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978-1-107-63117-5 - The History of Alexander the Great, Being the Syriac Version  
of the Pseudo-Callisthenes

Ernest A. Wallis Budge


Excerpt

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THE HISTORY OF ALEXANDER THE  
SON OF PHILIP KING OF THE  
MACEDONIANS.

BOOK I.

I. Now there used to be Egyptian sages, who were sprung from the families of the gods. They measured the earth, and stood thereon; they put in commotion the waves of the sea; and laid hold of the great Nile by its measure. They calculated the ordering of the stars of heaven. They delivered all these things to the world by the might of invincible words and by the powers of sorcery. Men say then of Naḳṭībôs (Nectanebus)<sup>1</sup> who was the last king of Egypt and was famed for great discoveries, that he was through his perfect knowledge the glory of Egypt, and to him were the creatures of the world subservient by reason of his magic. This king was a marvel, for when suddenly the hosts of the enemy were standing ready at his gate<sup>2</sup>, and wished to come to battle, he used not to trouble his camp, neither did he bring weapons of war for the use of the men, nor polished iron that glittered, nor was it his wont to contrive the stratagems or plans which are necessary for war; but he used to go into his palace and to set a brazen basin in the middle of the hall and to fill it with rain water. He then made small

<sup>1</sup> The  *Necht-néb-f*, or Nectanebus II of the hieroglyphics. Egyptian history is silent as to the end of this king. An *ushabti* figure bearing his name was found at Memphis (Mariette, *Mon. Div.*, p. 32) and hence it has been supposed that he was buried there. Diodorus says (xvi. 49—51) that he fled to Ethiopia. A statue of this king is in the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Or rather, *getting ready against his land*.

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models of ships and men in asphalt<sup>1</sup> and placed them in the basin. And he took in his hand a rod of plane wood<sup>2</sup>, and then uttered those words which he knew, and invoked the angels and Ammon the god of Lybia<sup>3</sup>. Now by this form of sorcery which took place in the basin, he was wont to contrive plans, until those models of ships and men which were in the basin went forth against the enemy and turned them back. In this manner he held constantly by his skill for a great length of time the kingdom of Egypt.

II. After a while, a certain man, a spy from among the guards who were there, came to him and answered and said, "O Nectanebus, while as yet thou hast peace, seek deliverance for thyself, for behold innumerable multitudes of hosts of enemies are making ready and coming against thee, to wit the Tûrâyê (or mountaineers), the Alâni, the Gûbarbêdâyê, the Armenians, the Medes, the Arabs, the Midianites, the people of Adôrbaigân, the Belsâyê, the Âlôsâyê, the Shabrônkâyê, the Alînîkâyê, the Galatians, the Têbarînîkâyê<sup>4</sup>, the people of Gurgân, the Chaldeans, the eaters of fish and of beasts of prey, multitudes without end of the nations from the regions of the East, mighty men, with a vast host, hastening to come to this land of Egypt which is thine. Consider now what is expedient and useful [to be done]." When the spy had spoken after this manner, Nectanebus laughed and said to the scout, "Thou hast done well, and hast acted properly as regards the watch which was entrusted to thee, in that thou hast spied out these things for me; but thou hast spoken timidly and not courageously. For I have observed that host of men which is coming, and they have no strength, although their will is very ready. One little word of wisdom however is able to turn back many, and a man who does good things can overwhelm a multitude of armies in the waves of the

<sup>1</sup> Or *bitumen*, ܩܘܫܐ, in Arabic قَفر and قير. The Greek text has "of wax", ἐκ κηρω (see Müller, p. 2, col. 1). The Ethiopic version has also "wax".

<sup>2</sup> Or rather, *teakwood*, ܡܫܐ, Ar. مساج. The Greek text has "ebony" (see Müller, loc. cit.).

<sup>3</sup> ܠܝܒܝܐ, transcription of the Greek genitive Λιβύης.

<sup>4</sup> Or people of Tabaristân?

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## HIS FATHER NECTANEBUS.

