

ALEXANDER AND DARIUS IN A CONTEST OF WIT («ALEXANDER ROMANCE» 1.36-38): SOURCES, FORMATION, AND STORYTELLING TRADITIONS¹

ABSTRACT

The story of the symbolic gifts sent by Darius to Alexander the Great (*Alexander Romance* 1.36-38) derives from a Hellenistic collection of fictional letters narrating the Macedonian conqueror's expedition. A direct model of the narrative was the legend about the Scythians' enigmatic presents to Darius I, recounted by Herodotus (4.131-132) and other sources and well known in Hellenistic times. Apart from this, the story of Alexander and Darius is also influenced from oral traditions of lore and entertainment, equally traceable to the Hellenistic age. The Persian and the Macedonian king compete in offering contrasting explanations of the symbolic items; their explanations are placed in a kind of ascending scale from weaker to stronger. Alexander's interpretation makes the objects stand for the notions of power and conquest, thus capping Darius' weaker allegory of childishness and submission. This narrative scheme recalls riddle games with analogous escalating structure, attested for early Hellenistic symposia by Diphilos and Klearchos of Soloi. In such playful competitions, two or more players strove to surpass each other by producing ever superior solutions for the same riddle.

La storia dei doni simbolici inviati da Dario a Alessandro Magno (*Romanzo di Alessandro* 1.36-38) è derivata da una raccolta ellenistica di lettere fittizie che raccontavano la spedizione del conquistatore Macedone. Un modello diretto di quella narrazione fu la leggenda sui regali enigmatici mandati dagli Sciti a Dario I, che è narrata da Erodoto (4.131-132) e altre fonti ed era ben nota nell'epoca ellenistica. Oltre a questo, la storia di Alessandro e Dario è anche influenzata da tradizioni orali di folklore e divertimento, ugualmente riconducibili all'età ellenistica. Il re Persiano e quello Macedone competono nell'offerta di spiegazioni contrastanti degli oggetti simbolici; le loro spiegazioni sono collocate in una sorta di scala ascendente dal più debole al più forte. Secondo l'interpretazione di Alessandro, gli oggetti rappresentano le nozioni di potere e di conquista, superando in tal modo l'allegoria più debole di puerilità e sottomissione proposta da Dario. Questo schema narrativo ricorda giochi di enigmi con analoga struttura a gradi, che vengono attestati da Difilo e Clearco di Soli per simposi di prima età ellenistica. In tali gare scherzose, due o più giocatori tentavano di superarsi l'un l'altro, trovando ogni volta una soluzione più forte per lo stesso indovinello.

¹ I am most thankful to the Director, Professor Edoardo Esposito, to my friend and colleague Professor Andrea Capra, and to the anonymous referee of the «Acme». All three offered valuable comments on my essay, which greatly helped me in revising my discussion and sharpening its focus.

1 Introduction

The so-called *Alexander Romance* is a fictionalized biographical novel relating the life, wars, exploits, and death of Alexander the Great. Part of its narrative seems to have been based on a historiographical account and incorporates several familiar episodes from the Macedonian conqueror's biography and military campaigns. However, the historical material is often cast in a much distorted form, with many anachronisms and errors in chronology, geography, and realia. Further, the storyline is adorned with many novelistic elements, fictitious episodes, legends, and wondrous tales about Alexander's explorations at far-off lands. The entire work is otherwise known as "Pseudo-Kallisthenes" because it was once falsely attributed to Kallisthenes of Olynthos, a nephew of Aristotle, who wrote a historical work about Alexander's deeds but was accused of conspiracy and executed in 327 B.C., years before Alexander's demise.

The Greek *Alexander Romance* survives nowadays in a series of successive recensions, which follow the same essential storyline but considerably vary in terms of particular plot elements and linguistic traits. The earliest of those redactions (α) is represented by a single Greek manuscript (A), as well as by a Latin and an Armenian translation. Recension α must have been composed in the 3rd century A.D., as indicated by the language and certain historical references of its Greek text, and is generally held to be closest to the lost original form of Pseudo-Kallisthenes. The date of the original form, however, is a matter of controversy. Several scholars would place the genesis of the prototypical *Alexander Romance* in the Imperial period, shortly before the compilation of recension α^2 . On the other hand, Richard Stoneman, whose arguments gain more followers in recent years, has consistently argued for a dating in the Hellenistic age and striven to locate the original novel within the cultural milieu of Ptolemaic Alexandria³.

In any case, the romance of Pseudo-Kallisthenes is largely a book made up of other books. As demonstrated by detailed investigations into its sources, the narrative has amply drawn on a variety of earlier works, both historical and fictional ones.

2 See e.g. Fraser 1972, I, p. 677, II, p. 946; Merkelbach 1977, pp. 90-91; Dowden 1989, pp. 650-651; Fraser 1996, pp. 221-223; Stramaglia 1996, p. 106; Jouanno 2002, pp. 13-16, 26-28, 34; Jouanno 2009a, pp. 7-8.

3 See Stoneman 1991, pp. 8-10, 14-17; Stoneman 2007, pp. xxviii-xxxiii, L, liii-lvi. In this respect, he is taking up a thesis of earlier scholars (e.g. Braun 1938, pp. 31-42; Berg 1973); but he has adduced new indications and arguments to support it. Stoneman is followed by other modern researchers, such as Whitmarsh 2013, pp. 171-172, 185-186. An intermediate position is advocated by Callu 2010, pp. 23-31, who proposes to date the *Alexander Romance* around the early 1st century A.D., but on very slim grounds. Most of Callu's theory reposes on a *Tabula Iliaca* from the early years of Emperor Tiberius (*SEG* 33.802). However, it is doubtful that this inscription actually contains a portion from the *Alexander Romance* itself; it may well represent one of Pseudo-Kallisthenes' sources or a redaction of an entirely different work; see below, section 2, for detailed discussion and bibliography.

Most of those compositions are independently attested in papyri or later Latin translations, and many of them seem to have been circulating already in the Hellenistic period⁴. The episode to be discussed in this essay presumably formed part of such a Hellenistic literary work; and as will transpire from its analysis, some of its elements may have connections to Hellenistic storytelling and cultural traditions.

2 Darius' symbolic gifts: Tradition and variants of the story

For a good part of the first two books of Pseudo-Kallisthenes, Alexander and his main rival, the Persian king Darius III, are shown exchanging letters, by which they menace each other or negotiate on various occasions of their conflict. The first epistolary contact between them occurs shortly after the start of Alexander's expedition, when the young Macedonian has just conquered Tyre and is preparing to advance into Asia and confront Darius' forces (1.36 and 38). At that point the Persian despot sends envoys to Alexander's camp, bearing a triad of symbolic gifts: a whip, a ball, and a chest full of gold. These are accompanied by a letter, in which Darius, among many other arrogant statements and threats, expounds the allegorical meaning of the dispatched objects. The whip is supposed to indicate that young Alexander is still in need of being disciplined and educated. The ball signifies that Alexander is merely a child, fit only for playing with his age-mates, not for undertaking military campaigns. Finally, the chest contains enough gold to provide for the Macedonian soldiers, so that all of them return to their homeland, even if Alexander does not possess the means to feed them on their journey back⁵. Alexander, however, is not intimidated at all. He writes a letter of response to Darius and gives a diametrically different interpretation of the symbolic presents, manipulating their meaning to his own advantage. The whip, in this reading, represents the weapons by which Alexander will beat the Persians and make them submit to his authority. The ball indicates that Alexander will dominate the world, which is similarly spherical in shape. Lastly, the coffer of gold foreshadows that

4 Generally on the sources of the *Alexander Romance* see the surveys of Fraser 1972, I, pp. 677-680, II, pp. 946-950; Merkelbach 1977; Stoneman 1991, pp. 9-14; Fraser 1996, pp. 210-220; Jouanno 2002, pp. 17-26; Stoneman 2007, pp. xxv-xxviii, xliii-l; Jouanno 2009a, pp. 7-10; Giuliano 2010, pp. 221-222.

5 *Alexander Romance* 1.36.1-5; see the earliest Greek text of codex A in Kroll 1926, pp. 40-41, and Stoneman 2007, pp. 82-84: ὑπήντησαν δὲ αὐτῷ πρέσβεις Δαρείου ἐπιστολάς κομίζοντες καὶ σκῦτος καὶ σφαῖραν καὶ κιβωτόν. ἀνατυλίξας δὲ τὰς ἐπιστολάς ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἀνεγίνωσκεν οὕτω περιεχούσας: "... διὰ τοῦτο ἔπεμψά σοι σκῦτος καὶ σφαῖραν καὶ χρυσίον, ἵνα ἄρης ὃ τι ποτὲ βούλει· τὸ μὲν οὖν σκῦτος, ὅτι παιδεύεσθαι ὀφείλεις· τὴν δὲ σφαῖραν, ἵνα παίξεις μετὰ τῶν συνηλικιωτῶν σου καὶ μὴ ἀγερώχως ἡλικίαν τοσοῦτων νέων ἀναπειθήης ... διὰ τοῦτο ἔπεμψά σοι κιβωτὸν μεστήν χρυσοῦ, ἵνα ἐάν μὴ ἔχῃς πῶς συστρέψῃς ἐπίδοσιν δῶς τοῖς ἐαυτοῦ συλλησταῖς, ὅπως ἕκαστος αὐτῶν σχῆ ἀνασωθῆναι εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν πατρίδα".

