

## العناصر الكلاسيكية والمحلية في تصوير الإسكندر على العملة في مصر

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### ملخص:

إن فتح الإسكندر لمصر في عام 332 ق.م يعتبر بمثابة مرحلة انتقالية بين مصر الفرعونية والمملكة البطلمية التي قامت في مصر علي يد " بطلميوس الأول"، فهي مرحلة عرفت تغيرات سياسية واجتماعية واقتصادية كثيرة وتمثلت أحدي مظاهرها الاقتصادية في بداية سك النقود للتداول الداخلي والتي لم تكن مسبوقة من قبل. ونجد أن النقود التي سكّت في عصر الأسكندر لم تكن للتداول الداخلي فقط ولكن كان لها مدلولات سياسية ودعائية تمثلت في بعض الرموز والعناصر التي أضيفت علي العملة، والتي تنوعت ما بين العناصر الكلاسيكية والعناصر " المصرية"، وعلي الرغم من غلبة العناصر الكلاسيكية كتصوير الإلهة أثينا ونيكي، في المرحلة الاولى لسك النقود الخاصة بالإسكندر وهو الأمر الذي كان بدون شك لغرض دعائي خارج مصر، إلا أن المراحل التالية بدأت العملة تتميز بمزج ما بين العناصر الكلاسيكية بعض العناصر المحلية علي العملة.

ويهدف البحث لمناقشة تلك العناصر الكلاسيكية والمحلية ومدى تأثيرها علي السياسة الداخلية والخارجية في مصر، وهل استطاع الملوك البطالمة وخاصة بطلميوس الأول من استخدام تلك الفئات النقدية في تدعيم حكمه علي مصر

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإسكندر الأكبر- عملة الإسكندر- مصر منذ فتح الاسكندر

## The Classical and Egyptian Motifs Depicted on Alexander's Coins in Egypt

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### Abstract:

Alexander's conquest of Egypt, in 332 BC, was considered a transitional phase between the Pharaonic era and the Ptolemaic era, which was established in Egypt by Ptolemy I. One of the economic changes that began during the reign of Alexander the Great was the coinage, which were not known before.

It is noted that the coins that were minted in the era of Alexander were not mere monetary for internal circulation only, but they had political and propaganda implications represented in some symbols and elements that were depicted on coins. These symbols varied between classical and Egyptian motifs. In the first stage of minting money for Alexander, which undoubtedly for the propaganda purpose, there was a predominance of the classical motifs. In later stages, the coin began to be characterized by a mixture of classical and Egyptian elements.

This paper aims to discuss these classical and Egyptian motifs on Ptolemaic coinage, as well as the impact of these monetary on the local and foreign politics in Egypt, and how could the Ptolemaic kings, especially Ptolemy I, were able to use the minting money to consolidate their rule over Egypt.

**Keywords:** Alexander the Great, Coinage, Ptolemaic, Ptolemy I.

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## Introduction:

Alexander III, or as he is known as Alexander the Great, was the son of Philip the ruler of Macedonia at the beginning of 359 B.C., his mother, Olympia, was a daughter of King Neoptolemus, king of Epirus (Fildes& J. Fletcher, 2001,p.15). Alexander III was born On July 20 or 26, 356 B.C (Radwan, 2006, p.15). Alexander grew up in the city of Pella, the capital of Macedonia, in its royal palace. Alexander was first educated by Lanice during his first seven years. Then, he was taught by his teacher, Leonidas (Fildes& J. Fletcher, 2001,p.15).After that, the famous philosopher Aristotle, take care of teaching him in the following period (Farah, 2002,p.18).

