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THE AUTHENTICITY OF *METAPHYSICS ALPHA ELATTON* IN THE *SCHOLIUM PARISINUM* AND IN ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS' *RECENSIO ALTERA*

Abstract

The present note offers a brief new analysis of the well-known *scholium* found in codex Parisinus gr. 1853 (E) on folio 234r. My analysis will compare it to the exegetical approach that Alexander of Aphrodisias adopts at the outset of *Alpha elatton* – attested by two different *recensiones* – and to Asclepius' exegesis of the first lemma of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

Keywords

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; Book *Alpha Minor*; *Scholium* Parisinus Gr. 1853, f. 234r (E); Alexander of Aphrodisias's Commentary; Asclepius's Commentary

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The present note offers a brief new analysis of the well-known *scholium* found in codex Parisinus gr. 1853 (E) on folio 234r. My analysis will compare it to the exegetical approach that Alexander of Aphrodisias adopts at the outset of *Alpha elatton* – attested by two different *recensiones*, one of which is especially at stake here, the *recensio altera* (Laur. 87.12) – and to Asclepius’ exegesis of the first lemma of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

I begin by citing the *scholium* of codex Parisinus gr. 1853 (E), located in the right margin of folio 234r, between the end of *Alpha meizon* and the beginning of *Alpha elatton*:

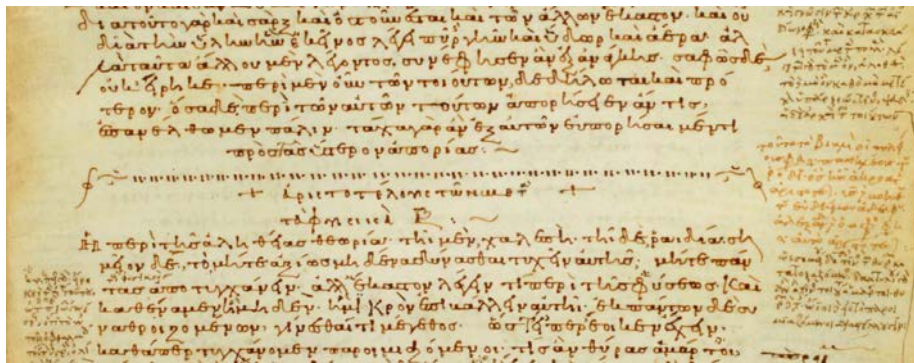


Figure 1: Parisinus gr. 1853 (E), f. 234r

τοῦτο τὸ βιβλίον οἱ πλείους φασὶν εἶναι Πασικλέους τοῦ Ροδίου ὃς ἦν ἀκροατὴς Ἀριστοτέλους· υἱὸς δὲ Βοηθοῦ τοῦ Εὐδήμου ἀδελφοῦ, Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ ὁ Ἀφροδισιεύς φησὶν εἶναι αὐτὸ Ἀριστοτέλους.

Most say that this book is by Pasicles of Rhodes, who was a pupil of Aristotle and the son of Boethus, brother of Eudemus. But Alexander of Aphrodisias says that it is by Aristotle.

Although the text of this *scholium* shows affinities to Asclepius’ discussion of *Alpha meizon* (*In Metaph.* 4.21-22), the early editors of the *Metaphysics* believed that it referred to *Alpha elatton*.¹ The placement of the *scholium* –

¹ For previous analysis of the *scholium Parisinum*, see Hecquet (2005), Vuillemin Diem (1983), Berti (1982), Moraux (1967). Moraux argues that the *scholium*, first considered by C. A. Brandis in 1836 and later by W. Christ and W. Jaeger, is a valuable testimony in favor of attributing *Alpha elatton* to Pasicles. H. Bonitz, in his critical edition *Aristotelis Metaphysica* of 1848, also considered the *scholium* to be related to *Alpha elatton*. Berti

in the right margin at the end of *Alpha meizon* and near the start of *Alpha elatton* – clearly raised doubts among scholars as to which of the two ‘Alpha books’ the deictic phrase τούτο τὸ βιβλίον (“this book”) actually points. It is worth noting, however, the affinity between the beginning of the *scholium* and the phrase καὶ τούτο τὸ βιβλίον that begins the proem in the Laurentian codex to the second book of the *Metaphysics* (“this book, too ...”), where the exegete specifically addresses the Aristotelian authorship of *Alpha elatton*.

According to my analysis, the *scholium* in the Parisinus gr. 1853 exhibits similarities not only to Asclepius’ commentary but also to the *recensio altera*, i.e., the text of Alexander’s commentary found in Laurentianus 87.12.

