

The Use and Abuse of the Argumentum ex Silentio – the Case of Alexander in Jerusalem

ORY AMITAY

The relevance to Samaritan studies of the various accounts concerning Alexander's relations with the Jews of Jerusalem is obvious enough. In three out of four strands of this tradition, the animosity between Samaritans and Jews plays a decisive role.¹ Considering also Curtius' notice of a Samaritan rebellion against Alexander's new administration, and the famous finds from Wadi Daliah, which date from about the same time and very likely reflect some aspect of this rebellion, there is little need for further explanation why it is crucial to get as firm a grasp as we can of the various stories about Alexander and the Jews.² As usual in early Samaritan history, it is inseparable from the Jewish.

In the sixth conference of the *Société d'Etudes Samaritaines*, held in the summer of 2004 in Haifa University, I had the pleasure of presenting a paper titled "Gerizim and Zion Between Persia and Alexander". In it, I questioned the methodological premises of the *communis opinio* regarding Alexander's visit to Jerusalem, and offered an alternative view, based on a panorama of the four different tellings. The paper was followed by controversy and debate, which clarified to me the need for a detailed reexamination of the entire topic. Given the amount of scholarship already devoted to Alexander in Jerusalem, and the complex and variegated nature of the ancient sources, it is perhaps not too surprising that what was originally intended as an article is now already assuming the shape of a book-size monograph.³

1 These are: Josephus, *AJ* 11.302-45; *Megillat Ta'anit* on Kislev 21sr (=Noam 2003: 100-103, 262-65; cf. *Bavli Yoma* 69a); *Megillat Ta'anit* on Sivan 25th (=Noam 2003: 70-77, 198-205; cf. in *Bereshit Raba*, 61.7; *Bavli Sanhedrin* 91a). The fourth telling, that of the monotheistic *Alexander Romance* (e: chapter 20 = Trumpf 1974: 75-78; g: 2.23-4 = ENGELMANN, *Alexanderroman*, 214-219), does not involve the Samaritans in the story.

2 Curtius 4.8.9-10. For the Wadi Daliah finds see the initial publication by CROSS, *Discovery*; CROSS, *Papyri*; MOR, *Samaria*, 60-62.

3 For some interim conclusions see AMITAY, *Story*; AMITAY, *Shim'on*.

My purpose in this article is therefore much more limited: to address one of the main tenets, on which rest the attempts to negate the historicity of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem – the argument from silence. The argument is simple enough: none of the surviving accounts of Alexander's campaigns contains any description of negotiations with the Jews of Judea, let alone a visit to Jerusalem. Since the story of Josephus (which has received the lion's share of modern scholars' attention) contains manifest mythic elements, as well as some details which are seemingly anachronistic, its value as historical evidence is outweighed by the silence of the standard Alexander-histories.

This argumentum *ex silentio* is now as ubiquitous in modern scholarship as the opinion, which denies any historical value to the accounts of Alexander's visit.⁴ According to Niese's definitive history of the Greek and Macedonian states, Josephus' story was based on an invention. This judgment he based first and foremost on the fact that "*alle Alexanderhistoriker schweigen davon, obwohl das Ereignis Alexanders Person betrifft.*"⁵ In Tcherikover's essential book *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* the argument from silence moves from the notes to the text:

"The Greek and Roman writers who relate the life and deeds of Alexander – Arrian, Diodorus, Plutarch and Curtius – pass over the short period which Alexander spent in Palestine in almost complete silence. [...] This silence reflects historical reality."⁶

This verdict received further support from Marcus, in his appendix to the Loeb translation of Josephus' *Antiquitates*. After professing some hesitation to deny categorically the historicity of a visit to Jerusalem, he nonetheless adduces

"the strong negative argument that the oldest Greek and Latin sources do not mention it [...] as we might reasonably expect them to do, in spite of the comparative unimportance of the Jews to the Greeks in the time of Alexander".⁷

The same sentiment is prevalent also in post-WWII scholarship. Momigliano declared openly:

"I shall say immediately and dogmatically that I assume that there is no truth in the visit of Alexander to Jerusalem. It is not recorded

4 For a brief history of the debate, which was at one point much more even handed than it is today, see GOLAN, Josephus, 29-30 n.1.

