The Gymnosophist Riddle Contest (Berol. P. 13044): A Cynic Text?

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ONCE A TEXT gets labelled, even on scant evidence, its subsequent interpretation often fails to question or revisit the initial reasoning behind the label. The accumulative effect of similar scholarly verdicts renders the task of freeing such a text from its assigned slot quite daunting. An example of this is the papyrus Berol. P. 13044, which contains the scene of Alexander questioning ten naked philosophers.[1] The papyrus probably dates from around 100 B.C. and is generally considered to be a Cynic text. Its fate reflects a fairly common tendency, that of assigning texts to the ever-welcoming genre of "Cynic diatribe," now largely discredited but still managing to obscure proper assessment of later Cynicism. The case of the Berlin papyrus is particularly challenging owing to the complexity of the tradition of Alexander's encounter with the Indian philosophers.

The Indian sages referred to as *γυμνοσοφίσται* exerted considerable influence in Greek literature. They are listed in the company of the Persian magi, the Chaldaeans of the Assyrians or the Babylonians, the druids of the Celts and the Galatians, the priests of Egypt, astrologists, and the Etruscan diviners among the Romans.[2] Some ancient sources claim that famous figures like Lycurgus, Democritus, and Pyrrho travelled to the

[1] U. Wilcken, "Alexander der Große und die indischen Gymnosophisten," *SBBerl* 1923, 149–183 [hereafter "Wilcken"], text at 161–162; reproduced in *FGrHist* 153 F 9.

[2] Strab. 16.2.39/Posidonius fr.133 Theiler; Diog. Laert. 1.1, 6, 9; Hippolyt. *Refut.* 1.13, 24.

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east to tap their wisdom.[3] They resurface in authors such as Philo, Lucian, Clement, Philostratus, and Heliodorus[4] and acted as models to Cynics and early Christian ascetics alike.[5]

Their original context, however, is the Macedonian conquest of India. Two traditions deal with encounters between them and Alexander and his men. Initially, the two traditions correspond to two separate incidents (most probably historical) during the Macedonian campaign and two separate sets of Indian sages.[6] The first, which I will refer to as the Dandamis tradition, relates to the sojourn at Taxila after the crossing of the Indus in 326 B.C. Strabo mentions Aristobulus, Onesicritus, and Nearchus as contemporary sources: Aristobulus and Nearchus describe the customs of the Indian sages while Onesicritus reports a conversation between himself and two sages mentioned by name, Calanus and Mandanis.[7] The meeting is also reported in the Alexander historians Plutarch and Arrian.[8] These sages are the proper *γυμνοσοφίσται* even though Onesicritus does not himself use the term.[9]

[3] Diog. Laert. 9.35, 61; Plut. *Lyc*. 4.6.

[4] Philo *Som*. 2.54–57; *Abr*. 181.3–183.3; *Prob*. 72.4–74.7, 94.1–96.12; Luc. *Fug*. 6.19–7.4; Clem. Alex. *Strom*. 1.15.71.3–5, 3.7.60.3–4, 4.4.17.3; in Philostr. *VA* the *γυμνοί* are from Egypt/Ethiopia as are the *γυμνοσοφίσται* in Heliod. *Aeth*.

[5] Cf. C. Muckensturm, "Les gymnosophistes étaient-ils des Cyniques modèles?" in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé and R. Goulet (eds.), *Le Cynisme ancien et ses prolongements* (Paris 1993) 225–239; B. Berg, "Dandamis: an Early Christian Portrait of Indian Asceticism," *ClMed* 31 (1970) 269–305, on Hippolytus, the gnostic Brahmans, Encratites, and Palladius.

[6] N. Powers, "Onesicritus, Naked Wise Men, and the Cynics' Alexander," *SyllClass* 9 (1998) 70–85, at 70.

[7] Strab. 15.1.61–66; Mandanis in later sources became Dandamis. Strabo also relies on the somewhat later Megasthenes, 15.1.58–60.

[8] Plut. *Alex*. 65 and Arr. *Anab*. 7.1.5–6

[9] Plutarch's version, conflating the two incidents, probably preceded him: P. Berol. 13044 already refers to the Brahmans as *γυμνοσοφίσται*. The Greeks were in general unconcerned with distinguishing between the two groups; cf. R. Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the

The second tradition fits later into the Macedonian campaign during the trek down the Indus and after the incident with the Malli and the revolt of Sambus.[10] Here the Indian sages, acting as political counsellors, correspond to the Brachmanes as identified by Nearchus (Strab. 15.1.66). Plutarch (*Alex*. 59.8) mentions that the "philosophers of India" incited revolt and Alexander caught and hanged many of them. The incident may be historical, but the session in which he interrogated ten gymnosophists is no doubt fictional.[11] In the latter episode, a brutal Alexander wishes to test their reputation for being clever and for giving concise answers (βραχυλόγοι). In Plutarch's version, a single wrong answer would lead to the execution of all, while the Berlin papyrus would allow only the appointed judge to live. By a display of cunning, particularly in the final answer, the gymnosophists manage to outwit the tyrant.

