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GREEK SYMPOSIA – MACEDONIAN REVELRIES.
 THE CAROUSALS OF KING ALEXANDER III OF MACEDONIA

Abstract: The paper compares the feasts and drinking binges of King Alexander III of Macedonia with the Greek symposia of the Classical Age. In the first part of the study, the Greek symposia are presented, highlighting the most important elements of the feasts. In general, the Hellenized Macedonians took over many elements of classical Greek feasts (sophisticated conversation, drinking after the dinner and the participation of the men only to the exclusion of the women, except the hetairai). Many have the idea that the Macedonian ruler had been a reckless and crapulous drinker, although he cannot be considered an alcoholic in modern terms. Historians unanimously argue that Alexander was not an immoderate wine drinker, however, in some cases, heavy drinking culminated in tragedies, like in the two cases analyzed below: the burning of Persepolis and the murder of Cleitus.

Keywords: Greek symposia, Alexander III, king, Macedonia, feasts.

The two Greek historians, Plutarch and Arrian, wrote in their biographies of King Alexander III of Macedonia, better known as Alexander the Great, including their feasts and revelries organized by the world-conqueror king himself. One of the most famous of these banquets was held in the year 323 BC in Susa following the death of Kalanos, the famous philosopher from India.¹ Plutarch writes the following: ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἀπὸ τῆς πυρᾶς γενόμενος, καὶ συναγαγὼν πολλοὺς τῶν φίλων καὶ τῶν ἡγεμόνων ἐπὶ δεῖπνον, ἀγῶνα προὔθηκε καὶ στέφανον ἀκρατοποσίας. ὁ μὲν οὖν πλεῖστον πῶν Πρόμαχος ἄκρι χοῶν τεσσάρων προῆλθε: καὶ λαβὼν τὸ νικητήριον, στέφανον ταλαντιαῖον, ἡμέρας τρεῖς ἐπέζησε, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων, ὡς Χάρης φησί, τετταράκοντα καὶ εἷς ἀπέθανον πίνοντες, ἰσχυροῦ τῆ μέθῃ κρύου ἐπιγενομένου.²

1 During his campaign, many of the leaders and scholars of the occupied territories joined the Macedonian king. Kalanos was a Hindu Brahmin from Taxila. Diodorus of Sicily mentions him as Karanos, see: Diod. XVII. 107. 5. Bosworth, A. B.: Conquest and Empire. The Reign of Alexander the Great. Cambridge, 1993. 155. (further see: Bosworth, 1993.)

2 Plut. Alex. 70. „But Alexander, after returning from the funeral pyre and assembling many of his friends and officers for supper, proposed a contest in drinking neat wine, the victor to be

Promachus alone drank about 13 liters of wine, thus he most probably died of alcohol intoxication, like his forty-four fellow drinkers. Considering the fact, that 452 Macedonian soldiers had fallen at the Battle of Issus in 333 BC, according to the figures of Curtius Rufus, the loss of lives during the feast of Susa was high, especially due to the circumstances of the death of soldiers – technically, they were drinking themselves to death. In my paper, I am looking for the possible connection between the symposia of classical Greek antiquity and the infamous revelries of Alexander the Great, and to find the answer about the importance of these frolics in the Greco-Macedonian world.

The origins of the symposia go back to the Mycenaean Age when the leaders and warriors consumed their joint feasts in the palaces. Homer describes several of such feasts. Once, when Telemachus travelled to Pylos to visit Nestor, the oldest and wisest of the Achaean heroes, to determine he whereabouts of his father, Odysseus, the young man arrived in Pylos accompanied by the goddess Pallas Athena, to find the king and his companions feasting on the beach in honour of the sea-god Poseidon. The participants were lying on leather, steaking meat on skewers and drinking wine mixed with honey. Peisistratus, the son of King Nestor, offered meat and wine to Telemachus and the goddess in disguise, urging them to offer a sacrifice in honour of Poseidon, meaning, they were supposed to pour some wine on the ground. The goddess Athena asked for the blessings of Poseidon for Nestor and his sons in order to complete their mission successfully; Telemachus also offered the wine-sacrifice and asked the same. The sacrifice was offered in a golden chalice, and then the feast had begun, where the best parts of the animal were given to and consumed by the guests. Only when all the sacrifices were made and the meal was consumed did Nestor ask the guests about the purpose of their journey. Homer's text is one of the oldest descriptions of hospitality, the xenophilia, that followed the divine law regardless of the person of the guest.³