5 NIESE, Geschichte, 83 n. 3.

6 TCHERIKOVER, Civilization, 41.

7 MARCUS, Appendix, 528. The influence of MARCUS' essay on the discussion is crucial. Appearing in the Loeb translation, it is often the first (if not last) piece of scholarship on the topic met by Anglophone students.

by any respectable ancient source on Alexander and is full of details which are impossible.”⁸

Goldstein, who does accept the historicity of a meeting between Alexander and some Jewish delegates (possibly even the High-Priest), nonetheless writes:

“If any population in any way refused to submit to Alexander, the king was quick to react, and the historians could hardly pass over the matter in silence. Nevertheless, the surviving pagan histories of Alexander, by Arrian, Curtius, Diodorus, Plutarch and Justin, say nothing of an encounter of Alexander with the Jews...”⁹

Finally, and most emphatically, Gruen:

“Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem is outright fiction. The king never approached Jerusalem. The historical narratives of his march breathe not a hint of any side trip to that city [...] There was certainly no reason for our Greek sources to have suppressed a visit to the holy city. They regularly report Alexander’s arrival at key shrines and sacred places, where he honored native gods and performed public acts of sacrifice. Jerusalem would fit nicely into that repeated scenario, and the Alexander historians could hardly have missed or omitted it. The tale is a fiction.”¹⁰

Our first step, therefore, in addressing dogma should be to define the cadre of authors, whose resounding silence drowns so effectively all existing positive evidence. Many contemporaries – Kallisthenes, Ptolemy, Aristoboulos, Polykleitos, Onesikritos, Nearchos, Chares – who had taken part in making history during Alexander’s campaign, also took upon themselves to write it. Regrettably, their works have all perished. The influential work of Kleitarchos, a younger contemporary, suffered a similar fate. The surviving texts, which provide the backbone of any modern historical narrative of Alexander’s life and deeds, are those written (in chronological order) by Diodorus of Sicily, Curtius Rufus, Plutarch, Arrian and Justin. The first four should thus be classified as secondary sources at best. Justin, who epitomized an earlier work by Pompeius Trogus, is at least tertiary. Diodorus, the earliest of the five, is nevertheless later than the events which he describes by at least three centuries. Curtius and Arrian, the most detailed of the five, are even later. These facts, coupled with the distressing loss of information, caused by the disappearance of all contemporary eye-witness accounts, should be enough to warrant extreme caution in the use of the *argumentum ex silentio*. A closer inspection of these five sources, and of

8 MOMIGLIANO, Flavius, 443.

9 GOLDSTEIN, Alexander, 71

10 GRUEN, Heritage, 195.

the ways in which they construct the relevant parts of their respective narratives, gives even more cause for alarm.

One necessary condition, which any source must meet in order to qualify as viable support for an argument from silence, is that it be detailed enough to have included the specific episode under investigation. Thus, a useful question would be: what do the surviving accounts have to say about Alexander's activities in the period between the conclusion of affairs in Phoenicia and his arrival in Egypt? The earliest of our sources, Diodorus, recounts this part of the story rather briefly:

"and Alexander, having marched against Gaza – garrisoned by the Persians – and besieged it for two months, captured the city by force. In the year when Aristophanes was archon in Athens, Spurius Postumius and Titus Veturius consuls in Rome, King Alexander settled the affairs concerning Gaza, and sent Amyntas to Macedonia with ten ships, having ordered to select from among the youth those fit for military service. He himself with the entire force marched to Egypt, and captured all the cities there without any risk."¹¹

All in all, Diodorus devotes exactly 75 words to the entire sequence of events between the conclusion of the siege of Tyre and Alexander's famous adventure at Siwah. If we remove the standard chronological notice for the year 331/330, we are left with merely 61.