Both groups of stories have been linked to Cynic circles. The Cynic credentials of the first group seem reputable. Onesicritus, the original source of the Dandamis conversation, was himself a pupil of Diogenes and his Mandamis, who puts

Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance," *JHS* 115 (1995) 99–114, at 110.

[10] Diod. 17.102.6; Arr. *Anab*. 6.16.3–5; Curt. 9.8.13–15.

[11] Plutarch treats them separately in *Alex*. 59 and 64. Folkloric features in the riddle contest include the stock material employed in the questions and answers, the so-called "neck riddle" and logical impasse, the precise number ten, and the scene's structured presentation; cf. Wilcken 163; G. Zuntz, "Zu Alexanders Gespräch mit den Gymnosophisten," *Hermes* 87 (1959) 436–440; H. van Thiel, "Alexander's Gespräch mit den Gymnosophisten," *Hermes* 100 (1972) 343–346; J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch Alexander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1969) 179; Stoneman, *JHS* 115 (1995) 111. Diels's view that the scene goes back to Onesicritus (Wilcken 174) would be difficult to prove and, given Onesicritus' reputation, does not impact on its fictional character. Stoneman is correct that the riddle contest is incompatible with Onesicritus' Taxila report, but we do not have his account of the later incident. The brutally depicted tyrant, however, speaks against Onesicritus as origin; cf. Wilcken 175–177.

Diogenes on a par with Pythagoras and Socrates, advocates a super-Cynic view.[12] The juxtaposition of the worldly leader and the self-sufficient sage proved to be fertile ground for moral elaboration, often with a noticeably Cynic undercurrent. The encounter was extended sometime between Onesicritus' work and early layers of the Alexander Romance: in Onesicritus' version, only the narrator himself converses with them, but later versions culminate in a dialogue between Dandamis and Alexander. The story accumulated various influences from popular philosophy observable in the Geneva papyrus Inv. 271, in the Alexander Romance, and in Palladius.[13] A further tradition expanded on the role of Calanus, the other gymnosophist whom Onesicritus mentioned by name.[14]

The riddle contest tradition is also often claimed to be Cynic, either by origin or by reworking.[15] On closer scrutiny, the

[12] Strab. 15.1.63–65; cf. T. S. Brown, *Onesicritus: A Study in Hellenistic Historiography* (Berkeley 1949) 38–53. Plutarch knows of other versions as well, *Alex*. 65.4.

[13] On P. Genev. Inv. 271, cf. V. Martin, "Un recueil de diatribes cyniques: pap. Genev. Inv. 271," *MusHelv* 16 (1959) 77–115; P. Photiadès, "Les diatribes cyniques du papyrus de Genève 271, leurs traductions et élaborations successives," *MusHelv* 16 (1959) 116–139; W. H. Willis and K. Maresch, "The Encounter of Alexander with the Brahmans: New Fragments of the Cynic Diatribe P. Genev. Inv. 271," *ZPE* 74 (1988) 59–83; the papyrus definitely contains un-Cynic elements, such as an interest in divination and life after death. For the Romance, Stoneman, *JHS* 115 (1995) 99–114, and "Who are the Brahmans? Indian Lore and Cynic Doctrine in Palladius' *De bragmanibus* and its Models," *CQ* 44 (1994) 500–510; for the Brahman tract in Palladius, Berg, *ClMed* 31 (1970) 280–294, and *ClMed* 31 (1970) 280–294. Derrett concurs with Palladius' claim that the tract was written by Arrian; Berg on the other hand, while noticing strong Cynic influence on the tract, still thinks (295) that "of the manifold intellectual and religious systems of the period [i.e. 2nd cent. A.D.], Dandamis' speech best fits Christianity," in particular the Encratite variety.

[14] Strab. 15.1.64, cf. 68; Philo *Prob.* 94–96; cf. also Metz Epitome 71–74, P. H. Thomas (ed.), *Incerti auctoris Epitoma rerum gestarum Alexandri Magni* (Leipzig 1966).

[15] Wilcken 173–180; Brown, *Onesicritus* 47; Hamilton, *Plutarch* 179; Stoneman, *CQ* 44 (1994) 500; Powers, *SyllClass* 9 (1998) 84–85.

