

Stoneman,, R.2011 ‘Primary Sources From the Classical And Early Medieval Periods’ in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*
[p2]

The most enduring of these early accounts was the **Alexander romance**, which was attributed in some medieval MSS to Callisthenes and has thus come to be known as Pseudo-Callisthenes (PC).³ The formation of this work is complex. It includes several separate strands of writing: a novella about the birth of Alexander in which his father is the exiled Pharaoh Nectanebus II; a military narrative, in which the topography and chronology are highly garbled; a series of letters between Alexander and Darius, which once existed as a separate work (parts have been found on papyrus); the ‘Letter to Aristotle about India,’ which is full of encounters with fabulous beasts and monstrous races of human beings; the account of the meeting with the Naked Philosophers or Brahmans in Taxila, which started as an independent novella and went on to an independent career through a number of rewritings; a novella about his meeting with the Queen of Meroe, Candace; and the Will of Alexander, which emanates from a Ptolemaic milieu and bolsters Ptolemy’s claim to the rule of Egypt. The date at which these elements were welded into a single work is disputed. The present author is of the view that something like the existing earliest recension of the Romance was completed in the reign of Ptolemy II, but the traditional view has been that the composition of the work as

1 The standard survey is Pearson, 1960.

2 For a recent edition and study of Arrian’s work, see J. Romm (ed.) and P. Mensch (trans.), *The Landmark Arrian: The Campaigns of Alexander* (New York, 2010).

3 There is a translation, with brief introduction and further bibliography in Stoneman, 1991. See also Stoneman, 2007 and 2008, and R. Merkelbach, 1975 for a study of the genesis of this PC.

[p3]

an entity did not take place until the third century A.D., shortly before its translation from Greek into Latin by Julius Valerius. The arguments are discussed in detail in Stoneman 2007.

The Alpha Recension

The first recension (α) is represented by a single MS, A. This recension provides the narrative structure on which the later versions are based. It begins with the story of the last Pharaoh of Egypt, Nectanebus, who, seeing through his magic arts that his country will fall victim to Persian conquest, flees in disguise to Pella in Macedon. Here he becomes the confidant of Queen Olympias, who is anxious that her husband Philip may reject her if she does not produce a son. Nectanebus promises to make her conceive a son by the god Amon (I.4). He sends her dreams in which Amon appears to her and promises her a son. However, Nectanebus plays a trick on her and, after obtaining the key to her room, disguises himself as Amon in order to have intercourse with her (I.7). When in due time a son is born Nectanebus uses his astrological calculator to establish the best moment for birth: he gets her to delay until the most auspicious moment, which will make her son a world-ruler. (I.12. This passage is heavily corrupt in A and is omitted or abridged in all subsequent recensions).

Alexander is looked on with some suspicion by Philip because of the difference of his looks; however, he accepts him as his son, has him educated by Aristotle, and is impressed when he tames the man-killing horse Bucephalus (sic; the correct historical name is Bucephalus). At the age of twelve, Alexander asks Nectanebus to give him a lesson in

astronomy (I.14); the magician takes him to a hill outside the city whereupon Alexander pushes him over a cliff. His reason is not given. The dying Nectanebus reveals that Alexander is his son. At fifteen, Alexander attends the Olympic Games at Olympia (I.18–20: in the Gamma recension, the location is changed to Rome) and defeats his opponents in the chariot race. On his return he finds Philip taking a new wife, Cleopatra: a quarrel breaks out, which ends when Alexander reconciles his parents (I.20–22). Alexander takes part in various military campaigns. Presently a neighboring king, Pausanias, makes an attempt to carry off Olympias, and then murders Philip (I.24). Alexander, on succeeding to the throne, assembles a great army to continue Philip's planned campaign