Yet even this short account seems verbose and elaborate in comparison with Justin's version: *Inde Rhodum Alexander Aegyptum Ciliciam sine certamine recepit*.¹²

As stated above, a source may be used as supporting evidence for an argument from silence, only when it supplies an amount of detail, which is substantial enough to enable one to argue reasonably about what was not included in it. In other words, the sources at hand ought to tell us enough about other events which had taken place during this part of Alexander's campaign, to justify the claim that they would have reported any dealings with the Jews of Jerusalem, had they occurred. A clear yardstick for determining such qualification is the treatment of the Gaza siege. A protracted and dangerous engagement, it afforded many interesting stories: complicated and costly military operations, a failed

11 *Ajebandroj del strateusaj epil Gazan frouroumehhn upol Perswan kail dimhnon prose-dreusaj eile katakratoj thh pol in. Ep' ajxontoj d' Ajhhhsin Ajistofahouj eh Rwm\$ katestajhsan upatoi Spourioj Postomioj kail Titioj Oupetourioj. Epil del toutwn Ajebandroj o(basil euj talperilthh Gazan dioikh\$aj Ajnuhtan meh meta\deka newa eij Makedonian epepemye, prostataj twa newn touj eujletouj epil ecai proj strateian, autoj del meta\pashj thj dunamewj parh\$ Jen eij Aijupton kail parel abe pasaj taj eh auj\$-pol eij xwrij kinduhwn (17.48.7-49.1).*

12 "Thence Alexander received Rhodes, Egypt and Cilicia without a fight" (11.1.1).

assassination attempt against Alexander's person, a well-interpreted omen, two injuries suffered by Alexander during the fighting, and finally the brutal treatment of the Persian garrison commander, Betis – all fascinating stuff, well in line with the usual material of the Alexander-histories. Yet Diodorus does away with two months of gruesome fighting in a single sentence, and Justin makes no mention of them at all. Whatever may or may not have taken place between Alexander and the Jews, no existing telling breathes as much as a hint of a violent interaction which actually took place between the two parties. Any source which passes so hastily over the siege of Gaza cannot be used to refute a visit to Jerusalem *ex silentio*.

Plutarch's reference to the Gaza siege offers us slightly more detail than Diodorus' curt remark. During the siege, he writes, a bird dropped a clod of earth on Alexander, hitting him on the shoulder, and was then caught in the ropes of one of the siege engines. The prophet Aristandros interpreted the events to mean that Alexander would indeed capture the city, but be injured on the very same day. As usual, his prediction was successful.¹³ The anecdotal nature of Plutarch's treatment of the Gaza siege is characteristic of his narrative for the entire period in question.¹⁴ This includes two more anecdotes: one involving the gifts sent by Alexander to friends and family from the booty captured in Gaza, the other telling how proper housing was found for that famous bit of reading material, lugged around by Alexander throughout his campaign, a recension of the *Iliad* with remarks and annotations by Aristotle. This last episode, which deals with Darius' marvelous regal paraphernalia, will have taken place during the aftermath of Issos. Plutarch seems to have postponed it for literary reasons: with the mention of Homer he glides to the foundation story of Alexandria. Alexander, so Plutarch, was inspired by the poet in choosing the site for his new foundation.

It is clear, therefore, that while Plutarch was impressed enough with the siege of Gaza to include the story of the bird and Aristandros' prediction, this part of his narrative can hardly be used as evidence for the argument from silence. For one, the text does not maintain a chronological integrity, using the flashback method in order to return to the *Iliad's* casket *after* the Gaza siege, then jumping forward to the foundation of Alexandria. Nor was it ever a part of Plutarch's scheme to include every possible detail of the events which had occurred during the campaign. Quite the opposite, in fact. At the very beginning of the *Alexan-*

13 Plutarch, *Alex.* 25.4-5 (division of sections according to ZIEGLER'S Teubner edition, 1968) – pls. complete the bibliography of Ziegler.

14 Plutarch, *Alex.* 25.4-26.2.

der Plutarch offers his famous apology, stating that due to the multitude of the deeds to be treated, it would be impossible to tell all of them, or even to give all possible detail concerning what is to be told. After all, he adds, “we do not write histories, but lives.”¹⁵ With such self-recommendation, Plutarch’s biography of Alexander is hardly suitable for use in the *argumentum ex silentio*.

