

**On the Cusp of Legend and History:  
The Myth of Alexander the Great in Italy between  
the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century**

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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## Abstract

This dissertation concerns the reception of the myth of Alexander the Great in Italian art during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In particular, I discuss the turning-point in the tradition which took place in Renaissance Italy around the middle of the fifteenth century: the transition from the medieval imagery of Alexander as a legendary, almost fairy-tale, figure to the historical portrait of him as an *exemplum* of moral virtue and military prowess.

On the basis of the *corpus* known as the *Alexander Romance*, during the Middle Ages Alexander was depicted as a fabled explorer and knight, whose marvellous adventures enjoyed huge popularity both in the literary tradition and in the visual arts. Around the mid-fifteenth century, with the changing cultural atmosphere associated with the rise of humanism, this medieval conception was superseded by a different image of Alexander, drawing on the newly discovered ancient historical accounts of Plutarch, Curtius Rufus, Arrian and Diodorus Siculus.

There are five chapters, all illustrated, plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the literary and iconographic tradition of Alexander in Italy from 1100 to 1400, exploring the most popular episodes from the legend. In Chapter 2, I present examples of the persistence of the legendary tradition in the Quattrocento (especially, some fresco cycles of the Nine Worthies). Chapter 3 is concerned with the humanist recovery of ancient sources and its impact on the received view of Alexander; the important contribution of Petrarch and Boccaccio is also examined. Chapter 4 deals with the emergence of a new Renaissance portrait of Alexander around 1450, notably in paintings on marriage chests. In Chapter 5 I discuss the development of this new image of Alexander in the sixteenth century, with the establishment of an iconographic repertoire, centring on novel episodes taken from ancient historical sources.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I first began thinking about Alexander in the late spring of 2002, when I was a student in history of art at the University of Venice. Impressed by a lecture given by Claudia Terribile on the Alexander painting by Veronese, now at the National Gallery, and at the same time looking for a subject for my September exam in Renaissance art, I gladly took up a suggestion offered by the course tutor Augusto Gentili, and chose as a topic for my research the representation of Alexander in Renaissance art. What was meant to be a rather limited investigation on the existing literature became an intoxicating immersion in the myth of Alexander, from the fourth century BC to the twentieth century AD. I vividly remember that summer as one of the most absorbing and intellectually thrilling of my life, spent as it was among books, piles of photocopies and a large notepad of handwritten notes that kept growing a little thicker every day. It took, however, several years, a few life detours, and a relocation to London to give to that spellbinding attraction the shape of a more-structured academic work.

During the time that it took to complete this dissertation, I have incurred many debts, the greatest of them to my supervisor Jill Kraye. Her tireless dedication and invaluable help have reached far beyond the duties required of a supervisor; for this, and for being to me an example of scholarly accuracy and generosity throughout, I feel immensely grateful. I am also indebted to Alessandro Scafi, who co-supervised the first part of my work and had the providential role of providing the earliest encouragement to turn my long-time interest for Alexander into a PhD dissertation at the Warburg. Thanks are also due to Marta Ajmar, who gave useful advice as an external reader for my upgrade exam.

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This dissertation is for my family, who know all too well that the name of Alexander is never too far from my lips: without their love, unfailing support and unconditional faith in me very little of what follows could have been achieved.



## Introduction

In this dissertation, I investigate the representation of Alexander the Great as it developed in Italian art in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This period marked a turning point within the Alexander tradition, both literary and iconographic, for in the course of the 1400s the dominant imagery throughout the Middle Ages was replaced by a new Renaissance portrait of Alexander, which became established in the early 1500s. My research focuses on the visual tradition located on the cusp of this dramatic change.

One of the most enduring, complex and widespread cultural myths of the entire Western tradition has grown up around the figure of Alexander.<sup>1</sup> The son of Philip II of Macedon and Olympias, princess of Epirus, Alexander was born at Pella (present-day Greece) in 356 BC, was educated by Aristotle, became king as Alexander III at the age of twenty, set out on his journey to Asia at twenty-two, conquered the Persian Empire from Egypt to India in less than ten years and died suddenly in Babylon on 10 June 323 BC, when he was not yet thirty-three years old. In view of such accomplishments, it is hardly surprising that he came to be regarded in his own lifetime as a heroic, almost divine figure; nor is it surprising that such an exceptional life, cut short by such an untimely death, earned Alexander an enduring renown, which spread well beyond the boundaries of the empire he conquered, reaching from England to Indonesia, from Russia to Ethiopia, and producing an

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<sup>1</sup> To have some sense of it, see, e.g., the vast selection of material presented in a number of recent exhibitions: *The Immortal Alexander the Great: The Myth, The Reality, His Journey, His Legacy* (exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, 2010-11), ed. A. Trofimova, Amsterdam 2010; *Alexander der Grosse und die Öffnung der Welt-Asiens Kulturen im Wandel* (exhibition catalogue, Mannheim, Reiss-Engelhorn Museen, 2009), ed. S. Hansen et al., Regensburg and Mannheim 2009; *Sulla via di Alessandro: da Seleucia al Gandhara* (exhibition catalogue, Turin, Palazzo Madama, 2007), ed. V. Messina, Cinisello Balsamo 2007; see also *Heracles to Alexander the Great: Treasures from the Royal Capital of Macedon, a Hellenic Kingdom in the Age of Democracy* (exhibition catalogue, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 2011), ed. Y. Galanakis, Oxford 2011, and *Au royaume d'Alexandre le Grand: la Macédoine antique* (exhibition catalogue, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 2011-12), ed. S. Descamps-Lequime, Paris 2011.

uninterrupted fascination over the centuries which has hardly any comparison in history.

When considered against this wider backdrop, the European tradition, and in particular the Italian Renaissance branch of it with which my research is concerned, might appear very limited. In an absolute sense, of course, this is true. And yet, as I hope my research will help to show, the way in which Alexander was interpreted, re-evaluated and transformed in the Italian peninsula during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is an important, and as yet little studied, chapter in the Alexander tradition.

Such a captivating figure was inevitably re-shaped again and again, with each age creating its own Alexander. The Alexander inherited from the Middle Ages by the Italian Renaissance was very different from the great conqueror who, in antiquity, had been emulated by Hellenistic rulers and Roman and Byzantine emperors alike.<sup>2</sup> As I show in Chapter 1, on the basis of the late ancient Greek *Alexander Romance* conventionally known as the Pseudo-Callisthenes and of the vast and ramifying texts ultimately deriving from it, the Middle Ages turned Alexander into a marvellous, almost fairy-tale hero, the protagonist of an enormously successful legendary tradition which flourished from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and which continues to receive the most attention from scholars.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the ancient historical tradition, based on the Greek and Latin accounts of Quintus Curtius Rufus, Plutarch, Arrian and Diodorus Siculus, which had presented a more reliable and less imaginative record of Alexander and his life,

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<sup>2</sup> From the vast bibliography on the reception of Alexander in antiquity and, in particular, the *imitatio Alexandri*, see *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. J. Roisman, Leiden and Boston 2003, with bibliography; see also D. Spencer, *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth*, Exeter 2002, and *Alessandro Magno tra storia e mito*, ed. M. Sordi, Milan 1984. Still essential are P. Treves, *Il mito di Alessandro e la Roma di Augusto*, Milan 1953, and S. Mazzarino, *L'impero romano*, 3 vols, Rome and Bari 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Alongside the bibliography cited in Chapter 1, see *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. D. Zuwiyya, Leiden and Boston 2011, with further references.

was almost entirely lost to the Middle Ages. It re-emerged, however, in the early fifteenth century, when these texts began to circulate widely in Europe after their recovery by humanists. In this dissertation, I refer to these two traditions as 'legend' and 'history' respectively, using the terms not merely in relation to these particular literary sources, but also to the entire textual and visual tradition of Alexander (and, therefore, the conception of Alexander) which is largely dependent on them.

We need to bear in mind, however, that the categories of legend and history are not mutually exclusive but rather intertwined and overlapping, with no sharp distinction between them. According to Santo Mazzarino, a certain degree of contamination between the historical tradition ('tradizione veridica') and the legendary tradition ('tradizione fantastica') – or, in my terminology, between legend and history – characterises the earlier extant accounts on Alexander's life<sup>4</sup> – and also, as far as we can tell, even the works, now lost, written by Alexander's contemporaries.<sup>5</sup> The supernatural aura which surrounded Alexander and which encouraged the comparison of his deeds to those of Achilles, Hercules and Dionysus had already begun to form during his lifetime. What we now call 'the myth of Alexander' – created in the interstices between truth and imagination, fact and fiction – was not, therefore, a tribute paid to the conqueror by his court poets or later emulators, nor was it merely the result of the tradition through which he has come down to us. It was, instead, an essential part of Alexander's own historical

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<sup>4</sup> S. Mazzarino, *Il pensiero storico classico*, 2 vols, Rome and Bari 1966, II.1, p. 24: 'Noi oggi non possiamo più accettare integralmente la divisione netta, che tuttavia apprendemmo sui banchi di scuola, fra la tradizione "veridica" (pragmatica) sulle imprese di Alessandro e la tradizione "fantastica" (retorica o drammatica) intorno a quelle imprese medesime. Possiamo dire che c'era un più e un meno di invenzione; anzi, che ce n'era in taluni storici d'Alessandro moltissima, un minimo in altri; ma non ci riuscirà mai di segnare una barriera netta fra la storiografia pragmatica e quella retorica.'

<sup>5</sup> On these works, see L. Pearson, *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great*, London 1960, and M. A. Levi, *Introduzione ad Alessandro Magno*, Milan 1977, pp. 19-107. The surviving fragments of Alexander's first historians, edited by F. Jacoby, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 3 vols, Berlin 1923-58, vol. 2B, pp. 618-828, nos 117-53 (commentary in vol. 2D, pp. 403-542), are now collected (with French translations) in *Historiens d'Alexandre*, ed. J. Auberger, Paris 2005.

personality, as well as, to a large extent, a deliberate creation of Alexander himself.<sup>6</sup> We know, for example, that the image of a deified Alexander appeared on coins issued by Ptolemy, his successor in Egypt, as early as 322-321 BC – that is, only two years after Alexander's death – which tends to confirm Paul Goukowsky's observation that Alexander entered myth before he entered history.<sup>7</sup>

And yet, the distinction between 'legendary works' and 'historical accounts', formulated some sixty years ago by George Cary in his attempt to organise the extraordinarily rich literature on Alexander produced in Europe during the Middle Ages,<sup>8</sup> remains valid. Although it has been criticised as problematic and simplistic by some scholars,<sup>9</sup> Cary's distinction is nevertheless a useful research tool and remains to this day the standard approach to the Alexander literature<sup>10</sup> – and to some parts of the Alexander iconography as well.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, a contamination between the legendary and the historical traditions can be detected from the very beginning of the Alexander myth: shreds of

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<sup>6</sup> See P. Goukowsky, *Essai sur les origines du mythe d'Alexandre (336-270 av. J.-C.)*, 2 vols, Nancy 1978-81. On the Alexander myth as a self-promoted creation, see M. Centanni, 'Il mito di Alessandro nell'Ellenismo letterario', in *Alessandro Magno: storia e mito* (exhibition catalogue, Rome, Palazzo Ruspoli, 1995-6), ed. C. Alfano, Milan 1995, pp. 153-9, esp. pp. 153-4; and her introduction to the first modern Italian translation of the Greek romance: *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, ed. M. Centanni, Turin 1991, pp. VII-LX. On the inclusion of 'materiale consciamente mitopoietico' in the historical accounts of Alexander, see P. Dronke, 'Introduzione', in *Alessandro nel Medioevo occidentale*, ed. P. Boitani et al., Milan 1997, pp. XIII-LXXV, at pp. XV-XVII.

<sup>7</sup> Goukowsky, *Essai sur les origines*, I, p. 92: '[Alexandre] entré dans le mythe avant même d'être entré dans l'Histoire.'

<sup>8</sup> G. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross, Cambridge 1956, esp. pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Dronke, 'Introduzione', pp. XV-XIX.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., D. J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus: A Guide to Medieval Illustrated Alexander Literature*, London 1963. Cary himself applied these categories only to the sources on Alexander which were available to the Middle Ages; however, his classification has been extended to the entire literary production on Alexander, including the earliest accounts which were rediscovered only in the Renaissance by the humanists (e.g., the works of Arrian and Diodorus Siculus, which Cary did not discuss).

<sup>11</sup> The dichotomy *fabula/historia* is commonly adopted, e.g., in relation to the important literary and iconographic production about Alexander found in late fifteenth-century Burgundy; see S. McKendrick, *The History of Alexander the Great: An Illuminated Manuscript of Vasco da Lucena's French Translation of the Ancient Text by Quintus Curtius Rufus*, Los Angeles 1996, esp. pp. 63-5.

historical facts are present even in the most fanciful retellings of his story, and some fanciful material occasionally filtered into the most historically reliable accounts. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the two traditions which I refer to as ‘legend’ and ‘history’ developed along different paths and according to different timescales. So, in the Middle Ages, when the ancient historical sources disappeared almost completely, the legendary tradition became enormously influential and assumed dominance. The humanist recovery of Alexander’s ancient historians, however, together with the new cultural atmosphere of the Italian Renaissance, resulted in the gradual eclipse of the legendary tradition over the course of the Quattrocento and the creation of a new portrait of Alexander, based on recently restored historical texts from antiquity, which were taken to present him as a virtuous man and a moral *exemplum*.

Although this transition from the medieval Alexander of legend to the modern Alexander of history is generally acknowledged in the scholarly literature, it has never been fully discussed or adequately addressed.<sup>12</sup> Historians of the Alexander legend such as George Cary and Victor Schmidt have touched on it as the epilogue to the medieval legendary tradition – Cary, however, examined only the literary production, while Schmidt focused on a single episode, admittedly the most popular one, from the visual tradition: the ‘Flight with Griffins’.<sup>13</sup> The same can be said of a four-volume study which came out while I was in the final stages of completing this dissertation and which presented the results of a five-year research project devoted to the reception of Alexander in the European literature from the

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<sup>12</sup> Attention to this transition has been drawn by Monica Centanni in a number of studies, e.g., ‘Alexander the Great’, in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. A. Grafton et al., Cambridge MA and London 2010, pp. 25-31, esp. p. 30; see also C. Frugoni, *La fortuna di Alessandro Magno dall’antichità al Medioevo*, Florence 1978, pp. 23-4.

<sup>13</sup> See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 226-59 (on England, France and Germany) and 260-72 (on Italy); V. M. Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image: The Aerial Flight of Alexander the Great*, Groningen 1995, pp. 155-65.

tenth to the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup> On account of the impressive amount of material gathered together and thoroughly examined, it is truly a landmark work. Since, however, its merits lie in the mapping of the legend – concentrating, moreover, exclusively on the literary, not the visual, tradition to which it gave rise – the work contributes little to the topic of my research. Other recent works have completely passed over the period of transition from the legendary to the historical Alexander, devoting attention instead to the Renaissance iconography after it was already established, from the sixteenth century onwards, without taking into consideration either its emergence in the previous century or its possible connections to and overlaps with the medieval tradition.<sup>15</sup>

This neglected phase, on the cusp between legend and history, is the focus of the dissertation. Although it is intended as an examination of the visual tradition of Alexander, I have researched it in constant dialogue with the literary tradition, which it was usually influenced by, if not dependent on; and I have also tried to take into account the cultural and material context of the artworks, spanning several media, which I discuss. As for the time frame, the vast majority of artefacts date roughly from the 1450s, when images of Alexander based on the historical ancient sources first emerged, to the 1560s, when the Renaissance visual repertoire based

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<sup>14</sup> *La fascination pour Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures européennes (X<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle): réinventions d'un mythe*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas, 4 vols, Turnhout 2014. See also A. Ippolitov, “Stand Less between the Sun and Me”, in *The Immortal Alexander the Great: The Myth, The Reality, His Journey, His Legacy* (exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam, Hermitage Amsterdam, 2010-11), ed. A. Trofimova, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 52-67; Spencer, *The Roman Alexander*, pp. 205-18; and N. Yalouris, ‘Alexander and His Heritage’, in *The Search for Alexander: An Exhibition* (exhibition catalogue, Washington, National Gallery of Art and elsewhere, 1980-2), Boston 1980, pp. 10-20. Further literature on the Alexander tradition is cited in the chapters below where relevant.

<sup>15</sup> See, above all, *Alexander the Great in European Art* (exhibition catalogue, Thessaloniki, Organisation for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997-8), ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Athens 1997, which discusses material dating from the 1500 to 1750; *Alessandro Magno in età moderna*, ed. F. Biasutti and A. Coppola, Padua 2009 (despite their promising titles, the essays by Corrado Bologna, ‘Trionfo e fine di Alessandro: dal Medioevo all’età moderna’, pp. 11-71, and Patrizio Tucci, ‘Dall’Alessandro medievale all’Alessandro umanistico [Villon, Montaigne]’, pp. 73-93, do not provide any insight into this theme). Some interesting material is in *Figures d’Alexandre à la Renaissance*, ed. C. Jouanno, Turnhout 2012, which, however, focuses mainly on the French tradition.

on those sources was firmly in place. In addition to these core fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artworks, a selection of earlier ones, from the 1160s to the end of the fourteenth century, serve to illustrate the legendary iconographic tradition of the Middle Ages.

The organisation of the dissertation is both chronological and thematic. In Chapter 1, I give an overview of the iconographic tradition of the legend in medieval Italy, examples of which are taken mainly from illuminated manuscripts, but also include sculpted reliefs, floor mosaics and similar decorative features. The small number of artworks from the fifteenth century which continue to draw on the legendary tradition (most importantly, four fresco cycles of the 'Nine Worthies') are presented in Chapter 2. In contrast to the other chapters, the third is devoted to the literary tradition: I discuss the humanist recovery of the main ancient historical sources on Alexander, their circulation in Italy through epitomes and translations and the impact which the discovery of these texts had on humanists (Petrarch, Boccaccio, Angelo Decembrio and Pier Paolo Vergerio) and on the received view of Alexander. The fourth and longest chapter traces the emergence of the new Renaissance iconography of Alexander resulting from the recovery of his ancient historians, as it appeared in Florentine *cassone* panels, humanist cycles of *Uomini famosi* and the creation of an *all'antica* portrait of Alexander based on the ancient numismatic types bearing his effigy. Chapter 5 illustrates the development and consolidation of this new Renaissance iconography of Alexander in the sixteenth century, when a vast repertoire of episodes from his life, taken from the ancient historical sources, took shape and which presented him as an *exemplum virtutum* and a model for rulers and aristocrats to emulate. Finally, in the Conclusion, I bring together the results of my investigation.

## Chapter 1

### The Legendary Tradition of Alexander the Great in Medieval Art and Literature

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literary and iconographic tradition of Alexander as it developed in Italy during the Middle Ages. I shall consider as ‘Italian’ those artworks and texts which were produced either within the boundaries of present-day Italy or by Italian artists living elsewhere. As the majority of the extant material dates from between 1100 and 1400, my main focus will be on the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, with occasional reference to earlier or later items. I shall not examine this large body of work in detail. Instead, my intention is to present the medieval view of Alexander as reflected in the art and literature of the period, since it is in dialogue with – and against – this view that the Renaissance conception of Alexander arose in the fifteenth century.

In the ‘Foreword’ to D. J. A. Ross’s *Alexander Historiatus: A Guide to Medieval Illustrated Alexander Literature*, E. H. Gombrich referred to the ‘forbidding maze of the Alexander story.’<sup>1</sup> The image of a labyrinth with no ready exit is certainly an apt description of the enormous *fortuna* enjoyed by Alexander throughout the Middle Ages. Staying within the confines of the Western tradition,<sup>2</sup> the life of Alexander was recounted in so many versions, which were translated into so many languages, that it is virtually impossible to disentangle the web of interrelations, ramifications and contaminations of texts (and different recensions

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. V.

<sup>2</sup> On the Eastern tradition, see most recently *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. R. Stoneman et al., Groningen 2012, and F. Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition Through Seven Centuries: From Pseudo-Callisthenes to Šūrī*, Paris and Leuven 2010.



of texts) from which the medieval Alexander literature emerged.<sup>3</sup> Alongside this enormous *corpus* of texts is an equally vast iconographic repertoire, in which the stories about Alexander are illustrated, mainly in the form of illuminations accompanying texts, but also as ‘independent’ works of art such as, for example, sculpture and mosaics.

The paramount role played by the so called Pseudo-Callisthenes in the transmission of the myth of Alexander has long been established.<sup>4</sup> Between late antiquity and the Quattrocento – when the historical sources were recovered by humanists – this work was almost the only means by which the Alexander stories were known and disseminated.<sup>5</sup> The conventional name by which it is known deserves some explanation. The philosopher Callisthenes of Olynthus (c. 360-328 BC), a kinsman of Aristotle’s, was appointed by Alexander as the official historian of his expedition to Asia. The account he wrote, only fragments of which remain, was regarded in antiquity as a eulogistic composition which exaggerated Alexander’s merits and the extraordinary nature of the places he and his army visited in Asia.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps due to this reputation, several manuscripts of the anonymous Greek

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<sup>3</sup> For attempts to create a *stemma* of a part of the written tradition, see Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 46, 52 and 60. Corrado Bologna (‘Prologo ai prologhi’, in *Alessandro nel Medioevo occidentale*, ed. P. Boitani et al., Milan 1997, pp. 5-15, at pp. 7-8) has rightly observed that Alexander is ‘implicato in una fra le più straordinarie vicende di versioni, volgarizzamenti, adattamenti che la storia letteraria conosca.’

<sup>4</sup> For the *status quaestionis* on the Pseudo-Callisthenes, see C. Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses du Roman d’Alexandre: domaine grec*, Paris 2002, esp. pp. 13-55, and R. Stoneman, ‘Introduzione’, in *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, ed. R. Stoneman, 2 vols, Milan 2007-, I, pp. XV-LXXXVIII, at pp. XVII-LXXXIII. R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Munich 1977, remains essential. For an overview of the literary tradition stemming from the Pseudo-Callisthenes, see R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend*, New Haven and London 2008, pp. 230-45.

<sup>5</sup> Despite its occasional influence on the iconographic tradition, I shall not take into consideration the vast body of medieval philosophical and theological literature first explored by Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 77-162, in which Alexander is mentioned in exemplary anecdotes and apologues. A useful distinction between such ‘materiali alessandrini’, on the one hand, and ‘testi alessandrini’, devoted specifically to Alexander, on the other, has been drawn by Paolo Rinoldi, ‘La circolazione della materia “alessandrina” in Italia nel Medioevo (coordinate introduttive)’, in *Alessandro/Dhù l-Qarnayn in viaggio tra i due mari*, ed. C. Saccone, Alessandria 2008, pp. 11-50, at pp. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> See L. Prandi, *Callistene: uno storico tra Aristotele e i re macedoni*, Milan 1985.

*Romance* were attributed to Callisthenes, including the codex seen in Paris by Isaac Casaubon, who, in a letter of 1605 to Joseph Scaliger, coined the name ‘Pseudo-Callisthenes.’<sup>7</sup>

The Greek text of the Pseudo-Callisthenes was assembled in Alexandria around the third century AD from various materials partially dating to the third century BC;<sup>8</sup> a Latin translation by Julius Valerius became available as early as 340-350 AD.<sup>9</sup> The five known recensions are all characterised by a mythic narrative tone, which presents Alexander as a child of magic<sup>10</sup> whose birth and death are foretold by dramatic presages. First and foremost, Alexander is depicted in the Pseudo-Callisthenes as a fearless adventurer who encounters all the sorts of wonders and monstrous creatures which were thought to inhabit the East. Guided by divine providence (*pronoia*), which in later versions becomes the Christian God,<sup>11</sup> Alexander is portrayed not only as the *domitor Orientis*, but also as the conqueror of both the East and the West.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Stoneman, ‘Introduzione’, pp. LII-LVI, and Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 84, n. 2.

<sup>8</sup> The Pseudo-Callisthenes combines, often with very little consistency, a range of materials of different nature and origin, some of them dating to the early third century BC – only a generation after Alexander’s death. Stoneman dates the composition of the text, in its essentials, to the third-second century BC; see his ‘Introduzione’, pp. XXV-XXXIV.

<sup>9</sup> Julius Valerius, *Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis translatae ex Aesopo graeco*, ed. M. Rosellini, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Stuttgart 2004. See also J.-P. Callu’s introduction to his French translation of the text, *Roman d’Alexandre*, Turnhout 2010, pp. 5-37.

<sup>10</sup> According to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.1-12), followed by its derivatives, Alexander’s father is not Philip of Macedon but the Egyptian pharaoh and magician Nectanebo. I shall come back to this in Chapter 2 (2.2). All my references to the Pseudo-Callisthenes are to *The Greek Alexander Romance*, ed. R. Stoneman, London 1991.

<sup>11</sup> On the Christian patina found in all recensions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, see Centanni’s introduction to her *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, pp. XXVII-XXVIII.

<sup>12</sup> Among the plans left unfulfilled at Alexander’s death, both Curtius Rufus (X.1.17-18) and Diodorus Siculus (XVIII.4.4) mention a military expedition against Italy and the West. In the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.29-30) these plans are reported, not as wishful projects, but rather as successful achievements.

A key factor in the diffusion of the Pseudo-Callisthenes throughout Europe was the Latin translation made by the Archpriest Leo in Naples around 950.<sup>13</sup> Despite the poor quality of the Latin, Leo's *Nativitas et victoria Alexandri Magni* is at the origin of three highly influential interpolated versions (J<sup>1</sup>, J<sup>2</sup>, J<sup>3</sup>), known as *Historia de Preliis*, as well as of all the Alexander romances written in Europe during the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> By combining Leo's account with materials from a variety of sources such as Orosius, Solinus and, most importantly, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle about India*,<sup>15</sup> the interpolated texts emphasised the elements of myth and fable already present in the Pseudo-Callisthenes. In particular, they gave special prominence to Alexander's adventures in India – e.g., his flight to heaven with griffins, exploration of the ocean, encounter with the monstrous races and journey to paradise.<sup>16</sup> In these texts and their illustrations, Alexander is transformed into a chivalric hero and a restless explorer, whose curiosity for the unknown is limitless. He is the protagonist of hugely successful and beautifully illustrated poems such as the thirteenth-century *Old French Prose Alexander* and Alexander of Paris's *Roman*

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<sup>13</sup> According to Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 47: 'no version of the Alexander-romance has had a wider influence nor produced more vernacular progeny than this wretched little book.'

<sup>14</sup> See the edition of the text provided by F. Pfister, *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, Heidelberg 1913. On the circumstances of Leo's translation, see A. Frugoni, 'La biblioteca di Giovanni III duca di Napoli (dal *Prologus* dell'arciprete Leone al "Romanzo di Alessandro")', *Annali della Scuola Speciale per Archivisti e Bibliotecari dell'Università di Roma*, 9, 1969, pp. 161-71. On the interpolated recensions of the *Historia de Preliis*, see Pfister, *Der Alexanderroman*, pp. 14-9; Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 43-58; Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 50-61.

<sup>15</sup> *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem ad codicum fidem edita et commentario critico instructa*, ed. W. W. Boer, Meisenheim am Glan 1973. See also L. L. Gunderson, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle about India*, Meisenheim am Glan 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Accounts of these marvels entered encyclopedic compilations and in this way influenced the European conception of India throughout the Middle Ages. See R. Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5, 1942, pp. 159-97; J. Le Goff, 'L'Occidente medievale e l'Oceano Indiano: un orizzonte onirico', in *Mediterraneo e Oceano Indiano: atti del sesto colloquio internazionale di storia marittima tenuto a Venezia dal 20 al 29 settembre 1962*, ed. M. Cortelazzo, Florence 1970, pp. 243-63; G. Zaganelli, *L'Oriente incognito medievale: enciclopedie, romanzi di Alessandro, teratologie*, Catanzaro 1997, pp. 87-129; E. Baumgartner, 'L'Orient d'Alexandre', *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 6, 1988, pp. 7-15. For the journey to Paradise, see *Les voyages d'Alexandre au paradis: Orient et Occident, regards, croisés*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas and M. Bridges, Turnhout 2013.

*d'Alexandre* (c. 1185);<sup>17</sup> he becomes the prototype of the noble knights in *chansons de geste* (for example, those in the Arthurian legend) and their model in terms of courage and *largesse*.<sup>18</sup> The figure of Alexander became so entangled with chivalric literature that he was turned into a Christian hero himself, protected and guided by God and not always readily distinguishable, in illustrated manuscripts, from the paladins of medieval sagas. The Christianisation of Alexander – a process which began in late antiquity<sup>19</sup> and which was encouraged by his assimilation to Christ (or the Antichrist) in the theories of theologians and moralists since the early Middle Ages<sup>20</sup> – reached its apex at the time of the Crusades, when his battles against the Persians were transformed into wars against the Saracens, and it would, no doubt, have been easy to forget that Alexander was not, after all, a Christian.<sup>21</sup> Also, the direct contact with the exoticism of the East gave an unprecedented appeal to Alexander's marvellous adventures in India, making them all the more popular in the illustrated manuscripts.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the lavishly illustrated MS 78.C.1 in Berlin, c. 1290s, reproduced in A. Rieger, *Der Alexanderroman: ein Ritterroman über Alexander der Großen: Handschrift 78.C.1 des Kupferstichkabinetts Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin*, Wiesbaden 2006; and MS Bodl. 264 in Oxford, a fourteenth-century miscellany and one of the most sumptuous illuminated manuscripts of the entire Middle Ages, on which see M. Cruse, *Illuminating the Roman d'Alexandre: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264: The Manuscript as Monument*, Cambridge 2011, and *Il manoscritto Bodley 264: il Romanzo di Alessandro, i Viaggi di Marco Polo*, 2 vols, Rome 2014, I, *Saggi e commenti*.

