

MOTHER OF SNAKES AND KINGS: APOLLONIUS RHODIUS' *FOUNDATION OF ALEXANDRIA**

Abstract: Of all the lost *Foundation Poems* attributed to Apollonius Rhodius, active at the court of Ptolemy II, the *Ktisis of Alexandria* must have been the most important for his contemporaries, and surely is the most intriguing for modern scholars of the Hellenistic world. Unfortunately, only a brief mention of this *epyllion* survives, in a *scholion* to Nicander's *Theriaka*, relating to the birth of poisonous snakes from the severed head of Medusa, carried by Perseus over Libya. Deadly and benign serpents belong to a multi-cultural symbolic imagery intertwined with the Greek, Macedonian, Egyptian and Jewish origins of the city. This paper explores the possible connections of the only episode preserved from Apollonius' *Ktisis* with the most ancient known traditions on the foundation of Alexandria —possibly even created at the time of Alexander or of the first Lagid dynasts, Ptolemy I and II.

*And I wished he would come back, my snake,
For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.*

D. H. Lawrence, *Snake* (Taormina, 1923)

Introduction

Apollonius of Rhodes is credited with a certain number of *Foundation poems* in hexameters, namely on Alexandria, Naucratis, Caunus, Cnidus, Rhodes and, possibly, Lesbos.¹ The epic poem *Argonautica* is Apollonius' only work which has survived through direct tradition, and the only one mentioned in the biographical sources,² while his *Κτίσεις* are only known through short quotations and summaries by different ancient authors

* The research on Apollonius' *Κτίσεις* began in 2011, when I was asked to edit the fragments for *FGrHist* IV, ed. by S. Schorn and D. Engels (Leiden, forthcoming). I have presented talks on the *Foundation of Alexandria* in London (UCL, 2012) and Cadiz (seminar *Poetología y Metapoesía griegas del Helenismo a la antigüedad tardía*, Universidad de Cádiz, 2013): I am grateful to all the colleagues and friends attending those lectures and reading early drafts of this work, and also to the anonymous readers for *Histos*, for comments and suggestions; the responsibility for what is written remains exclusively mine. The title is inspired by G. Carducci, *Giambi ed Epodi* I, *Per G. Monti e G. Tognetti*, III vv. 17–19: 'E voi, che sotto i furiosi raggi | Serpenti e re nutrite, | Africa ed Asia, immani ...'.

¹ For an edition and a full commentary of all the fragments of Apollonius' *Κτίσεις* (including *dubia*), see Barbantani, *FGrHist* IV 12, forthcoming. For older editions see Powell, *CA* FF 4–9, 12; Michaelis FF 2, 5–9.

² *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium vetera, Prolegomena*, pp. 1–2 Wendel, Γένος α. In *Suda*, s.v. Ἀπολλώνιος (α3419 Adler) he is mentioned generically as ἐπῶν ποιητής.

(as late as Stephanus of Byzantium, 6th century AD), or reference works such as the *Etymologica* and the *scholia*; until now, no fragment belonging to Apollonius' *Κτίσεις* preserved on papyrus has been found. Probably most of these *epyllia* were lost in their entirety very early, and by the first-second century AD they were known only, or mainly, through mythographic abridgments (like Parthenius' *Erotika Pathemata*), anthologies, extracts quoted in bio-bibliographic compilations, monographs or commentaries.

Before the Hellenistic period, 'Κτίσις' was not yet an autonomous poetic genre but a theme which could be developed in sections of epic poems, elegies, lyric odes, or historical narratives.³ After the journeys of Alexander, who presented himself often as a hero-founder, and with the gathering of massive scholarly information from all over the world in one place, the Library of Alexandria, interest in geo-ethnographical erudition flourished from the 3rd century BC onwards: many contemporaries of Apollonius, older or younger than him, included foundation tales in their poems.⁴ Interest in foundation tales was not confined to the world of Alexandrian learned poets: the foundation of new cities and the development of new cultural centres were phenomena characterising the Syrian kingdom under its first dynasts, and may have spawned as well a new breed of erudite poets relying on Seleucid patronage, eager to linger on *κτίσις* tales for intellectual curiosity and for political purposes: unfortunately we do not have as much information on them as we have on the Alexandrian *poetae docti*.⁵ Most scholars now agree that the 'Foundation poem' as a recognisable poetic genre (with a specific title *Κτίσις* / *Κτίσεις* attributed by the author himself) was shaped in the Hellenistic period, and only thereafter was this label applied retrospectively to older literary creations related (loosely or specifically) to foundation stories.⁶ Possibly it was Apollonius Rhodius who was the first to 'canonise' the *Κτίσις* as a poetic genre: this can be defined basically as an *epyllion*, a small-scale poem in dactylic metre (mainly hexameters, but apparently elegiac couplets were used as well in later poetry), focusing on a foundation tale.⁷ From what we can gather from our testimonies, the narrative of such poems did not follow necessarily a

³ Dougherty (1994). For a more extensive discussion on the *Κτίσις* as a genre see Barbantani, *FGrHist* IV, introduction to Apollonius' *Κτίσεις*.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Call. *Aet.* F 43 Pf. (Sicilian cities) and *Hymn to Apollo* (Cyrene); Nicaenetus, *Lycus*, F 1 Powell.

⁵ For an example of Seleucid foundation tale see Barbantani (2014a).

⁶ Sistikou (2008) 315, 337.

⁷ The *Argonautica* are full of *κτίσις*-connected episodes, belonging to the past or projecting the events into the future: see Krevans (2000) 70–1.

chronological linear narrative sequence of events, but implied any sort of digressions, both *prolepseis* into the future—maybe even as far as the contemporary world of the author—and *analepseis* into a past even more remote than the act of foundation itself. Surprisingly, none of the fragments we have describes the actual foundation of the city.

Apollonius is constantly presented by ancient sources as a younger contemporary ('pupil') of Callimachus, so probably his activity stretched from the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 BC) to that of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–221 BC), and possibly of Ptolemy IV (221–205 BC). Most scholars now accept as a fact that Apollonius held for a period the office of Chief Librarian (before Eratosthenes) and, at the same time, fulfilled the task of tutoring the crown prince, like Zenodotus and Eratosthenes before and after him respectively.⁸ Leaving aside an exhaustive discussion on the debated chronology of his move to Rhodes, which will lead us astray from the main focus of this paper, we can suppose that the engagement of Apollonius in composing foundation poems involving this island and the places mythologically and historically tied with it could either precede or follow the period of hostility between Rhodes and the Ptolemaic kingdom, during the Second Syrian War;⁹ a sojourn on the island would be in any case consistent with the image of Apollonius as 'poet of the Ptolemies' emerging from his main poem, the *Argonautica*:¹⁰ for most of the 3rd century, and in spite of its disturbing independence, Rhodes was mainly considered by the Ptolemies an ally. It would be reductive, in any case, to consider the *Κτίσεις*, like every other manifestation of Alexandrian court poetry, a mere piece of political advertising produced in order to please the royal patrons.¹¹ Certainly, given that all the places featured in the *Foundation Poems* were, during the 3rd century BC, under direct control or in the diplomatic network

⁸ For a debate on the question see, most recently, Geus (2002), 26–7; Murray (2012). On Apollonius' biography see Rengakos (1992), Cameron (1995), Lefkowitz (2008); Köhnken (2008).

⁹ See Barbantani, *FGrHist* IV, introduction to Apollonius' *Κτίσεις*. Cameron (1995) 218 remarked that Apollonius' move to Rhodes would have been strange during a period when Rhodes was at war with Ptolemy II. Green (2004) 205 placed the 'exile' to Rhodes early in Apollonius' life (285–280 BC), followed by a glorious return to Alexandria around 265; the political situation could fit also a different (and, in my opinion, less likely) scenario, that of Apollonius abandoning Alexandria when his position of Head Librarian was taken over by Eratosthenes about 245 BC. On Rhodian politics in the 3rd century BC and its relationship with the Ptolemies see Wiemer (2011) 128; Berthold (1984) 89–91; Reger (1999) 77–8; Marquaille (2008) 48–9.

¹⁰ See Stephens (2000) and (2008); Mori (2008); Thalmann (2011).

¹¹ Cf. Barbantani (2001) 'Introduction'.

of the Ptolemies, Apollonius' *Κτίσεις*, like other contemporary erudite works, could serve as agents of 'intentional history', from the perspective of the rulers of Egypt but also of the cities which aspired to make their political ties with the Ptolemies official through fictitious genealogies:¹² it cannot be excluded that, besides circulating in their bookish form for the pleasure of the Hellenic and Hellenised *literati*, the *Κτίσεις* could be recited during local festivals in Rhodes, Cnidus and Caunus.¹³ There must have been also a personal, scholarly interest of the author in the choice of the places to celebrate: Apollonius shared a curiosity for geographic oddities and toponomastic peculiarities with his older colleague Callimachus, who wrote a monograph on *Foundations and Changes of Name of Islands and Cities* (*Κτίσεις νήσων καὶ πόλεων καὶ μετονομασίαι*).¹⁴ On top of all that, I would not exclude on this topographical selection the influence of Apollonius' personal ties with specific Ptolemaic officers and royal *philoi*, who could function as 'oral sources' for some of the local legends (cf. the guest from Icus discussing a traditional cult of his island at the symposium held by Pollis in Alexandria in Call. F178 Pfeiffer), and in turn be flattered by a poetic tribute to their homeland by a fellow, learned courtier. Actually, the celebration of the *poleis* of the *Κτίσεις* is not only consistent with the political and economic interests of the Ptolemies, but also with the ethnic and geographical makeup of the court during the first four generations of their rule. The first and main audience for an Alexandrian learned poet would always be within the royal court, visited by foreign guests and diplomats and regularly populated by officials of different origin and ethnicity: some of the most relevant ones in the period we are discussing here—Zenon of Caunus,¹⁵ Sostratus of Cnidus,¹⁶

¹² On intentional history see Gehrke (1994) and (2001); Foxhall–Gehrke–Luraghi (2010). On the development of kinship mythical links for cultural and political interests see Patterson (2010), Erskine (2005); Gruen (2011) 224–52 (who boldly defines Greek foundation tales as 'identity theft').

¹³ As possibly in the archaic period: see Bowie (1986); Smith (2001) 280. For the performance of epic/elegiac poems in Hellenistic festivals see discussion and bibliography in Barbantani (2001) 7–9, 14–9.

¹⁴ Pfeiffer (1968) 135. For the Callimachean traits of Apollonius' *Κτίσεις* see Sistikou (2008) 316–20.

¹⁵ See Orrieux (1983) and (1985); Clarysse–Vandorpe (1995).

¹⁶ *Philos* of Ptolemy II, he was a diplomat active in Caunus, Delphi, Athens, Cyrene; see Mooren (1975) 56–7; Marquaille (2008) 60. Sostratus was responsible for the building of the Pharos in Alexandria: see Posidippus, *Epigr.* 115 Austin–Bastianini; Str. 17.1.6; Plin. *NH* 36.83.

Callicrates of Samos¹⁷ and Timosthenes of Rhodes¹⁸—came from the cities Apollonius selected as protagonists of his poems.

The *Foundation of Alexandria*: Audience and Occasion

Attractive as the hypothesis may be, we cannot be sure that the *Foundation of Alexandria* was the first *Κτίσις* composed by Apollonius,¹⁹ even though one can imagine it was very well received by his patron Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who, for some years, carried on and fulfilled his father's building projects (notably the Museum, the Library and the Pharos) in the new royal capital. What may have prompted Apollonius to compose a poem on the *Foundation* of the city in the first place could have been not just a general enthusiasm for the young and lively metropolis where he was living, but a specific event that took place in the days Apollonius was active at the court of Philadelphus: according to Pausanias (1.7.1), it was Ptolemy II who took the initiative of moving the body of the hero founder, Alexander, from Memphis, where it was first laid to rest by his father, Ptolemy Soter, to Alexandria. The issue is still debated, and most scholars still prefer to give credit to the majority of the ancient sources, which attribute the transfer to Ptolemy I:²⁰ indeed the expression used by Pausanias (καὶ τὸν Ἀλεξάνδρου νεκρὸν οὗτος ὁ καταγαγὼν ἦν ἐκ Μέμφιδος: 'it was *he* [i.e. Ptolemy II and not another Ptolemy] who was the one who transferred the corpse of Alexander') may suggest that he was consciously offering a different version from the *vulgata*. Of course the relocation of Alexander's body to Alexandria must have been in Ptolemy Soter's plans since the beginning, and the only reason for him to delay the move and leave it to his son could have been the

¹⁷ He is quoted in Posidipp. *Epigr.* 116 and 119 Austin–Bastianini. On his career see Hauben (1970); Barbantani (2005); Marquaille (2008) 60–1.