The only surviving writers to have left a narrative of events between Tyre and Egypt, which is both comprehensive and historically minded, are Curtius and Arrian. Curtius’ account of the events after Tyre is rather detailed. He devotes time to the epistolary exchange between Darius and Alexander (4.5.1-8), reports the accession of the Rhodians and the appointments of various generals as local governors (4.5.-10), mentions the honors to Alexander decreed by the Greek celebrators at the Isthmia (4.5.11-12) as well as military operations undertaken by various Macedonian commanders in other theaters of war (4.5.13-22). Then, after a digression on Persian secrecy explaining why Alexander could not obtain reliable information on Darius’ whereabouts (4.6.1-6), he proceeds with a description of the Gaza siege. This part of the narrative, too, is rather full, including a survey of the landscape, some picturesque scenes from the battlefield, the clod-dropping bird and Aristandros’ prophecy, the assassination attempt against Alexander by a pretended Arab deserter, and finally the fall of the city and the epic torture of Betis, commander of the local garrison.¹⁶ The chapter concludes with Alexander’s orders to Amyntas to sail off to Greece and recruit new troops (4.6.30-31). Arrian’s account, less detailed than Curtius’, nevertheless records the epistolary exchange with Darius (2.25.1-3), the preparations of Betis and a description of Gaza (2.25.4-26.1), and a detailed, if problematic, description of the siege, including the bird

15 Plutarch, *Alex.* 1.2.

16 The garrison commander’s name is given as “Betis” by Curtius, “Batis” by Arrian, and as “Babêmêsis” by Josephus (*AJ* 11.320, with MS variance). His fate was gruesome. He was tied by his ankles to a chariot and dragged around the city. Alexander claimed to be imitating his ancestor Achilles (*Il.* 22.395-404), but surpassed him in cruelty: Achilles had abused Hektor’s body; Betis was still breathing when the torture began. The story is also related in a lost work by Hegesias (3rd century BC), preserved in Dionysius of Halikarnassos’ *De Comparatione Verborum* 18.124-126. The entire episode has been rejected by Tarn (*TARN, Alexander, II*, 67-70) – another good example for the abuse of the *argumentum ex silentio* (and other questionable tactics of source-critique) in order to do away with an inconvenient story. He is followed by PEARSON, *Textes*, 247-248; but see LANE FOX, *Alexander*, 193; SCHACHERMEYR, *Alexander*, 220 n. 242; BOSWORTH, *Conquest*, 68; O’BRIEN, *Alexander*, 85-86, who rightly accept the story as historical. Still, HAMMOND, *Genius*, 96, dismissed on the grounds that the story does not agree with (his image of) Alexander’s character.

and prophecy anecdote (2.26.2-27.7).¹⁷ The episode concludes with Alexander selling off the women and children, and repopulating the city with local tribesmen.

To be sure, Curtius and Arrian both offer quite detailed narratives, which are organized in chronological order and according to the principles of historical writing. Both are, to use Momigliano's definition, "respectable" historians. Since neither says anything about Jerusalem or the Jews, they seem to offer legitimate support for an argument from silence. Yet even here one should exercise extreme caution. A good example why is supplied by the incident of Andromachos and the Samaritans. The story, as intriguing as it is mysterious, is reported by Curtius: Andromachos, who had been made prefect of Koile Syria, was burned alive by Samaritans. Alexander, much grieved at the news, hurried to the scene as fast as he could. The authors of the crime were handed over to him and punished accordingly.¹⁸ This episode is fascinating and significant well beyond the narrow boundaries of Samaritans studies: whatever its motives, this is the only reported case of actual resistance offered to Macedonian occupation in the vast expanse between Kyrene and Gaugamela. The mode of execution – Andromachos was burned alive! – is certainly an attention grabber. Yet the entire incident is reported solely by Curtius. Arrian saw no place for it in his own work. What place would he find for a routine visit to a small temple town, which – the fact bears repetition – did not entail any violence at all?¹⁹

Nor is this the only incident, attested by other sources but passed over in silence by Arrian. Another such case is Alexander's meeting with the envoys of Kyrene. According to Diodorus (17.49.2) and Curtius (4.7.9), an embassy from this city met Alexander as he was marching west along the Mediterranean shore, en route to Siwah. The meeting was amiable. The envoys greeted Alexander warmly, presented him with costly gifts, and sued for peace and friendship. Pleased with their initiative and good sense, Alexander granted them their wish, and marched on. This incident, the historicity whereof is not in question, has nonetheless been omitted by Arrian.

Other events during Alexander's journey have gone unmentioned by any of the surviving Alexander-histories. According to Pausanias,

17 All references to Arrian are to the *Anabasis*. His account of the siege is riddled with difficulties and shows ignorance of the terrain (BOSWORTH, *Commentary*, I, 258-9).

