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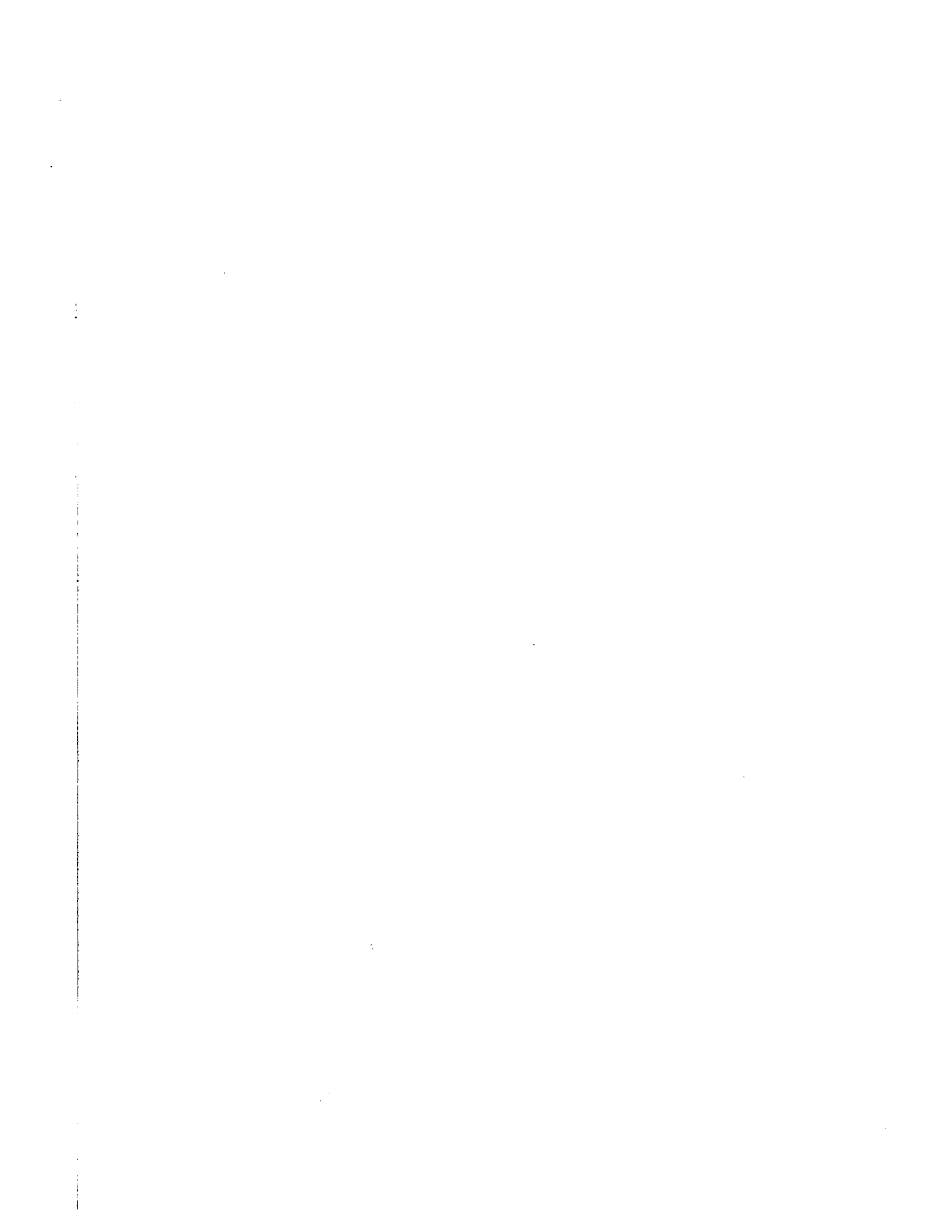
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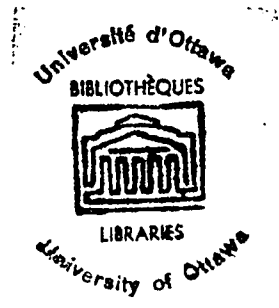
THREE ANGLO-SAXON PROSE PASSAGES:

A TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

By Donald D. Davidson

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of Master of Arts.

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Donald D. Davidson was born December 4th, 1939, in Dalhousie, New Brunswick. He received the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Ottawa, 1962.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTENTS OF THE NOWELL CODEX

The MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv barely escaped destruction in the fire of 1731 at Ashburnam house. The outer sheets were scorched at the tops and sides, and thus became subject to crumbling. This process, along with a great deal of handling, forced the authorities of the British Museum to prevent further losses by having the book rebound in such a way as to protect it with strips of thin transparent paper. In spite of these precautions some of the manuscript has been lost.

This manuscript is made up of two codices, bound together in Elizabethan or early Stuart times.¹ The first codex, called the Southwick codex, since its first known owner was St. Mary's priory in Southwick, Hampshire, contains ninety vellum leaves. The second codex is longer than the first by twenty-six pages and is commonly dated "circa" 1000. The second codex is called the Nowell codex because its first known owner, the antiquary Laurence Nowell, left a notation on the first page of the MS and the date, 1563..

The first codex was written in two main hands in the twelfth century and contains four articles: Flowers from St. Augustine's Soliloquies, translated by King Alfred;

Gospel of Nicodemus; Dialogue between Solomon and Saturn; and a fragment of eleven lines concerning martyrs. The second codex, also in two hands, consists of five articles. In the hand of the first scribe are: the fragmentary Life of St. Christopher, starting where Laurence Nowell signed and dated the manuscript; Wonders of the East; Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle; and the first 1939 lines of Beowulf. In the hand of the second scribe are the remaining lines of Beowulf and Judith.

Recently, attention has been focused on the contents of the Nowell codex with the publication of a facsimile edition, edited by Kemp Malone². The contents of the codex, as a result of that publication, are available for more extensive study. Certain general conclusions are now accepted concerning the manuscript: that there was no such collection until the second half of the tenth century; that each of the articles is a copy of an earlier work; that the MS is probably the work of monastic scribes; that the manuscript collection was designed to preserve marvellous stories in verse and prose. It is with the last point that this thesis is concerned, particularly the three Anglo-Saxon prose passages which precede Beowulf in the codex.³

It is in the context of the scholarly interest in the Nowell codex (manifested chiefly by the recent facsimile

edition), and the popularity of Anglo-Saxon literature in translation for the scholar attempting a study of the whole picture, that this thesis is projected. The student of Anglo-Saxon, who is already familiar with the contents of Beowulf, will find related material in the three prose passages which justify their presence beside the heroic poem. Furthermore, the work contained herein argues, from the point of view of content alone, that the codex reflects more than just a haphazard collection, but one designed to preserve a part of literature that delighted the Anglo-Saxon Christian.

The present translation is the result of working with Stanley Rypins' authoritative edition of the three prose passages⁵, checked by constant reference to the Latin of MS. Tiberius B v and to the facsimile edition. It is hoped that this endeavour will shed light on some of the contents of the Nowell codex. These translations will be found in the order that they are contained in the codex.

In our examination of the matter of the three prose passages we will discover the similarity of content of the articles in the codex and some of the problems connected with the translation of the manuscript. The contents of the Life of St. Christopher, Wonders of the East, and the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle are seen as

contributing notably to an understanding of the atmosphere in which the epic, Beowulf, was conceived. In these passages one finds not only the heroic suffering of a saint, and the extensive wanderings of a king, but a familiarity with (even a fondness for) monsters, fabulous riches, and other kinds of "mirabilia".

NOTES

1 For the dating of the codex see Kemp Malone, "The Nowell Codex", Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, Vol. 12, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1963, p. 11 ff.

2 Kemp Malone, "The Nowell Codex", Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, Vol. 12, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1963, 119 p. and photostat.

3 No attempt is made to bring Judith into the same design. It has not been proven why Judith is in the collection, but it may be that Judith, like Beowulf, was considered to be a saviour of her country, in a time of Danish invasion when English heroes were needed for inspiration.

4 Stanley Rypins, Three Old English Prose Texts, London, Oxford University Press, 1924, 1-148 p.

5 Rypins reverses the order of the pieces, placing the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle, at the beginning, because he considers it to be (rightly enough) the most significant of the three works.

CHAPTER II

THE MATTER OF THE THREE PROSE PASSAGES

The student of Anglo-Saxon is familiar with the heroic trials of Beowulf. Confronted with obstacles of sufficient magnitude to intimidate any ordinary mortal, Beowulf bravely struggled and triumphed. His were not the usual tests of the fortitude of man in war. Beowulf's triumphs are significant because his conflict involved foes of another order than the order of men. He swam in the high seas for five nights and was attacked there by sea monsters, whales and walruses, all of which he overcame. He met, hand to hand, with Grendel, a member of the monstrous race of giants who were the offspring of Cain. He challenged the mother of Grendel in her own lair, at the bottom of a monster-filled pool. He finally died from the venomous fangs of a fire-breathing dragon, but not before he had succeeded in killing the monster. All of Beowulf's adversaries were as powerful and deadly as they were unreal. In fact, it is apparent that the fantastic quality of such foes makes Beowulf a hero worth hearing or reading about. Whatever the questions these stories of man against monster give rise to, they cannot diminish the fact that they were the popular stuff of Anglo-Saxon writing.

The three prose pieces found in the Nowell codex, along with Beowulf, substantiate the interpretation that the Anglo-Saxon was impressed by the marvellous, by the stories of great men against fantastic (in the true sense of the word) odds. The Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle, recited in the words attributed to Alexander (after a brief introduction by the author concerning Alexander and his travels in India), is the tale of the travels of a proud leader of men. Of the three prose pieces it most resembles Beowulf because it involves a hero, his travels and his amazing encounters. Although Alexander does not die at the conclusion of his story, he does hear the prophecy of his death and so the general comparison is almost complete. We must also remember, in this general comparison, the prophecy of the son of Weohstan at the end of Beowulf. He predicts that the raven will tell the eagle of the exploits of Beowulf, and he concludes his prophecy, saying that the dead warrior-king will go to God and live with him forever. The quality of pathos found in Beowulf¹ is echoed in the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle.

The followers of Beowulf mourn:

Sad in spirits
they with mind-care bewail'd
their liege lord's death; (ll. 6288-6290).

And Alexander's men weep when they hear that their leader has not long to live.

Alexander qualifies the account of his marvellous adventures by first cautioning Aristotle that the things he writes about are difficult to believe. He apologizes for any appearance of falsehood his letter might contain, adding simply that he writes from memory. This short introduction represents the only extended instance, in both the prose pieces and Beowulf, of some kind of objectivity. The rest of the letter, the Wonders of the East and the Life of St. Christopher are almost completely unqualified in their representation of the marvellous, although in Alexander's Letter, Beowulf, and the Wonders of the East, interjections are found indicating amazement at what is seen and heard.

It is clear from the beginning that the author of the Letter of Alexander to Aristotle is primarily interested in the wonderful tales of Alexander. Famous battles and kings are mentioned, but not elaborated upon. Historical material is present only to hold up the spare structure of the narrative. The letter begins with the conquering of Darius, king of Persia, at the Ganges River. Alexander ignores the actual battle, claiming that he has told Aristotle about it in an earlier letter. Instead, Alexander proceeds to describe the wonderful, diverse and abundant riches of the defeated king. The palace of Darius is pictured with its golden columns, gold-covered walls, and golden vines bearing crystals and emeralds as fruit. Such

material is as popular, almost, as monsters and marvels. One is reminded of Heorot with its golden tapestries, of the constant reference in Beowulf to treasures and riches, including jewelled saddles, a golden banner, and a rich treasure-horde guarded by a fire-breathing dragon. Jewels and precious stones are mentioned three times in the Wonders of the East: the first mention is of a golden vineyard with vines one hundred and fifty feet long bearing precious stones; the second account of gems is included in a note on the greatest and highest mountain in the world near which men live who have the reputation of being honest and who have a great number of precious gems in their possession; the third mention of jewels appears as another marvel: trees which bear precious stones as fruit.

