



Fig. 1 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), frontal. Photo: Hans Rupprecht Goette

A Roman Portrait of Alexander the Great from Beth Shean

“The most important Hellenistic sculpture found in the Holy Land”

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Introduction

Although the larger than life-sized marble head from Beth Shean presented here has been known for nearly 95 years and has been on display in either the Rockefeller Museum or the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (hereafter IMJ) for much of that time, it has never been subjected to a thorough analysis (figs. 1–3).¹ Called “the most important Hellenistic sculpture found in the Holy Land,”² it has been mentioned in a number of scholarly articles, most of which refer to the portraiture of Alexander the Great. Most scholars assign it a date in the Hellenistic period,³ and, indeed, the current label for the sculpture in the gallery in the IMJ indicates a date in the third to first centuries BCE. The results of my study of the head and an analysis of the marble by Tambakopoulos and Maniatis (Appendix below) reveal its true importance: it is not Hellenistic but Roman; it is the only sculptural portrait of Alexander from the Roman Near East, and it is one of the few portraits of Alexander with a secure archaeological context, although a secondary one in this case. It may have

been an object of veneration in a Roman revival of the cult of Alexander in the temple on the acropolis of Scythopolis. Further, it was deliberately mutilated, adding to the plentiful evidence of Christian iconoclasm at Scythopolis.

The sculpture was found on the tell of Beth Shean in 1925 by the Palestine Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (hereafter Penn Museum) during excavations that were conducted from 1921 to 1933 in the British Mandate for Palestine.⁴ Many of the archaeological finds from these excavations were sent to the Penn Museum, but this head remained in the Mandate. I became interested in the marble head because of my research on and publications concerning other marble sculptures from these excavations housed in the Penn Museum.⁵ With the kind permission of David Mevorach, the assistance of the staff of the IMJ, and a fellowship from the Albright Institute of Archaeology, I was given access to the head for study and marble sampling in 2016.



Fig. 2 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), right profile.
Photo: Hans Rupprecht Goette



Fig. 3 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), left profile.
Photo: Hans Rupprecht Goette

Context

The Alexander head was discovered in a cistern to the south of a large peripteral temple on the tell, the only significant post-Early Iron Age and pre-Byzantine structure on the height (fig. 4).⁶ The plan of the temple is generally understood from its stone platform and meagerly preserved architectural fragments, some of which can be dated to the later first or second century CE.⁷ It is not completely clear which deity was venerated in this temple for there is evidence at Scythopolis for the worship of both Zeus (Zeus Akraios or Zeus Olympios) and Dionysos, as well as of a god who was a conflation of the two – Zeus Bacchus.⁸ Scythopolis was not a known center of the imperial cult, and there is only tentative evidence for cult places in that city for the worship of Roman emperors and the imperial family.⁹

The large cistern was a convenient place to dump material that was being cleared off the tell in preparation for the building of the Round Church in the late fifth–early sixth century CE.¹⁰ The contents of the cistern were a jumble of debris, including large column drums from the temple, as well as earlier Iron Age objects, with no real stratigraphy.¹¹ We must presume that the primary context of the material in the cistern was the tell, as it would seem unlikely that large stone sculptures and architectural members would have been carried up the steep slopes of the tell to be dumped there. The other sculptures found in the cistern are a limestone fragment of a figured capital dated to the Severan dynasty bearing the head of Dionysos or a satyr;¹² a life-sized Pentelic marble left hand;¹³ and eight fragments of colossal fingers (eight- to ten-times life-size) from an acrolithic statue that is likely to

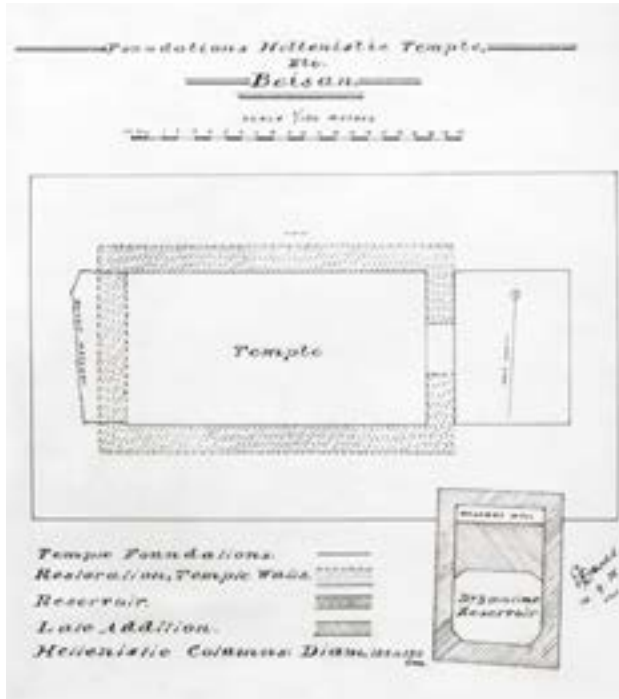


Fig. 4 Plan of the temple and cistern on the tell of Beth Shean by E. Davies, dated 09–14–1925, archives of University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Photo: Courtesy of the Penn Museum, image #134793

have been the cult image for the Roman temple (fig. 5).¹⁴ We can only restore a seated statue on this colossal scale in the temple,¹⁵ eliminating Dionysos, as that god is rarely shown draped and seated after the Archaic and Classical periods in a pose appropriate for a cult image,¹⁶ and suggesting Zeus for its identification. The sculpture fragments from the cistern represent distinct sculptures: one architectural sculpture and three different marble or partly marble free-standing sculptures, which can be distinguished from one another by their scale, marble, or technique.¹⁷

Description of the Head

The marble head is larger than life-sized, made separately from the torso and preserved from the crown to the lower neck, with a maximum preserved height of 0.42 m (H. from crown to chin 0.285; H. face 0.189; W. face 0.19; P.H.