18 4.8.9-10. For Andromachos' appointment see 4.5.9, with BOSWORTH, *Government*, 46-53, on the question of Syria's governors in the years 333-331 BC.

19 Cf. his own criteria for including material in his work: **oti kai\ au\ta\ a\p\iafh\g\ta\ te/ moi e\lloce kai\ ou\pant\\$ ap\ista** (preface, §3). In paraphrase, one could say that a Jerusalem story might be considered by him as **ou\pant\\$ a\p\iafh\g\ta**.

Alexander made an attempt to cut a tunnel through the Corinthian isthmus. Uncharacteristically, he failed.²⁰ He made a more successful attempt in Klazomenai, where he connected the city, till then an island, to the mainland.²¹ These two episodes, which will have involved massive construction work and considerable expenditure, remained outside the scope of those same authors, whose silence is evoked to refute the visit to Jerusalem. Yet there is no obvious reason to question their historicity.²²

The argument from silence, on which the case against the historicity of Alexander's visit relies so heavily, thus appears to rest on wobbly foundations. The seemingly solid body of evidence brought in support – the silence of five independent authors – dissolves under close scrutiny. Diodorus and Justin are too cursory to be useful, Plutarch too anecdotal. Even Arrian, a respectable and thorough historian, has been shown to omit a number of stories, at least as likely (or even more so) to enter the historical record, as an innocuous visit to Jerusalem. The only historian who is detailed enough to be used as evidence is Curtius. And his work, let us remember, is a secondary source, written some four centuries after the events it describes. Even his true identity, for all our best efforts, still remains a mystery.²³ His silence seems insufficient to carry the burden laid on it by modern research.

Furthermore there are other pieces of evidence, which still merit our attention. In the twelfth book of his *Natural History* Pliny the Elder writes about balsam (54.111-123). This marvelous plant grew only in Judea, in two smallish gardens – one of 20 *iugera*, the other even small-

20 Which failure elicited from Pausanias the remark: “’tis hard for a man violently to overpower things Divine” (2.1.5).

21 The source is again Pausanias, 7.3.9. The project undertaken at Klazomenai anticipates Alexander's strategy in the siege of Tyre. One might thus expect a mention in either context.

22 While these details are certainly absent from the narratives of Diodorus, Plutarch, Arrian and Justin, they may have been included in Curtius'. Until the first two books of Curtius – where these events would have been narrated – are found, this must remain an open question.

23 For research on the time and identity of Curtius see argumentation and bibliography in Atkinson, *Commentary*, 19-73; Baynham, *Alexander*, 201-19. Although the uncertainty concerning Curtius' identity remains, it is at least agreed that his history of Alexander belongs to the latter half of the 1st century CE. Linguistic considerations aside, these conclusions rely for the most part on the biases deduced from his writing. It is much harder, of course, to say anything about any bias or prejudice which might induce him not to include material in his work.

er.²⁴ The most valuable product made of this plant was its resin. This was procured by making a small incision in the bark of the plant, from which the resin oozed in small drops. These drops were then collected, and stored first in a hollow horn, then in brand new clay vessels. The process of production was very slow, and it is *à propos* this that Pliny brings up Alexander's name: *Alexandro Magno res ibi gerente toto die aestivo unam concham impleri iustum erat.*²⁵

At first glance, it is hard to know what to make of Pliny's remark. Droysen, the founder of modern Alexander studies, took it to mean that the King visited Jericho in person (and even crossed the Jordan in order to found Gerasa). His uneasiness with this interpretation of Pliny's testimony, and with the entire reconstruction of events in the *Eretz-Israeli* hinterland, is nonetheless evident from the fact that he did not insert it in the main narrative of Alexander's campaign (his vol. I), reserving the topic for discussion in vol. III part 2, where he deals with city foundations by Alexander and his successors.²⁶

Later scholarship reversed Droysen's verdict, and interpreted Pliny's mention of Alexander as nothing more than a chronological note, stating that this was the situation of the plant's productivity at the time of Alexander's campaign.²⁷ Marcus, who seems to have thought that there was more to Pliny's words than mere chronology, nevertheless dismissed them as unauthentic, by yet another invocation of the *argumentum ex silentio*.²⁸ But as we have seen, this position is no longer tenable.