Darius will be defeated and forced to pay tribute to the Macedonian conqueror⁶. The brief epistles of this kind, which are interspersed in the narrative of Alexander's expedition and also involve other participants in the war as senders or addressees (Darius' satraps and family members, the Tyrians, the Indian king Poros etc.), seem to derive from an earlier composition, going back to Hellenistic times. Two papyri preserve fragments from collections or anthologies of such fictitious epistles: both include letters of Alexander and Darius which also occur in the *Alexander Romance*, along with others of the same kind, related to the Macedonian king's expedition but unattested in Pseudo-Kallisthenes. It thus becomes clear that the papyri represent broader compilations and do not derive from a version of the romance itself. One of them (*P.Hamb.* 129) is most probably dated to the 2nd century B.C., showing that those fictional epistolary works were already in circulation by the mature Hellenistic period⁷.

Merkelbach and several scholars following him have hypothesized that the letters originally formed a proper "epistolary novel" (*Briefroman*) narrating the story of Alexander's Asian expedition in the form of a series of missives, *i.e.* from the viewpoints of various historical personages involved in the war. The author of the *Alexander Romance* must have used that epistolary work as one of his main sources, taking over many of its individual letters and inserting them at suitable places of his own narrative. In more recent studies Merkelbach's theory has been criticized for its "rigidity". Doubt has especially been cast on the German expert's attempt to reconstruct an "original" *Briefroman* consistent with the actual chro-

6 *Alexander Romance* 1.38.7, again according to the earliest redaction of A; see Kroll 1926 p. 43, and Stoneman 2007, pp. 88-90: ἀλλ' ἐπεμψάς μοι σκῦτος καὶ σφαῖραν καὶ κιβωτὸν χρυσοῦ. σὺ μὲν ἐμοὶ ταῦτα ἐπεμψας χλευαζόμενος, ἐγὼ δὲ αὐτὰ ὡς ἀγαθὰ σημεῖα ἀπεδεξάμην. καὶ τὸ μὲν σκῦτος ἔλαβον, ἵνα ταῖς ἐμαῖς λόγχαις καὶ ὄπλοις δειρῶ τοὺς βαρβάρους καὶ ταῖς ἐμαῖς χερσὶν εἰς δουλείαν ὑποτάξω. τῇ δὲ σφαίρα ἐσήμανάς μοι, ὡς τοῦ κόσμου περικρατήσω· σφαιροειδῆς γὰρ καὶ στρογγύλος ὑπάρχων ὁ κόσμος. τὴν δὲ κιβωτὸν τοῦ χρυσοῦ μέγα μοι σημεῖον ἐπεμψας, σεαυτῷ δὲ ὑποταγὴν ἐμήνυσας· ἡττηθεὶς γὰρ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ φόρους μοι χορηγήσεις. The substance of the story (the gifts and their interpretations) remains the same in the other representatives of the earliest recension (Julius Valerius' Latin translation, Armenian text) and in most of the later Greek redactions (β, L, and most manuscripts of γ). For the peculiar divergences of the Syriac and Medieval Greek versions see below. Generally on this episode see Merkelbach 1977, pp. 51, 118; Eckard 1997; Rosenmeyer 2001, pp. 177-180; Jouanno 2002, pp. 142, 193, 203-204, 224; Stoneman 2007, pp. 553-554; Whitmarsh 2013, pp. 176-177.

7 A date in the 1st century B.C. was advocated by Merkelbach 1977, pp. 11, 55 (with references to previous bibliography), and often reiterated in scholarly literature. On the other hand, Candiloro 1965, pp. 171-176, proposed an earlier dating around the middle of the 2nd century B.C., on the basis of the writing style of the papyrus. Her opinion is well founded on detailed comparisons and argumentation. Cavallo - Maehler 2008, p. 69, similarly propose the first half of the 2nd century B.C. Cf. Stramaglia 1996, p. 108; Jouanno 2002, pp. 19-20, 43; Jouanno 2009a, p. 8; Callu 2010, p. 28; Giuliano 2010, pp. 216-219, 222.

nology of Alexander's campaign, by rearranging the letters of Pseudo-Kallisthenes according to the accurate sequence of historical events. In fact, it is far from certain that the initial "epistolary novel" was a full, methodical and systematic rendering of the entire history of the Asiatic campaign through a well-ordered series of perfectly consistent and complementary missives. It might conceivably have looked more like a compilation or anthology of rhetorical letter-pieces which illustrated select occasions and crucial moments of the expedition by highlighting the *prosopopoeia* of the protagonists⁸.

Further complications are created by a fragmentary inscription on a tablet (*Tabula Iliaca*) from the early years of Tiberius (ca. A.D. 16-20), which offers three lines from a letter of Darius to Alexander also included in Pseudo-Kallisthenes (2.17.2-3) and in *P.Hamb.* 129. These are followed by one line of third-person narration, similar (though not identical) to the narrative coming after Darius' letter in the *Alexander Romance* (2.17.5): «When this letter came [...]». This would suggest that at least some of the fictional letters had already been combined with a narrative frame by the early 1st century A.D., well before recension α of Pseudo-Kallisthenes. However, since the preserved text is too small, the nature of the narration reflected in the *Tabula Iliaca* remains unclear: was it a novelistic fiction like the *Alexander Romance*, or a historical work embedding literary epistles (such as the so-called Metz epitome)⁹? It is also conceivable that a proper epistolary novel might incorporate brief narrative statements intervening between the letters to connect them (a practice attested by papyrus texts)¹⁰.

In any case, the papyri testify that one or more collections¹¹ of fictitious letters concerning episodes of Alexander's expedition were in circulation during the Hellenistic age — exactly the time when epistolary fiction was developed and flourished as a literary genre. The epistles inserted in the war narrative of the *Alexander Romance* were ultimately derived from such a work.

It is noteworthy that the substance of the story about the symbolic gifts in Pseudo-Kallisthenes 1.36 and 38 is fully contained in the missives dispatched

8 On the "epistolary novel" and its form see in general van Thiel 1974, pp. XIII, XVI, XXI-XXIV; Merkelbach 1977, pp. 11-15, 18, 48-55, 230-252; Stoneman 1991, pp. 9-11, 20; Bounoure - Serret 1992, pp. XVII-XVIII, XXIV; Holzberg 1994, pp. 6-7, 49, 52; Stramaglia 1996, pp. 106-113; Fraser 1996, pp. 216-218; Franco 1999, pp. 49-50; Rosenmeyer 2001, pp. 169-192; Jouanno 2002, pp. 19-21, 42-44, 142-144, 176, 193-194; Stoneman 2007, pp. XXVI-XXVIII, XXXIII, XLIV-XLV, LIV, LXXVII-LXXVIII; Giuliano 2010; Whitmarsh 2013.

9 *SEG* 33.802: see Burstein 1989; Merkelbach 1989. For discussion see further Stramaglia 1996, pp. 110-113; Fraser 1996, p. 217; Rosenmeyer 2001, p. 170; Jouanno 2002, pp. 20-21; Stoneman 2007, p. LXXVIII; Callu 2010, pp. 27-28; Whitmarsh 2013, pp. 174-175.

10 See Holzberg 1994, pp. 6-7, 24.

11 There may well have been more than one such compilation or various divergent redactions of it. See Merkelbach 1977, p. 54; Stoneman 2007, pp. XLIV-XLV; Jouanno 2002, p. 43; Giuliano 2010, pp. 218-219, p. 221; Whitmarsh 2013, p. 175.

by Darius and Alexander: the texts of those letters describe both the objects involved and their competing interpretations. The surrounding third-person narration offers nothing important for this particular tale. There is only a brief narrative mention of the presents before the citation of Darius' epistle (1.36.1: «The envoys of Darius bringing letters, a whip, a ball, and a chest»). This, however, is no more than a summary duplication of the information furnished by the Persian king's letter — and a defective one at that: at least in the earliest Greek text of A it is not specified that the chest is filled with gold, a fact essential both for Darius' and for Alexander's symbolic explanation¹². The contents of the chest are disclosed only in the epistles, the sole and true conveyors of the story.

It is thus plausible to assume that the entire episode of Darius' gifts and their conflicting allegorical readings was developed in the “epistolary novel” from which Pseudo-Kallisthenes drew. The story may have been invented by the author of that fictional letter compilation; or it may have stemmed from an earlier independent anecdote, current in Hellenistic times, which the creator of the *Briefroman* reworked and adapted in his own text. The former possibility seems more likely because of one particular factor: the tale of Darius' symbolic objects is not attested in any other ancient source about the Macedonian conqueror, outside the letters of the *Alexander Romance*¹³. If it were an autonomous and widespread legend, we would expect to discover a trace of it in one or the other of the many historians of Alexander.

A peculiar variant of the tale is found in other branches of the tradition of Pseudo-Kallisthenes, which expand the series of symbolic presents with an additional element. The best form is offered by the Syriac prose version of the romance, which probably derives from an early Greek text close to recension α. Darius, alongside the usual three objects, also sends to Alexander ten measures of sesame seed. These are meant to stand for the myriads of the Persian troops, innumerable like the sesame grains. Alexander takes a handful of the seeds, puts them in his mouth, chews them, and pronounces judgement: «They are numerous, but they have no taste». In return, he dispatches to Darius a bushel of mustard grains. In his accompanying letter, apart from expounding his own reading of Darius' gifts,

12 In Julius Valerius' Latin translation and in the Byzantine Greek recension γ, even this narrative statement is omitted. Alexander is simply said to receive Darius' letter (Valerius: *accipit litteras Darii Persae in hanc sententiam scriptas*) or the envoys bringing it (rec. γ: Δαρῆιος δὲ ταῦτα μαθὼν ἀγγέλους πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον ἀποστέλλει καὶ ἐπιστολὴν περιέχουσαν οὕτως). The dispatch of the objects is only deduced from the text of the epistle, which immediately follows. See von Lauenstein 1962, pp. 124-127; Rosellini 2004, p. 54; Stoneman 2007, pp. 330-332, 432; Jouanno 2009a, pp. 97-98; Callu 2010, p. 88. By contrast, the Armenian translation and other later Greek redactions (β, L) cover up the narrative gap by supplementing that the coffer enclosed gold (κιβώτιον χρυσοῦ or similarly): see Bergson 1965, p. 57; Wolohojian 1969, p. 58; van Thiel 1974, p. 52; Stoneman 2007, p. 198.

