

**The basilisk:
An episode from the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni****

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Abstract. The paper aims to analyse the episode about the fight of Alexander the Great with the sinister, poisoning the air with his breath and eyes basilisk in the medieval tradition about the *Romance of Alexander*, respectively the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni* (Rezension J³).

However, the tracing of the literary tradition in the Latin West unequivocally suggests the functioning of at least three basic variants of the mythic-and-literary narrative, which presupposes the multiplication of the sources and its transmission. Variations in the story of Alexander and the basilisk sometimes indicate a distancing and alienation from the paradigm of the Rezension J³.

If the oldest *α*-Rezension of the Pseudo-Callisthenes' literary core dates no later than AD 200, we are most likely faced with a later interpolation of a text that functioned independently of it, but dating back to an earlier epoch, not later than the middle of the 4th century, and probably before that. This would hypothetically outline the chronological boundaries and possible transmissions of the episode with the meeting of Alexander the Great and the basilisk as an integral part of the landscape of the Otherworld on the way to the "land of the blessed" and the end of the world passing through the "land of twilight", where miracles can happen and fantastic monsters meet.

Keywords: *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, Rezension J³, Archipresbyter Leo, basilisk, *Itinerarium Alexandri*

*Thou shalt tread on the asp and basilisk:
and thou shalt trample on the lion and dragon...*
Psalm 91:13

In the middle of the 3rd c. BC in Alexandria, Egypt, with the first *koine* Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, known as *The Translation of the Seventy*

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or *Septuagint*, from the darkness of ancient Hellenic mythology appears the mysterious figure of the basilisk (*Psalm* 91:13 and *Isaiah* 59:5; cf. *Jeremias* 8:17), “the King of Snakes” (or *regulus* in Latin). Translators see in it the most appropriate Hellenic correspondence for the Hebraic name for a highly venomous or monstrous serpent (?) *tziph’oni/siph’oni* (Murison 1905, 115-130). Classical Hellenic literature is too discreet about the basilisk, which might be explained by its possible mysterial nature.

A few centuries later, approximately around AD 200, again in Alexandria reappeared the oldest version of *The Romance of Alexander* (Rezension *a*), around which was generated a sustainable tradition of various revisions and translations. In one of the later versions of *The Romance of Alexander*, the medieval *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni* (Rezension *J*³), appeared an unusual episode about the collision of Alexander the Great with the sinister basilisk, poisoning the air with his breath and his gaze (Fig. 1). This episode was almost unknown to the other versions of *Historia de preliis*, and it was also absent in the main, oldest core of *The Romance of Alexander*.



Fig. 1. Alexander fighting a crowned dragon: *Peniarth 481D*, Folio 90r, a late 15th-century illuminated manuscript of the *Historia de preliis*, a unknown Flemish illuminator, The National Library of Wales (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_fighting_a_crowned_dragon.jpg (24.06.2021))

The extensive interpolation included at the beginning of Chapter 106 of Rezenson J³ of *Historia de preliis* (Pfister 1912a, 264-265; Steffens 1975) is part of the detailed description of Alexander's fantastic journey into the Otherworld, filled with many wonders and monsters: anomalous plants, magical waters, dragons, snakes and lions are an integral part of the gloomy landscape of the Otherworld, through which passes the way to "the land of the blessed" and *the end of the world* (Fig. 2). Having marched for 170 days, Alexander and his army reached a high mountain, the top of which seemed to reach the sky. It looked like a wall, so no climb was possible. There were only two passages that cut through the mountain: one to the north and the other to the east. The king believed that this division of the mountain was not the result of human hands, but of the inundation caused by the Flood. He suggested taking the road to the east and so they walked for eight days through this narrow gap.

Then they met a terrible stinking basilisk, which poisoned all the air not only with his breath but also with his gaze; as far as he could reach, he poisoned the air. The Macedonians and Persians who passed by him fell dead from his sight. When the soldiers learned of this danger, they did not want to continue. What follows is an anecdotal episode about Alexander's ingenuity, through which he defeated the terrifying basilisk by means of a huge mirror made from the outer surface of the shields of his warriors. When the monster looked at it, his gaze reflected and killed him (Pfister 2012a, 264-265; Pfister 1978, 163-164).