Gold, the precious currency which abounds in Beowulf, is popular with Alexander. Even when his army is severely burdened with requisitioned golden treasure, Alexander will not allow it to be left behind. He solves the dilemma of the extra bulk by having the gold objects melted down and the army's weapons plated with it. Alexander tells Aristotle that this made a glorious spectacle:

And this was the glorious spectacle of my troops such that they surpassed in beauty all kings of the earth. I, myself, gazed on them and saw my prosperity and glory and the strength of my youth and the happiness of my life; then was I somewhat

joyful and lifted up in my heart. ²

The great value of gold is delightfully acknowledged in one anecdote (and one of the few with any kind of plot) in the Wonders of the East. The story is about ants as big as dogs and with feet like grasshoppers, who dig gold from the earth at night. This gold is desired by the men who live across the river from the ants. When the men wish to collect the rich ore, they approach the river and tether their colts (camels) on one side while crossing with their stallions and their mares. They pack the gold, which the ants have dug up, on their mares and leave the stallions behind. The men then escape quickly across the river because the mares are anxious to return to the foals which were left behind. The ants, discovering their loss, busy themselves with the stallions. This story represents the only mention of gold in the Wonders of the East, and there is no mention whatever of marvellous riches in the Life of St. Christopher fragment.

Alexander does not tarry long at the palace of Darius, being anxious to prevent the escape of King Porrus. ³ In spite of warnings against deadly snakes, in spite of the great burden of the gold, in spite of the affliction of terrible thirst, the army proceeds. Soon they encounter a shy people living on an island. When some of the men attempt to swim over to the island, they are devoured by a

multitude of fierce water-beasts,⁴ an incident which so enraged Alexander that he had the guides that led him into such perils fed to the beasts. Carnivorous water-beasts are found in Beowulf, in the account of Beowulf's swimming match with Breca, and in the account of Beowulf's descent to Grendel's lair. Such "fish" are not mentioned in either the Wonders of the East or the Life of St. Christopher.

With the execution of the guides, the account of these strange peoples is dropped and the army continues on its way. Further trials, however, await them. On the way to fresh water they are attacked by bears, tigers, leopards and wolves. After they camp they are invaded by snakes and scorpions which have come to drink. These are many-coloured beasts with scales that shine like gold. The struggle continues for two hours⁵ until the beasts depart. But rest is shortlived, for soon more terrible snakes, some with two heads, some with three, crawling strangely on their backs and slitting the ground in front of them, invade the camp. These snakes breathe fire and kill many of Alexander's men. Following these monsters are white lions as big as bulls, huge leopards, tigers, bloodthirsty bats as large as pigeons, three-horned beasts with horses' heads, poisonous clouds, mice as large as foxes, and finally owls, which prove to be the least harmful of all their afflictions. The Wonders of the East also provides an

extensive list of equally strange and formidable beasts. There are rams the size of oxen, hens which burn the body of the man who touches them, two-headed animals with eight feet and the eyes of a Gorgon, which set fire to themselves if captured; snakes with two heads and luminous eyes; asses with horns as great as oxen's; snakes with rams' horns; half-dogs with horses' manes, boars' tusks, dogs' heads, and flaming breath; ants as big as dogs; beasts covered with sheep's wool with the ears of an ass and the feet of a bird; dragons, one hundred and fifty feet long; beautiful animals, called "catinos". The ember-vomiting dragon of Beowulf finds himself in familiar company among these marvellous, and often malicious, beasts. The fire-breathing snakes which harassed and killed many of Alexander's men might well be the cousins of the monster who dealt Beowulf his fatal blow, and the one hundred and fifty-foot dragons found in the Wonders of the East must also be members of the same family. These monsters are variations on animal themes, but such are not the only types which inhabit the three prose pieces and Beowulf. Alexander, too, encountered quasi-human beasts in his travels, but these were fewer in number than those found in the Wonders of the East. He meets hairy men and women who are nine feet tall and wear no clothes. These people are called "Ictifafonas" by the Indians. And immediately after that adventure, the Greek

army is attacked by "half-dogs", the monstrosities which appear in the Wonders of the East and of which, some legends ago, St. Christopher is one. But monsters do not stop Alexander; they only make him more wary and anxious to move.

The plague of the monsters mentioned earlier initiated another move by Alexander and his vast army. They came to a land called "Patriacen"⁶ where they are generously welcomed, but they did not stay for long, being anxious to apprehend Porrus and his army.

Soon after the pleasant diversion offered by the land of Patriacen, Alexander came upon the camp of King Porrus, and he recounts in the letter a story in which he disguises himself as a shepherd and enters Porrus' camp to speak with the king. There is no corresponding incident for this tale in the history of Alexander the Great, but the story is not new. A similar adventure enriches the legend of Alexander the Great of England. Alfred is said to have stolen into the opposing Danish camp disguised as a strolling minstrel and to have remained there several days until he had satisfied himself that he knew what the Danish plans were. It is curious that this story is found in Anglo-Saxon lore and not in the Alexander history. Seemingly, the story was popular and the author of the Letter interpolated it in the marvellous story of Alexander because of this popularity.

Alexander's narrative continues and the great battle of the Hydaspes is ignored in favour of Alexander's subsequent friendship with Porrus. Expressing the wish to see more wonderful things, Alexander moves his army on again around the western parts of India. His wish is fulfilled. Besides meeting the "Ictifafonas" and the "half-dogs", the progress of the Greeks is further inhibited by snow and cold and deadly clouds. But through all this Alexander and his men persist until they reach Ethiopia.

Along with other descriptions of strange men and women, the Wonders of the East contains one which mentions Alexander. There seems to be some confusion in meaning, but the marvellous qualities of the women described are undeniable. They are thirteen feet tall. They have tusks like boars' They have hair down to their heels and oxen tails on their loins. They are the colour of marble, and they have camels' feet and asses' teeth. The author of the Wonders of the East writes that Alexander destroyed these creatures because they were shameless and contemptible in body. Unfortunately the account ends on this point. Still, the Wonders of the East abounds in creatures which almost make the creator of Grendel a monster-maker of very pedestrian tastes. One will discover in the Wonders of the East quasi-human creatures ranging in height from six to fifteen feet. They appear in a variety of colours, shapes

and temperaments, and often have some of the accoutrements of birds and beasts. A brief description of three of these creatures will give the reader an idea of their fascinating appeal to the Anglo-Saxon. Huge men are described whose feet and legs are twelve feet long (how this length is distributed is not explained) and who are called "hostes" because they devour any man who touches them. Quasi-divine men are described as being in the shape of soothsayers from their heads to their navels⁷ while the rest of their body is like that of a man. These creatures deceive men with pleasant words spoken in whatever language is necessary for communication. After this deception the monsters proceed to devour their human prey, but they sit and weep over the head of the man they have just eaten. (Grendel's mother, remember, does not devour the head of Aeschere, but leaves it behind on the shore of the pool in which she lives. Evidently the Anglo-Saxons held the notion that the human head was quite unpalatable.) There are still other men who have eyes which shine very brightly in the night. The size, ferocity and cunning of these creatures can be related to Grendel. Notable also in such a comparison are the strange eyes of Grendel from which a horrid light shines. And Grendel must surely have been a large creature because he is able to carry off the corpses of thirty thanes. Furthermore, Grendel is able to devour a

man in a few seconds. Grendel and his mother are pictured as having the shape of giant humans. These similarities seem to point to something more than coincidence. At least two conclusions seem inevitable: 1.) monsters are not unconventional characters; 2.) monsters are popular in Anglo-Saxon literature.

An examination of the fragmentary Life of St. Christopher reveals another approach to giants, for here St. Christopher is the giant able to perform miracles and withstand extreme torture. St. Christopher is described as being twelve fathoms tall. The fragmentary account contained in the Nowell codex begins at the torture of St. Christopher. He is being punished because he refuses to sacrifice to pagan gods. He is beaten with iron rods; three men sit on his head⁸; he is roasted over a fire; he is shot at with arrows from dawn to evening. St. Christopher scorns the first two punishments, claiming they are sweet to him. The roasting has little effect. The iron platform upon which he was bound melted like wax, and his body became so red that King Dagnus was amazed. Not one of the arrows aimed at St. Christopher actually touched him. It is true that the wonders of St. Christopher are a result of the intervention of God, but the saint himself is a marvellous being in that he is brave in the face of grave danger and because he is a creature of such great stature.

The presence, therefore, of a holy saint among monsters, some of whom are the descendants of the enemies of God, is not altogether strange, for St. Christopher is no ordinary man. Alexander and Beowulf are wonder-workers; Grendel, the dragon, and the other marvellous conglomerations are monsters. St. Christopher combines the two: he is both a monster and a worker of miracles. His place in this manuscript goes unquestioned. The compiler of the manuscript has not been inconsistent. Furthermore, King Dagnus calls St. Christopher the "savagest of wild beasts", and Kenneth Sisam has shown⁹ that in other sources of material on St. Christopher, the great man is a member of the race of dog-headed cannibals ("healfhundigas") which are found in Alexander's Letter and in Wonders of the East.

Even St. Christopher's prayers to God for a boon concerning his future is not unique in this manuscript. The communication between a divine order and the human order is found also in Alexander's Letter. In Ethiopia, Alexander came upon a strange cave of the gods where no man dared enter without offerings, and expect to live, and where the gods might speak to mortals. At the end of Alexander's Letter, the great Macedonian writes to Aristotle about the holy trees of the sun and the moon which have the powers of prophecy. A bishop, three hundred years old, leads Alexander to the holy, prophetic trees, and Alexander

learns that he will never return home. He is to die in this strange part of the world in less than two years. A reference to a bishop is itself not unique, for there is, in the Wonders of the East, a story of a bishop who lives in a temple built in the time of Belial and Jove. This is a very gentle bishop whose only sustenance is oysters. These can be seen as examples of primitivism, for both bishops live a humble life. An inter-weaving of Christian and pagan elements did not disturb the compiler of the manuscript.

Alexander concludes his letter to Aristotle with the prophecy of his death, which he received from the trees of the sun and the moon. He expresses the wish that his great history may endure and become a model for all men of all time. In this way any sort of plot is incomplete. Perhaps the letter ends where it does because the marvels were exhausted, the memory and the imagination of the original author having been scraped clean of the fabulous. Or perhaps the original compiler of the manuscript stopped because the wonders stopped. The reason for this ending is not significant; the wonders are. The Wonders of the East has no plot whatsoever and is best described as a catalogue of marvels. The fragmentary Life of St. Christopher is like Beowulf insofar as it pursues a plot to the death of the hero and concludes on a note of praise for

the protagonist.

The obvious overlapping of material in the three prose pieces and Beowulf must certainly argue for two principal conclusions: 1.) the manuscript was not casually compiled, but was a calculated procedure intent on gathering a quantity of fabulous material under one cover; and 2.) the Anglo-Saxon reader or listener was not perplexed by, or confused about, the monsters in his life. The monsters could be the enemies of God or the most beneficent of men met by the world conqueror, Alexander. Whatever they were, they were cherished for their own sake. In the three prose pieces, and Beowulf, one can find a preoccupation with gold, jewels and treasure, with heroes in fantastic struggles; and with Christian concepts and horrid monsters. The heroic poem Beowulf has long prevented this manuscript from being easily dismissed. The manuscript is, as Sisam puts it, a "Liber de diversis monstris, anglice"¹⁰, but more than this, it must be clear that a certain corollary is imperative: that the Anglo-Saxon took obvious delight in fabulous material. In terms of the marvellous, Beowulf and the three prose pieces found in the same manuscript stand as a single unit, and they must certainly be considered as an indication of the prevalence of this literary motif. The above pieces, along with Apollonius of Tyre and many a saint's legend, show an appetite for Oriental wonders and

adventures, an appetite which the crusades were destined to whet.

NOTES

- 1 All line references from Vincent F. Hopper, ed. "Beowulf" in the Benjamin Thorpe Transcription, Great Neck, U.S.A., Barron's Educational Series, 1962, xxii-230 p.
- 2 See translation below, p. 91.
- 3 Such accounts, although they are not pursued, do follow fairly closely the chronological order as recorded in historical accounts of Alexander in the East.
- 4 The word "niceras" appears in Beowulf (line 1151) in the accusative plural. In the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle it appears as "nicres" in the genitive singular, and as "nicoras" or "nicres" in the nominative plural. It is probably most appropriate to translate this word simply as 'sea-monster', but I suggest 'hippopotamus' best catches the spirit of an Eastern monster in the Letter. See footnote 13 below, p. 95.
- 5 It should be mentioned that the author of the Letter made some attempt to account for time lapses by indicating, in hours, the durations of time the army was bothered by adversities, or the amount of time consumed in marching. The months (May, July and August) also appear, probably for the sake of verisimilitude. Darius is defeated in May, and the Caspian sea is reached in August. These months correspond generally with the actual historical dates.
- 6 The name "Patriacen" appears three times in the Letter, while a similar construction, "Fasiacen", appears a total of five times. "Patriacen" appears in the Latin as "bactriacem", while "Fasiacen" is the same in the Latin. No English word exists for "Patriacen", but "Fasiacen" may become "Phassis", a river in Media. See footnote 3 below, p. 94.
- 7 It is difficult to understand what is implied by describing creatures as half soothsayer and half human. The facsimile edition shows the spelling to be correct as "fri(or e)fteras". There is no translation for such a word. There are two illustrations beside this passage: one depicts

an eagle's head on a man's body and he holds a detached human limb; and the other illustration shows a human creature with very long hair. Only the eagle-like head marks either of these creatures as unhuman. In the final balance, we can say that Rypins' conjecture of "frihteras", or 'soothsayer' is adequate.