Fig. 5 Colossal fingers from the cistern on the tell of Beth Shean, on display in the Penn Museum. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (29–107–924). Photo: Irene Bald Romano

neck 0.14; W. front of neck 0.14; Max. W. 0.27–0.28; Max. Th. 0.28; Th. at neck 0.17 m). In general, there is excellent preservation of paint on the hair, suggesting that the head was displayed in a protected location for the duration of its primary use. Parts of projecting locks of hair on the top of the head are broken, and there is notable damage to the face that mostly appears to be deliberate, especially to the nose, leaving a gouge across it, and the mouth, which is hacked out, almost certainly the result of Christian iconoclasm of which there is plentiful evidence at Scythopolis (fig. 6).¹⁸

The beardless male head is inclined to his right and tipped slightly upward. Above the forehead, the long hair is divided by a central groove from which thick arching locks rise. The hair falls on both sides of the face to the mid-neck in layers of thick sausage-like clumps, more carefully executed on the right than on the left; the ears are not visible. There is a channel along the hairline on the right and left sides of the brow and face, requiring bridges or struts for the tips of the undercut locks of hair to attach to the skin of the brow, cheeks, and neck; three of these struts have survived intact on the right and left sides of the cheek and neck and one on either side of the forehead (fig. 7). Above the central part and behind the rising front locks is a circular hole for the

attachment of an attribute, probably of metal (Diam. 0.015; Max. Depth [at back] 0.03 m, Figs. 8a, b). In front of the hole hidden behind the front locks is a shallow channel that merges with the drilled central hair part. Around the hole are eight raised locks of hair with slight incisions, clearly planned and carved in relation to the hole. The hair on the crown is shallowly carved and in an irregular arrangement, with comma-shaped locks, brushed forward in areas, sideways and back in others, more or less around a central point (fig. 9). The carving on the back of the head was executed with less attention to detail, and the hair is arranged in three layers with comma-shaped curls; a groove separates the middle layer of short curls from the lower, elongated sausage-shaped locks, which end in spirals or loose upturned curls on the back of the neck (fig. 10). These locks were tooled with narrow, light incisions with no indication of the use of a deep drill. There is no evidence of the addition of a wreath, diadem, or *taenia* in the hair, as there are no holes or grooves that are continuous around the head.¹⁹

The face is rectangular with full, broad cheeks, turning subtly at the jaw to the neckline. The forehead is low with a pronounced concavity above the right eye. The brow line describes a gentle convex curve, set more or less horizontally with no tooling for eyebrow hairs; these details may have been executed in paint. The eyes are set wide apart beneath the brows; the upper lid is a thickened rolled ridge, overlapping the lower lid at the outer edge. The lachrymal glands are delineated by a shallow drilled depression. Both the area below the eyes over the lower eye socket, especially below the right eye, and the naso-labial area are finely modeled and executed with subtle indentations. The mouth is small with deep drilled depressions visible at the outer corners. The thick, sturdy neck swells in the center at the “Adam’s apple” and is squared off on the sides with strong platysma muscles defined on the right and left sides to mimic the inclination of the head to the right and up.

The underside of the neck is roughly finished and uneven, with more careful leveling toward the front right side,



Fig. 6 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), detail of face. Photo: Irene Bald Romano

where there is evidence of a surface finished with a claw chisel. The neck would have joined the cavity between the shoulders at an approximately fifteen-degree angle, with an incline for the setting from a higher back to a lower front. There is no obvious protruding tenon and no dowel hole in the undersurface, suggesting the use of an adhesive and a tight fit with the torso around the finished edges (fig. 11).²⁰

The face and neck are finely polished to a medium finish (see Fig. 7), whereas the hair is unpolished, which allowed the red pigment to adhere better. Traces of a thick white ground are preserved in places on the hair, on top of which there is a ruddy red-brown pigment, especially well-preserved on the front of the head. Thinner pigment appears on the back, and there are only faint traces on the top of the head. There are



Fig. 7 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), detail of right side. Photo: Hans Rupprecht Goette



Fig. 8a Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), detail of top of head and hole for attribute. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, photo by Elie Posner



Fig. 8b Detail of area on top of head. Photo: Hans Rupprecht Goette; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, photo by Elie Posner



Fig. 9 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), crown of head. Photo: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, photo by Elie Posner



Fig. 10 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), back of head. Photo: Hans Rupprecht Goette



Fig. 11 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), underside of neck. Photo: Irene Bald Romano

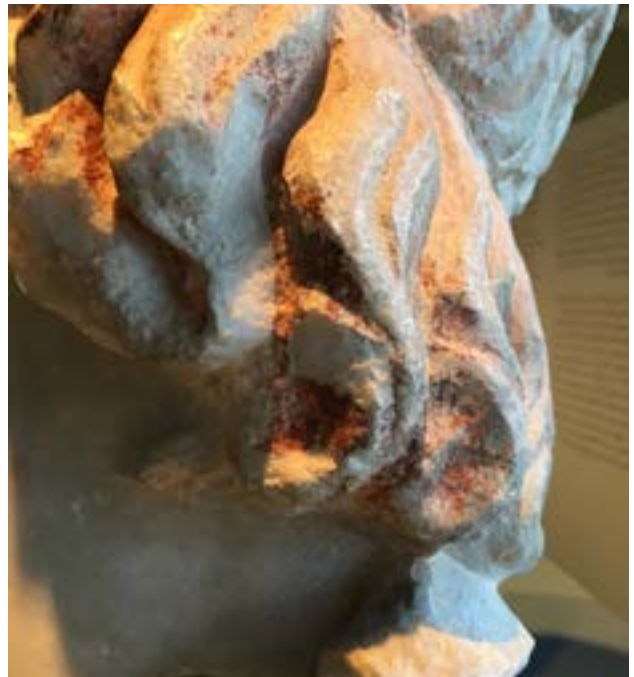


Fig. 12 Head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7), detail of lower right. Photo: Irene Bald Romano

also traces of red on the eyebrows, the eyelids, the right and left eyes, and the left edge of the lip. There are faint traces of yellow-orange pigment on a feature below the locks of hair at the bottom of the neck on the left side, interpreted as a remnant of a garment (fig. 12).