Fig. 2. Alexander and his men facing amazing beasts and monsters across a river: *Peniarth 481D*, Folio 68v, a late 15th-century illuminated manuscript of the *Historia de preliis*, a unknown Flemish illuminator, The National Library of Wales (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_and_his_men_facing_amazing_beasts.jpg (24.06.2021))

What are the possible primary sources and transmission mechanisms of this amazingly fantastic interpolation?

1. *The Romance of Alexander* is a unique composite work (composed of historical stories, “letters”, folklore traditions and diverse anecdotal material) with a phenomenal existence, which has functioned for centuries in the medieval literary tradition. The additional sources clinging to the primary literary core raise many questions and issues. The original core of the text dates back to the Greek text of Pseudo-Callisthenes *Historia Alexandri Magni* (Ausfeld 1907; cf. Meusel (ed.) 1864, 703-816). It is considered to be the source of the first Latin translation of *Res gestae Alexandri Magni* in three books (birth, deeds, death), made before AD 340 by an unknown author identified with Julius Valerius (Kuebler 1888). An anonymous author sometime between the 8th and 9th centuries, known today as the *Zacher Epitome* after its publisher and commentator Julius Zacher, epitomized this translation (Zacher (Hrsg.) 1867; Ross 1956, 127-132), and was included by Vincent of Beauvais († ca. 1264) into his encyclopaedic work *Speculum historiale* (*The Mirror of History*).

Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni is one of the later medieval versions of *The Romance of Alexander*, ascending to the Latin translation of Archipresbyter Leo of Naples (made between 951 and 968/9) of a Byzantine manuscript found by him in Constantinople as it becomes clear from the *Prologue* to the text (Pfister 1941, 273-281; see Pfister 1913, 5-8), preserved entirely only in the manuscript of The Bamberg State Library (Cod. Bamb. E III. 14), as well as partially in a Munich (*Cod. Lat. Monac. 23489*, s. xii-xiii) and in a Parisian (*BN Nouv. Acq. Lat. 310*, s. xii) manuscripts. The *Prologue* contains unique information about the personality of Archipresbyter Leo and about the process of translation thereof titled *Nativitas et Victoria Alexandri Magni*. Leo served at the court of the Duke of Naples John III (928-968), who was famous for his passion to collecting ancient manuscripts. As one of his main agents in this endeavour, Leo was sent to Constantinople with the special task of searching for Greek and Latin manuscripts. When he returned, he translated some of them, including the text of *Nativitas et Victoria Alexandri Magni*. The translation of Archipresbyter Leo did not enjoy much attention from his contemporaries, which is evident in the scarce number of transcripts, but the three interpolated receptions J¹, J², J³ (Ausfeld 1907; Steffens 1975) have become the main transmission for the spread of the medieval tradition of *The Romance of Alexander*, with a huge influence on his contemporary, and on the subsequent medieval literature of the Latin West (Fig. 3).

Historia de preliis (J³) followed quite accurately version J¹, however it also added some new material. The starting point for its dating is the influence of this version on the Latin text of *Gesta Herewardi*: compiled ca. 1150, the poem was dedicated to an English hero who had led his people against the Norman expansion in the second half of the 11th c. (Hamilton 1927, 113-146; Cary 1956, 52).