The 'feast of chieftains' during the Mycenaean Age managed to survive in Sparta known as the *syssitia*, or 'the table'. The rigorous law-giver of Sparta, Lycurgus, decreed that the fifteen-member group of the *homoioi*, or the "equal ones", did not only train but they also feasted together, and all of them had to contribute to the feast with income from their lands (*klaros*). The contribution per each guest was the following: one *medimnos* (about 58 liters) of barley-meal, eight *khus* of wine (about 3 liters), five *mina* of cheese (about 2.5 kg), five and a half *mina* of figs (about 3 kg), as well money for purchasing the meat and a certain portion of the hunting prey.⁴ According to Plutarch's description,

crowned. The one who drank the most, Promachus, got as far as four pitchers; 1 he took the prize, a crown of a talent's worth, but lived only three days afterward. And of the rest, according to Chares, forty-one died of what they drank: a violent chill having set in after their debauch." (Trans. Bernadotte Perrin).

3 Hom. Od. III. 28-48. For the symposia of the Mycenaean Age see Papakonstantinou, Zinon: Wine and Wine Drinking In the Homeric World. = *L'Antiquité classique* LXXVIII. 2009, 1-24. (especially 7-13, for the feast of Nestor)

4 Plut. *Lyc.* 12.2: συνήρχοντο δὲ ἀνὰ πεντεκαίδεκα καὶ βραχεῖ τούτων ἐλάπτους ἢ πλείους. ἔφερε δὲ ἕκαστος κατὰ μῆνα τῶν συσσίτων ἀλφίτων μέδιμνον, οἴνου χόας ὀκτώ, τυροῦ πέντε μνᾶς, σύκων ἡμιμναῖα πέντε, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις εἰς ὀψωνίαν μικρὸν τι κομιδῆ νομίσματος.

these were very simple meals. The participants were not lying on couches, but rather sitting. They prepared their own food, and there were neither cooks nor slaves to serve it. During the meals, the soldiers told stories about their heroic deeds, which also served as education for the young people who were taking part in the meals.⁵ According to the tradition, Lycurgus so enraged the wealthy people with his provisions and prescription for the feast that they „denounced him publicly with angry shouts and cries; finally many pelted him with stones so that he ran from the marketplace.”⁶ The Spartan equality had gradually disappeared, and the aristocracy had a luxurious way of life in Hellenistic Sparta just like the aristocrats of other Greek city-states, consuming special and delicate foods.⁷

The symposia of Athens were the social events of the Greek elite, where the feast was followed by carousing, wherein the participants listened to music or attended a lecture. Symposia were held on special occasions too, for instance when a young man reached adulthood and was presented to the guests. It was also usual that the victories gained at different contests (sports or poetry), such as the famous symposium in 416 BC recorded by Plato and Xenophon, was organized to celebrate Agathon, the famous winning poet of the literary contest of the Dionysia. The imposing list of guests included the intellectual elite of Athens, like Socrates and his disciples, Plato, Phaedrus (an Athenian aristocrat), Pausanias, the scholar Eryximachus, the comic playwright Aristophanes, the tragic poet Agathon and the prominent Athenian politician and general Alcibiades.⁸

The number of participants was limited due to space: between 14 to 30 people, who lay on 7 to 15 couches. The young males were not allowed to lay down, they were sitting instead.

Only men were allowed to participate at the symposia (except the hetairai), this is why these events were held in the male section of the houses.⁹ The number of participants was limited to the available space: between 14 to 30 people, who lay on 7 to 15 couches.

5 Plut. *Lyc.* 10.

6 Plut. *Lyc.* 11.1.: διὸ καὶ μάλιστα φασὶ τῷ Λυκούργῳ πρὸς τοῦτο τὸ πολίτευμα χαλεποῦς γενέσθαι τοὺς εὐπόρους, καὶ συστάντας ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀθρόους καταβοᾶν καὶ ἀγανακτεῖν τέλος δὲ βαλλόμενος ὑπὸ πολλῶν ἐξέπεσε τῆς ἀγορᾶς δρόμῳ.

