

S a c c o n e , C a r l o (ed.) : Alessandro / Dhu l-Qarnayn in viaggio tra i due mari. (Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei 1) Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2008. x, 370 pp.

The book under review is the inaugural volume of an annual (whose editor is Carlo Saccone from the University of Bologna) concerned with the cultural area encompassing the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Up to p. 321, the unifying theme is the myth of Alexander the Great, and all essays are in Italian, except two that are in French. Saccone's introduction is followed by Paolo Rinaldi's paper, *La circolazione della materia 'alessandrina' in Italia nel Medioevo (coordinate introduttive)* (11–50), about the spread (actually, a classification) of Alexander texts in Italy during the Middle Ages: texts in Latin, texts in 'Italian' (based on some Latin version), texts in French. Actually, Italy is important in the history of the manuscripts of versions of the Hebrew romance of Alexander, but there is no mention of this in Rinaldi's essay; it's not a criticism, it's simply outside his scope. Rinaldi's purpose is to provide an outline, and this is why there is a fairly long bibliography.

Gianfelice Peron, in his chapter, *Rielaborazione narrativa e originalità dell'Alexandre castigliano: la storia di Bucefalo* (51–76) is concerned with the narrative reworking and originality of what is related about Alexander's wondrously fierce horse in the Castilian *Libro de Alexandre*, based on the edition by J. Cañas (Madrid 1995). Recent related scholarly literature about that version, that Peron cites, includes L. Lazzerini, *El Libro de Alexandre y sus (presuntos) enigmas: nuevas propuestas* (*Cultura Neolatina* 45 [2005] 100–152); A.L. Imondi, *Un autore per il "Libro de Alexandre"* (*Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale [Naples], Sezione Romanza* 43.1 [2001] 133–148). Note that the medieval traditions about the horse Bucephalus eating human flesh before he is tamed by Alexander, have a precedent in the mares of Diomedes, eating human flesh (Pseudo-Apollodoros, *Bibliothēkē* 2,96). The Hades connections of donkeys and mares were discussed by Ezio Albrile, e.g. in his *Oltre le soglie di Ade: Un excursus mitografico* (*Laurentianum* 47, 337–348).

A particular episode from a prominent French tradition – the fairy-like flower-damsels – is shown in its relation to parallels from Arab folklore (unrelated to the Alexander myth) and to Graeco-Roman mythology, in Patrizia Caraffi's chapter, *Alessandro in Oriente: le fanciulle fiore* (*Roman d'Alexandre, III, vv. 3286–3550*) (77–90). The delightful flower-damsels are a source of satisfaction, not danger to Alexander's soldiers. These damsels appear in entirely human form, dressed like medieval French noblewomen, and Alexandre de Paris refers to them once as fairies, whereas they have nymph features. Alexander the Great is told they are born at spring time as flowers, and that in winter they are swallowed by the earth. (there are parallels in the *Ramayana*, and in the Arab tales on Waqwaq Island). They are vulnerable, rather than harmers. Not so the hybrid female beings that appear in Lucian's *True History* 1: half vines, half women, they cause a delirium in those men they kiss. Two of Lucian's companions mate with them and are turned

into half humans, half vines carrying grapes. Lucian likens the vine women to visual representations of Daphne's metamorphosis, but whereas Daphne is vulnerable, Lucian devised beings with her likeness half way through her transformation, but who are harmers instead. I have dealt with lethal plants in folklore in two of my own papers (*An Insidious Rose, Lethal Flowers or Plants: A Version of the Death of Moses, and a Sanfedist Trick from the Napoleonic Wars*. In: *Fabula* 50 [2009] 111–117, *Deadly Flowers, and Plants with a Lethal or Spectacular Impact: A Theme in Folklore, in Fiction, and in Metaphoric Imagery*. *ibid.* 293–311).

The flower-damsels episode was included as § 4a 13 (309–321) and discussed (by Corrado Bologna, in Italian, 610–613) in a book edited by Liborio (*infra*). In Italy, medieval traditions about Alexander the Great have been the subject of a nine-volume series, *Le storie e i miti di Alessandro*, published by Mondadori (Milan) for the Fondazione Lorenzo Valla. Vols. 1–7 comprise works from antiquity, ending with Pseudo-Callisthenes, whereas the rest are bulky medieval anthologies: Vol. 8 is *Alessandro in Oriente*, and Vol. 9 is *Alessandro nel Medioevo Occidentale*. The latter, edited by Mariantonia Liborio, appeared in 1997, and verse or prose appear in the original and in translation into Italian on facing pages.