Another work based on J³, was the work of Quilichinus of Spoleto *Alexandreis* (Kirsch (ed.) 1971). In 1236 (Pfister 1976, 23-26; Merkelbach 1954, VIIa-VIIIa; Steffens 1975), he reworked this edition into a long epic poem in elegiac couplets in Latin, which is also a kind of *terminus ante quem* of compiling

of J³ (Pfister 1912a, 249-301, see 287). The poem was presented mainly in the manuscript from Zwickau (1434) with some additions to the details from the Darmstadt manuscript from the 15th c. (Pfister 1976, 23-26; Merkelbach 1954, VIIa-VIIIa; Pfister 1941, 273-281; see Pfister 1913; Steffens 1975). Soon the work was translated into Italian by the younger Dante's contemporary, Domenico Scolarì (*Istoria di Alessandro Magno*, 1355), and into Middle German by an unknown Bavarian poet (1397). The Rezension J³ was very popular and had a strong influence on the late medieval literary tradition and especially on the Italian literary tradition of *The Romance of Alexander* (Cary 1956, 52; Morosini 2011, 329-364). The interest in it was dictated by the growing preference for the incredible and fantastic adventures of Alexander at the expense of reducing or shortening the historical facts.

A brief overview of the literary influence of version J³ of *Historia de preliis* broadly outlines the boundaries of the functioning of the main version of the

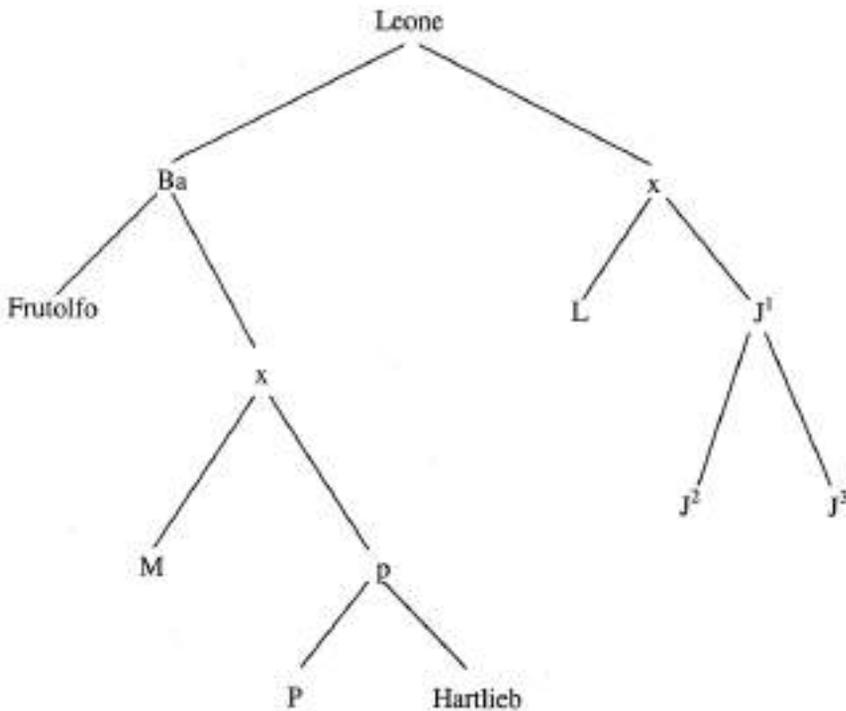


Fig. 3. J¹ - J² - J³- Rezensionen of the Latin translation of Leo the Archpriest
Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni

Leone - Leo the Archpriest, *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*; **J¹** - **J²** - **J³** - Rezensionen; **Ba** - Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Hist. 3; **M** - München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, lat. 23489; **P** - Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. acq. lat. 310; **L** - London, Lambeth Palace 342; **Frutolfo** - *Chronicon universale* by Frutolf von Michelsberg, 1099; **Hartlieb** - German translation by Johannes Hartlieb (15 c.)

episode with Alexander and the basilisk as an integral image of “the land of twilight”, in which the king himself resolves the crisis situation, using a mirror or the mirror surface of the shields of his warriors. According to Fr. Pfister (Pfister 1912a, 264-265), the episode with the basilisk and the mirror or the mirror surface of the shields of his warriors entered Latin Europe through version J³. However, the tracing of the literary tradition in the Latin West unequivocally suggests the functioning of at least two more variants of the mythic-and-literary version, which presupposes the multiplication of the sources and its transmissions.