7 Rabinowitz, Adam: Drinking from the Same Cup. Sparta and Late Archaic Commensality. In: A Companion to Sparta. Ed. Powell, Anton, Wiley-Blackwell, 2018. 113–192. The comparison of *syssitia* and *symposion* see: 113–116. According to Rabinowitz, the *syssitia* of Sparta was characterised by the publicity, temperance and harmony, and unlike the Athenian *symposia*, not the consumption of alcohol but rather the improvement of civic and social values stood in the centre of these events. The Athenian *symposion* sought excessiveness, the immoderate consumption of wine and the entertainment of the elite. (ibid. 113)

8 We have only two accounts of these events, the *Symposium* by Plato and Xenophon's work with the same title.

9 Only the hetairai, the elite prostitutes of the period were the only women with the admittance to the feasts, see: György Németh – Zsigmond Ritoók – János Sarkady – János György Szilágyi: Görög művelődéstörténet. (Greek Cultural History) Budapest, 2006. 380. (further see: Németh – Ritoók – Sarkady – Szilágyi, 2006.)

The young males were not allowed to lie down; they were sitting.¹⁰ In the Macedonian symposia, the young men were granted the right to lay on couches after they had killed a boar, thus proving their manliness.

First, the dishes were served to the symposia, and after having consumed the dish, the guests drank wine. According to Greek traditions, the profuse wine was drunk adulterated. The wine was debased on the instruction of the symposiarch, the master of ceremonies in large kraters. It was then mixed with water or honey according to the following proportions: according to Homer, 20 units of water to 1 unit of wine,¹¹ 2 units of water to 1 unit of wine, as claimed by Anacreon,¹² and 3 units of water to 1 unit of wine, according to the report of Athenaeus.¹³

Mixing wine with resin was accidentally discovered, as the amphoras, which had been made of the porous material, were smeared with pine resin, so some derivatives of the resin were absorbed into the wine. This special flavour became very popular and spread throughout the Hellenistic and the Roman Empires. The Pliny the Elder also recommends mixing pine resin during boiling in his *Natural History* (*Historia Naturalis*), claiming that wine made in this way had a more pleasant taste.¹⁴ According to Athenaios, the best Greek wines came from the islands of Thasos, Chios, and Lesbos.¹⁵

The wine mixed in the krater was poured into the small stemmed chalice, the so-called kylix, by the servants or the flute girls who often attended the feasts. The kylix was a personal belonging brought by the participants themselves to the symposium. Many kylices were found intact or fragmentary during the Athenian excavations, sometimes with names or engraved abbreviations, indicating the owner.¹⁶

10 Németh-Ritoók-Sarkady-Szilágyi, 2006. 388.

11 Hom. *Od.* IX. 208-211: τὸν δ' ὅτε πίνοιεν μελιηδέα οἶνον ἐρυθρόν, / ἔν δέπας ἐμπλήσας ὕδατος ἀνά εἴκοσι μέτρα / χεῦ', ὀδμή δ' ἠδεῖα ἀπὸ κρητῆρος ὀδώδει / θεσπεσίη: τὸτ' ἂν οὐ τοι ἀποσχέσθαι φίλον ἦεν.

12 Athenaeus, *Sophists at dinner* 10.29 (427A-B) = Anacreon 43: ἄγε δὴ φέρῃ ἡμῖν, ὦ παῖ, / κελέβην, ὅκως ἄμυστιν / προπίω, τὰ μὲν δέκῃ ἐγγέας / ὕδατος, τὰ πέντε δ' οἴνου / κυάθους, ὡς ἀνυβρίστως / ἀνὰ δηῦτε βασσαρήσω.

13 In his *Deipnosophists*, Athenaeus discourses on the mixing of water and wine, and he claims, that Amphictyon, the legendary king of Thermopylae and Athens learned the art of mixing the water with wine by the god Dionysos himself. See: Athen. 38c: Φιλόχορος δέ φησιν Ἀμφικτύονα τὸν Ἀθηναίων βασιλέα μαθόντα παρὰ Διονύσου τὴν τοῦ οἴνου κρᾶσιν πρῶτον κεράσαι. διὸ καὶ ὀρθοὺς γενέσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οὕτω πίνοντας, πρότερον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀκράτου καμπτομένους: καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἰδρῦσασθαι βωμὸν ὀρθοῦ Διονύσου ἐν τῷ τῶν Ὀρῶν ἱερῷ αὐταὶ γὰρ καὶ τὸν τῆς ἀμπέλου καρπὸν ἐκτρέφουσι. πλησίον δ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς Νύμφαις βωμὸν ἔδειμεν, ὑπόμνημα τοῖς χρωμένοις τῆς κράσεως ποιούμενος.

