
The Horse Makes the Man: Bucephalus and Alexander in Art, History, and Legend

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the previously unexamined parallel characterization of Alexander the Great and his horse Bucephalus in Hellenistic art, Ancient Greek history and biography, the *Alexander Romance*, and the Medieval Spanish *Libro de Alexandre* (*Book of Alexander*). Throughout sixteen centuries of the Alexander tradition, the pair assimilate aspects of each other's character. Sometimes, the shared characteristics are presented as laudable, including strength, courage, and a special connection to the divine. On the other hand, the pair sometimes share a ferocious and wrathful nature. Alexander was first characterized through his mount in Hellenistic art, in which Bucephalus promotes Alexander's representation as strong, vigorous, and possessing a special connection with the divine. In the historian Arrian and biographer Plutarch, Bucephalus can also represent Alexander's character's darker, more ferocious side, although at times only to allow the king to triumph over it. The bond between horse and rider reaches its apex in the *Alexander Romance*, where a shared monstrosity indicates that a certain nobility coexists with something beastly in Alexander's nature. Finally, in the *Libro de Alexandre*, Bucephalus plays a vital role in the Christianization of the pagan king in medieval legend.

KEYWORDS Alexander, Bucephalus, *Alexander Romance*, Plutarch, Arrian, animals

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The classical historian Paul Cartledge rudely remarks about Hephaestion, Alexander the Great's close friend from childhood and possible lover, "It is tempting, indeed, to say that the two greatest loves of [Alexander's] life were both dumb brutes" (230). The second "dumb brute" that Cartledge refers to is Bucephalus, the famous conqueror's trusty steed. Over time, as stories about Alexander were passed from generation to generation and through multiple cultures in what could be called the Alexander tradition, legends about Bucephalus and Alexander changed and multiplied. A common quality underlies depictions of Bucephalus in ancient art, in the works of the Greek biographer Plutarch and historian Arrian, and in fanciful retellings of the king's story such as the *Alexander Romance* (*Historia Alexandri Magni*) and the medieval Spanish *Libro de Alexandre* (*Book of Alexander*). Throughout these works from disparate periods, the horse and master assimilate aspects of one another's character. Other research has pointed out similarities between Alexander's characteristically turned neck in ancient portraiture and ancient depictions of lions (Cohen, "Turning Heads" 92-100) and parallels between Bucephalus and the Greek hero Achilles's talking horses (Charles 147-67). However, previous scholars miss something important about the special connection between Alexander and Bucephalus.

By examining this special link between horse and master, we gain insight into an important and ignored means of characterization employed throughout the Alexander tradition. Bucephalus is both a literal and literary vehicle. The horse adopts Alexander's vigor, courage, and divinity, but so too his quick temper. In the *Libro de Alexandre*, concerned as this work is with Christian religious themes, Bucephalus even helps Christianize the monarch. The connection between Alexander and Bucephalus operates in both directions. Sometimes, Alexander emerges positively from comparison with his steed, taking on the superhuman strength and dynamism of an unusually spirited horse. Often, however, the effect produced is more ambiguous, also hinting at the beastly nature of Alexander, especially in characterizing his anger. Through their mirrored characterization, Alexander and Bucephalus each partake of both animalistic ferocity and transcendent nobility.

Bucephalus in Hellenistic Art

The Hellenistic period between Alexander's death in 323 BCE and the death of Cleopatra VII (30 BCE) was characterized by the dominance of much of the known world by kings who claimed to succeed Alexander. The art of this period provides the first attestation of this link between horse and hero. Mutually constitutive imagery of horse and rider promotes Alexander as strong, vigorous, and

possessing a special connection with the divine. In *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics*, Andrew Stewart convincingly argues that Alexander took care to direct many aspects of his image and that his successors reproduced this public image. Alexander's successors continued to use the resonance between horse and rider for propaganda, making Bucephalus an effective symbol of power and the qualities on which Alexander based his authority, including his manly vigor and supposed divinity.

One of these Hellenistic works was a bronze equestrian statue at Alexandria honoring the city's heroic founder. The statue was likely commissioned by an early member of the Ptolemies, a dynasty of rulers of Egypt descending from Alexander's general Ptolemy and ending with Cleopatra VII (Pollitt 26-28). The statue (now lost) would have served both to legitimize the dynasty through its association with Alexander and as part of the extensive contemporary beautification program in Alexandria.¹ Seven centuries later, the late antique teacher Nicolaus Rhetor wrote an ekphrasis of this statue, capturing the dynamism of horse and rider but also hinting at the shared wrathful temper described elsewhere.² Nicolaus emphasizes the interdependent symbolism of horse and master, stating that "through the one, it is the more possible to regard the other, since Alexander shows the nature of the horse, and the horse makes clear what sort of man rides him" (*Progymnasmata* 27.8).³ Characteristically, Bucephalus is depicted in the act of rearing up, and the rush of the equine body in motion mirrors Alexander's speed and vigor and demonstrates "the swiftness of his deeds" (*Progymnasmata* 27.2). The fierce beast has an eye almost as terrifying as Alexander's.⁴ The horse's flesh makes manifest his *thumós*, probably best translated here as "spirit," and his spirit shows his *orgḗ*, probably best translated as "temper" (27.10). The horse has courage and spirit, just like his master. In context, *thumós* and *orgḗ* are best translated as "spirit" and "temperament," respectively, just as I have done, following Stewart (400). Still, these words also provide hints of something darker. Plutarch and Arrian, as I will discuss below, use these same two terms to denote the wrathful temper shared by the horse and master instead.

