite difficult to get a clear idea of what his motivations for such a reckless adventure across Asia Minor might have been. In any case it is possible to include a strong desire to outdo his father among Alexander's motivations, or at least initially, an urge to emulate Philip of Macedon's great accomplishments. Philip himself was a prodigy, much like his son. Indeed, during his reign, Philip significantly expanded Macedonia's borders, acquiring wealthy coastal cities, subjugating most of the Peloponnesian peninsula, and transforming Macedonia into the leading power in the region within a short time. He did this

through an adroit combination of adept diplomacy and lightning-fast conquest, made possible with his well-trained phalanxes²⁰.

Yet, vengeance and a strong competitive spirit seem to be a rather insufficient explanation for the intensity of Alexander's conquering drive. There is substantial evidence to show that, stirred by the memory of the exploits of his glorious ancestors and role-models, Achilles and Heracles, Alexander sought to achieve a similar status in the hearts and minds of the Ancient world.

The Macedonian was certainly aware of what would be necessary to achieve a hero's status. Moses Hadas and Morton Smith explain in their work, Heroes and Gods, "It is by ignoring prudential consideration and pursuing his independent course that the large personage achieves heroization" (11). Callisthenes himself recounts that this objective was certainly ever-present in Alexander's as he embarked on his journey of conquest, but his methods of attaining this status are perhaps questionable. Upon his army's arrival at Elaeus, in Chersonese, just before they crossed the Hellespont, Alexander made a sacrifice on the tomb of Protesilaus, because the latter was the first Greek in Agamemnon's army to land in Asia Minor. Achieving hero status requires more than blindly worshipping legendary figures and aping their deeds, though. This leads one to ask what the necessary actions are to achieve the status of hero. If Alexander could emulate the amazing accomplishments of his idols, this would be a good starting point. Ambition is an essential component; clearly, an individual must have lofty goals if he wishes to surpass *le commun des mortels*. To that end, the young Macedonian sets the bar very high, attempting (and successfully) crushing the sprawling

²⁰A phalanx is a compact wall-like formation of foot soldiers, about 16 rows deep, armed with long spears. Historians credit the Macedonian phalanx with having a large part in both Alexander and Philip's military successes.

Persian realm in record time, achieving victory where demigods failed, as in his seizure of the impregnable Aornus rock above the Indus river, and extending the boundaries of the known world beyond those set by Heracles. Other characteristics are essential to a hero, however. Hadas and Smith write that:

Ambitious and high-souled men... choose a glorious death in preference to life and are more jealous of their reputations than of their existence, shrinking from nothing in order to leave behind a remembrance of themselves that shall never die". (8)

Death-seeking, reveling in the dark embrace of *thanatos*, this is the true aim of a hero, because only by reaching out toward oblivion in this way, can the aspiring hero hope to obtain immortality. This is a key element. To possess such zealous ambition, leading inevitably to perdition, should allow an individual to attain immortality: "It is as much a paradox to speak of a brave warrior during his lifetime as a hero as it is to speak of a good man during his lifetime as a saint" (Hadas and Smith 9). Death may be another prerequisite.

This leads one to ask if it is possible be considered a hero or a god while one is alive. In the context of Classical Antiquity, whether or not individuals could achieve god-status and be worshipped as such while still alive has been a matter of much debate over the past century. Concerning Alexander the Great specifically, the Center for Hermeneutical Studies of the University of California at Berkeley organized a Colloquium in 1976 to explore the notion of this historically significant figure's deification. It is not the most recent of studies, but many of the points raised are altogether valid. For the most part, the scholars at the colloquium tended to agree that cults of hero-worship and deification rarely if ever existed before an individual's death. Lysander, the Spartan leader responsible for winning the Peloponnesian War, was supposedly the first Greek man ever to be granted divine honors, but all the evidence points to this bestowal taking place *after* his death. Before Alexander, in

any case there is no hard evidence that men were worshipped as gods during their own lifetime.

Yet Alexander did, on some level, expect to be worshipped as a god, especially when one considers his insistence that his followers adopt the Persian practice of *proskynesis*. In the fall of 324, the possible deification of Alexander was debated in Athens, and as a matter of fact, Demosthenes, the great orator, though at first violently opposed to the idea of awarding the Macedonian conqueror such an honor, finally gave in and said about Alexander's desire to be revered as a god: "Let him be son of Zeus and of Poseidon too if that's what he wishes" (Badian 11). This statement and Athens's likely eventual decision made under duress (Alexander had ordered the Greek city states essentially to give up their overseas colonies) that Alexander should be deified, are still not sufficient evidence to say that Alexander achieved widely accepted divine status during his lifetime. To the contrary, in fact, it seems that the bestowal of this status, at least from the point of view of the Athenians, was nothing more than an honorary title. Badian's conclusions concerning the debate summarize the historical reality:

We may take it that Alexander both wanted divine cult and, near the end of his life, received it at least from some Greek cities. ...It must be held that at least as early as 327 a ceremony [*proskynesis*] that, to Greeks and Macedonians implied such cult would have been welcome to him and his failure to impose it rankled. (11)

Within the medieval sources contemporary to the Roman d'Alexandre, Alexander is depicted as having actively sought deification. In reality, though, he never actually received the universal acclamation he sought.

II. Myth

Where does one situate the Roman d'Alexandre within the literary tradition of the twelfth century? It is a text that possesses characteristics of multiple genres: the battle scenes certainly belong to the genre of the *chanson de geste*, the marvelous components are reminiscent of Marie de France's *lais*, and the overarching biographical trajectory of the text links it to the hagiographic genre. Alexandre de Paris provides a few clues as to his intentions, referring to his work within Branch I as an "estoire" and declaring that his desire is to recount the "vie" of Alexander of Macedon (v. 1, 30, 62, I). The introductory paragraphs of the Roman also highlight a decisive didactic focus for his work, though, as he underlines the numerous laudable characteristics of his hero and points to them as a worthy model for his noble readership.

Didacticism, wonders, martial prowess, and the sketched outlines of a pseudo-historical account: all these components combine to create a new type of text, one that in many ways resembles most closely the mythological narratives of classical antiquity, and without a doubt one of the goals of our author-compiler is indeed to imitate the work of the Ancients. In so doing, though, he appears to be creating a new type of myth, one in which a protagonist with resolutely human characteristics is the focus. Alexander rivals, imitates, and stands apart from some of the most illustrious heroes of the Classical tradition, and an understanding of the extent of this mimicry provides insights into Alexandre de Paris's purpose in recounting the life of the young Macedonian king. But before considering

Alexander as a dynamic heroic figure operating in a world of new myth, some definitions of the concept of myth itself are necessary.

Some Definitions of Myth

It is a tricky matter to talk of myth when one is dealing with a literary figure based on an actual living person, because the risk of conflation between the literary persona and reality is great, and myths have commonly been associated with the realm of the imagination. This is complicated by the fact that many questions still swirl about the real-life Alexander concerning his motivations, his true character, and his actual accomplishments. The tale of his journey east certainly belonged to the realm of myth at the time of the Roman's compilation. The lands beyond Constantinople fascinated medieval man, and as Francis Dubost points out, these largely unexplored kingdoms allowed, by means of their nature as *terrae incognitae*, unusual monsters, strange flora, marvelous phenomena, and items with magical properties to survive in the imagination of medieval man²¹. Since it was impossible to find these extraordinary beings and occurrences within the more familiar western kingdoms, the very existence of this unknown realm of the East provided medieval man with a home for the creatures he had never before witnessed. What medieval man did not see in his everyday life, but read about, could become more believable if he knew that it had a

²¹Dubost's description of medieval man's vision of India is insightful: "On persiste à considérer l'Orient en général et l'Inde en particulier, comme la terre des *merveilles*. Pendant très longtemps, en dépit des progrès réalisés dans la connaissance de ces pays, le clerc médiéval s'en tiendra à une géographie mythique. Mais on a le sentiment que ce refus ou ce rejet, de l'information n'a d'autre objet que de préserver une poétique de l'ailleurs, de prolonger l'existence littéraire de contrées fabuleuses, et de sauvegarder ainsi un espace imaginaire, qui ne va pas tarder à être dénoncé comme tel dans le champ du savoir, mais qui pour l'instant est essentiellement perçu comme une autre dimension du réel. Le fantastique exotique est d'abord une invitation au voyage dans un autre espace, qui est aussi l'espace de l'autre, à la rencontre de *l'étrange* et du *divers*" (257).

home in a land far from his own to which he doubtless would never have traveled. Thus, the distinction between myth and reality could be blurred.

What then is myth? There are numerous possible definitions, but for the purposes of this study, only a few of them are significant. When considering what constitutes myth, it is important to evaluate how a myth originates, especially when one looks at Alexander's struggle as an attempt to generate a new mythological tradition. Consider the approach to myth and its function in society as advanced by Mircea Eliade.

According to Eliade, myths tell how some element of human existence came into being. This element may be life itself, a certain species of animal or plant, or even a human practice or institution (16-25). He insists that the principal protagonists of myth are invariably supernatural beings, and that their accomplishments reveal these beings' sacred nature. The deeds of these supernatural, all-powerful creatures are wondrous and exemplary; therefore as such they will serve as a model of behavior for the society's members. In addition, these myths are considered to be absolutely true stories, because they always refer back to reality. Eliade elucidates this point quite simply: "Le mythe cosmogonique est 'vrai' parce que l'existence du Monde est là pour le prouver; le mythe de l'origine de la mort est également 'vrai' parce que la mortalité de l'homme le prouve" (17).

In Eliade's view, it is impossible to separate the supernatural from myth itself. The characters of the tale possess a superhuman quality and the events recounted do as well. It is his viewpoint and that of both Joseph Campbell and Georges Dumézil that the protagonists of myth fall into neat categories of characters, often called "archetypes". These archetypal figures range from such entities as the warrior-hero, the king, the shaman, the virgin, the priest, or the sage. The various permutations of their interlocking behaviors form the fabric of

the myths themselves, and recognizable characteristics within all these tales emerge as one becomes increasingly familiar with them. As a result, it is easy to identify patterns of similarity between mythical traditions of divergent cultures. For instance, by transposing the mythological apparatus on the Alexander saga, one can conveniently classify the hero as the classic "warrior-king", his preceptor Aristotle as the "sage", and Porus as the "traitor".

The problem with this approach to myth is that, although it is a wonderfully descriptive tool, it fails to explain sufficiently the genesis of myth itself. Given the universal and extemporal quality of mythical narratives, as proven by the popularity, to this day of the ancient Greek stories, it may be valuable to look at myth from a more contemporary perspective. Richard Slotkin, in his book, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* points out that:

The fundamental flaw in the archetypal approach is its mystification of the processes of mythmaking which it is designed to explain. The making of myths is seen as proceeding from some transcendent suprahuman entity- a collective "mind" or "collective unconscious"-or as something "generated by the operations of a disembodied and abstract "grammar" of literary tropes and structural rules... In effect, the archetypalist affirms the most important fiction that a myth contains- the implication that its sources are a part of the natural order of things, an expression of some law or rule that shapes a plastic and passive humanity. (28)

In Slotkin's view, myths represent stylized narratives that encapsulate the important metaphors and edifying symbols a society accumulates over time: "Historical experience is preserved in the form of a narrative; and through periodic retellings those narratives become traditionalized. The formal qualities and structures are increasingly conventionalized and abstracted, until they are reduced to a set of powerfully evocative and resonant 'icons'" (16). Thus, myths are, at their origin, tools of social control, providing a society's members with key lessons through examples of conduct and anecdotes illustrating behavioral errors and ensuing punishments. In the mythical retelling of Alexander's life, for example, Alexandre de

Paris repeatedly refers to the young king's generosity as a laudable trait, while subtly criticizing his brazen audacity in challenging the divine order.

René Girard's theory to explain the origins of myth is particularly appealing, especially for this study of the Roman d'Alexandre. Basing his work on the idea that society's beginnings are rooted in the violence surrounding sacrifice, Girard explains that the mythical tradition derives from tales invented to conceal the necessary “murder” of one individual so that order could be reestablished among a people torn apart by internecine violence. Girard believes that the root of all violence within a social group is *mimetic desire*, the compelling craving to possess that which your fellow man possesses, to wipe out the differences that separate him from you. As these differences disappear, violent struggle ensues, because individuals vie for control of the same resources, and society tumbles toward chaos and endless bloody conflict. According to Girard, the only way to escape this cycle of brutality is for society to focus its panic-induced wrath upon one individual, who for whatever reason, stands out from the group and can therefore be designated as the scapegoat. The distinguishing characteristic of this hapless victim may be physical deformity, or remarkable beauty, frightening ugliness, or incredible strength, but regardless of the nature of the trait or taint, the violence-consuming group identifies this person as the cause of their strife. This *difference* embodied within one individual, in a society where the tendency is towards uniformity, is seen as the root of the problem, and the group proceeds to execute the member who stands out from the horde; the unique individual is sacrificed, the violence consuming society has an outlet, and once this purge has taken place, order is reestablished. The scapegoat, formerly viewed as the cause of society's chaos, is posthumously viewed as the savior. His death, his *sacrifice*, gives the group new life. As a result, according to Girard, it is

not uncommon for this individual to become the object of worship, only after his death of course, but it is not inconceivable that he be deified. In any case, obeying the exigencies of the collective unconscious, society transforms the tale of the brutal events leading up to the scapegoat's demise, and herein lies the origin of myth. In the reworked account of the society's founding, the scapegoat may become a hero, or he may still be vilified as a monster, but in any case, the members of the society seek to hide their own responsibility in the victim's death. Because of the danger that violence represents, they deliberately leave it out of the fiction they weave. In his book, *René Girard and Myth, an Introduction*, Richard J. Golsan provides us with a nice summary of Girard's theory:

Far from being static, unchangeable forms, myths change through time, and their evolution 'is governed by the determination to eliminate any representation of violence' (Scapegoat, 76). At the same time the victim is sacralized, is transformed into a savior, because he or she is credited *ex post facto* with resolving the crisis. ... In the final stages of the evolution of myths the founding murder itself is often lost from view... Why do these transformations or transfigurations occur? The answer, according to Girard, is that in myths ... humans avoid acknowledging their own violence, and especially the crucial role it has played in the genesis of culture... As long as humans can believe that they have effectively rid themselves of their violence by attributing it to outside sources such as gods and other superhuman creatures, as happens so frequently in myths, they can continue to presume their own innocence. (68)

For this study, Girard's view of myth is uniquely suited, since the sacrificed victim is often worshipped posthumously as a god in the collective memory of the society. Keeping in mind that one important component of Alexander's journey was his quest for apotheosis, by transposing his adventures on Girard's theoretical mythical apparatus important similarities or differences that will help in understanding of the Alexander in the Roman may emerge.

Alexander and Myth

How then does the Alexander story fit within the framework of myth? The Roman d'Alexandre is a mixture of historical fact and literary invention, and yet the level of

modification that the original historical *récit* has undergone drives the tale a long way towards the realm of myth, at least as defined by Slotkin. These narrative transformations and inclusions of the marvelous correspond to the author's objective of developing powerful iconic symbols that will bind his tale to the culture's coded lessons and dictates. Alexander exemplifies the ideal king, generous unto his faithful followers and honorable toward his foes; his behavior as described by Alexandre de Paris is a not-so-subtle hint to the nobles at the court where the tale is recounted that this is the conduct one should expect from a realm's leader. The warning against arrogance in the face of divinity's might and mysteries is barely veiled as well.

The Roman takes possession of several narrative components of other myths as well. Several common themes recur: the hero's isolation from society in the episode of the *Val Périlleux*, encounters with strange monsters, and feats of strength such as his mastering of Bucephalus. Themes common to many of the classical myths of antiquity, newly uncovered and made accessible by the learned clerics, the authors of these *romans d'antiquité*, combine with images from the Christian mythological tradition in the creation of a new myth. Alexander's voyage of self-discovery is reminiscent of Christ's exile in the wilderness; and his encounter with the demon trapped under the stone in the *Val Périlleux* is much like the temptation of Jesus in the desert. Images of the Book of Revelations, rumors of apocalypse to come, surge up out of Branch IV as the *douze pairs* decry the death of their lord and bemoan the horrors to come after his passing. The birth of the monster at the beginning of this final branch is a clear reference to the frightening omens that govern the narrative of the Bible's rendition of the Apocalypse. On the one hand, Alexander's journey mimics the travels of famous mythical heroes such as Dionysus, Heracles, and Odysseus; but it also represents an

imitation of the exploits of medieval heroes. Alexander's *démésure* is much like that of Roland. In addition, twelve companions accompany him in battle, just like the *douze pairs* of Charlemagne, and his opponents are of the same order as *Baligant* or *Marsile*, the Saracen champions of the Chanson de Roland. A powerful binary opposition exists between *les preux* and *mécréants*; the creatures he encounters remind us at times of the fanciful *fées* of *la matière de Bretagne* such as those that can be found within the *lais* of Marie de France. When one examines his relationship with Bucephalus, hints of the strong bond between Chrétien de Troye's Yvain and his lion emerge, while at times the blind, somewhat fumbling nature of his exploration of India reminds us of the naïve, bumbling adventures of Perceval le Gallois, and that hapless young knight's wondrous curiosity with respect to the mysteries he encounters. The character of Alexander is really at the crossroads of the realm of classical myth and medieval epic. A comparison of Alexander with several well-known mythological characters of Greek classical antiquity will serve to elucidate this point.

Alexander's Mythical Forebears

Having based his Roman on Latin sources such as the Historia de Preliis, and the translation of Aristotle's letter to Alexander, and judging by some of the references to Greek deities such as Heracles and Vulcan found within, one can infer that Alexandre de Paris was familiar with the works of some of the most well-known classical writers such as Ovid or Homer²². Indeed, as Aimé Petit points out in his book, L'anachronisme dans les romans antiques du XII^e siècle, Alexandre de Paris was no less familiar with the classical literature of the Ancients than the

²²As evidenced in the introduction of the Roman de Thèbes, the authors of the *romans d'antiquité* looked with great reverence upon the famous classical writers: « Si danz Homers et danz Platons / et Virgiles et Citherons / lor sapience celasant, / ja ne fust d'els parlé avant » (v. 5-9). By referring to the wise Ancients in their works, the medieval French writers sought to attach legitimacy, authority, and power to their own creations. "The poet is obliged to impart his knowledge to his audience for the sake of immortality... The translation of wisdom proceeds from ancient Greece and Rome to twelfth-century France, the home of the *Thèbes* poet" (Clogan 2-3).

authors of the other *romans antiques*, texts more decisively rooted in a classical base, and he does not miss an opportunity to showcase his familiarity with the mythological tradition of the Ancients²³. Here is a good example of this. In the Third Branch, one of the Amazon queen's warriors warns her lady of the approach of Alexander with these words, a clear reference to the myth of Narcissus (206):

Jupiter li grans dieus, qui haut siet et loins voit,
Saut et gart la roine si com faire le doit,
Mars li dieus de bataille en aide li soit,
Phebus la gart de mal, n'ait trop chaut ne trop froid,
Juno li doint richece, Pallas la li otroit,
Venus li doinst amor ou ele bien l'exploit. (v. 7343-48, III)²⁴

With that in mind, it may be useful to examine the Roman, seeking out any similarities with some of these proto-texts. Whether Alexandre de Paris might have drawn on these sources for inspiration, sought to emulate them, or rival their artistry, closer study will certainly reveal to what extent certain mythological themes are repeated or transformed.

Homer's Odyssey is undoubtedly one of the most influential works that survived from Antiquity. The epic components of Homer's saga exist within numerous medieval texts, ranging from epic poems, such as the Chanson de Roland, to hagiographic texts such as the Navigatio Sancti Brendani or even the Vie de Saint Alexis. It is true that the principle of *imitatio* was the foundation of the *romans d'antiquité*, but the authors also incorporated

²³Alexandre de Paris's respect for the literary tradition of the ancients may have been evident even in his choice of pen-name. Aimé Petit postulates, "On peut se demander... si Alexandre de Paris, auteur du Roman d'Alexandre, n'a pas joué sur les mots: homonymie avec Alexandre, son héros, homonymie de Paris avec le célèbre héros troyen, appelé aussi Alexandre (cf. Hygins, *Fabulae*, XCI), association de l'antique *Alexandre* et du moderne *Paris*" (254).

²⁴"Jupiter, le grand dieu qui voit loin, de son siège élevé, sauve et protège la reine, comme il le doit!, / Mars le dieu de la guerre, lui vienne en aide! / Phébus la garde des maladies, de la chaleur ou du froid! / Junon et Pallas lui donnent la richesse! / Vénus lui donne un amour digne d'elle!"

innovation and their own creative modifications and inventions. The first step is to see what parallels exist between Alexandre de Paris's Roman d'Alexandre and the Odyssey.

Superficially, both of these works recount the journeys and adventures of a hero throughout areas of the world that for the readers of the time were certainly shrouded in mystery. In both works, the hero's *périple* is punctuated by encounters with strange and frightening individuals and monsters. To escape from these dangers requires the champion's guile and fighting prowess. Whereas Odysseus relies heavily on his craftiness to help him in these situations, the young Alexander more often than not employs his martial talents to undo his enemies, although the Macedonian prodigy is not wanting for cunning, either. Indeed, by strategically maneuvering his battalions, he manages to defeat the hordes of elephants in Darius's army, and in order to overcome Porus, much like Odysseus who donned the disguise of an old man in Ithaca in order to trick Penelope's suitors, Alexander hides his identity when he enters the enemy's camp to spy on the Indian king. The parallel between these two passages is remarkable, but certain episodes are even more striking in their similitude.

For instance, when Odysseus and his men make landfall on the tenth day of their return journey from Troy, they encounter a strange tribe, the Lotus-Eaters. These unusual folk seek to lure the men into staying in their land by offering them flowers to eat which will make them lose their will to go home. Virtually the same *rencontre insolite* exists in the Roman d'Alexandre. In the middle of the perilous Indian deserts, they come upon the exotic and alluring *filles de l'eau*, who seduce several of the young king's men and drag them to their deaths under the waters of their home. Several of Alexander's men succumb to this temptation, and join the *filles de l'eau* in their watery realm:

Quant virent cil de l'ost que si beles estoient
Ne por paor des homes pas ne se reponoient –

Qant trop en i aloit an l'eaue se metoient,
 Et qant il retornoient si se raparisoient,
 Les petites compaignes tres bien les atendoient,
 Qant il ierent o eles volentiers i gisoient -
 Cil les convoitent tant qu'a paines s'en partoient.
 Qant il ierent si las que faire nel pooient,
 Volentiers s'en tornassent, mais eles les tenoient ;
 Celes levoient sus, en l'eaue les traioient,
 Tant les tienent sor eles qu'eles les estaingnoient. (v. 2911-2921, III)²⁵

This event makes allusion to both the Lotus-Eater episode as well as that of the treacherous Sirens, who by means of their song would call passing mariners to their island, and then the same devious creatures would heartlessly kill their prey. Odysseus has curiosity as one of his principal driving influences: when his ship passes by the island of the Sirens, he insists that his men tie him to the mast and allow him to hear the haunting music, the words of which promise to reveal the secrets of the earth to all passersby. This reckless inquisitiveness strongly resembles the impulsiveness and thirst for knowledge of Alexander, who boldly rides fearsome griffons high into the sky and sinks to the ocean's depths in the terrifyingly fragile first bathyscaphe.

Yet several powerful differences between the Roman and a work such as the Odyssey also emerge. As previously mentioned, one of the most striking features of the Roman d'Alexandre is the astonishing absence of any divine presence, whether it is from the pagan realm or from some permutation of the Christian deity. Other writers, most notably, Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas²⁶, have commented on this point, but it warrants further

²⁵"Les soldats les voient merueilleusement belles, / sans peur des hommes, sans désir de se cacher: / quand ils viennent trop nombreux, elles se mettent dans l'eau, / mais dès qu'ils s'éloignent, les petites compaignes / reviennent à la surface pour les attendre. / Ils s'empressent alors de s'unir à elles / et pleins de désir, ne veulent plus les quitter. / Mais quand ils sont si las qu'ils qu'ils ne peuvent plus rien faire / et qu'ils voudraient repartir, elles les tiennent bien : / elles se redressent et les entraînent dans l'eau, / les serrant contre elles jusqu'à les étouffer."

²⁶Gaullier-Bougassas writes, concerning Alexander's relationship with the divine power: "Les dieux manifestent leur colère tout d'abord par une absence apparente et le silence, comme s'ils se retiraient du monde et

investigation. Indeed, in Homer's Odyssey, the gods are characters present within the narrative. Athena intervenes throughout the text to save her protégé, and there are even passages where Homer switches perspective from the world of men to Mount Olympus to show the gods' interactions, in particular when, during Poseidon's absence, wise Athena pleads with the other gods to pardon the shipwrecked Odysseus and let him return home. The gods interact with mortals throughout the Odyssey; following the discussion concerning Odysseus's sorry fate, Zeus agrees to help the stranded hero and sends Hermes to Calypso to demand that she release Odysseus from her island prison. These same omnipotent deities are absent from the Roman d'Alexandre: they remain stubbornly silent from the beginning of Alexander's trials to the end.

Another important distinction between Alexander and the intrepid Odysseus stands out, and this is perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of the young Macedonian king if one compares him to other prototypical mythological heroes. Alexander consistently expresses anguish over his destiny and fear in the face of danger throughout the Roman. Here the protagonist's existential torment is virtually a recurring motif. His reaction upon hearing the prophecy of the Trees of the Sun and Moon is an example of this type of agony:

La vois qui ist des arbres dist au roi: «Que feras?
Onques ne fus vaincus ne ja ne le seras,
Et si criems morir d'armes, ja mar en douteras.
A un an et set mois en Babilone iras;
Mais enterra li mois quant tu i parvenras
Ne ja outre cel mois un seul jor ne vivras.
Sires seras du mont et a venim morras.»
Li rois ot la parole si tint le chief en bas,
Fremist et devint noirs et de parler fu quas,

dissimulaient leur volonté pour abandonner Alexandre à ses propres forces. ... Si les dieux laissent le plus souvent Alexandre seul, face à lui-même et ses limites humaines, ils rompent cependant ce silence dominant en lui envoyant quelques signes afin de l'impressionner et de lui annoncer sa mort. Mais ils n'expliquent pas clairement leur volonté, ils gardent le mystère sur les causes apparemment multiples de leur colère" (498).

Ne pot sor piés ester, tant fu de paor las. (v. 3801-3810, III)²⁷

This is a very human reaction, and indeed, it is easy to identify with the feeling of terror gripping Alexander, as he comes to the realization that his death is imminent. Alexandre de Paris brings his reader closer to his protagonist than many of his contemporary writers ever manage to do. Faced with such a pitiable display, one certainly feels compassion, but the hero also loses some of his aura of invincibility. Fear, common to all mortals, but uncommon in mythical champions, is an omnipresent and visible emotion in Alexander's heart. This fear is also present in his great eagerness to discover the location of the fountain of immortality. Witness his reaction once he learns of the existence of this marvelous spring:

E! Dieus, dist Alixandres, se me volés souffrir
Que baignier m'i peüsse, car riens tant ne desir,
Sacrefice feroie tout a vostre plaisir. (v. 3003-3005, III)²⁸

It is by means of just such snapshots that Alexandre de Paris provides a glimpse of the darker spectrum of human emotions as they can exist in even the most admirable of characters. Alexander would do anything to achieve immortality, and the use of the word “sacrifice” aptly indicates quantity of blood that will be shed to reach this goal.

Alexander is much too *self-aware* to function effectively as a pure hero in the classical sense of the term. The readers see themselves in his reactions. His hesitations in the face of danger are not surprising, because in all likelihood, any common individual would react the same way. Fear is a completely normal reaction for anyone who might find himself stranded and alone in the *Val Périlleux*. His self sacrifice in this instance strikes us more as

²⁷"La voix qui sort des arbres dit au roi: «Que comptes-tu faire? / Jamais tu n'as été vaincu, jamais tu ne le seras, / et si tu crains de mourir à la guerre, tu as bien tort. / Dans un an et sept mois tu iras à Babylone. / Tu y entreras au début du mois de mai, / et tu ne vivras pas un seul jour au-delà de ce mois. / Tu seras le maître du monde et tu mourras empoisonné» / Le roi, à ce discours, baisse la tête, / il frémit, devient blême et ne peut plus parler; / la peur le fait vaciller."

²⁸"Ah, Dieu! dit Alexandre, si vous acceptiez de m'y laisser baigner, / je vous offrirais le plus beau des sacrifices! / C'est mon plus cher désir!"

the impulse of a brave, dutiful leader of men rather than the deed of a distracted and glory-minded champion. Life is precious to Alexander; it does not hold that much worth to the Olympian champions.

Alexander traced his ancestry to the God Zeus-Ammon; but as a Macedonian, he considered Heracles, son of Zeus by Alcmena, to be his ancestor as well²⁹. Heracles was indeed the perfect model for Alexander: a mortal of supreme strength who at the end of his life attained deification as a recompense for his numerous heroic accomplishments.

Historically, this was Alexander's goal, but the text of the Roman indicates that this is the objective of Alexander the literary character as well, or at the very least immortality. His is a deliberate quest, however, while Heracles was granted immortality as a reward; the son of Alcmena never deliberately sought such a fate, and this is one of the most important distinctions between the two men. An examination of the story of Zeus's prodigy in more detail may elucidate more parallels and defining differences.

Although the text of Pseudo-Callisthenes implies that Alexander was the illegitimate child of Nectanebus, the Egyptian sorcerer, who one night disguised himself as a serpent and slept with Olympias, Alexandre de Paris soundly rejects any possibility that the Greek king was anything but the offspring of the rightful King of Macedonia, Philip. In the Roman d'Alexandre, Nectanebus is simply present at Alexander's birth, and his main role is to interpret the stars. According to the Egyptian mystic, they were *almost* perfectly aligned when the baby Alexander took his first breath. Had the constellations and timing been ideal,

²⁹Paul Cartledge explains in his book, Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past, that the Macedonian people have always considered themselves closely linked to the immortal inhabitants of Olympus, for various reasons: "The Argeads [the Macedonian royal family] claimed direct lineal descent from one Temenus, who it was alleged had migrated from Argos in the Peloponnese to Macedonia in some dim and distant past. And so ultimately, since Temenus was a direct descendent of Heracles, they were descended from the hero-god Heracles himself. The geographical situation within Macedonian territory of Mount Olympus, home of the dozen major gods and goddesses, was a not inconsiderable reinforcement of such arguments" (45).

perhaps he would have lived longer and indeed reached the immortal state which he spent his short life seeking. Heracles, however, was born under a favorable star, as Robert Graves points out:

Heracles's birthday is celebrated on the fourth day of every month; but some hold that he was born as the Sun entered the Tenth Sign; others that the Great Bear, swinging westward at midnight over Orion- which it does as the Sun quits the Twelfth Sign- looked down on him in his tenth month. (449)

Strangely enough, both Alexander and Heracles have serpents associated with their birth. Hera, in a vindictive attempt to kill Heracles and his twin Iphicles, sent two formidable serpents to kill the two boys in their sleep. Heracles, however, with no effort at all, with his bare hands, grabbed and killed the two snakes before they could strike. Laughing, he then carelessly tossed them to the floor in front of his thunderstruck parents, Alcmena and Amphytrion. In the Pseudo-Callisthenes version, Nectanebo, having slept with Olympias and fathered Alexander, fools Philip into thinking that Zeus actually seduced his wife, by appearing as a giant serpent and embracing Olympias in front of the astounded king. In the Roman however, Philip is considered to be the only possible father, yet the serpent does figure prominently in the childhood of Alexander. At the age of 5, he dreams of a great snake, of which "Onques hom ne vit autre de la sieue figure" (v. 259, I) that surges forth from the egg he was about to eat. This frightening creature circled the child's bed three times and then returned to the egg's shell to die. In the story of Heracles, the serpents clearly serve as a means of demonstrating the hero's tremendous strength. Yet in the Alexander tradition, it would be difficult to assign that interpretation to the dream sequence. Indeed, the serpent appears here more as an ambiguous symbol, denoting simultaneously the awesome power of the young king and his insatiable appetite for conquest as well.

According to Graves, "Heracles surpasses all archers ever born... [his] eyes flashed fire, and he had an unerring aim, both with javelin and arrow" (454-455). At the age of 18, he single-handedly defeated the Thespian Lion: "... he dispatched it with an untrimmed club cut from a wild-olive tree which he uprooted on Helicon" (458). Heracles learned poetry and how to play the lyre as well, and he was exceptionally skilled at augury, but these skills pale in comparison to the attributes derived from his divine strength. In contrast, the Roman points out that Alexander's power lay in his remarkable knowledge of the world, acquired from Aristotle, his preceptor. Alexandre de Paris devotes virtually an entire stanza to the description of Alexander's education, but here is the essence of his instruction:

Aristotes d'Athaines l'aprist honestement;
 Celui manda Phelippes trestout premierement.
 Il li mostre escripture et li vallés l'entent,
 Greu, ebreu et caldeu et latin ensement
 Et toute la nature de la mer et du vent
 Et le cours des estoiles et le compassement
 Et si com li planete hurtent au firmament
 Et la vie du siecle, qanq'a lui en apent,
 Et conoistre raison et savoir jugement,
 Si comme restorique en fait devisement. (v. 333-342, I)³⁰

Clearly in the view of Alexandre de Paris, a wondrous knowledge of languages and the workings of the world is the most salient feature of his hero's character. This exceptional wisdom is apparent as well when Porus, "le roi d'Ynde," surrenders to Alexander and they speak together for the first time. Porus gives him his sword: "Et dist en son langage que il l'avoit molt chier. / Alixandres l'entent sans autre latimier, / Car de tous les langages s'estoit

³⁰"Aristote d'Athènes l'éduqua noblement; / c'est le premier maître que Philippe lui avait choisi. / Il lui fait lire les textes, le jeune homme comprend vite; / il lui enseigne le grec, l'hébreu, le chaldéen, le latin, / et tout ce que l'on sait de la mer et du vent, / et le cours des étoiles et sa mesure, / et comme les planètes s'opposent au mouvement du firmament, / Il lui apprend à user de sa raison et de son jugement, / comme la rhétorique l'explique."

fais enseigner" (v. 2127-29, III)³¹. Heracles may have indomitable mastery of the sword³², Alexander's tongue and ear are just as formidable, though³³.

The son of Zeus is nothing if not a solitary hero. Serving as a virtual slave for Eurystheus, Heracles set out on his first labor to slay the troublesome Nemean Lion, "an enormous beast with a pelt proof against iron, bronze, and stone" (Graves 465). When he comes upon the beast on Mount Tretus, he first tries every weapon at his disposal in his attempt to kill it, but no avail. He finally could find no better means of defeating the monster than to wrestle it, which he does, and by this method ends the animal's life. Physical strength is the most deadly asset of the son of Zeus.

In marked contrast, when Alexander finds himself alone in *Val Périlleux* with an evil demon, "qui cuidoit faire tout le mont perillier" (v.2814, III)³⁴, he relies on his intellect to

³¹"Et lui dit dans sa langue l'estime qu'il a pour lui. / Alexandre le comprend sans le moindre interprète, / car il connaît toutes les langues."