## Alexander the Great and the Conquest of Egypt:

Obviously, Alexander's upbringing as a prince in the royal palace in the capital Pella " a city in the region of ancient Bottiaia", since his early childhood, and his meeting with many different nationalities, whether from Greek cities or Asia Minor, Egypt, and Persia, had played a prominent role in his policy when he conquered many kingdoms and countries, including Egypt (Fildes& J. Fletcher, 2001, p.15). It was not only his royal upbringing that played a role in his politics, the myth of his divine birth also played a clear role in his policy, according to this myth; he was born as a result of a partial union between his mother Olympias and the god Zeus Amon (Abdul Wahhab, 1991, p.70). It is certain that this myth had the greatest impact on the situation of Alexander the Great in Egypt since his first day of conquest in 332 B.C. He was not faced by any significant struggle when he conquered Egypt, on the contrary, he was very welcomed by the Egyptians (Bury, 1996- 2001,p.16) who consider him a liberator from Persian rule, this had a clear effect in many fields  
rt and coins.

Since his first moment in Egypt, Alexander tried to confirm his legitimacy as the ruler of Egypt, so he visited the temple of the god Ptah in Memphis and sacrificed to the Egyptian god, then he was crowned as pharaoh of the country (Nashi, 1980,p.20), then he headed north to the location called Rhacotis where he ordered to build the city of Alexandria Which was built according to the Greek planning (plan: Show, 2000, p.406), after that he headed west to the Temple of oracle in Siwa oasis, as another attempt to confirm this legitimacy, where the High Priest greeted him saying: "Welcome the son of Amon" (Farah, 2002, p.28). Therefore, in the name of this god, Alexander was granted control over the world, the control that was given to the Egyptian pharaohs before, and therefore Alexander the Great hold the titles of the Egyptian pharaohs, which were associated with his name in the inscriptions including the "Horus" name (Nashi, 1980, p.16), the "sa Ra" name that means son of Ra, he was namedstp.n-r<sup>c</sup> mri-imnthat means "the chosen one by Ra, the beloved of Amun" (Abdul-Wahhab, 1991, p.72).

## The beginning of monetary issues in Egypt:

After the coronation of Alexander as a ruler of Egypt, a new era began in the history of Egypt. It was an era with new features in political,historical, and economic aspects of society. These new features were clear on the coins that were minted in Egypt during the reign of Alexander, which is considered the beginning of coinage in Egypt and may have been the beginning of the monetary exchange system in Egypt in general. Althoughsome opinions confirm that Egypt knew coinage in an earlier period, specifically in the era of the late dynasties (Al-Abadi, 1992, p.15; Greek, 1955, p.144)during the reign of Nectanebo II (360-343 B.C.), the last native ruler in pharaonic Egypt. It is believed

that this earlier coinage was not used for daily trading (Abdul-Aziz, n.d., p.120), but for foreign trade exchange, which was confirmed by finding some coins that are believed to have been minted in Athens for the trade exchange with Egypt, especially for their need to import wheat from Egypt, which were of the Tetradrachm category, with the image of the Egyptian Sphinx with the head of Pallas (Huber, 1862, p.160).

Although Egypt minted money during the Persian era according to Herodotus (Herodotus, IV, 166.) mentioned that Aryandes, the governor of Egypt during the reign of Darius - the Persian ruler - minted golden and silver coins (Fig.1). It was comparable in purity with the coins of the Persian (Parker, 1851, p.373, n.5), which was confirmed by what was found of coins in the category of four drachmas of the Athenian style and bearing an Arameans inscription from the period of the rule of Sabakes and Mazakes (Poerre, 199, p.221-230). So, this coin was considered a foreign coin, it is certain that Egypt knew minting money for local circulation with the death of Alexander in 323 B.C and during the reign of Ptolemy I, "Ptolemy son of Lagus", who ruled Egypt, Cyrenaica, and southern Syria as satrap under the Alexander the Great's family (Huber, 1862, p.162).

Egypt has known some bronze coins that bear a depiction of Alexander's face; they varied in large and small categories, such as those belonging to the city of Naucratis (Leonard, 1977, p. 1-35).

