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Legacy of the East and Legacy of Alexander

Krzysztof Nawotka, Agnieszka Wojciechowska

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edited by Krzysztof Nawotka and Agnieszka Wojciechowska



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Alexander, “Prince of the Two Deserts”: The Geopolitical Significance of the Trip to Siwa

Damien Agut-Labordère

Beside the foundation of Alexandria, the visit to the oracle of Ammon is the second of the memorable acts accomplished by Alexander in Egypt. It was during the winter and spring 332–331 BCE that Alexander walked through the Egyptian Western desert.¹ According to ancient historians, he suffers from thirst, but a providential rain renews his water supply, a storm loses his army in the dunes, two ravens -or snakes- finally guide him through the sands. At the end, the conqueror reached an oasis fed by a marvelous spring with alternately boiling or icy waters and a mine of crystal-clear salt. The place was dominated by a temple of Ammon, assimilated to Zeus, where the will of the god would have been revealed to the future master of the World.

For at least two centuries, historiography came up against the same issue which can be summarized as follows: Why did Alexander run the dangers of such a journey through the desert away and leave Darius, at least, another month and a half of respite? This question is partly related to what really happened when Alexander met the oracle of Ammon. However, as this took place far from any witness, we must, on the point, agree with the view of Ernst Badian: “We simply cannot tell exactly what happened.”² Formulated by the one who could be said “to have found the real Alexander”, this leaves

- 1 P. Hawara OI 2, a Demotic Annuity contract, provides the only date we have for the first year of Alexander the Great in Egypt: year 1, month of Mesore = October 10–November 8, 331 BCE (Georges R. Hughes and Richard Jasnow, *Oriental Institute Hawara Papyri: Demotic and Greek Texts from an Egyptian Family Archive in the Fayum (Fourth to Third Century B.C.)* (Chicago: Oriental Institute 1997), 16–18, pls. 8–13). This implies that Alexander the Great’s first year as pharaoh begins in November 332 BCE which is perfectly consistent with Alexander’s arrival in the fall of 332 BCE. A graffito at Luxor Temple dated to the fourth year of Philip Arrhidaios’ reign, also mentions “Alexander year 1, first month of Akhet, (day) 1”, being the New Year’s Day of the first year of Alexander’s reign = November 14, 332 BCE. Karl Jansen-Winkeln, *Biographische und religiöse Inschriften der Spätzeit aus dem Ägyptischen Museum Kairo* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2001), 180 and Francisco Bosch-Puche, “The Egyptian Royal Titulary of Alexander the Great, I: Horus, Two Ladies, Golden Horus and Throne Names,” *JEA* 99 (2013): 153 note 134 (with commented bibliography); 154, note 139, point this date as probably fictitious (see also Francisco Bosch-Puche, “The Egyptian Royal Titulary of Alexander the Great, II: Personal Name, Empty Cartouches, Final Remarks, and Appendix,” *JEA* 100 (2014): 81–82).
- 2 Ernst Badian, “Alexander the Great between two Thrones and Heaven: Variations on an Old Theme” In *The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in the University of Alberta on April 13–15, 1994, to Celebrate the 65th Anniversary of Duncan Fishwick*, ed. Alastair Small (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 18.

us with little hope of discovering the objective pursued by Alexander in Siwa through ancient historians' narrative.³

The excavations carried out in Siwa by Fakhry and, then, by Kuhlmann raised hope to get out this stalemate.⁴ Although archaeology has not added any decisive elements to the dossier concerning the Alexander's oracular consultation, it has, however, enabled important advances concerning the history of the Ammon's temples in Siwa between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE.

The purpose of the present work is to further extend the focus so as to contextualize Alexander's Saharan expedition not only in the history of the oasis of Siwa but also in that of the Eastern Sahara at the end of the first millennium BCE. I shall begin by asking a rather basic question: which of the three main ethnic groups that inhabited this vast region -the so-called "Libyans", the Greeks and the Egyptians- could be affected by the Ammon's oracular advices? (1) This will allow, in a second time, to revisit the political meaning of the three main motives put forward by ancient historians to explain Alexander's expedition to Siwa. (2) Alexander's visit to Siwa should therefore not be understood as a secondary operation to the conquest of Egypt, but rather as an autonomous campaign aimed at taking control of a territory of considerable geostrategic importance. The vagueness surrounding the political meaning of the expedition to Siwa in ancient historians was therefore in reality due to the fact that Alexander delivered different political messages, each of which was adapted to different ethnic groups of the Eastern Sahara (3).

1. To Whom Alexander Addressed Himself by Journeying to Siwa?

Since Egyptologists have clearly established that Ammon of Siwa was of no importance in the contemporary sources of the Nile valley,⁵ it is clear that the trip to its oasis couldn't played a role in Alexander's alleged pharaonic formal enthronement.⁶ If the expedition

3 Quote from Peter Green reported, and discussed, in Pierre Briant, *Alexandre. Exégèse des lieux communs*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), 398.

4 Ahmed Fakhry, *The Egyptian Deserts. Siwa Oasis, its History and Antiquities* (Cairo: Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte, 1944) and *id.*, *The Oasis of Siwa, its Customs, History and Monuments* (Cairo: Wadi el-Nil Press, 1950), Klaus P. Kuhlmann and William M. Brashear, *Das Ammoneion. Archeologie, Geschichte und Kulturpraxis des Orakels von Siwa* (Mainz: Philip von Zabern, 1988) and, more recently, Kai Chi Bruhn, *Ammoniaca I. „Kein Tempel der Pracht“ Architektur und Geschichte des Tempels aus der Zeit des Amasis auf Agurmi, Oase Siwa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010).

5 Jürgen Osing, "Siwa" In *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 5, ed. Wolfgang Helck and Wolfhart Westendorf (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1984), col. 965.