13 Cfr. Stoneman 2007, p. 554.

Alexander also notes that this bushel correspondingly represents the Macedonian army by comparison to the Persian multitudes. Upon receiving the response, Darius imitates Alexander's gesture: he grabs a handful of mustard seeds and throws them into his mouth. He is thus scalded by their sharp taste and exclaims: «They are few but pungent!».

The exchange of seeds doubtless goes back to the Hellenic model¹⁴. It is included also in the Latin translation of the romance by the Archpresbyter Leo of Naples (10th century), which was similarly derived from a Greek prototype akin to recension α and to the Syriac version. In Leo's text (1.40-41), Darius dispatches poppy grains (*sementem papaveris*) as a symbol of his innumerable people; Alexander in return sends a small handful of pepper, warning that the force of this latter spice will prevail upon the multitude of poppy seeds (*ut cognoscas, quia multitudinem papaveris sementis vincit fortitudo huius parvissimi piperis*)¹⁵. The different kinds of grain used in this version are linked by marked alliteration and homoeoteleuton (*papaver – piper, papaveris – piperis*), so that each species sounds like a wordplay on the name of the other. Indeed, the word *piper*, from a morphological point of view, looks like a shortening or abridgement of *papaver*, just as the Macedonian's pepper granules are lesser in quantity than the Persian's plentiful poppy beans. The disparity in army numbers, thematized in the episode, is reflected in the very forms of the corresponding names of seeds. Poppy and pepper evidently constitute a distinct pair of substances chosen in close mutual combination, a punning invention which operates only in Latin and is separate from the concept of the Syriac text.

14 Syriac version 1.36-39: see Budge 1889, pp. 46-50; cfr. Pfister 1913, p. 68; Moennig 1992, pp. 69, 100; Stoneman 2007, p. 555; Stoneman 2008, pp. 109. Generally on the provenance and sources of the Syriac text see C.A. Ciancaglini in Franco 1999, pp. 98-101; Stoneman 2007, p. LXXXI; Stoneman 2008, pp. 232-233; Cottrell 2012, pp. 235-236 with more bibliography. The exchange of sesame and mustard seeds also occurs in later eastern versions of the same episode: in the Arabic *History of the Prophets and Kings* by the Iranian historian al-Tabari and in the great epic *Iskandarnamah* by the Persian poet Nizami. See Zotenberg 1867, pp. 513-514; Wilberforce Clarke 1881, pp. 261-264; Perlmann 1987, pp. 89-90; Casari 2012, p. 189; Gad 2012, pp. 220-221, 227.

15 See Pfister 1913, pp. 68-69; Ross 1959, pp. 109-110.; Bergmeister 1975, pp. 82, 84; Moennig 1992, p. 69. On the Greek model of Leo see Stoneman 2007, pp. LXXX-LXXXII. However, in Leo's text the motif of the seeds does not form part of the same episode as the other symbolic gifts (sphere, stick, and coffer of gold). These latter items are sent and interpreted in the context of an earlier epistolary communication between Alexander and Darius (chapters 1.36-38), immediately after the conquest of Tyre (Pfister 1913, pp. 65-67; Ross 1959, pp. 104-107; Bergmeister 1975, pp. 68, 70, 76). The exchange of seeds takes place a few chapters later (1.40-41), when Alexander has traversed the river Straga and Darius writes him another threatening letter. The Medieval Latin derivatives of Leo's version (the various redactions of the so-called *Historia de Preliis*) preserve the same arrangement: see Bergmeister 1975, pp. 68-71, 76-77, 80-85; Steffens 1975, pp. 36-47; Hilka 1976, pp. 88-101, 104-111; Hilka - Steffens 1979, pp. 52-65.

The same motif, once again in direct conjunction with Darius' other symbolic gifts, reappears in the Greek tradition of later times. A version of it is contained in the Medieval and Modern Greek prose redactions of the romance, which ultimately derive from a lost Byzantine recension of the 14th century¹⁶. In those later rewritings, the rest of Darius' presents have also undergone extensive transformations¹⁷. Along with the toys and chests, the Persian despot sends two sacks of mustard grains (συναπόσπορον), explaining in his epistle that their quantity symbolizes his countless troops. Alexander takes some seeds, chews and spits them out, and responds to Darius as follows: «In the same way I shall crush and destroy your armies». In return, the Macedonian has a bushel of pepper conveyed to Darius: the pepper granules, much stronger and spicier than the Persian's mustard, indicate the superiority of the Greek soldiers¹⁸. This variant reverses the pattern of the Syriac narrative: the mustard now represents the insipid, not the piquant element, and is capped over by the greater pungency of pepper. The pepper was identically used in the Latin translation by Leo. In practice, the later Greek texts amalgamate ingredients occurring separately in the Syriac and in the Medieval Latin traditions¹⁹. Otherwise, the motif of the exchange of seeds remains the same, as does also its symbolic dimension.

These variations interestingly highlight the openness and fluidity characterizing the tradition of the episode. The list of symbolic objects could be altered, expanded or reduced, as the story underwent variations with the passage of time, from one rewriting of the romance to another. On this basis, scholars even hypothesize about other possible alternatives of the gift sequence: it has been argued that the prototypical form (e.g. in the Hellenistic epistolary collection or in an even more

16 See Moennig 1992, pp. 11-16, 29-152; Jouanno 2009a, p. 18; Jouanno 2012, pp. 105-106. The Medieval Greek prose redactions are now termed “recension ζ” of the *Alexander Romance*. Their Modern Greek descendant, which circulated as a very popular *Volksbuch* from the late 17th to the early 20th century, is generally known under the title Φυλλάδα τοῦ Μεγαλέξαντρου.

17 Instead of a whip and a ball, the Persian monarch sends a wooden whirligig and a stick to strike it and make it spin; these toys are intended to insultingly brand Alexander as a mere child at play. Darius' dispatch also comprises two empty coffers, which the Macedonian is called to fill with gold, as a token of tribute and submission to his Persian overlord. Alexander interprets again the toys to his own favour: he will conquer the entire world and make it turn round like the whirligig. As for the coffers, the young conqueror breaks them to pieces and foretells that he will capture and demolish Darius' castles in the same way. Analogous phenomena occur in the later Latin, European, and oriental branches of the romance (*Historia de Preliis*, the various forms of the French *Roman d'Alexandre*, al-Tabari's *History*, Nizami's *Iskandarnamēh* etc.): in their versions Darius' gifts are variously altered, curtailed or expanded. See Eckard 1997, pp. 250-257; Casari 2012, pp. 187-190; Gad 2012, pp. 220-221, 227.

18 See Pallis 1935, pp. 86-87; Mitsakis 1967, pp. 40-42; Lolos 1983, pp. 152-157; Veloudis 1977, pp. 24-25; Moennig 1992, pp. 69, 100, 180-182.

19 Cfr. the remarks of Moennig 1992, pp. 69, 181.

pristine anecdotal version) comprised only the whip and the ball, the two items to which Darius attributes a genuinely symbolic dimension. The casket of gold would then have been added in a later redaction²⁰. Indeed, this latter element has no allegorical meaning for Darius. It is a literal means of providing funds for the return journey of the Macedonian troops, and thus stands out from the other, properly symbolic objects. The same phenomenon will be traced below in the main narrative model of Pseudo-Kallisthenes' episode: the tale about the Scythians' symbolic presents for Darius I, which is also known in three divergent variants, each one with a different (longer or shorter) list of objects. Such diversity of alternative parallel forms recalls the transmission of folktales and popular narratives, which similarly circulate in multiple different retellings in oral tradition. The story of the gifts, with its diverging, less or more expanded manifestations in various branches of Pseudo-Kallisthenes, replicates, in a way, the conditions of oral folklore dissemination within the written but open and fluid textual tradition of a popular romance.

3 Literary antecedents

Various literary models can be proposed for the tale under discussion, both with regard to its overall scheme and in connection with particular motifs. Sending or offering toys to a rival, in order to mock and despise him as though a mere powerless child, is a pattern traceable in other ancient moralizing anecdotes. According to Plutarch (*De cohibenda ira* 458a), the comic dramatist Philemon had satirized Magas, the governor of Cyrene, in one of his plays; by bad luck, Philemon was shipwrecked at Paraitonion, on the north African coast, and fell in Magas' hands. The latter, however, left the poet unharmed and only regaled him with a ball and dice (*ἀστραγάλους*), thus implying that he held Philemon in no greater esteem than a silly child. Justin (38.9) reports a similar incident with regard to the Seleucid monarch Demetrios II Nikator: after being taken captive by the Parthians in 139 B.C., Demetrios twice attempted to escape but was overtaken and brought back on both occasions. Then the Parthian king Phraates presented him with golden dice as a reproach for his childish levity. It is noteworthy that both these biographical anecdotes refer to figures of the Hellenistic age (3rd or 2nd century B.C.); they may have been current around the time that the Hellenistic "epistolary novel" about Alexander's expedition was being composed²¹. That Alexander, especially

20 See Bounoure - Serret 1992, p. 238. *Contra* Eckard 1997, who takes the three gifts as a "tripartite functional unity" in Dumézil's sense, signifying Alexander's superiority in all three sectors of power: military prowess (whip/arms), world domination (ball/globe), and wealth (chest of gold). This, however, only applies to the Macedonian's counter-interpretation, not to Darius' initial message.