14 Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XIV. 124. Interestingly, that the first Hungarian treatise on the oenology refers several times on Pliny, see: József Nemes Fábrián: *Visgálódó és oktató értekezés a szőlő-mívelésről. II. kötet.* Veszprém, 1815. 112.

15 Athen. 28 d-e

16 Lynch, Kathleen M.: *Drinking Cups and the Symposium at Athens in the Archaic and Classical*

The symposia, however, were not only social and cultural events, but big revelries.¹⁷ There are many narrative sources and artistic representations (for instance, vase paintings), that support the claims of Plato's famous dialogue. In his dialogue, Plato mentions that the participants were already drinking profusely the day before, making them enervated and unable to drink more wine. At the beginning of the feast, therefore, Pausanias suggested that they drink at a moderate level and everyone should consume as much wine as they like. Later, however, Alcibiades, one of the central figures of the company, arrived who was already drunk and came from another symposium, underdressed and wearing a wreath of ivy leaves and violets on his head.

The evening, which started quite moderately, continued in the same manner for a while with the participants continuing their discussion about love. But soon, more revelers arrived and as the gates of the house were open, they went in and joined the company of Agathon. Everyone was supposed to guzzle wine, as they wanted. Some of the guests went home, others fell asleep on the couches until only the host Agathon, Aristophanes and Socrates were left drinking and talking. Eventually, both Agathon and Aristophanes fell out, and Socrates went to the Lyceum, washed, and spent the day there contemplating the evening's debate.¹⁸

Besides eating and drinking, there were a variety of attractions and entertainment. At the end of the Symposium of Xenophon, actors appeared representing the union of the god of wine and ecstasy, Dionysus, with Ariadne, princess of Crete.¹⁹ According to Plato, Eryximachus dismissed the flute girl and threw her out of the room so she would not disturb their cultured conversation. Rather, she was to entertain the female residents of the house, as the [male] participants had serious dialogue to conduct on various topics, especially on the nature of love.²⁰ All participants shared their own views on the topic, colouring their approach with personal stories. In addition to the music, the participants also played board games and games of skill, the most popular of which was the kottabos, which involved flinging wine-lees.²¹

Back to Alexander III, the Macedonians implemented many Greek customs and traditions into their own culture. Traditional Macedonian practices were combined with the Greek ones during the process of Hellenisation. Many features of feasts mentioned in

Periods. In: *Cities Called Athens*. Eds. Daly, K. – Riccardi, L., Bucknell University Press, 2015. 234. (further see: Lynch 2015.)

17 Lynch, 2015, 233.

18 Plat. Symp. 223b-d.

19 Xen. Symp. 9. 1-3.

20 Plat. Symp. 176e.

21 György Németh: *Ókori gyermekjátékok*. (Child's games in antiquity) Budapest, 2002. 16. Sparkes, Brian A.: *Kottabos: An Athenian After-Dinner Game*. = *Archaeology XIII*. 1960. 202-207; Athen. 665b-c: *κάγω δὲ παρακορήσων. / σπονδάς δ' ἔπειτα παραχέας τὸν κότταβον παροίσω: / τῆ παιδί τοὺς ἀλλοῦς ἐχρῆν ἤδη πρὸ χειρὸς εἶναι / καὶ προαναφυσᾶν. τὸ μῦρον ἤδη παράχρον βαδίζων / Αἰγύπτιον κᾶτ' ἴρινον στέφανον δ' ἔπειθ' ἐκάστω / δώσω φέρων τῶν ζυμποτῶν. νεοκράτᾳ τις ποιείτω, / α. καὶ δὴ κέκραται. β. τὸν λιβανωτὸν ἐπιτίθει σὺ ... εἴτ' ἐπάγει.* For the other sorts of entertainment, see: Németh-Ritoók-Sarkady-Szilágyi, 2006. 388.

