Legends telling of Alexander the Great’s encounters with exotic beasts, strange races of humans, and other wondrous marvels, some based loosely on historical events and others complete fabrications, seem to have begun circulating immediately after his death. These legends laid a foundation for the Greek *Alexander Romance*, which was falsely attributed to Alexander’s court historian Callisthenes. Richard Stoneman suggests that the Greek *Alexander Romance* was written down in a form similar to that which we now possess around the third century BCE, though the earliest extant manuscript dates to the third century CE.¹

The Greek *Alexander Romance* existed in several versions, and at some point in the early fourth century CE, Julius Valerius translated one of these versions, known as the alpha recension, into Latin.² More important for our purposes is a translation into Latin made by Leo, the Archpriest of Naples, in approximately 950 CE. Leo produced this translation as a commission for Duke John of Naples, after he brought back a copy of a version of the Greek *Alexander Romance* from Constantinople. Leo’s prologue to his translation survives in the Bamberg manuscript of the *Historia de Preliis*, which seems to have been produced

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around 1000 CE in southern Italy. In the preface, Leo tells us that one of his goals in producing the translation was to offer examples of the noble deeds of virtuous pagans in order to motivate Christians to pursue greater virtue. Leo seems to have abbreviated his source text severely and his command of Latin is less than perfect.³

Leo's translation was reworked into the Historia de Praeliis (henceforth HP). The anonymous author of this text expanded Leo's translation, added some passages from other Alexander texts (including the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem, a fictional letter from Alexander to Aristotle describing the wonders of India, and the Collatio Alexandri cum Dindimo, which offers fictional correspondence between Alexander and the king of the Gymnosophists), and improved Leo's Latinity.⁴ There are three recensions of the HP. J¹ is the original text and J² and J³ were later adapted from it. J², which dates to around the second half of the twelfth century, was used occasionally in Italy, but J³ was by far the most popular recension in Italy and may in fact have originated there. J³ cannot have been composed later than 1236, when Quilichinus of Spoleto completed a poem based upon it. The recension is distinguished by the frequent addition of moralizing passages and a prologue that explains the didactic purpose of the text as a source of moral instruction. It is possible that the author was Jewish.

Significant episodes in the HP include the Egyptian Nectanebus' fathering of Alexander (and eventual murder at his son's hands), Alexander's ascent into the sky in a basket carried by griffons, and his descent to the bottom of the sea inside a glass vessel.⁵ Also significant are Alexander's encounters with the