The Creative Reception of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran

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When the Greek emperor Alexander died, aged 33, in the year 323 BCE, his life and career destined him to become the ideal model for the topos of valiant hero and reckless conqueror. Considering his conquest of more or less the whole world known to the Greek culture of his day, he would even become the quintessential expression of a world ruler. In world literature, no other historical character plays a similarly significant role. No other character has been portrayed so often and in so many different ways in historical literature, in epics, romances, and legends, in songs and dramatic poetry, in works of pious edification and in prophetic revelations.[1] In terms of geography, the narrative tradition dealing with Alexander covers primarily the whole of Europe and the Near and Middle East. In terms of chronology, it has stayed alive and vibrant, albeit with changing notions, from the earliest versions up to the very present. As a matter of fact, the Alexander tradition is so overwhelmingly present in both space and time that in a historical perspective it is hard to think of any work of transnational narrative literature surpassing its popularity. Consequently, it was neither surprising nor coincidental that Alexander became the focus of scholarly attention towards the end of the second millennium CE, when his memory was celebrated in various conferences, large research projects, and numerous scholarly publications.[2]

The narrative tradition focusing on Alexander derives mostly from a work of late Greek antiquity that has erroneously been attributed to Greek historian Callisthenes (ca. 370–327 BCE). According to the present state of knowledge, it was actually compiled at the end of the third century CE by a an unlettered scribe from Alexandria. For his compilation, this scribe drew mainly on a historical treatment of Alexander dating from the Hellenistic age (second century BCE) together with the substrate of a collection of letters, some of them preserving traits of the oldest layers of the legend of Alexander. Current research divides the development and international diffusion of the *Alexander Romance* into three major stages.[3] After the initial

constitution of the romance, the second stage encompasses its spread in the Near and Middle East, resulting in versions in the Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Arabic, Ethiopian, Persian, Turkish and Mongolian languages. The Romance's translation into Latin in the tenth century initiated its ensuing triumph in the European vernacular literatures, where it brought forth versions in Russian, French, Spanish, German and numerous other languages.

Western tradition relates to Alexander as a foundational character belonging to the historical stratum of Greek antiquity against whose backdrop it defines the basic values of its own cultures. The literatures of the regions conquered by the historical Alexander understandably bespeak a different attitude. Here, learned as well as popular tradition was challenged with the task of integrating a foreign invader and ruthless conqueror into a harmonious interpretation of the conquered region's own historical development.

In the following, then, I propose to have a closer look at the creative reception of the *Alexander Romance* in the literatures of the Near East, in particular Iran. My presentation is divided into two parts.[4] First, I will summarize the different layers of the reception of Alexander in Persian literature. This reception is characterized by an outspoken dichotomy: Alexander is regarded as both an "evil destroyer" and an Iranian hero. Second, I will discuss in some detail the creative reception of the *Alexander Romance* in a Persian romance dating from the Islamic period. This romance to a certain extent owes its genesis and popularity to an ingenious adaptation of major traits of the *Alexander Romance* to the Persian Islamic context. My concluding considerations will link the reception of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran to yet another foundational narrative in Iran. This is the story of the third Shiite *imâm* Hosein ibn 'Alî, whose martyrdom during the battle of Karbala in the year 680 constitutes an event of pivotal importance for the constitution of Shiite Islam.

The oldest layer of the reception of Alexander in Iran is preserved in the tradition of those strata of society that relate closely to the time before the conquest. The age of Hellenism initiated by Alexander and his thousands of troops settling in Iran left its most decisive imprints in urban culture. The rural population, in particular the population of the south-western province of Fârs, was not permeated by Hellenistic influence to a similar degree. There, the Iranian adherents of Zoroastrianism managed to preserve their ancient culture to a large degree. And it is there that a decidedly negative evaluation of Alexander originates[5]. French traveller Jean Chardin, who visited Iran in the second half of the seventeenth century, sketched this evaluation in the following words:

> In the teachings of the Zoroastrians I have found nothing more sensible than the bad things they say about Alexander the Great. Instead of admiring him and revering his name, such as do many other peoples, they detest, hate and revile him, they regard him as a bandit, a robber, a man lacking any sense of justice and intelligence, who was born only in order to shatter the order of the world and destroy a portion of humanity.[6]