2. Medieval variants of the motif. A structural element in the first, the “classic” version of the mythological account of Alexander the Great’s clash with the basilisk is the mirror as the main and only means of overcoming the destructive power of the monster. In this version, Alexander himself finds a solution to the critical situation thanks to his ingenuity and wisdom. A complicated version of the same variant involves the intervention of Alexander’s teacher, Aristotle (as in Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Secretum Secretorum*: Williams 2003), of an anonymous philosopher or a wise old man/men. This paradigmatic framework more succinctly and with strongly moralizing strategies follows the narrative of the anecdote (Cap. 139) in *Gesta Romanorum* (Oesterley (Hrsg.) 1872). Alexander’s clash with the poisonous basilisk is recorded in the story of the siege of a city by the Macedonian king (identified as Tyre: Pfister 1912a, 255¹).

In the history of retransmission and interpretation of the episode, the medieval Arabic treatise, translated into Latin as *De causis proprietatum elementorum* (*On the Causes of the Properties of the Elements*), probably compiled in the 9th or 10th c., occupies a special place. The author claims that he is Aristotle, however as early as in the beginning of the 19th c., there is no doubt this was work of an Arabic author who was notionally named *Pseudo-Aristotle*. This was translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona in 1187, shortly prior to his death (Peters 1968). It was he that was supposed to have named Aristotle as the author of this treatise. From the 13th century onwards, it became one of the three main sources on geology, together with that *Meteorologica* attributed to Aristotle and Avicenna’s *De mineralibus*. When scholars started to understand during the Renaissance that *De proprietatibus elementorum* had not been written by Aristotle, the treatise was removed from academic use (Peters 1968).

Pseudoaristotelian treatises *De causis proprietatum elementorum* and *Meteorologica*, as well as Avicenna’s *De mineralibus* strongly influenced Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200 - 15 November 1280), German Dominican bishop and philosopher. The exposition of the basilisk episode was in fact a paraphrase of Albert, who perceived *De causis proprietatum elementorum* (Albertus Magnus, *De causis proprietatum elementorum*, 9.585-653; Borgnet, Borgnet (eds.) 1890, 643; Teske (ed.) 2010; see Vodraska 1969) to be an original work of Aristotle and made an in-depth commentary on it with quite detailed and almost verbatim paraphrases of the text. In his comment compiled between 1251 and 1254,

¹ Cf. chapters 26 and 27 in J¹, which tells the story of the siege of the town of Tyre.

according to the editor of the Latin text Paul Hossfeld (Albert the Great 1980, 49-104), he had introduced quite a distorted version of the episode with the meeting of Alexander with the basilisk. The story places Philip II of Macedon into the centre of events rather than Alexander, and Socrates rather than Aristotle.

In a stand-alone paradigm, outside of the context of *The Romance of Alexander*, the same motif appears in *Commentary A* to the treatise of Pseudo-Albert the Great *De secretis mulierum* (De secretis mulierum 1580; Lemay 1992, 55). *Secreta mulierum* or *De secretis mulierum* (*Of the Secrets of Women*) is a natural philosophical treatise from the late 13th - early 14th century, attributed to Albert the Great (*Val. Lat.* 4456, f. 5r; *Utrecht* 723, f. 51; *Munich CLM* 222917, f. 23v; *Munich CLM* 22300, f. 62; see Thorndike 1923, 880). It was written in Latin and used to circulate in a number of manuscripts, of which are known at least 105 Latin copies. According to the commentator, a lizard or a basilisk can be poisoned or killed when a mirror is placed in front of it, as it reflects the venom that is released from its body and it returns to it. The mirror paradigm would usually emphasize on the monster's destructive forces and the morale that there is no such thing as invincible evil.