Cynic link is far from obvious and probably owes more to its association with the first group than to anything in the text itself. The tale has survived in five versions. Ordered chronologically, these are P. Berol. 13044 (from ca. 100 B.C.), Plutarch *Alex.* 64 (on which Clem. *Strom.* 6.4.38 depends), *Anecdota Graeca* I 145–146 (Boissonade), Ps.-Callisthenes (Alexander Romance Recension β) 3.5–6, and the Metz Epitome 78–84.[16] Wilcken proposes the following family relationship between these versions: the text of the Romance differs significantly from the other versions and seems to have been reworked independently from the rest, even though still containing elements close to the original. Plutarch's text reflects an authorial hand retelling rather than copying his source, while the *anecdotum* goes back to a source behind that of the papyrus. The evidence of the papyrus also suggests that the Metz Epitome version, where it differs from Plutarch, goes back to a Greek version older than Plutarch. Wilcken suggests that the scene was extracted from an early version of the Alexander Romance; given the obscurity of the Romance's origins, Jacoby expresses scepticism about this hypothesis and suggests—in my view rightly—an independent source.[17] Wilcken's view of layers behind the Berlin papyrus and the variances in the narrative frames invites the (re)construction of an earlier version based on inner logic and coherence, as van Thiel attempted to do.[18]

The riddle contest is interesting for more than one reason. It consists of the classic showdown between power and wisdom, a *topos* common in ancient literature.[19] It boasts two further inter-

[16] Wilcken 162–163. Wilcken refers to the close correspondence between the papyrus version and that of the Metz Epitome, which he in fact uses to reconstruct the setting and text of the papyrus.

[17] F. Jacoby ad *FGrHist* 153 F 9 (p.542).

[18] Van Thiel, *Hermes* 100 (1972) 343, 346–353.

[19] Cf. M. Buora, "L'incontro tra Alessandro e Diogene: tradizione e significato," *AttiVen* 132 (1973/4) 244–245, 251–252; R. Stoneman, "The Legacy of Alexander in Ancient Philosophy," in J. Roisman (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great* (Leiden 2003) 330 n.18.

esting features: firstly, a version of the folkloric type appropriately named "neck riddle" where one party stands to lose its life if unable to solve a riddle;[20] secondly, the logical impasse with similarities to the "liar's paradox," by which the sophists finally manage to escape.[21] The ingenuity of the piece extends to structure as well. Van Thiel draws attention to the artful composition of the scene in the papyrus version, where questions and answers are put in an intricate pattern of infinitive clauses and direct and indirect speech, only revealed when viewed as a chiastic structure with the fifth question and answer in the centre. Here, it is not the question and answer itself that is revealing ("What is earlier, night or day?" "Day, by one night"), but the comment of the sophist after Alexander's perplexity about the answer: "When the questions are difficult to solve (ἄποροι), so must be the answers." This, the only "theoretical" comment in the entire scene, reveals ἄπορος as leitmotiv.[22]

Van Thiel distinguishes between the questions and answers themselves, and the narrative frame containing Alexander's threat at the start and the final resolution by means of a deadlock at the end. He correctly notes problems in the various transmitted narrative frames and consequently attempts to reconstruct a probable "original" version: Alexander states before starting to ask his questions that each one will be asked a question and whoever answers incorrectly will be executed. He then proceeds by posing each gymnosophist an ἄπορον ἐρώτημα. These they all manage to the extent that Alexander realises he is not going to be able to catch them out, frustrating his aim of

[20] Cf. van Thiel, *Hermes* 100 (1972) 345–346, referring to J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (London 1949) on *Halsrätsel*; see also J. D. Dorst, "Neck-riddle as a Dialogue of Genres: Applying Bakhtin's Genre Theory," *Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983) 413–433, on the neck riddle as a way of integrating folktale and riddle.

[21] Famously formulated by Eubulides of Miletus (4th cent. B.C.): "A man says he is lying: is he telling the truth or does he lie?" Cf. Epimenides' paradox: Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται, Tit. 1:12.

[22] Van Thiel, *Hermes* 100 (1972) 344.

punishing them with execution. His last question is then to ask the final gymnosophist which of the nine answers was the worst, slyly changing the criterion from absolute (incorrect) to relative (least correct). But the tenth sophist, "wishing none to be killed because of him," answers that each answer was worse than the preceding one. Alexander responds: "Then all shall die, starting with you, for this is how you judged." But the sophist reminds Alexander that he said he would kill only those who answered incorrectly. His own answer cannot simultaneously be correct (accepted by Alexander) and the worst (the final answer) without implying that not only his, but all the previous answers were correct, and the king is obliged to concede their wisdom and to let them all go. In van Thiel's reckoning, additional information, such as the sequence of execution (in Plutarch) and the appointment of the tenth sophist as judge already at the start of the session (in both Plutarch and the Berlin papyrus), obscures the simple original structure and diminishes the clever *denouement*.[23]

Van Thiel's construction, though not crucial in every detail to the present argument, does show that the papyrus version already presents some reworking of the material. When searching for a Cynic link, it may either be found in the original already, or in the edited papyrus version. Regarding the original, Cynic elements are far from obvious, and van Thiel significantly makes no reference to Cynic content. But evidence for Cynic interpolation in the Berlin papyrus is equally scant, as a survey of scholarly literature indicates.