8

This strange occurrence is traceable to a scribal error. Sisam notes that there is a difference between the line as it is in the Nowell codex and the complete Passion of St. Christopher, printed in the Acta Sanctorum. The translator seems to have omitted the words "fyrenne helm" (fiery helmets) after "heafde".

9

Kenneth Sisam, Studies in the History of Old English Literature, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, (London, 1953), p. 66.

10

Sisam, p. 96.

CHAPTER III

A MONSTER SAINT

The prose Life of St. Christopher is a fragmentary piece which begins the Nowell codex of the MS. Vitellius A xv. Of the three prose texts in the codex, it is the one most damaged by fire. The facsimile edition of the manuscript reveals that the first page of this tract was not only charred, but is considerably soiled. The fragment has never been translated into English, and, in fact, has only been edited three times. It was first printed in 1888, in Englische Studien¹, by G. Herzfeld and then erroneously rectified (according to Rypins, the author of the most recent edition) by Einkenel², in 1893.

Sisam notes that a characteristic of spelling³ indicates that the Life of St. Christopher comes from a distinct manuscript, and that the collection of the prose pieces with it has not been copied often since the Christopher fragment was added to the collection. Although the piece shows Oriental markings (St. Christopher, himself, is a monster) it would seem that the immediate ancestors of the Anglo-Saxon version were Latin. In Acta Sanctorum there is a sermon on Christopher which is similar to the one in the Nowell codex, but differences argue that this may not be the exact text used by the translator. It is

enough to remember that the Nowell codex was copied about the year 1000 which is not long after the flowering of the renaissance of religion which began in England at the beginning of the tenth century. And Aelfric's ambitious Lives of the Saints appeared in 996.

Sisam points out that the free handling of the Latin at the end ignores the mention of hail which removes it from the original which might have been composed in a vine-growing country such as Italy. In the translation Christopher offers protection against poverty, fire and all kinds of sickness.

St. Christopher is not a common saint, although he does appear in the Acta Sanctorum. He does not appear in Aelfric's Lives of the Saints, perhaps because his life was already available in English. St. Christopher did not really become popular until the end of the tenth century. The first Anglo-Saxon version was probably made soon after the middle of the tenth century, and St. Christopher's popularity may be attributed to the vernacular version.

Almost nothing is known of St. Christopher's life, but his story is as romantic as (indeed, very similar to) St. George's. Christopher's original name was Offerus. He was the son of a heathen king who bound himself to a mighty leader and to the devil, but found both lacking in courage. Offerus later encountered a hermit who instructed

him in the Faith and baptized him. His name was changed to Christopher (a combination of Christ and Offerus), and he accepted the dangerous task of carrying people across a raging stream. Once he carried a child across the stream who became heavier and heavier and who informed Christopher that he was the Creator and the Redeemer. When they reached the other side, the child told Christopher to fix his staff in the ground whereupon the staff became a fruit-bearing palm. This miracle converted many, but angered King Dagnus of Samos in Lycia. Christopher was imprisoned, and, after many cruel torments, beheaded. Most of the other legends of St. Christopher describe him as being a member of the race of dog-headed cannibals. In the Old English Martyrology he is described as follows: "(...) he had the head of a dog, and his locks were especially long, and his eyes gleamed as bright as the morning star, and his teeth were as sharp as the tusks of a boar."⁴ The version in the Nowell codex includes Christopher's torments and death. The name Dagnus is also mentioned as the king who is himself converted by St. Christopher.

The modern English translation included here is an attempt at an accurate but readable translation. As in the other translations, it is felt that sense is all important; therefore, where there are passages which are confusing, the most acceptable rendering will be found in the

text and an appropriate note will be appended.

Little more need be said about the piece save for the significance of its presence in the codex. As popular as St. Christopher was as a saint, it seems more reasonable that he is in this collection by virtue of his marvellous stature and appearance, for, as noted above, he is a member of the "healfhundigas", which are favourite Eastern marvels found in both Alexander's Letter and the Wonders of the East.

NOTES

- 1 G. Herzfeld, "Bruchstück Einer AE. Legende",
Englische Studien, Vol. xiii, 1888, pp. 142-145.
- 2 Einenkel, "Das Altenglische Cristoforus-Fragment",
Anglia, Vol. xvii, 1895, pp. 110-122.
- 3 Sisam, op. cit., p. 69.
- 4 G. Herzfeld, "Old English Martyrology", EETS,
1900, p. 66 and note.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRADITION OF THE WONDERS OF THE EAST

The chief interest of the Wonders of the East is its description of monsters. Such creations - some of them half human and half animal - play a part in the literature and thought of all peoples at all times. Monsters have figured in mythologies and fairy-tales, superstitions and prognostications. The matter of monsters is a heritage going as far into the past as early Greek mythology. The Greeks imagined that these creatures lived at a great distance in the East, particularly India. The "will to live" of the mythical monsters was such that they did not die with the geographical discoveries and a better knowledge of the East, but endured and became pseudo-rational to inhabit the dreams of western man.

The earliest report on India is found in the history of Herodotus, but his knowledge was based often on hearsay. A special treatise was written on India in the fourth century B. C. by Ktesias of Knidos. Owing to his book, India became renowned as the land of marvels.

After the end of the campaigns of Alexander the Great, Megasthenes presented a reliable account of the matter of India - ranging from geography to history and mythology - but he relates in the account the stories of

Indian marvels, of fabulous races and animals. He tells of serpents with wings like bats, of winged scorpions of great size; he repeats from Herodotus the story of the gold-digging ants; he describes wild men without mouths who live on the smell of roasted flesh and the perfumes of fruits and flowers. There are people who live for a thousand years; there are people who have no nostrils, with the upper part of their mouth protruding far over the lower lip; and there are others who have dogs' ears and a single eye in the forehead. Although some of these conceptions are based on mythology and superstition, the majority of fabulous stories were of literary origin, borrowed from Indian epics.

The Indians believed that all barbarous tribes had long ears, and the story that people exist who sleep in their ears was still current in Hindustan in the nineteenth century. A strange tale of gold-digging ants has been discovered in the Sanskrit.

There are two main sources of Medieval lore of monsters. One is Pliny's Historia Naturalis, and the other is Solinus' Collectanea rerum memorabilium. St. Augustine's authority was accepted throughout the middle ages concerning the reconciliation of these marvels with Christian doctrines. He argues first that they might, simply, not exist, but he goes on to make the point that if these races do really

exist, then they are descendants of Adam, and they were perhaps created by God so that we might not think the monstrous births of our own species are the failures of His wisdom.

1

Rudolf Wittkower¹ examines the transmission of the pictorial tradition and notes that from about the twelfth century onwards the marvels penetrated into the field of religious art. The Bestiaries find their source, in part, in the marvels. The marvels even had roles to play in certain allegories: the pygmies stood for humility and the giant for pride, while the "cynocephali", or "half-dogs", symbolized quarrelsome persons.

By the fourth century, the pagan dread of the monster as a foreboding of evil had replaced the Augustinian view of them. Wittkower points out:

We are faced with the curious paradox that the superstitious Middle Ages pleaded in a broad-minded spirit for the monsters as belonging to God's inexplicable plan of the world, while the 'enlightened' period of humanism returned to Varro's 'contra naturam' and regarded them as creations of God's wrath to foreshadow extraordinary events.²

As knowledge of the world and its contents increased, there resulted, by the seventeenth century, a rivalry between classical authority and exact observation. One theory advanced was that monsters did really exist, but they were created by men. Even Sir Walter Raleigh reported a nation of headless people living in the jungle of the

Amazon. And monsters of all sorts of shapes, sizes and powers crop up in travel literature throughout the ages. So great was the classical and mythical influence of these wonders that men of a stern scientific bent could not deny their imaginations and so modified their descriptions of objective discoveries to fit old visions.

The monster, then, has his place in the literature of all times. Today we do not try to prove an origin of such lore, but monsters are still created to become Yahoos, or Frankensteins, or Jeckyls and Hydes. They are loved because they are strange, exotic, wierd and imaginative. They are the symbols of our fearful dreams.

The primary Latin source is the pretended Letter of Fermes to the Emperor Hadrian, but two other texts are related to the MS. Tiberius B v, one of the two Latin versions known to be extant³. One is the pretended Epistola Premonis to the Emperor Trajan which has been lost, and the second is the Liber Monstrorum, known to students of Beowulf for its reference to Hygelac, king of the Geats, who is described there as being a 'monster' in stature. The Liber Monstrorum contains the section on the 'lertices'⁴ which the Letter of Fermes and Epistola Premonis omit.

The Letter of Fermes is found in a ninth-century manuscript, while the Liber Monstrorum is tentatively assigned to the eighth century. The Tiberius B v manuscript

dates at about the beginning of the eleventh century. Because of omissions in the Anglo-Saxon version of sections found in each of the above, it is impossible to date the Anglo-Saxon passage with any accuracy. It is best to suggest that the Anglo-Saxon versions (one in Tiberius B v and the other in Vitellius A xv) were written not far from the year 1000.

The Wonders of the East, translated below, has been twice edited. Cockayne⁵ included it in his Narratiunculae, printing both the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin texts from MS. Tiberius B v. The second edition, by Fritz Knappe, published in Berlin in 1906, has the Vitellius and Tiberius texts printed in parallel, with the Tiberius Latin version at the foot of the page.

The sources of the text are varied, but a tradition is clear. A comparison of this piece with the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle shows that the author was acquainted with that tradition. Parallels may also be found in the works of Ktesias, Megasthenes, St. Isidore, Arrian, Diodoro, Herodotus, Pliny, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, and Aulus Gellius.

As in Alexander's Letter, the items present in the Wonders of the East are unreliable. The author of the Wonders made a dubious attempt at verisimilitude by presenting measures of distances, but he is rarely constant in the

ratios between the two units used; "leones" and "stadio". His only consistency here is that the "leones" is longer than the "stadio".

The Wonders of the East is the only tract in MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv which has illustrations. These illustrations have a tradition of their own, and, in brief, they are pictures of the monsters described in the texts. Comparing the facsimiles of the illuminations⁶, we can easily see that those found in the Nowell codex are cruder than those found in Tiberius B v. For example, the picture of the "cynocephali"⁷ ("half-dogs") is surrounded by a rough, free-hand border in the Vitellius version, while the same beast is pictured clearly in a larger, straight frame in the Tiberius manuscript. The artist of the Tiberius "half-dog" pictured the beast as nude, and the drawing of the limbs is in perfect proportion. On the other hand, the Vitellius "half-dog" is fully clothed, his legs being represented almost as two inverted cones, disappearing at the top into his clothes, and at the bottom into very long and disproportionately large shoes. Clarity of detail and smoothness of line is witnessed in the Tiberius picture, and not in the Vitellius.

Further examination of these illustrations is not to our purpose here. The fact that they are present in the text we are examining indicates little, save for the

conclusions that the scribe saw some need for fidelity and/or liked some of the drawings (there are twenty-nine in the manuscript, compared to thirty-eight in Tiberius), and that he was an amateur artist. But, if these are the results of a monastic scribe, it may have been that he was told to draw what he saw, an idea which may point to another source of the Wonders of the East. Whatever the reason for their presence, the pictures contribute very little to our understanding of the text. Certainly, if the copy was made around the tenth century, the illustrations stand small beside the beautifully illuminated Lindisfarne Gospels of two centuries before. A scholar of manuscript illuminations might find these pictures an interesting area for study. The text which surrounds them is our concern.