<sup>18</sup> See C. Bologna, 'La generosità cavalleresca di Alessandro', *L'immagine riflessa*, 12, 1989, pp. 367-404, and Dronke, 'Introduzione', pp. XLII-XLVII.

<sup>19</sup> See L. Cracco Ruggini, 'Sulla cristianizzazione della cultura pagana: il mito greco e latino di Alessandro dall'età antonina al Medio Evo', *Athenaeum*, 13, 1965, pp. 3-80; ead., 'Un riflesso del mito di Alessandro nella "Historia Augusta"', in *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1964-5* (Antiquitas: Beiträge zur Historia-Augusta-Forschung, Bd. 3), Bonn 1966, pp. 79-89.

<sup>20</sup> See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 118-25.

<sup>21</sup> See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 183-6, and Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 210-11. For a comparable example from Byzantium, see C. Jouanno, 'The Persians in late Byzantine Alexander Romances: A Portrayal under Turkish Influences', in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. R. Stoneman et al., Groningen 2012, pp. 105-15. Fabrizio Lollini, 'Alessandro il Grande come Cristo in due manoscritti miniati armeni', *La rivista di engramma*, 39, 2005, pp. 7-14 (on-line journal), has discussed a striking case of Alexander's assimilation to Christ in the Armenian iconographic tradition.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Infurna, 'Alessandro viaggiatore medievale', in *Pothos: il viaggio, la nostalgia*, ed. F. Rosa and F. Zambon, Trent 1995, pp. 165-87; M. L. Meneghetti, 'Alessandro e famiglia: la

Italy played an important role in the medieval Alexander tradition: not only was the Archpriest Leo's translation made in Naples, but also the J<sup>2</sup> and J<sup>3</sup> versions were extremely popular in Italy – particularly in the south, where all three interpolated versions are likely to have been composed.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the Italian tradition has generally been neglected by scholars – in favour, above all, of French Alexander literature.<sup>24</sup> The only comprehensive study specifically devoted to the textual transmission of the *Alexander Romance* in Italy is the 1935 monograph by Joachim Storost.<sup>25</sup> Much valuable work has recently been done on the diffusion of the Latin and vernacular texts in Italy.<sup>26</sup> But there is still a major desideratum: a systematic survey of Alexander imagery in manuscripts and incunabula illustrated in Italy.

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circolazione dei romanzi di materia greca nell'Italia della prima metà del XIII secolo', in *Mito e storia nella tradizione cavalleresca*, Spoleto 2006, pp. 347-62.

<sup>23</sup> Rinoldi, 'La circolazione della materia "alessandrina"', p. 16 and n. 18. According to Michele Campopiano, "'Gentes, monstra, fere": l'Histoire d'Alexandre dans une encyclopédie du XIIe siècle', in *Conter de Troie et d'Alexandre: Pour Emmanuèle Baumgartner*, ed. L. Harf-Lancner et al., Paris 2006, pp. 233-52, the author of the J<sup>2</sup> recension should be identified with a Tuscan priest, Guido of Pisa.

<sup>24</sup> See P. Meyer, *Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature française du Moyen Âge*, 2 vols, Paris 1886. Among numerous recent contributions, the most important are: C. Gaullier-Bougassas, *Les Romans d'Alexandre: aux frontières de l'épique et du romanesque*, Paris 1998, and M. Gosman, *La légende d'Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature française du 12<sup>e</sup> siècle: une réécriture permanente*, Amsterdam and Atlanta GA 1997. Largely devoted to the French literature are also two monographic issues of *Bien dire et bien apprendre* (6, 1988, *Le Roman d'Alexandre*, and 7, 1989, *Autour d'Alexandre*).

<sup>25</sup> J. Storost, *Studien zur Alexandersage in der älteren italienischen Literatur: Untersuchungen und Texte*, Halle (Saale) 1935. The pioneering studies of 1829-30 by Guillaume Favre, 'Recherches sur les histoires fabuleuses d'Alexandre le Grand', in id., *Mélanges d'histoire littéraire*, 2 vols, Geneva 1856, II, pp. 1-185, including a chapter on the Italian literary tradition (pp. 118-25), deserve a mention.

<sup>26</sup> Rinoldi, 'La circolazione della materia "alessandrina"'; M. Campopiano, 'Parcours de la légende d'Alexandre en Italie: réflexions sur la reception italienne de l'*Historia de preliis* J<sup>2</sup> (XII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)', in *L'historiographie médiévale d'Alexandre le Grand*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas, Turnhout 2011, pp. 65-84; R. Morosini, 'The Alexander Romance in Italy', in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. D. Zuwiyya, Leiden and Boston 2011, pp. 329-64. See also Michele Campopiano's chapters in *La fascination pour Alexandre*, I, pp. 57-62 and 323-62; II, pp. 927-54; III, pp. 1489-507, 1720-2, 1744, 1755-7, 1771-3, 1800-2; IV, pp. 243-66.

The popularity of the imagery associated with Alexander went hand in hand with the diffusion of the *Alexander Romance*. The main source for illustrations of the episodes from the life of Alexander are illuminated manuscripts. Although the selection and number of stories represented vary considerably, the marvels connected to his 'Indian adventures' are almost always highlighted. Some episodes from Alexander's childhood are also frequently illustrated, including the 'Taming of Bucephalus'. Within this vast tradition, I shall discuss only those iconographic themes which are directly relevant to the argument developed in the following chapters: the emergence of the Renaissance portrait of Alexander. I shall therefore take into account the episodes which were particularly popular in Italy during the Middle Ages and which were involved in the elaboration of a new conception of Alexander in the fifteenth century. As far as illuminated manuscripts are concerned, the studies of D. J. A. Ross will provide the framework for my analysis.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.1. The Flight with Griffins

Of all the *fabulae* told in the *Alexander Romance* the 'Flight with Griffins' was by far the most widespread in the Middle Ages and is also the most extensively studied episode of the legend.<sup>28</sup> It was illustrated in nearly every artistic medium and was one of the very few themes to be represented outside the context of Alexander cycles

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<sup>27</sup> Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, and the supplement in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 30, 1967, pp. 383-8; see also his *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books in Germany and the Netherlands: A Study in Comparative Iconography*, Cambridge 1971.

<sup>28</sup> See C. Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri elevati per griphos ad aerem: origine, iconografia e fortuna di un tema*, Rome 1973; Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*. Still useful are: R. S. Loomis, 'Alexander the Great's Celestial Journey', *Burlington Magazine*, 32, 1918, pp. 136-40 and 177-85; G. Boffito, 'La leggenda aviatoria di Alessandro Magno nella letteratura e nell'arte', *La Bibliofilia*, 22, 1920-1, pp. 316-30, and *ibid.*, 23, 1921-2, pp. 22-32 and 268-71; G. Millet, 'L'Ascension d'Alexandre', *Syria*, 4, 1923, pp. 85-133.

in illustrated manuscripts.<sup>29</sup> The story goes back to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (II.41) as one of the tasks carried out by Alexander in the last part of his journey to the borders of the world.<sup>30</sup> Having reached the furthest part of Asia, Alexander is overcome by the desire to explore the heavens. He has a flying machine built (usually, a casket or a chariot) and travels through the air in the vehicle drawn by griffins, only to be sent back to the earth by a divine creature (in later versions, God). The ambiguity of this ascent led it to be regarded either as a symbol of Alexander's *hybris* or as an iconic image of power and a prefiguration of the imperial apotheosis. Whether praised or condemned, the Flight was charged with an ideological and symbolic meaning, which explains why it was represented as an independent work of art (e.g., in floor mosaics, reliefs, column capitals), mainly in churches and monasteries.<sup>31</sup>

One of the best-known examples of the Flight is the twelfth-century marble relief on the north façade of the St Mark's Basilica in Venice, brought from Constantinople in 1204 as part of the booty of the Fourth Crusade (**fig. 1**).<sup>32</sup> The specific connotation assumed by the triumphal image of the Flight in Byzantine art explains the inclusion of this relief in the renovation project of St Mark's after the

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<sup>29</sup> See C. Frugoni, 'La fortuna di Alessandro nel Medioevo', in *Alessandro Magno: storia e mito* (exhibition catalogue, Rome, Palazzo Ruspoli, 1995-6), ed. C. Alfano, Milan 1995, pp. 161-173, at p. 161. With regard to the popularity of images of the Flight, D. J. A. Ross, 'Alexander and the Faithless Lady: A Submarine Adventure', in his *Studies in the Alexander Romance*, London 1985, pp. 382-403, at p. 384, stated that 'specialists apart, those who know anything of Alexander the Great as a hero of medieval romance know him usually as an airman.'

<sup>30</sup> The account of the Flight appears in only one branch of the Pseudo-Callisthenes's textual tradition (L variant of the beta recension). It is not mentioned in the Latin translation by Julius Valerius, but it does appear in Archpriest Leo of Naples's version and its derivatives. See Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 5-11.

<sup>31</sup> For the diffusion in Italy, see *ibid.*, pp. 282-316. The European examples are listed in Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, pp. 167-209.

<sup>32</sup> J. Durand, 'Légende d'Alexandre le Grand', *Annales Archéologiques*, 25, 1865, pp. 142-58; Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 162-4; ead., 'La lastra marmorea dell'Ascensione di Alessandro Magno', in *La basilica di San Marco: arte e simbologia*, ed. B. Bertoni, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Venice 1999, pp. 167-9. Some useful remarks are in L. Bréhier, *La sculpture et les arts mineurs byzantins*, Paris 1936, pp. 64-5.

Venetian conquest of Constantinople. As the first *kosmokrator*, Alexander was regarded in Byzantium as a predecessor of the emperors, and the Flight was thought to prefigure their apotheosis, as well as an apotropaic image.<sup>33</sup> Alexander was often depicted wearing imperial robes and attributes, and in this way he was transformed into a Byzantine emperor. In the St Mark's relief, Alexander ascending to the heavens is *figura* of the defeated Byzantine emperor and therefore symbolises the 1204 *translatio imperii*, when the power of the emperors of Rome and Constantinople passed to the Venetian *doge*.<sup>34</sup>

The triumphal connotation of the Flight is confirmed by the presence of the same theme in the most precious artefact in the treasury of St Mark's: the Pala d'Oro. Completely renovated by Doge Andrea Dandolo in 1342-5, the Pala includes two enamel roundels from the 1204 Sack of Constantinople; surrounded by figures of saints and prophets, they are the only medallions displaying non-religious iconography.<sup>35</sup> The episode of the Flight is divided between the two enamels. In the first, the crowned head of Alexander appears between two rampant griffins in a simplified but unmistakable image of his ascent to the heavens (**fig. 2**). The second medallion shows the cosmic vision which, according to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (II.41), concludes the Flight: looking down from above, Alexander sees the earth as

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<sup>33</sup> On the use of the image of the Flight of Alexander at Constantinople, see Frugoni, *La fortuna di Alessandro Magno*, pp. 17-19, and ead., 'La fortuna di Alessandro nel Medioevo', pp. 165-8. For an examination of the relief and its meaning within the iconographic programme of the Basilica, see M. Centanni, "Alexander Rex" tra Bisanzio e Venezia: la doppia lettura ideologica del volo di Alessandro, tra XII e XIII secolo', in *Divinizzazione, culto del sovrano e apoteosi tra antichità e Medioevo*, ed. T. Gnoli and F. Muccioli, Bologna 2014, pp. 391-426.

<sup>34</sup> The political use of the image of Alexander in St Mark's is hardly surprising, given that the Basilica was the private chapel of the adjacent Ducal Palace from its foundation in 829 until 1797; in 1807 it became the cathedral of Venice.

<sup>35</sup> The two enamels discussed are part of a series of five; the other three represent scenes of a royal hunt with falcons. See Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 186-9; Centanni, "Alexander Rex", pp. 413-14 and 421-2; and W. F. Volbach, 'Gli smalti della Pala d'Oro', in *La Pala d'oro*, ed. H. R. Hanhloser and R. Polacco, Venice 1994, pp. 3-71 (on the five enamels, see pp. 65-6, nos 148-52).



a heavenly garden and the surrounding ocean as a serpent (**fig. 3**).<sup>36</sup> Despite the seminal studies of André Grabar,<sup>37</sup> as well as the important contributions by Chiara Frugoni and Monica Centanni,<sup>38</sup> the two enamels still need further investigation.<sup>39</sup>

The majority of the examples of the Flight of Alexander on a monumental scale are to be found in churches of the southern Italian region of Apulia.<sup>40</sup> They date from around the 1160s and are all very similar, both iconographically and stylistically; more importantly, they present the Flight as an *exemplum superbiae* and, therefore, as a negative episode. Three mosaic floors in the cathedrals of Otranto (**fig. 4**), Trani and Taranto<sup>41</sup> depict Alexander's Flight alongside biblical examples of pride being punished: for example, the Tower of Babel, the Fall of

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<sup>36</sup> For a different interpretation of the second enamel as the 'Tree of Life', see D. J. A. Ross's review of C. Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 88, 1976, pp. 165-74, at p. 169.

<sup>37</sup> A. Grabar, 'Le succès des arts orientaux a la cour byzantine sous les Macédoniens' and 'Images de l'ascension d'Alexandre en Italie et en Russie', in his *L'art de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, 3 vols, Paris 1968, I, pp. 265-90 and 291-6. The medallion with the Flight is also illustrated in G. Dimitrokallis, 'L'ascensione di Alessandro Magno nell'Italia del Medioevo', *Thesaurismata*, 4, 1967, pp. 214-22, at p. 214 and fig. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Frugoni, 'La fortuna di Alessandro nel Medioevo', p. 166 (with references to her previous contributions); Centanni, "Alexander Rex".

<sup>39</sup> A step in this direction is the research of Maria Bergamo, 'Alessandro, il cavaliere, il doge: le placchette profane della Pala d'Oro di San Marco', tesi di diploma in Storia e Beni Culturali della Chiesa, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2011-12; I thank the author for allowing me to read her unpublished thesis. A third medieval Venetian image of Alexander has not received much scholarly attention: an Alexander *kosmokrator*, with crown and sceptre, is carved on a 14<sup>th</sup>-century column capital in the Ducal Palace among the kings and emperors of antiquity; see A. Lermer, *Der gotische 'Dogenpalast' in Venedig: Baugeschichte und Skulpturenprogramm des Palatium Communis Venetiarum*, Munich and Berlin 2005, pp. 101, 103-4. This image of Alexander is merely mentioned in the otherwise authoritative study of the Ducal Palace capitals by A. Manno, *Il poema del tempo: i capitelli del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia: storia e iconografia*, Venice 1999, pp. 147-8.

<sup>40</sup> Apart from the case of St Mark's in Venice, reliefs with the Flight in north and central Italy are at Fidenza (Parma, cathedral of San Donnino), Narni (Terni, church of San Domenico), Matrice (Campobasso, Santa Maria della Strada) and Monte Sant'Angelo in the Gargano (Santa Maria Maggiore). See Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, pp. 169-74, with related bibliography. A marble relief of unknown provenance dated to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century is in the Museo Nazionale dell'Alto Medioevo, Rome: see *Alessandro Magno: storia e mito* (exhibition catalogue, Rome, Palazzo Ruspoli, 1995-6), ed. C. Alfano, Milan 1995, p. 323, no. 121 (A. Settis Frugoni).

<sup>41</sup> The lost mosaic in San Cataldo at Taranto is known through a drawing of 1844; the drawing is now also lost but was first published by G. Antonucci, 'Il mosaico pavimentale del Duomo di Taranto e le tradizioni musive calabro-sicule', *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania*, 12, 1943-4, pp. 121-32.

Adam and Eve and their Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. There is also a column capital in the cathedral of Bitonto which shows the episode divided into two scenes: on one side Alexander is portrayed ascending to the heavens, while on the other he is represented flying back to the earth (**figs 5 and 6**). The proximity to such notorious examples of overweening pride – or, at Bitonto, the emphasis on the conclusion of the adventure, which is rarely illustrated – makes it clear that the Flight was openly condemned in these works.<sup>42</sup> The same can be said of a badly damaged stone relief on the façade of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore at Corato, which has recently been identified as a representation of the ‘Flight with Griffins’.<sup>43</sup> No iconographic details nor connections to nearby scenes help us to understand whether Alexander was portrayed here as an *exemplum superbiae*; but the location of Corato, halfway between Trani and Bitonto, where other negative examples of the Flight are found, suggests that this might well be the case. This condemnatory attitude towards the ‘Flight’ is partly due to the influence of medieval theological literature, where Alexander’s celestial journey was regarded as a blasphemous act and came to typify the sin of pride.<sup>44</sup> But the concentration of negative images of the Flight in twelfth-century Apulia also calls for further explanation.<sup>45</sup> As Chiara

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<sup>42</sup> I do not share the view of Victor Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, pp. 60-5, who sees no negative connotation at all in the Otranto mosaic and interprets Alexander’s Flight, at p. 65, as ‘an indication of the salvation awaiting people in the afterlife.’

<sup>43</sup> G. Magnini and L. Soldano, ‘Un nuovo “Volo di Alessandro” a Corato, in Puglia’, *La rivista di engramma*, 124, 2015 (on-line journal).

<sup>44</sup> On the interpretation of the Flight by medieval theologians and mystics, see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 134-5, and Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 240-50.

<sup>45</sup> According to Francesco Gandolfo, ‘Una abbazia molisana e il suo programma decorativo: Santa Maria della Strada presso Matrice’, in *Le vie del medioevo: atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Parma, 28 settembre-1 ottobre 1998)*, ed. A. C. Quintavalle, Milan 2000, pp. 208-22, the Flight in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century tympanum in Santa Maria della Strada at Matrice (in neighbouring Molise) should also be interpreted as an *exemplum superbiae*. Gandolfo’s hypothesis is based on a re-examination of the entire sculptural decoration of the church, which I do not find entirely convincing. The traditional interpretation of the Flight at Matrice as a positive image still seems to me more likely. See E. Jamison, ‘Notes on Santa Maria della Strada at Matrice, Its History and Sculpture’, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 14, 1938, pp. 32-97, esp. pp. 67-9; A. De Rubertis, *Breve guida di S. Maria della Strada in Matrice*, Petrella Tifernina 1948; Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 296-302 and 304.

Frugoni has convincingly argued, the political context of this area around the 1160s is crucial for understanding the meaning of these works. The region had recently been conquered by the Normans, who were able to prevail over the Byzantines throughout southern Italy by the end of that century. At Otranto, and in the other Apulian examples, Alexander is emphatically represented as a Byzantine emperor: he wears a crown and imperial robes, sits on a throne (instead of the usual chariot) and is identified by the inscriptions on the mosaic floors as 'Alexander Rex'. According to Frugoni, these images carried a political meaning inspired by the Norman court: the proud Alexander, whose legendary ascent had been punished by God, became a symbol of the Byzantine emperor repeatedly defeated by the Normans on the battlefield.<sup>46</sup> This hypothesis is all the more persuasive as it helps to situate these images within the larger Italian context, where a more positive representation of Alexander's Flight image remained predominant.

## **1.2. The Submarine Voyage**

As iconic as the 'Flight with Griffins' is the episode of the 'Submarine Voyage'. This story is told in the Pseudo-Callisthenes (II.38), where it is narrated shortly before Alexander's flight to the heavens. While marching with his army by the ocean shore, he comes across a giant crab with huge pearls inside it; he supposes that the sea might contain other such wonders and resolves to explore the abyss to find out more. A glass jar protected by an iron cage is built for him to be lowered into the sea; he has a long chain attached to the submarine vessel and orders his men, who

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<sup>46</sup> Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 282-312, esp. pp. 303-12, and Centanni, "Alexander Rex", who also examines the similarity between the political use of the image of Alexander in Norman Apulia and the Republic of Venice after 1204. Other interpretations suggested about the Otranto mosaic (and by extension on the other Flight representations in Apulia) are summarised in Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 119-20. The recent contribution of M. Castiñeiras, 'L'Alessandro anglonormanno e il mosaico di Otranto: una *ekphrasis* monumentale?', *Troianalexandrina*, 4, 2004, pp. 41-86, contains important material but is often inaccurate and, in many respects, obscure.

are responsible for controlling it from the surface, not to pull him up until they feel the chain shake. The dive, however, is not a complete success; for while admiring the various fish and other sea creatures, Alexander is suddenly dragged for a mile by a huge fish which seizes the vessel in its mouth. When he is finally cast out on to the beach, Alexander, half dead with terror, thanks providence for his lucky escape.<sup>47</sup> Medieval versions of the *Romance* often emphasised the moralistic and symbolic meaning of the episode: not only was Alexander powerless against the huge fish he was dragged off by, but the ultimate lesson he was taught, while gazing at the fascinating but pitiless sea life from inside his glass jar, was that 'big fish eat little fish.'

The episode of the Submarine Voyage was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and is often regarded by scholars as an offshoot of the 'Flight with Griffins'.<sup>48</sup> Unlike the Flight, however, Alexander's descent into the sea does not seem to have been illustrated outside of the manuscript tradition.<sup>49</sup> The two scenes are usually represented one after the other, often on facing pages and sometimes even as part of the same picture. Their order, however, varies according to the structure of the text: in certain medieval versions, for instance, that of Leo of Naples (III.27<sup>2</sup>.5-6), the

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<sup>47</sup> On the parallel between Jonah 'vomited by the whale' and Alexander 'vomited by the abyss', see *Alessandro nel Medioevo occidentale*, ed. P. Boitani et al., Milan 1997, p. 663, n. 5.

<sup>48</sup> The narrative similarities between the two episodes are discussed by Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri*, pp. 110-13. For Alexander's underwater adventure, see, esp., Ross, 'Alexander and the Faithless Lady'; see also D. Carraroli, *La leggenda di Alessandro Magno: studio storico-critico*, Mondovì 1892, pp. 293-6; A. Hilka, *Der altfranzösische Prosa Alexanderroman*, Halle 1920, pp. XXXVIII-XLI; Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 111-14. Although devoted to French literature, useful remarks can be found in C. Gaullier-Bougassas, 'La réécriture inventive d'un meme sequence: quelques versions du voyage d'Alexandre sous la mer', *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 14, 1996, pp. 7-19, and S. Hériché Pradeau, 'Immersion et survivance dans *Les Faicts et les conquestes d'Alexandre le Grand de Jehan Wauquelin* (XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)', in *Dans l'eau sous l'eau*, ed. D. James-Raoul and C. Thomasset, Paris 2002, pp. 339-55.

<sup>49</sup> According to Frugoni, 'La fortuna di Alessandro nel Medioevo', pp. 171-3, the only representation on a monumental scale is one of the two 1460s tapestries for the Duchy of Burgundy, now held in the Palazzo del Principe at Genoa; the 'Submarine Voyage' is depicted here alongside the 'Flight with Griffins' and Alexander's battle with the monstrous creatures of the East. I shall come back to the so-called Doria tapestries in Chapter 3 (3.2.3) below.

account of the ‘Submarine Voyage’ comes after the ‘Flight with Griffins’, and not before it as in the Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes.

Two manuscripts of the *Historia de Preliis* from southern Italy show Alexander’s descent into the sea paired with his ascent to the heavens. The first manuscript, ascribed to a workshop in Salerno, is held in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS lat. 8501) and presents the two scenes on facing pages (**fig. 7**).<sup>50</sup> This picture cycle is based on French models, since the direct source of inspiration is a copy of the *Old French Prose Alexander*.<sup>51</sup> The availability of manuscripts of the French *Romance* in southern Italy is also documented by the painted ceiling of the Palazzo Chiaramonte in Palermo (1377-80), which I shall discuss later on in this chapter. The second manuscript is now in Leipzig and has the two episodes on the recto and verso of the same leaf (**figs 8 and 9**).<sup>52</sup>

A section devoted to Alexander is frequently found in larger works such as universal history compilations. This is the case of the *Weltchronick* of the German epic poet Rudolf von Ems, which was left unfinished at the time of the author’s death in about 1254 and was later continued by others. A manuscript of this expanded version (*Christherrenchronik*), dated 1385 and now in Kassel, was decorated by a northern Italian, most likely Venetian, illuminator.<sup>53</sup> The Alexander section contains three miniatures illustrating the ‘Submarine Voyage’ (**fig. 10**) and

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<sup>50</sup> See Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 196, no. 70, with related bibliography.

<sup>51</sup> This hypothesis was formulated by Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 51. For the *Old French Prose Alexander* (a 13<sup>th</sup>-century French derivative of the J<sup>2</sup> *Historia de Preliis*), see *ibid.*, pp. 54-7. The manuscript is discussed also by V. M. Schmidt, ‘The Picture Cycle of the Old French Prose Alexander’, in *Boeken in de late Middeleeuwen: verslag van de Groningse Codicologendagen 1992*, ed. J. M. M. Hermans and K. van der Hoek, Groningen 1994, pp. 239-52, at pp. 246-7.

<sup>52</sup> The most recent contribution on the manuscript is G. Orofino, ‘Il contributo di Federico II all’iconografia profana: le illustrazioni del Romanzo di Alessandro’, in *Federico II e le nuove culture: atti del XXXI convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 9-12 ottobre 1994*, Spoleto 1995, pp. 393-415. See also Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 182, no. 40.

<sup>53</sup> See Ross, *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books*, pp. 92-3, and Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, pp. 181-2, no. 38.

the ‘Flight with Griffins’ (the latter is unfortunately badly damaged by rubbing). A third scene follows, which depicts Alexander’s return to his army after his ascent to the heavens (**fig. 11**). His adventure in the abyss is represented here according to an anomalous version of the story, which is peculiar to German texts: a woman (the unfaithful wife or mistress of Alexander) replaces the men in lowering and raising the glass jar and tries to drown Alexander by releasing the chain attached to the vessel.<sup>54</sup>

A section devoted to the history of Macedon, and therefore to Alexander, was interpolated into the French book known as the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*, written in the early thirteenth century.<sup>55</sup> In MS 2576 of the National Library of Vienna, containing a Franco-Italian version of the history, a Venetian illuminator of the late fourteenth century included the ‘Submarine Voyage’ and the ‘Flight with Griffins’ in the same picture (**fig. 12**).<sup>56</sup>

### 1.3. The Visit to the Trees of the Sun and the Moon

The ‘Visit of Alexander to the Trees of the Sun and the Moon’ is a crucial event in the last part of the Pseudo-Callisthenes. After the ‘Submarine Voyage’ (II.38), the ‘Flight with Griffins’ (II.41) and the battle against the Indian King Porus (III.1-4), Alexander’s remarkable journey through India turns into an anxious march to the furthest edges of the world. At every step, signs and portents occur, which are

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<sup>54</sup> On this odd version of the story, see Ross, ‘Alexander and the Faithless Lady’.

<sup>55</sup> See D. J. A. Ross, ‘The History of Macedon in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*: Sources and Compositional Method’, *Classica et mediaevalia*, 24, 1963, pp. 181-231, esp. pp. 225-31 (republished in his *Studies in the Alexander Romance*, London 1985, pp. 198-248), and *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César ou Histoires pour Roger, châtelain de Lille, de Wauchier de Denain: l’histoire de la Macédoine et d’Alexandre le Grand*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas, Turnhout 2012.

<sup>56</sup> See Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 201, no. 82, and Ross, ‘The History of Macedon’, pp. 225-31; for a critical edition of MS 2576, see *Histoire ancienne* (ed. Gaullier-Bougassas), pp. 247-358 (pp. 303-4 for the episodes of the ‘Flight’ and the ‘Submarine Adventure’).

interpreted as bad omens for Alexander. Even his encounters with the legendary queen of Meroe, Candace (III.18-23) and with the Amazons (III.25-6)<sup>57</sup> take place in a menacing and discomfoting atmosphere. This is the context of the 'Visit to the Trees of the Sun and the Moon'.

According to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (III.17), the wise men of Prasiake, the capital of the kingdom of Porus, invite Alexander to visit the local sanctuary, where at the rising and the setting of the sun and the moon two oracular trees speak, the sun with the voice of a man, the moon with that of a woman. On three different occasions, the trees warn Alexander of his impending early death, foretelling that he will die very soon at Babylon by the hand of one of his companions and that he will not see again either his mother Olympias or his wife Roxane, who will both also suffer terrible deaths.<sup>58</sup> A fuller account of the episode is given in the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle about India* (43.5-52.6), where the wise men are replaced by a high priest with black skin and dog-like teeth,<sup>59</sup> who is the guardian of the trees and who translates their pronouncements. In this account, the tree of the sun also prophesies to Alexander his dominion of the world.

In the Italian iconographic tradition of this episode, Alexander is presented accompanied by a few companions, either standing or kneeling in prayer before the two trees. Placed either at the top of the image or in the foliage of the trees are the disks of the sun and the moon, which sometimes take the form of a male and female face (or of a crescent, in the case of the moon). The Leipzig manuscript mentioned

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<sup>57</sup> For more on these meetings, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 128-36.

<sup>58</sup> According to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (III.31) and its derivatives, Alexander dies from the poison given to him by his cupbearer Iollas at the order of Alexander's general Antipater. His death is therefore the result of treachery. See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 194-5 and 313-18.