³²Heracles is also known for his oafishness. Toward the end of his mortal existence, he clumsily boxed the ears of a young relative of Oeneus, the first human to receive a vine plant from Dionysus, and unwittingly killed the lad. Heracles's life story is filled with similar incidents, where his impulsiveness and need for action consistently overrules his capacity for reflection. This impulsiveness led him to acts of tremendous cruelty as well. On one occasion toward the beginning of his life, he horrifically maimed a group of heralds sent by King Erginus of Minyas to Thebes, demanding tribute, by chopping off their ears, nose, and hands. The historical Alexander was certainly more than capable of such deeds of tremendous cruelty. In 327 BC, suspecting his personal biographer of having plotted to have him assassinated, Alexander ordered his men to imprison Callisthenes. According to Justinian, "Alexandre veut qu'on motile tous les membres, qu'on lui coupe les oreilles, le nez et les lèvres, que ce spectacle soit exposé à tous, et que Callisthène, enfermé dans une cage de fer avec un chien sauvage, soit promené au milieu de l'armée pour frapper d'effroi tous les cœurs (Battistini 608)." The Alexander in the Roman, however, seems incapable of such brutality. In the eyes of medieval man and certainly in the view of our compiler, Alexander came close to being a paragon of virtue. His one principal fault was his heathenness and his pretensions to divinity, but in all other areas, he was to be emulated. The Roman is filled with mentions of his tremendous generosity, and also his sense of justice. He is furious when he learns that Darius's own men callously murdered their king. True to his word, when he discovers the identity of the murderers, Alexander has them put to death: "La ou Daryes fu mors, tres dedevant les portes, / Les fist li rois mener a deus de ses coortes. / Les bras en lieu d'ornicles leur fist lier de cordes, / Es cols leur fist lacier les hars en lieu de torques, / Desi q'en son les forches les fist traire a reortes (v. 348-352, III).

³³Undoubtedly, Alexandre de Paris must have held such learnedness in great esteem as well, having devoted his own life to the study of letters, philosophy, and rhetoric, and such a passage is certainly an attempt, on the part of Alexandre de Paris to valorize his own particular aptitudes.

³⁴"qui voulait mettre le monde entier en péril."

emerge victorious from the encounter. It is a place where he readily admits that: "C'i n'a mestier proëce ne lance ne escu," (v.2506, III)³⁵. The demon, ensnared beneath a rock, agrees to tell Alexander how to escape from the trap of the valley if only the young king will free him. Alexander insists that the creature tell him first how to escape from the *val sans issu*, and then he will remove the rock. The king is wise to test the veracity of the demon's words before proceeding to free the creature, for it was a lie. Having called his bluff, Alexander extracts the truth from the foul beast, and the demon then praises his sagacity. Thus, where Heracles might have removed the rock and pushed the demon up against the cave's wall, bullying the fiend to tell the truth, Alexander relies more on his wits rather than his skill with a sword to escape from the trap. The young Greek king is an unusual heroic figure in this respect. Truthfully, his intelligence and insatiable curiosity seem to be the dominant traits depicted in the Roman.

Where Homer's Achilles embodies swift, rash action and violent passion, Alexandre de Paris's Alexander is a model of hesitation, reflection, and a remarkable lack of the inner fire that spurred his supposed ancestor to commit such wild acts as betraying his Greek allies in the hope of winning the love of his enemy Priam's daughter, Polyxena. Driven mad with his desire for vengeance, he mercilessly kills Hector, the slayer of his comrade Patroclus, and subsequently defiles the Trojan warrior's corpse by dragging it around the besieged city three times every morning (Graves 671). Just like the legendary Heracles, powerful passions drive Achilles and constitute the fuel behind his actions. Anger dominates Achilles's deeds: it is his untamed fury at the death of his comrade Patroclus that enables him to crush the Trojan army

³⁵"La prouesse et les armes ne servent ici à rien."

and defeat Hector. Robert Graves's description of the fury that consumed the Greek hero gives us an idea of the strength of this passion:

None could stand against his [Achilles's] wrath. The Trojans broke and fled to the Scamander, where he split them into two bodies, driving one across the plain towards the city, and penning the other in the bend of the river... When Achilles at last met Hector and engaged him in single combat, both sides drew back and stood watching amazed (670-671).

Though Hector tries to tire Achilles by running around the city walls, he fails. When the Trojan champion finally takes a stand against his wrath-consumed pursuer, Achilles "ran him through the breast, and refused his dying plea that his body might be ransomed for burial" (671). In a sense, the source of Achilles's strength is precisely that which will also cause his downfall, that is to say his capacity to allow his emotions to overwhelm him. This dramatic and dangerous release of emotions often transforms into madness. Grief induced folly is at work when Achilles drags the dead body three times around the tomb of Patroclus, and his love for Polyxena spurs him to betray the Greek army. In marked contrast, the most powerful emotion that takes hold of the Roman's adventurous protagonist is fear. Dread seizes hold of him when he discovers that the time and place of his death are fixed, and when he learns of his own mortality. The description of his reaction here bears a certain resemblance to the passion-gripped madness of furious Achilles: "Li rois s'en va plorant et ses cheveux detire, / Fremist et devint noirs et remet comme cire. / De la paor qu'il a parfondement souspire." (v. 3846-48, III)³⁶. Alexander's fear of death is by no means a common heroic attribute.

These all-powerful passions are what enable the heroes of Greek myth to forget their own mortality; they drive the likes of Achilles, Heracles, and perhaps the most attainable for of them all, Odysseus, to fully embrace *thanatos*, the death-generating energy that the utter

³⁶"Le roi s'éloigne en pleurs, s'arrachant les cheveux; / il frémit, devient blême et jaune comme la cire. / La peur le fait soupiner."

devotion to which Miller claims propels these men into the ranks of the *surhommes*. In fact, if one looks at the Greek mythological tradition in its entirety, it becomes clear that in allowing themselves to succumb to their passions, these men are simply emulating the gods themselves: reason-shattering passion lies at the source of all the conflicts between the Olympians. In sum, to let reason disappear behind a sanguinary veil of rage is to behave like a god. Madness truly is divine.

To conclude this comparison with the mythical antecedents of the Roman's hero, it is worthwhile to consider Dionysus, a god often associated with folly. Historically, Alexander sought to emulate the wine god's accomplishments, and indeed his wild feasts and parties may have been a significant factor in his downfall³⁷. A brief account of the dissolute god's life will provide us with an excellent basis for comparison with Alexander. Dionysus is of course most well known for his association with wine, but the story of his travels throughout the Mediterranean and into India is worthy of note as well. He undertook this journey when Hera cursed him with madness after discovering that Zeus had been unfaithful to her and fathered a child with a mortal woman, in this case Semele, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes. At the head of an army of staff-and-serpent armed Maenads³⁸ and Satyrs, Dionysus traveled around the world, bringing the grape vine with him wherever he went. In Egypt, with the aid of several Amazon queens, he defeated the Titans and restored King Ammon to his throne. After Egypt, he traveled east; Graves describes this journey: "He reached India,

³⁷A night of frenzied drinking was purportedly behind his army's razing of the magnificent capital of the Persian Empire, Persepolis, and another wild party may have clouded his judgment when he slew faithful Cleitus the Black who had saved his life at the Granicus River.

³⁸The Maenads, or madwomen, were women who engaged in drunken orgies and were commonly associated with Pan and Dionysus (Graves 81).

having met with much opposition by the way, and conquered the whole country, which he taught the art of viniculture, also giving it laws and founding great cities" (Graves 104).

When he returned to Egypt, the Amazons resisted him, but he defeated them handily. He then made his way back to Europe. There his grandmother Rhea cleansed his spirit of the many murders he had committed, after which he invaded Thrace, and eventually undid Lycurgus, King of the Edonians. He then traveled to Boeotia, and after forcefully imposing the cult of his worship in those lands, he began a tour of the Aegean Islands, again spreading wine wherever he went. During his next stopover, he married Ariadne, whom Theseus had abandoned at Naxos. Graves summarizes the end of his travels thusly: "Finally having established his worship throughout the world, Dionysus ascended to Heaven, and now sits at the right hand of Zeus as one of the Twelve Great Ones" (106).

There are naturally numerous parallels between Dionysus's trajectory and that of the historical Alexander, not the least of which is the ambitious young king's journey through the Middle East and into India, and his inclination for founding cities wherever he went³⁹. Dionysus also often transformed himself into a lion, and Alexander, mindful as well of Heracles's lion skin mantle, adopted this animal as a symbol too⁴⁰. These parallels cease to be so evident when one considers the literary figure of Alexander as portrayed by Alexandre de

³⁹Alexander founded no fewer than twelve Alexandrias over the course of his travels east.

⁴⁰The historical Alexander's admiration for Dionysus stemmed from his mother Olympias's devotion to the god. Plutarch describes wild parties and worship ceremonies that she organized in the palace when her son was just a boy. If this is true, Alexander was steeped in the cult of wine-love and decadence and the youngest of ages, and it is no wonder that he would have sought to recreate such an atmosphere in later years, far away from his home in Pella (Cartledge 53).

Paris. The journey is the same, but the demigod's mastery of his destiny and his exceptional ability to extricate himself from danger are beyond Alexander's grasp⁴¹.

In the narrative of the Roman, Alexander brazenly bypasses the boundaries fixed by Liber (Dionysus), and Artus (a confusion/ conflation between Heracles and King Arthur). The bold Macedonian prince thus seeks to surpass the deeds of the wine god, and indeed he does, but is his dreadful demise as a result of drinking poisoned wine not an indication that Dionysus remembered all too well the prior insult? The description of his death is frightening:

Qant li rois vaut le vin, la coupe a demandee,
Et cil fiert ens ses paus si la li a donee.
Tantost com ot beü, si li art ala coree,
Li cuers li muert el ventre s'a la color müee. (v. 155-158, IV)⁴²

Poisoned by wine? It is doubtful that the Christian cleric, Alexandre de Paris would have assigned such a vengeful power to a pagan deity, but it is important not to forget the origins of the manuscript within the ancient Greek literary tradition of Pseudo-Callisthenes.

Alexandre de Paris was after all principally a compiler, and thus, to some extent it is possible to consider the component elements of his epic on an individual basis. The text of the Roman does after all, readily mix polytheistic and Christian features.

⁴¹Of course Alexander lacks the supernatural allies that accompanied Dionysus, the Satyrs and Maenads with their magical staves, snakes, and swords; as a matter of fact this type of supernatural beast is the manner of creature that typically opposes him in his travels east. Gone too in the Roman are the wild feasts and drunken orgies that constitute a constant backdrop to the adventures of the wine god, though in the historical account of Alexander's journey, these scenes of incredible debauchery are very present and in fact become more and more frequent as the conquerors head deeper and deeper into the lands of the Persians and the Indian kingdoms, almost as if the young king's role model gradually operates a shift from initially being akin to the soldier heroes, Achilles and Heracles, to the sovereign of carnal dissolution, Dionysus.

⁴²"Le roi, voulant du vin, lui demande sa coupe / et l'autre [Antipater] y enfonce ses pouces avant de la lui tender. / Dès qu'Alexandre boit, ses entrailles se mettent à brûler, / le cœur lui manque, il change de couleur."

Thanks to his many accomplishments over the course of his travels, Dionysus finally received recognition from the supreme authority and was granted a seat amongst the rulers of Olympus, on the right-hand of Zeus, no less. This destiny will of course slip between Alexander's dying fingers, and he will be forced to perform the sad ritual to which all mortals must submit, that of dividing his worldly possessions, in this case the lands he conquered, among those he leaves behind on earth. The gods possess everything and nothing, whereas it is the curse and the blessing of mortal man to be forever tied to the earth by means of the bonds of ownership. Dionysus, upon ascending to heaven, had no need to divide up his belongings- the lands where he brought the sacred vine will always be his. Alexander's cities would eventually crumble to dust and ruin.

Concluding Thoughts

What comes out of this comparison is an image of a heroic protagonist that is markedly different from the classical models established in antiquity. Perhaps the most salient and unifying feature of this distinction is the relative transparency of Alexander's thoughts throughout the tale of his adventures. Alexandre de Paris portrays the young king as governed much more by his intellect than by the blind dictates of honor or the necessity to obey the directives of a deity. In this respect, he is notably different from a Heracles, but his characteristic thoughtfulness and most importantly, *awareness* of the dangers he is facing also mark a separation from the epic heroes of the *chansons de geste*. By deliberately depicting his hero as possessing multiple human characteristics with which readers can easily identify, Alexandre de Paris forges a new myth, a myth in which deification will perhaps not be the ultimate consequence of the protagonist's struggles, sacrifices, and suffering. Many

elements go into the creation of a myth, though, not the least of which are monsters and marvels.

III. Monsters, Marvels, and Mysterious Peoples

Definitions and Approach

Even with its extensive passages devoted to the king's adventures with strange creatures, unusual humanoids, and frightening phenomena, the Roman d'Alexandre is far from unique among twelfth-century texts. These entertaining elements exist in the other *romans d'antiquité* as well. Within Alexandre de Paris's tale, however, the function of these marvelous components goes beyond simple *divertissement*. If these elements occupy such a prominent role in the text, it is because the author uses them to tell us something about the character of his hero. Examining selected examples of the king's encounters with *le merveilleux* in India, may reveal how these elements serve to mould Alexander's character as a new type of heroic figure, and also how they function didactically, depicting the lands of India as both realm of terrible danger and wondrous beauty that only the foolhardy would attempt to possess.

One of the reasons there are so many instances of the marvelous in the *romans d'antiquité* is in part because the literary tradition behind these reworked classical texts also had the peculiarity of including numerous references to fantastic invention as well⁴³. The

⁴³It may be useful here to consider once again what twelfth-century man would have considered as belonging to the realm of the "marvelous." Gervase de Tilbury's encyclopedic work the Otia Imperialia, filled with examples of mysterious places, people, and objects designed to entertain the emperor Otto IV, eldest son of Henry the Lion and Henry II's daughter Matilda, was written not long after the Roman, and provides an interesting glimpse of twelfth-century man's conception of the marvelous. Gervase writes, distinguishing between religious miracles and the marvelous: "We call those things marvels which are beyond our comprehension, even though they are natural: in fact the inability to explain why a thing is so constitutes a marvel (lviii). The editors of this version of the Otia Imperialia explain that one can situate this newfound interest in the marvelous within the context of evolving attitudes toward the world at this time: "A fresh perception of the challenging reality of the visible world emerged in both literature and art, becoming the life-force of a growing secularity. This perception

interest in fabulous animals, monsters, and strange events is not an invention of the High Middle Ages. Classical Greek culture was filled with tales of amazing animals, frightening heavenly interventions, and wondrous phenomena. It is significant to realize, however, that the popularity of such entertaining elements caused some of the first historians, even supposed eye-witnesses to events, to transform their tales and to incorporate unusual beasts and occurrences in order to amuse their readership or listeners. It was said of one of the historians who accompanied Alexander, the ship pilot Onesicritus, that he had a tendency to rely too heavily on inventive informers. Paul Pédech writes: "En réalité il était trop heureux d'accueillir des histoires merveilleuses qui feraient la délectation des lecteurs grecs. Mais on peut dire que peu d'historiens d'Alexandre ont résisté à l'attrait du fabuleux et du fantastique" (156).

Yet, this having been said, the medieval audience, presumably noblemen, must still have felt alienated as they read these texts, and one of the most striking means by which the authors succeed in generating this alienation is by presenting the reader with monsters that shock and terrify because they exist as some transformation or aberration of a common, recognizable creature: the fear derives specifically from the alteration of nature⁴⁴. Claude

prompted some early movements toward empiricism. For instance, a few travel records and topographical works based on empirical observation were written; a delight in drawing from life began to find an outlet in the margins of manuscripts; and the revival of science encouraged the observation of eclipses, volcanoes, tides, earthquakes, and other natural phenomena" (lviii).

⁴⁴Claude Lecouteux explains the origin of their frightening natures in Les Monstres dans la pensée médiévale européenne, "Le monstre s'écarte donc des normes. Ce peut être un individu taré, dénaturé (on relèvera le terme), difforme ou simplement laid, d'une taille inférieure ou supérieure à la moyenne. Il suffit que ces mœurs soient différentes des habitudes - les anthropophages sont des monstres! -, ou même que son alimentation paraisse insolite: les Mangeurs-de-poissons (*Ichthyophages*), de tortues (*Chélonophages*) ou de serpents (*Ophiophages*) prennent place dans les catalogues de monstres de l'Antiquité. Ici s'estompe la frontière entre monstres et merveilles. La même constatation vaut pour des animaux comme le phénix ou le caladrius. Tout être dont la constitution s'écarte de celle de l'espèce ou du clan est, à la limite, monstrueux. Chez certains peuples d'Afrique du Nord, on dit de ceux qui ont des yeux bleus qu'ils ont le mauvais œil, ne détonnent-ils pas dans une population aux yeux marrons? Le dragon chinois a les yeux ronds, ce qui est une façon d'accentuer sa monstruosité dans un pays d'hommes aux yeux bridés. Tout animal rare dans un pays donné ou inconnu, est

Lecouteux provides an introductory definition of such creatures "Le monstre est l'homme ou l'animal qui présente des singularités extraordinaires, soient-elles dues à son caractère ou à sa morphologie" (Monstres 9)⁴⁵. Within each of the *romans* there are numerous examples of these strange beings.

For the medieval writers, barring those creatures derived from the Northern European regional folk traditions, such as Marie de France's *bisclavret* or Beowulf's *Grendel*, the vast majority of the monsters in the *littérature de divertissement* and the didactic texts had their origins in the literary and pseudo-scientific legacy of Classical Antiquity. Medieval writers had access to Antiquity's mythological lore principally through the Latin translations or adaptations of Greek texts, the most significant example being without a doubt Pliny the Elder's vast encyclopedic text, the *Historia naturalis*. Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, completed some time in the early 7th century was, however, probably the source with which most writers would have been familiar, and the knowledge he recorded in his text was to some extent regarded as fact, and therefore became a sort of dependable reference work for all unbelievable and mysterious lore. These were the principal sources from which the medieval writers drew their inspiration, yet this still does not provide an indication of where the very concept of a *monster* comes from. For many writers monsters are simply inventions of the human psyche, i.e. concretizations of humanity's fear of the unknown and of the evil that seems to plague existence.

monstrueux. L'Occident médiéval connaît peu de reptiles et les serpents et les serpents connus par l'intermédiaire des écrivains romains deviennent des dragons. Le basilic crache des flammes, la céraсте (vipère à cornes) reçoit des cornes de bélier, le boa se transforme en une anguille gigantesque" (11).

⁴⁵Lecouteux also places the medieval conception of the monster within a theological framework: "Le chrétien, pour qui l'homme est fait à l'image de Dieu, tient pour un monstre tout individu qui s'écarte trop de la représentation qu'on se fait habituellement de la divinité. Les personnages contrefaites deviennent le symbole du mal; la beauté, signe de la grâce divine, s'oppose à la laideur, émanation du péché, et il en va ainsi dans la plupart des religions monothéistes, les polythéistes vouant souvent leur dévotion à des dieux monstrueux" (10).

It is quite clear though, that to medieval man, these monsters were not in the slightest bit imaginary. Lecouteux in his book, Les Monstres dans la pensée médiévale européenne, points out that the discovery of the fossils of prehistoric animals, recorded as early as the 1st century AD⁴⁶ provided people with convincing evidence that large, frightening creatures certainly existed. In the ninth century, the *Liber monstrorum*, essentially a compilation of Isidore's work and the early travel narrative *The Letter of Farasmanes*, describes the unearthing of the bones of the giant Hygelac, king of the Getes. Perhaps, the most compelling examples though are the Quaternary rhinoceros *Tichorinus antiquitatis* skull hailed in 1335 at Klagenfurt as that of a dragon, or the mammoth femur hung from the entryway to the Saint-Etienne cathedral of Vienne, that legend claimed belonged to a giant (Les Monstres 17). Here was incontrovertible evidence that the horrific monsters of myth and legend existed.

For the purposes of this study the medieval conception of a monster will be more significant than the modern one. On the surface it could be considered as a problematic notion for medieval man, since if there are monsters on earth; God must have created them, or at the very least allowed them to exist. If everything that God creates is beautiful and his vision is flawless, it is difficult to explain how such aberrations as the *Cynocéphales*, a race of dog-headed people, or the fur-covered and headless fish-eating race of men known as the *Ichthyophages* exist. These are truly abominations, and thus in the face of this apparent contradiction, the Church was compelled to come up with an adequate elucidation. Saint Augustine explains the origins of such anomalies as follows: if God allows monsters, these imperfect, horrid creatures to exist, it is in order to allow man to understand his own, and by analogy, God's beauty, through the dramatic contrast between humans' appearance and that

⁴⁶Lecouteux gives the example of Emperor Augustus's supposed collection of fossils, as described by the writer Suetonius (Les Monstres 16).

of the flawed ones. To clarify further, our medieval authority, Isidore of Seville explains that the nature of such monsters incorporates the very important concept of something going against nature, or against the natural order of things: hence, the idea that many of the monsters are evil, since they upset the natural order established by God and by nature⁴⁷.

Some of these creatures derive from classical mythology and yet others are wholly new, and originate in a different cultural tradition. In some cases, as he translated the Latin or Greek source text, the medieval author transformed the descriptions and included elements that would provide his readers with some identifiable point of reference. These anomalous beasts are essential to the narrative thread, because they project the tale into a mythological realm and provide the heroic protagonists with opponents worthy of their mettle. Lecouteux describes the function of monsters in the *littérature de divertissement* of the Middle Ages in this manner:

Ils [les monstres] permettent aux héros de faire leurs preuves- aspect initiatique- de s'accomplir en réalisant des exploits- aspect purgatif (*catharsis*)-, de s'intégrer à la société courtoise et d'y occuper la place qui leur revient de droit. Le chemin de l'honneur, de la considération et des possessions territoriales passe très souvent par un combat contre des monstres, un des principaux thèmes de l'Aventure. (Au-delà du merveilleux 22)

After all, it would not be that impressive for a hero to slay a wolf or a bear. Frightening enough though these animals may be, they are far too commonplace and predictable to represent a threat to the heroes of such tales. Thus, unlike in the case of these rather familiar beasts, the rules behind the behavior of strange entities, these monsters, will always remain unknown, unless of course, as the medieval author often insists, the creature is of malevolent

⁴⁷Lecouteux provides some more information concerning medieval man's view of the origin of the earth's monstrous peoples. In 1120 a middle high German poem, the *Genèse de Vienne*, recounts how Adam ordered his daughters not to eat certain plants that would be poisonous to them, but they disobeyed him, and the result was that they gave birth to abominations: children with no head, with only one giant foot, or others with the mouth located in the middle of their chest. The myth that this poem spread was very popular in the 12th century, and there are references to it in encyclopedic texts starting in 1190.

origin. The notion that many of these beings serve as guardians of a particular territory or location is also significant. At times these creatures become intimately connected with the lands they protect, and in no instance is this truer than when one considers the strange beasts of India, as described by Alexandre de Paris. The monsters of India are part of the unknown lands' identity, and it follows then, that if Alexander can somehow overcome these beasts, he will also come closer to becoming the master of India as well.

Indeed, it seems that one of the principal defining elements of mythological tales is that, in confronting such abominations, the heroes draw closer to the hidden creative forces governing the world. On a symbolic level, these creatures represent the unknown. Their appearance is unusual and typically frightening, their behavior is unpredictable, or rather, predictably hostile, and finally those individuals who encounter them will require a unique set of attributes to subjugate them. In many ways, they encapsulate the hero's quest into unknown territory, on a very real, physical level, as well as the hero's own very personal journey into the unknown regions of the soul. One must be courageous to face these mysteries, and draw upon strengths hidden deep within the soul to overcome the threat they embody. An expedition into wild lands is as much a journey of self-discovery as it is one of conquest or scientific enquiry. Presumably, after a confrontation with one of these monsters, the desperate self-probing demanded of the encounter will have engendered a profound transformation within the hero's core. At the end of such a harrowing road of self-searching, Heracles found deification, and Odysseus attained a status and reputation as a man of legend that have lasted to this day.

On another level, simply by encountering these mysterious creatures, a hero acquires a certain level of notoriety above that of his fellow comrades-in-arms. Simply to meet such

animals and live to tell the tale is to enter into the world of legend. This is what makes Alexander's journey so fascinating. He repeatedly confronts *and seeks out* unusual phenomena in a conscious effort to leave a legendary legacy behind. In this he is quite unique. A blend of the very real Marco Polo and Charles Darwin on the one hand and of Jason, captain of the *Argonaut* or Theseus bane of the Minotaur on the other, Alexander represents a strange mixture of scientific curiosity and legendary bravery. This duality is rather imperfect, however. As his journey unfolds, it becomes clear that he utterly fails to understand the mysteries he encounters, and that his quest to achieve divine status is rendered flawed by its self-motivated nature. Indeed, Heracles, who succeeded where Alexander failed, did not selfishly seek out divinity. The twelve labors were imposed upon him, and he carried his formidable strength like a burden more than like a powerful attribute.

The rules behind the behavior of these strange entities will remain unknown to us, unless of course, as the medieval author often insists, the creature is of malevolent origin. This is often the case, though, as the following passage taken from the Roman de Troie illustrates. The Roman de Troie is one of the first examples of the new genre of the *roman d'antiquité*, and there are instances of monsters within the text that, whether of mythological origin or not, firmly belong to the realm of the *merveilleux*. For instance, during the siege of Troy, early on, an ally of Troy, king Pistropleus, brings his men into action against the Greeks. One of his soldiers is indeed quite unusual:

Il ot o sei un saïetaire
Qui mout iert fel e de put aire.
Des le lonbril jus qu'en aval
Ot cors en forme de chaval.
Il nen est riens, se il vousist,
Qui d'isnelece l'ateinsist;
Chief d'ome aveit, braz e senblant,
Mais n'esteient mie avenant;

Il ne fust ja de dras vestuz
 Car come beste esteit veluz.
 La chiere aveit de tiel faïçon,
 Plus esteit neire de charbon.
 Li oill del chef reluiseient,
 Par nuit obscure li ardeient;
 De treis lieues, sans niul mentir,
 Le pot hon veeir e choisir.
 Tant par aveit la forme eschive,
 Soz ciel n'a nule rien qui vive
 Qui de lui ne preïst freor (v.12353-12371)⁴⁸

Benoît de Saint- Maure presents the reader with a portrait of le *Sagittaire*, essentially a monstrous mixture of horse and man⁴⁹. This passage reveals several of the defining elements of the creature descriptions that can be found in the *roman antiques*. The *Sagittaire* is first and foremost "fel," or evil, as the narrator indicates, it can therefore be considered to be the enemy of normal men. The physical description of the creature is clearly that of a centaur: the *Sagittaire* is half horse, half man, and yet Saint-Maure chooses to underline the beastly character of the monster, by insisting that he wears no clothes but is covered with fur. Its eyes present a terrifying aspect; indeed, glow with an evil light, and because of this feature, men can see the *Sagittaire* coming towards them from a great distance. This is frightening in and of itself, as one can imagine how distressing it would be to catch sight of these burning eyes in the middle of the inhospitable night. It is no coincidence that Saint-Maure sets this

⁴⁸"Il avait dans sa troupe un Sagittaire très cruel et très malfaisant. En dessous du nombril, le Sagittaire avait le corps et l'apparence d'un cheval et personne n'aurait pu le battre à la course. Le reste du corps, les bras, la figure, étaient semblables aux nôtres, mais l'ensemble n'était pas très plaisant à regarder. Il n'avait pas besoin de porter de vêtements, car il était velu comme une bête. Quant à son teint, il était plus noir que du charbon, ses yeux brillaient sur son visage et éclairaient la nuit la plus obscure. Sans mentir, on aurait pu le voir à trois lieues ou plus. Son visage était tellement effrayant que personne, en le voyant, ne pouvait s'empêcher de céder à la peur." Translations of this passage and all subsequent quotes from the *Roman de Troie* come from Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Françoise Vieillard's edition of the text.

⁴⁹On the origin of the *Sagittaire*, Edmond Faral writes that "[ce monster est un] type assez isolé dans la littérature du moyen âge et que l'auteur semble avoir décrit en s'inspirant à la fois des traditions relatives à la faune de l'Orient et des représentations du zodiaque que les sculpteurs employaient volontiers comme motif de décoration depuis le XIème siècle" (313).

scene after the setting of the sun; in the Middle Ages evil and darkness go hand in hand⁵⁰.

Underlining to what extent the centaur inspires fear, Saint-Maure writes that no man could look upon the monster and not be overcome by "freor," or sheer terror⁵¹. To finish this awe-inspiring portrait, our author bestows upon the creature two more qualities that attach it to the world of the *merveilleux*: 1) no mortal can draw the strings of the centaur's bow, and 2) the arrows, crafted of fine iron, have fletchings made of the feathers of another mythical beast, the alerion. The *sagittaire* possesses several qualities that render it unbeatable by normal men: it is a strange mixture on the one hand of deformity and by extension, exclusion from God's grace, and on the other hand, godliness in the pagan sense, that is to say it is endowed with marvelous strength and otherworldly weapons.

When the Trojan allies loose the *Sagittaire* upon the Greeks, the monster runs amok, and Benoit de Saint-Maure's description of the carnage reinforces the terror that such a monster's appearance causes: "Grant noise fet, si bret e crie / Que par trestot en vait l'oïe. / Toz cels de l'ost fet merveillier" (v.12411-12413)⁵². The Greeks are completely overcome by fear: "N'i a un sol, grant ne petit, / Qu'il ne mete en esfreance" (v.12417-12418)⁵³, and the monster's frightening appearance matches its deadlines:

⁵⁰Jean Verdon writes concerning medieval man's perception of the nighttime hours: "Peur de la nuit, peur dans la nuit. La peur consiste en une apprehension que rien ne justifie, sinon l'absence de perceptions visuelles. L'homme ne peut vivre sans dommage dans les ténèbres, il lui faut voir pour agir" (15).

⁵¹The concept of vision is closely linked to the *merveilleux*. Claude Lecouteux writes, concerning the etymology of the word: "Il [le mot *merveilleux*] a été formé sur *merveille*, qui date du XI^e siècle et vient de l'adjectif latin au neutre pluriel *mirabilia*. Par l'adjectif déverbal *mirabilis*, le verbe *miror* et l'adjectif radical *mirus*, on rejoint une racine indo-européenne *smei ou *mei que l'on retrouve dans le grec *meidio*, sourire. La racine latine *mir-* indique la vision, que l'œil joue un grand rôle: le merveilleux est donc d'abord une perception qui provoque une sorte de détente impliquant une tension, une peur" (Au-delà du merveilleux13).

⁵²"Il fait un bruit énorme: ses cris et ses rugissements se font entendre de tous les côtés, frappant de stupeur tous les Grecs."

⁵³"Il n'y en eut pas un, humble ou puissant, qui ne fût saisi d'effroi."

A un sol tret en ocit deus
 O treis, ce dit l'escriz, sovent;
 En peti d'ore en ocit cent.
 De la boche li saut escume
 Qui par mi l'air del ciel alume.
 La genz de Grece mout s'esmaie:
 Ses saietes, ainz qu'il les traie,
 I moille e atоче e adeise,
 Flanbe li fers, l'airs e li venz.
 Se longes durast cist tormenz
 L'osz de Grece fust mau bailie ;
 Ja uns sols n'en portast la vie.
 Par l'esfreïssement de lui,
 Si cum je pens e cum je cui,
 En perdent le jor tiels dous mile
 Dont buens chevaliers iert li pire. (v. 12422-12438)⁵⁴

The capacity to inspire fear is the characteristic of this creature to which our author repeatedly refers, fear from many sources. The unfamiliar breeds fear, but the embodied disruption of order that a monster represents is perhaps even more terrifying to medieval man. Medieval man's society was strictly ordered and hierarchical, and this was surely a source of comfort and provided individuals with a structure upon which to base their understanding of the world around them. God and his angels sat at the top of the pyramid, above the clergy, who in turn dominated the common man, who, finally had mastery of the animal world. Monsters, in particular these half-breed humans, symbolize a rupture with God's natural order. The extreme sense of alienation that the very concept of these creatures must have engendered in the medieval mindset must also have filled them with dread. Order, God's natural order meant security, predictability. Disorder, the abomination of nature these

⁵⁴"D'un seul trait, il lui arrive souvent - ainsi le dit ma source- d'en tuer deux, voire trois. En peu de temps, il en tue une centaine. L'écume jaillit de sa bouche et s'enflamme au contact de l'air. Les Grecs sont terrorisés. Ses flèches, avant de les envoyer, il les mouille et imprègne de cette écume qui les empoisonne. Ensuite, quand il décoche sa flèche, le fer, puis l'air, puis le vent en sont tout embrasés. Si cette lutte avait duré longtemps, les assiégeants auraient été en bien mauvaise posture. Pas un n'en aurait réchappé. La panique que leur cause le monstre est telle- c'est ainsi que j'imagine les choses- que plus de deux mille moururent ce jour-là dont le pire était déjà un bon chevalier."

creatures embody, implied chaos. Chaos was the dominion of the Fiend. In the Christianized West, Hell was the most frightening realm of which they could conceive.

Thus, in order to prevail over the terror that strikes the common individual, a hero with great courage and strength must at some point take it upon himself to confront the beast, to reestablish order by eliminating Hell's emissary. In this case, the Greek king Diomedes, finds himself, rather by surprise, standing alone in the abandoned Greek camp, face to face with the *Sagittaire*. Though he too feels fear in the face of the monster, he overcomes it, charges, and slices the evil thing in two. Yet even in death, the beast behaves in a surprising manner. After Diomedes smites it,

Ce qui a beste ert resenblant
Ala grant piece puis corant,
Tant que Grezeis l'ont abatu,
Qui en recoevrent lor vertu. (v. 12491-12494)⁵⁵

Benoît de Saint-Maure incorporates suspense and communicates to his reader the terror that the Greeks felt in the face of such a legendary menace. The monstrous part of the creature survives after the human part has been slain: just as these strange beasts defy comprehension, so too the physical embodiment of the otherworldly resists humanity's efforts to subjugate it.

Within the Roman d'Alexandre, the most striking encounter with monsters occurs shortly after the army enters India. Two wise men on a boat in the middle of a swamp indicate where the army might find a source of drinkable water, a freshwater pond in a valley not far away. There is a catch, however. The wise men advise Alexander not to tarry by the water's edge for, "Il n'a merveille en Ynde la nuit n'i viegne boivre; / Se serpent vous i

⁵⁵"La moitié bête court encore un bon moment jusqu'à ce que les Grecs, qui retrouvent alors leurs forces, l'aient abattue."

truevent, des ames serés soivre" (v. 1177-1178, III)⁵⁶. The scene prior to the Greeks' encounter with a host of India's monsters provides the reader with an important contrast and strengthens the impact of the creatures' arrival. It is one of several key moments in the text where Alexandre de Paris describes an event that is striking because of its singular normalcy. Alexander's knights, led by their treasonous guides, come across and startle a female bear and her cubs. The she-bear rushes forward and attacks the first thing she meets, in this case a hapless pack mule. Alexandre de Paris does not spare any realistic details in his description of her attempt to protect herself and her young ones: "De cele destre poe li dona tel colee / Que la senestre espaulle li a du bu sevre. / La mule chiet a terre, la ferine est versee" (v. 1194-1196, III)⁵⁷. The bear then returned to her cubs, thinking she had eliminated the threat, but a Greek knight avenges the poor mule and charges the bear, piercing its flank with his lance and killing the poor animal. This is a perfect example of the type of encounter with which Alexandre de Paris's noble audience would have been familiar; the scene with the enraged bear may have reminded his readers of their own experiences hunting. A she-bear would have been a very real monster for these wealthy landowners, and the juxtaposition of this scene with the one that follows, a scene that is filled with otherworldly, imaginary monsters, heightens the realism and believability of the more incredible of the two events.

This event may have further significance as well, if one examines the symbolism behind slaying of the female bear by the knight. Assuredly the bear attacked the knights' pack animal, and this aggression required a response. Yet the bear was not acting without provocation. Indeed, she was worried about the threat to the safety of her young ones that the

⁵⁶"Toutes les merveilles de l'Inde viennent y boire la nuit. / Si les serpents vous trouvent, vous y perdrez la vie!"