21 Cfr. Merkelbach 1977, pp. 49, 118; Jouanno 2002, p. 54; Stoneman 2007, p. 554.

at the beginning of his royal and military career, was regularly disdained by his opponents because of his youth and supposed inexperience, was also a *topos* in historical and biographical literature. The young king is repeatedly called a «boy» or «adolescent» (παῖς, μειράκιον), but of course always rebuts his detractors by demonstrating his truly manly virtues²². All these themes are reflected and reworked in Pseudo-Kallisthenes' story, which could have drawn them from various anecdotal or biographical traditions.

The main fictional motifs of the tale, *i.e.* the symbolic objects and their contrasted allegorical interpretations, are derived from an earlier narrative: the legend about the riddling gifts sent by the Scythians to Darius I, in the context of this latter king's military campaign in Scythia. One version is offered by Herodotus (4.131-132): After the Persian army had been pursuing the Scythians for some time, without being able to engage them in open battle, Darius was at a loss. At that point, the Scythian chieftains sent him an envoy carrying as presents a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The bearer refused to give any explanation of those items and only pointed out that the Persians had to guess their meaning for themselves. Darius took the objects to signify that the Scythians were subjecting themselves to his power: the mouse would represent earth and the frog water — «earth and water» being the standard tokens of submission demanded by the Persians from subjugated peoples. Further, the bird, symbolizing the horses, and the arrows would indicate that the Scythians were surrendering their means of might in battle. On the contrary, Gobryas, one of the highest Persian noblemen, interpreted the presents as a threat from the Scythian enemies: unless the Persians became birds to fly up to heaven, or mice to hide under the earth, or frogs to leap into the lakes, they would not escape the Scythian arrows. This second interpretation eventually proved to be correct, as the Persian army was forced to retreat²³.

An alternative version is narrated by Pherekydes (*FGrHist* 3 F 174, from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.8.44). Here the series of symbolic gifts, dispatched to Darius by the Scythian chief Idanthouras, is augmented with one addition: apart from the mouse, frog, bird, and one arrow (instead of Herodotus' five), they also comprise a plough. The two conflicting explanations are provided this time by two Persian military officials. The chiliarch Orontopatas argues for the favourable

22 See Plut. *Alex.* 11.6, 48.5; Diod. Sic. 17.2.2, 17.7.1-2; cfr. Diod. Sic. 17.3.6; Plut. *De Alexandri fortuna* 327d; Jouanno 2002, p. 203.

23 As demonstrated by West 1988, there are many parallels for such non-verbal communication (through rebuses and symbolic objects) in various illiterate peoples, especially of the Eurasian steppe (Tartars, Mongols, Chinese, and Tibetans). Therefore, the story may repose on a genuine ethnographical basis, reflecting a real custom of the ancient Scythians. This was subsequently developed and embroidered by legendary storytelling. See also Mazzarino 1974, pp. 143-146; Merkelbach 1975; A. Corcella in Asheri - Lloyd - Corcella 2007, pp. 664-665; Schubert 2010, pp. 96, 102, 112; Anderson 2012, p. 95. For general commentary on the story see Lateiner 1987, pp. 99-100; Hartog 2001, pp. 118, 127, 133; Steiner 1994, pp. 175-176; Schubert 2010, pp. 93-116.

reading: the Scythians mean to surrender, handing over their habitations (mouse), waters (frog), air (bird), weapons (arrow), and entire land (plough). Xiphodres, on the other hand, gives the same menacing interpretation as Gobryas in Herodotus, adding that the Persians cannot dominate the Scythian land (the symbolism of the plough). Finally, a brief divergent variant is found in Ktesias (fr. 13.21 Lenfant, from Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72, 38b13-16): The Scythians and Darius sent bows to each other. The Scythian bow was stronger (ἐπικρατέστερον), and therefore the Persians retreated, presumably understanding that they could not overpower their enemies. The catalogue of presents is here restricted to a minimum: the only object left is the bow, which perhaps means “bow and arrows” by synecdoche (*pars pro toto*)²⁴ and thus corresponds to the arrow(s) of Herodotus and Pherekydes. All the other, animalistic items are omitted.

It is noteworthy that the list of presents is one of the main variables in the tradition of this legend: it can be expanded with addition of new items or reduced by elimination of one or more objects. There has been much discussion as to the relationship between the extant versions, especially the more developed ones of Herodotus and Pherekydes. According to one view, these two variants must be independent of each other, reflecting diverse retellings of the legend as it was spreading in oral popular tradition²⁵. Other scholars argue that Pherekydes' narrative was the older and original one and known to Herodotus, who adapted it and altered various details for the purposes of his own narrative. Among other changes, Herodotus could have eliminated the plough because it did not suit his emphasis on the Scythians' primarily nomadic and non-agricultural way of life²⁶. In any case, the transmission of the tale is characterized by the same openness and fluidity that also mark the variations of the story about Alexander and Darius' presents. In both traditions the series of the gifts is a shifting element, liable to expansions or curtailments from one version to another — a phenomenon reminiscent of the

24 See Schubert 2010, p. 102. Generally on Ktesias' variant and its relationship to the other versions, see Aly 1969, pp. 85-86; Hartog 2001, p. 111; Lenfant 2004, p. LXXXIII; A. Corcella in Asheri - Lloyd - Corcella 2007, p. 665; Schubert 2010, pp. 101-102.

25 See Wilamowitz 1937, p. 136; Momigliano 1966, pp. 335-339; Aly 1969, pp. 84-86; Mazzarino 1974, pp. 143-144.; De Sanctis 1983, pp. 281-283.

26 See West 1988, pp. 210-211; A. Corcella in Asheri - Lloyd - Corcella 2007, pp. 664-665; Schubert 2010, pp. 93-101, 105. According to this kind of literary approach, Ktesias must also have been based on Herodotus' account, starkly simplifying its catalogue of gifts. Further, Ktesias was possibly influenced by another Herodotean episode, involving again an Achaemenid monarch (Cambyses) and the ruler of an enemy land at the confines of the world (the king of Ethiopia): the latter sent the former a big bow and warned him that unless the Persians were able to draw it, they would not manage to lead a successful campaign against the Ethiopians (Herodotus 3.21-22). Here the bow is similarly dispatched as a symbol of military prowess alerting the Persians to their opponents' superiority. Cfr. Aly 1969, pp. 84-86; Lateiner 1987, pp. 98-99; Hartog 2001, p. 111; Lenfant 2004, p. LXXXIII; Schubert 2010, p. 102.

adventures undergone by folktale motifs in oral dissemination.

It has often been pointed out that the episode with Alexander and Darius is inspired by Herodotus' Scythian legend²⁷. The author of the "epistolary novel" used by Pseudo-Kallisthenes seems to have been familiar with the Herodotean account. In one of the fictional letters of *P.Hamb.* 129, Darius threatens Alexander in terms quite similar to the second, menacing interpretation given to the Scythians' presents by Gobryas: «Because you have trodden on my land, burning and intending to sack your overlord's house, you must either fly up to heaven or sink down under the earth; but I will take revenge on you»²⁸. Interestingly, Herodotus' narrative also lies behind another Hellenistic anecdote, recorded by the historian Phylarchos (3rd century B.C., *FGrHist* 81 F 1, from Athenaeus 8.334a-b). A general of Ptolemy sent to King Antigonos (an opponent of Ptolemy) some large fishes and figs. Antigonos laughingly grasped the sarcastic meaning of the gifts: «You must either become master of the sea or restrict yourself to being a mere fig-eater». Phylarchos (at least according to Athenaeus' testimony) seems to have expressly compared this joke with Herodotus 4.131-132²⁹. His narrative clearly represents a humorous rehash of the Herodotean episode within the context of the wars of the Diadochi. It thus seems that Herodotus' tale was popular and productive in Hellenistic times, inspiring various adaptations. The author of the "epistolary novel", writing around the same period or slightly later, also formed part of that vogue. He transferred the Herodotean narrative to the confrontation of two more recent monarchs (Alexander and Darius III), just as Phylarchos projected it on Ptolemy and Antigonos; but he produced a much more complex and artful reworking than Phylarchos' relatively

27 See Eckard 1997, p. 248; Franco 1999, p. 71; Rosenmeyer 2001, p. 177; Jouanno 2002, pp. 31, 53-54; Stoneman 2007, p. 554. Anderson 2012, p. 95, though noting the parallel, doubts whether the episode in Pseudo-Kallisthenes entails a conscious literary allusion to Herodotus. However, see below for further indications of the epistolary author's familiarity with the Herodotean narrative.

28 *P.Hamb.* 129.57-64: ἐπειδὴ ἐπὶ τὴν [γῆν] τὴν ἐμὴν ἐπέβης καί[ων καὶ] οἶκον τὸν τοῦ σοῦ δεσπότητος πορθήσων, δεῖ σε ἢ εἰς τὸν ἀέρα ἀναπτῆναι ἢ ὑπὸ τὴν γῆν καταδῦναι· δίκη[ν δέ] μοι δώσεις. See Merkelbach 1975, p. 207; Merkelbach 1977, pp. 51, 234. Compare the formulation in Hdt. 4.132: ἦν μὴ ὄρνιθες γενόμενοι ἀναπτῆσθε ἐς τὸν οὐρανόν ... ἢ μύες γενόμενοι κατὰ τῆς γῆς καταδύητε. Cfr. also Pherekydes, *FGrHist* 3 F 174: ἐὰν μὴ ὡς ὄρνιθες ἀναπτῶμεν ἢ ὡς μύες κατὰ τῆς γῆς ... δύωμεν. The similarities include even verbal echoes.

