9 The Slavic Alexander

SUSANA TORRES PRIETO

In the ancient city of Vladimir, about 170 kilometres north-west of Moscow, the prince Vsevolod III Iurevich, known by his sobriquet 'Big Nest' due to his extended progeny, built a church to honour St Dimitrius, his patron saint, around the year 1194. On the top part of the south wall, below the arches, three figures are depicted in bas relief. From right to left, there are images of Alexander the Great, followed by King David, and Jesus Christ at the farthest left. The first one depicts Alexander's apotheosis, his ascension into the heavens taken by two gryphons or similar creatures (see Figure 9.1).

About two hundred years later, in Bohemia, an anonymous poet decided to render the Latin hexameters of the *Alexandreis* of Gautier de Châtillon into rhymed octosyllable verses to create the first literary work in his vernacular language, Old Czech.

Some forty years later, around 1340, another anonymous writer, most probably a monk from the monastery of Dečani, when composing the life of the Serbian king Stefan Uroš III 'Dečanski', of the dynasty of the Nemanjas, who ruled from 1322 to 1331, compared his master and patron to Alexander of Macedonia when he described how, after defeating Mikhail III of Bulgaria in the Battle of Velbazhd (1330), he cried bitterly over the death of his enemy, just like Alexander had done over the deaths of Darius and Porus.[1]

About 150 years after that, a Russian monk from the northern Russian monastery of Kirillo-Belozerskii, whose name was probably Efrosin, was putting together a miscellany of heroic and epic tales, and in choosing what to include, besides *The Tale of Dracula*, *The Letter to Prester John* and the autochthonous *Zadonshina* (*The Tale of the Battle beyond the Don River*), he decided on a tale of the life of Alexander of Macedonia, despite the fact that the language of the text he was copying was slightly unfamiliar and there were certain passages he didn't understand, and that were not heroic, so sometimes he had to shorten what he had in front of his eyes.

[1] Koroleva 2014a, 99.

Figure 9.1 Bas relief of Alexander the Great (apotheosis) at the Church of St Dimitrius in the city of Vladimir

Between these four approximate moments, between these four hundred years and within a territory of approximately 1,000,000 square kilometres, the figure of Alexander the Great travelled and was adopted and adapted in a territory that was immersed in the process of ending being Slavic, in general, to become the languages and nations we can recognise today. There was, therefore, not one Slavic Alexander, as there was not a (Western) European one. This chapter presents a general survey of the various Alexanders found in this vast territory, focussing on the uses given to the Macedonian king in the different literary traditions, rather than on a detailed survey of all the manuscripts and versions within the Slavic realm that narrate parts or all of the story of Alexander the Great, and its many related medieval texts, which surpass by far the hundreds.[2]

The *Alexander Romance*, however, is the perfect case study to explain several relevant aspects of the emergence of Slavic literatures in the centuries immediately after the year AD 1000. The Slavs arrived and settled down

[2] Ample bibliography of editions and critical studies can be found in the bibliography section of volume III of the collective work under the direction of Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas (2014, 1861–7, 1955–68). W. F. Ryan and M. Taube have recently finished (2019) the annotated translation of the East Slavic version of the *Secret of Secrets*, accompanied by a thorough introductory study on the relevance and impact of this text in East Slavic literature.

in Europe around the fifth century of our common era. From the basin of the river Pripet in northern Poland they migrated south and east to establish themselves in all the areas of Central and Eastern Europe in which a Slavic language is spoken today. They were lucky enough to have an alphabet created for them *ex professo* with which they could render all the sounds of their Indo-European language. Since the Glagolitic script was unpractical and complicated, a much easier Cyrillic script was finally adopted to render Common Slavic, the language that was once common to all the members of this newly settled group. The Cyrillic had also the obvious advantage of resembling the Greek, a form of script familiar to the Slavs who either in the Balkans or near the Black Sea had entered into contact with the Byzantine Empire, with whom they traded and against – and sometimes alongside – whom they fought.[3] For those Slavs who remained in the original settlement area or did not move around much, the cultural and political influence did not come from Byzantium, but from the Holy Roman Empire, and soon, after a little bit of haggling, they fell under the influence of German bishops and the German emperor, and the Pope in Rome. They abandoned for the most part both the Glagolitic and the Cyrillic alphabets, which had been created to a certain extent for them, and agreed to use Latin as a language in their liturgy and Latin as an alphabet in their writing.[4]

This led to an early division of Slavs who still used a more or less common language into two differentiated cultural spheres, which corresponded to two confronted spheres of political influence and two Churches. Basically, the Slavs entered and expanded in Europe between the years 500 and 700, and they were thrown into the European internecine fights to decide whether the continent had to remain loyal to the now decrepit Roman Empire whose capital was Constantinople (known as Byzantium to us), or whether it should be put in the hands of the new powers that had emerged with Charlemagne. The outcome is clearly known. The Slavs were just caught in the middle of the dispute.

