

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN  
ARISTOTLE AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT  
THE EARLIEST PIECE OF THE *ADAB*-LITERATURE

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Discovering and describing several Arabic manuscripts of Aristotle's works reserved in Istanbul R. Walzer was the first person to call attention to a hitherto unknown Arabic epistolary *roman* (Walzer 1934; 1962:137/141). This *roman* consists of a correspondence between Aristotle and Alexander the Great beginning with Alexander's birth and ending with his conquest of *Hurāsān*. In some of the letters referring to historical events Aristotle admonishes the young king. In others he addresses his teachings of the practical and theoretical philosophy to Alexander. The series of letters is chronologically ordered, so reading the letters one can get acquainted with Alexander's life story on the one hand, and the full system of the popular philosophy of the late Antiquity on the other.

Later on M. Grignaschi devoted two articles to the text. In these articles he proved its Greek origin by pointing out Greek motives in it and analysed its impact on later Arabic authors (Grignaschi 1965-66 & 1967). After the examination of bibliographies as well as internal and external evidences M. Grignaschi came to the conclusion that the original Greek novel was translated by his secretary *Sālim abū l-ʿAlāʾ* under the reign of *Hišām ibn ʿAbdalmalik* (724-743). M. Grignaschi collected all Syriac and Arabic works which contain parallel passages and belong to the same Arabic literary tradition as the epistolary *roman* does, so he largely elaborated on how the Arabic version of the novel became embedded in subsequent Arabic literature.

Now I would like to show the reverse of the medal by disclosing how this epistolary *roman* fits into the Greek literary tradition. This question is interesting considering what M. Grignaschi said: the Arabic text of the *roman* was the first piece of the Arabic *adab*-literature.

Every scholar who deals with Arabic literature is well aware of the fact that the Arabic *adab*-literature developed under Greek influence. In spite of this common knowledge nobody was able to find any fact to support this assumption. The mere existence of a Greek epistolary *roman* in an Arabic version at the beginning of the *adab*-literature is an unexpected and convincing proof that verifies the widely accepted supposition of Greek influence.

It is a surprising fact that the first Arabic prose work is an epistolary *roman*. It is even more striking that the letters contained in this *roman* are not similar to those ascribed to *Muḥammad* or the rightly guided Caliphs. The letters exchanged by Aris-

totle and Alexander reflect the classical practice and theory of writing epistles known to us from a later period of Classical Antiquity.

Speaking of the ancient epistolary tradition a distinction should be made between different kinds of letters. There were royal (Herzog 1930; Schubart 1920), official, private and literary letters (Koskenniemi 1956:48). After some passing examination into the letters contained in the Arabic epistolary *roman* the conclusion can be drawn that they belong to the group of literary letters.

In the classical tradition literary letters are called epistles (Luck 1961). In the group of epistles the letters in the Arabic Alexander-*roman* belong to the subgroup of teaching letters (*Lehrbriefe*) (Sykutris 1931:202-203). Teaching letters represented a special type of epistles (Thraede 1970:9, 24-25, 67, 155). This type of epistle can be characterised by the following features: there are two historical persons in correspondence. One of them occupies a position which enables him to address his teachings to the other. There must be an intimate relationship between them, which is quite often a master-pupil connection. In the Greek tradition there were also fictitious letters of the kind, e.g. the ones written by Isokrates to Plato, or the ones written by Aristippus to his daughter Arete, etc. (Thraede 1970:204; Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* II, 84; Sykutris 1931:202-203).

Against this classical background the letters of the Arabic epistolary *roman* can easily be identified as mainly belonging to the literary genre of teaching epistles and showing the characteristic features of the Greek teaching letters. Both Aristotle and Alexander were well known living persons, so, all the letters are set against concrete historical situations. Referring to the historical events of the period Aristotle, who was Alexander's teacher, addresses his advice, warnings and teachings to Alexander in line with his position.

As it might have emerged, the work has no roots in the Arabic literary tradition. All its characteristics can be understood only if one knows the rules and theory of the Greek epistolography. It is that area of literary scholarship that provides the clues necessary to define the exact position of the letters in that literature<sup>1</sup>. The *roman* can be regarded as the first appearance in Arabic of a typical Greek work of art that satisfies all the requirements that Greek traditions set.