The Wonders of the East is more a catalogue than a geography. The reader finds it difficult to establish a route followed by the author. One switches from wonder to wonder with barely a mention of direction, position or place. The author's chief interest is in an account of the fabulous, and no one is expected to look for truth in it. This miraculous method of presentation is found again in the St. Christopher fragment, where plot is sacrificed to wonder. Beowulf lays the greatest claim to plot, but it should be noted that Grendel is accepted without concern for his reality. These, in short, are monsters presented purely

for monsters' sake.

CHAPTER V

THE GENEALOGY OF THE LETTER OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT TO ARISTOTLE

The wide dissemination of the legends of Alexander the Great justifies the extensive attention they have received. It is not my purpose to present here a definitive catalogue of these legends, but to offer a perspective in order that the reader can place the unique Anglo-Saxon letter in an accredited literary tradition. Footnotes will indicate more comprehensive sources for those interested, specifically, in the succession of the Alexander legends.

The primary source for the study of Alexander material in Europe is a romanticized biography of Alexander called the "Pseudo-Callisthenes". Callisthenes was a nephew and pupil of Aristotle who distinguished himself as a writer and speaker, and who accompanied the Greek army with the express purpose of recording and glorifying the great deeds of his sovereign. The title, "Pseudo-Callisthenes", derives from the erroneous attribution to Callisthenes (by Isaac Casaubon) as the author of a Greek manuscript. The accepted theory on the sources and transmission of the "Pseudo-Callisthenes" is that the Alexander-Romance derives from two main sources brought together by a Greco-Egyptian writing in Alexandria about A.D. 300. The second of these sources is more relevant here because it

consists in a collection of imaginary letters, two of which are long letters of Alexander to Aristotle and Olympias describing the marvels of India.¹

It is improbable that any extant Greek text represents the Alexander story as it was first written, but the Julius Valerius translation is considered an important figure in any reconstruction of original sources.² The work of Julius Valerius was, perhaps, one of the sources of the Itinerarium Alexandri, a work of unknown authorship which was composed about 340-345 A.D., and through this version the peoples of the north-west and west of Europe became acquainted with the fabulous history of Alexander. Various other Latin translations are known to exist but they are not important to this survey. What is important is the fact that there took place a wide dissemination of the Greek work in Latin translations.

There are sixty-seven known renditions of the Epistola Alexandri manuscripts containing Latin versions of the letter of Alexander, few of which are of an earlier date than the Anglo-Saxon version, and none of which faithfully correspond in content to the Anglo-Saxon letter. This fact argues for both the popularity of this marvellous work, and for the conclusion that the letter was extracted either from Pseudo-Callisthenes or from Julius Valerius, and has circulated as a separate work. If it circulated

as a separate work in Latin, then an acceptable conclusion is that it will exist independently in Anglo-Saxon, assuming the Anglo-Saxon is a translation from Latin.

Knowledge of the East (Beowulf can be said to be from the West) came to England from Rome. Furthermore, the Latin version included in Rypins' edition of the letter agrees favourably with the Anglo-Saxon in content³. Deviations from the Latin can be attributed to scribal errors or invention, for the Beowulf scribe may well have been working from an Anglo-Saxon version as well as a Latin manuscript. It can be assumed, therefore, that the Anglo-Saxon version as found in the Nowell codex, being but a copy of a translation, is at least twice removed from the Latin original, but nonetheless derives from a Latin source⁴.

The legend of Alexander the Great does not stop in the tenth century. Perhaps it can be said that the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle inaugurated one of the two cycles that make up the "matter of Rome" in English literature, for the story of Alexander became popular in both England and France in the early Middle Ages. The comprehensive Middle English romance, The Lyfe of Alisaunder (c. 1325), is partly devoted to the travels of Alexander in India, with the fabulous sights of the region familiar to us from the Anglo-Saxon account.

The Anglo-Saxon version of the Letter of Alexander to Aristotle, found in MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv, has been thrice edited, though never before translated into modern English. The two earlier editions, one by T. Oswald Cockayne in 1861, and another by W. M. Baskervill⁵ in 1881,⁶ are of little importance because of inadequacies. The translation provided here is a result of work with Rypins' edition and, where there was any confusion in the text, with the recent facsimile edition of the Nowell codex, photographed directly from the manuscript in the British Museum. The material found herein represents an attempt at both accurate and meaningful translation. Where it is impossible to achieve both literal faithfulness and sense, the former will be sacrificed and so indicated in the footnotes.

NOTES

1 Reinhold Merkelbach, "Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans", Zetemata, Vol. ix, 1944. Article referred to in George Cary, The Medieval Alexander, (D. J. A. Ross, ed.), Cambridge University Press, p. 323.

2 E. A. W. Budge (Pseudo-Callisthenes, Cambridge University Press, 1889) notes the significance (Cf. p. lix) of the Julius Valerius translation as a prime source of Alexander material in western Europe. Furthermore, the original is longer than the Epitome of the ninth century and may have been a copy of the Pseudo-Callisthenes.

3 It is perhaps valuable to quote Rypins' arguments for his inclusion of the Latin MS. 82, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in his edition:

Among the available texts, MS. 82 of C.C.C. Oxford seems most worthy of reproduction; first, because its text is superior to that of other MSS., and illustrates the Anglo-Saxon version as adequately as any known variant; secondly, because the unique intermediate position of the Corpus codex between the Julius Valerius translation and the "Epitome" makes it peculiarly important; and, thirdly, because this valuable text has heretofore not been in print. (p. xxxvii).

4 Kenneth Sisam (Studies in the History of Old English Literature, 1953) points out (Cf. pp. 83-88) some interesting adjustments in translation made by the Anglo-Saxon scribe. Sisam concludes that uncouthness in Latin translation points to an early dating of the work and to a spirit of translation according well with the period of King Alfred's wars.

5 W. M. Baskervill, "Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem", Anglia, Vol. iv, 1881, pp. 139-167.

6 Cf. Rypins, op. cit., pp. xxix-xxx. The principal criticism that Rypins makes is that Baskervill never examined the manuscript for himself.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT THE TRANSLATIONS

The commentary on the three prose passages would not be complete without a brief word concerning the punctuation and paragraph structure of the translations which follow here. The function of punctuation in modern English is to aid the sense in writing or printing. It is with this role in mind that the present translations were punctuated and arranged into paragraphs.

The rules the Anglo-Saxon scribe followed in choosing a punctuation mark are far from clear, and paragraph structuring does not exist, except inconsistently (and without indentation) in the Wonders of the East where the scribe used capital letters to indicate a major division in the text. He was no doubt following the Latin divisions before him.

Throughout the codex, the punctum, or dot, is used to mark separation. Usually the scribe left such separations to take care of themselves, or provided for them in his spacing, but now and then he marked them with points. The separations do not have the same significance as punctuation in modern English. Two possibilities can be mentioned to explain these separations: 1.) the scribe wished to separate, or set off, one word or word-group from another,

or from its context, by a visible sign; 2.) the separations and points mark rests taken by the scribe as he copied from the originals. The former seems more likely because there is a certain consistency in the setting-off of material.

A title, or foreign words, may be set off, as "bis-
ceop" in 129v¹20 and "dentes tyrannum" in 125v17. Numerical expressions are often set off such as "prio hund monna" in 127r5. Often the point is used to mark the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next.

Instead of one dot there may be two in a row or two in a column. There are instances of a triangle of dots or a row of three dots slantingly aligned. A mark like the semicolon also appears, and the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle ends with two dots and a comma. A 7-like figure marks the end of the Life of St. Christopher.

It is obvious that to strictly follow the punctuation found in the manuscript, and to make sense of the texts at the same time, would be well nigh impossible. Where passages were punctuated to end one passage and begin another, or to set off sentences which were clear in their meaning as punctuated, I followed that punctuation. For the most part, though, making sense in modern English prohibits following the Anglo-Saxon punctuation.

Paragraph structure in the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle and in the Life of St. Christopher is placed according to the rules of modern English. Paragraphs in the Wonders of the East tract, are separated according to the Latin divisions of Tiberius B v found in Rypins' edition of the three prose texts.

This, then, is the punctuation and structure the reader will find. Specific difficulties which occurred in the translation, and which relate to punctuation problems, will be noted in the footnotes to the translations.

NOTES

1 The foliation referred to here is that of Kemp Malone's in the facsimile edition of the Nowell codex. The two dots separating "biscep" are visible, but faint, in the facsimile edition. Rypins does not include these dots. The examples quoted above are all taken from the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle.

CHAPTER VII

LIFE OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

"..... of my Lord and Saviour, Christ, but you, foolish and unwise, do not fear the Lord Who is the creator of all things."¹

The king then became angry and commanded his hands and feet to be bound together, and ordered him to be flogged with iron rods, and he commanded three men to sit on his head.²

The warriors who flogged him said to the king, "Fortunate would you be, Dagnus, if you who cruelly commandest the torture of this warrior of God, were never born."

The king became angry and he ordered these men to be killed at the same time. The holy Christopher called out to the king and said, "If you have thought of some greater tortures for me, then quickly do so because your tortures are sweeter to me than honey bread."

The king then commanded a platform made of iron, which was as tall as this man, to be brought forth. It was twelve fathoms long, and he commanded it to be set in the middle of the town, and then he commanded holy Christopher to be bound thereon, and he commanded that an immense fire be lit beneath it. And after that, when he

flames of the fire were at their greatest heat, he commanded ten jars of oil to be poured over because he wished the heat of the fire to be more cruel and more furious against the holy man.

Then holy Christopher, from the midst of the hottest and largest flames, called to God in a clear voice, and he said to the king,³ "This torture which you command to be brought to me shall lead to your destruction and to the destruction of your nation, and I shall never fear your torture nor your anger."

After the holy one in the midst of the greatness of the flames said this, the bench became as pressed wax unto him. Then King Dagnus saw the holy Christopher standing in the midst of the fire, and he saw that his body was like the bloom of the rose. When he saw this, he was filled with amazement in his heart⁴ and because of these terrible fears, he was so alarmed that he fell to the earth and lay there from morning until night, until holy Christopher saw him and commanded him to be raised up. And when he had arisen, he said to him, "You most evil of beasts. How long do you dare to seduce these people from me that it is not permitted unto them to sacrifice to my gods?"

The holy Christopher answered him and said, "Now a great crowd of people shall yet believe in my Lord, Holy

Christ, through me and after that, you yourself shall believe."

The king then answered him scornfully and said to him, "Do you believe that you may deceive me so that I will pray to your God and reject my own? Know you that tomorrow at this same time I shall wreak vengeance on you and shall have you and your name erased from memory and blotted out from this life. And you shall become an example unto those who, through you, have believed in your God."

The next day the king commanded that the holy Christopher be led to him and he said to him, "Understand my words and make sacrifice to my gods that you may not perish in so many torments as are prepared for you."

The holy one answered him and said, "Always I abominate your gods and I reject them because I hold my faith unblemished which I received in baptism."

The king then commanded a tree of immense size to be brought there that was as tall as the holy man, and he commanded it to be set before the hall, and he commanded him to be fastened thereon, and ordered that three warriors should shoot him with their arrows until he was killed. The warriors then shot at him from dawn to evening. The king then believed that all the arrows were fastened in his body, but, indeed, not one of them touched his body, but God's might was hanging in the wind at this holy man's

right side. And the king, after the setting of the sun, sent to the warriors and he ordered them to keep him tightly bound because he thought that the Christian people would unloose him the next day.

Then the king went out to the holy Christopher and said to him, "Where is your God? Why does He not come and free you from my hands and these dreadful arrows?" As soon as he said these words, two barbs from the arrows shot into the king's eyes and he was blinded by them.

When the holy Christopher saw that, he said to him, "You fierce and stupid creature, know that tomorrow at the eighth hour of the day I shall receive my victory, for it was revealed to me by God Himself that Christian men shall come and receive my body and set it in the place which was disclosed unto them by the Lord. Come then to my body and take some of the clay of the ground and mix it with my blood and set it on your eyes. Then, if you believe in God with all your heart, at the same time you will be healed from your eyes' blindness. Know you that the time approaches that Christopher, the chosen one of God, will receive the reward of his suffering and will go forth to life with the Lord."