With these words, Chardin characterized a perception that starkly contradicts the perspective of Western tradition. Although the Western Alexander-tradition at times also contains critical undertones, Alexander is here unanimously regarded as the epitome of successful conqueror and just ruler. From the viewpoint of Zoroastrian religion, Alexander was a foreign aggressor. Here, he was remembered above all for annihilating the Achaemenid dynasty, destroying the royal palace of Persepolis, burning the sacred books, and killing the Zoroastrian priests. And this image of Alexander was naturally transferred to the following dynasties of the Seleucid and Parthian rulers. Since the foreign invaders were dominant in terms of military organisation and technical superiority, the Zoroastrian priests took recourse to messianic prophecies as a means of religious propaganda against the foreign invaders. Repercussions of this propaganda are preserved in the *Sibylline Oracles*, a work thought to be compiled towards the middle of the second century BCE, and the *Bahman Yasht*, a prophetical work whose Avestan original was probably compiled during the reign of the earlier Sasanian rulers.[7] Both sources agree, albeit in somewhat veiled terms, that the rule of the foreign invaders will eventually come to an end. While the *Sibylline Oracles* speak of "a grievous calamity for Asia" brought forth by a "desperate woe" "from the race of the son of Cronos" in Macedonia,[8] the *Bahman Yasht* prophesies the destruction of the "wicked Akandgar-i Kilisyâkîh" and the reestablishment of the Persian empire.[9]

The negative image of Alexander was even more accentuated after the Persian empire had been re-established by the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashîr I, in 224 CE.[10] A letter supposedly written by Ardashîr's counsellor Tansar, though only preserved in a version dating from the second half of the sixth century CE, gives an account of the ruler's intention to rebuild the country. Alexander is accused of having destroyed the sacred scriptures of the Zoroastrians and thus having jeopardized the very roots of religion as the basis of Iranian culture and identity. The *Kârnâmag-e Ardashîr-i Bâbagân* (The Book of the Deeds of Ardashîr, son of Bâbak), compiled around the year 600 CE, regards Alexander as one of the most detested enemies of Ahura Mazda, the supreme god of the ancient Iranians. His evil impact is equalled to that of the legendary ruler Zahhâk, the

quintessential enemy of the ancient Iranians, and Afrâsiyâb, the ruler of Iran's hereditary enemy Turan. In the dualistic battle between the forces of Good and Evil, Alexander is a proponent of Ahriman or the dark powers that bring impurity, injustice, and disaster to the world.

It appears natural that the perception of Alexander in Iranian culture could only change after the religion of Zoroastrianism had been replaced in its pivotal position as a marker of Iranian identity. This happened with the event of the Islamic conquest in the seventh century CE. The Muslim Iranian authors, however, faced a dilemma. From the national Iranian point of view, Alexander had conquered their country and shattered their national integrity. From the religious Muslim point of view, however, Alexander had achieved the destruction of a religion that was now regarded as false. The Persian Muslim authors found a solution for this dilemma by turning Alexander into an Iranian. By establishing Alexander as the half-brother of Achaemenid ruler Darius III, he became the legitimate successor to the ruler whose reign he himself had terminated.

A significant mention of Alexander in historical sources of the Islamic period is found in the work of Dînawarî (died 895).[11] Writing in Arabic, Dînawarî, who most likely was of Iranian origin, puts a special emphasis on events relating to Iranian history. His account of Alexander's descent is of particular interest. According to this historian, Philip of Macedonia had made peace with the Iranian ruler Darius II after the latter's conquest of his territory. In order to strengthen their ties, Darius was married to Philip's daughter whom he took along to Iran. When he wanted to unite with her, Darius was, however, repelled by a bad smell that they treated with a herb called "al-sandar." The Iranian ruler's aversion to his Macedonian wife remained, however, so strong that he later sent her back to her father without being aware of her pregnancy. Later giving birth to her son, Alexander's mother named him in remembrance of the herb.

Other Iranian sources of the Islamic period further embellish the link between Alexander and Iranian culture.[12] When succeeding his father, Alexander refuses to continue paying tribute to Iran. In the ensuing battles, Iranian ruler Darius is mortally wounded by two of his own officers who side with Alexander. Consoling the dying Darius, Alexander confesses to him the fact that they share one and the same father, and promises to marry Darius' daughter Roxane.