It is not possible to be certain whether the head was part of a full statue, a herm, or a bust, but it is most likely to have been from a standing, at least partly draped statue (with the garment high up over the left shoulder), measuring more than 2 m in height – an appropriately heroic, larger than life-sized scale.

Marble

In the late 1980s Ze'ev Pearl conducted stable isotopic testing on a sample from the head in order to determine its ancient marble quarry, with the results indicating that the marble is probably from an Asia Minor quarry at Afyon or Aphrodisias.²¹ The field of marble studies has progressed significantly since the late 1980s with new white marble quarries studied and new analytical techniques (EPR, petrographic analysis), which, in a combined approach, allow for more certain results than the sole use of stable isotopes. Thus, in 2016 we requested permission from the IAA to have the marble of the head retested in order to confirm the identity of the ancient quarry. Analysis of the sample was conducted by Tambakopoulos and Maniatis at the “Demokritos” Laboratory in Athens, and their results confirm that with a high probability the marble is from one of the white marble quarries of Aphrodisias.²² We know that the Aphrodisias quarries were used locally in the Hellenistic period, but were not fully exploited until the later first century BCE, with the height of their exportation in the Roman Imperial period, especially in the second and third centuries.²³ Thus, the marble analysis provides some supporting evidence, though not definitive, for a Roman date for the head.

Dating

There are archaeological, historical, technical, and stylistic indications to support a date for this head in the Roman

period, probably the later second or early third century CE. First, there are no local marble sources in this region, and marble – the raw material and finished or semi-finished sculptures, as well as architectural decoration – had to be imported. Marble sculpture or marble architectural elements were very rarely imported to ancient Palestine before the middle of the second century CE.²⁴

The undercut locks of hair, leaving bridges or struts on the forehead, cheeks, and neck, are very characteristic of Antonine workmanship, as seen, for example, on the winged figure from the pedestal of the Column of Antoninus Pius in Rome, 161 CE, or on Severan sculpture, evident in various portraits of Septimius Severus, where the corkscrew locks falling on his forehead are similarly undercut.²⁵ Though we cannot assume that just because the marble is probably Aphrodisian, the sculptor was as well, there are good comparisons for this kind of treatment of the undercut hair with struts in portraits of the Late Antonine/Severan period from Aphrodisias itself.²⁶ It is certainly unlike Hellenistic workmanship and points to a later second or early third century CE date.²⁷ Moreover, the separately made head with an inclined join from a higher back to a lower front, lacking a tenon or dowel hole on the underside, is a technique characteristic of Severan period sculptures.²⁸

The general appearance of the head, including the pigment on the hair contrasting with the polished skin, closely matches other Roman sculptures from Beth Shean assigned to the Antonine or Severan period, including the Athena head from Tel Naharon, made of Thasian marble,²⁹ and the Aphrodite with Eros, also probably of Aphrodisias marble, both of which are on display in the IMJ.³⁰

Two other features that are worthy of note on the Scythopolis head are the lack of drilling of the eyes and the summarily finished back. Typically, we would expect portraits of the Antonine or Severan period to have the pupils or irises incised or drilled, and in the case of many Severan portraits the irises are shown rolled under the upper lids.³¹ In Classicizing,

idealized works of deities or deified heroes from this period, however, the eyes are often not drilled, as, for example, in the colossal Alexander statue from the *scaenae frons* of the Severan theater at Pamphylian Perge (fig. 13).³² The lack of fine, finished details on the back of our head is also characteristic of a number of Roman sculptures from Scythopolis, but is also generally a feature of Roman portraiture of the Antonine period, continuing into the Severan period.³³ It also suggests that the setting of this image precluded any necessity for finishing the back.

Identification of the Head

Questions have been raised about the identification of our head. The excavators originally suggested that it belonged to a statue of Dionysos, the most important deity of Scythopolis, and some scholars have followed this lead,³⁴ but most have included it among portraits of Alexander the Great. The literary accounts, primarily of the Roman period, and surviving portraits of Alexander from both the Hellenistic and Roman periods present us with a conflicting and mostly romantically idealized picture of Alexander's appearance.³⁵ Nevertheless, there has come to be a consensus on what a portrait of Alexander should look like – a youthful (beardless), idealized image with a long, leonine coif (god-like), locks of hair rising above his forehead (*anastolé*), his head dramatically turned to one side (usually to the left, though there are a number of his portrait heads turned to the right) and tipped upward toward the heavens, and his eyes deep-set with a longing gaze (*pothos*).

Various characteristics of this head correspond to those of the surviving portraits of the Macedonian ruler that are firmly identified, especially those of the type of the Azara herm, the inscribed first- or second-century CE herm now in the Louvre, which was unearthed in the eighteenth century at Tivoli (figs. 14a, b).³⁶ This herm portrait probably derived from the original portrait created by Lysippos during Alexander's lifetime, although we do not know the body type that goes with the head.³⁷ Since the herm has lost much of its surface and has been extensively recut and restored, we cannot



Fig. 13 Roman portrait of Alexander from Severan theater of Perge, Archaeological Museum, Antalya. Photo: Wikimedia.org, in public domain



Figs. 14a and 14b Azara herm, Musée du Louvre, Paris Ma 436 (MR 405). Photo: Wikimedia.org, in public domain

compare its style to the head from Beth Shean. Rather, it is the arrangement of the hair that is the key element that can be compared with our head and that of other Alexander portraits. Specifically comparable are the locks of the *anastolé* spurting like a fountain from the forehead, a defined crown of curls behind the *anastolé*, a groove separating the frontal mane of hair from the crown, the long locks on the nape of the neck, and the layered long locks on the sides of the head.

