

# The Ancient History Bulletin

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## **Edited by:**

Edward Anson ✦ Michael Fronda ✦ David Hollander  
Timothy Howe ✦ Joseph Roisman ✦ John Vanderspoel  
Pat Wheatley ✦ Sabine Müller ✦ Alex McAuley  
Catalina Balmaceda ✦ Charlotte Dunn



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# Oracular Politics: Propaganda and Myth in the Restoration of Didyma\*

Joshua P. Nudell

## Abstract:

*Alexander the Great's liberation of Miletus from Persia led to the rebirth of the oracle at Didyma, at least according to Callisthenes (Strabo 17.1.43). Modern scholars generally treat this account with healthy skepticism, but nevertheless accept the general outline of Callisthenes' claim. This paper reexamines the ancient evidence, showing that no relationship existed between Alexander and Didyma. The association between the king and the restoration of the oracle at Didyma was part of a larger program designed to establish the oracle's legitimacy that gained traction as a result of the relationships between Miletus and Seleucus I.*

## I. Miletus in the Shadow of Didyma

Didyma cast a long shadow over Miletus. Operated by the Branchidae, a non-Greek family of hereditary priests, the immense sanctuary to Apollo was the semi-autonomous home to one of the preeminent oracular seats in Archaic Greece. According to Herodotus, the sacred spring dried up when the Persians deported the Branchidae to Central Asia during the Persian Wars (6.19.2-20). With the Branchidae went the gift of prophecy. For much of the next two centuries the sanctuary continued to have cultic significance in Miletus, but the temple remained in ruins and the oracle silent.<sup>1</sup>

An ancient tradition held that Alexander the Great's liberation of Miletus in 334 caused the sacred spring to burst forth again and with its return came prophecy. Milesian ambassadors delivered the first pronouncements to Alexander in Egypt in 331, foretelling the Macedonian victory at Gaugamela and confirming Alexander's divinity (Strabo 17.1.43). This story, which originated with Alexander's court historian Callisthenes, is not without issue. First, plans for new construction in Miletus had begun earlier in the 330s, and, second, there is a three-year gap between Alexander's initial conquest of Miletus and the earliest evidence for the new oracle—a period during which the city had been captured by a Persian counter-offensive in the Aegean. Moreover, despite the reports that the oracle at Didyma was restored

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\* This article did not develop in a vacuum. I owe thanks to Ian Worthington, who supervised the dissertation from which this article developed, members of my writing group, and audiences in Williamsburg and Omaha for feedback on aspects of this project, and to the *AHB* referees for their astute comments. Any errors remain, of course, my own. All dates BCE unless otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> Fontenrose 1988: 14–15. The best evidence for the cult activity comes from the *Molpoi* inscription (I. *Milet* 1.3), which describes an annual ritual, see Gorman 2001: 176–86; Greaves 2010: 183–4; Robertson 1987: 359–65; Herda 2011: 57–86.

in the late 330s, construction at the sanctuary did not begin in earnest for more than two decades.

Recent scholarship has shown how the traditions about Alexander the Great are filtered through the Roman socio-cultural context,<sup>2</sup> and recently Howe has demonstrated that by the Roman era the historical tradition was already distorted by the political demands of the Diadochi.<sup>3</sup> This article builds on this body of scholarship, reexamining the restoration of Didyma to show how Alexander became associated with the sanctuary as a product of Seleucid propaganda and Milesian efforts to legitimize the new oracle.

## II. Reassessing the Restoration of Didyma

Modern scholars usually accept the implicit connection between Alexander's liberation of Miletus in 334 and the restoration of Didyma. Some, including Greaves, Parke, and Worthington, go so far as to suggest that Alexander himself visited and re-founded the oracle for propaganda purposes.<sup>4</sup> Yet, not one of the three ancient sources that record Alexander's capture of Miletus mentions a visit to Didyma (Diod. 17.22-3; Arr. *Anab.* 1.18-19; Plut. *Alex.* 17).<sup>5</sup> Others, including Anson, Bosworth, and Green, therefore argue that the liberation served as a catalyst for the Milesians to restore the oracle, but that Alexander only accepted the credit because it was politically expedient.<sup>6</sup> While positing diametrically opposed explanations for the process of restoring the oracle, both groups follow Strabo/Callisthenes in identifying Alexander's conquest as the development that prompted the renaissance of Didyma. The ancient evidence that supports this association, however, is not as solid as it appears.

Evidence for a relationship between Alexander and Didyma primarily comes from an account of Alexander's actions in Egypt during 331. While describing Alexander's visit to Siwah as recorded by Callisthenes, Strabo says (17.1.43):

προστραγωδεῖ δὲ τούτοις ὁ Καλλισθένης, ὅτι τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος τὸ ἐν Βραγχίδαις μαντεῖον ἐκλελοιπός, ἐξ ὅτου τὸ ἱερόν ὑπὸ τῶν Βραγχιδῶν σεσύλητο ἐπὶ Ξέρξου περσισάντων, ἐκλελοιπυίας δὲ καὶ τῆς κρήνης, τότε ἢ τε κρήνη ἀνάσχοι καὶ μαντεῖα πολλὰ οἱ Μιλησίων πρέσβεις κομίσαιεν εἰς Μέμφιν περὶ τῆς ἐκ Διὸς γενέσεως τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τῆς ἐσομένης περὶ Ἀρβηλα νίκης καὶ τοῦ Δαρείου θανάτου καὶ τῶν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι νεωτερισμῶν.