¹⁸ As an admiral of Ptolemy Philadelphus, he wrote *On Harbours* (Str. 9.3.10): see Marquaille (2008) 51. Like Apollonius' *Κτίσις* and other contemporary work by the scholars of the Museum of Alexandria, this was probably meant to be an indirect celebration of the Lagid supremacy *terra marique*. Rhodian military experts, however, were hired also by the Seleucids, like Theodotas, general of Antiochus I: see Berthold (1984) 82–3, 85.

¹⁹ Smith (2001) 281 conjectured that first Apollonius as a young poet composed a *Ktisis of Alexandria* for Ptolemy II; that would have triggered the poet's interest in foundation myths related to the most ancient Greek settlement in Egypt, i.e., Naucratis, and to his (second? elective?) homeland, Rhodes; Rhodian sagas in turn were entangled with Carian foundation myths, treated in the *Foundations of Caunus and Cnidus*.

²⁰ E.g. Erskine (2002) and (2013), Ogden (2013b); but cf. Bevan (1927) 20; E. Kosmetatou, at <http://www.greece.org/alexandria/alexander/pages/aftermath.html>.

fact that the *Sema*, or the shrine where the remains of Alexander were laid to rest, was still being built (as many other edifices of the royal capital) when Soter died.²¹ If the transfer of the body of the Founder (of Alexandria and, in a way, of the entire Ptolemaic dynasty) really happened during Apollonius' lifetime, one can imagine that the young poet found this crucial event worthy of being commemorated by a refined poem explaining the origins of the city. Ptolemy II may have perceived this as the final step in sanctioning Alexandria as the capital of his kingdom, the only true heir of Alexander's empire. All the pieces at last were falling into place: the hero Founder was returning to stay forever in the first city he had ever created, as its *Genius Loci* and as a role model for the Ptolemies, and could rest near the tomb of his general, friend and (according to some biographic legends) brother, Ptolemy I. In the opening scene of Theocritus' *Id.* 17 (13–33) Alexander and Ptolemy Soter appear side by side on Olympus as gods and descendants of Heracles, predecessors of the ruling king Ptolemy II, the true focus of Theocritus' *Encomium*. Although only one, puzzling testimony survives on the content of the *Ἀλεξανδρείας Κτίσις*, this may suggest, as we shall see, the presence of a theme heavily charged with symbolic connotations, strictly connected with the cult of the Founder.

I have already emphasised in the Introduction the assorted composition of the Ptolemaic court. It must be added here that among the courtiers close to the first three Ptolemies there were also Egyptians from priestly families, like Manetho of Sebennytes; many others followed in the next generations, especially administrative and military officers of mixed Greek-Egyptian lineage, who were bilingual and able to shift smoothly between different cultural environments.²² Both these individuals and the members of the Greek/Macedonian élite were well aware that Alexandria, the main and for a while the only Ptolemaic *polis* on Egyptian soil, did not have a significant Egyptian historical/mythological background,²³ especially if compared to the other, truly Egyptian royal capital, Memphis. Also, being founded in 332 BC, just a few decades before Apollonius, Alexandria could not even boast a

²¹ On the 'abduction' of Alexander's funeral carriage see below, p. 223.

²² Work on the Egyptian courtiers of the Ptolemies (and in general, on non-Greek *philoi* of the Hellenistic kings) has intensified in the last decades. For more examples and a bibliography on the Ptolemaic royal *philoi* see, among others, Clarysse (1985); Thompson (1992) 44–5; Barbantani (2007) and Barbantani (2014b).

²³ Apart from Pharos and the place where later the Serapeum was built, Rhakotis did not have any relevant connection with Egyptian dynastic mythology. That there was an ancient Ramesside fort still standing on the site of Rhakotis at the time of Alexander's conquest is a matter of speculation: most of the ancient material found on the spot seems to have been moved there from outside the city at a later date: see Ashton (2004), esp. 32–3.

glorious Greek past, not even one fictitious, unlike Naucratis and most Greek *poleis* of Asia Minor, featuring in the other foundation poems of Apollonius. Writing a *Ktisis of Alexandria* therefore was not an easy task. An epic-aetiological tale on its foundation must have included a reinterpretation of Alexander's recent stay in Egypt (even just by ways of allusions), as well as some *analepseis* to a mythical, glorious past, re-imagined *ex-novo*, and appealing both to a Greek/Macedonian and to an Egyptian or Greek-Egyptian audience. Alexandrian poets, living beside Egyptian officers and intellectuals, acquired some awareness of local cults, myths and traditions, even though their allusions to Egyptian matters are generally cryptic and always re-interpreted in a syncretic way for the sake of a Greek-speaking and Greek culturally-oriented audience.²⁴ Apollonius was not afraid to introduce such allusions into the *Argonautica*, especially in Book IV, particularly rich in echoes of traditional pharaonic and Egyptian cosmological themes (like, e.g., the voyage of the Sun): the most striking, for our purposes, is the summary of the travels and foundations of Sesostris, where the name of the hero-founder is lacking, thus implying a familiarity of the audience with this tale.²⁵ In the *Argonautica* there is no hint nor explicit references to the foundation of Alexandria, where a complex story about the birth of the nearby Cyrene serves as surrogate; singling out the new Ptolemaic royal city as the exclusive protagonist of her own epic, the *Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσις*, was a clever move on Apollonius' part, whatever the relative chronology of the two poems may be. Given that Alexandria, since its beginning, was a composite mosaic of diverse Greek ethnicities and of various non-Hellenic cultures (*in primis* the Egyptians and the Jews), each one possessing its own symbolic world and its myths, it is very likely that Apollonius had approached the tale of its origins in the same way he dealt with the large-scale reconstruction of the artificial 'Ptolemaic past' in the *Argonautica*: if the *Foundation of Alexandria* was really one of his first works, this could be seen—not much in terms of style, but of thematic choices and culturally heterogeneous imagery—a general rehearsal for his main poem.

²⁴ See Stephens (2003) and (2008). According to Smith (2001) 276–7, the focus of Apollonius in his *Ktiseis* was not only the Hellenic colonisation of 'barbarian' lands, but also the multi-ethnic and multi-regional integration of people that he could witness in contemporary Alexandria and Naucratis: one should be aware, however, that in the *Argonautica*, in spite of the openness to different cultural influences, the 'barbarian' characters are subsumed into Hellenic culture. For the contextualising of the *Argonautica* in the Greek-Egyptian milieu of Alexandria see Thalmann (2011) 206–18.

²⁵ See Krevans (2000) 75.

The Fragment

The only surviving fragment of the *Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσις* in fact suggests an interest in tales which could sound familiar both to the local Egyptian aristocracy and to the Macedonian élite. It comes from a *scholion* to Nicander's *Theriaka* (2nd c. BC), discussing the origins of wild animals that bite; in the disappointingly dry style of the scholiography, it states only that 'Apollonius of Rhodes in the *Foundation of Alexandria* says they came from the drops of blood of the Gorgon' (*schol. Nic. Ther. 12a* = F 4 Powell; F 2 Michaelis):²⁶

περὶ γοῦν τῆς τῶν δακνόντων θηρίων γενέσεως, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν Τιτάνων τοῦ αἵματος, παρὰ μὲν τῷ Ἡσιόδῳ οὐκ ἔστιν εἰρεῖν. Ἀκουσίλαος (*FGrHist* 51 F 14) δέ φησιν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Τυφῶνος πάντα τὰ δάκνοντα γενέσθαι. Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ ὁ Ῥόδιος ἐν τῇ τῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσει ἀπὸ τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ τῆς Γοργόνης αἵματος.

About the birth from the blood of the Titans of animals that bite, there is nothing to be found in Hesiod. Acousilaus says that everything that bites took its origin from the blood of Typhon. Apollonius of Rhodes in the *Foundation of Alexandria* (says it came) from the drops of blood of the Gorgon.

The information in the *scholion* is clearly very compressed, as always in this kind of source: the entity which took its origin ἀπὸ τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ τῆς Γοργόνης αἵματος is to be supplied from the previous sentence referring to Acousilaus, πάντα τὰ δάκνοντα; however, it must be understood that the reference is specifically to deadly snakes of Libya, if we have to judge from the episode here quoted (the severed head of Medusa carried by Perseus from Libya to Egypt),²⁷ and from the other occurrences of the story in Apollonius. This subject must have been particularly dear and special to the Rhodian poet, since it features prominently in two other of his works:²⁸

²⁶ Ed. Crugnola (1971) 39.

²⁷ See below, pp. 217, 237–8. On the myth of Perseus and Medusa see Ogden (2013a) 92–8.

²⁸ The subject was addressed in Latin epic poetry, notably by Ov. *Met.* 4.614–20: ... *inpositus iam caelo est alter, at alter | viperei referens spoliū memorabile monstri | aera carpebat tenerum stridentibus alis, | cumque super Libycas victor penderet harenas, | Gorgonei capitis guttae cecidere cruentae; | quas humus exceptas varios animavit in angues, | unde frequens illa est infestaque terra colubris.* Extremely detailed, gory and macabre is the account of the birth of the snakes from Medusa and of their toxic powers in Luc. *Phars.* 9.619–733.

Apollonius mentioned the lethal powers of North African snakes in the fourth book of the *Argonautica*, including a digression on the Gorgon's blood in the episode (*Arg.* 4.1502–31) of the seer Mopsus bitten by a deadly serpent (4.1513–17):

εὖτε γὰρ ἰσόθεος Λιβύην ὑπερέπτατο Περσεύς
 Εὐρυμέδων (καὶ γὰρ τὸ κάλεσκέ μιν οὖνομα μήτηρ)
 Γοργόνος ἀρτίτομον κεφαλὴν βασιλῆι κομίζων,
 ὄσσαι κυανέου στάγες αἵματος οὐδ' αὖς ἴκοντο,
 αἰ πᾶσαι κείνων ὀφίων γένος ἐβλάστησαν.

For when over Libya flew godlike Perseus Eurymedon (for by that name his mother called him) bearing to the king the Gorgon's head newly severed, all the drops of dark blood that fell to the earth produced a brood of those serpents. (Transl. R. C. Seaton)

The same horrifying death returns in a composition in choliambics entitled *Canopus* (F 3 Powell),²⁹ from the name of Menelaus' helmsman who, after landing in Egypt with his master (cf. *Hom. Od.* 4.123–32), ended up killed by a venomous *αἰμορροῖς*.³⁰ Although we know too little of this poem to define it as a *κτίσις*, it included possibly a foundation tale related to the Egyptian city of Canopus (modern Abukir, east of Alexandria), established by Menelaus as an act of commemoration for his companion: some connection with present events and *Realien* could be introduced by the poet, since in the Hellenistic period the city became famous for an important temple of the recent Ptolemaic deity, Sarapis.³¹ The reinterpretation of a well-known episode

²⁹ Schol. Nic. *Ther.* 305 and 312 = FF 1–3 Powell; FF 3–4 Michaelis.

³⁰ Ap. Rhod., *Canopus* FF 1–3 Pfeiffer, cf. schol. Nic. *Ther.* 303–4: αἰ δ' ὑπὸ γυίοις· αἰ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῖς μέλεσιν ὠτειλαὶ ῥήγνυνται. εἶπε γὰρ ὅτι ὄλον τὸ σῶμα πελιδνοῦται, καὶ ὠτειλῶν πληροῦται. ὠτειλαὶ γὰρ αἰ πληγαὶ εἰσιν, καὶ Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ φησι τῶν πληγέντων ὑπὸ αἰμορροΐδος ῥήγνυσθαι καὶ τὰς οὐλάς. 309–17: εἴ γ' ἔτυμον· τὸ ἐξῆς, τῶν δ' Ἑλένη μέσον ὄλκον ἀνέκλασεν, εἶτα, εἴ γ' ἔτυμον Τροίηθεν ἰούσα. ἰστέον δὲ ὅτι ἀπὸ Τροίας ὑποστρέφων ὁ Μενέλαος σὺν τῇ Ἑλένῃ ἐπλανήθη καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον. ὁ γοῦν κυβερνήτης αὐτοῦ Κάνωβος ἐξεληθὼν κοιμηθῆναι ἐν τῷ αἰγιαλῷ, ἄκων ἀπεκοιμήθη καὶ πιπέπτωκεν αἰμορροΐδι, ἣτις θλιφθεῖσα ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀνχένα καὶ ὀδυνηθεῖσα, ἐξελθοῦσα ἔδακεν αὐτόν. θνήσκοντα οὖν ὑπ' αὐτῆς τὸν κυβερνήτην θεωρήσασα ἡ Ἑλένη καὶ ὀργισθεῖσα ταῖς αἰμορροΐσιν, ἔκλασε τὴν ἄκανθαν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐξέβαλε τοὺς τῆς ῥάχεως αὐτῆς σπονδύλους, καὶ ἔκτοτε αἰ αἰμορροΐδες καὶ οἱ σκολιοὶ καὶ οἱ πλάγιοι κατὰ τὴν πορείαν κεράσται κεκλασμένοι εἰσὶν τὰς ῥάχεις. καὶ ἡ μὲν ἱστορία οὕτως. 312C: κυβερνητῆρα· ἡ αἰμορροΐς ἔδακε Κάνωβον, τὸν κυβερνήτην τοῦ Μενελάου, καθεύδοντα ἐν τῷ πρὸς Αἴγυπτον αἰγιαλῷ καὶ ἐνήκεν αὐτῷ ἰόν.