According to this early cultural split, specialists have traditionally divided the literary production of the following centuries, until vernacular traditions and the development of the printing press made a difference, into two areas, *Slavia Ortodossa* and *Slavia Romana*, labels intended to account for a myriad of cultural manifestations, from the use of a specific script to obedience to the Pope or Patriarch. Of course, such broad labels are always problematical

[3] The history of the creation and adoption of both scripts has been wonderfully summarised by R. Cleminson (2015, 55–6). For a longer survey see Schenker (1995).

[4] In Croatia and Bohemia a form of Glagolitic script called squared Glagolitic was also used by some monastic communities after the thirteenth century, but it was certainly not widespread.

because they necessarily iron out specific characteristics or traits and are difficult to apply broadly, and in particular in 'contact areas', like parts of the Balkans or Ruthenia, that are in the middle of such imagined borders.[5]

Nevertheless, for the study of the Slavic Alexander, as for the study of medieval Slavic literature in general, the relevant differences between these two broad cultural areas are two: first, from which languages literary works were being translated; and second, what was the approach adopted in two key aspects of transmission in manuscript culture – namely the perceived functionality and uses of the texts transmitted and the degree of innovation permitted.

The Slavic Alexanders derive from different source texts, and one possible approach to their study is their relation with the source text of the translation. In *Slavia Orthodoxa* (roughly encompassing the Orthodox Balkans and East Slavic territories before the emergence of Ukrainian, Russian and Belorussian as separate languages) translations were made from at least two different versions of the Greek text of Pseudo-Callisthenes known as the *Romance of Alexander*. In *Slavia Latina* translations were made from either the Middle High German text or, for the most part, from Latin. It is important to underline that in both cases the level of mutual intelligibility was quite high, particularly in the area of *Slavia Orthodoxa*. In this area the texts are in what we call 'Church Slavonic', the literary language used by Orthodox Slavs beyond the first narrow canon of Old Church Slavonic that was used before the thirteenth century. Church Slavonic was used as literary language, not exclusively for ecclesiastical purposes, before the emergence of literary vernaculars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This common Church Slavonic started to show evidences of various geographical variants (recensions) already in the late fourteenth century, but it is quite known that texts travelled easily between all these Orthodox lands and that, well into the fifteenth century, they were easily understood in all parts of *Slavia*

[5] These terms, coined by Picchio (1972, 7–13), have been one of the most satisfactory attempts to take into account the similarities and differences among Slavs in the course of time before and after the Schism of 1054, from the Byzantine Commonwealth coined by D. Obolensky to the Cyrillo-Methodiana denomination of Central Europe. Picchio's division responded mainly to religious and cultural differences, focussing on liturgy and on the liturgical language (Greek or Latin) from which translations were mainly made, the idea being that, to a certain extent, the initial translating activity driven by the necessity of importing a certain liturgy in rite was also later extended to paraliturgical and non-liturgical texts, and that, therefore, the transposition of a cultural sphere or other to the newly converted Slavs created, de facto, more Orthodox or Catholic cultural paradigms. In an attempt to narrow it down even more to attested writing practices, and precisely to account for the contact areas in which such uniformity was not equally felt, at least diachronically, W. Veder (2006) coined the terms *Slavia Slavonica* and *Slavia Latina*, according to the means and procedures of textual transmission.

Orthodoxa. In *Slavia Latina* the situation was similar to other parts of Christian Western Europe: Latin was a liturgical language and was sometimes also used for literary purposes, but did eventually yield to the preference for the vernaculars in literary, not ecclesiastical, endeavours.

Alexander As Biblical Figure

If we go back to our first example of the Cathedral of St Dimitrius in Vladimir, the inclusion of Alexander in a bas-relief narration of the history of salvation provides us with the first adaptation of Alexander in the Slavic realm. The presence of Alexander together with King David and Jesus Christ not only tells us many things about the concept of Christianity that Prince Vsevolod had and what was his call in this world when he commissioned the building, but it also says a great deal about who Alexander the Great was for the East Slavs.

The first notice the people of Kievan Rus' had of Alexander the Great was as a precursor of the salutary message propagated by their newly adopted religion. In all likelihood, the first time they heard his name was as one of the characters in the apocalyptic text known as *Revelations of Methodius of Patara*, now known as the Pseudo-Methodius, in which Alexander encloses the unclean nations or peoples behind the northern mountains.[6] The relation between Alexander of Macedon and the apocalyptic text of Pseudo-Methodius is, of course, not exclusive to the Slavonic tradition, but it certainly played a decisive role in introducing the character of the Macedonian king in Slavic letters. It is difficult to assess when exactly the text of Pseudo-Methodius was available in Slavic. Specialists now agree that it was probably composed in Syriac and then translated into Greek, from which, in all likelihood, the translation into Slavic was made. If the text was translated into Greek around the early eighth century, a translation of it must have been already available by the time the *Russian Primary Chronicle* was composed in the twelfth century, since it mentions *Revelations* at least twice: once, more extensively, under the year 1096, and another time, in passing, in the year 1223. Russian specialists thought