<sup>59</sup> As a consequence, in the Northern European tradition the high priest is sometimes depicted as a dog-headed man. See, e.g., the picture in a Bible decorated at Utrecht around 1467 (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 78 D 39, f. 374v), illustrated in Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pl. 16.

above includes a representation of this episode (**fig. 13**). The ‘Visit to the Trees of the Sun and the Moon’ was also introduced by another image, in which Alexander is seen meeting with the high priest in front of the trees, as for example in the important MS Correr 1493, containing the text of the French decasyllabic *Roman d’Alexandre* (**figs 14 and 15**).<sup>60</sup>

In the *donjon* of the castle of Quart, near Aosta in north-west Italy, a fragmentary figure of Alexander has recently been discovered.<sup>61</sup> Despite its damaged state, the fresco is remarkable in several respects. It represents a man on horseback, clearly identified by the inscription ‘ALEXANDER’, gesturing towards an unusual tree with nine branches, each of which ends with a human face depicted in profile (**figs 16 and 17**). Above the tree is the inscription ‘ARBOR SICA’ (**fig 18**). This scene is part of a larger fresco cycle decorating the so-called ‘Sala di Alessandro’, which has been dated on stylistic grounds to around 1290-1300. After the room underwent major alterations in the sixteenth century, the walls were whitewashed. The restoration campaign, which started in 2003, is still in progress; it is not surprising, therefore, that the iconographic programme of the cycle remains unclear. Nevertheless, a few observations can be made about it.

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<sup>60</sup> The manuscript (known as B redaction) is of crucial importance in the Alexander textual tradition, as it is one of the two surviving testimonies of the decasyllabic *Roman d’Alexandre*. As for its origin, several reasons point to Padua, rather than Bologna as alternatively suggested; owner of the manuscript was the Paduan jurist and humanist Rolando da Piazzola, whose uncle Lovato Lovati has been credited with the commission of the codex itself; see L. Novello, ‘Alcune testimonianze di miniatura cavalleresca del XIII secolo in Veneto’, in *Miniatura: lo sguardo e la parola: studi in onore di Giordana Mariani Canova*, ed. F. Toniolo and G. Toscano, Milan 2012, pp. 101-7, at pp. 102-5. On the manuscript, see *Le Roman d’Alexandre: riproduzione del ms. Venezia, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Correr 1493*, ed. R. Benedetti, Tricesimo 1998; for its decoration, see also R. Benedetti, ‘Pulcherrime codex! Il ms. Correr 1493 (*Roman d’Alexandre*) del Museo Correr’, *Bollettino dei Musei Civici Veneziani*, 30, 1986, pp. 123-42, esp. pp. 123-31 and 133-4.

<sup>61</sup> The frescoes on the north-west wall of the room, where Alexander is represented, were first published by Michelangelo Lupo and Gianfranco Zidda in *Fragmenta picta: testimonianze pittoriche dal castello di Quart, secoli XIII-XVI* (exhibition catalogue, Castello Sarriod de La Tour [Aosta], 2003), ed. E. Rossetti Brezzi, Aosta 2003, pp. 22-3, no. 2. I am grateful to Gianfranco Zidda, who kindly provided me with copies of this entry and his later articles on the fresco cycle, and Mario Casari, who generously gave me advice and shared his thoughts about it with me.



The episode was identified in 2003 as ‘Alexander before the Tree of the Sun’. In addition to the general iconographic appearance of the scene, this hypothesis was apparently strengthened by the presence of the letter ‘S’ from the inscription above (at the time the only legible one), which was assumed to stand for ‘S[OLIS]’.<sup>62</sup> When, however, the restoration process subsequently revealed (in 2008) the next three letters to be ‘I’, ‘C’ and ‘A’, the inscription, in fact, turned out to read ‘SICA’. As a consequence, the earlier identification of the subject matter with the episode of the Tree of the Sun seemed no longer to be valid, and the conjecture was withdrawn.<sup>63</sup>

There is, however, a tradition which identifies the ‘arbor solis’ (Tree of the Sun) of the Alexander story with the ‘arbor sica’ (Dry Tree) of the Christian tradition. The connection is already found in *The Travels of Marco Polo* (I.22), when, in the Persian province of Tonocain, Marco encounters the Solitary Tree (‘*Arbre Sol*’) which Christians called the Dry Tree (‘*Arbre Sec*’). According to the locals, he notes, it was here that Alexander and Darius fought in battle. In another passage (IV.5), Marco mentions ‘the *Arbre Sol*, which the Book of Alexander calls the *Arbre Sec*’.<sup>64</sup> The reason why he considers the Solitary Tree, the Dry Tree and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> G. Zidda, ‘Aggiornamento su alcune novità iconografiche nel *donjon* del castello di Quart, in seguito agli interventi di restauro condotti nel 2008’, *Bollettino della Soprintendenza per i beni e le attività culturali, Regione Autonoma Valle d’Aosta*, 5, 2008, pp. 219-21, states, at p. 221: ‘Il risultato più atteso, ma nel contempo più oscuro e controverso, è stato quello conseguente allo scoprimento delle lettere che formano il nome dell’albero a nove teste: ARBOR SICA. Viene così annullata l’ipotesi che la raffigurazione potesse ricondursi all’episodio dell’incontro di Alessandro con gli alberi del Sole e della Luna, presente nella *Lettera di Alessandro ad Aristotele*. Sinora non si trovano riferimenti ad un particolare episodio, e la parola SICA detiene un ermetismo di significato difficile da sviscerare.’

<sup>64</sup> Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, ed. H. Yule, 2 vols, London 1903; for the first passage, see I, pp. 127-8, and the editor’s note at pp. 128-39; for the second passage, see II, p. 466. For more on these themes, see R. Wittkower, ‘Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East’, in *Oriente Poliano: studi e conferenze tenute all’Is.M.E.O. in occasione del VII centenario dalla nascita di Marco Polo (1254-1954)*, Rome 1957, pp. 155-72, esp. pp. 166-9. For the Dry Tree, see also R. J. Peebles, ‘The Dry Tree: Symbol of Death’, in *Vassar Mediaeval Studies by Members of the Faculty of Vassar College*, ed. C. Forsyth Fiske, New Haven 1923, pp. 57-79, esp. pp. 67-70.

the Tree of the Sun to be the same deserves to be investigated, but this is beyond the scope of my dissertation. It should be borne in mind, however, that in the medieval versions of the *Romance Alexander* is said to visit the Dry Tree, on which a phoenix is perched. This episode, which in the textual tradition comes immediately before his 'Visit to the Trees of the Sun and the Moon', is often illustrated in manuscripts, as for example in the Leipzig *Historia de Preliis* (**fig. 19**).<sup>65</sup> This suggests the possibility, which is no more than a tantalising hypothesis at this stage, that such an iconographic conflation of the Dry Tree and the Tree of the Sun might have found its way into the castle of Quart.

I have already noted how unusual the tree with human heads is in the Alexander tradition in Italy, with nothing equivalent to it elsewhere in the peninsula. Nevertheless, the encounter between Alexander and a tree bearing human heads as its fruit is well documented in the Eastern iconographic tradition. The episode of Alexander's visit to the oracular trees is told in the *Shahnameh* ('Book of Kings'), written around the year 1000 by the Persian poet Firdausi. This is not by chance, since the story of Alexander (Iskander) occupies three entire books of this Persian national epic and plays a central role in it.<sup>66</sup> While Firdausi's account of the episode follows the text of the Pseudo-Callisthenes very closely, the illustrated copies of the poem always show the tree in the form of the waq-waq tree. The Arab tradition refers to speaking trees known by this name: they are found in the islands of Waq-Waq (possibly, Madagascar or Borneo) and have human heads as their

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<sup>65</sup> Another example is in a manuscript of the *Historia de Preliis* (J<sup>2</sup>), Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 7190. The codex, illuminated in northern Italy about 1370-80, contains at f. 36r a picture of Alexander being led to the Dry Tree with a phoenix. There is an illustration of the picture in Schmidt, 'The Picture Cycle', p. 243, fig. 6.

<sup>66</sup> According to the Persian tradition, as exemplified in Firdausi's poem, Alexander and Darius (Dara) are half-brothers; after the defeat of Darius, Alexander can therefore reclaim the throne as the legitimate king and enter the royal lineage of Persia. See Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 24-33.

fruit.<sup>67</sup> A famous fifteenth-century representation of this iconography, with both human and animal heads, is found in a manuscript now in the Bodleian Library (**fig. 20**).

Although such images bear a striking resemblance to the Quart tree, it is difficult to establish a connection between these Persian examples and the Val d'Aosta region of the late thirteenth century. Arguably, however, a study of the diffusion and influence in Italy of illustrated copies of *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which served as a conduit between East and West, might shed light on this matter.<sup>68</sup> I am aware of only one other example in the European tradition of Alexander approaching the oracular trees with human heads; it is found in a southern Italian manuscript of the thirteenth century of Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* and bears some resemblance to the Quart tree (**fig. 21**). It seems highly significant that Krystyna Secomska argued that this picture 'descends from the Oriental type of the "Wakwak" tree with anthropomorphic fruits.'<sup>69</sup> Despite the potential influence of

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<sup>67</sup> For more on the waq-waq tree, M. Casari, 'Alexandre et l'arbre anthropique', in *L'arbre anthropogène du Waqwaq, les femmes-fruits et les îles des femmes*, ed. J. L. Bacqué-Grammont, Naples 2007, pp. 177-201, and id., 'Percorsi tematici nel viaggio euro-asiatico dei testi', in *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo*, III: *Le culture circostanti*, II: *La cultura arabo-islamica*, ed. B. Scarcia Amoretti, Rome 2003, pp. 459-98, at pp. 493-6. See also P. Ackerman, 'The Talking Tree', *Bulletin of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology*, 4, 1935, pp. 66-72; J. Baltrušaitis, *Le Moyen Âge fantastique: antiquités et exotismes dans l'art gothique*, Paris 1954, pp. 117-32; id., 'Une survivance médiévale: la plante à têtes', *La Revue des Arts*, 4, 1954, pp. 81-92.

<sup>68</sup> The importance of the connection I suggest between Marco Polo's account and the Quart fresco is confirmed by the fact that Gianfranco Zidda, in his latest contribution on the cycle, has independently reached the same conclusion; see his 'Arbor sica: nuove chiavi interpretative di un'iconografia legata alla concezione figurativa medievale di Alessandro Magno', *Bollettino della Soprintendenza per i beni e le attività culturali, Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta*, 8, 2011, pp. 216-27.

<sup>69</sup> K. Secomska, 'The Miniature Cycle in the Sandomierz *Pantheon* and the Medieval Iconography of Alexander's Indian Campaign', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 38, 1975, pp. 53-71, at pp. 63-4, n. 50. It should be noted that Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* (1183-90) interpolated the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*; and it is from this part of the work, where the episode of the oracular trees is recounted, that the picture of Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS 5003 is taken. For further information on this manuscript, see Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 28; and *Manuscrits enluminés d'origine italienne* (Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des manuscrits, Centre de recherche sur les manuscrits enluminés), 3 vols, Paris 1980-2012, II: *XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. F. Avril and M. T. Gousset, p. 160, no. 188. On the *Pantheon*, see *La fascination pour Alexandre*, IV, pp. 27-30 (M. Campiano).

this larger context, I nevertheless believe that the episode depicted in the *donjon* at Quart should be regarded as the ‘Visit of Alexander to the Tree of the Sun’. The identification of the tree as the ‘arbor sica’, which is clearly stated in the inscription, supports, rather than undermines, this interpretation.

The unusual character of the Quart Alexander is apparent in other ways as well. To the best of my knowledge, showing Alexander approaching the tree on horseback, rather than standing or kneeling before it, is unique in the Italian tradition, nor is it documented, as far as I am aware, in any other Western European examples.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, several Persian miniatures depict Alexander riding Bucephalus as he approaches the oracular tree of the waq-waq: for instance, in the *Shahnameh* of the Freer Gallery in Washington (**fig. 22**). In the present state of research, the fresco in the Quart castle seems to be the only representation on a monumental scale of Alexander’s ‘Visit to the Tree of the Sun’. Also, if the suggested date of around 1290-1300 for the cycle is correct, this picture is a very early example of the illustration of legendary episodes from the life of Alexander.<sup>71</sup>

Further results from the ongoing restoration campaign will be essential for a better understanding of the Alexander picture, as well as of the entire fresco cycle of the *donjon*. The representation of a calendar with personifications of the months has been revealed on one of the walls, alongside pictorial fragments of other scenes, including the figure of Samson, an elephant, a fortified building and, possibly, a tournament.<sup>72</sup> While a connection with the Spanish *Libro de Alexandre* has been

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<sup>70</sup> At least for the German and northern tradition, some proof of this can be drawn from browsing the catalogue of pictures put together by Ross, *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books*.

<sup>71</sup> In *Fragmenta picta*, p. 22, Zidda writes: ‘Se dalla seconda metà del XIII secolo l’immagine di Alessandro è attestata da numerose miniature, l’affresco di Quart è l’unico documento della stessa epoca, sinora conosciuto, che sia realizzato con tecnica diversa e mostri peculiarità rispetto all’iconografia corrente.’

<sup>72</sup> G. Zidda, ‘Aggiornamento sui cicli pittorici esistenti nel torrione del castello di Quart’, *Bollettino della Soprintendenza per i beni e le attività culturali, Regione Autonoma Valle d’Aosta*, 3, 2006, pp. 166-7, and id., ‘Aggiornamento su alcune novità iconografiche’.

suggested,<sup>73</sup> I believe that the source of inspiration should instead be sought among the French versions of the *Alexander Romance*. In an area so deeply influenced by French culture as the Val d'Aosta region, the monumental *Roman d'Alexandre* by Alexander of Paris (c. 1185) might have provided an important point of reference. In the French decasyllabic *Roman d'Alexandre* MS Correr 1493, there is also a description of a 'magic tent' of Alexander's – stressing his conquest of the East, it is decorated with his heroic deeds and has a calendar with personifications of the months – which may have contributed to the iconographic programme of the 'Sala di Alessandro' at Quart.<sup>74</sup>

#### 1.4. The Taming of Bucephalus

No source about Alexander, whether legendary or historical, ancient or medieval, fails to mention Bucephalus.<sup>75</sup> From his childhood until shortly before his death at Babylon, Alexander is always accompanied by his most loyal and trusted companion: his horse Bucephalus. According to Andrew Runni Anderson, Bucephalus 'became the equine counterpart of Alexander':<sup>76</sup> even during Alexander's lifetime, it was believed that they were born at the same time; and some

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<sup>73</sup> G. Zidda, 'I cicli di Alessandro e dei Mesi nel castello di Quart', *Bollettino della Soprintendenza per i beni e le attività culturali, Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta*, 1, 2003-4, pp. 236-8, and id., 'Arbor sica', pp. 216-17. On the epic poem *Libro de Alexandre* and the Spanish tradition, see Z. D. Zuwiyya, 'The Alexander Tradition in Spain', in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. D. Zuwiyya, Leiden and Boston 2011, pp. 231-53.

<sup>74</sup> The description of Alexander's tent, but with no connection to the Quart fresco, is examined by A. Petit, 'Le pavillon d'Alexandre dans le *Roman d'Alexandre* (ms. B. Venise, Museo Civico VI, 665)', *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 6, 1988, pp. 77-96 (VI.665 is the former classmark of MS Correr 1493).

<sup>75</sup> The correct historical name of Bucephalus seems to be 'Bucephalas'. Nevertheless, the Pseudo-Callisthenes and its derivatives prefer 'Bucephalus', which I have therefore adopted.

<sup>76</sup> A. R. Anderson, 'Bucephalas and His Legend', *American Journal of Philology*, 51, 1930, pp. 1-21, at p. 1.

versions of the *Romance* synchronised their deaths as well.<sup>77</sup> The legends of Alexander and Bucephalus exerted considerable influence on each other; just as Alexander was regarded as a heroic and nearly supernatural figure, so, too, Bucephalus was very early on turned into a sort of mythical creature.<sup>78</sup> The event which marks the beginning of their lifelong friendship is the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’: this episode is recounted in both the historical and legendary accounts of Alexander’s life and was widely represented – though with significant changes in the appearance of Bucephalus – both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. It is therefore particularly significant for our discussion, since it is located precisely on the cusp of legend and history.<sup>79</sup>

According to Plutarch (*Alexander* VI), Bucephalus was presented to Philip of Macedon as a gift, but his savage nature made him intractable and dangerous to anyone who tried to approach him. Only the fifteen-year-old Alexander was able to tame and ride him, and this successful deed – the first in the career of the young prince – was immediately interpreted as a good omen, foretelling the future

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<sup>77</sup> The Ethiopic version of the *Romance* goes even further: Bucephalus is not only conceived at the same time as Alexander but shares with him the same father, the magician Nectanebo. See Anderson, ‘Bucephalus and His Legend’, pp. 15-16, and, more generally, P. C. Kotar, ‘The Ethiopic Alexander Romance’, in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. D. Zuwiyya, Leiden and Boston 2011, pp. 157-75. On the synchronised deaths of Bucephalus and Alexander in the gamma version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>78</sup> The literature on Bucephalus and his legend is not particularly large. In addition to the exhaustive study of Anderson, ‘Bucephalus and His Legend’, which remains essential for the topic, see Carraroli, *La leggenda di Alessandro*, pp. 290-3; D. J. A. Ross, ‘A Funny Name for a Horse: Bucephalus in Antiquity and the Middle Ages’, *Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 7, 1989, pp. 51-76; F. Dubost, ‘De quelques chevaux extraordinaires dans le récit médiéval: esquisse d’une configuration imaginaire’, in *Le cheval dans le monde medieval*, Aix-en-Provence 1992, pp. 189-208, esp. pp. 195-202; E. Baynham, ‘Who Put the “Romance” in the Alexander Romance? The Alexander Romances within Alexander Historiography’, *Ancient History Bulletin*, 9, 1995, pp. 1-13, esp. pp. 5-9. Despite its focus on the Spanish *Libro de Alexandre*, G. Peron, ‘Rielaborazione narrativa e originalità dell’*Alexandre* castigliano: la storia di Bucefalo’, in *Alessandro/Dhû l-Qarnayn in viaggio tra i due mari*, ed. C. Saccone, Alessandria 2008, pp. 51-76, is also useful.

<sup>79</sup> Discussing the historical events of Alexander’s life, Carraroli, *La leggenda di Alessandro*, p. 290, writes: ‘Sono stato in dubbio se dovessi parlare qui di Bucefalo, ovvero relegare questo cavallo straordinario tra le leggende mitiche; ma il fatto che molti storici autorevoli ne parlano con piena fede, non escluse alcune testimonianze contemporanee, mi hanno consigliato a porlo in questa categoria perché, pur fatte le debite concessioni alla storia, non si potrà negare che si tratti almeno della identificazione di un fatto storico con un mitico.’

greatness of Alexander. The Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.13-17) introduced a few important changes, the most remarkable of which was the transformation of Bucephalus into a man-eating horse, kept in an iron cage and fed by Philip on thieves and felons who had been sentenced to death. In addition, the Delphic oracle is said to predict that the one who tamed Bucephalus would conquer the world – a prophecy fulfilled by Alexander. In the Pseudo-Callisthenes, Bucephalus is not simply a wild horse; he is a monstrous creature implicitly compared to the mythical flesh-eating mares of Diomedes captured by Hercules as his Eighth Labour.<sup>80</sup>

Medieval illustrated manuscripts reflect this description and depict the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ accordingly. In MS Correr 1493 the ferocity of Bucephalus is expressed by showing him breaking down the doors of the iron cage in which he is imprisoned (**fig. 23**). In this picture, as well as in the rest of the manuscript, the illuminator portrays Bucephalus as a powerful but also graceful horse. A little further on in the text, however, he is described as a monstrous creature, born from an elephant and a dromedary.<sup>81</sup> In the Pseudo-Callisthenes it is stated that, as soon as Alexander approached his cage, Bucephalus recognised him as his master by licking his hand. This moment is very often depicted in manuscripts, as in a southern Italian *Historia de Preliis* in Paris, where the remains of the criminals killed by the horse are scattered on the ground (**fig. 24**).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This comparison can be inferred from the fact that, according to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.15), Philip was waiting ‘a second Hercules’ to tame Bucephalus; see *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, ed. Centanni, pp. 172-3.

<sup>81</sup> The text of MS Correr 1493 can be read in *The Medieval French Roman d’Alexandre*, 7 vols, Princeton and Paris 1937-76, I, ed. M. S. La Du, pp. 3-413. The description of Bucephalus is at stanza 73 (p. 39): ‘Antigonus li a Bucifalc mene, / Un buen destrer, ainc ne manja d’aveine. / Engedrez fu en l’isle de Micene / D’un olifant e d’une dromedene. / Set ans e plus lo fist norir Helene, / Li reis Felipes lo tramist a mout grant peine. / La selle fu d’un os de baalene, / E cil i monte quil fiert a son domene. / Quant il fu sus, un saut fist per l’arene, / Plus onist cler que non cante syrene.’

<sup>82</sup> On this manuscript, see Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 53-4, and *Manuscrits enluminés d’origine italienne*, I: VI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles, ed. F. Avril and Y. Załuska, pp. 83-4, no. 149.

More frequently, however, Bucephalus is depicted as a unicorn, with a single horn – or, less often, with two horns – on his head. This imagery is connected to the explanation of the origin of the name ‘Bucephalus’ (meaning ‘ox-head’) which had been suggested in the third century AD by Solinus. Ancient authors, for the most part, claimed prosaically that Bucephalus got his name from a brand with an ox-head sign on his haunch or shoulder (or alternatively, from a white blaze on his forehead).<sup>83</sup> Solinus, instead, offered a fantastic alternative: Bucephalus had horns like an ox.<sup>84</sup> Because this passage was interpolated into the *Historia de Preliis* and several other medieval Alexander books – as well as into the bestiary tradition – the image of Bucephalus as a unicorn became widespread.<sup>85</sup> It is found in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS 8501 mentioned above, where Bucephalus, in the guise of a unicorn, is presented to Philip and then approached by Alexander (**fig. 25**). The two scenes are also juxtaposed in a coloured pen drawing from a northern Italian manuscript of the late fourteenth century, now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (**fig. 26**).<sup>86</sup> In the same years a remarkable picture of a horned Bucephalus was painted on the ceiling of the Palazzo Chiaramonte (Steri) in Palermo, commissioned in 1377-80 by the powerful Count of Modica, Manfredi

<sup>83</sup> See Anderson, ‘Bucephalus and His Legend’, pp. 3-7. A representation of Bucephalus branded with the sign of an ox’s head on his thigh is found in the 11<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript of the *Cyнетica* by Pseudo-Oppian (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Gr. 479, f. 8v); see Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 6, and I. Furlan, *Codici greci illustrati della Biblioteca Marciana*, 6 vols, Milan 1978-97, V, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> C. Iulius Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed. T. Mommsen, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Berlin 1958, pp. 174-5 (45.8): ‘Alexandri Magni equus Bucephalus dictus sive de aspectus torvitate seu ab insigni, quod taurinum caput armo inustum habebat, seu quod de fronte eius quaedam corniculorum minae protuberabant, cum ab equario suo alias etiam molliter sederetur, accepto regio stratu neminem umquam alium praeter dominum vehere dignatus est.’ In the early fourteenth-century Italian manuscript of Solinus now in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (MS C. 246 inf., f. 18v), Bucephalus is depicted with two horns and resembles a bull: for a picture see Ross, ‘A Funny Name’, p. 72. Images of Bucephalus as a two-horned horse are also documented in the third century BC on coins issued by Antiochus I Soter and Seleucus I Nicator.

<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., Pseudo-Hugo of St. Victor, *De bestiis et aliis rebus* 3.23, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, CLXXVII, cols 9-164, at col. 91. This tradition reaches as late as Brunetto Latini, whose *Tresor* 186.3 (ed. P. G. Beltrami et al., Turin 2007, p. 308), of around 1260-6, also depicts Bucephalus with the head of a bull and two protrusions similar to horns.

<sup>86</sup> See Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 53-4, and Schmidt, ‘The Picture Cycle’.



Chiaromonte, when the palace was his official residence (**fig. 27**). Among the episodes from the childhood of Alexander, which unroll across the entire surface of one of the wooden roof beams, the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ is shown in a somewhat unconventional way, with Alexander entering the cage and grabbing Bucephalus’s horn with his hands (**fig. 28**). The influence of French – as well as, to some extent, Byzantine – models on the Palermo cycle has been demonstrated by Maria Bendinelli Predelli, and therefore this iconography has been compared to examples from these two traditions.<sup>87</sup> The general context to which the wooden roof beam with Alexander’s early life and the story of Bucephalus belongs is as significant as it is unique. I do not know of any other example in Italian art where stories of Alexander were depicted on similar wooden ceilings<sup>88</sup> – for instance, none of the fifteenth-century wooden ceilings decorated with portraits heads of men and women which were particularly favoured in Lombardy, includes an image of Alexander. The uniqueness of the Steri decoration can be explained, I believe, in light of the popularity, due to Arab influence, of painted wooden ceilings in medieval Sicily after the Norman conquest of the island, both in ecclesiastical and palatial settings. To anyone standing in the huge Sala Magna of Palazzo Chiaromonte, the stories of Alexander painted high up on the dark ceiling must have been, as they are today, unreadable. But it is significant that they were included in a vast iconographic programme encompassing the entire visual encyclopaedia of the late Middle Ages: from the mythical stories of Troy to the monstrous creatures in bestiaries, from the encounters of courtly lovers to hunting

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<sup>87</sup> M. Bendinelli Predelli, ‘La storia di Alessandro nel palazzo Chiaromonte di Palermo’, *Prospettiva*, 46, 1986, pp. 13-21. See also L. Buttà, ‘Storie per governare: iconografia giuridica e del potere nel soffitto dipinto della Sala Magna del palazzo Chiaromonte Steri di Palermo’, in *Narrazione, exempla, retorica: studi sull’iconografia dei soffitti dipinti nel Medioevo mediterraneo*, ed. L. Buttà, Palermo 2013, pp. 69-126, at pp. 109-12. For the ceiling as a whole, see F. Bologna, *Il soffitto della Sala Magna allo Steri di Palermo e la cultura feudale siciliana nell’autunno del Medioevo*, Palermo 1975 (where, however, the stories of Alexander are not identified).

<sup>88</sup> A 1457 wooden panel from a painted ceiling in Germany, showing the ‘Submarine Voyage’ and the ‘Flight with Griffins’, is illustrated in Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, pp. 204-5, no. 89 and fig. 113.

scenes and chivalric jousts, from the figures of the biblical prophets to the scenes from the Apocalypse.

The examples discussed in this chapter clearly indicate that Alexander imagery in medieval Italy was almost entirely based on the legendary tradition deriving from the Pseudo-Callisthenes. All these episodes were popular in the Middle Ages, but it was only the 'Taming of Bucephalus' which continued to be illustrated into the sixteenth century and beyond, although with dramatic changes in its representation. As we shall see, the 'Visit to the Trees of the Sun and Moon' virtually disappeared from the iconographic repertoire of Alexander stories, while only a few fifteenth-century depictions of the 'Flight with Griffins' and the 'Submarine Voyage' can be identified; and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### The Persistence of the Legendary Tradition in Fifteenth-Century Italian Art

The marvellous episodes from the *Romance*, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, were widely diffused in earlier centuries, no longer featured in the iconography of Alexander in fifteenth-century Italian art, apart from a few exceptions which I shall discuss below. Retellings and *volgarizzamenti* of the medieval *Historia de Preliis* continued to be written in Italy well into the fifteenth century – notably, the *Alexandreida in rima* (1420-37) and the *Libro del Nascimento* (published in Treviso in 1474), both printed several times, the former until the early eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> These texts also recount Alexander's marvellous adventures in India – including the 'Flight with Griffins', the 'Submarine Voyage' and the 'Visit to the Trees of the Sun and the Moon'; but are all unillustrated and therefore do not contribute to the topic of this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

In fifteenth-century Italian art, the legendary tradition of Alexander was indirectly continued mainly through his inclusion in the canon of Nine Worthies. Although this iconographic scheme did not depict any narrative illustrations of his exemplary deeds, it unmistakably reflected the medieval and chivalric conception of Alexander, since much of it relied on legendary material from the *Romance*. Yet, by reinstating Alexander's pagan identity, the Nine Worthies theme also marked a turning point within the tradition, contributing to the emergence of a new iconographic representation, which first appeared in the 1450s. This tradition consisted of a small number of episodes from Alexander's life, celebrating his heroic feats and virtuous behaviour. These episodes were selected from ancient sources made newly available through the efforts of humanists and so had not formed part of his medieval image. They are of particular importance since the iconography of Alexander which would become established from the early sixteenth century onwards was largely based on them. In this chapter, I shall discuss the persistence

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<sup>1</sup> See *La fascination pour Alexandre*, IV, pp. 248-50 and 259-60 (M. Campopiano). Two more fifteenth-century *volgarizzamenti* of J<sup>3</sup> are known, each preserved in a single manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS II.I.363; and Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS It. Cl. VI.66, sign. 6033); see *ibid.*, pp. 243-4 and 258-9.

<sup>2</sup> Something similar happened north of the Alps, where the episodes of the 'Flight' and the 'Submarine Voyage' were still recounted, but no longer illustrated, in late fifteenth-century manuscripts of French and German re-elaborations of the *Historia de Preliis*; see Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 161. Interesting remarks on this are also in Cruse, *Illuminating the Roman d'Alexandre*, pp. 199-204.

of the legendary tradition in the art of Quattrocento Italy, while the emergence of the humanist iconography of Alexander will be the focus of Chapter 4.