[p4] against the Persian Empire. The historical chronology is very garbled here: after the campaign against Sparta, Athens, and Thebes, Alexander moves immediately to Egypt (via Rome in later recensions), where he founds the city of Alexandria and establishes the cult of Sarapis (I.30–34). He then moves in reverse to besiege Tyre (I.35–37), where he begins an exchange of boasting letters with Darius (I.38), and back again to Asia Minor (I.40). After defeating Darius in a battle which must be that at Issus, he is next found campaigning back in Troy, northern Greece, and Thebes (again). A long set piece contains the appeal, in verse, by the local musician Ismenias for clemency to his city (I.46). This passage is much abridged in later versions. Book II begins with a debate in Athens about how to react to Alexander's campaigns: this is not found in any later recension. Then Alexander is found in Cilicia (II.8, picking up from I.41), where he is cured of illness by the doctor Philip. Further exchanges of letters with Darius are followed by Alexander's visit in disguise to the Persian court; he is recognised but escapes over the frozen River Stranga, which thaws as soon as he has crossed, so that his pursuers are swept away (II.13–15). A second battle with Darius (based on that of Gaugamela) is followed by the death of Darius, murdered by his own commanders. Alexander finds him dying and is told to marry the king's daughter Roxane and succeed him as king (II.20). Alexander exchanges letters with Darius's mother, wife, and daughter and becomes king (II.21). Book II ends here in A, but the Beta recension continues with a letter to Alexander's mother Olympias describing his adventures (II.23) and then his travels into the Land of Darkness (II.32–41; there are no chapters 24–31 in this recension). The Lambda manuscript extends chapters 39–41 with the stories of Alexander's construction of a diving bell and a flying machine, and his search for the Water of Life. Chapters 42–44 occur in Gamma only: 42–43 repeat the events of chapters 24–41, with some additional episodes, and chapter 44 describes an encounter with pygmies.

Book III (returning to A, which all the versions again follow) begins with the Indian campaign: Alexander marches against Porus the Indian king and defeats him in single combat. He then encounters the Naked Philosophers or Oxydracae of Taxila and interviews them about their customs. A inserts at this point the whole of Palladius's monograph, 'On the Life of the Brahmans' (III.7–16), and then the 'Letter to Aristotle about India' (III.17). This letter exists in two Latin versions (there are 67 MSS of the earlier one) as a much longer free-standing work.

[p5]

It is clearly translated from a (lost) Greek original, which has been heavily abridged for inclusion in the A-text. This episode is considerably expanded in later versions, especially Beta and L, which (alone) includes the famous episodes of the diving bell and the flying machine. In A, the lacunose text focuses on strange beasts and the 'Night of Terrors' when

the army is attacked by monstrous animals, and culminates in a visit to the oracular trees of the sun and moon, which predict Alexander's early death.

Book III continues with Alexander's visit to Queen Candace of Meroe (III.18–24). Either Meroe (Ethiopia) is conceived as an extension of India, or this story has become misplaced in the narrative. He goes to her in disguise but is recognised because she has secretly had his portrait painted. After some tense moments, they part as friends. Candace's son takes Alexander to visit the cave of the Gods, where he sees the dead Phararoh Sesonchosis, and then the god Sarapis, who again warns him of his early death but refuses to answer the direct question of when Alexander is to die.

Alexander then exchanges letters with the Amazons, who describe their way of life and offer their submission (III.25–26). A letter to his mother describes some of Alexander's adventures which have already been told, and also his visit to the City of the Sun (III.28). Ch. 29 occurs in the Gamma recension only. He arrives in Babylon (III.30), where omens foretell his death. He is taken ill at a dinner after swallowing poison sent by Antipater, the regent of Macedon. He tries to drown himself but is prevented by Roxane. He writes his will, outlining the disposition of his empire after his death (III.33). He dies and his body is taken to Memphis, and then to Alexandria, for burial: so "the city he founded becomes his tomb," as Sarapis had foretold in Book I (III.34).

The only MS of this recension is in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.⁴ It dates from between 1013 and 1124 and forms the last portion (from f.395) of a very large codex containing several other historical works. The scribe seems to have been tired by the time he reached the Alexander romance: the writing is slovenly and he was obviously working from a poor exemplar from which he at times copied meaningless strings of letters. All subsequent copyists of the Greek Romance, as well as Julius Valerius in Latin, seem to have been working from this text,

4 Parisinus 1711: A.

[p6] or something like it, and many of their alterations can only be seen as attempts to restore sense to something that made no sense in A.⁵

The Alpha version of the Romance (something close to A, but without the long astrological section in Book I) was translated into Latin by Julius Valerius Alexander Polemius, almost certainly to be identified with the Flavius Polemius who was consul in 338 A.D. and comes of the East in 345. The MSS give it the title 'Deeds of Alexander translated from Aesop the Greek.' His translation is into flowery and mannered post-classical Latin: it refers to the Aurelian Walls, built in 270, and describes Rome as the capital of the empire, which it ceased to be in 330, so those dates provide the time frame in which it was written. It thus belongs to a time when Alexander was becoming a symbol for the late antique 'pagan revival' in opposition to the newly dominant Christian religion.⁶

A text related to A was translated into Armenian about the year 500, possibly by the great historian Movses of Khoren: the earliest MS is of the 12th century. The translator worked from a much better text than A: the Armenian not only often makes clear what the original Greek actually said, but offers several additional episodes, including the correspondence of Alexander's parents with Zeuxis in Book I and the Letter to Aristotle about India (in fuller form than in A) in III.

