R. Stoneman, K. Erickson, I. Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing and Groningen University Library.

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Although the topic has been and it is still one of the most studied, the miscellany *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* offers a number of original and significant contributions relating to the transmission of the *Alexander Romance* in Persia and the East. The volume is edited by some of the leading scholars in this field of research - Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton – and it is divided into five thematic parts (respectively 1: formation of a tradition, 2: perspectives, 3: texts, 4: themes, 5: images) which address issues that are at the same time general and specific. On the one hand, it dwells on the thorny question of the greater or lesser hostility that was addressed toward the figure of Alexander the Great in the lands that had made up his empire. On the other hand, it examines in different literatures and eras "the connections and the tensions created by this remarkable – I am tempted to say unique – diffusion of the fictional story of a single man and his conquests and explorations" (p. ix).

The first part of *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* explores a series of wide-ranging questions that regard the formation of the *Alexander Romance*.

In the chapter "Persian Aspects of the Romance Tradition" (p. 3-18), Richard Stoneman resumes and expands some considerations already expressed in his previous "Oriental Motifs in the Alexander Romance" (*Antichton* 26, 1992), analyzing "how far the arrival of the Alexander story marks a new direction for Persian storytelling" (p. 4). The two contributions by Daniel L. Selden, "Mapping the Alexander Romance" (p. 19-59), and Faustina C.W. Doufikar-Aerts, "King Midas' Ears on Alexander's Head: In Search of the Afro-Asiatic Alexander Cycle" (p. 61-79), attempt to draw the Alexander tradition within the wider Afro-Asiatic literary context. On the one hand, Selden maintains that "text networks on the scale of the *Alexander Romance* united readers across Eurasia, without homogenizing them, in a utopian vision of the world" (p. 49), on the other, Doufikar-Aerts concludes the Afro-Asiatic mapping by saying that "the oriental Alexander cycle is part of an essentially coherent, but – in the course of time and distance – much differentiated tradition" (p. 76). These two contributions are particularly significant, although the conclusions to which they arrive are not definitive and reasonably not so punctual.

In "The *Alexander Romance* and the Pattern of Hero-Legend" (p. 81-102), Graham Anderson touches another key issue for the formation of the Romance: "how readily the 'heroic' inventions of the *Romance* mirror those already implicit in mythical and legendary materials before Alexander, and in historical and rhetorical traditions on the king himself, and how far they are underlined, and sometimes undermined, by the nature of popular narrative" (p. 81). In the formation of the *Romance*, the figure of Alexander as hero (with a thousand faces, one might add) clearly played a key role. This contribution is therefore significant to delineate another essential element within the Eastern tradition.

In the second part, the contributions are characterized by a more philological and textual perspective of research. In "The Persians in Late Byzantine Alexander Romances: A Portrayal under Turkish Influences" (p. 105-115), Corinne Jouanno analyses two Late Byzantine manuscripts, respectively the *Marcianus graecus* 408, "a rewriting of the two oldest versions of the *Alexander Romance*, the so-called α and *β* recensions", and a prose narrative text pertaining to the so-called *ζ* recension, trying to evaluate "how far the historical context influenced the account which both works gave of Alexander's campaign against Darius and whether the Late Byzantine redactors superimposed an image of the contemporary Turkish enemies on that of the old Persians" (p. 106). In "Adventures of Alexander in Medieval Turkish" (p. 117-126), Hendrik Boeschoten examines the content of six prose fragmentary stories composed in *masnavī* style in western Oghuz, which belong "to a cycle containing at least a report on Alexander's Indian and Chinese adventures" (p. 117), and other unpublished materials in Old Anatolian Turkish. The last chapter of this part, "Some Talk of Alexander. Myth and Politics in the North-West Frontier of British India" by Warwick Ball (p. 127-158), while being very unconventional (since it analyzes the echoes of the figure of Alexander in the Indo-British political relationships), shows very well how deeply the pervasiveness of themes and motifs is connected to the figure of Alexander.

The third part presents some specific texts containing Alexander's narratives considered as if they were case studies in the formation of the *Alexander Romance*.