⁵⁷"De la patte droite lui donne un tel coup / qu'elle lui arrache du corps l'épaule gauche. / La mule s'écroule à terre, renversant sa farine."

approaching Macedonian soldiers represented. It is difficult to distinguish right from wrong, and, the reader does not really know how to react to this contradictory event. Essentially though, the knight killed an innocent animal, and this thoughtless action would unleash terrible consequences on them all. The knight mindlessly kills an innocent bear, just as Alexander rushes blindly headlong into a realm he cannot hope to ever fully understand. Just as his follower violated nature's tranquility with a simple sword stroke, so too does Alexander seek to upset the balance of nature and creation established by the heavens in his quest to dominate India. The Greek knight responsible for killing the she-bear unwittingly triggers a calamity, for as she dies she lets loose a terrible cry of agony that awakens the host of India's strange and awe-inspiring creatures. It may in fact be divine vengeance for the killing of the bear, This mournful sound is all the more powerful because it resounds in the midst of a stanza dominated by silence. No dialogue or sounds precede the event. India's animals, alerted by the dying bear, emerge from the shadows following this incident, and a struggle ensues. It is interesting to note that at the end of the passage describing Alexander's nightmarish encounter with wave after wave of unusual beasts, another loud noise pierces the silence. He has his army blow the *cors* to signal their departure from their campsite, and in response, the final wave of serpents flees in fear, returning to the mountains to hide in the earth's dark places. The entire encounter with India's monsters is thus framed by these bursts of sound. Here, at the end of a long, terror-filled night, it is practically a wake up call. Daylight reestablishes its dominion, the monsters have left. It is as if the entire passage was nothing more than a transitory nightmare.

These marvelous episodes possess several functions that all serve to highlight the unique nature of Alexander's journey into the unknown: they reveal Alexander's fundamental

weaknesses with respect to traditional heroic figures, and project the entire epic into a new realm of myth that strangely blends creatures and images from the classical tradition with novel creations drawn from rumors and the apocryphal anecdotes of texts such as the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem. At the same time, Alexandre de Paris incorporates images that are reminiscent of the dramatic sequences found in the The Apocalypse of Saint John, perhaps taking inspiration from some of the most frightening *tableaux* available to Christian learned society. In the pages of the Roman there are sudden, terribly violent scenes of humans falling victim to strange beasts and vanishing into the night, as well as fleeting encounters with strange peoples that lend new meaning to the traditional medieval concepts of alterity and the *affrontement* with the Other, typically of pagan or Muslim origin. As the narration progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that these elements serve to heighten the difference between Alexander and traditional heroes, as well as to present a framework for the author's didacticism. Each of these portraits of the Orient's mysteries is rich in informative and moralizing detail. Essentially, Alexandre de Paris makes use of Alexander's travels to present his readers with a new type of heroic protagonist: his champion represents a subtle blend of humanity's inquisitive spirit and instinctive fears of the unknown, Antiquity's adventuring hero, and finally the Christian epoch's model liege lord, ever at odds with the demon world.

Incomprehension and Helplessness: Inverted Reality in an Alien Land

As soon as Alexander leaves the familiar realm of battle, virtually every encounter demonstrates his inability to effectively understand and overcome India's mysteries. After crossing the Indian desert, one of the earliest examples of this helplessness is the Greek

army's encounter with the hippopotami. They stumble upon the beasts immediately after almost succumbing to the terrible heat of the desert.

In the view of medieval man, the treacherous lands of the East were filled with mysterious creatures, rendered all the more terrifying because their likes had never been seen in Europe. It is therefore not surprising that until he enters India, Alexander encounters no such abominations. His adversaries are all human, albeit from faraway, assuredly alien lands, but they possess wholly recognizable features nonetheless. Alexander's first meeting with a true "monster" occurs shortly after his army has explored the abandoned treasure trove of Porus's palace. After unsuccessfully searching for water in the sun-baked Indian desert, they finally come upon a river. Sadly the water is undrinkable, as Alexander attests after taking a sip. He and his men continue marching along the river's banks, however, until they reach a strange island-fortress some distance from the river's banks. Giddy with overconfidence, Alexander proclaims that he will uncover the secret of the island inhabitants' livelihood. No bridge links the island to the mainland, and the inhabitants flee when they see Alexander's host, but as one might predict, given Alexander's inquisitive nature, this only piques his curiosity, and he becomes determined to glean information from the elusive natives. He decides to send 400 of his most capable knights at nightfall to capture the island folk. Following an admittedly creepy introduction, what ensues could only have inspired terror in Alexandre de Paris's readers:

Grans fu l'eaue et parfonde et li marés fu maus.
D'ambes pars de la rive fu parcreüs li rox,
Trente piés ot de haut at trois toises de gros
Et fu itant espés tous se tint a un dox;
Il n'a freté en Ynde ne chastel n'en soit clos.
Quatre cens chevaliers du mieus et des plus ox
Et qui en sa compaigne avoient meillor lox
I fait li rois entrer, les haubers en lor dox.

Onques cil n'i entra qui ne feïst que fox,
 Car unes bestes ot entre les trous repox,
 Li païsant les claiment les ypopotamox.
 Mil en issent ensamble, quis prenent par les cox,
 Mengüent lors les chars et defroissent les ox;
 Nes puet garir haubers, tant soit serrés a clox,
 Ne grans escus bouclés qui de trois cuirs soit vox
 Q'autresi nes transgloutent comme fuelle de chox. (v. 1107-1121, III)⁵⁸

Several features stand out in this passage. First of all, from the very first verse, nature takes on a completely hostile character. Plants that are normally non-threatening are gigantic in this alien country. Swamp water, typically only knee-deep, is bottomless and *infranchissable*. Further marking the alien quality of the hippopotamus's swamp, the narrator tells us that in every Indian fortified town, these enormous reeds serve as natural barriers. Even the most basic element of the scenery, such as a city wall, is strikingly unusual here; Alexandre de Paris clearly seeks to impress his readers: only someone who had actually traveled through these lands could confirm such information.

Alexandre de Paris uses this passage to create a foreboding atmosphere for his readers. The knights sent by Alexander find themselves confronted first with the physical obstacle of the river's deep, murky waters and by unnaturally tall and wide plants that obscure their vision. Keeping in mind that the men are attempting to cross the river in the dark of the night, the scene acquires an even more frightening character. As Alexandre de Paris points out, however, in this alien land, this sort of strangeness is to be expected: this type of natural wall serving man's needs can be found everywhere in India. Having thus set

⁵⁸"L'eau est large et profonde, le marais dangereux. / Sur les deux rives s'étendent de gigantesques roseaux, / de trente pieds de haut et trois toises de largeur: / leur épaisseur est telle qu'ils poussent dos à dos. / Toutes les places fortes, tous les châteaux de l'Inde ont de pareilles clôtures. / Le roi choisit quatre cents chevaliers parmi les meilleurs, les plus hardis / et les plus renommés de sa compagnie / et les fait entrer dans le marais, avec leur haubert. / Mais c'est folie que de vouloir y pénétrer, / car des bêtes se cachent dans les roseaux, / que les gens du pays appellent hippopotames. / Mille d'entre eux surgissent, attrapent les hommes par le cou, / leur brisent les os et les dévorent. / Malgré leurs hauberts aux clous serrés / et leurs grands écus à boucle à la triple couche de cuir, / ils sont engloutis comme des feuilles de chou."

the stage, what happens next is terrifying: disrupting the calm of tranquility of the scene, the hippopotami leap from out of the darkness and wreak havoc among the Macedonian knights, seizing them by the neck, crushing their bones, and then devouring them⁵⁹.

It is also important to note that Alexandre de Paris underlines the Macedonian king's choice of his very best *chevaliers* to undertake the mission. Their swift defeat at the gaping maws of the hippopotami reinforces the power of India's mysteries. Herein lies the crux of the passage's function: Alexandre de Paris is showing us that Alexander's victory is far from assured in this foreign land. In a futile gesture of rage, he orders that 100 of the 150 Indian guides accompanying him be thrown to the hippopotami. Just as the readers must have been horrified by the prospect of such a vicious creature surging up from the water, Alexander's men gaze in morbid fascination at the scene of carnage that follows: "Tout cil de l'ost les courent esgarder" (v.1141, III)⁶⁰, and this highlights one of the salient features of Alexander's trek into the wilds of the Orient: *l'émerveillement* of Western man faced with strange creatures and events beyond his ken. Their leader's own reaction mirrors this bewilderment. Alexander is *impuissant* against these creatures, and he tells his men to pack up their tents and move on.

The host's encounter with the *Dentirant*, also known as the rhinoceros⁶¹, at the end of the long passage describing the horde of monsters descending upon the watering hole is

⁵⁹This passage of the Roman is taken directly, almost word for word from the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem.

⁶⁰"Tout l'armée court les contempler."

⁶¹It is interesting to note that much like the most notorious monsters of Greek mythology or as in the example of the *Sagittaire* in the Roman de Thèbes, the rhinoceros has a proper name, *Dentirans*. This is not the first time a medieval author gives a proper name to an animal. Many of the horses in the *romans d'antiquité*, and in *chansons de geste* such as the Chanson de Guillaume, have names. The horse, vector of a knight's strength, possesses a more definite identity, and a name provides this reinforcement. To be named is to be able to operate in man's world on a more equal footing. The *Dentirant* is one of the deadliest foes Alexander's men face, and it

another good example of India's incomprehensible alterity. The beast proves to be unstoppable, because: "Qant ele voit le fu, si muert de maltalant, / Les pavellons esgarde si vait entor courant / Et vient droit as herberges par mi le fu ardant" (1362-1364, III)⁶². No one can even injure it; try though they might, with axes, lances, swords, and arrows. It kills 27 knights and 52 sergeants-at-arms before plunging into the water, after which Alexander, courageous in the face of this danger, tells his men to leave the beast to him; he will kill it with his sharp sword. He does not manage to do so though; nevertheless when the rhinoceros tries to leave the water, the Greeks cry out to herd it towards the waiting soldiers, who manage to slay it by crushing its head with hammer blows.

The king is not the one to eliminate the threat, though he does stand by his men to boost their morale. Fear holds mastery of the Greeks and the king is no exception. Alexandre de Paris writes concerning the men's reaction to the rhinoceros: "Au roi et a ses homes a molt grant paor fete" (1388, III)⁶³. It is a strange scene, because in fact the *Dentirant* is a very real animal, but medieval man had little or no knowledge of such a beast. By means of the proliferation of descriptive details, however Alexandre de Paris insists on the very real nature of the monster. When the reader is presented with such a precise image, he could never doubt that such a creature might have existed. Though swords, spears, and arrows are useless against the rhino, hammer blows are effective, and this is the means by which the soldiers rid

is interesting to consider that essentially, the combat described above strongly resembles the stylized, ritualistic, and ordered knight-to-knight struggles that permeate these epic works, more than a fight against a vicious, mindless monster. In addition, this method of naming a monstrous opponent renders it much more formidable. The implication is that there is only one such beast, and to defeat it is therefore to free the world permanently from the danger it represents.

⁶²"A la vue du feu, folle de rage, / elle regarde le camp, le contourne en courant / et vient droit sur les logis à travers le feu."

⁶³"Le roi et ses hommes ont eu grand-peur."

themselves of the menace. Once it is dead, there is a description of exactly what the rhinoceros looks like; essentially each of the giant mammal's body parts are used:

A maus et a cugiés fu Dentirans tüés,
Et puis l'ont escorchié, s'en fu li cuirs lavés,
Et veulent qu'a merveille soit par tout esgardés,
Que le poil a si bel qu'il semble estre dorés.
Li cuirs o la char blanche fu au roi presentés,
Devant son tref l'estendent sor l'erbe vert des pres;
Cent chevalier i gisent, tant par est grans et les,
Qant il geuent as tables, as eschés et as des.
Plus en vaut l'ossemente de quatorze cités;
Dieus ne fist chevalier, tant soit el cors navrés,
S'il en avoit beü ne fust sempres sanés
Ne ja puis en tout l'an n'avroit mal en ses les.
De ce fu Alixandres molt malement menés
Que les os de la beste ont en l'eaue getés. (v.1398-1411, III)⁶⁴

The frightening animal is immune to those deadly weapons one might traditionally use for ridding the earth of a monster. Alexander's followers must resort to brute strength to eliminate the rhinoceros, and the reference to hammer blows effectively communicates the intensity of their effort. The next few verses open up an entirely new dimension to the narrative. With a remarkable attention to detail, Alexandre de Paris describes how the different parts of *Dentirant* may be used. It is a beast that undeniably belongs to the realm of *le merveilleux*, for once they succeed in killing it, Alexander's soldiers stare at the rhinoceros's skin in amazement. References to exoticism and wealth permeate this passage as well: the beast's fur is so beautiful that it almost seems to be made of gold, and it is so large that 100 knights could easily be seated upon it. This is surely an example of epic

⁶⁴"C'est à coups de maillet et de cagnée que l'on a tué Dentirant, / avnat de l'écorcher et d'en laver le cuir. / Tous l'examinent avec émerveillement: / la fourrure est si belle qu'elle semble dorée. / Le cuir et la chair blanche sont présentés au roi, / La peau est si large que cent chevaliers peuvent s'y allonger pour jouer aux dames, aux échecs ou aux dés. / Le breuvage préparé avec les os vaut plus que quatorze cités, / car tout chevalier, si grièvement blessé soit-il, / est aussitôt guéri, s'il en boit, / et protégé de tout mal pendant un an. / Mais le malheur voulut pour Alexandre / que l'on jetât les os de la bête dans l'étang."

exaggeration, but by mixing this type of unbelievable element with other, more realistic details, Alexandre de Paris imbues his text with an unsettling atmosphere of realism.⁶⁵

These two examples, that of the hippopotami and the rhinoceros, aptly reveal to what extent Alexander and his followers are incapable of efficiently dealing with the beasts they encounter. The normal means of winning conflicts are ineffectual here. The bravest of his knights are powerless against the hippopotami in the swamp, and overcoming the *Dentirant* requires prodigious efforts- Alexander himself is helpless in the face of the beast. Alexandre de Paris portrays these encounters with intense realism, citing specific numbers of soldiers and wounded, describing the *Dentirant* in rich detail, and most importantly, showing that the king's powerful commitment to adventure is matched drop for drop by the strength of those that oppose him. These passages, potentially reminiscent of the epic battles Heracles fought against the Nemean lion or the Erymanthian boar, reveal that though Alexander tries to rival the deeds of his mythical forebears, India's unpredictable, alien nature thwarts his attempts and leaves him helpless. The opacity of these meetings is striking as well. Alexandre de Paris creates a powerful aura of mystery as he describes each of these monsters. On the one hand this murkiness results from the fact that the narrator introduces such a great number of unusual animals within a short period of time, and on the other, it is because they appear and disappear so quickly that one has no time to understand what is taking place before they vanish once again. At times though, Alexandre de Paris focuses his readers' attention on one creature and describes it in much greater detail, as if, against the blurry backdrop of a sea of confusion and chaos, several episodes stand out sharply contrasted, with intensity and

⁶⁵Furthermore, it is tragic to think that, had Alexander only drunk the potion made from the bones of the rhinoceros, he would have survived the deadly poison that the traitors will employ for his undoing in Babylon. This is also an indication, however of the young king's tragic mortality. A God would have no need of exotic draughts to ensure his survival.

vividness. They have ventured into a wholly alien realm, where the flow of the images is just as violent as the scenes themselves.

Sudden Violence and Nightmare images: Glimpses of the apocalypse

India's creatures strike without warning and the encounters are more violent than those with any human adversary the Greeks have encountered up until then. What is fascinating in the passage describing the army's nocturnal struggle with horde after horde of strange beasts is that after such an intense encounter, the reader is still left with incomplete knowledge of what sort of creature he has just witnessed. As Alexander plunges deeper into unexplored territory, the unfathomability of the unknown remains the dominant lasting impression in the readers' minds. These unusual animals surge forth from out of the darkness, and vanish just as quickly as they appear.

Alexandre de Paris's desired effect in his lengthy description of the mysterious ambush by India's bizarre denizens is to inspire fear and awe. Thus, just as the Macedonian knights are lost in unfamiliar territory, so too are those who seek to follow the unusual tale. These fearsome encounters are *déroutants* on several levels. On the one hand, with their unremitting assault, India's monsters physically throw Alexander's men from their projected course, but on the other, they also drive the Western adventurers away from their comforting conception of God's ordered universe. It is as if these creatures operate with intelligence and in concert, like men. Following the first battle with India's monsters, Licanor asks Alexander if the army will make camp for the night; gone is the young king's typical bravado. Fear is certainly present in his one-line response, "Ja n'en iert pris confors." (v.1217, III)⁶⁶. Thus, at the onset of nightfall, the Macedonian host heads out, hoping to leave a nightmarish scene

⁶⁶"Nous ne nous reposerons pas!"

behind it, but once again a foolish mistake, a terrifically loud trumpet call awakens India's mysterious inhabitants and the men must fight for their lives. *Chats huant, guivres*, and *griffons* track the Greek soldiers as they try to depart the valley, and they inflict a terrible toll on the helpless men. The danger is all the greater in the dark of the night. Alexandre de Paris heightens the aura of impending peril: "Cil qui ist hors de route molt par i fait que sos, / De cent pars est saisis et trainés es cros" (v. 1226-1227, III)⁶⁷. Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas comments on the nature of this other-worldly horde:

Ces animaux donnent une image terrifiante de la démesure et de la confusion qui, imagine-t-on, ont précédé la création divine. Le plus souvent indissociables de la nuit, moment privilégié pour le déchaînement des puissances du chaos, et presque toujours présentés au pluriel, ils forment un "spectacle d'une puissante intensité hallucinatoire", qui disparaît à l'aube comme par enchantement. (446)

In this lost mountain valley, the world is tipped on its axis. The suits of armor, the shields, and the helmets that might have protected the knights in a fight with a human enemy are quite useless.

Shocking images of blood and violence recur in these passages. Bodies are torn apart by harsh, rending claws, savaged corpses dragged off to be devoured in dark caves, blood covering the ground draws fearsome predators, wounded men lie on stretchers, and finally the fallen are burned: it is an oppressively grim scene. Wise Ptolemy leads the men down an old, abandoned trail, attempting to save them from their otherworldly foes, while Clin takes up the rear, where: "La vermine les pince qui derriere as dos bruit" (v. 1241, III)⁶⁸. Clin must encourage his men and prevent them from fleeing, so great is their terror. His incentive: Alexander, their liege, will never forgive them if they do not hold fast. Sensing the terror and

⁶⁷"Le fou qui se risqué de s'écarter de la troupe / est de cent côtés agrippé et traîné dans les grottes."

⁶⁸"Les reptiles les piquent et sifflent dans leur dos."

necessity of Alexander's men, the reader is filled with fear and anguish as well. The scene belongs to the realm of nightmares and hallucinations, where half-glimpsed, demonic adversaries hide in the dark places of the mind, stealthily waiting for the opportune moment to strike, and rend with sharp talons.

When the frightened men emerge from the gorge into open fields, owls and *chahuants* savage them from behind and from overhead. Out in the open, away from the suffocating danger of the canyon, death strikes from above. Not only do these animals pick off soldiers from the army's ranks, but the horses are their prey as well. Here again, a minor detail serves to heighten the realism of the scene. Terror holds dominion over the souls of the fleeing Greeks. Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas aptly describes the nature of the danger facing Alexander:

Deux images illustrent l'avidité destructrice de ces machines à tuer dont rien ne peut réfréner la violence instinctive: celle d'une gueule qui dévore et celle de serres qui emportent. Avec la représentation d'une disparition définitive dans leurs bouches infernales, on est loin du thème initiatique du monstre avaleur qui régénère sa proie. Le bestiaire engloutit à jamais certains soldats pour que d'autres, et surtout Alexandre, subissent l'épreuve de la peur et la sensation d'une complète impuissance. (447)

Men vanishing into the impenetrable night, hydra-like regenerating enemies, the persistent bewilderment of our hero and his followers: the chaotic scene Alexandre de Paris creates in this section plunges his readers into nightmarish waters, and they struggle to reach the surface and understand what is taking place just as much as the harried Greeks. The narration once again underlines the *impuissance* of Alexander and his followers in their struggles with India's inhabitants. In the face of an insurmountable, unpredictable menace, the rapid succession of threats communicates humanity's desperation in a world beyond their

ken⁶⁹; the chaotic nature of the entire account parallels the ungodly confusion of Satan's realm. Alexander's men have no respite from such unrelenting assaults against their sanity. Wave after wave of foes wash over the Greeks, and the heart's courage and steadfastness seem to be the only remedy. Alexandre de Paris reminds us of this: "Li home Alixandre ne sont mie garcon" (v. 1315, III)⁷⁰. Like phantoms, the white lions are formidable foes; at the cost of their lives, the Macedonians beat them back, but they cannot prevent them from drinking at the water's edge. Just as swiftly as they came, they race back off into the darkness.

One more example will serve to illustrate the nightmarish quality of Alexander's wanderings in through the mysterious Indian landscapes. Shortly after they pass the statues of Artu and Liber, Alexander and his followers find themselves in a strange valley. Intrigued, they descend into the beautifully verdant gorge, fleeing a sudden and mysterious storm. Yet as with everything else in India, appearances are deceiving, and before long the king and his men realize they are trapped. They have entered a strange land, a circular basin where even the wisest man would not be able to find a way out. The Greeks mill around aimlessly in the confines of the vale, but do not seem to be able to make any progress in any direction. The surrounding mountains are high and unclimbable that it is as if the men are in a trap from which there is no hope of escaping. Realizing their plight, Alexander decides to explore the dell on his own, in the hope of unraveling the mystery. Astride Bucephalus, he combs the

⁶⁹Although this passage is filled with fear-inspiring components, it is also not altogether without humor. Alexander wants to protect Bucephalus from the diving *chats-huants*, so he asks his *maréchal des écuries* to bring him a large royal court to protect his steed. The image is quite comical, but it also serves to underline once again the strength of the bond between Alexander and his horse: "Qant il li ont lacié as boutons du poitral, / N'en parut chiés ne queue ne li esperonal" (v. 1273-1274, III).

⁷⁰"Les hommes d'Alexandre ne sont pas des lâches."

entire vale, seeking an exit; finally he comes upon a stone on which is scrawled a foreboding message: "Se tuit cil du mont s'estoient el val mis, / Por trestout l'or du siecle n'en istroit uns seus vis / Se uns hom de son gré n'i remaint a tous dis" (2543-45, III)⁷¹. Alexander, realizing that without his sacrifice, all of his followers run the risk of perishing in that place, declares that he will stay behind. His men cry out in despair, knowing that without his leadership, their unity will not last long⁷². The events that take place once the king finds himself alone in the valley are truly remarkable. Alexandre de Paris paints an image of a cataclysm rivaling the scenes in Saint John's Apocalypse. The mountains surrounding the vale begin to shake, the earth trembles, and lightning begins to flash. The sun disappears, and the sky comes alive with fire and flashes of blinding light, and then a horde of creatures assaults the solitary king, as if the gods, furious with his insolence seek to teach him a lesson:

Ainc Dieus ne fist meruelle dont li puest sovenir,
 Fiére, laide et hideuse, que on doie cremir,
 Dont ne voie entor soi grans batailles tenir:
 Les dragons fu getans qui font l'erbe bruïr
 Et grans serpens volans qui font l'air escroissir
 Et maufés rechingnans qui veulent assaillir
 Et font as cros de fer samblant de lui saisir. (v. 2748-54, III)⁷³

Alexander fights for his life against this terrifying host, while his faithful steed Bucephalus cowers in fear beside him, hiding his head under the king's cloak.

⁷¹"Si le monde entier était enfermé dans la vallée, / pas un seul n'en sortirait vivant, pour tout l'or de la terre, / à moins qu'un homme n'accepte, de son plein gré, d'y rester à jamais."

⁷²What follows is essentially a bold foreshadowing of what will transpire in Branch IV, when Alexander permanently abandons his men, and dies. Emenidus launches into a long *planctus*, bemoaning the fate of those whom Alexander will leave behind if he chooses to remain in the lost valley, and the description of Alexander himself, stricken with fear akin to the terror of impending death is quite telling: "La paor quil destraint li change le viaire, / Car qui de mort se crient bien est drois qu'il i paire, / Tous en est enpalis car il ne set que faire" (v. 2716-18, III).

⁷³"Toutes les merveilles de la Création, / toutes les horreurs les plus redoutables, / il les voit toutes autour de lui pour l'attaquer: / les dragons dont le souffle enflammé brûle l'herbe, / les grands serpents dont le vol fait siffler l'air, / les démons grimaçants qui veulent l'assaillir / et cherchent à le saisir de leurs crochets de fer."

At no point does the narrator intervene within this passage to indicate the source of these frightening earthquakes and meteorological events. The reader knows as little as the tale's protagonist about what might be causing such an upheaval, and as a result, the text is firmly within the realm of the fear-generating other-worldly. After the battle, he explores the surrounding area. Deep in a cave on top of a mountain he discovers a terrible demon imprisoned beneath a rock. The demon offers to show the king the way out of the valley, if only Alexander will free him. Fear and caution overpower the brazen courage one might expect here from our hero, and only his quick wits save him: he insists that the fell creature first indicate the way out before freeing him. The demon tries to trick Alexander by indicating the wrong way, but the king verifies the answer and discovers the *fausse piste*. At this point the demon relents, lauding Alexander's perspicacity, and tells him to read the inscription on a door within the grotto that will indicate the way to exit the lost valley.

What follows is quite strange: once he confirms that the demon has told him the truth, Alexander honors their agreement and frees the demon, who eagerly leaps from his prison, letting out two blood-curdling cries: "Li diables saut sus si a jeté deus cris; / El siecle n'a cel home, s'il eüst oïis, / Ne cuidast tout por voir ester mors ou traïs" (v. 2864-66, III)⁷⁴. It is perhaps quite significant that just after indicating that any man of this world would be overcome by fear upon hearing the demon's cries, Alexandre de Paris writes that even the young king is filled with fear and almost collapses: he is fundamentally not that different from the common man.

In this episode it is as if the chaos of God's final judgment temporarily engulfs the text, and our hero stands on the precipice between life and death. The mournful lamentations

⁷⁴"Le diable bondit dehors, en poussant deux cris: / tout mortel, en les entendant, aurait cru sa dernière heure venue."

of his men at what they perceive to be their king's demise, coupled with Alexander's own expressed fears that his followers will not remain united if he dies and his empire will crumble are ominous predictions of what takes place at the end of the Roman. His act of freeing the demon also stands in defiance of the divine will. As a hero, striving to carve his place in among the ranks of immortals, this type of bold deed might be a powerful step in establishing a legacy of fearlessness. The motivations behind the king's action, though, remain mysterious. It is difficult to understand why he would honor a pact with a demon, one who, according to Alexandre de Paris, "cuidoit faire tout le mont perillier" (v. 2814, III)⁷⁵ just tried to trick him. His behavior here is cryptic, but rather than indicating a propensity for heroic inventiveness, his deed appears to be driven more by necessity than by strength of will; once again it is indicative of his inability to master the mysteries of the lands beyond the *bornes Artu*. Just as there is no explanation for the sudden appearance of hordes of marvelous creatures, and the cataclysmic earth tremors and shattering of the heavens, the explanation for the demon's escape will elude us as well, and contribute to the creation of a new realm of myth where mystery and unpredictably are the principal forces at work.

It is not too far-fetched to draw a parallel between the violence of the scenes described here and the nightmarish landscapes depicted in the The Apocalypse. If on no other level, the chaotic dimension of the nocturnal encounter with these creatures certainly calls to mind the spiraling disorder of the end of the world, and indeed, keeping in mind that medieval man considered India to be the antechamber of the earthy Paradise, the similitude is no coincidence. As he edges closer and closer to the physical boundaries of the known world and to the limits of human knowledge, the danger becomes more and more pervasive.

⁷⁵"Voulait mettre le monde entier en péril"

Angered by his insolence, the heavenly kingdom seeks to drive him away: access to the magical garden is strictly forbidden to all those who are not worthy. It is just one more indication that Alexander's quest is in direct defiance of the divine will. Alexandre de Paris's message is clear: Alexander is not made of the same mettle as a Heracles, who, for the twelfth labor, ventured unscathed into and out of the underworld and captured with his bare hands Cerberos, Pluto's vicious three-headed, dragon-tailed dog.

A Mythical Backdrop with a Twist

On numerous levels, India truly represents an inversion of medieval man's conception of Heaven's natural order. Here even the smallest of God's creatures is huge and capable of rending flesh. Yet the India as Alexandre de Paris describes it is also a decisive transformation of the mythological realms of classical antiquity.

Giant serpents would have been one of the creatures with which medieval readers certainly would have had some level of familiarity from reading other courtly narratives or Classical texts. Yet even these monsters are unique in India, because, as Alexandre de Paris points out, "Onques en nule terre si grans ne fu veüe" (v. 1335, III)⁷⁶. These titanic lizards, appearing even larger by contrast with the smaller ones that accompany them, and driven by thirst, hurl themselves at the fires set by the Greeks as they beat a hasty retreat from the watering-hole. It is a striking image, and Alexandre de Paris follows it with a scene of dramatic violence: the Greek knights "dont la rive est vestue" (v. 1339, III)⁷⁷ slay all but one of the beasts that escape the flames by beating them to death with hammer blows. Once again

⁷⁶"Les plus grands qu'on ait jamais vus en aucune terre."

⁷⁷"Qui étaient si nombreux qu'ils couvraient la rive."

India escapes Alexander's complete dominion, and the biggest reptiles, "Qui iert longe et lee et grosse et estendue, / Qui par aus ne pot ester tüee ne vaincue" (v. 1342-1343, III)⁷⁸.

This scene in particular highlights another of Alexandre de Paris's critical objectives. Such dragons or giant reptiles can be found in some of the core Classical texts with which Alexandre de Paris was undoubtedly familiar. To name just a handful of Classical wyms: the serpent guardian of the temple at Delphi, Python, the immortal dragon guardian of the apples of the Hesperides, or even the sea serpent Perseus killed in order to free Andromeda. Yet these infamous dragon tales all share a common denominator. In each case, a solitary hero is responsible for their undoing. In the Roman d'Alexandre however, this type of encounter no longer allows a heroic protagonist to stand out from the common soldier. The danger simply assumes too many different shapes- its nature is distinctly manifold- and as a result the expected myth-generating pattern does not function. Here no one individual is capable of acting as savior, of undoing chaos's representative and restoring order to the community. For one thing, many of India's creatures act as a horde. The defeat of one wave of animals simply spawns another onslaught, and in the end it merely becomes a struggle for survival. The hosts of serpents behave just like battalions of soldiers when they confront the Greek army. This is how Alexandre de Paris markedly transforms the mythical encounter. Alexander never struggles one-on-one with a monster. Thus, if his men always deal with a menace as a group, it is difficult to envisage how Alexander could ever possibly assume the role of the sacrificial victim, drawing the violence to himself, and thereby attain the heroic stature required before any attempt at apotheosis.

⁷⁸"Qui sont si longs, si larges et gros / qu'on ne saurait les tuer ni les vaincre."

One of the most singular episodes in the whole work, that of the cave of Arthur and Liber⁷⁹, reveals exactly how distant Alexander's story truly is from the realm of classical myth. After Alexander's army finds the three wondrous fountains of immortality, rejuvenation, and miraculous healing, they venture into the burning deserts of inhospitable India. The mysterious wrath of the gods strikes them repeatedly in the form of devastating storms, fire from the heavens, and blinding snowfall, and then they emerge in a hidden valley. Here, after dinner at camp, the men decide to wander and explore. They come upon a strange cave: "Desous une grant roche truevent un lieu cavé / Ou Artus et Libers avoient conversé" (v, 3221-3222, III)⁸⁰. Supposedly the cave is cursed, but Alexander refuses to believe the legend, and he sends four men into the grotto to uncover its secrets. Alexandre de Paris offers no explanation for what ensues: "Entrer i fist quatre homes qui furent armé, / Au tierc jor furent mort tout quatre hors trové, / En travers l'un sor l'autre a la terre geté" (v. 3229-3231, III)⁸¹. The Macedonian king's confusion mirrors the readers' own:

Alixandres les voit, longement a pensé;
 Por ce qu'il n'i pert caus ne il ne sont navré,
 N'en pot onques savoir li rois la verité
 Comment il ierent mort et iluec aporté. (v. 3232-3235, III)⁸²

He then asks the two old Indian guides who are accompanying them for an explanation of how these deaths came about. They provide no satisfactory elucidation of the mystery:

Les viellars yndiens, qui du païs sont né

⁷⁹The text refers here to the stones supposedly placed by Heracles to denote the furthest extent of his journeys in the Orient. The author has confused Heracles with King Arthur.

⁸⁰"[Ils] découvrent au pied d'un grand rocher une grotte / où Arthur et Liber avaient séjourné;"

⁸¹"Il fit entrer dans la grotte quatre hommes bien armés, / mais trois jours après les retrouva morts tous les quatre, / dehors jetés l'un sur l'autre sur le sol."

⁸²"Alexandre les considère longuement, songeur: / ils ne portent ni la moindre trace de coup ou de blessure / et le roi ne peut donc deviner / comment ils sont morts et et venus jusqu'ici."

Et avoient grant piece el païs conversé,
 A fait li rois venir si lor a demandé,
 L'un des deus avant l'autre a forment conjuré,
 Que de cele mervelle qui l'a si effréé
 Li dient anbedui toute la verité:
 S'en la cave a fantosme, serpent ne enferté
 Qui si soutainement a cest lieu deserté.
 Li dui viellart respondent, qui sont de grant aé,
 Que Artus et Libers par lor grant deïté
 Entoschierent le lieu si l'ont enfantomé. (v. 3236-3243, III)⁸³

Beyond the wise men's indication that the place is cursed or haunted, the exact nature of the enchantment will forever remain a mystery. This cave was purportedly visited by two mythological heroic figures, and yet Alexander, who seeks to rival their accomplishments, is completely incapable of piercing the mystery surrounding it. The world in which Alexandre de Paris's protagonist operates is quite different from the world of myth as it once was. Yet at the same time, a new type of storytelling emerges out of this chilling tale of the disturbing disappearance of Alexander's men. This is the setting that the author chooses to establish for his protagonist; India, ante-chamber of Paradise, kingdom of immeasurable riches and sudden violence, den of wild misshapen creatures but also heavenly beauty, and final frontier even for the classical gods' explorations, defiantly rejects all attempts at comprehension. The inclusion of well-known mythological names such as Liber (Dionysus) and Artu (King Arthur- but it should actually be Heracles) lends credibility and authority to Alexandre de Paris's work, and with these credentials established, our author is at liberty to create a new world, a subtle blend of Antiquity's myth and India's unfathomable mysteries.

⁸³"Le roi fait venir pour les interroger / les vieux Indiens natifs du pays, / où ils ont longtemps séjourné. / Il les conjure l'un après l'autre / de lui dire toute la verité sur cette mervelle qui l'a effrayé: / qu'y a-t-il dans la grotte, enchantement, serpent, maléfice, / qui fasse de ce lieu un désert? / Les deux vieillards de grand âge répondent / qu'Arthur et Liber, par leur pouvoir divin, / ont empoisonné le lieu et l'ont enchanté."

