# The *Alexander* Bromance: Male Desire and Gender Fluidity in Oliver Stone's Historical Epic

KONSTANTINOS P. NIKOLOUTSOS

*Alexander* (2004) is an epic film that generated much controversy before it was even released. The reason was the decision of its director and co-author of the script, Oliver Stone, to portray history's greatest conqueror as a man who defied not only geographical but also sexual boundaries. Stone's critics saw the homoeroticization of Alexander the Great as a distortion of the historical record.[1] He, on the other hand, defended his choice by stating that a historical advisor, Robin Lane Fox, was on set to ensure the accuracy of the project. In the United States, the film was a box office failure,[2] a fact attributed by Stone himself to an "American apathy to ancient history" (Scott 2004) as well as to a "raging fundamentalism in morality" (James 2005), especially in the South.

This paper examines *Alexander*'s sexual agenda in an attempt to determine the relation between historical accuracy and artistic license[3]—and assess the erotics of the film independently of this debate. I shall argue that, whereas certain male characters (such as Alexander's father Philip) are fashioned in full agreement with the protocols of sexuality in Greek antiquity, the construction of Alexander's own erotic image both reproduces and violates these protocols. Focusing on the relationship between Alexander and his most intimate friend, Hephaestion, I shall expose Stone's conflicting efforts to eroticize this relationship by using standard Hollywood romance formulas and at the same time to de-eroticize it by reinscribing the physical interactions between these two male characters within heteronormative visual regimes. Although the result of this inconsistent representational strategy is a hero who cannot function as an identification figure for either the straight or the gay viewer, Stone's *Alexander* is a groundbreaking film for its genre for two main reasons: first, it challenges contemporary stereotypes of masculinity in ways that recognize the fluidity of both gender and desire; second, it reinscribes the homoerotic within the homosocial and thus opens up new conceptual spaces for the representation of queer identities in mainstream cinema.

## The Compulsory Heterosexuality of *Alexander the Great*

Hollywood's first attempt to dramatize the life of the King of Macedon was *Alexander the Great* (1956), a biopic written, produced, and directed by Robert Rossen at a time at which epic films set in the classical world were at the zenith of their popularity in Hollywood.[4] The emphasis given in this film to history, often at the expense of spectacle,[5] has led critics like Jon Solomon (2001, 42) to characterize it as "one of the most historically faithful of all movies about the ancient world." Although Solomon's assessment is correct with respect to the number of historical events included in the narrative, *Alexander the Great* is, in fact, another example of cinematic appropriation and distortion of classical antiquity.[6] The veneer of historicity fades away once we begin to examine the details of the film, especially the way Alexander's erotic life is portrayed.

Thus, although Alexander (Richard Burton) marries Roxane (Teresa del Rio), in the film she is identified as the daughter of the Persian king Darius III and not of the Bactrian baron Oxyartes, as all ancient sources present her. Similarly, their wedding does not take place after the surrender of the Sogdian Rock in the spring of 327 B.C.E., an event that is not dramatized in the film. Instead, it forms part of the mass marriage ceremony at Susa three years later, when more than eighty high Macedonian officers were forced by Alexander to take brides from some of the noblest Persian and Median families. As Arrian (7.4.4–5) narrates, at this ceremony Alexander himself took another two wives: Stateira, the eldest daughter of Darius III, and Parysatis, the youngest daughter of Artaxerxes III Ochus.[7] The omission of this detail from the film shows how the past is revived and reinterpreted according to the moral standards of the present. Rossen's Alexander is saved from the shame of polygamy that hung over his father Philip (Fredric March) and emerges, in this last scene of the film, as a monogamous[8] man whose marriage to a non-Macedonian woman sets an example of ethnic unity for his vast empire.

Alexander's masculinity is validated throughout the film, for he attracts and is attracted to every woman he encounters, whether that is Eurydice (Marisa de Leza), Philip's seventh wife, or Barsine (Claire Bloom), wife of Memnon (Peter Cushing), the commander of the Greek mercenaries who are placed in the service of king Darius. The amorous glances and insinuating dialogue between Alexander and these two female characters, in Chaeronea and Athens respectively, leave no doubts about his sexual preferences. Modeled in line with the dominant ideology

about gender roles and sexuality in the 1950s, Rossen's Alexander is a heterosexual man who is able to victimize women and penetrate their bodies even with his gaze.

Barsine's portrayal is the clearest example of the way Rossen resurrects figures associated in the historical record with Alexander's erotic life and shapes them to suit the purposes of his film. Although she does not receive much attention in ancient sources,[9] she is a major character in the film. Alexander has a long-term affair with her, but he never marries her. So strong is her presence that she even overshadows Roxane at Alexander's deathbed. Barsine is included in the narrative not only because she reinforces Alexander's heterosexual image by being his mistress but also because she incarnates his dream to unite Greece and Persia. The daughter of the satrap of Phrygia Artabazus, Barsine was born into the highest Persian nobility and received a Greek education, as Plutarch notes (*Alex.* 21.4). In the film, she is half-Persian, half-Greek, as she emphatically tells Alexander when they first meet in Athens. In trying to convince Memnon not to join forces with the Persians and fight for their corrupt rule, she makes exactly the same comment to him: "I am both Persian and Greek, and I know both worlds."[10] Whereas Roxane is completely submissive and speaks only once in the entire film, just to tell her name, Barsine is almost always placed in direct confrontation with Alexander and challenges his ideological positions and choices—just as she does with her husband before the battle at Granicus. As I shall show, however, such confrontations are, along with the silencing of the legitimate wife, part of the process of straightening Alexander for popular consumption, for they illustrate his performative powers vis-à-vis the opposite sex. In other words, they enable him to project a masculine image in a highly gendered narrative.

Since the Hays Code, the self-imposed censorship code instituted in 1930 by the American motion picture industry, was in effect when *Alexander the Great* was produced, the sexual aspect of the affair with Barsine is not depicted explicitly. Allusions to it are, however, included in the scene that follows the sack of Miletus, when Alexander seizes Barsine as part of the city's spoils. The scene dramatizes the morning after the siege/sex, two acts that are symbolically linked to each other. Its arrangement reproduces the stereotype of male dominance and female submission, allowing Alexander to emerge as a conqueror not only of Asia but also of its women. Alexander is lying semi-naked in a bed under a canopy of a rich red color that matches his royal status. Barsine is sitting on a bench in front of the bed, staring at him while she covers her bare shoul-

ders. Rossen's choice to place the bed outdoors, amongst the ruins of the city, strikes the viewer as odd. On the one hand, the broken pillars serve an antiquarian aesthetic and illustrate the film's supposed attention to historical accuracy. On the other, the ravaged cityscape offers the viewer visual testimony that Alexander has complete control over Miletus and its people, an idea that is emphasized when the camera turns away from the bed for a moment and shows a local woman pushed mercilessly to the ground by a Macedonian soldier. The opening of this scene thus equates masculinity with violence and coercion, and femininity with suffering and social degradation. Alexander is no longer the liberator and civilizer Barsine herself had believed in prior to his arrival in Asia, but an(other) oppressor.