Two of the MSS are beautifully illustrated and the iconography probably goes back to the late antique tradition: one is in the John Rylands Library,⁷ the other San Lazzaro, Venice.⁸

A version close to Alpha, now lost, was translated into Syriac probably in the seventh century, the golden age of Syriac writing, centered around the churches of Syria (Brock, 1983). The source text was related to A but differs so considerably that it has generally been reckoned a witness for a lost Greek recension known as Delta*. It includes the episode of Alexander's visit to the emperor of China which became a standard feature of the Persian versions. Other episodes only in Syriac are Aristotle's advice to Alexander about the building of Alexandria;

5 Editions of A: Kroll, 1926; Stoneman, 2007 (Book I; II, and III forthcoming). Translations: Haight, 1955 (English), Pfister, 1978 (German), Tallet-Bonvalot, 1994 (French), Franco, 2001 (Italian).

6 Edition: Rossellini, 2004 (2nd edition).

7 Armenian 3, 14th century.

8 Cod. 424, 13th–14th century. For modern edition, see (Armenian) by the Mekhitarists in Venice, 1842. Greek retroversion (translation from Armenian into ancient Greek): Raabe, 1896. English translation: Wolohojian, 1969.

[p7] Nectanebus's and Olympias's discussion of Philip's disaffection from his wife (I.14); the metaphor of the golden eggs (I.23); and the jokes about the mustard seeds (I.36 and 39). The commissioning of a painting of Alexander by the ambassadors from Darius is properly motivated only in this version, where it is shown to Darius's daughter. But there is a large lacuna at II.6–14, presumably the result of a defective Greek original. It used to be thought that this translation was made from a Pehlevi (Middle Persian) version, but Ciancaglini (1998) has disproved this and shows that it was made directly from the Greek.⁹

The Beta recension

The author of Beta wrote some time after the Latin translation of A was made by Julius Valerius (by 330), but he was apparently not aware of the variants in the Greek source of the Armenian version. Beta wrestles with the text of A and frequently rewrites and rephrases his model to make better (or any) sense of it, but he also includes new material. The end of Book I and the first six chapters of Book II (the debate in Athens) are missing from Beta, but Beta has the end of Book II which is not in A. The four main MSS are Parisinus gr. 1685 (B), a finely written MS completed in Otranto in 1468; Vaticanus 1556 (V: 15th–16th century); Laurentianus 70.37 (F: a palimpsest of the 13th century); Mosquensis 436 (298) (K, 14th–15th century). The earliest MS is Parisinus suppl. 690 (S: 11th century), which contains only III.30–35. Some MSS contain additional material, for example K, which has part of the Epsilon recension also.¹⁰

The Lambda recension

A variant of Beta preserved in five MSS: Bodl. Barocc. 23 (O, 14th century, incomplete); Vaticanus 171 (W, 16th century); Bodl. Holkham Gr. 99 (H, 15th century); Ambrosianus O 117 sup. (N, a faithful copy

9 Translation: Budge, 1889, based on British Museum Add MS 25, 875 (A.D. 1708), with readings from four other MSS. Van Bladel (2007) casts doubt on Ciancaglini's conclusions.

10 Edition of Beta: Bergson 1965, with full details of all the MSS.

[p8] of H, 16th century); and Bodl misc. 283 (P, 1516). The most substantial additions are in Book III.¹¹

L.12 This is a unique variant of Beta. Its version of the story, written before the eighth century, expands the Beta version with several new adventures, most notably the diving bell and the flying machine. It has therefore been a popular choice for translators.¹³

The next text that should be mentioned is the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. This pretends to be the work of Methodius, bishop of Patara in A.D. 311, but was, in fact, written in the seventh century, in Syriac and soon translated into Greek; like the slightly earlier seventh-century Syriac works, the Poem of Jacob of Serugh, and the 'Christian legend of Alexander' (Budge, 1889) it is concerned in part with Alexander's enclosure of the Unclean Nations.¹⁴ It presents a history of the world from Adam and Eve to the present, based on the presupposition that the end of the world is imminent: Alexander's role in enclosing the Unclean Nations, who will be released on the coming of Antichrist, is a crucial part of this progression. Because of this, the story was incorporated into subsequent rewritings of the Alexander romance.

