De geboorte van Alexander de Grote
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Summary:

Chapter 1 Introduction:

The importance of the Greek Alexander Romance:
The introduction deals with the importance of the Greek Alexander romance which enjoyed
almost as large a circulation as the Bible.
The influence of Greek tradition in relation to the adventures of Alexander the Great on the
literature of both Eastern and Western peoples is discussed, while mention is made of the
appropriation of the hero by, in particular, the Egyptians (the begetting of Alexander the
Great by the last Pharaoh, Nectanebo II).
Furthermore, attention is paid to the popularity of the Greek Alexander romance.

The popularity of the Greek Alexander romance:
Although traditional stories about Alexander can be found not only in the Greek Alexander
romance, but also in the works of Plutarch and Arrianus among others, the popularity of the
Alexander romance greatly overshadows that of the other works on Alexander the Great. In
this context it should be remembered that the Alexander romance, apart from the Vita
Alexandri by Plutarch, is the only work that deals with the youth of Alexander the Great.
The main reasons for this popularity are:
1) The popularity of Alexander the Great
2) The popularity of the heroic romance with its mixture of Wahrheit und Fiktion (Helmut
van Thiel, p.XI).
3) The fact that the language of the Alexander romance, the Koine, was closer to ordinary
people than e.g. the atticistic language of Plutarch.

Authorship and Origin:
Here one point is of particular importance, viz. the fact that the author remained unknown.
The result of this has been that legends about Alexander the Great continued to be formed
for a long time. This would account for the existence of numerous, in many aspects, rather
different Greek recensions (α, β, ε, γ, δ, ζ) and the versions which resulted from these in
other languages (respectively the Latin translation by Archpriest Leo of Napels in the 10th
century, the Syriac version and, according to U.Moennig (1992) also a Serbian version).
Of these non-Greek versions Julius Valerius, the Armenian version and, as far as Book I,
chapter 12 (henceforth referred to as I,12) is concerned, the Syriac version are closest to
the α-recension. The oldest recension dates either from 200 B.C. (Jacob Seibert), or from
the end of the 3rd century A.D. (Kroll).

The sources:

1) Historical:
Ptolemy I Soter's Ephemerides and the fragments of the work by Clitarchus can bementioned as historical sources. It is, however, not clear what contribution the works of these historians have made to the origin of the Alexander romance. More important in this respect is the so-called Epistolary Romance.

2) The Epistolary Romance:
This genre developed in Hellenic times in the Schools of Rhetoric. Standard letters were taken as examples for students to practise writing letters. Alexander's letter to the Persians (II,21), the correspondence between Alexander and the gymnosophists (III,5) and the correspondence between Alexander and Candace (III,18) could be considered such examples.
The anonymous author of the Alexander romance seems to have taken these letters as authentic and - in spite of their slight historical value- he took these to be more useful than the historical sources which he had at his disposal. However, he incorporated the letters into his story in such a strange way that in one particular case the answer to a letter precedes the letter itself. Moreover, one letter is in contradiction with the text.

The recensions:

The $\alpha$-recension:
There are different opinions about the recensions. Ausfeld (Leipzig 1907, pp.29-122) thought that the nucleus of the Alexander romance had to date from the times of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (200 B.C.).
In the Praefatio of his edition of the $\alpha$-recension (1926/58, p.XV) Kroll indicates that the oldest recension of the Alexander romance cannot have been written before the end of the third century A.D.
Contrary to Ausfeld he is of the opinion that one cannot separate off an older nucleus, because in the course of the centuries material has been added as well as scrapped.
Based on the so-called Favorinus quotation in the translation of Julius Valerius (338 A.D.), Zacher and Dashian (Vienna 1892) think that the oldest recension originated around 150 A.D.
Because this quotation does not occur in the Greek recensions, it cannot be considered very valuable.

Conclusion: A dating of the oldest recension of the Alexander romance before 200 A.D. is therefore not very likely, on the other hand, because of the date of the translation of Julius Valerius, it must have originated before 338 A.D.
The β-recension:

Because the Armenian translation mainly goes back to the β-recension but also contains elements of α, the dating of the β-recension largely depends on the dating of the Armenian version.

Because of the dating of the Armenian translation - which must have originated during the silver age of Armenian literature (450-572), the β-recension must be earlier than 550 A.D. and, obviously later than the Latin version of Julius Valerius (338 A.D.). The ultimate dates may therefore be taken to be between 338 and 550 A.D.

The recensions ε and γ:
On the basis of the dating of Pseudo-Methodios the ε-recension cannot be earlier than the eighth or ninth century. Some passages may, however, be earlier. The γ-recension is a contamination of recensions β and ε, and therefore for the greater part later than ε, but some parts, such as the chariot-race scene, could be earlier.