The dialogue between Alexander and Barsine illustrates how Rossen fashions his central character so as to embody traditional ideals of manhood and leadership. While Barsine looks at the Milesian woman lying on the ground and realizes that her own fate may soon be the same, Alexander gets up and tries to comfort her by saying: "You will be treated according to your rank." Barsine, upset, stands up and tries to walk away. Alexander grabs her arm; she turns her face to him and says with voice full of anger: "Alexander Conqueror . . . You've sacked a city . . . Burned it to the ground. Looted, pillaged, taken a woman." When he draws her closer and asks her to look at him and let him see what he saw in her eyes back in Athens, Barsine replies: "In Athens I betrayed Memnon with my soul. Here in Miletus, Alexander must be loved. And where is Alexander's love?" Alexander, of course, avoids answering her question, just as he does when she asks him again: "What do you now fear to say that you did not fear to say last night?" His refusal to admit in the daytime (on the screen) what he confessed to her the night before (off screen) perpetuates the stereotypical identification of masculinity with toughness and self-discipline; at the same time, it casts emotionality and spontaneity as feminine traits. Rossen's Alexander proves that he is a strong, macho man not only when he fights on the battlefield or when he confronts his political enemies at the assembly, but also in the private domain. Instead of telling Barsine that he loves her, he says: "You chose to go. Go." Coming from a man who conquers one city in Asia after another, this is not a real choice. Barsine, a stand-in for the defeated city of Miletus, cannot but submit to Asia's new master and become his concubine, sharing the glory and shame of the anonymous Milesian woman, as she emphatically states. The closing of the scene is thus a celebration of the patriarchal order and of the 'natural' hierarchy of gender roles.

Within the narrative's heteronormative economy, Hephaestion (Ricardo Valle), the most famous of Alexander's male lovers, is simply another comrade, acknowledged by name only once in the entire film. "Rossen's enthusiasm for name-checking mandates his inclusion . . . [but] his Hephaestion is a nonentity, a gaping absence in the narration" (Nisbet 2006, 98). Alexander's excessive mourning over Hephaestion's death[11] is here replaced with his mourning over the death of Cleitus the Black (Gustavo Rojo), one of the old guard generals and one of Alexander's most trusted commanders. At a banquet—held, according to the historical record, in Maracanda (modern Samarkand in Uzbekistan) in November 328 B.C.E.—Cleitus, under the influence of wine, questions Alexander's despotic behavior and orientalization policy. He also accuses him of diminishing the achievements of Philip and other Macedonian officers in order to emphasize his own. Filled with anger, Alexander reacts violently and kills him with a spear. In a fit of remorse, he then attempts to commit suicide by impaling himself on the same spear. After he is restrained by his companions, he kneels, hugs Cleitus's lifeless body tightly, and cries out: "Oh, Cleitus, brother. Cleitus, brother."[12]

This scene—the only one in the entire film in which affection between males is put on display—reproduces a basic convention of the epic genre which we will need to keep in mind while evaluating the moments of physical intimacy between Alexander and Hephaestion in Stone's film. As William Fitzgerald (2001, 38, 40) notes about historical epics produced in the 1950s and early 1960s:

> [N]ot only is the male body put on display more than the female, but the most intense scenes, both physically and emotionally, tend to transpire between men. . . . [T]he natural brotherhood of men only intensifies the emotional world of these relationships, so that the physicality through which enmity is expressed comes to express also the love that revolts against that enmity.

These films form part of a tradition of intensely emotional male bonding that goes back to Homer's *Iliad,* where it is exemplified not only between close friends (Achilles and Patroclus) but also between enemies who participate in the 'flirtation' of warfare (Achilles and Hector). The scene with Cleitus contains elements that invite a homoerotic reading and at the same time undermines such suspicions, revealing a gap between text and image. These elements are: the phallicity of the spear with which Alexander penetrates Cleitus's body, the tenderness with which he holds the dead body in

his arms, and the complete absence of women from the drinking party, even as entertainers. Despite this visual ordering that suggests a homoerotic subtext, at the end of the scene Alexander laments the loss of a "brother." According to Arrian (4.9.3) and Curtius (8.1.21), Cleitus had been close to Alexander and his family ever since his sister Lanice (or Hellanice) served as Alexander's nurse. In this scene, Cleitus is employed as a figure through which the concept of family is metaphorized and resemanticized to include the idea of lifelong intimate friendship called *philia* in ancient Greek.[13] Once he leaves Macedonia and his own family, Rossen's Alexander seeks to found a new, 'chosen' family composed of his officers, men with whom he shares the same ethnic origins, military experiences, and political vision. Rossen emphasizes the importance of male bonding in this community of soldiers by giving it the name of brotherhood. This emphasis on the homosocial character of male camaraderie can be read as a defensive response to the persistent (heterosexual male) anxiety about homosexuality that haunts contemporary receptions of classical antiquity. Just as most 'buddy movies' include what Robin Wood (2003, 261) calls a "homophobic disclaimer" (that is, a gesture, image, or language that is explicitly renunciatory) to prevent potential gay appropriations of the intimacy between the film's male characters,[14] so too in Rossen's film the closeness between Alexander and Cleitus is stripped of its latent eroticism through the proleptic labeling of their relationship as brotherhood. Safeguarded against any immoral stain, this bonding might be expected to have a special symbolic meaning for the American male viewers who fought in two wars a few years before the release of the film: World War II and the war in Korea.

## *Alexander* and Sexual Asymmetry

When Oliver Stone's film was released on 24 November 2004, viewers were presented with an Alexander (Colin Farrell) who marries a woman but declares his devotion to, and exchanges vows of eternal love with, another man; an Alexander who has difficulties taming his wife in the bedroom but finds it easy to kiss a eunuch in public; an Alexander who has several (and meaningful) private interactions with Hephaestion (Jared Leto) but only one with Roxane (Rosario Dawson). The cinematic Alexander of the twenty-first century is a man with a much more diverse erotic agenda than the cinematic Alexander of the 1950s; as such, he complicates the process whereby the presumptively heterosexual male spectator seeks to identify with him.[15]

Nor is Alexander the only character in the film who is implicated in this logic of sexual plurality and non-fixity of male desire. At a banquet in Pella that Philip (Val Kilmer) organizes to celebrate his marriage to his seventh wife Eurydice (Marie Meyer), the niece of Attalus (Nick Dunning),[16] Philip rapes the young Pausanias (Toby Kebbell) in front of his guests and then throws his victim into the arms of other men for further sexual abuse. In a similar, if more playful, sympotic spirit, the young Cleitus (Gary Stretch) and Cassander (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) kiss Alexander and Perdiccas (Neil Jackson) respectively.[17]

Some critics saw *Alexander* as a film through which Stone sought to make a remarkable intrusion into the genre of historical epics by openly discussing a taboo issue, that of homosexuality in classical antiquity, which previous big-budget productions had persistently avoided or, at least, had glossed over. For example, in an article that appeared in the *New York Times* four days before *Alexander* was released, author Sharon Waxman (2004) wrote:

> As the culture wars rage anew between social conservatives and their liberal counterparts, Hollywood is preparing to break fresh ground by releasing a high-budget epic film in which the lead character—a classic, and classical, action hero—is passionately in love with a man. . . .
>
> In decades past, Hollywood hinted at classical homosexuality in major films like 1960's *Spartacus.* And it has dealt with the contemporary subject comically in films like *The Birdcage,* the 1996 adaptation of the French film *La Cage aux Folles.* But the film industry has never risked quite so much on a blockbuster film that depicts a leading man as gay or bisexual. . . .
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> At least some experts say they believe the resulting film will be credited with breaking a taboo that was due to fall. "I think it will be seen as a landmark," said Thomas Waugh, film professor at Concordia University in Montreal and author of *The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writing on Queer Cinema.*