One final key inclusion of classical mythological references bears commentary. After capturing Babylon, one of the emir's men, Samson, reminds Alexander that, although much of the world has capitulated to his might, one kingdom remains unconquered, and it will not be easy-going. The Amazons, the tribe of warrior women thwarted by Heracles in his ninth labor, live in a wild country completely surrounded by a river. They were the very last people that Alexander must confront, and since his opponents become progressively more and more challenging the further he plunges into unknown India, then these women should represent the greatest challenge of all, and indeed, at least initially, Alexander's scouts communicate that impression. Not only are the Amazons formidable warriors, but they also belong firmly within the realm of the *merveilleux*. Once a year, a group of knights arrives and sleep with them. If, after this night, the women give birth to a baby boy, they leave the child with the father, while any baby girls remain among the Amazons to become just as warlike as their mothers. In a sense, by going to encounter the Amazons, Alexander has truly gone as far as possible in his journey of discovery. The society of these women represents the inverse of his own: roles are reversed, power lies in the hands of the Amazon queen, and even more strangely, Alexander will not even need force of arms to achieve victory here. Passion proves the mightier weapon: the two Amazon emissaries, Floré and Beauté, fall in love with Clin and Aristé, two marriages ensue, and the queen, frightened by a dream sequence, surrenders her realm to the conquering Macedonian. She is a mirror image of Alexander: just before Alexander began his campaign, he had a dream which revealed his destiny, and in a similar manner, the queen dreams that an eagle drove a female peacock and her chicks into a kitchen where she fell down, overcome and subjugated. The queen's steed is just as unusual as famous Bucephalus, too: "Il est uns grans poisons en cele Rouge Mer, / Ce est uns chevaus

pois, ainsi l'oï nomer; / Le cheval la roïne sor coi aloit joster / Engendra en une yeve, si com l'oï conter" (v. 7699-702, III)⁸⁴. Where the love element has been noticeably absent from the tale up until this point, save for a brief interlude with Queen Candace, it appears here to be a decisive force with which to be reckoned. On the surface Alexander conquers the Amazons, but in reality is it really his triumph or is it not the distinctly female strength- indomitable seductive energy- that dominates? The male aspect dimension, symbolized by violent energy, holds no power here. What's more, in a further complication, the structure of the text itself mirrors this male-female power inversion, Alexandre de Paris shifting his narration from blood-soaked *chanson de geste* to peaceful *pastorale*. The flirtatious interactions of Clin, Aristé, Floré, and Beauté supplant the traditional scenes of combat: "Or chevalchent ensamble tuit quatre belement, / Li uns parole a l'autre d'amor et de jovent" (v. 7537-38, III)⁸⁵. When Alexander and the Queen allow the two couples to be wed, the choice of words in the exchange between Aristé and Clin is telling: "<<Fait avons riche proie, C'or est vostre Biautés et Florés si rest mois>>" (v.7642-43, III)⁸⁶. The last of the Macedonian king's victories is a bloodless one; does this also foretell the end of his savage streak of conquests?

In any case, the Amazon episode is yet another example of our author's efforts to adapt a tale from classical myth to his purposes. The diplomatic, flirtatious interaction of Alexander's men with the Amazons is diametrically opposed to Heracles's swift defeat of Hippolyte, the warrior queen, and her followers. Alexander's strength, a steamroller's conquering might evidenced in the numerous battle sequences in the previous Branches, is

⁸⁴"On trouve un grand poisson dans la mer Rouge, / qu'on appelle cheval-poisson, à ce que l'on m'a dit, / était né de cet animal et d'une jument."

⁸⁵"Tous quatre chevauchent ensemble, tout heureux, / parlant gaiement d'amour et de plaisir."

⁸⁶"Quelle riche conquête nous avons faite, se disent les chevaliers, / en gagnant Beauté et Floré! "

fundamentally defused by the conflict's peaceful resolution. Where a mythical hero triumphed through force of arms, Alexander's great might proved completely superfluous⁸⁷.

Untouchable Beauty

The most frightening of the reptiles Alexander encounters in India are undoubtedly the crested serpents, and Alexandre de Paris treats us to a magnificent description, worthy of the most colorful bestiary:

Des crués de la montaigne de la voisineté
Enprés la mienuit vinrent serpent cresté,
Si grant comme colombes, qui se sont devalé.
De deus chiés ou de trois sont li pluisor armé;
Li un sont pers et ynde et li autre doré,
De blanc et de vermel menüement listé;
Li oel lor reflamboient, qui sont envenimé. (v. 1345-1351, III)⁸⁸

These snakes surge up from the mountain valleys in the darkest hour of the night; the description itself contains powerful contrastive elements. For instance, the shimmering, multi-headed serpents stand out starkly against the backdrop of pitch black night, and their eyes, burning like those of the Roman de Troie's Sagittaire, could certainly send shivers down the spines of the bravest of readers. It is an indication that in India bright colors and gold do not necessarily connote wealth and alluring exoticism. Here the reflective, shimmering colors bespeak danger. To let oneself be drawn in by their brightness is to walk blindly into mortal peril. In the lands to the east of Greece, Alexander's knights rarely engage

⁸⁷The Amazons are present in two other *romans d'antiquité* as well, the Roman de Troie and the Roman d'Eneas, and this passage may be an attempt on the part of Alexandre de Paris to rival the literary deeds of his contemporaries. It is interesting to note that in both of the other texts, the Amazons clash violently with the men they encounter, while here, they serve to develop a minor love interest. Whereas they appear as strong fighters in the Roman d'Eneas and the Roman de Troie, in the Roman d'Alexandre their physical power is eclipsed by their seductive capacities. Once again, traditional myth finds a new permutation in the Indian adventure.

⁸⁸"Des creux de la montagne voisine / vinrent après minuit des serpents à crête / grands comme des colonnes, qui ont dévalé. / La plupart sont pourvus de deux ou trois têtes; / striés de blanc et de vermeil. / Leurs yeux pleins de venin flamboient."

in simple, straightforward struggles. Each enemy presents the Greeks with several, often paradoxical features: the *serpents à crêtes* are deadly but beautiful, as are the Amazons mentioned above.

Following Alexander's solitary adventure in the *Val Périlleux*, the army's guide leads the men to the coast where they discover the mysterious *filles de l'eau*, hiding within the grasses and the sand dunes on the beach. Alexandre de Paris writes that no one knows from where they originate, but their beauty is indescribable. They live in the water like fish, and they are entirely naked. Some aspects of their nature are reminiscent of passages from the *bestiaires*: "Li chevel lor luisoient com pene de paon" (v. 2907)⁸⁹. When the knights, completely thunderstruck by their beauty, try to approach the *filles de l'eau*, the women flee; but in small bands, they bring the men into the water where they embrace the Greeks and drag the helpless soldiers down into the water's depths to then drown them. Of the group of men that enter the water, only four come back alive, and still Alexander's soldiers are drawn to the water's edge. Alexander forbids them from approaching these deadly women, and this command is all that saves them from certain perdition.

The episode of the *filles de l'eau* naturally brings to mind the sirens or mermaids of classical myth. Lost, and struggling to find his way home across treacherous and unknown seas, crafty Odysseus must sail past the sirens' rock and resist their deadly yet beautiful song. Alexander is lost as well: he knows not where his journey will take him, but he actively courts danger over the course of his travels. He leads his men across desert wastes, past terrifying grottos, into inhospitable jungles, and over foreboding mountain peaks. He, like Odysseus resists temptation while his men fall prey to the deadly ministrations of the beautiful water nymphs.

⁸⁹"Leur chevelure brille comme les plumes du paon."

Immediately following the attack of a group of hairy and frightening *Ichthyophages*, Alexander's men enter the lush forest and encounter the *filles-fleurs*. These women are in many ways the opposite of the ocean's predatory *filles de l'eau*. They too are beautiful and seductive, but their caresses are far from deadly. Rather, the power of their beauty is such that the Macedonian soldiers would rather linger in their sweet embraces than continue on their journey.

Where Alexandre de Paris claims concerning the *filles de l'eau*, "Que de la biauté d'eles ne sai dire raison" (v. 2910, III), for the *filles-fleurs* he is capable of finding words, and he paints a magnificent portrait. In marked contrast to the ethereal, unholy attractiveness of the water sprites, the beauty of the *filles-fleurs* is anchored in the flesh, in a tangible reality. Alexander's exclamation serves as the basis for our description. He asks his awestricken men: "Veïstes mais si beles en trestous vos aés?... / Bien sont faites de cors, grailles par les costés, / Mameles ont petites et les flans bien mollés" (v. 3372-3381, III)⁹⁰. Alexander himself is completely seduced by one of these flower women, "La char ot blanche et tenre comme noif sor gelee" (v. 3488, III)⁹¹. He wants to take her with him, away from the garden, but as soon as she leaves the shade of the forest's trees, she faints four times in a row, stricken with terror. If the *filles-fleurs* leave the sanctity of their garden they die immediately. Such is the nature of India's wonders. The reader, like Alexander, is continually stymied by the fleeting quality of these marvels. When the king asks his guides how these magical women manage to maintain their eternal youth and beauty, they explain to him that the *filles-fleurs* go underground when winter comes and resurface in the summer, in the form of white flowers.

⁹⁰"Avez-vous jamais vu d'aussi belles femmes de toute votre vie? /... / Elles ont le corps bien fait, la taille fine, / les seins menus et les flancs arrondis." (3488, III)

⁹¹"Sa peau était plus blanche et tendre que la neige." (3488, III)

Though Alexander's men would like to stay with these beautiful women in the forest, their king threatens them with death if they remain behind.

This encounter illustrates a key defining feature of Alexander's journey of discovery. India is most certainly not what it appears to be, and it is completely impossible to possess or conquer. The most beautiful of things is deadly in the Indian wilds. Herein lies one of the essential characteristics of this near-heavenly realm: it is utterly inaccessible to mortals. In this respect, the beauty of the earthly paradise mirrors the splendor of Eden as imagined by medieval man. In many ways, the deadly *filles de l'eau* are representative of India itself. There is an alluring realm, filled with marvels, unimaginable riches, precious stones, and even wondrous possibilities in the form of magical fountains imbued with miraculous properties that thwart the rules that bind mortals to the earth, but in the end, as Alexandre de Paris repeatedly points out, such divine beauty will forever remain inaccessible to Alexander and his mesmerized followers.

Concluding Thoughts

Until Alexander and his army arrive in India, unusual phenomena are notably absent from their journey. The first strange incident occurs when the army leaves the kingdoms of Bile and Lutis, immediately after Alexander recovers from a strange sickness induced by swimming in the frigid water of a river near the *Roche Orgueilleuse*. In fact, this sickness marks the beginning of the king's *voyage initiatique* across the wild lands of the East. It is therefore no surprise that the king's journey begins with a freezing cold bath in a river, a symbol of change and transformation. The description of how Alexander is affected is striking, indeed:

Dedesus le rivage est li rois descendus,
Por le chaut s'est en l'eaue trestous armés ferus.

De la froidor de l'eue, dont clers estoit li rus,
Et du chaut du soleil qui sors aus est cheüs
Li est li sans el cors torblés et commeüs,
La parole li faut et li rois devint mus;
Or iert molt grans damages se ensi est perdus.
La grant froidor de l'eau qui sordoit de fontaine
Et l'ardor du soleil qui au flunles amaine
A si souspris le roi que sor lui nen a vaine
Qui de sanc seellé ne soit souronde et plaine ;
La parole li faut et li rois pert l'alaine. (v. 2392-2404, I)⁹²

This great king, who as the tale evolves, will strive to leave an indelible mark on the earth in the manner of a Heracles or Dionysus, loses his capacity to speak and breathe, as the cold water and burning sunshine strike him. It is significant that Alexandre de Paris underlines three times the king's loss of speech. Such a hero seeks to leave his mark somehow in order to attain the much sought after realm of the gods, but if he cannot communicate, he becomes like the author who cannot recount a tale, for in many ways, just as the narrator guides the readers on the king's adventure, so too will the king act as a guide as they enter India's unknown lands. The foundation of a legend is often the spoken word, and Alexander's sudden muteness and brush with death just when he is on the verge of plunging into a realm of repeated hero-building challenges reveals just how uncertain the outcome of his quest to enter the ranks of mythical champions will be.

Other elements of this passage are telling as well. Just as he will deal with the dangers facing him in the Orient usually by force of arms, the king enters the crystal clear waters of the river bearing his arms and armor. Alexandre de Paris is careful to point out that the water is glacially clear, deceptively inviting, and capable of offering a clear vision of future events.

⁹²"Le roi descend sur le ravage, il a si chaud / qu'il se plonge dans l'eau tout armé. / Mais l'eau aux flots clairs est si froide, / et le soleil, qui écrase les hommes, si brûlant / que le roi est frappé d'un coup de sang: / la parole lui manque, il devient muet. / Ce sera une grande perte, s'il périt ainsi! / Le froid glacé de l'eau qui provient des fontaines, / après l'ardeur du soleil qui pousse les hommes vers le fleuve, / a atteint le roi si durement / que tout son sang s'est glacé dans ses veines: / la parole lui manque, il perd le souffle."

This brush with death also foreshadows two of the king's later adventures in India, his descent into the ocean's depths and his flight in a griffon-drawn chariot: the water in which he bathes, like the ocean's depths, is deadly cold. Just as the burning heat of the sun will force him to drive his griffon steeds back to earth, so too does the heat of the solar rays inflict deadly harm here. The brief passage also foreshadows Alexander's ultimate demise at the mercy of a deadly poison. In Branch IV, the poison deals the king a similarly crippling blow, and his intention of killing himself by drowning in the Euphrates River is a reminder as well of his earlier ill conceived bath.

Yet the young Macedonian monarch escapes death following his river swim. He is saved by the man Darius sent to kill him, a skilled doctor from the region of Acarnania, who cannot bring himself to poison and kill the man who will be responsible for awakening the world: "Ne vaut por covoitise faire si grant merveille / Q'il ocie celui qui tout le mont esveille" (v. 2484-49, I)⁹³. The wise doctor also considers Alexander to be "Celui qui des autres est sire," (v. 2474, I) and he reasons that to murder him would be a horrific crime because "tous li mons se doit vers lui afflire," (v.2475, I)⁹⁴. He goes on to say that "Ce est li mieudres hom que on puisse descrire" (v. 2476, I)⁹⁵.

Despite Alexander's inability to master the challenges he encounters in India, Alexandre de Paris insists on his hero's greatness. Yet it is evident that the adventures that Alexander undertakes following his near-death encounter in the river simultaneously parallel and stand in sharp contrast to the deeds of his mythological forebears. Yes, he does run

⁹³"Il refuse de laisser la convoitise lui faire commetre la monstruosité / de tuer celui qui met en éveil le monde entier."

⁹⁴"Celui devant qui le monde entier doit s'humilier."

⁹⁵"C'est le meilleur de tous les hommes;"

headlong into marvelous beasts and strange occurrences, but where Heracles would have pummeled into submission the monsters affronting him, our hero stands helpless, as thunderstruck at the mystery he is witnessing as his readers. Alexandre de Paris repeatedly shows his readers that the realm his hero has entered completely escapes his grasp, and yet within these repeated failures lies the essence of what defines Alexander as a new type of heroic figure. His *émerveillement* at the world's wonders and relentless drive to uncover even more of its hidden secrets are simply put, unique, and transform him into a new type of hero- one who's humanity is evident in every one of his deeds. Alexander goes further in his quest for illumination than any other man; he steadfastly persists, even in the face of daunting obstacles, the greatest of which is his discovery that he will soon die. His curiosity, so profoundly human, is what defines him as a new type of hero. For a mortal, failure to overcome such threats is to be expected, the narrator underlines, because India's beautiful wonders bind it very closely to the heavenly kingdom. The violation of its sanctity by Alexander and his men unleashes horrors and violence that rival the nightmarish terrors of the apocalypse. Marvels and monsters are not the only defining characteristics of this world, however. In keeping with his objective of creating a new mythical setting for his hero, Alexandre de Paris also fills his text with numerous examples of kings, knights and horses from faraway lands, priceless materials and precious stones, that while serving to entertain his readers on the one hand, on the other, also provide a didactic backdrop for the adventures he is recounting.

IV. Exoticism

Definitions and Approach

In the process of creating a world of mystery, marvels, and frightening novelty, Alexandre de Paris deliberately weaves into his text numerous components that his contemporary readers might consider to be exotic, that is to say so unusual, that they could be viewed as other-worldly. One must make a distinction here between what this study will refer to henceforth as the marvelous and the exotic. On the one hand, it is possible to link the concept of earthly wealth with the exotic. For example, Alexandre de Paris may describe the arms or horse of a knight using terms that denote worldly riches, or elsewhere he may paint an image of an exquisitely decorated object. On the other hand, the reference to the exotic may simply be an allusion to a remote geographical locale. For instance, some of the passages describing the places uncovered by the adventuring Greek army offer glimpses of a wildly foreign setting: barren deserts, unfathomable caves, murky swamps, exquisite palaces, and imposing funerary monuments covered with rare, coveted materials. Regardless of these variations, however, the exotic includes all those narrative elements that do not belong to the world of the text's origin. In this case, the Roman d'Alexandre was written in the context of the courtly *milieu* of 12th century Anglo-Norman France. Thus, any references to the distant lands of Africa and the Middle East could certainly be considered as exotic. Some of the place names may have been familiar to the author's noble audience, but this would certainly be as a result of their knowledge of other *chansons de geste*, courtly literature, or even classical texts. Yet familiar though these names may have been, they may still have conjured up images in the readers or listeners minds of faraway lands and mysterious peoples. The following description of

Aminadap, nephew of king Moab of Africa is a perfect example of the presence of the exotic in this work:

Aminadap l'apelent Persant et Filisté
Et fu dus de Caspois, d'une grant richeté,
Une terre garnie de trestout le bien Dé...
Sist sor un cheval blanc qui fu destre comé,
Qui plus cort de ravine qant on l'a esfrée,
Que faus ne sieut aloe qant il a geüné.
Ses lorains et ses armes valent une cité :
La sele fu d'ivoire, li frains d'or esmeré,
Ses haubers fu legiers so ot molt grant bonté,
Ne crient caup de saiete ne de dart enpené ;
Li hiaumes de son chief getoit molt grant clarté,
En son ot un topace a esmaus neelé ;
Li escus de son col estoit d'or envausé,
L'anste de son espié fu d'un fraisne plané,
En son ot un penon d'un vert paile rôé. (v. 747-763, III)⁹⁶

This soldier from a distant land is covered with symbols of great power and wealth.

Alexandre de Paris describes every component of his equipment in exquisite detail, and simultaneously provides the reader with a brief history, and thereby opening up vistas for the reader's imagination to explore. Aminadap is astride a magnificent steed⁹⁷, seated in a saddle

⁹⁶"Perses et Philistins l'appellent Amidanap; il est duc de Caspois, une riche contrée / pourvue de tous les biens créés par Dieu. / La mort de son oncle Moab, fils de Taré, / le remplit d'une douleur bien naturelle. / Il monte un cheval blanc à la crinière flottante / qui va plus vite, quand il a peur, / que le faucon affamé poursuivant l'alouette. / Son harnais et ses armes valaient une cité. / La selle était d'ivoire, le frein d'or pur, / le haubert, léger, était si bien fait qu'il ne craignait ni fleche ni dard empenné. / Le heaume, sur sa tête, dégageait une vive clarté, / orné à son sommet d'une topaze émaillée de noir. / L'écu pendu à son cou était couvert d'or. / Le bois de sa lance était de frêne poli, / avec à son sommet un pennon de soie verte brodée de rosaces."

⁹⁷The horse is a powerful vector of exoticism in this work. Alexandre de Paris borrows much from the literary tradition of the *chansons de geste*. Each combat sequence emulates the epic literary style established by such poems as the Chanson de Roland or the Couronnement de Louis, and the attention given to the description of each combatant's steed is one of the most striking details in these passages. The horse holds a special place in The Roman, especially if one considers the marvelous portrait that Alexandre de Paris paints of Bucephalus, Alexander's own mythical mount, in the First Branch (v. 423-433, I). If one examines tales from classical mythology, one cannot help but see another parallel. Indeed, the practice of granting special attention to the creatures that are frequently inseparable from the mythical hero or heroine has its origins in the literary tradition of Antiquity⁹⁷. Edmond Faral writes, concerning famous horses: "Car Bucephalus et Pégase sont nommés dans les descriptions comme les parangons de montures parfaits (*Partonopeus*, 9630 ss; *Phyllis et Flora*, 197)- D'autre part, les chevaux, comme nous l'avons déjà remarqué pour d'autres objets, empruntent quelque chose de leur prestige aux maîtres qui les ont possédés. Galatée, la monture d'Hector, lui a été donnée par Orva la fée (*Troie*, 8024); la monture de Phyllis a été donnée par Neptune à Vénus, qui l'a ensuite donnée à la reine Hiberna

made of solid ivory, a material certainly only accessible to the wealthiest of horsemen, while the bridle's bit is solid gold, and his breastplate is forged from impenetrable materials. From the dazzling topaz-topped helmet on his head to the tip of his lance from which dangles a green silk pennant, Aminadap is a powerfully wealthy foe for Alexander's companions. This type of extravagant description appears throughout the text. Doubtless, Alexandre de Paris employs this sort of depiction to create worthy opponents for his heroic protagonists, for if Tholomé, who bravely affronts Aminadap in this *laisse*, "Li dus point a lui, ne l'a pas

(*Phyllis et Flora*, 177 ss.) etc. - Enfin ces chevaux se distinguent par certaines qualités propres. les plus extraordinaires sont ceux que décrit l'auteur d'*Eneas*: les chevaux de Meneceüs, "Ki n'ont mehaing, jale ne boce," qui sont admirablement rapides et vaillants, qui ne vivent que trois ans, et le cheval de Camille, dont la robe est la plus prodigieuse qu'on puisse imaginer (4049 ss.). C'est à peine si de tels chevaux le cèdent à ces "azeivres" dont est attelé le char d'Amphiaras [*Thèbes*]" (359). Certainly the image of Bellerophon astride Pegasus leaps to mind, as well as the mythical creatures known as the centaurs. In many cases, the horse speaks to the exotic and alien origins of its rider. Astarot, one of the companions of Porus, rides a "destriers de Nubie," (862, III), while Moab, a king of Africa actually, "Sist so rune gazele / Qui plus cort de ravine que ne vole arondele" (v. 733-34, III). Brave and faithful Clin has a "destrier de Castele" (v. 737, III). When Porus, perhaps Alexander's most dangerous opponent, kills Bucephalus in the course of the first struggle following his betrayal of the Greek king, Alexander is devastated. Historians recorded Alexander's reaction following the death of his faithful animal companion as well Olivier Battistini and Pascal Charvet's in their work, [Alexandre le Grand: Histoire et Dictionnaire](#), refer to Quintus Curtius's record of Bucephalus's death. The Roman historian paints a touching scene: Lors de la campagne 'est alors que en Inde, Bucephalus jette Alexandre au cœur de la formation ennemie. C'est alors que le cheval, malgré de profondes blessures au cou et au flanc, déjà mourant, emporte le roi au galop et le met à l'abri des traits avant de s'écrouler, rassuré d'une manière presque humaine de voir son maître sain et sauf. A la suite de cette bataille contre Poros, Bucephalus meurt, non pas immédiatement, mais un peu plus tard, alors qu'on le soigne...Alexandre est affecté par la mort de son cheval, pensant avoir perdu un familier ou un ami Sur les bords de l'Hydaspe, ... le roi fonde une Alexandrie Bucephalus. (606) Alexandre de Paris paints a poignant scene of the Macedonian king's mourning when Bucephalus dies (v.4061-4073, III) The personification of Bucephalus also serves to connect Alexandre de Paris's saga with the realm of myth. An animal with such human characteristics reminds us of more famous steeds, such as Bellerophon's Pegasus or even Odin's eight-legged horse, Sleipnir. Not only do these mounts have wondrous characteristics themselves, but by means of their marvelous strengths, they also serve to elevate their riders to accomplish incredible feats. Saddened though he is by the loss of Bucephalus, Alexander does not forget his duties as leader. When he confronts Poros for the last time, he is astride a brand new, supernatural horse, further evidence that a true hero cannot be without an amazing steed. The [Roman](#) plays with traditional themes and projects them into the realm of the exotic and the marvelous: many of the knights Alexandre de Paris describes have powerful horses, and yet none of these can rival Bucephalus, a fear-inspiring blend of ox, lion, and horse. Bucephalus's rich nature mimics the complexity of his owner's character, however, who constantly fluctuates between stubbornness, tyrannical fury, and gentle mercifulness. The most impressive steeds in the whole [Roman](#), however, are the griffons that Alexander tames for his ascent into the heavens.

redouté" (v. 767, III)⁹⁸ were to fight and defeat a common foot soldier, the Roman's readers would not be impressed. The enemy must measure up to the laudable characters present since the beginning of the epic, but at the same time, for the purposes of this work, they must belong to another world, a world where the unknown reigns. Hence, each of the details that show such extravagant, unusual wealth is important. Wealth is synonymous with power, and power originating in a foreign country is even more difficult to defeat than the power one finds in one's homeland.

It is also possible to associate the concept of the "exotic" with the genre of the text itself. Alexandre de Paris creates a work that is in and of itself so different from other contemporary works that it almost represents a snapshot of an alien world, and it cannot easily be compared with the courtly literature of the time. The *chanson de geste* motif of the traditional struggle between the infidel and the Christian warrior is not present here. Absent too are the comforting, recognizable mountains and plains of Europe where the action of so many other contemporary epic poems takes place. Alexander is not the typical valorous, God-fearing knight: he is a man of numerous contradictions confronting mysterious dangers and plagued by the knowledge (too much perhaps) of his own grim destiny. The world of the Roman d'Alexandre does not seem to respect the rules of the pyramidal God-Church-Man hierarchy governing the literary creative efforts of the time. When Alexander dies, there are no archangels present to accompany his soul to heaven. Indeed, the reader of the Roman finds himself in a confusing realm where God is noticeably absent; Alexandre de Paris's work stands in stark contrast to the classical poems of the pagan Greeks and even their Old French permutations: here no deities of any sort are present. It is an eerie world in which

⁹⁸"Le duc galope vers lui sans peur."

Alexander and his faithful companions operate, where men stand completely alone against awe-inspiring, otherworldly dangers. At the same time, the sad destiny, the dark star looming over the young king's head throughout his journeys leaves the reader with the feeling that some malevolent force is at work behind the scenes, beyond the realm of understanding, and certainly out of reach of the comprehension of our often hapless protagonists.

The singular episode of the cave of Artus and Liber is a good example of how strange and unpredictable the Roman may be. Alexandre de Paris offers no explanation for what takes place in the grotto, no details to indicate how the knights may have died. It is precisely this type of unusual, frightening atmosphere that pervades the work and contributes to the aura of exoticism surrounding the adventures of the Macedonian hero. Many of the events that occur throughout these travels escape comprehension entirely, and this is the objective of Alexandre de Paris. If he can successfully create a land that will surprise and shock his readers, his hero will be able to stand out from the ranks of common knights, and the tale of his exploits will edge that much closer to the mythological genre.

Wealth and Grandeur

For Alexander's first principal opponents, Nicholas and Darius, our author provides few details concerning the nature of their kingdoms and the sources of their power. Concerning Nicolas, king of Caesarea and the first enemy encountered by the young Greek conqueror, Alexandre de Paris offers very little description of the man, and more importantly perhaps, hardly any information about the domain he rules. In this instance, the dearth of exotic symbols associated with the typically powerful figure of a king weakens Nicolas's stature. There is only a very cursory description just before he goes into one-on-one combat with Alexander, sufficient nevertheless to indicate that he is, nevertheless, a worthy opponent for

the young hero. Indeed, he is a giant of a man: “Et ot bien d’Alixandre le cors deus piés plus grant; / S’il ne fust orgellous, fors le roi conquerant, / N’eüst un mellor prince desi q’en Oriant” (v. 1515-1517, I)⁹⁹. Just like for every other knight that the author singles out, Alexandre de Paris gives his readers a glimpse of Nicholas’s arms:

Nicholas s’est armés d’un hauberc jaserant
Qui ot la maile blanche et serree et tenant;
Onques de sa bonté ne vit ont mains pesant,
Ne doute caup de lance ne quarrel d’arc traiant. (v. 1489-1492, I)¹⁰⁰

To have his protagonist fight and defeat an utterly common man would not do. For this reason, Alexandre de Paris hastily completes his portrait of the Cesarean king with a few noteworthy details that make him stand out above his followers. Yet, if this man is indeed supposed to rival the young Greek hero's might, the minimal number of exotic features surrounding his character leaves him ill equipped to do so. With few unusual descriptors to complete his portrait, Nicholas appears more like a simple knight, and therefore represents no great danger to our hero. Whereas Alexander is linked by birth to a powerful Arabian sorcerer, is tutored by Aristotle, one of the wisest men of the Classical world, singlehandedly tames the frightening horse-monster Bucephalus, and is knighted at the age of 13, king Nicolas appears as a mere mortal, with no great strengths of which to speak. The amount of wealth that Alexandre de Paris associates with the young Greek king is impressive. When he is knighted, no details are spared in the description of his equipment:

Les conrois Alixandre ne saroit nus prisier;
Toutes les vesteüres ne vos sai desraissnier :
Ses haubers fu ouvrés en l’isle de Durier,

⁹⁹"Il dépasse Alexandre de plus de deux pieds. / Sans son orgueil, il n'y aurait meilleur prince, / hormis le roi conquérant, d'ici jusqu'en Orient."

¹⁰⁰"Nicholas a revêtu un haubert d'Alger / aux mailles blanches serrées, et solides; / il n'en était pas de meilleur ni de plus léger, / il ne craint ni coup de lance ni flèche."

Li pan sont a argent, la ventaille d'or mior,
 La maile ne crient lance en caup d'arbalestier,
 Oncques de sa bonté ne vit on si legier ;
 Le cercle de son hiaume ne peust esligier
 Li rois de Maceline por or ne por denier,
 Douze pierres i ot que fols ne doit baillier,
 Devant sor le nasel un escharboucle chier ;
 Ses escus de sinople et ses brans fu d'acier,
 Quatre mois et demi mist Bilés au forgier,
 Les renges sont de soie faites par eschequier. (v. 553-565, I)¹⁰¹

Needless to say these are the arms of a man who will surpass many, many others. To paint this image, Alexandre de Paris leans on all the devices and formulae typically found in *chansons de geste*. The author astonishes his reader or listener by his insufficient craft in describing: “[...]je ne saurais vous dire,” or “Jamais on n’a vu.” Indeed it appears that the power of each character in the Roman is directly proportional to the vividness of the portrait that Alexandre de Paris paints of him.

Although Darius, the second of Alexander's opponents, occupies a more significant role in the narrative framework of the Roman, he has hardly any exotic elements associated with his position as king and antagonist. There is a simple explanation for this absence, however. Fundamentally, Alexandre de Paris does not consider Darius to be truly a very honorable enemy. His Aristotle transforms Darius into an object lesson for his young pupil. According to the philosopher, Darius made the very great error of elevating “malvais sergans” (v. 63, II) in rank and listening to their counsel. As a result, Darius dies ignominiously, murdered by two of these unworthy vassals, Besas and Liabatanas. Since Alexander does not have to confront the Persian king in combat, and since he has proven

¹⁰¹“Le prix de ce qu’il porte est inestimable. / Je ne saurais vous décrire tout son armement: / son haubert vient tout droit de l’île de Durier, / les pans en sont d’argent, la ventaille d’or pur, / les mailles sont résistantes aux lances, aux arbalètes, / jamais on n’en a fait de si bon ni de si léger. / Quant au cercle du heaume, le roi de Maceline, / malgré tout son trésor, ne pourrait l’acheter: / il porte douze pierres qu’on ne donnerait pas à un fou, / devant, sur le nasal, une précieuse escharboucle. / Près de l’écu de sinople, l’épée d’acier / a demandé quatre mois et demi de travail au forgeron Bilès. / L’étoffe du baudrier est de soie tachetée.”

himself to be a misguided ruler, Alexandre de Paris does not need to embellish his portrait with exotic images. Essentially, within the Roman it is practically impossible to separate symbols of affluence from the concepts of power and the notion of valor. Whenever one of Alexander's twelve *pairs* fights an enemy knight or king, exotic components can systematically be found in the description of both the combatants. The presence of these elements has no relation to the concepts of good and evil. An enemy knight may have just as many exotic identifiers as a champion of good.

Alexander's army stumbles upon one of the most striking examples of exotic wealth and luxury after the first battle with Porus, the Indian king. So many fabulous and unusual images are associated with the ruler of this distant realm because according to the criteria within the text, he is a more worthy opponent than the kings who fell before him. Barring the Emir of Babylon, the young Greek king's final opponent, Porus is indeed perhaps the toughest enemy that Alexander has faced thus far in his journey; Alexandre de Paris describes him in this manner: "Fors lui n'a sous ciel home qui l'osast envair / Ne qui riens nule osast vers lui contretenir" (v. 3898-3899, III)¹⁰². Of all the enemy monarchs he will face, the young Greek king develops the most complex relationship with Porus. Alexander will fight him twice, emerge victorious, enlist his aid as a guide in the mysterious lands of India, and finally defeat him when he rebels and betrays him following the revelation of the prophecy of the Trees of the Sun and the Moon. The description of the seat of the Indian king's power, his palace, which Alexander and his men invade after Porus's first rout, is rich in details denoting the exotic power. It is one of the most intricate descriptions in the entire text, taking up roughly four *laissez* toward the beginning of the Third Branch.

¹⁰²"C'est le seul home au monde qui oserait l'attaquer / et lui tenir tête."

Before beginning a more in-depth analysis of this elaborate description, it is important to keep in mind that one of Alexandre de Paris's principal reasons for associating such exotic affluence with Porus is simply because he is the king of India, this most exotic-of-worlds in the mind of medieval man¹⁰³. This depiction is consequently just one more step in our author's efforts to create a magnificently alien décor that will astound and frighten his readers, and against which the actions of his god-aspiring protagonist can be adequately highlighted.

Firstly, the palace is filled with symbols revealing the Indian monarch's incredible wealth. Gold, perennial symbol of royalty, is omnipresent. When Alexander enters the palace, he sees that, "Par toutes les parois est li fins ors batus. / [...] / Trusq'a trente pilers a de tel or veüs / Qui por bien afiner fu quatre fois fondus" (v. 881-884, III)¹⁰⁴. There are also numerous references to other exotic materials and symbols of power: the palace doors are made of ivory, crystal conduits that fill the baths of the palace with heavenly perfumes, and enamel-decorated beds.

This sophisticated description of the extraordinary affluence of Porus's palace also serves as another *tremplin* for Alexandre de Paris to laud Alexander's legendary generosity. Interspersed throughout his picture of India's unimaginable wealth he includes several pointed comments to indicate that his hero, although duly impressed by such grandeur, intends to share this wealth with his faithful followers:

Qant ot pris Alixandres le palais principal,
Por parler a ses homes s'arestut el portal.

¹⁰³See Jacques LeGoff's discussion of medieval man's conception of India as the earthly paradise in Un Long Moyen Age (240-246).

¹⁰⁴ "Tous les murs sont couverts d'or fin battu / [...] / il découvre jusqu'à trente piliers d'un or / que l'on fait fondre quatre fois pour mieux l'affiner."

Par un sien chevalier manda au seneschal
L'eschec de la bataille departe par ingal
Celui qui vait a pié gart que il ait cheval
Et face livrison a chascun a l'ostal. (v. 895-900, III)¹⁰⁵

Porus lived in the lap of luxury, surrounded by symbols of earthly power. An evil king does not share his riches with his men, while one who seeks to mirror the liberality of the gods, such as our young protagonist, is generous with all those who follow him in pursuit of loftier objectives, i.e. the accumulation of glory and the acquisition of celestial knowledge.

Alexander asks what he would do with such fabulous wealth: “Qui or en veut avoir por quoi se fait il mus? / Ja en donrai jet ant as grans et as menus / Ja mais au mien espoir n'en iert uns confondus” (v. 890-892, III)¹⁰⁶. Farther on within the same Branch, in a striking contrast of kingly behaviors, the Greek hero's generosity extends to the beaten Indian monarch as well.