Plato's dialogue and other descriptions of symposia appeared in Macedonian celebrations. The revelries after the feasts were similar to the classical Greek carousals, with an essential difference: the consumption of the wine straight, in the „Barbarian” manner, as it was considered by the Greeks, with all of its consequences.²² The father of Alexander, King Philip II of Macedon, was an immoderate drinker of wine. This is shown in the story of his wedding with Cleopatra, daughter of Attalus,²³ when Philip was clashing with his own son, Alexander. Plutarch described this event as it follows: „ἐκφρανεστάτην δὲ Ἄτταλος παρέσχεν ἐν τοῖς Κλεοπάτρας γάμοις, ἦν ὁ Φίλιππος ἠγάγετο παρθένον, ἔρασθεις παρ' ἡλικίαν τῆς κόρης, θεῖος γὰρ ὦν αὐτῆς ὁ Ἄτταλος ἐν τῷ πότῳ μεθύων παρεκάλει τοὺς Μακεδόνας αἰτεῖσθαι παρὰ θεῶν γνήσιον ἐκ Φιλίππου καὶ Κλεοπάτρας γενέσθαι διάδοχον τῆς βασιλείας, ἐπὶ τούτῳ παροξυνθεὶς ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ εἰπὼν, 'ἡμεῖς δὲ σοι, κακὴ κεφαλὴ, νόθοι δοκοῦμεν;' ἔβαλε σκύφον ἐπ' αὐτόν, ὁ δὲ Φίλιππος ἐπ' ἐκείνον ἐξανέστη σπασάμενος τὸ ξίφος, εὐτυχίᾳ δὲ ἐκατέρου διὰ τὸν θυμὸν καὶ τὸν οἶνον ἔπεσε σφαιεῖς, ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐφυβρίζων, 'οὗτος μέντοι,' εἶπεν, 'ἄνδρες, εἰς Ἀσίαν ἐξ Εὐρώπης παρεσκευάζετο διαβαίνειν, ὃς ἐπὶ κλίνην ἀπὸ κλίνης διαβαίνων ἀνατέτραπται.' μετὰ ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν ἀναλαβὼν τὴν Ὀλυμπιάδα καὶ καταστήσας εἰς Ἠπειρὸν αὐτὸς ἐν Ἰλλυριοῖς διέτριβεν.” After this event, the relationship between Philip and Alexander came to an end and Olympias went into voluntary exile in Epirus, together with Alexander.²⁴ In Plutarch's description, there is an apparent contrast between Philip, who was inebriated and enraged by wine and attacked his own son with arms, and Alexander, the sober, moderate, true ruler. The Greek historian foreshadows here the deprivation of Alexander's character, including the murder of Cleitus in India.²⁵

22 Plut. Alex. 25. The revelries of Alexander and the Macedonians were the subject of several studies, see: Liappas, J. A. - Lascaratos, J. - Fafouti, S. - Christodoulou, G. N.: Alexander the Great's relationship with alcohol, = Addiction, XCVIII. 2003. 561-567; Worthington, Ian: By the spear. Philip II, Alexander the Great and the rise and fall of the Macedonian Empire. Oxford, 2014. (especially 307-308.); Alexandra F. Morris: Alexander the Great: Head to Head with CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy). = Athens Journal of History III. 2017/3. 225-234. (especially 228.)

23 Attalus was a Macedonian nobleman and general of Philip II of Macedonia. A child was born from the marriage of Philip and Cleopatra who potentially could have claimed the throne against Alexander. This is why many of their contemporaries also believed that the assassination of Philip was orchestrated by Alexander and/or Olympias.

24 Plut. Alex. 9.4-5: „The most open quarrel was brought on by Attalus at the marriage of Cleopatra, a maiden whom Philip was taking to wife, having fallen in love with the girl when he was past the age for it. 1 Attalus, now, was the girl's uncle, and being in his cups, he called upon the Macedonians to ask of the gods that from Philip and Cleopatra, there might be born a legitimate successor to the kingdom. At this Alexander was exasperated, and with the words, 'But what of me, base wretch? Dost thou take me for a bastard?' threw a cup at him. Then Philip rose up against him with a drawn sword, but, fortunately for both, his anger and his wine made him trip and fall. Then Alexander, mocking him, said: 'Look now, men! here is one who was preparing to cross from Europe into Asia; and he is upset in trying to cross from couch to couch.' After this drunken broil, Alexander took Olympias and established her in Epirus, while he himself tarried in Illyria.” About the marriage of Philip and the assassination see Bosworth, 1993, 22-23. and Worthington 2014, 109-110.