Pseudo-Methodius was translated into Greek within twenty years, and into Latin about the same time; the Latin version was then translated into most western languages by 1500, and there are 220 MSS of the European versions.¹⁵

The Epsilon recension. (MS Bodl. Barocc. 17, 13th century: Q)

The importance of this abridged rewriting of the story was only recognised by Jürgen Trumpf who edited it in 1974. Trumpf argued for a

11 Edition of Lambda: van Thiel 1959.

12 Leiden Vulcanius 93, 15th c., Sicily.

13 Editions: van Thiel, 1983. Translations: van Thiel, 1983 (German); Dowden, 1989 (English); Stoneman, 1991 (English); Centanni, 1991 (Italian); Bonoure and Serret, 1992 (French).

14 Edition of 'Poem': Reinink, 1983; German translation: Hunnius, 1906. 15 MS of the Syriac text: Cod. Vat. Syr 58; see further Aerts and Kortekaas, 1998, p. 37. Translations: Reinink, 1993 (German). The only modern English translation is Budge 1889; for the Middle English version, see D'Evelyn, 1918. Of the fifteen Greek MSS, four are fundamental: Cod Vat Gr 1700, Cod. Laud. Gr 27, Pii II Gr. 11, Vindob. Med. 23: see Aerts and Kortekaas,

1998, p. 38. Editions: Aerts and Kortekaas, 1998 (Greek and Latin recensions); Lolos, 1983 (Greek).

[p9]

seventh-century date, but because the source text for the episode of the Unclean Nations, the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, is now dated around 692, the traditional eighth century date remains likely.

Epsilon narrates this episode in chapter 39, towards the end of its account of Alexander. The other episodes in this version are mostly the same as in the previous ones, but the order is changed so substantially that the text requires a different numbering. The other main additions are a campaign to conquer Rome (ch.13) and a visit to Jerusalem (ch.20) where Alexander is converted to Judaism and subsequently preaches it in Alexandria. This episode is clearly influenced by the milieu of Byzantine Christianity, with its strong interest in Judaism.¹⁶

The Gamma recension

This is the longest of the Greek recensions. It follows the basic structure of A and Beta but incorporates the new material from Epsilon described above; as a result, the sequence of the narrative becomes quite confusing, and some episodes that are in the first person in the earlier recensions are told in the third person in Gamma. It contains much that is clearly of Jewish origin such as the visit to Jerusalem and the preaching of one god in Alexandria, and some elements also seem to be Christianized, though the main ‘theological’ elements remain pagan (Sarapis, Amon, Heracles, and Dionysos). III.29 is devoted to the construction of the gate to enclose the Unclean Nations, from Pseudo-Methodius via Epsilon. There is some absurd over-writing, not least the episode after Alexander’s death where his horse, Bucephalus, enters the room where Alexander lies, identifies the murderer, and tears him to pieces: “bits of him flew all over everyone like snow falling off a roof in the wind.”

There are three MSS: Parisinus suppl. 113 (C: of 1567); Bodl. Barocc. 20 (R: 14th century); and Venice, Hellenic Institute gr. 5 (D; 14th c.), a beautifully illustrated MS whose pictorial tradition probably goes back to late antiquity.¹⁷ 16 Edition of Epsilon: Trumpf, 1974. 17 Editions: Lauenstein, 1962 (bk I); Engelmann, 1963 (Bk II); and Parthe, 1969 (Bk III); Stoneman, 2007 (Book I; II and III forthcoming). Translation: none. Facsimile edition: Trahoulias, 1997.

[p10]

It is perhaps unfortunate that this recension was the first to be edited, by Carolus Müller in 1846, since that edition established the book and chapter numbering which subsequent editors have perforce followed: this results in some at first sight puzzling jumps from one chapter number to another in the other recensions (e.g. the omission of II.1–6 in Beta, and of III.29 (the Unclean Nations) in all other recensions. This concludes the survey of the Greek Romance texts which became known to the Latin Middle Ages.