Callisthenes adds to this in a style fit for the stage that when Apollo abandoned the oracle at Branchidae when the temple was stripped by the Branchidae who took the side of the Persian Xerxes, the spring also dried up, but at the time when the spring reemerged Milesian ambassadors carried many oracles to Memphis concerning

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<sup>2</sup> e.g. Spencer 2002; Spencer 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Howe 2013: 57–66.

<sup>4</sup> Greaves 2002: 134–6; Greaves 2012: 179; Parke 1985b: 36; Worthington 2014: 266–7; cf. Howe 2013: 62, who describes Didyma as Alexander's "tame oracle."

<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Arrian (4.1.22) records a triumphal procession to the Artemisium at Ephesus.

<sup>6</sup> Anson 2013: 107; Bosworth 1988: 282; Green 1991: 277.

Alexander's descent from Zeus, and a future victory in the vicinity of Arbela, and the death of Darius, and the revolt at Lacedaemon.

Persian forces had seized Miletus and most of the coast of Asia Minor in Alexander's wake. Upon the conclusion of the war in the Aegean in 332, Greek ambassadors went to Egypt to affirm their loyalty to Alexander and submit traitors for punishment (Arr. *Anab.* 3.5.1; Curt. 4.8.12; Strabo 17.1.43). Neither Arrian nor Curtius mention the Milesians by name, but there is no reason to doubt the existence of the embassy. Miletus had surrendered to Persian forces and, along with other Ionian poleis, had to be recaptured (Curt. 4.5.13-14), so it is reasonable to assume that the Milesians had to account for their actions.<sup>7</sup> With them came tidings of the oracle's miraculous rebirth.

The report about Didyma in this passage is juxtaposed with the relationship between Alexander and Siwah. Strabo describes the account as embellished, but generally accepts Callisthenes' story. The fact that Callisthenes was a contemporary to these events lends his account credibility,<sup>8</sup> but there is reason to approach his work with caution. Callisthenes was not an impartial chronicler. He was Alexander's official court historian and it is well established that he was an instrumental part of a communications program that actively manipulated dispatches from the campaign, contributing greatly to the interpretation of Alexander's divinity.<sup>9</sup> In this case, the resurrection of and prophecies from Didyma were part of a litany of oracular predictions, including those from Siwah and the Erythraean Athenais (Strabo 17.1.43), that showed Alexander as destined to conquer Persia and confirmed his lineage from Zeus.

The fact that Callisthenes presented these oracles together suggests that they might have been the result of Alexander making known his desire for such declarations, but this is not supported in the evidence. It is unknown when Athenais, who Strabo describes as "being like the Erythraean Sibyl of old" (καὶ γὰρ ταύτην ὁμοίαν γενέσθαι τῇ παλαιᾷ Σιβύλλῃ τῇ Ἐρυθραίᾳ),<sup>10</sup> made her pronouncement, but tentatively placing it in the same context poses no complication. Erythrae was in the same bind as Miletus in 332, and it should not be a surprise that both declarations are traceable to communities patently in need of pardon for their action during the war in the Aegean. These prophecies were invaluable propaganda fodder in tandem with the report from Siwah, but they need not have been solicited.

The initiative to tell Alexander about the "miracle" came from the Milesians. Plans for new construction at Didyma had probably been developed parallel to work on the intramural Delphinium in the period 340–320,<sup>11</sup> but in 331, when the evidence for the restored oracle first appears, the city of Miletus was in difficult straits, as indicated by the eponym "Apollo the son

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<sup>7</sup> On the war in the Aegean and subsequent embassy, see Bosworth 1980: 266–9; Ruzicka 1988: 144.

<sup>8</sup> Fontenrose 1988, 15–16; cf. Parke 1985b: 62–3. Dillon 2017: 339 is skeptical.

<sup>9</sup> On this process, see Howe 2013: 62–3; Pearson 1960: 33–6; Pownall 2014: 56–71; Cartledge 2004: 271–3; Müller 2014: 50–6.

<sup>10</sup> Graf 1985: 342–3, notes that in the second half of the fourth century there was controversy over which Sibyl was legitimate, a conflict exacerbated by this pronouncement. Callisthenes' list of oracles other than Siwah was a house of cards.

<sup>11</sup> Patronos 2002: 65. Voigtländer 1975: 14–28, supports an even earlier date for the first phase of construction, see below.

of Zeus” (Ἀπόλλων Διός) on the *stephanephoro*i list. The appointment of Apollo is usually thought to indicate financial hardship in Miletus, perhaps being years in which the city borrowed from one of the god’s treasuries.<sup>12</sup> The embassy’s claim of a link between Alexander and the rebirth of Didyma therefore served two purposes for the Milesians: it affirmed their loyalty to the king and it served as an opportunity to petition him for donations to rebuild the temple.<sup>13</sup> In his account of Ionia, however, Strabo refers to the rebuilding of the temple as the work of the Milesians (ὕστερον δ’ οἱ Μιλήσιοι μέγιστον νεῶν τῶν πάντων κατεσκεύασαν, 14.1.5).<sup>14</sup> Alexander is entirely absent.

Fontenrose’s explanation for the disparity, that Alexander “was probably too busy with his campaigns” in 334 to attend to Didyma is inadequate.<sup>15</sup> At Priene and Ephesus elsewhere in Ionia, Alexander offered to pay for the construction and reconstruction of important sanctuaries (RO 86A; Strabo 14.1.22), and even led the army in a procession to the sanctuary of Artemis at Ephesus (Arr. *Anab.* 1.18.2).<sup>16</sup> No comparable evidence exists for Didyma and there is no reason to suppose that Alexander lacked the financial means to support the sanctuary.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Alexander justified his invasion of Persia as retribution for past wrongs, and the Ionians were praised for leaving their temples, including Didyma, in ruins as monuments to barbarian impiety (Isoc. 4.156). A donation or promise of support would have thus been in line with Alexander’s propaganda during a phase in his campaign when he was still emphasizing his Hellenic credentials.<sup>18</sup> As such, other explanations must be sought for the difference between Miletus and the other Ionian cities.