After *Alexander* was released, however, not many critics and viewers could share the optimism of Thomas Waugh. The omission of the epithet *Great* from the title of the film foreshadowed the negativity with which it was received, especially in the United States.[18] Not only was it deemed not to be a great film but, in keeping with the etymology of his proper name—a derivative of *alexō* (ward off, put off) and *anēr* (man)—*Alexander* did drive men away. None of the reviews surveyed for the pur-

poses of this paper failed to comment on the representation of Alexander's sexuality, an issue that also gave rise to a long debate among bloggers, both homophobic[19] and pro-gay. In particular, strong resentment was expressed by the gay press because the film failed to keep its promise of presenting Alexander as a gay icon. As most critics saw it, Stone's Alexander is gay yet not gay enough. Characteristic is the following review from *The Advocate:*

> I had high hopes from Oliver Stone's *Alexander.* How groundbreaking it would be to portray a world conqueror as the other-than-hetero man he was! But Stone has never created a robust gay character, and his Alexander is a neurotic mess. He wasn't queer because same-sex love was honorable in his time but because he suffered from mother horror and father fixation—a good candidate for reparative therapy. (Goldstein 2005)

The two articles quoted above use freely the terms 'gay,' 'queer,' and 'bisexual' to define Alexander's sexual identity. However, these are modern terms that cannot encapsulate the complexities and strictures of the ancient Greek sexual system, which Stone, as I shall show, takes into account in certain respects, and in other respects disregards.

In fifth- and fourth-century Athenian literature, sex is discussed in connection with the issues of age, class, gender, and power.[20] In our male-authored texts, sexual intercourse is perceived as an act that reflects (or should reflect) the hierarchical structure of society; as such, it involves a penetrator (i.e., an adult male citizen) and a penetrated *other* who could be a woman, a slave, a metic (i.e., a non-citizen resident), a prostitute, or a *kinaidos* (i.e., an effeminate man who preferred the passive role in sexual intercourse). According to the moralizing discourses of ancient Athenians, a freeborn man who wished to retain his claim to full masculine status should always seek to play the active/insertive role while having sex with other men. Otherwise, he ran the risk of being assimilated, in the eyes of his fellow citizens, to the kind of man who was expected to be at the receptive end, that is, a socially inferior man (e.g., a slave or foreigner) or a man who was believed to be incapable of performing his civic duties because of his engagement in unmanly behavior, such as a *kinaidos,* who played 'the woman's part' during sex, or a prostitute who abrogated his masculinity by allowing others to dominate and penetrate his body for money.

Freeborn men in ancient Athens and other Greek city-states did have a

wide range of erotic objects from which to choose. However, sexual object choice was regulated by specific socio-moral codes of conduct. This is especially true of the relationship between an adult man and an adolescent boy. An *erastēs* might court a boy for the sole purpose of having sex with him; an *erōmenos,* in turn, might ask for gifts before submitting to the sexual desires of a man. In either case, however, a freeborn *pais* could not be penetrated without losing (or running the risk of losing) his citizen rights. In theory, the main goal behind the formation of a pederastic affair was the moral advancement of the *erōmenos* at this liminal stage of his life, for the *erastēs* was expected to play a role similar to that of a life coach and transmit skills and knowledge that would be useful for a youth who was about to enter adulthood and become a citizen. As Marilyn Skinner (2005, 119) puts it, "Pederasty as a system was class-marked because courtship required leisure and money"; it thus became a tradition deployed by the elite for the dissemination of values and ideas among its members.

Like Rossen, Stone modifies, omits, or adds details about the erotic life of Alexander and the people who surround him. Unlike Rossen, however, Stone takes the ancient protocols of sexuality into serious consideration. The rape of the young Pausanias is a good case study through which to examine the relation between the film and ancient sexual traditions. According to the historical record, the rape did not take place during the banquet that Philip threw to celebrate his marriage to Eurydice in 337 B.C.E. Nor was it Philip who raped Pausanias. As Diodorus Siculus narrates it (16.93–4), Pausanias, an aristocratic young man from the district of Orestis, attracted Philip with his beauty and became his *erōmenos* and bodyguard. When Philip fell in love with another youth, also named Pausanias, the first Pausanias made a jealous scene and accused the second of being a hermaphrodite and ready to accept the amorous advances of any man. The second Pausanias, who had confessed the insult to his friend Attalus, died at a battle in Illyria during which he showed his devotion to Philip by stepping in front of him and receiving on his body all the blows that were directed against the Macedonian king. The death gave rise to a big scandal in aristocratic circles. It was linked to the quarrel and was viewed as an attempt by the second Pausanias to clean his name. Seeking revenge, Attalus invited the first Pausanias to dinner. After getting him drunk, he delivered his unconscious body to his muleteers for sexual abuse. When Pausanias recovered, he appealed to Philip who expressed his disgust at the barbarity of the act. However, since Attalus was the uncle of his new wife and had been

appointed joint commander of the upcoming expedition into Asia Minor, he could not punish him and so he compensated Pausanias with a promotion. Pausanias externalized his anger (or so our sources invite us to believe) by assassinating Philip in Aegae in 336 B.C.E.[21]

Although the way Stone portrays Pausanias's rape is historically inaccurate, the act itself is compatible with the ancient protocols of sexuality. Philip assumes the active role and demonstrates before his guests that, as a man and a king, he can exercise dominion over any body, whether that body belongs to a male or a female. Yet, despite this public display of virility, this episode makes Philip look unmanly because it betrays a lack of self-control (*enkrateia*) which, as Michael Foucault (1986) shows, was a fundamental component of masculinity in Greek antiquity. "A king must demonstrate self-mastery above all, because it makes him least like a slave and most like a ruler, because he must be an example of moderation to his people" (Davidson 1997, 282). In this respect, the relocation of Pausanias's rape contributes to the decadent image of an inebriated, self-absorbed, and above all powerless Philip. Philip was earlier seen carried around by a girl and Pausanias, prompting Alexander to say before exiting the palace: "And this is the man who is going to take you from Greece to Persia? He can't even make it from one couch to the next." Philip boasts of his ability to conquer and control other nations, but he fails to control himself.

The kisses between Cleitus and Alexander, on the one hand, and Cassander and Perdiccas, on the other, likewise accord with ancient sexual attitudes, for pederasty was a well-established practice in ancient Macedonia and aristocratic youths engaged in it, sometimes beyond adolescence.[22] The kiss between Alexander and the eunuch Bagoas (Francisco Bosch) is, however, somewhat different, for Bagoas's status as a eunuch marks him as a departure from the protocols of classical Greek homoerotics. Greek authors of the classical period had contempt for eunuchs as one of the many trappings of Asiatic despotism. Along with the power accorded to queens, eunuchs were a constant point of reference in the gendering of the Persian Empire and its backstage politics as feminine in Greek historical thought (Llewellyn-Jones 2002). Castrated at a young age to preserve their boyish look, eunuchs were employed at the palace as servants of and proxies for royal women. Among their tasks was to take care of the sexual needs of the monarch and other noblemen.[23]

In Stone's film, the kiss between Alexander and Bagoas paves the way for the clash with Cleitus the Black (mentioned above), which takes place

at a banquet held not in Maracanda, as indicated by the historical record, but in India. Plutarch (*Alex.* 67.1–4) reports this manifestation of eroticism between ruler and subject as an anecdote and places it at a theater in Gedrosia (modern southwestern Pakistan).[24] After the Macedonian army entered the neighboring region of Carmania (modern southeastern Iran) in a Bacchic procession, Alexander returned to Pura, the capital of Gedrosia, where he held choral contests to entertain his soldiers. They had been drinking for days. After gaining a dramatic victory, Bagoas crossed the theater and sat by Alexander. The Macedonians were so pleased by his performance that they exhorted their king to kiss the victor and did not stop applauding and shouting until he granted their wish.