### The first group:

The monetary issues of this group begin in the period between 326-325 B.C, they were minted in Memphis (Stewart, 1994, p.231), which is the old mint before moving the mint to the new capital, Alexandria,

in 320 B.C (Farah, 2002, p.103). All the issues of this group are mint of gold stater category; they continued to be minted for fifteen years until 310 B.C. Alexander is depicted in this group wearing the elephant scalp (Stewart, 1994, p.231). Another coin of bronze dates from the same period, with Alexander depicted on obverse, while the reverse bearing the image of the goddess Athena Promachos, (Fig. 4) (Dahmen, 2007, p.112). Alexander the Great might have aimed by depicting the goddess Athena on his coin, to conciliate the Athenians indirectly to continue to support him with their naval fleet, and also because of his need to silver from the Athens mines (Kadus, 1999, p.285-286). He also might have aimed to depict himself in Greek shape as political propaganda in Greece as the liberator of the Greek cities from the Persians (Dahman, 2007, pp.111-112). Moreover, it is obvious that Ptolemy I tried to present Alexander to the Egyptians in the form of the Macedonian king (Ujfalvy, 1902, p.147), thus, Alexander appeared with his natural features, which correspond to the description of Julius Valery. So, this group of coins came purely Greek, without any of Egyptian influences. It could be said that this group of coins may have been more propaganda than for actual internal trading in Egypt, or perhaps it was for external trading only.

Another coin from the same group was minted in Memphis, dated to the period between (326-323 B.C). It depicted Alexander the Great on obverse in the form of Heracles, but it is depicted in this piece with features that differ from what is customary in portraying Alexander the Great. He appeared with a prominent forehead and a full and small mouth. The nose appears straight, the eyes look up, and the hair is in Heracles style, while the reverse depicts the god Zeus sitting on

the throne (Fig. 5) (Smith, 1988, fig13).

It is noted that although the features of Alexander in this coin were far from his personal portraits' features portrayed by Lysippus, it has one of his characteristics, which is eye upward, that shows divinity as if Alexander was looking at the sky where the throne of his father Zeus (fig.6). It seems that this coin was too religious and political propaganda outside Egypt, specifically in Greece, therefore it could be said that this coin was for external trade only.

### The second group:

This group dates from the period between 322-318 B.C. It can be divided into sub-groups from A to D as follows:

#### Group 2-A

Tetradrachm silver coin, which depicts, on the obverse, Alexander the Great in form of the god Heracles wearing the skin of a lion as a helmet (Stewart, 1994, p. 231), while on the reverse there is an inscription for the name of Alexander ΑΛΑΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ, and depicts the god Zeus seated on the throne holding the sceptre, while the eagle is standing on his hand, next to him is a lotus flower. This coin was minted between 326-325 BC. It is believed that it was minted at Memphis (Fig. 7) (Abdul-Aziz, n.d, p.126; Kadous, 1999, p.175).

There is no doubt that this monetary form was not only limited to Egypt, but spread in many other Hellenistic kingdoms. For example, a silver coin of the category of tetradrachm from Pamphylia, which dates (324-323 B.C), where Alexander is depicted on the obverse of the coin in the form of Heracles, wearing a lion's skin over his head, and it is believed that it depicts a personal portrait of Alexander, while the

reverse depicts the god Zeus sitting on the throne holding the eagle in his right hand and the sceptre in his left hand (Fig. 8), this depiction of god Zeus is a copy of his statue in the Temple of Zeus at Olympus (Fig. 9). The inscription "King Alexander" was written on the obverse ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΑΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ. This coin is preserved in the Philadelphia Museum under No. (469-126-29) (Danien, 1990, p.77, figs.2,8). Another coin from Sidon is very similar to the two previous coins (Fig. 10), which dates back to the second century BC. (Jidejian, 1988, p.35).

