

An Early Source of the *Alexander Romance*

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MUCH of the fanciful material from the Hellenistic period on Alexander the Great was gathered together in the *Alexander Romance*, a conglomerate work made up of disparate sources.¹ The *Romance* enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages. Its wide circulation proved to be its textual undoing, for it was handled and mishandled so often before it reached the eleventh century (the date of **A**, the earliest of numerous and variegated mss) that the original wording and, in some cases, contents can only be approximated. Yet most of the internal contradictions and chronological confusion found in the *Romance* cannot be blamed on the mediaeval scribes but stem from the original nature of the work. It was never a simple, uniform book but a jumble of once separate works on Alexander, all of a popular, imaginative nature, awkwardly pieced together

¹ The Latin translation by Julius Valerius of the *Romance*, edited by B. Kübler, *Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis* (Leipzig 1888), the fifth-century Armenian version, and a Greek ms, **A**, constitute the earliest manuscript group, α . The Armenian version has been retranslated into Greek by R. Raabe, *Historia Alexandrou* (Leipzig 1898). W. Kroll in his edition of **A**, *Historia Alexandri Magni* (Berlin 1926), tries to give an approximation of the α prototype. δ , an offshoot of α , is the lost Greek text used by the archpriest Leo for his popular tenth-century Latin translation: see Pfister's edition, *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo* (Heidelberg 1913). The other families of Greek mss β , γ and λ , differ most strikingly from α in that they include a long 'marvel letter' between Books II and III of the *Romance*. Karl Müller's edition, published in the Dübner Arrian (Paris 1846), is a mixture of three mss, which tries to give an idea of the contents of each, **A**, **B** (from the β group), and **C** (from the γ group), but peculiar in that it has been recollated with a β group ms which, as far as I can tell, is closest to **L**. Müller relies most heavily on **B**. I follow his numbering, as do recent editors. β has been edited by Leif Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman Rezension β* (*Studia Graeca Stockholmiensia* III, 1965), including the peculiarities of **L**. γ , including the peculiarities of **C**, is published in *Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* 4, 12 and 33, *Der griechische Alexanderroman Rezension γ* (Meisenheim am Glan), Book I by Ursula von Lauenstein (1962), Book II by Helmut Engelmann (1963), Book III by Franz Parthe (1969). λ has been edited by Helmut van Thiel, *Die Rezension λ des Pseudo-Kallisthenes* (Bonn 1959). Ms **Q** represents a recension midway between β and γ known as ϵ ; it is to be published by Jürgen Trumpf. According to Bergson (introduction x) β is from the fifth century, ϵ the sixth, λ the seventh, and γ is sometime after ϵ .

sometime before A.D. 345 by an anonymous compiler who is called Pseudo-Callisthenes by scholarly convention.²

Scholars have tried to recover the main source of the *Romance*. Ausfeld and Pfister have argued that the bulk of it is based on an earlier kernel, the original *Romance*, which they date to the second century B.C.³ More recently however, the letters, sprinkled through the *Romance*, which Darius exchanges with satraps, allies and Alexander himself, have been shown to stem from an independent collection of letters, remains of which have turned up in two papyri, the earlier dated to the first century B.C. This letter collection, as we now know, like the marvel letters (apocryphal letters from Alexander on the marvels of the East, so clumsily inserted into the *Romance* that their separate origin is plain to all), was once independent of any novel or history. In the light of these new finds, Merkelbach has suggested that the *Romance* rests on two major sources, a biography of Alexander, and another work made up of various sources and including both groups of letters. Pseudo-Callisthenes, according to Merkelbach, has larded the biography with material from this second source and composed the most melodramatic episodes himself.⁴

Even this scheme imposes more of a framework on the *Romance* than the work actually betrays. I believe that Pseudo-Callisthenes invented few episodes himself but has not used any one source as a framework for his book. Rather, he put the story of Alexander's life together,