[p11]

Leo the Archpriest

In the tenth century a cleric named Leo was sent by the Duke of Naples on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople. He brought back a MS of the Greek Romance (perhaps A) and made a new translation in unawareness of the earlier version by Julius Valerius. This translation ended up in the cathedral library at Bamberg, founded by the Emperor Henry II in 1007 (Bambergensis E.111.4, circa 1000): presumably he brought it back from his campaigns in Southern Italy along with many others. This MS also contains the *Commonitorium Palladii*; Palladius on the Brahmans; the *Collatio Alexandri cum Dindimo* and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle about India*. There is a second, partial copy of Leo in Lambeth Palace Library, MS 342. The scribe had clearly made a compilation of Alexander works for the Bamberg library. Leo's version of the Romance does not correspond exactly to any of the known Greek recensions, though it is close to the Alpha recension as known from the Syriac. It is evident that the Greek work was still being copied and adapted in Byzantium when Leo went there, though in Byzantium it was Epsilon that was to become the dominant influence.⁴² **This work,**

n42 Leo does not include the text of Palladius which forms chpts. III. 7–16 in A. But, like Beta, it stops halfway through Book II. The letter to Aristotle is given in the first person as in A and Beta. The story of the diving bell and the flying machine appears,

[p18] **through its successive rewritings as the *Historia de Preliis*, is the foundation stone of the whole medieval European tradition.**⁴³

Somehow Leo's work became well known, and three expanded versions of Leo's work were made in the course of the twelfth century.

The *Historia de Preliis*

The oldest MS of this work is Bodleian Rawlinson B 149 and bears the title *Liber Alexandria Philippi Macedonum qui primus regnavit in Grecia et de proeliis eiusdem*, hence its usual designation as *Historia de Preliis* or HP. There are three recensions:

HP J1, before A.D. 1100. This is a combination of Leo's text with elements from Josephus, Jerome, Orosius, Solinus, Isidore, the Letter of Pharasmanes, the Indian treatises and the Letter to Aristotle.

MSS: Graz, Universitätsbibliothek MS 1520 (12th c.), Innsbruck Universitätsbibliothek 525 (A.D. 1304); Editio princeps Cologne (ca. 1471); two Dutch editions probably from Utrecht (ca. 1475).⁴⁴

HP J2, The 'Orosius recension', so-called because of its heavy use of Orosius. It also borrows material from Valerius Maximus, Pseudo- Methodius, Josephus (the visit to Jerusalem), Pseudo-Epiphanius de Gemmis and the Indian works. It was the source of the Old French Prose Alexander⁴⁵ and of two Middle English poems.⁴⁶

HP J3, completed by 1236 when it became the basis of the Latin verse version by Quilichinus of Spoleto. It is a reworked version of J1 and also includes the episode of the Sages at the Tomb of Alexander. There are very many MSS and it was printed at Strassburg in 1486, 1489, and 1494.⁴⁷

but in the first person, in the course of the Letter to Olympias (III. 27–29), not as part of the narrative as in the Greek version of L. The story of the trees of the sun and moon does not appear.

43 Editions: of Leo: Pfister, 1913 (Bamberg MS); Ross (Lambeth MS). For the other works in the Bamberg MS: Pfister, 1910. Translation: Stoneman, 1994a (of the minor works, not Leo). Kratz, 1991 includes translation of Leo.

44 Edition of J1: Hilka and Steffens, 1979. English Translations Pritchard, 1992; Kratz, 1991 (with portions of J2 and J3, the Letter to Aristotle, the Journey to Paradise and Leo).

45 See Hilka, 1920.

46 Edition of J2: Hilka, Bergmeister, and Grossman, 1976–77. German translation: Kirsch, 1991, with miniatures taken from the Leipzig MS.

47 Editions of J3: Kirsch, 1971 (with Quilichinus); Steffens, 1975. Synoptic edition of all three recensions (books I–II only); Bergmeister, 1975.

[p19]

The third recension was the one that became best known, and was the source of an enormous number of translations into the vernacular languages of Europe, not least the verse reworking by Quilichinus of Spoleto, whose date of 1236 provides a terminus ante quem for its creation. Not only are there numerous MSS, but it was printed several times from 1471 onwards. (It should be noted that all of these recensions draw on Latin sources for their elaborations of the original: there was no further use of Greek after Leo's initial, one might say epochal, act of translation).