It could be noticed, from first glance, that the previous coins portrayed Alexander the Great with the characteristics of portraits by Lysippus that include noble features, curved nose, and delicate mouth. This is not the only Greek influence in those coins, there are some other Greek influences, which were represented in the god Zeus, the great Olympian gods, in addition to that Alexander was depicted with some symbols of Heracles, which is the cover of the head skin lion "Nemean", with which he was depicted in many of his personal images (Fig. 11a-b). These coins depict Alexander the Great as the legendary hero Heracles (Pollitt, 1986, p.25-26). His features came to reflect his power which is the sharp look, obtuse mouth, and wide, expressive eyes.

So, it could be confirmed that this group of coins came with purely Greek features, far from Egyptian influences. This was confirmed through a coin depicting Alexander wearing a helmet with two ostrich feathers, as it depicts the horns of Amon. The reverse, depicts the winged goddess Nike, and the depiction of Khnum, as Newel mentions (Fig. 12), which carry some of Egyptian influences.

### Group 2-B:

This group of coins dates back to the period between 322 - 318 B.C. This group bears another style of Alexander's images. On the observe, Alexander is depicted wearing an elephant's skin cover and the horns of Amon, and the royal band. On the reverse, God Zeus is depicted sitting on the throne, and the name of Alexander is inscribed ΑΛΑΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ or "King Alexander" ΑΛΑΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ. (Fig. 13) (Stewart, 1994, p.231-41).

In this group, there is a mixture of Greek and Egyptian elements, where Alexander appeared, combining the depiction of the Greek god Zeus depicted on observe of the coins, as well as the features of Alexander, which were similar to Alexander's portraits by Lysippos. The elephant skin, which is considered one of the god Dionysus symbols, might also have been a symbol of Alexander's conquest of India, as Dionysus' trip to India was not known to Greece before Alexander's conquest (Dahmen, 2007, p.113), it should be noticed that Alexander, during his life, did not wear an elephant skin, not because of its heavy weight but because Alexander had not borrowed the elephant skin, which is one of the symbols of the god Dionysus (Ephippus, 12, 537e). Ptolemy I, Perhaps, added the elephant skin to the coins after Alexander's death, therefore this group can be dated between 322-318 B.C. These coins could be similar to the depictions of Alexander the Great in his personal image, and similar to the Medallion of Alexander the Great wearing elephant skin, perhaps Alexander was not depicted in this way on stone and marble statues because it was difficult to sculpt on these materials.

Egyptian elements in this group included the horns of the ram, the symbol of the god Amon, which was added to the portraits of Alexander after his visit to the Temple of Oracle in Siwa (Clement, 4,48; Damien, p.1990,85) It seems that Alexander wanted everyone to believe that he was the son of the god Amon, that why he was portrayed with a human face and ram horns (Clement 4,48).

There is a coin belonging to this group of silver tetradrachm. It depicts Alexander the Great with his head decorated with the horns of Amon and cover with elephant skin. This coin dates back to about 305 B.C (Ujfalvy, 1902, p.147). In this coin, the features of Alexander were far from the features of his portraits by Lysippos, although of worshipping Alexander, his depiction on these coins shows royalty and nobility, and far from the features of gods that could be seen on Lysippos portraits, although the coins include the symbols of the god Amon. It is noted in this group that the Greek influence predominate over the Egyptian influence.

### Group 2-C:

This group of coins dates between (314 - 313 B.C). On the coins of this group, Alexander the Great appears wearing an elephant skin and ram horns, in addition to the aegis, and puts a Mitra (Stewart, 1994, p.231). Here, the mixture of the Greek and Egyptian symbols could be easily recognized. The symbols of Greek gods are represented with the Mitra, which is considered one of the symbols of the Greek god Dionysus, who is considered the half-brother of Alexander, according to the story of Alexander's birth, and the god Zeus is considered the father of both of them. In addition, the symbol of the Egyptian god Amon is represented by the horns of the ram.

## Group 2-D:

The last group, which depicts Alexander the Great in Egypt, dates around 312 B.C. or a little earlier. It depicts, on the obverse, Alexander the Great wearing an elephant skin, a ram horn, a Mitra, and the aegis. The reverse depicts the goddess Athena Promachos in her war equipment, in front of her is the standing eagle on the thunderbolt, the symbol of the Ptolemaic family, and the name of Alexander ΑΛΑΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ or Alexander Ptolemy ΑΛΑΞΑΝΔΡΑΣΙΟΥ - ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ is inscribed.