The identification of portraits of Alexander is, however, complicated by his continued popularity through the

Hellenistic/Republican and Imperial periods, with rulers and emperors seeking to emulate him,³⁸ and with his portrait features often used or conflated with images of other heroes and gods such as Helios, Apollo, or the Dioscouri.³⁹ Thus, we should consider whether this image from Beth Shean might represent just Alexander or if it depicts a god *in imitatione Alexandri*. That is, could this head be of a god in Alexander's guise or a conflation of Alexander with a divine figure?

The Attribute: Gods and the Severan Dynasty

In examining these possibilities the interpretation of the attribute inserted in the hole on top of the head is critical, for it might have conveyed the message of any union of Alexander with another hero or god and signaled the meaning of the image in this particular context. In images of Alexander – painted, on coins, or in bronze and marble sculptures – he wore many different types of headgear, including a helmet, the lion-skin of Herakles, the sun rays of Helios,⁴⁰ a diadem, *taenia*, or wreath, an elephant scalp, and the horns of Zeus-Ammon, to name the most common. All of these can be eliminated for our head, however, based on the existence of the single hole, the finished upper surface of the head with the arrangement of projecting locks around the hole, and the lack of any other cuttings or attachment holes. Whatever the attribute was on his head, it would not have covered his head but would have projected from the shallow hole (Diam. 0.015; Max. Depth [at back] 0.03 m). Andrew Stewart suggested that it was an Egyptian hem-hem crown, an elaborate triple *atef* rising from two corkscrew sheep horns and usually two uraei, as worn by Alexander in the reliefs of the Shrine of the Barque in Luxor (330–325 BCE) and strongly associated in the Roman period with Harpokrates/Horus, the god of the rising sun, rebirth, and resurrection.⁴¹ A technical reason would suggest otherwise, however, for a wide base and large hole would be needed to attach such a crown. In addition, the pattern of raised locks of hair around the hole would be an impediment, obscured, or rendered unnecessary by such a wide attribute.

We should examine the attributes associated with the primary gods of Scythopolis and consider if any of their symbols might be appropriate for this head. Zeus was worshipped at Scythopolis as Zeus Akraios or Zeus Olympios, but none of his symbols seem feasible (not the kalathos/modius of Zeus/Serapis⁴² nor a crown of sun rays for Zeus Ammon⁴³). Moreover, there is no epigraphical, numismatic, or other archaeological evidence for Zeus being worshipped in Scythopolis in his Egyptian guise and, as an older bearded

god, Zeus is not compatible with the youthful, beardless Alexander for the purposes of a synchronized image.

Dionysos is the most obvious god with whom Alexander might be conflated, not just at Scythopolis, where he founded the city on the site where his nursemaid Nysa was buried, but throughout the Mediterranean. In ancient mythology, Dionysos and Alexander were divine half-brothers, both born from Zeus in miraculous fashions – Dionysos from the thigh of Zeus and Alexander from Olympias, who was impregnated by Zeus in the form of a snake (Plutarch, *Alex.* 2). Both Alexander and Dionysos were youthful heroes/gods who journeyed to the East and brought Eastern influences back to the Mediterranean. Plutarch (*Moralia* 332a) promoted the idea in the second century CE that Alexander consciously followed in the footsteps of Dionysos. Strabo also mentioned the eastern campaigns of Alexander and linked them to Dionysos (11.5.5). Yet, surprisingly, there is little confirmable archaeological or iconographic evidence of visual assimilation of Alexander with Dionysos in the Hellenistic or Roman periods. The most obvious attribute that would be undeniably Dionysiac, a wreath of vines and grapes, cannot be restored on this head.

Perhaps in order to answer the question of the attribute, we should address how this portrait would have been understood in the context of late second–early third century Scythopolis, a city that prided itself on being a *Hellenis polis*, a Greek city.⁴⁴ There was a general resurgence of interest in Alexander in the Roman East, especially in the later second and third centuries CE, with several cities of Transjordan alleging Alexander as their founder. This was a time when cults of the founders developed, and it was popular for cities to claim some divine or heroic Greek founding.⁴⁵ For instance, Capitolias, a Decapolis city east of the Jordan River, claimed Alexander as its founder on a coin issue from the reign of Commodus (r. 177–180 CE), with the reverse bearing the legend ΚΑΠΗ[ΤΩΛΕΙΟΝ] ΑΛΕΞ[ΑΝΔΡΟΣ] ΜΑΚΕ[ΔΩΝ] (“Kapitoleion Alexander of Macdeon”).⁴⁶ Alexander was also claimed as the founder of Gerasa, just 47 miles from Scythopolis and another city



Figs. 15a and 15b Bronze Coin of Gerasa, minted under Elagabalus (r. 218–222 CE). Obverse: Elagabalus; Reverse: diademed bust of Alexander and legend “Alexander of Macedon.” Photo: American Numismatic Society, NY of coin in the Sofaer Collection, Israel Museum, Jerusalem

of the Decapolis. Under Elagabalus (r. 218–222 CE), a bronze issue was minted bearing the legend ΑΛΕ[ΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ] ΜΑΚ[ΕΔΩΝ] ΚΤΙ[ΣΤΕΣ] ΓΕΡΑΣ (“Alexander of Macedon founder of Gerasa”) beneath the diademed bust of Alexander (figs. 15a, b).⁴⁷ There is no comparable coin issue for Scythopolis, but to judge from the numismatic evidence, there is a case to be made for a general “Alexandrolatry” in Decapolis cities and among other cities of the Near East, as well as in Greece,⁴⁸ Asia Minor, and Egypt in the Antonine and Severan periods.⁴⁹ This interest in naming Alexander as the founder of various cities in Roman Syria in the late second and early third century might explain the presence of a statue of Alexander on the acropolis of Scythopolis during the Severan period. It might also suggest that the attribute on this head of Alexander might not be connected to a deity of Scythopolis but, rather, to the Severan dynasty.