In *Alexander,* Bagoas displays some of the stereotypical features of a eunuch: effeminacy, domesticity, submissiveness, and sexual availability. Curtius (6.5.22–3) tells us that Bagoas was introduced to Alexander at Hyrcania, a region on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea where Alexander received him as a gift from Nabarzanes, one of the assassins of Darius III. He adds that Bagoas was exceptionally beautiful and that with his pleas he convinced Alexander to pardon Nabarzanes. In the film, however, Alexander sees Bagoas for the first time when he seizes the palace of Darius in Babylon and enters its inner court, where he and his officers discover the existence of a large harem made up of both women and eunuchs.[25]

Bagoas is, throughout the film, a silent character confined to the bedroom. His duties are thus consonant with the etymology of the Greek term *eunouchos:* deriving from *eunē* (bed) and *echō* (have, hold), it denotes a guardian of the bedchamber.[26] Stone's Bagoas is the polar opposite of the Bagoas of ancient literature who is politically active despite his sexual passivity. Not only does he use his charms to save the life of Nabarzanes but he also succeeds in convincing Alexander to sentence the satrap Orsines to death (Curt. 10.1.25–38). While he paid respect to all of Alexander's other friends, Orsines refused to do the same with Bagoas because to him the eunuch was nothing but a *scortum* (whore). According to Curtius (above), he paid with his own life for this offence, saying before he died: *"audieram . . . in Asia olim regnasse feminas; hoc vero novum est, regnare castratum!"* ("I had heard . . . that women once reigned in Asia; but this is new, for a castrated man to rule!").

Although Stone denies Bagoas political agency, he does not deny him a symbolic role in the film's dramatic web. In the scene in which Alexander kisses him, Bagoas is cast as a representative of oriental tradi-

tions and moral license that Alexander embraces without any reservations, demonstrating in public his inability to exercise mastery over himself. Alexander, the ultimate conqueror, is easily seduced, and victimized, by Bagoas's dancing skills, just as also happens when he first sees Roxane in the film. Yet there is more to Bagoas's role than this. A liminal figure himself (neither man nor woman), Bagoas draws attention to Alexander's own liminality. At this banquet in India, at the most distant point of his newly established empire, Alexander oscillates between his fascination with the *other* (as illustrated by his eastern clothing and the fact that he has Indian nobles sit next to him) and his desire to prove that he is still the *same* (as shown by the fact that Macedonian officers and some Macedonian soldiers are included in this party, although they are all sitting at a distance from him). To his onlookers, however, Alexander is neither a true Asian nor a real Macedonian anymore. Completely humiliated by the kiss between Alexander and Bagoas, Roxane leaves the banquet telling her husband with a voice full of anger: "You lose face. These Indians . . . they are low, evil people. . . . In Persia you are a great king. Here . . . they hate you." Similarly, Cleitus makes a toast not to Alexander but to his father Philip, "a real hero," and expresses his objection to Alexander's orientalization policy by saying: "Let me rot in Macedonian rags . . . rather than shine . . . in Eastern pomp."

After rewarding the eunuch with a kiss, Alexander makes a toast both to Bagoas and to Dionysus who traveled to India, as he says, some 6,000 years before him. The god Dionysus is the epitome of gender ambiguity in the ancient Greek world. In the literature and visual arts of the classical period, he is attributed feminine qualities—in Euripides' *Bacchae* 353, he is called *thylumorphos* (womanlike)—and he is often depicted as a youth with long, curly hair and girlish facial features, dressed in exotic gowns. His androgynous look serves as a reminder of his position poised between two opposite worlds: Greece and the East. Alexander's double toast thus invites us to perceive the similarities between Bagoas and Dionysus. A eunuch like Bagoas was the product of acculturation since he underwent a removal of his testicles so that he would be unable to procreate, was raised in the women's quarters under the supervision of older eunuchs, and was taught manners appropriate for his prescribed role. His identity was the result of enforcement, learning, and adaptation. Within the cultural environment that produced him, Bagoas occupied a third gender space that defied the boundaries between the conventional categories of male and female. Similarly, Dionysus was adopted by ancient Greeks and adapted to the needs of their religion, society, and

economy; yet, although he became a panhellenic god, Dionysus, as his iconography indicates, retained elements that emphasized his non-Hellenic past and his inability to be confined within specific geo-cultural and sexual borders.

Like Dionysus and Heracles, Alexander travels to the East; unlike them, he will never return to Greece. By kissing Bagoas in public, he demonstrates that he is bound to this new world he has made his home—an aspect of the story that is clearly important to Stone.[27] Bagoas is also a symbol of nonproductivity; as such, he dramatizes the pressure Alexander receives to beget an heir—an important marker of masculinity in the classical world. Before he leaves for Asia, Olympias (Angelina Jolie) urges him: "Announce your marriage to a Macedonian now. Beget a child of pure blood. . . . If you go to Asia without leaving your successor, you risk all." In Bactria, when his officers ask him why he wants to marry Roxane, a non-Macedonian woman, Alexander does not mention love as a reason. Instead, he says: "Because I want a son." When Hephaestion visits Alexander in his bedchamber on the night of his wedding and presents him with a big ring, he tells him: "I wish you a son." And after Alexander fails to impregnate Roxane, at the banquet in India Cleitus exposes Alexander's infatuation with Asia(nism), as illustrated by his kiss to Bagoas, by asking: "Now you kiss them? Take a barbarian, childless wife and dare call her queen?" His inability to father a son makes Alexander look less of a man and more like a eunuch.

Alexander's gender fluidity is reflected in the androgynous look that he is granted long before he arrives in Asia and adopts eastern ways. For example, in a scene that is set in Pella, the young Macedonian prince is portrayed as receiving advice from his mother Olympias on political issues. As Stone remarks in his commentary in the Director's Cut DVD, in this particular scene Alexander looks like a "masculine-feminine action figure." Stone admits that showing this confrontation between mother and son too early in the theatrical version was a mistake, and goes on to explain that in the Director's Cut DVD he moved the scene to the middle of the narrative in order for Alexander to win the battle at Gaugamela first and thus be established as a conqueror in the viewer's eyes.