In the introductory section to his critical edition of Khion's letters I. Düring wrote the following words: "Sykutris has a chapter on the Romance in Letters (*Briefroman*), which might induce the reader to believe that we possess a whole literature of this kind. Strictly speaking Chion's letters are the only example worthy of being called a novel in letters. The letters of Themistocles and Hippocrates are at the most attempts in this direction" (Düring 1951:23).

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<sup>1</sup> The rules of the Greek epistolography are treated in Marius Victor's manual of rhetorics.

Khion's letters to his parents form a series which is ordered chronologically. They tell the story how Khion came from his native city to Athens where he studied with Plato. Getting acquainted with his philosophy, especially with his moral principles and the political developments of his homeland, he decides to return to his city and kill its tyrant.

It is well known from history that Herakleia did have a tyrant who was killed. This is the concrete historical situation which served as a background necessary to a fictitious novel in letters. Plato and the Platonic philosophy represent the moral teaching, which is a constituent part of the short epistolary novel.

The above references to Themistocles' and Hippocrates' letters, Khion's epistolary novel show how long the way from the creation of a theory of letters until the first attempt to write a novel in letters was.

Koskenniemi pointed out that the theory of letters was set up by Peripatetic philosophers. The collection of letters written by Aristotle was the first one published in Greece (Sykutris 1931:197). His letters were held in high esteem by his pupils and they deduced the rules of letter-writing from them. The person who created a theory of letters in this way was called Artemon (Koskenniemi 1956:26). This explains why Aristotle was the most popular author of fictitious letters in the Greek epistolary tradition.

In addition to these facts it should be noted that the first short fictitious letter written by Aristotle to Alexander appeared in book 20 of Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*. Comparing the Arabic epistolary *roman* under investigation with these short letters one is likely to come to the conclusion that the voluminous correspondence between the two prominent persons must have been the result of long development which took place in the following centuries.

Summing up the observations already made the following presumptions seem reasonably justified: From the first draft of a Greek theory of epistolography and the first fictitious letters the history of the development of the Greek epistolary literature can be followed up to the rise of Khion's epistolary novel. The Arabic epistolary *roman* known under the title *Aḥwāl al-ḥukamā' fī ayyām al-Iskandar* must be the latest, longest and most advanced representant of this tradition. There is no trace of any similar literary tradition in the Arabic world.

Even a short survey of these facts shows convincingly that this Greek tradition was the natural framework the Arabic work under investigation can easily be fitted into. At the same it must be noted that one of the most interesting pieces of Greek literature, the original Greek version of the longest and best developed version of the epistolary novel has got lost. Therefore the Arabic *roman* *Aḥwāl al-ḥukamā' fī ayyām al-Iskandar* can be regarded as an important source of any knowledge of the late Greek literature.

After defining the work as a Greek epistolary novel containing teaching epistles mainly, it is time to turn to its language. With regard to its stylistic aspects it seems

reasonable to proceed on the assumption that the Arabic translation reflects the style of the original Greek version. The Greek theory of epistolography says that a letter must be characterised by *philophronesis* (kind treatment, courtesy) (Thraede 1970:24-25). From this friendly feeling appertaining to any epistle follows a widely accepted definition of letters: *amicorum colloquia absentium*. This definition goes back to Artemon who said that a letter is like the other half of a conversation<sup>2</sup>. This definition implies that the style of a letter must be close to the tone of conversation<sup>3</sup>. As Philostratus Lemnius said: the language of a letter must be the common language of everyday conversations, but rather close to the Attic dialect, or to the Attic dialect which is rather close to the common language of everyday conversation (Proclus, *De forma epistolari* 7). Iulius Victor, the only classical author who devoted a special section in his *Ars rhetorica* to the question of letters, says that a letter must be written in short and clear sentences<sup>4</sup>.

See a small section of the text in question.