Arab and Persian historians of the Islamic period[13] such as al-Tabarî (died 923), Hamza al-Isfahânî (died 970) and the anonymous author of the *Mujmal al-tavârîkh wa-'l-qisas* (Compilation of Historical Events and Other Stories) retain the accounts of destruction Alexander brought about in Iran, such as the burning of the sacred books and archives and the assassination of

the Iranian nobles and priests. And even the elaborate account of Alexander in the Persian national epic, the *Shâh-nâme* compiled by Ferdousi around the year 1000 CE, still mirrors Alexander's destructive impact on Persian culture.[14] But step by step the image of Alexander in Iranian culture turns to regarding him as a legitimate successor to the Iranian rulers. In the *Shâh-nâme*, Alexander even promises Darius to preserve the ancient Iranian customs and rekindle the sacred fire of Zoroaster. In addition, Alexander executes the officers who assassinated Darius and promises the nobles of Iran to rule with justice.

The positive evaluation of Alexander in Iranian culture finds its apogee in the *Eskandar-nâme* (Book of Alexander), the final one of Persian poet Nezâmi's famous five poems (*Khamse*) compiled at the end of the thirteenth century.[15] In Nezâmi's *Eskandar-nâme*, even though Alexander destroys the Zoroastrian temples, he declares himself the legitimate successor to Iranian rule. After numerous battles and conquests, Alexander matures to wise man, and finally, to prophet. With this development, the ancient Zoroastrian aversion to Alexander is finally overcome. With Nezâmi and the strong impact his work had, the image of Alexander in Persian literature has finally undergone a complete metamorphosis. The culmination of this metamorphosis has Alexander embody the three values that the influential Arabic philosopher al-Fârâbî (died 950) defined as characterizing the ideal ruler. Alexander is at the same time a military and political ruler, an ethical leader, and a prophet legitimated by a divine mission.[16] In this manner, he is not only the legitimate successor to Iranian rule. Moreover, he has become a prefiguration of the prophet Mohammad, the only character of the historically experienced period who embodied all three qualities.

To conclude this concise *tour de force* on the development of Alexander in Iranian tradition, mention must be made of the reference to Alexander in the catalogue compiled by Baghdad bookseller Ibn al-Nadîm at the end of the tenth century CE.[17] Ibn al-Nadîm explicitly mentions Alexander as the first ruler to put special emphasis on the profession of story-teller. In fact, Alexander is quoted as having listened to the story-tellers every night— probably not so much in order to be entertained, but rather to stay awake and alert during the long nights of his military campaigns. A ruler who put such a strong emphasis on story-telling appears to be a suitable subject for later narrative creativity. In the Islamic period of Iranian culture, besides the adaptations of his image in the literary works of, above all, Ferdousi and Nezâmi, Alexander is also the hero of popular prose versions relating to the *Alexander Romance*. The best known of these prose epics are the version compiled by Tarsusi at the end of the twelfth century CE[18] and the elaborate romance transcribed from the performance of professional story-teller

Manuchehr-Khân Hakim during the Qajar period in the nineteenth century.[19] In European philology, the *Alexander Romance* is more or less a phenomenon of historical literary analysis. In Iran—and, considering the historical development sketched above, one feels inclined to say: in Iran out of all places—adapted versions of the *Alexander Romance* were still sold as popular reading matter until early in the second half of the twentieth century.[20] The chapbooks offered by itinerant booksellers and sidewalk peddlers only disappeared for good after the abolishment of the Pahlavi regime and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as did many other items of traditional reading matter. Already many centuries before, the indigenous successor to the *Alexander Romance* in the context of Muslim Iran was another popular romance that I will now turn to—a romance that, to some extent, can be read as an Islamicized Persian version of the *Alexander Romance*. This romance, known as *Romuz-e Hamze* (The Secrets of Hamza) or simply *Hamze-nâme* (Book of Hamza), is probably the most widely read popular romance in the whole Muslim world. It focuses on the legendary exploits of the historical character of Hamza ibn 'Abdalmuttalib, the prophet Mohammed's paternal uncle, who died in 625.[21]

The narrative starts[22] when Hamza's birth is announced in an enigmatic dream to the Persian King Anushirvân, who subsequently sends one of his counsellors to hail the promising hero. Hamza already in his youth displays an extraordinary, almost superhuman strength. Advised by the mythical wise man Chadir, he visits the Garden of Salomon and gains a coat of arms that makes him invincible. Together with his companion and faithful servant 'Omar he starts out on a series of adventures, fighting and defeating robbers and other villains. All of Hamza's enemies are subsequently converted to the religion of Islam. (And here it should be noted that the early course of events takes place in pre-Islamic times, when Mohammed, the later prophet and founder of the religion, was not even born). When Hamza is introduced to the Persian court at Ktesiphon, he falls in love with Princess Mehrnegâr. Though both are promised to each other, they are allowed to marry only much later, since first Hamza is sent on a series of elaborate adventures.