Alexander's taming of the unbroken Bucephalus is an important scene in literary portrayals of Alexander's life and legend. While depictions of the scene in

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¹ See Stewart 244 for a more detailed discussion of the statue's chronology.

² The ekphrasis is part of a collection preserved within Libanius' model rhetorical exercises (*Progymnasmata*). For the text of the collection, see Foerster 491-538.

³ μάλλον δὲ δι' ἐκατέρου κατιδεῖν ἐκάτερον πάρεστιν Ἀλεξάνδρου μὲν τὸν ἵππον οἷον δεικνύοντος, τοῦ δ' ἵππου δηλοῦντος τὸν ἐποχούμενον. This and other translations in this paper are my own.

⁴ On the importance of the eyes in portraiture of Alexander, and the way they reflect his character, see Pollitt 20.

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Hellenistic art are rare, one bronze figurine (ca. second century BCE, see Figure 1 below) illustrates how valuable the story could be to emphasize Alexander's excellence (*aretē*). The work's sculptor portrayed Alexander (identifiable by his famous locks) naked and powerfully built. The conqueror's nudity and muscular physique suggest a god, hero, or athlete. He calmly and courageously restrains Bucephalus. The sculpture depicts Bucephalus in motion. The beast is just as powerfully built as Alexander. Still, his wild movement reflects an untamed ferocity that contrasts the calm collectedness apparent in the stance and face of his soon-to-be master. In his *Life of Alexander* (6.1-7.2), Plutarch later reworks this contrast between Bucephalus's passion and Alexander's self-control into an allegory in which Bucephalus symbolizes the boy's youthful passion, which he will subdue through education.



Figure 1. Alexander taming Bucephalus. Source: Archaeological Museum of Florence, Photo Scala, Florence—courtesy of the Ministry of Culture.

Another artwork featuring the duo is the famous Alexander Mosaic from the House of the Fawn at Pompeii. The Alexander Mosaic depicts Alexander's victory at the Battle of Issus (333 BCE) over the Persian King Darius III, whom the Mosaic shows fleeing in his chariot. Although the Mosaic itself is Roman, dated to 100-120 BCE, it is thought to be based on a Hellenistic painting (Cohen, *The Alexander Mosaic* 1). It is uncertain when the painting was commissioned, but it could have been as early as immediately after Issus (Stewart 134, 149). Alexander's horse in the Mosaic is certainly Bucephalus, but time has robbed us of most of the horse: a large chunk of that part of the Mosaic is missing (Stewart 137). Nevertheless, we can tell from what remains of Bucephalus that most of his body would have been visible in the foreground of the Mosaic (see Figure 2 and 3 below). The Mosaic demonstrates Bucephalus's excellence by juxtaposing him with the terrified horses of Darius, just as it juxtaposes Alexander's determination with the pathos of the fleeing Darius III. While Darius's horses run off whinnying in a panic, Bucephalus appears just as calmly intent upon his goal as his rider. We are even reminded of the terrifying eye of the bronze statue described by Nicolaus (*Progyrnasmata* 27.10) when we notice that Bucephalus casts his uncannily intelligent gaze straight at the viewer (see Figure 3). The Mosaic emphasizes Bucephalus and Alexander's laudable traits through this parallel depiction.

The Mosaic does not just emphasize the pair's strength, speed, and courage, but also alludes to the horse's name, hinting at the supernatural. Bucephalus is "like no other horse on the Mosaic: the inside of his ear is colored white to make it appear like an ox horn" (Stewart 137). Similarly, the horned horse is a common symbol on the coins of Seleucus I, another successor of Alexander (see Figure 4).⁵ This type of coin could be the source of the legend of the horned Bucephalus, a fantastical etymology for the horse's name (properly *Boukephálas*) which means "oxhead" from *boûs* (ox) and *kephalé* (head). Appealing to the same etymology, Nicolaus informs us that the horse on the equestrian statue at Alexandria had a head that resembled, as much as possible, that of an ox (27.9). However, this literal interpretation of "oxhead" is only one of many potential explanations for Bucephalus's name. Contrary to the etymology suggested by the Mosaic, the tradition preserved by Plutarch and Arrian records that Bucephalus was entirely black except for a white, ox-shaped blaze on the forehead (*Alexander* 32.12;

⁵ I agree with Stewart (315), according to whom the horse on the coin serves to represent both Bucephalus and the horse upon which Seleucus I fled to Antigonos in 315 BCE *contra* Miller and Walters (1), who deny that the horse was originally meant to represent Bucephalus but acknowledge that the coins likely played a role in the origin of the horned horse legend. See also Wójcikowski 124-25.

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Anabasis 5.19.4-6).⁶ Still, the legend of the horned Bucephalus continues into the Middle Ages when, for example, the Latin version of Marco Polo's *Il Milone* mentions horses descended from Bucephalus "who are all born having horns on their head like Bucephalus" (21).⁷ While the mosaic is not as explicit as the later tradition, we can see a hint here of the horned horse of later legend.