The potential implications of Pliny's statement were realized more fully by Abel, who wrote about a reconnaissance party led by Alexander or by one of his generals, which left the shore and actually reached Jericho.²⁹ Further implications are inescapable: did this reconnaissance force also reach Jerusalem? *Nous l'ignorons*.³⁰ A similar approach is taken by Gutman, who accepts the historicity of a Macedonian visit to the

24 Cf. Josephus, BJ 1.138, 361; 4.469; AJ 8.174; 9.7; 14.54; 15.96. Imported, according to legend, by the Queen of Sheba, the groves were later coveted, and obtained, by Kleopatra and rented back from her by Herod.

25 "When Alexander the Great was conducting business there, it was an honest summer day's work to fill one conch-shell" (§117).

26 DROYSEN, *Geschichte*, III 2, 203.

27 WILLRICH, *Juden*, 18; BUCHLER, *Relation*, 6-7; SPAK, *Bericht*, 47 n. 2; STONEMAN, *Traditions*, 39.

28 MARCUS, *Appendix*, 521-522.

29 The main two centers of balsam cultivation were in Jericho, some 25 km east by north-east of Jerusalem, or in 'Ein-Gedi, on the shores of the Dead Sea, some 40 km south-east of the city. The former location seems a more plausible place for this putative visit, both because of its greater accessibility, and for another reason to be discussed below.

30 ABEL, *Alexandra*, 58.

balsam plantations, but ascribes it to Parmenion or to one of his officers. Such a visit will have been motivated by scientific curiosity, but also by the need to assess this industry's profitability, in order to tax it.³¹ However, Gutman's reconstruction is based on the *a priori* assumption that Alexander never ventured into the *Eretz-Israeli* hinterland, and Pliny's text clearly mentions Alexander, not Parmenion.

The relevance of the questions raised by modern scholars concerning the *testimonium Plinianum* to the discussion at hand is obvious enough. Unfortunately, the current state of the evidence does not allow a clear verdict one way or the other. A more profitable result can perhaps be gained from a different question: what can we say of Pliny's source(s)? It has long been noticed that his account of the balsam bears some striking resemblances to the description of the same plant by Theophrastos.³² For example, we read in both authors that the plant is harvested in summer, that a conch-shell takes a full day to fill, that the sap is worth twice its weight in silver, and that the plant only grows in two specific gardens, of exactly the same size.³³ Buchler argued that since Pliny literally copied Theophrastos' account, the insertion of Alexander's name is merely a chronological marker, which cannot be used as evidence for the King's presence in Jericho.³⁴

However, a close inspection reveals that Pliny's account is hardly a copy of Theophrastos'. Putting aside a significant amount of independent material, such as the history of the plant in Roman times (which is obviously later and does not concern us here), the different names used for its native land ("the valley of Syria in Theophrastos', "Iudaea" in Pliny), and the basic disagreement on whether the incision may or may not be made with an iron blade, the composition of Pliny's account (especially the highly dissimilar arrangement of material) does not give any indication that his source was Theophrastos in particular. Furthermore, elsewhere in his work Pliny never hesitates to credit Theophrastos when he borrows from him.³⁵ Why should he neglect to do so here? Finally, Pliny dated Theophrastos' *Historia Plantarum* about a decade

31 GUTMAN, Alexander, 278-279.

32 *Historia Plantarum* 9.6.1-4.

33 REINACH, *Textes*, 275 n. 1, remarks that in copying Theophrastos' measures, Pliny neglected to take into account the difference between the Attic plethron and the Roman iugerum.

34 BUCHLER, *Relation*, 7.

35 One typical example is his famous observation about the natural habitat of ivy: 16.62.144. Cf. also 3.5.57; 8.43.104, 8.49.111, 8.54.128, 8.69.173, 8.82.222; 9.8.28, 9.83.175; 10.41.79; 11.116.281; 13.30.101; 15.1.1, 15.3.10, 15.40.138; 17.37.226; 19.10.32, 19.48.162; 21.9.13, 21.68.109; 25.5.14, 25.32.69; 26.63.99; 27.40.63.

after Alexander's death.³⁶ It is highly unreasonable that he should add to information borrowed from this work a chronological marker relating to Alexander's lifetime.