[6] For a more detailed account of the relation between Alexander and the unclean nations see Torres Prieto 2019, Stoneman 2008, 170–85, and Garstad 2012, vii–xiv. The Greek text was edited by Aerts and Kortekaas (Aerts 1998). The Slavonic versions of *Revelations* were first published by Tikhonravov in 1863 (repr. 1973) and studied by Istrin (1897). More recently, D. Ostrowski (2014) has studied the identification of the unclean peoples in the context of the *Russian Primary Chronicle*.

the earliest translation of *Revelations* could also have been made in the twelfth century.

The Pseudo-Methodius text, which refers to Alexander in its chapter 8, was also later incorporated into some later version of Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance*, which absorbed, at some point, elements of the Methodian tradition and incorporated them into this protean narrative – specifically, the versions we now call λ, ε and γ, the latter a later combination of ε with an earlier β. Both λ and ε contain references to the Pseudo-Methodius tradition, but since ε is a further Christianised and epitomised version, datable to the end of the eighth century or beginning of the ninth, λ, usually dated to the early eighth century, is the first of the Pseudo-Callisthenian versions in which this apocalyptic role of Alexander is explicit.

Needless to say, the aforementioned reference in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (*Povest' Vremennych Let* (PVL)) to Alexander the Great as he appears in the *Revelations* of Pseudo-Methodius, even if this text is also later incorporated into the *Romance*, is not conclusive evidence to attest the arrival of the *Alexander Romance* to East Slavic letters as early as the mid twelfth century (tentative time of redaction of the first of the chronicle entires), but does offer some clues as to the possible interest this text raised among Kievan scribes.

The first translations into Slavic of the Pseudo-Callisthenes text might easily be traceable to the λ version, not only for the presence of these references, but also for the presence of other episodes, among them the descent in the diving bell and the flight into the air, theoretically the scene represented in the bas relief of the Cathedral of St Dimitrius in Vladimir. These two episodes are also present in the famous manuscript L of the β version, but this manuscript does not include the Pseudo-Methodian references.

The first translation of the *Alexander Romance* into Slavic has traditionally received the name of *khronograficheskaia* – that is chronographic. This label was given due to the fact that the earliest translations were included in chronographs, narrations of the history of the world, particularly from its biblical origins up to a more or less recognisable historical past: some go down to Byzantine times, others continue to the history of Russia. A *khronograph* is not a mere addition of historical sources in a more or less continuous narrative; it is actually a composite creation in which several texts, used as 'building blocks', are interwoven and reworked to create something that resembles a chronicle, but is not a year-per-year description of events. There were many *khronographies* in East Slavic letters, and in some of them the *Alexander Romance* (in Russian, *Aleksandriia*) played a prominent role, usually accompanied by Byzantine

historiographic texts such as the Chronicle of John Malalas or the chronicle of George the Monk (George Hamartolos). This inclusion of Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* alongside parts of other chronicles in historical compendia (*khronography*) led nineteenth-century scholars to name this first adaptation of the *Romance* as *khronograficheskaia* – that is 'chronographic' – due to the type of historical compendia it which it was first found.[7] This denomination was used to distinguish it from later adaptations of other versions of the Pseudo-Callinthenes text made outside historiographic compendia in South and East Slavic.

The first translation of the *Alexander Romance* into Slavic is also a curious case of fluidity between literary generic boundaries. We know that both John Malalas (Book VIII) and George Hamartolos (Book I, chapters 17–26) used material from the Pseudo-Callisthenes text in the wording of their respective accounts about Alexander in their chronicles. Hamartolos, whose own ninth-century chronicle was heavily based on Malalas, is also responsible for introducing the episode of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem as he borrowed it from Flavius Josephus' *Jewish Antiquity* (Book XI, chapter 8, § 304–46). In the Slavic tradition of the *Alexander Romance*, the earliest manuscripts of Slavic versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes text also contain parts of translations of these two Byzantine chronicles, thus creating a unique textual unit of mirroring reflections. None of these historical narratives is attested in manuscripts earlier than the late thirteenth, maybe earlier fourteenth century. These chronographs were not translated as such, but most likely were composed, or interwoven, in Kievan scriptoria. Unlike other historiographic Byzantine texts, from which we have independent manuscript evidence without being part of a recomposed historical narrative, no manuscript survives of the *Alexander Romance* outside these historical compendia, although that does not invalidate the possibility of an independent translation before becoming part of one of these chronographs. It is a likely scenario, but one that cannot be proved. Linguistic analysis (presence of East Slavic features) seems to corroborate the preference of Kiev as a possible place for translation rather than any other part of the Slavic realm such as Bulgaria or Serbia.[8]

[7] There are currently three main editions of this text: the classical one made by Istrin (1893, 5–343) in several redactions, the one made by Tvorogov (1999, 85–178) within his edition of the Hellenic and Roman Chronicle, and the one made recently by Vilkul (2008, 2009a, 2010, 2011) from the manuscript of one of the oldest historical compendia (*Troitskii Khronograf*), which was published in several issues of the specialised journal *Palaeoslavica*.