In this scene, Olympias urges her almost nineteen-year-old son to become a man and strike back against Philip. She asks him to repress his love for Hephaestion, marry a noble girl from Macedonia, and beget a son before he leaves for Asia in order to secure his claim to the throne. To Olympias's despair, Alexander defends not only Philip but also his feelings for Hephaestion. Hephaestion, he says, loves him the way he is and

not for the great man he is expected to become. Alexander's status as a divided subject—a man placed between personal drives and sociopolitical pressures, between "love and duty," as the title of the scene indicates—is also emphasized by his looks. Although Farrell has a muscular body, his virility is undermined by his bleached blond wig and dyed eyebrows. Blond is not a color associated with masculinity in the epic film genre. Brad Pitt may be blond in his role as Achilles in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004), but at least he offers viewers, both male and female, the visual pleasure of bronzed and buffed-up beefcake.[28] Likewise, Maximus's body in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) is constructed as a site on which popular ideas of masculinity are rearticulated and reaffirmed. Russell Crowe has dark brown hair and a beard. He also has a tanned, slightly hairy, and solid yet not overly muscular body that was shown to endure physical pain and resist erotic temptation. Other features that enhance his macho look include a commanding voice, a penetrating gaze, and a stern face that suggests self-confidence, fearlessness, and vengefulness.[29]

Stone's film defies generic conventions pertaining to the physical representation of the male protagonist. After Alexander enters inner Persia and adopts eastern ways—i.e., for the whole latter half of the film—gender ambiguity becomes permanently marked on his body. Farrell is constantly in drag: he wears a bleached blond mullet wig, mascara, heavy eyeliner, big necklaces, big rings, and long, colorful dresses. Just before he is murdered by Alexander, Cleitus sarcastically remarks that now that they have reached India, the Macedonians "have been transformed into such a pretty army." This image of Alexander and some of his officers led a *Village Voice* critic to call the film "a festival of risible wiggery."[30] Although fair from an aesthetic perspective, this comment overlooks the performative nature of gender suggested by Alexander's portrayal in drag. As Judith Butler (1993, 125) remarks, drag "reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality." Thus, in contrast to the conventional heterosexual heroes of revisionist epics like *Gladiator* and *Troy*, *Alexander* reminds us that 'man' is not a universal and homogeneous gender category; that 'man' is a product of societal and cultural norms that one (Alexander) adopts and another (Cleitus) rejects.

## Alexander in the Closet

The scenes in Stone's film that I have discussed so far present us with an Alexander who resists the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, in contrast

to the image constructed in Rossen's earlier film. At the same time, they reflect the fact that erotic object choice in Greek antiquity was subject to certain cultural constraints and protocols. Contrary to popular modern perceptions, there was no freedom of sexual expression in the classical world;[31] such a concept was alien to the Greek philosophy of sex and gender. Likewise, we should not expect to find in surviving sources any prototypes for contemporary models of homosexuality, simply because the system for categorizing sexual behaviors was different in ancient Greece.

Stone's film, however, is a different matter. As the review from *The Advocate* quoted above shows, gay audiences were intensely engaged with Alexander's potential to serve as a prototype for contemporary gay men, especially through his relationship with Hephaestion. In Stone's film, Hephaestion is promoted to the forefront of the narrative at crucial moments in Alexander's life. However, the exact nature of his relationship with the Macedonian king remains obscure. He is not simply Alexander's closest friend; at the same time, he is not clearly cast as his lover either. The term that can best describe the relationship between these two heroes is 'bromance': a deep, mutual attraction between brothers-in-arms. Stone's representational strategy is ambivalent and inconsistent at best. Although he creates an atmosphere of eroticism around Alexander and Hephaestion on several occasions, he denies them any explicit physical expression of same-sex desire on the screen.[32] Every time their bonding is close to being identifiable as a gay love affair, there are efforts, either on the visual or on the textual level, to preclude such conclusions. At the same time, by stimulating the viewer's imagination through a series of erotically charged interactions between Alexander and Hephaestion, the director exploits the appeal of the image of two men who presumably have sex off screen. This ambivalence is not difficult to explain. For, as I as shall argue, Stone uses Alexander and Hephaestion to explore transgression only to glorify an eventual return to heterosexual norm. Although *Alexander* challenges sexual stereotypes to a much greater degree than previous Hollywood films set in the classical world (and so expands the thematics of the epic film genre),[33] it ultimately reaffirms the marginal position of homosexuality in mainstream cinema.

Stone's strategy can be observed in several scenes. One of these is the fictitious episode that follows the triumphant entry of the Macedonian army into Babylon and the seizure of the palace of Darius. Hephaestion comes into Alexander's bedroom one night, and the two men walk out to the balcony from which they have a panoramic view of the city (see fig. 1).

There they engage in a discussion about the expedition and its goals that illustrates Stone's vision of his central character: a conqueror with great ambitions but also a man with insecurities and self-doubts. This scene is placed in the middle of the film, at a crucial juncture in the narrative. In less than four years, Alexander has conquered half—by Greek standards, the most important half—of the Persian Empire and, although Darius has not yet been caught, Alexander has started to fashion himself as the new king of Asia. Whereas many of his officers believed that after the victory at Gaugamela their mission in Asia was accomplished and they could return home, to Alexander, as Peter Green (1991, 297), for example, explains, the surrender of a city like Babylon that had been the symbol of grandeur for centuries opened up new horizons of conquest. Having against him a friend on the verge of megalomania, Hephaestion initiates an endoscopic process that makes Alexander realize (albeit momentarily) the existence of limits in life and ask: "Which am I, Hephaestion? Weak or divine?" Stone invents this episode to show the human side of a legend, as he personally understands it, and portray Alexander as a man divided between West and East, desire and conformity, myth and reality, mother and father, self and other(s).

The balcony scene (and with it the first half of the film) closes with a declaration of mutual love and devotion. Touching Hephaestion's right cheek tenderly, Alexander says: "I trust only you in this world. I've missed you. I need you. It is you I love, Hephaestion. No other. . . . You'll never lose me. . . . I will be with you always. Till the end." Hephaestion draws him into his arms and replies: "You're everything I care for . . . and by the sweet breath of Aphrodite . . . I'm so jealous of losing you to this world you want so badly." Oddly, Stone denies the two men a kiss, just as he does in another fictitious episode that takes place at the Macedonian camp the night before the crucial battle at Gaugamela. Alexander and Hephaestion, recalling the example of the epic heroes Achilles and Patroclus (whose names had been associated with homoeroticism since ancient times),[34] vow to avenge each other's death if the Persians win. Their erotic attraction is obvious in this scene too. They exchange amorous glances and lines full of passion, such as: "If you were to fall, Hephaestion . . . I will avenge you . . . and follow you down to the house of death" and "Perhaps this is farewell . . . *my* Alexander." Their love, however, is not consummated on the screen, in contrast to Alexander's relationship with Roxane. As Fitzgerald (2001, 38) observes about epic films produced in the 1950s and early 1960s, "homoeroticism is there but not there." Four decades later, the same pattern is reproduced. Hephaestion receives only

a hug—not the kiss for which the camera prepares the viewer—and Alexander retreats into his tent alone. Here Stone misses an opportunity to subvert modern stereotypes about homosexuality and masculinity by showing that men who sleep with men can still be bloodthirsty warriors. Instead, he shows that, although same-sex desire is part of the military experience, a conqueror like Alexander, once he crosses the gay line and becomes too intimate with another man, needs to return to the closet, aptly metaphorized by his tent. Stone's Alexander 'comes out' as he goes in.