6 Stanley M. Burstein, "Pharaoh Alexander: A Scholarly Myth," *Ancient Society* 22 (1991): 139–40 see also *id.*, "Alexander in Egypt: continuity or change?" In *Achaemenid History. VIII: Continuity and Change. Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop, April 6–8, 1990, Ann Arbor, Michigan*, ed. Amélie Kuhrt and Margaret Cool Root (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1994).

has a political significance, it can only concern the Greeks and the inhabitants of the Western Desert and of its northern fringes.⁷ Could we be more precise?

The history of Siwa remains opaque to our eyes until the middle of the first millennium BCE. The main temple was built on the top of Aghurmi Hill. Kuhlmann argued, from the proportions of the preserved signs of the royal cartouche engraved on the naos, that the dedicatee would be Amasis rather than Akoris.⁸ These inscriptions testify that the sanctuary was also decorated thanks to the support of the "Prince of the Two Deserts Sethirtaios son of Leloutek" (*wr h3s.ty šth-ir-di-s s3 Rrwtk*).⁹ This probably means that his territory of the latter extended over the Egyptian Western desert and the Cyrenaican one, on both sides of the large sandy area (about 800 km. by 300 km.), situated south of Siwa, and west of Farafra in which there's apparently no source of water.¹⁰ Thanks to Pr. Frédéric Colin, we know that members of the Prince of the Two Deserts' family had close relations with an unidentified temple of Thoth in the Nile Valley. Such a connection is therefore attested by a small bronze base dedicated by a certain "Amenemope son of Leloulek, Prince of the Two Deserts" commemorating an offering to a sacred aviary.¹¹ The work undertaken under Amasis and Sethirtaios in the temple of Aghurmi is more or less contemporaneous with the consultation of the oracle of Ammon by Croesus reported by Herodotos (1.46.2). All the evidence, therefore, points to significant activity around Aghurmi at least from the middle of the 6th century BCE. Unsurprisingly, the Cyreneans seem to have been in regular contact with Siwa. The circulation of the so-called "story of the Nasamonians" (Herodotos 2.32.1–7) is significant on this point, because it was first told by Etearchus "king of the Ammonians" (τῷ Ἀμμωνίων βασιλέϊ) to the Cyreneans before they told it to Herodotos (2.32.1). It was through the only Greek poleis settled in North Africa that the Greek world in general was connected to the Saharan oracle.

With the 5th century BCE, the prestige of the oracle increased in Greece, especially in Attica.¹² Following Pausanias, Pindar, who composed two odes in honour of Arkesilaos IV of Cyrene, (Pi. P. 4 and 5), "sent to the Ammonians of Libya a hymn to Ammon" (Paus. 9.16.1). According to a tradition collected by Plutarch, Kimon secretly consulted the Libyan oracle during his preparation of his last campaign against the Persians in

7 Indeed, according to Herodotos (2.18.1–3), the inhabitants of Apis (Zawiyet Umm en-Rakham) and Marea consulted the oracle to settle their ethnic identity (see Frédéric Colin, "Les fondateurs du sanctuaire d'Amon à Siwa (Désert Libyque). Autour d'un bronze de donation inédit" In *Egyptian Religion. The Last Thousand Years*, II, *Studies Dedicated to the Memory of J. Quaegebeur*, ed. Willy Clarysse Willy, Antoon Schoors and Harco Willems (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 331–32.

8 Kuhlmann and Brashear, *Das Ammonion*, 2–3.

9 Colin, "Les fondateurs du sanctuaire d'Amon à Siwa," 339–41.

10 Bonnie M. Sampson. *The Geology of Egypt. A Traveler's Handbook* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 147.

11 Colin, "Les fondateurs du sanctuaire d'Amon à Siwa," 341–45.

12 Marta Zorat, "Atene e il santuario di Ammone (per una storia delle relazioni greco-libiche)" In *Studi sulla Grecità di Occidente (= Hesperia 1)*, ed. Lorenzo Braccesi (Roma: "L'Erma" di Breitschneider), 89–123.

450–449 BCE (Plu. *Cim.* 18.6–7). Alcibiades would have also sent men to consult the oracle of Ammon before the Sicilian Expedition (Plu. *Nic.* 13.1). Later, at the end of the Peloponnesian War, the Spartan general Lysander tried to corrupt consecutively the temples of Delphi, Dodona and Siwa to obtain an oracle supporting his project of constitutional reform (Plu. *Lys.* 25.3 = Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 206; D.S. 14.13.5). Consulting the oracle of Ammon to determine the fate of a military, or a political, project seems to be in line with Greek oracular practices of the 5th and 4th century BCE.¹³ At the same time, Ktesias mentions the visit to Siwa by the mythic Assyrian queen Semiramis.¹⁴ This could mean that, half a century before Alexander, Siwa was already tied to the figures of the great conquerors in the Greek imagination. In the 4th century BCE, Athenian made the cult of Ammon public.¹⁵ In Aphytis, in Chalkidiki, a temple of Ammon was erected at a date that remains unclear. It is not all certain, indeed, that this sanctuary predates Alexander's visit to the oracle.¹⁶ The same development can be observed in Siwa itself where a second temple, known as Umm Ubeida, was dedicated to Ammon at the foot of Aghurmi. This monument is consecrated by an individual named Wenamun "Prince of the desert" (*wr* [ʕ] *h3s.t*), being a contemporary of Pharaoh Nektanebo II (360–342 BCE).¹⁷

The seemingly continuous rise in popularity of Ammon of Siwa in the Greek world occurs through its assimilation to Zeus. The oldest monument attesting to the existence of this *interpretatio graeca* is a bronze strip (intended to cover a wooden pedestal) dedicated in Greek "to the Theban Zeus" (τῷ Ζηνί Θηβαίῳ) by someone named [Με]λάνθιος during the second half of the 6th century BCE.¹⁸ One century later, a fragment of Pindar

13 Pl. *Alc.* 2 148 d–e and Pl. *Lg.* 738.b–c shows that the political prestige of the oracle was intact in the first decades of the 4th century BCE. On Siwa during Ptolemaic period, see James Gill, *Dakhleh Oasis and the Western Desert of Egypt under the Ptolemies* (Oxford: Oxbow books, 2016), 137–38. The decline of the oracle seems to have been complete at the very end of the Hellenistic period, see Str. 17.1.43.