The choice to represent Bucephalus with a horn-like ear instead of a white blotch upon his head allows the horse to express his master's special connection to the divine. It implies—regardless of what may have been the true origin of Bucephalus's name—that the name "Oxhead" derives from a unique feature of the horse's appearance. Alexander frequently had himself portrayed with the ram's horns of the Egyptian god Ammon (Stewart 174-78). Having his horse portrayed with horns makes Bucephalus as supernatural as his master, even though ox horns admittedly look reasonably different from a ram's. A divine master requires a divine steed—Alexander was as exceptional among men as Bucephalus was among horses.

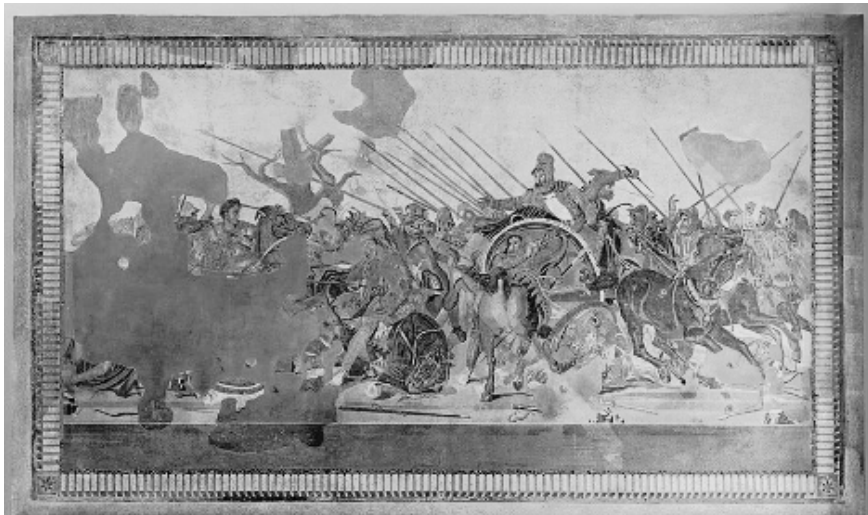


Figure 2. The Alexander Mosaic (Hellenistic/Roman copy) from Pompeii. Original, ca. 330 B.C. Naples. License: Berthold Werner, Naples National Archaeological Museum, May 2013 (CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED).

⁶ On the name Bucephalus see Anderson 3-7 and Miller and Walters 53. The consensus among Stewart (137), Hamilton (15), and Charles (130) is that Bucephalus is the name of a famous breed of Thessalian horses, branded on the shoulder with the sign of an ox's head. Arrian gives this as an alternative etymology for the name at *Anabasis* 5.19.4-6. This is also the explanation preferred by the Byzantine *Etymologicum Magnum*.

⁷ *Inveniebantur in hac provincia equi qui descenderant a natura equi regis Alexandri, Bucifalch nomine, qui nascebantur omnes cornu habentes in fronte sicuti Bucifalch, quia ab ipso equo eque conceperant.* Text is quoted from the edition of Alvaro Barbieri.



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Figure 3. Close-up of Alexander and Bucephalus. License: Berthold Werner, Naples National Archaeological Museum, May 2013 (CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED).



Figures 4. Silver Tetradrachm of Seleucus I Nicator, Pergamum, 281 BC (Public Domain).

Biography and History

Histories of Alexander written by his contemporaries have been lost, but they served as source material for later writers.⁸ One such writer was Plutarch (c. 46

⁸ For a survey of ancient historians of Alexander, see Shipley 6-7.

CE to after 119 CE), a Greek biographer of the Roman period, who wrote a life of Alexander, one of his *Parallel Lives* in which he compares famous Greeks and Romans from history. In the preface to his *Alexander*, Plutarch (1.2-3) compares his biographical methodology to visual art. He contends that battles where tens of thousands die, massive troop deployments, and sieges of cities often do not present a character as clearly as small matters like sayings and jokes (1.2). He continues:

So, just as painters obtain likenesses from the face and the expression of the eye[s], by which character is revealed, thinking very little about the rest of the parts [of the body], thus we must be allowed to enter more into the signs of the soul, and through these to sculpt the life of each man, leaving to others the mighty deeds and the battles. (*Alexander* 1.3)⁹

Although Tim Duff questions the once-dominant view that this passage applies to Plutarch's *Lives* in general (17), he leaves no doubt about its relevance to its specific context within the *Life of Alexander*. It is particularly poignant that Plutarch mentions the eyes as a repository of character in portraiture. Elsewhere in the same biography, he notes the liquid quality (*hugrótēta*) of Alexander's eyes as one of the two key characteristics captured by the contemporary sculptor Lysippus in his portraits of the ruler (4.1).¹⁰ Given the importance of the king's gaze in the artistic representation of his character, Nicolaus Rhetor's direct comparison between Bucephalus's eyes and Alexander's takes on new meaning. By suggesting that both sets of eyes reflect the same fearsomeness, he adds a dimension of animalistic ferocity to Alexander's aggression.

One of these "signs of [Alexander's] soul" that Plutarch explores is the episode of Bucephalus's taming. Though it lacks the epic scale of one of Alexander's great battles, the taming proves far more critical to Plutarch's attempt to define the king's character. The biographer follows the Peripatetic theory that a person's actions (*práxeis*) best explain their character (Hamilton xlv). From this philosophical vantage, Plutarch appropriates the identification between horse and master already established in Hellenistic art. For Plutarch, the taming of Bucephalus represents the culmination of Alexander's Greek education. Plutarch saddles

⁹ ὥσπερ οὖν οἱ ζωιογράφοι τὰς ὁμοιότητας ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν ὄψιν εἰδῶν οἷς ἐμφαίνεται τὸ ἦθος ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ἐλάχιστα τῶν λοιπῶν μερῶν φροντίζοντες, οὕτως ἡμῖν δοτέον εἰς τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα μᾶλλον ἐνδύεσθαι, καὶ διὰ τούτων εἰδοποιεῖν τὸν ἐκάστου βίον, ἑάσαντας ἑτέροις τὰ μεγέθη καὶ τοὺς ἀγῶνας. Text is quoted from the edition of Konrad Ziegler.