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sea." And when he had spoken these things to the spy, he called him and said to him, "One dog is able to turn back many deer, and one wolf is able to destroy a whole flock of she-goats. Do thou, then, with those numerous horsemen that are under thy orders, go and keep thy watch carefully; for by one word I am able to overwhelm and drown in the waves of the sea this innumerable band of enemies."

III. And Nectanebus went into his palace, and put out all the people, and remained by himself. Then he filled the brazen basin with rain water, made those ships of asphalt spring up<sup>1</sup> in the middle of the house, took the rod of plane wood in his hand, and began to speak those words which were full of terror. And when he had spoken them, he looked into the basin, and saw all the gods of Egypt leading the ships and guarding them. When he saw that Egypt was betrayed by her gods, he left his kingdom and fled. He shaved the hair of his head and his beard, and put on other apparel; then he took as much gold as he was able [to carry] and departed from Egypt, and went by way of Pelusium. Now when he had travelled through a multitude of countries and a number of nations, he came to Pella of the Macedonians. And he put on linen clothing like the Egyptian prophets and astrologers (*lit.*, those who shew the signs of the zodiac), and sat in the midst of the highways, and the people of the land came to ask him questions. In those times he was renowned. And after Nectanebus had gone away from the land of Egypt, all the Egyptians drew near to Hephaestus, the head of the race of the gods, and besought him with entreaty to shew them what had happened to Nectanebus the king of Egypt, and at what place he had arrived. Then Hephaestus promptly sent to them an oracle concerning him by the hands of the priests, saying, "The king of Egypt who has fled, a mighty man and a warrior, but an old man, will after a time bring a new lord, a young man, mightier and more powerful than he, who will kill him and seize his land; and he shall traverse the world, and shall subjugate all the enemies of Egypt to your service." And when the Egyptians had heard this oracle, they forthwith inscribed it with letters (*lit.*, carvings) under the tablet of brass on the stone

<sup>1</sup> The word ܥܘܩܝܢܐ, *he made to grow, or spring up*, does not suit the context well, and is probably corrupt.

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pedestal upon which [the statue of] king Nectanebus stood, that they might see what would be the issue of the oracle.

IV. And Nectanebus was going to and fro openly in Macedonia, and many people came to see him and to ask him questions. He was so renowned that even Olympias<sup>1</sup> the queen desired to enquire of him as to what was about to happen. Now Philip, the husband of Olympias, had gone to war, and she commanded that Nectanebus should come to her. And when he had come and had entered the royal palace, he saw the beautiful countenance of the queen, whose countenance was more beautiful than the moon. He was a man innocent of women, but at the sight of Olympias his mind was excited and his heart burned with love for her. He stretched out his hand, and saluted Olympias, and answered and said to her, "Peace be with thee, O queen of the Macedonians." Now he could not persuade himself to call her "lady," for as yet the royal manner of speech was in his mouth. Olympias answered and said to him, "Peace be with thee, O doer of good things, and knower of everything; come, seat thyself." And when he had sat down, Olympias said to him, "Art thou really an Egyptian? for in thy speech there is no lying." Nectanebus answered and said to her, "Those who have had experience of me speak well [of me]." Olympias said to him, "By what wisdom and knowledge, or by what power, knowest thou to speak correctly what is going to happen?" Nectanebus answered and said to her, "O queen, well dost thou know how to put a question; for the interpreters of dreams are of many kinds, and the knowers of signs, those who understand divination, Chaldeans [or] augurs, and casters of nativities; the Greeks call the signs of the Zodiac 'sorcerers'<sup>2</sup>; and others are counters of the stars. As for me, all these are in my hands, and I myself am an Egyptian prophet, a magus, and a counter of the stars." And while he was saying these and other such like things to her, he was scrutinising her with great earnestness and intentness. Now when she saw in what manner he was looking at and scrutinising her, she answered and said to him, "O sage, whilst thou wert enumerating thy wisdom and skill in these things, why didst thou gaze on me lustfully?"

<sup>1</sup> In the Syriac *Olympidâ*, from the acc. Ὀλυμπιάδα.

<sup>2</sup> This clause seems to have been mistranslated, or to be corrupt.

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## NECTANEBUS AND OLYMPIAS.