² The firm upper date of 345 for Pseudo-Callisthenes' compilation is established through the translation of his book from the original Greek into Latin by Julius Valerius. B. Kübler, in the preface to his edition of Julius Valerius (*supra* n.1), argues for 330 as an upper limit because Valerius seems to picture Rome, not Constantinople, as the capital of the world (p.vii). The translation was certainly done before 345, as it was used by the author (possibly Valerius himself) of the *Itinerarium Alexandri*, dedicated to Constantius between 341 and 345 (p.vi). Julius Valerius is a historical figure, who was consul in 338 (p.viii). Pseudo-Callisthenes, on the other hand, may have lived several generations if not centuries before Valerius, but his world is clearly that of the Roman Empire (see A. Ausfeld, *Der griechische Alexanderroman* [Leipzig 1907] 251–52), and although most of his sources go back ultimately to early Hellenistic times, his own knowledge of the period is vague. He is called Pseudo-Callisthenes because the name Callisthenes (a contemporary of Alexander and his official historian) appears in several mss. Other mss ascribe the work to figures like Aesop or Ptolemy. All the author names are discussed by F. Pfister, "Studien zum Alexanderroman," *WürgJbb* 1 (1946) 29–60 on pp.42–44.

³ Pfister, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2), and Ausfeld, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2). Ausfeld gives his arguments for a second-century B.C. date for the Alexandrian 'kernel' of the *Romance* on pp.238–39.

⁴ R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans* (*Zetemata* 9, Munich 1954), discusses the papyri on pp.1–40 and gives a text pp.195–219. For his view of the two major sources see pp.1–55; on the contributions of Pseudo-Callisthenes see pp.56–60.

taking now from one work, now from another, in such a way that it is impossible to single out any one or two elements as the basis of the *Romance*. The book has no real framework except that it deals with Alexander throughout, and it has no uniting themes. Most likely Pseudo-Callisthenes is only the last in a series of editors, for it is hard to imagine that one man is responsible for all the patching the *Romance* evinces. His actual sources may already have been compounds. While confusion crept in slowly as the work evolved, even some of the earliest sources were largely fantasy. The editors of the *Romance* preferred imaginative stories over factual histories and had little interest in battle arrangements or chronology. The *Romance* was never shaped into a smooth, consistent literary whole until mediaeval poets like Rudolf of Ems and Alexander of Paris transformed it into courtly epics.⁵

Proponents of the theory of an early kernel (Ausfeld and Pfister), claim that the original *Romance* stems from Ptolemaic Alexandria, while those (Kroll and Merkelbach) who argue that it is essentially a product of Roman times based loosely on earlier sources assert that the late author, Pseudo-Callisthenes, was himself an Alexandrian.⁶ The conviction that the *Romance* has an Alexandrian origin rests mainly on two major episodes of the first book which are clearly connected with each other, the Nectanebo story (1.1–14) and the section on the founding of Alexandria (1.30–34). The *Romance* opens with the Nectanebo story, in which Alexander is depicted as the son of Nectanebo, the last native Egyptian pharaoh. Again Alexander appears in the rôle of Nectanebo's son in the section on the founding of Alexandria under the auspices of Egyptian gods Ammon and Serapis. Together the two episodes constitute evidence for an Alexandrian story presenting Alexander as the rightful king of Egypt, which was utilized by Pseudo-Callisthenes at least for these two episodes.

According to this Alexandrian story, Nectanebo (who in fact lost his throne to the Persians in the fourth century B.C.), having learned through magic that his kingdom is fated to be conquered by the barbarians, flees to Macedonia and seduces Olympias in the guise of Ammon. Meanwhile in Egypt the oracle of the god Serapis prophesies that Nectanebo will return as a young man (*Romance* 1.1–7). Some-

⁵ For a good summary of the later transformations of the *Romance* see A. Abel, *Le Roman d'Alexandre, Légendaire médiéval* (Brussels 1955).

⁶ See n.2 and Merkelbach, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 59.

what later in the *Romance* when Alexander begins his great campaign, he does not, as is historically correct, first go to Greece, then Asia Minor, then the Levant, spending long years in battles, marches and siege works, but passes quickly through Italy and Carthage to the Libyan oracle of Ammon. The story of the visit to Ammon, the founding of Alexandria and Alexander's crowning in Memphis is told in great detail, and many specific place names are given (1.30–34). The foundation of Alexandria and the visit to Ammon always play a large part in histories of Alexander because many of the first Alexander historians, Ptolemy and Cleitarchus for example, were inhabitants of the magnificent new city. In the *Romance*, however, the episode runs quite differently. Here Alexander is transformed from a Macedonian conqueror into an Egyptian hero. He reveals himself as the son of Nectanebo in Memphis. He founds Alexandria under the guidance of the oracles of Ammon and Serapis. The author is clearly an Alexandrian as his knowledge of Alexandria shows, as well as his remark, as Alexander approaches the site of Alexandria, that "he came to this land" (1.31).⁷

I believe this second Egyptian episode to be connected with the Nectanebo story, for in the latter section Alexander fulfills Serapis' prophecy of the return of Nectanebo and is shown a vision of Ammon embracing his mother. The Alexandrian story from which these two tales (Nectanebo and Alexander's visit to Egypt) are taken is rooted in the desire to legitimize Macedonian rule over Egypt, a preoccupation which indicates an early date for the story, well before the Roman conquest of Egypt.