Among the Severans, Caracalla’s passionate interest in Alexander the Great is well known. His pathological cultivation and idolization of Alexander resulted in his self-identification as Alexander (Cassius Dio 77.9; 77.18.1; 78.7–9).⁵⁰ We are told by ancient sources that Caracalla made a voyage/campaign through the East in 214/215 CE, at least in part, as an *imitatio Alexandri* and that he visited sites where Alexander had been, most importantly Alexandria.⁵¹ In an anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus Sexti Aureli Victoris* (21.4) from the fourth century CE, we read that:

“[A]fter Caracalla inspected the body of Alexander of Macedon, he ordered that he himself should be called ‘Great’ and ‘Alexander,’ for he was led on by the lies of his flatterers to the point where, adopting the ferocious brow and neck tilted toward the left shoulder that he had noted in Alexander’s countenance, he persuaded himself that his features were truly very similar.”⁵²

Caracalla imagined himself a great hero like Alexander, both sons of great military men,⁵³ and set up portraits of Alexander in Rome (Herodianus IV, *Antoninus Caracalla* 8, 1). Caracalla might never have gone to Scythopolis or made a dedication to Alexander there, yet he rejuvenated Alexander the Great and stimulated his memory in the Severan period, using it to help legitimize his own rule.⁵⁴ The construct of Caracalla as Alexander continued to be cultivated by other members of the Severan family, especially Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, the latter taking the Macedonian hero’s name. For Caracalla, Elagabalus, and Alexander Severus, it made good sense to highlight the Severan dynasty’s lineage by evoking its connections to Alexander the Great. By association with the memory of the long-gone, famed, youthful, heroic Macedonian ruler/victor who spread Greek ideals and culture across a vast empire, the Severan rulers used Alexander to legitimize their reigns and emphasize their own lineage in *aemulatio* of and *comparatio* to Alexander.

Among the Severan symbols that may be appropriate for the attribute on the head of the Scythopolis portrait of Alexander, a star, a sun burst, or another astrological symbol are strong possibilities, signifying the universal power of the *kosmokrator*.⁵⁵ The imagery of the *kosmokrator* is utilized in Septimius Severus’ colossal statue among the seven planetary deities in the monumental façade of his palace on the Palatine, the Septizodium (*Historia Augusta Septimius Severus* 19, 5; 24, 3).⁵⁶ The Severans had deep associations with the cult of the sun god at Emesa in Syria, the birthplace of Septimius’ wife Julia Domna (160–217 CE). Severus is depicted as the sun god, Sol, on a coin issue of 197/198.⁵⁷ Caracalla also venerated the sun god and appears

on his coins crowned with the rays of the sun.⁵⁸ Elagabalus and Alexander Severus both took a special interest in the cult of the sun god and also appear with crowns of sun rays.⁵⁹ Although a crown of sun rays is not possible for our head, a single sun burst or shooting star is the most likely possibility for the attribute worn on the head of the Alexander portrait from Beth Shean. Such a cosmological symbol may have been of gilded bronze, rising from a rod set into the hole. This attribute would signal Alexander as *kosmokrator*, linking this hero-god with the Severan rulers for whom the symbolism of the universal sovereign held special importance in their fraught dynastic rule (fig. 16).

The Severan emperors may not have been responsible for dedicating/financing/erecting the statue of Alexander in the temple of Scythopolis. It may have been a decision on the part of local leaders to set up the statue, wishing to emphasize their city's "Greekness" and to compete with other cities in the region that were claiming Alexander as their founder, while at the same time flattering Caracalla or Severan dynasty rulers by showing support for "Alexander-mania."⁶⁰

A Cult of Alexander in Scythopolis?

We should also take into account the possibility that the temple on the height of Scythopolis might have been the locus of a Roman ruler cult of Alexander, even though the principal god of the temple was probably the Olympian deity Zeus. There is ample numismatic and epigraphical evidence for such ruler cults of Alexander in the Roman East with sanctuaries, priests (at Carian Bargylia, Ephesos, Erythrai, Thessalonike, and Alexandria), and games in honor of the ruler (on Rhodes by the Ionian *koinon*), and statues of Alexander as a god (inscribed statue bases in Thessalonike and Bargylia).⁶¹ In no case, however, has a temple or a cult statue of Alexander been discovered and firmly identified in a Roman cult of Alexander. There is a possibility that honors and rituals might have been shared (*theos synnaos*) by Zeus and Alexander in the temple on the height of Scythopolis. Being cautious with the evidence, however, we can only emphasize