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Nectanebus answered and said to her, "I looked at thee carefully for the sake of becoming well acquainted with thee; for there is something which I heard a long time ago, and which I now remember. It was revealed to me of old by my god, who said to me 'In the future thou wilt give augury to a queen, and everything that thou shalt say to her shall really come to pass.'" And when he had thus spoken to her with such like words, she straightway brought out into the midst a beautiful and magnificent table of ivory which belonged to the palace, set with splendid stones and of great value, the qualities of which the mouth of man knows not how to describe, for it was made of acacia wood and gold and silver. Three circles were fitted to it after the manner of belts. Upon the outer belt there was a representation of Zeus with the thirty-six *decani*<sup>1</sup> surrounding him; upon the second the twelve signs of the Zodiac were represented; and upon the third the sun and moon. Then he set the table upon a tripod, and he emptied a small box which was set [with stones] after the manner of the table upon the table, and there were in it [models of] those seven stars that were in the belts, and in that one which was in the middle, which they call in Greek 'the watcher of the hours' (*τὸν ὥροσκόπου*), were set by the crafts of art eight kinds of precious stones; and he arranged them upon the table with the other gems. Thus he completed his representation of the great heavens upon so small a table. He arranged a sun of crystal and a moon of adamant; and Arês, whom they call in Persian *Vahrâm* (بهرام), of a red stone, the colour of blood; Nâbô the scribe, who is called in Persian *Tîr* (تیر), of an emerald; Bêl, who is called in Persian *Hormazd* (هرمزد), of a white stone; Baltî, who is called in Persian *Anâhîd* (آناهید), of

<sup>1</sup> On the top of the table were represented in the inner circle the sun and moon; in the middle circle the twelve signs of the zodiac; and in the outer circle the thirty-six *decani*, three to each sign of the zodiac. Lepsius in his *Chronologie der Aegypter*, p. 71, gives a list of them, and shews which three belong to which sign. He also gives a list of them at pp. 68, 69, from five different sources, with the list of Salmasius and an emended text. See also Brugsch, *Astronomische und astrologische Inschriften*, pp. 137 foll.; and *Description de l'Égypte*, t. iv. pl. 20.

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a sapphire stone of a dark colour, and the horoscope of copper (?), which is called in Persian *Farnôj* (فَرَنُوج)<sup>1</sup>. And after he had set these in order, he said to Olympias, "Tell me, O queen, the year, the month, the day and the hour of thy birth;" and she told him. Then Nectanebus calculated his own nativity and that of Olympias, that he might know if the stars of both of them coincided exactly. And when he saw that they were precisely the same, he said to her, "It is fitting that thou shouldst tell me thy mind, and what thou wishest to ask, and what it is that thou desirest?" She said to him, "[I wish to ask] concerning my husband Philip, for I have heard a rumour that, after he returns from the war, he will divorce me, and will take another wife." Then Nectanebus answered and said to her, "This report about thyself which thou hast mentioned, O queen, is false, in so far as that it will happen now shortly; after a time, however, it will actually be done. But I, being an Egyptian prophet and a magus, am able to help thee in many things, when thou hast need of it in any such matter as this. Now, however, it is granted unto thee—according to what thy nativity which is before me reveals—that a god of the land shall sleep with thee; thou shalt be pregnant by him, and thou shalt bear a son to him, who shall avenge thee upon Philip thy husband for the offence which he has committed against thee." Olympias answered and said to him, "Who is this god who thou sayest will sleep with me?" Nectanebus answered and said to her, "He will have horns on his head, and will be clothed in the rich apparel of Ammon the god of Libya." Olympias said to him, "What is the age of this god, and what is his appearance, and the form of his figure?" Then Nectanebus answered, "He is of middle age, and his form and appearance are thus; upon

<sup>1</sup> Possibly the modern Persian <sup>بُرِنُوج</sup>, *burinj*, or <sup>پِرِنُوج</sup>, *piring*. The

Persian word <sup>بُرِنُوج</sup> is used in modern Syriac under the form of <sup>ܒܪܝܢܝܟܐ</sup>, and the American missionaries use it to translate <sup>ܒܪܝܢܝܟܐ</sup>, Heb. <sup>בְּרִינִיךָ</sup>, in their version of the Bible (e.g. Gen. iv. 22; Ps. cvii. 16; Dan. x. 6), and the History of the Jews published by them in their monthly journal, <sup>ܐܘܨܬܘܪܐ ܕܝܘܗܘܕܐ</sup>. See the number for <sup>ܒܪܝܢܝܟܐ</sup> 1887, p. 44, col. 2, line 34.