Similarly, *Malleus maleficarum* (*Hexenhammer* or *Hammer of the Witches*), an Inquisitorial treatise on the witches dated 15th c., compiled by two Dominican monks, Heinrich Kramer (lat. Henricus Institor) and Jacob Sprenger in 1486 and published the next year, discusses on the basilisk, explaining how it can kill a man and how a man can destroy the basilisk using mirrors (Kramer, Sprenger 1971, 18; Broedel, 2003). It is important that the author explicitly mentions the commentary on *Psalms* 51:8 as the source of these notions, although it would have been much more logical to have used the commentary on *Psalms* 90 (91):13 (ἐπ' ἀσπίδα καὶ βασιλίσκον ἐπιβήσῃ καὶ καταπατήσεις λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα...).

Variations in the story of Alexander and the basilisk sometimes suggest remoteness and abstraction from the paradigm of Rezenion J³. Two texts authored by Pseudo-Aristotle, *De lapidibus* (Rose 1875, 321-455; 364-365; 390; Ruska 1912, 195) and *De proprietatibus elementorum* (Hertz 1905, 119 ff., cf. 192), contained similar stories where appears the figure of a philosopher (Aristotle or Socrates). In the version of *De lapidibus*, Aristotle tells the story, in which however Alexander finds (without his help) means to destroy the snakes by means of a mirror surface, which snakes, looking in it, die of terror (Thorndike 1922, 229-258, see 244-245; Thorndike 1923, 262).

Another line is followed by a group of medieval authors who, instead of a mirror, introduce a huge glass vessel (a glass barrel) (similar to the one with which Alexander descends to the bottom of the sea) as a means of overcoming the deadly impact of basilisks (Fig. 4). Such an episode was included by Brunetto Latini (ca. 1220-1294) into *Li livres dou tresor* (*The Book of the Treasure*: Brunetto Latini 1948; Brunetto Latini 1993, I, 140, p. 109) and Pietro d'Abano (1257-1316) in his treatise *De venenis eorumque remediis*.

Between 1260 and 1266, Brunetto Latini was exiled in France and during his stay there he wrote in French his *Li livres dou tresor* (*The Book of the Treasure*), and this work of his is considered the first encyclopaedia written in any modern European language. Starting from 1268, his work was already circulating in



Fig. 4. Alexander's underwater adventure in a huge glass barrel, *BL Royal MS 15 E vi*, ca. 1445 (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=38953> (24.06.2021))

an Italian translation (*Il Tesoro*), attributed to a Bono Giamboni, whose name appeared in an unfinished Venetian manuscript from the 14th c. *Tesoro* is a compendium of abundant classical material ascending to the Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, which is organized in three books. The basilisk episode appears in Book I dedicated to some practical knowledge such as Biblical and secular history, geography, astronomy and bestiary.

The first part of Brunetto Latini's description of the basilisk repeats in a shortened way the description of the basilisk given by Pliny the Elder (Plinius, *Historia naturalis*, 8.33), followed almost verbatim by both the ancient and medieval natural philosophic treatises and by the medieval *bestiaries* (Fig. 5). However, its exposition includes a distorted version of the episode describing what had happened to Alexander. The Macedonian king had found a large quantity of basilisks between two mountains when he was passing there with his men and many of them died whenever the monsters looked at them. Neither Alexander nor his men could figure out why so many of them would die in such a mysterious way. However later they made a large vessel of glass. When the men were in there



Fig. 5. Basilisk, Bestiary: British Library manuscript Harley 4751 f. 59, ca. 1225-1250 (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=28734> (24.06.2021))

they could see the basilisks, but the basilisks could not see the men. That was the strategy that helped the men to save themselves from the monstrous creatures. However, the main version followed by most part of the medieval authors would suggest one monster only (Goldstaub, Wendriner 1892).

In his treatise *De venenis eorumque remediis* Pietro d'Abano (ca. 1257-1316) repeats the story citing Pseudo-Aristotelian's *De causis proprietatum elementorum* as a source of his, but instead of the steel mirror he introduces a glass barrel, from which the dragons could be watched safely (Petri de Abano 1565?, Cap. 2 *De remediis*, p. 20), as it is in the description given by Brunetto Latini. This "invention" would quite probably have been influenced by the similar apparatus, which was used by Alexander to submerge under water to contemplate nature and behaviour of fish. However, in my opinion, this motif might find its explanation in the context of the basilisk's alchemical being that had penetrated into Latin Europe largely owed to the translations made of the Arabic treatises ascending in turn to some Greek manuscripts. Such suggestions are evident in the Arabic Pseudo-Aristotelian treatises, translated into Latin from the 10th century onwards.