³¹ The story bears many resemblances with the tale of Palinurus in the *Aeneid*; see Sistakou (2008) 339; Krevans (2000) 76–9, 81–3. Canopus, the eponymous hero, was

focusing on Homeric characters, Menelaus and his companions, active in Egypt provided a link between the foreign country recently conquered by the Greeks and the most famous Hellenic saga, the Trojan cycle including the *Nostoi*.³² The connection between Peloponnesian mythical characters and dangerous snakes in the area of the future Alexandria is further confirmed by a mythical episode reported by Aelianus (*De Nat. Anim.* 9.21), who makes the area of the island of Pharos, a fundamental landmark of Alexandria, infested with poisonous snakes at the time Helen was a guest of the local king Thonis; the passage elaborates an entire novelistic story from the Homeric lines *Od.* 4.227–32.³³

It is impossible to know whether Apollonius tried, in some way, a thematic cross-over between different works of his, the *Foundation of Alexandria*, the *Canopus* and the *Argonautica*: the wandering of the Argonauts and Perseus' magic flight over Libya, like the *Nostos* of the Homeric heroes who touched the Egyptian shores, are all associated by a connection with the activity of poisonous reptiles. Apparently, generation after generation in the mythical past of the Greeks in Egypt an enterprise related to serpents is to be expected: the Argonauts live at least a generation before the protagonists of the Trojan saga; what we have in the only fragment of the *Foundation of Alexandria* is a reference to an even earlier Greek hero, Perseus, who, being a mixture of Egyptian descent and Argolic blood, and at the same time a thoroughly Hellenic hero, perfectly embodies the ethnical

probably granted a catasterism (Canopus = Alpha in the constellation of Carina/Argo Navis; Ps.-Eratosth. *Cat.* 37; Hecataeus, *FGrHist* 1 F 308). On the Hellenistic finds in Canopus (esp. in the Abukir bay) see Breccia (1926); Goddio (2004) and (2008); Libonati (2010). Between Alexandria and Canopus was located Cape Zephyrion, site of the temple of the deified Arsinoë II, see Barbantani (2005), with previous bibliography.

³² Cf. Hunter (1989) 9 and Stephens (2008) 98. On the tradition of the wandering of the Spartan Menelaus in Libya and Egypt see Malkin (1994) esp. 48–9 for the *Canopus*.

³³ Aelian. *De Nat. Anim.* 9.21: Φάρος ἡ νῆσος πάλαι (λέγουσι δὲ Αἰγύπτιοι οἷα μέλλω λέγειν) ἐπεπλήρωτο ὄφρων πολλῶν τε καὶ διαφόρων. ἐπεὶ δὲ Θῶνις ὁ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων βασιλεὺς λαβὼν παρακαταθήκην τὴν Διὸς Ἑλένην (ἔδωκε δὲ αὐτὴν ἄρα καὶ περὶ τὴν ἄνω Αἴγυπτον καὶ περὶ τὴν Αἰθιοπίαν πλανώμενος ὁ Μενέλεως) εἶτα ἠράσθη αὐτῆς ὁ Θῶνις, βίαν αὐτοῦ προσφέροντος τῇ Ἑλένῃ ἐς ὀμιλίαν ἀφροδίσιόν φησιν ὁ λόγος τὴν Διὸς αὐτὰ εἰπεῖν ἕκαστα πρὸς τὴν τοῦ Θῶνιδος γαμετῆν (Πολύδαμνα ἐκαλεῖτο), τὴν δὲ δείσασαν μὴ ποτε ἄρα ὑπερβάλληται ἢ ξένη τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆν, ὑπεκθέσθαι τὴν Ἑλένην ἐς Φάρον, πόαν δὲ τῶν ὄφρων τῶν ἐκεῖθι ἰέχθρῶν δοῦναι, ἥσπερ οὖν αἴσθησιν λαβόντας τοὺς ὄφεις εἶτα καταδῦναι. τὴν δὲ αὐτὴν καταφυτεῦσαι, καὶ χρόνῳ ἀναθῆλαι καὶ ἀφείναι σπέρμα ἐχθρὸν ὄφεισι, καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐν τῇ Φάρῳ θηρίον τοιόνδε οὐκέτι γενέσθαι. κληθῆναι δὲ τὴν πόαν ἐλένιον λέγουσιν οἱ ταῦτα εἰδέναι δεινοί. In Euripides' *Helen* the king of Egypt, son of Proteus, is named Theoclymenus, and his sister Theonoe.

duality of Ptolemaic Egypt.³⁴ Actually, his genealogy shows that even his 'Egyptian lineage' is originally Argolic: as often in Greek foundation tales, colonisation is presented as a return to the origins. Perseus is the son of Zeus and Danae, daughter of Acrisius of Argos (son of the Danaid Hypermestra and of the Egyptian Lynceus):³⁵ he is ultimately a descendant of Danaus and Aegyptus, both of them great-great-grandsons of the Argive Io (Egypt is defined as the 'land of Danaus' in Callimachus' *Victoria Berenices*³⁶); through Andromeda and her father Cepheus, he is also linked with Ethiopia. Already Herodotus had registered Perseus' connection with Egypt, in the area of Canopus (Hdt. 2.15.1: a watchtower located at the west end of the Delta)³⁷ and in Chemmis (Hdt. 2.91: a temple and Greek-style *agônes* in his honour), where he arrived, so the locals say, for the same reason alleged by the Greeks, carrying from Libya the head of the Gorgon.³⁸ Callimachus mentioned in an hexametric fragment an Egyptian plant bearing his name, the *perseia* (F 655 Pfeiffer): according to Plin. *NH* 15.46 it was introduced by Perseus himself in Memphis, and therefore ('ob id') used by Alexander to crown the winners of the games he instituted there; the same connection between the plant, Perseus and the Ptolemies is underlined by Isidore (*Etym.*

³⁴ On Perseus, Heracles and other heroes as *Grenzgänger* between the Greek and the 'barbarian' world see Gehrke (2005) and Gruen (2011) 253–65 (Perseus as 'multiculturalist' hero).

³⁵ See Auffarth (1999). On the Argolic genealogies see Hall (1997) 77–83.

³⁶ F 143.6 Massimilla = 383 Pf. + *SH* 254. Cf. also F 144 Massimilla (674 Pfeiffer + *PSI* 1500).

³⁷ But for a different location (near the Bolbitine mouth) cf. Str. 17.1.18.

³⁸ See Gruen (2011) 259. Hdt 2.91: ἔστι δὲ Χέμμισ πόλις μεγάλη νομοῦ τοῦ Θηβαϊκοῦ ἐγγὺς Νέης πόλιος· ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει ἔστι Περσέος τοῦ Δανάης ἱρὸν τετράγωνον, περίξ δὲ αὐτοῦ φοίνικες πεφύκασι· τὰ δὲ πρόπυλα τοῦ ἱεροῦ λίθινά ἐστι κάρτα μεγάλη· ἐπὶ δὲ αὐτοῖσι ἀνδριάντες δύο ἐστᾶσι λίθινοι μεγάλοι· ἐν δὲ τῷ περιβεβλημένῳ τούτῳ νηὸς τε ἔνι καὶ ἄγαλμα ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνέστηκε τοῦ Περσέος· οὗτοι οἱ Χεμμῖται λέγουσι τὸν Περσέα πολλάκις μὲν ἀνὰ τὴν γῆν φαίνεσθαι σφίσι, πολλάκις δὲ ἔσω τοῦ ἱεροῦ, σανδάλιον τε αὐτοῦ πεφορημένον εὐρίσκεσθαι, ἐὼν τὸ μέγαθος δίπηχυ, τὸ ἐπεὶ φανῆ, εὐθενεῖν ἅπασαν Αἴγυπτον· ταῦτα μὲν λέγουσι, ποιεῦσι δὲ τάδε ἑλληνικὰ τῷ Περσέϊ· ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν τιθεῖσι διὰ πάσης ἀγωνίης ἔχοντα, παρέχοντες ἄεθλα κτήνεα καὶ διὰ πάσης ἀγωνίης ἔχοντα, παρέχοντες ἄεθλα κτήνεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ δέρματα· εἰρομένου δέ μοι ὅτι σφι μούνουσι ἔωθε ὁ Περσεὺς ἐπιφαίνεσθαι καὶ ὅτι κεχωρίδαται Αἰγυπτίων τῶν ἄλλων ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν τιθέντες, ἔφασαν τὸν Περσέα ἐκ τῆς ἐσωτῶν πόλιος γεγονέναι· τὸν γὰρ Δαναὸν καὶ τὸν Λυγκέα ἐόντας Χεμμίτας ἐκπλῶσαι ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα· ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων γενεηλογέοντες κατέβαινον ἐς τὸν Περσέα· ἀπικόμενον δὲ αὐτὸν ἐς Αἴγυπτον κατ' αἰτίην τὴν καὶ Ἑλληνες λέγουσι, ὄσοντα ἐκ Λιβύης τὴν Γοργοῦς κεφαλὴν, ἔφασαν ἐλθεῖν καὶ παρὰ σφέας καὶ ἀναγνῶναι τοὺς συγγενέας πάντας· ἐκμεμαθηκότα δὲ μιν ἀπικέσθαι ἐς Αἴγυπτον τὸ τῆς Χέμμισ οὐνομα, πεπυσμένον παρὰ τῆς μητρὸς· ἀγῶνα δὲ οἱ γυμνικὸν αὐτοῦ κελεύσαντος ἐπιτελέειν.

17.7.7: *Persicum vocatum quod eam arborem primus in Aegypto severit Perseus, a quo se oriundos Ptolemaei ferebant*): it is tempting to imagine that the genealogical connection between the Argive hero and the Macedonian conqueror (and consequently the Ptolemies) emphasised by the Latin sources was already present in Callimachus, and/or in one of his contemporaries, like Apollonius.³⁹ As a progenitor of the Macedonian Argead dynasty, Perseus was a hero cherished by all the main Hellenistic dynasties, but in particular by the Ptolemies,⁴⁰ who had an interest in enhancing any possible association between this character and the land they ruled. The reference to the Gorgon's head spawning wild beasts was most probably embedded in a section of the *Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσις* celebrating Perseus as the first Greek hero bringing to Egypt his cultural influence, in the shape of competitions (as in Chemmis), or foundations, or other elements transmitted in the later sources seen above—in a way 'colonising', leaving a Hellenic mark on the land, just as in historical times his descendant Alexander, and his Lagid successors did.

The Good, the Bad and the Royal... Snakes of Alexandria

It remains to understand how a reference to a negative, terrifying fact such as the birth of poisonous ophids could fit into a foundation poem meant to celebrate Alexandria. This could have been just a passing reference to a well-known myth, but given that nothing is casual in a composition by an Alexandrian *poeta doctus*, especially when he repeatedly addresses, as we have seen, the same subject in different poems, the suspicion is that this herpetological oddity was closely linked to the foundation of the city, and probably not without some relevant cultural and political implications.

The life of Alexander was reinterpreted in many ways, often novelistic and mythical, even by contemporary historians. A core of ancient, reliable testimonies (like the historical reports written by Ptolemy I himself), is preserved in later biographical narratives on the Macedonian king, and gives us a clue to the political use of his character at the time of the first Ptolemies. A good starting point, or a decisive episode, for a foundation story and for a *κτίσις* poem, was the visit of the *oikist* to an oracle to receive some prophecy regarding the foundation of the city: in fact, before founding Alexandria, the young conqueror travelled to the oracle of Ammon, not just to obtain a confirmation about his birth, but also, according to the *Alexander Romance*, to receive indications of the exact place where to establish his new

³⁹ See also Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.4 (*agôn* in Memphis); Callixeinus ap. Athen. 5.198b.