14 "She [Semiramis] then passed into Egypt, subdued almost all Libya, and went to the temple of Ammon to question the oracle about the time of her death." (D.S. 2.14.3 = *FGrH* 688F1b.388)

15 Sterling Dow, "The Egyptian Cults in Athens," *Harvard theological Review* 30 (1937): 184 (with references) and, more recently, Élodie Matricon-Thomas, "Le culte d'Ammon à Athènes (Ve – IIIe siècle avant J.-C.) : chronique d'une intégration avortée ?" *Circé. Histoire, savoirs, sociétés* 7/2 (2015).

16 On Aphytis, see Stefano Caneva, "D'Hérodote à Alexandre. L'appropriation gréco-macédonienne d'Ammon de Siwa, entre pratique oraculaire et légitimation du pouvoir" In *Les représentations des dieux des autres* (= *Mythos* Suppl. 2), ed. Corinne Bonnet, Amandine Declercq and Iwo Slobodzianek (Palermo: Salvatore Sciascia Editore), 197 see also Andrew Collins, "Alexander's Visit to Siwah: A New Analysis," *Phoenix* 68 (2014): 63.

17 Ahmed Fakhry, *The Oasis of Egypt*. Vol. 1. *Siwa Oasis* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1973), 168. In the temple in the nearby oasis of Bahrain, Wenamun takes the Egyptian royal pharaonic title, Paolo Gallo, "Ounamon, roi de l'oasis libyenne d'Ighesep (El-Bahreïn) sous la XXX^e dynastie," *Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie* 166 (2006): 11–30; Lorenzo Uggetti, "Il tempio nell'oasi di El Bahrein: analisi iconografica ed architettonica," in *Egittologia a Palazzo Nuovo. Studi e ricerche dell'Università di Torino*, ed. Paolo Gallo (Novi Ligure: Edizioni Epoké, 2013), 261–62.

18 *SEG* 27.1106. Olivier Masson, "Quelques bronzes égyptiens à inscription grecque, N. 1, plaquette de bronze pour Amon à New York," *Revue d'égyptologie* 29 (1977): 53–67; Louis Robert, "Bulletin

confirms this syncretism. In an hymn addressed to him, Ammon is said to be “master of Olympus” (fr. 36 Maehler = fr. 8 Puech).¹⁹ At the same period, Herodotos attributes this assimilation to the fact that the two gods are associated with the ram (2.42.4–5).

Examination of the epithets attached to Ammon in the Western desert helps to further understand this syncretism. Nikolaos Lazaridis published recently a group of hieroglyphic inscriptions from two rock sites in the Darb Ain Amur (between Kharga and Dakhla oasis) dated to the second part of the 2nd millennium BCE.²⁰ These are invocations to a divinity designated as “Amun-Ra²¹, lord of the sky” (*Imn-R^c nb p.t*). Contrary to “king of the gods” or “lord of the Two Lands”, “Lord of the sky” is an uncommon epithet of Amun-Ra.²² “Lord of the sky” is also attested several century later as epithet of Ammon in his temple of Umm Ubeida in Siwa.²³ Thus, like Zeus, Ammon of the Western desert was conceived as a god reigning over the celestial vault.

Neither completely Greek nor entirely Egyptian, the oracle of Ammon stands at the eastern end of the Libyan world. Herodotos provides a story reportedly told by Theban priests which perfectly sums up the ambiguous position held by Siwa in cultural geography. According to this tale, the introduction of the oracles both in Libya and Greece originated in the abduction of two women consecrated to the service of Amun-Ra of Thebes by Phoenicians (2.54).²⁴ This means that, in the middle of the 5th century BCE, the Theban clergy was perfectly aware of the prestige that surrounded the oracle of Ammon in Siwa in the Greek world. However, they perceived the Libyan oracle both as an emanation of the temple of Amun-Ra in Thebes but also as not belonging to the Egyptian world, but to the Libyan one. By this short tale, the Theban priests gave to Amun of Thebes the merit of anteriority on Ammon of Siwa, while stressing that the latter could not be considered as a fully Egyptian god.

This brief reminder of the main elements of the history of the oracle of Siwa between ca. 550–ca. 350 BCE helps to establish two things.

épigraphique,” *REA* 92 (1980): 533, n° 642.

- 19 Quoted and discussed by Stella Georgoudi, “Des sons, des signes et des paroles : la divinisation à l’œuvre dans l’oracle de Dodone,” in *La Raison des signes. Présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne*, ed. Stella Georgoudi, Renée Koch Piettre and Francis Schmidt (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 60. This identification must be analyzed in the broader context of the assimilation of Zeus to Amun-Re, Collins, “Alexander’s Visit to Siwah,” 63, note 4.
- 20 Nikolaos Lazaridis, “Crossing the Egyptian Desert: Epigraphic Work at Kharga Oasis,” *MAARAV* 19, no 1–2: 123–26; Nikolaos Lazaridis, “Amun-Ra, Lord of the Sky: A Deity for Travellers of the Western Desert,” *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 22 (2015): 43–60.
- 21 I write “Amun” to designate the Theban god or in the name “Amun-Ra.” The spelling “Ammon” is used only in connection with the god worshipped in Siwa.
- 22 Lazaridis, “Amun-Ra, Lord of the Sky,” 50.
- 23 Ivan Guermeur, *Les cultes d’Amon hors de Thèbes : recherches de géographie religieuse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 425–27.
- 24 The following passage (Hdt. 2.55) gives a story attributed to the prophetesses of Dodona concerning the Theban origin of their oracle.