On the next morning before he was killed by the soldiers, with these words he began to pray, and said, "Lord almighty, Who turned me from error and instructed me

in good wisdom, that I your servant now on this day pray to You to prepare it for me that whatever place my body is, there will be no poverty nor fear of fire. And if there are weak men here and they come to Your holy temple and there they pray to You with all their hearts, and for Your name they call my name, then heal them, Lord, from whatever weakness they have."

And at the same time a voice was heard saying to him, "Christopher, my servant, your prayer has been heard. Though your body be not in that place, whatever faithful people call your name in their prayers will be healed of their sins, and whatsoever they rightly pray for in thy name and through thy merits, they shall receive."

When this glorious speech was heard from heaven, and he was quickly cut down and slain by the soldiers, he went to Christ in great happiness and glory. And it was wonderful the number of whom the holy Christopher through his teaching, gained for God. That was eighty-four thousand, one hundred and fifteen men.

The next day the king said to his thanes, "Let us go out and see where the soldiers have put him." And when they came to the place where the holy body was, the king called in a great voice and said, "Christopher, show me now your God's truthfulness and I will believe in Him." And he took part of the earth where this martyr of Christ had

suffered and a little blood and mixed them together and set it on his eyes and said, "In the name of the God of Christopher, I apply this."⁵ And quickly at that instant, his eyes were opened and he received his sight, and he called out in a loud voice before all the people, "Glorious and great is the God of the Christians Whose glorious works no human craft can overcome. From this day forth I send my command throughout my kingdom that no man who comes into the control of my kingdom may presume to do anything contrary to the will of the God of heaven Whom Christopher preached. If, then, any man, through the devil's craft, be so far deceived that he dares it, at the same time let him be punished with the sword, because I now truly know that there is no earthly power, nor any transitory power, except what comes from God."

And so it came to pass through the might of God and through the merits of the blessed Christopher that the king, who was before filled with the devil's will, believed. It would be too long to relate the glorious deeds which Our Lord accomplished through him unto the praise of His name and works even unto this day, because there flourishes and grows his holy prayer, and there is obedience to the Lord with complete peace and joy, and there is blessed Christ, Son of the Living God, Who rules with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Ghost for ever and ever, Amen.

This holy Christopher asked in the last hour before he sent forth his spirit and said, "Lord my God, deliver good reward unto those who write of my martyrdom and eternal reward for those who read it with tears in their eyes."⁶

NOTES

1 The condition of this first page, because of charring and soiling, prevents an accurate reading. As it remains, the text begins in mid-sentence. The Latin has: "Ego non sum stultus, sed sum servus Domini Jesu Christi;" ("I am not stupid, but a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ;"). The punctuation and paragraphing of the rest of this translation is calculated to make the best possible rendering.

2 The translator omitted the Latin "igneam cassidem", and therefore considerably diminishes the pain of this torture. In fact, fiery helmets were placed on the head of Christopher.

3 The meaning here must be that Christopher called to God for strength after which Christopher spoke to the king.

4 The rest of this line and about a third of the next seems to have been erased. Smudge marks indicating this erasure can be seen in the facsimile edition of the manuscript.

5 The manuscript contains the word "dem" here. This is best taken as a miscopying of "do", 'apply', which is often written with an accent.

6 The closing punctuation consists of a punctum followed by the 7-like sign for "and". This sign, which is clear in the facsimile edition, is not the same as the signs for "and" contained in the text, being larger and more angular. It is perhaps best considered as a flourish by the translator to indicate closing punctuation, but it should be remembered that the same sign is often used to denote completion of a text in Anglo-Saxon paleography.

CHAPTER VIII

WONDERS OF THE EAST

Starting from the land of Antimoline, this land is reckoned to be five hundred of the lesser measures, "stadia", and three hundred and sixty-eight of the greater, called "leuwas"¹.

There is a great multitude of sheep on the island. From that place to Babylon is a distance of one hundred and sixty-eight "stadia" or one hundred and fifteen "leuwas". This settlement is mostly inhabited by merchants. There are found rams which are the size of oxen. They dwell between the city of the Medes, named Archemedon, which is next to Babylon in size. The distance from Archemedon to Babylon is three hundred "stadia" or two hundred "leuwas". There are found the great works which the Macedonian, Alexander the Great, commanded to be made. This land is two hundred "stadia" or one hundred and thirty and a half "leuwas" in length and breadth.²

On the way to the Red Sea, there is a certain place called Lentibelsinea, and in it are hens similar to those of a red hue with us. If any man seizes or touches them, they quickly burn all of his body. This is incredible sorcery.

Besides these, there dwell there wild animals who, when they hear the voices of men, they flee far away. These

animals have eight feet, the eyes of a Gorgon and two heads. If any man tries to capture them, then they set fire to their own body. These are fabulous animals.

This place has adders. These snakes have two heads and their eyes shine in the night as bright as lanterns.

In one land there are asses which have horns as great as oxen. They are of great size, and dwell in the south half between Babylon and the Red Sea, because of the multitude of snakes that dwell in that place. They are called "corsias" and they have horns as great as rams. If they hit or touch a man at all, then he dies soon after. In that land is an abundance of peppers. The snakes have possession of the peppers. When a man wishes to take peppers, he sets fire to the area and then the snakes flee from the earth to the hills. For that reason the peppers are black. From Babylon to the land of Persia, where the peppers grow, is a distance of eight hundred "stadia" or six hundred and twenty-three and a half "leuvas". This place is unfruitful because of the multitude of snakes.

Also there live half-dogs which are called "conopenas"³. They have horses' manes, and boars' tusks, and dogs' heads, and their breath is like the flame of a fire. This land is near the towns which are filled with all the wealth of the world. That is in the southern part of the land of Egypt.

In one land there are men who are six feet tall. They have beards down to their knees and hair down to their heels. They are called "homodubii" because they are doubtful men⁴. They live by fish eaten raw.

The river called "Capi" is in the place called "Gorgoneous", or "Valkyrie". There are ants there as big as dogs. They have feet like grasshoppers. They are both red and black in colour. The ants dig gold up from the earth from the previous night until the fifth hour of the day. Men who are daring enough to take that gold, take with them camel mares with their foals and the stallions. They tether their colts before they cross the river. They pack the gold on the mares and leave the stallions behind. Then the ants discover them; and while the ants are busy dealing with the stallions, then the men with the mares and the gold cross the river. They are so quickly across that one would think that they flew over it.

Between these two rivers, the Nile and the Bryxontes,⁵ is a place called "Locotheo". The Nile is the chief source of all the rivers and it flows out of the land of Egypt. They call the river "Archoboleta", which means "the great water". In this place is the great multitude of camels.

There are found men fifteen feet tall with white bodies and two long, very red noses set on one head, and black hair. When they wish to give birth, they go to India

in ships and there they bring their offspring into the world.

In Ciconia, in the land called Galilee⁶, there are three-coloured men. They have manes like lions and are twenty feet tall and they have great mouths like fans. If they see or perceive any man in that land, or if anybody follows them, then they flee far away and sweat blood.

To the east from that place, beyond the river Bryxontes, there are great and tall men who have feet and legs twelve feet long. They are seven feet wide across the breasts. They are well-named "Enemy", because if they seize any man, they devour him.

Then there are found beasts which are called "Lertices". They have the ears of an ass, sheep's wool and birds' feet.

There is another island, south from the Bryxontes, on which there are men without heads. Their eyes and mouths are in their chests; they are eight feet long and eight feet wide.

This is the native place of dragons, which are one hundred and fifty feet long. They are as big as great stone pillars. Because of the greatness of these dragons, no man can easily cross that land.

From this place, there is another kingdom in the southern part of the ocean⁷, that measures three hundred and

fifty-three "stadia" or two hundred and fifty-four "leuvas". There are creatures called "homodubii", that is "doubtful men". Down to their navels they are in the shapes of humans and from there on they are like asses, and have legs as long as birds', and gentle voices. If they see or observe any man of that land, then they flee far away.

There is another place where there are barbarous men and they have kings among them who are reckoned to be one hundred of the worst and most barbarous men. Two lakes⁸ are there. One is of the sun and the other is of the moon. The lake of the sun is hot by day and cold by night. The lake of the moon is cold by day and hot by night. Their widths are two hundred "stadia" or one hundred and thirty-three and a half "leuvas".

In this place are kinds of trees like laurel and olive trees; from these balsam trees the most precious oil is produced. This place is one hundred and fifty-one "stadia" or fifty-two "leuvas" in extent.

There is a certain island in the Red Sea where there are men whom we have named "donestre"⁹. They have grown as soothsayers¹⁰ from the head to the navel, and the other part is like a man, and they know the language of men. When these men see a man of a strange tribe, they call him and his kinsmen with the names of known men and with blandishing words, they deceive him and seize him, and after that they

eat him, all but the head and then they sit and weep over the head.

Then eastward from here there are found men who are fifteen feet tall and ten feet wide. They have great heads and ears like fans. At night they spread one ear underneath themselves and they cover themselves with the other. Their ears are very light and they are as white as milk. If they see or perceive any man in the land, then they take their ears in their hands and they flee so quickly you would think they were flying.

There is a certain island on which there are men whose eyes shine so bright, it is as if a man had lighted a great candle in the dark night ¹¹ .

There is a certain island that is in length and breadth three hundred and fifty "stadia" or one hundred and ten "leuwas" ¹² . In the time of Belial and Jove, a temple of iron work was wrought of iron and moulded glass. And in the same place, at dawn, is the quiet seat of the gentlest of bishops who ate nothing but sea-oysters and lived by them. ¹³

There is, in the east, a golden vineyard which has vines one hundred and fifty feet long; and upon these vines are produced precious stones.

There is another kingdom in the land of Babylon where there is the greatest mountain between the mountains of Media and Armenia. Of all the mountains, this is the

greatest and the highest. There are found honest men who have dominion over the Red Sea and precious gems are in their control.

About this place are women who have beards down to their breasts, and they have horses' hides as clothing. They are most especially called "huntresses" and for dogs they have tigers, lions and lynxes which they feed. And all the other kinds of wild animals which are in the mountains, they hunt for their skins¹⁴.

There are found other women who have tusks like boars' and hair down to their heels and oxen tails on their loins. These women are thirteen feet tall, and their body is the colour of marble, and they have camels' feet and asses' teeth. These were destroyed on account of their greatness by the great Macedonian, Alexander, who killed them when he never could take one alive, because they were shameless and contemptible in body¹⁵.

By the ocean is a kind of wild beast called "Catinos"¹⁶. They are very beautiful animals. And there are men there who live on raw flesh and honey.

In the western part of the kingdom, in which are the animals called "Catinos", are hospitable men. They have kings who have under them numerous tyrants. The limits of their land lies near the sea.

Thence westward are many kings. These men live many years and they are very beneficent. If any man visits him, then he is given a woman before he is allowed to leave. When the Macedonian, Alexander, came to them, he was amazed at their humanity; nor would he kill them or do any harm to them.

There is a kind of tree from which most precious stones are brought forth and grown.

There are found men who are black in countenance.
17
These men are called Ethiopians.

NOTES

1 These units of measurement appear a total of nine times in the text and always in pairs, as above. The Latin "stadia" is rendered in Anglo-Saxon as "stadio" or "stadi", and the Latin "leuvas" (probably 'leagues') appears as "leones" or "leon". Because there is no modern English translation for the words, I retained the Latin spellings of the MS. Cotton Tiberius B v, which are consistent throughout. There is no constant ratio of the length of the "stadia" to the length of the "leuvas", but the "stadia" are consistently the smaller units. The ratio is roughly three "stadia" to one "leuua". These figures are so haphazard that it is best to assume that they are not supposed to represent reality, but are present as an attempt at verisimilitude.

2 The paragraph divisions in the above translation follow the Latin divisions. No continuity in narrative is to be seen. The piece is a catalogue of marvels. In this way it is inferior to the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle which does pursue a narrative line.

3 This word is only a foreshortening of the Latin, "conopoenas".

4 The meaning here must be that these men were so like monsters that it is doubtful that they can be called men.

5 The Anglo-Saxon text has "fullicra" here which, meaning "most foul", is inadequate. The Latin version has "capud" or "source" which makes more sense. Perhaps the scribe intended the genitive plural, "eallicra", which would satisfy the sense of the passage: "The Nile is the chief of all rivers..."

6 The word "gallia" is not translated, but is found the same way in the Anglo-Saxon version. Galilee, being in the same geographical area as the Nile, seems a safe conjecture.