### 2.1. The Flight with Griffins in a Curtius Rufus Manuscript

Around 1468 the illuminator Cola Rapicano decorated a vellum manuscript of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni* for Ferdinand I (Ferrante) king of Naples (1458-94).<sup>3</sup> The manuscript, today in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (MS Vit. 22.9), has received very little attention, despite its richly decorated title-page (**fig. 29**). Framed by a floral decoration with *putti* and initial containing an author portrait, the title-page – the only part of the codex to be illuminated – on the right hand side has two medallions depicting Alexander. The online catalogue of the Biblioteca Nacional describes this page as lavishly illuminated, but gives only a vague reference to its ‘varios medallones con miniaturas.’<sup>4</sup> Although Lisardo Rubio Fernández specifies that these pictures are a ‘paisaje fantástico y una miniatura de Alejandro’,<sup>5</sup> I believe that the subject of the two medallions can be more precisely identified (**fig. 30**).

The higher of the two medallions is an unmistakable representation of the ‘Flight of Alexander with Griffins’ (**fig. 31**). From an iconographic point of view, the composition is perfectly consistent with the medieval tradition examined in Chapter 1 (1.1): seated on a throne carried by griffins, Alexander, whose name is clearly written above his head, wears a crown and holds a sceptre, as well as the globe of power. He is therefore represented as a *kosmokrator*, a ruler of the world, whose glory seems to be announced by the winged *putto* at the top of the medallion who blows a trumpet. In light of this imagery, I would suggest that the second medallion, placed immediately below (**fig. 32**), rather than representing a ‘paisaje fantástico’,

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<sup>3</sup> On Cola Rapicano, who was active in the Aragonese court of Naples in the second half of the fifteenth century, see the entry by G. Toscano in *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani: secoli IX-XVI*, ed. M. Bollati, Milan 2004, pp. 893-6. Also useful is id., ‘La bottega di Cola e Nardo Rapicano’, in *La Biblioteca Reale di Napoli al tempo della dinastia Aragonese/La Biblioteca Real de Nápoles en tiempos de la dinastía Aragonesa* (exhibition catalogue, Naples, Castel Nuovo, 1998), ed. G. Toscano, Valencia 1998, pp. 385-415.

<sup>4</sup> The manuscript is also briefly mentioned, but with no description of its decoration, by J. D. Bordona, *Manuscritos con pinturas*, 2 vols, Madrid 1933, I, p. 395, no. 947; T. De Marinis, *La biblioteca napoletana dei re d’Aragona*, 4 vols, Milan 1947-52, II, p. 61; E. Pellegrin, ‘Manuscrits des auteurs classiques latins de Madrid et du Chapitre de Tolède’, *Bulletin d’Information de l’Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes*, 2, 1953, pp. 7-24, at p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> L. Rubio Fernández, *Catálogo de los manuscritos clásicos latinos existentes en España*, Madrid [1984?], pp. 399-400, no. 485.

shows the Earth which Alexander, according to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (II.41), contemplated from the heavens to which he had ascended. In the medieval versions of the *Romance*, Alexander has a marvellous vision of the Earth, which seemed like a garden surrounded by a dragon, that is, a body of land encircled by an ocean. In the miniature of the Madrid manuscript, the marvellous element has largely been eliminated; but the nature of the vision remains the same: Alexander sees from above the mass of an inhabited land surrounded by the water. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the two medallions are visually connected by decorative elements on the page; moreover, in the first medallion Alexander is clearly looking down, in the direction of the medallion at his feet.

It is particularly striking that an illustration so closely connected to the *Romance* and the medieval conception of Alexander was made as late as the 1460s. Furthermore, the Madrid manuscript does not contain the medieval *Romance* in one of its innumerable versions, but instead a newly rediscovered historical account from antiquity: Curtius Rufus's life of Alexander. Why, then, does a legendary episode which is totally inconsistent with and unrelated to this text appear on its illuminated title-page? A plausible answer is that, in order to provide an illustration for a book which still lacked any iconographic apparatus, Cola Rapicano (or his workshop) turned to the established repertoire of the *Alexander Romance* and selected the most popular episode from it: the Flight. This is also suggested by the old-fashioned style of both the crown of Alexander and the throne he is sitting on, which were clearly copied from an earlier model,<sup>6</sup> probably belonging to the dispersed library of the kings of Aragon. What is significant, however, is that, by illustrating Curtius Rufus's text with an image of the 'Flight', the illuminator presented the historical and legendary Alexander side by side. It is worth noting that Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni* was very popular at the Aragonese court in Naples and was even credited with miraculous healing powers: in a famous anecdote reported in 1455 by Panormita (Antonio Beccadelli), his patron King Alfonso I, merely by reading the *Historiae*, recovered at once from a serious illness which no physician had been able to cure.<sup>7</sup> According to Pier Candido Decembrio,

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<sup>6</sup> I thank Fabrizio Lollini, to whom I owe this observation, for discussing the picture with me; further advice was offered by Anna Melograni.

<sup>7</sup> See Panormita, *De dictis et factis Alphonsi regis* 14, transcribed by Gianvito Resta in his annotation on Panormita, *Liber rerum gestarum Ferdinandi regis*, ed. G. Resta, Palermo 1968, p. 68, n. 1. For references to the episode found in late sixteenth-century historical treatises, see A. Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 4-5, n. 9.

the reading of his own Italian translation of Curtius Rufus (which will be discussed in Chapter 3) had the same effect on a future duke of Ferrara who had been taken ill in Naples, the young Ercole I d'Este.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.2. Alexander as King of Swords in the Sola-Busca Tarocchi**

The Sola-Busca Tarocchi is the only complete set of metal-engraved tarot cards to survive from the fifteenth century. The deck is comprised of seventy-eight pieces: fourteen for each of the four suits (Swords, Staves, Coins and Cups), plus twenty-two so-called *trionfi* or trumps. Sometime after they were engraved, the cards were painted, and several iconographical details were added to the original composition.<sup>9</sup> The deck takes its name from the Sola-Busca family in Milan which owned it until 2009, when it was acquired by the Pinacoteca di Brera. Despite the impressive literature on these tarot cards, many questions about them are still unanswered. The main issues concern the date and place of their production (suggested as either Ferrara or Venice), the name of the artist (or artists) involved in their creation and their iconographic meaning.<sup>10</sup>

Their recent acquisition by the Pinacoteca di Brera has made it possible to re-examine the entire *status quaestionis*, as well as to provide an in-depth analysis of these tarot cards within the context of the culture which produced them. It is now thought that the deck was engraved in the 1470s by Nicola di maestro Antonio of Ancona and illuminated in Venice in 1491, most likely for the Venetian historian,

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<sup>8</sup> Pier Candido Decembrio, *De laude et commendatione vitae clarissimi Principis Herculis Estensium Ducis liber*, Ferrara, Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, MS Antonelli 495, ff. 16v-17r, transcribed in G. Resta, *Le epitomi di Plutarco nel Quattrocento*, Padua 1962, p. 57, n. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Impressions from the original plates are held in several museums: the British Museum (4 cards); the Kunsthalle in Hamburg (4); the Albertina in Vienna (23); and the Musée du Petit Palais in Paris (4). They are particularly useful to scholars because they show the cards in their original, uncoloured state.

<sup>10</sup> See A. M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving: A Critical Catalogue with Complete Reproduction of All the Prints Described*, 2 vols, London 1938-48, I, pp. 241-7; *Le muse e il principe: arte di corte nel Rinascimento padano* (exhibition catalogue, Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, 1991), ed. A. Mottola Molino and M. Natale, 2 vols, Milan 1991, II, pp. 262-77, no. 71; M. J. Zucker, 'The Master of the *Sola-Busca Tarocchi* and the Rediscovery of Some Ferrarese Engravings of the Fifteenth Century', *Artibus et Historiae*, 18, 1997, pp. 181-4.

Marin Sanudo. The tarot cards have also been linked to the hermetic-alchemical tradition of the late Quattrocento.<sup>11</sup>

The Sola-Busca Tarocchi include a figure of Alexander, who is represented as the King of Swords. He is seated on a chariot drawn by four griffins and is holding both a sword and the globe of power. An inscription at the top of the card spells out his name as 'ALECXANDRO M' (**fig. 33**). Not only is Alexander himself present in this set of tarot cards, but three other cards display figures closely connected to him in the legendary tradition: the Queen of Swords (**fig. 34**) is represented by his mother, Olympias ('OLINPIA'), the Knight of Swords (**fig. 35**) by the Egyptian god Ammon ('AMONE') and the Knight of Cups (**fig. 36**) by Nectanebo ('NATANABO').<sup>12</sup> A fifth card, the King of Coins, identified in an inscription as 'R[EX] FILIPO', may represent Philip, King of Macedon and father of Alexander (**fig. 37**).<sup>13</sup> While Alexander was often depicted in court decks,<sup>14</sup> the group of cards associated with him and his legend seems to be unique to the Sola-Busca Tarocchi. The portrayal of Alexander holding the globe of the *kosmokrator* and sitting on the chariot of the flight to heaven also signals that he is being represented as the hero of the medieval legend.

According to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.1-12), the father of Alexander was not Philip of Macedon but the Egyptian pharaoh and magician Nectanebo, who fled his country when it was under Persian attack and took refuge in Macedon, at the court of King Philip.<sup>15</sup> Thanks to his cunning and magical arts, Nectanebo seduced Queen Olympias and tricked her into becoming his lover. By first turning himself

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<sup>11</sup> *Il segreto dei segreti: i tarocchi Sola Busca e la cultura ermetico-alchemica tra Marche e Veneto alla fine del Quattrocento* (exhibition catalogue, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera, 2012-13), ed. L. P. Gnaccolini, Milan 2012, esp. pp. 15-59.

<sup>12</sup> Gnaccolini, in *Il segreto dei segreti*, p. 55, n. 96, tentatively suggests that the Nine of Cups, depicting a creature which is half-man, half-sea serpent, might represent Alexander's cook, who, according to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (II.41), stole the water of life from Alexander and was therefore transformed into a sea monster.

<sup>13</sup> The inscription was misread as 'A FILIPO' by S. R. Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot*, 3 vols, New York 1978-90, II, p. 297, who interpreted it as a dedication, possibly referring to Filippo Maria Visconti, and on this basis suggested that the deck was made in Milan.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 7. An incomplete Venetian tarot deck of the early sixteenth century also includes Alexander as the King of Swords; two griffins are part of the throne on which he is seated. See *ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>15</sup> Nectanebo II (360-343 BC) was the last pharaoh of Egypt. When the Persian king Artaxerxes Ochus conquered Egypt, he fled to Nubia and was never heard of again. The Pseudo-Callisthenes has Nectanebo flee to Macedon instead. See B. E. Perry, 'The Egyptian Legend of Nectanebus', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 97, 1966, pp. 327-33.

into a serpent, and then by wearing horns of a ram and a golden fleece, he disguised himself as the god Ammon, of whom he was also the priest, and entered Olympias's bedroom. That night Olympias and Ammon/Nectanebo conceived Alexander. Nectanebo was also present at the birth of Alexander: as an expert astrologer, he consulted the stars, cast horoscopes and made sure that Alexander was born when the astrological conjunctions were as auspicious as possible. Based on the stars, Nectanebo predicted to Olympias that Alexander would be the ruler of the world.<sup>16</sup> The Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.14) also states that twelve years later Nectanebo, while teaching astronomy to Alexander, was murdered by him and with his last breath revealed to Alexander the truth about his birth.

The story of Alexander being fathered by Zeus Ammon (the Greek name of the Egyptian sun god Amun-Ra, whose incarnation is the serpent) was part of the Alexander tradition from the very beginning and was, of course, at the core of the (very problematic) question of the divinity of Alexander.<sup>17</sup> Ancient authors such as Curtius Rufus (*Historiae Alexandri Magni* IV.7.25) say that he was greeted as 'son of the god' by the priest of the oracle of Ammon at Siwa, in the Libyan desert. But only the Pseudo-Callisthenes mentions Nectanebo and the crucial role he played in the events leading to the birth of Alexander.

The legendary tale of Alexander's birth therefore explains how the four cards in the Sola-Busca Tarocchi are connected. Olympias and Ammon, the mother and divine father of Alexander, share with him the suit of Swords, while his 'biological father' Nectanebo belongs to the suit of Cups. Both Ammon and Nectanebo are depicted as Knights on horseback; Queen Olympias of Macedon, and the Queen of Swords in the deck, is seated on her throne. Furthermore, in my view, the King of Coins represented on the fifth card mentioned above should be identified with King Philip II of Macedon, the 'historical father' of Alexander, rather than, as has been suggested, the Roman emperor Philip the Arab.<sup>18</sup> In the Quattrocento, the only Philip who could possibly be labelled 'R[EX] FILIPO' was Philip of Macedon.

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed and entertaining account of the conception and birth of Alexander, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 6-24.

<sup>17</sup> See J. P. V. D. Balsdon, 'The Divinity of Alexander', *Historia*, 1, 1950, pp. 363-88; A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge and New York 1988, pp. 278-90; B. Dreyer, 'Heroes, Cults, and Divinity', in *Alexander the Great: A New History*, ed. W. Heckel and L. A. Tritle, Malden MA and Chichester 2009, pp. 218-34.

<sup>18</sup> *Il segreto dei segreti*, p. 18.



As mentioned above, the Sola-Busca Tarocchi have been associated with the hermetic-chemical tradition of fifteenth-century Italy, on the grounds that Alexander, through his ascent to the heavens, represents the new sun, symbol of the noblest of metals and the ultimate goal of alchemical transmutation: gold. He was also presented as an *exemplum* to those rulers who aspire to greatness, since the ‘Flight with Griffins’ alludes to immortality.<sup>19</sup> I am not entirely convinced by this interpretation. The connection between the Sola-Busca Tarocchi and the stages of the alchemical process which has been proposed is a good fit for the suit of Coins, but it is not applicable to the others. If, moreover, the only reason for including Alexander in the deck was to symbolise both gold and the aspiration to immortality, then the picture of Alexander with the griffins would have been sufficient on its own, and none of the other four cards associated with it would have been needed. The inclusion of Olympias, Ammon, Nectanebo and Philip in the deck therefore undermines this line of argument.

The appearance of Alexander in the Sola-Busca Tarocchi is a rare and striking example of the persistence into the late Quattrocento of the legendary image of Alexander, made even more emphatic by the presence of the group of figures connected to the Pseudo-Callisthenes and to the medieval *Romance* that accompanies him. A more thorough investigation of the circumstances of the commission and production of the tarot deck may shed light on the reasons for this anomaly.

### **2.3. A Fifteenth-Century Drawing Depicting the Submarine Voyage**

Very little is known about a late fifteenth-century drawing depicting the ‘Submarine Voyage’ of Alexander which has been attributed, though on questionable grounds, to Raphael and which is now in the Louvre (**fig. 38**).<sup>20</sup> According to Victor Schmidt,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 25, 33 and 52.

<sup>20</sup> D. Cordellier and B. Py, *Raphaël, son atelier, ses copistes* (Musée du Louvre/Musée d’Orsay, Département des arts graphiques. Inventaire general des dessins italiens, V), Paris 1992, p. 3, no. 1 (with related bibliography). The attribution to Raphael, which seems to me most unlikely, is essentially based on the fact that his name is written, in Greek and Italian, alongside an inventory number at the bottom left of the drawing. This note, presumably by an early 17<sup>th</sup>-century hand, has been convincingly compared to those added by Filippo Baldinucci to the works he acquired for his private art collection: see J. Byam Shaw, *Drawings by Old Masters at Christ Church Oxford*, 2 vols, Oxford 1976, I, pp. 11-12. The drawing has been assigned by some scholars to Pietro Perugino, in whose workshop Raphael was trained in the last decade of the fifteenth century.

it is probably ‘a reflection of, or a study for a monumental cycle, which no doubt included Alexander’s Flight.’<sup>21</sup> Since neither the cycle nor the pendant drawing of the ‘Flight with Griffins’ has been traced, Schmidt’s hypothesis, while intriguing, needs to be supported by further evidence before it can be treated as credible.

The episode of Alexander’s exploration of the ocean has already been discussed in Chapter 1 (1.2). The Louvre drawing shows the sea dotted with boats, two of which carry the men who control Alexander’s descent. On the left-hand side, a landscape with some men and a walled city is represented. At the centre of the composition, Alexander is standing in the glass sphere, surrounded by fish and sea creatures; two small animals are sketched in the vessel next to him (**fig. 39**). As we have seen, Alexander is usually alone in the glass jar; but a version of the story found mainly in German texts recounts that he took with him two or three animals – a cat, a hen and usually a dog. Every animal has a specific purpose in the adventure, which is connected to the belief that the sea will not tolerate the presence of a corpse or of blood. So, in case of danger or misfortune, Alexander would be able to kill one of the animals, and the water would immediately cast the vessel ashore, allowing him to escape and save his life. This version of the story sometimes includes a ‘faithless lady’ who takes control of Alexander’s descent from the boat.<sup>22</sup> Mario Casari has shown how this particular version of the story came to Germany from Persian models;<sup>23</sup> and Roberta Morosini has recently drawn attention to its occurrence in fourteenth-century texts belonging to the Italian tradition such as the verse adaption of Brunetto Latini’s *Tresor* and, with minor variations, Domenico Scolarì’s *Istoria di Alessandro Magno*.<sup>24</sup>

The two small animals sharing the vessel with Alexander in the Louvre drawing can be identified as the cat and the hen in this version of the story. I do not know of any other Italian example of this iconographic variant, which, surprisingly

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<sup>21</sup> Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 119. His speculation about the existence of a pendant representation of the ‘Flight with Griffins’ is based on the fact that, as we have seen in Chapter 1, depictions of the ‘Submarine Voyage’ do not occur independently.

<sup>22</sup> Ross, ‘Alexander and the Faithless Lady’; see also id., *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>23</sup> M. Casari, ‘Alessandro e Utopia nei romanzi persiani medievali’, supplement 1 to *Rivista degli studi orientali*, 72, 1999, esp. pp. 51-2.

<sup>24</sup> R. Morosini, “Perché Alessandro cercò molti istrani paesi”: i viaggi di Alessandro e la malattia di Aristotele: la crisi della conoscenza dall’*Alexandreis* di Quilichino da Spoleto (1236) al *Triumpho Magno* di Domenico Falugio (1521)’, in *Sindbad mediterraneo: per una topografia della memoria, da Oriente a Occidente*, ed. R. Morosini and C. Lee, Lecce 2013, pp. 157-227, at pp. 192-8. For Scolarì’s *Istoria* of 1355, see *La fascination pour Alexandre*, IV, pp. 263-5 (M. Campopiano), with bibliography.

for the legendary tradition, appears as late as the 1490s. There is, however, an important point to be made: despite the continuity of the subject matter, this representation of the ‘Submarine Voyage’ does not resemble the flat, two-dimensional medieval precedents which I have discussed and illustrated in Chapter 1. The compositional arrangement of the scene, the more realistic way in which the space is conceived, the scale and proportion of the vessel in which Alexander is standing and of the large ships from which it is manoeuvred – all these portray Alexander’s descent into the abyss, not as a fanciful adventure, but as an exploration which really could take place. The construction of the glass jar demonstrates an engagement with the technological challenge posed by an underwater descent and resonates with actual attempts documented from the mid-Quattrocento to design submarine vessels and similar aquatic machines (in the works, for instance, of Mariano Taccola, Roberto Valturio, Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Leonardo).<sup>25</sup> In this light, it seems significant that a number of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian re-elaborations of the *Romance* mentioned by Morosini put particular emphasis on the scientific interest of the story,<sup>26</sup> that is, on the construction of the vessel, rather than stressing the moralistic and symbolic meaning of the descent, as was usually the case in the Middle Ages (the moral of ‘big fish eat little fish’, which we have seen in Chapter 1).<sup>27</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the drawing in the Louvre is unique in Italian art for its display of a technical sensibility in the depiction of the ‘Submarine Voyage’. As such, it is a rare transitional hybrid, in which a very popular episode from the medieval legend, at the tail end of that tradition, is visualised in a distinctively Renaissance manner.

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<sup>25</sup> See G. Moretti, ‘Alessandro, le razze mostruose e i viaggi fantastici: scienza e leggenda fra Antichità, Medioevo e Rinascimento’, in *L’Histoire d’Alexandre le Grand dans les tapisseries au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: fortune iconographique dans les tapisseries et les manuscrits conservés: la tenture d’Alexandre de la collection Doria Pamphilj à Gênes*, ed. F. Barbe et al., Turnhout 2013, pp. 103-10, at pp. 106-7. See also P. O. Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship: Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Baltimore and London 2001, pp. 104-16 and, in general, L. Molà, ‘Inventors, Patents and the Market for Innovations in Renaissance Italy’, *History of Technology*, 32, 2014, pp. 7-34.

<sup>26</sup> Morosini, “Perché Alexandro cercò molti istrani paesi”, pp. 189-92. A similar preoccupation is noted in the Northern European tradition by Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 161.

<sup>27</sup> For the scientific interest in the ‘Submarine Voyage’ shown by Roger Bacon as early as 1250, see Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 162.

## 2.4. Alexander among the Nine Worthies

The most important canon of military valour and moral virtue in medieval and early modern Europe was the Nine Worthies. Alexander appears in it alongside Hector and Julius Caesar as representatives of the pagan world. This first triad reveals at once the rationale behind the selection of heroes for inclusion in the canon: figures from the myth and history were put together as equals, side by side, regardless of the different times in which they had lived and, more importantly, without any distinction between historical or fictional characters. The Nine Worthies were chosen by virtue of their wisdom and valour, which were the highest chivalric ideals embodied in the canon. The verses accompanying the figure of Alexander as a Worthy often allude to his marvellous adventures or to episodes of his life recounted in the *Romance*. In one sense, therefore, the representation of Alexander among the Nine Worthies was part of the legendary tradition. In another sense, however, his inclusion in the canon of Nine Worthies restored Alexander to his pagan identity, signalling the end of the long process of Christianisation – begun in late antiquity and culminating in the thirteenth century – which was discussed in Chapter 1.

The canon of Nine Worthies (*Neuf Preux*) was first mentioned in *Les Voeux du Paon* ('The Vows of the Peacock'), a poem about Alexander completed by Jacques de Longuyon in 1312 at the instance of the prince-bishop of Liège, Thibaut of Bar. Towards the end of the work, the Nine Noblest and Bravest Men are introduced as a comparison to the valour shown on the battlefield by Porus.<sup>28</sup> They are presented in three triads, according to their religious confession: the Heathens (Hector, Alexander, Julius Caesar), the Jews (Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus) and the Christians (King Arthur, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon). From the pages of *Les Voeux du Paon*, the Worthies quickly passed into art, literature and pageant, enjoying an immediate popularity throughout Europe. From the early fourteenth century, they provided rulers and princes with the exemplary personifications of the ideals of chivalry, chosen from the Augustinian ages of *ante legem*, *sub lege* and *sub gratia*. The Nine Worthies were represented in a variety of artistic genres, from sculpture to frescoes, from tapestries to plasterwork, from manuscripts to

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<sup>28</sup> *Les Voeux du Paon* was published in *The Buik of Alexander or the Buik of the Most Noble and Valiant Conquerour Alexander the Grit*, ed. R. L. Graeme Ritchie, 4 vols, Edinburgh and London 1921-9, II-IV. The Nine Worthies are presented at vv. 7484-7579 (IV, pp. 402-6). On the composition of the poem and its huge popularity throughout Europe, see *Les Voeux du Paon de Jacques de Longuyon: originalité et rayonnement*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas, Paris 2011.

engravings.<sup>29</sup> Though many of these works are either lost or documented only in written sources, a large number survive and show that the Nine Worthies were usually portrayed standing upright in full armour, with each Worthy identified by his own coat of arms, as well as a *titulus* describing his life and deeds.<sup>30</sup> At a later stage, probably thanks to Eustache Deschamps, Nine Lady Worthies (*Neuf Preuses*) were paired with the male Worthies: mainly selected from the Amazons of the myth, their identities and iconography remained far more variable than those of their male counterparts.<sup>31</sup>

The theme of the Nine Worthies was extremely successful north of the Alps, especially in France and Germany, until at least the seventeenth century. Contrary to an influential statement in Cary's *Medieval Alexander*,<sup>32</sup> the theme was not alien to Italian art and culture. One of the first mentions of the Worthies in Italy occurs in Franco Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle*, written in the 1390s.<sup>33</sup> As Maria Monica Donato has pointed out, moreover, the Hebrew Worthies were painted among the four *sub*

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<sup>29</sup> The most important studies remain R. L. Wyss, 'Die Neun Helden: Eine Ikonographische Studie', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 17, 1957, pp. 73-106, and H. Schroeder, *Der Topos der Nine Worthies in Literatur und bildender Kunst*, Göttingen 1971; more recently, see also W. van Anrooij, *Helden van weleer: De Negen Besten in de Nederlanden (1300-1700)*, Amsterdam 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Within this canonical representation, there were innumerable variations and combinations: the *titulus* is not necessarily present (though in this case it is usually replaced by the name of the Worthy) and the coats of arms can vary slightly. More rarely, the Worthies appear to be seated on thrones, as in the well-known fragmentary tapestry set, woven in the Netherlands for Jean de Berry around 1400-10 and now at the Cloisters: see A. S. Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1993, pp. 94-124. In the sixteenth century a variation of the theme, particularly successful north of the Alps, represents the Worthies on horseback: among them, Alexander is usually riding an elephant, clearly alluding to his Indian military campaign. Examples are offered by Schroeder, *Der Topos der Nine Worthies*, pls. 9-25.

<sup>31</sup> On the *Neuf Preuses* see I. Sedlacek, *Die Neuf Preuses: Heldinnen des Spätmittelalters*, Marburg 1997.

<sup>32</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, p. 262, n. 1: 'the Nine Worthies were unknown to Italian writers.' In Cary's view, the only exceptions were the frescoes and verses in the castle of La Manta, which were so deeply influenced by neighbouring France as to be considered no more than an import from abroad. Cary's opinion became a commonplace and has only recently been questioned. For the La Manta fresco cycle, see below.

<sup>33</sup> Tale CXXV, in Franco Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, ed. F. Pernicone, Florence 1946, pp. 277-8, which recounts a story about Charlemagne, begins with the mention of the Nine Worthies: 'Praticando di valorosi cristiani signori, costui [Charlemagne], e lo re Artù, e Gottifredi di Buglione, sono di più virtù tre reputati; e' Pagani sono altri tre, Ettore, e Alessandro Magno, e Cesare; e tre judei, David, Josuè, e Juda Maccabeo.' This mention was first noted by P. D'Ancona, 'Gli affreschi del Castello di Manta nel Saluzzese', *L'Arte*, 8, 1905, pp. 94-106 and 183-98, at p. 100.

*lege* figures on the vault of Orsanmichele in Florence (1398-1401), the iconographic programme of which was designed by Sacchetti himself.<sup>34</sup>

No fourteenth-century Italian representation of the complete canon of Nine Worthies has survived. The only preserved examples date to the first half of the fifteenth century: afterwards, the theme seems to have disappeared from Italian art. It is certainly not by coincidence that three of the four extant series are found in fortresses and strongholds (Castel Roncolo, Castelnuovo and La Manta) located very close to the northern border of present-day Italy in the Piedmont and Trentino-Alto Adige regions, areas which have been profoundly influenced over the centuries, both culturally and politically, by French- and German-speaking lands. The fourth fresco cycle, in the Palazzo Trinci at Foligno, a central Italian town in Umbria, depicts an ‘expanded Nine Worthies’,<sup>35</sup> with an unprecedented juxtaposition of two heroes from the Roman history to the standard chivalric canon.

North of the Alps the Nine Worthies were represented in a variety of artistic media. In particular, there are countless mentions of tapestries depicting the Nine Worthies in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century inventories; regrettably, however, almost all of these works are now lost, depriving us of a key element in the decoration of European palaces and castles. By contrast, in Italy the theme survives only in four mural paintings on a monumental scale;<sup>36</sup> nevertheless, these fresco cycles can perhaps give us some sense of what many reception halls of medieval and early modern Europe would have looked like.

#### 2.4.1 The Triads of Castel Roncolo

Perched on the top of a rocky spur near Bolzano, in the South-Tyrol/Alto Adige region of northeast Italy, the fortress of Castel Roncolo (Runkelstein Castle) had its golden age under the brothers Niklaus and Franz Vintler, who acquired the castle in 1385 and three years later undertook a vast campaign of renovation, enlargement

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<sup>34</sup> M. M. Donato, ‘Gli eroi romani tra storia ed “exemplum”: i primi cicli umanistici di Uomini Famosi’, in *Memoria dell’antico nell’arte italiana*, ed. S. Settis, 3 vols, Turin 1984-6, II: *I generi e i temi ritrovati*, pp. 95-152, at p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> A. Dunlop, *Painted Palaces: The Rise of Secular Art in Early Renaissance Italy*, University Park PA, 2009, p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> See N.-C. Rebichon, ‘Le cycle des Neuf Preux au Château de Castelnuovo (Piémont)’, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome: Moyen Âge*, 122, 2010, pp. 173-88, at pp. 176-7.

and decoration of the entire complex.<sup>37</sup> Under the wooden balcony of the Casa d'Estato, overlooking the inner courtyard, is a scene of thirty figures, divided into nine groups of 'triads' (**fig. 40**). The frescoes, painted by an unidentified artist, have been variously dated between 1393 and 1405.<sup>38</sup> On the far left, the series begins with the Nine Worthies: the Heathens (Hector, Alexander and Julius Caesar) come first, followed by the Jews (Joshua, David and Judas Maccabeus) and the Christians (King Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon). These three triads, and above all the first one, have suffered considerably from the damage of time, to the point that the figure of Hector has almost completely vanished. Still visible, though not in good condition, Alexander stands in full armour between Hector and Julius Caesar; he is bearded, wears a crown and holds a banner and shield in his hands (**fig. 41**). The coat of arms once depicted on his shield had already disappeared by the mid-nineteenth century, since it is not present on the watercolour copy of the frescoes made by Ignaz Seelos in 1857.<sup>39</sup>

What is distinctive about the frescoes at Castel Roncolo is not the presence of the Nine Worthies in itself, but rather the general iconographic context of which they are part. The figures which complete the series of nine triads in the Casa d'Estato have no real counterparts in other decorative schemes of this kind and are likely to have been personally selected by the Vintlers. The fourth to ninth triads present in succession: three Arthurian knights (Percival, Gawain and Ywain); the most famous lovers of the Middle Ages (Wilhelm von Österreich and Aglye, Tristan and Iseult, Wilhelm von Orleans and Amelei); three heroes from the German sagas (Dietrich von Bern, Siegfried and Dietleib), with their magic swords; and the three most famous giants, giantesses and dwarves.<sup>40</sup> This unusual juxtaposition of historical figures, legendary heroes and mythical creatures seems to reflect the history of the world as presented in the *Heldenbücher* ('Books of Heroes'). According to this German epic tradition, dwarves, giants and giantesses were the

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<sup>37</sup> See the exhaustive study: *Castel Roncolo: il maniero illustrato*, Bolzano 2000.