To extrapolate from this material a central Alexandrian source for Pseudo-Callisthenes is unwarranted, as only these two sections of the *Romance* are concerned with Alexander as an Egyptian national hero. Most of Pseudo-Callisthenes' material comes from other sources. To attribute all the Egyptianizing tendencies of the *Romance* to Pseudo-Callisthenes himself, on the other hand, reducing his source for the Nectanebo story to the level of a nebulous, apparently oral 'legend' or 'saga' (as Merkelbach⁸), is also incorrect, for the two Egyptianizing episodes have a characteristic flavor, an insistence on divine sanction, quite unlike what we glimpse of Pseudo-Callisthenes' style and preoccupations throughout. Therefore it is very likely that the two epi-

⁷ The passage is noted by Pfister, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 63.

⁸ Merkelbach, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 49, 56–60.

sodes come not merely from oral Alexandrian material but were borrowed wholesale by Pseudo-Callisthenes from a written Alexandrian novel dating from Ptolemaic times. This supposition is reinforced by evidence of several similar novels from the same period, which has been gathered by Martin Braun. The Alexandrian story (as I reconstruct it from the tales of Nectanebo and the founding of Alexandria) is one of a series of early Hellenistic romances which transform a historical figure into a national patron saint and a world conqueror. The books about Semiramis and Sesostris, both known to Diodorus, conform well to this pattern, as do the stories of Joseph and Nectanebo himself.⁹

Further evidence that the two sections on Nectanebo and Alexandria once existed separately from the *Romance* is furnished by a Jewish version of the founding of Alexandria. The story of the city's origin, including the information that Alexander was recognized as the son of Nectanebo but utilizing no other section of the *Romance*, in combination with other Jewish material on Alexander which dates to the first century (the story of his visit to Jerusalem, known to Josephus), has been inserted into a late version of the *Romance*, γ , in the second book (2.24–28). From the knowledge he betrays it is logical to assume that the author of the Jewish material, who changes the protector of Alexandria from Serapis to Jehovah, had read only the early Alexandrian novel, not the full *Alexander Romance*. At a much later date his work was inserted into one branch of the *Romance*.¹⁰

The early Alexandrian novel is represented by a few sections of the *Alexander Romance*, perhaps not much more than 1.1–14 (the Nectanebo story) and 1.30–34 (the founding of Alexandria), although I think

⁹ Pfister, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 58, details the similarities between the *Alexander Romance* and the Sesostris novel. On the remains of all the Hellenistic romances see M. Braun's informative book, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford 1938). Braun believes that there was a romance with Nectanebo as its hero, evidence for which comes from a second-century B.C. papyrus (UPZ I 81), "Nectanebo's dream" (p.24). Braun is particularly interested in the story of Joseph, and accepts Pfister's picture of an early, "original romance" on which the *Alexander Romance* is based.

¹⁰ The story of Philip the doctor occurs in 2.25; 2.8; and 1.41. It was a very well known Alexander legend, which the Jewish author could have borrowed from anywhere. Pfister, "Eine jüdische Gründungsgeschichte Alexandrias," *SBHeidelberg* 1914.11, discusses the Jewish story. He claims that it is evidence that the "original romance" was known by the first century and argues that the story of the founding of Alexandria was a separate *ktisis* used in the original romance. I am convinced, however, that the episode cannot be separated from the Nectanebo story.

it very likely that at least two other segments of the *Romance* which exhibit the same imaginative charm, the same naïve delight in tricks, disguises and magic as the Nectanebo story, were also once a part of the Alexandrian novel. One of these episodes is the story of Alexander's visit to the Persian camp in disguise (2.13–15), the other is the romantic tale of Alexander's visit to the Ethiopian kingdom of Queen Candace (3.18–24). Alexander, in disguise, performs gallant deeds and eventually is sumptuously received by the queen in her fairy-tale palace.¹¹ It is significant that in both these stories Egyptian figures appear. It is Ammon, disguised as Hermes, who guides Alexander to the camp of Darius. At the end of the Candace episode Alexander is directed to the cave of the gods, where he converses with Sesostrius, a romantic figure based on an Egyptian pharaoh.