Thus, since both accounts show such distinct similarities, yet appear to be independent of each other, the logical inference is that both derive from a common source.³⁷ What will this source have been? The answer seems to lie in Pliny's particular choice of words: *res ibi gerente*. This emphasis on the *res gestae* implies that the source in question is one of the now lost Alexander-histories. But which one? In the first book of the *Natural History* Pliny lists both the topics to be discussed in each volume, and the authors used therein. Among those whose works have been utilized for book 12 we find Kallisthenes, Kleitarchos, Nearchos, Onesikritos, Chares and Ptolemy. Any attempt to discern who is the most likely candidate for the balsam story would entail a discussion of the putative publication dates for the various authors' works on Alexander – a discussion which, even if it can be resolved, lies well outside the scope of this paper.³⁸ But a description of the balsam in one of the first-generation histories is hardly surprising. Alexander, a younger student of Aristotle, was famously interested in medicine, and can be expected to have shown an interest also in the qualities of this rare and marvelous plant.³⁹

It is a cliché of historical study that an *argumentum ex silentio* may only be resorted to in the case of a most resounding silence. In this paper I have tried to show that the silence cited in modern scholarship, in order to attack the historicity of Josephus' and other stories about the dealings of Alexander with the Jews of Jerusalem, does not qualify. Of the five authors, whose silence is brought forth as evidence, Diodorus and Justin are too brief to serve as evidence, Plutarch too anecdotal. Arrian, although a methodical and relatively detailed historian, can be shown to have omitted other stories, with equal or greater appeal. The only writer whose silence counts is Curtius. On the other hand, as we have learned from Pliny's and Theophrastos' accounts of the balsam plant, at least one of the first-generation Alexander-histories discussed the properties of the balsam. This discussion, connected by Pliny with

36 *Theophrastus, qui proximus a Magni Alexandri aetate scripsit circa urbis Romae annum cccxxxx* (13.30.101, in reference to *Hist.Plant.* 5.3.7). For other mentions of Theophrastos' time see: 15.1.1, 16.62.144.

37 Theophrastos openly declares that his description of the balsam is based on another's account: *Paradeisouj d' ei]nai/ fasi dub mohouj* (9.6.1).

38 The *terminus ante quem* should be c.314, the publication date of Theophrastos' work. Kallisthenes, at least, qualifies without difficulty, as he died before Alexander.

39 Interest in medicine and healing herbs: Plutarch, *Alex.* 41; Curtius 9.8.21-27.

Alexander's actions *in situ*, was omitted by all of the five authors mentioned above.⁴⁰

Of course, in and of itself this conclusion hardly proves that Alexander did visit Jerusalem (or Jericho), let alone that he bowed down before the Jerusalem High-Priest or sacrificed to Yhwh in his temple. The surviving accounts of his dealings with Judean Jews display such strong mythical and folkloristic motifs that taking them at face value or treating them as straightforward history would be a grave methodological error. On the other hand, it would be just as dangerous methodologically to invoke the *argumentum ex silentio*, in order to argue that they do not contain any kernel of truth.

Bibliography

- ABEL, Père F.-M., Alexandre le grand en Syrie et en Palestine, in: *Revue Biblique* 44 (1935) 44-61.
- AMITAY, Ory, Shim'on ha-Šadiq in His Historical Contexts, in: *JJS* 58 (2007) 236-249.
- AMITAY, Ory, The Story of Gviha Ben-Psisa and Alexander the Great, in: *JSPE* 16 (2006) 61-74.
- ATKINSON, John E., A commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, Amsterdam 1980.
- BAYNHAM, Elizabeth, *Alexander the Great: the unique history of Quintus Curtius*, Ann Arbor, MI 1998.
- BOSWORTH, A. Brian, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge 1988.
- BOSWORTH, A. Brian, *Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander*, 2 vols., Oxford 1980-1995.
- BOSWORTH, A. Brian, The Government of Syria under Alexander the Great, in: *CQ* 24 (1974) 46-64.
- BUCHLER, Adolf, La relation de Josèphe concernant Alexandre le grand, in: *REJ* 36 (1898) 1-26.