From then on, Hamza is caught in between Bozorjmehr, the one of Anushirvân's two counsellors who is friendly towards him, and the second counsellor, the evil Alqash. While Hamza at all times remains loyal to the Persian king, Alqash seeks to destroy him in order to avert any future misfortune for his master. On the advice of the evil counsellor, Anushirvân sends Hamza on various dangerous adventures where he has to solve many difficult tasks. However, instead of being eventually killed, Hamza always remains successful, gains an ever-growing number of friends who are superb warriors or possess supernatural powers and marries a number of other

women (such as a fairy princess in whose realm he is kept in erotic captivity for several years). In the end, Hamza conquers almost the whole known world, all of whose inhabitants he converts to Islam. After accomplishing numerous victories in far-off lands (such as Ceylon, North Africa, and the empire of the Franks) and risking—like Alexander—to run out of worlds to conquer, Hamza eventually subdues the non-human inhabitants of the fantastic regions, such as the camel-footed monsters, the wolf-riders and the giant cannibals. On his way back home, however, his whole army counting 70,000 troops is annihilated in a huge fire. Only he himself and 71 of his close companions manage to escape. After having destroyed a magical device originally installed by Zarathustra, Hamza returns to his native town of Mecca. There he fights valiantly in the historical battle of Badr (624). In the following year, when fighting at Uhud (625), he is slain and mutilated.

It has been argued that the origins of the *Hamze-nâme* lie in a combination of two different characters. One is the historical Hamza ibn 'Abdalmuttalib, and the other is a certain Hamza ibn Âzarak (died about 825), a local leader who successfully led a rebellion against the Abbasid Caliph Hârûn ar-Rashîd in the south-eastern Iranian province of Sîstân. Already at the beginning of the eleventh century, the exploits of the latter, who was a famous warrior, were praised in popular narratives. As these stories gained circulation, they were eventually transferred to the earlier Hamza, who was an orthodox Muslim champion acceptable to all. This conjecture, though attractive, rests on circumstantial evidence alone. At any rate, already in the fourteenth century Hamza's fantastic adventures are known to have been particularly popular with the Turkmen soldiers of Syria. This fact is documented by the concern voiced by the Arabic theologian and jurist Ibn Taimiyya who abhorred this kind of fictional literature as being based on uncritical popular belief rather than historical knowledge.[23]

Since then, the romance in various Near Eastern literatures has developed into a sometimes dramatic size: the Turkish compilation by a certain Hamzavi (died 1412) comprised twenty volumes.[24] And the Moghul emperor Akbar (died 1605) adored the romance so much that he had a fourteen volume manuscript of gigantic size prepared that presumably contained about 1,400 lavishly executed miniature illustrations.[25] In Safavid Iran, the recitation of the *Hamze-nâme* was so popular as to become a specific branch of a storyteller's education, and we even know of a literary work that deals explicitly with the ways to perform the *Hamze-nâme*.[26] Oral performance of the *Hamze-nâme* remained popular in nineteenth century Iran and Turkey. In nineteenth-century Iran, when the introduction of printing allowed for the large scale production and distribution of popular literature, a Persian version of some 600 folio leaves drawing on the performance of

professional story-tellers was produced.[27] Besides Iran and Turkey, the romance also exists in a number of Arabic versions.[28] It also constitutes popular reading matter in the Indian subcontinent, where it is spread in countless popular editions in various languages, above all in Urdu. Urdu tradition also produced a forty-six volume version of the *Hamze-nâme* that has been termed the "crowning glory of the Urdu dastan tradition,"[29] being surely the longest single romance cycle in world literature, since the volumes average 900 pages each.[30] By way of Malay translations prepared from the fifteenth century onwards, the *Hamze-nâme* also reached Indonesia, where it became a vital constituent of live dramatic performance.[31] Considering its international dissemination, the *Hamze-nâme*'s popularity in the Muslim world truly equals that of the *Alexander Romance* in the West.