الْفَرَسُ أَصْحَابُ فَالٍ فَاسْتَعْمِلَهُ فَإِنَّهُ بَابٌ مِنْ تَحْرِيكِ الْبَحْتِ.  
 إِذَا أُرْسِلَتْ إِلَيْهِمْ رَسُولًا فَلَا تُرْسَلُهُ سَلِيمَ الْعَيْنِ الْيَمْنَى فَإِنَّهُمْ يَتَطَيَّرُونَ بِهِ ذَلِكَ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّهَا  
 لِلشَّمْسِ، وَإِذَا دَخَلَ رَسُولُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ فَلْيَأْخُذْ مَا أَمَكْنَهُ وَلَا يَدْفَعْ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا وَأَمْرُهُ أَنْ يَحْطُطَ رَأْسَهُ  
 وَلَا يُشِيرَ بِيَدَيْهِ إِلَيْهِمْ وَإِذَا قَعَدَ فَلَا يَقْعُدْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ فِي الْمَرَّةِ الْأُولَى يَغْتَمُونَ بِذَلِكَ وَيَتَّقُونَكَ  
 بِسَبَبِهِ وَلِيُرَدَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَسُولُكَ فِي كُلِّ أَمْرٍ يَقُولُونَ لَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَكُونَ أَمْرًا بَيْنَنَا وَإِنْ سَأَلُوهُ عَنْ خَاصَّةِ  
 الْمَلِكِ قَالُوا هُوَ كَمَا يُحِبُّ صَدِيقَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ عَلَى خِلَافِ مَا تُرِيدُ أَعْدَاؤُهُ وَإِذَا انصَرَفَ فَلْيَكْثِرْ  
 التَّلَفُتَ إِلَى بِلَادِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ يَكْرَهُونَ ذَلِكَ وَلِيَتَنَاوَلَ مِنْ دَاخِلِ مَدِينَتِهِمْ وَمَنْ خَارِجِ الْمَدِينَةِ وَمَنْ  
 أَنْهَارَهَا شَيْئًا فَإِنَّهُمْ يَتَطَيَّرُونَ بِهِ. وَاكْتَبَ إِلَى دَارِ فِي أَوَّلِ مَا تَكْتَبُ مَا رَسَمْتَ لَكَ.

#### نَسْخَةُ الْكِتَابِ إِلَى دَارِ

من الاسكندر المتمسك بالدين الراغب في نصرة الحق النافي سطوة الجور الحامي عن المروءة  
 القاصد لسبيل أسلاف الروم وأهل الفضل من الفرس إلى دارا كبير أهل الفرس المتملك عليهم  
 بغير استحقاق ومن قد جعل دينه ورياسة خادما لمملكه وفكره خادما لبطنه وعقله  
 خادما لحواسه سلام على من رغب في نصرة الحق وإثبات السنة التي لا عيب فيها.

<sup>2</sup> Koskenniemi 1956:35-42. Demetrios, *De elocutione* 13: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐπιστολικὸς χαρακτὴρ δεῖται ἰσχυρότητος, καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ λέξομεν. Ἀρτέμων μὲν οὖν ὁ τὰς Ἀριστοτέλους ἀναγράψας ἐπιστολικὸς φησὶν ὅτι δεῖ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ διάλογόν τε γράφειν καὶ ἐπιστολάς· εἶναι γὰρ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου.

<sup>3</sup> Proclus, *De forma epistolari* 6: ἐπιστολὴ μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ὁμιλία τις ἐγγράμματος ἀπόντος πρὸς ἀπόντα γνωμένη καὶ χρειώδη σκοπὸν ἐκπληροῦσα, ἐρεῖ δὲ τις ἐν αὐτῇ ἅπερ ἂν παρών τις πρὸς παρόντα.

<sup>4</sup> Iulius Victor, *Ars rhetorica* 105: "... brevitatis observanda: ipsarum quoque sententiarum ne diu circumferatur, quod Cato ait, ambitio, sed ita recidantur, ut nunquam verbi aliquid deesse videatur: Lucem vero epistulis praefergere oportet, nisi cum consulto [consilio] clandestinae litterae fiant ..." etc.

Examining this excerpt everyone can see that it consists of short, well-defined and clearly structured sentences which are not customary in Arabic prose works. The Arabic translation reflects the original Indo-European syntax.

