The existence of affinities between the Life of Aesop and the Alexander Romance has been remarked more than once, and in recent critical approaches to the ancient novel, both works are viewed together—as examples of “fringe” novels. Ancient readers too were certainly conscious of the similarities existing between the Life of Aesop and the Alexander Romance, for the two works have been copied together in some medieval manuscripts. The presence, in both texts, of the same character, Pharaoh Nectanebo, who is Alexander’s father in the Alexander Romance, and an enemy of the Babylonian king Lykourgos in the Life of Aesop, even suggests the possibility of some mutual influence—perhaps of the Alexander legend upon the Life of Aesop, for the story of Nectanebo seducing Philip’s wife had been circulating a long time before the emergence of the Alexander Romance as a fully-constituted text in the 3rd century AD. And it seems quite probable that exchanges continued throughout the centuries, for we can see the emergence of other common episodes in later versions of the Life and the Romance (specifically, I think of the story of Alexander’s ascension and of the apophthegms uttered by the hero in the lambda version of the Alexander Romance). But here I shall limit myself to the examination of the

1 I would like to thank Ingela Nilsson and David Konstan for generously helping me to improve the English text of this paper.


2 In the Leid. Vols. 93 (XVth c.) we can read both the β recension of the Alexander Romance and the W version of the Life of Aesop; in the Par. Gr. Suppl. 690 (XIth c.) have been copied abstracts from the β recension of the Alexander Romance and Aphthonios’ Life of Aesop (as a preface to the Aesopic fables). It must be added that Julius Valerius’ Latin translation of the Alexander Romance is entitled Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis translatae ex Aesopo graeco—another proof of the affinity felt by ancient readers between the Alexander Romance and the Aesopic world.

3 Alexander’s ascension is to be compared with the episode of the ethereal tower
earliest transmitted versions of the two works, the alpha recension of the Alexander Romance and the Grottaferrata version of the *Life of Aesop.*

1. *Non-canonical novels ... in form and content*

1.1. *Unconventional form*

When compared with the canonical Greek novels, the *Life of Aesop* and the Alexander Romance appear to be strongly deviant works. Whereas each of the “big five” may be said to be the product of a single mind which created the whole work, plot and wording alike, things are quite different in our texts, whose anonymous authors did not build their works out of nothing, but reused a lot of pre-existing material, some of which had been circulating independently for a long time. I shall go over this point briefly, since it has been studied at length, among others by David Konstan and by C.M. Thomas. The result of such a process of amalgamation is, of course, a composite work, what we may call a “patchwork novel”, made of heterogeneous elements (the fables, or the story of Akhikar in the *Life of Aesop*, the Letter of Alexander to Aristotle, the story of his encounter with the Gymnosophists, or his Last Will in the Alexander Romance). Such a lack of unity makes further additions or subtractions all the easier, so that each retelling of the story tends to produce a new version—as attested by the textual tradition of the *Life of Aesop* and the Alexander Romance, with their multiplicity of recensions and sub-recensions: fluidity is the main characteristic in the transmission of this kind of text.

1.2. *Unconventional heroes*

The heroes of such unconventional works stand far apart from the idealistic norm of the kalos kagathos: this is evident for Aesop, who at the beginning of the *Life* is a slave of the lowest kind, described as