In "Alexander the Great in the *Shāhnāmeh* of Ferdowsī" (p. 161-174), Haila Manteghi returns to one of the most complex and important text constitutive of the eastern Alexander tradition, i.e. the *Shāhnāmeh* by Ferdowsī, studying the different

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"layers" that formed the story of Alexander it contains: the indigenous sources, the Christian references and the Arabic background. On the "probability that more than one Arabic translation from the Syriac was in circulation", the conclusions to which the author arrives agree with those by Doufikar-Aerts, since, according to Manteghi, "there was a Persianized version in Middle Persian, derived from Syriac which was translated into Arabic in the Islamic period, most probably in the Abbāsid period, and it turned into an important source especially for the Persian authors although they wrote in Arabic" (p. 172).

In "The King Explorer. A Cosmographic Approach to the Persian Alexander" (p. 175-203), rather than looking at a single text, Mario Casari rereads the Persian sources as if they represent in their whole a cosmographic cycle with Alexander in the guise of King Explorer. The contribution of David Zuwiyya, "'Umāra's *Qiṣṣa al-Iskandar* as a Model of the Arabic Alexander Romance" (p. 205-218), continues along this line of research. It focuses on the *Qiṣṣat al-Iskandar* by the eighth-century author 'Umāra Ibn Zayd which represented a sort of literary model in the Arab-western tradition (Maghrebi Arabic, Spanish and Aljamiado). El-Sayed M. Gad's "Al-Tabari's Tales of Alexander: History and Romance" (p. 219-231) focuses on the four versions of the story of Alexander given by the historian al-Ṭabarī, by tracking in them Romance themes and locating "these stories within the context of the historical development of the Alexander Romance both in the Persian and in the Arab worlds of the late third and early fourth AH/ AD ninth and tenth centuries" (p. 219). Emily Cotrell, "Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik and the α Version of the *Alexander Romance*" (p. 233-253), presents the text of Ibn Fātik comparing the Arabic version and the Syriac version in relation to the pacific conquest of China by Alexander. In "Aspects of Alexander in Coptic Egypt" (p. 255-261), Leslie S.B. McCoull offers some brief reflections on the nine preserved fragments of a Coptic-language version of the Alexander Romance. Yuriko Yamanaka's "The Islamized Alexander in Chinese Geographies and Encyclopaedias" (p. 263-274) analyzes the question of the transmission of the Alexander Romance in China.

The fourth part is a continuation of the previous one, but it is focused on a variety of themes. It includes contributions respectively dedicated to the dragon-slaying stories ("Sekandar, Dragon-Slayer" by Daniel Ogden, p. 277-294) and the first Alexander's wife, Roxane, the daughter of the Bactrian noble Oxyartes ("Stories of the Persian Bride: Alexander and Roxane" by Sabine Müller, p. 295-309). It also includes more comparative contributions regarding the figure of Alexander as philosopher ("Alexander the Philosopher in the Greco-Roman, Persian and Arabic Traditions" by Sulochana Asirvatham, p. 311-326), the popular motif of the water of life ("In Search of Water of Life: The Alexander Romance and Indian Mythology" by Alexandra Szalc, p. 327-338), the problem of Alexander's kingship ("The Kingship of Alexander the Great in the Jewish Versions of Alexander Narrative" by Alexandra Klęczar, p. 339-348) and the figure of Alexander within the rabbinic literature ("Alexander in *Bavli Tamid*: In Search for a Meaning" by Ory Amitay, p. 349-365).

The fifth and final part presents some case studies on the relationship between the *Alexander Romance* and its iconographic representations. In particular, Olga Palagia focuses on "The Impact of Alexander the Great in the Art of Central Asia" (p. 369-382). Agnieska Fulinska's "Oriental Imagery and Alexander's Legend in Art: Reconnaissance" (p. 383-404) gives a short overview on Alexander's iconography within the Hellenistic Greek style art, "concentrating on the assimilation with and attributes of these deities who were perceived in relation with the East" (p. 383-384). The short contributions by Firuza Melville, "A Flying King" (p. 405-409), describes (without iconographic apparatus) some flying machine in the *Shāhnāmeh* by Ferdowsī.

Among the books recently published on Alexander the Great in Persia and the East, *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* provides a very rich and unique overview on this field of research. Some contributions, such as that by Doufikar-Aerts, will influence future research on this literary tradition that seems to be endless.

Francesca Bellino
University of Turin (Italy)

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