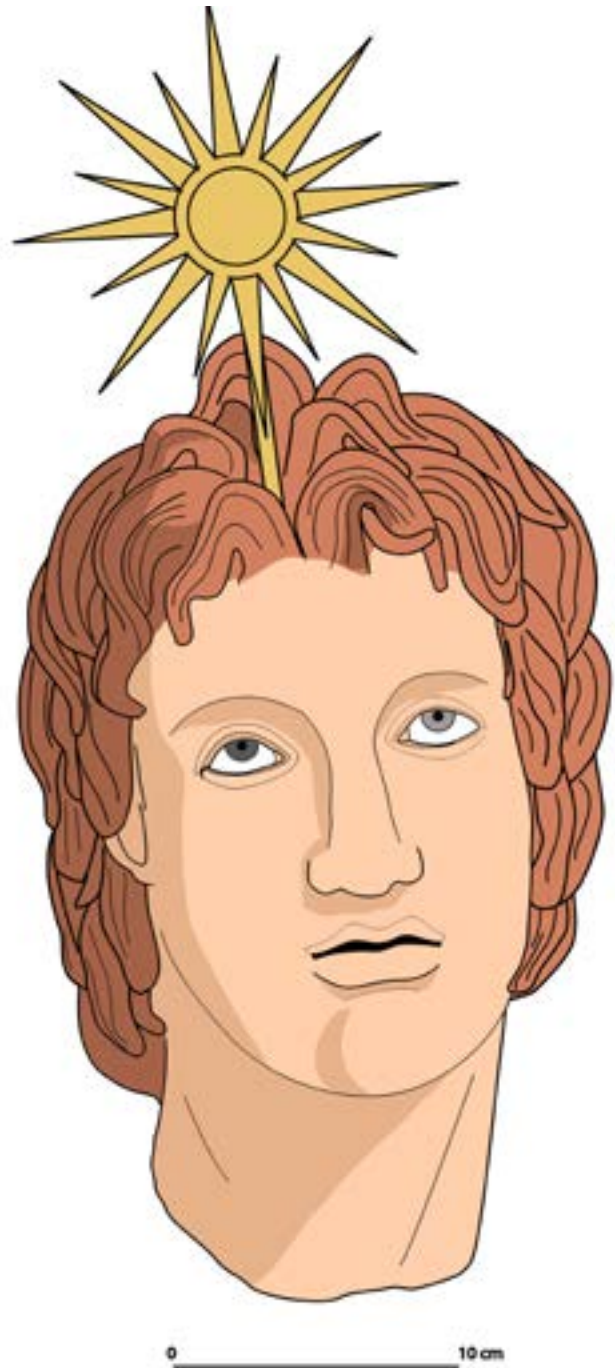


Fig. 16 Reconstruction drawing of the head of Alexander from Beth Shean (IAA 1931-7) with a star attribute. By Yannis Nakas

that this example from Scythopolis is a rare instance of a Roman statue of Alexander that can be associated with a temple, although it was found nearby in a secondary context.

Conclusions

The Beth Shean Alexander is a dramatic, though detached image of a youthful, idealized Classical hero-god on a heroic scale – completely consistent with the romantic images of Alexander in the High Empire. A portrait of Alexander erected on the acropolis of Scythopolis, probably inside the temple, during the time of the “Alexander renaissance” in the Severan period hints at the possibility that there might have been a ruler cult for Alexander in the city. Although there is no supporting epigraphical evidence for this, Scythopolis, as the most important center of the Decapolis, might well have been an appropriate place for the establishment of such a cult. It is possible that as a result of Caracalla’s and subsequent Severan emperors’ hero-worship of Alexander, the temple on the acropolis of Scythopolis was re-dedicated in the Severan period and a portrait of the deified Alexander – a universal hero who stood for universal power (*kosmokrator*) – was set up, possibly alongside a colossal acrolithic cult image of a seated Zeus. It would be unlikely, however, that Alexander’s divine half-brother and the founding deity of Scythopolis, Dionysos, would have been neglected. It is reasonable to assume that there was also a statue of Dionysos alongside the seated cult image. Alexander and Dionysos would, thus, be presented as sons of Zeus and as *ktistais*, founders of the city.⁶²

The statue of Alexander would have survived in the temple for some 200 years or more before being subjected to deliberate defacement in an effort to expunge the dangerous demons that dwelled in an image of a powerful ancient hero-god who may have been viewed as a symbol of an anti-Christ. The statue may have been left on display in a mutilated condition for nearly a century as an object of Christian derision before finally being dumped into the watery cistern in the late fifth or early sixth century CE.

Notes

- 1 This article is a summary of some of the key points that are presented in full in a forthcoming monograph using an object biography approach to discuss the head of Alexander from Beth Shean. I am deeply grateful to David Mevorach, the staff of the IMJ and the Rockefeller Museum, and to many colleagues for sharing their insights with me. I also thank Yannis Maniatis and Dimitris Tambakopoulos for their collaboration on the marble analysis; Hans Goette and the Israel Museum for their photographs; and Yannis Nakas for working with me on reconstruction drawings. For their generous financial support for this project I owe thanks to the Albright Institute of Archaeology, Jerusalem; American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia; 1984 Foundation; School of Art, College of Fine Arts and School of Anthropology, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, University of Arizona.
- 2 Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 8–9.
- 3 Field Number 25-11-158; Beisan Find Number 1925, no. 213; Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) no. 1931–7, in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Rowe 1930, 44–45, pl. 55; Thiersch 1932; Watzinger 1935, 21, 54, pl. 23; Schwarzenberg 1967, 108, n. 92; 111, n. 124; Lifshitz 1977, 275; Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 8–9, figs. 13, 14; Wenning 1983, 108–11, pl. 16, 3; Smith 1988, 181, no. 16; Smith 1991, 224, fig. 264; Kreikenbom 1992, 15–16, 118, Kat. Nr. I.6; Stewart 1993, 169, 338, n. 46; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, fig. 41; Fischer 1998, 38, 255, n. 343, pl. 1a, 1b; Lichtenberger 2003, 147; The Israel Museum 2005, 244–45; Erlich 2009, 10–11; Trofimova 2012, 90, 96, fig. 94; Dayagi-Mendels and Rozenberg 2013, 95, fig. 1; Mazor 2015, 372, 374, fig. 14.14; Romano et al. 2018.
- 4 Rowe 1930, 44–45, pl. 55.
- 5 Romano 2006, 189–202; Romano and Fischer 2009.