Perhaps two other sections of the *Romance* can be traced back to the Alexandrian novel as well. The first is a short story of a pact between Ptolemy and Perdiccas to share Alexander's heritage (3.32—it occurs only in **A**), which depicts Ptolemy as Alexander's half-brother and heir. The other passage concerns Alexander's burial in Egypt, first in Memphis, then in Alexandria, according to the instructions of oracle and prophecy (3.34). This scene is prefigured in the episode of the founding of Alexandria, in which the oracle of Serapis prophesies that Alexandria will contain the tomb of Alexander (1.33). It is logical that the Alexandrian story should have continued up to Alexander's death, and these two episodes show the same concern with legitimacy and

¹¹ Ausfeld, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 187–88, shows that the Candace episode is out of place and should occur not in Book III but in Book I, after Alexander's visit to Memphis. Because of this confusion Ausfeld decided that the Candace episode did not belong to the Alexandrian 'kernel' of the *Romance*. If we see the later Pseudo-Callisthenes as the principal organizer of the *Romance*, however, the attempt to fit the Candace story into an eastern context can be attributed to him. Probably because she was a woman ruler, he decided to locate her between the land of Semiramis and that of the Amazons. Pfister's argument (*op.cit.* [*supra* n.2] 62) that the Candace episode does not belong to the "original romance" because it nowhere speaks of Alexander as a *kosmokrator* is very weak—he overemphasizes the *kosmokrator* motif. Braun, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9), has shown that Graeco-Oriental historical romances usually have an erotic element and points out that in the Ethiopian version of the *Romance* the Candace episode is presented as a love story (p.18). In the original source the story may have had erotic overtones which were expunged by Pseudo-Callisthenes. Merkelbach, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4), had argued, as I do, that the two stories of Alexander's visits in disguise to Darius' camp and Candace's palace do betray the same style as the Nectanebo story (he attributes all three to Pseudo-Callisthenes), but what I see as characteristic charm he sees as characteristic bad taste (pp.56–60).

oracles familiar from the other passages we have traced to this work.¹² If the two sections concerning Alexander's death are truly part of the Alexandrian story, they show that the author was interested in establishing Ptolemy I Soter's legitimacy in Egypt as well as Alexander's. This interest in the first Ptolemy might suggest a very early date, although perhaps not in Ptolemy's lifetime. We know that Ptolemy encouraged the Serapis cult and actually stole Alexander's body for Egypt, but his Egyptianizing and romantic tendencies might not have been so pronounced as to inspire the fantasies of the Alexandrian novel, since he himself wrote a relatively dry history of Alexander.¹³

Ausfeld was correct in believing that an early romance about Alexander, written in Alexandria, once existed. We have reduced the contributions which this nationalistic novel made to the *Alexander Romance* to a restrained group of episodes, which betray an author with a particular interest in Egypt and a romantic imagination. The adventures of Alexander in Egypt and North Africa (the Libyan oracle of Ammon, the Ethiopian kingdom of Candace) no doubt played by far the most important part in the novel. Yet if the story of the visit to Darius' camp also comes from it, the novel must have touched on Alexander's eastern campaigns, and it seems to have followed his career down to his death and burial. From the novel's remains, we realize that, alongside the learned romance of Apollonius Rhodius which told of the fantastic adventures of Jason, there circulated in Alexandria the story of Alexander, the son of Nectanebo, the prince who inherits his native kingdom. This was a more humble work but in some ways more profound, more in touch with the actual politics and current folktales of the times.

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¹² Pfister, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 48–49, thinks these two episodes, as well as several others from the *Romance*, belonged to the ending of the "original romance." He points out rightly that we know the source (from the Metz codex) of most of what Pseudo-Callisthenes says about Alexander's death. Significantly, the two episodes I have discussed do not appear there and so could well have been borrowed from the Alexandrian novel.

¹³ On the books of Ptolemy and other Alexander historians see L. Pearson, *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great* (*APA Philological Monographs* XX, 1960).