There were local differences in how the Milesians received their liberation. Miletus, alone among the cities in Ionia, resisted Alexander and was taken in a swift, bloody siege (Arr. *Anab.* 1.18.4-19.6; Diod. 17.22; Strabo 14.1.7), opening the possibility that the cold shoulder was punishment for resistance. And yet, there is no evidence that Alexander treated Miletus differently from neighbors either in 334 or in 331, so a punitive explanation fails to explain the absence of a donation. But are there reasons that Alexander might have both acknowledged a connection with Didyma and deferred making a donation? It is plausible, if unlikely, that Alexander delayed his support for Didyma because the campaign to avenge the sanctuary had not reached a satisfactory conclusion. The oath of Plataea, which demanded the Greeks leave the ruined sanctuaries untouched until the Persians were defeated, was an historical fiction, but one that carried great weight in the fourth century (RO 88; Lycurg. 1.81; Diod. 11.29.3).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The name also appears on the list in 299/8, the year of Seleucus’ extravagant dedications. On the eponym, see Fontenrose 1988: 16; Burstein 1985: 33 n.3; Dignas 2002: 238; Sherk 1992: 231-2.

<sup>13</sup> Parke 1985b: 42-3.

<sup>14</sup> Noted by Fontenrose 1988: 16; Green 1991: 276-7; Günther 1971: 21-2.

<sup>15</sup> Fontenrose 1988: 16.

<sup>16</sup> The date of these donations is controversial. The Ephesians rejected the offer allegedly on account of Alexander’s divinity, but more likely as a way to play both sides in case of a Persian victory, see Rogers 2012: 48. An inscription from the temple of Athena Polias attests to the dedication at Priene, see Schede 1964: 30-5; Patronos 2002: 117-20.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander was short of cash when the campaign began, but he quickly gained access to resources from the captured territories, see Kholod 2013: 83-92.

<sup>18</sup> On Alexander’s Panhellenic propaganda, see in particular Flower 2000: 96-115.

<sup>19</sup> On the development of this oath, see Cartledge 2013.



Since Didyma had been destroyed during the Persian Wars, unlike the sanctuary of Artemis at Ephesus and the temple of Athena at Priene, the oath would have offered reasonable grounds for delaying a donation to the sanctuary, but neither was it invoked nor was a donation forthcoming after Alexander accepted the mantle of Lord of Asia after the battle of Gaugamela in 330 (Plut. *Alex.* 34.1).

Alexander may have also demurred in 334 because the Branchidae were still alive. One ancient tradition maintained that this changed in 329. Alexander allegedly stumbled across the town of the Branchidae in central Asia while pursuing Bessus, who had arranged Darius' murder and assumed the Persian throne in his place (Arr. *Anab.* 3.21.10; Diod. 17.73.3). Accordingly, we are told, Alexander convened a council to which he summoned the Milesians with the army (Curt. 7.5.30-1). According to Curtius, Alexander included the Milesians because they bore a long-standing grudge against the Branchidae (*Vetus odium Milesii gerebant in Branchidarum gentem*). He continues by saying Alexander let the Milesians decide whether to remember the affront or their common origin with the Branchidae (*Proditis ergo, sive iniuria sivi originis meminisse mallent, liberum de Branchidis permittit arbitrium*). When the Milesians could not agree on a course of action, Alexander made the decision for them, choosing to remember the crimes (Curt. 7.5.28-35; cf. Pliny *N.H.* 6.18; [Plut.] *Mor.* 557B).

Parke argues that a vocal group of Milesians with Alexander interpreted the choice as an invitation to accept the Branchidae back to Miletus and thereby strip away Miletus' control of the new oracle.<sup>20</sup> He suggests, without evidence, that Demodamas son of Aristides was a leader of this group because the Milesian was instrumental in negotiating donations from Seleucus after 305 (see below).<sup>21</sup> In Parke's reconstruction, Demodamas and the Milesians goaded Alexander to action by filling his ears with the crimes of the Branchidae.<sup>22</sup> That there were Milesians with the army is entirely plausible, but this hypothesis requires that Alexander be unaware of the scope of the crimes, while Curtius' narrative says that he only summoned the Milesians because of their longstanding hostility toward the Branchidae.

In addition to the problem of the Milesians, the massacre of the Branchidae is subject to widely varying interpretations concerning its veracity, Alexander's motives, and whether the act was morally justified. The affair was long dismissed because Arrian did not mention it, and thus was thought to be a fiction introduced to contextualize the punishment of Greek traitors.<sup>23</sup> In the past several decades, the consensus has shifted to accept that a massacre did take place,<sup>24</sup> but controversy remains.<sup>25</sup> Despite the massacre allegedly bringing final closure to the Persian sacrilege at Didyma and the alleged involvement of the Milesians, still Alexander did not pay for new construction. In marked contrast, Seleucus returned to Didyma the cult

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<sup>20</sup> Parke 1985a: 67-8; 1986: 123-4.

<sup>21</sup> Parke 1985a: 67.

<sup>22</sup> Parke 1985a: 68; 1985b: 39-41.

<sup>23</sup> e.g. Hammond 1983: 141; Pearson 1960: 240; Tarn 1922: 63-5.