<sup>38</sup> The Casa d'Estato was built between 1390 and 1393, and was probably decorated shortly afterwards. Paolo D'Ancona ('Gli affreschi del Castello di Manta', p. 105) suggested that the frescoes should be dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century and, in any case, before Niklaus Vintler's death, which he wrongly placed in 1414 rather than 1413. These are the grounds, I believe, on which Noëlle-Christine Rebichon recently dated the frescoes to the years around 1400-5: see her 'Le cycle des Neuf Preux', p. 177, n. 26.

<sup>39</sup> See I. V. Zingerle, *Fresken-Cyklus des schlosses Runkelstein bei Bozen: Gezeichnet und lithographiert von Ignaz Seelos*, Innsbruck 1857, pl. III.

<sup>40</sup> The giants and giantesses have recently been identified thanks to the inscriptions above their heads which are still legible; however, no inscriptions for the dwarves remain. See *Castel Roncolo*, pp. 101-9.

first beings to be created by God; and only when they were in need of help and protection did the heroes and courageous knights appear.<sup>41</sup> The fifth triad, depicting the exemplary lovers, represents the culmination of a scheme celebrating the chivalric ideals and popular romances of contemporary European society, which serve as the inspiration for the decoration of the Casa d'Estato as a whole, with rooms devoted to the adventures of Tristan, Garel and Wigalois.<sup>42</sup>

Within the broader context of the Castel Roncolo triads, the Nine Worthies occupy no special position. Although they begin the visual sequence of figures on the balcony, no distinction is made between them and the heroes of the Northern sagas and legends. Nor is the arrangement in any way hierarchical: historical kings and commanders are presented to the viewer as equals to knights of medieval epic and vice-versa: Alexander is as worthy as Siegfried, and Dietrich (the legendary transfiguration of Theodoric the Great) is equivalent to Julius Caesar. The court society of medieval Europe, so unmistakably mirrored in the Castel Roncolo frescoes, had no concern for the historical authenticity of these exemplary figures, who, as mentioned above, were chosen by virtue of their military valour and courage, regardless of their historical or fictional identity. Niklaus Vintler, a bourgeois who had become counsellor and financier of the dukes of Tyrol, was long considered a *parvenu* at the Habsburg court, although he had been ennobled in 1393. It is not surprising, therefore, that the decoration he commissioned for the Castel Roncolo celebrated and reflected the moral values and chivalric ideals of the aristocratic society which Vintler had entered.<sup>43</sup>

#### 2.4.2. The Castelnuovo Cycle

The fresco cycle which once decorated a room in the castle of Castelnuovo (at Castelnuovo Nigra, 40 km north of Turin in Piedmont) was discovered around 1980 by a group of boys on a school trip, who noticed traces of paint on a scratched wall of the medieval castle, locally known as 'il castellaccio'. Those traces were the remnants of a fresco cycle representing eight warriors, who were depicted on the

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<sup>41</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 109, and R. Wetzel, 'L'image du monde dans un monde d'images. Les fresques littéraires et courtoises de Castelroncolo dans leur contexte socioculturel et historique (Haute Adige, XIV-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)', in *L'histoire dans la littérature*, ed. L. Adert and E. Eigenmann, Geneva 2000, pp. 139-50, at pp. 148-9.

<sup>42</sup> The decoration of these rooms is examined in *Castel Roncolo*, pp. 109-71 and 331-50.

<sup>43</sup> Wetzel, 'L'image du monde', pp. 143-6.



two opposite walls of a 'saletta pitturata' ('painted room') at the very centre of the castle.<sup>44</sup> Given the poor condition of the castle, which had been in ruins for almost two centuries, the restorers were urged to detach the frescoes from the walls; and, since 2005, they have been displayed in the nearby Museo Archeologico del Canavese at Cuornè.<sup>45</sup>

The cycle was executed around 1430-40, on commission from Count Uberto di San Martino di Castelnuovo, and has been attributed on stylistic grounds to the Piedmontese painter Giacomino da Ivrea.<sup>46</sup> It is preserved in a fragmentary state: while the east and west walls are entirely lost, a large fragment with trees and the barely identifiable figures of two armoured knights has been detached from the south wall. The frescoes from the north wall are in far better condition: six warriors are lined up, side by side, their legs partially hidden by the Ghibelline merlons of a city wall (**fig. 42**). The figures are almost identical: all young, standing in full armour and helmeted. Two of them (the second and third from the left) wear a crown on top of their helmet. The warriors are, however, distinguished by the coats of arms on the broad shields which they hold. Three of them are named in the inscriptions above their heads as Julius Caesar, David and Judas Maccabeus; and on this basis, the six warriors have been identified as the surviving segment of a Nine Worthies sequence.

Identifying the three unnamed figures proved to be more difficult, since there was no apparent connection between the coats of arms on the shields and the standard iconography of the Nine Worthies.<sup>47</sup> The riddle has recently been solved by

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<sup>44</sup> A notarial act signed in the castle on 10 March 1485 mentions a 'saletta pitturata'; see *Il ciclo gotico di Villa Castelnuovo: intervento di salvataggio e valorizzazione*, ed. C. Bertolotto et al., Turin 2006, pp. 23-5 and 51. This document is of crucial importance for the history of Castelnuovo and of the frescoes themselves, as it decreed the division of the castle between two owners; the property was only reunited in 1980 when it passed into the ownership of the municipality of Castelnuovo Nigra.

<sup>45</sup> Not much has been published on the Castelnuovo cycle: apart from Rebichon, 'Le cycle des Neuf Preux', see *Il ciclo gotico*, issued at the conclusion of the 2005 restoration campaign, in which there is a useful account of the historical background of Castelnuovo at the turn of the fourteenth century: M. Cima, 'L'ambiente storico di origine del ciclo pittorico', *ibid.*, pp. 13-23.

<sup>46</sup> See C. Bertolotto, 'Dati di stile e di costume per la lettura del ciclo dei prodi. Una proposta per Giacomino da Ivrea', in *Il ciclo gotico di Villa Castelnuovo: intervento di salvataggio e valorizzazione*, ed. C. Bertolotto et al., Turin 2006, pp. 45-7. On Giacomino, see the entry by A. J. Martin in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon: die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, LIII, Munich and Leipzig 2007, p. 151.

<sup>47</sup> See F. Gualano, 'Una sfilata di Prodi da Villa Castelnuovo al Museo Archeologico di Cuornè', in *Il ciclo gotico di Villa Castelnuovo: intervento di salvataggio e valorizzazione*, ed. C. Bertolotto et al., Turin 2006, pp. 35-43.

Noëlle-Christine Rebichon, who examined the coats of arms of the Nine Worthies in two fifteenth-century illuminated heraldic manuscripts, which, like the Castelnuovo paintings, reflect French chivalric culture (**fig. 43**). As the names of the Worthies are written above their shields, the sequence in the manuscripts can be reconstructed as follows: Hector has a shield with three arrows, Alexander with three crowns and Julius Caesar with the heads of three deer; Joshua has the sun, David the harp and Judas Maccabeus two arms wielding swords. The coats of arms in the manuscripts match perfectly those of the six Castelnuovo Worthies, enabling Rebichon to identify the three unnamed Worthies on the north wall and to show that the six heroes are portrayed in their usual order: first the Heathen, then the Jews. To complete the canon, the Christian Worthies were painted on the south wall: once again in complete accordance with the coats of arms in the manuscripts, the visible remains of two shields are sufficient to identify the two surviving knights with Arthur and Charlemagne; however, the third, presumably Godfrey of Bouillon, is definitively lost.<sup>48</sup>

The Castelnuovo cycle is an eloquent example of the variability of attributes and iconographic details of the Worthies within the established canon. Some of the six Worthies have unusual coats of arms (Hector with the arrows, Julius Caesar with the deer heads, Joshua with the sun); as for Alexander, the three crowns depicted on his shield are not merely unusual but are normally attributed to Arthur (**fig. 44**). The crowns on Arthur's shield symbolised the three kingdoms which he governed: Scotland, England and Brittany. When assigned to Alexander, their meaning is less certain. Rebichon has argued that the crowns might represent the three continents or parts of the world ruled by him: Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.<sup>49</sup> I would suggest, instead, that the crowns on Alexander's shield, like those on Arthur's, were intended to symbolise the three kingdoms over which he acquired sovereignty: Macedon-Greece (the throne of his ancestors), Egypt (the throne of the pharaohs) and Persia-Asia (the throne of Darius III).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rebichon, 'Le cycle des Neuf Preux', pp. 181-4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>50</sup> I owe this suggestion to Paolo Sacht.

### 2.4.3. The Sala Baronale in the Castle della Manta

On the hillside of the town of Saluzzo, in the province of Cuneo (Piedmont), the Castle della Manta had been an isolated fortress of strategic importance in the small Marquisate of Saluzzo for more than two centuries. On his deathbed in October 1416, the Marquis Thomas III bequeathed the castle to his natural son Valerano, nicknamed 'il Burdo' (the Bastard), who enlarged and transformed it into a noble residence for his family. At the core of the castle is the Sala Baronale, which has a fresco cycle commissioned by Valerano, around 1420,<sup>51</sup> to a painter known only as 'the Master of La Manta' (**fig. 45**).<sup>52</sup> Starting just to the right of the fireplace on the west wall, the series of Nine Worthies (*Neufs Preux*), accompanied by their female counterparts (*Neuf Preuses*), appear in an horizontal band all along the north wall, up to the beginning of the east wall. Under their feet, a second parallel band contains the *tituli*, short compositions in verse which present each figure to the viewer. Across from them is a representation of the Fountain of Youth, to which the elderly flock in order to be given back both youthfulness and love.

The procession of armoured knights and graceful ladies – all dressed in the lavish fashion of early fifteenth-century courts – stands on a flowered meadow against a whitewashed background. Each of the eighteen figures is flanked by a leafy tree on the trunk of which hangs a shield bearing the distinctive arms of its owner. The triads of Worthies are arranged in the canonical order, as in the Castel Roncolo

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<sup>51</sup> A date around 1420-5 for the execution of the frescoes is now largely accepted. Maria Luisa Meneghetti ('Il manoscritto fr. 146 della Bibliothèque Nationale di Parigi, Tommaso di Saluzzo e gli affreschi della Manta', *Romania*, 110, 1989, pp. 511-35, at p. 532) has pointed out that, despite the absence of any relevant archival documentation, at least the *post* and *ante quem* dates can be determined. According to her, the decoration of the Sala Baronale is likely to have been commissioned by Valerano while in a position of power within the Marquisate. On the death of his father Thomas III of Saluzzo in 1416, Valerano was appointed guardian to the legitimate heir Ludovico, who at the time was underage, while Thomas's wife Marguerite of Roussy was named as the regent. Between 1416 and 1424, when Ludovico took command of the state, Valerano was in a powerful position, so the frescoes were probably painted between these dates. For an overview of the problematic dating of the frescoes, see C. Robotti, 'Moda e costume al Castello della Manta (Indicazioni per la datazione degli affreschi della sala baronale)', *Bollettino della Società Piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti*, 42, 1988, pp. 39-56.

<sup>52</sup> Given the geographical and cultural proximity of the Piedmont region to France – as evident in the style of the frescoes of the Sala Baronale – it is not surprising that, in attempting to identify the artist responsible for the paintings, scholars have suggested (though later withdrawn) both Italian and French names, most notably Jacques Yverny and Giacomo Jaquerio. For a concise and useful overview of this topic, see V. Sgarbi, 'Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?', *FMR*, 32, 1985, pp. 114-24, esp. p. 124. On the castle and its decoration, the main reference is *La Sala Baronale del Castello della Manta*, ed. G. Romano, Milan 1992; still useful is the work of Paolo D'Ancona, 'Gli affreschi del Castello di Manta', who first published the frescoes.

frescoes already discussed: the Heathen, followed by the Jews and the Christians.<sup>53</sup> So, Hector opens the procession by the fireplace, while Godfrey of Bouillon, in the middle of the north wall, connects the series of knights to that of their ladies, from Deipyle to Penthesilea. Alexander appears in the second position, next to Hector, at the very end of the west wall (**fig. 46**). Dressed in blue and red over his armour, Alexander is depicted with a beard and curly brown hair, wearing a crown and holding a sword. Just above his right hand, which is raised and clearly pointing at Hector, is a golden globe surmounted by a cross (**fig. 47**). The arms on his shield show a lion sitting on a chair and holding a halberd – not very different from those of Hector, with a leopard sitting on a similar chair and holding a sword (**fig. 48**).

The image of Alexander at La Manta has a few unusual elements. The most notable is that Alexander, who died at only 32 and was usually represented as a young man, if not a boy, is depicted here as a mature, bearded man. Roberto Benedetti has argued that, after being incorporated in the canon of the Nine Worthies, Alexander tended to assume the physical attributes of wisdom appropriate to these exemplary figures, in particular, a beard. This would explain why in the fifteenth century Alexander was so often represented as a man in his mature years, with a short beard, or even as a venerable old man, with a very long white beard.<sup>54</sup> In addition to the examples of French illuminations mentioned by Benedetti, I can add two similar images which are contemporary with the Manta frescoes: the cycle of Famous Men from the 1430s in the palace of Cardinal Giordano Orsini on Monte Giordano (Rome);<sup>55</sup> and an illuminated page in the Paris manuscript of the poem *Le Chevalier Errant* written by Thomas III of Saluzzo himself, to which I shall return. Robert Louis Mode, however, suggested another possible reason for representing a mature Alexander at La Manta. He pointed out that, given the nature of military training in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

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<sup>53</sup> As we shall see later on (2.4.4, below), in the frescoes of Palazzo Trinci at Foligno the triads of Worthies are not in the same order: they begin with the Jews, followed by the Heathen and the Christians.

<sup>54</sup> R. Benedetti, 'Codice, allocuzione e volti di un mito', in *Le Roman d'Alexandre: riproduzione del ms. Venezia, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Correr 1493*, ed. R. Benedetti, Tricesimo 1998, pp. 29-53, at pp. 49-50.

<sup>55</sup> See R. L. Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle of Cardinal Giordano Orsini and the *Uomini Famosi* Tradition in Fifteenth-Century Italian Art', PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1970, p. 127; L. Scalabroni, 'Masolino a Montegiordano: un ciclo perduto di "uomini illustri"', in *Da Pisanello alla nascita dei Musei Capitolini: l'Antico a Roma alla vigilia del Rinascimento* (exhibition catalogue, Rome, Musei Capitolini, 1988), ed. A. Cavallaro and E. Parlato, Milan and Rome 1988, pp. 62-72, at p. 67. I will discuss this cycle in Chapter 4 (4.2.2.2) below.

which required lengthy drillings and physical strength, an exemplary knight, held up for emulation by princes and rulers, could not have been young; instead, 'it was this sturdy warrior type, the product of knightly discipline, who became the ideal of heroic action if and when his great strength was properly matched by extraordinary valor.'<sup>56</sup> Whatever the reason for this particular depiction of Alexander as a mature man, it is worth keeping in mind that representations of him with a beard among the Nine Worthies are found in European art even before the fifteenth century; indeed, a bearded Alexander appears in the earliest surviving iconographic example of the *Neuf Preux*, sculpted around 1330 for the City Hall of Cologne and nowadays still *in situ*.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, this was by no means an established iconography: among the Worthies in Palazzo Trinci at Foligno, as we shall see, Alexander, who appears as a fully armoured knight, holding a shield and a sceptre and wearing a crown, is extremely young and beardless.

In the Sala Baronale of La Manta, Alexander has three attributes. The sword identifies him as a warrior and the crown as a king, while the globe shows him to be a *kosmokrator*, a ruler of the world. The cross on top of the globe clearly indicates that this world is a Christian one. An iconographic tradition of Alexander as *kosmokrator* existed in antiquity and is well documented as early as the third century BC.<sup>58</sup> The globe was not, however, part of the original iconography; it was first introduced as a symbol of sovereignty by the Roman emperors and passed down to the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, who placed the cross of the Christian faith on top of it. In the La Manta frescoes a globe identical to Alexander's also appears in the hands of Julius Caesar and Charlemagne – both of whom regarded themselves as emulators of Alexander. It is not surprising that Julius Caesar holds a globe as a symbol of power, since he was included in Suetonius's *De vita Caesarum* and throughout the Middle Ages had been regarded as the first Roman emperor. It is more surprising that, while both Julius Caesar and Charlemagne grasp the globes

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<sup>56</sup> Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle', pp. 187-8.

<sup>57</sup> The Nine Worthies of Cologne, as the earliest known representation of the theme, are mentioned in much of the literature specifically devoted to the *Neux Preux*. See, e.g., Schroeder, *Der Topos der Nine Worthies*, pp. 113-14; also, van Anrooij, *Helden van weleer*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>58</sup> See Goukowsky, *Essai sur les origines*, I, pp. 149-53. For this iconographic tradition, see H. P. L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture*, Oslo 1947, pp. 19-27. The most remarkable example of Alexander as *kosmokrator* is a terracotta fragment (third-second century BC) in the Musée du Cinquantenaire, Brussels, in which Alexander is shown looking heavenward and crowned with astral symbols: for this object see *Alexander der Grosse und die Öffnung*, p. 243, no. 7 (N. Massar); see also P. Moreno, *Alessandro Magno: immagini come storia*, Rome 2004, pp. 400-1.

firmly in their hands, Alexander is not even touching his, which is depicted as suspended in mid-air, as if floating before his eyes. In an essay which has opened up a new perspective on the decoration of the Sala Baronale, Daniel Arasse examined this 'iconographic anomaly', offering an explanation which shed new light on the Alexander of the La Manta cycle and his role in the iconographic programme of the Sala itself.<sup>59</sup>

According to a tradition first reported by Valerano's descendant Valerio Saluzzo della Manta in 1587, the person who commissioned the cycle and his wife are depicted opposite each other, at either side of the procession: so, portrayed under the garments of Hector is Valerano il Burdo, while his wife Clemenza Provana di Pancalieri is represented as Penthesilea.<sup>60</sup> These identifications, which are supported by several iconographic elements,<sup>61</sup> have been generally accepted. The presence in the Sala Baronale of these two portraits, moreover, has led scholars to speculate that each of the eighteen painted figures is to be identified with a member of the Saluzzo family: the nine most important rulers of the Marquisate are depicted as Worthies, from Valerano-Hector to Manfred I-Godfrey of Bouillon,<sup>62</sup> while their wives are represented as the nine Lady Worthies. Following this principle, Alexander, who is standing next to Hector, represents Valerano's father, Thomas III. The idea that the Sala Baronale is a room of portraits in disguise has quickly

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<sup>59</sup> D. Arasse, 'Portrait, mémoire familiale et liturgie dynastique: Valerano-Hector au château de Manta', in *Il ritratto e la memoria. Materiali 1*, ed. A. Gentili, Rome 1989, pp. 93-112, esp. p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> See Valerio Saluzzo de Signori della Manta, *Libro delle formali caccie* (Turin, Biblioteca Reale, MS Miscell. Saluzzo 657): 'Non voglio tacere come nel primo personaggio dei nove [sic] prodi posto in capo la parte qual confina al camino ci è dipinta sotto il titolo di Ettore Troiano la effigie di Valerano primo Sig.re della Manta... et all'altro capo verso la faccia della entrata ci è posta la Regina Pantasilea..., la cui effigie fu protratta alla sembianza della Sig.ra Clementia Provana figliuola del Conte di Pancalieri moglie allo istesso Valerano.' The passage, which is part of an accurate description of the frescoes in the Sala Baronale, has been published by A. Griseri, *Jaquerio e il realismo gotico in Piemonte*, Turin 1965, pp. 150-4, from which my quotation is taken (at pp. 151-2). The figure of Clemenza-Penthesilea is only partially preserved: the entire upper part of her body, including her face, has long been lost. On the portrait of Valerano-Hector and its execution, see the important, and unjustifiably overlooked, account of the 1989-91 restoration campaign: P. Brambilla Barcilon, 'Note sul restauro degli affreschi nella Sala Baronale', in *La Sala Baronale del Castello della Manta*, ed. G. Romano, Milan 1992, pp. 81-105, at pp. 86-9.

<sup>61</sup> Valerano's personal motto *leit*, which appears throughout the walls and ceiling of the Sala Baronale (as well as in several rooms of the castle), is painted on the dresses of both Hector and Penthesilea. Moreover, Penthesilea holds the glimmering golden collar of the Order of the Broomclod which had been bestowed on Valerano and his wife by the French king Charles VI in 1411. See Arasse, 'Portrait, mémoire familiale', p. 95; more recently, see R. Silva, *Gli affreschi del Castello della Manta: allegoria e teatro*, Milan 2011, pp. 12-13.

<sup>62</sup> Manfred I del Vasto (1123?-1175) was the first ruler of the Saluzzo Marquisate.

become a sort of scholarly commonplace; but even though it is certainly not to be rejected out of hand, it remains essentially speculative and particularly problematic with regard to the earlier ancestors, since there are no comparative portrait to back up such identifications.<sup>63</sup>

In his study Arasse has shown how these frescoes were intended to depict a 'galerie dynastique mythique';<sup>64</sup> in other words, on the walls of the most representative room of his own castle, the illegitimate Valerano placed himself among the idealised portraits of the Saluzzo lineage, becoming part of the noble family by virtue of his lawful, though temporary, position as ruler of the Marquisate. More importantly for our purposes, Arasse argued that the unusual – and, as far as I am aware, unprecedented – floating globe above Alexander's hand could be explained in the light of the traditional identification of Thomas III with Alexander. Gazing into each other's eyes, Hector and Alexander are the only figures among the Worthies who address one another with significant gestures: Alexander points his right forefinger towards Hector, in a gesture of offering, to which Hector replies by raising his right hand in a gesture of acceptance, while laying his other hand on the tree on which Alexander's coat of arms hangs. In Arasse's view, this mute dialogue has at its centre the globe of power, which is floating from Alexander to Hector in a sort of *translatio imperii* taking place before our eyes. Such an unusual scene, Arasse continues, makes perfectly sense if we think of it as an allusion to the investiture which did, in fact, take place in 1416 at the Saluzzo court, when Thomas III entrusted Valerano with sovereignty over the marquisate.<sup>65</sup> There is good reason to conclude, therefore, that, just as Valerano is represented as Hector, so Alexander stands for Thomas III. Indeed, the globe itself, otherwise inexplicably floating in the air, is the key iconographic element supporting this identification. In the light of this, it might also be added that Alexander's beard can be seen as a means of representing the older Thomas in comparison to the younger and beardless Valerano.

It has long been established that the entire decoration of the Sala Baronale is meant as an homage to Thomas III, inspired by the allegorical poem *Le Chevalier*

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<sup>63</sup> The first who suggested to identify the *Preux* and *Preuses* with the Saluzzos seems to have been Luigi Botta (*Il castello della Manta*, Turin [1987?], p. 6). The list, which is often alluded to without any reference to its source, has been latest reported by Silva, *Gli affreschi del Castello della Manta*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Arasse, 'Portrait, mémoire familiale', p. 95.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-101.

*Errant*, which he wrote – or at least began – while in Paris between 1403 and 1405.<sup>66</sup> The encounter of the wandering knight of the title with the Nine *Preux* and *Preuses* in the ‘palais aux esleuz’ is one of the longest and most elaborate episodes of the final part of the poem. In the Paris manuscript which preserves Thomas’s work, two half-page miniatures show the groups of *Preux* and *Preuses*, fully armoured and displaying their coats of arms (f. 125r-v) (**fig. 49**).<sup>67</sup> Although the eighteen figures depicted in the Sala and those in the manuscript belong to the same context, Marco Piccat has definitively disproved the assumption that the frescoes were a mere transposition onto wall of the Paris miniatures;<sup>68</sup> apart from a number of iconographic details which are exactly alike (e.g., Joshua’s backward position or the coats of arms of the *Preuses*), the two series differ greatly from one another.<sup>69</sup>

Alexander is very much a case in point. In the Sala Baronale, as we have seen, Alexander stands in the second position, between Hector and Julius Caesar; he is brown-haired and bearded, with a sword, crown and globe. In the Paris manuscript, Alexander is represented as an old man, with a white beard, dressed in armour and wearing a crown; he holds a banner and a large shield depicting a rampant lion with an axe in its paws. Also, as the name written underneath him tells

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<sup>66</sup> On the much discussed circumstances which led to the composition of the poem, see now M. Piccat, ‘Tommaso III, Marchese errante: l’autobiografia cavalleresca di un Saluzzo’, in Tommaso III di Saluzzo, *Il Libro del Cavaliere Errante (BnF ms. fr. 12559)*, ed. M. Piccat, Cuneo 2008, pp. 5-26, at p. 13. The connection between *Le Chevalier Errant* and the frescoes was already mentioned by the first scholar to draw attention to the La Manta cycle, Julius von Schlosser; see his ‘Ein veronesisches Bilderbuch und die höfische Kunst des XIV. Jahrhunderts’, *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen der Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 16, 1895, pp. 144-230, at pp. 177-8. For other literary sources which inspired the representation of the Fountain of Youth on the opposite wall of the Sala Baronale, see Meneghetti, ‘Il manoscritto fr. 146’, esp. pp. 526-8.

<sup>67</sup> The poem *Le Chevalier Errant* is preserved in only two manuscripts, both illuminated in France and now in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS fr. 12559) and Turin (Biblioteca Nazionale, MS L.V.6). The scholarly literature is mainly based on the Paris copy, which is the more complete and lavishly decorated of the two. The Turin manuscript was seriously damaged by fire in 1904 and, as far as its fragmentary state allows us to say, did not include any illuminated picture of *Preux* and *Preuses*: see *Giacomo Jaquiero e il gotico internazionale* (exhibition catalogue, Turin, Palazzo Madama, 1979), ed. E. Castelnuovo and G. Romano, Turin 1979, pp. 212-15 (A. Quazza).

<sup>68</sup> M. Piccat, ‘Le scritte in volgare dei Prodi e delle Eroine della sala affrescata nel castello di La Manta’, *Studi piemontesi*, 20, 1991, pp. 141-66, at pp. 142-3 and 165. The assumption disproved by Piccat was essentially based on a superficial interpretation of the ‘analogia strettissima’ which Paolo D’Ancona, ‘Gli affreschi del Castello di Manta’, p. 191, had seen between the miniatures and frescoes.

<sup>69</sup> Given that the iconography of the *Preuses* was less well-established than that of the *Preux* and that there were fewer representations in early fifteenth-century European art, it seems plausible to me that the miniature depicting the Ladies at f. 125v might have provided the Master of La Manta with a point of reference where it was most needed (e.g., in the coats of arms mentioned above).



us, Alexander occupies the third position, instead of the second, in the Heathen triad, coming after Hector and Julius Caesar. This unusual disposition has been noted in the literature, but no one has as yet produced a convincing explanation for it.<sup>70</sup> As mentioned above, representations of Alexander as a venerable old man are not an exception in the fifteenth century; in my view, however, Alexander's appearance in the Paris codex mirrors the way he is presented in the text of the poem. In *Le Chevalier Errant* Alexander is no longer the proud conqueror of the world: his deeds and marvellous adventures are praised, but they are dismissed by Alexander himself and recounted as triumphs belonging to the past. Despite the deference he inspires and the significant position he holds in the poem,<sup>71</sup> Alexander comes across as a sickly and extremely weak man. In accordance with a large part of the medieval tradition concerning the circumstances of Alexander's death,<sup>72</sup> *Le Chevalier Errant* presents him as betrayed and poisoned by his general Antipater. Even though the illuminations in the Paris manuscript are not *verbatim* illustrations of the text, I think that this aged Alexander among the Worthies may have been intended to reflect the Alexander portrayed by Thomas III in his poem. It seems significant that a number of fifteenth-century representations of Alexander wearing a long beard are found in illustrations of his death. In addition to the French miniature mentioned by Benedetti to which I referred earlier,<sup>73</sup> another example is an illuminated page from the Bible of Borso d'Este. Alexander is the only figure of classical antiquity to be mentioned in the Bible and therefore to have a place in Judaeo-Christian history: an account of his conquests appears at the beginning of the first book of Maccabees (I.1-7), from the destruction of the Persian

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<sup>70</sup> The figure of Julius Caesar as presented in *Le Chevalier Errant* has recently been studied by Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, 'Entre la France et l'Italie: Jules César chez Thomas III de Saluces et Eustache Deschamps', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 14, 2007, pp. 191-205. Although Mühlethaler discusses both the La Manta frescoes and the Paris manuscript, he does not provide an explanation for the unusual placement of Julius Caesar in the central position of the heathen triad.