⁴⁰ See Lloyd (1969); Ogden (2008) 114–6; Thomas (2007), 55–97. On the connection between Argos, the Argead dynasty and the Ptolemies see also Bulloch (1985), esp. 12–13.

city. The trip through the Libyan desert to reach Siwah was potentially dangerous and even deadly for the young king, considering the presence of the venomous snakes that in the past had killed the prophet Mopsus and the helmsman Canopus, while even the mighty Argonauts and the hero Menelaus could do nothing to prevent it. However, according to Arrian, drawing from a source as early as Ptolemy I, Alexander could count on local, supernatural help which had not showed up at the time of his mythical predecessors: he was led to the oasis of Siwah by two benevolent, talking snakes, possibly an hypostasis of the Egyptian gods Psois and Thermuthis (*Anab.* 3.3.5):⁴¹

... ἀλλὰ ἐπλανᾶτο γὰρ ἡ στρατιὰ Ἀλεξάνδρω καὶ οἱ ἡγεμόνες τῆς ὁδοῦ ἀμφίβολοι ἦσαν. Πτολεμαῖος μὲν δὴ ὁ Λάγου λέγει δράκοντας δύο ἰέναι πρὸ τοῦ στρατεύματος φωνὴν ἰέντας, καὶ τούτοις Ἀλέξανδρον κελεύσαι ἔπεσθαι τοὺς ἡγεμόνας πιστεύσαντας τῷ θείῳ, τοὺς δὲ ἡγήσασθαι τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν τε ἐς τὸ μαντεῖον καὶ ὀπίσω αὐθις.

... consequently, Alexander's army lost the way, as even the guides were in doubt about the course to take. Ptolemy, son of Lagus, says that two serpents went in front of the army, uttering a voice, and Alexander ordered the guides to follow them, trusting in the divine portent. He says too that they showed the way to the oracle and back again. (Transl. E. J. Chinnock).

In a serendipitous reversal of the frightening tales featuring in the *Canopus* and in the *Argonautica*, then, the semi-divine Macedonian king trod unharmed the land of the poisonous snakes, led by benign reptiles, autochthonous as well as the deadly ones (and possibly even more ancient than them): if this version of the tale must really be attributed to Ptolemy I (*FGrHist* 138 F 8),⁴² I find it very unlikely that Apollonius would not have any knowledge of it, and I am tempted to imagine that he would at least have alluded to it, if not fully treated it, in his *Foundation* poem, in order to show the superiority of Alexander to his precursors Heracles and Perseus. The rivalry between Alexander and his mythical forefathers is indeed another element emerging in the episode of the journey to Siwah, as told by Arrian: the motivation behind Alexander's call to the oracle of Ammon was the

⁴¹ See Tarn (1928) 219; probably Ptolemy narrated the story identifying Psois with Sarapis, after the cult of the Agathos Daimon had been established in Alexandria. Cf. Schwemer (1995) 191; Ogden (2013a) 297, 333.

⁴² Other versions are preserved, where the guides of Alexander are crows; see Ogden (2013a) 333.

desire to compete with his ancestors Heracles and Perseus, both sons of Zeus, who had consulted the oracle before him (*Anab.* 3.3.1–2):⁴³

ἐπὶ τούτοις δὲ πόθος λαμβάνει αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν παρ' Ἄμμωνα ἐς Λιβύην, τὸ μὲν τι τῷ θεῷ χρησόμενον, ὅτι ἀτρεκέες ἐλέγετο εἶναι τὸ μαντεῖον τοῦ Ἄμμωνος καὶ χρῆσασθαι αὐτῷ Περσέα καὶ Ἡρακλέα, τὸν μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν Γοργόνα ὅτε πρὸς Πολυδέκτου ἐστέλλετο, τὸν δὲ ὅτε παρ' Ἀνταῖον ἦει εἰς Λιβύην καὶ παρὰ Βούσιριν εἰς Αἴγυπτον. Ἀλεξάνδρῳ δὲ φιλοτιμία ἦν πρὸς Περσέα καὶ Ἡρακλέα, ἀπὸ γένους τε ὄντι τοῦ ἀμφοῖν καὶ τι καὶ αὐτὸς τῆς γενέσεως τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἐς Ἄμμωνα ἀνέφερε, καθάπερ οἱ μῦθοι τὴν Ἡρακλέους τε καὶ Περσέως ἐς Δία. καὶ οὖν παρ' Ἄμμωνα ταύτη τῇ γνώμῃ ἐστέλλετο, ὡς καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ ἀτρεκέστερον εἰσόμενος ἢ φήσων γε ἐγνωκέναι.

After these transactions, Alexander was seized by an ardent desire to visit Ammon in Libya, partly in order to consult the god, because the oracle of Ammon was said to be exact in its information, and Perseus and Heracles were said to have consulted it, the former when he was dispatched by Polydectes against the Gorgon, and the latter, when he visited Antaeus' in Libya and Busiris in Egypt. Alexander was also partly urged by a desire of emulating Perseus and Heracles, from both of whom he traced his descent. He also deduced his pedigree from Ammon, just as the legends traced that of Heracles and Perseus to Zeus. Accordingly he made the expedition to Ammon with the design of learning his own origin more certainly, or at least that he might be able to say that he had learned it. (Transl. E. J Chinnock).

As aptly underlined by Erskine (2013) 174, the narrative of Arrian on the actual foundation of Alexandria, relying on Ptolemy's account, discards all prodigious divine interventions and highlights Alexander's own responsibility and initiative in all the process, in tune with the political needs of his old general turned king. But this does not exclude that some light supernatural touches could be sprinkled also into Ptolemy's 'rational' account. The fact that the founder of Alexandria, descendant of the same hero who was unwillingly responsible for the birth of noxious snakes, Perseus, miraculously went unharmed through a place where mighty heroes before him had been conquered by such deadly beasts could certainly find a place in a mythical reinvention of the *κτίσις* of Alexandria.

⁴³ Cf. Str. 17.115; Plut. *de Alex. M. fort.* 332a; Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.43; Ov. *Met.* 4.670. See Patterson (2010) 84–5, 94.

The foundation of Alexandria itself is inextricably tied to a serpentine imagery, with a continuous antiphrastic interplay of lethal and benign reptiles, the ones chasing the others, or transfiguring into the others. Serpents, as chthonian deities, were perceived by Greeks until Late Antiquity (see e.g. Philostr. *Her.* 8) as strictly connected with the cult of heroes, including the cult of the hero-founder of a city which was the core of the local religious life: 'The founder cult was very closely integrated with the formation of the civic identity of new settlements. It provided a common "past" for the new city of which Alexander, as the founder, was to hold center place'.⁴⁴ Ptolemy I, even before being crowned king of Egypt, tried very hard to secure himself such a powerful symbol: to be recognised as a legitimate king and dynasty-founder, he needed to connect himself as closely as possible with the hero-founder Alexander.⁴⁵ Ptolemy basically hijacked the funeral carriage with the body of the Macedonian king, traveling from Babylon to Aegae, and, since Alexandria was still a workshop, he had it buried in Memphis, a city which was also the site of Nectanebo II, the last pharaoh of Egypt and the alleged father of Alexander in the *Alexander Romance*.⁴⁶ In the Beta *recensio* of the *Alexander Romance* 3.34.5, the resting place of Alexander is meant to be Memphis, but a local high priest intervenes ordering instead that the body must be laid to rest 'in the city he founded', that is Alexandria (this is also the meaning of the Egyptian toponym Rhakotis, 'place which is being built').⁴⁷ In a legend preserved by Aelian, the presence of the hero-founder would have granted the city eternal impregnability: according to a priest Aristandros, 'the gods had told him that the land which received his body, the former habitation of his soul, would enjoy the greatest good fortune and be unconquered through the ages (πανευδαίμων τε ἔσται καὶ ἀπόρθητος δι' αἰῶνος)'.⁴⁸ This is at the same time,

⁴⁴ Quotation from Lianou (2010) 126. On hero-cults and snakes see Ogden (2013a) 249–70.

⁴⁵ See Erskine (2002); Mori (2008), 24–25, 109; Erskine (2013). The cult of Alexander as founder was probably started by Ptolemy I once he had 'kidnapped' his body (Diod. 28.3.5), while according to Lianou (2010) 126 it started before, and was different from the official cult granted him by Ptolemy I. See sources in Visser (1938) 8; Cohen (2006) 378.

⁴⁶ Body in Memphis: Paus. 1.6.3; Curt. Ruf. 10.7.13–19; Ps.-Callisth. *Alex. Rom.* 3.34.158; *Parian Marble* under year 321–320, *FGrHist* 239. In the *Oracle of the Potter* the prophecy foresees that the *Agathos Daimon* will leave Rhakotis to go back to Memphis.

⁴⁷ See Dillery (2004). For an alternative reading see Ashton (2004), 17.

⁴⁸ Ael. *Var. Hist.* 12.64: Ἀρίστανδρος ὁ Τελμησεύς, θεόληπτος γενόμενος ἢ ἔκ τινος ἄλλης συντυχίας κατασχεθείς, ἦλθεν ἐς μέσους τοὺς Μακεδόνας καὶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἔφη πάντων τῶν ἐξ αἰῶνος βασιλέων εὐδαιμονέστατον Ἀλέξανδρον γεγονέναι, καὶ ζῶντα καὶ ἀποθανόντα. λέγειν γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι ἄρα ἡ ὑποδεξαμένη γῆ τὸ σῶμα, ἐν ᾧ τὸ πρότερον ἔκησεν ἢ

from a narratological point of view, a version of the universal folktale theme of the talisman protecting a city (cf. e.g. the story of the Lion of Metymna, possibly treated in the *Foundation of Lesbos* attributed to Apollonius)⁴⁹ and, from the anthropological point of view, a manifestation of the Greek and of the Egyptian belief in the powers of the *Genius Loci*.

The act itself of founding the city of Alexandria had a relevant connection with benevolent reptiles. The tale is preserved by the *Alexander Romance* 1.32.5–13,⁵⁰ whose core (including the following passage) has been recognised by Stoneman and others to originate in 3rd-century BC Alexandria (Ps.-Callisth. *Alex. Rom.* 1.32.5–13, *recensio a*, ed. Kroll 1926):⁵¹

ἤρξαντο δὲ οἰκοδομεῖν τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἀπὸ Μέσου πεδίου [...]. (6) τοῖς δὲ περὶ αὐτὴν τρεπομένοις δράκων συνήθως παραγενομένος ἐξεφόβει τοὺς ἐργαζομένους, καὶ ἐγκοπὴν ἐποιοῦντο τοῦ ἔργου διὰ τὴν τοῦ ζώου ἐπέλευσιν. μετεδόθη δὲ τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τοῦτο· ὁ δὲ ἐκέλευσε τῇ ἐρχομένῃ ἡμέρᾳ ὅπου ἂν καταληφθῆ χειρώσασθαι. (7) καὶ δὴ λαβόντες <τὴν> ἐπιτροπὴν παραγενομένου τοῦ θηρὸς κατὰ τῆς νῦν καλουμένης Στοᾶς τούτου περιεγένοντο καὶ ἀνεῖλον. ἐκέλευσε δὲ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐκεῖ αὐτῷ τέμενος γενέσθαι καὶ θάψας κατέθετο· καὶ πλησίον ἐκέλευσε στεφάνους στέφεσθαι εἰς μνήμην τοῦ ὀφθέντος ἀγαθοῦ δαίμονος. [...] (10) ἰδρυμένου δὲ τοῦ πυλῶνος τοῦ ἠρώου ἐξαίφνης πλάξ μεγίστη ἐξέπεσεν ἀρχαιοτάτη πλήρης γραμμάτων,⁵² ἐξεπήδησεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ πολλὴ ἴλη <ὄφρων> καὶ ἐρπύσαντες εἰσέδραμον εἰς τὰς οἰκίας τὰς ἤδη γενομένας δ'. ἔτι <δὲ> παρὼν (11) ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος καθίδρυσε Τύβι κε' <τὴν πόλιν> καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἠρώον. ὅθεν καὶ τούτους τοὺς ὄφεις ἐσεβάζοντο οἱ θυρωροὶ ὡς

ἐκείνου ψυχῆ, πανευδαίμων τε ἔσται καὶ ἀπόρθητος δι' αἰῶνος. The translation above is that of N. G. Wilson.

⁴⁹ See Barbantani, commentary on Apollonius *FGrHist* IV 12 F 10, *dubia*.