<sup>24</sup> Greaves 2012: 179-80; Hammond 1998; Heckel 2007: 95-6; Parke 1985a.

<sup>25</sup> Most recently, J. Reames, in a paper given at the 6th International Alexander Symposium at the University of Utah in October 2014, argued that Alexander adopted a Near-Eastern practice that called for the destruction of sacred precincts during war, which goes far to explain both Alexander's behavior and the apparent befuddlement of the Greek and Roman commentators.



statue of Canachus Apollo, in c.305 (Paus. 8.46.3), which he claimed to have found in Ecbatana (Paus. 1.16.3). I believe that this statue was a forgery,<sup>26</sup> but the gesture alone indicates that the Persian sack of Didyma remained a potent political symbol. The same must have held true for Alexander. He knew the propaganda value of a dedication when he sent three hundred captured Persians shields to Athens after the battle of Granicus (Plut. *Alex.* 16.8) and when he was supposed to have returned other statues looted by the Persians, including those of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.7–8; 7.19.1–2).<sup>27</sup> And yet there is only silence regarding Didyma. The account of the Branchidae, moreover, is embedded in Curtius' narrative about the arrest and execution of the treacherous Bessus. The consultation of the Milesians is best seen as a fiction that served to legitimize the massacre for a Greek audience while the massacre itself is paired with the punishment of Bessus in order to reinforce Alexander's retributive vengeance.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, Didyma is not listed among the sanctuaries to receive money in Alexander's *hypomnemata*.<sup>29</sup> The document is fictitious,<sup>30</sup> but neither Didyma's later prominence nor its notional association with Alexander caused it to find its way onto the list. In fact, the most inclusive version of the testament does offer a bequest for the Milesians, but not for Didyma (Metz Epitome 120). Even down to Alexander's final days, his relationship with Didyma remained entirely within the realm of potentiality.

In sum, the only ancient testimony that makes the connection between Alexander's liberation of Miletus and the restoration of Didyma is a passing reference in Strabo/Callisthenes. If a relationship existed, it is all the more remarkable that it does not appear in other ancient accounts that connected Alexander and Miletus. This is a negative conclusion, but one that invites a follow-up question: how did Alexander become associated with the restoration of Didyma? The answer lies with two concurrent agendas, those of Seleucus I and his immediate successors, and those of the Milesians, both of which had vested interests in returning the oracle to prominence.

### III. Didyma and Seleucid Propaganda

Despite preliminary plans to restore Didyma that could have predated 334 and proclamations from the oracle in 331, there were no physical signs until the end of the fourth century. Only

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<sup>26</sup> See Moggi 1973, but Strocka: 2002: 96–7, argues that the Milesians had already created a new cult statue.

<sup>27</sup> Another version credits Seleucus with returning the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Valerius Maximus 2.10.

<sup>28</sup> See Hammond 1983: 141–2; cf. Heckel 2007: 95–7.

<sup>29</sup> As noted by Parke 1985b: 67.

<sup>30</sup> That the will is a later invention is universally accepted; see Badian 1968: 183–204; Heckel 1988: 1–18; Worthington 2014: 297. The question is who created Alexander's will, when, and for what purpose. Most recently, Worthington 2016: 150–4, has argued that it was a creation of Ptolemaic propaganda in 309 to win the hand of Cleopatra, Alexander's sister, in marriage and buttress his claim to the Macedonian throne; On the Ptolemaic origin, cf. Bosworth 2000: 207–41; Lane Fox 2014: 185–7.

between 306 and 300, around the same time that Seleucus initiated his benefactions to Didyma, did construction begin anew. As noted above, Seleucus returned the cult statue from Ecbatana in this period, but he and his family also made a series of donations to Miletus after the battle of Ipsus in 301, including a *stoa* in Miletus with its revenues to go to Didyma (McCabe, *Didyma* 7), funds for the construction of the *naos* (McCabe, *Didyma* 8, ll.8–9), and lavish dedications including thousands of sacrificial animals and exotic offerings such as cinnamon, frankincense and myrrh (McCabe, *Didyma* 19). The incentives for Hellenistic monarchs to make ostentatious donations to Greek poleis are well documented,<sup>31</sup> but it does not answer why Miletus or why Didyma—at least not until the donations are read in the context of the Seleucid propaganda program that connected Seleucus to Alexander and Apollo.

Early Seleucid religious iconography was primarily dedicated to two gods, Zeus and Apollo. Each in its own way made the connection between Seleucus and Alexander. Seleucus showed his devotion to Zeus from an early date as he continued to mint Alexandrian coin types, including one depicting Zeus Nikephoros, and promoted a royal cult for Seleucus Zeus Nikator (*OGIS* 245).<sup>32</sup> Less trustworthy, but equally indicative of a concerted propaganda effort are the myths about the foundation of Antioch on the Orontes in Syria.<sup>33</sup> In one, the late writer Libanius claimed that the site was chosen because Alexander dedicated an altar to Zeus Bottiaeus there (*Orationes* 11.72–6), while, in the other, Seleucus was sacrificing to Zeus at the captured city of Antigoneia and looking for guidance about what to do regarding the city, when an eagle carried the meat to the site of the future Antioch (Libanius, *Orationes* 85–8; Malalas, *Chronicle* 8.13–17). Both stories read more like local myth than history, but nevertheless demonstrate the close connection of Seleucus with Zeus.<sup>34</sup> As if the patronage of Zeus were insufficient, these traditions built on Seleucid propaganda programs that cultivated connections with Alexander. Thus, Libanius says that Seleucus was descended from Heracles (*Orationes* 11.91), meaning not only that he had the favor of Zeus and Alexander, but also that he was family.<sup>35</sup>

If Seleucus used the association with Zeus to present himself as the new Alexander, his devotion to Apollo had a concurrent purpose. Seleucus' coinage in Babylonia featured Apollo from c.305, and the connection became more pronounced after he founded the sanctuary of Apollo at Daphne in 300, allegedly at the urging of the oracle at Didyma.<sup>36</sup> These seeds took root and sprouted during the reign of his son Antiochus, but there is no reason to deny Seleucus a second divine patron. Alexander, after all, was associated with Heracles and Dionysus, as well as Zeus.