40 Pliny's testimony is all the more credible for its casual nature – he certainly had no axe to grind here. Incidentally, it is also corroborated by a unique version of the *Romance* in Hebrew, the *Sefer Toldot Alexander* published by I. LÉVI, *Tehilah le-Moshe* (Leipzig, 1896), pp. 142-163, 237-235; DAN, *Alilot*, 136 ch. 15; English translation and preface: GASTER, *Studies*, see 838 ch. 16. This version tells of a meeting between Alexander and a mysterious old man, during which Alexander is shown the body of a dead king, preserved in balsam oil from Jericho.

- CROSS, Frank Moore, The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri, in: BA 26 (1963) 110-121.
- CROSS, Frank Moore, The Papyri and Their Historical Implications, in: Lapp, Paul W. / Lapp, Nancy L. (eds.), Discoveries in the Wâdi Ed-Dâliyeh, Cambridge, MA 1974, 17-29.
- DAN, Yosef, 'Alilot Alexander Moqdon, Jerusalem 1969.
- DROYSEN, Gustav Johann, Geschichte des Hellenismus, Gotha 1877.
- ENGELMANN, Helmut, Der Griechische Alexanderroman Rezension G, Buch II, Meinsheim a.G. 1963.
- GASTER, Moses, Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Medieval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology, II, London, 1925-1928.
- GOLAN, David, Josephus, Alexander's Visit to Jerusalem, and Modern Historiography, in: RAPPAPORT, Uriel (ed.), Josephus Flavius: Historian of Eretz-Israel in the Hellenistic and Roman Period, Jerusalem 1982, 29-55 (Hebrew).
- GOLDSTEIN, Jonathan A., Alexander and the Jews, in: PAAJR 54 (1993) 59-101.
- GRUEN, Erich S., Heritage and Hellenism, Berkeley, CA / Los Angeles, CA / London 1998.
- GUTMAN, Yehosu'a, Alexander the Great in Eretz-Israel, in: Tarbiz 11 (1940) 271-294.
- HAMMOND, Nicholas Geoffrey Lemprière, The Genius of Alexander the Great, Chapel Hill 1997.
- KASHER, Aryeh, The Journey of Alexander the Great in Eretz-Israel, in: RAPPAPORT, Uriel & RONEN, Yehudit (eds.), The State of the Hasmoneans, Jerusalem / Tel-Aviv 1993, 13-35 (Hebrew) (Bet Miqra 20 [1975] 187-208).
- LANE FOX, Robin, Alexander the Great, London 1973.
- LÉVI, I., Romance in Hebrew, The *Sefer Toldot Alexander, Tehilah le-Moshe*, Leipzig, 1896.
- MARCUS, Ralph, Appendix C, in Josephus (Jewish Antiquities VI), Cambridge, MA 1937, 512-532.
- MOMIGLIANO, Arnaldo, Flavius Josephus and Alexander's Visit to Jerusalem, in: Athenaeum 57 (1979) 442-448.
- MOR, Menahem, From Samaria to Shechem, Jerusalem 2003 (Hebrew).
- NOAM, Vered, Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History, Jerusalem 2003.
- NIESE, Benedictus, Geschichte der griechischen und makedonischen Staaten seit der Schlacht bei Chaeronea, Darmstadt 1963 (Gotha 1893).
- O'BRIEN, John Maxwell, Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy, London / New York 1992.
- PEARSON, Lionel Ignacius Cusack, The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great, New York 1960.

- REINACH, Theodore, *Textes d'auteurs grecs et romains relatifs au Judaïsme*, Paris 1895.
- SCHACHERMEYR, Fritz, *Alexander der Grosse*, Vienna 1973.
- SPAK, Isaac, *Der Bericht des Josephus über Alexander den Grossen*, Königsberg 1911.
- STONEMAN, Richard, *Jewish Traditions on Alexander the Great*, in: *StPhilo* 61 (994) 37-53.
- TARN, William Woodthorpe, *Alexander the Great*, 2 vols., Cambridge 1948.
- TCHERIKOVER, Victor, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, New York 1959 (translated by APPLEBAUM, S. from the 1931 Hebrew edition).
- TRUMPF, Jürgen, *Vita Alexandri Magni Regis Macedonum*, Leipzig 1974.
- WILLRICH, Hugo, *Juden und Griechen vor der makkabäischen Erhebung*, Göttingen 1895.
- ZIEGLER, Konrat, *Plutarch, Alex. 25.4-5*, Leipzig 1968.