After the first short sentence (الفَرَسُ أَصْحَابُ فَالِ فَاسْتَعْمِلْهُ فَإِنَّهُ بَابٌ مِنْ تَحْرِيكِ) comes another (from إليها للشمس to أرسلت البخت). The next unit is: إِذَا دَخَلَ رَسُولُكَ أَمْرُهُ أَنْ يَحْطَ رَأْسَهُ). In the following section (ولا يدفع إليهم شيئاً ولا يشير بيديه إليهم) there is a short sentence preceding a longer one: إِذَا قَعَدَ فَلَا يَفْعُدُ بِأَمْرِهِمْ فِي الْمَرَّةِ الْأُولَى يَغْتَمُونَ بِذَلِكَ وَيَتَّقُونَكَ بِسَبَبِهِ). The next few sentences must be rendering compound Greek ones: وَلَيُرَدُّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَسُولُكَ فِي كُلِّ أَمْرٍ يَقُولُونَ لَا إِلَّا أَنْ وَإِنْ سَأَلُوهُ عَنِ خَاصَّةِ الْمَلِكِ قَالَ هُوَ كَمَا يَحِبُّ صَدِيقَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ عَلَى خِلاَفٍ وَيَكُونَ أَمْرُ بَيْنِنَا مَا تُرِيدُ أَعْدَاؤُهُ. As the excerpted passage proves, the Arabic translation is transparent enough to recall the short Greek sentences which fully comply with the well-known requirements of the classical theorists.

The words used in the passage are common words from everyday Arabic conversation. The vocabulary of the Qur'ān or that of the early Arabic poetry is not to be found in the text. Expressions like حط رأسه seem more attached to the simple colloquial register. In the Qur'ān the meaning of the word is rather to put down sins, i.e. remission, or profession of faith (Penrice 1971:36). In the expression وَيَتَّقُونَكَ وَيَتَّقُونَكَ بِسَبَبِهِ the word بِسَبَبِهِ means "therefore", while in the Qur'ān the words فَلْيَمْدِدْ بِسَبَبِ السَّمَاءِ mean "let him make his way to heaven by means of a rope" (Q 22.16).

In one passage the following words can be read: وَقَدْ قَالَ قَاتِلُونَ إِنْ الْعَدْلَ تَبِعَ السُّلْطَانَ. In this Arabic sentence (p. 75) the word تَبِعَ is the means the translator expressed a genitive with. This usage is utterly foreign to the high literary style, as it belongs to the colloquial Arabic register specific to Syria.

It is enough to quote these items, if one purports to show how often the usage in the Arabic epistolary novel coincides with our modern everyday usage and how different it is from the usage in the Qur'ān, although the epistolary *roman* and the Qur'ān are century apart, and the *roman* and our epoch are separated by approximately 13 centuries.

Proclus's handbook of the epistolary theory says that the proper beginning of a letter is  $\delta\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\ \tau\omega\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\ \chi\alpha\lambda\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$  (*hic illi salutem*) (Proclus, *De forma epistolari* 8). In practice this theoretical requirement can be realised in different ways. Cicero e.g. begins his letters with similar dedications: Cicero Memmio S. (Cicero, *Epistularum* XIII, ii-iii); M. Cicero Q. Valerio Q. F. Orcae procos., etc. salutem (Cicero, *Epistularum* XIII, vi).

The first sentence of the letter quoted above in Arabic follows exactly the same pattern. It contains the name of the person who sends the letter (Alexander) and the name of the addressee (Dareios). In this literary letter the simple form was extended by a lot of attributes which serve the purpose of characterizing the two persons. This beginning is deeply rooted in the Greek epistolary theory and is different from the Arabic practice, where letters begin with greetings. In a Greek or Latin letter

greetings are at the end. In our case the text of a letter to Alexander written by Aristotle ends with the words *كُنْ صَالِحًا وَإِخْوَانَكْ أَجْمَعِينَ* (p. 86/7). This phrase corresponds to the Greek *ἔρρωσο* (the Latin “*vale*”), which is a regular complimentary close of classical letters.

The passages selected indicate that the Arabic work examined follows the Greek stylistic rules of epistolography.

Turning to the passage quoted above some good advices can be found describing the proper behaviour in Dareios' court. Reading the text Alexander learns what his legates should do and what they should avoid. The Greek handbooks of epistolography contain a classification of letters. In this classification a well-known type is the *suasorius* (*συμβουλευτικός*) letter (Demetrios, *Typi epistulares* 3). In *suasorius* letters “*adhortamur ad aliquid aut debortamur ab aliquo*”, exactly in the same way as it happens in the passage quoted above.

There is a letter with the following address and beginning:

تهنئة كتبها أرسطو إلى الاسكندر بفتح سقوثية  
لست أستحسن ترك المدح لمن استحقه بل أرى فعل ذلك واجبا فكما أن الذين يحضرون  
مشاهد الصراع والمصاولة والمزاولة إذا رأوا أمراء قد أجاد نعروا اهتزازا لما كان منه وهزأ  
له كذلك ينبغي أن نفعل بمن أدرك شيئا من الفضائل في المدح له والثناء عليه ولذلك ما أتكلف  
مدحك وأنشر فضائلك وما أكثر من يسارع إلى وصفك وتزويق الكلام في أمرك يومنا هذا.