- First, if Alexander’s arrival in Siwa constitutes an important moment in the history of the oracle, this episode is in line with other ‘political’ consultations attested since the middle of the 6th century BCE.
- Secondly, while the Ammon oracle is clearly of little importance to the Egyptians of the Nile Valley, its authority radiates over the Western desert and its Egyptian and Libyan margins. The fact that the “Princes of the Two Deserts” supported the construction and renovation of the two Siwa temples in the 6th and 4th centuries BCE shows that the political importance of Ammon of Siwa also extended to the Cyrenai-can desert. Thus, by going to Siwa, Alexander addressed both the Greeks and, which is very rarely emphasized, to the Libyan populations who lived on either side of the Marsa Matruh-Siwa axis. We must then take seriously into account the fact that Alexander’s visit to the oracle of Siwa takes place in a Libyan political centre to interpret the testimony of the ancient historians.

2. Three reasons for one trip.

Nine passages report on the consultation of the oracle of Ammon by Alexander: in chronological order of the books in which they appear, Diodoros 17.51, Strabo 17.1.43 (= Kallisthenes *FGrH* 124 F14a), Curtius 4.7.5–32, Plutarch (*Alex.* 26.6–7, 27), Arrian (*An.* 3.3–4), Justin (11.11), Pseudo-Kallisthenes, *Alexander Romance* 1.30 and the *Fragmentum Sabbaiticum* *FGrH* 151 F1.9–10, an allusion to the episode in Athenaios 12.53 (= Ephippus *FGrH* 126 F5).²⁵

Three main causes explaining Alexander’s expedition to Siwa can be identified.

	Imitating Perseus and Herakles	Questioning about Alexander’s divine ancestry	Becoming the master of the universe? The future of the Alexander’s ἀρχή.
D.S. 17.51		X	X
Str. 17.1.43 (= Kallisthenes <i>FGrH</i> 124 F14a)	X		
Curt. 4.7.5–32		X	X
Plu. <i>Alex.</i> 26.6–7, 27		X	X
Arr. <i>An.</i> 3.3–4	X	X	X

²⁵ Krzysztof Nawotka, *The Alexander Romance by Ps. Callisthenes: A Historical Commentary* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 94 provides a commented list of these passages.

	Imitating Perseus and Herakles	Questioning about Alexander’s divine ancestry	Becoming the master of the universe? The future of the Alexander’s ἀρχή.
Ath. 12.53 (= Ehippos <i>FGrH</i> 126 F5)		X	
Just. 11.11		X	
Ps.-Kallisthenes, <i>Alexander Romance</i> 1.30.			X
<i>Fragmentum Sabbaiticum FGrH</i> 151 F1.9–10		X	

First of all, on reading these passages, the Western desert appears as a theatre scene on which the temple of Ammon is the only element. The presence of a political authority in Siwa, which is attested a few decades before Alexander’s arrival, is not even mentioned. The oasis seems to be populated only by priests waiting for the conqueror to arrive. It is most probably because of this truncated narrative, focused on the psychology of Alexander, that this episode has become difficult to understand.²⁶ It is therefore symptomatic that an author as precise as Arrian has no other solution than to invoke the *πῶθος λαμβάνει αὐτόν* (Arr. *An.* 3.3.1), the “compelling desire”, that seized Alexander and threw him on the roads of the desert.

Beside the two most attested motives –the question concerning the Alexander’s divine ancestry and relative to the becoming of his ἀρχή-, to which we will return later, a tradition attested only by Strabo and Arrian, explains the desert trip by Alexander’s desire to imitate Perseus and Herakles who had journeyed to the Libyan oasis.²⁷ Following Strabo, it finds its origin in Kallisthenes.²⁸ Krzysztof Nawotka is most certainly right when he qualifies it as the official version providing the authorized and public motive for the journey to the Greek and Macedonian soldiers and, incidentally, to the Greeks of Egypt.²⁹ It is indeed unlikely that the Egyptians were concerned by the *imitatio Persei* or *Herculi*. This reason is, in any case, perfectly consistent with what we know about

26 For an overview of the bibliography, Caneva, “D’Hérodote à Alexandre,” 193 note 1.

27 The cattle of Geryon (Herakles’ Tenth Labour) and the apples of the Hesperides (Eleventh Labour) took place in Libya.

28 Ulrich Wilcken, “*Alexanders Zug in die Oase Siwa*,” *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phil.-Hist. Klasse* 30 (1928): 582.

29 Nawotka, *The Alexander Romance*, 95; Collins, “Alexander’s Visit to Siwah,” 65.

the place occupied by the oracle of Ammon in the Greek imagery at the end of the 4th century BCE.

Concerning the two others motives, the situation was summarized by Jouguet in the 1940's: "There is therefore a contradiction between the testimony of Kallisthenes and the tradition of Kleitarchos."³⁰ According to Kallisthenes, the conqueror desired above all to know the fate and the extent of his rule (ἀρχή). Wilcken, by asserting that the conqueror was surprised to be greeted as "son of Ammon" by the priest of Ammon, is probably one of the best continuers of this tradition.³¹ For the advocates of this approach, Alexander's consultation was in the line with those of Kimon, Lysander and Alkibiades. However, it is surprising that Alexander bothered in person when he could have dispatched a detachment to Siwa. Thus, the need to consult the oracle on political matters are not sufficient in itself to satisfactorily resolve the difficulty posed by the expedition.