<sup>71</sup> See M. Piccat, 'Alessandro: il ritorno di un mito', in *Immagini e miti nello Chevalier Errant di Tommaso III di Saluzzo*, ed. R Comba and M. Piccat, Cuneo 2008, pp. 87-114, at pp. 88-90.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 1, n. 58 above.

<sup>73</sup> See Benedetti, 'Codice, allocuzione e volti', pp. 49-50 and fig. 16. The *en-grisaille* miniature decorates an early fifteenth-century copy of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à Pompée* (Bibliothèque de Genève, MS fr. 72, f. 142v). It shows the body of an aged Alexander being reduced to ashes before his subjects (among whom is a queen, presumably Alexander's spouse); Benedetti labelled the picture 'Alessandro muore vecchio'. For this manuscript, see *L'enluminure de Charlemagne à François I<sup>er</sup>: Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève* (exhibition catalogue, Geneva, Musée Rath, 1976), Geneva 1976, p. 93.

Empire to his death and the partition of his kingdom among his successors.<sup>74</sup> In the Borso Bible, the lower register of the opening page of Maccabees shows Alexander summoning his generals to his deathbed and dividing his empire among them. Although the accompanying text states that the Diadochi are the same age as Alexander, they are depicted as young courtiers, while Alexander is portrayed as an aged king (**figs 50 and 51**).<sup>75</sup>

In the Sala Baronale, as was customary in representations of the Nine Worthies, Alexander is accompanied by a *titulus* summing up his life and deeds. The verses, written in an Italianised French, have been published several times.<sup>76</sup> As recently emended by Marco Piccat, the *titulus* reads as follows:<sup>77</sup>

J'ay co[n]quis por ma force les illes d'outra mer;  
d'orient jusques a occident fu-ge ja sire apelés;  
j'ay tué roy Daire li Persian, Porus li Endia[n], Nicole l'armirés;  
la grant Babiloina fi-ge ver moy encliner;  
e fuy sire du monde, puis fui enarbrés:  
ce fut III.<sup>c</sup> ans devant que Diu fut nee.  
Alisandre.

In these verses Alexander presents himself as the king of the world, conqueror of both East and West, victor over his enemies and lord of Babylon. The passage in which he declares: 'e fuy sire du monde, puis fui enarbrés' is, however, problematic. The meaning of the word 'enarbrés' – or, perhaps, 'en-arbrés' – remains obscure, as

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<sup>74</sup> According to St Jerome's commentary, Alexander's kingdom had been predicted by the prophet Daniel ('Commentaria in Daniele', in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, XXV, cols 529-30, 535-6, 557-8). The account in Maccabees and the prophecies of Daniel as interpreted by Jerome are the basis for the theological conception of Alexander throughout the Middle Ages; see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 118-25.

<sup>75</sup> In the commentary accompanying the facsimile edition of the Borso Bible, the Alexander depicted in this miniature is mistakenly identified as Alexander Balas Epiphanes, the alleged son of Antiochus IV, whose life is recounted further on in Maccabees: see F. Toniolo, 'Descrizione delle miniature del secondo volume della Bibbia', in *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este: commentario al codice*, 2 vols, Modena 1997, II, pp. 499-573, at p. 530. There is no question, however, that the Alexander mentioned in the beginning of Maccabees is Alexander the Great.

<sup>76</sup> The first transcription of the verses was published by D'Ancona, 'Gli affreschi del Castello di Manta', pp. 195-8.

<sup>77</sup> Piccat, 'Le scritte in volgare', p. 143.

it is unexampled elsewhere in medieval French. Several interpretations have been offered, but none is entirely convincing.<sup>78</sup> It is worth noting that all the *tituli* in the Sala Baronale – in line with the customary tradition for this theme – clearly mention the death of the *Preux* or *Preuses* to which they refer; and it is highly improbable that Alexander would have been an exception to this rule. Therefore, it seems very likely that ‘enarbrés’, whatever it might mean, somehow alludes to the death of Alexander.

In the third verse, Alexander is said to have killed Darius, Porus and a ‘Nicole l’armirés’, who I believe can be identified as King Nicholas of Armenia, also known as Nicholas of Caesarea (present-day Kayseri, in Cappadocia), after the city where he took refuge from the advancing Alexander. The single combat in which Nicholas was defeated and eventually beheaded is not recorded in any of the ancient historical sources, but appears instead in some medieval versions of the *Romance* (for instance, the French decasyllabic text preserved in MS Correr 1493, where the story is also illustrated by three pictures).<sup>79</sup> This proves that the Alexander *titulus* at La Manta depends on the *Romance* and therefore on the legendary tradition. In addition, in the same verse Darius of Persia and the Indian king Porus are said to have been killed by Alexander – an event which is mentioned only in the *Romance* and is in conflict with the historical tradition, where Alexander shows mercy towards Darius (who is betrayed and killed by his own kinsmen) and Porus (who is wounded and defeated, but not killed by Alexander).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dunlop (*Painted Palaces*, p. 259) has recently suggested ‘then [I was] in Araby’, alluding to his planned conquest of the Arabian peninsula; while Piccat (‘Le scritte in volgare’, p. 154) has proposed translating ‘enarbrés’ as ‘elevated’, referring to Alexander’s Flight with griffins. Neither of these translations, however, seems appropriate.

<sup>79</sup> See the facsimile reproduction of the pages in *Le Roman d’Alexandre*, f. 8r-v.

<sup>80</sup> The death of Porus at the hands of Alexander is reported in the Pseudo-Callisthenes III.4 and was transmitted to its derivatives. More problematic is the reference to the murder of Darius, which is ascribed to Alexander far less frequently and is likely to have developed ‘out of the tradition of a single combat between Darius and Alexander’, as suggested by P. Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, Cambridge MA and London 2015, p. 395. The episode is recounted, e.g., in Hartlieb’s German version of the *Romance* of about 1444 (for a picture from an illuminated manuscript in Munich, see E. Gossart, *Johann Hartliebs ‘Histori von dem grossen Alexander’: zur Rezeption des Werkes am Beispiel der bebilderten Handschriften und Inkunabeln*, Korb 2010, pl. 16). On the theme, see F. Pfister, ‘Dareios von Alexander getötet’, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 101, 1958, pp. 97-104.

#### 2.4.4. The 'Cavalcavia' with the Worthies of Palazzo Trinci

Ugolino Trinci was lord of Foligno (near Perugia in Umbria) from 1386 until his death in 1415. Nearly twenty years of his reign were taken up with the major building works he commissioned in order to transform the sprawling houses and shops beside the city cathedral into the imposing Palazzo Trinci. Ugolino's 'domi novae' were completed in 1407, and their fresco decoration was undertaken shortly afterwards.<sup>81</sup> One of the first spaces to be painted was the newly built corridor connecting the second floor of Palazzo Trinci to the Palazzo delle Canoniche adjacent to the cathedral, where the Trinci had been living since 1379.<sup>82</sup> The 'ponte sopra la strata de Sancto Iacomo', as it was referred to in the documents,<sup>83</sup> is a covered, roughly L-shaped passage, which was decorated sometime between 1407 and 1410. On the left wall a local artist depicted *en-grisaille* the Seven Ages of Man, a theme which appears twice more in the palace.<sup>84</sup> Ugolino's change of plans with regard to the decoration of the palace and his commissioning of Gentile da Fabriano in 1411 to paint the 'monumental quarter' on the second floor (that is, the Sala Imperatorum, the Room of the Arts and Planets and the loggia with the story of Romulus and Remus) also resulted in a decisive alteration to the decorative scheme of the corridor.<sup>85</sup> Around 1411-12 the frescoes with the Seven Ages of Man were whitewashed and replaced by a series of eleven life-size figures, standing in a

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<sup>81</sup> The phrase 'ante domos novas magnifici domini Ugolini de Trinciis de Fulgineo etc., positas in civitate Fulginei' appears in a document dated 23 February 1411: see C. Cardinali and S. Felicetti, 'La fabbrica del palazzo: testimonianze archivistiche (secc. XV-XIX)', in *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno*, ed. G. Benazzi and F. F. Mancini, Perugia 2001, pp. 647-94, at p. 651, doc. 3. The dates of beginning and end of the works (1389-1407) can be inferred from the epigram inscribed on an ancient relief once attached to the wall at the entrance of the palace: see L. Sensi, 'Priscorum hic poteris venerandos cernere vultus', in *Nuovi studi sulla pittura tardogotica: Palazzo Trinci*, ed. A. Caleca and B. Toscano, Livorno 2009, pp. 95-106, at pp. 96-7.

<sup>82</sup> See S. Nessi, *I Trinci: signori di Foligno*, Foligno 2006, pp. 75-6.

<sup>83</sup> See Cardinali and Felicetti, 'La fabbrica del palazzo', p. 654, doc. 14.

<sup>84</sup> For the original decoration of the corridor and an overview of its problematic attribution, see G. Benazzi, 'I cicli pittorici del tempo di Ugolino e Corrado Trinci', in *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno*, ed. G. Benazzi and F. F. Mancini, Perugia 2001, pp. 459-94, at pp. 469-71.

<sup>85</sup> On 27 August 1411 and 12 January 1412, Gentile da Fabriano 'rilascia quietanza al M(agnifico) D(omino) Ugolino de Trinciis di 225 fiorini d'oro per quasdam picturas' completed with the assistance of his workshop in the Sala Imperatorum, the Rooms of the Arts and Planets and the loggia. The documents are known only through a partial transcription in the so-called *Taccuino Coltellini*, a manuscript of 1780 discovered in 2000 by Laura Lametti in a private archive; see L. Lametti, 'Il manoscritto intitolato *Appunti sopra la città di Fuligno: scritti da Ludovico Coltellini accademico fulginio: parte nona: 1770-1780*', in *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno*, ed. G. Benazzi and F. F. Mancini, Perugia 2001, pp. 427-45, esp. p. 428.

painted architectural frame representing a pointed-arch loggia.<sup>86</sup> Many of the figures are only partially preserved: over time portions of paint have fallen off, incidentally revealing large fragments of the Seven Ages underneath. Nevertheless, the eleven figures are still identifiable, thanks to either their inscriptions or the coats of arms on their shields. The series begins with two figures from Roman history, Romulus and Scipio Africanus,<sup>87</sup> and continues with the Nine Worthies, presented in the unusual order of Jews, Heathens and Christians.

The pagan triad, no doubt, began with Hector, who is entirely lost, and continued with Julius Caesar, very little of whom survives, apart from the shield bearing his distinctive crowned eagle. After Julius Caesar comes Alexander, shown as a young knight, holding a shield and a pike and wearing a crown identical to those of the other kings depicted in the corridor (**fig. 52**). As in the miniature of *Le Chevalier Errant*, the Palazzo Trinci Alexander occupies the third position, instead of the second, in the pagan triad. A possible explanation for this unusual disposition is that to anyone entering the corridor and walking from the new palace to the old one, Alexander would appear to be placed in a prominent position (**fig. 53**). On the wall directly opposite the entrance, only three Worthies are immediately visible: Julius Caesar, Arthur and, in between them, Alexander.

It has been pointed out that the iconographic programme of Palazzo Trinci seems to be reflected, if not described, in the poem *Legenda di San Feliciano*.<sup>88</sup> Written by Pier Angelo Bucciolini at the court of Ugolino, the poem is a panegyric of the Trinci family. Praising Ugolino's virtues in octave CLXIX, Bucciolini portrays him as a disciple of the Liberal Arts ('vestise delle septe liberali'), surpassing the Roman emperors in his magnanimity ('Cesari avança per magnanimitade') and outdoing Alexander in his royalty: 'passò Alesandro de realetade'.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> After they were whitewashed in their original location on the left wall, the Seven Ages of Man were replicated with some changes onto the opposite wall at the right hand side of the corridor, where they can still be seen.

<sup>87</sup> The figure with the inscription 'Sipio' has been identified by Mario Salmi ('Gli affreschi del Palazzo Trinci a Foligno', *Bollettino d'Arte*, 13, 1919, pp. 139-80, at p. 155 and n. 2) as Scipio Nasica. I agree with Cristina Galassi ('Un signore e il suo palazzo: iconografia, cronologia e committenza dei cicli pittorici nelle "case nuove" di Ugolino Trinci', in *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno*, ed. G. Benazzi and F. F. Mancini, Perugia 2001, pp. 269-98, at pp. 289-9), who argues persuasively that he is instead Scipio Africanus.

<sup>88</sup> See e.g. Galassi, 'Un signore e il suo palazzo', p. 271.

<sup>89</sup> Pier Angelo Bucciolini, *Legenda di San Feliciano*, ed. S. Nessi, Foligno 2003, p. 69. On Bucciolino, see the entry by M. Pieri in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XIV, Rome 1972, pp. 783-4.

The unprecedented juxtaposition of Romulus and Scipio, both allegedly connected to the origin of the Trinci family and the city of Foligno,<sup>90</sup> with the Nine Worthies is the most notable aspect of the frescoes in the Trinci corridor. It is important to bear in mind that the redecoration of the corridor in 1411-12 was part of the overall iconographic programme for the palace commissioned by Ugolino. The series of Nine Worthies and two Roman figures was clearly intended to be read in connection with the nearby Sala Imperatorum, where a selection of twenty *Uomini famosi* drawn from Roman history (five of whom are not preserved) was set into a painted loggia which recalls the one framing the heroes in the corridor. Of the rooms painted by Gentile da Fabriano and his workshop in Palazzo Trinci, the Sala Imperatorum was the most highly praised and was inspired by the Sala Virorum Illustrium, painted in the Reggia Carrarese in Padua in the 1370s and based on Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*.<sup>91</sup>

In Palazzo Trinci, Romulus and Scipio Africanus were depicted both in the corridor and in the Sala Imperatorum;<sup>92</sup> they therefore create a visual *continuum* between the old Worthies of the chivalric tradition and the new *Uomini Famosi* of the humanist canon.<sup>93</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the poem *Il Quadriregio*, written around 1400 by Federico Frezzi, the most influential man of letters at the court of Ugolino, Roman emperors and heroes of the Republic are presented alongside Hercules, Hector, Alexander, Arthur and Godfrey of Bouillon. All of them appear to the author in a vision 'de' Magnanimi, e Valentissimi, ne' quali risplendette la Virtù della Fortezza' (IV.7).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> This connection, based on a passage of *Il Quadriregio* by Federico Frezzi and a local tradition reported by Ludovico Jacobilli, is discussed by Galassi, 'Un signore e il suo palazzo', pp. 289-90.

<sup>91</sup> On the Sala of the Reggia Carrarese (now Sala dei Giganti), see Chapter 4 (4.2.2.3) below.

<sup>92</sup> Romulus is one of the five gigantic figures now lost, but his presence is documented by the epigrams of Francesco da Fiano once accompanying the heroes: see R. Guerrini, "Uomini di pace e di guerra che l'aurea Roma generò": fonti antiche e tradizione classica negli epigrammi di Francesco da Fiano per la Sala degli Imperatori (*Anthologia Latina*, Riese, 1906, 831-855<sup>d</sup>), in *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno*, ed. G. Benazzi and F. F. Mancini, Perugia 2001, pp. 375-400, at p. 376. On Francesco da Fiano, see the entry by F. Bacchelli in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XLIX, Rome 1997, pp. 747-50.

<sup>93</sup> This connection has been repeatedly stressed by Cristina Galassi ('Un signore e il suo palazzo', pp. 289-90), who definitely disproved Salmi's dismissal of Romulus and Scipio as heroes 'messi, io credo, a completare le pareti del corridoio' (Salmi, 'Gli affreschi del Palazzo Trinci', p. 158).

<sup>94</sup> Federico Frezzi, *Il Quadriregio o poema de' Quattro Regni*, 2 vols, Foligno 1725. For the chapter referred to, see I, pp. 282-7. On Frezzi, see S. Foà's entry in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, L, Rome 1998, pp. 520-3.

The continuity between the series of frescoes in the corridor and those in the Sala Imperatorum was so evident that in 1646 the historian Ludovico Jacobilli, when describing Palazzo Trinci in his *Discorso sopra la città di Foligno*, listed twenty-nine figures: the twenty gigantic heroes in the Sala Imperatorum and the Nine Worthies in the corridor. He clearly considered the two series to be intertwined; and since Romulus and Scipio Africanus were mentioned as part of the decoration of the Sala Imperatorum, he did not refer to the paintings of them in the corridor.<sup>95</sup>

To sum up: the legendary tradition derived from the *Romance* persisted in a limited number of Italian art works of the fifteenth century. Although very different in nature, all of them adhere to the medieval imagery of Alexander, either by illustrating his marvellous adventures ('The Flight with Griffins' in the Curtius Rufus manuscript; the 'Submarine Voyage' in the Louvre drawing), or by alluding to his mysterious birth, half divine and half magic, as recounted in the *Romance* (in the Sola-Busca tarot deck) or by presenting Alexander in a way which clearly reflects the *Romance* (in the four cycles of Nine Worthies). Yet hints of the dramatic change in Alexander iconography which I shall examine in the following chapters can be detected in some of these artworks: the text which the Madrid 'Flight with Griffins' illustrates is the newly recovered Curtius Rufus; and the 'Submarine Voyage' in the Louvre sheet reveals an interest in the technical aspects of the episode which is not found in previous representations of the theme. The lack of significant novelty in the 'Alexander group' of tarot cards in the Sola-Busca deck can be explained by the fact that, despite the refined quality and possibly prestigious commission of the deck (as indicated by the inclusion of an 'Alexander group'), tarot cards tended to stick to the standardised repertoire of forms and subjects which were long established in the tradition.

The most significant of the artworks discussed in this chapter are the four cycles of Nine Worthies. They were all commissioned to occupy important spaces, often the main hall, of castles and palaces; and, as part of major decorative projects, they were clearly charged with much larger aims and purposes than the other pieces. That they were steeped in the legendary tradition is proved by the way in which figures from myth and story are juxtaposed – a feature which is particularly evident in the Castel Roncolo cycle. Solid references explicitly linking the images of

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<sup>95</sup> Jacobilli's list is reported by M. Faloci Pulignani, *Le arti e le lettere alla corte dei Trinci: ricerche storiche*, Foligno 1888, p. 19.

Alexander to the *Romance* are found only at La Manta, where episodes from it, as we have seen, are mentioned in the *titulus*. The new attitude towards Alexander, and more generally towards the past, which emerged in the fifteenth century can be seen in the presentation of him among Heathens: no longer assimilated to, and therefore confused with, a Christian hero, he is restored to his rightful place in the pagan era *ante legem*. In the Manta cycle, he is even located accurately in time, as the *titulus* ends by saying that he lived ‘three hundred years before Christ was born’ (‘ce fut III.<sup>e</sup> ans devant que Diu fut nee’). In the Palazzo Trinci frescoes there is a further step forward: the introduction of Roman figures, a characteristic feature of the humanist cycles of *Uomini famosi*, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. Before that, however, it is necessary to examine the crucial stage in the transition from legend to history: the humanist recovery of ancient historical texts about Alexander, which is the subject of the next chapter.



## Chapter 3

### The Humanist Recovery of Ancient Historical Sources and Its Impact on the Myth of Alexander

Starting in the early fifteenth century, the humanist recovery of ancient sources radically changed the received view of Alexander and was a decisive turning point in the tradition. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the conception of Alexander in the Middle Ages was almost entirely based on the *Alexander Romance*, a body of texts deriving from the Pseudo-Callisthenes. These previously unavailable or neglected ancient sources, in which Alexander was portrayed neither as the son of the magician Nectanebo nor as a miraculous adventurer who had travelled up to the heavens and down to the bottom of the sea, produced an entirely new image of him. This new historical portrait of Alexander gradually eclipsed the medieval legendary tradition, which was initially questioned and criticised, before falling into oblivion, so that no significant trace of it can be detected in Italy after the end of the fifteenth century.

Among the sources on Alexander which came to light in the Quattrocento were the four main ancient accounts of his life. Written either in Greek or Latin between the first century BC and the second century AD, they circulated in the fifteenth century in Latin or vernacular translation and later on made their way into print. These sources are: Book XVII of the *Bibliotheca Historica* by Diodorus Siculus (in Greek, first century BC); the *Historiae Alexandri Magni Macedonis* by Quintus Curtius Rufus (in Latin, early first century AD); the *Life of Alexander* by Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives* (in Greek, early second century AD) and the *Anabasis* by Arrian (in Greek, mid-second century AD). To these works, a fifth source should be added, as it is often referred to by humanists in conjunction with Curtius Rufus: Books XI and XII of Justin's *Epitoma* of the lost *Historiae Philippicae* by Pompeius Trogus (in Latin, third century AD).

Other references to Alexander are, of course, scattered throughout the ancient Greek and Latin literature known to humanists (for instance, in the works of Valerius Maximus, Pliny the Elder, Quintilian, Strabo). These are mainly presented in the form of anecdotes and exemplary moral episodes, framed within works which are not about Alexander. Such references did not affect the overall image of Alexander which emerged in the Renaissance, but they did contribute some significant details.

### 3.1. Recovery of Ancient Sources

#### 3.1.1. *Plutarch's Life of Alexander*

The *Life of Alexander* was the first of the ancient accounts on Alexander to become available in fifteenth-century Italy. Written by Plutarch of Chaeronea (before 50-after 120 AD) as part of the *Parallel Lives*, the *Life of Alexander* is paired with that of Julius Caesar; however, the *synkrisis*, or *comparatio*, which usually concludes each pair of lives, is missing.<sup>1</sup> The *Life of Alexander* was translated from Greek into Latin by Guarino of Verona (1374-1460) before 1408, during his stay in Constantinople.<sup>2</sup> Guarino's version had a wide circulation in the first half of the century and was included in the *editio princeps* of the *Lives*, edited by Giovanni Antonio Campano and printed in Rome by Ulrich Han in 1470.<sup>3</sup> An Italian translation of the entire *corpus* of the *Lives* was printed in Rieti in 1482, and the original Greek text appeared in Florence in 1517.<sup>4</sup> In addition, several compendia of the *Lives* were compiled during the fifteenth century; these were mainly intended, however, for personal use and had no claim to completeness.<sup>5</sup> An epitome of the

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<sup>1</sup> On Plutarch's life and work, see K. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia*, Stuttgart 1964; see also T. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford 1999, and T. Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 239-81.

<sup>2</sup> The *Life of Caesar* was also translated by Guarino around 1411-13. On the tradition of Plutarch in the fifteenth century, see M. Pade, *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2 vols, Copenhagen 2007 (on Guarino's translation of the *Lives of Alexander and Caesar*, see I, pp. 172-7; and II, pp. 133-5, for a list of relevant manuscripts). See also V. R. Giustiniani, 'Sulle traduzioni latine delle "Vite" di Plutarco nel Quattrocento', *Rinascimento*, 1, 1961, pp. 3-62, and Resta, *Le epitomi di Plutarco*. Useful remarks are in M. Manfredini, 'Codici plutarchei di umanisti italiani', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, 17, 1987, pp. 1001-43. An Aragonese translation of 39 of the 46 Plutarch's *Lives*, including that of Alexander, was made in Avignon around 1387-8; this version was the first translation of the *Lives* to appear in the Latin West and, despite its limited circulation, was instrumental in rousing the interest of Coluccio Salutati – and of other humanists – in the work of Plutarch. See Pade, *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives*, I, pp. 76-87; R. Weiss, 'Lo studio di Plutarco nel Trecento', *La parola del passato*, 32, 1953, pp. 321-42; and G. Di Stefano, *La découverte de Plutarque en Occident: aspects de la vie intellectuelle en Avignon au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Turin 1968. For a broader and still useful overview, see N. Criniti, 'Per una storia del plutarchismo occidentale', *Nuova rivista storica*, 63, 1979, pp. 187-203. On Guarino, see G. Pistilli, 'Guarini, Guarino', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LX, Rome 2003, pp. 357-69.

<sup>3</sup> No modern edition of Guarino's translation of the *Life of Alexander* has been provided as yet. The text can be read in the *editio princeps* of the *Lives*, which I have consulted in the copy now at the British Library ([Plutarch, *Vitae illustrium virorum*], ed. G. A. Campano, 2 vols, Rome 1470). The *Life of Alexander* is in vol. II, ff. 374r-393v, followed by the *Life of Caesar*. The Campano edition was reprinted several times in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: see Giustiniani, 'Sulle traduzioni latine', pp. 10-47.

<sup>4</sup> See Resta, *Le epitomi di Plutarco*, p. 92, n. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-22.

Latin version of all the *Lives* was produced by the humanist Dario Tiberti of Cesena in 1492 and enjoyed considerable success until the early nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Plutarch provides a vivid portrait of Alexander, from his birth to the immediate aftermath of his death. He depicts Alexander as an exceptionally gifted man, whose actions are driven by great passions, which can be noble and generous as well as cruel and vengeful. As we shall see, the literary and iconographical impact of Plutarch on the Renaissance image of Alexander was huge. The reason for this success probably lies in the nature of the *Lives*: the *Life of Alexander*, rather than presenting the reader with an accurate and linear succession of events, consists of selected, often minor, episodes which offer an insight into his personality and character.<sup>7</sup> It is these episodes which influenced the literature and the art of the Renaissance.

In addition to the *Life*, Plutarch devoted an *opusculum* from the *Moralia* to Alexander, *De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute*, which also circulated among humanists. It was first translated into Latin between 1405 and 1409 by Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia (c. 1360-1411) and again around 1449 by Niccolò Perotti.<sup>8</sup> This *opusculum* also contributed to the humanist conception of Alexander, since it was considered to be a supplement to the *Life* and was often transmitted together with it.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 76-100 and 109-22. The ambitious project of epitomising Plutarch's *Lives* was first conceived by Pier Candido Decembrio, whose work, probably begun around 1437, was never completed. It survives in three manuscripts, two of them beautifully illuminated, but without the *Life of Alexander*. See *ibid.*, pp. 23-75, and Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 82. On one of the three manuscripts, now in Verona, see L. Locatelli, *Gli uomini illustri di Plutarco nelle miniature del compendio di Pier Candido Decembrio: codice CCXXXIX della Biblioteca Capitolare di Verona*, Verona 2003. Tiberti's epitome was printed several times in the sixteenth century (*editio princeps*: Ferrara 1501) and was also translated into Italian (Venice 1543) and French (Paris 1558). See Resta, *Le epitomi di Plutarco*, pp. 92-100.

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *Alexander* I.2-3: 'it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue and vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities ... So I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests.' On this passage, see Hägg, *The Art of Biography*, pp. 268-72; see also, in general, F. Muccioli, *La storia attraverso gli esempi: protagonisti e interpretazioni del mondo greco in Plutarco*, Milan and Udine 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See Pade, *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives*, I, p. 114. On Jacopo Angeli, see P. Falzone's entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LXII, Rome 2004, pp. 28-35; on his work as a translator, see F. Stok, 'Le traduzioni di Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia', in *Plutarco nelle traduzioni latine di età umanistica*, ed. P. Volpe Cacciatore, Naples 2009, pp. 147-87. On the translation of the *Moralia*, which were partially known in the Middle Ages, see F. Becchi, 'Le traduzioni latine dei *Moralia* di Plutarco tra XIII e XVI secolo', in *ibid.*, pp. 9-52. On Perotti's translation, see A. D'Angelo, 'N. Perotti traduttore di Plutarco: il "de Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute"', *Studi umanistici piceni*, 14, 1994, pp. 39-47.

### 3.1.2. Arrian's *Anabasis*

A local governor and administrator, as well as a trusted friend of the Emperor Hadrian, Arrian of Nicomedia (c. 85/90-175 AD) wrote the *Anabasis Alexandri*, with the intention, as he clearly states at the beginning of the work, to give a reliable account of Alexander's military expedition. Among the many and contradictory traditions concerning Alexander, Arrian writes, he has relied exclusively on the most trustworthy and credible sources – the accounts of the eyewitnesses Ptolemy and Aristobulus.<sup>9</sup> Other events, or different versions of the same events, reported by various authors, are also referred to by Arrian, but only as 'tales told of Alexander' (*legomena*).<sup>10</sup> From the fifteenth century, when the text was recovered by humanists, the *Anabasis* was considered, as it is still today, the most important and reliable account of Alexander's career. The focus, from Alexander's accession to the throne of Macedon to his death thirteenth years later, is always on his military expedition and related matters. Unlike other authors such as Curtius Rufus, Arrian does not show any interest in the wider context of the campaign against the Persian Empire.

As an appendix to the seven books of the *Anabasis*, Arrian also wrote a shorter composition entitled *Indike*.<sup>11</sup> It consists of a geo-ethnographic description of India, which is presented as a digression from an account of the journey of Alexander's fleet from the Indus to the Persian Gulf. The majority of the surviving manuscripts of the *Anabasis* also contain the *Indike*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Both Ptolemy and Aristobulus followed Alexander in his expedition against the Persian Empire. Upon Alexander's death, his lieutenant Ptolemy assumed the sovereignty on Egypt as Ptolemy I Soter and founded the Ptolemaic dynasty. Not much is known about Aristobulus, who was likely enrolled in Alexander's army with logistic and engineering responsibilities.