In this letter Aristotle congratulates the king after his conquest of Scythia. This letter belongs to the group of the *gratulatorius* (*συγχαριστικός*) letters in which “*de magnis aut inopinatis, quae alicui evenerunt, congratulantes scribimus*” (Demetrios, *Typi epistulares* 5).

These items prove quite convincingly that the letters were written by the unknown author with regard to the Greek classification of letters. All items in the Arabic epistolary *roman* under investigation correspond exactly to a special type among the categories of letters in the classification.

This is a matter which needs some explanation. Knowing the late Antique literature it is easy to find a satisfactory answer. In the Pseudo-Aristotelian letters of this novel one can find a lot of Homeric quotations. All these quotations are Pseudo-Homeric verses. Referring to the opinion of his colleague at the university in Trieste, Professor Corbatto, M. Grignaschi says that it was common practice in all schools of rhetoric to compose verses in Homer's style (Grignaschi 1967:225). The Pseudo-Homeric quotations of the text indicate that the unknown author's way of writing was closely related to that of the rhetoric schools.

It is well-known that letters were also written in these rhetoric schools. All letters were composed with the knowledge of a certain historical epoch in view of certain historical events and names. All letters of the novel under examination reflect this practice of the late Antique rhetoric schools. The close correspondence between the letters of the novel and the different types of letters treated of in the epistolary theory can be explained by the fact that the author's aim was to compose letters

according to the rules set up by the rhetors who developed and taught the epistolary theory in the schools of rhetoric.

In this connection one of the most interesting parts of the novel is the first letter written by Aristotle to Philippos. In this letter Aristotle wants to persuade Philippos to give his son philosophical education. In the first part of the letter he refutes the views of those who suggest in their teachings that philosophy brings only temporary advantages and proves how important it is to get acquainted with it. Later he refutes the arguments of those who say that Alexander as a future king may not be able to become a master of philosophy, which he does not even need to know.

This letter, which refutes false views and defends the right ones as far as the benefits of a philosophical education are concerned, is a typical *protreptikos* (*adhortatio*).

It is well known from the history of philosophy that Aristotle as a young man wrote an *adhortatio*, a *Protreptikos* himself. Unfortunately that work has got lost. A *protreptikos* meant the beginning of a philosophical curriculum, a general introduction that refuted the false views on philosophy listing and proving its real merits. No wonder that it served as model for all similar works later<sup>5</sup>.

A *Protreptikos* traditionally consisted of two parts. The first one was known as λόγος ἀπελεγκτικός (refutation), the second as λόγος ἐνδεικτικός<sup>6</sup>. The first letter contains precisely those two parts and its ultimate aim is incitation to study philosophy. One can regard it as a *protreptikos*, an introduction to philosophy leading up to the subsequent letters, which contain the whole system of practical and theoretical philosophy. At the same time this letter corresponds to the *παραινητική*, hortatory group in the classification of letters "qua hortamur aliquem incitantes ipsum ad petendum aut etiam fugiendum aliquid".

To cut a long discussion short: the Arabic text of the *Aḥwāl al-ḥukamā' fī ayyām al-Iskandar* indicates that its author composed his work according to the standards of the Greek theory of literature.

The Arabs are not very likely to have got acquainted with the Greek theory of literature, but they had a popular book which followed that theory and served as an example for the Arab writers of future generations.

It is perhaps not too early to raise some questions about later works written in Arabic. One of these questions may be the following: why did Ibn Ṭufayl write his philosophical work in the form of a novel? Did he follow the Pseudo-Aristotelian practice?

<sup>5</sup> Hartlich 1888:236: *Atque primus inter Exhortationum scriptores offertur nobis Aristoteles, philosophorum princeps, qui hac quoque in re quasi exemplar exstitit, quod omnes qui sequebantur imitati sunt.*

<sup>6</sup> Hartlich 1888:293: *Atque duae partes Hortensii insignes sunt, altera Hortensii contra philosophiam disputatio, altera exhortatio ad philosophiam. ... etc.*

I hope that the anonymous *Aḥwāl al-ḥukamā' fī ayyām al-Iskandar* will help us to answer these questions and some more of the kind.

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