[8] All the linguistic arguments, with a slight Russian slant, were summarised in E. Koroleva 2014b, 605–37.

As for the original Greek text that could have been used as source text, all the versions inserted in historiographic compendia in East Slavic were translations made from the β version, sometimes from the later L manuscript. It seems, according to the presence or absence of some episodes, that more than one translation was made over time. The text, however, contains some innovations that are somehow puzzling. Three main episodes contribute to the Christianisation of this Alexander: his visit to Jerusalem, his conversation with something similar to an angel or bird who tells him to conquer the earth and his closing of the impure peoples behind the Caspian Gates, the famous episode of Gog and Magog. The problem is that this version contains all these elements in ways that no other Greek version of the Alexander Romance has.

Firstly, the visit to Jerusalem is placed between chapters 33 and 34 of Book I – that is, between the oracle at the Serapion and his arrival to Egypt. Although Josephus mentions a visit to Jerusalem, the visit narrated in this version of the *Alexander Romance* does not match exactly Josephus' text either. A similar interpolation with a biblical city as protagonist will take place in the Greek version between Book II.17 and Book II.18, where a short text relates Alexander's visit to Babylon. Secondly, the episode of Alexander flying into the skies occurs immediately after the episode the water of life and is slightly modified. In Slavic, the birds with human form and face, speaking in Greek, order him to attack Porus. Finally, the episode of the enclosed peoples is referred to immediately after Book II, chapter 23, in the Greek version.

The first Slavic translation was included in the earliest versions of several 'khronographies' recounting world history from different sources, mainly collected from the Byzantine chronicle of Malalas and Hamartolos. In our versions the incipit of Malalas itself is substituted with the Tale of Saint Epiphanius of how God created the world in twenty-two acts (tasks) and in six days; ample sections of Book I are rewritten by copying word for word the text of Genesis (Gen. 5, 6 and 7), which deal with the lineage of Abraham and the Deluge of Noah. Different sections, particularly on the history of Greek gods, are seriously abridged from the Malalas text (1.10–1.18) to the point that some of Malalas' books turn almost into chapters or paragraphs. Clearly the scribe had no interest in and no knowledge of Greek mythology, instead of which he introduces shortly after Malalas' Book 6 the book of Daniel, including the deuterocanonical chapters on Susanna and Bel and the dragon. And this goes on until the end of Book 7 of Malalas. And then Book 8 should have started, according to Malalas, but it does not, because Book 8 is the one devoted to the Kingdom of the

Macedonians, and the scribe decided to change this for the Pseudo-Callisthenian *Alexander Romance*.

It remains a mystery as to why the scribe decided to include the text of the *Alexander Romance* right there. Both of the aforementioned chronicles had sections on Alexander the Great, and, most likely, if the inclusion had been made in a Byzantine compendium translated in blocks into Slavic, the difference in language, let alone in genre literary conventions, probably could not have gone unnoticed: to a Greek-speaking scribe/writer, the difference in language between the high style of the chronicles and the popular Greek of the *Romance* would have been crystal clear, a nuance probably lost in translation. Most likely, the innovation was made in Slavic: the scribe decided to use the Pseudo-Callisthenes text just as he had decided to use the Bible before, to fill in the gaps of what he wanted to say with a better text. This could maybe favour the idea that there must have been a translation of the *Alexander Romance* into Slavic, separated from the historical compendia we have now, and used as an independent source, as a building block, to incorporate it into the historical narrative. If that was the case, we cannot know because there is no manuscript to attest it. In any case, there is something unique about this first Slavic version: the first Pseudo-Methodian interpolation occurs in Book II, after chapter 23, which is not the usual place in the *Alexander Romance* versions that contain references to *Revelations*, usually in Book III.[9] Moreover, the wording of this specific interpolation is very close to the reference in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* under the year 1096, as Tvorogov (1999, vol. 2, 166–7) noted in his edition. He also noticed that the redaction of the text from *Revelations* that had been copied after the *Alexander Romance* in the second redaction of one of these historical compendia, the *Hellenic and Roman Chronicle*, was close to some of the translations made into East Slavic of the apocalyptic text of Pseudo-Methodius. The close relation in Slavic of the text of the *Alexander Romance* with the apocalyptic vision of Pseudo-Methodius and its introduction in Slavic literary culture as a biblical figure linked to the salvation of Christianity would justify more clearly his inclusion in the iconography of salvation in the Cathedral of St Dimitrius in Vladimir as well as the use of the Pseudo-Callisthenian text as a long interpolation to praise the life and deeds of