29 *FGrHist* 81 F 1 = Athenaeus 8.334a-b: οἶδα δὲ καὶ Φύλαρχον εἰρηκότα πού περὶ μεγάλων ἰχθύων καὶ τῶν συμπεμφθέντων αὐτοῖς σύκων χλωρῶν, ὅτι αἰνιττόμενος Πάτροκλος ὁ Πτολεμαίου στρατηγὸς Ἀντιγόνῳ τῷ βασιλεῖ ἔπεμπεν, ὡς Δαρεῖω Σκύθαι ἐπερχομένῳ αὐτῶν τῇ χώρᾳ. ἔπεμψαν γὰρ οὗτοι μὲν, ὡς φησὶν Ἡρόδοτος, ὄρνιν καὶ ὀστῶν καὶ βάτραχον· ἀλλ' ὃ γε Πάτροκλος, ὡς διὰ τῆς τρίτης τῶν Ἱστοριῶν φησὶν ὁ Φύλαρχος, πεμφθέντων τῶν προειρημένων σύκων καὶ ἰχθύων <ἠνίττετο διὰ τούτων>. ἐτύγγανεν δὲ κωθωνιζόμενος ὁ βασιλεύς, καὶ ὡς πάντες διηποροῦντο ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις, ὁ Ἀντίγονος γελάσας πρὸς τοὺς φίλους ἔφη γινώσκειν τί βούλεται τὰ ξένια· ἢ γὰρ θαλαττοκρατεῖν ἡμᾶς φησι Πάτροκλος ἢ τῶν σύκων τρώγειν.

simple anecdote.

In Alexander's story the Persian monarch was also called Darius. This favoured the transplantation of the Herodotean legend concerning the earlier Darius I within the new narrative about Alexander's Asiatic war. Both tales involve the Persian king in confrontation with the leader (or leaders) of an enemy power at the northern borders of his empire (Scythia or Macedonia) — a power destined to prove stronger and defeat the Achaemenid army. In both cases the plot revolves around a group of riddling presents, which collectively convey a symbolic message and are sent by one of the opposed parties to the other. Both stories are structured on a similar twofold pattern, which contrasts two diametrically opposed interpretations of the presents' meaning: one propitious to the Persians and one inimical to them, signifying their defeat by the enemy force. As in Herodotus, so also in Alexander's tale it is King Darius who rashly gives the explanation favouring his own side. But this latter view soon proves to be mistaken, as the hostile power overcomes the Persians and puts them to flight.

Other details of the Herodotean model were of course changed in the episode about Alexander, so that the storyline might be adapted to the new circumstances and requirements of the Macedonian's legend. The correct, anti-Persian interpretation is not revealed by a wise counsellor of Darius (a typically Herodotean personage) but by Alexander himself, so as to highlight the young conqueror's dynamic and confident personality. The relation between sender and recipient is also reversed. The gifts are not sent to Darius by the leader of the enemy power as a threat and a warning. They are dispatched by Darius himself to the hostile King Alexander as a boastful declaration of the Persian's supposed superiority; and it is the Macedonian's task to overturn that initial reading with a competing explanation. Both in Herodotus and in Alexander's story it is the recipient of the presents who imposes on them a new meaning, beneficial to himself and different from the sender's original intention. But in the Scythian legend this re-interpretation (by Darius) proves false, while in Alexander's case it triumphantly comes true.

The background of Alexander's story, however, is not restricted to the Herodotean exemplar. Within the episode of Pseudo-Kallisthenes another narrative model is also in play, entwined and interacting with the Herodotean story pattern and conditioning some of the alterations in individual traits, especially in the layout and interpretations of the riddling message. This supplementary model is of course attested and described in Greek literary sources; it is only through the testimonia of written texts that we may nowadays acquire knowledge of its existence in antiquity. Essentially, however, the model in question is not a literary construct. It rather derives from oral traditions, from popular games of conundrums and practices of live sympotic entertainment, all of them based on a climactic structure of competition. These will be analyzed in the following section. In this way, the creation of the tale about Darius' gifts emerges as a complex process combining adaptation of a literary antecedent with influences from oral lore: an interplay of bookishness and orality producing an

original tale about the great Macedonian's exploits in wit³⁰.

4 The riddles with escalating solutions

The group of symbolic gifts collectively constitute a kind of riddle conveying a concealed significance, which the recipient must guess and decode. Characteristically, both in Herodotus and in Pseudo-Kallisthenes the personages interpreting the message apply to it vocabulary which in other Greek contexts is typically connected with riddles and their function or explanation³¹. In particular, the ensemble of objects produces a special kind of puzzle, the so-called "picture-riddle" (*Bilderrätsel* or rebus): *i.e.* a visual enigma consisting not of words (like a proper conundrum) but of material items and images, which cryptically refer to a coded meaning. In this respect, the symbolic objects function like the verbal

30 Another popular narrative pattern may also have contributed to the formation of the story about Alexander's and Darius' exchange: the so-called "magical transformation contest", a motif-cluster which is widespread in the international folktale tradition and displays an analogous structure of climactic progress. The transformation contest usually involves two protagonists, both endowed with marvellous supernatural capacities, who compete with each other in ever stronger magical metamorphoses. Each one of them strives to produce or to transfigure himself into a creature superior and more powerful than the one brought forward immediately before by his adversary. See the typological classifications of Thompson 1955-1958, motif D 615, and Uther 2004, I, pp. 207-208 (tale type ATU 325), with extensive bibliography. For detailed folkloristic studies see most notably Cosquin 1922, pp. 501-612; Scherf 1995, I, pp. 110-113, 748-751, II, pp. 868-871, 1096-1098, 1436-1441; Clouston 2002, pp. 210-224, 255-257; de Blécourt 2013. This story pattern was already current in the ancient world: examples are attested both in Greek sources and in many traditions of the Near East (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel); see Cosquin 1922, pp. 601-604; Bolte - Polívka 1930, p. 107; Rose 1958, pp. 293-294; Gunkel 1987, pp. 116-117; Scherf 1995, II, p. 1438; Anderson 2000, pp. 110-111 Konstantakos 2008, pp. 74-77. A full comparative analysis of the relations between the magical transformation combat and the tale of Darius' gifts would require another essay almost as long as the present one. There is no room for such an endeavour here. I therefore intend to devote a separate article to this subject.

31 Alexander employs the terms *σημεῖον* and *σημαίνειν* for Darius' objects (Pseudo-Kallisthenes, codex A 1.38.7: *ὡς ἀγαθὰ σημεῖα ἀπεδεξάμην ... τῇ δὲ σφαίρα ἐσήμανάς μοι, ὡς τοῦ κόσμου περικρατήσω ... τὴν δὲ κιβωτὸν τοῦ χρυσοῦ μέγα μοι σημεῖον ἐπεμψας*). In Herodotus the solving of the enigma is described with the verbs *γινώσκειν* and *εικάζειν* (4.131-132: *αὐτοὺς δὲ τοὺς Πέρσας ἐκέλευε, εἰ σοφοὶ εἴσι, γνῶναι τὸ θέλει τὰ δῶρα λέγειν ... εικάζοντος τὰ δῶρα λέγειν*). These terms are regularly used in connection with riddles and their meaning. For *σημαίνειν* ("the riddle means") see Athenaeus 10.450c, 452c, 453b, 457b; cfr. Heraclitus 22 B 93 Diels-Kranz (for the enigmatic oracles of Delphi). For *γινώσκειν* in the sense "find the solution of a conundrum" see *e.g.* Eur. *Phoen.* 1759; Antiphanes fr. 75.8, fr. 194.16; Nausikrates fr. 1.5; Pseudo-Herodotean *Life of Homer* 35-36 West. For *εικάζειν* ("guess") cfr. Hdt. 1.68.4 (about an enigmatic oracle).

metaphors of the common riddle, hiding the solution under allegorical imagery³². With regard to the visual puzzle and its interpretations, there is a notable difference between the Scythian legend and Alexander's story. In the latter case the contrasted solutions are structured on an escalating pattern, so as to form together a kind of scale or climactic progress. The first explanation of the enigmatic items, the one offered by Darius himself, interprets every one of them as a sign of weakness and submission: the whip represents the chastisement of a disobedient boy, the ball means a child's play, the chest of gold points to the Macedonians' lack of funds. The second solution, by contrast, as set out by Alexander, turns each one of these objects into something much more forceful, a symbol of power and victory: the whip stands for the strength of weapons and military triumph; the ball indicates domination of the world; and the coffer of gold predicts the tribute to be levied on a conquered vassal state. In this manner, the Macedonian leader outdoes his opponent Darius by capping the latter's solution of the riddle with a new and stronger one. The same artefacts that were for Darius tokens of feebleness and childishness become in Alexander's mouth the heralds of manly and warlike prowess. The two solutions construct a scale ascending from loss to gain, from underdog to overlord, from weaker to stronger.

This pattern is peculiar to the narrative about Alexander and Darius. There is no such effect in the Scythian legend as reported by Herodotus and Pherekydes. There the various items (mouse, frog, bird, arrow) signify more or less the same things in both interpretations (respectively earth, water, air or heaven³³, and the Scythian weapons). It is only their different combination in each solver's mouth, their different "notional syntax" that produces two contrasted answers to the riddle, one favourable to the Persians and the other to the Scythians³⁴. The objects themselves

32 On the "picture-riddle" or *Bilderrätsel* see Ohlert 1912, pp. 116-122; Karadagli 1981, pp. 2-3, 72-96; Konstantakos 2004, p. 91; Konstantakos 2008, pp. 99-100, 195-196, with many examples and further bibliography. For the symbolic gifts as a riddle cfr. also Aly 1969, pp. 84-85; Mazzarino 1974, pp. 144-145; Lateiner 1987, pp. 99-100; West 1988, p. 208; Steiner 1994, p. 175; Schubert 2010, p. 97; Anderson 2012, p. 95.