This is where the motive put forward by Kleitarchos comes naturally. As Alexander was first in search of his divine origin, he couldn't do anything than going to Siwa in person. This hypothesis has been recently advocated by Andrew Collins who refuted what he calls the "greeting thesis."³² Based on D.S. 17.51.1–2, this "thesis" asserts that the greeting 'son of Ammon' was addressed to Alexander not in public and outside the temple but in intimacy, in the naos, by the priest of Ammon. It could mean that the recognition of Alexander's divine filiation was not fortuitous but had a real oracular value. Bosworth goes even further by assuming that Alexander had already conceived the idea of his divine filiation before his visit to Siwa. In this perspective, the *imitatio Herculi et Persei* underlined by Kallisthenes was into the service of his divinization. Indeed, according to Bosworth, the quest of Alexander in the Western desert finds its origin in Greek mythology, particularly in the status of the two heroes who claimed human and divine parentage and with whom Alexander himself, as their descendant, intended to compete.³³

The debate between those who see the expedition to Siwa as a mere oracular consultation by a political leader and those who believe that Alexander was going to meet his father actually dates back to the Alexander's campaign. It is indeed symptomatic the name of Ammon reappears spontaneously in the sarcasms of the veterans during the Opis rebellion in 324 BCE "and it is by the blood of Macedonians, and by these wounds, that thou art become so great as to disown Philip and make thyself son to Ammon." (Plu. *Alex.* 50.6; Arr. *An.* 7.8.3). The same irony underlies the well-known anecdote reported by Plutarch according to which the "divinization" of Alexander by the oracle was due to

30 Pierre Jouguet, "Alexandre à l'oasis d'Ammon et le témoignage de Callisthène," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 26 (1943–1944): 102.

31 Wilcken, "Alexanders Zug in die Oase Siwa," 591.

32 Collins, "Alexander's Visit to Siwah," 71–72.

33 Albert Brian Bosworth, "Alexander and Ammon" In *Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory: Studies Presented to Fritz Schachermeyr on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday* ed. Konrad H. Kinzl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 51–75.

a pronunciation error, to a confusion made by the priest of Ammon between ὦ παιδίον (“O, my son!”) and ὦ παιδῖος (“O son of Zeus!”) (Plu. *Alex.* 27.5).³⁴

If the imitation of Herakles and Perseus or the consultation of the oracle to guess the future of the campaign were acceptable motives for the Greeks, the proclamation of Alexander’s divine ancestry was, on the other hand, more likely to cause embarrassment and even disorder among the troops. It is therefore possible that this part of the political message was not directed at Greeks and Macedonians but at the populations of the oases of the Eastern Sahara for which the oracle of Siwa was adorned with prestige. Recognized as “Son of Ammon”, Alexander thus became the undisputed successor of the “Princes of the (Two) Deserts”. In doing so, the priests of Siwa recognized his dominance not only over the Egyptian Western desert but also over some of the oases in the Cyrenaican Desert.³⁵ In a region where political power had not taken such a stable form as in Greece or Egypt, the recognition of Alexander’s divine filiation by the oracle could be equated with the acceptance of his authority. The visit to Siwa can be analyzed as an operation to conquer the Eastern Sahara without combat or battle. While the political significance of this proclamation was clear to the inhabitants of the desert, it was hardly acceptable to the Greeks and Macedonians. Some of them chose to ignore it, while others derided it. All were victims of a misunderstanding because the political message or the oracle was not addressed to them.

2. Siwa ad aegyptum: Alexander as Master of the Eastern Sahara.

Alexander’s arrival in Siwa marks the beginning of the Graeco-Macedonian domination over the oasis. This new political order resulted in the disappearance of the local “oasian princes”, such as Leloutek, Wenamun or Etearchus. This domination of Macedonian power continued under the first Ptolemies. According to the testimony of Pausanias, Ptolemy I marked his devotion to Ammon of Siwa by dedicating an altar to it.³⁶ Oases of the Western desert ceased definitively to be places of rebellion as they regularly were during the Persian period.³⁷ The presence of Alexander is also attested in the neighbour-

34 See the important discussion in Gérard Lucas, “La réponse d’Ammon à Alexandre corrigée par Plutarque” in *Les jeux et les ruses de l’ambiguïté volontaire dans les textes grecs et latins*, ed. Louis Basset and Frédéric Biville (Lyon: Maison de l’Orient méditerranéen, 2005), 198 who analyzes this oracle as a forgery.

35 On Awjila oasis, see Sophie Marini, *Grecs et Libyens en Cyrénaïque dans l’Antiquité. Aspects et vicissitudes d’un rapport millénaire* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2018), 26.

36 “Pindar (...) sent to the Ammonians of Libya a hymn to Ammon. This hymn I found still carved on a triangular slab by the side of the altar dedicated to Ammon by Ptolemy the son of Lagus.” (Paus. 9.16.1).

37 In Ayn Manâwir, at the southern end of the oasis, a contract (O.Man. 5446) is dated from the reign of Pharaoh Inaros who, took up arms against Artaxerxes I in the late 460s BCE (Michel Chauveau, “Inarôs, prince des rebelles” in *Res Severa Verum Gaudium. Festschrift für Karl-Theodor Zauzich zum 65. Geburtstag am 8. Juni 2004*, ed. Friedhelm Hoffmann and Heinz-Josef Thissen (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 39–46. By proposing to read the title of the former *p3 w r n n3 bk3l.w* “The Great of

ing oasis of Bahariya. On the edge of the palm grove on which the trail to Siwa leads, the temple of Qasr el-Megisba was built during its rule.³⁸ From the reign of Alexander is dated an altar dedicated in hieroglyphs by a local first prophet of Amun-Ra, “master of giving advices” (*Imn-R^c nb ir.t shr*) published by Francesco Bosch-Puche. This altar is also engraved by the following Greek inscription Βασιλεὺς | Ἀλέξ<α>νδρος | Ἄμμωνι | τ[ῶ]ι πατρί, “King Alexander to Ammon-father.”³⁹ It is far from certain that this last dedication dates back to Alexander’s passage to Bahariya, as Ivan Ladynin recently stated.⁴⁰ It is indeed more likely that this inscription was added to the monument in the decades following Alexander’s death. This shows the importance of the expedition to Siwa in the imagery of the Greeks living and travelling in the Western desert under the Argeads and the early Ptolemaic period.⁴¹ In this perspective, it is interesting to note that the idea that Alexander returned via Bahariya appeared precisely in Ptolemy’s history,

the Bakales”, Jan Winnicki, “Der libysche Stamm der Bakaler im pharaonischen, persischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten,” *Ancient Society* 36 (2006): 135–42 made this oasian king the leader of a Libyan tribe settled at Tokra, on the shore of Cyrenaica (on the Bakales, see Marini, *Grecs et Libyens en Cyrénaïque*, 27–28; 46–47). Recently Olaf Kaper, “Petubastis IV in the Dakhla oasis: New Evidence about an Early Rebellion against Persian Rule and Its Suppression in Political Memory” In *Political memory in and after the Persian Empire*, ed. Jason M. Silverman and Caroline Waerzeggers (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 125–49 uncovered in Amheida (Dakhla oasis) a monumental stone gate bearing the name of the king Petubastis IV who reigned concurrently to Darius I.