⁵⁰ See Visser (1938) 65. The episode of the *drakon* appears in *Codex A*, ed. by Kroll (1926), but not in all versions.

⁵¹ About the sources of the *Alexander Romance* see Welles (1962) 272–3; Fraser (1996) 215; Smith (2001) 279–80. According to some scholars the title of the work would be *Life of King Alexander the Founder (Ktistês)*. Jasnow (1997) suggests that a version of some Alexander stories (the Nectanebo episode, the foundation of Alexandria) circulated in a Demotic version as early as 275 BC; cf. Stephens (2003), 64–73 (68: 'The connection of Alexander with Nectanebo could only have been made during the formative stages of Macedonian-Greek rule in Egypt, when there was a desire -if not a need- to stress the continuity of the new rule and its integral connection with the past'); Fraser (1996) 203–26; on 3rd century BC core of the *Romance* see also Merkelbach (1954); Stoneman (1991), and (1994b). The first complete version of *recensio alpha* is dated 3rd century AD.

⁵² This phrase comes from *recensio beta*: see Bergson (1965).

ἀγαθούς δαίμονας εἰσιόντας εἰς τὰς οἰκίας. οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἰοβόλα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ δοκοῦντα εἶναι ἰοβόλα ἀπελαύνουσι. καὶ θυσία τελεῖται αὐτῷ τῷ ἥρωι <ὡς ὄφιογενεῖ>. στεφανοῦσι δὲ τὰ κτήνη, ἀνάπαυσιν αὐτοῖς παρεχόμενοι διὰ τὸ συνεργῆσαι (12) ἀχθοφοροῦντα εἰς τὴν καθίδρυσιν τῆς πόλεως. ἐκέλευσε δὲ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος τοῖς φύλαξι τῶν οἴκων σῖτον δοθῆναι οἱ δὲ λαβόντες ἀλήσαντες καὶ (13) ἀθηροποιησάμενοι τὴν † ἡμέραν τοῖς ἐνοικοῦσι † θάλλον διδόασιν. ὅθεν καὶ μέχρι τοῦ δεῦρο τοῦτον τὸν νόμον φυλάττουσι παρ' Ἀλεξανδρεῦσι, Τύβι κέ' τὰ μὲν κτήνη στεφανοῦσθαι, θυσιάζεσθαι δὲ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς δαίμοσι τοῖς προνοουμένοις τῶν οἰκιῶν καὶ διαδόσεις τῶν ἀθηρῶν ποιεῖσθαι.

They started to build Alexandria in the Middle plain [...]; while they were busy at that, a snake used to appear and scare away the workers, so they stopped working because of the arrival of the animal. The fact was reported to Alexander: and he ordered that they undertake work the day after where [the snake] had been found. As they followed the order, when the beast appeared in what now is called 'Stoa', they captured it and killed it. Alexander ordered to build a sacred precinct and to bury it there; and ordered that they hang crowns near it, in memory of the Agathos Daimon who appeared there [...] While the gate of the *heroön* was being set up, suddenly a huge and very ancient tablet of stone, completely inscribed, fell from it, and from under it sprang out a large number of snakes, which, crawling, took refuge in the four houses that were already there. Alexander was still present when he ordered to build the city and the *heroön*, on the twelfth-fifth day of the month of Tybi. Therefore even nowadays the door-keepers worship these snakes as good spirits (*agathoi daimones*) when they enter into their houses: in fact they are not poisonous, but they also keep away the ones which are thought to be poisonous. And there is a sacrifice for the hero as serpent-born. They place garlands on the working animals, offering them a rest day, because they helped them carrying weights for the construction of the city. Alexander ordered to give wheat to the guardians of the houses; and they, taking it and grinding it and making porridge for that day, give it to the inhabitants. For this reason the Alexandrians to this day keep this custom, of crowning the working animals on the 25th of Tybi, making sacrifices to the Agathoi Daimones protecting the houses, and making distributions of porridge.

The two episodes involving snakes are not present together in all the versions of the *Romance*, but they are both associated with the construction of the city centre of Alexandria, and imply the presence on the spot of

Alexander himself. The first wonder is the repeated appearance of a δράκων, a snake of enormous proportions, in the area of the Stoa, which then became, upon Alexander's command,⁵³ the location of his burial and of his *temenos*, as a manifestation of the Agathos Daimon. The second prodigy happens during the building of the *heroön*, identified by most scholars with the said tomb of the *Agathos Daimon*, at the crossing of the Street of the Soma and the Canopic street:⁵⁴ an ancient slate of stone⁵⁵ fell down from a gate and from under it numerous benign little snakes emerged and took refuge in the nearby houses, which had already been built. The date of the dedication of this *heroön* was to coincide with the birth of the city, and thus celebrated every year on the 25th of Tybi = 7th of April; since then, on this very occasion, the door-keepers used to honour with offerings of meals, some kind of porridge (*athera*)⁵⁶ these domestic little serpents, *agathoi daimones*,⁵⁷ not only explicitly defined as 'not poisonous', but also able to dispel the venomous ones (οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἰοβόλα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ δοκοῦντα εἶναι ἰοβόλα ἀπελαύνουσι). In the Armenian version of the *Romance*, an additional sentence informs us that, during the festival, a sacrifice is to be offered to 'the hero as serpent-born' (καὶ θυσία τελεῖται αὐτῷ τῷ ἥρωι <ὡς ὀφιογενεῖ>, *Alex. Rom.* 1.32.11.4 Kroll):⁵⁸ the most common interpretation of this passage is the identification of the serpent-born hero with the snake-like Agathos

⁵³ The elimination of a monster put Alexander somehow at the same level of his ancestor Heracles, who slew the serpent Ladon, that guarded the garden of the Hesperides (Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.1396–401), and other snake-like creatures before that; see Smith (2001) 280; Ogden (2013a) 33–9.

⁵⁴ On the location see Chugg (2004–5), esp. 80–2. Under Ptolemy IV the body of Alexander was probably moved to the common burial place of all the Ptolemies: see Str. 17.1.8 (*Soma* in the royal district, a walled enclosure) cf. Diod. 18.28, Herodian 4.8.9; Dio Cass. 76.13.2; Achill. Tat. *Leuc.* 5.1. The shrine of the *Agathos Daimon* was still seen in the 4th century AD by Ammianus Marcellinus (21.11.6–7).

⁵⁵ Πλάξ: on the nature of this architectonic element see Jouguet (1942) 166 n. 1.

⁵⁶ For the meals offered to the *Agathoi Daimones* in relation with the episode of the birds in the foundation of Alexandria see Le Roy (1981).

⁵⁷ For the domestic cult of *Agathos Daimon* and of serpents (cf. Ael. *H.A.* 17.5 and Plut. *Amat.* 755E–F) in Egypt see Nilsson (1950) 177, 206; Roussel (1915–6) 91; Ogden (2013a) 290, 303–5. For *Agathos Daimon* as a snake, see Ganschietz (1918) 48–51; Ogden (2013a) 297. Jouguet (1940) 194 reports the tradition of the fellahin of his time, honouring as 'the Habitant' the djinn of their foyer, often appearing as a serpent. For the folktale motive of snakes as house-spirits see Thompson (1955–8) F480.2.

⁵⁸ The *Romance* was translated into Armenian in the 5th century AD. For the Armenian version see Wolohojian (1969) and Simonyan (1989). Kroll's use of the Armenian version is debated: see Traina (1998) 311–22 and Simonyan (1998).

Daimon,⁵⁹ whose *heroön* had just been built in Alexandria and who also had an *heroön* in Thebes (*Suda* α122 Adler, *s.v.* Ἀγαθοῦ Δαίμονος). The Agathos Daimon is one of the manifestations of the Egyptian god Shaï, who is also mentioned in the Hellenistic *Oracle of the Potter* as a protector of Alexandria (when he will leave the city for Memphis, Alexandria will be destroyed).⁶⁰ As we have seen above, describing Alexander's trip to Siwah, another Egyptian manifestation of the 'Good luck genius' was the serpent Psois/Psai, coupled with Thermuthis;⁶¹ the city of Ptolemais in Egyptian was indeed denominated 'Psois',⁶² from the name of its protector spirit, the local *agathos daimon*. The snake became an *hypostasis* of the Aion Plutonium, later identified with Sarapis,⁶³ the divine entity that resided in the place chosen by the oracle of Ammon, at the request of Alexander, as a site for the city which was to bear his name (Ps.-Callisth. *Alex. Rom.* 1.30.5). Other scholars,⁶⁴ however, recognise in the hero ὄφιογενής of the Armenian version of the *Romance* Alexander himself, allegedly conceived thanks to a miraculous snake, one of the forms in which the god Ammon used to manifest himself; in the *Alexander Romance* it is the shape-shifter Nectanebo who chooses to morph into a reptilian shape to have intercourse with Olympias.⁶⁵ The conception by Ammon was most probably already used by Alexander himself (Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.1–2: καὶ αὐτὸς τῆς γενέσεως τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἐς Ἄμμωνα ἀνέφερε, καθάπερ οἱ μῦθοι τὴν Ἡρακλέους τε καὶ Περσέως ἐς Δία) as a political tool to step, in the smoothest possible way, into the place of the Egyptian pharaohs.⁶⁶ Scholars who identify the 'serpent-born hero' with Alexander also consider the *heroön* of the Ps.-Callisthenes' passage one and

⁵⁹ Tarn (1928) 214–5.

⁶⁰ See Ogden (2013a) 290.

⁶¹ The snake *agathodaimones* were also called *Thermutheis*: see Tarn (1928) 218–9.

⁶² On Ptolemais' *agathos daimon* see Visser (1938) 5–7, 66; Tarn (1928) 215; Nilsson (1950) 204–6; Stoneman (2007) 532–3 and (2008) 56–7.

⁶³ Arr. *Alex. Rom.* 33,12; Pettazzoni (1954) 174; Welles (1962) 283–94.

⁶⁴ See Ausfeld (1900) 355; Taylor (1927) 163 and (1930) 376–7; Jouguet (1940) 196 and (1942) 167–8; Visser (1938) 7–8; most recently, Ogden (2013a) 296. On the cult of the *oikistês* as hero see Antonaccio (1999).

⁶⁵ Ps.-Callisth. *Alex. Rom.* 1.4 and 6 and 10. Olympias was already mastering snakes related to local cults; she is seen by Philip in bed with a snake in Plut. *Alex.* 2.3–6. For the iconography of Olympias and the snake see Ross (1985) ch. 20.

⁶⁶ See Stoneman (2008) 6–8; Fraser (1996) 211–2. On the Ammon-related version of the tale of the Foundation of Alexandria see Erskine (2013) 176–8. Cf. Bernand (1969) no. 71 = Peek, *GVI* 1935, ll. 27–8, Alexandria, 1st/2nd c. AD: οὐδ' αὖ Μακεδὼν ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος, | ὃν τίκτεν Ἄμμων θέμενος εἰς ὄφιν μορφήν;

the same with Alexander's tomb, the *Sema*.⁶⁷ Even though the early identification of Alexander with the Agathos Daimon has been convincingly disputed by Tarn (1928) 213, at some point both the hero founder and the *genius loci* may well have been perceived as protectors of the city and tended to merge into one divinity. The idea that at a very early stage the public image of the city founder was indissolubly entangled with the snake has been reinforced by E. Schwarzenberg,⁶⁸ who pointed out the presence of a small serpent crawling over a tree near Alexander's left leg in a statuette of the type 'Alexander *Ktistes/Aigiochos*',⁶⁹ going back to Lysippus, the official sculptor of the Macedonian king; it is not clear if this was a miniature version (possibly for private, cultic use) of a full scale statue prominent in Alexandria: a statue of Alexander *ktistes*, but very different from the small-scale models of the *Aigiochos* type, is described by a late testimony.⁷⁰

Like any other relevant ethnic group in Alexandria, the Jews at a certain point felt the need to elaborate their own traditions within the pre-existing Greek-Egyptian symbolism associated with Alexander hero-founder.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, the conflict between the toxic and the good snakes resurfaces also in this case. A curious episode is preserved in an account of the life and death of the prophet Jeremiah, included in Ps.-Epiphanius' *De prophetarum vita et obitu*, a composite work of Egyptian origin, whose core is first known from 6th-century manuscripts, but combining many earlier and diverse Christian and Jewish traditions (5–6 Schwemer (1995) 159–60):⁷²

⁶⁷ On the possible identification of the temple of the *Agathos Daimon* with the tomb of Alexander see discussion in Taylor (1927) and (1930); Jouguet (1940) 195 and (1942), following Ganschietz (1918); Stoneman (2007) 533; Ogden (2013a) 289. The *temenos* with the altar of the Agathos Daimon was located near the Tetrastylon, at the crossing of the Street of the Soma and the Street of Canopus: according to the depiction of the altar from Roman coins, the architecture was in the Greek and not in the Egyptian style: see Handler (1971) 69.

