



THE RÜLEK SCROLLS:

AN INTRODUCTION, A SIGNIFICANT PARATEXT, INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE



Readers of the PROCEEDINGS OF ESTAR(SER) will already be aware of the considerable efforts made by various scholars, collectors, bibliophiles, and editors to sift the historicity of that peculiar body known as THE ORDER OF THE THIRD BIRD. Despite these labors, a great deal of uncertainty (and even some genuine confusion) persists concerning the nature and workings of this fugitive and filiating community—which would seem, at least in its modern incarnation, to function as a semi-clandestine association of histrionic aesthetes who convene to perform public and private rites of sustained attention to made things (often works of art). New documents bearing on the genesis, ideology, evolution, and practices of THE ORDER are continually coming to light, and we are pleased here to offer a sample of a striking find that surfaced recently in “The ‘W’ Cache.” Details follow.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

The document reproduced here emerged in a sheaf of polyglot *Nachlass* attributable to Marton Bialek (1889-1966), a Francophone Transylvanian priest, orientalist, and explorer who almost certainly had ties to practicing communities of Birds in Ottoman and French Mandate territories during the interwar period. The small holograph sheet appears to represent a “protocol for sustained attention” of a sort familiar to initiates of the Order: instructions lay out a sequence of mental “postures” by which the practitioner is directed to give attentive presence to a given work of art; possible effects and ramifications follow. This brief text would thus seem to shed light on a distinctly Buddhist strain of Bird practice in use among initiates of the Order working in Paris, Turkey, and the Levant in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, however, much earlier sources may be in play: “The Exercise of the Trochilus” appears on a scrap of foolscap pinned to Bialek’s elaborate translation/summary of three highly syncretistic manuscript scrolls he claims to have found in Chinese Turkestan during service with the third Aurel Stein expedition (1913-1916). Composed in a largely illegible aggregate of central Asian scripts, the “Rülek Scrolls”—at least on the basis of Bialek’s redaction—outline a remarkable and exigent technique for attaining psychosomatic/metempsychotic union with a material, human-made object. This ritual process, comprising elements of both acute danger and unbearable rapture, begins with close meditational attention to the object, and transits through episodes of mental transmigration, of near self-loss, and of (ideally) temporary metamorphosis. Paraphrase is quite impossible, but a full publication of Bialek’s manuscript is currently underway. Until then, it is hoped that the present text—apparently a preparatory exercise devised by Bialek to assist practitioners in readying themselves for one phase of this demanding encounter—will be of interest and use to the relevant persons. A transcription appears overleaf, with instructions.

L'Exercice du Trochilus
 Premier Mouvement
 Aspect: ce qui se voit de la porte
 Par un point de vue
 Regardez-le sans bouger
 Deuxième Mouvement
 Aspect: ce qu'on voit de la
 terrasse la porte de l'observateur
 Dehors cette porte
 Troisième Mouvement
 Aspect: ce qu'on voit de la
 porte exactement ainsi, même lorsque vous êtes
 Sentez la qualité de la porte de l'œuvre en tête de soi



Ne s'agit pas de l'Exercice. Attention à ce que l'on voit
 exactement sans point de vue. Mais à l'œuvre
 elle-même, c'est-à-dire à l'œuvre elle-même, c'est-à-dire à l'œuvre elle-même.



FIGURE: A facsimile of Marton Bialek's "The Exercise of the Trochilus" (W. Cache – Convolute 32.2; photo courtesy of Peter Legg).

THE EXERCISE OF THE TROCHILUS



A note for those wishing to attempt this exercise: Each movement should be allotted a fixed duration of not less than three minutes; the hands should be free and the body unburdened; silence and focus are essential.



FIRST MOVEMENT

ASPECT: "AT THE GATE"

ASSUME A POSITION BEFORE THE MADE THING.

REGARD IT WITHOUT MOVING.

SECOND MOVEMENT

ASPECT: "ASCENDING THE PATH"

FIND THE DOOR IN THE WORK.

BECOME THIS DOOR.

THIRD MOVEMENT

ASPECT: "FLEEING THE GATEKEEPER"

REMAIN EXACTLY SO, EVEN AS YOU DEPART.

BEAR THE DOOR-BEING OF THE WORK IN YOUR FLESH.

Remember: The Third Movement does not end until the practitioner passes through a material door. Until this time, all nearby things and persons will communicate their door-being to the practitioner.

1. The significance of "Trochilus" (*Τρόχιλος*) is not absolutely clear: it is certainly possible that the exercise is named after the Greek mythological figure associated with the chariot or chariot wheel; more likely, in our view, it is an invocation of the eponymous wading birds described by Herodotus as plucking leeches off the tongues of Nile crocodiles (hence the genus *Limnodromus*, i.e. "goers of the threshold").