In the volume under review here, Margherita Lecco discusses the myth of Alexander's birth, in French or Norman texts (the latter, in Thomas of Kent) in relation to the Latin tradition, in her own chapter, which is in Italian, notwithstanding the French quotation in its title («*Amon, le dieu de Lybie, en vous l'engendrera*»: *Le leggende sulla nascita di Alessandro nei romanzi del Medioevo francese*, 91–108). It is followed by Danielle Buschinger's French chapter, *Alexandre, un opéra inabouti de Richard Wagner* (109–119). In her diary, Cosima Wagner related (in the entry for April 1st, 1878) about the project of an opera. Richard Wagner worked at *Alexander and Darius* indeed. In 1883, less than one month before he died, he told Cosima that he shared Gobineau's opinion of Alexander. Buschinger's chapter is relevant for Caraffi's, because Buschinger discusses (110–111) the flower-damsels scene from *Parsifal*. Buschinger proposes as a possible indirect source a ballet from Act III of *Robert le Diable* (1831) by Meyerbeer and Scribe, and then turns to discussing possible Buddhist influences, having mentioned that “Dans son article «*De Chrétien de Troyes à Richard Wagner*», Claude Lévi-Strauss [*L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 38–39 (January–February 1982) 8–15], quant à lui, suggère, que Wagner a pu s'inspirer, pour la scène des filles-fleur au deuxième acte de son œuvre, de légendes bouddhiques, notamment de celle où le Sage, méditant au pied de l'arbre, résiste aux assauts séducteurs des filles du démon du mal dont les flèches se changent en fleurs. Une autre histoire raconte que ce sont les projectiles que lance Mâra sur Çâkyamuni [que] se transforment en guirlandes de fleurs. J'ai montré ailleurs que Wagner a amplement utilisé la tradition bouddhiste [Buschinger: *Le Moyen Âge de Richard Wagner*. Amiens 2003, 125 sqq.]” (111). Buschinger concludes her paper by stating: “Il est ainsi assuré que pour l'épisode, resté mystérieux jusqu'à aujourd'hui, des filles fleurs, Wagner s'est largement appuyé sur la version S du Roman allemand d'Alexandre. Le mystère est levé! [...]” (119).

Alessandra Coppola's own chapter is *Alessandro e la regina Candace* (121–129). Candace, in India, recognises Alexander notwithstanding his disguise, because previously she had a portrait of him secretly made ('Tolemeo' [126] is a typo for 'Tolomeo'). The Candace episode, based on a Middle English romance of Alexander, was even analysed in mathematical formulae, in a paper of my own (*Identification and Doing Without It, II: Visual Evidence for Pinpointing Identity. How Alexander Was Found Out: Purposeful Action, Enlisting Support, Assumed Identity, and Recognition. A Goal-Driven Formal Analysis*. In: *Cybernetics and Systems* 34.4–5 [2003] 359–380).

Carla Corradi Musi (*Echi della visione sciamanica del mondo nel "Romanzo di Alessandro"*, 131–146) is concerned with Pseudo-Callisthenes. Nectanebus' metamorphosis is put in relation to shamanic traditions ('Nactabnebo' [132] should be 'Nectanebo'), and so is Bucephalus. Musi ascribes the transmission of solar myths to contacts and trade routes, and also refers to Tracian and Scythian soldiers in Philip's and Alexander's army (that in fact, recruited among European peoples to the north; some have even related that background of part of Alexander's troops, to the genetics and appearance of some individuals of a non-Islamised ethnic group in Pakistan's mountains). The same chapter also discusses fabulous episodes concerning the monstrous races, or wondrous animals (such as the attacking crabs). Claudio Mutti (*L'ascensione di Alessandro*, 147–155) reinterprets a relief from a church at Borgo San Donnino, and showing a sitting human figure holding two diagonal long objects, as being a representation of Alexander's flight: he is sitting in a chair (or throne), and holding to what may be understood as being ropes.

Human flight being carried by non-aggressive birds of prey in some form of container is also the case of the two children in the *Book of Aḥiqar*, as opposed to other forms of flight by being carried by such a bird (flight of Gilgamesh), of by dangling down being pulled by one's hair by an angel (*Ezekiel* 8,3). A Hebrew homiletical tale (*Midrash Tanḥuma*, pericope *Bereshit*, §7) situates in that manner the prophecy in *Ezekiel* 28,2, by applying it against Hiram, the King of Tyre, who is imagined in his own palace which – by means of a (mechanical or magic) contrivance – is standing in mid air at the entrance of the Adriatic Sea, i.e., above the Straits of Otranto ("between Adrias and the Ocean", i.e., the Sea of Rome, the Mediterranean): Ezekiel needs to be carried up there, so he would be able to talk to Hiram face to face. Hiram, like other kings (they are enumerated) who built a palace amid waters, came to consider himself a god, and was therefore punished. Another tale has Hiram rewarded for his help in building King Solomon's Temple, by being admitted to paradise alive, only to be expelled because he came to consider himself a god. The latter tale is found in *Derekh Erez Zuta* 1,18 (M. Higger: *The Treatises Derek Erez*. Brooklyn, New York 1935, 68–70), and *Pseudo-Sirach* (E. Yassif: *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle Ages: A Critical Text and Literary Studies*, Jerusalem 1984, version A, 253–258; cf. A.W. Zwiep: *Assumptus est in caelum. Rapture and Heavenly Exaltation in Early Judaism and Luke-Acts*. In: F. Avemarie/H. Lichtenberger (eds.): *Auferstehung. The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Tes-*

tament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity [Tübingen, September, 1999]. Tübingen 2001, 323–349, 337).