The sub-recension λ:
This recension represents a lost manuscript of β. This lost manuscript was closely related to MS. L (ed. Van Thiel 1983). On the whole the text of λ is worse than that of MS. L, so that this sub-recension is not very valuable for determining the β-recension.

The hypothetical recensions *δ and *ζ:
The *δ and *ζ-recensions are considered hypothetical recensions. The Syriac version as well as the Latin translation of Leo Archpriest of Napels depend on the former recension. U. Moennig (1992) assumes the existence of a *ζ-recension which would then be based on Middle Greek, where appropriate a Serbian version which in its turn was assumed to have originated from the ε-recension.

List of editions of the most important recensions:
Recensio α: MS. A: Parisinus gr.1711 (11th century)
Translation of the Armenian version:
Evidence of the lost (hypothetical) recension *δ:
E. Wallis Budge, The History of Alexander the Great, being the Syriac version, edited from the manuscripts of the Pseudo-

Recensio \( \beta \) : The most important manuscripts: MS B: Parisinus gr. 1685 (15th century).
Editions: (MS B): L. Bergson, Der Griechische Alexanderroman, Rezension \( \beta \), Upsala 1965.
(MS L): H. Meusel, Pseudo-Callisthenes, Jahrbücher für classische Philologie, Suppl. 5 Leipzig 1871.
Also important for recensio \( \beta \) is the Byzantine Alexander poem.
Recensio \( \gamma \): Most important manuscript: R: Cod. Bodleianus Barocc. 20.15.
Edition rec. \( \gamma \) Book I:
U. von Lauenstein, Rezension \( \Gamma \), Buch I Meisenheim am Glan 1963.

Editions of related texts:
The following editions can be mentioned:

The \( \alpha \)-recension and the evidence for it:
Since the text of the only manuscript (MS A) that has come down to us is rather corrupt in many places, the witnesses of this recension are very important. The most important witnesses are: the Latin translation Julius Valerius Polemius (c. 338 A.D.), the Armenian version (5th century) and the Syriac version (7th century). The Latin translation by Leo Archpriest of Napels (950 A.D.) is therefore less valuable because he made some big cuts in the material - some chapters in his translation sometimes only contain one line. The Armenian version largely goes back to the \( \alpha \)-recension but also contains elements of the \( \beta \)-recension.
An important characteristic of the Syrian version is that in I, 12 some attention is paid to Nectanebo's astrological influence on the labour-pains of Olympias.

The contents of Book I, cap. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 23.

Finally in the Introduction the contents of the most important chapters of the first book of the Alexander romance are mentioned.
Caput 1: the exiled Pharaoh Nectanebo II is referred to as the father of Alexander instead of Philip. He wages war with the help of magic and a special form of fortune-telling.
(lecanomancy) and not by military force.

Caput 2: Spies report the arrival of an enormous army to Nectanebo.

Caput 3: Nectanebo retreats to see if he can bring this war to a good end. When he sees in
the magic bowl that the gods are now on the side of the enemies, he flees from Egypt with a
lot of gold and goes to Macedonia. Before he leaves, he shaves his head and puts on the
garments of an Egyptian priest.

In Egypt the subjects who have stayed behind consult their divine ancestor Hephaestus-Ptah
and are told that their king will return rejuvenated and that he will overcome the enemies.

Caput 4: Nectanebo waits upon Olympias, explains to her what forms of magic and
fortune-telling there are and passes himself off as an Egyptian priest who has mastered all
these arts. Olympias explains to him her problems with Philip, whereupon Nectanebo offers
her his help.

Caput 6: The concubinage of Nectanebo and Olympias. He appears to her in various shapes:
as a serpent, as the Egyptian (Lybian) god Ammon, as Heracles, Dionysus and finally in his
own shape.

Caput 12: Nectanebo influences the last part of the labour pains of Olympias in a very
remarkable manner. On the basis of the astrological constellation and a story related to this
from mythology he warns her that she must control herself for awhile,
because otherwise her son will be destined to undergo much misery. Not until Jupiter is in
the zenith, is she to give birth.

Caput 23: In the absence of Philip the young Alexander sends the Persian ambassadors
home after a fruitless mission. They had come to Macedonia to demand the subjection of
Philip to the Persian king.

In chapters II, III and IV three strange stories about Alexander the Great are studied closely,
as they appear in the Greek Alexander romance, in Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, Livius and
Justianus Justinus.

Chapter II deals with the fact that Alexander is descended from Heracles and Dionysus both
in the Alexander the Great romance and in Plutarch. The lineage-lists given by Theopompus
of Chios and Diodoros Siculus are also discussed.

In chapter III the tales which deal with the descent of Alexander from the divine serpent are
compared with each other.

In the Greek Alexander romance (Book I, cap. 6) Nectanebo changes for instance into a
serpent which begets a divine son in Olympias.