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<sup>31</sup> e.g. Orth 1977: 18; Patronos 2002: 174–93.

<sup>32</sup> Debord 2003; Erickson 2013: 113–18; Hadley 1974. Erickson demonstrates that Seleucus' invocations of Alexander iconography were not static, but repurposed to articulate a new Seleucid image. He concludes, however, that Seleucus failed and Antiochus replaced lingering references to Alexander with iconography personal to the dynasty.

<sup>33</sup> For these myths, see De Giorgi 2016: 40–4; Ogden 2017: 99–114.

<sup>34</sup> Debord 2003.

<sup>35</sup> For the Heraclid origins of the Argeads, see Hammond 1979: 3–14.

<sup>36</sup> On the connection between Didyma and Daphne see De Giorgi 2016: 150–4; Ogden 2017: 57, 138–51, 272.

There are two versions of the story about Seleucus and Didyma. The first appears in Diodorus Siculus' account of Seleucus' return to Babylon after the battle of Gaza in 312.<sup>37</sup> Seeing that his soldiers feared an attack by Antigonus, Seleucus first appealed to their experience, but then said that they should put their trust in oracles since "when he consulted the oracle at Branchidae the god addressed him as Seleucus king" (ἐν μὲν γὰρ Βραγχίδαις αὐτοῦ χρηστηριαζομένου τὸν θεὸν προσαγορεύσαι Σέλευκον βασιλέα, Diod. 19.90.4). He does not mention Alexander while recounting the alleged oracle, but the passage concludes by invoking a dream in which Alexander stood over Seleucus and indicated his future rule. This account is rife with folkloric elements, as Ogden has shown,<sup>38</sup> and the Alexandrian echoes are particularly prominent in that the portent came in a mistaken address, just like the one that confirmed Alexander's divinity at Siwah (Diod. 17.51; Plut. *Alex.* 27.3-6). Thus Didyma, which offered a potent combination of connections to both Alexander and Apollo, played the same symbolic role for Seleucus that Siwah did for Alexander.

The second version of the prophecy, preserved by Appian in a list of prodigies about the king, is that Seleucus asked the oracle whether he should return to Macedonia and was told "Do not hurry back to Europe; Asia will be much better to you" (μὴ σπεῦδ' Εὐρώπηνδ'. Ἀσίη τοι πολλὸν ἀμείνῳ, App. *Syr.* 56).<sup>39</sup> This tradition does not make reference to Alexander and is appropriately vague, which leads Grainger to accept the response as "approximately accurate," though Fontenrose classifies it as not genuine.<sup>40</sup> Both traditions conform to formulaic models for oracular consultation, adapted to fit Seleucus.<sup>41</sup>

Irrespective of the content of the responses, a problem remains: when did Seleucus petition the oracle at Didyma? The *termini post* and *ante quem* are both clear (334 and 312, respectively), but there are few possible dates between that range—and less positive evidence. Appian says that the consultation took place while Seleucus was serving with Alexander, but offers little clarity (App. *Syr.* 56). The most common proposal is that he petitioned the oracle in the first winter of the campaign against Persia when Alexander sent a contingent of newly married men back to Macedonia (Arr. *Anab.* 1.29.3–4), and duly received the advice not to return to Europe.<sup>42</sup> If the oracle's restoration coincided with Alexander's campaign, a consultation in 334/3 was indeed possible, but this interpretation is not without issues. First, it is not at all certain that the oracle was restored in 334 and less so that it had immediate legitimacy. Second, there is a conspicuous lack of evidence for Seleucus' life before his appointment to the office of *hipparch* in 330. His swift promotion to the upper echelons of the army's hierarchy indicates that Seleucus must have distinguished himself in the early years of the campaign, but, despite the tenuous assumption in Appian, it is unknown whether he was

<sup>37</sup> Diodorus' source for this passage is suspect. Hadley 1969: 144, traces the source to Hieronymus of Cardia, but Bearzot 1984: 79, argues that it has the tenor of an eyewitness account and thus identifies that witness as Demodamas of Miletus. Both proposals are highly speculative.

<sup>38</sup> Ogden 2017: 70–84.

<sup>39</sup> There is firmer ground to establish this version as the work of Hieronymus of Cardia, see Hadley 1969: 149–50.

<sup>40</sup> Grainger 1990: 164; Fontenrose 1988: 215–16.

<sup>41</sup> Bowden 2017: 168–9, notes a similar process for the literary accounts of Philip and Alexander's interactions with the Pythia at Delphi.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. Bearzot 1984: 61; Grainger 1990: 164.

with the expedition from the outset or joined shortly thereafter.<sup>43</sup> A consultation between 334 and 330, while it cannot be entirely dismissed, is more likely a fabrication that served to link Seleucus more closely to Alexander.