38 Frédéric Colin, “Un ex-voto de pèlerinage auprès d’Ammon dans le temple dit ‘d’Alexandre’, à Bahariya (désert Libyque),” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 97 (1997): 91–96; Francisco Bosch-Puche, “L’ ‘autel’ du temple d’Alexandre le Grand à Bahariya retrouvé.” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 108 (2008): 29.

39 Bosch-Puche, “L’ ‘autel’ du temple d’Alexandre le Grand,” 37–38.

40 Ivan Ladynin, “АЛТАРЬ ИЗ ХРАМА АМОНА В ОАЗИСЕ БАХАРИЯ С ЕГИПЕТСКОЙ ЦАРСКОЙ ТИТУЛАТУРОЙ АЛЕКСАНДРА ВЕЛИКОГО. I. НАДПИСИ АМЯТНИКА,” *Vestnik Drevney Istorii* 2 (2014): 3–12 and *id.* “АЛТАРЬ ИЗ ХРАМА АМОНА В ОАЗИСЕ БАХАРИЯ С ЕГИПЕТСКОЙ ЦАРСКОЙ ТИТУЛАТУРОЙ АЛЕКСАНДРА ВЕЛИКОГО. II. ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ И ДАТИРОВКА.” *Vestnik Drevney Istorii* 3 (2014): 3–20 put forward, with solid paleographical arguments, the hypothesis that this dedication would in fact have been added a few years later. One might add that the royal title does not appear to have been assumed by Alexander until 330–329 BCE (Robert, “Bulletin épigraphique”, 459). With his customary generosity, Dr. Julien Monerie notifies me of a brief inscription attributed to Alexander and discovered at Xanthos on a base reused in the imperial period. Robert, “Bulletin épigraphique”, 458–59, n. 487 notes about it: “On pourrait même se demander si les Xanthiens n’ont pas tenu eux-mêmes à rappeler le passage du roi, plus ou moins longtemps après l’événement.” Note that in Xanthos, as in Siwa, Alexander received an oracle concerning the future of his power over the world (*Plu. Alex.* 17.4–5). The graffito containing “Alexander year 1, first month of Akhet, (day) 1” in Karnak may be another example of pseudo-inscriptions attributed to the conqueror (see note 1 for further details).

41 Note that the epithet “beloved of Amun” (*mry Imn*) is attested in the titulatures of Alexander and of the first Ptolemies (Bosch-Puche, “The Egyptian Royal Titulary of Alexander the Great, I,” 151–52) and, obviously, in the official name of Alexandria at the time of its foundation as it appears on the Satrap Stele (311 BCE): “The-Wall-of-the-King-of-Upper-and-Lower-Egypt-Chosen-by-the-Beloved-of-Amun/Ammon-son-of-Ra-Alexander” (*p3 sbi n n nsw bity stp-n-R^c mry Imn s3 R^c IIsksidrs*, Åke Engsheden, “Aux confins de l’étymologie. Rakotis, le nom indigène d’Alexandrie” In

contrary to Aristobulos, who claimed that Alexander returned to Egypt by the same route he had taken on the outward journey (Arr. *An.* 3.3.5–6). In the same vein, Kleitarchos, who was a courtesan at the court of Ptolemy I, insisted the most on the oracle's recognition of Alexander's Ammonian origin.⁴² It seems that the Ptolemies promoted a narrative of the expedition to Siwa in line with their political interests in the Western desert where Alexander had installed the Greek dominance.

At the end of his fundamental article, Francesco Bosch-Puche sketches a comparison between the Alexander's altar from Bahariya and the twelve altars that he would have built on the banks of the Hyphasis according to Flavius Philostratos, author of a life of Apollonios of Tyana.⁴³ These monuments would have borne a dedication which, in some respects, recalls the one found on the Egyptian altar: "To my father Ammon, to my brother Herakles, to Athena Foresightful, to Zeus Olympios, to the Kabirs of Samothrace, to the Indian Helios, to Apollo Delphian." This comparison does not seem relevant. The altars of the Hyphasis explicitly present themselves as landmarks indicating the eastern limit of the conquest. Indeed, in the center of these altars would have been enched a bronze stele engraved with these words: "Here stopped Alexander" In a very different way, the altar of Bahariya is a well attested votive object offered to a deity whom a private person intends to honour.

Nevertheless, comparing the Bahariya votive altar with the Hyphasis boundary altars reveals the way we conceive the geography of the Western desert. For us, as for the Greeks⁴⁴ and the Ancient Egyptians⁴⁵, Siwa is perceived as the end of the Egyptian Far West. However, the pioneering articles of Mario Liverani (2000 and 2005)⁴⁶ have revealed the role played by Siwa to connect the Egyptian Western desert to Libya since, at least, the middle of the first millennium BCE. Recently, Sabine Müller perfectly demonstrate that the detachment launched by Kambyses in the wake of the conquest of Egypt but, also, the journey of Alexander to Siwa was due to the will to control the car-

Études d'onomastique égyptienne. Méthodologie et nouvelles approches, ed. Yannis Gourdon and Åke Engsheden (Cairo : Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2016), 90.

42 Luisa Prandi, *Fortuna e realtà dell'opera di Clitarco* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996); *ead.*, "New Evidence for the Dating of Kleitarchos (POxy LXXI. 4808)," *Histos* 6 (2012): 15–26.