¹⁰ On the image of Alexander in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, see Galbois 113-16.

Bucephalus with a less flattering role than Hellenistic art: the horse represents the future king's youthful and excessive passion. Nevertheless, by externalizing and absorbing one of Alexander's negative qualities and allowing him to tame it, the depiction of Bucephalus still contributes to glorifying his master.

Plutarch sandwiches the Bucephalus episode between two sections on Alexander's tutors, Leonidas, Lysimachus, and Aristotle. As Tim Whitmarsh puts it, the story derives its thematic centrality from the fact that "the horse is assimilated to the unruly passion of the youth" (181). Alexander's father, Phillip, describes the fierce horse as altogether wild (*ágrios*) and unbroken (*akólastos* *Alexander* 6.2). The adjective *ágrios*, which literally means "living in the fields" like a wild animal, frequently refers to "savage" behavior.¹¹ The word *akólastos* is literally "unchecked," but frequently means "morally licentious." It implies a lack of "educative correction" (Whitmarsh 181). Philip sees Alexander's nature as "hard to influence" (*dusníkēton* *Alexander* 7.1). This description mirrors that of Bucephalus in 6.1 as "difficult" (*chalepós*) . . . and altogether recalcitrant (*dúschrēstos*)." Quoting Sophocles, Philip feels that Alexander's education will be a task for "many bits (*chalinoí*) and rudders," which is to say that harsh measures will be necessary to tame the beastly part of his soul (*Alexander* 7.2, Sophocles fragment 785N²).¹² Bucephalus also wears a bit (*chalinós*, *Alex* 6.7). Plutarch thus constructs the taming scene "as a model for the domination of education over passion" (Whitmarsh 181). He does so by using the horse as a mirror and receptacle for the savage aspect of Alexander's character.

In conquering Bucephalus, the prince also triumphs over the beast within his own soul. Alexander's education has provided him with the virtues of moral uprightness—including courage—and perceptive intelligence. He uses both to dominate Bucephalus. Plutarch's Alexander reveals the centrality of these two virtues when he alleges that others cannot ride the horse on account of ignorance (*apeiría*) and (moral) softness (*malakía*, *Alexander* 6.2). It follows that Alexander *can* ride Bucephalus because of his knowledge and bravery. The episode also highlights Alexander's intelligence as the prince astutely discerns that Bucephalus will make a good horse, after his ferocity is conquered (*Alexander* 6.2). Once tamed, horse and master share a bravery based on knowledge and self-control. Alexander's own taming through his education is both paralleled and symbolized in the taming of Bucephalus.

¹¹ For instance, Plato (*Republic* 571c) uses the term to describe the savage parts of the soul, pairing the term with θηριώδης, which literally means "beastly."

¹² Duff notes that the episode "encourages the reader to see Alexander's education in terms of the training of the 'spirited horse' in Plato's *Phaidros*" (Plato 253c-254e; Duff 85).

Still, the ostensibly positive bravery that Bucephalus shares with his master is highly ambiguous.¹³ Like Alexander, the animal is full of courage (*thumós*) and spirit (*pnéuma*) (*Alexander* 6.6).¹⁴ In this episode, Plutarch's Alexander succeeds in controlling his anger by taming Bucephalus. However, the *thumós* that horse and master share can denote not only "courage" but also "anger," which Plutarch considers "almost always wrong" (Whitmarsh 183). The resonance that Plutarch establishes between Bucephalus and Alexander's harsh and passionate temper foreshadows the biography's darker moments. Before Alexander even leaves to conquer the Persian empire, Plutarch attributes Alexander's sack of the Greek city of Thebes to the king's *thumós* (*Alexander* 13.2). In Plutarch's narrative, as the conqueror drives east, his rage grows further and further beyond his control. The serenity of his earlier Aristotelian education is "counterpoised" with "a darker stratum of violence and force" (Whitmarsh 186).

One event that illustrates the darker turn in Alexander's character is his killing of Black Cleitus, a Macedonian nobleman and cavalry commander. Although Cleitus had saved the king's life earlier, Alexander kills him at a banquet after they quarrel drunkenly about Alexander's adoption of Persian ways (*Alexander* 50.6, 51.5). Plutarch links Alexander's resurgent ferocity with the same qualities he formerly dominated in equine form. Plutarch asserts that Cleitus's murder was "more savage" (*agriōtera*) than his killing of the accused conspirator Philotas. In this assertion, Plutarch evokes the language used to describe Alexander's fierce horse, including the term *agriós* itself (*Alexander* 50.1). Alexander kills Cleitus because he gives into his anger (*Alexander* 51.5-6). The word used for Alexander's anger, *orgē*, is the same one used to describe the "temper" of horse and rider by Nicolaus Rhetor, though his use carries a more positive connotation (*Progymnasmata* 27.10). By breaking the ethics governing behavior at a banquet and killing Cleitus, who had earlier saved his life, Alexander momentarily behaves more like a raging Macedonian warhorse than an educated Greek philosopher. Duff sees this as one instance of a general trend of moral ambiguity in Plutarch's *Lives*. It is the ambitious and spirited (*thumoeidés*) part of his soul that "propels him to his great conquest and to pursue his civilizing mission" to spread Greek culture (*Alexander* 26.14; Duff 85). Plutarch presents Alexander's spirited nature, closely identified with Bucephalus, as responsible for both Cleitus's murder (presented negatively) and the king's conquests (presented positively).