25 Beneker, Jeffrey: Drunken Violence and the Transition of Power in Plutarch's Alexander. In.

Historical narratives claim that Alexander and his general staff often held feasts after their major victories and during breaks in their campaign. In Phaselis of Lycia, Alexander crowned the statue of Theodectes, the famous philosopher and tragic poet of the city, with garland after the supper.²⁶ He met his Bactrian wife, Roxana, during a dance banquet.²⁷ In many cases, the dinners of Alexander were followed by the traditions of the Athenian symposia in having scientific conversations about the seasons, the weather or the differences of the climate between Macedonia and the eastern territories of the realm.²⁸

Drinking had a special ceremony that was reported by Chares of Mytilene.²⁹ At that time, Alexandros was no longer the King of Macedonia, but rather an Eastern despot. They shared a goblet with the hetairoi, and the drinking started with Alexandros, after which he handed over the goblet to one of his friends. He stood up and turned to the house shrine, drank from the goblet (he offered a sacrifice to the gods), then fell to his knees before Alexander and kissed him, then laid back on the sofa and handed the goblet to the person next to him. Everyone paid the same homage to the king, and eventually, the goblet got into the hands of the historian Callisthenes (c. 360 – 327 BC), who, as he was talking to Hephaestion, a friend of Alexander, simply drank from the goblet and then went to the king to kiss him. One of the leaders, however, Demetrius, told Alexander not to accept the kiss of Callisthenes, for he did not give him the divine reverence as he did not bow down before him. It was the traditional ceremony of the proskynesis, the act of solemn expression of respect for the Eastern despots, to lie prostrate before the king (a custom that was adopted by the Macedonians from the Persians).³⁰ Alexander turned his face away from the kiss, and Callisthenes said: ‘Well, then, I’ll go away the poorer by a kiss.’ (Plut. Alex. 54.4: ‘φιλήματι τοίνυν ἔλασσον ἔχων ἄπειμι.’) This event also contributed to Callisthenes’s loss of favor and eventual execution for his alleged involvement in a conspiracy against the king.³¹

Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch. Eds. Ribeiro Ferreira, José – Leão, Delfim – Tröster, Manuel – Barata Dias, Paula. Coimbra – Classica Digitalia. CECH, 2009. 193-200. (føleg 199-200.)

26 Plut. Alex. 17. Theodectes (4th century BC) was an orator and author of tragic poems, the student of the famous Athenian rhetor Isocrates, see: Athen. XIII. 20. (566).

27 Plut. Alex. 47.

28 Plut. Alex. 52. Plutarch mentions in his *Moralia*, that Alexander liked the banquets due to the conversations with his friends and not because of the revelries. (Plut. Mor. 623d = *Questiones convivales* 1.6: λόγος ἦν περὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ βασιλέως, ὡς οὐ πολὺ πίνοντος ἀλλὰ πολὺν χρόνον ἐν τῷ πίνειν). Gómez, Pilar – Mestre, Francesca: The banquets of Alexander. In: *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch*. Eds. Ribeiro Ferreira, José – Leão, Delfim – Tröster, Manuel – Barata Dias, Paula. Coimbra – Classica Digitalia. CECH, 2009. 213. (further see: Gómez – Mestre 2009).

29 Plut. Alex. 54.; Arr. Anab. IV. 12.

30 The Greek adored their gods only with prostration, otherwise, they considered prostration before the Persian kings as a type of disgusting act and blasphemy, regarding it as a sign of submission. Bosworth gave an excellent overview of the examples of proskynesis before the age of Alexander (e. g. the divine cult of Lysander, navarchos of Sparta and King Philipp II of Macedonia), but these were the exception rather than the rule, see: Bosworth, 1993, 280-287., especially p. 286, and the analysis of the story narrated by Chares of Mytilene see p. 285.

31 At a later occasion, Callisthenes clashed again with the king over the proskynesis (Plut. Alex.

Now we have arrived at one of the most controversial issues of the recent historiography of Alexander, One of the most negative elements of his character, the tyrannical despotism, was manifested in several serious cases of abuse,³² each of them connected to the revelries. Plutarch wrote about Alexander, stating: „ὄθεν οἱ ξηροὶ καὶ διάπυροὶ τόποι τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ πλεῖστα καὶ κάλλιστα τῶν ἀρωμάτων φέρουσιν ἐξαιρεῖ γὰρ ὁ ἥλιος τὸ ὑγρὸν ὥσπερ ὕλην σηπεδόνος ἐπιπολάζον τοῖς σώμασιν. Ἀλέξανδρον δὲ ἡ θερμότης τοῦ σώματος, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ ποτικὸν καὶ θυμοειδῆ παρεῖχεν.”³³ Nevertheless, he writes also that the king was basically temperate in wine consumption and drank only in order to express his respect for the hetairai and to be an excellent host.³⁴ He was also moderate in his meal, once joking during the magnificent feasts, that „he had better cooks given him by his tutor, Leonidas; for his breakfast, namely, a night march, and for his supper, a light breakfast.”³⁵

In the following famous cases Alexander's drinking had serious consequences: the burning of Persepolis and the murder of his friend, Cleitus.