The initial phrase of the proem to *Alpha elatton* as transmitted in the codex Laurentianus 87.12, f. 55r, reads as follows:

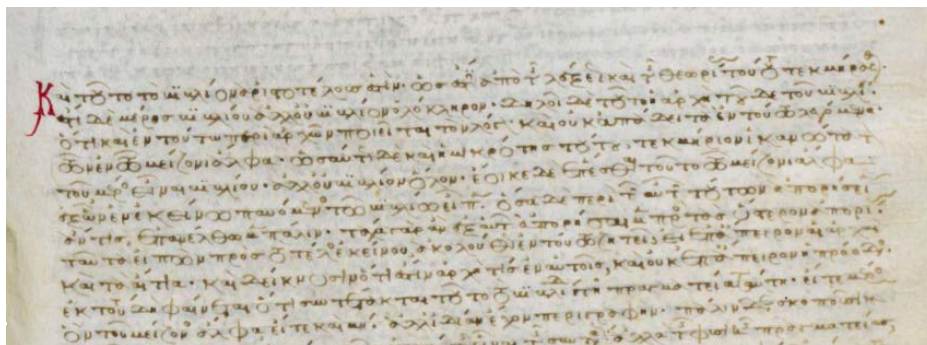


Figure 2: Laurentianus 87.12 (L), f. 55r

(1982) and Hecquet (2005), however, have opposed the attribution, which was adopted by German philologists up to Jaeger, and hold that the *scholium* refers to *Alpha meizon*, see also Vuillemin Diem (1983), esp. p. 174. Their arguments deserve consideration and could be analyzed more fully in a dedicated, comprehensive essay. On the relationship between the testimony of Asclepius, the *scholium* of the Parisinus gr. 1853 and *Alpha meizon*, see Primavesi (2012) pp. 418-9. Most interestingly, on folio 234r of Parisinus gr. 1853, in the upper margin and along the right-hand side of the folio, there is an extended *scholium*, in my view written by a later hand, which in its initial part quotes the entire content of the lateral marginal *scholium*, with only a few divergences. This upper *scholium* was edited by Brandis (1836) 589a41-b18, see also Vuillemin-Diem (1983), pp. 164-6. On the hands of the copyists of the Parisinus graecus 1853, see Moraux (1967).

Καὶ τοῦτο τὸ βιβλίον Ἀριστοτέλους ἐστὶν ὡς ἔστιν ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως καὶ τῆς θεωρίας τούτου τεκμηρησθαι.²

This book, too, belongs to Aristotle, as can be inferred from its style and theoretical content.

The opening of the *recensio altera* begins with a καὶ (“also”), which I consider significant. The exegete firmly asserts that *Alpha elatton* is by Aristotle, underscoring its argumentative coherence with the preceding book.

The Laurentian codex continues:

ἔστι δὲ μέρος βιβλίου ἀλλ’ οὐ βιβλίον ὁλόκληρον. δηλοῖ δὲ τοῦτο ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦδε τοῦ βιβλίου ὅτι καὶ ἐν τούτῳ περὶ ἀρχῶν ποιεῖται τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἀπάδει τὰ ἐν τούτῳ λεγόμενα τῶν ἐν τῷ μείζονι Α.

It is part of a book rather than a complete book; and the beginning of this work itself shows this clearly, since here too Aristotle deals with principles, and the statements found in it do not depart from those in the greater Alpha.

The repeated use of the present indicative form of εἶναι imparts a certain firmness to the argument. In this proem, the exegete of the Laurentian codex seems to contest an earlier opinion that may have questioned Aristotle’s authorship of *Alpha elatton*.

The commentary on *Alpha elatton* in the *recensio vulgata* presents differences in its opening, but it aligns with the *recensio altera* on one point: both focus on the brevity of *Alpha elatton*.³ This brevity makes it challenging to classify the text as a complete book, suggesting instead that it might be part of one. In the proem of the *recensio vulgata*, the sequential use of the verbs ἔοικεν (“it seems”, 137.3) and δόξει (“it will appear”, 137.6) weakens the exegetical argument, rendering it uncertain. In this regard, it is illuminating to compare this uncertainty to the conclusion preserved in the Laurentian

² Cf. Alex. *In Metaph.* 137.2-3 Hayduck. Laur. 87.12, as highlighted by Fazzo (2018), is the earliest witness of Alexander’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*. The new edition (*CAGB* III 1, Golitsis 2022), does not fully account for the significance of the *altera recensio*. Incorporating the readings of Laur. 87.12 could therefore provide valuable insights on specific textual and philosophical issues.

³ Cf. Alex. *In Metaph.* 137.2-7 in Hayduck’s edition: τὸ ἐλαττον ἄλφα τῶν Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικὰ ἔστι μὲν Ἀριστοτέλους ὅσα καὶ τῆ θεωρίας τεκμηρησθαι, οὐ μὴν ὁλόκληρον ἔοικεν εἶναι. ἀλλ’ ἔστιν ὡς μέρος βιβλίου τεκμαιρομένοις τῆ τε ἀρχῆ καὶ τῆ τοῦ βιβλίου μικρότητι. ὅσον μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τῷ περὶ ἀρχῶν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ποιεῖσθαι τινὰ λόγον δόξει καὶ οὐκ ἀπάδειν τοῦτο τοῦ μείζονος Α ἀλλ’ ἔπεσθαι ἐκείνῳ περὶ ἀρχῶν καὶ αἰτίων.

commentary. Here, the arguments for and against the idea that *Alpha elatton* is part of *Alpha meizon* conclude with a succinct philological observation (cf. 137.9-12 H):

εἴτε μέρος ὄν τοῦ μείζονος ἄλφα εἴτε καὶ μὴ ἄλλ' ἰδίαν ἔχον περιγραφὴν.