Carlo Saccone is concerned with Alexander as king and prophet, in a Persian literary work, in his chapter *Paradigmi della sovranità nel romanzo irano-islamico di Alessandro: il re-profeta e la 'sospensione del potere' nell'Eqbâl-nâme di Nezâmi (XII sec.)* (157–178). Nizâmî is also the author whose work is analysed by Johann Christoph Bürgel, in *Guerra e pace nell'Alessandreide di Nizami* (179–194). Aḥmedî (1333/4–1412/3), an early Ottoman poet, authored a work on Alexander that is analysed by Alberto Fabio Ambrosio, in *Ahmedî et son Iskender-nâme: un Alexandre des deux mondes* (195–208). A Central Asian, Herat-born Turkish author from the second half of the 15th century is analysed by Ermanno Visitainer, in his long essay, *L'Alessandro 'turco': alcune riflessioni in margine al Sedd-i İskenderî (La muraglia di Alessandro) di [ʿAlî Šîr Navāʿî* (209–251). To Navāʿî, like in the Persian tradition, Alexander is a conqueror, a philosopher, and a prophet, and Navāʿî devoted to him the fifth, and last, epic in his *Khamse* (Quintet).

Cristiano Donini, in *Il colloquio fra Alessandro Magno e i Gimnosofisti: analisi e prospettive* (253–273), discusses how texts from antiquity dealt with the debate of Alexander the Great and the Indian wisemen. Donini's perspective is at the same time an Indologist's and a classicist's. India is also the subject of Alessandro Grossato's chapter, *Alessandro Magno e l'India. Storico intreccio di miti e di simboli* (275–312). This essay, too, juxtaposes Indian and classical studies.

The last chapter in the thematic section is by Giulio Soravia, and is, in a sense, the most exotic one. It is titled *Alessandro Magno in Indonesia: una breve cronistoria* (313–321). Alexander the Great, for sure, never reaches as far as the Malay Archipelago, whose very existence he quite possibly even ignored. And yet, there are Indonesian versions of the romance of Alexander in Indonesia, and the best-known version is *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain*, an edition of which (by Khalid Hussein) was published in Kuala Lumpur (by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka) in 1967. The manuscript (Leiden, University's Library, Cod. Or. 1696) is from 1830. This Malay version is considered to be of Sumatran origin. Curiously enough, there is almost nothing in it of Alexander's historical or even mythical biography. It is just at the beginning that we are told that King Iskandar was the son of Raja Darab, a Rum [Greek, Byzantine] from Macedonia, and that he travelled in order to visit the East, and reached India's border. His army defeats a local ruler. Iskandar requests that he joins the true (Abrahamic) faith, and the defeated king complies. Much of the Indonesian romance of Alexander is about the negotiations for Alexander to marry the daughter of the defeated Indian king. The intermediary is none else than the fabulous Nabi Khidir (Khidr), the enigmatic Islamic character associated by Eastern Jews with Elijah, and by Eastern Christians with St. George. Eventually, Alexander's father-in-law asks Alexander to leave his wife with her father, when he departs. She is pregnant, it turns out, and much of the rest of the Indonesian romance of Alexander relates a genealogy descended from Alexander's son born to this princess.

Longworth Dames remarked that Khiḍr (in India Khizr) is “in many parts of India identified with a rivergod or spirit of wells and streams”, and “is believed to ride upon a fish”: “Possibly in this case there is also a survival of the fish-avatar of Vishnu” (M. Longworth Dames: *Khwādja Khaḍr*. In: *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*. ed. H.A.R. Gibb/J.H. Kramers. Leiden 1953 [reprint 1974], 235). A tradition about Khiḍr is preserved in the Ethiopic Alexander romance: “He is said to have become green through diving into the spring of life and thus got his name” (A.J. Wensinck: *al-Khaḍir* [or *al-Khiḍr*]. *ibid.*, 232–235), Wensinck mentions several identifications of Khiḍr in Islamic traditions.

The volume concludes with several book reviews, followed by an essay by Johann Christoph Bürgel, *Turandot – Von Nizami bis Puccini* (347–364). This book is a valuable addition to the scholarly literature about the Alexander myth, and is an excellent way to launch the *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei*, whose second volume (2009), guest-edited by Daniela Boccassini, is *Dreams and Visions in the Indo-Mediterranean World*.

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