The *Hamze-nâme* in its historical growth displayed a unique ability to grow, to ramify, and to travel. In this way, it constitutes an exemplary model of transnational narrative in the Islamic world in various aspects: First, the narrative covers the whole world known at the time of its compilation, from the central Islamic lands to the outskirts of the Islamic sphere of influence and including even the realms of fantastic geography. Second, its hero Hamza, his companions, and his antagonists, originate from a large variety of nations. They are of Arabic, Persian, Indian, and European origin, and in their fantastic adventures they even encounter the fabulous creatures of the imaginary world. And third, the *Hamze-nâme* has been compiled, translated, read and recited in all of the major languages of the Islamic world, from Persian and Arabic to Turkish, Urdu, and Malay. The *Hamze-nâme* even crossed the religious boundary to Christian Europe in that it engendered the Georgian epic *Amiran-Daredzhaniani*, compiled by Mose Khoneli in the twelfth century CE.[32] The success of this popular romance in the Near and Middle Eastern literatures is unparalleled. Surely, the romance must contain elements that enable a vast readership to identify with its hero, even though they themselves may originate from and belong to different regional and cultural backgrounds.

An important aspect of explaining the success of the *Hamze-nâme* is the fact that it can be read as an adapted version of—and even more as an indigenous response to—the *Alexander Romance*. In terms of structure, Hamza—as did Alexander—conquers more or less the whole world. As the Macedonian Alexander, the Arab Hamza is a non-Iranian foreigner who by way of circumstances acquires a certain familiarity within the Iranian context. Similar to Alexander, who married the Persian princess Roxana, Hamza woes Sasanian ruler Anushirvân's daughter Mehrnegâr. And while Alexander burned the sacred writings of the Zoroastrians, Hamza destroys the magical device originally installed by Zarathustra.

Moreover, in terms of content, a number of the most exciting episodes appear to be directly adapted from the *Alexander Romance*, such as the encounter with the huge gold-digging ants, the hero's adventure in the city of brass, and various fights with monsters and dragons.[33]

But while in these instances there is a certain convergence between Hamza and Alexander, the two heroes also differ in several ways: First, Alexander's foreign ethnic origin provokes such a stark contrast to the Iranian context that Iranian authors felt the need to adopt him into their culture by way of an invented genealogy; Hamza, though being ethnically different, belongs to the same religious background as Islamic Iran, so there is no severe conflict that would need to be harmonized. Second, Alexander in historical truth conquered most of the known world, and—not surprisingly—the *Alexander Romance* is spread all over the regions that regard themselves as the legitimate heirs to his rule. Hamza, in contrast, remained known in history primarily because of his relation with the prophet as Mohammed's paternal uncle, and, probably, because he was famed as a valiant warrior. The historical Hamza certainly was not the world conqueror the narrative makes him to be, and he may rightly be surmised to have gained that role primarily so as to stand up against the powerful example of Alexander. And third, Alexander to this day remains primarily the model of the supreme world conqueror, in which quality he was envied and imitated by later conquerors (such as the Mongol emperor Timur in the fourteenth century). But only in later versions of the Romance, Alexander's adventures were elaborated into a spiritual conquest serving a higher purpose than human vanity. Hamza, on the contrary, from the very start acts against the background of religious vocation, for which, in the end, he even gives his life.

The contribution of Persian literature to the romance about Hamza is quite significant. The romance most probably originated in Persian oral tradition, and Persian literature produced some of its most elaborate versions. And yet, Hamza was an Arab. Even though he was a vassal to the Persian king, he was of a different regional, ethnic, linguistic, and religious origin. Moreover, even though by courting and marrying the Persian princess Mehrnegâr, Hamza eventually linked his lineage with the Persian court, some of his acts, such as the destruction of Zarathustra's magic, constitute an outspoken aggression against core values of the Persian culture. And yet Hamza's popularity in Persian literature far outshines the various rather modest versions in Arabic, while the *Alexander Romance* is widely appreciated in Arabic tradition.