[9] The edition of the Greek λ version was made by H. Van Thiel in 1959. It differed substantially from the L manuscript of the β version in the contents from Book III, chapter 17 onwards. The best analysis so far of both versions, among others, is found in Jouanno 2002, 247–303 (version β) and 305–38 (version λ).

the monarch responsible for enclosing the unclean peoples. In this sense, the Slavic scribe probably used the *Alexander Romance* as functionally equivalent as he has previously used books of the Hebrew Bible, probably due to the limited space dedicated by either Malalas or Hamartolos to a character who clearly epitomised for him the personification of a pagan monarch who nevertheless can 'become' Christian and be decisive in the teleological history of the Christian *oikoumene*. Alexander provided the best possible precedent to a recently converted ruling dynasty in the idea that it was possible for formerly pagan monarchs to occupy a relevant place in Christian history.[10]

Alexander As Model for Princes

Our second Alexander is a completely different story and a most remarkable one, because the king of Macedonia, the conqueror of the world, is going to be the protagonist of the first literary work of one the most prolific Slavic literatures ever, the Czech tradition, and also because it is the only historiographic tradition of the life of Alexander of Macedon in Slavic.

Alexander was not completely unknown in the Bohemian court. In fact, he was used most profusely in order to create a princely model for the Bohemian dynasty in various ways.[11] The Bohemian court of the Přemysl dynasty had witnessed the composition in Middle High German of Ulrich von Etzenbach's *Alexander* between the years 1270 and 1287, the last years of the rule of Ottokar II (1253–78). This adaptation in Middle High German of Gautier de Châtillon's Latin poem in hexameters was dedicated to the new king, Wenceslas II of the aforementioned dynasty.

In the last years of the thirteenth century or the first years of the next, an anonymous poet decided to attempt a similar feat by trying to render Châtillon's *Alexandreis* into Old Czech. It was certainly daring because his listeners/readers most likely knew and certainly had access to both the Latin original and the German adaptation by von Etzenbach. In comparison to the 5,500 verses of Châtillon's work or the 28,000 verses of

[10] Aside from the excellent analysis by M. de Jong (McKitterick 2001, 131–64) on the main characteristics of medieval accounts of conversion to Christianity of barbarian kings, Vodolazkin (2000, 37–40) has dealt with the importance of translations of world history in early Rus' in order to make sense and justify to a certain extent their previous pagan history.

[11] The uses of the figure of Alexander in Bohemian political propaganda have been brilliantly analysed by Éloïse Adde-Vomáčka in the collective work under the direction of Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas (Adde-Vomačka 2014, 1165–81).

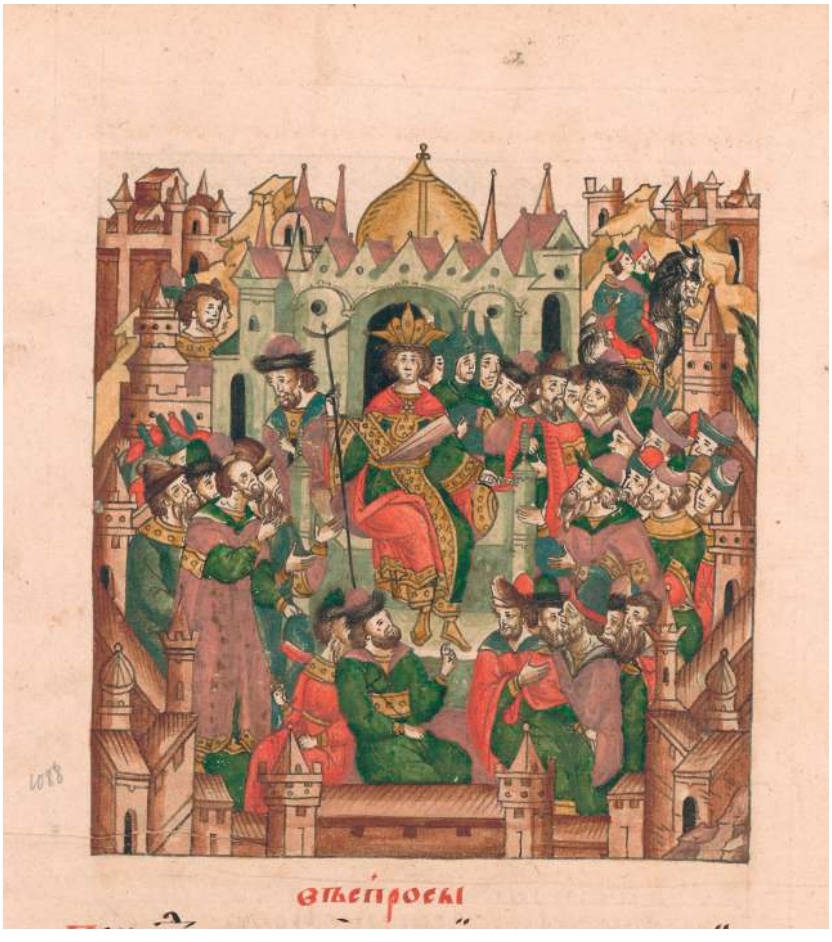

Figure 9.2 Alexander arrives to Jerusalem. Illustrated Chronicle of Tsar Ivan IV (Litsevoi letopisnii svod), second half of the sixteenth century, f. 613 v. Library of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg

Etzenbach's, the anonymous Czech poet's endeavour was far more modest. Only 3,363 verses (3,992 if we count the repetitions) have survived dispersed in nine fragments dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[12] Clearly his main source was Châtillon, though he would also have had access to the German version by Etzenbach, who had incorporated parts of Leo of Naples' *Historia de Preliis* (J ^{2}). There may be no need to suppose that the author also had access to the later attested translation into Czech of Leo of Naples' work, which seems to be in the version J ^{3}. It is unlikely,

[12] The edition still used is Vážný 1947.

though, that, despite the similarity of certain passages, this was a direct translation of Châtillon's: it is rather a version, an adaptation.

From all the fragments, whose dating is tentative in the absence of any colophon, the longest (Svatovítský (2460 v.) f. 157 v.–f.169 v.) is actually dated to the fifteenth century and bears the title *Alexander Bohemicalis*. The disposition of the manuscript contains 50 octosyllabic rhymed verses per column and two columns per page. It is divided into books and within them, with rubrics, sometimes in Latin, sometimes in Old Czech, sometimes in both. It corresponds to Books I–IV of Châtillon's text. It finishes after the burial of Darius' wife. The second longest fragment contains 492 verses (Jindřichohradecký) and can be confidently dated to the first half of the fourteenth century. It corresponds to parts of Books II and III of Châtillon's text. The other two longer ones (Budějovický and Budějovicko-musejní) are also unbound folia, like the preceding one, and slightly earlier, both dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. The first one has rubrics in Old Czech and corresponds to parts of Books IV, V and VI of Châtillon's work. The second one, in parchment, includes parts of Books VI and VII. The rest of the fragments, all from the fourteenth century, contain around 100 verses each, and get as far as the death of Alexander. Some of them are repetitions of other fragments. There are references to a prose version created later based on this versified one, but we do not have a manuscript of it and it seems not to have had the same impact.

Three main facts make this Czech version unique. As mentioned before, it is the only rendering in Slavic of an Alexander as it was depicted in antique historiography, since Gautier de Châtillon's *Alexandreis* was based on Quintus Curtius Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri Magni*; secondly, it contributed to the creation in Czech of the octosyllabic verse as a form of high poetry, and throughout the fourteenth century its expansion in the newly born vernacular Czech literary tradition is considerable; thirdly, Alexander is used here, but not for the first time, as a *speculum principis* in a tradition that would be continued by further translations into German and Czech, such as Leo of Naples' work, and other versions into Polish and Belorussian. Indeed, the Czech poet focusses particularly on the advice Aristotle gave to Alexander about the need for humility and elaborates extensively on the issue of treason. Of course, since we only have fragmentary evidence of the poem, it is difficult to evaluate whether he favoured these topics over others, or whether it is the text containing these topics which has survived. It has been argued, however, that this Czech version tried to promote the agenda of the nobility, rather than the absolute ruler's, and that this Alexander is depicted more as a *primus inter pares* than as an

absolute emperor or prince. In support of this theory is not only Alexander's disposition to listen to the advice of his master, but also the fact that Alexander seems to take most of his decisions by consensus with his own generals.[13] It seems, from an overall impression, that the poet had a high degree of freedom in composing, so he was not merely a translator (episodes clearly abridged or directly suppressed are combined with long expanded ones) and that he was highly realistic and critical of his contemporary society.

The anonymous poet of the Old Czech *Alexandriada* knew exactly what he wanted to say, and he said it. He presents a fully Christianised Alexander whose birth is left without question (Nectanebo is not even mentioned in this poem), who is crowned in a ceremony similar to the ones familiar to his audience, who is victorious in his campaigns against Athens and the Persians because he has God on his side – in short, he creates a fully Christian prince out of a legendary figure of antiquity. This Alexander does not enclose impure peoples or become Christian after speaking with the elders in Jerusalem because he is already a Christian prince. In this sense the level of adaptation is extraordinary because it is really a new, original Alexander. As a model for princes, he does not have to link himself to a history of Christian salvation for humanity to deserve a place in high literature.