A surprising array of arguments has been mustered to link the episode to Cynic circles. To Powers, the fact that the Berlin papyrus was part of a collection of Cynic diatribes "virtually guarantees the Cynic provenance of the tale."[24] But Powers surely thought of the Geneva papyrus Inv. 271, which does seem to contain Cynic elements and is accompanied by the

[23] Van Thiel, *Hermes* 100 (1972) 351–352.

[24] Powers, *SyllClass* 9 (1998) 84.

Seventh Epistle of Heraclitus, considered to be of Cynic provenance.[25] On the Berlin papyrus, on the other hand, the riddle contest is followed—in fact on the very next line of the same column—by the *Laterculi Alexandrini*, a subliterary text consisting of various lists with no discernable Cynic link.[26]

Stoneman, who has devoted two articles to the Indian philosophers, claims in his 1994 article the riddle contest to be of Cynic origin, but backs that by referring to his much more circumspect 1995 study.[27] Rejecting any plausible Indian influence, Stoneman suggests that "the encounter could easily have been developed on a folk-tale basis in Greek philosophical circles."[28] The proposed philosophical line of influence—from Megarian predilection for paradox and linguistic puzzles to early contact between Megarians and Cynics—is rather dubious and Stoneman finally answers his own question—whether there is anything distinctively Cynic about the story—by referring to the *Life of Secundus the Philosopher*, of uncertain date but set under Hadrian. More to the point seems to be his observation that the riddle contest should rather be considered "a free-floating text, elaborated on the basis of the knowledge of Alexander's visit to the gymnosophists, but not based on any actual document describing that visit."[29]

It appears that the Cynic association with the riddle contest

[25] See Stoneman, *CQ* 44 (1994) 500 n.1. For the 7th Heraclitus letter, cf. H. W. Attridge, *First-Century Cynicism in the Epistles of Heraclitus* (Missoula 1976) 25–40; A. J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles*: *A Study Edition* (Missoula 1977) 22–26, 186–215.

[26] The lists are of legislators, painters, sculptors, architects, engineers, the seven wonders, the largest islands, the highest mountains, the largest rivers, the most beautiful springs and lakes. The text, with description and bibliography, may be accessed at http://cpp.arts.kuleuven.be/index.php?page=closeup&id=0273. I wish to thank Daniel Ogden for directing me to this site.

[27] Stoneman, *CQ* 44 (1994); *JHS* 115 (1995).

[28] Stoneman, *JHS* 115 (1995) 113.

[29] Stoneman, *JHS* 115 (1995) 113; cf. however n.11 above.

relies for the most part on the earlier views of T. S. Brown and Ulrich Wilcken. Both these scholars accept that it started off as a literary piece independent from the *eigentliche* Alexander historians, and both are equally adamant to find an early link to Cynic circles. Brown grounds his view on the hostility towards Alexander and the setting of the powerful ruler *versus* the wise man, where the former comes off second best after a show of παρρησία by the sage.[30] Neither of these arguments is compelling: the tyrant-sage *topos* does not by itself indicate Cynic origin, nor does hostility towards Alexander. Even the famous meeting between Alexander and a dismissive Diogenes is not unambiguously hostile, as I argue elsewhere.[31] Cynic παρρησία (acerbic, satiric, exposing truth) is certainly not a feature of the papyrus exchanges.

Brown leans heavily on the text's initial editor, Ulrich Wilcken, and it is this author's analysis that requires careful consideration. As far as the doctrinal content of the answers is concerned, Wilcken considers only four as possibly betraying Cynic thought. Question 1 receives an answer which plays on the word "be" (question: "Which is the most numerous, the living or the dead?"; answer: "The living, for is it not correct that those who are would be more than those who are not."); Question 6, possibly connected to Cynic φιλανθρωπία (question: "What should one do to be most loved by people?"; answer: "If he who is the strongest need not be feared for anything."); Question 7, possibly connected to the divinisation of the sage (question: "What needs to be done in order to become a god?"; answer: "If someone would do what no man could."); and the final answer in which the tenth sophist rebukes Alexander that "it is not kingly to lie" (possibly connected to the

[30] Brown, *Onesicritus* 47.