7 The Latin has "Red Sea".

8 Coincidentally, the Letter of Alexander the Great contains not lakes, but trees of the sun and the moon.

9 The word in the Latin is qualified by "quasi divine".

10 As explained above (Cf. footnote 7, "The Matter of the Three Prose Passages", p. 22) this is an obscure description. The illustrations seem to follow the "quasi divine" found in the Latin preceding this and therefore offer no help as to the sense of the line.

11 The resemblance of this description to Grendel in Beowulf has been noted in the section above, "The Matter of the Three Prose Passages", pp. 15-16.

12 This is the second, and the only other instance in the passage, of a two-dimensional measurement. The others are one-dimensional.

13 This entire passage represents a strange corruption of the Latin. Somehow, the scribe derived "Bel" and "Iob" from the Latin, "beliobolis"; "aereo" becomes 'moulded glass'; and the 'sea-oysters' are from "oppida maritima" or 'sea town'. Still, the scribe does make this ordinary passage the more marvellous by his error. Could this be a calculated interpretation?

14 It is difficult to make sense of this section. The ending 'for their skins' is pure conjecture. The MS. is not clear. MS. Cotton Tiberius B v omits the passage. It is probably best ignored.

15 This confusing rendering is not helped by the Latin.

16 The Latin has "catini". The Anglo-Saxon scribe changed the word only slightly.

17

The Latin does not end here, but includes three more sections (34-36). Section 5 of the Latin is also omitted from the Anglo-Saxon of the MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv. No concluding punctuation is visible. The word "wurbasa", which Rypins notes as following, written in red ink, is barely visible in the facsimile edition of the MS.

CHAPTER IX

LETTER OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT TO ARISTOTLE

Here is the text ¹ of the letter which Alexander, the famous king of Macedonia, wrote and sent to Aristotle, his teacher, about the extent of the great country of India, and of the vastness of his expeditions and travels which he made throughout the world.

He spoke in this manner at the very beginning of the letter: "I am always mindful, even in the midst of the doubts and dangers of our battles, that you, my beloved teacher, are my dearest friend next to my mother and sisters. And because I knew you were well skilled in wisdom, I then, therefore, thought to write to you about this nation of India, and about the state of the heavens, and about the countless variety of snakes and men and wild animals in order that your learning and genius might contribute something to the understanding of these, my experiences. Although complete skill and wisdom abide in you and require no aid, but only the law of right reason ², I wished still that you learn of my deeds (which you love) and hear of the unseen things which I saw in India through manifold struggles and through many dangers with the Greek army. These I write and make known to you and each item is worthy of memory according to the manner in which I

observed it. I would not have believed by the word of any man that so many wonderful things were possible before I saw them myself with my own eyes. The earth is wonderful to behold both in what she at first brings forth in good things (and afterwards in evil), by which she is disclosed to those who gaze upon her. She is the producer of all familiar things, and iron ore and wonderful beings. All these things were unto the men who saw and observed them, scarcely to be believed, because of the variety of their forms. But the things which come first into my mind I write them to you (lest against me may idle talking or culpable lying be attributed); lo, you, yourself, know the nature of my mind always holds me to the boundaries of truth and justice. And I sparingly recorded with words as they had been performed in deeds.

Now I, nevertheless, hope and believe that you understand these things and that you do not suppose that I am in any way bragging or exaggerating about the greatness of our toils and struggles. Wherefore I actually wished that the extent of these sufferings had been less.

I give thanks to the Greek army and especially to the strength of youth and unto our unconquered band, because they were with me in good times and they did not shrink from me in evil times, but they always remained patient with me and I was named "king of all kings".

Wherefore, rejoice in these, my honours, my beloved teacher.

I now write these things especially to you, and to Olympias, my mother, and my sisters in common, for you should be one in love. And if this is not so, then you would seem to be less than I formerly believed you to be.

In the other letters which I sent to you I told and explained to you about the eclipse of the sun and the moon and about the paths of the stars and their positions and about the signs of the clouds. All these things may not otherwise be but as they are arranged and fore-ordained by a great intelligence, and now I write to you about all of these new things in a written document. When you read them, then you will know that they all were just as in the recollection of your Alexander it was proper to send unto you.

In the month of May, Darius, King of Persia, was at the Ganges River where we overcame him and conquered him, and we seized control of all his territory. And we camped there and established our officers over the Eastern people, and we were enriched by many honoured treasures. I said that to you in the first letter and, lest that my report may seem to you to be too repetitious, I will pass all of this and now recite what now happened there.

In the last days of the month of July we came to India unto the place called Fasiacen³, and there with wonderful quickness we overcame and conquered King Porrus. And we

took all of his country by force and we were honoured by many royal riches in that land, but I wished that you should know the things that are worth your remembering.

At first, I write to you about the numberless multitude of his troops. Not counting an unnumbered horde of foot soldiers, this was sixteen thousand and eight hundred men, all arrayed with war gear. And there we captured four hundred elephants⁴ upon which were borne archers in mail. After that we attacked the royal palace with our weapons, and his hall and his royal house appeared there. There were many strong and secure golden columns, immense and of great height, which we counted to the number of four hundred. The walls were also golden, covered with a gold metal about the thickness of a finger. When I wished more eagerly to see these things, and went further, then I saw golden vines, strong and firm, and their branches hung about the columns. I then wondered greatly about this marvel. In the vines were golden leaves and its tendrils and its fruits were crystals and emeralds. Another kind of precious stone hung here and there among the crystals. His bed chambers and his principal rooms were all wonderfully decorated with precious stones, unions and carbuncles⁵. On the outside there were built cypress columns inlaid with elephant tusks which were wonderfully white and fair. And cypress columns and laurels entwined them without, and

entwined and wreathed about the golden posts which stood therein.⁶ And within and without there were innumerable treasures of gold and they were of manifold and of diverse kinds. And there were brought forward many jewelled cups and crystal drinking vessels and golden jars. Seldom did we find any silver there. Afterwards, when I had all of these things in my possession, I then wished to see the interior of India.

Then, with all my army, I came to the land of Caspia.⁷ There was the most fertile soil of the country, and I, in very much admiration of the fertility of the earth, rejoicing in my mind, desired more eagerly to see the land.

The inhabitants of the land then said to us that we should beware of the various kinds of snakes and fierce wild beasts, lest we should encounter them. Great numbers of them dwell in these hills and valleys, and in the woods, and in the fields, and hide themselves in the caves. But nevertheless, I preferred rather to travel the dangerous way and path so that I might encounter Porrus, fleeing from the battle, before he escaped to the remote fastnesses of the earth. I then took with me two hundred and fifty guides who knew the more direct routes of travel.

Then, in the month of August, we travelled through burning sands and places devoid of water and all moisture,

and I promised reward to those who would lead us surely through the unknown lands of India, and would lead me and my army back safe into "Patriacen"⁹ land. And most especially I desired that they lead me to the secret weavers of fine purple cloth, who spun it most craftily from the leaves and the fleece¹⁰ of the tree related to the sun tree, and wove it and fashioned it into precious cloth. But the inhabitants attempted to perform the desires of our enemies more than ours, for they led us through the lands in which were intolerable kinds of snakes and fierce wild animals.

When I perceived and saw, for my part, the hardships that came upon me, because I formerly passed over and did not heed the more useful advice of my friends, but followed the advice of those who deceived me into taking these routes, then I commanded my thanes and ordered them that they make themselves ready with their weapons. And they fared forth on route, in battle order. And they, likewise, and my own troops and those that were my retainers and all my army, were dragging and carrying with them the gold and precious stones that they had plundered and had taken much distance, because they feared and dreaded that, if they left it behind, their foes would secretly take it and carry it away. And, indeed, my thanes and all my company were so much enriched that they were scarcely

able to bear and carry off all the burden of this gold. Also, the weapons of my followers, my bodyguard and the army, were no little burden because I had commanded them to cover them with gold plate. And all of my company was in the likeness of stars or lightning because of the abundance of the gold; it shone and sparkled before me and around me in splendour. And standards and banners were led before me. And this was the glorious spectacle of my troops such that they surpassed in beauty all kings of the earth. I, myself, gazed on them and saw my prosperity and glory and the strength of my youth and the happiness of my life; then was I somewhat joyful and lifted up in my heart. But, as often happens in the better and more sound things, fate and fortune often reverse them and turn them awry: Then it happened to us that we were grievously oppressed and weakened by thirst.

We bore and endured the thirst with difficulty.
Then my thane, called Seferus¹¹, found water in a hollow stone and with a helmet he drew it and brought it to me. Although he, my thane, was himself thirsty, nevertheless, he cared more for my life and welfare than his own. When he then brought the water to me, as I said before, then I called my company and all of my troops together and there, in the sight of all, poured it out lest I should drink when my followers, my army, and all who were with me, were

thirsty. And then before all of them I praised my thane, Seferus, and before all of them I bestowed upon him precious gifts for the deed. And then, when my company was encouraged and calmed, we marched forth on the way we had earlier set out.

Not long after this we came to a certain river in the wilderness. On the shore of the river stood reeds and vines and silver fir trees of a tremendous girth and size which grew and flourished on the cliff. When we came to the river, I ordered, on account of the intolerable thirst that afflicted myself¹², and also my army and the animals which were with us, my troops to rest and encamp. When we had made camp, then I wished to alleviate and quench my thirst. Then, when I had tasted the water, it was more bitter and horrible to drink than any other I had ever tasted. And no man could drink it, nor could any of his cattle partake of it. Then, because of the dumb animals, I was very much oppressed because I knew that the men could endure their thirst more easily than the beasts.

There was a great multitude of four-footed beasts with me and an immense multitude of elephants of great size, one thousand in number, who bore and drew the gold, and twenty-four hundred horses besides the cavalry, and twenty thousand foot-soldiers. There was a third part composed of a thousand mules who drew the loads, and thirty thousand

pack-horses and oxen that carried wheat, two thousand camels, five hundred cattle of which some were used daily for meat, and there was a countless number besides those on horses, mules and camels, and an immense number followed after us on elephants, all of which were afflicted and weakened with intolerable thirst. At times the men licked the iron carefully, and at other times they tasted oil, and on those things cooled their horrible thirsts. Some men, abandoning their shame, tasted urine in their need. This situation was grievous for me in two ways: first because of my own distress and also that of my thanes. I then called for each man to prepare himself with his weapons and march forth, and I firmly commanded that whatever man was not properly arrayed and ready with his weapons should be killed. They then wondered very much why, in their great thirst, they should bear the heaviness and the greatness of their weapons when no enemies were evident. But, nevertheless, I knew our journey and path was through that land and place wherein were various kinds of dwellings and snakes and fierce wild animals, and, as we were ignorant and unacquainted with these lands, disaster might suddenly come upon us. At the eighth hour of the day we marched forth by the shore of the river.

Then we came to a certain town built on an island in the middle of the river. This town was built with reeds

and that kind of tree which grew over the river of which we wrote and spoke earlier. And then we saw and perceived in the town a few, half-naked, human beings living there. When they saw us, they at once hid themselves secretly in their homes. I then wished to see the faces of these men, that they might show us sweet, fresh water. When we had waited a long time and no man was about to do so, I commanded a few arrows to be sent into the town so that if they would not willingly show themselves to us, they would do so out of fear of battle. Then they were the more afraid and hid themselves more securely. Then I commanded two hundred of my men of the Greek army to arm themselves with light weapons and take to the water and swim over to the town. When they had swum in the river one quarter of the way to the island, a terrible thing happened to them: that was a multitude of hippopotamuses¹³, larger to look upon and more fierce than elephants. They pulled the men down among the waves to the bottom of the river and tore and made them bloody with their mouths. And this way they consumed them all, so that none of us knew what had become of any of them. I was then very angry with our guides who had led us into such dangers; I commanded one hundred and fifty of them to be thrust into the river, and as soon as they were in it, the monsters were ready, and tore them to pieces as they had done before with the others. There was

such a countless multitude of the monsters in the river that they swarmed as thick as ants. I commanded my trumpets to be blown and the army to set out. It was then the eleventh hour of the day when we marched forth.

After that, we saw men travelling along the river. From the reeds and trees which grew over the river, they had fashioned a boat on which they sat. When we asked the men about fresh water, they answered us in their language and told us where we might find it, and said that we should find a very large lake in which the water was very fresh and sweet, and that we should come to it quickly enough if we were diligent. And, because of such great afflictions, we travelled all night fatigued with thirst. And throughout the whole night which we marched, plagued with the burden of our weapons, we were pursued by lions, bears, tigers, leopards and wolves, and we withstood them. Then, the next day at the eighth hour, we came to the body of water about which one man spoke to us before, which was all overgrown to the depth of a mile. There was, however, access to the water.