The scene at the camp has been deleted from the Director's Cut DVD, and so Stone offers no commentary on it. But he does defend his decision not to have Alexander and Hephaestion kiss in the balcony scene:

> [Alexander] had perhaps a prior relationship with Hephaestion, but I am suggesting that at least they were really soul mates. There is an issue that insofar as most Greek sexual relationships between boys ended at around nineteen, eighteen, twenty and the men entered the public arena. So it is not at all my thought that Alexander and Hephaestion continued to have a relationship, a physical relationship, after that age. We don't know that. We know that they were soul mates, Platonic soul mates, and that they loved each other—from the funeral games and from the closeness—but we have no evidence whatsoever that Alexander, in the field or anywhere else, was in bed with Hephaestion. So there is no point even in speculating on it. I am criticized by some from the homosexual community for not having them kiss so passionately, but there is no evidence on it. So that is a speculation.

In theory, Stone's view of Alexander's relationship with Hephaestion is in agreement with contemporary scholarship on the issue. Critics, such as Jeanne Reames-Zimmerman (1999), Paul Cartledge (2004, 228), and Marilyn Skinner (forthcoming), to name a few, argue that although it is difficult, almost impossible to arrive at safe conclusions on the exact nature of this relationship based on surviving sources alone, we cannot exclude the possibility that the bond between these two men might have been stronger than mere friendship; if so, their love must have been expressed physically during adolescence, but probably not after early adulthood. Stone defends himself by appealing to this scholarly view of ancient sexual practices, but his defense is undermined by the images on the screen which produce an atmosphere of sensuality and hedonism, illustrating that the two men are not merely "Platonic soul mates."[35]

Prior to the balcony scene, for example, Hephaestion comes into Alexander's bedroom wearing a long, ethereal Persian robe that is completely open and shows off his smooth, muscled chest while he is parading in front of the camera. Two necklaces, mascara, heavy eyeliner, three rings with big, colored stones, and a pair of wide cuff bracelets enhance his oriental look. The use of Hephaestion's body as a medium for the projection of ancient Greek beliefs about Persian luxury and effeminacy results in his typecasting as a 'pretty boy' (and therefore as the 'feminine' partner in the relationship); at the same time, it equates homosexuality with dandyism and narcissism.[36] Hephaestion walks past a sculptor, presumably Lysippus, who is working on a bust of the new ruler of the empire, and approaches the bed where Alexander lies reading a letter from Olympias. Alexander extends his right hand and Hephaestion kisses it. This gesture is an adaptation of a Persian custom called *proskynēsis* (obeisance) in Greek. According to this custom, a man of low rank had to prostrate himself before his superiors. Equals received a kiss on the mouth and near-equals a kiss on the cheek.[37] Replacing the kiss on the mouth with a kiss on the hand helps to preserve Alexander's heterosexual image.

Hephaestion starts massaging Alexander's neck and shoulders. When Alexander, overwhelmed by his mother's advice and demands, asks him to stay for the night, he turns his head and looks at Bagoas who is preparing his master's bath. Alexander orders the eunuch to leave, thereby ensuring the privacy needed for the upcoming moment of physical intimacy with Hephaestion, as the viewer is, at least, led to believe on account of Alexander's request to his presumed bedfellow.

To the viewer's frustration, this moment never comes. The film places a large amount of emphasis on the love that the two men feel for each other, only to deny it and then complicate it further by having them leave the bedroom and walk out to the balcony. Stone's claim that Alexander and Hephaestion are "Platonic soul mates" collapses completely when the two men start exchanging lingering glances and the latter says: "Is there not love in your life . . . Alexander? . . . You strike me still, Alexander. And you have eyes like no other. I sound as stupid as a schoolboy, but . . . you're everything I care for." Alexander's response (quoted above) is a promise of everlasting love of a kind that he fails to make when he marries Roxane in the distant land of Bactria. Holding her hand at their wedding, he simply proclaims: "Through our union, Greek and Barbarian may be reconciled in peace." Explaining the motives for Alexander's decision to take a woman of no political significance,

Ptolemy, the voice-over narrator, mentions love as the third and last reason. Although Stone uses Hollywood romance formulas to eroticize Alexander's relationship with Hephaestion—perhaps influenced by Robin Lane Fox (1973, 57), the film's historical advisor, as Skinner (forthcoming) plausibly suspects—he nonetheless refuses to grant the two men a kiss. Instead, he compensates them with something that may not be a taboo image for mainstream cinema but is still ambiguous: a hug. The film teases the viewer visually and verbally only to repress the overt expression of homoerotic desire. Simply put, *Alexander* provokes, but when the narrative reaches its climax, it holds back.

The same representational strategy can be observed in another fictitious scene, when Hephaestion comes into Alexander's bedroom on the night his marriage to Roxane is to be consummated. This is the only intimate moment between Alexander and Roxane; after that she is placed on the margins of the narrative. Stone explores the dynamics of this heterogeneous heterosexual couple through the triangulating presence of another man in the bedroom. While Alexander is still alone, Hephaestion comes in, asks him to remain silent, and presents him with a large and gaudy ring that he found in Egypt. There is an acute dissonance between his words and what takes place on the screen. While he wishes Alexander a son, he puts the ring on the fourth finger of his left hand (see fig. 2), as if he were marrying him, and hugs him. This is the ring that we see falling to the ground in slow motion at the very beginning of the film, when the dying Alexander removes it from his finger trying—as we understand in retrospect—to give it to one of the officers who are gathered around his deathbed and thus designate his successor. In the film, no successor is appointed—although the camera focuses on Ptolemy—since Alexander dies just after he takes off the ring. According to the historical record, his signet went to Perdiccas who had been his chief confidant since the death of Hephaestion.[38]

Of course, no ancient source reports that it was Hephaestion who made Alexander 'lord of the ring.' This is Stone's invention which serves to emphasize the intensity of the bond between the two men and suggest that their 'marriage' has a prior claim over the sexual union between Alexander and Roxane. Despite this marital gesture, however, Stone once more denies Alexander and Hephaestion a kiss, even though their lips are very close and ready for the act. Just when Hephaestion is whispering "Many will love you, Alexander, but none so pure and deep," Roxane, the legitimate wife, comes into the bedroom to erase the image of two men hugging each other tightly and impose corrective heterosexuality.

Alexander and Hephaestion turn and look at her, their faces marked with guilt. Hephaestion leaves the room, and when Roxane asks her husband if he loves him, the camera focuses on the ring. But Alexander is unable to admit what the scene has been implying so far. All he says is: "He is Hephaestion! There are many different ways to love, Roxane. Come."

The gay viewer gets frustrated by the way the film once more creates but in the end discards an opportunity to legitimize same-sex attraction. Moreover, in this particular scene Alexander fails to state explicitly that he loves Hephaestion, although he does so without apparent difficulty in the balcony scene. The film stages homoerotic desire in order to override it through the interference of a woman and the subsequent, violently passionate, sexual encounter between Alexander and Roxane. Eroticized looking and touching between the two men thus serve as foreplay for the straight sex that closes the scene, allowing *Alexander* to remain within Hollywood's heterosexual film conventions that are necessary for commercial success. The frame of the screen—as opposed to the film's imagined off-screen spaces—is invested with symbolic meaning and becomes the domain where heterosexual values are preserved and perpetuated. Not only does the film deny gay viewing pleasure; it also asks (almost demands) that gay viewers obtain erotic satisfaction through Alexander's intercourse with a woman who is so masculinized—she even wrestles and exchanges blows with Alexander—that she becomes a surrogate body for the absent Hephaestion.

