

Krzysztof Nawotka, *The Alexander Romance by Ps.-Callisthenes. A Historical Commentary*. Leiden and Boston: Brill 2017. *Mnemosyne* Supplement no. 399. Pp. xii+360, 15 in-text colour illustrations. ISSN 0169-8958, ISBN 978-90-04-33521-9 (hardback), 978-90-04-33522-6 (e-book)

This is the first complete commentary on the Greek *Alexander Romance* to appear since Adolf Ausfeld's in 1907. (The present reviewer's commentary, completed in 2001, awaits publication of its third volume, comprising Book III, with the Fondazione Lorenzo Valla). N.'s is a commentary on the oldest Greek recension of the work, the alpha recension, which survives in a single MS of the 11th century, now in Paris, known as A. As the closest in time to the date of Alexander, it has the best claim to be treated as some kind of historical text, and accordingly N. describes his commentary as a 'historical' one. It tests the evidence of the AR against the other historical sources and provides judicious assessment of its details. But it is much more than that. It does not shy away from linguistic comment, especially where this is pertinent to historical matters. It does eschew discussion of sections that appear only in later Greek recensions (not to mention those in other languages) and thus maintains a clear focus on what may be regarded as the formative version of the *Romance*.

N. and the present reviewer (hereinafter 'I') differ on the fundamental question of the likely date of the alpha-recension. Like Corinne Jouanno, N. regards the AR as a work of the third century AD, completed not long before the *terminus ad quem* of Julius Valerius' translation into Latin. I prefer to see it as a work created in all its essentials in the third century BC in the milieu of the Ptolemaic court. No one will deny that many elements of the story, notably the Nectanebo 'novella' and the Will of Alexander, are of Ptolemaic origin: the question is whether the various elements that make up the AR were welded into a whole at this date, or by a sophist working in the Second Sophistic, when it can be aligned with that age's enthusiasm for Greek *paideia* as well as with the emerging genre of hagiography (p. 18). N. does not discuss in detail the arguments I advanced in the introduction to my commentary on Book I (2007, xxv-xxxiv) for a Ptolemaic date for the whole, and does not cite my article 'The Author of the Alexander Romance' (in M. Paschalis et al, eds., *Readers and Writers in the Ancient Novel* (Groningen: Barkhuis 2009, 142-154)) which extends those arguments into a hypothetical scenario. Part of my argument was based on the popularity of choliambic verse in the third century BC; N. sees choliambics as a verse-form of the third century AD; thus, as so often, arguments cut both ways. N. does, for sure, assemble a great deal of linguistic evidence, and allusions to Roman conditions (e.g. 246, the Letter to the Rhodians is presented with a Roman style of address to city magistrates; see also 120 on Darius' titles), that persuasively indicate a third century AD date; but this would be compatible, in my view, with a 're-edition' in the Second Sophistic of a basically Hellenistic text. (On p. 37 he refers to an Alexandrian 'final editing'). On p. 234 he discusses the *Technitae of Dionysus* as a third century AD

phenomenon, but since these guilds certainly originated in the third century BC this seems to be over-stating the case for the third century AD. The more one regards the work as a Hellenistic one, the more it can be regarded as the earliest testimony for the career of Alexander, or at least for the way he was regarded in the third century BC; but on this point N. and I will rarely disagree, since he acknowledges the third century BC origins of substantial portions of the text. When N. remarks (222–3) on the possible common source of Diodorus and Ps.-Callisthenes, a window is opened a crack on the process of formation of the *AR*.

N. is well informed on the Egyptian context and background pertinent to the early chapters of Book I — he refers to ch. 3 as ‘authentic Egyptian tradition’ — and is able to provide more up to date information on Sarapis and the Serapeum than was available to me in my commentary. He argues (40, 51) that the lecanomancy episode of Ch. 1, the horoscope narrative of Ch. 4, and the description of Nectanebo’s *pinax*, refer to details specific to second century AD Egypt: this is somewhat problematic since the Nectanebo narrative as a whole must be among the earliest strands of the *AR*, belonging in essence to the Ptolemaic period. N. does not cite Ryholt’s suggestion (‘Nectanebo’s Dream or the Prophecy of Petesis’, in A. Blasius and B. Schipper, eds., *Apokalyptik und Ägypten*, Leuven: Peeters 2002, 221–41) that the fragmentary demotic *Dream of Nectanebo* may have concluded with a form of the Greek narrative about Nectanebo, which would put the whole story back to an early date.

N. also provides plentiful valuable comment on the Babylonian episode at the end of Book III (229–231, the birth omen, and 241–2). Possible Persian traditions in the *AR* are also discussed (170, 260). His treatment of Plataiai (143) is full of good detail; the explanation of the destruction of Thebes, presented by Ismenias as ‘a seat of evil on earth’ (132) is attractive; the discussions of dates (207, 269) are clear; the discourse on coin values (179–180, cf. 224 on gold as an indication of a late date) is valuable. Every proper name occurring in the text receives a brief and helpful biographical sketch, even when it is hard, as with some of the guests at Medius’ dinner, to identify them as historical personages.

I have never read a book that contained so many citations of my own work, and I am pleased to say that in some cases N. corrects or improves on my statements. At 175 he rightly states that the inscription preserving a short passage of the *AR* is Tiberian in date, and admits that it shows the Letter of Darius in question was circulating long before the third century AD. At 192 he also concedes that the Letters were circulating in the Hellenistic age. At 188 N. rightly omits Chs. 23–44, which are missing in A, on which his commentary is based. But he discounts the possibility that they were in the archetype, because they are not in Julius Valerius, the Syriac or Leo, whereas I suggested in my commentary that they were, since they appear in the Armenian translation. Here is another place where the evidence seems to cut both ways.

In the discussion of the Indian episode (III. 22) N. suggests (219) that the visit to the Cave of the Gods may indicate knowledge of Indian cave temples, though all those that we know of belong to the third century or later, as do Buddhist cave monasteries. The beautiful photographs of the rock cut temple at Ellora (eighth century AD) may not really illuminate the megalithic temples of the Land of Candace. These can scarcely belong to a contemporary tradition about Alexander if they did not exist at the time, yet the episode, in which Sesonchosis is prominent, suggests a Ptolemaic origin. I would like to believe in genuine Indian detail in the *AR* (*Eos* 103 (2016), 89–98, though N., 208–9 prefers to see the Talking Trees as Egyptian), but the connection seems problematic.

There is rich material for debate in this book, and anyone studying the *AR* will find it a reliable, thorough and very up-to-date guide.

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