33 In Herodotus' version only the meaning of the bird is substantially changed between Darius' and Gobryas' interpretation. Darius whimsically takes the bird to mean the Scythians' horses, a mainstay of their power — an extravagant hypothesis, probably intended to underline the Persian despot's arrogant self-delusion. Gobryas more naturally connects the bird with the air and flying. In Pherekydes' variant this latter symbolism is attributed to the bird by both solvers, without any discrepancy: for Orontopatas it represents the element of the air, for Xiphodres it denotes flying.

34 Only Ktesias' divergent retelling describes an exchange comparable to the escalation pattern of Alexander's story: Darius and the Scythians send bows to each other, and the Scythian weapon proves to be stronger than the Persian one. In this case, there is indeed an ascending scale from weaker to stronger, as the Scythians cap their opponent's gift with a more powerful item of their own. However, the structure is not entirely similar to that of Pseudo-Kallisthenes' narrative. The escalation is formed by the objects themselves, which are mutually sent by both sides — not by the divergent interpretations of one and

do not stand for something feebler or stronger in the first solution by comparison to the second one. The gradation of the symbolic meanings, the placement of the different explanations in an ascending scale, is an original feature of the tale preserved in Pseudo-Kallisthenes, not inspired by the Herodotean prototype. The models or sources of influence for this kind of structure are to be sought elsewhere. The climactic pattern formed by the solutions to an enigma brings to mind a particular category of riddle games, which were popular in social entertainments of the ancient Greek world. Those intellectual puzzles usually involved a question of an open kind, admitting of many diverse answers, and called for the participation of several players. Each player strove to forward a solution which would surpass the answer of the immediately preceding participant by referring to a stronger, bigger or otherwise superior element. In this way, the various solutions proposed would form an escalating sequence, increasing from lesser to greater with regard to the quality required by the riddle. The winner would be the player pronouncing the strongest, unsurpassable item, the one which could not be outdone by anything else³⁵.

This kind of game was most easily played with the so-called “riddles of the superlative”, *i.e.* questions asking what thing or person possesses a given quality to the utmost degree. Such queries are by nature open to many different answers and thus facilitate the competition between two or more players, who try to surpass each other with ever superior answers. The comic poet Diphilos (*Theseus* fr. 49, from Athenaeus 10.451b-c), writing at the beginning of the Hellenistic age, gives a characteristic example of such a contest of wit, carried out by three wenches playing a riddle game at a symposion:

They propounded the following riddle among themselves: What is the strongest of all? So one of them answered: “Iron”, and proved her point by arguing that men can dig and cut everything with iron and generally use it for every purpose. After she was applauded, the second girl took over and claimed that the blacksmith possesses much greater strength: because he, in performing his task, can bend the hardest iron, soften it, and do anything he pleases with it. Finally, the third wench declared that the penis is actually the strongest of all: as she explained, even the blacksmith groans when he is sodomized by it.³⁶

The three players’ answers construct a climactic scale from weaker to stronger,

the same series of presents.

35 For this kind of riddle game see Konstantakos 2004, pp. 132-133; Konstantakos 2008, p. 76; Konstantakos 2010, with many examples.

36 Δίφιλος δ’ ἐν Ἐθῆσιν τρεῖς ποτε κόρας Σαμίας φησὶν Ἀδωνίοισιν γριφεύειν παρὰ πότον· προβαλεῖν δ’ αὐταῖσι τὸν γριῖφον, τί πάντων ἰσχυρότατον; καὶ τὰν μὲν εἰπεῖν ὁ σίδαρος, καὶ φέρειν τούτου λόγου τὰν ἀπόδειξιν, διότι τούτῳ πάντ’ ὀρύσσουσιν τε καὶ τέμνουσι καὶ χρῶντ’ εἰς ἅπαντα. εὐδοκιμούσα δ’ ἐπάγειν τὰν δευτέραν φάσκειν τε τὸν χαλκέα πολὺ κρείττω φέρειν ἰσχύ· ἐπεὶ τοῦτον κατεργαζόμενον καὶ τὸν σίδαρον τὸν σφοδρὸν κάμπτειν, μαλάσσειν, ὃ τι ἂν χρήζη ποιεῖν. τὰν δὲ τρίταν ἀποφῆναι πέος ἰσχυρότατον πάντων, διδάσκειν δ’ ὅτι καὶ τὸν χαλκέα στένοντα πυγίζουσι τούτῳ.

just like the interpretations of Darius and Alexander in Pseudo-Kallisthenes. In Diphilos' passage the final, obscene item is a humorous twist suitable to the tone of popular comedy. In so far as the form of the competition is concerned, however, it need not be doubted that such games would have been actually played in Greek symposia of the time. Riddles and kindred intellectual quizzes were exceedingly popular in banquets, as indicated by a great number of ancient sources, both in the classical age and later³⁷.

Other riddling contests of a similar kind are recorded by Klearchos of Soloi, the Peripatetic philosopher and polymath, who was also flourishing in the early Hellenistic period, slightly later than Diphilos. Klearchos (*On Proverbs* fr. 63, I Wehrli, from Athenaeus 10.457c-f) reports a variety of riddle games destined for a group of players and following a serial pattern comparable to the scale structure discussed above³⁸. Especially one phrase of his description (ἐκαστον εἰπεῖν ὅσων ἂν προσταχθῆι συλλαβῶν ἔμμετρον, «each player must pronounce a metrical verse comprising a prescribed number of syllables») implies a competition based on a climactic progress, similar to that of Diphilos' comic scene: the first player would recite a verse with a given number of syllables; then the following participant would have to outdo him by delivering another verse with a greater number of syllables; and so on for the rest of the competitors. Thus, each player would cap the answer of the immediately preceding one with a longer poetic line. In this kind of puzzle the players' solutions form again a gradation based on a progressively increasing quality (the length of the verse), just as in Diphilos' riddle game the answers construct an ascending escalation with regard to strength.

The same pattern underlies a famous scene of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1378-1410): the "weighing of poetic verses", which forms part of the contest of wisdom between the two great tragic authors, Aeschylus and Euripides. In that particular phase of the *agon*, each poet has to recite a line from his tragic works over a weighing balance, as though "placing" his verse on one of its scales. The line that proves to be "heavier", outweighing the other on the balance, wins. The "weight" of the poetic texts is determined, of course, by their content: the line speaking of heavier objects is deemed more ponderous and tips the scales. The climactic gradation is again easy to discern: each competitor has to surpass his opponent by mentioning heavier items in the iambic trimeter he chooses to enunciate. The Aristophanic scene seems to be inspired from riddle contests of escalating structure (similar to those of Diphilos and Klearchos), which may have been popular in symposia and

37 See Ohlert 1912, pp. 60-82; Konstantakos 2000, pp. 153-154, 162-163, and Beta 2012, with further references.

38 For example, the players are required to recall successive verses from a given poetic text; or to recite Homeric lines (or names of Trojan and Achaean heroes, or names of historical cities etc.) which begin with successive letters of the alphabet. For extensive discussion of Klearchos' passage and the riddle games described in it, see Konstantakos 2010, pp. 322-328; cfr. Beta 2012, pp. 71-72.

social entertainments already around the close of the 5th century³⁹.

All these games have obvious analogies to the confrontation between Darius and Alexander in the story of the gifts. The young Macedonian king tries to overcome his Persian adversary by producing a stronger solution to the riddle posed by the symbolic presents. The exchange of different kinds of grain, included in the Syriac, Medieval Latin, and later Greek versions of Pseudo-Kallisthenes, also conforms to the same escalation pattern. Darius sends to his opponent a large quantity of a particular species of seeds (sesame in the Syriac, poppy in the Medieval Latin, mustard in the Medieval and Modern Greek); this is again intended as a *Bilderrätsel*, a symbolic representation of the multitude of Persian troops, as innumerable as the minute granules contained in a big sack. Alexander, however, caps his opponent's gift with another type of seeds, which are by nature more pungent than those of Darius (mustard in the Syriac, pepper in the Medieval Latin and the later Greek texts). Thus, the Macedonian king's picture-riddle refers not to the numbers but rather to the strength and power of his own army. For one more time, Alexander surpasses his adversary's dispatch with a stronger item (seeds stronger in flavour and piquancy, more scorching when chewed in the mouth). In this case, not only the interpretations but also the symbolic gifts themselves form a scale of increasing force⁴⁰.

Just as Diphilos set the climactic riddle competition in a drinking party, so also Klearchos attests that similar games were favoured in symposia, at least in an earlier epoch⁴¹. Much later, Athenaeus recommends the same kind of intellectual puzzle for the learned banquets of his own age (2nd or early 3rd century A.D.)⁴². Significantly, Diphilos and Klearchos belong to the commencement of the Hellenistic era. It was roughly during that period that the "epistolary novel" about Alexander's expedition (presumably including the contest of the riddling gifts) was also composed — although its exact date is impossible to fix and may conceivably have been somewhat later than Diphilos' and Klearchos' times⁴³. In this context, the narrative about Darius' presents may well have received formative influence from riddle games based on an escalation pattern, such as might have been played in Greek symposia or social amusements of the Hellenistic period. The author of the epistolary novel could have been familiar with those kinds

39 See in detail Konstantakos 2010.

40 In this respect, the exchange of seeds is similar to Ktesias' version of the narrative about the Scythian gifts: see above, nt. 34.