<sup>10</sup> Arrian, *Anabasis* I, 2-3: 'In fact other writers [than Ptolemy and Aristobulus] have given a variety of accounts of Alexander, nor is there any other figure of whom there are more historians who are more contradictory of each other, but in my view Ptolemy and Aristobulus are more trustworthy in their narrative ... However, I have also recorded some statements made in other accounts of others, when I thought them worth mention and not entirely untrustworthy, but only as tales told of Alexander.'

<sup>11</sup> Useful is the commentary in the recent Italian edition, *L'Indiké*, ed. N. Biffi, Bari 2000.

<sup>12</sup> On the tradition of Arrian, see P. A. Stadter, 'Arrianus, Flavius', in *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries: Annotated Lists and Guides*, 10 vols, Washington DC 1960-2014, III, ed. F. E. Cranz, pp. 1-20.

The first known copy of the *Anabasis* to arrive in Western Europe was brought from Constantinople by Giovanni Aurispa (1376-1459) in 1423.<sup>13</sup> Around 1433-7 Pier Paolo Vergerio (c. 1370-c. 1444),<sup>14</sup> then at the court of Emperor Sigismund in Buda, translated both the *Anabasis* and the *Indike* from Greek into Latin on commission from Sigismund.<sup>15</sup> The simple and unsophisticated style adopted by Vergerio may explain why it was forgotten for nearly twenty years. In 1454 Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, while a secretary in the chancellery of Frederick III, found Vergerio's autograph manuscript and sent it as a gift to Alfonso I of Naples. Vergerio's work appeared so crude to the learned Neapolitan court that Alfonso commissioned his historiographer Bartolomeo Facio (c. 1405/10-1457) to revise and improve it – a task he undertook with the help of the Greek scholars Theodore Gaza and Niccolò Sagundino. The revised edition was completed by a collaborator of Facio, the Genoese Giacomo Curlo (c. 1400-c. 1463), only in 1461, after the death of both Facio and Alfonso.<sup>16</sup> It was this final version, as corrected by Ludovico Odassi, which finally went into print in 1508 at Pesaro; and Pietro Lauro's vernacular translation came out in Venice in 1544.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On Giovanni Aurispa, see E. Bigi's entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, IV, Rome 1962, pp. 593-5. He was in Constantinople in 1405-13 and again in 1421-3. A copy of the *Anabasis* was in his possession in 1421 (see Giovanni Aurispa, *Carteggio*, ed. R. Sabbadini, Rome 1931, p. 159: 'Arianus, De ascensu Alexandri, suavissimus et diligentissimus scriptor'), and it is mentioned again in 1424 among the Greek books he owned (letter to Ambrogio Traversari, Bologna, 27 August 1424, in *ibid.*, pp. 10-15, at p. 13: 'Historia Arriani de Alexandro'). No work of Arrian is listed in the 1459 inventory of Aurispa's library published by A. Franceschini, *Giovanni Aurispa e la sua biblioteca: notizie e documenti*, Padua 1976, pp. 53-169. It is worth noting, however, that other works concerning Alexander were owned by Aurispa: the inventory records a copy of 'Quintus Curcius, de Hystoria Alexandri, sine albis' and a 'Guicherus, Litteris latinis, in membranis sine albis', which is likely to be Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* (*ibid.*, pp. 140, no. 469, and p. 96, no. 202, respectively).

<sup>14</sup> For a biography of Vergerio, see Stadter, 'Arrianus, Flavius', pp. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the chronology of Vergerio's translation, see Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Epistolario*, ed. L. Smith, Rome 1934, pp. 379-81, n. 1. Vergerio's work was never printed, nor is there a modern edition of it. The two manuscripts which preserve it, in Brussels and Paris – the latter a copy made for the papal legate in Germany Tommaso Parentucelli, the future Pope Nicholas V – are listed by P. O. Kristeller, *Iter Italicum: A Finding List of Uncatalogued or Incompletely Catalogued Humanistic Manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and Other Libraries*, 6 vols, Leiden 1963-97, III, pp. 117b and 289a.

<sup>16</sup> On Bartolomeo Facio, see P. Viti's entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XLIV, Rome 1994, pp. 113-21; on Giacomo Curlo, see G. Petti Balbi, 'Curlo, Giacomo', *ibid.*, XXXI, Rome 1985, pp. 457-61.

<sup>17</sup> For the vicissitudes that led to the Latin translation of the *Anabasis*, see Vergerio, *Epistolario*, pp. 379-82, n. 1, and Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 81. See also Stadter, 'Arrianus, Flavius', esp. pp. 3-12; in 1454 Niccolò Perotti began another Latin translation of Arrian, but it seems that he never completed his work: *ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

Presenting Arrian's *De gestis Alexandri Macedonis*<sup>18</sup> to Emperor Sigismund, Vergerio wrote a prefatory letter which is one of the most eloquent testimonies of the humanist recovery of ancient sources on Alexander. Translating the *Anabasis* – with its telling exposition of the principles and method of work – gave Vergerio an opportunity to reflect on the craft of writing history. Even more importantly for the purpose of my argument, in his dedicatory letter to Sigismund Vergerio not only maintained that Arrian was the most trustworthy of the newly recovered sources on Alexander, but also discussed and passed judgement on the entire Alexander tradition available to him. I shall come back to this point later on in the chapter.

### 3.1.3. Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni*

Nothing is known about Quintus Curtius Rufus, the author of the *Historiae Alexandri Magni*. Although his identity remains obscure and the exact period in which he lived and wrote cannot be ascertained with any certainty, it is generally agreed that the *Historiae Alexandri* was composed at the beginning of the first century AD, under the Julio-Claudian dynasty.<sup>19</sup> The longest ancient account of Alexander's life which has come down to us, it is also the only Latin work from antiquity entirely devoted to Alexander. The text consists of ten books, but the first two are lost and other parts are lacking – the end of the fifth book (a *lacuna* which deprives us of the crucial account of Darius's death), the beginning of the sixth and various bits of the tenth book.<sup>20</sup> What remains is an account of Alexander's career from his arrival in Phrygia to his death in Babylon. The loss of the first two books, in

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<sup>18</sup> This is the title of the work as can be read in the *incipit* of Vergerio's translation in the Paris manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Nouv. Acq. lat. 1302); see Vergerio, *Epistolario*, p. 382, n. 1.

<sup>19</sup> On the vexed question of Curtius Rufus's identity, see J. E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4*, Amsterdam 1980, pp. 50-7. On his work and tradition, see S. Dosson, *Étude sur Quinte Curce, sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris 1887, and E. Baynham, *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius*, Ann Arbor 1998. The characteristics and limitations of the *Historiae* were discussed by W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, 2 vols, Cambridge 1948, II: *Source and Studies*, pp. 91-122.

<sup>20</sup> These losses are common to the entire textual tradition, as they are already present in the earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Historiae*, dating to the ninth century. One of these earliest manuscripts (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS plut. LXIV.35) deserves a mention, as it preserves 105 verses which are the only extant fragment of the earliest known *Roman d'Alexandre* in the vernacular, a Franco-Provençal poem by Alberic de Pisançon. For the verses, written by a twelfth-century hand on two blank pages of the Curtius codex (ff. 115v-116r), see *The Medieval French Roman d'Alexandre*, III, ed. E. C. Armstrong, pp. 2-8 and 37-60. See Meyer, *Alexandre le Grand*, II, pp. 69-101, and *Alessandro nel Medioevo occidentale*, pp. 535-42.

particular, was greatly lamented by humanists. In a letter of 1429 to Niccolò Niccoli, for instance, Poggio Bracciolini shared with his friend the exciting news he had just learned: among the books owned by Nicholas of Cusa there seemed to be a complete volume of Curtius's *Historiae Alexandri*.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, this was not the case.<sup>22</sup>

Curtius's work was certainly read in antiquity, although it does not seem to have been particularly successful, for no ancient author ever refers to him.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* and Arrian's *Anabasis*, the *Historiae Alexandri* circulated in medieval Europe. There was also an expanded version known as the 'interpolated Curtius', of which six exemplars survive,<sup>24</sup> in which material from various sources (mainly Justin, Solinus and Julius Valerius's translation of the Pseudo-Callisthenes) were used to fill the *lacunae* in Curtius's text and, more importantly, to replace the lost Books I and II. Between 1178 and 1182, the French cleric Walter of Châtillon composed a Latin epic poem in ten books devoted to Alexander, the *Alexandreis*, which is largely based on Curtius's *Historiae*.<sup>25</sup> A hugely popular work for at least two centuries, which was also taught in schools, the *Alexandreis* played an essential

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<sup>21</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *Lettere*, ed. H. Hart, 3 vols, Florence 1984-7, I: *Lettere a Niccolò Niccoli*, p. 78, no. 28 (letter from Rome, 26 February 1429): 'Nicolaus ille Treverensis scripsit litteras cum inventario librorum, quos habet. Item aliud volumen ... quo magis gaudeas, Q. Curtium, in quo sit primus liber; de fine nil scribit, sed existimo postquam principium est, non deesse reliquia.'

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104, no. 38 (letter from Rome, 27 May 1430): 'De A. Gellio et Curtio ridicula quaedam attulit; A Gellium scilicet truncum et mancum, et cui finis sit pro principio, et unam chartam, quam credebat esse principium Curtii, rem insulsam et ineptam, reliqua in spongia abierunt.'

<sup>23</sup> Dosson, *Étude*, pp. 357-60, has shown that before the twelfth century Curtius exerted an 'influence anonyme', as materials from the *Historiae* found their way into Latin and early medieval literature, but without an explicit mention of Curtius's name.

<sup>24</sup> Five out of the six manuscripts, now in Oxford, Paris, and the Vatican Library, date from the twelfth to the fifteenth century and originate from France and Italy. The essential reference is E. R. Smits, 'A Medieval Supplement to the Beginning of Curtius Rufus's *Historia Alexandri*: An Edition with Introduction', *Viator*, 18, 1987, pp. 89-124. See also Dosson, *Étude*, pp. 322-4, 337-8 and 344; Meyer, *Alexandre le Grand*, II, pp. 381-6 (Appendix 1, focusing on Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 82), and Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 68. A sixth, unique manuscript of the interpolated Curtius, now in Cambridge, was copied in Bruges around 1471-8; see A. Derolez, *The Library of Raphael de Mercatellis, Abbot of St. Bavon's, Ghent, 1438-1508*, Ghent 1979, pp. 41-4, and E. R. Smits, 'A Medieval Epitome of the *Historia Alexandri* by Quintus Curtius Rufus: MS London BL Cotton Titus D.XX and MS Oxford Corpus Christi College 82', *Classica et mediaevalia*, 42, 1991, pp. 279-300, at pp. 282-3, n. 21. The interpolated Curtius was first printed in Lyon in 1615.

<sup>25</sup> The standard modern edition is Walter of Châtillon, *Alexandreis*, ed. M. L. Colker, Padua 1978. See also Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 72, and *La fascination pour Alexandre*, IV, pp. 13-22 (J.-Y. Tilliette), with bibliography.

role in the reception of Curtius.<sup>26</sup> Yet, as Robert Bossuat has noted, this did not contribute to a wider knowledge of the *Historiae Alexandri*, since it was from Walter, rather than directly from Curtius himself, that several medieval authors took material and inspiration for their Alexander books.<sup>27</sup>

The recovery of Curtius's *Historiae Alexandri* itself dates to the fifteenth century, as is evident from the sudden increase in the number of extant manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> The Latin text was printed almost simultaneously in Venice and Rome in 1470-1 (Vindelinius de Spira and Georgius Lauer); by then, however, Curtius's account had been circulating in Italy for more than thirty years. In 1438 the humanist Pier Candido Decembrio (1399-1477) presented his patron, Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan, with a vernacular (Lombard) translation of the *Historiae Alexandri*, which triggered the popularity of Curtius's text, first in Italy, then more widely in Europe. Decembrio did not merely translate Curtius's text; working from a Latin manuscript of the non-interpolated version,<sup>29</sup> he filled the internal *lacunae* with appropriate material from Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*<sup>30</sup> and wrote a *Comparatione di Cesare et d'Alexandro*, in imitation of the *synkriseis* usually found at the conclusion of Plutarch's paired biographies. This vernacular version of Curtius, followed by the *Comparatione*, circulated widely in manuscript; it was also translated into Tuscan, Spanish, French and Portuguese and was printed several times, first in 1478 in Florence.<sup>31</sup> But Decembrio's version of Curtius was

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<sup>26</sup> Over 210 manuscripts of the *Alexandreis* survive, mostly from the thirteenth century: see Walter of Châtillon, *Alexandreis*, pp. XXXIII-XXXVIII. On the explanatory glosses and marginalia which are usually found in them, see R. de Cesare, *Glosse latine e antico-francesi all'Alexandreis di Gautier de Châtillon*, Milan 1951. Among the Alexander sagas based on Walter's poem is the Spanish *Libro de Alexandre*: see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 63-7.

<sup>27</sup> R. Bossuat, 'Vasque de Lucene, traducteur de Quinte-Curce (1468)', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 8, 1946, pp. 197-245, at p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> Though incomplete, see the list of extant manuscripts in Dosson, *Étude*, pp. 315-56: against the 36 codices from the ninth to the fourteenth century, nearly 100 exemplars from the fifteenth century alone are recorded.

<sup>29</sup> Resta, *Le epitomi di Plutarco*, pp. 33-4, n. 2, suggested identifying the Curtius manuscript used by Decembrio for his translation as MS Par. lat. 5720, which in the 1430s was in the library of Pavia and had previously belonged to Petrarch.

<sup>30</sup> The account of the death of Darius, taken from Plutarch (*Alexander* XLIII), has been published by E. Ditt, *Pier Candido Decembrio: contributo alla storia dell'umanesimo italiano*, Milan 1931, pp. 71-2.

<sup>31</sup> See M. Pade, 'Curzio Rufo e Plutarco nell'Istoria d'Alexandro Magno: volgarizzamento e compilazione in un testo di Pier Candido Decembrio', *Studi umanistici piceni*, 28, 1998, pp. 101-13 (with bibliography and a list of manuscripts and printed editions), and M. Zaggia, 'Appunti sulla cultura letteraria in volgare a Milano nell'età di Filippo Maria Visconti', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 170, 1993, pp. 161-219, at pp. 199-219. See also



still missing the two initial books, which he supplemented some time after 1438 by translating into the vernacular chapters 2 to 17 of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (from Alexander's birth to the immediate aftermath of the battle of the Granicus). Few manuscripts contain the supplement from Plutarch in addition to the translation of Curtius and the *Comparatione*;<sup>32</sup> nevertheless, Decembrio conceived the three texts as a whole, referring to them as the 'Istoria d'Alexandro Magno'. Decembrio took great care to present his work as a learned attempt to make a classical account accessible, through use of the vernacular, to a wider public, as well as to his patron Filippo Maria Visconti, who was fond of ancient works but not in command of Latin or Greek. It is no accident that several manuscripts of Decembrio's translation are written in a humanist 'littera antiqua' hand, normally employed in Latin manuscripts.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Decembrio began his translation by stating that, for the life of Alexander, only authoritative sources should be trusted, making it clear that Curtius was just such a source.<sup>34</sup>

Even though Curtius's work was known throughout the Middle Ages, it can still be regarded as one of the newly recovered sources from antiquity. Not only because, until the fourteenth century, knowledge of the *Historiae Alexandri* was largely indirect – that is, through intermediary sources such as Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* – but also, and more importantly, because humanists themselves presented Curtius as a newly available and more reliable account of Alexander's life. As we have seen, Poggio was eager to find a complete manuscript of the *Historiae Alexandri*, the first two missing books of which were particularly sought after. Dedicating his vernacular translation of the *Historiae Alexandri* to the Duke of Milan, Pier Candido Decembrio presented Curtius as an *auctoritas*, while in the *De*

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Pade, *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives*, I, pp. 251-4, and Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 68. On Decembrio, see P. Viti, 'Decembrio, Pier Candido', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XXXIII, Rome 1987, pp. 488-98, and V. Zaccaria, 'Sulle opere di Pier Candido Decembrio', *Rinascimento*, 7, 1956, pp. 13-74.

<sup>32</sup> According to Pade, 'Curzio Rufo e Plutarco', pp. 107-8 and 111-13, only four codices contain the initial supplement, which was never printed. As Pade has shown (*ibid.*, pp. 107-9), Decembrio translated Plutarch from Guarino's Latin version of the *Life of Alexander*, and not from the Greek – despite owning a Greek text of the *Lives*, now MSS Heidelberg, University Library, Palat. gr. 168 and 169, on which see Resta, *Le epitomi di Plutarco*, pp. 103-8.

<sup>33</sup> Pade, 'Curzio Rufo e Plutarco', pp. 110-11, has noted that the Turin copy of the vernacular Curtius by Decembrio (MS Biblioteca Reale, Varia 131), written before 1440, is 'tra i primi esempi di un testo in volgare copiato in scrittura umanistica.'

<sup>34</sup> For the passage, taken from MS Varia 131, see *ibid.*, p. 108: 'De lorigine antique dalexandro Magno, si come neglialtre vetustate sole evenire, piu a lautoritate cha ad altra ragione credere ne bisognia, poi che da letate e notitia nostra sono molto distante.'

*politia litteraria*, as we shall see, his brother Angelo called on Curtius to disprove and ridicule the fabulous tales of the medieval Alexander legend.<sup>35</sup> Most European rulers commissioned at least one copy of Curtius's *Historiae*, and humanist educational treatises advised children to peruse the work – not least because of its polished Latin.<sup>36</sup>

It should be pointed out, finally, that the image of Alexander found in Curtius's work is not entirely a positive one. The figure of the great conqueror who showed himself to be merciful towards the captive family of Darius is overshadowed by the unforgivable crimes against his innocent companions, Callisthenes, Cleitus and Philotas. Curtius does not spare any detail of their murders, drawing attention to and commenting on disgraceful aspects which were merely touched on by other authors. He also stressed the negative influence that adopting Persian customs had on Alexander (the so-called 'Persianisation', emblematically expressed in the introduction of *proskynesis* at court, on which more in Chapter 4) and in this way warned his readers about the dangers of excessive power. Curtius provided his readers with plenty of detail, epic and drama; but he also offered an ambiguous portrait of Alexander, at the same time good and evil. This lies behind, I believe, the diametrically opposed use of Curtius in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when his authority was employed in support of both a positive and a negative view of Alexander.

#### 3.1.4. Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotheca Historica*

The earliest surviving historical account of Alexander was written by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (first century BC). Book XVII of his monumental *Bibliotheca Historica*, a history of the world in forty books, is devoted to Alexander. Like Arrian, Diodorus starts his account with the crowning of Alexander and terminates it with his death at Babylon. Books XVI and XVIII to XX also concern Alexander, as they tell of the rise to power of his father Philip II and of the reigns of the Diadochi. Information on the immediate aftermath of Alexander's death

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<sup>35</sup> North of the Alps, something similar was done by Vasque de Lucene, who translated Curtius's *Historiae Alexandri* into French for the Duke of Burgundy in 1468. The prologue and epilogue of his work are one of the most carefully constructed attacks on the fabulous tales of the medieval legend, for which see Bossuat, 'Vasque de Lucene'.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Leonardo Bruni, 'De studiis et litteris liber ad Baptistam de Malatestis/The Study of Literature to Lady Battista of Montefeltro', in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. C. W. Kallendorf, Cambridge MA and London 2002, pp. 92-125, at p. 108.

appears in Book XVIII, which begins with the only extant description of Alexander's coffin and funeral carriage.<sup>37</sup>

Unknown to Western Europe until the Renaissance, Diodorus Siculus had very little influence on the reception of Alexander, as the recovery of his work was rather late. Around 1454 Pope Nicholas V commissioned a Latin translation of all the surviving books of the *Bibliotheca Historica*. Three scholars were appointed to share the task, and Books XVI to XX – what we might call the ‘Macedonian section’ of the *Bibliotheca* – were entrusted to Pier Candido Decembrio.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the project was abandoned, due to the death of the pope in March 1455, and was never resumed.<sup>39</sup> What Decembrio had completed by then – the translation of the first 49 chapters of Book XVI – was later presented by him to the king of Naples.<sup>40</sup> In a letter to Cicco Simonetta of 10 May 1459, Decembrio lamented the sudden interruption of his work: the five books he was asked to translate would have been extremely valuable, as ‘the entire story of Alexander was told’ in them.<sup>41</sup> Diodorus's account of the life of Alexander became available only in 1539, when a Greek edition of Books XVI to XX was printed in Basel by Vincentius Opsopoeus. A Greek-Latin edition of all the surviving books of the *Bibliotheca Historica* came out in Hanau as late as 1604.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.1.5. Justin's *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum*

In the early first century AD, a certain Pompeius Trogus (or Trogus Pompeius) wrote the *Historiae Philippicae*, an immense world history in 44 books, in which

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<sup>37</sup> An excellent introduction to Book XVII is in the French edition of Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliothèque Historique, Livre XVII*, ed. P. Goukowsky, Paris 1976, pp. IX-LVIII; see also L. Prandi, *Diodoro Siculo, Biblioteca storica, libro XVII: commento storico*, Milan 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Of the other surviving parts, Books I to V were given to Poggio, and Books XI to XV to George of Trebizond.

<sup>39</sup> Poggio alone completed his task, and his translation of Books I to V was first printed in Bologna in 1472.

<sup>40</sup> See Viti, ‘Decembrio, Pier Candido’, p. 496.

<sup>41</sup> The letter is published in M. Simonetta, ‘Esilio, astuzia e silenzio: Pier Candido Decembrio fra Roma e Milano’, in *Roma donne libri tra Medioevo e Rinascimento: in ricordo di Pino Lombardi*, Rome 2004, pp. 81-107, at pp. 103-4, letter XV: ‘Nam tota in eo historia Alexandri Magni descripta erat.’

<sup>42</sup> At least Diodorus's account of the immediate aftermath of Alexander's death became available in the early sixteenth century, when Claude de Seyssel translated Books XVIII to XX into French, entitling them *L'Istoire des successeurs d'Alexandre*; see Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 81.

special attention was given to the history of Macedon, from Philip II to Alexander and the Diadochi.<sup>43</sup> This compilation, which is lost apart from the summary prologues to each of the books, survives in an epitomized version compiled by the otherwise unknown Justin (Marcus Junianus Justinus) in the third century AD. Books XI and XII of his *Epitoma* are concerned with Alexander.<sup>44</sup>

The textual tradition of Justin's work (often referred to as Trogus-Justin) has not received much scholarly attention.<sup>45</sup> The *Epitoma* was certainly well known in the Middle Ages and was used as a source by influential writers such as Orosius, Vincent of Beauvais and the authors of some vernacular Alexander books. The popularity of Justin, however, really began in the fifteenth century. According to Ross, at least 175 manuscripts (that is, three-quarters of the overall 230 codices he traced) were produced in Italy in the fifteenth century.<sup>46</sup> These figures make Justin's *Epitoma* stand out as by far the most popular ancient historical account of Alexander in the Italian Quattrocento.<sup>47</sup> Alongside the Latin texts, three different vernacular translations also circulated from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and were printed several times between 1477 and 1590.<sup>48</sup>

Although brief and in many respects inaccurate, Justin's *Epitoma* nevertheless had some authority as the work of a respected historian. More importantly for my purposes, Justin presents Alexander as the conqueror of the world who never lost a battle or failed to subdue a besieged city – only death triumphed over him. According to Justin, Alexander, from the very start of his military expedition, made no secret of his intention to conquer 'the entire world'

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<sup>43</sup> See L. Braccesi et al., *L'Alessandro di Giustino (dagli antichi ai moderni)*, Rome 1993, esp. the essay by G. Cresci Marrone, 'L'Alessandro di Trogo: per una definizione dell'ideologia', pp. 11-43.

<sup>44</sup> See Justin, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus, Books 11-12: Alexander the Great*, ed. J. C. Yardley, Oxford 1997.

<sup>45</sup> F. Rühl, 'Die Textesquellen des Justinus', *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie*, suppl. VI, Leipzig 1872, pp. 1-160; *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds, Oxford 1983, pp. 129-30. See also Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>46</sup> Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Fewer than 40 manuscripts of Arrian and nearly 100 of Curtius from the fifteenth century are known at present.

<sup>48</sup> The fourteenth-century version, printed in Venice in 1477 and several times after that, can be read in Justin, *Delle istorie di Giustino abbreviatore di Trogo Pompejo volgarizzamento del buon secolo tratto dai codici Ricardiano e Laurenziano e migliorato nella lezione colla scorta del testo latino*, ed. L. Calori, Bologna 1968.

(‘universus terrarum orbis’: XI.6.3). Justin is the ancient source in which Alexander’s bold political ambitions are most clearly expressed.<sup>49</sup>

As we shall see, Justin is often mentioned in Quattrocento literature, though usually side with Curtius Rufus. I think the reason for this conjunction might be that they complemented each other, in that Justin was regarded as the most useful supplement to the fragmentary Curtius Rufus, since he reports on events and episodes which are lost in Curtius – such as, for example, the death of Darius.

To sum up: the various classical sources on Alexander which became available starting in the early fifteenth century were not all, strictly speaking, new acquisitions. Nevertheless, they were enthusiastically welcomed by humanists as reliable historical accounts which were worth reading, recommending and teaching. Each of them contributed in different ways to the development of a new conception of Alexander, one which replaced the adventures and tales recounted in the medieval *Romance* with deeds recorded by ancient historians.

### **3.2. Humanist Use of Ancient Sources**

The humanist critical approach towards ancient sources made the discrepancy between the image of Alexander inherited from the Middle Ages and the very different one found in the newly recovered historical texts all the more evident. The myth of Alexander was subjected to a scholarly revision aiming at repossessing the ‘true Alexander’ as described by the ancients. In order to do so, the medieval tradition based on the *Romance* had to be rejected, and a clear distinction between ‘legend’ and ‘history’ had to be drawn. As I shall show below, this attempt did not result in a fifteenth-century ‘debate on Alexander’ in humanist and learned circles; instead, the rejection of the legendary tradition seems to have been carried out largely *ex silentio*. Among the many references to Alexander found in humanist writings, however, there are a few examples, which will be discussed below, where an opposition between the legendary and the historical tradition is clearly articulated, using the terms *fabula* and *historia*, that is, ‘legend’ and ‘history’.

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<sup>49</sup> See Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, II, pp. 122-7, esp. p. 126.

### 3.2.1. Petrarch

The humanist attitude towards Alexander and his literary tradition has a prelude in the work of Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304-74).<sup>50</sup> Petrarch wrote at a time when the ancient historical sources on Alexander had not yet been recovered – with the exception of Curtius Rufus, whose *Historiae Alexandri* Petrarch was one of very few scholars to possess.<sup>51</sup> Despite his limited access to historical accounts from antiquity, Petrarch shows the same critical and sceptical approach to the medieval legendary tradition which is central to the humanist conception of Alexander.

Mentions of Alexander, mainly anecdotes from a variety of sources, are scattered throughout Petrarch's *oeuvre*.<sup>52</sup> His real interest in the figure of Alexander, however, developed fairly late in his life, around the 1350s, and can be seen in the *Collatio ducum*<sup>53</sup> and, more importantly, in *De Alexandro Macedone*, a biography written around 1355-6 and included in his major historical work, *De viris illustribus* (composed around 1341-3).<sup>54</sup> The portrait of Alexander drawn by Petrarch is one of the harshest ever attacks on him.<sup>55</sup> Alexander is presented as a vicious and ferocious man, prepared to indulge in any form of moral turpitude. Petrarch openly doubts his military valour, questions his reputation for liberality and makes no mention whatever of the good actions for which Alexander had usually been praised in medieval literature. He even accused him of insanity and lust – vices typical of a tyrant which were rarely ascribed to Alexander in the

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<sup>50</sup> See, above all, E. Fenzi, *Saggi petrarcheschi*, Fiesole 2003, esp. 'Alessandro nel *De viris*', pp. 447-68, and 'Grandi infelici: Alessandro e Cesare', pp. 469-90.

<sup>51</sup> His personal (and heavily annotated) copy of Curtius, now MS Par. lat. 5720, is among the nine codices from the fourteenth century traced by Dosson, *Étude*, p. 327; it was identified as Petrarch's copy by P. de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, 2 vols, Paris 1907, II, pp. 94-8.

<sup>52</sup> A partial but useful list of references is in Petrarch, *Triumphs*, ed. M. Ariani, Milan 1988, p. 309.

<sup>53</sup> See E. Fenzi, 'Scipione e la *Collatio ducum*: dal confronto con Annibale a quello con Alessandro Magno', in his *Saggi petrarcheschi*, Fiesole 2003, pp. 365-416 (references to previous bibliography, especially the studies of Guido Martellotti and Giuliana Crevatin, are at p. 395, n. 24).

<sup>54</sup> The life of Alexander is the fifteenth biography in *De viris illustribus*, ed. G. Martellotti, Florence 1964, pp. 58-71. On its date of composition, see E. Fenzi, 'Le postille al Livio Parigino e la revisione del *De viris*', in *Reliquiarum servitor: il manoscritto Parigino latino 5690 e la storia di Roma nel Livio dei Colonna e di Francesco Petrarca*, ed. M. Ciccuto et al., Pisa 2012, pp. 175-202, at pp. 190-1. For more on *De viris illustribus*, see Chapter 4 (4.2.1) below.

