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P.Hal. Inv. 31: Alexander and the Speaking Bird
(cf. Ps.-Call., III, 28)


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W. Luppe has recently published two 'Warte'-Texte from the papyrus collection in Halle. He dated the first of these, P. Hal. Inv. 31, very correctly to the first century B.C. The slowly written capital hand shows indeed a remarkable resemblance to the scripts of P. Oxy. 24. 2399 and of P. Fouad Inv. 266, which have both been assigned to that same period. Especially the hand of the Oxy-papyrus looks very similar for several letters (α, ε, ι, τ, v and ω). The Fouad papyrus, on the other hand, furnishes interesting parallels for the form of θ, μ (in four movements) and ν.

The text in the Halle papyrus corresponds with a passage of one of the 'miracle letters' included in the Alexander-Romance, viz. Alexander's letter to Olympias (Ps.-Call., III, 27-28). As is well known, the Alexander Romance, composed in the IInd-IIIrd cent. A.D., has been preserved in many recensions. According to the standard theory of R. Merkelbach, its author, con-
ventionally referred to as Pseudo-Callisthenes, used as main sources an Alexander history in the Cleitarchan tradition, a letter-romance\(^7\), in which the Alexander campaigns were told through letters to and from leading persons, and some 'miracle letters', which belonged to the teratological literature\(^8\). To the latter group\(^9\) belong Alexander's long letter to Olympias and Aristotle (Ps.-Call., II, 23-41) about his trip through the desert to the sea, his voyage to the land of the blessed, his descent in the depth of the sea and his ascent in the air; further also the letter to Aristotle about his adventures in India (Ps.-Call., III, 17), and finally his letter to Olympias (Ps.-Call., III, 27-28) about similar experiences.

As already mentioned, *P. Hal. Inv.* 31 corresponds with a part of the latter letter, more precisely with the account of Alexander's visit to the palace of Cyrus and Xerxes, where he finds among other marvels a speaking bird.

We provide below a supplemented transcript, for which we had to use several of the recensions which exist for the Alexander Romance\(^10\).

**Transcript**

1. ὁρνεον] τὸ μέγεθος Ἱ[ν ἡλι-κον περιστερᾶ. τούτῳ δὲ ἔφασα]ν ἐρμηνεύει[ν τοῖς βασιλεῖς ἑώρων άνθρωπονι

5. φωνῇ, ἡνίκα ἀν [τὰς προσπιπτούσας φονάς ἁυκοῦσιν] εἶναι δ[ἐ]

**Translation**

"The bird was of the size of a dove. And they said that it spoke to the kings with a human voice, whenever it heared the voices that reached it, and that is was..."

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\(^{11}\) reply to this article by R. Merkelbach, *Der Brief des Dareios im Getty-Museum und Alexanders Wortwechsel mit Parmenion*, *ibid.*, pp. 277-280.

\(^7\) R. Merkelbach, *o.c.*, p. 224 has dated this 'letter romance' to about 100 B.C. Some letters collected in the anthologies *P. Hamb.* 2. 129 (1st cent. B.C.) (= Pack\(^2\) 2115) and *PSI* 12. 1285 (2nd cent. A.D.) (= Pack\(^2\) 2114) recur in the Alexander Romance.


\(^9\) The letters have been studied thoroughly by R. Merkelbach, *o.c.*, pp. 55-70 and by L.L. Gunderson, *o.c.*

\(^10\) As L.L. Gunderson, *o.c.*, p. 86 rightly stressed, "this Letter is incredibly distorted in all recensions and translations of the Romance". On p. 89 he even exclaimed: "Would that this Letter to Olympias had survived in a less ruined condition!"
Commentary

The whole passage can be restored fairly well on the basis of the different recensions of the Alexander Romance. We have used as a starting-point the text of the A-recension (cf. Kroll, p. 130 and Feldbusch, pp. 140a-142a), which is the oldest one, though at the same time very corrupt:

(7) ἱν δὲ ὁ οἶκος μέγας προμῆχης, οὐ αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰθιστο χρηματίζειν, ἐν ὦ ἔφασαν ὄρνεον ἀνθρωπίνη φωνῆ ἐρμηνεύειν ἧνίκα ἀν τὰς προφ.

(8) ἱν γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ τῆς ὀρφης ὀρτυγοτροφεῖν χρυσοῦν κρεμόμενον, ἐν ὦ ἦν ὄρνεον ἡλίκων (περιστερά). τούτῳ ἔφασαν ἐρμηνεύειν τοῖς βασιλεύσιν. ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ ἔφασαν εἶναι χρόνον ἰκανόν.

1 It seems impossible to assume, so shortly before the bird-sequence, a reference to the tall priest described several lines earlier in ms. C of the γ-recension with ἐβλεπον καὶ τὸ μέγεθος (cf. Parthe, p. 417.11), or to the magnitude of the palace of Cyrus and Xerxes (cf. the A-recension: οἶκος μέγας προμῆχης). Therefore τὸ μέγεθος is more likely an accusative of respect, which refers to the size of the bird. Cf. the A-recension (ἐν ὦ ἦν ὄρνεον ἡλίκων (περιστερά)), the Armenian version (cf. Feldbusch, p. 142a: ἐν ὦ ἦν τὸ ὄρνεον τούτῳ ἡλίκων περιστερά - see also Wolohojian, p. 146: "and in it was that bird which was about the size of a dove"), and Leo Archipresbyter (cf. Feldbusch, p. 143b: erantque coturnices tam magnae sicut columbae). For τὸ μέγεθος added as an accusative of respect to ἡλίκος, cf. Plut., Thes., 8.2: ἡλίκου τὸ μέγεθος θηρίου κρατήσειν. After reading a first draft of our article Dr. W. Luppe proposed to complete the first line as follows: ἐν ὦι ἦν ὃρ-[νον, ὦ] τὸ μέγεθος ἦ[ν ἦλι-].