¹³ On the contrast between the more ambivalent Alexander of Plutarch's *Lives* and the wholly positive portrait of Alexander as a philosopher king in Plutarch's *On the Fortune of Alexander*, see Whitmarsh 178-79.

¹⁴ Note that Nikolaos Rhetor also uses the terms θυμός and πνέυμα in his description of a bronze statue of Bucephalus discussed above.

The Greek historian Arrian (c. 86-c. 160 CE), who, like Plutarch, wrote during the Roman period, also uses Bucephalus to characterize Alexander. Whereas Plutarch foregrounds Bucephalus near the beginning of his narrative, Arrian's *Anabasis* (*Expedition to the Interior*) does not mention the animal until he dies.¹⁵ Arrian's tone is almost apologetic about including Bucephalus. He feels the need to justify his inclusion of Bucephalus, saying, "Let me hold this Bucephalus in such honor because of Alexander" (*Anabasis* 5.19.6).¹⁶ Arrian seeks to distance himself from Bucephalus, even if the steed's prominence in other historians' narratives of Alexander prevents him from completely expunging the animal from his own. Arrian insists that Bucephalus died not in battle but due to disease and old age (*Anabasis* 5.19.4-5). Despite Arrian's calm assertion of supposed fact, Bucephalus's demise is "almost as controversial as Alexander's own" (Charles 142). Arrian recognizes this controversy implicitly through this need to specify how Bucephalus *did not* die. Plutarch, on the other hand, makes the controversy explicit. Plutarch explains that the majority opinion, which Arrian disputes, is that Bucephalus died shortly after the Battle of the Hydaspes from a wound that he suffered during the fighting. Arrian follows the earlier historian Onesikritos in maintaining instead that Bucephalus died after becoming worn out from his old age (*Alexander* 61.1).

The prosaic end for Bucephalus is part of Arrian's general disposition as a historian. By giving Bucephalus a peaceful death, Arrian resists the prevailing tendency to heroize the animal. The historian's proem includes a methodological statement emphasizing accuracy and probability (*Anabasis* 1.1). This has garnered him a reputation as the most reliable of the Alexander historians (McInerney 425). In one sense, the historian's choice here is one more example of his distaste for the fantastic. By removing the possibility of a heroic death for his steed, Arrian preempts Bucephalus's use as a vehicle for Alexander's own ascent into legend. While he openly confesses admiration for the conqueror in the "second preface" to his *Anabasis* (1.12.2-5; Gray 181), for Arrian, the best praise is believable praise, and to be believable, praise must avoid the fantastic.

Arrian immediately follows his description of the horse's death with a brief eulogy and an anecdote showing how Alexander's connection to the horse could reveal a more brutal kind of *thumós*. Like Plutarch, Arrian makes explicitly positive statements about Alexander while using his connection to the horse to display the ambiguity of some of his ostensibly positive qualities. Like Plutarch's depiction,

¹⁵ See Miller 109-20 on the possibility that a series of coins, appearing to depict Alexander and Bucephalus in combat with the Indian king Porus, may have been minted to commemorate the foundation of Bucephala, named in honor of the dead horse.

¹⁶ ἐμοὶ ἐς τοσόνδε τιμηθῆτω ὁ Βουκεφάλας οὗτος Ἀλεξάνδρου ἕνεκα. Text is quoted from the edition of Antoon Roos.

Arrian's Bucephalus is "great in size and noble (*gennaios*) in spirit (*thumós*)" (*Anabasis* 5.19.5). The warhorse's *thumós* here is most directly associated with his nobility. Still, when the horse goes missing among the Uxians, a people living in the heartland of the Persian empire, the king proclaims through heralds that he will kill all the Uxians through the land unless they lead the horse back to him (*Anabasis* 5.19.6). Although Arrian merely states that the steed "vanishes," the implication, explicit in descriptions by other authors such as Plutarch, is that the Uxians have stolen the horse.¹⁷ In addition to showing Alexander's wrath, the incident, of course, also serves to prove the deep care that Alexander felt for the horse, which Arrian uses to justify his own focus on the animal.

A comparison with Plutarch's account of the Uxian episode makes Arrian's Alexander appear even more wrathful. In Plutarch's rendering of the incident, Alexander does not bear the Uxians' affront with appropriate moderation (*metriōs*), reflecting the almost reckless passion that at times afflicts the king in Plutarch's narrative (*Alexander* 44.3). He threatens to kill all the Uxians, together with their wives and children. Nevertheless, despite being quick to anger, Alexander can still forgive and be gracious. Ultimately, he treats those who return his horse to him with kindness and even pays them a ransom (*Alexander* 44.3). Plutarch thus attempts to put a better spin upon an incident that could be used just as easily to emphasize Alexander's tyrannical rage. Arrian does not mention any reconciliation between Alexander and the Uxians, and the fact that the historian does not make the theft explicit—he merely states that Bucephalus had vanished—further minimizes the Uxians' blame and magnifies Alexander's disproportionate response.