[31] P. R. Bosman, "King meets Dog: The Origin of the Meeting between Alexander and Diogenes," *AClass* 50 (2007) 51–63; see 59–60 on the argument of hostility towards Alexander as Cynic reaction to Onesicritus' encomium which was raised by Wilcken 176–177, and elaborated by R. Höistad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King* (Uppsala 1948) 135–138.

Cynic ideal of the sage as true king). The connection to Cynicism in all of these is tenuous, as Wilcken himself readily admits. None of these answers, constituting less than half of the total, even approaches the core of Cynic doctrine or has anything specifically Cynic about them.[32] They are little more than displays of ready wit (*witzige Schlagfertigkeit*), at most quasi-philosophical. If Arrian indeed came across the scene during his research for the *Anabasis*, his scepticism about the philosophical worth of the Indian Brahmans' sophisms should come as no surprise.[33]

Wilcken offers three reasons for regarding the document as Cynic: (1) the gift of clothing given them by Alexander at the end of the scene; (2) the anti-Onesicritus tendency of the portrayal; and (3) the importance in Cynic circles given to ready wit in solving riddles.[34] His argument is in essence cumulative: on their own, the last two reasons do not account for much, but rather add weight to the first. As for reason (3), Wilcken adduces only Lucian's *Demonax* 39 as evidence. While true that the Diogenes tradition contains witty and jocular answers to sometimes difficult questions, it is to be doubted that this was ever a typically Cynic pastime: Stoneman shows how widely question-and-answer sessions occur in ancient literature; among the Greeks themselves they were a kind of intellectual party game.[35] If any group was particularly associated with the answering of ἄπορα, it was the Indian sophists, as Philostratus shows in his *Vita Apollonii*.[36] Reason (2) assumes an intra-Cynic debate. Noting the contrast between the depiction of Alexander in Onesicritus' account and in the riddle contest (in the former

[32] Zuntz, *Hermes* 87 (1959) 436–440, demonstrates the traditional Greek content of the questions and answers; e.g. Diog. Laert. 1.104 on Question 1 (Anacharsis) and 1.36 on Question 5 (Thales).

[33] Arr. *Anab.* 6.16.5; noted by Droysen; cf. Wilcken 178.

[34] Wilcken 180–181.

[35] Stoneman, *JHS* 115 (1995) 110–114.

[36] Philostr. *VA* 3.18.34.

the philosopher-king; in the latter a bullying tyrant), Wilcken suggests that the hostile depiction should be seen as a reaction to Onesicritus' panegyric, where the sages emerge as victors of the encounter just as Diogenes does in the famous anecdote of his meeting with the king. Apart from the fact that the Alexander-Diogenes anecdote probably derives from Onesicritus himself, neither the philosopher-tyrant opposition nor hostility towards Alexander may be considered exclusively or distinctively Cynic. The argument furthermore falls flat when an independent origin is assumed.

Wilcken's argument thus boils down to a single element, that of the gift of clothing to the gymnosophists in the final line:

> τὸν δὲ Ἀλ[έ]ξανδρον ἀκούσαντ[α] κρῖναι σοφ[ο]ὺς εἶ[ν]αι τοὺς ἄνδρ[ας] <καὶ> προστάξαι δόντας [ἱ]ματισμὸν ἀφεῖναι πάντας.
>
> When Alexander heard this, he judged the men to be wise, and after ordering that they be given clothing, he sent them all away.

Considering that the gift is made to a group of naked philosophers, the papyrus version ends on a rather surprising note and the question is what to make of it.[37] Wilcken's solution is ingenious. Noting that the Metz Epitome 84 has a close Latin translation (*hos ubi Alexander audivit, sapientes esse existimans vestimenta dari ac missos fieri iussit*), he links the final line of the episode to the earlier introduction of the *Indorum philosophi* (Metz Epitome 71), where they are depicted as *qui amiculo duplici contenti reliquo vestitu carebant* ("who, content with a double cloak, went without other clothing"). In Wilcken's reckoning, *amicus duplex* corresponds to the folded cloak associated with the Cynics, rendering acceptable Alexander's final gift while also identifying the sages as Indian Cynics. He thus assumes that the sages in the papyrus too were not completely naked as in Onesicritus' depiction, but clothed in Cynic attire.