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## HIS CONCEPTION.

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each side of his head he has the like of ram's horns. Do thou, however, O queen, prepare thyself to sleep with him; but first of all in a dream thou wilt see this god who is going to sleep with thee." Olympias answered and said to him, "When?" Nectanebus said to her, "It will not be far off, but to-day; therefore I counsel thee to prepare thyself magnificently like a queen, for in this very night he will unite with thee in thy dream." Olympias said to him, "If it be that I see any such thing, I will not only hold thee to be a prophet, but I will worship thee as if thou wert a god."

V. Now when they had spoken these words with one another and conversed, Nectanebus went forth from the royal palace, and went out swiftly and speedily to the plain. Then he hastened to the desert, and gathered those roots which men use for dreams, and he pounded and pressed them all; and in a dream of the night Nectanebus by his magic sent to Olympias what she desired, so that in her dream she thought that she was actually sleeping with the god Ammon, and that he was embracing her, and that of his own free will he abode with her, and that when he had done with her he said to her, "O woman, behold, thy womb will avenge thee."

VI. And when Olympias awoke from her sleep, great terror laid hold of her because of this dream; and she sent and called Nectanebus to her. And when he had come into her presence, she commanded that everyone should go forth from her. Then Olympias answered and said to Nectanebus, "Behold I have this day seen a dream according to what thou didst say unto me, and the god Ammon sleeping with me; but I wish that when I am awake, he should sleep with me continually. This I require of thee, and thou art able to supply this need. I wonder now if I shall obtain this through thee." Nectanebus answered, "Nothing is more feeble than I, but inasmuch as thou desirest this, that thou mightest see him when thou art waking, it is right for me to consider, because a dream is one thing, but the thing that thou requirest is another. Now, I have thought that since thou hast this desire, bid them construct a place for me close by thy bedchamber, that, if thou art terrified when the god comes to thee, I who know thee may strengthen thee; for this god when he comes to thee will be in



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the form of a serpent and will creep and crawl on the ground, sending forth loud hisses. Then he will return, and his horns will be in the form of those of a ram; thus will he be. Then he will return again, and will appear in the form of the hero Hêraklês; and he will return a third time, and appear in the form of Dionysus, decorated and ornamented with ringlets; and he will return yet again, coming back and appearing in my own form." When Olympias heard these things, she said to him, "O prophet, thou hast spoken well; abide now in one of the bedchambers within the palace where I sleep, and if it happens that, being awake, I see such things and know that I am pregnant by the race of the gods, I will honour thee and will hold thee to be the father of the child." Then Nectanebus answered and said to her, "Behold, I have told thee beforehand concerning the snake; now therefore fear him not, but trust thyself the more to him, and be fearless."

VII. When therefore all these things happened as Nectanebus had said, the queen was not terrified at all at the change of the forms of the gods, but she feared when she slept with the form of the serpent. Now when he had done with her, he again stood over her, and set his mouth upon her mouth, and said to her, "An unconquerable seed, and one which shall not be subject to any man, flows into this womb." And when Nectanebus had said these words, he went to his own bedchamber; and afterwards at this time he slept with her in the form of Ammon and of Hêraklês and of Dionysus. And when she was great with child, she lifted up her eyes and saw Nectanebus, and she answered and said to him, "O prophet, what shall I do when Philip my husband returns from war and finds me pregnant?" Nectanebus answered and said to her, "Fear not, O queen, this Ammon of the three-fold form is able to help thee in every way, and can shew Philip in a dream [what has happened], that thou mayest be without blame and without care." So for a long time Olympias was beguiled by these words, and played the harlot with a man, thinking he was a god. Then Nectanebus the Egyptian king brought a hawk and muttered over it his charms, and made it fly away with a small quantity of a drug, and that night it shewed Philip a dream. In his dream it shewed him a god, whose