2-7 Kroll has added in his A-text, (8) περιστερά on the analogy of the β-recension (cf. Bergson, p. 178.8) and of the Latin, Armenian and Syriac translations (cf. Feldbusch, pp. 142a-143b). In (7) Kroll assumed that ἦνίκαι ἀν τὰς προφ was a corruption of ἡλίκος in (8). He also proposed to delete the whole phrase ἐν ὦ … προφ, except for ἀνθρωπίνη φωνῆ, which he wanted to transfer from (7) to the next paragraph, as a complement there of ἐρμηνεύειν.

L. 5 of the Halle papyrus, where ἦνίκαι ὦν is beyond any doubt, rather suggests the following procedure. It seems likely that the copyist of A at first made an (unjustified) jump from ἐρμηνεύειν in (7) to the same word in (8), where, in his model, ἦνίκαι ἀν κτλ. followed. He must have noticed his error and broken off the text of (7), without, however, taking care afterwards to finish properly the temporal clause in (8). That such a temporal clause was indeed part of (8), is suggested very strongly by the Armenian translation, which Raabe has translated back into Greek as follows: τοῦτῳ δὲ ἔφασαν ἐρμηνεύειν τοῖς βασιλεύσιν ἀνθρωπίνη φωνῆ, ὅταν τῶν φωνῶν τῶν προσπιπτούσιν αὐτῷ ἀκούσῃ (cf. Feldbusch, p. 142a). See also the English translation by Wolohojian, p. 146: "They say that it interprets in a human voice to kings when it hears the sounds which pulse through it". It is furthermore supported, we believe, by a variant in ms. K of the β-recension (cf. Bergson, p. 178.7-8) which reads: ἦνίκα τὰς προσπιπτούσις φωνῶς instead of διὰ τὰς προσπιπτούσις φωνῶς. The Armenian translation also supports the papyrus, ll. 4-5, in the addition of ἀνθρωπίνη φωνῆ as a complement to ἐρμηνεύειν and thus eventually the transposition of these terms in the A-recension from (7) to (8), as it was proposed by Kroll.
Our tentative restorations have been inspired by the Armenian translation (cf. *supra*). As mentioned, the β-recension has τοῦτο ἔφασαν ἐρμηνεύειν τοῖς βασιλέσσιν διὰ τὰς προσπιπτούσας φωνὰς and it is followed by the γ-recension, which however inserts δὲ after τοῦτο (cf. Parthe, p. 418. 16-17).

Since the verb προσπίπτω regularly governs a dative, an alternative restoration for l. 6 might be προσπιπτούσας α[ῦντο]. Dr. W. Luppe in fact prefers now to identify the last legible letter as an α rather than as a φ. However, the omission of φωνὰς seems improbable, in spite of the preceding φωνη. Indeed, none of the recensions omits this word, whereas αὐτό does not figure in the β- and γ- recensions.

In l. 7 εἶναι should be interpreted as a second infinitive along with ἔφασαν (l. 3). It is paralleled in the Α-recension (ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ ἔφασαν εἶναι χρόνον ἵκανόν), the β-recension (cf. Bergson, p. 178. 8: καὶ τοῦτο δὲ ἔφησαν ἰερόν εἴναι) and the Armenian translation (cf. Feldbusch, p. 142a: καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ εἶναι χρόνους πολλοὺς). In our fragment, however, εἶναι apparently introduces a new dependent clause and was almost inevitably followed by δὲ. The traces on the papyrus seem to confirm this: the two last strokes visible on l. 7 may be best interpreted, according to Dr. Luppe, as the diagonals of a somewhat flat *delta*.

An alternative restoration of l. 7 would be: ἔκων ἄκορος, with τὰς … φωνὰς (ll. 5-6) as the subject of the infinitive of a verb meaning 'to speak' or 'to sound', such as λέγειν, φράζειν, φονεῖν, ἥχειν or a compound of one of them. The vertical stroke identified in our transcript as a *iota* might indeed also be the hasta of a *kappa*, and the diagonal which follows does not seem too far removed to have belonged to that same letter. But *omicron* as the last letter before the lacuna is very doubtful, since, as mentioned, the last remaining stroke seems to be a diagonal rather than part of a loop.

The remaining text unfortunately does not allow us to determine whether the story about Alexander's visit to the palace of Cyrus and Xerxes was told in the form of a letter, as it was in the later Alexander Romance. The complete text may have had the form of a narrative or even have belonged to a larger collection of sagas about the great Alexander. P. Hal. Inv. 31 in any case provides us with one of the sources of Ps.-Callisthenes, a source which dates back at least to the first century B.C. It is not necessary to assume that this source was adopted integrally and literally by Ps.-Callisthenes, which may account for some slight differences in the wording of the papyrus fragment vis-à-vis the text of all known recensions.

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11 R. Merkelbach, *o.c.*, p. 224 stated about the three 'miracle-letters' in the Alexander Romance: "Diese Briefe sind der literarische Niederschlag lebendiger, alter Sagen von Alexander; sie sind also der merkwürdigste und interessanteste Teil des Buches".

12 According to R. Merkelbach, *o.c.*, p. 68 the 'miracle letters' reflect oral traditions about Alexander which may have originated already during his life-time.