Bohas Georges, Saguer Abderrahim, Sinno Ahyaf (trad.), *Le roman d'Alexandre à Tombouctou. Histoire du Bicornu. Le manuscrit interrompu*. Traduction de Georges Bohas, Abderrahim Saguer, Ahyaf Sinno / *Qiṣṣat Ḏī al-Qarnayn Ḥasaba maḫṭūṭat Maktabat Mammā Ḥaydara (Timbuktū)*.

Arles, Actes Sud/École normale supérieure de Lyon, Bibliothèque Mamma Haidara, 2012, 98 p. (French text) + 134 p. (Arabic text). ISBN : 978-2330013394

The publication of work resulting from important research is always a welcome event to be received with enthusiasm. The event must arouse more attention when the edition is of a manuscript of particular importance within a specific recension or tradition and when a work has not previously been published.

Le roman d'Alexandre à Tombouctou. Histoire du Bicornu presents the edition of a manuscript found by Georges Bohas in Timbuktu (Mali), containing an Arabic version of the story of Alexander the Great preserved in the Mamma Haidara Library. Despite the importance of this version, George Bohas did not give a proper presentation of the manuscript within the Alexander Romance tradition. To better appreciate the text here reviewed, it seems appropriate to precede the review with a brief presentation of the state of the art regarding this complex and intricate tradition, which is still far from being fully established.

Since Theodor Nöldeke[1] traced the development of the Alexander Romance in the East, remarkable progress has been made in outlining the leading developments of the Arabic Alexander tradition. As highlighted by Faustina Doufikar-Aerts, Nöldeke was the first scholar who "explained along general lines what had led to the development of the literary forms of the Alexander Romance that we find in Syriac, Arabic, Persian and Ethiopic literature".[2] Afterwards other scholars such as Karl Friedrich Weymann,[3] Mark Lidzbarski,[4] Israel Friedlaender,[5] Mario Grignaschi,[6] Tilman Nagel,[7] François De Polignac[8] contributed to the knowledge of this intricate and wide-ranging tr tadition within the specific framework of Arab-Islamic literature. At the same time, many other scholars focused on Arabic Alexander traditions by means of short essays on specific themes. The most important recent developments have been the volume *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great* edited by Z. David Zuwiyya[9] and especially the monograph *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* by Faustina Doufikar-Aerts. As argued by Doufikar-Aerts herself, she has presented a "general overview which can serve as a basis for analyzing the composition and development of the *Sīrat Iskandar*".[10] The importance of this study is to examine the entire tradition of the Alexander Romance for the first time after Nöldeke, proposing a new (and in some cases different) *stemma*. Hence Doufikar-Aerts identified four major branches of the Arabic Alexander Tradition: the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition, Alexander and wisdom literature, the Ḏū l-Qarnayn tradition and the so-called *Sīrat al-Iskandar* tradition, of which she has presented the main primary and secondary sources.[11]

The Mamma Haidara manuscript edited by George Bohas should be placed in the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition and more specifically in what is now called Western-Arabic Alexander tradition.[12]

(1) Theodor Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*, Wien, In Kommission bei F. Tempsky, 1890.

(2) Faustina Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus. A Survey of the Alexander Tradition through Seven Centuries: from Pseudo-Callisthenes to Ṣūrī*, Paris-Lauven-Walpole, Peeters, 2010, p. 3.

(3) Karl Friedrich Weymann, *Die äthiopische und arabische Übersetzung des Pseudo-Callisthenes, eine literaturkritische Untersuchung*, Kirchhain N.-L., Druck von M. Schmersow, 1901.

(4) Mark Lidzbarski, "Zu den arabischen Alexandergeschichten", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 8, 1 (1893), p. 263-312.

(5) Israel Friedlaender, *Die Chadhirlegende und der Alexanderroman: eine Sagengeschichte und literarhistorische Untersuchung*, Berlin, Druck und Verlag von B.G. Teubner Leipzig, 1913.

(6) See Mario Grignaschi, *Les Rasā'il Aristāṭālīsa ilā-l-Iskandar de Sālim Abū-l-'Alā' et l'activité culturelle à l'époque omayyade*, Damas, Ifpo, 1967. The articles by Mario Grignaschi on Alexander are so many that they cannot all be mentioned. Suffice it to recall that he made the sensational discovery of a manuscript preserved at the Aya Sofia Library in Istanbul which contains an adaptation of the late Epistolary Romance cycle, i.e. a novelized correspondence between Alexander and Aristotle.

(7) Tilman Nagel, *Alexander der Große in der frühislamischen Volksliteratur*, Walldorf-Hessen, Vfo, 1978.

(8) *Alexandre le Grand. Figure de l'incomplétude*, François de Polignac (éd.), *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge*, tome. 112, Roma, 2000.

(9) Z. David Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great taken from Two Medieval Arabic Manuscripts in Madrid*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2001.

(10) Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 9.

(11) The *Sīrat al-Iskandar* tradition gives a recension of the story of Alexander which made this text comparable to that of an Arabic epic cycle (*sīra*, pl. *siyar*). In this respect Doufikar-Aerts argued that the Arabic Alexander Romance has become part, for all intents and purposes, of the epic tradition, thanks to a gradual and complex process of *sīra*-tification of the narrative material about Alexander, and that it constitutes an autonomous branch.

(12) See Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 45-73, in part. p. 51.