An example of this group is a coin of silver tetradrachm from Alexandria (Fig. 14), where Alexander the Great is depicted, on the obverse, wearing an elephant skin that reaches up to the shoulder which covered part of the ram's horn, the symbol of the god Amon, while the reverse depicts the goddess Athena Promachos, who heads to the right and wears a helmet, holds her spear, the eagle appears at her feet, standing on the thunderbolt, behind the goddess, on the left side of the coin, is an inscription bearing the name of Alexander ΑΛΑΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ. (Smith, 1988, p.38)

It could be noticed that a small number of coins depicted Alexander during his life, while the rest of the coins that were found were minted during the reign of his successors (Dahmen, 2007, p.6); This is because Alexander, unlike his father Philip, rarely appeared on coins during his life, but after his death, his face began to appear on coins steadily (Fildes & Hatcher, 2001, p.68).

## Conclusion:

The depiction of Alexander on coins in Egypt can be categorized under the name of political and religious

propaganda, as it was not for a purely economic purpose, and there is no doubt that Ptolemy I "Soter" supported Alexander's status as a legitimate ruler and a god at the same time, he tried to support his political and religious status as a successor to Alexander in Egypt, which appeared later when he used some symbols that were depicted on Alexander's coins, such as the eagle standing on the thunderbolt in his coin to declare himself as king of Egypt.

Based on the above-mentioned, Alexander's coins in Egypt can be divided into two phases:

**Phase I:** belong to political propaganda. It is the stage that followed his conquest of Egypt. It was found that his depiction of coins came in a purely Greek style. In some of them, the depiction of Alexander followed the style of his portraits portrayed by Lysippos, that depicts him with features that show heroism and powerful, as if he resembles himself with the hero Achilles, as he wanted to emphasize a certain military idea at that early stage as controller and powerful on the region. This type of political propaganda could be considered as a type of international propaganda, as portraying Alexander not only for the Egyptians but also for all the regions that he conquered, this is confirmed by the coins that bore his image in that period.

**Phase II:** It is the stage of religious propaganda, the stage that followed the stage of political propaganda, in which Alexander tried to speak before the Egyptians on a local scale through the coins that were minted during that period, so he was depicted with the horns of a ram in an attempt to prove his relationship with the god Amon, the most popular deity not only in Egypt but also in the whole ancient world. It is certain



that Alexander adopted this attitude with the Egyptians, due to his full awareness of the Egyptian character and their religious attachment to the gods and to their Pharaohs, who often gave them a religious character. Another point that can be noticed in the coinage of the second stage is the depiction of the lotus flower, which is considered an Egyptian symbol that has significance in funerary art, it represented the resurrection for the dead people. Moreover, these depictions indicate the deification of Alexander.

As for the global scale, Alexander was portrayed with the Greek gods or with their symbols as political and religious propaganda, he often dedicated religion to serve his political purposes. It is noted that Alexander, on the coins of phase II, was far from depicting himself with the symbols of the gods, whether Greek or Egyptian.

It is also clear that the coins of Alexander in Egypt has a Greek influence in it is subject, which represented by depicting Alexander on the observe with the addition of some symbols of Greek gods, such as the god Dionysus or the hero Heracles, while the other side depicts one of the Greek gods, such as the god Zeus, whom Alexander considered him as a father, or the goddess Athena, while some of the Egyptian elements appeared, such as the horns of the ram, the symbol of the god Amon, and the lotus flower.