The medieval literary tradition of the episode shows variability and significant deviations from the version of J³, which suggests the functioning of alternative transmissions of the mythology, on the basis of which was constructed the episode with the meeting of Alexander and the basilisk in “the land of twilight”, i.e., beyond the Inhabited World.

3. *Itinerarium Alexandri*. If the episode with the basilisk is analysed in a broader context as an integral symbolic element in the landscape of the Otherworld (ἄλλον κόσμον), its roots might be traced far back in time, to the Late Antiquity at least. The description of Alexander’s travel to “the land of the blessed” and to the *end of the world* is alien to the oldest versions of *The Romance* as it appeared in *Cod. Paris 1711* or A (Mueller (ed.) 1846), as well as in the earlier α- and β-Rezensions of the main text. It is also absent in the oldest group of versions belonging to the translation made by Julius Valerius, as well as in the Latin translation by Archipresbyter Leo (Pfister 1911, 460). This motif appears only in the early medieval ε-Rezension of Pseudo-Callisthenes in chapters 23-44 according to the numbering of C. Mueller, which was dated by the experts as the end of the 6th c. (Bergson 1965, X; Trumpf (ed.) 1974; Merkelbach, Trumpf 1972, 96, 135, 206). The interpolated narrative (composed of many different and unrelated episodes) describes the march undertaken by Alexander the Great after conquering the entire inhabited world and deciding to head to the “Otherworld” to reach the *end of the world*. During his journey across Beyond, he encountered incredible monsters that put him in difficult situations that he would overcome by his wisdom and ingenuity. Some versions would contain the description (Ch. 37 §12) of “the land of twilight”, “into which the sun was scarcely able to penetrate”. It was precisely there that Alexander and his soldiers would come across those horrible monsters, the basilisk being mentioned amongst them.

A very detailed description of a journey across the Beyond, to the end of the world, through the land of twilight, appears in a text that had functioned independently from *The Romance*, viz. *The Life of Saint Macarius of Rome, a servant of God who was found to be near Paradise, by Theophilus, Sergius and Hyginus* (*The Life of Saint Macarius*) (*Vita Sancti Macarii Romani, servi Dei, qui inventus est juxta paradisum, auctoribus Theophilo, Sergio, et Hygino*: Migne (ed.) 1849, 415-426; cf. Vassiliev (ed.) 1893, 137-165; Lozanova 2020, 173-188), which however reflects a number of elements and motifs from the tradition of *The Romance of Alexander*. *The Life of Saint Macarius of Rome* was dated by A. Vassiliev approximately to the 6th or the beginning of the 7th c., but in its core it undoubtedly ascends to an earlier epoch. The paradigmatic framework of the narrative follows a long journey of three monks to the east. They decided to reach the end of the world, imitating Alexander’s expedition, which is quite similar to *The Romance*. An integral motif uniting the two works is the narration about the Arch of Alexander during the Transition to the world of the Beyond (ch. 8), preceded by the description of the sinister monsters, whom the king meets during his journey to the “gloomy valley” or “the land of twilight” in the narrow pass between two steep mountains.

The Latin version of *The Life of Saint Macarius* is known from two manuscripts. One of them, which was published in 1615 in *Vitae Patrum* by Heribert Rosweyde (Rosweyde 1615; Migne (ed.) 1849, 415-426), was not very different from the first of the two Greek texts published by A. Vassiliev (Vassiliev 1893, 137-165),

although it is a much later translation. The earliest preserved Greek manuscript (*Vat. Gr. 824*; Trump 1970, 23-26) was dated to be as late as 11th c., although its sources might be attributed to a much earlier period.