In 330 BC, despite his habit, Alexander took part in the drunken party of his companions, or hetairoi, where women also were invited to participate with their lovers in drinking and celebrating. The most famous of the women was Thais of Attica who was one of the most literate of the prostitutes (hetairai) of her age and who was highly praised by Alexander. When the mood culminated, she held a pretentious speech, talking about the worthy reward of the long Asian campaign that she could enjoy having a feast in the palace of the Persian kings, but it would be even more delightful if Alexander would burn down the house of Xerxes who burned Athens. Thais was referring to the Persian invasion of 480 BC when Athens was set on fire upon the orders of King Xerxes of Persia.³⁶

54., Arr. Anab. IV. 10.), after two Greeks explained that Alexander deserved divine reverence. In his counterargument, Callisthenes referred to the strict distinction between gods and men, which was eventually accepted by Alexander because of the approval of the Macedonian noblemen. From that moment, proskynesis was obligatory only for the subjects from the East, the Macedonians and Greeks were not supposed to prostrate before the kings. See Bosworth, 1993, 285-286.

32 Worthington, Ian: How „Great” was Alexander? *Ancient History Bulletin* XIII. 1999/2. 39–55., Holt, F. L.: Alexander the Great Today: In the Interest of Historical Accuracy? *Ancient History Bulletin* XIII. 1999/3. 111–117.

33 Plut. Alex. 4.3: „Wherefore the dry and parched regions of the world produce the most and best spices; for the sun draws away the moisture which, like material of corruption, abounds in vegetable bodies.”

34 Plut. Alex. 23.1: ἦν δὲ καὶ πρὸς οἶνον ἦττον ἢ ἐδόκει καταφερῆς. ἔδοξε δὲ διὰ τὸν χρόνον ὄν τοῦ πίνων μᾶλλον ἢ λαλῶν εἰλκεν ἐφ’ ἐκάστης κύλικος, αἰ μακρόν τινα λόγον διατιθέμενος, καὶ ταῦτα πολλῆς σχολῆς οὔσης, ἐπεὶ πρὸς γε τὰς πράξεις οὐκ οἶνος ἐκείνον, οὐχ ὕπνος, οὐ παιδιὰ τις, οὐ γάμος, οὐ θέα, καθάπερ ἄλλους στρατηγούς, ἐπέσχε. The Greek historian and military commander of the Roman period, Arrian of Nicomedia (c. 86-89 AD – c. 146/160 AD) writes the same about Alexander's wine-drinking habit: καὶ οἱ πότοι δέ, ὡς λέγει Ἀριστόβουλος, οὐ τοῦ οἴνου ἔνεκα μακροὶ αὐτῷ ἐγίνοντο, οὐ γὰρ πίνειν πολλὸν οἶνον Ἀλέξανδρον, ἀλλὰ φιλοφροσύνης τῆς ἐς τοὺς ἐταίρους. (Arr. Anab. VII. 29.)

35 Plut. Alex. 22. see also. Arr. Anab. I. 23. About the character of Alexander see Hammond, N. G. L.: Alexander the Great. King, Commander and Statesman. Bristol, 1989. 269-273.

36 Her. Hist. VIII. 53.

By this, as Thais claimed, „that the women in the train of Alexander inflicted a greater punishment upon the Persians on behalf of Hellas than all her famous commanders by sea and land.” The king, inspired by the speech of Thais, jumped with the garland on his head and set the first fire in the palace.³⁷ Alexandros later, like Xerxes, regretted his deeds.³⁸ The modern historiography considers the deliberate burning of the palace as a fiction of the historians of the Hellenistic and Roman period, and rather an accidental fire could have caused the destruction of Persepolis.³⁹

The other case was the murder of Cleitus, one of Alexander's best friends. During cheerful drinking after a banquet, some people were singing songs that mocked Macedonians who were defeated by the Barbarians. The older hetairoi did not like these songs and reviled the poet and the singers of the song. However, Alexander liked it, so they did not stop singing. The harsh-tempered and wilful Cleitus, who was already drunk at that time, attacked Alexander himself, reminding him that not so long before that he had saved the life of the king in battle. Some of the guests removed Cleitus, but he soon returned and scolded Alexander for denying his father Philip and made himself adored as the son of god, Ammon. Alexander picked up a spear and stabbed Cleitus. All of the sources described this case, high lighting that the king did it in his drunken anger and later regretted it very much.⁴⁰