⁶⁸ Schwarzenberg (1976) 233–5. The Alexander *Aigiochos* holds the Palladium, another symbol of impregnability.

⁶⁹ Schwarzenberg (1976); *contra*, Stewart (1993) 246–7, 250. The statuette studied by Schwarzenberg is at the Louvre; another version, from the Museo Biblico y Oriental in Léon, has been added by Ogden (2013a) 287–8.

⁷⁰ Equestrian statue of Alexander *Ktistes*: ps.-Liban. *Progymn.* 27, 533–55 Foerster; cf. Stewart (1993) 397–9.

⁷¹ Cf. Erskine (2013) 179; Schwemer (1995) 180–90.

⁷² On the Jewish background and sources of the *Vitae*, see Schwemer (1995) 9–12, 58–65; esp. on the *Life of Jeremiah*, see Schwemer (1995) 65, 177–8, 180–3, 187, 191–3, 236–7. According to this author, while most of the *Vitae* could be considered as originating in the Palestinian region, only the *Life of Jeremiah* has distinctive elements (Hellenistic, Jewish and autochthonous Egyptian) and linguistic clues that suggest an Egyptian origin: cf.

ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠκούσαμεν ἐκ τῶν παίδων Ἀντιγόνου καὶ Πτολεμαίου γερόντων τινῶν, ὅτι Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδὼν ἐπιστὰς τῷ τόπῳ [sc. τῷ τάφῳ] τοῦ προφήτου, καὶ ἐπιγνοὺς αὐτοῦ μυστήρια εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν μετέστησεν αὐτοῦ τὰ λείψανα, περιθεὶς αὐτὰ ἐνδόξως κύκλῳ· καὶ ἐκωλύθη ἐκ τῆς γῆς τὸ γένος τῶν ἀσπίδων, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὡσαύτως τοὺς κροκοδίλους,⁷³ καὶ οὕτως ἐνέβαλεν τοὺς ὄφεις τοὺς λεγομένους ἀργόλας, ὃ ἐστὶν ὀφιομάχους, οὓς ἤνεγκεν ἐκ τοῦ Ἄργους τῆς Πελοποννήσου, ὅθεν καὶ ἀργόλαι καλοῦνται, τουτ' ἐστὶν Ἄργους δεξιοί. λαιὰν γὰρ λέγουσιν πᾶν εὐώνυμον.⁷⁴

Schwemer (1995) 65, 177. On the different *recensiones* of the *Vitae Prophetarum* see Schwemer (1995), esp. 12–18. On the episode see also Tarn (1928) 215; Pfister (1976) 953–9; Stoneman (1994a) and (2008) 58–9; Ogden (2013a) 293–5.

⁷³ The text as presented by Schwemer takes into account different *recensiones*: see Schwemer (1995) 173. Cf. Ps.-Eriphan. *Vit. Proph.* 9–10 (A, *recensio* prior = Ep1 Schwemer): Ἱερεμίας ὁ προφήτης ἦν ἐξ Ἀναθῶθ καὶ ἐν Τάφναις Αἰγύπτου λιθοβοληθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ἐτελεύτησε. κείμενος δὲ ἐν τόπῳ τῆς οἰκίσεως Φαραῶ, ὅτι οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ἐδόξασαν αὐτὸν εὐεργετηθέντες ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. ἀσπίδες γὰρ καὶ τῶν ὑδάτων οἱ θῆρες, οὓς καλοῦσιν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι Νεφῶθ, Ἕλληνες δὲ κροκοδίλους, οἳ ἦσαν αὐτοὺς θανατοῦντες· καὶ εὐξαμένου τοῦ προφήτου Ἱερεμίου ἐκωλύθη ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης ὁ θυμὸς τῶν ἀσπίδων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὡσαύτως (10) τὸ ἔνεδρον τῶν θηρίων. καὶ ὅσοι εἰσὶ πιστοὶ ἕως σήμερον εὐχονται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ἐκείνῳ, καὶ λαμβάνοντες τοῦ χοῦ δῆγμα ἀσπίδων θεραπεύουσιν καὶ αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ θηρία τοῦ ὕδατος φυγαδεύουσιν; and Ps.-Eriphan. *Vit. Proph.* 61–2 (C, *recensio* altera = Ep2 Schwemer) Schermann: Ἱερεμίας ἦν ἐξ Ἀναθῶθ καὶ ἐν Τάφναις τῆς Αἰγύπτου λίθοις βληθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ἀποθνήσκει. κείμενος δὲ πλησίον τῆς οἰκίας Φαραῶ, ὅτι οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ἐδόξασαν αὐτὸν εὐεργετηθέντες δι' αὐτοῦ· ἠῤῥατο γὰρ, καὶ αἱ ἀσπίδες αὐτοὺς ἔασαν καὶ τῶν ὑδάτων οἱ θῆρες, οὓς καλοῦσιν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι μὲν Ἐφῶθ, Ἕλληνες δὲ κροκοδείλους, οἳ ἦσαν αὐτοὺς θανατοῦντες, καὶ εὐξαμένου τοῦ προφήτου ἐκωλύθησαν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης τὸ γένος τῶν ἀσπίδων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὡσαύτως τὸ ἔνεδρον τῶν θηρίων. καὶ ὅσοι εἰσὶ πιστοὶ θεοῦ, ἕως τοῦ νῦν εὐχονται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ὅπου κείμενος, καὶ λαμβάνοντες τοῦ χοῦ τοῦ τόπου δῆγματα ἀσπίδων θεραπεύουσιν, καὶ τὰ θηρία τοῦ ὕδατος φυγαδεύουσιν. ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠκούσαμεν ἐκ τῶν παίδων Ἀντιγόνου καὶ Πτολεμαίου γερόντων τινῶν, ὅτι Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδὼν ἐπιστὰς τῷ τάφῳ τοῦ προφήτου, καὶ ἐπιγνοὺς τὰ εἰς αὐτὸν μυστήρια εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν μετέστησεν αὐτοῦ τὰ λείψανα, περιστείλας αὐτὰ ἐνδόξως· καὶ ἐκωλύθη ἐκ τῆς γῆς τὸ γένος τῶν ἀσπίδων, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὡσαύτως τὰ θηρία. For a detailed commentary to the text see Schwemer (1995) 159–237 and (1997) 570–6.

⁷⁴ On the section of the *Vita* mentioning the *argolai* see Schwemer (1995) 190–3. Cf. Dorotheos. *Chronicon Paschale* 293–4 Dindorf (1832): Ἱερεμίας ἦν ἐξ Ἀναθῶθ, καὶ ἐν Τάφναις Αἰγύπτου λίθοις βληθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ἀποθνήσκει. κείμενος δὲ ἐν τόπῳ τῆς οἰκίσεως Φαραῶ, ὅτι Αἰγύπτιοι ἐδόξασαν αὐτὸν εὐεργετηθέντες δι' αὐτοῦ· ἠῤῥατο γὰρ αὐτοῖς. τῶν γὰρ ὑδάτων οἱ θῆρες, οὓς καλοῦσιν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι μενεφῶθ, Ἕλληνες δὲ κροκοδείλους, καὶ ὅσοι εἰσὶ πιστοὶ θεοῦ ἕως σήμερον εὐχονται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ἐκείνῳ, καὶ λαμβάνοντες τοῦ χοῦ τοῦ τόπου δῆγματα ἀνθρώπων θεραπεύουσι, καὶ πολλοὶ αὐτὰ τὰ θηρία τὰ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι φυγαδεύουσιν. ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠκούσαμεν ἐκ τῶν παίδων Ἀντιγόνου καὶ Πτολεμαίου, γερόντων ἀνδρῶν, ὅτι Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ τῶν Μακεδόνων, ἐπιστὰς τῷ τάφῳ τοῦ προφήτου καὶ ἐπιγνοὺς τὰ εἰς αὐτὸν μυστήρια, εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν μετέστησεν αὐτοῦ τὰ λείψανα, περιθεὶς αὐτὰ ἐνδόξως κύκλῳ,

We heard from the some old servant of Antigonus and Ptolemy, that Alexander the Macedonian, after visiting the grave of the prophet and learning about his mysteries, had his remains moved to Alexandria, scattered them in circle with honours; and the race of the asps was kept away from the land, and likewise the crocodiles from the river, and thus he introduced the serpents called Argolas, that is snake-fighters, which he imported from Argos in the Peloponnese; therefore they are called Argolai, ‘right-hand (creatures) from Argos’; ‘*laian*’ [= ‘sinister’] is said of everything of good omen.

We are told that Alexander, once he found the tomb of Jeremiah and came to know the powers of this prophet in life and death (averting the asps and other deadly creatures, healing bites), transferred his remains from Daphnae to Alexandria, scattered them carefully in a circle,⁷⁵ so that all the dangerous snakes would be warded off from the boundaries of the city. The last section of the tale, appearing with variants in other texts like the *Chronicon Paschale* and the *Suda*, adds an interesting detail: Alexander threw into the perimeter circumscribing the city, and already protected from external evil by Jeremiah’s *reliquiae*, special snakes he had brought from Argos, the ἀργόλαι (simply ‘Argive’, cf. Aristoph. F 298 Edmonds; Eur. *Rh.* 41: στρατὸς Ἀργόλας), falsely etymologised as Ἄργους δεξιοί ‘right hand side, fortunate, good-omened <creatures> of Argos’, from the apotropaic (mis)interpretation of the ending of the adjective from λαιός (‘left’ = sinister).⁷⁶ These Greek snakes, another embodiment of the local *agathoi daimones* we have encountered in the

καὶ ἐκωλύθη ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης τὸ γένος τῶν ἀσπίδων, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὡσαύτως, καὶ οὕτως ἐνέβαλεν τῶν ἀσπίδων, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὡσαύτως, καὶ οὕτως ἐνέβαλεν τοὺς ὄφεις τοὺς λεγομένους ἀργολάους, ὃ ἐστὶν ὄφιομάχους, οὓς ἤνεγκεν ἐκ τοῦ Ἄργους τοῦ Πελοποννησιακοῦ, ὅθεν καὶ ἀργόλαι. (294) καλοῦνται, τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν Ἄργους δεξιοί. λαλιὰν δὲ ἔχουσιν ἠδυτάτην καὶ πανευώνυμον.

⁷⁵ On this gesture, read as a double of the foundation legend of Alexandria preserved in Plut. *Alex.* 26.4 and Ps.-Callisth. *Al. Rom.* 1.32.4–13, see Schwemer (1995) 186–7 (esp. on the Jewish context of the story: ‘Mit dieser Legende wollten die alexandrinische Juden in späthellenistischer Zeit zugleich ihre Eigenständigkeit gegenüber Jerusalem betonen’); Schwemer (1997) 575–6; Ogden (2013a) 294–6 (also suggesting a possible influence of the mythical traditions about the Libyan Psylli, snake-born and able to dispel snakes, on the characters of Alexander and Jeremiah).

⁷⁶ The term could simply be a corruption from ἀργῆς (Dor. ἀργᾶς), a type of serpent (see LSJ s.v.: Achaeus, F 1 Snell, Trag. Adesp. 199, Hipp. *Epid.* 5.86; Hesychius, α7013: ἀργᾶς· ὄφεις), or conceal an original Hebrew term indicating the ichneumon or mongoose, a rodent enemy of snakes; on the latter hypothesis, see Schwemer (1995) 191–2 (ὄφιομάχοι too would be a gloss on an originally Hebrew text).

Alexanderroman, were capable of fending off other serpents (ὄφιομάχοι), and thus keep his city free from every poisonous reptile—the ones which, from time immemorial, according to the legends related about Perseus, the Argonauts, Menelaus and Helen, were dwelling in the desert surrounding the site of Alexandria. In the synthetic and rather confused entry of the *Suda* (α3781 Adler, s.v. Ἀργόλαι), we find the opposite pseudo-etymology of the name:

εἶδος ὄφρων, οὓς ἤνεγκε Μακεδὼν Ἀλέξανδρος ἐκ τοῦ Ἄργους τοῦ Πελασγικοῦ εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν καὶ ἐνέβαλεν εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν πρὸς ἀναίρεισιν τῶν ἀσπίδων, ὅτε μετέθηκε τὰ ὀστᾶ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου ἐξ Αἰγύπτου εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν: οὓς ὁ αὐτὸς προφήτης ἀπέκτεινεν. ἀργόλαι οὖν ἐκ τοῦ Ἄργους λαιοί.