In Plutarch's taming of Bucephalus, the resonance between horse's and rider's wrath creates an opportunity for the philosopher king to triumph over his passions, only to later allow those same passions to get the better of him during incidents such as the murders of Black Cleitos and the chronicler Callisthenes. On the other hand, Arrian fails to imbue his Bucephalus story with the same ambiguity, preferring to use Bucephalus to reveal only Alexander's brutal streak.

The *Alexander Romance*

The *Alexander Romance* is a mostly fictional account of Alexander's life, which features several notable incidents involving Bucephalus. Based on a Greek original written before 338 CE in Alexandria, it grew over time and as it was translated into

¹⁷ Plutarch explains: ἐνταῦθα τῶν βαρβάρων τινὲς ἀπροσδοκῆτως περιτυχόντες τοῖς ἀγούσι τὸν ἵππον αὐτοῦ τὸν Βουκεφάλαν λαμβάνουσιν (*Alexander* 44.3).

different languages, including Syriac, Latin, Old French, Armenian, Arabic, and Persian.¹⁸ Because the text is so mutable and variable, it is necessary to discuss the manuscript tradition before showing how the *Romance* reflects the resonance between horse and master. Three main recensions are visible in the surviving manuscripts: A, β, and γ (Charles 170). The A group are the closest versions to a theoretical Alexandrian original (α). A single Greek manuscript, Julius Valerius's Latin text, the fifth-century Armenian *Romance*, and perhaps an eleventh-century Arabic version belong to A (Wolohojian 2; Cary 21). Most Greek manuscripts belong to β, which developed from reworkings of the A group. The γ Recension derives from a β-type manuscript combined with episodes from ε, a compressed eighth-century CE recension of A and β. γ and ε alone contain a unique Bucephalus episode in which the horse avenges his dead master (Charles 170-71). For our purposes here, it will be sufficient to examine Wilhelm Kroll's critical edition of the Greek Recension A (*Historia Alexandri Magni*) and Jürgen Trumpf's of ε (*Anonymi Byzantini vita Alexandri regis Macedonum*).¹⁹ Together, these give extensive coverage of Bucephalus's taming and death, and the later ε includes the interesting alternative version in which Bucephalus outlives his master instead of the opposite. In general, the *Alexander Romance* expands and amplifies the fusion between the personae of horse and master in Plutarch, Arrian, and Hellenistic art. More specifically, the shift in representation of Bucephalus from the earlier to the later recensions shows the tradition realizing more fully the potential for using Bucephalus as an Alexander surrogate.

Whereas Alexander's taming of Bucephalus in Plutarch showcases the prince's courage and intelligence, in the *Romance*, it reveals an almost supernatural influence over the natural world. In both A and ε, Bucephalus's taming occurs when Alexander approaches the cage in which Philip has kept the equine man-eater to serve as an executioner (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.17.1; *Anonymi Byzantini* 4.2). As soon as Alexander approaches the cage, the savage beast grows calm. While Plutarch's Bucephalus wears a "bit" or *chalinós* (*Alex* 6.7), the *Romance* does not need such a thing; Alexander subdues the animal without a bit, that is *achalinōton* (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.17.4). A strange, perhaps magical connection between man and mount is implied by how the formerly savage animal prostates itself before the prince (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.17.3). Bucephalus's ability to recognize his future master without any foreknowledge hints at a steed as touched by the divine as his rider and one of almost human intelligence.

¹⁸ On the Syriac, Persian, and Arabic recensions of the *Alexander Romance*, see the chapters in Stoneman et al.

¹⁹ For a full survey of the Greek *Alexander Romance*, see Jouanno.

Bucephalus fantastic appearance in ε further underscores the supernatural connection between horse and rider. The stablers who bring him to Philip assert that a horse has been born in his stables that exceeds Pegasus in beauty (*Anonymi Byzantini* 4.1). The horse has not only the head of a bull (*boûs kephalê*) branded on his right thigh but also a horn on his head (4.1). Here, we have the more prosaic etymology for Bucephalus's name—also found in A (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 15.2.1)—combined with the more fantastical one suggested in Hellenistic art. By including the more fantastic etymology, ε links Bucephalus more closely with Alexander's general air of the supernatural. Although within Recension ε itself, Alexander is not depicted as having horns, they are certainly emphasized as attributes of his divine protector and sire Ammon (16.3).

Along with his beauty, the *Romance* also amplifies the horse's negative qualities. In Plutarch (*Alexander* 6.2), Phillip orders that the fierce horse be taken away as altogether wild and unbroken. The *Romance* “demands something more, something daimonic, a monstrous representative of the natural world” (Charles 175). In Recension A, Bucephalus is a man-eater (*anthrôphôphágos*, *Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.17.3).²⁰ ε provides an even more lurid description of Bucephalus's anthropophagy. Whereas in A, the horse is simply introduced as a man-eater, in ε, the stablers introduce the gruesome detail that he has already devoured many of them (4.1). These grotesque portrayals partially amplify the monumental nature of Alexander's feat.