Commenting on the ring scene in the Director's Cut DVD, Stone states:

> [Hephaestion] is really screwing up Alexander's moment here because he should have found another way to give the ring is what I think. He gets caught, and getting caught he drives a stake between Roxane and him and Alexander. That's why Alexander was surprised when he came in and he was wondering what he would be doing here on his wedding night. To have your soul mate come see you and give you a ring on your wedding night is a bit of a reversal of the genre, as you know. [Laughing out loud] What can I say? I'm sorry. This is not *Braveheart*. . . .

This comment reveals Stone's dishonesty and intention to play with the expectations of the viewer, for he attributes to Hephaestion, his own fictional character, an interiority and agency that derive only from his decision to portray him as such. It is Stone himself who should (or could)

have found another way to have Hephaestion give Alexander the ring. His sarcastic comment that *Alexander* is not *Braveheart* reflects the negative stereotyping of homosexuality as the very opposite of masculinity. By staging all private interactions between Alexander and Hephaestion at night, Stone shows that same-sex desire should be hidden and expressed only in the darkness. Although acknowledged as part of the human sexual experience, same-sex attraction is ultimately negated so that Alexander—Stone's lifelong obsession—will be free from any stain of perversion. Evidently, Alexander and Hephaestion are not "Platonic soul mates," as Stone claims, but lovers—as illustrated by the ring, the symbol of their bond—caught red-handed in the bedroom, an apt metaphor for the closet into which they are entrapped by their own creator throughout the film.

## Conclusion

Despite the repression of physical expression of homoerotic desire, *Alexander* does take a pioneering stand in regard to same-sex coupling by presenting the relationship between Alexander and Hephaestion as a romantic bond analogous to that of companionate marriage. The two men are always framed as a couple in the film, even in public. The most notable instance of this framing is when the Macedonian army enters Babylon (see fig. 3). Alexander leads the procession and the only officer who rides his horse next to him is Hephaestion, as if he were the queen. Their relationship is constructed as the antithesis of the kind of mating that is imposed by societal factors, as exemplified by Alexander's marriage to Roxane. Male bonding is built upon involvement in specific personal and non-personal environments (e.g., gymnasium, camp, battlefield, assembly). In contrast to the usual homophobic disclaimer, here the homoerotic potential of the homosocial bond is affirmed through the ring that Hephaestion gives to Alexander. This object is more than a symbol of a strong homoerotic bond; it denotes a relationship between two males which represents a unique level of social solidarity. In the film, Hephaestion is the only officer whom Alexander trusts, the only male with whom he does not have a competitive relationship. On the ideological level, Hephaestion is cast as Alexander's twin. Although there is no kiss between them, the construction of their affair as a prototype of loyalty, courage, and self-sacrifice in the military/political field constitutes a remarkably positive attitude towards homosexuality for mainstream cinema. Despite the elision of gay sex, then, which so disappointed gay

viewers, Stone ends up celebrating gay pair-bonding, perhaps despite himself.[39]

## Notes

1. The argument about *Alexander*'s distortion of historical reality was advanced especially by a group of twenty-five Greek lawyers—self-appointed defenders of Alexander's masculinity—who threatened to file a lawsuit against both Stone and Warner Brothers, the production company. The lawyers ended up suing Spentzos Film, the film distributor in Greece, but suspended the action after they watched a preview screening. Cf. <http:// news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4064727.stm>; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment /4032245.stm>; <http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/11/25/alexander/; http://news.kathimerini. gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_civ_2_01/12/2004_125316>, all accessed on 29 February 2008.

2. *Alexander,* which cost $155 million to produce, grossed only $34 million in the United States and $133 million abroad. By contrast, *Gladiator* (2000), made at a budget of $108 million, earned $188 million nationally and $267 million internationally. The respective figures for *Troy* (2004) are: $175 million (production budget), $133 million (domestic gross), and $364 million (foreign gross). Figures quoted from <www.boxofficemojo.com>, accessed 29 February 2008.

3. On *Alexander*'s faithfulness to ancient sources, see Solomon 2005 and Lindner 2006.

4. The first cinematic representation of Alexander is *Sikander,* a 1941 Bollywood film directed by Sohrab Modi. This is a partial rendition of Alexander's expedition into Asia, which focuses only on the invasion of India in 326 B.C.E. For a scene-by-scene outline of the story, see <http://www.pothos.org/content/index.php?page=sikander-1941>, accessed 29 February 2008. On Alexander on the big screen and television, see also Reames-Zimmerman 2004; Nisbet 2006, 87–135; Pomeroy 2008, 103–11.

5. On the reasons why Rossen's film fails to engage the viewer, see Nisbet 2006, 90–101; Shahabudin, forthcoming.

6. On the relation between cinema and history in epic films, see Wyke 1997, 8–13; Joshel et. al. 2001, 1–22; Coleman 2004; Ward 2004; Winkler 2004; Fitton 2007; Shahabudin 2007; Solomon 2007.

7. On the conflation of Alexander's marriage to Roxane with his marriage to Stateira and Parysatis, see Pomroy 2008, 97.

8. I use 'monogamous' here to mean 'married to only one wife,' not 'to have one partner at a time.' The moral agenda of *Alexander the Great* is inconsistent (and very provocative by the moral standards of its time). Confronting Eurydice, Philip's new wife, Alexander repeats emphatically: "My father, as I said, had many wives and mistresses." This statement is ironic, for the difference between father and son in Rossen's film is the number of wives and mistresses each of them has.

9. Barsine was involved in a relationship with Alexander in 332 or 331 B.C.E., when she was captured by Parmenion at Damascus in the aftermath of the battle at Issus. Ancient sources describe the affair in sexual terms, but not as marriage. Barsine reportedly gave birth to Alexander's first son Heracles; this suggests that she must have enjoyed a high status even after Alexander's marriage to Roxane. See, e.g., Brunt 1975; Carney 2000, 101–5, 149–50.

10. On the construction of Barsine and Roxane as symbols of the unity of Greece and Persia in Rossen's film, see Shahabudin, forthcoming. All quotations from *Alexander the Great* and *Alexander* have been transcribed by me.

11. Arrian, *Anab.* 7.14; Diodorus Siculus 17.114–5; Justinus, *Epit.* 12.12.12; Plutarch *Alex.* 72.

12. The scene is a compilation of details drawn from various ancient sources. Alexander's attempted suicide is reported by several authors, but only Curtius (8.2.8–10) mentions that Alexander requested that Cleitus's dead body be brought to his private quarters and that he mourned over it for a while. On the Cleitus episode, see, e.g., Carney 1981; Green 1991, 360–6, 550 nn. 20–5; Hammond 1995; Bosworth 1996.

13. Relations between brothers in Greek antiquity were also understood in terms of *philia*, on which see Blundell 1989, 42.

14. The (de)homoeroticization of relationships between males is also a typical motif of the Western genre, on which see Blundell and Ormand 1997, 546–7, n. 36.

15. On the complication of this identificatory process, see also Pomeroy 2008, 101–2.

16. In Stone's film, Attalus is cast as the uncle of Eurydice; in Rossen's film, he is said to be her father. In ancient sources, Attalus's relation to Eurydice (or Cleopatra, as she is also known) is not clear, since he is listed variously as her father, uncle, guardian, or brother.

17. All scenes discussed in this paper are from the Two-Disc Widescreen Special Edition of *Alexander* released on 2 August 2005. The film is available in another two versions: *Alexander—Director's Cut* (Full Screen Edition and Two-Disc Widescreen Special Edition), also released on 2 August 2005, and *Alexander Revisited—The Final Cut* (Two-Disc Special Edition) released on 18 September 2007.