The second and in my opinion more probable opportunity came in 314/3 when Seleucus commanded a Ptolemaic fleet in the Aegean (Diod. 19.60.3–4).<sup>44</sup> Not only had the oracle nominally been functioning for more than fifteen years since delivering the prophecies to Alexander in Egypt, but campaigning in Ionia also gave Seleucus ample opportunity—and excuse—to negotiate with the Milesians. There is no way to know whether these negotiations included consultation with the oracle at Didyma and it is possible that the Milesians delivered an unsolicited prophecy to use as diplomatic leverage. In the absence of positive evidence, these proposals are speculative, but the situation created plausible context for an oracular consultation. Moreover, if this tradition was a forgery, there is no evidence that the Milesians were eager to disabuse Seleucus of his mendacity.

Neither extant version of the prophecy screams historical veracity. The oracle's words are only preserved by dubious and contradictory historical traditions, but neither is the prophecy the only omen that foretold Seleucus' kingship. Another allegedly manifested upon Alexander's return to Babylonia. According to this story, Seleucus retrieved Alexander's diadem when it was blown from the royal brow and settled in the marsh near the tombs of the Babylonian kings. Seleucus placed the diadem on his own head to keep it dry while returning to Alexander's barge, an omen for the transfer of kingship from Alexander to Seleucus (Arr. *Anab.* 7.22.5; App. *Syr.* 56). A pleasing story for Seleucus, no doubt, this episode is a variation on a common type of early Hellenistic propaganda designed to support claims to kingship.<sup>45</sup> Aristobulus described the scene more plausibly, saying that a Phoenician sailor retrieved the diadem, receiving a reward for his dedication and punishment for placing it on his head (Arr. *Anab.* 7.22.4–5). Since this episode was an established part of the tradition about Alexander it was an easy step to replace the unnamed Phoenician sailor with Seleucus. In the same way, the tradition about Didyma mutated through the years alongside the other elements of Seleucus' legend.

The most probable context for Seleucus' diplomacy with Miletus is 314/3, but the specifics of the interaction, including the oracular predictions, were subsumed by an evolving discourse. The distortion that added a mistaken address to the exchange, which reinforced Seleucus' kingship and demonstrated that a divine Alexander favored his endeavor, probably dates to between 305 and 301, after Seleucus claimed the title *basileus* in 305/4<sup>46</sup> and at the same time that he issued a new series of coins depicting a heroized Alexander.<sup>47</sup> Hieronymus of Cardia then exaggerated the prophecies in the decades after Ipsus, inventing the second one

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<sup>43</sup> cf. Heckel 2006: 246, who takes a cautious approach to reconstructing Seleucus' early career.

<sup>44</sup> This date is likewise supported by Mehl 1986: 97, 217; Parke 1985b: 44.

<sup>45</sup> On this propaganda type, see Heckel 2006: 247; Ogden 2017: 33–43.

<sup>46</sup> Boiy 2011: 1–12. Plutarch (*Demet.* 17.4–5) records an episode at Antigonus' court in 309 where Aristodemus (also of Miletus) began the announcement of Demetrius' victory over Ptolemy by hailing Antigonus as king. To assume similar flattery from Miletus for Seleucus, however, mistakes the different positions with regard to the city. On this passage, see Bosworth 2000: 228–32.

<sup>47</sup> See Hadley 1969: 52–3; Ogden 2017: 271.

out of whole cloth since it reveals not only Seleucus' conquests in Asia, but also his eventual death.<sup>48</sup> In turn, these prophecies burnished the reputation of Didyma, serving as testimonials for its restoration.

Seleucus' donations and those of his family were part of a long-term reciprocal relationship with Miletus that served to reinforce the dynastic image of Seleucus and his heir, Antiochus.<sup>49</sup> It was in this context that a tradition developed about Seleucus having a sister named Didymeia (Malalas, *Chronicle* 8.198). The evidence for this sibling is both slim and late, but, while he may have indeed had a sister, the attributed name is most likely meant to attest to the predestined nature of his relationship with Didymeian Apollo—something not at all plausible.<sup>50</sup> There was nothing inevitable about the choice to patronize Didyma and Miletus, but it sat at a potent confluence of local circumstances that were ripe for picking and associations to Alexander and Apollo that suited Seleucus' ambitions.

#### IV. Miletus and early Hellenistic Didyma

To this point, I have examined negatively Alexander's relationship with Didyma and the underpinnings of Seleucus' interest in the sanctuary, but what about the Milesians? The process of restoring the sanctuary of Apollo had begun already before 334. In the early 330s there was a spate of new construction in the city that included renovation and expansion of the city Delphinium.<sup>51</sup> The oracles that the Milesian embassy delivered to Alexander in Egypt in 331 are the first concrete evidence of this restoration, but plans for the new sanctuary at Didyma plausibly belong in this earlier milieu.<sup>52</sup> The decision to rebuild one of the largest sanctuaries in the Greek world, though, was neither a cynical scheme rashly concocted after Alexander conquered the city nor caused by the power of his liberation of Miletus from Persia. It is impossible to know whether these plans included the restoration of the oracle, its resurrection was a consequence of the diplomatic needs of the city after 334, or if the change in political circumstances expedited the process. Irrespective of the date when the plans for the oracle were actually made, the official story juxtaposed the return of the sacred spring with Alexander's campaign, linking the two even without the Milesians explicitly making the connection.

The oracles in 331 served multiple purposes, including an appeal to Alexander's mercy and a barely-veiled request for funding to build their temple. When no funds appeared, they had to temporarily shelve the plans, only to pick them up again in the last years of the fourth century. When the opportunity to work on the project next presented itself, the Milesians took

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<sup>48</sup> As argued by Grainger 1990: 190–1; Hadley 1969: 151; Parke 1985b: 44–5.