41 Klearchos fr. 63,I (= Athenaeus 10.457c-d): οἱ παλαιοὶ ... προέβαλλον γὰρ παρὰ τοὺς πότους.

42 Athenaeus 10.458a-f, especially 458a: καὶ ἂν προβάλλειν δεῖ τοιαῦτά τινα εἶναι ἡγοῦμαι.

43 *P.Hamb.* 129 only establishes the mid-2nd century B.C. as a *terminus ante quem* for the circulation of that epistolary work — at least if the well-argued dating of Candiloro 1965 is accepted (see above, nt. 7).

of contest of wit from live experience, through his participation in convivial or other communal entertainments. It was such mental puzzles, with their progressive scales of ever stronger solutions proposed by the participants, which conditioned the analogous structure of the intellectual competition between the Persian despot and the Macedonian conqueror.

It is noteworthy that Alexander, both in the overall storyline of Pseudo-Kallisthenes and more particularly in the letter collection, is portrayed as a very clever personage: he is an expert manipulator of language and rhetoric, an inventor of crafty stratagems and practical artifices, and even a cunning trickster⁴⁴. These excellent spiritual endowments also entail a formidable capacity with regard to all kinds of riddling questions. In the romance, as also in later Greek and eastern retellings of his legend, Alexander appears as a grand master of riddles. He skilfully solves conundrums and related intellectual problems (such as abstruse enigmatic inscriptions, symbolic dreams and portents, arithmetical and alphabetical puzzles). He is also adept in devising and propounding such γρῖφοι: see *e.g.* the acrostic he incises in the foundations of Alexandria (*Alexander Romance* 1.32.9) or the tricky trap questions he poses to the Indian Brahmans (*ibidem* 3.6)⁴⁵.

This portrait of Alexander as a hero of *mētis* was perhaps the ultimate cause or motive behind the creation of the episode of Darius' gifts. Since the Macedonian conqueror was shown as an expert riddler in the legendary tradition, his figure could have functioned as a "magnet" for various kinds of such puzzles — the *Bilderrätsel* of the Herodotean narrative, as well as the climactic riddle competitions of Hellenistic symposia. Both the former and the latter were eminently suitable materials to transplant and adapt to the Macedonian king's adventures; thus, they were fused together into a composite narrative of intellectual combat, another one of Alexander's exploits in cunning. Darius was clearly a fool⁴⁶ to challenge his young enemy with a picture-riddle, *i.e.* precisely the sort of game in which the Alexander of legend excelled above everyone else. The Macedonian mastermind was bound to win, easily capping his Persian adversary with a stronger interpretation.

44 For discussion of these qualities and many textual examples illustrating them see Stoneman 1995; Konstan 1998; Rosenmeyer 2001, pp. 172-180, 192; Jouanno 2002, pp. 200-208, 230-232, 259-260, 286-287, 356-359, 413-414; Stoneman 2007, pp. xli-xlii, lxxi-lxxiii; Stoneman 2008, pp. 108-111; Jouanno 2009a, pp. 10-11, p. 101; Jouanno 2009b, pp. 41-47; Anderson 2012, pp. 95-97.

45 For Alexander's competence with riddles and similar problems see Stoneman 1995; Jouanno 2002, p. 232; Stoneman 2007, pp. xli-xlii, lxx; Stoneman 2008, pp. 93-96, 109-111, 121, 141, 187; Anderson 2012, p. 95.

46 Generally in the epistles of the *Alexander Romance*, Darius is depicted as an *alazon*, an arrogant despot, grossly overrating his own powers and senselessly underestimating his opponent's capacities. See van Thiel 1974, pp. xxii-xxiii; Merkelbach 1977, pp. 48-51; Franco 1999, pp. 83; Rosenmeyer 2001, pp. 177-180, 182; Jouanno 2002, pp. 193-194; Giuliano 2010, pp. 211-215, 220; Jouanno 2012, pp. 106-109; Whitmarsh 2013, pp. 177-181.

5 Epilogue

The contest of wit between Alexander and Darius around the latter's symbolic gifts, included in Pseudo-Kallisthenes' romance and presumably stemming from a Hellenistic epistolary collection, is a complex narrative product. It combines influences and echoes from diverse models, both literary and oral ones. The main narrative framework was apparently furnished by the legend concerning the Scythian presents sent to Darius I: this latter story, especially in its Herodotean form, enjoyed some popularity in the Hellenistic age, being reworked by historiographers such as Phylarchos for the formation of new historical anecdotes. The author of the epistolary work about Alexander also picked up the Herodotean tale and refashioned its central situation into an exchange between another Persian monarch named Darius and his Macedonian opponent.

Herodotus, however, was not the sole source. The competition of symbolic interpretations offered by Alexander and the Achaemenid king recalls riddle games with a similar escalating structure, which were played in Greek symposia at least up to early Hellenistic times. The author of the letter collection, who was also active during the Hellenistic period, could easily have become familiar with such traditions of entertainment. His narrative creation thus emerges as the result of a dynamic interaction between literary antecedents and orally transmitted lore. It is precisely this kind of combination and interplay that makes the story original: a new tale of Alexander's wit, not replicated in the other historians or biographers of the Macedonian conqueror, but destined to enjoy a prolonged *Nachleben* in the later adaptations of Pseudo-Kallisthenes' novel, in both East and West.

Ioannis M. Konstantakos
iokonstan@phil.uoa.gr

Bibliographical references

Aly 1969

W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen*, Hrsg. L. Huber, Göttingen 1969 (I ed. 1921).

Anderson 2000

G. Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World*, London - New York 2000.

Anderson 2012

G. Anderson, *The «Alexander Romance» and the Pattern of Hero-Legend*, in R. Stoneman - K. Erickson - I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen 2012, pp. 81-102.

Asheri - Lloyd - Corcella 2007

D. Asheri - A. Lloyd - A. Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV*, ed. by O. Murray - A. Moreno, Oxford 2007.

Berg 1973

B. Berg, *An Early Source of the «Alexander Romance»*, «Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies» 14 (1973), pp. 381-387.

Bergmeister 1975

H.-J. Bergmeister, *Die Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni (Der lateinische Alexanderroman des Mittelalters). Synoptische Edition der Rezensionen des Leo Archipresbyter und der interpolierten Fassungen J1, J2, J3, (Buch I und II)*, Meisenheim am Glan 1975.

Bergson 1965

L. Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman: Rezension β*, Stockholm - Göteborg - Uppsala 1965.

Beta 2012

S. Beta, *Gli enigmi simposiali: dagli indovinelli scherzosi ai problemi filosofici*, in S. Monda (a cura di), «*Ainigma*» e «*Griphos*»: *Gli antichi e l'oscurità della parola*, Pisa 2012, pp. 69-80.

Bolte - Polívka 1930

J. Bolte - G. Polívka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, IV, Leipzig 1930.

Bounoure - Serret 1992

G. Bounoure - B. Serret, *Pseudo-Callisthène: Le Roman d'Alexandre. La vie et les hauts faits d'Alexandre de Macédoine*, Paris 1992.

Braun 1938

M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature*, Oxford 1938.

Budge 1889

E.A.W. Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great, being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo Callisthenes*, Cambridge 1889.

Burstein 1989

S.M. Burstein, *SEG 33.802 and the Alexander Romance*, «*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*» 77 (1989), pp. 275-276.

Callu 2010

J.-P. Callu, *Julius Valère: Roman d'Alexandre*, Turnhout 2010.

Candiloro 1965

E. Candiloro, *Politica e cultura in Atene da Pidna alla guerra mitridatica*, «Studi Classici e Orientali» 14 (1965), pp. 134-176.

Casari 2012

M. Casari, *The King Explorer: A Cosmographic Approach to the Persian Alexander*, in R. Stoneman - K. Erickson - I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen 2012, pp. 175-203.

Cavallo - Maehler 2008

G. Cavallo - H. Maehler, *Hellenistic Bookhands*, Berlin - New York 2008.

Clouston 2002

W.A. Clouston, *Popular Tales and Fictions: Their Migrations and Transformations*, ed. by C. Goldberg, Santa Barbara - Denver - Oxford 2002 (I ed. 1887).

Cosquin 1922

E. Cosquin, *Études folkloriques: Recherches sur les migrations des contes populaires et leur point de départ*, Paris 1922.

Cottrell 2012

E. Cottrell, *Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik and the α Version of the «Alexander Romance»*, in R. Stoneman - K. Erickson - I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen 2012, pp. 233-253.

de Blécourt 2013

W. de Blécourt, *Zauberer und Schüler*, in R.W. Brednich (Hrsg.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens: Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*, XIV, Berlin - Boston 2013, pp. 1165-1168.

De Sanctis 1983

G. De Sanctis, *Scritti minori*, V, a cura di A. Ferrabino - S. Accame, Roma 1983.

Dowden 1989

K. Dowden, *Pseudo-Callisthenes: The Alexander Romance*, in B.P. Reardon (ed.), *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 1989, pp. 650-735.

Eckard 1997

G. Eckard, «*Habenam et pilam loculosque cum aureis*»: *Les présents envoyés par Darius dans le «Roman d'Alexandre» et les vestiges d'une formule trifonctionnelle en ancien français*, in D. Knoepfler (éd.), *Nomen latinum: Mélanges de langue, de littérature et de civilisation latines offerts au professeur André Schneider à l'occasion de son départ à la retraite*, Neuchâtel - Genève 1997, pp. 247-257.