43 Bosch-Puche, "L' 'autel' du temple d'Alexandre le Grand," 38–39.

44 Siwa is associated with Herakles, "ordonnateur des confins", Gwadlys Bernard, "Héros et monstres des confins occidentaux de l'oecoumène" In *Confines. El extremo del mundo durante la Antigüedad*, ed. Fernando Prados Martínez, Iván García Jiménez and Gwadlys Bernard (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2010): 73–94.

45 The Egyptian name of Siwa is *t3y-n-dr.w / drw.w* "the end of the farthest point", Klaus Peter Kuhlmann, "Gleanings from the texts in the Sanctuary of Amun at Aghürmi (Siwa Oasis)," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 57 (2001), 200–203; Guermeur, *Les cultes d'Amon hors de Thèbes*, 423.

46 Rhys Carpenter, "A Trans-Saharan Caravan Route in Herodotus," *American Journal of Archaeology* 60, n°3 (1956): 231–42 and Robin C. C. Law, "The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise in Classical Times," *Journal of African History* 8, n°2 (1967): 181–200 paved the way for the study of caravan routes in the Eastern Sahara in Antiquity.



Fig. 1: Anamorphic map of the Alexander's Campaign resized according to its duration (see Appendix 1 concerning the duration of the trip). (after: Damien Agut-Labordère and Martin Sauvage, "Les conquêtes d'Alexandre," in *Atlas historique du Proche-Orient ancien*, ed. M. Sauvage [Paris-Beyrouth: Les Belles-Lettres-Ifpo, 2020], 138).

avans tracks.⁴⁷ Beside this, the progress made in Fezzan archaeology over the last forty years, which prove the expansion of trade between the heart of the Libyan Sahara and the Egyptian Western desert from the 2nd century BCE onwards, tends to confirm the

⁴⁷ Sabine Müller, "Kambyses II., Alexander und Siwa: Die ökonomisch-geopolitische Dimension" In *Diwan. Untersuchungen zu Geschichte und Kultur des Naben Ostens und des östlichen Mittelmeerraums im Altertum. Festschrift für Josef Wiesehöfer*, ed. Carsten Binder, Henning Börm and Andreas Luther (Duisburg: Wellem, 2016): 223–45, see also Eugen Cruz Uribe, "The Invasion of Egypt by Cambyses," *Transeuphratène* 25 (2008): 9–60 (for Persian Period) and John C. Darnell, David Klotz and Colleen Manassa, "Gods on the Road: The Pantheon of Thebes at Qasr el-Guheita" In *Documents de théologie thébaine tardive*, ed. Christophe Thiers (Montpellier: Égypte nilotique et Méditerranée), 1–31 (Saite Period).

Liverani’s and Müller’s hypothesis.⁴⁸ The commercial network organized around Siwa was not limited, in its east, to the Egyptian desert. It was in fact already connected to Nubia, and more precisely to Darfur, through one of the oldest Saharan itinerary: the Darb al Arba’in (Forty Days’ Road).⁴⁹

This change in perspective leads us to re-evaluate the importance of the Siwa expedition as part of Alexander’s expedition to Africa. Traditionally, and as we have written in the first lines of this article, the Siwa expedition is presented as a subordinate part in the conquest of Egypt.⁵⁰ On the contrary, it is more probable that the geostrategic importance acquired by Siwa within the Eastern Sahara explained that it became a military goal in its own right.

If we consider not only the distance but also the time spent conquering a territory, we observe that the trip to Siwa (and moreover the conquest of the Eastern peripheries of the Persian Empire) took much longer than that of its centre. This simple observation suffices to conclude that the seizing of the Egyptian Western desert was an objective in itself whose importance was such that it justified not only endangering Alexander but also postponing the military operations in the heart of the Persian Empire.

By targeting Siwa, Alexander wasn’t just trying to seize a commercial crossroads. The oasis of Ammon and, through it, the territory of the “Two Deserts”, was a political objective in themselves.⁵¹ This means that the trip to Siwa was an operation of conquest in the full sense of the word. Alexander won a new victory there without a blow because the recognition of his divine filiation by the oracle meant that the Siwite elites finally accepted his authority.⁵² Capturing the legitimacy given by Zeus-Ammon was of crucial importance because it seems that it was the unique common god within the Eastern Sahara, venerated by the Libyans, the Egyptians but, also, by the Greeks who populated this part of Africa, especially in Cyrene. As a matter of fact, the siwite god appears on Cyrenenan coinage since the late 6th century.⁵³ This makes perfect sense since Cyrene

48 On this last point, see the recent synthesis proposed in David J. Mattingly, Victoria Leitch, Chloe N. Duckworth, Aurélie Cuenod, Martin Sterry and Franca Cole, *Trade in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and The Society for Libyan Studies, 2017).

49 Franz Förster and Heiko Riemer, “Ancient desert roads: Towards establishing a new field of archaeological research” In *Desert Road Archaeology*, ed. Franz Förster and Heiko Riemer (Köln: Heinrich-Barth-Institut, 2017), 50–53.

50 This is in contradiction with the Greek geographical conception concerning Egypt reported by Herodotus: “Now if we agree with the opinion of the Ionians, who say that only the Delta is Egypt”, 2.15.1), Egypt is essentially assimilated to the Delta.

51 Klaus Peter Kuhlmann, “The Realm of the ‘Two Deserts’: Siwa Oasis Between East and West” In *Desert Road Archaeology*, ed. Franz Förster and Heiko Riemer (Köln: Heinrich-Barth-Institut, 2013): 133–66.

52 The relative political autonomy enjoyed by the clergy of Ammon in relation to Alexander could be seen in the refusal of his request for the divinization of Hephaisstion reported by Arrian and Plutarch (Arr. *An.* 7.14.7; 7.23.6 and Plu. *Alex.* 72.3). It is true, however, that the conqueror was then in the far east of his empire, thousands of kilometers from the Sahara.