<sup>49</sup> Müller 2013: 206–9; Widmer 2016: 19–20, hence Apame's increased visibility in the dynastic image at the same time that Seleucus took a second wife. Cf. Ramsay 2016: 88–9.

<sup>50</sup> Heckel 2006: 111–12; Hadley 1974: 53, 58–9; Grainger 1990: 3–4; Grainger 1997: 44.

<sup>51</sup> On the phases of public construction at Miletus, see Patronos 2002: 65.

<sup>52</sup> Voigtländer 1975: 14–28, puts the plans before 340 on the basis of a stylistic analysis of the decorations and the biographies of the architects involved. As Cook 1976, notes, however, this interpretation relies on speculation about the interrelationship of monumental construction in fourth-century Asia Minor.

full advantage with a concerted campaign to restore the legitimacy of the sanctuary and the oracle.

Three inscriptions dated to the first half of the 290s attest both to the intensification of the relationship between Miletus and the Seleucid court and to the renewed activity at Didyma.<sup>53</sup> As already established, these donations had three purposes from the Seleucid perspective: first, they built a relationship with Miletus; second, they recognized the positive oracles from Didyma and thus recognized Apollo's divine patronage; third, despite Antiochus' donation coming as a private person rather than royal heir, the set of benefactions built a cohesive dynastic image. The Milesians in return received financing for their new temple, but the inscriptions also reveal other forms of interaction with the Seleucid court. In addition to praising Apame for her dedications at Didyma, the honorary decree for the queen reveals that she played a role in supporting Milesian mercenaries while they fought for her husband (McCabe *Didyma* 8, l. 6).<sup>54</sup> The inscription is also notable for the name of one of the proposers, Demodamas—a man who has been credited with an outsized role in fostering the relationship between Seleucus and Didyma.

Little is known about Demodamas. He proposed the honors for Apame as a private citizen, and introduced the motion to honor Antiochus, plausibly indicating that he was in Miletus in c.300/299. The confluence of honors for Apame on behalf of Milesian soldiers and lack of a public office, however, has commonly led scholars to argue that he was a mercenary who became a *philos* at the Seleucid court.<sup>55</sup> From this position Demodamas served as an intermediary between his city and his king.<sup>56</sup> The only other unambiguous piece of evidence about Demodamas supports this reconstruction, testimony for an altar to Didymeian Apollo that he dedicated while in central Asia (Pliny *NH* 6.49). This expedition is impossible to date, with some scholars suggesting that it was an extension of Seleucus' ultimately unsuccessful campaigns of 306–303 in the Indus region (App. *Syr.* 55).<sup>57</sup> Following this proposal, Demodamas would have been a soldier during these wars, and in position to influence the decision to restore the cult statue of Canachus Apollo, as well as dedicating the altar, which leaves the honors for Apame as the climax of this relationship.

This is a neat chronology, but one that is ultimately unsatisfactory. Milesian soldiers, possibly including Demodamas, served with Seleucus before 299, but, as Widmer points out, that need not be the context for the dedication.<sup>58</sup> The altar Demodamas dedicated was done in the name of the two Seleucid kings, Seleucus and Antiochus, so, unless mention of a second king was added later, the dedication must post-date Antiochus' accession to the co-kingship in 294. This date, moreover, coincided with Antiochus' appointment to rule the eastern half of the kingdom (Diod. 21.20). While an unattested military campaign in central Asia is far from

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<sup>53</sup> On the date, see Robert 1984: 469–71.

<sup>54</sup> Orth 1977: 20; Robert 1984: 467–70; Widmer 2016: 21–3, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Hausoullier 1902: 36, argues that he had relatives in the Seleucid court, but there is no need to imagine another set of unnamed individuals.

<sup>56</sup> On this process, see Widmer 2016: 29.

<sup>57</sup> Bikerman 1938: 73; Hausoullier 1902: 48–9; Mehl 1986: 166–81; Robert 1984: 471–2; Savalli-Lestrade 1998: 5, followed by Ramsay 2016: 89–90.

<sup>58</sup> Widmer: 2016: 25.



impossible, Widmer has recently made the case that Demodamas' role as *philos* need not have been strictly military. Instead, she argues, both in dealing with Miletus and with central Asia, Demodamas had a diplomatic function that served to construct royal authority among the local elite.<sup>59</sup> Further, as Kosmin has recently argued, the dedication played a concrete role in the Seleucid articulation of empire in central Asia.<sup>60</sup> By the time of Demodamas' dedication, Didymeian Apollo was an important component of the Seleucid dynastic image that included Seleucus, Antiochus, and Apame and the sanctuary and the altar bracketed imperial territory along its Northeast and Northwest borders, thereby defining the limits of Seleucid space.

While the sanctuary and oracle at Didyma were crucial for the interaction between Miletus and the Seleucid kings, the refoundation also had local ramifications. The Archaic sanctuary had overshadowed the city while maintaining its autonomy under the leadership of the Branchidae, its non-Greek priestly family. In the early Hellenistic period, the Milesians began to rewrite these mythical genealogies, both as a way to give legitimacy to the restored sanctuary and to subordinate the sanctuary to the city. For instance, in the earliest testimony for an explicit connection between Miletus and Didyma a fragment from the late-fourth century historian Leandr(i)us, claims that Cleochus, the grandfather of the eponymous founder of Miletus, was buried at the sanctuary (BNJ 491-2 F 10).<sup>61</sup> Another early Hellenistic variation on the foundation of Didyma made Branchus descended from priests at Delphi rather than Apollo (Callimachus F 229). Callimachus' poetry engaged with the Seleucid ideology on behalf of his Ptolemaic patrons and conspicuously manipulated the presentation of Apolline geography with an eye toward geopolitical considerations,<sup>62</sup> but this variation also granted Didyma legitimacy by implying its descent from Delphi.<sup>63</sup> A third story, preserved in a fragment from Conon in the first century, was that King Laodamas of Miletus dedicated the child of a woman he captured to Apollo (*Narr.* 33). This child was adopted by Branchus and given the name Euangelos, inheriting the oracle and becoming the ancestor of the Milesian Euangelidae family.