- 6 Mazar (2006, 38–40) discusses some simple Hellenistic dwellings on the tell and the limited nature of the Hellenistic finds, including pottery, ca. 50 stamped amphora handles, terracotta figurines, and coins, indicating some occupation from the third to the first century BCE.
- 7 Rowe 1930, 43–44; Fischer 1990, 61–62, Nr. 229: limestone Corinthian capital from the temple, dated by Fischer to the mid-second century CE, at the earliest; Fischer 1998, 231–47; Romano and Fischer 2009. In his recent reassessment of the architecture of the Roman city, Benjamin Arubas proposes a later first century CE, perhaps Flavian, date for the temple (personal communication, December 4, 2019).
- 8 Zeus: *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* 8: 1937, no. 33; Lifshitz 1961, 189–90, pl. 8B; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 95, 98; Ovadia 1975, 117, 120; Barkay 2003, 140–45, nos. 14 and 26; Lichtenberger 2003, 154–55. Dionysos: Gitler 1991; Barkay 2003, 112–30; Lichtenberger 2003, 135–41; Ovadia and Mucznik 2015.
- 9 Neapolis is the only known *neokoros* in Roman Palestine (Burrell 2004, 260–65). Yet, see Mazar 2015 for a discussion of the imperial cult in the Decapolis and, more specifically, in the lower city of Scythopolis. However, the identification of the Caesareum is much disputed (Trümper 2009; Weber 2009; Belayche 2017, 10–11).
- 10 Arav 1989; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 109; Mazar et al. 2008, 1634; Nocera 2013.
- 11 Rowe 1930, n. 79; Alan Rowe, Field Diary (Beth Shean Excavation Records, Archives of Penn Museum), November 19 and 24, 1925, 109, 111, 116 “Big Hellenistic Reservoir” with the Byzantine addition to the south. “It now appears that there were three reservoirs at different times in this place, two being inside the others.” (November 24, 1925, 116). Fitzgerald (1931, 32, n. 28) indicates that the foundations of the “Hellenistic temple” were laid over an earlier cistern. It now seems unlikely that either the temple or the cistern should be assigned a Hellenistic date, though the Greek inscription with a reference to *Olympios* found in the same cistern suggests that there may have been a Hellenistic shrine devoted to Zeus on the tell, of which there are no observable remains (Rowe 1930, 45, pl. 53.1; *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* 8, 1937, no. 33; Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology 29-107-961; Lifshitz 1977, 273–74). Dr. Kyle Mahoney is now studying this inscription for a forthcoming publication.
- 12 Romano 2006, 194–95, no. 94.
- 13 Rockefeller Museum, S. 968; Excavation Field Number 25-11-159. P.L. 0.175; Max. W. 0.11; Th. 0.078 m. Although the hand is recorded in the excavation notebook and sketched, it has not been previously published.
- 14 Romano 2006, 191–93, no. 93; Romano 2020. Stable isotopic analysis of the marble of these finger fragments in the Penn Museum, conducted by Scott Pike in 2007, indicates that the probable quarry is Aphrodisias. One more finger fragment was located in 2016 in the storage rooms of the Rockefeller Museum (S.851).
- 15 The eight- to ten-times life-sized scale of the fingers would indicate a standing statue of some 16 to 20 meters, a height that would be impossible in this temple. Benjamin Arubas has estimated the height of the temple to the entablature, based on some twenty-two surviving architectural fragments, at 15.8 meters (personal communication, December 4, 2019). Thus, the statue had to have been seated.
- 16 See Gasparri and Veneri 1986, 1, 437–39: *Dionysos seduto*.
- 17 In addition, a fragment of a small marble statuette (P.L. 0.11; P.H. 0.07; P.Th. 0.066 m) of a ram was found in the same context (Romano 2006, 202, no. 101).
- 18 See Kristensen 2013, 218–32.
- 19 In the 2005 Abrams publication of highlights from the museum (*The Israel Museum* 2005, 245), it is recorded that there are drill holes in the hair, which indicate that it was crowned by a golden wreath. However, there is only one hole – the one on the top of the head.
- 20 See Claridge 1990, 144–45, fig. 11m, n.
- 21 Pearl 1989, sample nos. 109, 110; Fischer 1998, 255, n. 343.
- 22 See the Appendix below by Maniatis and Tambakopoulos for the results.
- 23 See Long 2012; Long 2017, 65–74.
- 24 Fischer 1998. One well-dated and large-scale exception is a larger than life-sized cuirass statue of the Augustan period from Samaria Sebaste made of Carrara marble (IAA 36-2185; Laube 2006, 135–36, no. 59, Taf. 60). See also Erlich 2009, 10–13 for some other sculptural examples, and Bar-Nathan and Snyder