Then I was glad of this sweet and fresh water. I first quickly slaked my own thirst and then all of my army. I then commanded our horses and our cattle which were all consumed with thirst to be watered quickly. At once I ordered the army to make camp. This camp was twenty

furlongs long, and just as wide.

When they had made camp, I ordered the woods to be cut down, and the trees to be chopped down, so that the men were more easily able to go to the lake by which they had encamped. I then commanded that all our horses and cattle and elephants be assembled, and ordered them to be brought to the middle of our camp, in the centre of the tents, lest any of them should be lost, for we did not know what would happen during the interval of night. I then commanded my men to also light fires from the wood which was cut down. The army which was with me then did so. There were fifteen hundred fires lighted so that I knew that if strange things came upon us in the night, we might get light and aid from the fires. When we had built as many of the fires as seemed necessary, then my trumpet was blown and I and all my army took food. It then lacked one hour of evening. Then I ordered the two thousand golden lanterns that I had with me to be lighted. Then, before the moon came up, there came scorpions, like the snakes that came before, seeking their customary portion of water. There were many of these snakes, and the numberless multitude quickly hastened into our camp and penetrated. Then, after that, came horned serpents, dragon-like creatures called "Carastis". They were of many colours. Some of them were red, some black, some white. Some of them had

shiny scales and glistened as if they were gold when man looked on them.

The entire land resounded with the hissing of the snakes and we were not a little afraid of them, but we defended ourselves against them and struck them with long-shafted lances and killed them. Many also burned in fire. We thus endured these things and fought with the snakes and struggled at least two hours in the night. After drinking the water, the snakes departed away and afflicted none of us.

Then, in the third hour of the night, when we wished to rest ourselves, again came snakes more monstrous and more terrible than the others were. They had two heads and some had three. They were of a wondrous size. They were as large as the columns.

Also came taller and bigger dragons from the neighbouring hills and caves that they might drink the water. The snakes came and their breasts were turned strangely upwards, and they moved along on their backs slitting up the ground before them, and, as if with a sickle, they tore it with their mouths.¹⁴ The snakes had three-pronged tongues. When they breathed, then breath came from their mouths like a burning torch. The breath (and breathing) of these snakes was so deadly and poisonous, that many men perished because of it. We fought with these snakes for

more than one hour of the night. The snakes killed thirty men of the army and twenty of my own thanes.

Then I urged the army that they should nonetheless have good courage in the face of the many troubles and hardships that happened to us. When it was the fifth hour of the night, we had a mind to rest ourselves, but there came white lions the size of bulls, and they came roaring greatly. When the lions came, they at once attacked us and we protected ourselves against them as well as we could, and there was such trouble and wretchedness with the coming of the animals in the dark, murky night. There also came leopards of immense size, and many other beasts, and also tigers harassed us in the night. There came also bats as large in size as pigeons, and they struck and pulled on our faces. These bats had teeth as large as those of men; with these they wounded and tore the men.

Besides the other toils and afflictions which happened to us, then came suddenly large animals, larger than any others; that animal had three horns in front and with these he was fearfully armed. The Indians call this beast "dentes tyrannum". That beast was black-coloured and had a head like a horse. When this beast had drunk the water, it then beheld our camp, and then suddenly attacked us and our camp. Nor did it flinch from the burning fires and hot flames which were against him, but it

advanced and went over all. When I had rallied the strength of the Greek army, and we wished to protect ourselves against it, then it at once killed twenty-six of my thanes in one attack, and trod down fifty-two, and they were made cripples so that not one of them might be useful. We shot at it vigorously with hard arrows and long-shafted spears and struck and slew it.

Just before dawn, there appeared poisonous white clouds. It was varied in patches and rings, and many men perished because of the poisonous stench in the poisonous clouds which thus appeared there.

Then there came, into the midst of the army, Indian mice of the size of foxes. They then bit and wounded our four-footed animals and many of these died of their wounds. All of the men survived it, although it wounded some of them.

Before daybreak there came birds called "desert owls", the size of falcons. These birds were brown in hue, with completely black beaks and claws. The birds settled all around the mares and did none of us harm or injury, but drew up and devoured with their claws, their customary fish that were in the lake. We did not put the birds to flight nor do them harm in any way, but they themselves later departed.

In the morning, when it was daylight, I called all my guides who had led me into such hardships, and ordered that they be bound and their bones and legs be broken that they might be consumed at night by the snakes who sought the water there. And I ordered their hands to be cut off that they deservedly would suffer the torments which they knowingly had led and brought us into. I then ordered the trumpet to blow, and the army went forth on the way which we began before.

Then we fared through the impenetrable lands and impassable terrain. There was gathered there and great army of Indians and strange men who inhabited the land, and we fought with them. When we perceived that there would be more fighting in the future, and more struggles, we then quit the dangerous routes and paths and took the better ones. And so with my army intact, we came into the land of "Patriacen" much enriched with gold and other gifts, and we were there received warmly and lovingly. When we again left the land of the "Patriacians", we came to the borders of the Medes and the Persians and there we had another great battle, and I camped there with my army for twenty days until we set forth.

After one day, we came to the land where King Porrus was camped with his army. He trusted rather in the fortresses of the land than to his fighting ability. Then he

desired to know me and my thanes. When he inquired and asked from those going in and out of my camp, I was told that he wanted to know about me and my army. I laid aside my royal robes and I dressed myself in undistinguished and mean clothing as if I were a common man in need of meat and wine. When I was in Porrus' camp in the condition I have already described, he at once asked about me there, and his men said that there was a man come from Alexander's camp. Then he ordered me to be brought to him at once. When I was brought to him, he asked me what King Alexander did, and what kind of a man he was, and how old.

Then I fooled him with my answers and said that he was very old, and so old that he could not keep himself warm anywhere but by the fire and the burning coals. He was at once very happy and rejoicing at these answers and words of mine, because I told him he was so old. Then he asked, "How indeed can he, such a very old man, succeed against me in battle, for I myself am young and strong?"

When he questioned me more closely about his affairs, then I said that I did not know much about his doings, and seldom saw him because I was his thanes' man and his cattle-shepherd and cattle-keeper. When he heard these words, he gave me a letter or epistle, and commanded me to deliver it to King Alexander, and also promised me a reward if I delivered it to him; I told him that I would

do as he bade me. After I had gone thence and came again to my camp, I was very much moved to laughter, both before and after I read the letter.

These things I tell you, my master, and Olympias, my mother, and my sisters, in order that you should hear and know the proud audacity of this barbarian king. I had seen this king's camp and his fortresses into which he had gone with his army.

Immediately, on this morning, King Porrus, with all his army and troops, came into my power when he had perceived that he could not conquer me. He became my friend after the hostility and a friend of the entire Greek army and my companion and my ally, and I gave him his kingdom again. And when I returned the unexpected honour of the kingdom which he himself did not expect, he showed me all his treasure and enriched both me and all my army with gold and with the likenesses of the two gods, Hercules and Liber¹⁵, both of which he cast and fashioned from gold, and set them both in the east part of the earth. When I wished to know if the likenesses were cast just as he said, he commanded the two which were made to be bored, and I, afterwards, ordered the hole through which their men probed to be filled in, and then ordered sacrifice to be made to both the gods.

Then we travelled forth and wished to see and behold more wonderful and more glorious things, but then, as we travelled, we saw nothing but barren fields and woods and hills by the ocean, where it was impassable to men because of wild animals and snakes.

Nonetheless, I then travelled by the sea so that I would know if I might travel around all the land as the sea surrounds. But then the natives said to me (that) this sea and all this ocean was so dark that no man could travel it with a ship. And then I wished to travel around the west parts of India, lest anything in the land was concealed or kept secret from me. Then all that land which we so travelled around was dried up and marsh and cane and reedy fen land.

Then suddenly there came certain animals from the swamp and from the fastnesses. The backs of all of these animals were studded with pegs. The beast had a head quite round like the moon, and the beast is called "quasi caput luna"¹⁶, and they had breasts like the breasts of hippopotamuses, and hard teeth, and greatly was it armored and toothed. And then that beast slew two of my thanes, and we could wound that beast neither with spears nor with any weapons, but with difficulty, with iron hammers and sledge hammers, we hit it and beat it off.

Then, after that, we came to the woods of India and to the outermost limits of these lands, and then I ordered the army to camp there, by the river called "Biswicmon"¹⁷. The camp was fifty furlongs in length and of the same width. Then, it was the eleventh hour of the day, when we were about to sit down to our food, it was suddenly ordered that we take our weapons and endeavour for ourselves, for there was a great need for us to protect ourselves. When we had seized our weapons, as we were ordered, then there came a great herd of camels from the woods. They came to the place in order to attack our camp. Then I quickly ordered the horses to be made ready, and the horsemen to be made ready, and many swine to be taken and driven with the horses toward the camels, because I knew that the swine were loathed by the beasts and that their grunting could frighten them off. As soon as the camels saw the swine, they were afraid and ran into the woods. And we passed the night safely in camp, and I had so protected us with defences that neither animals nor any other hardships might injure us.

The next morning we crossed into another province of India and we came upon large plains where we saw women and men who were as hairy as wild animals. These people were nine feet tall; they were naked and wore no garments. The Indians called these people "Ictifafonas"¹⁸, and from

the neighbouring rivers and waters they caught garfish, and lived on them, and afterwards drank water. When I wished to see these men and examine them close up, they quickly fled into the water and hid in the caves.

Then, after that, we saw among the woods and trees a great crowd of half-dogs; they came with the intention of harming us, and we shot at them with arrows and they quickly fled and departed into the woods.

And afterwards we crossed into the wastelands of India and we saw nothing wonderful or marvellous there. And then we returned to "Fasiacen" from whence we had departed and we camped there by the neighbouring waters, and we there put up all our tents in the evening, and there were many fires lighted. Then suddenly there came a great wind and noise, and the wind became so fierce that it beat down many of our tents, and it greatly afflicted our cattle. Then I ordered the tents and the supplies to be gathered together, and the men carried the supplies and the equipment of our campsite with difficulty due to the wind.

Then we camped in a milder and warmer valley. When we had camped and readied all our things, I ordered the whole army to sit at food and to taste meat, and they did so. When evening came, the winds began to increase and the weather became stormy and unbearably cold. In the evening much snow came and it snowed more than I have ever

seen, in great abundance like many great fleeces. When it seemed to me that it would overwhelm the whole camp, I then commanded the army to tread the snow with their feet. The fires were very nearly extinguished because of the abundance of the snow. However, there was one thing in our favour, and that is that the snow remained only one hour. Soon after came very black clouds and mist, and out of the blackness came burning clouds and fire. The fire then fell to earth like burning torches and because of these fires, the whole field was burned. Then the men said that they thought that the anger of the gods had fallen upon us. I then commanded old clothes to be torn up ¹⁹ and used as a protection against the fire. Afterwards we had a good and quiet night; this scourge left us and we ate meat and rested ourselves without harmful incidents. Then I buried five hundred of my thanes who had died as a result of the fire, the snow and the sufferings which had fallen upon our camp.

Afterwards I commanded the army to break camp and we went forth by the sea and we saw the highland, the plain, and the ocean and Ethiopia. We also saw the huge hills which men call "Enesios" ²⁰ and the cave of the god, "Liber". I then commanded condemned men to be shoved in there, to see if there was any truth in the saying that no man might enter the cave and then come out healthy, unless he entered the cave with offerings. And that was afterwards

demonstrated by the deaths of the men, because those who entered the cave perished on the third day. I then earnestly and humbly asked the gods that they exalt me as lord and king of all the world, by means of great victories, and that they would lead me again to Macedonia and to my mother, my sisters and my relatives.

I then decided to go back into "Fasiacen" and as I went there with my army, two old men met us on the way and I asked them if they knew of any things worthy of note in that land. They answered me that there was no larger route that man might go in ten days. If I wanted to go with my whole army together, I could not, because of the narrowness of the roads, but I might make it with only four thousand men, and I would see something marvellous. Then I was very joyful and happy at their words.

Again I spoke to them and said, in gentle words, "Lo, tell me, old men, what wonderful and great things you have promised that I shall see."