A number of objections may be raised against this construction. Firstly, the garment generally regarded as the philosopher's mantle, but especially associated with the Cynics, was in

[37] Wilcken 173 calls it "verwunderlich"; see also Brown, *Onesicritus* 47.

fact the τρίβων or coarse cloak.[38] The term would have been expected to appear either in the missing introduction or in the conclusion. For the end of the scene, the very general ἱματισμός corresponds to the equally nonspecific *vestimenta* in the Metz Epitome. For the introduction, the possibility cannot be excluded that *amicus duplex* in the Epitome translated τρίβων διπλοῦς, although the preferred Latin equivalent for the τρίβων seems rather to have been the *pallium*.[39] It should also be kept in mind that wearing the τρίβων was already testified for Socrates and thus not exclusively Cynic.[40] More likely, however, the papyrus—like the other Greek versions—did not contain a description of the sages' clothing. It would be odd for the earliest extant occurrence of the term γυμνοσοφίσται[41] to be defined as philosophers wearing the Cynic costume. The description in the Metz Epitome of the "Indian philosophers who wear nothing but a folded mantle," more probably served as late interpretation for the single Greek term.[42] Even in the unlikely event of the papyrus's lost introduction clothing the sages in the philosophers' mantle, the ending remains problematic, as it still is in the Epitome. For why would Cynics write a scene about sages who are content with the bare minimum in clothing and then accept clothes as a reward for beating the tyrant in a verbal contest? The question gains in pertinence when this

[38] For the Cynic costume, see D. Clay, "Picturing Diogenes," in R. B. Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (eds.), *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy* (Berkeley 1996) 370–373; G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum reliquiae* IV (Naples 1990) 499.

[39] For τρίβων διπλοῦς cf. Ps.-Diog. *Ep.* 7.1, 15.1, 30.3; Diog. Laert. 6.22; for *pallium/palliolum duplice* in a Cynic context, Plaut. *Pers.* 126; Varro *Sat.Men.* fr.314; Hieron. *Adv.Jovin.* 2.14.

[40] Pl. *Symp.* 219B, *Prot.* 335D.

[41] Arist. fr.35 (Diog. Laert. 1.1) does not prove Aristotle's use of the term; Onesicritus does not seem to have known it.

[42] γυμνός is admittedly ambiguous and does include the meaning "lightly clad"; cf. Ar. *Nub.* 498; Pl. *Resp.* 474A. Onesicritus' account in Strab. 15.1.63–64 implies complete nudity; cf. also γυμνοπεριβόλους in Ps.-Call. *Alex.Rom.* 3.5.

instance of gift giving is compared to the Dandamis tradition which emphasises the self-sufficiency of the sages and their disregard for worldly possessions. In what follows, I will attempt to establish the significance of the final gift giving for the text as a literary unit.

It is significant that other versions of the riddle contest also end with some form of gift giving: the Metz Epitome, as we have seen, corresponds with the Berlin papyrus in stipulating the gift as *vestimenta* (84), while Plutarch (*Alex.* 65.1) generalises to τουτοὺς μὲν οὖν ἀφῆκε δωρησάμενος ("after presenting them with gifts, he dismissed them"). Strictly speaking, the Alexander Romance β ends the riddle contest without a gift, but immediately proceeds with Alexander offering Dandamis an array of gifts: gold, bread, clothing, wine, and oil.[43]

From a literary point of view, the whole scene is one of an uneven contest, with Alexander literally in control of life and death. The narrative frame and Question 4[44] bring a particular historical situation into hermeneutic play: Alexander, the aggressor from far-off Greece, invaded the country of the Indians. The philosophers incited insurrection, were captured, and are now powerless. Alexander has them brought to him for little more than amusement before they will be executed. In the papyrus version, Alexander is even crueller than in van Thiel's constructed original: here all except the judge are going to die anyway. He does not offer them a way of winning their freedom: only the sequence of their execution may still be deter-

[43] 3.6.51–52. L. Bergson, *Der griechischen Alexanderroman Rezension β* (Uppsala 1965) 148, includes ἱματισμούς in his text based on *Paris.gr.* 1685; its omission in *Mosquensis* 436 (298), *Vat.gr.* 1556, and *Leid.Vulc.* 93 as well as in the γ Recension points to controversiality; it remains inconclusive whether it was part of an original list of gifts or included on the basis of the tradition to which the Berlin papyrus and the Metz Epitome belong.

[44] Col. 3.1–9: "The fourth he asked why he advised their leader Sabeilo to make war against him; he said: 'So that he would either come to live well, or to die well'." Corruption of the name Sambos (Diod. 17.102.6, Arr. *Anab.* 6.16.3) indicates a significant remove from the historical sources; cf. Wilcken 161, 168.

mined by their cleverness. He puts questions and they answer; no verdict is given on the quality of their responses; only when Alexander gets caught in the logical impasse is he forced to let all of them live.

