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**The Macedonians in the Historical Imagination of the Second Sophistic**

Just as Philip II's Macedonian background was a challenge to his suitability for "leading the Greeks against the barbarians" in the 4th century, the Macedonians, who since the time of Herodotus had been considered by Greek writers to be ethnically and culturally ambiguous, continued to present an ideological challenge to the classicizing Greek writers of the Second Sophistic—even despite the importance of Alexander the Great as a precursor to the Roman Empire.

I focus here on Aelius Aristides, who in his extreme classicism is a product of his time. What is initially striking is the painstaking manner in which the Antonine rhetor, who shows a general lack of interest in Macedonian history, reinvents the figure of Philip II as a tyrant in his Theban Speeches based on a single oration of Demosthenes that is lost to us, and may even have been lost to Aristides himself. Incorporating other Demosthenean speeches (most notably *De Corona*) into his reconstruction, Aristides makes the 4th century debate comprehensible to his modern audience by intensifying the ancient ethnic and cultural charges against Philip and the Macedonians and using similar language as he does of the Persians elsewhere. For Aristides, it appears, these two great threats to the classical city-states have become interchangeable: both are "barbarian" foils to the "Greek". The period after Alexander's death fares no better, appearing as inferior to both classical Athens and contemporary Rome in Aristides' paeans to the two cities, wherein, respectively, Athens is the cultural ideal, and Rome the political. So in the Panathenaic Oration, we see Macedonia's capital city of Pella stressed as a cultural backwater in contrast to Athens (Behr 332), whereas in *To Rome*, the "Macedonians"—representing here only the Successors—are failed imperialists: they were unable to continue Alexander's empire (Oliver 27), and are summarily relegated to the succession of barbarian empires (Oliver 91).

But if Aristides excluded Macedonia from "Greek" history, how did he treat Alexander the Great? On the face of it, Aristides has a disregard for Alexander that is unusual for Second Sophistic writers, considering that his empire was the only one that they could consider in some way "their own". Rather than acknowledging Alexander as the prefigurer of the Roman hegemony, Aristides uses him as a negative foil to the privileged entities of Athens and Rome. For example, in the Panathenaic Oration, Alexander and Philip are important only inasmuch as they appreciate the superiority of Athens and therefore do not destroy her (Behr 331). In this role they are, more or less, barbarians. And in *To Rome*, Alexandria is praised vaguely as Alexander's achievement, but primarily as a Greek city and as the "jewel" of the Roman empire (Oliver 95).

In a sense, however, Alexander's role here as a foil to Greece/Athens and to Rome is not completely out of the ordinary. The image of Alexander in the empire was easily able to shift among Greek, Macedonian and barbarian, according to what each author valued. Aristides simply privileges those aspects of Alexander that make him look most "barbaric" in order to emphasize, by contrast, the greatness of Athens and the "manifest destiny" of the Roman Empire.