After he has been crushed a second time by Alexander, Porus begs for mercy¹⁰⁷:

Porrus vit Alixandre armé sor son destrier,
Envers lui s'umelie se li prent a proier
Que il nel face ocirre ne son cors laidengier,
Car sol de bele garde en puet avoir d'or mier
Plus que ne porteroient quatre mile soumier ;
Prist le par l'estriviere, le pié li veut baisier.
Pitié ot Alixandres sel fist sus redrecier,
Rent lui toute a terre et commande a baillier,
Ses prisons li amaine ses a fait deslier.
Et Porus le vit, prist s'en a mervellier
Et dist que il nen iert nus hom fieus de mollier

¹⁰⁵“Quand Alexandre a pris le palais princier, / il se dresse à la porte pour parler à ses homes. / Il envoie un chevalier dire à son seneschal de répartir équitablement le butin de la bataille: qu'il veille à donner un cheval à ceux qui vont à pied / et à livrer à chacun sa part à son logis.” One can surmise, judging by the literary customs of the time, and by similarities in the other *romans d'antiquité*, that this repeated reference to Alexander's generosity represents an effort on the part of Alexandre de Paris to convince his patrons to emulate the young Greek hero, and to be just as munificent toward the text's author as well.

¹⁰⁶“Si l'on veut de l'or, qu'on parle! / J'en donnerai tant aux grands et aux petits / que pas un seul, je crois ne sera déçu! ”

¹⁰⁷The use of the of the verb “mervellier” in this passage as Porus admires the beneficence of Alexander is further evidence that the Macedonian king is at all times either steeped in, or flirting with les *zones limitrophes* of the realms of the marvelous.

Qui osast un tel don faire ne commencer. (v. 2133-2144, III)¹⁰⁸

Alexandre de Paris's description of the bathhouse of the Indian emperor presents the reader with a multiplicity of exotic materials. Indeed, the bathhouse itself represents a powerful symbol of ridiculous wealth, baths being reserved at the time only for the most affluent nobles. The very idea of a bathhouse may also have stirred up memories in the minds of his readers of the glorious days of Classical antiquity, when such edifices were common to every city. These baths are particularly amazing, as Alexander's scouting party discovers:

Au chief de cele chamber truevent un sousterin
Ques maine en une trelle qui fu faite a or fin.
D'Ethyope la firent orfevre barbarin
Si com lor ensegnierent quatre clerz sarrasin;
Toute l'uevre qu'i fu entaillierent Hermin,
D'ebenus sont les forches, li chevron cipressin.
Une vigne i ot mise par issi grant engin,
Les fuelles sont d'argent, ce truis el parchemin,
De jagonces les vis, de cristal li roisin;
Ce samble ques esgarde qu'il soient plain de vin,
De jaspes, d'esmeraudes i ot si grant train. (v. 918-928, III)¹⁰⁹

Several features stand out in this lavish description. The baths in Porus's palace are far from ordinary: under the direction of four Saracen clerics, Ethiopian goldsmiths hand-crafted the pure gold latticework above the bathes, while Armenian artists created the sculptures. The imagination of the twelfth century readers must have run wild at the mention of such distant

¹⁰⁸"Porus voit Alexandre, en armes, sur son destrier. / Il s'humilie devant lui et le supplie / de lui épargner la mort et les supplices: / s'il le traite bien, il peut recevoir en or pur / la charge de quatre mille chevaux. / Il saisit l'étrivière, veut lui baiser le pied. / Emu de pitié, Alexandre le fait se relever: / il lui rend toute sa terre et lui en laisse le commandement, / lui amène ses prisonniers, qu'il fait délivrer. / Porus émerveillé à cette vue, / dit qu'un simple mortel / n'aurait jamais eu le cœur de faire un tel don."

¹⁰⁹"A un bout de cette pièce ils trouvent un souterrain / qui les mène à une treille d'or fin, / œuvre d'orfèvres berbères d'Éthiopie, / sous la direction de quatre clercs sarrasins; / des Arméniens se sont chargés de la sculpture. / Les enfourchures sont d'ébène, les branches de cyprès; / une vigne y est représentée avec le plus grand art, / avec des feuilles d'argent, mon parchemin le dit, / des vrilles d'hyacinthe, des raisins de cristal: / on croirait à les voir qu'ils sont gorgés de vin, / tant brillent parmi eux les jaspes et les émeraudes."

and alien lands as Ethiopia or Armenia¹¹⁰. This is truly an example of exoticism in the service of creating a worthy, grandiose setting for the adventures of a hero-king. In the subsequent stanza Alexandre de Paris is careful to mention his hero's reaction to this marvel. The reference here to the eyes, principal protagonists in the recognition of all things *merveilleux*, is therefore not haphazard:

Qant ot assés la trelle esgardee et joïe,
Vait entor le palais par une herbeusse vie,
Par le pan du mantel les lui Licanor guie,
Car veoir veut de l'uevre com ele est estable.
Ains Dieus ne fist cel arbre qui entailliés n'i sie
Ne maniere d'oiseil n'i soit a or sartie,
Et ont or en lor ongles, en lor bes margerie. (v. 929-935, III)¹¹¹

This is not the only allusion to God in this passage. A little farther down, Alexander cries out after ending his visit of the palace in a temple filled with thousands of gold statues of all the gods, all holding sacrificial plates:

Dieus! dist li maines rois, com faite manandie!
Com ert poisons li rois qui ce ot en baillie,
Car trestoute la terre qui est adesertie,
Si com la mer l'enclot qui environ tornie,
De l'or qui est çai ens puet ester raplenie. (v. 946-950, III)¹¹²

The king who seeks to rival the gods calls out to God in amazement when he sees marvels that could only be of divine origin, yet openly seeks to rival the power of such masterful craftsmen. His astonishment stems therefore not so much from respect, but from envy, and

¹¹⁰Indeed, Alexandre de Paris draws here upon attested sources; even in medieval times, both Ethiopia and Armenia were known as lands where one could find gold. Another possibility is that the poet's patrons might even have possessed much-admired examples of such exotic craftsmanship, and that our author deliberately draws a parallel between the riches of Porus and those of the man with whom he ceaselessly seeks to curry favor. In any case, whether destined to inspire approval or fascination, the technique is effective.

¹¹¹"Quand il a bien rempli ses yeux du spectacle de la treille, / il parcourt le palais par un chemin herbeux, / guidant Licanor à ses côtés par le pan de son manteau: / il veut voir toutes les merveilles du palais. / Dieu n'a créé d'arbre qu'il ne retrouve, sculpté, / avec toutes les espèces d'oiseaux, où l'on a enchâssé l'or: / ils ont des griffes d'or, leur bec est une perle."

¹¹²"Dieu! s'écrie le grand roi, quelle richesse prodigieuse! / Qu'il était puissant, le roi qui possédait ces trésors! / Car tous les deserts / enclos par la mer qui les entoure, / pourraient être couverts par l'or de ce palais!"

one could view his use of the exclamation, "Dieus!" an attempt to possess heavenly status by naming the creator, rather than a mark of humility in the face of celestial power.

Another recurring aspect of these descriptions of overwhelming affluence is notable, however. Indeed, as one reads the intricate depiction of Porus's palace, one cannot help but notice that it is quite empty. It is certainly a paradisiacal demesne, beyond the grasp of any European king, but it is also lifeless and devoid of human spirit. Alexandre de Paris clearly seeks to draw our attention to this fact, for at verse 936, he comments on Alexander's visit to the *cellier*:

Par un huis est entrés en la boutellerie,
De mil et set cens nes la trova garnie,
Peu en I ot d'argent, toute l'uevre est chancie,
Bien a mil ans passes c'une n'en fu emplie (v. 936-939)¹¹³

This raises two possible interpretations of what Alexandre de Paris is trying to communicate to us: (1) although beautiful, the acquisition of such magnificent wealth is fundamentally unfulfilling. If one contrasts the treachery and deceit associated with the character of Porus with the utter devotion and comradeship surrounding Alexander, it is clear that the possessor of such wealth is even farther from the path to true greatness and divinity than the Roman's protagonist. (2) This is also a comment on the nature of India's mysterious wonders. Superficially, they are dazzling and spectacular, however, as the previous episodes in the wilds of India have shown, appearances are deceiving, and although it is possible to associate such splendor with the wonders of a Christian heaven, to do so would be to err. Just as the halls of Porus's palace are empty, so too does the much sought-after Indian *paradis terrestre* hold nothing of worth.

¹¹³"Une porte le mène au cellier, / rempli de mille sept cents nefes de table, / la plupart en or; mais toute la décoration en est moisie, / car il y a bien mille ans qu'on ne les a pas remplies."

The Emir of Babylon is the last great enemy that Alexander will defeat in battle, and just as with Porus, the arms of the Emir reflect his considerable might. His *haubert* is extremely lightweight, and he has a helmet "qui por fern e fist faille" (v. 6352, III)¹¹⁴. Alexandre de Paris paints a quick portrait of the Emir's gray and black-necked horse, before describing the magnificent saddle and stirrups on which Babylon's king is seated. The saddle is quite luxurious:

Covers fu d'une porpre molt riche et molt vaillant;
Frain i ot assés bel et bon avenant,
Une sele ot el dos que firent dui gaiant,
Les alves furent faites de l'os d'un olifant,
Ambedui li arçon de Pierre d'aïmant,
A glus i sont saudé par maiestire grant. (6356-6361, III)¹¹⁵

Alexandre de Paris includes two important references to the exotic materials in this brief passage: (1) the saddle crafted by two giants, (2) and the *planchettes* made out of elephant tusks. The saddle designed by two giants is clearly a mythological reference, and reminds us of the type of equipment commonly employed by famous Greek heroes. If one examines the description of his arms in Graves's The Greek Myths, one finds some remarkable similarities in the description of Heracles's weapons and armor:

It has been said that when Heracles set forth on his Labours, Hermes gave him a sword, Apollo a bow and smooth-shafted arrows, feathered with eagle feathers; Hephaestus a golden breast-plate, and Athene a robe. Or that Athene gave him the breast-plate, but Hephaestus bronze greaves and an adamantine helmet... The gift of Poseidon was a team of horses; that of Zeus a magnificent and unbreakable shield. (463-464)

¹¹⁴"Qu'un fer n'a jamais percé"

¹¹⁵"Caparaçonné d'une pourpre riche et précieuse; / le frein est magnifique, / et la selle a été fabriquée par deux géants. / Les planchettes viennent des défenses d'un éléphant / et les arçons sont recouverts de diamants / collés sur le métal avec un grand art."

Greek heroes frequently receive wondrous arms with magical properties from their protectors; this is not unusual. The *romans d'antiquité* maintain this tradition but extend it to less divine characters, such as the Emir in this example. Truly the only thing missing from the description of the Emir's horseback riding equipment are the names of gods, but one can say with some confidence that an ordinary man would not possess a saddle crafted by two giants. The second exotic reference to the elephants' tusks reminds the reader that the heroes are in India; the elephant was known to the inhabitants of Western Europe at the time, but it was undoubtedly associated with the dangerous and mysterious realms of the East. It is therefore fitting that the King of an eastern realm be equipped with such *defenses*.

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of exotic wealth and Indian magic is the description of the Emir's tomb at the end of the Third Branch. Defined repeatedly as the final objective of Alexander throughout the Roman, it is thus to be expected that the city of the Emir should have one of the most powerful representations of India's mysterious might. Alexandre de Paris spares no detail in his description of the tomb, and it is remarkably similar to the descriptions of funeral monuments and magnificent edifices found in other contemporaneous works, in particular the tomb of Pallas in the Roman d'Eneas.

It is quite strange that Alexander would decide to build such an extravagant funerary monument to honor his adversary, especially after this king had insulted him in a communiqué before the battle. Yet this generosity toward his defeated noble enemies is characteristic of Alexander. As long as his foe is noble, he honors him, even if prior to their encounter grave insults may have flown left and right, and the enemy leader may have been the Greek king's most hated rival. The tomb's description is worthy of some attention.

Alexander has the body of the Emir richly embalmed. The notion that the dead hero's corpse should resist the ravages of time and thereby in some way achieve some degree of immortality, is a recurring motif in the *romans d'antiquité*. If nothing else, his memory will endure, because when people view the tomb the grandeur of his exploits will be reawakened. His exotic wealth survives as well, "L'amiraut a fait metre en un drap de Rossie," (v. 7109, III)¹¹⁶. The entire tomb is lavishly constructed: the floor is covered with inlaid diamonds, the pillars are ivory and marble, and the walls reach high into the air. Four harps hang from the ceiling, and when one enters the chamber, because they have been so cleverly placed, music rings out, to honor the memory of the dead king. A typically inert object is magically animated almost as if it could breathe new life into the dead leader's corpse.

Several other magical elements decorate the tomb as well, and they transport the edifice even further into the realm of the *merveilleux*. Four lamps hang magically suspended in midair above the casket- they burn without any oil, whilst the walls of the building are covered with wonderfully lifelike images, recounting the Emir's life. Just as the tents of these heroic leaders are decorated with scenes depicting the mechanisms of the natural world and the exploits of demigods, so too does this building strive to capture the fleeting nature of a man's life and bestow some form of immortality upon him:

Tous les fais l'amiraut de color i paignoient
E deseur tout ice letres i escrivoient;
Li fait tel com il ierent tout de fin or paroient,
C'estoit avis a ciaux qui bien les esgardoient
Que fust chose vivant la peinture qu'il voient. (v. 7148-7152, III)¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶"Il fait envelopper le corps de l'émir dans une étoffe de Russie."

¹¹⁷"Des peintures colorées montraient toute la vie de l'émir, /que des inscriptions expliquaient au-dessus. / Toute sa vie était représentée, à l'or fin, / et on avait l'impression, en regardant les peintures, / de voir des tableaux vivants."

In addition, two automatons guard the Emir's final resting place, just like the two enchanted statues that watch over the entrance to the forest of the *filles-fleurs*, highlighting once again the forbidden nature of India's power and secrets. The sepulchre itself is made of emeralds¹¹⁸ and alerion wings cover the entire surface of the casket; these are imbued with the magical ability to safeguard the corpse from decay, and even the manner in which these feathers are laid out constitutes an unimaginable wonder. An onlooker can see no seams separating the feathers. On top stands a statue of Apollo, whose eyes are topazes, "L'une est des douze pierres qui molt est clere et pure". The topaz is one of the world's twelve most precious stones, as laid out in the books of Exodus and Apocalypse (Harf-Lancner 698). At the very top of the structure perches a splendid golden bird that sings out whenever a breath of wind disturbs it. When the sun strikes it, the little bird's gleams brightly and bedazzles all those who see it.

By comparing this masterpiece with the tomb of Alexander the Great as it is described in Branch IV, certain distinctive differences should stand out which distinguish the two men. Alexander's tomb is just as magnificent as the Emir's. Alexandre de Paris first points out that regardless of what sort of fables one might hear about lavishly decorated tombs in other works, none of them could even come close to the description of Alexander's funerary monument. Just as his conquests surpassed those of all his fellow men and defied reason, so too does the construction of the tomb belong to the realm of the impossible, the unimaginable, and just as Alexander's deeds could never be emulated, so too could the

¹¹⁸The description of the Emir's tomb is similar to that of Pallas's funeral monument in the Roman d'Eneas. For instance, a lamp also hangs above Pallas's funeral monument, and it too burns with an eternal flame, the difference here being that the author of the Roman d'Eneas provides us with an explanation for this wonder: "D'abesto an estoit la mece, / d'une pierre que l'an alume; / tel nature a et tel costume: / ja puis estointe ne sera, / ne nul foiz ne deffera" (v. 6577-6581). Pallas's sarcophagus is also made of green stone, and they embalm his corpse just as carefully as Alexander's men seek to preserve the Emir's lifeless body. According to Marbode's Poème des pierres précieuses, emeralds grant particular power to those who seek to see into the future (27).

magnificence of his tomb never be repeated: "S'or estoient ensamble trestout icil ovrier / Qui or sont en cest siecle, por les poins a trenchier / N'en feroient un tel, por les members trenchier" (v. 1490-1492, IV)¹¹⁹. It is a strange comparison, and somewhat unsettling to consider that only the most horrific suffering could possibly allow one to attain something equivalent in splendor to the shrine honoring the greatest of Earth's conquerors. Yet this is not the only instance where Alexandre de Paris alludes to suffering in his description of the Macedonian king's memorial. The construction of the giant pyramid in which the king's body would reside required more than one barrel of bull's blood to mix the cement: "Et si ot sanc de buef plus d'une grant tounee" (v. 1528, IV)¹²⁰. Although Alexandre de Paris never underlines this aspect of the king's conquest-filled journey into Persia and India, it is true that the battles are one of the most salient recurring elements within the narrative. He uncovers innumerable mysteries, yes, but he also leaves a trail of destruction and bloodshed in his wake. This may in fact be the most memorable feature of Alexander's brief but tumultuous life: certainly the battles are one of the most dominant features of the narration in Roman. Yet this destructive energy is not the aspect that Alexandre de Paris overtly underlines in the final pages of his work; rather he repeats his praise for the young king's generosity and respect for those with noble origins: "Mais proëce et largesce font bien terre tenir. / Ice fist Alixandre essaucier et tehir, / Car il conquest le mont trestout a son plaisir" (v. 1635-37, IV)¹²¹.

¹¹⁹"Si tous les ouvriers du monde / étaient réunis, dût-on leur trancher les poings, / ils ne pourraient pas le refaire, dût-on leur trancher les membres."

¹²⁰"On y avait mis plus d'un tonneau de sang de bœuf"

¹²¹"Prouesse et Largesse aident à bien gouverner une terre. / Voilà les qualités qui ont permis à Alexandre de grandir et de s'élever, / de conquérir le monde à sa volonté."

Even the stretcher upon which the followers of Alexander place the king's body is made of exotic substances. The sides are made of the wood of the Cyprus tree, the head and the foot are of ivory. To protect the body from the horrendous heat, they cover the bed with "Un blanc drap de Sidoine, qui molt fait a proisier" (1478, IV)¹²². Most of the tomb itself is made of gold and silver, the most precious of metals- Alexandre de Paris writes that none of the traditional building materials one might expect in such an edifice- wood, stone, or cement- were used. The only common metal employed in the construction, iron, is used in a brutally functional manner to hold up the immense vaulted ceiling. Much like the inner drive that propelled the young king on his journey of discovery and conquest, the core of the edifice is strong and purposeful. The outer shell of the edifice, however, is much more attractive. Marble and a myriad of colors, white, crimson, and green are blended in with gold and silver powder, to form the principal building material of the structure. Alexander's iron will merges here with his thirst for the world's most precious and elusive secrets, those symbols that will show to the world, and the divine authority, that his power is supreme. The rest of the building's design is remarkable as well:

Sus el premier estage firent fenestres cent;
 Qant l'une moitié oevre, et l'autre clot au vent.
 Les fenestres sont faistes d'une pel de serpent;
 Qant vient el mois de may, que li solaus respient,
 Tres par mi cele pel li rais lai ens s'estent,
 Car la pel est si clere que rien ne li deffent.
 Et por l'or qu'est molus, qant il le soleil sent,
 C'est a vis qui l'esgarde, a trestoute la gent,
 Que ce soit fus espris qui si grant clarté rent. (v. 1511-1519, IV)¹²³

¹²²"Un précieux drap blanc de Sidon"

¹²³"Au premier étage, on fit plus de cent fenestres / dont la moitié s'ouvre, tandis que l'autre moitié se referme, au souffle du vent. / Ces fenêtrés sont faites d'une peau de serpent : / Quand vient le mois de mai, que le soleil respandit, / les rayons traversent les fenêtrés, tant la peau en est fine, / et quand l'or reçoit la lumière du soleil, / la clarté est si grande qu'on a l'impression / de voir brûler un feu."

The ambiguous symbolism of the serpent resurfaces when Alexander dies. In the premonitory dream at the very beginning of his life, the serpent circled the king's bed three times only to finally slither back to die in the egg whence it came. Alexander's final resting place is within the shimmering scales of a thousand dead serpents, this colorful complexity mirroring the young man's own convoluted nature.

Another important feature is the funerary monument itself, which is gigantic, truly matching the king's *démesure*. Four ivory statues stand at the building's very base and support the entire structure, each one separated by an *arpent de terre*. Within the tomb itself, the sarcophagus of the king resembles a giant pyramid, and it is so tall, the narrator recounts, that not even a crossbow bolt could reach the summit. The mourning knights placed Alexander's body in this pyramid, and cover the corpse with a precious blade. Finally, atop this blade they firmly fixed a gold statue holding a large apple, symbolic, so Alexandre de Paris explains, of the world that the young man conquered.

Several elements stand out in this passage. It is significant that although the tomb is dazzlingly impressive, it is completely devoid of marvelous components. Silver and gold, marble and iron, olive and Cyprus wood: these are all exotic building materials, but they possess no otherworldly qualities per se, and this is indicative of the fact that the king may have conquered many lands, but one realm always remained firmly beyond his mastery: the lands described in Branch III, India with its countless mysteries. In fact, in comparison with the Emir's *tombeau*, although it is grandiose, Alexander's is rather ordinary. It has certain majestic qualities, yes, but it has no *automatons* to decorate it, no magical harps float above it, and no flame burns everlastingly over the dead king's corpse, providing his spirit with eternal life. It is a solid, earth-bound structure, worthy of much admiration, certainly, but not

a resting place fit for a god. Certain descriptive elements truly heighten this massiveness, such as our compiler's use of very specific numerical measurements. These few verses in particular, describing the stone slab that makes up the pyramid's frame and the sarcophagus itself, resound with a certain immutable solidity:

Por ce fu en grigois piramide apelee
Que d'une seule pierre fu toute acovetee;
Cele fu d'aïmant si fu a fer saudee
Et ot neuf piés de lé, ainsi fu mesuree,
Et vint en ot de lonc et fu dedens cavee (v. 1523-1527, IV)¹²⁴

Though they represent an imposing size, Alexandre de Paris uses these numbers and measurements to attach the king's death to the world of the common man, just as the authors of the *chansons de geste* insert numbers within their works in order to render their texts more believable and realistic.

Elaborate descriptions and references to exotic symbols of wealth and power are present in all of the *romans d'antiquité*. Indeed, one has the impression in these texts that the descriptions of such exotic riches are showpieces for the authors. By filling their text with strange place names and words that connote unattainable affluence, they are showing off their vast knowledge of foreign lands or simply their familiarity with the world's most unusual gems and expensive materials. As Edmond Faral says: "[ce type de description] est destinée à exciter l'admiration; elle prétend enchanter l'imagination du lecteur" (308).

The wondrous tent: recurring trope of exoticism and wealth

The Roman d'Alexandre is also filled with elaborate descriptions of structures or objects that have been wonderfully decorated, such as pavilions, chariots, or shields. These items are covered with representations of the earth's wonders or with symbols of regal power, and the

¹²⁴"Elle porte ce nom de pyramide en grec, / parce qu'elle est toute recouverte d'une seule pierre, / faite de diamants soudés de fer. / Elle mesurait neuf pieds de large, / vingt de long, et elle était creuse."

passages describing them resemble veritable paintings of vast, sweeping scenes. The level of detail is extreme, and these moments within the text are striking, because they completely interrupt the flow of the narration.

In texts like the Roman d'Alexandre and the Roman de Thèbes, thought to be the first of the *romans antiques*, these intricate descriptions serve multiple purposes: They instill a sense of bewildered wonderment within the reader. They capture his attention, and they display the knowledge the author has acquired in his studies. To the 12th century mindset, having access to the lore of the ancient Greeks and Romans could certainly be equated with possessing great material wealth. It is also possible to link these treats for the inner eye to a particular narrative function; for instance, in the aforementioned Roman de Thèbes, the arrival of two extraordinarily beautiful women in the army camp of Adrastes, King of Argos is paralleled by a lengthy description of the awe-inspiring beauty of the monarch's *pavillon*. The author of the Roman de Thèbes points out that the beauty of these women is incomparable:

Par l'ost chevauchent les puceles,
et dient tout que molt sont beles ;
por eux veoir eissent des très
plus de cinquante mil Grés.
La plus bele en volent choisir,
mais il n'i poent avenir,
car de leur beauté n'est mesure:
par estude les fist Nature. (v. 4290-4297)¹²⁵

As Francine Mora-Lebrun indicates in her edition of the Roman de Thèbes this particular type of portrayal has its origin in the depiction of the *palais du soleil* in Ovid's

¹²⁵"Les jeunes filles traversent l'armée à cheval, / et tous disent qu'elles sont très belles; / pour les voir, sortent des tentes / plus de cinquante mille Grecs. / Ils veulent discerner la plus belle, / mais ils ne peuvent y arriver, / car leur beauté passe toute mesure: / c'est avec grand soin que les fit la Nature." The translations for passages from the Roman de Thèbes are taken from Francine Mora-Lebrun's edition.

Metamorphoses¹²⁶. If one examines the *pavillon* in detail, the extent of the author's efforts to emulate the art of the Ancients becomes clear:

Li très fu merveillous et granz
et entaillez a flours par panz ;
ne fu de chanv[e] ne de lin,
ainz de porpre d'oltre marin.
De porpre fu ynde et vermeille,
et painte y ot meinte merveille. (v. 4300-4305)¹²⁷

To sleep within such a fabulous tent is to have access to the limitless power of the gods, and by the same token to be able to describe it in such detail is to possess the wisdom of the Ancients¹²⁸. Both features project the text into the realm of classical mythology. What follows is a description of the *mappemonde* that is depicted within the *pavillon*, implying that the tent's owner is also the one who rules the earth. Here is the detailed illustration of the first section of this magnificent tent:

Par cinc zones la mape durre,
si paintez come les fist Nature ;
car les deux qui sont deforaines
sont de neif et de glace plaines,
et orent inde la colour,
car alques tornent a freidour ;
et le chaude, qu'est el melo

¹²⁶In Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du Moyen Age, E. Faral shows that the description of *mappemondes* such as the one that figures in this passage of the Roman de Thèbes often accompanied manuscripts of Macrobius's Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, "Un texte néoplatonicien très exploité à cette époque par l'école de Chartres " (338-339).

¹²⁷"Cette tente était extraordinaire, vaste, / brodée de fleurs sur tous les pans; / elle n'était faite ni de chanvre ni de lin, / mais de soieries venues d'outre-mer. / Elle était faite de soieries violettes et rouges, / et couverte de peintures extraordinaires."

¹²⁸As Paul M. Clogan points out in his article, "New Directions in Twelfth Century Courtly Narrative: The Roman de Thèbes," The clerk's ability to demonstrate his mastery of the knowledge of the Ancients is always of paramount importance, especially within the *romans d'antiquité*: "The revival of classical learning enhanced the position of the clerk who as narrator mediated and recovered the past. His learnedness is seen in his use of the topos of *translatio studii*, suggesting the continuity of ancient learning in the context of a later society. The ancients' authority and intellectual culture serve as the background for a new kind of writing and the learning of the past is renewed in the work of the clerics. The poet assumes the role of the clerkly narrator figure and his learning and culture regarding the ancient book generates an enormous difference between the poet and the narrator in his poetry and helps distance the narrator's voice in the text." (2)

cele est vermeile pur le feu ;
 que por le fou, que por les neis,
 nuls homme habite ne celes treis.
 Entre chascune deforaine
 est la chaude qu'est mieloaine,
 et ot une qu'est tempré. (v. 4310-4323)¹²⁹

Soucieux of highlighting his own poetic talent, in the first two lines of this passage the author not so subtly makes not-so-subtle direct comparison between himself as artist and Nature herself. The first part of the description concerns the aspect of the world where Nature's power is most evident: the climate zones and their respective colors and defining features. As the description continues, the effect of man's presence on the earth gradually becomes evident, and finally some of the symbols of his power in the world emerge:

Illoec sont les citees antives
 oue murs, oue tors et oue eschives;
 a or batu sount li toureil
 et li portal et li torneil.
 Tout li realme et li dreit rei,
 chascuns y est, la sus par sei
 et li septante dui language,
 et mer Beté et mer Salvage;
 la mer rogist, fait [a] niel, (v. 4324-4332)¹³⁰

Finally, this section of the *pavillon* is also covered with an overwhelming array of precious stones, receptacles of mystery, strength, and wonder. The purpose of this *étalage* is definitely to impress the reader, but these gems also reveal the insuperable force of Adrastes:

Esmeragdes, jaspes, sardoines,

¹²⁹"La mappemonde s'étend sur cinq zones, / peintes comme les a faites la Nature; / car les deux zones qui sont à l'extérieur / sont pleines de neige et de glace / et sont de couleur violette, / puisque c'est un peu le domaine du froid; / elle est toute rouge, pour évoquer le feu; / tant à cause de la chaleur ardente qu'à cause des neiges, / aucune créature humaine n'habite dans ces trois zones. / Entre chaque zone extérieure et la chaude qui est au milieu, / se trouve une zone tempérée"

¹³⁰"Là sont représentées les antiques cités, / avec leurs murs, leurs tours et leurs défenses: / les tourelles sont dorées à la feuille d'or, / ainsi que les portails et les ponts-levis. / Tous les royaumes et leurs rois légitimes / y sont chacun, représentés, à leur place, ainsi que les soixante-douze dialectes, / la mer Gelée et la mer Sauvage; / on y voit la mer Rouge, incrustée d'émail noir."

Berils, sardes et calcidoins
et jagoinces et crisolites,
et topaices et amatistes
ot tant en l'or, qu'il l'avironent,
contre soleil grante clarté donent. (v. 4346-4351)¹³¹

The tent, in the epic medieval genre, represented the power of the king; each *pavillon* was essentially a microcosm of the lord's court, and as such served to project his strength and mirror his attributes. Thus, it is not surprising that symbols of temporal power and nature's strength dominate the next section of the description of the *pavillon*:

De l'autre part, el maistre pan,
sont peint li douze meis de l'an.
Estez y est oue sez amours,
oue sez bealtez et oue sez fleurs ;
oue sez coulours est peint zestez.
Iver y fait sez tempestez,
qui vente et plue et neige et gresle,
et ses orez ensemble mesle...
Des reis de Grece y fu l'estoire,
de ceux qui orent bone memoire,
les proescs et les estors
que chascuns d'els fist en sez jors. (v. 4352-4367)¹³²

It would appear that Adrastes controls the seasons and the weather as well. If the tent mirrors the extent of the king's power surely many kings would look upon it with great envy. Indeed, his rival, Eteocles, whom the author portrays systematically in a negative manner, possesses no such fancy tent. Mastery of the past is essential to any omnipotent monarch as well, hence the depiction of the deeds of the great kings of Greece's past on the tent's walls. After all, a

¹³¹"Les émeraudes, les jaspes, les sardoines, / les béryls, les sardes et les calcédoines, / les hyacinthes et les chrysolithes, / les topazes et les améthystes / sont si nombreux dans l'or qu'ils parsèment qu'ils resplendissent à la lumière du soleil."

¹³²"De l'autre côté, sur le pan central, / sont peints les douze mois de l'année. / L'été y est avec ses amours, / avec ses beautés et avec ses fleurs; / avec ses couleurs, l'été y est peint. / L'hiver y déchaîne ses tempêtes, / ventant, pleuvant, neigeant et grêlant, / et faisant s'affronter ses ouragans. / ... / Des rois de Grèce on y trouvait l'histoire / - de ceux qui avaient laissé un bon souvenir-, / les prouesses et les combats / que chacun d'eux avait menés pendant sa vie."

good king must be able to emulate the glorious accomplishments of his forbears as well as learn from their mistakes in his pursuit of even greater actions. Lastly, the author draws our attention to the more mundane, but no less impressive details of the tent, that also demonstrate Adrastes's might. Here are some of the tent's ornaments and internal decorations:

Par terre fu d'un paile brun,
onc ne veïstes meillor un,
entaillez a menuz marreals,
a pilers trais et a quarreals.
Colombe ot un en mie la bouche,
d'ivoire fut et teinte rouge,
qui sostint l'aigle et escharbocle
qui fu Flori l'antif, son oncle,
que il conquist quant il prist Perse,
et quant il prist les tourz [de] Terse...
Li paisson qui tiennent le tref
sont de colour vermeil et blef,
les cordes d'argent nielees
et environ desouz trescés. (v. 4370-4385)¹³³

Virtually every aspect of the world appears on the king's tent as well as almost every possible component of earthly wealth. There can be no doubt as to the power of such a monarch, and in the same vein, such an elaborate description prevents us from questioning the author's authority as a transmitter of Ancient lore. To be powerful is to possess the world, even if it is just in the form of a symbolic representation. Adrastes's *pavillon* reveals his power over two of the most significant dimensions of earthly existence: time and space. He is truly a mighty king. Considering his overwhelming desire to govern the world and uncover

¹³³"Le sol était couvert d'une soierie brune; / jamais vous n'en avez vu de meilleure: / elle était brodée de petits motifs géographiques, / avec des piliers et des carrés. / Juste au sommet il y avait une colombe, / faite d'ivoire, teinte en rouge; / elle portait l'aigle et l'escarboucle / qui avait appartenu à Flori l'Ancien, son oncle: / il l'avait conquise quand il avait pris les tours de Tarse. / Sur toute l'étendue de la tente, au sol, / ... / Les piquets qui tiennent la tente / sont de couleur rouge et bleue, / les cordes sont d'argent incrusté d'émail / et tressées par en dessous, tout autour."

its most hidden mysteries, it will be interesting to see how Alexander's tent differs from that of the worthy Adrastes.

Alexandre de Paris palces his description of his hero's tent in the stanza preceding the young conqueror's decision to challenge Darius on the field of battle. Alexander's tent sits in a field, surrounded by innumerable other tents, all of them adorned with eagles: "La fu li maistres tres Alixandre tendus; / Et par la prairie mil pavellons menus, / Tant aigle et tant pomel i ot a or batus" (v. 1936-1938, D). The eagle, veritable king of the heavens, is perched at the tent's summit, just as in the case of Adrastes's pavilion; the tent, if indeed it can be considered as a rich symbol of majesty and worldly supremacy, will inevitably also be a showcase of the leader's strengths. As if to underline the significance of this heavily symbolic abode, this detailed description of the young Greek king's tent interrupts the narration of the preparations before the confrontation with Darius, in a style reminiscent of that of the author of the Roman de Thèbes:

Del tref Roi Alixandre vos dirai la faiture,
Il est et grans et les haus a desmesure ;
L'estache en fu d'ivoire a riche entailleüre,
Et quant ele estoit droite n'i paroit pas jointure.
Li festes iert a or a molt riche faiture ;
A pierres prescieuses estoit l'adobeüre. (v. 1948-1953, D)¹³⁴

Several features stand out in this passage. First of all, the tremendous size of the tent matches the great extent of Alexander's power and eventual conquests. The use of the adjective "desmesure" is also reminiscent of another epic hero from the tradition of French epic poetry. Indeed, the protagonist of the *Chanson de Roland* is nothing if not the incarnation of the concept of "démésure"; his desire for battle-won honor knows no limits, and the lengths to

¹³⁴"La tente du roi Alexandre, je vais vous la décrire: / elle est d'une hauteur et d'une largeur immenses, / soutenue par un pilier d'ivoire richement sculpté, qui se dresse tout droit, sans la moindre jointure apparente. / La poutre du faite est somptueusement décorée d'or / et sertie de pierres précieuses."

which he will go to achieve his vainglorious objectives are without bounds as well.