What would the function of the gift then be? At first glance, the gift giving seems to be about reward (the sages performed well and they are given something in return), recognition (of their status and their wisdom), and reinstatement of honour and dignity. While these elements play some part, studies into ancient reciprocity claim that gift exchange is really about establishing relationships of indebtedness and power. Von Reden notes that typical of the mode of gift exchange is "a delay between the gift and its return so that the indebtedness of the recipient is the immediate return for the gift."[45] Were the scene to be analysed as reflecting history, indebtedness would have made sense: Alexander's gift forged a continuing link between him and the potentially dangerous sophists, enabling him to keep on exerting influence over them. Thus seen, the gift would have functioned as a safeguard for future peace and social stability. However, since the riddle contest is essentially a literary text, an interpretation in terms of the imposition of power seems more pertinent.

Gift giving is a status game played by the powerful. Aristotle notes the political dimension of magnificence: the *μεγαλοπρεπής* is obliged by his position to spend lavishly while in the process enhancing his social position.[46] Disinterested or altruistic generosity may be the overt impression striven for, but the gift puts the recipient under obligation. Until such time as the beneficiary is able to reciprocate, the obligation remains,

[45] S. von Reden, *Exchange in Ancient Greece*[2] (London 2003) 18.

[46] Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1122a–1123a. One of the most remarkable and admired features of Alexander was his being a "naturally great giver of gifts," Plut. *Alex.* 39: *φύσει δὲ ὢν μεγαλοδωρότατος*.

even to the degree of actual subservience.[47] Viewed from the receiving side, gift exchange is a sign of weakness, even of humiliation in cases where the value of the accepted gift is greater than what can be returned.

There can be little doubt that power and obligation are central to the gift exchange between Alexander and Dandamis. In Ps.-Callisthenes, the question-and-answer session has a completely different feel to it, with Alexander depicted as interested and sympathetic. It concludes with Alexander offering the gymnosophists anything they would request, but unable to give them the immortality they want. The scene moves abruptly to the Dandamis dialogue, starting with Alexander offering Dandamis gold, bread, clothing, wine, and oil. The latter, laughing, declines everything but the oil, which he pours into a fire. This version's gift exchange is similar to the Brahman tract in Palladius, where the list of gifts also includes clothing, along with coined gold and silver, bread, and oil. In both versions the laughing Dandamis demonstrates the sage's superiority to the king: not only does his self-sufficiency prevent the king from exercising control over him, but he can only smile at the ignorance of Alexander to think that he would fear his threat to have him executed or that he would have use for his gifts. Dandamis sends Onesicritus back to Alexander, calling the latter's threat and gifts ὅπλα, "weapons":

> ταῦτα δὲ ἀπειλείτω Ἀλέξανδρος τοῖς θέλουσι χρυσὸν καὶ θάνατον φοβουμένοις; πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὰ δύο αὐτοῦ ὅπλα πέπτωκεν; οἱ γὰρ Βραγμᾶνες οὔτε χρυσὸν φιλοῦσιν οὔτε θάνατον φοβοῦνται. ἄπελθε οὖν καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ λέγε, ὅτι Δάνδαμις τῶν σῶν χρείαν οὐκ ἔχει; διὰ τοῦτο πρός σε οὐκ ἐλεύσεται. εἰ δὲ σὺ Δανδάμεως χρείαν ἔχεις, ἐλθὲ πρὸς αὐτόν.
>
> Let Alexander threaten with these things those who want gold and fear death; toward us his two weapons have failed, for the Bragmanes neither love gold nor fear death. Go then and tell

[47] For a discussion from an anthropological perspective, cf. H. van Wees, "The Law of Gratitude: Reciprocity in Anthropological Theory," in C. Gill et al. (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 13–49.

> Alexander that Dandamis has no need for his things: therefore he will not come to you. If you need something from Dandamis, go to him. (Pall. *De gent. Ind. et Bragm.* 2.18)

Further on in the speech, Dandamis' explicit rejection of Alexander's clothing gift stands in stark contrast to the silently accepting gymnosophists of the riddle contest (2.38):

> ἱμάτιον περιβέβλημαι ὃ ἐξ ὠδίνων ἔχοντά με ἡ μήτηρ ἔτεκεν. ἀέρι τρέφομαι καὶ ἡδέως ἐμαυτὸν [τοιοῦτον] βλέπω. τί ἀναγκάζεις με περιθέσθαι ὅλου τοῦ σώματος δεσμόν;
>
> I am clothed in the garment I had when my mother gave birth to me. I am sustained by the air and I gladly see myself like that. Why do you force me to put bondage around my whole body?

