

The Geographical Review

VOLUME 95

October 2005

NUMBER 4

ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S MOUNTAIN*

VERONICA DELLA DORA

ABSTRACT. The metaphorical power of natural landscapes and geographical objects has attracted an increasing amount of critical interest. The myth of Dinocrates planning to carve Mount Athos into the figure of Alexander the Great epitomizes the complex relationship between the insistent materiality of prominent geographical features such as mountains and imagination. Through an iconographic reading of different renderings of the Dinocratic myth in western Europe, this article explores the way Mount Athos turned into a powerful emblem circulating across space and time. While considering the continuity of a Classical vision projected on rock, the article focuses on its constant reappropriations and transformations in different historical and geographical contexts. Dinocratic Athos becomes a metaphor of egotism, power, and desire but also a free-floating referent, reflecting a shifting relationship between the microcosm of the human body and the natural macrocosm. *Keywords:* *Alexander the Great, Greece, Mount Athos, natural landscapes, reception theory.*

In the summer of 2002 an eclectic Greek American sculptor made headlines in the international press. He launched a campaign to carve a 73-meter-tall likeness of Alexander the Great into a Greek craggy cliff—"four times the size of the presidents of Mount Rushmore" (VRC 2002). At a time when Greek pride was smarting over the Macedonian question, Anastasios Papadopoulos and his supporters presented the colossal project as a true mission to render justice and honor to the memory of the man who "brought Hellenism [and thus civilization] throughout the known world" (Alexandros Foundation 2002) and to proclaim once and for all Macedonia's Greekness.¹ Although nothing came of it, the "Mountain of Alexander the Great" was the object of an animated dispute. Besides the noble ideals of Papadopoulos's Greek American supporters, economic promises allured the mayor of Agios Georgios, a resort town on the Chalcidic peninsula. He hoped the project, complemented by a museum, an amphitheater, and a parking lot, would give new impetus to the area's declining tourist industry (Tzimas 2002). Environmental groups, however, threatened legal action "to protect the pine-clad province from turning it into a theme park" (VRC 2002). Aligned with them were Greek archaeologists and conser-

* I would like to thank Denis Cosgrove for reading and commenting on the first draft of this article, two anonymous referees for their valuable suggestions and insights, and Chris Eckerman for help with editing.

✦ DR. DELLA DORA is a postdoctoral research associate in geography at the University of California, Los Angeles, California 90095.