Some historians assume that the death of Alexander was also caused by his excessive wine consumption. In addition to the continuous fighting, the great number of injuries and the constant marching (with a minimum of 18.000 km during his campaign) excessive drinking also ruined the health of the young king. Before his death, Alexander was constantly involved in revelries, like the drinking competition mentioned in the

37 Plut. *Alex.* 38.2-3: ἔφη γάρ ὢν πεπόνηκε πεπλανημένη τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀπολαμβάνειν χάριν ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας ἐντροφῶσα τοῖς ὑπερηφάνοις Περσῶν βασιλείοις ἔτι δ' ἂν ἥδιον ὑποπρῆσαι κωμάσασα τὸν Ξέρξου τοῦ κατακαύσαντος τὰς Ἀθήνας οἶκον, αὐτὴ τὸ πῦρ ἄψασα τοῦ βασιλέως ὄρωντος, ὡς ἂν λόγος ἔχη πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ὅτι τῶν ναυμάχων καὶ πεζομάχων ἐκείνων στρατηγῶν τὰ μετὰ Ἀλεξάνδρου γύναια μείζονα δίκην ἐπέθηκε Πέρσαις ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑλλάδος. ἅμα δὲ τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ κρότου καὶ θορύβου γενομένου καὶ παρακελεύσεως τῶν ἐταίρων καὶ φιλοτιμίας, ἐπισπασθεὶς ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἀναπηδήσας ἔχων στέφανον καὶ λαμπάδα προῆγεν.

38 Her. *Hist.* VIII. 54.

39 Rung, Eduard: The Burning of Greek Temples by the Persians and Greek War-Propaganda. In: *The Religious Aspects of War in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome*. Ed. Ulanowski, Krzysztof. Leiden-Boston, 2016. 166-179. Rung argues that the idea of the destruction of Persian sanctuaries appeared already in the Greek war propaganda during the Persian invasion 480 BC. The Persian themselves justified the devastation of the Greek temples with the burning of the shrine of Cybele in Sardeis by the Ionians. (Rung 2016. 167-168).

40 Plut. *Alex.* 50. It is noteworthy, that Alexander can not be regarded as an alcohol addict in the concepts of modern medicine, as his revelries did not obstruct him in his political and military decisions, see Worthington, 2014. 307-308. The background of the murder of Cleitus was rather his inner psychological transformation from a slightly democratic Greco-Macedonian king into an Eastern despot, see Whitmarsh, T.: *Alexander's Hellenism and Plutarch's Textualism*. = *Classical Quarterly* LII. 2002. 174-92.; Gómez - Mestre, 2009, 215-216.

introduction, wherein more than forty people died. A huge celebration was organized in honour of his navarch, Nearchus. When Alexander was utterly exhausted, he bathed and was about to go to bed, but an envoy called him to another feast. Drinking all day long, he had a fever in the evening. Because of the fever, Alexander wanted to still his thirst with wine, but he became unconscious, did not wake up and was unable to designate his successor.⁴¹

Conclusion

During the process of their Hellenization, the Macedonians took over many cultural elements of the Greeks, including the tradition of the feast. The fictional descriptions of Ancient authors contain a number of elements that are similar to the feasts of Classical Greece. After the eating, conversations were held and, being a fundamentally military society, they listened to heroic songs and stories. Alexandros himself participated in these feasts, and though the revelries were long, they did not always end with drunkenness. Like the Greek feasts, only men were involved in the Macedonian celebrations (except for hetairai). The sprees of Alexander were a particular issue which might have caused serious consequences such as the burning of the royal palace of Persepolis or the killing of one of his best friends, Cleitus. At the same time, the sources clearly describe that Alexander was temperate in drinking, and he lost his measure in a few cases, but these led to tragedy. The reality content of these stories cannot be assessed.

41 Plut. Alex. 75. For the death of Alexander, see Bosworth, 1993, 171-173.; Borza, E. N. – Reames-Zimmerman, J.: Some New Thoughts on the Death of Alexander the Great. = The Ancient World, XXXI. 2000/1. 22-30.

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