A type of snakes, which the Macedonian Alexander brought from Pelasgian Argos to Alexandria and threw into the river for the destruction of the cobras, when he moved the bones of the prophet Jeremiah from Egypt to Alexandria; the prophet himself killed them. So 'argolai' [means] 'ill-omened [lαιοί] out of Argos'. (Transl. J. Benedict)

In a twist of Fate which seems designed to make amends for the birth of dangerous snakes in Libya caused by his ancestor Perseus, Alexander introduced to Egypt the benevolent ἀργόλαι from Peloponnesian Argos, precisely the birthplace of Perseus, and therefore also presumed homeland of his (and Ptolemy's) family, the Argead:⁷⁷ another connection is then created between a Greek-Macedonian royal myth and local traditions related to the protection from evil reptiles. The peculiar phrase ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠκούσαμεν ἐκ τῶν παίδων Ἀντιγόνου καὶ Πτολεμαίου, γερόντων τινῶν⁷⁸ ('we heard from the old servants of Antigonus and Ptolemy' i.e., most probably, Antigonus Monophthalmos and Ptolemy I Soter) which, in some versions of the *Vita Jeremiae*, introduces the story of Alexander relocating the relics of the prophet in Alexandria, is the only first-person statement in all the *Vitae Prophetarum*. It pushes back the tale to an almost legendary past, from the point of view of the Jewish and Christian writers, attributing credibility to

⁷⁷ For the relations between the Argead and the Ptolemies, see Lianou (2010); Schwemer (1995) 193; Ogden (2013a) 295. Among the cities celebrated by Apollonius in the *Khiseis*, and gravitating in the sphere of influence of the Ptolemies, Caunos also claimed an Argive kinship, attested by the myth of Lycus.

⁷⁸ On the scholarly debate this phrase see Schwemer (1995) 181–3 (some suspect this passage to have a Christian literary origin) and (1997) 574.

the episode through an oral source ultimately deriving from the court (the ‘servants’, maybe the courtiers of the Diadochi) only one generation, or less, after the death of the Macedonian king. Of course this remark could be nothing but a fictitious claim; however, it may point to an actual Ptolemaic origin of the anecdote, as suspected e.g. by Ogden (2013a) 295, or, more specifically, if the entire tale of Jeremiah comes from the Jewish Alexandrian Diaspora, in the environment of the cultivated, Hellenised Jewish dignitaries close to the Ptolemaic court.⁷⁹

In one way or another, then, as a sort of homeopathic principle,⁸⁰ the snake-born or snake-associated Founder obliterates the evil powers of pre-existing reptiles. It is worth recalling here that the identification between the function of Founder and that of Deliverer from evil snakes is attributed also to the Thessalian Phorbas, the colonizer of Rhodes (Ophioussa, ‘Snake-Land’), one of the cities to which Apollonius devoted a *κτίσις*.⁸¹ While the snakes issued from the decapitated Gorgon had lethal powers, good snakes, in the Greek tradition often connected with the incubation practices of the *Asklepieia*, had curative abilities. In fact, even before he became the *genius loci* of Alexandria, a legend attributes to Alexander thaumaturgic powers granted him by a ‘good snake’: Cicero, *De div.* 2.66.135, followed by Curtius Rufus 9.8.22–27 (cf. Diod. 17.103; Str. 15.2.7, 723) reports an episode possibly originating from Clitarchus,⁸² according to which, when his close friend

⁷⁹ As hypothesised by Schwemer (1995) 183. For the early origins of the Jewish community of Alexandria, under Ptolemy I, see Gambetti (2007); for the relationship between the Alexandrian court and the Jewish see Capponi (2011) and (2014).

⁸⁰ Using the definition of Schwemer (1995) 190.

⁸¹ Diod. 5.58.4; cf. Ps-Hygin. *Astr.* 2.14.

⁸² Cf. Ogden (2013a) 333, 346. Cic. *div.* 2.66.135: *qui* [scil. Alexander], *cum Ptolomaeus, familiari eius, in proelio telo venenato ictus esset eoque vulnere summo cum dolore moreretur, Alexander adsidens somno est consopitus. tum secundum quietem visus ei dicitur draco is, quem mater Olympias alebat, radiculam ore ferre et simul dicere, quo illa loci nasceretur (neque is longe aberat ab eo loco); eius autem esse vim tantam ut Ptolomaeum facile sanaret. cum Alexander experrectus narrasset amicis somnium, emissi sunt qui illam radiculam quaerent; qua inventa et Ptolomaeus sanatus dicitur et multi milites, qui erant eodem genere teli vulnerati. Curt. 9.8.22–7: praecipue Ptolomaeus, laevo humero leviter quidem saucius, sed maiore periculo quam vulnere adfectus, regis sollicitudinem in se converterat. sanguine coniunctus erat, et quidam Philippo genitum esse credebant: certe pelice eius ortum constabat. idem corporis custos promptissimusque bellator et pacis artibus quam militiae maior et clarior, modico civilique cultu, liberalis inprimis adituque facili nihil ex fastu regiae adsumpserat. ob haec, regi an popularibus carior esset, dubitari poterat. tum certe primum expertus suorum animos, adeo ut fortunam, in quam postea ascendit, in illo periculo Macedones ominati esse videantur: quippe non levior illis Ptolomaei fuit cura, quam regi. qui et proelio et sollicitudine fatigatus cum Ptolomaeo adsideret, lectum, in quo ipse adquiesceret, iussit inferri. In quem ut se recepit, protinus altior insecutus est somnus. ex quo excitatus, per quietem vidisse se exponit speciem draconis oblatam herbam ferentis ore, quam veneni remedium esse monstrasset; colorem quoque herbae referebat agniturum, si quis repperisset, adfirmans. inventam*

Ptolemy was wounded by a poisonous arrow during the siege of the Indian town of Harmatelia, Alexander kept watch and slept at his side, until he dreamt of a serpent (in Cicero it is the one kept by his mother Olympias) carrying a herb in his mouth, which was the antidote against the poison: so Alexander was able to cure and save his friend. In the account of Diodorus (Diod. 17.103.4–6), the poison of the Brahmins' arrows derives specifically from the decomposing bodies of local snakes, and the effect of the intoxication are painstakingly described:

ὁ γὰρ τῶν βαρβάρων σίδηρος κεχρισμένος ἦν φαρμάκου θανασίμου δυνάμει, ἧ πεποιθότες κατέβησαν εἰς τὴν διὰ τῆς μάχης κρίσιν. κατεσκεύαστο δὲ ἡ τοῦ φαρμάκου δύναμις ἔκ τινων ὄψεων θηρευομένων καὶ τούτων εἰς τὸν ἥλιον νεκρῶν τιθεμένων. τῆς δ' ἔκ τοῦ καύματος θερμασίας τηκούσης τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς φύσιν ἰδρῶτας ἐκπίπτειν συνέβαινε καὶ διὰ τῆς νοτίδος συνεκκρίνεσθαι τὸν τῶν θηρίων ἴον. διὸ καὶ τοῦ τραθέντος εὐθύς ἐνάρκα τὸ σῶμα καὶ μετ' ὀλίγον ὀξεῖλαι συνηκολούθουν ὀδύνη καὶ σπασμὸς καὶ τρόμος τὸν ὅλον ὄγκον κατείχεν, ὃ τε χρῶς ψυχρὸς καὶ πελιδνὸς ἐγένετο καὶ διὰ τῶν ἐμέτων ἐξέπιπτεν χολή, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἀπὸ τοῦ τραύματος μέλας ἀφρὸς ἀπέρρει καὶ σηπεδὼν ἐγεννᾶτο. αὕτη δὲ νεμομένη ταχέως ἐπέτρεχε τοῖς καιρίοις τόποις τοῦ σώματος καὶ δεινοὺς θανάτους ἀπειργάζετο. διὸ συνέβαινε τὰ ἴσα τοῖς μεγάλα τραύματ' εἰληφόσι καὶ τοῖς μικρὰν καὶ τὴν τυχοῦσαν ἀμυχήν ἀναδεξαμένοις.

deinde—quippe a multis simul erat requisita—vulneri inposuit; protinusque dolore finito intra breve spatium cicatrix quoque obducta est. Diod. 17.103.6–8: τοιαύτη δ' ἀπωλεία τῶν τραθέντων ἀπολλυμένων ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐχ οὕτως ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐλυπήθη, ἐπὶ δὲ Πτολεμαίῳ τῷ ὕστερον μὲν βασιλεύσαντι, τότε δὲ ἀγαπωμένῳ μεγάλως ἠχθέσθη. ἴδιον γὰρ τι καὶ παράδοξον συνέβη γενέσθαι περὶ τὸν Πτολεμαῖον, ὃ τινες εἰς θεῶν πρόνοιαν ἀνέπεμπον. ἀγαπώμενος γὰρ ὑφ' ἀπάντων διὰ τε τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ ὑπερβολὴν τῆς εἰς πάντας εὐεργεσίας, οἰκείας τοῦ φιλανθρώπου βοηθείας ἔτυχεν. ὁ γὰρ βασιλεὺς ἶδεν ὄψιν κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον, καθ' ἣν ἔδοξεν ὄραν δράκοντα βοτάνην ἐν τῷ στόματι κρατεῖν καὶ δεῖξαι ταύτης τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ φύεται. ἐγερθεὶς οὖν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ τὴν βοτάνην ἀναζητήσας καὶ τρίψας τό τε σῶμα τοῦ Πτολεμαίου κατέπλασε καὶ πιεῖν δούς ὑγιῆ κατέστησε. γνωσθείσης δὲ τῆς εὐχρηστίας καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ τυχόντες τῆς ὁμοίας θεραπείας διεσώθησαν. Str. 15.2.7, 723: ἦν δὲ κίνδυνος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ὄψεων. ἐν γὰρ τοῖς θισὶν ἐπεφύκει βοτάνη, ταύτη δ' ὑποδεδυκότες ἐλάνθανον τοὺς δὲ πληγέντας ἀπέκτεινον. ἐν δὲ τοῖς Ὠρίταις τὰ τοξεύματα χρίεσθαι θανασίμοις φαρμάκοις ἔφασαν, ξύλινα ὄντα καὶ πεπυρακτωμένα. τραθέντα δὲ Πτολεμαῖον κινδυνεύειν. ἐν ὕπνῳ δὲ παραστάντα τινὰ τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ δεῖξαι ρίζαν αὐτόπρεμνον, ἣν κελεῦσαι τρίβοντα ἐπιτιθέναι τῷ τραθέντι. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὕπνου γενόμενον, μεμνημένον τῆς ὄψεως εὐρεῖν ζητοῦντα τὴν ρίζαν πολλὴν πεφυκυῖαν καὶ χρήσασθαι καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους. ἰδόντας δὲ τοὺς βαρβάρους εὐρημένον τὸ ἀλέξημα ὑπηκόους γενέσθαι τῷ βασιλεῖ. εἰκὸς δὲ τινα μνηῦσαι τῶν εἰδότην, τὸ δὲ μυθῶδες προσετέθη κολακείας χάριν.

The Brahmins had smeared their weapons with a drug of mortal effect; that was their source of confidence when they joined the issue of battle. The power of the drug was derived from certain snakes which were caught and killed and left in the sun. The heat melted the substance of the flesh and drops of moisture formed; in this moisture the poison of the animals was secreted. When a man was wounded, the body became numb immediately and then sharp pains followed, and convulsions and shivering shook the whole frame. The skin became cold and livid and bile appeared in the vomit, while a black froth was exuded from the wound and gangrene set in. As this spread quickly and overran to the vital parts of the body, it brought a horrible death to the victim. The same result occurred to those who had received large wounds and to those whose wounds were small, or even a mere scratch. (C. Bradford Welles, tr.)

While the description of Mopsus' quick death in the *Argonautica* is depicted without lingering too much on gruesome particulars,⁸³ the effects here described recall somehow the wounds not of Canopus cicatrised (see above, n. 30) and the extravagant horror feast of Lucanus (see above, n. 28). In a remote town in India, Ptolemy, contaminated by snake venom, had indeed run the risk of ending like the victims of the children of Medusa among the sands of North Africa. Whether there was some truth in the detail of the dream of Alexander or it was a posthumous forgery (rightly Str. 15.2.7, 723 suggests that the omen of the serpent was invented *κολακείας χάριν*), Ptolemy himself, once he became king of Egypt, had an interest in enhancing the reptilian symbolism related to the cult of Alexander and in underlining the association between the Founder of the city and its liberation from any evil influence: a clever political move which also had some echoes in his personal history. His son Ptolemy II, whose direct experience of deadly serpents was probably limited to the court zoo,⁸⁴ but whose political flair and literary curiosity matched those of his father, probably could not even imagine a snake-free *Ἀλεξανδρείας Κτίσις*.