Points of discussion are: a) the concubinage, b) the reaction of Philip to it, c) similar stories
about intercourse between a divine serpent and the mother of a future ruler (e.g. Octavia, the
mother of the emperor Augustus) and d) the divine nature of the serpent in Egypt.

In this context the most important authors, apart from the Greek Alexander romance, are:
Plutarch, Cicero, Livius and Junianus Justinus.

As has been indicated before, in the last section of chapter III the divine nature of the
serpent in Egypt is discussed.

Here the link between the god Ammon and the so-called Kematef-serpent is important.
In chapter IV Alexander the Great's treatment of the Persian ambassadors (Ps. Call. I, 23) is
discussed. Moreover a comparison is made with similar stories by other authors, i.e.
Herodotus (V, 20) and Plutarch (Vita Alexandri, cap. 5). Ample attention is paid in particular
to the comparison of the behaviour of Alexander the Great, as described in the Greek Alexander romance, with the behaviour of his fifth-century predecessor with the same name in in Herodotus.

The Commentaries

In chapters V to IX the following capita of Book I of the Greek Alexander romance are commented on: capita 1,2,3,4 and 12.

Not only are there commentaries on the text by Kroll, but where necessary or desirable, readings have been suggested that differ from those suggested by Kroll in his edition of recension α.

In corrupt places conjectural readings have been offered.

Both the suggested different readings and the conjectural readings have been chosen after comparison of text A by Kroll with those of recension β and the Armenian and Syriac versions. The Armenian version is of the greatest importance for the reconstruction of the oldest manuscript tradition.

Commentary cap. 1:
Especially in §§ 3 and 4 conjectural readings have been offered.
In § 3 the text by Kroll only gives the verb ἐκβάλλω which means among others to wear out and which has been translated by us as to drill. Most manuscripts give three verbs but MS L, as well as recension β, give four, i.e. - apart from the verb just referred to - also ἔτοιμαζω, εὐτρεπήςω and κατασκεύαζω.

Because of the number of objects and because of the fact that it is in agreement with MS L, it seemed acceptable to us that in the oldest text these four above-mentioned verbs must have occurred. As far as § 4 is concerned, the first sentence of cap. 2 § 1 has been added to this paragraph, which is in accordance with the Armenian version. As far as the commentary proper is concerned, in § 1 and 2 this mainly deals with an account of the science and magic of the Egyptians and in particular of Nectanebo.

Commentary cap. 2:
This caput has few textual critical problems, although in this caput (§ 2) the names of the peoples in Kroll's text are given a crux-symbol. These names are partly fictional, partly authentic. As to the names of non-existent peoples, references are made to the Lotus-eaters in the Odyssey, as well as to the fictional peoples in the Verae Narrationes of Lucianus and to those in Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels. The summary as such is compared with the one in Ezekiel's Prophecies (Chapter 38).

Commentary cap. 3:
This deals with (§§ 1 to 3) the behaviour of Nectanebo before and after his flight from Egypt, the garments he puts on as an Egyptian priest and his shaving his head for this disguise.

Furthermore, in § 2 a comparison is made between the behaviour of Nectanebo and the Athenian Alcmaeon in Herodotus' story (VI,125).
In this caput Nectanebo takes as much gold with him on his flight as he can carry, in Herodotus' story Alcmaeon, as the guest of King Croesus of Lydia, is allowed to take as
much gold as he can conceal on himself.
The most important textual critical work has been done in the treatment of # 4. Here too, after consulting other recensions and versions, as well as Kroll's textual criticism, a reading different from the latter's is proposed.
Moreover the contents of § 4 is dealt with: the prophecy about the return of the king in a rejuvenated shape, which is of special importance for legitimising the rule of the Ptolemies in Egypt.

Commentary cap. 4:
In dealing with this caput of the Greek Alexander romance very little textual critical work was required; the emphasis here is on the discussions of ancient astrology and the meaning of μάγος in §§ 2 to 7. In the last-mentioned paragraphs attention is paid to the relation between gems and planets (including the sun and the moon). In connexion with this the Lapidario attributed to the Spanish King Alfonso X (13th cent.) has been consulted. In the discussion of § 9 the various epitheta ornantia of the Egyptian (here the Lybian) god Ammon are dealt with.

Commentary cap. 12:
This the key chapter of Book I. The original intention of the story wasto demonstrate, with the help of astrological and mythological evidence, the world-dominance of Alexander the Great.
It is very regrettable that this extremely important chapter has come to us in such a corrupt form. A great deal of textual critical work is required to trace the original intention. In almost all the paragraphs the text, or the lack of it, posed problems. The transition from § 4 to § 5 is particularly problematic, but the text of § 7 has also come down to us in a very damaged form. In our opinion an acceptable solution can only be achieved with the help of the astrological context, a knowledge of Greek mythology and some imagination.