

Religion, Culture, and History: A New Assessment of Alexander the Great in Egypt

The recent publication of Ian S. Moyer's award-winning book, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*, new research on Alexander's architectural and sculptural program at Thebes, Elephantine Island, and elsewhere, as well recent archaeological work at Saqqara, Alexandria, and Siwa, have shed new light on Alexander's activities, intentions, and accomplishments in Egypt (Flower. 2000a; Flower. 2000b; Green. 1992; Stoneman. 1997). This paper analyzes the new evidence for Alexander's achievements in Egypt and situates them within Moyer's framework of the Greek view of Egyptians as an alien but subsumable culture on the one hand, as exemplified by the fifth century B.C.E. Greek historian, Herodotus; and the Egyptian management of the Greek incursion with a policy of accommodation and incorporation on the other hand, as exemplified by the late fourth - early third century B.C.E. Egyptian writer, Manetho, who also rose to become the chief priest of the sun god Ra at Heliopolis, and may have experienced Alexander first hand as a young man. Alexander deployed a combination of diplomacy, display, and a carefully coordinated building program to create connections to specific Egyptian gods, pharaohs, and key points in Egyptian history. But he also used Egypt's place in Greek mythology (Iphigenia, Theseus, etc. all stopped in Egypt; Herakles and Perseus visited Siwa) and history (Herodotus and Plato spent time in Egypt), to subsume Egypt into Greek culture. His goal was to create a religious, cultural, and historical logic, acceptable to Greeks and also Egyptians, for his assumption of pharaonic powers and crowns, and his incorporation of Egypt into his growing realm.

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