Whether it is part of the greater Alpha or not, it nevertheless possesses its own distinct definition.

In his commentary on the opening lemma of *Metaphysics Alpha meizon* (Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει), Asclepius⁴ (*In Metaph.* 4.4-16)⁵ acknowledges the existence of a *πραγματεία συγκεκριτημένη*,⁶ that is, a treatise assembled in a particular manner, sometimes lacking unity and compactness. A bit further on, Asclepius discusses how many books make up Aristotle's treatise; and he refutes the claim of those who have attributed *Alpha meizon* to Pasicles of Rhodes, son of Boethus and brother of Eudemus, appealing to the clarity of the Aristotelian style and thought.⁷ Asclepius' reasoning, which emphasizes stylistic and conceptual homogeneity to confirm Aristotle's authorship of *Alpha meizon*, is perfectly consonant – indeed, shares a similar firmness – with Alexander's testimony in the proem to *Alpha elatton* in the Laurentian codex.⁸

⁴ It should be borne in mind that Asclepius is the only Neoplatonic author of the sixth century whose consecutive commentary on the *Metaphysics* from book *Alpha* to book *Zeta* has come down to us in Greek. On the value of Asclepius as a useful source from a philological point of view for the reconstruction of the text of the *Metaphysics*, see the contributions of Luna (2001); Fazzo (2012); Primavesi (2012).

⁵ Hayduck (1888).

⁶ Cf. Asclep. *In Metaph.* 4.4-16.

⁷ Cf. Asclep. *In Metaph.* 4.17-24: Εἶτα λοιπὸν δεῖ εἰπεῖν καὶ περὶ τοῦ μεγάλου ἄλφα καὶ περὶ τοῦ μικροῦ ἄλφα. εἰδέναι τοίνυν χρὴ ὅτι δεκατέσσαρα βιβλία ἔγραψεν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τῇ παρούσῃ πραγματεία· μέχρι γὰρ τοῦ ν στοιχείου ἔγραψε καὶ αὐτοῦ. τινὲς δὲ εἰρήκασιν ὅτι δεκατρία· τὸ γὰρ μείζον ἄλφα περὶ οὗ νῦν πρῶτως διαλέγεται, οὗ φασιν εἶναι αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ Πασικλέους τοῦ υἱοῦ Βοήθου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ Εὐδήμου τοῦ ἐταίρου αὐτοῦ. οὐκ ἔστι δὲ ἀληθές· σώζεται γὰρ ἡ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους δεινότης καὶ ἐκ τῆς λέξεως καὶ ἐκ τῆς θεωρίας.

⁸ I would add that Asclepius also makes clear in the incipit to *Alpha elatton* his view about the authorship of the book, cf. Asclep. *In Metaph.* 113.5-8: Πληρώσαντες τὸ μείζον Α νῦν ἵκομεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἐλαττον Α. γνήσιον δὲ ἐστὶ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τοῦτο δηλον

If Asclepius, after citing a contrary opinion, argues for the authenticity of *Alpha meizon*, and the exegete in the Laurentianus explicitly upholds the authenticity of *Alpha elatton*, then the scholiast of E seems to combine in a single note both the view refuted by Asclepius concerning *Alpha meizon* and the exegetical stance on *Alpha elatton*'s authenticity found in the *recensio altera*. After all, Alexander is never known to have questioned the authorship of *Alpha meizon*, nor did Asclepius ever deny it.

This brief interpretation of the *scholium* in the Parisinus gr. 1853, examined in relation to Alexander's introduction to *Alpha elatton*, could suggest the importance of the *recensio altera* in the historical processes of studying and commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. If my analysis is correct, it might be inferred that Asclepius possibly drew on the *recensio altera*, and that the scholiast of the codex Parisinus also knew it and took it into account.⁹

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ἔκ τε τῶν δογματῶν καὶ ἐκ τῆς λέξεως καὶ τῆς φράσεως γὰρ τὸ ποικίλον πατέρα τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην προσαγορεύει. Asclepius here shows argumentative affinities to what the exegete of the Laurentian commentary states in the beginning of the proem to the same book. The exegete is certain that Aristotle's authorship of *Alpha elatton* can be deduced from the theory expounded in it and the variety of argumentation.

⁹ In the history of the analysis of this *scholium* of Parisinus gr. 1853 (f. 234r), there is no reference to the reading in the proem of the commentary on *Alpha elatton* witnessed in the Laurentianus 87.12.

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