53 Edward S. G. Robinson, *Catalogue of the Greek coins of Cyrenaica* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1927), CCXXXIV, n°12 a–c, pl. III, 1–3; n°26–29, pl. IV, 22–25.

was the main Mediterranean outlet of the commercial and political network captured by Alexander in Siwa. It is therefore logical that the Cyreneans sent to him a delegation charged with proposing a peace treaty as soon as it was announced that Alexander was on the roads to Marsa Matruh.⁵⁴ Their perfect knowledge of the regional geography had allowed the Cyreneans to understand that by entering the Western desert, Alexander became their new ruler. Therefore, appearing as the son of Zeus-Ammon was, for Alexander, the best way to rule the whole Eastern Sahara.⁵⁵ In a certain sense, the divinization of Alexander by the Saharan oracle wasn't for the Macedonians, or for what we could call the "non-African Greeks".

We will never know what the priest of Ammon of Siwa told Alexander in the secret of the temple of Aghurmi. However, it becomes clear that to progress in the understanding of Alexander's conquest, we have, paradoxically, detach ourselves from him –or rather what we think we know about his psychology-. Alexander was not advancing in a vacuum. On the contrary, he had to deal with ancient political realities with, to put it more directly, peoples who, in the words of Pierre Briant, were "actors in their own right of what is not only Alexander's conquest."⁵⁶ I hope that the present paper will have made it possible to restore the importance of the Libyan desert(s) in what led Alexander on the road to Siwa.

Appendix 1: The Duration of the Alexander's Expedition to Siwa

From Alexandria to Marsa Matruh and thence to Siwa, and, probably, back to Memphis via Bahariya⁵⁷, Alexander's itinerary reconstructed from Classical sources represents a 1300-kilometers journey, including more than 1000 kilometers in an hyperarid environment. The ancient historians have underlined the perils incurred during this arduous

54 As soon as the Cyreneans learned that Alexander was about to launch his expedition to Siwa, they sent a delegation "... envoys from Cyrene brought gifts, and asked for peace and for a visit to their cities. He accepted the gifts and after concluding friendship with them continued to pursue his intended journey." D.S. 17.49.2–3; Curt. 4.7.9 and the comment of Pierre Briant, *Alexander the Great and His Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 76.

55 Victor Ehrenberg, *Alexander und Aegypten* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1926) supposed that Alexander, during his stay on Egypt, had thought of founding a Mediterranean Empire of which Alexandria would have been the capital and Ammon the imperial god. The main merit of this hypothesis is to force us to renounce a teleological reading of Alexander's campaign, since there is no proof that Alexander had from the outset the project of conquering the entire Persian Empire. It is possible that Alexander may have sought during the winter of 331–330 BCE to unify a territory made up of the shores of the eastern Mediterranean. This hypothesis is all the more likely since it was in Egypt that Alexander received the report from Hegelochos, his admiral who had just reduced the last pockets of resistance in the Aegean (Chios, Lesbos and Mytilene) (Arr. *An.* 3.2.3 and Curt. 4.5.14).

56 Pierre Briant, *Alexandre. Exégèse des lieux communs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), 566–67.

57 Arr. *An.* 3.3.6 "... and returns to Egypt, according to Aristobulos, by the same way; according to Ptolemy, by the shortest way to Memphis."

journey in the desert (these passages were very conveniently gathered and commented in Leclant 1949: 197–202). I would like to insist here on the duration of this journey which was not a simple visit to an oracle, as in the cases of Dodona or Delphi, but a real desert expedition. In winter, a camel caravan can travel at least about fifty kilometers per day.⁵⁸ It can therefore be estimated that Alexander spent at least thirty days to reach Memphis from Alexandria via Siwa. This estimation is all the more credible as the layout of the path vary very little over the millennia in desert area. The permanence of the Saharan itineraries has been perfectly described by one of the best experts of the Egyptian desert, the English geologist Llewellyn Beadnell.⁵⁹ Although Alexander's journey is not characterized by a significant difference in altitude⁶⁰, it is worth emphasizing that it was dangerous because of its duration. Around thirty days of travel in the Western desert, even with a stopover in two oases, represents a considerable physical effort for an army that has never traveled in a hyper-arid environment. Egypt.

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58 In 1900, Machell and Hohler took five days to reach Siwa from Marsa-Matrouh with a caravan of 42 camels, traveling 60 kilometers a day, Jean Leclant, " 'Per Africae Sitientia'. Témoignages des sources classiques sur les pistes menant à l'oasis d'Ammon," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 49 (1949): 237.

59 Hugh J. Ll. Beadnell, *An Egyptian Oasis. An Account of the Oasis of Kharga in the Libyan Desert, with Special Reference to its History, Physical Geography, and Water-Supply* (London: John Murray, 1909), 39: "My friend Ball lays great stress on the tortuous nature of the roads between the oasis and the valley, and recommends the scientific travelers to steer an independent course. But after traversing the majority of the main caravan roads, and with a fairly intimate knowledge of the characters of the intervening areas, I must say, that, in my opinion, it would be difficult to better them. These roads were not laid out yesterday, but results from the accumulated experiences of centuries. The original tracks may have been tortuous enough, but they have become straightened out by the cutting off of corners here and there, until at the present day the roads fulfill the three most important objects in view – the ascent and descent to and from the plateau at the point offering the easiest gradients, and the crossing of the plateau itself as directly as possible over the smoothest and most level ground available. The roads give a wide berth to the outcrops of rough limestone, and anyone who has done much cross-country travelling in the Libyan Desert will appreciate their doing so." Fakhry 1942, VIII, describes the same situation: "for many thousands of years the routes of the desert have remained unchanged. Since they were first used in the remote ages, millions of men and animals have trodden there, and so in the course of time they were marked on the face of the desert." (Quoted by Leclant, " 'Per Africae Sitientia' ", 233).

60 The "Miocene limestone wall" culminates only at 200 m. high.

- Duncan Fishwick (= *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 17*), ed. Alastair Small, 11–26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
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