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form was fair, of middle age, with horns upon his head like the god Ammon, who was sleeping with Olympias. And when he had done with her, he said to her, "Behold thou hast in thy womb my seed, and thou shalt bear me a child who will avenge thee and Philip his father." And in the same dream he saw as if a river like the Nile flowed and went forth from the couch on which they were lying; and [he saw] the figure of a man sewing linen. He saw too the womb of Olympias sealed with a gold ring, with a gem on which was engraved the head of a lion holding the sun in his claws, or in his paws, and there was a whip beside him, and a hawk which overshadowed him with its wings<sup>1</sup>.

VIII. Now when Philip had seen these appearances in his dream, he rose up early in the morning, and sent and brought into his presence the wise men the interpreters of dreams, and related before them the dream which he had seen. Then they answered and said to him, "O king Philip, as thou hast seen in the dream, so shall it be; behold, Olympias is pregnant, but she is pregnant by a god. Forasmuch as thou hast seen her womb sealed, surely it is pregnant; for an empty vessel is not sealed, but only one that is full. And whereas thou hast seen the form of a man sewing linen, this seed is Egyptian; for they do not sew linen in any other place but Egypt. And his fortune is not little, but great and mighty and glorious and renowned, because [the womb] was sealed with a seal of gold, and there is nothing more valued than gold, for even the gods are worshipped for the sake of gold. And the lion which held the sun in his claws, and the whip which was [engraved] on the ring, [shew that] he will go to the east, and will walk like a lion in his might; and he will subdue all countries and cities with his whip. And as for the god whom thou didst see, of middle age and with horns on his head, this is Ammon the god of Libya, and the seed is his." Now when the learned in dreams had given the explanation in this manner, Philip believed of a certainty that Olympias was pregnant by a god.

IX. And when [Philip] had conquered, he returned from the war, and came to his own house and greeted Olympias.

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, ch. 2, says that Philip dreamt that he sealed up the queen's womb with a seal, the impression of which was a lion.

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Then she was ashamed; and when he saw that she was agitated through fear of him, he answered and said to her, "To whom didst thou deliver thyself to be defiled, O Olympias? He has not, however, defiled thee, for thou shalt bear a son by him, and shalt name him the son of Philip; for I have seen in a dream everything that has happened to thee, and therefore I leave thee in peace. Kings are able to contend with everything, but to contend with the gods they are not able." And when he had said these things to her, he heartened her and Olympias regained her selfpossession.

X. Now it fell out one day, because Nectanebus was within the royal palace, that he heard Philip say to Olympias, "Thou art an erring woman, for thou art not with child by a god, but by one of the human race." And while they were thus speaking together, Nectanebus by his sorcery changed his own form and assumed that of a huge serpent, and he hissed with a loud voice in the midst of the hall where Philip was standing, gliding in a terrible manner, and hissing as he went, so that all who heard quaked and trembled at his voice. And when Olympias saw her lover, she lay down upon her couch, while the monster reared himself up over her, and suddenly he straightened himself out. Then Olympias spread out her hands and embraced his neck, whereupon the serpent opened his mouth and placed his lips upon her lips, kissing her repeatedly just as a man kisses his friend out of love. And while it was doing thus, every one in the palace and Philip too saw it. Philip answered and said to Olympias, "O great queen Olympias, and all the rest of you who stand before me, I saw such a serpent as this when I was fighting with my enemies at yon time, and also the mind of many of the enemy was humbled and made weak thereby. But as for me, from this time forward I will glorify and praise myself because men will call me father of one sprung from a god."

XI. Now after some days, when Philip was sitting in his summerhouse by the side of the royal reservoir of water, and all kinds of birds were pecking grain before and around him, he was reading in the book of the philosophers. Suddenly a halfbred hen which was being reared in the house happened to sit in Philip's lap. Now she was but a small [bird], and when she had sat in his lap, she laid an egg thereon. When Philip saw this