There is no doubt that Alexander's coins in its first group were more inclined to Greek influences than Egyptian influences, and this may be due to the fact that those coins that were minted in Memphis followed the general shape of coins during Alexander's life, but after Alexander's death every one of his successors began to try to assert their control over the

area under his rule, which appeared clearly in Group 2-D, in which Ptolemy I began to add some symbols as a preparation for his independence with Egypt to become an independent state under his rule, so, he used the eagle standing on the thunderbolt, which became the symbol of the Ptolemaic kingdom later, and he also used some inscriptions indicating his name ΔΟΦ. Thus, the coin that carried the portrait of Alexander turned from a coin with global features, for the whole Alexander's empire, to coin with local features, as Ptolemy I began establishing his own kingdom with distinctive features from the rest of the Hellenistic world that was built on the ruins of Alexander's empire.

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## Figures



**Fig.1.** A coin minted in the era of the Persian governor Ariandis (after: G.K. Jenkins, "Greek coins recently acquired,by the British Museum," Numismatic Chronicle 1955, p.145, 24, pl. 1)3



**Fig.2.** A coin minted during Alexander's life. The obversedepicts Alexander wearing the skin of a lion, the reversedepicts the god Zeus sitting on a throne holding an eagle (after: Wheatley,P., Baynham,E., East and West in the World Empire of Alexander, Oxford, 2015,fig.13.1)



**Fig. 3.** A coin depicting on the obversea vertical image of the goddess Athena. The reversebears an image of the goddess Niki holds a wreath with the sign of the Egyptian god Khnum, the name Alexander ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ is written (after: Svoronos,j,N,TaNomismatouKratous ton Ptolemaio,1904-8,pl.1fig).



**Fig. 4.** A coin depicting on the obverseAlexander and on the reverseAthena Promachos (after: Morkholm,Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum,Egypt:The Ptolemies, SNG,Copenhagen,1977,no.14).



**Fig. 5.** A coin depicting on the obverseAlexander with the horns of Amon wearing the skin of an elephant, the reverse depicts the god Zeus sitting on a throne( after: (Smith, 1988, fig13).)



**Fig. 6.** A coin depicting on the obverseAlexander with the horns of Amon wearing the skin of an elephant, the reverse depicts the god Zeus sitting on a throne next to him is a lotus flower (after: Svoronos,j,N,TaNomismatouKratous ton Ptolemaio,1904-8,pl.20



**Fig. 7.** A coin depicting on the obverse Alexander wearing a lion's skin cap, the reverse depicts Zeus (after: Svoronos, j.N, Ta Nomismatata tou Kratous ton Ptolemaio, 1904-8, pl. 1. no. 7)



**Fig. 9.** The god Zeus in the Temple of Olympus (after: Clayton, P.A., Price, M.J., The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, London, 1988, Fig. 30).



**Fig. 11.** Alexander depicted with a lion's skin (after: Hossain, Depicting Alexander sculptural figurines in Egypt between Egyptian and Greek influences, Giza through the ages, studies in archeology, written in Arabic, restoration, environment and tourism 2008, 11, fig. 8).



**Fig. 8.** A coin from Amphibia depicting on the obverse Alexander in the form of Heracles, the reverse depicting the god Zeus seated on the throne (after: E.C. Danien, The World of Philip and Alexander "A Symposium on Greek Life and Time", (The University of Pennsylvania, 1990), p. 77, Fig. 2.)



**Fig. 10.** A tetradrachm coin from Sidon



**Fig. 12.** A coin depicting on the obverse Alexander wearing a military helmet, from which two ostrich feathers hang, the reverse the goddess Niki (after: Wheatley, P., Baynham, E., East and West in the World Empire of Alexander, Oxford, 2015, fig. 13.2)



**Fig. 13.** A coin depicting on the obverse Alexander wears the skin of an elephant and the horns of Amon, the reverse depicts the god Zeus sitting on a throne (after: Svoronos, 1904, pl. 2, no. 11).



**Fig. 14.** A tetradrachm coin depicting Alexander on the obverse and Athena Promachos on the reverse (after: Svoronos, j.N, Ta Nomismatou Kratous ton Ptolemaio, 1904-8, pl. 146).