Then one of them answered me and said, "You shall see, king, if you go, the trees of the sun and the moon speaking in Greek and Indian. The sun tree is of the male sex, and the moon tree is of the female sex. And they will tell a man who asks them what good or evil shall happen to him."

Then I did not believe them and thought that they

spoke to me in deception and in mockery, and I said to my companions, "My greatness ranges from the East to the West, and here, now, are two old foreigners who scorn me."

I had in mind to command that they be punished. They quickly swore that they told the truth and did not lie about these things. Then I wished to test whether they spoke the truth to me. And my companions besought me that they be not deprived of such joys, but that we discover whether it was so, and that it was not far to go.

Then I took three thousand men with me and left my army behind to wait for me in "Fasiacen" under King Porrus and my lieutenants. Then we set out and our guides led us through land scanty of water and through lands intolerable in wild animals and snakes, which had wonderful names in the Indian language.

When we reached the country, we saw men and women dressed in the hides of panthers and tigers and none others. When I approached them, and asked of which nation they were, they answered me and said in their own language that they were Indians.

The land was extensive and abundant in balsam and incense. This welled out of the boughs of trees and the men of the land lived and flourished thereby. As we more eagerly examined this place and went among the groves, I wondered at the delightfulness and fairness of the land.

Then the bishop of that place came to meet us. He was ten feet tall and he was all black except his teeth, which were white. And his ears were pierced and earrings fashioned of manifold jewels hung from them. He was dressed in the hides of wild beasts. Then the bishop came to me and at once greeted me and saluted me according to the custom of his people. He asked me where I was from and what I wanted. I then answered him that I would be pleased to see the holy trees of the sun and the moon.

He answered, "If thy companions were free from the touch of women, then they could go into the holy grove." The companions with me numbered three hundred men. Then the bishop commanded that my companions take off all of their shoes and all their robes, and I gave orders to do as he bade us.

That was in the eleventh hour of the day; then the priest was waiting for the setting of the sun, because the sun tree reveals answers at sunrise and sunset; and the moon tree did the same thing at night.

Then I began earnestly to observe the place and throughout the trees and grove I saw balsam running, of the very best perfume, welling out of the trees. The holy trees of the sun and the moon were in the midst of other trees; they were about a hundred feet tall and there were still other trees of wondrous heights. These the Indians

called "Bebronas"²¹. I was amazed at the height of the trees and I said that I thought they grew so tall because of so much moisture and rain. Then the bishop said that never a drop of rain came to that land, nor did any birds, animals or poisonous snakes dare approach the boundaries of the trees of the sun and the moon. The bishop also said that when there was an eclipse, that is, a failing of the sun or the moon, the holy trees began to weep greatly and were stirred with much pain, because they feared that their divine power would be taken away.

"Then I thought," said Alexander,²² "that I would make sacrifice there, but the bishop forbade me and said that it was not permitted to any man to kill any cattle or shed blood there. But he bade me pray, at the foot of the trees, that the sun and the moon trees would give true answers to the questions I asked.

"After this had been done, we saw from the west the rays of the sun and the rays touched the topmost parts of the trees. Then the bishop said, 'Now everyone look up and ask anything ye will. Let each think secretly in his heart and let no man speak out his thoughts openly in words.'

"As we stood close to the grove and the oracles, then I thought in my heart whether I would get the whole world in my power and then afterwards be honoured with

triumphs and again return to Macedonia and to my mother, Olympias, and my sisters. Then the tree answered me in the Indian tongue and said, 'You, Alexander, invincible in battle, you will become king and lord of all the world, but, yet, you will not come back to your homeland from whence you formerly set out, for your fortune has thus decreed it and foreordained it upon your head.'

"When I was ignorant of the Indian words which the tree spoke, the bishop interpreted it for me. When my companions heard that I would never return alive to my native land, they were very sad. Then I, therefore, wished to ask again in the evening, but the moon was not yet up.

"When we again went into the holy grove and again stood by the trees, we at once prayed before the tree as we had done before. And I also led with me my three most trusted friends who were my special companions: these were, first "Perticam" and "Clitomum" and "Pilotan"²³, because I had no fear that any of those would betray me; for it was not right to kill anyone there on account of the holiness of the place.

"Then I wondered in my heart and mind in what country I should die. When the moon first arose, she touched with her beams the uppermost parts of the trees, and the tree answered my thought and said this: 'Alexander, you have reached the final term of your life: next year you will die

in Babylon, in the month of May, at the hands of those who you least think would betray you.'

"Then both me and my friends there with me were very sorry, and they began to weep because they cared more for my welfare than they cared for their own safety.

"Then we departed to our companions again and they wished to sit down to their food. And I wished to rest myself because of the turmoil in my mind. But my companions bade me that, in such anxiety and distress, I would not afflict myself with fasting. I then took a great deal of food against the inclination of my mind, and then, afterwards, went to my rest because I wanted to be ready to go in again at sunrise.

"When morning came, I awoke and aroused my most trusted companions, for then I wanted to go into the holy place. But the bishop still rested, dressed and covered in the skins of animals.

"The men in that land lack iron and lead. Gold is plentiful and the men of the land live on balsam, and from the neighbouring mountain, fair and pure water flows and it is very sweet. The men drink it and live by it, and when they rest, they sleep without bed or pillow, but the hides of animals is their bedding.

"Then I awakened the bishop who was three hundred years old. When the bishop arose, I went to the holy place

and, for the third time, asked of the sun tree by what man's hand my end was appointed, or what end my mother or my sisters should now expect. The tree then answered me in Greek, and said, 'If I tell you your slayer, you will easily reverse your fate and stop his hand. But I say to you truly that you shall die within the space of one year and eight months, in Babylon, nor will you be killed by the sword as you think, but by poison.²⁴ Your mother shall depart from the world by a foul and shameful deed²⁵ and she will lie unburied in the road as prey to the birds and the beasts. Your sisters will have a long and happy life. And although you shall live just a little while, yet you shall be lord and king of all the earth. But ask and question us no more, because we have exceeded the bounds of our light. But return again to "Fasiacen" and to King Porrus.'

"Therefore my companions wept because I had so little time to live. But the bishop forbade this weeping, lest their tears and sobs vex the holy trees. And no one heard the answer of the trees except my most trusted friends. And no man outside of these knew it, lest the foreign kings whom I had necessarily brought to obedience should rejoice that I had so little time to live. And besides, no man should make it known to the army lest they become despondent and by that means, unconcerned over my ambitions and my honour for which they would travel with me

to success. And the earlier end of my life was not such great sorrow to me as the fact that I should have performed fewer wonders than was my desire.

"These things I write to you, my beloved teacher, that you be the first to rejoice in the success and glories of my life. And my memory shall stand eternally and remain as a model to other kings that they know more clearly that my glory and honours were greater than those of all other kings who ever were in the world." finit²⁶

NOTES

- 1
The passage begins with the first four words in capital letters, thus: "HER IS SEO GESEGENIS". The second "g" is unmistakable; but appears as a "t" elsewhere, thus: "gesetenisse" in l. 5: Cf. Rypins, Three Old English Prose Texts, p. 1..
- 2
This is perhaps a reference to Aristotle's ability to reason in a logical manner.
- 3
This word is as it appears in the Latin text. The word "Facen" appears in the Middle English King Alisaunder (edited by G. V. Smithers, London, Oxford University Press, 2 vols., 1952) and is noted to be a country of the river Phasis or Rion, which flows into the Black Sea. Herodotus records this as a river in Colchis.
- 4
There is mention of Alexander's surprise at the sight of the elephants, but, according to history, he and his troops were amazed at the formidable sight confronting them across the Hydaspes.
- 5
The Geography of Strabo (edited by H. L. Jones, Harvard University Press, 1954) catalogues many different types of carbuncles, and some of these were said to have magical powers.
- 6
This is a confusing passage, with which even the scribe had difficulty in his rendering it from Latin.
- 7
The Latin has "caspias portas", ('Caspian Gates') with which the history agrees.
- 8
The word "wolde" is clear in the facsimile, but this should be "woldon", the pret. 3 sg. and pret. pl. of "willan". Possibly the scribe intended to put a stroke over the "e" ("e") which would be correct.

9 Cf. footnote 6, p. 21. This name may be a corruption of "Fasiacen" as it first appears in the text. Perhaps the word is connected with the Roman "patriacians" who were a privileged class, as distinguished from the "plebeians".

10 This note on the fleece is not in the Latin.

11 This name is not mentioned in the Alexander history. The Latin has "Zeferus".

12 The Latin has nothing equivalent to the word 'myself'.

13 This word was misread by Rypins, Cockayne and Baskervill as "mera". A glance at the manuscript itself confirms the observation of Davis that this is not "mera" but "nicra", or 'sea-monster'.

14 The scribe mistranslated this passage. The Latin has "pectora erecta", or 'breasts held erect'.

15 Liber is an old Italian deity whose characteristics are obscured by Greek ideas subsequently introduced. He became identified with Dionysus and Bacchus. Liber has a female counterpart, named "Libera".

16 The scribe mistranslated here, for the monster is described in Latin as having two heads, one of a lion and the other of a crocodile. The scribe omits the crocodile's head altogether and leaves the lion's head in the Latin as above.

17 This can be translated as 'deceiver of men'.

18 The Latin has "hictisas". This probably refers to the "Ichthyophagi", whom Herodotus (translated by Henry Cary, London, 1848) describes as being Ethiopians who are said to be the tallest and handsomest of all men.

19

The scribe elaborated on the Latin, "scissas vestes opponere ignibus", ('torn clothes to be placed against the fire') perhaps to make this moment more dramatic.

20

The Latin has "dionisios". The association of Liber with Dionysus has been noted (Cf. footnote 15, p. 95), and the legend of the god, Dionysus, is that he grew up on Nysa, a mountain whose locality is variously stated. Herodotus locates it in Ethiopia, which is consistent with our text. Cf. Henry Cary, Herodotus, p. 154.

21

The Latin has "bebrorias". The scribe may have had a derivative of "beberan" ('to supply with'), or "be-beorgan" ('to protect'), or "beferan" ('to surround'); all of these are possibilities.

22

The Latin does not suggest this interpolation. Perhaps the scribe forgot that he was translating a letter.

23

These names may refer to Perdicas, Clitus and Philotas, all of whom were associated with Alexander, but not all were his friends. Philotas, for example, was never in India with Alexander since he had been earlier executed for plotting against the king. Clitus was a friend of Alexander, but was given to drink and once, when drunk, insulted Alexander. Alexander killed him. Perdicas was a general in Alexander's army in India.

24

And, indeed, Alexander died in Babylon, but it is now doubtful that he was poisoned. Cf. Benjamin I. Wheeler, Alexander the Great, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900, pp. 490-491.

25

Olympias was executed by Cassander. She was, at the time of her death, still involved in the civil strife which followed the death of her son, Alexander.

26

This is the conclusion of Alexander with the punctuation shown. The rest of the page, thirteen lines, is blank.

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ABSTRACT

Our thesis set out to translate, with relevant commentary, the three prose passages found in the MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv. The contribution we are convinced this translation makes to Old English studies, along with the importance attached to the manuscript containing Beowulf, is the justification for our thesis.

After commenting on the contents of the manuscript in general, our study turns to the matter of the three prose passages. Here we discover remarkable correspondence in material and in the approach of the Anglo-Saxon redactor to that material. Monster and marvel are combined in the texts in such a way as to provide us with the conclusion that the passages were gathered under one cover to preserve a literary motif.

Beginning with the Life of St. Christopher, the texts are introduced individually. We infer an Eastern origin for the Life of St. Christopher, but its immediate predecessor was Latin. Similar treatment of the Wonders of the East and the Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle indicate a tradition in the pattern of their transmission. Each reveals an Eastern origin, a preoccupation with the monstrous and the marvellous, and an immediate Latin predecessor.

A brief review of the problems connected with working with a manuscript of irregular punctuation (and no physical structure) introduces the three prose passages in translation. We have endeavoured to produce a text that is both readable and as close as possible to the original in structure. The translations are annotated throughout to provide the reader with both a knowledge of textual problems and an awareness of similarities of content among the three passages and Beowulf. While we worked with published editions of these works in Anglo-Saxon, we very carefully checked these against the recently published facsimile of the manuscript; in some instances, this double-checking enabled us to discover meanings that did not seem clear in the printed editions.