

Dr. Stephen G. Miller's response to Dr. Tompkins' comments.

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Response to Dr. Dan Tompkins re: "Letter to Archaeology"

Although I am away from my library and cannot provide precise citations for the following, some of the statements in the essay by Dr. Tompkins deserve a prompt response.

1) "Brunwasser's report in Archaeology magazine nowhere claimed that Alexander and his family were "Slavic.""

If the people of Skopje are claiming that Alexander is their ancestor, aren't they claiming that he and they have the same ethnicity? Perhaps I misread the Archaeology article: are the people of Skopje claiming that they are Greek?

2) "On Alexander, the problem for anyone who reads Professor Miller's source, Herodotus (Books 5, 8 & 9), is that the family, going back to Alexander I during the Persian invasion, is one that exploits its status as a border people."

Dr. Tompkins appears to think that the behavior of Alexander I during the Persian invasion is, in some way, a reflection of his ethnicity. But the reader of the books of Herodotus he mentions (as well as Book 7) will note that several city-states "medized" and did not support the Greek efforts against the invaders. Has anyone ever questioned whether the Thebans or the Argives (for example) were therefore not Greeks?

3) "If Herodotus' account is, in fact, literally true..."

Such an implicit question about the veracity of Herodotus is, I fear, characteristic of some current trends of scholarship which attempt to identify prejudices in our ancient authors and to analyze those authors' motivations. Such efforts can all too easily result in decisions about what we will believe and what we won't believe. For me, Herodotus had the benefit of eye-witness accounts of the events he described and as a primary source is much more to be trusted than modern interpretations of what he ought

to have written. I do not feel comfortable with a methodology that relies on secondary scholarship to the exclusion of the primary evidence of the ancient author.

Indeed, Dr. Tompkins acknowledges this "pick and choose" method of scholarship further on in his note: "whether Alexander's account is "true" or wildly improbable, depends upon the reader." It ought rather, I believe, to depend upon the ancient author and what he wrote to us.

4) "... then the only people in Macedonia of certain Greek blood would be the members of this immigrant royal family, not the rest of the Macedonians."

I have read this or similar statements repeated by many modern authors, but I do not know the evidence upon which it is based. It would be welcome to know that evidence. The existence of a royal house and a commons does not mean ipso facto that they were of different ethnic groups. Were the helots of Sparta or the penestai of Thessaly not Greek?

Finally, I hope that I have not misunderstood Brunwasser's sympathies. It seems to me that he was making a political statement in referring to the ancient land of Paionia as Macedonia, and in posing in front of a modern statue of Alexander with a Slavic inscription.

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