This literary feat was not, however, the only rendering of the life of Alexander of Macedon in Bohemia. Shortly after (end of the fourteenth century or beginning of the fifteenth), another version of Alexander (*Historie Alexandra Velikého*) was circulated in Bohemia. This was a direct translation of Leo of Naples' *Historia de Preliis* (J^3). It comprised 6,120 fifteen-syllable verses without a rhyme ('political') and its popularity is well attested by the five extant manuscripts that have reached us accounting for as many variants. This translation, close to its Latin source text to the point of not being comprehensible in parts, depicts Alexander as an adventurer, a conqueror, but also as a great example of a lecturing tale: after years of power and adventures, he would become a pious and modest man, a moralising example of Christian virtues. It is dated to the end of the fourteenth century thanks to a colophon in one of the manuscripts, though of course we cannot know if earlier manuscripts also circulated. From the same tradition (Leo of Naples'), the first Polish translation was made as late as 1550 (*Historyja Aleksandra Wielkiego*).

[13] Adde-Vomačka 2014, 1172–5.

These two depictions of Alexander seem to have coexisted in Bohemia, together with old and new translations into German, throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Written in two different styles of language – a more formal one (in octosyllabic verses) and a more colloquial one for the greater public (in fifteen-syllable verses) – Alexander was from the beginning a literary character rather than a historical or biblical one, not only due to the sources through which his story was known, which, at the end, pretended to be more historiographic, but, more importantly, because he served different purposes when he was borrowed, either as a model for princes or as an exemplary novel character.

Besides these two *Alexandriads* in Old Czech, translations were made of the *Secreta Secretorum*, of the *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum* attributed to a Pseudo-Walter Burley, where a whole original section on Alexander was inserted (1350–70), and, continuing with the tradition of a bilingual court as inaugurated by Ulrich von Etzenbach, it is likely that the *Alexander* of Seifrit (1352) was also composed for the king of Bohemia and future emperor Charles IV.

The engagement, therefore, of the Přemysl dynasty first and of the kings of the house of Luxenbourg later with the figure of Alexander of Macedon, seems to have been quite fruitful and everlasting, taking into account that most of these works of what some specialists have wanted to call 'the Czech cycle' of the *Alexander Romance* were commissioned by the monarchs themselves.[14] It is hardly surprising, then, that a work entitled *The Privilege of Alexander the Great to the Slavs* (*Zápis Alexandra Velikého Slovanům*) (*c.*1360) would see the light in this environment, provided the good press the Macedonian emperor enjoyed in this part of the world.[15] This document, written in Latin during the reign of Charles IV (1346–78) and presented as an official privilege signed by Alexander of Macedon, granted the Slavs, his loyal and courageous allies, the right to inhabit the territory from the northern frontier of Italy to the end of the world. This *falsum*, quickly identified as such by Piccolomini in his *Historia Bohemica*, enjoyed wide distribution for almost a century and even reached Polish lands in a translation Marcin Bielski inserted in his *Kronika wszystkiego świata* (*Chronicle of the Entire World*) in 1551, which would eventually be translated into Russian in 1584. Of course, its composition responds to an anti-Habsburg reaction by Charles IV in a time when he was trying to affirm the independence of the Bohemian kingdom from its German neighbours (this is also the time when the Slavic church rite will be

[14] Hashemi-Kopecka 2006, 644–9. [15] Adde-Vomáčka 2014, 1170, 1180–1.

reinstated in Bohemia with his foundation of the Monastery of the Slavs), but what might be more surprising, perhaps, is the choice of Alexander as a sanctioning authority due to his undeniable role as model for princes and emperors.

Alexander As Literary Hero

The last two 'moments' proposed at the beginning of this chapter have much in common, but more importantly they have in common the adoption of Alexander as a heroic figure, as a literary character. This adoption of Alexander as a literary character was probably behind the translations made in the Balkans and the South Slavic territories from the beginning. The Dalmatian coast of Croatia was undoubtedly one of the most prolific centres in producing Slavic translations of Latin originals, as well as, very likely, of knightly romances composed in France and England. In a book inventory found in the city of Zadar dated to 1389, there is notice of various romances, among which is found 'unus liber Alexandri parvus in littera sclava'.

On the other hand, translations of the Greek text of Pseudo-Callisthenes are found from Wallachia to Moscow. Across the Balkans alone, including Wallachia, we have been able to trace down forty manuscripts, and more than three hundred manuscript copies of the *Alexander Romance* have survived in East Slavic.[16] What is the difference between this text and the one Prince Vsevolod had available? Very little, actually, despite having been called by different names for more than one century of scholarly endeavour. Both derive from the Pseudo-Callisthenian text, both include more or less the same episodes and both were probably, in origin, translated as independent works from versions created in Greek between the eighth (from λ) and the ninth centuries (from ε or ζ), both of them deriving from the Greek fifth-century β version.