Each of these stories is compressed and confused, but they clearly strengthen the connection between city and sanctuary and plausibly date to the early Hellenistic period. At this same time, the *prophetes* at Didyma became an annual magistrate appointed by lot from nominees chosen by the five Milesian demes, thereby integrating the cult with civic institutions.<sup>64</sup> Other than establishing the connection between Didyma and Delphi, these mythical genealogies did not have broad ramifications outside Miletus, but demonstrate another way the Milesians sought to recapture their Archaic legitimacy while serving the needs of the Hellenistic city.

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<sup>59</sup> Widmer 2016: 25-7. *cf.* Grainger 1997: 86. Ramsay 2016: 95-6, highlights Apame's role in this same process.

<sup>60</sup> Kosmin 2014: 61-7.

<sup>61</sup> No earlier version of this foundation myth connects the founder Miletus with Didyma, see Sato 2012.

<sup>62</sup> See Brumbaugh 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Greaves 2012: 181-3, argues that the restored oracle adopted the Delphic model of mantic trance for delivering responses, reinforcing this connection.

<sup>64</sup> On the integration of the oracle with civic institutions, see Fontenrose 1988: 46-8; Parke 1985b: 41-2. A similar process was underway at Ephesus, see Rogers 2012: 85-8.

Another component to the branding of the oracle as legitimate was the altar. Excavators at Didyma have found a monumental blood altar built on an Archaic model and without parallel among other Hellenistic sites.<sup>65</sup> Despite the impressive size of the new temple, it was this altar and the Archaic—or at least archaizing—statue of Canachus Apollo that became the standard iconographic representations of the sanctuary, appearing on Milesian coins and on friezes in the theater.<sup>66</sup> The origin of both symbols lay in the Archaic period, which reinforced the message that the sanctuary and oracle of Didyma were not new foundations, but the ancient institutions returned.

In a city known as the ornament of Ionia for its temples, the temple of Apollo at Didyma was the crown jewel. Famous sanctuaries like the one to Artemis in nearby Ephesus and oracles like the one at Delphi attracted wealthy patrons. In the Archaic period, Didyma had rivaled the Artemisium in size and the temple housed the second most important oracular seat in the Greek world after only Delphi. But Didyma had been destroyed, allegedly betrayed to Persia by its own priests. The restoration of the sanctuary and oracle had obvious benefits for the Milesians, but less obvious are the steps they took to give the new oracle legitimacy. There was a thorough branding campaign in the early Hellenistic period in support of the new sanctuary that included rewriting its mythical genealogy, refurbishing the original altar, and cultivating relationships between the sanctuary and world of imperial politics, most notably with the Seleucids. But words are wind. Critical to this process was evidence that the new oracle was not a sham. Definitive proof lay only in its prophecies coming to pass. Alexander's propaganda machine started this process when it appropriated the message from Miletus in 331, but the more important testimonial came from Seleucus, whose magnificent donations left no doubt that the oracle had indeed been reborn.

## V. Invented Traditions and the Business of Oracles

Alexander's recent death and the combination of competitive politics and propaganda made the early Hellenistic period fertile ground for establishing new traditions, but the consequences went beyond dynastic dustups. For the Milesians, this period offered an opportunity to restore the long-dormant oracle at Didyma, which was potentially a potent weapon in the arena of imperial competition. This process did not take place in a vacuum, but in dialogue with royal propaganda. While the practical and ideological benefits of engagement with Didyma are clear for Seleucus and Antiochus, the Milesians stood to gain more than the patronage of a Hellenistic king.

Oracle-mongering had the potential to be big business in the ancient world, as the second-century CE author Lucian indicates in his *Alexander the False Prophet*. Lucian is skeptical of oracles in the dialogue, and he viciously satirizes Alexander's schemes to gain legitimacy on the oracular circuit by issuing clarifications, expunging incorrect prophecies, and trading on the reputation of established oracles such as Delphi and Didyma (26–9, 33). Seen in the context of the refoundation of Didyma, Lucian's tirades about Alexander's vulgar exploitation of

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<sup>65</sup> On this altar, see Weber 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Strocka 2002; Weber 2015.

people's credulity for profit appear in a new hue. Such were the politics of oracle genesis. When the Milesians promoted the restoration of Didyma they burnished its relationships with Alexander and Delphi and advertised its demonstrably correct prophecies, proof of which Seleucus provided with his dedications, even if the specific "prophecies" never existed and the donations were part of a larger reciprocal relationship between sovereign and city. Alexander—alongside Apollo—served as an *aition* for the restoration.

This is not to say the process was simple or seamless. The restoration of the oracle at Didyma progressed in fits and starts over the course of decades, and the first historical responses outside of Strabo/Callisthenes date to the 220s when it became a common practice to inscribe the responses in stone at the sanctuary.<sup>67</sup> Yet all of the elements were in place by c.300. Alexander came to be credited with the restoration Didyma in the foggy recollection of cultural memory, not for his own actions but because his insertion into the foundation myth served both Milesian and Seleucid ends.

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<sup>67</sup> Dillon 2017: 339; Fontenrose 1988: 86, with a catalogue of responses 177–244.

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