Since the times of F. Pfister (Pfister 1912b, 572; Pfister 1959, 20-21) there has been no doubt that the episode with the Arch of Alexander and the journey Beyond in *The Life of Saint Macarius* ascend to the tradition of *The Romance of Alexander*. The development of the mythological motif and its enrichment with details was further complicated as the time passed by, mainly between 4th and 6th/7th c., which does not mean that the later interpolated elements did not ascend to some earlier original sources unrelated to the tradition, however integrated during the Early Middle Ages in *The Romance of Alexander*.

The motif about the Transition (Διαβά) between the two worlds, which Alexander marked with some noteworthy monuments, among which dominated the figure of the Arch with an inscription, may also be found in several thematically similar manuscripts dated as early as at least the middle of the 4th c. Those had functioned as stand-alone narratives in the context of the genre *itineraria*, which included some compilations of real and/or imaginary journeys where the starting point, the distance and the destination of the route were indicated. While pilgrimage was typical of Christianity from the very beginning thereof, the 4th century marked some intensification of the journeys to the Holy Lands focusing more particularly on some sacred *toposes* such as Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome. This reflects in generating a number of *itineraria* back in those times describing routes and significant (i.e., sacred) *toposes* along those routes. This is the case of two Latin texts published as *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (*Description of the World and Its Peoples*), compiled by an unknown author (Mittag 2006, 338-351) and *Liber iunioris philosophi in quo continetur totius orbis descriptio* (*The Book of the Younger Philosopher in which a description of the whole world is contained*: Klotz 1910, 606-616; Pfister 1911, 458-471), dated in the middle of the 4th c., whose original sources, according to the convincing arguments of Alfred Klotz (Klotz 1910, 606-616; cf. Klotz 1906, 97-127; Wölffin 1904, 573-578) maybe ascend to some Greek examples.

Closely related to them is a Greek text published (based on two manuscripts known at the time) by Alfred Klotz, preserved today in 5 known manuscripts - 4 Greek (British Museum *Ms. Add. 36753*, f. 219-220 = B, dated 1198; *Cod. Dresd.* 52, f. 31-32 = D from the 13th c., but destroyed during World War Two; *Cod. Vat. Graec. 1114*, f. 174-175 in the Vatican Library, dated as the end of the 13th - early 14th c.; and *Cod. Gr. 252*, f. 66-69 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library in Saint Petersburg dated in 1661) and one Georgian. The text entitled Ὀδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδέμ τοῦ παραδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ῥωμαίων is considered the original source of the two Latin versions, deviating from it in a number of details. The narrative follows the topography of the world from east to west, beginning with the Paradise, on the way to which the mystical place of the Transition between the two worlds appears, marked by the compiler as Διαβά. The predominant versions of the episode specify that on his return from the Otherworld, the king erected an Arch with an inscription warning of the troubles awaiting the imprudent (uninitiated), continued to the land of the blessed and took the wrong direction (Lozanova 2020, 173-188).

In his analysis of this part of Alexander the Great's expedition in the Rezension γ of Pseudo-Callisthenes, in chapters 23-44 after the numbering of C. Mueller, I. Friedländer (Friedländer 1910, 161-246; cf. Friedländer 1913) notes that from Chapter 29 begins the interpolation of a different source, the prototype of which can be found in Ὀδοιπορία or in a possible similar Greek *periplus* with a more detailed description of the path Beyond the inhabited world, dating back to the time before the middle of the 4th century. If the oldest α -Rezension of the Pseudo-Callisthenes' literary core of *The Romance of Alexander*, which has survived until today, is dated around the year of 200, we are most likely faced with a later interpolation of a text that functioned independently of it, but ascends to an earlier epoch, not later than the middle of the 4th century, and probably before that. This would hypothetically outline the chronological boundaries and possible transmissions of the episode with the meeting of Alexander the Great and the basilisk as an integral part of the landscape of the Otherworld on the way to "the land of the blessed" and *the end of the world* passing through "the land of twilight", where miracles can happen and fantastic monsters can be met.

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