While the overt reason for Dandamis' refusal is his lack of need, the subtext is the philosopher's rejection of the king's attempt to get a hold on him. The notion of self-sufficiency was a widely held ideal in Socratic circles, its most distinct version belonging to the Cynics. Dandamis' double refusal—of both the actual gifts and what they signify—corresponds to the two planes of Cynic αὐτάρκεια identified by Rich: physical ("contentment with the bare necessities of life") and spiritual ("complete detachment from the world and worldly values").[48]

Rejection of Alexander's gifts thus demonstrates the sages' rejection of the reciprocity game. This crucial element is absent in the riddle contest, making its Cynic provenance unlikely unless the scene from the start belonged to the Dandamis dialogue and its gift giving served as a transition for the latter's display of self-sufficiency. This, however, appears just as unlikely. Plutarch, who also relies on a source that conflates the

[48] A. N. M. Rich, "The Cynic Conception of ΑΥΤΑΡΚΕΙΑ," in M. Billerbeck (ed.), *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung* (Amsterdam 1991) 233–239. Both the Cynic and gymnosophist definitions of αὐτάρκεια go beyond mere contentment with one's circumstances in regarding anything above the requirements of nature as obstacles on the road to moral perfection; the gymnosophists are even more radical, as Mandamis pointed out to Onesicritus (Strab. 15.1.65), in rejecting any compromise whatsoever with νόμος; cf. Muckensturm, *Les gymnosophistes* 229–238.

two traditions, does not portray the ten sophists as responding to the gifts, but instead uses the gift giving to manufacture an antithetical transition between this episode and the account of Onesicritus' meeting with Calanus and Dandamis. Onesicritus' identification as a Cynic in Plutarch seems to apply only to the latter account in order to highlight the harsh asceticism of Calanus. Palladius has the gifts but no riddle contest, while Ps.-Callisthenes' reworked version has the questions and answers inserted into the Dandamis scene: Alexander is introduced to Dandamis before he asks his questions and presents the gifts to Dandamis afterwards. The only overlap between these scenes of gift giving is that clothing appears in the gift lists of Ps.-Callisthenes and Palladius. Its inclusion seems natural enough, as it represents one of those seemingly basic needs of humankind the radical Indian philosophers are able to do without.[49]

To conclude: the Cynic associations with the Berlin papyrus stem from three sources: (1) Onesicritus, the Cynic author of an encounter with the Indian gymnosophists; (2) the Cynic-oriented Dandamis-dialologue/Brahman tract based on Onesicritus' account; and (3) interpretive links argued by modern scholars. Since the riddle contest most probably originated independently from the first two sources, these cannot be used to argue for a Cynic origin. Not surprisingly, the riddle contest displays none of the Cynic traits in these sources. Regarding scholarly interpretation, none of the proffered arguments convincingly demonstrates Cynic influence.

The most difficult interpretive problem is the gift of clothing at the end of the scene. Regarding the versions of the riddle contest that feature only a clothing-gift—the Berlin papyrus and the Metz Epitome—two explanations present themselves: either the rest of an originally longer list of gifts was suppressed to leave only the one element, or clothing was originally the only gift. Again the former explanation is less likely given the independent features and literary unity of the riddle contest still

[49] Cf. Pall. *De gent. Ind. et Bragm.* 1.11.

observable in the instances where it has been inserted into the Dandamis tradition. The more likely explanation is that the gift of clothing at the end of the riddle contest was included for the literary purpose of counter-balance in the narrative frame. In the scene's introduction, the sages were introduced as "naked philosophers," but this information does not play a role as events unfold. Their clothing at the end thus frames the scene as a second reference to their outward appearance.

The riddle contest can thus be seen as having no particular philosophical allegiance. It consists of various folkloric elements: the *topos* of the tyrant outfoxed by sages, quasi-philosophical displays of wisdom culminating in a clever *denouement* which saves the lives of the wise from the brutal king. These are given an appropriate historical setting. Alexander had long since become the epitome of worldly power and unbridled ambition, while his most diametrical opposites were those Indian philosophers who needed nothing. The Brahmans-turned-gymnosophists heightened the required contrast between power and wisdom. However, the scene does not present a balance between the two opposing forces to the reader. Alexander, sardonic, savage, like a cat amusing himself with his prey, has no interest in the philosophical foundations for their dismal appearance. The ten sages are given no opportunity to explain: their dismissal after receiving clothing disallows them the chance to respond with the required *αὐτάρκεια*. They remain brutalised, nameless and faceless, and finally humiliated to the point where the coloniser dresses them in the oppressors' clothes and in the process robs them of their very identity. From a literary point of view, Alexander's gift can only be interpreted as a final insult, whether intended as such or due to ignorance. Even if the author wished to emphasise the persistent *τύφος* of Alexander, the wry sense of humour discernible in the gift of clothing was probably not that of a Cynic.

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