This ζ version has been proposed lately as a possible Greek version behind the translation found in Serbian. This assumption is based on the fact that there is a Middle Greek version which presents clear mistakes that could only be due to a retroversion from Slavic into Greek, and the fact that the Serbian version is also somehow particular. Some scholars therefore propose a common prototype, ζ*, now lost, itself based upon ε, written in

[16] Several editions of some of these versions are now available: Serbian (Novaković 1878, Marinković 1986, Christians 1991 and Van den Berk 1970), Russian (Botvinnik et al. 1965), Bulgarian (Köhler 1973), Ukrainian (Gaevskii 1929) and Croatian (Jagić 1871).

Middle Greek, that was the origin of the Serbian translation, maybe also of a Russian one. From this Serbian translation a retranslation would have been subsequently made into Middle Greek, due to the mistakes found in it.[17]

The Serbian version is basically much more novelistic than the previous text. It presents, aside from all the wonders Alexander discovers in his travels, a more detailed account of Aristotle's teachings, a more humanised Alexander, who cries bitterly when he finds out he has killed his own father, Nectanebo, or a more dramatic Roxana who decides to kill herself when Alexander dies. It is full of Christian and Jewish elements, such as the presence of the prophet Jeremiah in Alexander's visit to Jerusalem, and, all in all, it resembles more the structure of a novel than the Alexander depicted in the historical compendia.

By the time the Serbian monk used Alexander as the other term of the comparison with his ruler, it was certainly because the figure of Alexander was sufficiently known and respected to use it in this context. Bearing in mind that the comparison is made in the mid fourteenth century, it is not completely far-fetched to propose at least a century earlier when the first copies of the *Romance* were made. Similarly, by the time Efrosin decided Alexander was a literary character, along with Prester John, it was also probably due to the fact that Russia had established its place in the history of salvation of humankind firmly enough to require ancient figures to do so.

The denomination of this second translation of Pseudo-Callisthenes as Serbian has more to do with the history of scholarly literature on the subject than with any particular linguistic ascription of the text. By the time the great Russian scholar V. M. Istrin described the *Alexander Romance* as he found it in East Slavic historical compendia in 1893, another great specialist on Slavic studies, V. Jagić, had published in Zagreb in 1871 a text he called *The Life of Alexander the Great* (*Život Aleksandra Velikoga*) in which he edited a seventeenth-century Church Slavonic (Serbian recension) manuscript, and Novaković (1878) had also made the first serious study of the *Alexander Romance* in Slavic. Both acknowledged Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian and Russian recensions of this version, and Jagić admitted the translation was probably made 'somewhere in the South' either in Bulgarian or Serbian lands, but into Church Slavonic, the literary language they had in common. Jagić was

[17] A complete survey of this possibility, with arguments in favour and against, can be found in the recension that Mario Capaldo made of Marinković's and Van den Berk's books (Capaldo 1973–4).

Croatian. Novaković was Serbian. We have manuscripts of this text in all the aforementioned recensions, and little evidence to prove that one version was made before or after others. Istrin used the term 'Serbian' in view of the editions available at the time he was writing. Calling the second translation of the Pseudo-Callisthenes 'Serbian' is a convention as much as calling the first one 'chronographic'. They both come from the same Greek source, if maybe from two different versions, the only differences being (1) that it was edited differently, and (2) that the recension might have had different intermediate stages via other South Slavic languages. This means that all the Alexanders known in *Slavia Orthodoxa*, those territories that kept the Cyrillic script and took texts mainly, almost exclusively, from Greek, only knew about Alexander as Pseudo-Callisthenes and all his continuators presented him.

The Cyrillic Slavic Alexander, therefore, is from the beginning a legendary one, if we consider the Greek source text from which it was translated, different from the Alexander of Latin historiographic sources adapted in Bohemia much later. It is important to underline that is the same original text, the *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-Callisthenes, that will be again translated or adapted later on in Serbia and that will reach again the Eastern Slavs, and that will be considered a work of heroic literature. The paradox, of course, is that when they most badly needed a fully Christian Alexander, they only had available a Hellenistic pagan one, and had to supplement the text from other sources. When they finally get a fully Christian and more moral Alexander, a later Byzantine version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, they don't need him as a Christian figure anymore. To a certain extent, it is a parallel situation to that in Bohemia, where an original Alexander would inaugurate Czech letters, so Alexander was useful for that, but, due to his high language and morals, this Alexander was soon abandoned in favour of a more popular, colloquial Alexander, as Leo of Naples presented him, whose public wanted to hear more about faraway lands. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the first one barely survives in fragments and from the other we have at least five full manuscripts.

So, Alexander, malleable as he always is, managed to serve the incipient literary traditions in Slavic languages well, allowing them to create the character they most needed at a certain given time. Bearing in mind that the Slavs did not have ancient literature and that they never were in touch with classical literature in the making nor were part of the Roman Empire, let alone the Macedonian, the resilience and capacity of the Macedonian king to catch their imagination, in all his guises, was certainly phenomenal.

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