Alexander's all-consuming need to conquer the world is akin to Roland's greatest strength and most tragic flaw. Once again the presence of exotic, kingly materials, ivory and gold, reminds us of our hero's stature, and the wondrous ivory column, essentially holding up the "heavens" within the tent belongs to the realm of the marvelous. It is flawless, just like the power of divinity and the forces that created the earth. Precious stones, holders of mysterious power, decorate the tent as well, just as in the case of Adrastes's pavilion. There are some differences between the two works, however, and these elements reveal some of the exceptional qualities of Alexander. The Macedonian prodigy's tent possesses many more marvelous qualities than that of the king of Argos, an indication perhaps that the young king seeks to inscribe himself within the mythological realm. Take for example the top of the structure:

Deus pumiaus i a teus qui sont bon par nature,
L'uns iert d'un escharboucle, qui luist par nuit obscure,
Li autres d'un topasce, la pierre est clere et pure
Et tempre du soleil la cholor et l'ardure.
Or vus dirai après quels est la couverture ;
Il n'ot onques mellor tant com li siecles dure,
Car tuit li quatre pan furent fait sans consture.
De fin or espanols furent fait li paisson,
Et les cordes de soie, qui tendent environ,
Et ot aveuc mellé plume d'alerion ;
Arme nes peut trenchier, tant ait acier bon. (v. 1954-1964, I)¹³⁵

When one reads the description of the precious stone at the top of the tent, one cannot help but think of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the magnificent *phare*

¹³⁵"Les deux pommeaux ont de merveilleux pouvoirs: / l'un est une escharboucle qui illumine les nuits obscures, / et l'autre une topaze, une pierre claire et pure / qui atténue la chaleur et la brûlure du soleil. / Quant aux étoffes qui recouvrent la charpente, / on ne pourrait en trouver de meilleures dans le monde entier: / les quatre pans sont faits d'une seule pièce. / Les piquets sont du plus pur d'or d'Espagne, / et les cordes qui tendent les étoffes / sont tissées de soie et de plumes d'alerion: / l'acier le plus fort ne saurait les trancher."

*d'Alexandrie*¹³⁶. The magical gem on top is symbolic of one of Alexander's most unusual qualities as an adventurous monarch. Just as the powerful light from the "escharboucle" illuminates the night, so too does Alexander seek to uncover the earth's secrets, and journey to all its hidden parts. This beam of energy, piercing the fear-inspiring obscurity, reflects Alexander's own insatiable curiosity and the driving hunger of his intellect. The topaz, on the other hand, a veritable scientific wonder similar to the bathyscaphe or the gryphon-drawn chariot¹³⁷, magically reduces the strength of the sun's rays and protects the tent's inhabitants from excessive heat. The tent's construction also belongs to the mysterious world of *le merveilleux*: the fabric of its walls is unique and priceless, the stakes are of pure Spanish gold, the ropes are made of silk and the rare feather of the *alerion*¹³⁸ and therefore imbued with terrific strength: no blade can slice through them. The tent's exterior at first sight is fairly banal; each *pan* is a different color: white, black, red, and green. Yet, the origin of these colors is anything but ordinary:

L'uns est plus blans que nois et plus chers que glaçon,
Li autres de travers est plus noirs que charbon,
Et li tiers fu vermaus, tains de sanc de dragon,
Et li quars fu plus vers que fuelle de plançon.
La roïne le fist, ce dist en la leçon,

¹³⁶In actual fact, the story of this light atop Alexander's tent probably has its origins in reality. Olivier Battistini and Pascal Charvet write in their annotated history of Alexander the Great, *Alexandre le Grand: Histoire et Dictionnaire*: Alexandre apporta des modifications aussi profondes qu'utiles à l'organisation et au fonctionnement des son corps de bataille... Quand il décidait de lever le camp, c'était la trompette qui en donnait le signal, mais dans le vacarme ambiant, la plupart du temps, on n'en percevait pas le son; en conséquence, il fit dresser au-dessus de la tente royale une perche visible de partout, au sommet de laquelle le signal était, pour tous également, bien en vue: la nuit c'était une flamme, le jour une fumée. (108). This is just one example of the sort of change that Alexandre de Paris operates on the sources of his work.

¹³⁷In the Third Branch of the *Roman*, Alexander asks his men to build a submarine of glass to allow him to explore the ocean floor. Similarly when his army enters the wild lands of Scythia, he orders the construction of a chariot that gryphons will carry into the sky.

¹³⁸Laurence Harf-Lancner writes that, according to the tradition in the bestiaries, the feathers of the *alerion* were as sharp as razors (196).

Qui par sa grant biauté deçut Roi Salomon. (v. 1966-1971, I)¹³⁹

Superlatives dominate this description: the color of each wall of the tent is so rich that it cannot be found in all the natural world, and one of the *pans* is dyed with the mythical dragon's blood. Alexandre de Paris also lets us know that the tent itself has a famous ancestry. Biblical wonders and myth combine to impress the reader in this passage; Alexandre de Paris never answers the question of how Alexander came to possess such a relic, but rather continues in his dizzying explanation:

Del poil fu d'une beste qui salemandre ot non,
Tous tans se gist en fu, n'a autre garison,
Ne ja ne porra fus ardoir le pavellon ;
Et qant il est ploiés et mis en quaregnon,
Sel met on en la goissed'un dencel de grifon. (v. 1972-1976, I)¹⁴⁰

There are four references to creatures of the Bestiaries in this *laisse*: the alerion, the dragon, the salamander, and the griffon. Each one is powerful, exotic, and mysterious; they are never present in such great numbers in other more traditional medieval epics. It may be possible to find an eagle's feather or a lion's claw scattered here or there in a work such as the Chanson de Roland or the Couronnement de Louis, but their dominant presence here is a strong indicator of the author's intention to create new myth by following in the tradition of his Classical forebears. The tent's material is fire-resistant because it is made from the salamander's fur. It is almost as if, as in the case of the Roman de Thèbes, the tent's description presents the reader is an opportunity for the author to show off his knowledge of *le merveilleux* and the secrets of Antiquity. Even the tent's entryway has magical qualities:

¹³⁹"L'un est plus blanc que neige et plus clair que la glace, / l'autre, sur la largeur, plus noir que le charbon; / le troisième est vermeil, teint du sang d'un dragon, / et le dernier plus vert que la feuille sur la branche. / C'est l'œuvre, à ce que disent les livres, d'une reine de grande beauté qui trompa le roi Salomon."

¹⁴⁰"On y trouve la fourrure d'un animal nommé salamandre, / qui vit dans le feu et s'y trouve bien: / nul feu ne saurait donc brûler le pavillon. / Et quand il est plié en quatre, / il a la taille d'une dent de griffon."

Li huis du pavellon fu fais d'autre maniere,
 De la pel d'un serpent qui fu grans et pleniere ;
 Ele est et blanche e clere plus que nule verriere,
 Por la bonté qu'ele a doit ele estre plus chiere,
 Car se hom i aproche, neïs feme legiere,
 Qui port entoschement, torner l'estuet messiere,
 Après devient obscure et gete tel fumiere
 Com fet desor le fu une bollant chaudiere,
 Cele espoisse li dure une lieuee entiere. (v. 1977-1986, I)¹⁴¹

This magical doorway combines several remarkable qualities. Firstly, it is made from the transparent, shimmering skin of a rare serpent. Secondly, it possesses the marvelous capacity to detect evil, and to become a solid, impenetrable barrier when a man or woman *de moeurs légères* tries to gain entry. It also spews forth a thick, all-obscuring cloud of smoke to deter intruders. One might ask however if a valiant hero-king really needs such a fantastic defense mechanism. Yet few symbols can rival the power of the statue of the animal at the very top of the tent:

Sor la feste du tref, ou sont li dui pumel,
 Par molt grant maiestire i ot mis un oisel
 En samblance d'un aigle, nus hom ne vit tant bel ;
 La roïne le fist c'on clamoit Ysabel.
 Li pié sont d'aïmant, entaillié a cisel,
 Si ot sanc de buef, plus de plain de tounel,
 Et tient entre ses piés de fer un grant quarrel ;
 Et li cors et les eles et li maistre coutel
 Furent tuit de fin or et cuisses et mustel ;
 Et la plume d'argent, entaillie a neel ;
 Les pierres precieuses valent mieus d'un chastel ;
 Qui n'est mie plus grans que li cors d'un aignel ;
 Dieus ne fist encor onques nul dromont si isnel,
 Qui tant fust escuellis devant le vent bisel,
 Q'il ne face arester, sel claïment escuinel.
 Ens el bec dedevant avoit un chalemel ;

¹⁴¹"L'entrée du pavillon offre un autre spectacle, / grande et large, formée de la peau d'un serpent, / plus claire et brillante qu'une verrière, / et plus précieuse encore par son merveilleux pouvoir: / si jamais s'en approchant un homme ou une femme légère / porteurs de poison, il leur faut faire demi-tour, / car la porte se ferme, plus infranchissable qu'une muraille de pierre, / devient sombre et projette une fumée plus épaisse que celle d'un chaudron sur le feu, / sur plus d'une lieue de long."

Qant li vens se fiert ens, donques chante si bel
Que mieus vaut a oïr que flagol ne frestel. (v. 1989-2007, I)¹⁴²

If Alexandre de Paris devotes an entire *laisse* to his description, he must have a good reason.

The eagle is a tremendous symbol of strength. King of the heavens as well as the earth below, it also harkens back to the far-reaching supremacy of Rome. The paintings on the inner walls of the tent represent essentially an amalgam of the varied interests of the world conquering king's voracious intellect. One of the inner walls is adorned with images of the seasons and months, but Alexandre de Paris makes sure to underline the true significance of these representations. He ends this first descriptive *laisse* with the following: "Par letres sor escribes i est tout devise" (v. 2019, I)¹⁴³. The explanation of the image is just as significant as the image itself. Herein lies one of the essential differences between our hero and the typical all-conquering protagonist of a *chanson de geste*: Alexander the Great is perhaps one of the first, complex, difficult-to-read literary characters. He is truly multi-dimensional: intellectual ability, valour, excellent leadership, thoughtfulness, and awareness of his own mortality all coexist within one man. Is it going too far to say that he is the one of the first medieval prototypes of a renaissance man? The description of the second wall reinforces this hypothesis:

En l'autre pan après, se voliés garder,
Veissiés mapamonde ensegnier et moster
Ensi comme la terre est enclose de mer

¹⁴²"Au faite de la tente, orné des deux pommeaux, / on avait placé avec grand art un oiseau, / un aigle d'une beauté incomparable, / qu'avait créé la reine nommée Isabelle. / Ses pattes sont de diamant taillé; / on a utilisé, pour le faire, plus d'un tonneau de sang de bœuf. / Il tient entre les pattes une grande flèche de fer. / Les corps, les ailes et les pennes / sont d'or fin, comme les cuisses et les jambes. / Ses plumes sont d'argent sculpté et émaillé. / Les pierreries qui le couvrent ont plus de prix qu'un château. / La queue est faite de l'arête d'un poisson / qui n'est pas plus grand qu'un agneau; / il n'est pourtant navire au monde, si rapide soit-il, / et emporté par le vent, / don il n'arraîte la course: on nomme échénéide. / Dans son bec, on a placé un chaleumeau / qui au souffle du vent, est plus doux à entendre / que le son des flûtes et des flageolets."

¹⁴³"Des descriptions, en haut, expliquent toutes les figures."

Et com li philosophe la varent deviser
Et metre en trois parties que je sai bien nomer :
C'est Aise et Eürope et Aufrique sa per. (v. 2020-2025, I)¹⁴⁴

This *étalage* of knowledge is not indicative of not only Alexander's intellectual capacities, it is as if to underline his own knowledge, Alexandre de Paris addresses the reader directly here, describing how the tent's wall provides a geography lesson. Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas points out that: "[Alexandre de Paris] se sert de ses connaissances encyclopédiques comme de motifs littéraires, il les resémantise en les intégrant au récit de la destinée d'Alexandre (263). Even more directly, he shows off his *connaissances* and tells his readers that he is quite capable of naming the parts of the earth that are depicted.

The tent, font of the king's power on campaign, within the Roman reflects the ambitions of our protagonist and the goal of his relentless pursuit of conquests. The next few lines provide us with a rare glimpse of Alexander's true motivations:

Alixandres li rois I veut molt esgarder
Qant il gist en son lit por son cors deporter,
Li douze per o lui por son sens escouter;
Et qant porpensés s'est, si commence a jurer
Que molt fist Dieus poi terre por un home honorer;
Deus tans en peüst bien uns preudoms gouverner.
Et puis a dit après: "Se longes puis durer,
Seur tant com il en est vaurai je segnorer." (v. 2028- 2035, I)¹⁴⁵

This magnificent tent therefore not only reveals Alexander the Great's power and intelligence, it also could be viewed as a sort of dreamscape, where his visions and aspirations of conquest can take shape. Thus, among the list of attributes that can be

¹⁴⁴"Plus loin, sur l'autre pan, vous pourriez découvrir / la mappemonde qui vous montre et enseigne / que la terre est entourée de mer / et divisée, selon les philosophes, en trois parties que je sais nommer: / c'est l'Asie et l'Europe et l'Afrique leur compagne."

¹⁴⁵"Alexandre le roi les contemple souvent, / étendu dans son lit, quand il se repose, / entouré des douze pairs qui admirent sa science. / Il médite et se met à jurer / que Dieu a créé une terre trop petite pour l'honneur d'un homme: / un seul preux pourrait gouverner deux fois plus d'espace. / Et d'ajouter: «Si je peux vivre assez longtemps, / je veux étendre mon empire sur toutes les terres existantes!»"

associated with the Greek king, one might also add the traits of a dreamer and a visionary.

Why a visionary? Alexander conceives of marvelous contraptions for exploring the world; think of his griffon chariot and wondrous submersible. The dreamer in Alexander comes out because he hopes to see all those things that medieval man's imagination can envision and beyond. How many heroes of the medieval era cherish such lofty dreams? Curiosity beyond all measurement is an uncommon characteristic of a *preu chevalier*.

Concluding thoughts

Alexandre de Paris's incorporation of so many rich details relating to the exotic and alien worlds of the unexplored East transforms what could have been a typical Western European medieval didactic epic, replete with familiar symbols of power and the ubiquitous Christian/Pagan struggle, into a tale filled with mesmerizing images of gems and jewels, rare coveted metals, elaborately lifelike painted scenes, automatons, towering monuments, and legendary horses in which the hero almost assumes a secondary role in contrast to the myth-generating apparatus surrounding him. Alexander operates in this world, as awestruck as the Roman's readers at the breathtakingly beautiful world he seeks to dominate, and this is one of the key elements that project the saga into the realm of new myth. This world of heavenly riches is so impressive that over the course of the Greek army's journey, it begins to acquire an unreal, otherworldly quality, and it is precisely at the *croisement* of the real world and this dream world that Alexander emerges as a new type of heroic figure.

V. Dreams and Reality

Alexander's future is foreshadowed in a dream sequence in the first Branch of the Roman. This is one of the first appearances of the marvelous in the work, and it is not by coincidence that the dream sequence is rich in marvelous components. The dream is necessarily *porteur de sens* for medieval man, and the only meaning that can match Alexander's turbulent identity is one that is steeped in mystery and the realm of the other-worldly. In Au delà du merveilleux: Essai sur les mentalités du Moyen Age, Claude Lecouteux describes the significance of dreams to the medieval mindset:

Le contenu du rêve est donc bien une réalité, d'où son importance dans l'univers mental des hommes du Moyen Age. C'est un message, une préfiguration, un avertissement plus ou moins clair, d'où la nécessité de recourir à des spécialistes de l'interprétation (norrois *draumspakr*). C'est une forme de communication entre les hommes, communication qui passe par une autre dimension qui peut être l'au-delà. (50)

If one considers the dream to be a *croisement* of the concrete world and the realm of the imagination, this text appears in a different light. Fantasy and reality coexist and become confused in a dream sequence, and this disorder persists throughout the entire Roman. Fantastic elements will consistently infiltrate otherwise realistic scenes, or at least scenes that are commonplace in the more reality-bound genre of the *chanson de geste*. Here is the account of the famous dream of the five-year-old king that numerous sages will seek to interpret:

La nuit songa un songe, une avison obscure,
Que il mangoit un oef dont autres n'avoit cure,
A ses mains le roloit par mi la terre dure,

Si que li oés briosit par mi la pareüre;
 Uns sarpens en issoit d'orgelleuse nature,
 Onques hom ne vit autre de la sieue figure;
 Son lit avironoit trois fois tout a droiture,
 Puis repairoit ariere droit a sa sepulture,
 A l'entrer chaï mors, ce fu grans aventure. (v. 254-62, I)¹⁴⁶

Essentially, this dream encapsulates the story of the king's life. Several wise men will offer their interpretations of the vision, but the assembled councilors only accept Aristotle's opinion. His is the voice of the ancients, a scholar whose wisdom is timeless. Medieval man knows of his teachings and considers many of them without question as truth. Yet the first two mages who analyze the sequence, Saligot de Ramier and Astarus, are perhaps closer to reality in their interpretations. Both view the dream as an ill omen; the serpent does indeed represent Alexander, but they see him as a cruel tyrant, a conqueror who will eventually suffer a terrible defeat and disgrace. Indeed, as Jacques LeGoff points out in his collection of essays, Un Autre Moyen Age, dreams often possessed a dangerous quality for medieval man. Under most circumstances, unless a Christian symbol appeared during the vision, they were considered to be the work of demons. There were some exceptions, however. He writes that «Le christianisme accepta le maintien et même la renaissance d'une élite traditionnelle de rêveurs privilégiés : les rois. » (723)¹⁴⁷. Yet Alexander is not a Christian king! The muddled possible interpretations of the significance of the dream serve to heighten the obscure nature of the young king's identity. Is he a king to be admired or feared, and are his actions

¹⁴⁶"La nuit il eut un songe, une vision obscure: / Il allait manger un œuf dont nul autre ne voulait, /le faisait rouler dans ses mains sur le sol dur, / et la coquille de l'œuf se brisait. / Il en sortait un redoutable serpent, / le plus redoutable qu'on eût jamais vu; /par trois fois il faisait le tour du lit / puis retournait tout droit vers l'œuf, sa sépulture, / et tombait mort en y entrant, par un grand prodige." (Harf-Lancner 87-89)

¹⁴⁷Le Goff explains that to the pagan mind, dreams have always possessed the potential for bearing prophecy, but that this function of dreams entered directly into conflict with onirological interpretation as promulgated by the Church: "La grande attraction des rêves pour les païens venait surtout du fait que certains d'entre eux, les rêves prophétiques, pouvaient révéler l'avenir. Mais désormais le futur fait partie du domaine réservé du Dieu chrétien " (716).

praiseworthy or entirely self-seeking? The rest of the Roman will offer possible answers to these questions.

Le Merveilleux and Reality

Caught between the genres of the *chanson de geste* and the *roman*, le Roman d'Alexandre is filled with stylistic effects that reveal the epic struggle of a heroic figure set against the ever-shifting backdrop of reality-anchored and *motif*-based scenes of combat, council and character description and fantastic, surreal scenes of encounters with other-worldly characters, creatures, and events. At times, elements of *le merveilleux* can be found side by side with realistic descriptions. For instance, in his descriptions of battle scenes, observing the typical style of the *chanson de geste*, Alexandre de Paris provides the reader with brief biographical details about each of the combatants and their steeds. Typically, the warrior in question hails from some exotic locale, or possesses exceptional skills, but on occasion, the narrator inserts a surprising detail. When Alexander's army confronts the host of the Indian king for the second time, the narrator precedes each individual confrontation with an introductory description of each of the warriors. Sometimes, however, these can be quite unusual:

Bos, li rois de Cartage, a sa gent amenee,
Et furent bien vint mil de noire gent barbee.
Il sist el cheval noir que li tramist la fee
Por cui amor passa un bras de mer salee. (v. 1838-1841, III)¹⁴⁸

One wonders who this *fée* is for whom the evil king of Carthage crossed the sea, driven by love. The *récit* continues without any further explanation, however. To excite his reader's imagination, Alexandre de Paris deliberately blurs the line between the world of cold steel,

¹⁴⁸"Bos le roi de Carthage, conduit ses troupes, / vingt mille chevaliers noirs et barbus. / Il monte un cheval noir, don de la fée / pour l'amour de laquelle il a franchi la mer."

charging *destriers*, bloodshed, and the realm of enchantments, magic, and fairy love. There is no further clarification concerning the identity of the Carthaginian king, and it is as if, by incorporating the detail of the *fée* so haphazardly, Alexandre de Paris wants the reader not to hesitate in believing it to be true. In this text, reality and *le merveilleux* coexist on an equal footing. The first Branch of the Roman offers another example of this calculated blend of realism and the fantastic. Before Alexander's men encounter Darius, they come upon a strange mountain:

A l'issue du regne, a l'entrée d'Elis,
 Truevent une merveille quis a tous esbahis,
 Une tertre aventureus de maint home haïs,
 Qui iert et haus et lons et de deus pars closis
 De vaus grans et parfons, perilleus et soutis;
 Qui charroit la dedens bien porroit estre fis
 Que ja mais n'en istroit, ains i seroit peris.
 Or oiés la merveille don li mons est garnis:
 Qant couars hom i entre, senpres devient hardis,
 Tous li pires du mont i est si esbaudis;
 Et li preus i devient ainsi acouardis
 Et malvais de corage et de fais et de dis
 Tous li mieudres i est fols et avilenis;
 Et li destriers de garde laniers et alentis
 Et li roncis malvais desreés et braidis.
 De maint home a esté icis tertres maudis. (v. 2517-2532, I)¹⁴⁹

This is an example of a common sequence within the Roman. Alexandre de Paris takes great care to paint a picture of the enchanted mountain in detail, providing his readers initially with a believable description of a steep outcropping flanked by perilous ravines. Yet this is merely a lure whereby he draws the reader in, providing him with an image of a recognizable, awe-

¹⁴⁹"Au sortir du royaume, a l'entrée d'Elis, / ils trouvent une merveille qui les frappe de stupeur: / un tertre aventureux haï de tous les hommes. / Il était haut et large, borde des deux côtés / de grandes vallées profondes, périlleuses, écartées: / si l'on y tombait, on pouvait être sûr / de n'en jamais sortir et de mourir au fond. / Ecoutez la merveille qui domine cette montagne: / quand un couard y pénètre il devient courageux; / le pire soldat du monde se sent rempli de d'ardeur. / Mais le preux est soudain rempli de couardise / lâche dans son cœur, ses actes, ses paroles: / le meilleur sombre dans la folie et la vilénie. / Le destrier de prix devient lent et poussif, / Et le mauvais roussin fougueux et impétueux. / Ce tertre a suscité bien des malédictions."

inspiring natural phenomenon to which he then attributes supernatural, fear-generating qualities.

Alternatively, one might also view this scene as an inversion of reality; perhaps it provides the reader with a glimpse of the protagonist's fundamental inner failing. Here Alexander is clearly not the demigod one might find in a classical text. He is indeed not immune to the ravaging effects of the mysterious mountain. Yet, as Lecouteux points out, mountains are often where the heroes of medieval literature test their mettle: "La montagne est frontière entre les dieux et les hommes, entre les chrétiens et l'Antéchrist, entre le bien et le mal; elle est le lieu où s'affrontent deux mondes diamétralement opposés qui tentent de communiquer par le biais des héros et des élus" (Au-delà du merveilleux 138). During this adventure, however, Alexander fails to bridge the gap between the two worlds. He remains just as frightened or stunned by the mountain's mystery as his men:

N'a si sage home en l'ost qui ne s'en espoënt ;
Alixandres meïsmes s'en va molt mervellant.
Li val furent parfont , et li tertres agus
Qui a fait maint preudome dolens et irascus,
Grant duel ot Alixandres ains qu'il en fust issus. (v. 2557-2561, D)¹⁵⁰

No one comes away victorious from this encounter with the other-worldly realm; in fact, the mountain reduced all the heroes to cowards while elevating the timorous to the ranks of the brave. The peaceful tranquility that only nature can provide, in this case "Un bruel d'oliviers novelement foillus" (v. 2563)¹⁵¹ which Alexander and his men come upon shortly after coming down from the mountain, is the only force capable of restoring balance to the world.

¹⁵⁰"Les plus sages, dans l'armée, sont épouvantés / Alexandre lui-même est rempli de stupeur. / Les vallées sont profondes, et le tertre au sommet pointu / plonge bien des preux dans la douleur et l'affliction. / Alexandre endure bien des souffrances avant de le quitter."

¹⁵¹"Un bois d'oliviers aux feuilles nouvelles"

This placement of the strange incident of the enchanted mountain at the beginning of the army's march into the unknown east is an ill omen, indicative perhaps of a mysterious doom that will befall the hero and his army during their travels. It certainly could have significance, for Alexander and his men do not always contend with the marvels of the Orient in the bravest of manners. Alexandre de Paris underlines the shock and fear they endured after the frightening mountain:

Alixandres meïsmes en apela ses drus;
D'ient de la meruelle qui les a deceüs
Q'onques mais en cest siecle ne fut eus plais veüs. (v. 2571-2573, I)¹⁵²

This episode marks the hero's entry into a realm where virtually every aspect of his environment will present him with a challenge, whether he is in combat with a rival king such as Porus or the Emir of Babylon, or simply trying to cross a marshland infested with hippopotami.

The recurring theme that the world is not large enough to satisfy Alexander's ravenous curiosity shapes Alexandre de Paris's narrative. Alexander's unusual undersea journey is indeed a perfect example of this *démesure*. His men are terrified at the idea, and this fear serves to accentuate the audacity of the young king's plan. He announces:

Or vous veul aconter que jou ai en pensé :
Assés ai par la terre et venu et alé,
De ciaus de la mer voil savoir la verité,
Ja mais ne finerai si l'avrai esprové. (v. 395-398, III)¹⁵³

¹⁵²"Alexandre appelle ses compagnons; / ils parlent de la meruelle qui les a pris au piège: / on n'a jamais vu sa pareille au monde."

¹⁵³"Voici mon nouveau projet . / J'ai beaucoup voyagé sur la terre. / Je veux découvrir la vie des habitants de la mer: / il me faut a tout prix faire cette expérience!"

Alexander orders the construction of a submersible ship entirely made of glass for himself and two other occupants. Strangely enough, the text does not indicate who exactly accompanies him on the journey, but this may be to avoid detracting from the focus set upon the young king. Regardless, of this omission, one can only marvel at such a strange creation:

Li ouvrier li ont fait un molt riche vaissel,
Tous iert de voirre blanc, ainc hom ne vit si bel.
De meisme font lampes environ le tounel,
Que la dedens ardoient a joie et a revel
Que ja n'avra en mer tant petit poissoncel.
Que li rois bien ne voie, ne agait ne cembel. (v. 422-427, III)¹⁵⁴

Here however, Alexandre de Paris closely blends realism with a fantastic, fear-inspiring component of his narrative. The present-day reader, and his medieval counterpart are drawn in to believing that this odd creation existed, because Alexandre de Paris describes the bathyscaphe's construction in some detail. Additionally, he provides a 'realistic' description of how the craft is sent off into the depths:

Li notonier l'en portent en mer en un batel,
Que il ne pust hurter a roche n'a quarrel.
Ens el pommel desus ot fondu u anel,
Iluec tient la chaene, dont fort sontli clavel.
Li touniaus fu en l'eaue en un batel portés
Et fu de toutes pars a plonc bien scelés. (v. 430- 435, III)¹⁵⁵

There may be a subtext here. The young king is perhaps too anchored in reality for him to possibly ever attain the status of a true mythical hero. Such a hero would operate solely in the realm of the fantastic, and would not need a meticulously lead-sealed craft to explore the undersea world. Alexander is perhaps one of the few (or the first?) characters to bridge/

¹⁵⁴"Les ouvriers fabriquent un superbe vaisseau, / tout de verre limpide, on n'en vit jamais de si beau. / Ils garnissent de lampes l'intérieur du tonneau: / c'est un grand plaisir que de les voir ainsi briller! / La mer ne contient pas poisson assez petit / pour échapper au regard du roi, tout comme le moindre piège."

¹⁵⁵"Les marins le transportent en haute mer, / pour lui éviter de heurter le moindre rocher. / Au sommet est fixé un anneau / où est accrochée la chaîne aux maillons robustes."

straddle the two realms of literary creation: the purely imaginative and the fear-generating real.

In any case, the undersea journey offers Alexander an opportunity to see the predation dynamics of the aquatic world which parallel the social structure of the surface. In three consecutive *laissez*, the poem describes how the fearless young king sees observes the big fish devouring the little ones:

Li grant, li plus hardi, cil sont el premier front;
Qant prenent le petit, sempres transglouti l'ont,
Et se il lor eschape, tantost agait li font.
Li plus for prent lefeble si l'ocist et confront;
Qant li petit eschapent a val la mer s'en vont. (v. 485-490, III)¹⁵⁶

Witnessing the inescapable cruelty of the natural world brings great joy to Alexander, who, upon his return to his companions on the surface, declares his intention to fight Porus, the sovereign of India awaiting the arrival of the Greeks on the borders of his kingdom.

Alexander's dual nature emerges in this episode. On the one hand, he is a ruler and general, preoccupied with matters of conquest and power. He therefore interprets his frightening undersea experience as an allegory for the constant human struggle between the weak and the strong. Yet, at the same time, throughout this experience our protagonist is quite literally steeped in the impossible, in the terrifying realm of the improbable, for it is hard to conceive of someone daring to sink to the bottom of the ocean in such a fragile glass container as he does. On this occasion at least, his actions mirror those of the intrepid mythical figures of classical antiquity. Heracles defeated the nine-headed Hydra of Lerna, an impossible, implausible task. One of the creature's heads was immortal, and if he hacked off any of the

¹⁵⁶"Les grands, les plus hardis se trouvent au premier rang: / ils prennent le petit, ont tôt fait de l'engloutir; / si jamais il échappe, ils lui tendent un piège. / Le plus fort prend le faible, le tue et le détruit. / Quand les petits échappent, ils s'enfoncent dans la mer."

others, two heads would grow in its place. Both heroes confront and succeed at a task where a normal human could not. Alexander's "conquest" of the undersea realm is not unlike Theseus's striking down of the Minotaur on the island of Crete, Perseus's skillful evasion of deadly Medusa, and Odysseus's defeat of Polyphemus.

One principal difference, however, between Alexander and the traditional Greek heroic figures, is that where Heracles, Jason, Theseus, Perseus, Atalanta, or Odysseus affront perils that are essentially trials in order to survive, the young king exhibits a conscious ambition to inscribe himself in the mythological tradition. Alexander's decision to descend to the ocean floor is motivated by his own quest for glory. It is almost as if he hopes to achieve the status of a mythic hero through imitation. His efforts, however, are greeted by silence on the part of the gods. Similarly, toward the end of Branch III, he seeks to conquer the heavens by being flying into the sky in a chariot drawn by savage, terrifying beasts, the griffons of Scythia. Alexandre de Paris clearly indicates to the reader that to attempt such a feat is folly:

En icele contree don't vos fais mension
Conversent un oisel qu sont nome griffon,
D'orable forme sont, hideus comme dragon,
Bien mengue au mengier chascuns d'aus un moton.
Volentiers les esgarde li rois et si baron,
Chevalier et sergant, escuier et garcon ;
Pluisors en a en l'ost q'en ont grant marison.
Li rois est molt pensis que fera ne que non :
Vers le ciel veut monter, s'il en trueve raison,
Et dedesus les nues se metra a bandon,
Et s'il i fait trop chaut sentir en veut l'arson. (v. 4949-4959, III)¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷"Dans cette contrée dont je vous parle / vivent des oiseaux qu'on appelle griffons, / d'aspect horrible, hideux comme des dragons. / Chacun d'eux mange bien un mouton à son repas. / le roi et ses barons les contemplent, / et tous les chevaliers, les sergents, les écuyers et les serviteurs: / plus d'un dans l'armée est épouvané à leur vue. / Le roi hésite sur la conduite à tenir: il veut monter au ciel, s'il en trouve le moyen / et s'élancer au-dessus des nuages, / et même s'il fait trop chaud, sentir la brûlure du soleil."

This episode clearly parallels the classical tale of Daedalus and Icarus's escape from imprisonment from the labyrinth of the island of Crete using wings designed by the old inventor and architect. Yet, necessity motivates this daring feat, while curiosity and vainglory drive Alexander in his flight. The Greek legend decries the recklessness of the foolhardy son, Icarus, who does not heed his father's warning and climbs too high, striving to reach the sun. The wax holding his wings together melts, and he hurtles to his death in the ocean. Apollodorus, a Greek poet who probably wrote in the first or second century A.D, uses this incident to contrast the carelessness of youth with the poise and wisdom of old age.

Several other elements also stand out in this passage in the Roman: the young king's own hesitation when faced with the fearsome beasts, and the terror exhibited by his followers, which systematically serves to incite Alexander to action. First and foremost, his desire to enter the world of myth is evident: "De moi et de mes fais et de mon hardement veul que se mervellent a tous jors mais la gent" (v. 4985-86, III)¹⁵⁸. He does not thrust himself into danger oblivious to the feat's inherent risk, however. Hesitation clearly governs his actions: "Li rois est molt pensis que fera ne que non: / Vers le ciel veul monter, s'il en trueve raison, / et dedesus les nues se metra a bandon" (v. 4956-59, III)¹⁵⁹. Alexandre de Paris writes that: "Li rois en a en soi grant ire et grant tençon" (v. 4964, III)¹⁶⁰. Try as he might to rival antiquity's greatest heroes, he cannot escape his human nature. Just as his faithful, eminently mortal followers are scared of the gryphons, so does the young ruler hesitate before leaping into action. Ultimately though, he cannot resist the temptation of acquiring

¹⁵⁸"Je veul qu'à tout jamais le monde s'émerveille / de mes exploits et de ma hardiesse."

¹⁵⁹"Le roi hésite sur la conduite à tenir: / il veul monter au ciel, s'il en trouve le moyen, / et s'élancer au-dessus des nuages."

¹⁶⁰"Le roi [est] soucieux et tourmenté."

more knowledge that taming the beasts and riding them into the heavens will allow. Here is Alexander's reasoning, where reason once again *lui fait défaut*, as he explains his motivations to his men:

Je veul monter au ciel veoir le firmament,
Veoir veul des montaignes en haut le comblement,
Le ciel et les planetes et tout l'esteement
Et tous les quinze signes ou li solaus descent
Et comment par le mont courent li quatre vent,
Sorveoir veul le siecle, si com li mons porprent ;
La nue porte l'eaue, si veul savoir comment. (v. 4969-75, III)¹⁶¹

It is a very deliberate attempt to rival the omniscience of the heavenly power; Alexander seeks to understand, on a very tangible level, how the world functions (i.e. learning what causes rainfall), but in order to do so, he must defy the medieval conception of the possible, and cross the threshold into the realm of the impossible (i.e. flying into the air in a vehicle drawn by monsters). Just as in the undersea adventure, this passage mixes realistic details in with the fantastic. Alexandre de Paris enters into great detail in his description of the means by which his hero will hurtle into the heavens; whether in an attempt to render his writing as believable as possible, or perhaps in order to underline just how firmly his protagonist is restricted by the flimsy constraints of the human condition. He cannot take flight by simply leaping on the back of the gryphon and commanding it to leap into the air. First, he must ask of his carpenters to fashion a chariot for him:

Segnor maistre, fait il, se vos estes mi dru,
Faites moi une chambre selonc vostre seü,
Ja mais ne soit si bone, ne onques tel ne fu,
De cuirs envelopee, novel soient et cru,
A las les m'atachiés et engliés a glu,

¹⁶¹"Je veux monter au ciel voir le firmament, / et découvrir d'en haut le sommet des montagnes, / le ciel et les planètes et toutes les étoiles, / et les quinze signes le long desquels le soleil suit sa course, / et les quatre vents qui parcourent le monde. / Je veux dominer l'univers, toute l'étendue du monde, / savoir comment les nuages apportent l'eau."

Et fenestres i faites, quel part que me remu,
Que se besoins me vient, par ce n'aie perdu. (v. 4995-01, III)¹⁶²

It is difficult to imagine a mythical hero who would be concerned that his chariot have windows so that he can see danger before it strikes. It is equally difficult to conceive of an intrepid adventurer who would even need such a machine to fly into the heavens.