⁸³ Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.1524–31: *σχέτλιος· ἦ τέ οἱ ἤδη ὑπὸ χροῖ δύετο κῶμα | λυσιμελές, πολλή δὲ κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν χέετ' ἀχλύς. | αὐτίκα δὲ κλίνας δαπέδῳ βεβαρηότα γυῖα | ψύχετ' ἀμηχανίη· ἔταροι δέ μιν ἀμφαγέροντο | ἥρωσ τ' Αἰσονίδης, ἀδινῆ περιθαμβέες ἄτη. | οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ' ἐπὶ τυτθὸν ἀποφθίμενός περ ἔμελλε | κείσθαι ὑπ' ἡελίῳ· πύθεσκε γὰρ ἔνδοθι σάρκας | ἰὸς ἄφαρ, μυδώσα δ' ἀπὸ χροὸς ἔρρεε λάχνη.*

⁸⁴ See Schwemer (1995) 193.

Conclusion

This series of traditions which interweave episodes of the life of the hero-founder Alexander with the destiny of his city, and which consistently involve ophidic avatars of the local divinity (or of the king himself), suggest that some of these legends may go back to the early Hellenistic period: Ptolemy Soter is the only source to preserve the story of the two good serpents leading Alexander to Siwah; the successor of Apollonius as chief librarian and royal tutor, Eratosthenes, acknowledged the reptilian origin of Alexander, presented as the conviction (put to political use) of his mother Olympias (*FGrHist* 241 F 28 = *Plut. Alex.* 3);⁸⁵ the section of the *Alexanderroman* including the episode of the *drakon* and of the *agathoi daimones* is considered one of the most ancient cores of the *Romance*.

The fragment of Apollonius mentioning poisonous snakes infesting the Libyan desert in a mythical, pre-historical era, could have been contrasted, in the rest of the poem, with some historical, recent manifestation of positive forces in the same region thanks to the advent of the young Macedonian king.⁸⁶ Fraser (1996) 214 went as far as suggesting that the lost *Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσεις* could be one of the sources for the *Alexander Romance, recensio Alpha*.⁸⁷ It is a fascinating thought, although I would not venture to consider Apollonius' poem a *direct* source of this narrative. In the *Romance* sometimes the Macedonian background of Alexander is eclipsed in favor of his blending with the local habits and the protection of the local gods;⁸⁸ in Apollonius' *Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσεις*, although references and allusions to Egyptian myths could be present, one can rather imagine a tendency to stress the Hellenic mythical origins of facts and places, as Apollonius usually does about non-Greek locations both in the *Argonautica* and in other fragments of the *κτίσεις*: incorporating the autochthonous traditions into the

⁸⁵ See Geus (2002) 93–4: Eratosthenes disapproved the historians of Alexander who introduced in their chronicles supernatural elements in order to flatter the king; his remark on the snake legend, therefore, must have been placed in a critical context.

⁸⁶ Cf. Schmid (1947) 66–9.

⁸⁷ That this late antiquity (3rd c. AD) novelistic reinvention of the life of Alexander could have had an early Hellenistic source had been already suspected by Ausfeld (1900), Berg (1973) 387 and Pfister (1976), while others, like Merkelbach (1954) and Kroll (1926), prefer to date the entire creation to Roman times.

⁸⁸ See, esp. for the story of the shape-shifter Nectanebo and the tale of the foundation of the city, Berg (1973) 384.

Greek ones, the *poeta doctus* provides an Hellenic-oriented syncretism of imagery and symbols that could be highly appreciated both by the Greek and the Hellenised Egyptian *philoi* of Ptolemy II.

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Appendix

Another Testimony for the *Foundation of Alexandria*?

A *scholion* to Apollonius' *Argonautica* complements the one to the *Theriaka* we have discussed above. I report here the text as it appears in the Wendel edition, adding more information in the critical apparatus:

Schol. Ap. Rhod. Arg. 4.1515a, p. 321 Wendel: [...] ἄλλοι δέ φασι τὸν Περσέα κατατομήσαντα τὴν Γοργόνα ὑπὲρ τῆς Λιβύης πετασθῆναι, ἐκ δὲ τῶν κατενεχθέντων σταγόνων τοῦ αἵματος γενέσθαι θηρία πολλὰ καὶ δεινὰ· διὸ καὶ τὴν Λιβύην πολύθηρον εἶπε. τὸ αὐτὸ φησι καὶ <Λυκόφρων> ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρᾳ.

<Λυκόφρων> *suppl.* H. Keil, *Scholia vetera e cod. Laurentiano*, in R. Merkel, ed., *Apollonii Rhodii Argonautica* (Leipzig, 1854), pp. 299–562 : ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρᾳ L : ὡς φησι καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος P (cf. Polyhistor, *FGrHist* 273 F 142) : ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρ<εί>α H. Fraenkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika of Apollonius* (Munich 1968), p. 606.

[...] Other say that Perseus, once he had the Gorgon decapitated, flew over Libya, and from the fallen drops of blood many and dreadful wild animals were born. Therefore he [*scil.* Apollonius] describes Libya as 'full of beasts' [cf. *Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 4.1561]. The same says also <Lycophron> in the *Alexandra*.

The main part of the *scholion* (here omitted),⁸⁹ recording the story of Perseus and the Gorgon, depends, according to the scholiast, on Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 11),⁹⁰ while the section I have reproduced above adds another detail, evidently absent in Pherecydes and present in other sources not explicitly mentioned (ἄλλοι δέ φασι), that is, the birth of venomous serpents from the drops of blood of Medusa that had fallen on Libyan soil; this episode is already attributed to Apollonius' *Foundation of Alexandria* in the *scholion* to Nicander we have discussed above (p. 216).

The last two lines of this *scholion* to the *Argonautica* have suffered corruption, which has left the text heavily summarised. The first puzzling fact is that the adjective πολύθηρος, 'full of wild beasts', which according to the scholiast the poet used to define Libya, does not appear in the *Argonautica*: the most similar adjective one could find referring to Libya in Apollonius is θηροτρόφος, in *Arg.* 4.1561 (Εὐρύπυλον Λιβύη θηροτρόφω

⁸⁹ *Schol. Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 4.1515a, pp. 319–20 Wendel.

⁹⁰ Pherecydes flourished in the 5th cent. BC; cf. *schol. Ap. Rhod. Arg.* 4.1091.

ἐγγεγαῶτα). The last statement of the *scholion* is also perplexing: in the text proposed by Wendel, the scholiast apparently refers to the *Alexandra*; but the text here is clearly corrupt, as <Lykophron> is an unsuitable supplement by Keil, prompted by the reading ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρᾳ offered by manuscript *L* (*Laurentianus* 32.9, saec. XI). Actually, in Lycophron's poem there is no trace of πολύθηρος: the relevant passage of the *Alexandra* (ll. 834–44), which alludes cryptically to the myth of Perseus and Andromeda and the killing of Medusa, contains neither this adjective nor an equivalent one (Lycophr. *Alex.* 834–43):

ἐπόψεται δὲ τύρσιος Κηφηίδας
καὶ Λαφρίου λακτίσμαθ' Ἑρμαίου ποδὸς
δισσὰς τε πέτρας, κέπφος αἷς προσήλατο
δαιτὸς χατίζων. ἀντὶ θηλείας δ' ἔβη,
τὸν χρυσόπατρον μόρφνον ἀρπάσας γνάθους,
τὸν ἥπατουργὸν ἄρσεν' ἀρβυλόπτερον
πεφήσεται δὲ τοῦ θεριστήηρος ξυρῶ,
φάλαινα δυσμίσητος ἐξινωμένη,
ἵπποβρότους ὠδίνας οἷξαντος τόκων
τῆς δειρόπαιδος μαρμαρώπιδος γαλῆς.

And he shall visit the towers of Cepheus and the place that was kicked by the foot of Hermes Laphrios, and the two rocks on which the petrel leapt in quest of food, but carried off in his jaws, instead of a woman, the eagle son of the golden Sire—a male with winged sandals who destroyed his liver. By the harvester's [i.e. Perseus] blade shall be slain the hateful whale dismembered: the harvester who delivered of her pains in birth of horse and man the stony-eyed weasel [i.e. Medusa] whose children sprang from her neck. (A. W. Mair, trs.)

If we must accept Keil's supplement and the reading of *L* (ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρᾳ), the expression of the compact *scholion* 'The same says also <Lykophron> in the *Alexandra*' clearly would not refer precisely to the adjective πολύθηρος, but, very loosely, to the last lines of this passage mentioning the birth of the 'children' of Medusa.

I am not satisfied with this solution, and other explanations are possible. Where manuscript *L* has ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρᾳ, *P* (*Parisinus* 2727 saec. XVI) introduces a reference to 'Alexander' (sc. Polyhistor, 1st c. BC). This reading was favoured by F. Jacoby (*FGrHist* 273, *Komm.* ad F 142), who was convinced that since Alexander Polyhistor is already mentioned in *schol.* Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.1492 for his Κρητικά, he could as well be the source here, possibly from his

Λιβυκά. Although manuscript *P* is known for preferring *lectiones faciliores* in comparison with *L*,⁹¹ in this case one is tempted to prefer the reading of *P* over that of *L*.

There is, however, a third choice. Fraenkel (1968) 606–7, followed by Vian (1981) 201–2, maintained the reading of *L*, but suggested that the *πολύθηρος* of the *scholion* may come from the *Foundation of Alexandria*: he therefore corrected ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρᾳ to ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρ<εί>α: ‘...Therefore he also describes Libya as *πολύθηρον*. He [*scil.* Apollonius] says the same thing in the *Alexandria*.’ Again, τὸ αὐτό here would refer not precisely to the use of the adjective *πολύθηρον*, but to the general meaning of the word, alluding to the tale of the Gorgon’s head spawning snakes. And in fact the *scholion* to Nicander’s *Theriaka* confirms the presence of this tale in the *Foundation of Alexandria* (see above, p. 216). That the same poem could be defined in the *scholion* to Nicander as Ἀλεξανδρείας κτίσις and in this *scholion* simply as Ἀλεξανδρεία is not unusual, since the same kind of abbreviation is known in the case of *The Foundation of Caunus*, in the *manchettes* listing Parthenius’ sources and parallels (Parth. *Er. Path.* 1: ἡ ἱστορία παρὰ [...] Ἀπολλωνίῳ Ῥοδίῳ Καύνῳ; *ibid.* 11: ἱστορεῖ [...] Ἀπολλώνιος ὁ Ῥόδιος Καύνου κτίσει).⁹²

The expression, as it is, is not entirely satisfactory (*πολύθηρον* still does not appear in Apollonius’ vocabulary), but this could be due to the heavy synthesis of the *scholion* or to a misunderstanding by the scholiast. In the last sentence we should expect something like: τὸ αὐτό φησι καὶ Ἀπολλώνιος ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ, διὸ καὶ τὴν Λιβύην πολύθηρον εἶπε; the *scholion* then would read: ‘Others say that Perseus, once he had the Gorgon decapitated, flew over Libya, and from the fallen drops of blood many and dreadful wild animals were born; the same said also Apollonius in the *Alexandria*, therefore he also described Libya as *πολύθηρος* [*sc.* in the same poem, the *Foundation of Alexandria*].’ Or better, but with an equally substantial correction, we could propose: διὸ καὶ τὴν Λιβύην θηροτρόφον εἶπε. τὸ αὐτό φησι καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρ<εί>α: ‘therefore he [*sc.* Apollonius] described Libya as *θηροτρόφον* [in *Arg.* 4.1561]; the same (*sc.* *πολύθηρον*, ‘the same’ as *θηροτρόφον* for the meaning) he says also in the *Alexandria*.’ It would be methodologically incorrect, however, to re-write *scholia* heavily whenever the sense is not clear: Fraenkel’s proposal for now appears to give the best result with a minimum retouching of the text.

⁹¹ See Wendel (1932) 33–8 and (1935) xv, xxii. *L* usually has better readings, while *P* tends to simplify, give lengthier explanations and *lectiones faciliores*.

⁹² See Barbantani, comm. on Apollonios, *FGrHist* IV 12 FF 5–6 (Καύνου Κτίσις).

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