In Plutarch and Arrian, the darker side of the horse/man resonance consists of a tendency towards wrath. In the *Romance*, the shared beastliness is literal. Already in Recension A, Alexander has sharp, peg-like teeth and the rushing gait of a savage lion (1.13.3). The depiction of Alexander as lion-like may derive from his representation in art with Heracles's lion skin cap or his famously leonine hair.²¹ The *Romance* also imbues Bucephalus with supernatural leonine qualities. When Alexander hears Bucephalus for the first time, he asks whether he hears the loud “neighing of a horse or the roar of a lion” (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.13.1). Philip explains the tendency towards the monstrous in both man and mount when he knowingly states that Bucephalus fulfills the old proverb that “good grows close to evil” (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.13.7).²² The idea that those with the potential for great good also have the potential for great evil is an established part of the

²⁰ The fact that it is Ptolemy who first introduces Alexander to the horse supports the idea that the *Romance* originated in Ptolemaic Alexandria (Πτολεμαῖος <ὁ> ὅστερον σωτήρ ἐπικληθεῖς, *Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.18.2, cf. Wolohojian 38). The presence of several artistic depictions of Bucephalus in Alexandria may have made him an especially attractive symbol for the early author(s) of the *Romance*.

²¹ On the connection between Alexander and lions, see Cohen (“Turning Heads” 92-100), Leimbach (214, 216), and Hölscher (27-28).

²² ἐγγύς ἀγαθοῦ παραπέφυκε κακόν.

Alexander tradition, at least from the time of Plutarch, who describes the dual valence of Alexander's *thumós*. The leonine appearance of horse and master in the *Romance* further expands this idea; although the lion is a noble creature, to share its peg-like teeth or taste for human flesh is not noble but monstrously predatory.

The *Romance's* embellishment of Bucephalus's death, like that of his taming, deepens the characterization of man through horse. In recension A, Alexander's horse falls to the ground, struck by the enemy's lance (3.3.6). In an epic touch, Alexander drags the horse out of the battle so that the enemy does not take his body, just as the Greeks do with the hero Patroclus's body in *Iliad* 17. As we see so often in the *Romance*, Bucephalus acquires human characteristics, being treated more like a fallen warrior than a dead animal. Alexander's retrieval of the body recalls the trouble he takes to retrieve a living Bucephalus from the Uxians in Arrian's narrative. Here, unlike in Arrian, Alexander's action has a positive valence. The king reciprocates his mount's years of trusty service with reciprocal loyalty. Still, disregarding the ongoing battle to preserve the body of an animal shows some of the same reckless passion involved in threatening the Uxians with total destruction should they fail to return Bucephalus.

Recension ε provides an alternative death for Bucephalus that allows the horse to take on even more of his master's characteristics. In Recension A, Bucephalus dies in the final battle against the Indian king Porus, but in ε, he only suffers a near miss. Fortunate to be mounted on Bucephalus, Alexander barely escapes (36.6). Almost ten chapters later, one of Alexander's cupbearers poisons him, and Alexander dies after uttering his last words to Bucephalus (46.3). In a thrilling and gruesome scene, Bucephalus becomes the avenger of Alexander's murder, then dies alongside his master:

And after Bucephalus saw this man [Alexander's assassin], having cast off his downcast aspect and sullenness, he avenged his master. And after he ran into the middle of all and took hold of the slave and brought him up to Alexander, he threw him into the air, jumping up in a leap, and afterward throwing himself down onto the ground with the slave. The slave was smashed to pieces in such a way that someone would say that a winter snow fell from a high roof. And the horse got up, neighed a little, [then] fell down straightaway and breathed its last, so that Alexander smiled at him and with the smile died. (*Anonymi Byzantini* 46.4)²³

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²³ ὁ δὲ Βουκέφαλος τοῦτον ἰδὼν τὸ κατηφὲς καὶ στυγνὸν ἀπορρίψας τὴν τοῦ δεσπότης ἐκδίκησιν ἐποίησεν. καὶ μέσον πάντων ἐπιδραμών καὶ τὸν οἰκέτην δραξάμενος καὶ ἀντικρυς Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦτον ἀγαγὼν, μεταρσίῳ δὲ εἰς ὕψος πεδήματι ἄρθεῖς, παραχρῆμα δὲ ἑαυτὸν σὺν τῷ δούλῳ προσρίψας τῇ γῇ, ὁ μὲν δούλος διεσκορπίσθη ὡς ἄν

The decision by the author(s) of ε to allow Bucephalus to live until Alexander's death creates a certain ring composition. Recension ε has the horse serve an important role both near the beginning of Alexander's life, with the taming scene, and at his death. By running into the middle of the crowd to seek revenge, the bull-headed horse demonstrates the same speed and impetuous decisiveness in attacking the enemy that Alexander did in his numerous battles. His ability to recognize Alexander's killer again makes Bucephalus an incredibly perceptive or intelligent horse, or perhaps one aided by divine inspiration. Finally, the fierce beast reveals that he is just as willing to use violence in avenging his master as Arrian's Alexander is in retrieving his steed from the Uxians.