Alexandre de Paris effectively communicates to what extent this adventure belongs to the realm of the fantastic. The followers of the king are terrified by his blind determination to plunge into the gaping maw of perdition. The account of precisely how the apparatus will function is extremely detailed, and in so doing perhaps Alexandre de Paris is simply trying to communicate something essential about the nature of his protagonist. Alexandre de Paris incites his readers to empathize with his hero; after all, wouldn't any simple mortal need to *know* exactly how his flying machine would work? Yet he who truly does not fear death would not care. The powerful need for *action* would govern his spirit, and not the doubts and fears inherent to our all too mortal *reflection*. People think, but heroes act. Alexandre de Paris's account of the young king's preparation for flight is reminiscent of the tale of the first 20th century daring aviators:

Cil ont si charpenté et le cuir estendu
Que de tous fu loëe et a son talent fu.
Li rois la fait porter loins de l'ost en l'erbu,
Cordes i fait lacier, molt se sont esmeü ;...
Vistement est li rois dedens l'engin entrés,
Une lance avec lui et fresche char assés; ...
Li rois est en l'enging, qui n'est pas esgarés;
Estes vos les oisiaus entor lui avolés
Sus et just sont assis et decoste et delés,
Les cuirs crus et la char ont durement grevés (v. 5009-27)¹⁶³

¹⁶²"Maîtres, leur dit-il, si vous m'aimez, / construisez-moi, avec tout votre art, / une loge, la meilleure qu'on ait jamais vue / enveloppée de cuirs tout frais et crus, / fixés par des lacets et enduits de colle! / Faites aussi des fenêtres, afin que, où que j'aïlle, / je puisse voir venir le danger!"

The precision with which Alexandre de Paris describes how the marvelous apparatus functions is rather startling. It is almost like an engineer's rudimentary account of how a mechanical device might work, and it practically satisfies the ever-critical contemporary reader's need for realism. One can nearly envisage how the flying machine could function. Once the king has captured seven or eight gryphons by means of cords, he uses the meat on the end of his lance to incite them to fly:

Qant chascuns d'aus se sent ainsi aficelés,
Ils sachent durement, li engiens est tumbés ;
Il s'en rist coiemment si s'est en piés levés.
Li rois estut sor piés, la chambrete est versee,
Il a prise sa lance, la char i a boutee,
Hor de l'enging la mist, contre mont l'a levee.
Li oisel famelleus la char ont esgardee,
Il tendent contre mont, rendent la lor volee ;
La chambre en ont molt tost lassus en l'air portee.
Il vont la char chaçant, chascuns geule bae,
A tel point com il montent si est la char montee,
Tous tans la cuident prendre, mais folie ont pensee. (v. 5033-44, III)¹⁶⁴

Throughout the text, Alexandre de Paris provides little details that while most certainly highlighting Alexander's valor, also point out the weaknesses behind the youthful king's façade of so-called reckless bravery. The king is fearless, only because he is safe within his carefully fashioned chariot: "Li rois est en l'enging, qui n'est pas esgarés;" (v. 5024, III)¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶³"Ils construisent la loge, la recouvrent de cuir: / tout le monde les félicite, le roi la trouve à son goût. / Il la fait transporter loin de l'armée, dans l'herbe, / y fait fixer des cordes. Tout émus, / ... / Le roi entre vite dans son engin, / avec une lance et des provisions de viande fraîche. / ... / Le roi, dans son engin, n'a aucune crainte. / Voici les oiseaux qui volent autour de lui, / qui se posent ça et là, de tous côtés, / entamant les cuirs et la viande qui entourent la loge."

¹⁶⁴"Quand les oiseaux se sentient attachés, / ils tirent de toutes leurs forces, font tomber l'engin: / Alexandre sourit et se redresse. / Le roi est debout, la petite loge renversée. / Il prend sa lance, y fixe un morceau de viande / qu'il sort de son engin pour la lever vers le ciel. / Les oiseaux, affamés, regardent la viande: / ils s'élancent vers le ciel en prenant leur vol / et ont tôt fait d'emporter la loge dans les airs/ Ils pourchassent la viande, la gueule grande ouverte, / ils croient toujours l'attraper, mais ils ont bien tort."

¹⁶⁵"Le roi, dans son engin, na aucune crainte."

Or further along, he must wear gloves to protect himself from being savaged by the gryphons: "Un gant ot en sa main que il ne fust mostrés" (5029, III)¹⁶⁶ He escapes the fate of Icarus, however, for when he flies so high that the heat becomes deadly in its intensity, the prudent king chooses to return to earth. His reasoning is mysterious, though, as he considers what might happen if the gryphons were to stop flying:

Li rois s'est porpensés, s'il perdent la vole,
Il charra a la terre s'iert sa vie finee
Et sa gent en sera dolente et esgaree,
Car toutes gens le heent qui terre il a gastee. (v. 5054-57, III)¹⁶⁷

These sorts of concerns distance Alexander from the ranks of blindly unthinking warrior heroes and bring him closer to the practical, responsible *modus operandi* of the most earthbound leaders of men.

When Alexander and his army enter the Indian desert after defeating Porus the first time, the Greeks are led by 150 traitorous guides. Alexandre de Paris clearly means for this episode to constitute a trial of sorts for the hero. The desert represents a boundary between two worlds: (1) the lands where the Greeks exhibited their domination of Persians, Indians, and rogue city states and where Alexander successfully mastered the waters of the ocean, and (2) an unknown, hostile realm, where betrayal, deception and mysterious, uncontrollable forces will reign. It resembles to some extent a descent into Hell. In the deserts of India, the serpent is king. "Terre est desiretee, / Car l'ardor du soleil l'a issi eschaufee / N'i a se serpens non dont ele est abitee"v. 986-988, III)¹⁶⁸. In L'Imaginaire médiévale Jacques LeGoff points out that in the literary and hagiographic tradition of the Middle Ages, the desert is in fact

¹⁶⁶"[Le roi] porte des gants pour se protéger."

¹⁶⁷"Le roi se dit que si les oiseaux cessent là leur vol, / il tombera à terre, sa vie s'achèvera là, / et ses hommes seront abandonnés à leur douleur et à leur triste sort."

¹⁶⁸"C'est une terre désolée, / si brûlée par le soleil ardent / qu'elle n'est habitée que de serpents. "

often the place where demons tempt and torture monks and saints (495-498). Similarly, in his article, "La conception du désert chez les moines d'Égypte ", A. Guillaumont indicates that "le désert des moines d'Égypte apparaît comme le lieu par excellence du merveilleux; le moine y rencontre le démon, d'une façon qu'on peut dire inévitable, car le démon est chez lui au désert; mais aussi le moine trouve, au désert, d'une certaine manière, le Dieu qu'il y est venu chercher" (38).

This is of course the ideal landscape in which an epic hero might thrive. If one also considers that not only is the desert a place of trials and devilry, but also, an empty, barren waste, then against the bland background of such a painting, the colorful and active epic hero stands out. Indeed, on numerous occasions, Alexander behaves in a manner befitting just such a hero as well. Indeed, when faced with the desert's trial of unquenchable thirst, he behaves as a praiseworthy leader, standing as a model for his men, and nobly discarding the helmet-full of water that Zéphirus offers him, preferring to endure the suffering along with his men.

As the reader discovers this dread-inspiring land, Alexandre de Paris paints a strikingly realistic scene of the army's anguish as it stumbles across the sun-baked earth into the heart of the Indian desert:

Molt fu l'ost icel jor confondue et matee
Du chaut et de la soif por poi ne fu desvee.
Cil qui pot avoir eaue sa bouche a atempree
Et qui gout n'en ot a sa broigne engoulee,
Por la froidor du fer a la soif respassee. (v. 1035-39, III)¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹"Les hommes sont en ce jour abattus, à bout de leurs forces; / la chaleur et la soif les rendent presque fous. / Celui qui a de l'eau y trempe ses lèvres, / celui qui n'en a plus presse sa broigne dans sa bouche / pour faire passer sa soif à la fraîcheur du métal."

The heat drains the men's will to go on, but temptation and torture also abound. When the army does find a river, near "une roche agüe"(v. 1064, III)¹⁷⁰, its water is undrinkable and bitter to the taste. Crushed by the painful realism of this scene, the abrupt *surgissement* of the marvelous is even more striking. The Greek soldiers stumble along the banks of the river until they come across a fortress on an island set in amongst reeds. How the inhabitants of the island manage to survive in this inhospitable land is, according to our narrator, a feat belonging to the realms of both *mirabilia* and *miraculosus*¹⁷¹. Notably not as present within the Roman as in other medieval works of literature, this descriptive passage contains two references to God. First of all, it is a god-forsaken place, where no grain will grow: "Puis que premierement ot Dieus le mont fermé, de trestoutes anones n'i ot plainpoing semé" (v. 1087-1088, III)¹⁷². Secondly, Alexandre de Paris proclaims that indeed only by a divine miracle could people truly live on that island floating in the middle of poisonous waters: "Nuls ne set lor convine ne don't il ont plenté ou s'il vivent du vent ou de la gloire de Dé" (v. 1096-97, III)¹⁷³.

Naturally, faced with such a mystery, Alexander's need to demonstrate his courage drives him to make a brash decision. He sends 400 of his best men to hide in the marshes surrounding the island until nightfall, because as soon as his soldiers enter the water they are set upon and savaged by the deadly hippopotami that were lurking among the reeds. When

¹⁷⁰"un rocher pointu"

¹⁷¹Le Goff makes a distinction between *mirabilis*, those fantastic elements in a medieval narrative that belong to the realms of pagan mythology and literary invention, and *miraculosus*, or as he writes, "ce que l'on pourrait justement appeler le merveilleux chrétien" (460), where the hand of the Christian God is present in generating awe-inspiring deeds.

¹⁷²"Depuis que Dieu créa le monde, / on n'y sema jamais une poignée de grain."

¹⁷³"Nul ne sait leurs usages ni d'où ils tirent leurs biens, / à moins qu'ils ne vivent du vent ou de la gloire de Dieu!"

Alexander himself hurls himself toward the banks of the river and seeks to avenge his men's deaths, Clin and Tholomé rush to stop him. Symbolic perhaps of his *impuissance*, the young king bows his head and gives in to his companions' pleading. Alexander frequently inclines his head throughout the Roman. The wilds of the Indian desert have gotten the better of him: "Li rois clina vers terre et geta un soupir" (v. 1133, III)¹⁷⁴. He will be unable to conquer the island citadel, and as if to underline his frustration, he condemns to death the 150 guides who knowingly sought to lose the army as they crossed the desert by throwing them in the hippopotami-infested waters, where they are promptly devoured. His men stare at the fearsome beasts' feeding-frenzy, awestruck.

This scene is one of the first instances of the Greek king's failure to master his destiny and that of his men. The heat of the desert almost got the better of Alexander's army, and the island city remains unreachable, surrounded by fetid water and wild animals. After throwing the treasonous guides to the hippopotamuses, Alexander and his men spend an uneasy night unable to sleep, traumatized by the savagery of the scene they just witnessed: "Molt fu liés Alixandres qant il vit ajorner, Il a dit a ses homes: "Ci fait mal converser. Que nous porfiteroit ici a sejourner / Ne hebreger les l'eaue don't nous ne poons gouster ?" (v. 1144-1147, III)¹⁷⁵.

It would seem that rather than show his humanity and express his fear of the frightening creatures in the waters around the fortress, Alexander prefers to tell his men that his reason for leaving is simply that they need to find a source of drinkable water. It is indeed another good example of Alexandre de Paris's desire to marry realism and the fantastic to

¹⁷⁴"Le roi baisse la tête et pousse un soupir."

¹⁷⁵"Alexandre est heureux de voir venir le jour. / Il dit à ses hommes: «Il ne fait pas bon séjourner ici. / a quoi bon rester ici et nous loger / près d'une eau que nous ne pouvons boire?"

highlight one dimension of his protagonist's fallibility. Alexander's fear reflects the reader's own apprehensions as he discovers the wonders of India. It becomes an omnipresent component of the atmosphere generated by the text. As the tale progresses, the Greek king's strengths as a leader and warrior persist, but an air of fragility gradually taints these valorous traits. He becomes less and less master of his own fate. Even throughout this downfall, however, the honorable qualities remain, and he never fails to exhibit regal generosity towards his followers and those who assist him.

After Alexander's entry into the desert of India, his ability to control his destiny seems to escape his grasp to a greater and greater extent. The Indian desert presents him with one challenge after another and the number of instances of the marvelous increases tenfold. India represents an unknown, frightening realm to medieval man. In his collection of essays, Le Goff writes: "C'est Alexandre qui en quelque sorte révèle cette contrée lointaine aux Occidentaux et à une grande partie du monde. Et qui a renforcé cette double représentation de l'Inde : pays de merveilles et de monstres" (Un Long Moyen Age 234). In the Roman, Alexander is edging ever closer to the earthly paradise as medieval man perceived it, and as he approaches the kingdom of God, his power begins to falter. In the 12th century mindset, the earthly paradise lay beyond India, the farthest known region of the world. Le Goff explains why India is the location of Paradise:

Sans doute parce que c'est l'endroit le plus lointain que l'on connaisse. C'est la, selon les légendes médiévales que se trouvent les peuples de Gog et de Magog (qui désignent, dans l'Apocalypse, les nations révoltées à la fin des temps). Ceux-ci étant emprisonnés par Dieu derrière de hautes murailles qu'ils rompent à la fin des temps pour venir envahir le monde, avec l'Antéchrist. Ces peuples sont en quelque sorte les gardiens qui empêchent les hommes de parvenir au Paradis, située derrière eux. Comme presque toujours au MA, ces fantaisies sur l'Inde se construisent à l'intérieur d'un habillage chrétien. L'Inde est l'antichambre du Paradis. (238)

Illusion and disguises

In this land close to heaven, kings lose their power, and roles are reversed. As the tale progresses, it becomes clear that the depiction of Alexander is quite different from the often overly-simplified heroic archetypes that one finds in a *chanson de geste*. Alexandre de Paris goes to great lengths to not paint a one-dimensional portrait of his protagonist. It is certain that Alexander is a brave combatant, but he is also crafty and wily, not above employing subterfuge to achieve his objectives. In the tradition of an Odysseus, who disguises himself as a feeble beggar in order to surprise and trap the covetous suitors who had invaded his home and were pursuing Penelope, Alexander employs a similar method to trick Porus out of food and supplies and to make him believe that he will face a weak, harmless adversary. After facing the nightmarish hordes of monsters in the Indian desert, Alexander's army comes upon the host assembled by Porus in the plains of Bactria. The young king establishes a truce during which the local inhabitants may sell food and wares to the Macedonian soldiers in their encampment. Porus takes advantage of this opportunity to surreptitiously gather information about Alexander and his followers. When Alexander finds out that the Indian king has been asking about him, he decides to counter the dishonorable tactics of his opponent with guile and subterfuge as well: "Qant l'oï Alixandres, saut sus isnelement, / Por aler au marché monta sor un jument, si li furent changié si roial vestement" (v. 1531-1533, III)¹⁷⁶.

To complete his disguise, Alexander trades his trusty warhorse for a nag. Where one would normally find a laudatory, but brief description of a hero's magnificent warhorse,

¹⁷⁶"Alexandre à cette nouvelle, saute sur ses pieds, / et prend une jument pour se rendre au marché, / après avoir changé ses vêtements royaux."

Alexandre de Paris treats his readers to a comical scene where Alexander tries, unsuccessfully, to master a stubborn and unresponsive cob that bucks and leaps about wildly in response to the hero's attempts to spur it forward. Certainly, this is intended as *divertissement* for the reader, but the scene holds more significance than simple, straight-forward comic relief. A warrior of unsurpassed quality, one of the youngest kings to ever conquer so much land and to travel so far in search of heroic challenges, is struggling to master a poor, clumsy beast of burden. This is the same man who tamed Bucephalus, the beast of whom they say:

Qant on prent en ceste regne traïtor ne larron,
 Ja nus hom n'en fera justice se il non;
 A la beste le livrent s'en fait destrusion;
 Il en ocirroït bien quatre vins d'un randon. (v. 437- 440, I)¹⁷⁷

The portrait of the beast the fearsome Greek king will ride when he goes to spy on Porus is quite different:

Montés est Alixandres, au marchié veut aler
 De sor une jument, nus hom ne vit sa per.
 N'estoit noire ne blanche; ne vos sai deviser
 De quel poil ert la beste, onques ne sot ambler.
 Qant li rois fu desus et il s'en veut torner,
 El n'ala mie avant, ains prist a reculer.
 Des esperons la fiert li roiss qui tant fu ber,
 Et ele commença molt fort a regiber,
 En travers a saillir et des pies a geter. (v. 1534-42, III)¹⁷⁸

It is worthwhile to compare this description with one that follows several stanzas later, when the Greeks and Indians have engaged in battle, and Filote, one of the *douze pairs*, charges

¹⁷⁷"Les voleurs et les traîtres qu'on prend dans le royaume, / on lui laisse le soin d'en faire bonne justice: / on les livre à la bête, qui les met à mort / et pourrait en tuer quatre-vingts à la fois."

¹⁷⁸"Pour aller au marché, Alexandre monte une jument / dont on n'a jamais vu la pareille: / elle n'est ni noire ni blanche, je ne peux vous en dire / la couleur ; elle ne sait pas aller à lamble. / Quand le roi monte en selle et veut se mettre en route, / elle refuse d'avancer, se met à reculer. / Le noble roi la pique des éperons / et elle se met à regimber, à sauter et à ruer de côté."

into the fray: “Filotes sist armés el cheval espanois, / Qui fu destre comés et si blans comme nois” (1925-1926, III)¹⁷⁹. This is more like the type of equine portrait to which Alexandre de Paris’s readers are accustomed. Knowing that Alexander will eventually die, poisoned, ignominiously murdered, and not succumb to wounds received in a glorious, hard-fought battle, where his martial abilities could be tested, sheds an even spookier light on this scene. It essentially foreshadows his humiliating demise.

Doubtless Alexandre de Paris seeks principally to entertain his readers with this unusual scene of the hero riding a steed more suitable for a peasant than for a king. Yet once again, it could also be viewed as a striking image of Alexander’s fundamental inability to completely control his surroundings and his destiny. The inversion of power roles may be significant as well. He who claims to be a descendant of Achilles the fearless, must don the garb of a merchant and resort to subterfuge to spy on his enemy in order to avoid capture. Could he not simply walk into the enemy’s camp, demand that his foe surrender, and slay him if he refuses? This is perhaps an exaggeration of an epic hero’s capabilities, but the contrast in depictions is remarkable nonetheless. Alexander uses this disguise to trick Porus, and to have the Indian king believe that his Macedonian opponent is a weak, enfeebled old man. Naturally, Porus is overjoyed when he learns of his enemy’s frailty. His mission of spreading misinformation completed, Alexander goes back to his men. Here is what the reader sees upon his return:

Alixandres repaire s’a son boucel trossé,
 D’une malvaïse sele son jument enselé;
 Li estrier furent tuit et rompu et noué
 Bien resamble mendis, si drap furent usé. (v. 1606-1609)¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹“Filote, en armes, monte un cheval espagnol / blanc comme neige, à la crinière flottante.”

¹⁸⁰“Alexandre revient, chargé de son outre; / sa jument porte une mauvaise selle, / les étriers sont tout rapiécés et pleins de nœuds: / il a tout d’un mendiant, avec ses vêtements usés.”

His soldiers laugh when he arrives at the encampment disguised thus, and he then recounts how he tricked Porus by providing them with an inaccurate portrait of himself; one wonders if it is really that imprecise, however. At the end of his account, Alexander says: "Molt est fel et entulles, nus n'en puet avoir gré, Tout le mont veut avoir desous sa poësté" (v. 1624-1625, III)¹⁸¹. There is some truth within these verses, though. Alexander's thirst for knowledge and conquest is insatiable, and he does seek to rival the gods' might. The following scene is even more disturbing and revealing. As is his wont, Alexander allows his men to divide up the prizes he brought back from his expedition, and they set upon the cakes and wine stolen from the Indian host like a pack of hungry hyenas:

Nus hom ne vit trossel plus fort desbaraté;
 L'uns tire, l'autre boute, le sac ont deschiré,
 Assés se sont iluec detrait et detiré;
 Molt estoit Alixandres tenus en grant chierté.
 Au departir la cire ot maint home enversé,
 Les chanestiaus menguënt, senpres furent gasté. (v. 1647-52, III)¹⁸²

This entire sequence foreshadows what will happen when Alexander dies. Poisoned and crippled by the two traitors, Divinuspater and Antipater, the fallen Greek king will have to divide up his kingdom between his *douze pairs*.

Alexandre de Paris weaves a complex tale. All the while complimenting the Greek king's generosity and impressive valor, he also does not fail to include subtle details that reveal his inherent weaknesses. He permits his readers to occasionally catch a frightening glimpse of what one might view as the bleak, sobering reality of a madman's foolhardy

¹⁸¹"Il est cruel, insensé, toujours insatisfait, / et veut dominer le monde entier!"

¹⁸²"On ne vit jamais chargement si bien mis en pièces! / L'un tire, l'autre pousse, le sac est déchiré, / tout le monde se bat et se bouscule. / Tous chantent les louanges d'Alexandre. / Pour partager la cire, bien des hommes tombent à terre; / on mange les gateaux, aussitôt mis en miettes."

march at the head of group of opportunistic mercenaries across wild, untamed lands to their tragic doom. It is on these occasions that the blend of the stylistic characteristics of the genres of the *chanson de geste* and the Roman seems to disappear, replaced by hints of a poignantly descriptive and perceptive text that at times rejects a glorifying tone and its fantastic components in favor of brutally realistic, disquieting imagery. Mixed in among the formulaic passages devoted to descriptions of combat and the awe-inspiring images of exoticism and *le merveilleux*, Alexandre de Paris paints a great number of curious scenes where the reader discovers a new form of realism, masked by parody and troubling symbolism.

After witnessing the Greek soldiers' unrestrained greed, the reader must once again change mindsets, for the style shifts again, and he is once again ensconced in the traditional battle descriptions of a *chanson de geste*.

Heroicism, leadership, and pretensions of divinity

Alexander is truly an enigmatic character, whose motivations are mysterious and perhaps this is one of the principal reasons that Alexandre de Paris deliberately associates so many fantastic, impossible elements with the young king. Throughout the Roman, he remains fundamentally unreadable. On the one hand, he loves his men and eagerly shares his riches with those who are faithful to him, but at the same time he endangers them all, by recklessly adventuring into danger-fraught lands. He is a superb combatant and does not fear hurling himself into the unknown, but Alexandre de Paris insists that his protagonist also exhibits the qualities of a just monarch. After defeating the Indian king, the young Greek ruler lectures to Porus on the differences between a good and a bad head of state:

Avers hom ne puet mie conquerre autrui regné,
Ains pert molt de sa terre, q'ainsi veulent li dé.

Ses com m'aiment mi hoe par ma grant largeté ?
 De ma volenté faire se sont tous jors pené,
 Et jou ai a chascun itant du mien doné
 Que miaus vaudroient estre trestuit ars et venté
 Que riens eüssent fait contre ma volenté. (v. 2242-2248, III)¹⁸³

In demonstration of his *largesse*, once Porus surrenders to him, Alexander gives him back his lands and frees the prisoners he had taken. His generosity is unequaled; even Porus points out that that young Greek's munificence rivals that of the gods: "Et qant Porrus le vit, prist s'en a mervellier / Et dist que il nen iert nus hom fieus de mollier / Qui osast un tel don faire ne commencer" (v. 2142- 44, III)¹⁸⁴.

One cannot fault his bravery, either. His desire to explore the deserts of India corresponds to the needs of a brave adventurer who cannot rest until his mettle has been thoroughly tested. The motivations behind his curiosity are somewhat questionable, however. His wish to uncover all of the world's secrets and surpass other heroes' bravery closely resembles incredible selfishness. When he reaches *les bornes d'Hercule*, supposedly erected by the hero as a monument to the furthest point in his travels, his first thought is to move beyond them¹⁸⁵. Porus explains: "Ainc outre les ymages nen ot home vivant" (v. 2358, III)¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸³"L'homme cupide ne saurait conquérir un royaume: / c'est lui qui perd sa terre, ainsi le veulent les dieux, / Si tu savais l'amour que me vaut ma largesse! / Mes hommes se mettent en peine de faire ma volenté / et j'ai si bien donné de mon bien à chacun / qu'ils préféreraient être brûlés, leurs cendres répandues au vent, / que faire quoi que ce soit contre ma volenté."

¹⁸⁴"Porus, émerveillé à cette vue, / dit qu'un simple mortel / n'aurait jamais eu le cœur de faire un tel don."

¹⁸⁵Porus explains about the origin of these statues to Alexander: "Qant Artus et Libers vinrent en / Et ornet tant alé qu'il ne porent avant, / Deus ymages d'or firent qui furent de lor grant. / En tel lieu les poserent que bien sont aparant / Et que mais a tos jors i fuissent demorant" (2353-2356). There are also references to these statues in the classical pseudo-scientific tradition. According to the ancients, these monuments were erected by Heracles at the end of his twelve labors. They mark the gateway to the Atlantic Ocean. Pliny the Elder writes of them in his *Historia Naturalis*: "Of both sides of this gullet, neere unto it, are two mountaines set as frontiers and rampiers to keepe all in: namely, Abila for Africke, Calpe for Europe, the utmost end of Heracles Labours. For which cause, the inhabitants of those parts call them, the two pillars of that God" (Book III). In addition, Laurence Harf-Lancner explains the appellation, *bornes Artu*: "L'expression *bornes* ou *bonnes Artu* désigne les limites orientales du monde, fixées par Hercule" (78).

¹⁸⁶"Nul mortel n'a jamais dépassé les statues."

The *déchu* Indian monarch encourages him to offer up a sacrifice to appease the gods. Faced with this monument erected by a demigod the deeds of whom he seeks to emulate, Alexander clearly expresses his disdain. He declares that the people who worship such idols are mad; the statues can neither see, nor hear nor move, so what is there to fear? Alexandre de Paris's message here is unclear. On the one hand, the reader admires Alexander's fearless bravado, but on the other hand is not the tone somewhat *irrespectueux*? In addition, his cockiness comes across almost as bluster, for as his men move beyond the statues, he anxiously watches to make sure no harm befalls them, and he rejoices when they pass by unscathed. Is this a mark of a good king, to endanger his men in order to pursue his own self-centered quest for glory? He laughs at their good fortune, and there is most definitely a note of relief detectable in his words: "Quant Alixandres vit ses gens a seürté, / De la joie qu'il ot a Porrón apelé " (v. 2375-76, III)¹⁸⁷.

It is a confusing passage. Certainly, as a good Christian the medieval reader should be as disdainful as Alexander of the stone idols guarding the entrance to the unknown lands of India, but at the same time, the youthful king's acts certainly seem to possess a brash quality. Indeed, following the army's passage beyond the Pillars of Heracles, the number of mysterious dangers the Greeks face increases dramatically. Ultimately, Alexander will only find death in these uncharted lands where *le merveilleux* holds a firm grasp. Sure enough, as soon as the army settles down for a meal, a horde of deadly elephants descends upon them. The Greeks fight the beasts off and win a victory, but the fright they have endured gives Alexander pause. Porus urges him to turn back before they are all killed:

Sire, ce dist Porrus, ceste terre est molt fiere,

¹⁸⁷"Quand Alexandre voit ses hommes sains et saufs, / il appelle Porus, tout joyeux."

Molt est deshabitee, ne sai avant que quiere ...
 Tant com vostre compaigne est si saine et entiere,
 Ains que vostre maisnie perdés en la fouchiere,
 Si nous en retornons toute noste chariere. (v. 2412-18, III)¹⁸⁸

Strangely enough, Alexander accedes, perhaps one of the only instances in the entire Roman where he actually listens to the advice of one of his counselors. Stranger still, the Greeks return and offer up sacrifices to the gods at the site of the *bonnes Artu*. Incapable of vanquishing the might of the pagan deities, Alexander backpedals. This is hardly the behavior of a fearless epic hero. Just a few stanzas higher, Alexander mocked the foolish people who would worship such false images: “La gent de ceste terre sont fol et miscreant, / Qui croient ces ymages et les vont aourant,” (2363-64, III)¹⁸⁹. A descriptive passage at the beginning of the Roman can now be examined in a different light. It is in fact rich in portents:

Ert uns hom en la terre, plains de molt grant voisdie,
 Nectanebus ot non en la terre arrabie;
 Au naistre aida l'enfant, que que nus vos en die,
 Q'il fu nes pres du punct qui done seignorie.
 Et il eüst un poi cele nuit devancie,
 Q'il fust nes en l'espasse que il avoit choisie,
 Ne fust mie si tost sa proece faillie
 Ne par venim mortel sa valor aconplie,
 Plus regnast longement et plus eüst baillie. (v.186-194, I)¹⁹⁰

Alexandre de Paris subtly indicates to his reader one possible source of his protagonist's fundamental inability to rival the gods' power. He was in fact born “pres,” or “near” to the

¹⁸⁸“Seigneur, lui dit Porus, cette terre est cruelle, / elle n'est pas habitée; que chercher plus avant? / ... / Tant que votre armée est saine est sauve, / avant de perdre vos hommes dans ces fougères, / revenons sur nos pas!”

¹⁸⁹ “Le people de ce pays est fou et mécréant / de croire à ces statues et de les adorer! ”

¹⁹⁰« Il y avait dans cette terre, un homme plein de ruse, / nommé Nectanebus dans la terre d'Arabie. / Il présida, c'est sûr, à la naissance de l'enfant, / qui fut presque placée sous le signe du pouvoir suprême. / Et si Alexandre était né un peu avant cette nuit-là, / au moment précis désigné par l'enchanteur, / sa prouesse n'aurait pas connu une fin si rapide, / le poison mortel n'aurait pas mis un terme à son destin, / il aurait régné plus, sur un plus grand empire.”

point of incomparable divine power, but not precisely underneath the good fortune-bearing star. Had he been born under slightly better circumstances, the story of our hero would in fact have been would have been quite different. In addition, the king's association with the mysterious sorcerer, Nectanebus, is undoubtedly another reason for Alexander's fatal weaknesses.

Conclusion: Alexander, Myth and Apotheosis

The Roman d'Alexandre exists as a narrative on multiple levels. First of all, it claims to be a record of events. Alexandre de Paris acknowledges that his will be a story based on a real life individual from the very beginning of his work, while nonetheless simultaneously including a tiny element of doubt as to the story's veracity: "La vie d'Alixandre, si comme ele est trovee / En pluisors lieus escrete et par bouche contee."¹⁹¹ our compiler states that he based his work on other biographies and oral accounts of the Macedonian's life; in this way he legitimizes the tale he will recount, yet he never affirms that the story is true beyond a shadow of a doubt. Rather, his self-proclaimed purpose in appropriating the story of Alexander's life is primarily didactic:

Ains vos commens les vers d'Alixandre d'Alier,
De cui sens et proëce furent gonfanonier;
A lui pregne regart qui se veut afaitier
Et de bones costumes estruire et ensegnier. (v. 57-60, I)¹⁹²

Alexander serves as a model for those who hear of his exploits. Indeed, according to Alexandre de Paris, the dynamic young Macedonian founded the feudal system of loyalty, honor, and gracious servitude: "Honors de seignorie fu en cestui plantee," (v. 122, I)¹⁹³. Superficially, Alexander represents the perfect *maillon* in the hierarchical chain of earthly power: a good lord who generously provides for his followers. One might ask to whom he

¹⁹¹"La vie d'Alexandre, telle qu'on peut la trouver / dans bien des livres et des récits qu'on raconte."

¹⁹²"Mon poëme est dédié à Alexandre d'Alier, dont Sagesse et Prouesse portaient le gonfanon. / Qu'on prenne modèle sur lui, si l'on veut se former / dans l'apprentissage des bonnes coutumes."

¹⁹³"L'honneur de seigneurie avait pris racine en Alexandre."

owes fealty, though. Identifying the nature of his relation with the supreme heavenly power, so important in the medieval conception of reality is essential. How could he be a faithful Christian king, if the Christian God had not even established his religion at the time of Alexander's life?

A Godless Hero

The preceding study has shown that the Alexander-hero of the Roman is a complex character whose multiple facets are at the very least quite contradictory. The development of the character in a broadly divergent historical tradition may be one explanation for this ambiguity, but some of this strangeness also stems from the efforts of the text's author-compiler to portray a new type of protagonist, one who would not easily fall within the predictable hero categories of the time. At times in following the deeds of Alexander, the reader catches a glimpse of a brash and fearless Roland, but just when it seems like one has a firm grip on this permutation of his nature, Alexander surprises us and acts more like a reflective Odysseus, allowing himself to be thrown about by the mysterious forces of destiny, all the while relying mainly on his wits to extricate himself from the challenges confounding him. Above all, an insatiable curiosity and desire to surpass the mythical heroes who preceded him appears to govern his actions. He very deliberately competes with long-vanished mythical figures such as Dionysus, Heracles, and Achilles with limited success.

In the end, however, what is perhaps most striking about the journey of this unique individual is the unnerving absence of religion as a guiding or restricting force governing his deeds and decisions, and what is more, his fundamental solitude. The constant presence of the *douze pairs* does not change the fact that he operates by himself in the strange universe of the east. This is in and of itself confusing, because the very concept of the *douze pairs* stems

from the Christian epic, most notably the Chanson de Roland. If Alexander is essentially godless, who are these twelve comrades-in-arms, mimicking the twelve disciples of Jesus? Yet for the most part Alexander appears to be operates alone in the world; he rarely heeds the advice of his twelve followers, and he rarely acts with the divine authority in mind.

To be quite honest the role of deities within the Roman appears completely haphazard. For instance, at the very beginning of his work, Alexandre de Paris makes numerous references to God, leading one to believe that the link between the Christian deity and our hero is a strong one. It appears from the outset that in our author's view God deliberately laid out Alexander's destiny, intending for the young king to go far. Within the first stanza, Alexandre de Paris refers to God no fewer than four times: "Ce est du mellor roi que Dieus laissast morir," (10) "D'Alixandre vos veul l'estoire rafreschir, / Cui Deus dona fierté et el cors tel air," (v. 12-13), and finally in perhaps the most telling passage:

A l'eure que li enfes dut de sa mere issir
Demostra Dieus par signes qu'il se feroit cremir,
Car l'air estut müer, le firmament croissir
Et la terre croller, la mer par lieus rougir
Et les bestes trambler et les homes fremir;
Ce fu senefiance que Dieus fist esclarcir
Por mostrer de l'enfant q'en devoit avenir
Et com grant seignorie il avroit a baillir." (v. 22-29, D)¹⁹⁴

These strange and frightening events on Alexander's day of birth are ambiguous: they appear to be an indication as Alexandre de Paris suggests, that a great man has been born who will one day be a powerful lord and conquer much of the earth. Or there could be another

¹⁹⁴"A l'heure où l'enfant devait sortir du ventre de sa mère / Dieu montra par des signes qu'il saurait se faire craindre: / on vit l'air s'agiter, le ciel se déchirer, / et la terre vibrer, la mer devenir rouge, / et les bêtes trembler et les hommes frémir. / Dieu voulait par là sgnifier à tous / le destin de l'enfant et révéler ainsi / qu'il régnerait un jour sur un très grand empire."

message behind this meteorological and earthly upheaval. Traditionally a blood-red sea, rolling thunder, and terrified animals are warning signs of great trouble to come, the forerunners to some apocalyptic event, in this case it may signify that the conquering Macedonian will cut a bloody swathe through the lands he traverses¹⁹⁵.

Regardless, it is interesting to note that this passage in the text, essentially the romance's introduction, represents the one instance where numerous references to God are present. Here at the tale's beginning, our hero should emerge, an innocent babe from his mother's womb; and yet this day is fraught with sinister unnatural omens. This may be the moment within our protagonist's life, when, at his most innocent, he is closest to the divine power. The sea turns blood red, and yet in Branch III, Alexander will not hesitate to plunge recklessly to the ocean's depths. The air trembles and thunder crashes, but still he chooses to taunt heaven and fly as high as possible into this forbidding realm. Alexander willfully disregards the warnings he receives, and seeks to lay claims, as Dubost indicates¹⁹⁶, to every dimension of the world, that is to say both the horizontal and vertical planes of existence.