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At the moment, three Western-Arabic legends are part of it. The first is the anonymous work *Ḥadīṯ Ḏī l-Qarnayn* published by Garcia Gomez in 1929 and generally known as *Leyenda de Alejandro*.(13) The second is an Aljamiado text, handed down from a manuscript dated 1588, published both by Francisco Guillén Robles I 1888(14) and by Alois Richard Nykl in 1929 as *El Rrekontamiento del Rrey Ališandere*.(15) Problems concerning this legend relate to the relationship between the Aljamiado text and a number of North African and Spanish versions (all still unpublished).(16) The third legend is the *Qiṣṣat Ḏī l-Qarnayn* recounted by Abū ʿAbd al-Malik. Following Doufikar-Aerts, this legend, which comes from a (lost) translation of the Syriac Alexander Romance in Arabic, contains in part the same tradition as the Aljamiado text of the *Rekontamiento del Rey Ališandere*, in part segments of text which are based on the Syriac Pseudo-Callisthenes and motifs thought to be specific to the (Western-) Arabic tradition.(17)

A first, preliminary analysis of the manuscript allows us to consider the Mamma Haidara manuscript a further version of the *Qiṣṣat Ḏī l-Qarnayn* told by Abū ʿAbd al-Malik. Since no version of this legend has yet been published, it is not currently possible to draw definitive conclusions on the originality or uniqueness of the text here reviewed. Particularly significant, at least in terms of geographical distribution of the story, is the fact that an almost complete version has been preserved in Mali. The manuscript of Timbuktu stops at the episode of the meeting with Qandafa and lacks conclusions, colophon, date and name of the copyist.

Despite not having carried out a systematic comparison between the various manuscripts and versions preserved, Bohas gives a brief account of the above questions in the "Introduction" by merely mentioning two other manuscripts preserved in Rabat (Bibliothèque Royale 12648 and Bibliothèque nationale 2325).(18) In the part devoted to the French translation he recorded cross-references to the text published by Zawiyya and the Pseudo-Callisthenes (French translation) in the footnotes, but without being systematic. On the other hand, he recorded further cross-references to the Qur'ān and various works of the Arab-Islamic literature in a more timely manner.

As regards the criteria of edition of the text, the manner in which Bohas has edited the Arabic text is questionable, particularly in light of the complexity of the Western-Arabic Alexander tradition and of the importance of the version of Timbuktu. In this regard Bohas writes: "Je n'ai pas trouvé de trace d'un manuscrit analogue qui m'aurait permis d'en faire l'édition critique" (p. 11-12). Hence his choice to edit the "corrompu et unique" manuscript of Timbuktu "d'une manière novatrice". It must be said that innovation means not only the decision to provide a different arrangement of the text, but also the decision even to intervene in the text with changes. I quote Bohas again: "La page d'édition est divisée en deux colonnes. Dans la colonne de droite on trouve le texte même du manuscrit. [...] Les seules modifications qui ont été apportées concernent la standardisation de l'écriture du *q* et du *f*, ainsi que l'écriture du *hamza*. [...] Dans la colonne de gauche nous donnons notre interprétation du manuscrit en arabe standard. Cette interprétation a été effectuée par Ahyaf Sinno, avec ma modeste collaboration" (p. 12). According to Bohas, interventions on the text would necessarily be such as to prevent its readability. However, comparing the original text and the correct one, it does not seem that those corrections are so great that they could not be shown in the footnotes.

(13) Emilio García Gómez, *Un texto árabe occidental de la leyenda de Alejandro según el manuscrito ár. XXVII de la Biblioteca de la Junta para ampliación de estudios*, Madrid, [Impr. de E. Maestre], 1929.

(14) Francisco Guillén Robles, *Leyendas de José, hijo de Jacob y de Alejandro Magno sacadas de dos manuscriptos moriscos de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid*, Zaragoza, Imprenta del Hospicio Provincial, 1888.

(15) Alois Richard Nykl, *A Compendium of Aljamiado literature containing: El Rrekontamiento del Rrey Ališandere, an Aljamiado version of the Alexander legend, with an introduction, study of the Aragone traits, notes an glossary, The History and classification of the Aljamiado literature*, New-York – Paris 1929 [Extrait de *Revue hispanique* 77 (1929), p. 408-611].

(16) Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 45-73, cites a number of Western-Arabic versions. The manuscript of the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid 5379 and the Gayangos 61 in the Real Academia de la Historia de Madrid, that "largely cover the contents of the *Rekontamiento*". She then quotes two other versions, both preserved in Rabat, the first in the Library of the Royal Palace, Ḥasaniyya collection, 12066, and the second in the General Library, D 1427, ff. 75-118, under the title *Qiṣṣat Ḏī l-Qarnayn wa mā fīhā min al-ʿaǧā'ib wa l-ġarā'ib*. The latter is widely commented upon and compared with the Spanish and Aljamiado text. To these must be added the two versions presented by J. Bauwens, "Deux textes 'tunisiens' de la Légende d'Alexandre Dûlqarnayn", *IBLA*, 114-115 (1966), p. 1-33.

(17) Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 57.

(18) It is unclear whether the manuscripts of Rabat cited by Bohas are the same as those summarized by Doufikar-Aerts.

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The choice of Bohas undoubtedly has the merit of offering the contemporary reader a clean and readable text (at least one!), full of correct references and quotations from the Qur'ān. However, by making this choice, Bohas has betrayed the spirit of an edition that returns the *original* version of Timbuktu, full of mistakes and imperfections, but unique and irreplaceable as each version within a specific tradition is.

That said, the importance of the manuscript is so great that the volume of Bohas should be greeted with enthusiasm.

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