Summing up the various arguments, it becomes obvious that in the Muslim context, the identification offered by Hamza is stronger than that of

Alexander, since its appeal relies on the basic values of the Islamic religion. With this understanding, it becomes clear why and how the *Hamze-nâme* was able to gain a prominent position in virtually all of the Islamic literatures: A Western critical reader might perceive the romance as a version of the *Alexander Romance* that has been superficially adapted to the Islamic context. In contrast, to a Muslim reader, the religious component probably constitutes the decisive argument for the appreciation of this kind of fictional narrative. From a historical perspective, virtually all of the regions in which the *Hamze-nâme* is popular today were conquered by Muslim armies, enduring heavy loss in manpower and, supposedly, cultural identity. Yet the new identification supplied by the religion of Islam provided a link for all members of the new community. It generated a collective identity that both integrated and superseded previously existing individual regional identities.

In his study on the Arabian epic Peter Heath compares the *Hamze-nâme* to the Arabic epic about the hero 'Antar and wonders: "What characteristics made *Sîrat 'Antar* so popular in Arabic but unpopular in other linguistic spheres, while *Amîr Hamza* crossed linguistic boundaries so easily?"[34] As a possible solution to this question, Heath points out that the "main difference is that the hero of the second is Islamic and transethnic, while the hero of the first is pre-Islamic, tribal, and Arabocentric." He continues: "The translinguistic receptivity of Islamic stories among the various literary traditions of Islamic culture therefore appears to be an important consideration for their translatability." No detailed comparison of the various versions of the *Hamze-nâme* has yet been endeavoured, but presumably an eventual result of such a comparison would reveal the fact that the *Hamze-nâme* was never really translated, but rather adapted. In this respect, the *Hamze-nâme* shows quite an incredible potential to adapt itself to varying contexts, since only its vaguely sketched frame is a necessary given fact. This frame is commonly accepted as historically reliable. Moreover, it constitutes an element of the religious identity for all the literatures in which the *Hamze-nâme* prospers. Since the general condition of identification with its main hero was fixed, the further ingredients of the romance were free to adapt to whichever contextual conditions they encountered in terms of cultural background or regional expectations.

As a final point, I would like to draw attention to yet another possible repercussion of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran. Since the beginning of the Safavid dynasty, Iran adheres to the denomination of Shiite Islam as a state religion. The foundational narrative of Shiite Islam is the story of the legitimate rulers of the Islamic community, the *imâm*s. Of special interest are the heroic exploits of the first Shiite *imâm* 'Ali, the prophet Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, and the martyrdom of the third Shiite *imâm*, 'Ali's

son Hosein, whose death during the battle of Karbala in the year 680 constitutes an event of pivotal importance for the constitution of the Shiite creed.[35] No detailed comparison has yet been made between the *Alexander Romance* and the numerous adventures and heroic fights attributed to either one of the Shiite heroes. While 'Ali is mainly portrayed as a valiant fighter for the course of Islam, who in his legendary exploits even vanquishes dragons and demons, Hosein is a tragic hero. 'Ali's exploits can be understood as a repercussion of the heroic traits of Alexander, meanwhile Hosein has been embellished in popular tradition with a particular trait that closely relates him to Alexander as a legitimate ruler of Iran. This trait is Hosein's marriage with a certain Shahrbânu, a woman regarded by popular Shiite tradition as being the daughter of the last Sananian ruler Yazdegerd and the mother of Hosein's son 'Ali, the fourth *imâm* of the Shiite community. This attempt to legitimize Hosein as an "Iranian" leader is also a significant link to the religious hero Hamza, since Hamza also married a Persian princess. And yet another feature links the historical Hosein and the fictional Hamza. Hosein is traditionally perceived to have met his destiny at the plains near Karbala in a group numbering 72 fighters; and Hamza escaped the huge fire that annihilated his troops in the earliest known version of the *Hamza-nâme* together with 71 close companions, a scene that in terms of numbers can be read as a prefiguration of Hosein's later tragedy. The least one could say about these convergences between the characters of Alexander, Hamza, and Hosein is that they do not appear to be coincidental. Considered against the backdrop of the ancient tradition, they suggest a promising future branch of studying the repercussion of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran.