In the Roman's third stanza, Alexandre de Paris attaches these events more specifically to his hero's life, but this time God's role in creating them evaporates, and instead he is replaced with almost pagan personifications of the natural world. This textual transformation is striking. The earth shudders in fear of Alexander's birth, knowing that it

¹⁹⁵It is worth noting that these cataclysmic portents, the blood-red sea, thundering skies, earthquakes, all appear within Saint John's Apocalypse as signs of the coming of the end of the world. It is also significant that Alexander's life ends in Babylon, that wicked city, source of all earthly evils as described in the Biblical tradition. Through these parallels, Alexandre de Paris may be indicating to us that the Macedonian's life is inextricably tied into the fate of the world, but perhaps not in the most positive way.

¹⁹⁶Concerning the nature of Alexander's conquests, Dubost writes: "L'initiation à l'espace se fait d'abord selon les trois dimensions qui sollicitent la curiosité humaine: l'étendue terrestre de la conquête représente la dimension horizontale. Le vertige de l'ascension et la tentation de la descente dans les profondeurs marines ou dans les abîmes de la terre représentent de leur côté les deux dimensions verticales. Alexandre les a poussées plus loin que n'importe quel mortel" (264).

will be subjugated by the young man: "Por ce craula la terre en icele jornee / Q'en cele eure naissoit la personne doutee / A qui poësté el fu puis aclinee" (v. 77-79, I)¹⁹⁷. The passage explaining the ocean's transformation is equally significant; Alexandre de Paris clearly links the waves' crimson color with the blood that will be spilled by his conquests: "Et la mers enrougi par cele destinee / Que en li prist l'enging de la gerre aduree / Et d'embuschier agais dedens selve ramee, / Dont sans fu expandus par tant mainte contree" (v. 81-84, I)¹⁹⁸. Finally, Alexandre de Paris writes that the animals of the earth shuddered in apprehension as well at his birth, knowing they would all soon be subjected to his might; some would be destined to serve him, others, like the desert serpents of India, would reject his dominion, and poison his men, but regardless, every living thing would feel his influence in one form or another. Yet where is God, where is the power of a deity in this interpretation of the omens? The fluctuation in the presence of God throughout the Roman, through its inconsistency, in effect creates a predictable pattern of confusion. In other words, our hero operates in a world bereft of the meaning and order provided by the divine.

At times, it appears that a deity, although Alexandre de Paris never specifies which one or who, intervenes on behalf of the young king. Alexandre de Paris explains that it is thanks to the gods that Alexander's army finally manages to escape the monsters of India: "Cel jor por Alixandre firent li dieu vertus, / Car grant piece ains midi est des desers issus" (v. 1492-1493, III)¹⁹⁹. On other occasions, these same deities remain stubbornly silent or enigmatic, as for instance when he makes his journey aloft. His heavenward expedition offers

¹⁹⁷"Voilà pourquoi, ce jour-là, la terre annonça par son tremblement / Que naissait à cette heure le héros redouté / Sous le pouvoir de qui ell devait s'incliner."

¹⁹⁸"Et la mer devint rouge pour montrer qu'elle devait / lui apprendre les ruses de la guerre terrible / et des embuscades dans les forêts ombreuses, / qui devaient verser le sang dans de nombreux pays."

¹⁹⁹"Ce jour-là, les dieux accomplirent un miracle pour Alexandre, / car bien avant midi il était sorti des déserts."

no divine illumination or insight into the universe's secrets, in fact all that results is that he comes very close to being killed by the tremendous heat of the sun. It is indeed a strikingly uninformative expedition.

There is however a repeated confusion of the polytheism of the ancients with the monotheism of the moderns throughout the entire text. When Clin tries to bring one of the gorgeous *filles-fleurs* with him away from the forest, she begs for Alexander's mercy, because to leave the confines of the forest would be fatal for her. He naturally grants her freedom, and offers a curious blessing: "Mervelleuse pitié l'en est au cuer entrée, / A terre la fist metre, a Dieu l'a commandee" (v. 3507-08, III)²⁰⁰. This is of course a common formulaic expression for 12th century courtly literature, but it would be unwise to neglect to attribute perhaps more meaning to it given the importance within the Roman of Alexander's all-consuming quest to surpass the universe's creator(s). The extremely sporadic nature of such references to God almost lead one to feel as if Alexander seeks to deal with the heavenly power from the position of a near-equal or equal; as though God were an individual to whom one could turn for help when in need, but who could also just as easily be ignored in other circumstances.

Throughout the account of the king's adventures, God/the gods are mostly absent, supplanted by references to unimaginable earthly wealth, supernatural creatures and machines, and all the other permutations of the marvelous this study has examined up to this point. There are occasional exclamations to God, but otherwise, these strange new lands are so alien, that even the most fundamental of reference points for medieval man, the presence of the divine, is missing, and this renders the young hero's journey all the more *déroutant*.

²⁰⁰"Plein de pitié, / il la fait mettre à terre, la recommande à Dieu."

The army's quest for the three wondrous fountains in Branch III is an important component of the text's treatment of heavenly authority. Each of the fountains possesses a marvelous attribute: one restores youth to those who drink of its waters, the second grants immortality, and the third has the power to resurrect the dead. By themselves these fountains deeply undermine the natural heavenly order. In order for such devices to exist, God's power over life and death would have to be distinctly absent.

It is not until the end of the Roman that God resurfaces, when Alexander is on his deathbed. At the journey's end, when death, the most disturbing facet of the real world, strikes Alexander, the narrative suddenly returns to the recognizable references to the divine that are more commonplace in medieval literature. For instance, as he is dying, just before he begins to recite his will, he calls out to God no fewer than five times: "Nos avons, merci Dieu, mainte terre conquise," (v. 261) "S'en sera, Se Dieu plaist, m'ame en Paradis mise," (v. 266) "C'est Divinuspater, qui li cors Dieu cravent, / Il et Antipater, qui me fist le present" (v. 273) "Ha! Dieus omnipotent, / Je ne verrai le jor qu'en soit pris vengeance" (v. 276), and finally "Segnor, dist Alixandres, ves me ci present. / Jan e serai gaires, puis Dieus nel me consent," (v. 282-83)²⁰¹. Alexander is completely transformed in this stanza, unrecognizable from the brash, irreverent hero of the first three Branches. In Branch IV, the Roman as a whole reestablishes itself in the genre of more traditional courtly narratives, describing in detail the nature of Alexander's bequest to each of the *douze pairs*. Mirroring the numerous marvelous events that took place at the king's birth, Alexandre de Paris tells us that another unnatural occurrence takes place in the days before his death, and our compiler insists on the

²⁰¹"Nous avons, Dieu merci, conquis bien des terres," "S'il plaît à Dieu, mon âme ira au paradis", "C'est Divinuspater (Dieu le maudisse!) / qui m'a fait ce présent, avec Antipater", "Ha! Dieu tout-puissant, / je ne pourrai pas me voir vengé!" and "Seigneurs, dit Alexandre, vous me voyez devant vous, / mais pas pour longtemps, car telle est la volonté de Dieu."

point that the divine power was behind it. In Babylon a Saracen woman gives birth to a multi-headed monster, and the sages interpret this as an indication that the king's death is imminent:

A l'issue de may, tout droit en cel termine
Que li biaux tans revient et yvers se decline,
Estoit en Babilone nes d'une Sarrasine
Une mostres merveilleus par volenté devine....
Deseure iert chose morte desi q'en la poitrine,
Et desous estoit vive, la ou li faut l'eschine.
Tout environ les aines, la ou li ventres fine,
De ces plus fieres bestes qui vivent de rapine
I avoit pluisors testes et font chiere lovine;
Molt sont de male part et de malvaie orine,
Ne se pueent souffrir, l'une l'autre esgratine.
Molt par est grans merveille que Dieus el mont destine,
Que la mort Alixandre veut demostre par sinne. (v. 1-14, IV)²⁰²

Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas maintains that Alexander's failure to attain apotheosis stems in part from an ill-conceived desire to humiliate the gods, but there may be more involved in his failure than that. Defiance of the gods is not the strongest recurring motif throughout the text. He certainly wishes to rival their accomplishments, but his scorn for them is a much less palpable quantity. In fact, this disdain more closely resembles sheer brazenness, the attribute/flaw that is most dominant in a Roland. Where Alexander is unique, is in his boundless curiosity. Within the confines of the Roman, this all-consuming drive to uncover the earth's mysteries and travel to its geographic limits is what stands out the most vividly as a defining character trait, and in this he is unique. His self-awareness and propensity to express fear and distress in situations are also distinctive among medieval heroes. For all of these reasons, he

²⁰²"A la fin mai, juste au moment / où le beau temps revient, où l'hiver se termine, / une Sarrasine avait donné naissance à Babylone, / par la volonté divine, à un monstre prodigieux... Le haut du corps était mort, jusqu'à la poitrine, / et vivant en-dessous, au bas de l'échine. / Tout autour du ventre, près de l'aine, / il y avait plusieurs têtes de bêtes féroces / qui vivent de proie, comme des loups: / elles étaient cruelles et mauvaises, / et ne pouvant se supporter, elles s'entredéchiraient. / Ce grand prodige était un signe par lequel Dieu voulait annoncer au monde la mort d'Alexandre."

represents a considerable shift away from the monolithic, God-fearing and blindly courageous heroes of the *chansons de geste* and of the other *romans antiques*.

It is clear, however, that Alexandre de Paris actively places his protagonist within a specific, carefully crafted context in order to propel the story into the realm of myth. Iconographic figures of traitors and princesses, enemy kings and savage monsters fill his tale. Exotic elements such as precious stones, unimaginable wealth, strange geography, and mysterious events combine to generate this effect as well, as does the recurring potential for and sporadic accomplishment of heroic exploits. The Roman is riddled with commentaries and clues that allude to the notion that Alexander is almost divine, but the emphasis consistently remains on *almost*. He was *almost* born under the perfect star, if he hadn't died so young, he would have ruled the earth. Perdicas goes so far as to exclaim: "Fortune meïisme, qui me jure et affie, / Se Deus iert trespasés et sa vie fenie, / Qu'il avroit après lui des angles la maistrie, / Du ciel et de la terre toute la segnorie" (v.1193-97, IV)²⁰³. This is quite a bold statement. It reveals that his people worship him, and that among men, he had no equal. Yet this is not enough to be considered a deity. Alexandre de Paris is at times more precise about his protagonist's powers. At the end of Branch III, he even references his high opinion of the king's leadership abilities by mentioning a historian, Lucan: "Encor le dist Lucans, qui fu maistres auctors, / Que de tous ciaus du siecle fu Alixandres flors, / Des rois qui sont en terre et des empereors" (v. 7279-81, III)²⁰⁴. Although Alexander is not

²⁰³"Fortune elle-même me jure / que si Dieu trépassait, si sa vie s'achevait, / Alexandre serait après lui le maître des anges, / le seigneur du ciel et de la terre."

²⁰⁴"Lucain nous le dit bien (c'est une autorité): / Alexandre dut la fleur de tous les mortels, / de tous les rois du monde comme des empereurs."

comparable to the most common heroic archetypes, he nevertheless possesses characteristics that place him within a unique category of leader.

Failed Sacrifice, Failed Myth, and Violence without End

In the Roman, the path that Alexander chooses is unique among literary heroes. If indeed he actively seeks to rival the strength of the gods, Alexandre de Paris never says this overtly. He simply indicates that Alexander's curiosity knows no bounds, and that his desire for conquest is just as relentless. Yet to possess such knowledge and to control so much of the earth implies a level of power only accessible to a god or to a god-blessed ruler, in the formidable *lignée* of a Charlemagne, and the implicit message of our compiler is certainly a warning against such reckless ambition. A few verses in the final stanzas of Branch IV state this warning quite clearly, although Alexandre de Paris couches the message in among words of praise: "Hom qui tent a honor, il n'i puet pas faillir, / Mais q'en tel lieu entende ou il puisse avenir; / Cil qui se desmesure si puet molt tost chair" (v. 1640-1642, IV)²⁰⁵. In the medieval Christian universe, of course, the historical Alexander's very real quest for deification was unthinkable, so it does not make much sense to address this dimension of the literary tradition. It is possible, however, to consider the young hero's relation to myth.

To avoid confusion, a brief discussion of the historical Alexander's real life quest for deification is necessary. Alexander's journey of conquest across the wild lands of the Middle East propelled the young man into the mythological tradition of the Classical period through to the Middle Ages. He became an iconic figure for scholars, priests, and rulers alike, functioning either as a model of behavior or as the perfect example of how not to act.

Historically, however, if one considers René Girard's definition of myth, it would be difficult

²⁰⁵"Qui recherché l'honneur ne peut manquer d'y parvenir, / à condition de fixer une limite à son ambition: / la démesure provoque bientôt la chute.":

to see how he could be viewed as the perfect scapegoat-hero, whose death in theory should bring society's violent struggles to an end. Peace did certainly not follow on the heels of his demise in Babylon on the evening of the 10th or 11th of June in 323 BC. Immediately after his demise, his realm was thrown into chaos. Michael Chugg describes the violent events that took place:

His Macedonian marshals mourned their king in blood. On 11 June 323 BC Perdiccas called an emergency meeting of senior officers to discuss the succession... The atmosphere was tense and fractious, and Curtius gives a near-verbatim account of the spiraling arguments, which led to a schism between the infantry, led by an officer called Meleager, and the cavalry, commanded by Perdiccas and Alexander's Bodyguards... There was fierce fighting around Alexander's deathbed. Outnumbered, the cavalry withdrew from Babylon to camp out in the surrounding plains, where they instigated a siege by cutting all supplies to the city. (33-34)

Chosen by a social group to purge them of violence, the sacrifice of the scapegoat, in many cases a king, should bring about peace. This certainly did not take place; in fact, the tremendous strength of his will and his magical charisma were all that were holding Alexander's kingdom together. Unity and peace evaporated when he disappeared. In order for the sacrifice to function properly, the death of the scapegoat should provide an outlet for the destructive internecine violence, and in the wake of his death/ sacrifice, the society can rebuild. Girard points out that following this horrific event, the memory of the scapegoat may undergo a transformation. He will often be remembered as a savior, even though he was initially viewed as the culprit. In the case of Alexander's demise, however, a confusing amalgam of events renders Girard's deification/ mythification process difficult.

First of all, is it even possible to consider Alexander to have been an effective scapegoat? Michael Chugg's recent and thorough analysis of the Macedonian's conqueror's death provides strong arguments for his death having been simply the result of malaria from a mosquito bite. Based on the evidence from historical sources such as Justin and Arrian, it is

difficult to accept that he may have been poisoned, simply because most sources concur regarding the description of his dying agony, and though they differ in other areas regarding his demise, these consistently affirm that he suffered for six days, after initially feeling sharp pains during the course of a meal. Chugg explains that, "'Medically, any poison potent enough to produce sharp and incapacitating pains should have been promptly fatal" (18). So the man who sought to carve a place on Mount Olympus next to Zeus wasn't even murdered, nor did he die in battle, facing one of the many foes he encountered on his journey east! It is tragic to admit, but in all likelihood he died a death that any one of his lowliest followers might have died. Alexander did not suffer the "hero's death," he did not become the focal point for the purging of society's ills, nor did he perish in battle as a martyr, as a pillar of valiance fighting off hordes of enemies. In fact, his death brought about even more violence, as his empire was torn to pieces by rival generals. In 317 BC, vengeful Olympias had the successor to Alexander's throne, Philip III Arrhidaeus, son of her husband Philip II but by Philinna of Thessalian Larissa, murdered, and seven years later Cassander, son of Antipater, poisoned and killed Roxanne and Alexander's only known son, Alexander IV, thereby ending any hope that the Macedonian prodigy's legacy would endure. Alexander's short-lived dynasty ended, his bloodline disappeared, and all that would remain would be a dozen or so crumbling Alexandrias that he had established over the course of his conquests in the former Persian Empire and the lands of India.

It is fairly certain that Alexander's dying wish was to be buried in Egypt²⁰⁶-the much-dreamed-of apotheosis must have been on his mind when he realized he would not survive

²⁰⁶Chugg's explanation of why it is likely that Alexander wished to be buried in Egypt is compelling: "Alexander's request is thoroughly consistent with our knowledge of his personality and beliefs. He seems to have considered himself to be the "Son of Ammon" in a religious (but probably not a literal) sense and he deferred to Ammon's authority in such matters as Hephaistion's worship. Above all, he knew that in Egypt he

his illness, and although it will never be known for sure, it is possible to intuit that the oracle at the Siwah oasis must have told him that, at the very least, he could claim filiation from or close kinship with non-Greek Ammon, "the Hellenized form of Libyan-Egyptian sky god, Amun" (Cartledge 298). After his death, however, what happened to his body remains a mystery that has yet to be resolved to this day. Most scholars agree that, according to his wishes, Ptolemy transported his *dépouille* to Alexandria in Egypt, and most likely it remained entombed there for some time, but by the second century AD an atmosphere of mystery in the historical records shrouds the tomb's whereabouts. The mausoleum in which he was purportedly buried, the Soma, may no longer have existed by this period, indeed it may have been destroyed by a besieging army in the time of Roman occupation of Alexandria or by a terrible earthquake which struck the eastern Mediterranean in 365 AD. Essentially, the last physical vestige of a man who, in a hell-bent quest to rival the gods, desperately sought to leave an indelible mark on the face of the world completely vanished into obscurity within a short time after his death.

Divinely Human

What concerns this study more specifically, however, is the character of Alexander as he exists within the narrative of the Roman. For the anachronistic reasons already discussed, considering the Christian context of the text's writing, it is impossible to say that Alexandre de Paris sought to portray his protagonist actively undertaking a quest for deification. His objectives did nonetheless include the acquisition of knowledge rivaling that of God, and his journey east at the very least constituted a deliberate challenge to the medieval conception of the natural order. With this in mind then, an examination of his portrayal of the ill-fated

stood to achieve the apotheosis, which was perhaps the driving force for his pursuit of superhuman achievements" (36).

Macedonian's death should be quite revealing; this final scene may reveal something significant about the pursuit of forbidden knowledge.

In the Roman, Olympias writes to Alexander and informs him that Antipater, lord of Sidon, and Divinuspater, lord of Tyre, are not behaving as should dutiful vassals toward their king. Furious at their betrayal, he summons them to Babylon, where he intends to judge their misdeeds. Fearing his wrath, the two miscreants decide to murder Alexander with poison, but part of their reasoning is not completely evil: "Par lui a prise mort mainte bele jovente, / Plus a il rois destruis mien ensient de trente" (v. 7812-13, III)²⁰⁷. Alexandre de Paris's inclusion of this detail may be important. Perhaps the two traitors were somewhat justified in wanting to punish Alexander for causing the death of so many kings. Or Antipater and Divinuspater may simply be the agents of the divine power, exacting retribution for Alexander's persistent arrogance in the face of God. Poison derived from snake's venom will be their weapon of choice. This would not be the first time in the history of mankind that the serpent served as a means of punishing upstart humans.

Antipater and Divinuspater administer the poison at the feast following the coronation ceremony. A pair of disgruntled vassals, tainted wine and then a poison-tipped feather are the ingredients that bring the young king to his knees. It remains to be seen whether or not Alexander's demise is akin to the sacrificial death of a scapegoat as described by Girard, i.e. the death of a hero and the birth of a myth. It would be difficult to say that it is. The Roman in no way describes a generalized atmosphere of discontent and simmering violence prior to Alexander's murder. On the contrary, his twelve faithful companions' faith in him is stronger

²⁰⁷"Par lui bien des jeunes gens ont trouvé la mort; / il a tué, je crois, plus de trente trois."

than ever, he has just peacefully subjugated the kingdom of the Amazons, and as a result his campaign of conquests has come to an end. There is no one left to defeat.

In Girard's conception of the origin of myth, the scapegoat's murder should renew the society and restore peace. In other words, a human sacrifice should purge the group of the increasingly violent energies that up until that event had been gradually eroding the order holding it together. When the mechanism does not function properly, that is to say, when the scapegoat does not operate effectively as such, the violence persists and worsens. Girard explains what happens during this *crise sacrificielle*:

S'il y a trop de rupture entre la victime et la communauté, la victime ne pourra plus attirer à elle la violence; le sacrifice cessera d'être «bon conducteur» au sens où un métal est dit bon conducteur de l'électricité. Si, au contraire, il y a trop de continuité, la violence ne passera que trop aisément, et dans un sens et dans l'autre. Le sacrifice perd son caractère de violence sainte pour se «mélanger» à la violence impure, pour devenir le complice scandaleux de celle-ci, son reflet ou même une espèce de détonateur. (64)

Almost in a mirror image to the actual historical occurrences, Branch IV reveals that Alexander's death will bring about more pain and suffering. First of all, it is not completely clear that society, within the context of the romance at least, is on the verge of descending into chaos. Rather, the conflicts here appear to have come to an end: Alexander successfully defeated the only foes remaining who might have challenged his power, the Amazons. In addition, throughout the final stanzas of Branch IV, there are numerous veiled references to a sense of anguish and despair over what will *follow* this tragic event. This is the opposite of what should take place within Girard's conception of the creation of myth. Violence should precede the scapegoat's death, but calm should ensue. With this in mind, the *plaintes* of Alexander's twelve comrades are particularly revealing. Quite literally, the blood immediately begins to flow once the king dies, foretelling violent upheavals to come.

Festion, one of the rarely-mentioned companions of the king in the Roman, scars himself out of grief at his lord's passing: "Lors desront ses cheveus, sa barbe / Que tous en fu sanglens ses pus et ses mentons; / Au dolouser qu'il fist, ausi com il iert lons / En travers de la biere chaï a ventrellons" (v. 1396-99, IV)²⁰⁸. The knight is clearly expressing his emotional agony over the passing of his much-loved king, but that this sadness should degenerate into violence is disturbing, and it hints at a more ominous crisis to come. Festion's *planctus* goes even further in creating this sense of impending doom. Here he addresses his dead lord: "Com est por voste mort li cieus noirs et enbrons, / Li oisel s'atapissent et abaissent lor sons. / Molt nos avés laissiés en grans torblacions" (1379-81, IV)²⁰⁹. He is not alone in deliberately injuring himself out of sheer anguish. Licanor too strikes himself in the forehead and covers himself with blood:

Se hurte a une pierre bise,
Si que le cuir du front en trois lieus li encise;
S'il fust trois fois baigniés en l'eaue de Tamise,
Ne fust il plus molliés qu'il iert sous sa chemise
Du sanc qui de lui ist vermaus comme cerise. (v. 1323-27, IV)²¹⁰

This is quite a violent, bloody image. The king's followers essentially try to mimic the suffering of their leader, perhaps in an attempt to prevent the impending crisis. If they can substitute themselves as scapegoats for the king, whose sacrifice has failed, there may be a chance that the world will not be consumed by violence. Festion and Licanor are not the only ones to fear what will occur after the king's passing. Filote expresses this sense of impending

²⁰⁸ "Il s'arrache les cheveux, la barbe, les moustaches, / couvrant de sang son menton et sa poitrine; / dans sa douleur, il tombe de tout son long / à plat ventre, en travers de la bière."

²⁰⁹"Que le ciel est noir et sombre depuis votre mort! / Les oiseaux se cachent et assourdissent leur chant. / Vous nous avez laissés dans la pire détresse."

²¹⁰"A ces mots, il se heurte à une pierre bise, / et se fait trois coupures sur le front: / s'il s'était baigné trois fois dans la Tamise, / il aurait été moins trempé que maintenant, / inondé de sang vermeil comme cerise."

doom as well: "Ja mais ne serai liés en trestout mon aage, / Car je voi enforcier le perilleus orage / Qui tout le mont traira a duel et a hontage" (v. 1352-1354, IV)²¹¹. Finally, this atmosphere of terror permeates Perdiccas's *planctus*, too: "Li biens va descroissant et li maus molteplie. / Or ne pris mais le siecle une pume porrie, / ... / Dieus, por coi vif ge tant? Male mort, car m'ocie!" (v. 1187-90, IV)²¹². It is to be expected that his knights would be so distressed at losing their liege, but the references to dangers that will consume the earth seem to be somewhat misplaced and excessive. Why should everything fall to pieces once he dies? Was Alexander the only thing maintaining the order within the empire? More importantly, if the order he established is so ephemeral, it would be difficult to consider him as a true hero, i.e. the type of protagonist whose powerful memory alone can provide the glue to hold a society together. Heroes, by their death, should leave behind a legacy of strength and enduring vitality. This is the function of their sacrifice, and this it is not possible to view Alexander's demise as such. In other words, Alexander's death is a fundamentally divisive event, not a unifying one- witness the blow by blow description of the division of the kingdom among his followers that constitutes virtually the entirety of Branch IV.

There are many other areas in which Alexander's qualifications as a hero, at least within the traditional sense of the term, are lacking: he is not possessed of limitless courage and physical strength, he is constantly self-aware, and perhaps most importantly, he is terrified of his own death. It may be useful now to summarize the defining traits and episodes that, from the beginning to the end of the Roman contribute to the characterization of our

²¹¹"Je ne connaîtraï plus la joie de toute ma vie, / car je vois s'étendre la périlleuse tempête / qui emportera le monde entier dans le deuil et la honte. "

²¹²"Le Bien va déclinant, le Mal se multiple. / Le monde vaut désormais pour moi autant qu'une pomme pourrie: /... / Dieu à quoi bon vivre? Male mort, tue-moi donc!"

hero. Alexandre de Paris repeatedly recalls Alexander's quality as a generous liege lord.

From the youngest age, he rewards those who are worthy. After he is knighted, in Branch I, he immediately shares his wealth:

Li noviaus rois de Gresse, qui le corage ot fier,
Qui onques nen ama traitor losengier,
A fait ses compaignons devant aparellier
Et dist que li plus povre soient vestu premier,
S'ait chascuns bones armes et bon courant destrier (v. 548-52, I).

Virtually the entirety of Branch IV lauds this aspect of his character, as our narrator describes in detail the tremendous affection his vassals have for their dying king, and the precise nature of the lands each one will inherit after his passing. This is perhaps his most distinctive heroic quality. With such boundless generosity, Alexander exemplifies respect for the all-important medieval conception of social hierarchy.

Yet is he really perfect in this respect? Why is it then that Antipater and Divinuspater decide to murder their liege? One of the criticisms that Alexandre de Paris consistently levels at the enemy kings, Nicolas, Darius, and Porus, is that they committed the terrible error of rewarding *serfs de sale engeance*, unworthy individuals, who because they lack any sense of honor as might be expected turn on their master and betray him. This is how Darius dies, murdered by his followers. It would seem that Alexander makes the same mistake. At the end of Branch III it is revealed that Alexander made Divinuspater and Antipater lords of Sidon and Tyr, but they are woefully remiss in their duties as noble leaders.

There is another area in which Alexander's respect for the natural order is flawed. His project of rivaling God, of going to the ends of the earth, and surpassing all his fellow men is the perfect example of disrespect for authority. To underline this brazen dimension of his character, here is what he declares to his army just after defeating Darius:

La terre sous les nues toute est vostre herités.
Mais d'une riens me poise dont me sui porpensés
Q'en si estroite roche est li mondes formés;
Dieus a fait trop poi terre a un prodome assés. (v. 3084-87, II)²¹³

This is terribly arrogant. In the face of such impudence, is it any wonder that the heavens would seek to put the upstart young king in his place? He may be a good liege lord on earth, but he is a terrible vassal when it comes to respect for the heavenly power, and it is possible that this defiance is what costs him his life in the end.

His adventurous spirit and self-proclaimed fearlessness also seem to correspond to good heroic attributes. As a matter of fact, his courage is quite unique: who else in the medieval literary tradition dared to journey to the ocean's depths or climb so far into the heavens? Alexander stands as a champion against miscreant, unworthy rulers; Nicolas, Darius, and Porus, each one insults or defies Alexander initially, and this in turn triggers his rage and desire to punish their insolence. His response is just; arrogant, threatening lords deserve punishment.

Once again, though, this blind courage and sense of self-justification hide a character flaw. His fearlessness goes too far, his bravado transgresses the boundary between humility in the face of the gods' / God's wonders and foolish insolence. One example of this is when he sends his men to their death against the hippopotami, or when his knights are killed in the mysterious cave of Artus and Liber. His insolent stance with respect to India's wonders is the most strident example of punishment-worthy sin. Alexander exhibits *démésure* with respect to India's secrets, plunging forth headlong into the unknown, just as Roland blindly thrust his followers into harm's way when he adamantly refused to blow the *cor* and call for help.

²¹³"Toute la terre qui s'étend sous les nues est votre héritage. / Mon seul regret est que le monde / soit limité à cette étroite roche: / Dieu a fait trop peu de terre pour un homme de valeur!" (Harf-Lancner 289).

This form of courage can take on a positive character at times, however. Indeed, it is precisely with this valor that he confronts some of his most fearsome foes: Nicolas, Darius, and Porus. It would be hard to fault him for that. This is the sort of audacity that is the stuff of heroes, it is the same sort of bravado that Achilles projects in the face of impregnable Troy, or that provides the laudable backbone to Heracles. Once again though, the text provides numerous counterexamples which actively confuse the image of Alexander that the reader is developing. Alexander is not always valiant in the face of adversity. For example, he is not immune to the devilish effects of the strange cowardice-inducing mountain, he trembles with fear in the *Val Périlleux*, and when the oracle of the Sun and the Moon tells him of his imminent demise, his confidence is shattered, and terror takes dominion over his soul, as it never does with a Roland or a Perseus.

Alexander is also capable of great acts of mercy. He pardons Porus, with whom he fought twice- Porus, who had insulted him and whose soldiers had killed many of the Macedonian conqueror's followers. When Darius dies, murdered by his treasonous lieutenants, Besas and Liabatanas, Alexander gives his former enemy a proper burial and punishes the culprits: "Alixandre li rois le fist bien sevelir / Et hautement plorer et plaindre et costeïr" (v. 311-12, III)²¹⁴. After his army crushed the city of Tarsus, a musician from the city plays for the king in his tent. Alexander enjoys the artist's *lai*, and when he learns that the man is from the city that he had just devastated by force of arms, and that up until the Macedonian's conquest, the man had led a comfortable life, he is overcome with pity. Here is Alexander's response, a perfect blend of mercy and supreme generosity:

‘Se tu es d'avoir povres, je t'en donrai, amis;
Vien avant, sans-demeure, tien, je t'en ravestis
De la cité de Trace et de tout le país;

²¹⁴"Le roi Alexandre lui fit de belles funérailles: / il fut longuement pleuré et noblement enseveli"

Ja n'en perdras plain pié tant com je soie vis;
 Ne ne m'en tornerai, de ce soies tous fis,
 Ains iert aussi pueplee comme iert or a huit dis
 Et seront redrecié li mur d'araine bis.'
 Devant lui s'agenolle, li rois poësteis
 Li a doné la terre par son peliçon gris. (v. 2645-54, I)²¹⁵

The conqueror gives the city to the humble musician, moved on the one hand by the man's music, and on the other by a sense of guilt for having destroyed the source of his livelihood.

Alexander speaks with the sword as well as the heart. Conversely, in stark contrast with this marvelous capacity to be charitable, he possesses a great penchant for cruelty as well.

Aristotle must rely on ruse to prevent him from massacring the population of Athens and burning the city to the ground. In these bloodthirsty tones, Alexander addresses the besieged people of the city in a letter. If they do not surrender, "A fu grigois ardent sera arse et esprise / Et trestoute la gent detrenchie et ocise" (v. 1693-94, I)²¹⁶. Persisting in his decision to punish the obstinate Athenians, he goes so far as to declare: "'Dont lor sort uns tel fes / Que en toutes lors vies aront il paine adés'" (v. 1761-62, I)²¹⁷. Only the young king's own bull-headedness spares the city's inhabitants. He swears not to listen to the council of Aristotle, and when his tutor, knowing his student well, urges him to wait no longer before sacking the town, Alexander is stymied and has no choice but to relent. In the wilds of India, his punishment for one of his followers, Enoch, for bathing in the fountain of immortality, could not be more brutal. He entombs the man alive in a pillar of stone. Alexander's own words to Enoch here reveal the extent of his cruelty: "'Enoc, fait Alixandres, ne te puis tormenter, /

²¹⁵"Si tu es pauvre, ami, je te donnerai des biens. / Avance, toi qui te dis sans terre, je te donne pour fief / la cité de Tarse avec tout le pays: / de mon vivant, tu ne perdras pas un pied de ta terre. / Et je ne m'en irai pas, je te le garantis, / sans avoir rebâti ses murs de terre bise.' / L'homme s'agenouille devant lui, et le puissant roi / lui donne sa pelisse grise en gage de la terre."

²¹⁶"Des feux grégeois la mettront en flammes et la consumeront, / et toute la population sera mise à mort!"

²¹⁷"Alors leur vie est menacée / de ne plus être qu'une longue douleur!"

Occire ne te puis, ardoir ne afoier, / A dolor te ferai toute ta vie user"²¹⁸ (v. 3100-02, III)

Finally, one of the main reasons why Antipater and Divinuspater plot to kill their king is to avenge the deaths of more than thirty kings and untold numbers of young men, caused by their liege's power-hungry campaign of conquest.

As a hero, he is far from the paragon of virtue and strength that one might expect: he often expresses fear, his might is not infallible, he hesitates, and where another might have succeeded or at the very least pushed the envelope of his abilities, Alexander withdraws. In sum, the Alexander of *Alexandre de Paris* is an extremely complex protagonist, rich in contradictory traits, much closer in nature to the flawed humanity of a mortal than the daunting strength and power of a demigod. It is precisely for this reason that although he is depicted as an awe-inspiring king on a material level, one of the most extraordinary rulers the earth has ever seen (if one consider his superb generosity, tremendous wealth, and brilliant generalship), he also represents one of the most human, accessible heroes in literature up to this point in time. When *Alexandre de Paris* describes the bleak terror that grips the king on learning of his future death, the reader sees a reaction that he too would certainly feel were he in the same situation. More importantly, the reader shares Alexander's wonder at the incredible sequences of marvels he witnesses in India; his deeds here are noteworthy, not because he overcomes the trials in a spectacular fashion, but precisely because in the young king's struggles, the reader sees his own helplessness when faced with the world's mysteries. If Alexander marks us, it is perhaps because his humanity is more tangible than that of an Odysseus or an Achilles. Essentially, although he operates in a marvelous and alien space, the character of Alexander himself is steeped in realism. This is the premise this reader has

²¹⁸"Enoch, dit Alexandre, je ne peux te supplicier, / ni te tuer ni te faire brûler, / mais je ferai en sorte / que tout le reste de ta vie ne soit plus que souffrance!"

tested within this study: that in his depiction of Alexander the Great, Alexandre de Paris generates a new type of myth within the context of the old mythical traditions. In the Roman d'Alexandre it is not a question of dealing with the type of myth that a hero's sacrifice generates, nor the myth that secretly orders and channels societal behavior. Through Alexander's journey the medieval reader caught fleeting glimpses of the mysterious east, but the importance of his travels lies elsewhere. The reader sees himself in Alexander's actions, reactions, fears, and wonder at exploring new lands, creatures, and peoples. Herein lies the essence of the new myth the narrator has created: by portraying Alexander as a hero clutched by the same fears and passions that govern every mortal, Alexandre de Paris goes much further than many of his contemporaries in fathoming the undiscovered regions of the human psyche. Page by page, the Roman d'Alexandre unravels the myth of the relentless conqueror, the immutable god-king with a heart of stone.

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