The *Libro de Alexandre*

Alexander's literary afterlife is even more far-reaching than the man himself. One example is the Spanish *Libro de Alexandre*, an epic written by an anonymous poet in the 1220s and an important part of the flourishing vernacular literature of the then-newly created universities in the Christian kingdoms of Spain.²⁴ The poem is the first example of the Spanish literary mode known as *mester de clercía* or "cleric's craft," a term encompassing about thirty vernacular poems written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Weiss 1).²⁵ Recent scholarship on the poem has emphasized its relationship to the politics of knowledge in Castile and medieval Europe more generally.²⁶ As E. Michael Gerli puts it, the poem's anonymous author "conceived of himself as both an intellectual and a moralist, as a clerk who was both a scholar and a pious man of the Church; as a person who saw the very work he crafted as both an admonition on, and a self-reflexive exercise in, the responsible use and limits of secular power and knowledge" (392). The poem is an act and celebration of knowledge but simultaneously warns about its limits.²⁷

τις εἶποι χίονα νότιον ἀπὸ ὑψηλοῦ καταπεσοῦσαν στέγους, ὃ δὲ ἵππος ἐγερθεὶς καὶ χρεμετίσας μικρὸν εὐθέως πεσὼν ἐξέψυξεν, ὥστε Ἀλέξανδρον ἐπὶ τούτῳ μειδιάσαι καὶ σὺν τῷ μειδιάματι τὴν ψυχὴν ἀποδοῦναι.

²⁴ On the poem's anonymous author, see Riva 14-22 and Arizaleta 73-9, 82-93.

²⁵ These poems share an adherence to the *quaderna vía* or "fourfold way," whose learned aesthetics, including the use of rhymed alexandrine quatrains, are celebrated by the *Libro de Alexandre*'s anonymous author in its first few verses (*Libro de Alexandre* 2).

²⁶ See especially Gerli's chapter "Reflections of the Long Thirteenth Century: Curiosity, the Politics of Knowledge, and Imperial Power in the *Libro de Alexandre*," Riva's book "*Nunca mayor sobervia comidió Lucifer*" *Límites del conocimiento y cultura claustral en el Libro de Alexandre*, and Weiss's *The "Mester de Clerecía": Intellectuals and Ideologies in Thirteenth-Century Castile*.

²⁷ For example, Alexander's arrogance in planning to unlock the secrets of Nature by force is described as exceeding even that of Lucifer (*Libro de Alexandre* 2327).

In the *Libro de Alexandre*, the taming of Bucephalus (Buçifal) comes at the end of a detailed passage, taken in large part from the French *Roman d'Alexandre* (c. 1177), describing Alexander's various arms (Casas Rigall 159). His clothing and arms are those of a medieval knight (*indumentaria caballeresca*), but the horse's merit exceeds that of all of Alexander's accoutrements (*Libro de Alexandre* 108). Like in the Greek *Alexander Romance*, Bucephalus has many fantastic characteristics, although these come filtered through the French *Roman d'Alexandre* and the Tenth Century Latin *Historia de Proeliis* (Willis 15-16). He is a beautiful horse (*Libro de Alexandre* 108), the offspring of an elephant and a dromedary (112). Philip encloses him in three iron cages (109) and uses the man-eating horse to execute thieves (113-14). Upon seeing Alexander, Bucephalus suddenly becomes docile and acknowledges his master's destiny (117). In monstrosity and intelligence, this Bucephalus matches his predecessors.

What sets the *Libro de Alexandre* apart from its predecessors, however, is the addition of a new Christianizing element. We are informed that "the prince did not want to ride the horse before he was armed and kissed the altar" (*el infant'el cavallo no'l quiso cavalgar/ ante que fues'armado e besás'el altar*) (199a-b). Indeed, the king's zeal to be knighted is emphasized by the rushing effect of the heavy use of elision in the lines describing Alexander's decision. The knighting scene that follows has only a vague precedent in the *Roman d'Alexandre*, in which the religiosity of the later edition is notably absent. In the *Libro de Alexandre*, Alexander prays at the altar, beseeching God to favor his arms and Greece (122-23). He then knights more than 500 men of valor to serve him (124d), and he finally rides off on Bucephalus, who is happy to be ridden by such a man, suggesting that the horse, too, desires to do God's will (125b). Just as in the earlier tradition, a dual characterization allows Bucephalus to characterize and be characterized by Alexander. The *Libro de Alexandre* Christianizes both man and horse through its reinterpretation of Alexander's taming of Bucephalus, once again using this mirror characterization to tell the story of Alexander.

Conclusion

While Alexander was known to name cities after himself (such as the famous Alexandria in Egypt), the only city he founded honoring someone other than himself was Bucephala. One could surmise that Alexander valued his horse more than many of his human companions. Bucephalus is depicted in art, history, and legend with his master's quick temper, vigor, divinity, and even intelligence. Our earliest attestations of the characterization of Alexander through his mount appear in

Hellenistic art, in which the equine counterpart promotes Alexander's image as strong, vigorous, and possessing a special connection with the divine. The mutually constitutive characterization of Alexander and Bucephalus is then taken up by the Roman-period Greek authors Arrian and Plutarch, who similarly, yet in a more nuanced fashion, use Bucephalus to comment on Alexander. In the narratives of Arrian and Plutarch, Bucephalus can also represent the darker, more savage side of Alexander's character, if sometimes only to offer his master an opportunity to triumph over it.

This connection between horse and rider reaches its height in the *Alexander Romance*. Just as Bucephalus adopts Alexander's traits, so too Alexander assimilates the qualities of Bucephalus, including his monstrous appearance. Sometimes, Alexander emerges positively from comparison with his steed, taking on the superhuman strength and dynamism of an unusually spirited horse. Often, however, the effect produced is more ambiguous, serving to suggest that a certain nobility coexists with something beastly in Alexander's nature. From Hellenistic artworks to thirteenth-century Christian adaptations, the relationship between mount and rider is an overlooked but crucial vehicle of characterization in the Alexander tradition.

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