18. Characteristic is the title "*Alexander,* The Not-So-Great" of a review that appeared in the *Washington Post* (section WE.41) on 26 November 2004. A search on the Internet leads to more than ten film reviews with the same title.

19. One blogger writes: "I can remember one particular scene where Alexander's barbarian bride actually saw him mouthing one of his lifelong gay partner[s], named Hepatitis or something" (<http://www.michaelooi.net/2004/11>, accessed 12 May 2006). Alexander's death was also linked to the AIDS epidemic: "Alexander GAY hah? No wonder he died at a young age, maybe he died of aids, someone might have to rewrite history" (from the same Website).

20. Bibliography on ancient Greek (homo)sexuality is vast. See, e.g.: Cartledge 1981; Foucault 1986; Dover 1989; Halperin 1990; Winkler 1990; Hubbard 1998; Monoson 2000; Davidson 2001; Hubbard 2003, 1–267; Percy 2005; Skinner 2005, 1–146. On *Alexander* and ancient Greek sexuality, see also Skinner, forthcoming.

21. Cf. Green 1991, 105–9, 524 nn. 65–8; Ogden 1996, 121, 156 nn. 121, 122; Cartledge 2004, 47–8, 94.

22. On homoeroticism in the aristocratic circles of ancient Macedonia, see Ogden 1996, 119–23; Reames-Zimmerman 1999, 86–9; Koulakiotis 2000, 2003; Percy 2005, 43; Skinner, forthcoming.

23. The number of eunuchs depended on the size of the royal family. As Llewellyn-Jones (2002, 33–4) notes, Artaxerxes I had "eighteen daughters by his wives and concubines, but Artaxerxes II is said to have had 118, all of whom, as immediate members of the royal family, would probably have required a staff of eunuchs."

24. Badian (1958, 151) argues that Plutarch writes, by a mere slip, Gedrosia instead of the correct Carmania, where Alexander did hold choral contests, and that, given the nonexistence of theaters outside the Greek world, Plutarch's reference to a theater makes sense if the spectators were arranged in an analogous shape to attend the games.

25. For reasons of plot economy, the film casts Babylon as a palatial capital of the Persian Empire. Alexander did not enter any of Darius's luxurious palaces until the surrender of Susa, the administrative capital of the empire, in early December 331 B.C.E.

26. For the meaning of "eunuch" as chamberlain, see also Ringrose 2003, 16, 220 no. 35.

27. In an interview for *Cineaste*, Stone described the relation between Alexander and the East as follows: "Alexander is a unique story in that he is the 'proto-imperialist,' according to some people, who goes East in the Greek tradition (i.e., Dionysus, Heracles, Jason, Agamemnon, Ulysses, Achilles, Theseus, Perseus, etc.). The startling difference is that Alexander *stayed* in the East. He did not go back to his home and drain its resources, or bring the queen, the fleece, the glory, and the fame. He stayed in the East because he obviously was on his own path of discovery, such as in his relationships with Bagoas and Roxane" (Crowdus 2005, 17).

28. In *Troy* Pitt represents a masculine aesthetic that reflects the conventions of Hollywood action movies. Although his buff physique received positive comments, critics were less enthusiastic about his long blond hair. Characteristic is the following review, the author of which writes: "His pumped up visage is impressive. Less so is the obviously artificial hair color, which seems to range from honey blond to a golden orange sometimes in the same scene" (quoted from <http://www.reelmoviecritic.com/rmc/T/troy.htm>, accessed 29 February 2008). On *Troy*'s exploitation of Pitt's position as a symbol of straight white masculinity in Hollywood and American society in general, see Cyrino, forthcoming.

29. On *Gladiator*'s rhetoric of masculinity, see Fradley 2004 and Cyrino, forthcoming. On homosexuality in *Gladiator*, see Rose 2004, 166.

30. Cf., <http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0447,187546,58646,20.html>, accessed 29 February 2008.

31. As Dyer (2002a, 25) points out, since the nineteenth century classical antiquity has been used by gay men as a means of representing homoerotic desire, "both in the sense of imagining it to themselves and in the sense of arguing for it to the world. . . . [The classical example has thus provided] both the form of desire and the defense of it." For other such appropriations of classical antiquity, see Wyke 2002, 364–7; Richlin 2005.

32. As Carvel (2005a, 84) notes: "Alexander and Hephaistion (played by Jared Leto) do not get much further than lingering glances and manly hugs that will hardly cause straight guys to throw up. In this respect it is barely more than a buddy-film, and the plot keeps it clean not so much by adhering strictly to the Hays Code (1930) on nudity and sexual contact but by failing to give them a real relationship with ups and downs. Boy-meets-boy, they like each other, and they die, not even together." The fact that Hephaestion dies in the end is *Alexander*'s ultimate renunciation of homoerotic desire.

33. Historical epics produced during the genre's golden age, such as *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960), touch briefly on the theme of homosexuality, on which see Fitzgerald 2001, 36–42. The theme is fully, and provocatively, explored in *Sebastiane*

(1976), an independent film made by British artist Derek Jarman that does not comply with the rules of the Hollywood studio system, on which see Wyke 2001.

34. The exact nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus (i.e., whether they were simply brothers-in-arms or lovers) gave rise to a long debate among authors in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, on which see Clarke 1978; Halperin 1990, 75–87; Michelakis 2002, 41–6; Skinner 2005, 42–4 and forthcoming. This relationship was also used by Arrian (1.12.1–5) and Aelian (*VH* 12.7) as a model for describing that between Alexander and Hephaestion, on which see Ogden 1996, 122; Reames-Zimmerman 1999, 90; Percy 2005, 44. On Alexander's self-fashioning as Achilles and the influence of Mycenaeans on Macedonia, see Cohen 1995.

35. The expression "Platonic soul mates" is problematic, if not contradictory. 'Platonic' is used in English to mean 'non-sexual,' 'non-erotic,' 'non-romantic.' 'Soul mate,' by contrast, is a standard term (like 'other half') for finding the perfect spouse or the love of one's life, which *is* a sexual, erotic, romantic category. The combination of 'platonic' and 'soul mates' is simply not possible. I owe this observation to Ruby Blondell.

36. On gay typification in cinema, see Dyer 2002b, 19–49.

37. Alexander tried to impose this tradition on his Greek and Macedonian officers (but not until he conquered Bactria in the spring of 327 B.C.E.) only to meet their strong resistance since to them *proskynēsis* was a manifestation of religious adoration; to perform it would mean that they recognized Alexander as a living god. Hephaestion was one of the very few Macedonian propagandists of this practice. See, e.g., Green 1991, 372–6; Cartledge 2004, 202–3, 228, 245–6.

38. Curtius 10.5.4, 10.6.4; Diodorus Siculus 17.117.3, 18.2.4; Justinus, *Epit.* 12.15.12; Nepos, *Eum.* 2.1.

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Figure 1. *Alexander (right) and Hephaestion (left) at the balcony in Babylon. From behind, they look like a heterosexual couple.*

Figure 2. *Hephaestion is putting the ring on Alexander's finger as if he were marrying him.*

Figure 3. *Hephaestion (right), as if he were the queen, rides next to Alexander (left), while entering Babylon.*