

3.1 CONFLICT – GREECE AT WAR



Type: Bronze statue of Alexander the Great

Findspot: unknown

Chronology: End of 4th century BC

Actual location: Musee du Louvre (Paris, France. Inventory nr. Br 370)

Further informations: <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/alexander-spear>

The small statue (height: 16,50 cm) portrays Alexander the Great holding a spear in his left hand and a sword in the right (both weapons are now lost). It can be easily identified thanks to the characteristic hairstyle and the general posture of the body. The king is portrayed naked, as a Greek hero (i.e. a figure with semi-divine characteristics) and the statue is likely derived from an original, life-size bronze statue.

The achievements of Alexander the Great were widely celebrated in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, both by his immediate successors (such as for examples the members of the Ptolemaic, the Antigonid or the Attalid dynasties) and in the fight for political and military supremacy during the Roman Late Republic. We do not know exactly the context for which the statue was made but it fits perfectly in the context of the celebration of the king in the aftermath of his death and the subsequent fight for power between the Greek generals that ended up establishing their own separate kingdoms in the Hellenistic period.

The visual arts had a powerful role in ancient Mediterranean politics: Alexander became quickly a powerful role model for those seeking absolute power through military achievement, such as the Greek Hellenistic kings and centuries later the Roman generals, such as Pompey the Great and Octavian.

You can explore how military conquest was celebrated in the Greek written and visual sources and which role they played in defining the political changes that occurred in the Greek Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period.

MY RESEARCH

Why Alexander the Great is represented naked rather than wearing a cuirass? How does the celebration of the military defeat of the Persian king Darius III compare to the way the victory of the Greeks over the Persians was celebrated in Classical Athens? And why?