- 2019 for colored marbles imported for opus *sectile* floors of the Herodian period at Banias and Jericho. Further north along the Phoenician coast, marble (identified as Parian) sarcophagi are found in the necropolis of Sidon and at nearby sites.
- 25 For example, in his portrait in the Boston (MFA 60.928; Comstock and Vermeule 1976, no. 369; Vermeule and Comstock 1988, 115, for additional bibliography.
- 26 For example, in the portrait statue of Dometeinos, found in the bouleterion, with a portrait statue of Tatiana on the other side (Smith 2006, 69–71, 170–76, no. 48, figs. 19, 24, pls. 40–42: Dometeinos; 216–19, no. 96: Tatiana). The drilled channel that separates the hair from the face of the Alexander can also be compared to the drilled groove setting off the hair along the face and neck of the portrait statue of Tatiana. See also Smith 2006, 288–89, no. 207: female head with stephane, second–third century CE, with a deeply drilled channel separating the face and neck from the hair.
- 27 Stewart 1993, 338, n. 46.
- 28 Claridge 1990, 144–45, fig. 11 m, n, though in these cases the angle is steeper.
- 29 IAA 1978-505; P.H. 0.55 m; Vitto 1991 (H. 0.55; restored H. ca. 2.45 m); Gersht 1996, 436–37, fig. 6; Fischer 1998, 161, 201, 249, no. 191; Friedland 2008, 343, no. 3; Kristensen 2013, 230–31.
- 30 IAA 2001-2987; H. 1.63 m. Tsafrir and Foerster 1994, 99–101; Tsafrir and Foerster 1997, 129, and fig. 37; Foerster 2005.
- 31 Stewart (1993, 338, n. 46) noted that the irises of the eyes were rolled up high under the upper lids on this head, one indication of its Severan date. In autopsy, incisions for the iris are not visible, though in certain light the “ghosts” of painted semi-circular outlines for the irises tucked below the upper lids are barely detectable (especially on the right eye).
- 32 Özgür 2009, 36–37.
- 33 Fittschen and Zanker 1985, I, 70–71, nos. 65–66, 68–71, 80–85.
- 34 Rowe 1930, 44–45. Thiersch (1932) presents a more complex argument about the “Hellenistic” head representing Antiochus IV Epiphanes as Dionysos-Alexander-Zeus; Lifshitz 1977, 275; Trofimova 2012, 83–98 (Alexander-Dionysos).
- 35 Stewart 1993, see especially Appendix 1, 341–58 for the testimonia on the appearance of Alexander.
- 36 Paris, Louvre MR 405; Ma 436 (H. 0.68 m); Stewart 1993, 165–66, 423, with a list of two other marble copies and bibliography, figs. 45, 46. For bibliography see Stewart 1993, 423.
- 37 Schwarzenberg 1976, 254–55, n. 4. See also Reinsberg 2004, 328–30.
- 38 For example, regarding Octavian/Augustus and Alexander, see Gruen 1998, 190–91; O’Sullivan 2016, 340, n. 8 for other commentary on this matter.
- 39 Trofimova 2012.
- 40 For a thorough analysis of crowns of sun rays, see Bergmann 1998.
- 41 Dattari 1901, 1721–722; Milne 1933, 720. See also Powers et al. 2018 re. Antinous in San Antonio where a hem-hem crown is suggested.
- 42 In Graeco-Roman Egyptian iconography the modius (with the lotus blossom in relief) is found on the head of Hermanubis. For example, see Laube 2012, 315, no. 169: a fragment of a votive relief dating to the second century CE, now in Dresden. In this case, the head of the figure bears elements of Alexander portraiture, including the *anastolé* hair. See also the bronze statuette of Hermes with the portrait features of Alexander in the garb of Hermes and holding a caduceus (Schreiber 1903, 145–47, Abb. 12: from a private collection in Alexandria, lacking provenience).
- 43 Bergmann 1998, 49; Grimm 1978, Abb. 91–95.
- 44 Civic titles such as *Hellenis Polis* appear on a coin issue of 175/6 CE and on an inscribed base for a statue of Marcus Aurelius, the latter probably dedicated on the occasion of the emperor’s visit in 175 CE. (Fuks 1976, 1983; Foerster and Tsafrir 1986/1987; Foerster and Tsafrir 1992; Tsafrir and Foerster 1997, 90–91, 97; Belayche 2001, 257–67; Barkay 2003, 162–65, fig. 26).
- 45 See Dahmen 2007, 52–55 for the general phenomenon of claims of Alexander as *ktistes* for cities, which reaches a high point from the Antonine (ca. 180s) through the Severan periods, ending with the death of Alexander Severus, as witnessed in the numismatic evidence. See also Di Segni 1997, 148–61; Wallace 2018, 167–68, n. 18.
- 46 Cohen 1998, 96.
- 47 Seyrig 1965, 25–28, Stewart 1993, 419 and fig. 111. This is a very rare issue, and the examples that survive are in very poor

condition. In other issues of this period from Gerasa, such as that shown in Figs. 15a and 15b, Alexander of Macedon is identified without the label “founder.”

- 48 Several Severan period inscriptions on statue bases from near Thessalonike record dedications to Alexander *basileus*, son of Zeus, and his family, also referring to a priest of Alexander, indicating a cult (*Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* XLVII 960; *Inscriptiones graecae* X.2 (1), l. 1-3; Wallace 2018, 187).
- 49 Cohen 1995, 104, 317-18; Cohen 1998, 96-97.
- 50 Baharal 1994, 1996, Appendix I, 69-83; Rowan 2012, 152-63 for Caracalla and his Alexander-mania; Castritius 1988 for a discussion of Cassius Dio's passages on Caracalla and Alexander.
- 51 Levick 1969, 440-5; Johnston 1983 thoroughly evaluates the numismatic evidence for Caracalla's journey and takes issue with some of Levick's conclusions. See Hekster and Kaizer 2012, 95, n. 27-28 for relevant bibliography.
- 52 Stewart 1993, 348, T21.
- 53 Kemezis 2014, 76.
- 54 Rowan 2012, 157-163, especially Asclepius, Apollo, Serapis, Liber Pater, and Hercules.
- 55 Dahmen (2013, 24) describes the shield of the zodiac on Roman coins of the second century CE and its meaning related to the rule of the universe, *kosmokrator*. See also Stewart 2003, 63, fig. 16.
- 56 Platner and Ashby 1929, 473-75; L'Orange 1947, 79-86; Nash 1968, 302-5.
- 57 Bergmann 1998, 10, 270-71, Taf. 52.2.
- 58 Bergmann 1998, 274, 280-81.
- 59 Bergmann 1998, 274, 122, 281.
- 60 Dahmen 2007, 54.
- 61 Stewart 1993, Appendix 3, 419-20; Chankowski 2011; Noreña 2016.
- 62 See Belayche 2017, 14, for a reading of an unpublished inscription on an altar dated to the 130s CE, in which Zeus Akraios Soter and Dionysos are named as *ktistais*.

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