In conclusion, we might remind ourselves that the concept of world literature is not an easy one to define. There are, indeed, very few works that speak to different audiences with a similar emotional intensity as does the *Alexander Romance*. And yet, the qualification of this work as an outstanding specimen of world literature does not only result from the transnational appeal of its basic narrative, which portrays its hero as the ultimate epitome of world conqueror. The *Alexander Romance* speaks to a large variety of different audiences and has given rise to varying interpretations in the long history of its creative reception. It hereby demonstrates that world literature is not only, and maybe not even primarily, defined by the appeal of a given literary work, but moreover by this work's capacity to link its basic narrative to different cultural contexts and thus become part of a web of tradition that is constantly woven by the creative combination of history and imagination.

Notes

[1]For a short survey of the narrative tradition focusing on Alexander see Thiel et al. 1977: 272–291.

[2]The following is a random selection of some fairly recent titles: *Problematics of Power: Eastern and Western Representations of Alexander the Great.* Ed. Margaret Bridges, and Johann Christoph Bürgel, Bern: Lang, 1996; *Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures occidentales et proche-orientales. Actes du colloque de Paris [27–29 novembre 1997].* Ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner, Claire Kappler, and François Suard. Nanterre: Service Publidix, 1999; *The Medieval French Alexander.* Ed. Donald Maddox, and Sara Sturm-Maddox. Albany: State U of New York P, 2002; Stoneman, Richard. *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend.* New Haven, Conn.: Harvard UP, 2008; *Alexander the Great: A New History.* Ed. Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence A. Tritle. Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; Demand, Alexander. *Alexander der Große: Leben und Legende.* Munich: Beck, 2009; Doufikar-Aerts, Faustina. *Alexander Magnus Arabicus. A Survey of the Alexander Tradition through the Seven Centuries: from Pseudo-Callisthenes to Suri.* Paris, Leuven: Peeters, 2010; Ogden, Daniel. *Alexander the Great: Myth, Genesis, and Sexuality.* Exeter: U of Exeter P, 2010.

[3]See for example Schmalzriedt et al. 1974: 899.

[4]The first section of my presentation is heavily indebted to Yamanaka 1993: 55–87; see also Yamanaka 1998: 73–88; Yamanaka, In Harf-Lancner 1999, 341–353, and Yamanaka 2009.

[5]See also Gignoux 2007: 87–98.

[6] Quoted in Darmsteter 1883: 232. A recent edition of the travel account is Chardin, Jean. *Travels in Persia. 1673–1677.* New York: Dover, 1988. See *Iskandarnamah.* Trans. Minoo S. Southgate 1978: 189.

[7]See Yamanaka 1993: 61–70.

[8]See *The Sibylline Oracles,* Book 3, lines 381–387; trans. Lancester 1913: 368–406.

[9]Yamanaka 1993: 64.

[10]Southgate 1978: 186–189; Yamanaka 1993: 65–70.

[11]Southgate 1978: 191–193; Yamanaka 1993: 70–72.

[12]Southgate 1978: 170; Yamanaka 1993: 73.

[13]Southgate 1978: 193–196; Yamanaka 1993: 73–75.

[14]Kappler, In Bridges and Bürgel 1996: 165–190.

[15]Bürgel, In Bridges and Bürgel 1996: 91–107; Yamanaka 1993: 76–78.

[16]See also Waugh 1996: 237–253.

[17]*The Fihrist of al-Nadîm* 1970: 714.

[18]Southgate 1978: 181–184; *Alexandre le Grand en Iran* 2005.

[19]Manuchehr-Khân 1383/2004.

[20]Marzolph 1994: 41–42, no. XV.

[21]Marzolph 1990: 430–436; Pritchett 1991; see also Ghalib 2007; Sabri 2011.

[22]The following summary follows the work's shorter recension such as known from the Persian manuscript dating to the Safavid period. More recent versions in Urdu and Persian are considerably longer and contain numerous additional adventures.

[23]Marzolph 1990: col. 431.

[24]Kellner 1981: 181–196; Sezen 1991.

[25]Seyller 2002.

[26]See Khan 2010.

[27]Marzolph 2001: 258–259.

[28]Lyons 1995: 223–238; see also Lyons 1995, vol. 1, pass.; Leder 2009: 167–180.

[29]Pritchett 1985: 5.

[30]Pritchett 1991: 7.

[31]Van Ronkel 1895.

[32]Lang & Meredith-Owens 1959: 454–490.

[33]Marzolph 1990: 432–433.

[34]For this and the following quotations see Heath 1996: 63.

[35]For a general introduction to the narrative about Hosein's death at Karbala, see Chelkowski 2010: 258–277.

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