FGrHist

F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, I-III, Berlin - Leiden 1923-1958.

Franco 1999

C. Franco, *Il romanzo di Alessandro*, «Quaderni di Storia» 49 (1999), pp. 45-102.

Fraser 1972

P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, I-II, Oxford 1972.

Fraser 1996

P.M. Fraser, *Cities of Alexander the Great*, Oxford 1996.

Gad 2012

El-S.M. Gad, *Al-Tabari's Tales of Alexander: History and Romance*, in R. Stoneman - K. Erickson - I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen 2012, pp. 219-231.

Giuliano 2010

L. Giuliano, *PSI XII 1285 e le lettere del ciclo di Alessandro*, in G. Bastianini - A. Casanova (a cura di), *I papiri del romanzo antico*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 11-12 giugno 2009), Firenze 2010, pp. 207-222.

Gunkel 1987

H. Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament*, transl. by M.D. Rutter, Sheffield 1987 (I ed. 1917).

Hartog 2001

F. Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote: Essai sur la représentation de l'autre*, Paris 2001 (I ed. 1980).

Hilka 1976

A. Hilka, *Historia Alexandri Magni (Historia de Preliis): Rezension J2 (Orosius-Rezension)*, I, Hrsg. H.-J. Bergmeister, Meisenheim am Glan 1976.

Hilka - Steffens 1979

A. Hilka - K. Steffens, *Historia Alexandri Magni (Historia de Preliis): Rezension JI*, Meisenheim am Glan 1979.

Holzberg 1994

N. Holzberg, *Der griechische Briefroman: Versuch einer Gattungstypologie*, in N. Holzberg - S. Merkle (Hrsg.), *Der griechische Briefroman: Gattungstypologie und Textanalyse*, Tübingen 1994, pp. 1-52.

Jouanno 2002

C. Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses du Roman d'Alexandre: Domaine grec*, Paris 2002.

Jouanno 2009a

C. Jouanno, *Histoire merveilleuse du roi Alexandre maître du monde*, Toulouse 2009.

Jouanno 2009b

C. Jouanno, *Novelistic Lives and Historical Biographies: The «Life of Aesop» and the «Alexander Romance» as Fringe Novels*, in G.A. Karla (ed.), *Fiction on the Fringe: Novelistic Writing in the Post-Classical Age*, Leiden - Boston 2009, pp. 33-48.

Jouanno 2012

C. Jouanno, *The Persians in Late Byzantine Alexander Romances: A Portrayal under Turkish Influences*, in R. Stoneman - K. Erickson - I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen 2012, pp. 105-115.

Karadagli 1981

T. Karadagli, *Fabel und Ainos: Studien zur griechischen Fabel*, Königstein 1981.

Konstan 1998

D. Konstan, *The «Alexander Romance»: The Cunning of the Open Text*, «Lexis» 16 (1998), pp. 123-138.

Konstantakos 2000

I.M. Konstantakos, *A Commentary on the Fragments of Eight Plays of Antiphanes*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Cambridge 2000.

Konstantakos 2004

I.M. Konstantakos, *Trial by Riddle: The Testing of the Counsellor and the Contest of Kings in the Legend of Amasis and Bias*, «Classica et Mediaevalia» 55 (2004), pp. 85-137.

Konstantakos 2008

I.M. Konstantakos, *Ἀκίχαρος: Ἡ «Διήγηση τοῦ Ἀχικᾶρ» στὴν ἀρχαία Ἑλλάδα*, I, Athens 2008.

Konstantakos 2010

I.M. Konstantakos, *Ἡ ἀβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα τῶν στίχων: Παιχνίδια γρίφων στὸν ποιητικό ἀγώνα τῶν «Βατράχων» τοῦ Ἀριστοφάνη*, in S. Tsitsiridis (ed.), *Παραχορήγημα: Μελετήματα για το ἀρχαίο θέατρο πρὸς τιμὴν τοῦ καθηγητῆ Γρηγόρη Μ. Σηφάκη*, Herakleion 2010, pp. 317-341.

Kroll 1926

G. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni (Pseudo-Callisthenes)*, I, *Recensio vetusta*, Berlin 1926.

Lateiner 1987

D. Lateiner, *Nonverbal Communication in the «Histories» of Herodotus*, «*Arethusa*» 20 (1987), pp. 83-119.

Lenfant 2004

D. Lenfant, *Ctésias de Cnide: La Perse, l'Inde, autres fragments*, Paris 2004.

Lolos 1983

A. Lolos, *Ps.-Kallisthenes: Zwei mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen des Alexanderromans. Teil I*, Königstein 1983.

Mazzarino 1974

S. Mazzarino, *Il pensiero storico classico*, I, Bari 1974.

Merkelbach 1975

R. Merkelbach, *Zwei Bilder aus der Sprache der Reiternomaden*, «*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*» 19 (1975), pp. 203-207.

Merkelbach 1977

R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans*, München 1977 (I ed. 1954).

Merkelbach 1989

R. Merkelbach, *Der Brief des Dareios im Getty-Museum und Alexanders Wortwechsel mit Parmenion*, «*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*» 77 (1989), pp. 277-280.

Mitsakis 1967

K. Mitsakis, *Der Byzantinische Alexanderroman nach dem Codex Vindob. theol. gr. 244*, München 1967.

Moennig 1992

U. Moennig, *Die spätbyzantinische Rezension *ζ des Alexanderromans*, Köln 1992.

Momigliano 1966

A. Momigliano, *Terzo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Roma 1966.

Ohlert 1912

K. Ohlert, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele der alten Griechen*, Berlin 1912 (I ed. 1886).

Pallis 1935

A.A. Pallis, *Ἡ Φυλλάδα τοῦ Μεγ' Ἀλέξανδρου ἢ Ἱστορία τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνοϋ: Βίος, πόλεμοι καὶ θάνατος αὐτοῦ*, Athens 1935.

Perlmann 1987

M. Perlmann, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, IV, The Ancient Kingdoms*, New York 1987.

Pfister 1913

F. Pfister, *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, Heidelberg 1913.

Rose 1958

H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, London 1958 (I ed. 1928).

Rosellini 2004

M. Rosellini, *Iulius Valerius: Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis*, Monachii-Lipsiae 2004 (I ed. 1993).

Rosenmeyer 2001

P.A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature*, Cambridge 2001.

Ross 1959

D.J.A. Ross, *A New Manuscript of Archpriest Leo of Naples: Nativitas et Victoria Alexandri Magni*, «Classica et Mediaevalia» 20 (1959), pp. 98-158.

Scherf 1995

W. Scherf, *Das Märchenlexikon, I-II*, München 1995.

Schubert 2010

C. Schubert, *Anacharsis der Weise: Nomade, Skythe, Grieche*, Tübingen 2010.

SEG

Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum.

Steffens 1975

K. Steffens, *Die Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni: Rezension J3*, Meisenheim am Glan 1975.

Steiner 1994

D.T. Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece*, Princeton 1994.

Stoneman 1991

R. Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, London 1991.

Stoneman 1995

R. Stoneman, *Riddles in Bronze and Stone: Monuments and their Interpretation in the «Alexander Romance»*, «Groningen Colloquia on the Novel» 6 (1995), pp. 159-170.

Stoneman 2007

R. Stoneman (a cura di), *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, I, trad. di T. Gargiulo, Milano 2007.

Stoneman 2008

R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend*, New Haven - London 2008.

Stramaglia 1996

A. Stramaglia, *Fra «consumo» e «impegno»: usi didattici della narrativa nel mondo antico*, in O. Pecere - A. Stramaglia (a cura di), *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Cassino, 14-17 settembre 1994), Cassino 1996, pp. 97-166.

Thompson 1955-1958

S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, I-VI, Bloomington 1955-1958 (I ed. 1932-1936).

Uther 2004

H.-J. Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*, I-III, Helsinki 2004.

van Thiel 1974

H. van Thiel, *Leben und Taten Alexanders von Makedonien: Der griechische Alexanderroman nach der Handschrift L*, Darmstadt 1974.

Veloudis 1977

G. Veloudis, *Η Φυλλάδα του Μεγαλέξαντρου: Διήγησις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνα*, Athens 1977.

von Lauenstein 1962

U. von Lauenstein, *Der griechische Alexanderroman: Rezension Γ, Buch I*, Meisenheim am Glan 1962.

West 1988

S. West, *The Scythian Ultimatum (Herodotus iv 131, 132)*, «Journal of Hellenic Studies» 108 (1988), pp. 207-211.

Whitmarsh 2013

T. Whitmarsh, *Addressing Power: Fictional Letters between Alexander and Darius*, in O. Hodkinson - P.A. Rosenmeyer - E. Bracke (eds.), *Epistolary Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*, Leiden - Boston 2013, pp. 169-186.

Wilamowitz 1937

U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Kleine Schriften, V/2, Glaube und Sage*, Berlin 1937.

Wilberforce Clarke 1881

H. Wilberforce Clarke, *The Sikandar Nāma, e Barā, or Book of Alexander the Great, Written A.D. 1200, by Abū Muḥammad bin Yūsuf bin Mu, ayyid-i-Nizāmu-'d-Dīn*, London 1881.

Wolohojian 1969

A.M. Wolohojian, *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes. Translated from the Armenian Version with an Introduction*, New York - London 1969.

Zotenberg 1867

H. Zotenberg, *Chronique de Abou-Djafar-Mo 'ammed-ben-Djarir-ben-Yezid Tabari, traduite sur la version persane d'Abou-'Ali-Mo 'ammed Bel 'ami, d'après les manuscrits de Paris, de Gotha, de Londres et de Canterbury, I*, Paris 1867.