<sup>55</sup> See G. Cary, 'Petrarch and Alexander the Great', *Italian Studies*, 5, 1950, pp. 43-55. For the less harsh view of Alexander developed by Petrarch later in life, see G. Martellotti, 'Linee di sviluppo dell'umanesimo petrarchesco', *Studi petrarcheschi*, 2, 1949, pp. 51-80.

historical tradition.<sup>56</sup> His negative attitude towards Alexander was largely due to the nature of *De viris illustribus*, a work conceived in praise of Rome and based on the authority of Livy,<sup>57</sup> who had also attacked Alexander in a famous *excursus* (*Ab urbe condita* IX.17-19), claiming that had he got as far as Europe and encountered the Romans on the battlefield, he would doubtless have lost to them.<sup>58</sup> In Petrarch's collection of biographies of famous men, there are only three non-Romans: Alexander, Hannibal and Pyrrhus, whose lives and deeds greatly undermined the (self-) promotion of Rome as the mightiest empire of all times; these *externi viri* were included only to prove the unquestionable superiority of Rome, and this explains Petrarch's hostility to Alexander.<sup>59</sup>

The sources on which *De Alexandro Macedone* is based are Justin and Curtius Rufus, whom Petrarch occasionally cites in the text.<sup>60</sup> In many passages, these two authors are instrumental in establishing the historical truth (or what Petrarch thought to be the historical truth) of events or in dismissing popular beliefs concerning Alexander. Nevertheless, he did not regard either of them as infallible sources; and the general thesis underpinning *De viris illustribus* – the celebration of Rome as the supreme power of all times – remained Petrarch's overriding interest. Alexander's virtues and good deeds were therefore stripped from Curtius's ambiguous portrait, while Justin's presentation of Alexander as a world conqueror,

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<sup>56</sup> See L. Braccesi, 'Giustino e l'Alessandro del Petrarca', in L. Braccesi et al., *L'Alessandro di Giustino (dagli antichi ai moderni)*, Rome 1993, pp. 99-145, esp. pp. 104-8. In presenting Alexander as a madman, Petrarch certainly had in mind the Alexander 'vesanus' of Seneca, *De beneficiis* I.13.3.

<sup>57</sup> For the crucial role played by Petrarch during the 1320s in the recovery of the work of Livy, see G. Billanovich, 'Petrarch and the Textual Tradition of Livy', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14, 1951, pp. 137-208.

<sup>58</sup> On Petrarch, Livy and the relationship between Alexander and Rome, see L. Braccesi, *L'ultimo Alessandro (dagli antichi ai moderni)*, Padua 1986, and his *L'Alessandro occidentale: il Macedone e Roma*, Rome 2006. See also Treves, *Il mito di Alessandro*; Fenzi, 'Scipione e la *Collatio ducum*', pp. 390-4; and N. Biffi, 'L'*excursus* liviano su Alessandro Magno', *Bollettino di studi latini*, 25, 1995, pp. 462-76.

<sup>59</sup> As noted by Donato, 'Gli eroi romani', p. 115, and G. Bodon, *Heroum Imagines: la Sala dei Giganti a Padova: un monumento della tradizione classica e della cultura antiquaria*, Venice 2009, p. 19, n. 62, Petrarch was clearly drawing on Livy, who introduced Alexander, Pyrrhus and Hannibal in *Ab Urbe Condita* solely to demonstrate the pre-eminence of Rome.

<sup>60</sup> Braccesi, 'Giustino e l'Alessandro del Petrarca', has convincingly shown that Petrarch's main source for *De Alexandro Macedone* was Justin's *Epitoma*, a copy of which, as noted by de Nolhac (*Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, II, p. 294), was in his library in Vaucluse in 1355. It is nevertheless certain, as shown by Enrico Fenzi ('Petrarca lettore di Curzio Rufo', in his *Saggi petrarcheschi*, Fiesole 2003, pp. 417-45), that Petrarch's interest in Alexander really took off after 1356, when he got hold of a copy of Curtius's *Historiae*; see G. Billanovich, 'Petrarca e i libri della cattedrale di Verona', in *Petrarca, Verona e l'Europa: atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Verona 19-23 settembre 1991)*, ed. G. Billanovich and G. Frasso, Padua 1997, pp. 117-78, at pp. 150-4 and 174.

a *communis opinio* openly in conflict with the fact that he did not set foot in the West, was completely rejected.<sup>61</sup>

In the 'Prohemium' to *De viris illustribus*, Petrarch set out his intention: not to dream up fables, but rather to recount history ('neque michi fabulam fingere sed historiam renarrare propositum est').<sup>62</sup> He here mentions the two categories which are at the core of my research: legend (*fabula*) and history (*historia*). With regard to history, Petrarch chose the most reliable sources on Alexander available to him; and yet, despite his concern with establishing the historical truth, his preoccupation with the glory of Rome was even more important to him. Exemplary of his biased attitude towards Alexander are his criticisms of Curtius Rufus and Justin, whom he reproached for excusing the vices of Alexander on account of his youth.<sup>63</sup> Petrarch also accused Walter of Châtillon, the twelfth-century author of the *Alexandreis*, of celebrating Alexander out of pure envy for Rome, in a passage which was taken almost *verbatim* from Livy.<sup>64</sup>

What, then, was Petrarch's attitude towards *fabula*, the legendary tradition of Alexander, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, was still very popular in the fourteenth century? We can assume that he was well aware of the tales concerning

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<sup>61</sup> Petrarch, 'De Alexandro Macedone' 45, in his *De viris illustribus*, p. 69: 'De reliquo autem scio persuasum vulgo Alexandrum mundi dominum fuisse, que opinio extirpanda est.' On these grounds, Petrarch also contested the opening of the first book of Maccabees (1-3) where it is said that on Alexander's death, 'siluit terra in conspectus eius'.

<sup>62</sup> See Petrarch, 'Prohemium', ed. G. Martellotti, in his *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti et al., Milan and Naples 1955, pp. 218-27, at p. 220.

<sup>63</sup> Petrarch, 'De Alexandro Macedone' 43, in his *De viris illustribus*, p. 68: 'Quem [scil. ebrietatem] miror scriptores quosdam nobiles et – quod est mirabilius – latinos, sui operis amore deceptos et quasi sorte iuvenis miseratos, non tantum excusare sed laudare etiam voluisse.' On this famous passage, in which the 'scriptores nobiles et latini' have been identified as Curtius Rufus and Justin, see Braccesi, *L'ultimo Alessandro*, pp. 100-11.

<sup>64</sup> Petrarch, 'De Alexandro Macedone' 50, in his *De viris illustribus*, p. 70: 'Livius tamen hanc assertionem levissimorum dicit esse Grecorum contra romanum nomen Parthorum etiam glorie faventium; que quidem, quod ille neviscit, levissimorum quorundam similiter est Gallorum, quos non veri studium non fides rerum non denique Alexandri amor ullus sed Romanorum invidia atque odium impellit.' It has long been established that behind the unnamed 'most frivolous among the French' is Walter of Châtillon, whom Petrarch attacked several times (see, e.g. 'Invectiva contra eum qui maledixit Italie', ed. P. G. Ricci, in his *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti et al., Milan and Naples 1955, pp. 768-807, at pp. 790-1) without ever mentioning him by name; see Braccesi, *L'ultimo Alessandro*, pp. 111-20. Despite the open contempt shown by Petrarch for Walter, his own *Africa* was influenced by the *Alexandreis*; see G. Velli, 'Petarca e la grande poesia latina del XII secolo', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 28, 1985, pp. 295-310, esp. pp. 300-6. For the passage of Livy upon which Petrarch's attack is based, see F. Muccioli, 'La rappresentazione dei Parti nelle fonti tra II e I secolo a.C. e la polemica di Livio contro i *levissimi ex Graecis*', in *Incontri tra culture nell'Oriente ellenistico e romano*, ed. T. Gnoli and F. Muccioli, Milan 2007, pp. 87-115.



Alexander; but, as with later humanists, his criticisms and disbelief are not stated expressly but instead conveyed *ex silentio*. So, in *De Alexandro Macedone*, rather than mentioning the legend of Alexander, Petrarch simply ignored it. In other works, however, he mocked the beliefs connected to Alexander's divine birth from Ammon/Nectanebo. In *De remediis utriusque fortune*, Petrarch wrote that Olympias candidly confessed to Philip that Alexander was not his son.<sup>65</sup> For Petrarch, these stories were mere *fabulae*, which merited no belief whatever; as for the others – the Indian adventures, the 'Flight with Griffins', the 'Submarine Voyage' and so on – they were not even worth mentioning.

### 3.2.2 Giovanni Boccaccio

As in Petrarch's writings, so, too, in Boccaccio's, there are frequent references to Alexander, which are found in both his early and later works.<sup>66</sup> His most significant assessment of Alexander's life is in the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante* of 1373-5: believing that the 'Alessandro' placed among the tyrants in *Inferno* XII.107 is none other than Alexander the Great, Boccaccio writes a biographical digression, describing him as a cruel and violent figure.<sup>67</sup> His portrait is not as harsh as Petrarch's; but Alexander is nevertheless presented as a restless and ambitious conqueror, who stripped Asia of its riches and freedom and who did not hesitate to make his way by means of deceit and to murder enemies and friends alike. In order to show the true extent of Alexander's wickedness, Boccaccio related an episode which he very likely took from his main source for this biography, Curtius Rufus's

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<sup>65</sup> Petrarch, *Les remèdes aux deux fortunes/De remediis utriusque fortune*, ed. C. Carraud, 2 vols, Grenoble 2002, I, p. 768 (II.50: 'De filio qui alienus inventus est'): 'Fassa est idem Olympias Philippo, magno viro; magnii filii iacturam, non fletum, nec suspirium, nec querelam legimus.'

<sup>66</sup> See R. Morosini, "Quell'antica pazzia" di Alessandro e i "passaggi" di Olimpiade: dal *De casibus* e *De mulieribus* alle *Genealogie*', *Critica del testo*, 16, 2013, pp. 273-305, and M. Campopiano, 'Langues et genres littéraires de l'Alexandre italien', in *La fascination pour Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures européennes (X<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle): réinventions d'un mythe*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas, 4 vols, Turnhout 2014, I, pp. 323-62, at pp. 352-4.

<sup>67</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, ed. G. Padoan, Milan 1965, pp. 574-7. Which Alexander Dante had in mind was not certain in Boccaccio's time, as he begins by saying: 'non dice l'autore quale, con ciò sia cosa che assai tiranni stati sieni, li quali questo nome hanno avuto; e, però che nel maggiore si contengono tutti i mali fatti da' minori, credo sia da intendere che egli abbia voluto dire d'Alessandro, re di Macedonia' (ibid., pp. 574-5). Today scholars generally agree on the identification of Dante's 'Alessandro' as Alexander of Pherae; see G. Martellotti, 'Alessandro Magno', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols, Rome 1970-8, I, pp. 117-19, at pp. 118-19. I am inclined, however, to think that the person intended is, in fact, Alexander the Great, as was clearly stated by the first commentators on the *Commedia*.

*Historiae Alexandri Magni* (III.1.11-8): the ‘Cutting of the Gordian Knot’.<sup>68</sup> Nowadays the most famous of Alexander’s deeds, this episode was extremely rare in the medieval tradition, since it was absent from the Pseudo-Callisthenes and its derivatives. The ‘Cutting of the Gordian Knot’ is morally ambiguous, showing Alexander as both a resourceful and a crafty man; Boccaccio, however, presented it in a totally negative light as an example of trickery – in contrast, it is worth noting, to the later tradition, where the episode took on a completely positive connotation.<sup>69</sup>

The portrait of Alexander which emerges from Boccaccio’s *De casibus virorum illustrium* (written in 1355-60 but revised up until 1374), a moral composition centring on the misfortunes and tragic ends of famous men and women, is also quite negative.<sup>70</sup> There is no life of Alexander in this work; but Book IV includes the biographies of five people who were either his friends (Callisthenes and Eumenes of Cardia: IV.7 and IV.11 respectively), his relatives (his mother Olympias and her brother Alexander the Molossus king of Epirus: IV.12 and IV.8)<sup>71</sup> or his enemy (the Persian King Darius: IV.9). Boccaccio credits Alexander with a single act of magnanimity, recounted by Justin (*Epitoma* XI.15.14-15), and that is when, on hearing of Darius’s death, he ordered the body to be solemnly buried according to Persian custom.<sup>72</sup> This merciful behaviour, however, could do little to redeem the overall image of Alexander as a greedy conqueror and a tyrant, as shown especially in the life of the philosopher Callisthenes, the official historian of the Asian expedition, who refused to give Alexander the divine honours he claimed for

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<sup>68</sup> Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, p. 575. On the episode, see L. E. Roller, ‘Midas and the Gordian Knot’, *Classical Antiquity*, 3, 1984, pp. 256-71, and *Alessandro nel Medioevo occidentale*, pp. 560-2 (M. Liborio); still useful is Carraroli, *La leggenda di Alessandro*, pp. 318-39.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 5, n. 77 below. A tyrannical Alexander, stripped of the generosity, which was his distinguishing characteristic throughout the Middle Ages, also appears in Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris* LXIX (‘De Busa canusina apula muliere’), ed. V. Zaccaria, Milan 1967, pp. 274-9, at p. 276.

<sup>70</sup> See M. Campopiano, ‘Les multiples portraits du roi Alexandre en Italie’, in *La fascination pour Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures européennes (X<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle): réinventions d’un mythe*, ed. C. Gaullier-Bougassas, 4 vols, Turnhout 2014, II, pp. 927-54, at pp. 940-1.

<sup>71</sup> Morosini, “Quell’antica pazzia” di Alessandro’, p. 275, n. 9, mistakenly identifies this Alexander with Alexander the Great; but the biography leaves no doubt about his identity, starting with the title: ‘De Alexandro Epyrotarum rege’. For Alexander Molossus, see L. Braccesi, *L’Alessandro occidentale*, pp. 43-54.

<sup>72</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustrium* IV.9 (‘De Dario Persarum rege’), ed. P. G. Ricci and V. Zaccaria, Milan 1983, pp. 316-22, at pp. 320-2. A copy of Justin’s *Epitoma* was in Boccaccio’s library: see A. Mazza, ‘L’inventario della “parva libraria” di Santo Spirito e la biblioteca di Boccaccio’, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 9, 1966, pp. 1-74, at p. 33.

himself and paid for this opposition with imprisonment and, finally, his own life.<sup>73</sup> It seems significant that Alexander, whom Boccaccio denied a biography of his own, is very much present in *De casibus virorum illustrium*, the events of his life appearing all the more disreputable because narrated by some of the people for whose misfortunes, or even death, he was responsible. Not only did he order Callisthenes's murder and wage war on Darius, but, in Boccaccio's view, the terrible fates of his successors – Eumenes of Cardia, ruler of Cappadocia and Paphlagonia, and Olympias, who both died in the civil wars fought over the throne of Macedon<sup>74</sup> – were in retribution for Alexander's overweening ambition and insatiable thirst for glory.<sup>75</sup> Doom seemed to touch everyone connected to Alexander, as Boccaccio makes clear in two additional chapters: on the miserable destiny of the Diadochi (IV.10); and on Alexander's wife and legitimate child (IV.14). Even his uncle, Alexander Molossus, who died in the attempted conquest of Magna Grecia, shared the same destiny.<sup>76</sup>

Like Petrarch, Boccaccio made extensive use of Curtius Rufus and Justin, whose works he possessed;<sup>77</sup> but he also referred to a 'Guiglielmo d'Inghilterra', who is none other than Walter of Châtillon, an author dismissed by Petrarch.<sup>78</sup> Boccaccio was, of course, well aware of the legendary tradition, and in his youth he personally transcribed texts related to the *Romance* in his Zibaldone Laurenziano.<sup>79</sup> As with Petrarch, he never mentioned the 'Flight with the Griffins' or the 'Submarine Voyage'; but the attention he gave to the reputedly divine birth of Alexander is particularly interesting.

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<sup>73</sup> See Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustrium* IV.7 ('De Callisthene phylosopho'), pp. 306-12. For more on Callisthenes, see Chapter 4 (4.2.2.2) below.

<sup>74</sup> A second and even more dramatic biography of Olympias is in *De mulieribus claris* LXI ('De Olympiade regina Macedonie'), pp. 246-51.

<sup>75</sup> As noted by Campopiano, 'Les multiples portraits', p. 941.

<sup>76</sup> On the confusion between, and occasionally conflation of, Alexander and his uncle in the Middle Ages, see Braccesi, *L'ultimo Alessandro*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>77</sup> See Mazza, 'L'inventario della "parva libraria"', p. 50; Boccaccio prides himself on his in-depth knowledge of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri* in his *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, p. 641.

<sup>78</sup> Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, p. 641.

<sup>79</sup> Now MS Plut. XXIX, 8 in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. See Morosini, "Quell'antica pazzia" di Alessandro', p. 281, and F. Di Benedetto, 'Presenza di testi minori negli zibaldoni', in *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura*, ed. M. Picone and C. Cazalé Bèrard, Florence 1998, pp. 13-28, at pp. 14, 26 and 28.

In the *Amorosa visione* (VII.82), an early work composed in 1341-3 and revised around 1360, Boccaccio explicitly mentions Nectanebo riding alongside King Philip, both of them proudly gazing at Alexander, who precedes them on horseback.<sup>80</sup> In later references to the birth of Alexander, however, the name of Nectanebo no longer appears, and the idea of Alexander's marvellous conception is vehemently rejected. Towards the end of his *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* (XIII.71.1-2), Boccaccio explains why he did not include Alexander in his work:<sup>81</sup> the story that he was fathered by Zeus in the guise of a serpent is a 'fabula' and a 'stultitia' which should not be believed.<sup>82</sup> Not only did Alexander allow this fable to circulate, according to Boccaccio, but he bribed the priests of Zeus Ammon at the temple of Siwa into confirming his birth from the god.<sup>83</sup> Alexander was therefore willing for his mother to be considered an adulterer,<sup>84</sup> and he himself a bastard, in order to justify his claim to be immortal. Boccaccio finishes by stating that Alexander was denied a place in the *Genealogiae*, firstly, because he was not the son of Zeus and, secondly, because he tried to gain immortality through deceit rather than virtue.

Both Petrarch and Boccaccio dismissed Alexander's divine birth as a *fabula* which was not to be believed, but whereas Petrarch did it *ex silentio*, Boccaccio formulated a response which is particularly significant for my purposes because of his reassessment of the word *fabula* in Book XIV of the *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*.<sup>85</sup> As part of his battle in defence of poetry, Boccaccio distinguished four types of *fabulae*, each containing a different combination of fact and fiction and a certain degree of truth; none of them is contemptible, he says, apart from the fourth type, which have no truth whatever in them and are concocted by deranged old

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<sup>80</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Amorosa visione*, ed. V. Branca, Milan 1974, p. 167 (in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. V. Branca, 12 vols, Milan 1964-98, III, ed. V. Branca, pp. 1-272, at p. 167).

<sup>81</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*, ed. V. Zaccaria, Milan 1998, pp. 1350-3. Boccaccio similarly excluded Scipio Africanus, who, in a story modelled on Alexander's, was also rumoured to have been fathered by a divine serpent.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander's conception from a serpent is in Justin, *Epitoma* XII.16.2.

<sup>83</sup> Boccaccio's source is here Justin, *Epitoma* XI.11.6, who is the only source stating Alexander's bribery.

<sup>84</sup> As such Olympias is depicted also in *De mulieribus claris* LXI, p. 248.

<sup>85</sup> See esp. *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* XIV.9, pp. 1410-18. From among the vast bibliography on this theme, see P. G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age*, Leiden and New York 1994 (on Boccaccio, see pp. 151-3), and A. Hortis, *Studj sulle opere latine del Boccaccio*, Trieste 1879, pp. 174-97.

women ('delirantium vetularum inventio'). Boccaccio does not provide examples of such foolish fables; but the legendary stories of Alexander might well belong to this fourth type, as suggested by the words he uses to describe the story of his divine birth ('fabula', 'stultitia' and even 'mendaciorum fascinationes') and by his silent omission of episodes such as the 'Flight with Griffins'.

### 3.2.3. Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria*

Like his older brother Pier Candido, Angelo Decembrio (c. 1415-post 1467) greatly valued Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni*.<sup>86</sup> In the 1440s, he copied the entire Latin text (Books III-X) twice: the autograph manuscripts, both heavily annotated by Angelo, are now in Budapest (National Library, MS Clmae 161, written in 1444) and in the Vatican Library (MS Vat. lat. 4597, written between 1446 and 1450).<sup>87</sup> In the latter, he also attempted to reconstruct the content of the lost Books I and II by drawing on the accounts of Arrian, Plutarch and Justin.<sup>88</sup> The Budapest autograph manuscript contains a short treatise composed by Angelo himself, entitled *Disputatio de condicionibus pacis inter Alexandrum et Darium reges* (or *Disputatio egregia*), which is also preserved in MS 343 of the Bibliothèque Municipale of Caen.<sup>89</sup> The *Disputatio* is a learned discussion of an episode reported by Curtius; it was reworked a few years later by Decembrio, who included it in his major work, *De politia litteraria* (VI.67).<sup>90</sup> In the *Disputatio* Angelo points out contradictions in the account of Curtius and concludes that such inaccuracies are

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<sup>86</sup> See P. Viti, 'Decembrio, Angelo Camillo', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XXXIII, Rome 1987, pp. 483-8, with bibliography.

<sup>87</sup> The two manuscripts are described by Dosson, *Étude*, pp. 333 and 348. See also P. Scarcia Piacentini, 'Angelo Decembrio e la sua scrittura', *Scrittura e civiltà*, 4, 1980, pp. 247-77, and E. Giua, 'Un nuovo codice autografo della *Disputatio egregia* di Angelo Decembrio (Caen, Bibl. Municipale 343)', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 45, 2004, pp. 211-41, at pp. 213-18.

<sup>88</sup> For the incipit of MS Vat. lat. 4597, containing Decembrio's discussion of the lost books of Curtius, see Dosson, *Étude*, p. 348.

<sup>89</sup> See Giua, 'Un nuovo codice'; on the decoration of the Caen manuscript copied in 1447, see A. Melograni, 'Tra Milano e Napoli a metà Quattrocento: la *Disputatio egregia* di Angelo Decembrio e la bottega del *Magister Vitae Imperatorum*', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 45, 2004, pp. 187-209; see also F. Gualdoni, 'Sulle tracce di Angelo Decembrio, umanista milanese tra Napoli e Spagna (1447-1462)', *ibid.*, 49, 2008, pp. 125-55.

<sup>90</sup> The text of the *Disputatio* was published by the Hungarian collector Nicolaus Jankovich, who owned the Caen manuscript in the early nineteenth century: Angelo Decembrio, *De conditionibus pacis inter Alexandrum M. et Darium reges, ut apud Q. Curtium legitur Disputatio, ex mss. codd. Jankowichianis nunc primum edita*, Budapest 1825.

not acceptable in a text which claims to be the work of a true historian;<sup>91</sup> and in *De politia litteraria* he condemns vernacular translations of classical authors – in his opinion, a practice which should not be encouraged<sup>92</sup> – clearly referring to the work of his brother Pier Candido, whose Italian version of Curtius had been completed only a few years before.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, when it came to disproving the fabulous tales of the medieval legend of Alexander, Angelo invoked the authority of Curtius. Chapter 68 in Book VI of his *De politia litteraria*, written in the 1450s but set in the court of Leonello d'Este in Ferrara in the 1430s and presented as a dialogue between Leonello and his courtiers,<sup>94</sup> contains an attack on the tapestries produced at the time in Northern Europe and hung on the walls of many Italian palaces. Weavers and designers, writes Decembrio, are clumsy and ignorant, because they are concerned only with the opulence and colour of the tapestry and do not care about what they actually depict. Many of the subjects of their tapestries are popular absurdities, and no attention is given to what ancient historians have, in fact, recorded. For example, Decembrio continues: '[The weavers] represent Bucephalus, Alexander's horse, not with the jaws of an ox, as Curtius describes him and as his very name in Greek makes clear, but rather as some hell-horse of Pluto's or Charon's, or like Jason's fettered fire-breathing bulls. And so it goes on, wherever one looks, through the folly of these northern people.'<sup>95</sup>

In the context of the present discussion, it is important to note that Decembrio, in order to disprove the legendary representation of Bucephalus as a horned and monstrous beast, turned to the newly available Curtius, even though, as

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 2. See also Giua, 'Un nuovo codice', pp. 218-19.

<sup>92</sup> Angelo Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, ed. N. Witten, Munich 2002, p. 163 (I.6.1).

<sup>93</sup> See 3.1.3 above.

<sup>94</sup> Giua, 'Un nuovo codice', pp. 211-12, n. 2, provides a list of bibliographical references, among which is worth mentioning A. Biondi, 'Angelo Decembrio e la cultura del principe', in *La corte e lo spazio: Ferrara estense*, ed. G. Papagno and A. Quondam, 3 vols, Rome 1982, II, pp. 637-57, and D. Friggè, 'Redazioni e tradizione della "Politia litteraria" di Angelo Decembrio', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 37, 1994, pp. 27-65. For the first publication of Chapter 68, with an English translation, see M. Baxandall, 'A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este: Angelo Decembrio's *De Politia Litteraria* Pars LXVIII', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 26, 1963, pp. 304-26. On Decembrio and the use of Curtius at the court of Ferrara, see Grafton, *What was History?*, pp. 49-61.

<sup>95</sup> Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, p. 428 (VI.68.10): 'Inde Alexandri Bucephalum equum, non cuiusmodi Curtius exponit et animalis Graeca declarat appellatio, quod rictus bovis exhiberet, sed ut infernalem Plutonis vel Charontis equum; aut Iasonis tauros ore flammam evomentes, cathenatos cruribus; et reliqua passim pro eius transalpinae gentis vanitate.'

Michael Baxandall pointed out, there is no relevant description of Bucephalus in what survives of the *Historiae Alexandri*. Decembrio's actual source remains obscure; Baxandall suggested that a possible inspiration might have been a passage from Arrian's *Anabasis* (V.19.5), in which Bucephalus is said to have a brand with an ox-head, after which he took his name.<sup>96</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter 1.4, however, this explanation for Bucephalus's name is found in several ancient authors, including Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* VIII.64.154), who was often quoted by Decembrio in *De politia litteraria*.

The description of the monstrous and savage Bucephalus is so vivid that Decembrio very likely had a visual source in mind, if not before his eyes – presumably a Northern tapestry of the type he was attacking. A tapestry very close to the one described by Decembrio still exists: it is part of an outstanding two-piece set known as the 'Doria tapestries', made in Tournai around 1460 for the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, and now in the Palazzo del Principe in Genoa (**fig. 54**).<sup>97</sup> This tapestry illustrates episodes from the childhood and youth of Alexander,<sup>98</sup> among which is the 'Taming of Bucephalus' (**fig. 55**). Alexander's horse (**figs 56 and 57**) is first brought to Philip and then mounted by his young master; it is depicted as a ferocious creature with twisted horns and sharp teeth, fettered with chains and clearly, as the human remains scattered on the ground of his iron cage testify, a man-eating beast. This corroborates Decembrio's observation that, around the mid-fifteenth century, the Bucephalus depicted north of the Alps was still the legendary monster of the *Romance*.

Decembrio provides the best eyewitness testimony we have for the dramatic change from 'legend' to 'history' in the Alexander tradition. He dismisses the artistic

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<sup>96</sup> Baxandall, 'A Dialogue on Art', p. 317, n. 46.

<sup>97</sup> On the Doria tapestries, which were first brought to the attention of scholars in 1913 by Aby Warburg ('Airship and Submarine in the Medieval Imagination', in id., *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, Los Angeles 1999, pp. 332-7), see the essays in *Le imprese di Alessandro Magno in Oriente, Collezione Doria Pamphilj: presentazione dell'arazzo restaurato: atti della giornata internazionale di studi, Genova, 11 aprile 2005*, ed. L. Stagno, Genoa 2005, and in *L'Histoire d'Alexandre le Grand dans les tapisseries au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: fortune iconographique dans les tapisseries et les manuscrits conservés: la tenture d'Alexandre de la collection Doria Pamphilj à Gênes*, ed. F. Barbe et al., Turnhout 2013. On the Ferrara court under Leonello and Borso d'Este and its artistic taste and patronage, see *Le muse e il principe*, esp. the essays of C. Rosenberg and N. Forti Grazzini, in I, pp. 39-52 and 53-62 respectively.

<sup>98</sup> The second tapestry depicts Alexander's marvellous adventures in the East, including the 'Flight with Griffins', the 'Submarine Voyage' and his encounter with monstrous creatures and ferocious beasts. On the Doria tapestries as one of the last depictions of Alexander's legendary adventures in Europe, see Centanni, "Alexander Rex", pp. 401-2.

production based on the *Romance*, still so popular in the Italian courts of the time,<sup>99</sup> as contemptible ‘vanitas’ flourishing north of the Alps, and relegates ‘inter fabulosa’ all vernacular books, which, in his view, should be banished from the ideal library and are useful only for entertaining women and children on winter nights.<sup>100</sup> Even the vernacular works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, alongside texts written in French and Spanish, are placed ‘cum Gualfredis, Gualteriisque similibus, cum Cassiodoris et Isidoris’,<sup>101</sup> in an undistinguished group of medieval authors including Walter of Châtillon (‘Gualterius’) and ‘Gualfredus’ – probably Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *Vita Merlini* and *Historia regum Britanniae* were at the origin of the Arthurian literature. All of them, as Tissoni Benvenuti has noted, are scornfully referred to in the plural.<sup>102</sup> There was no room in *De politia litteraria* for the medieval legend of Alexander in any form. It should be emphasised that this was wishful thinking on Decembrio’s part: on the shelves of fifteenth-century libraries, including that of the Este in Ferrara, where Decembrio composed *De politia litteraria*, chivalric literature and Italian poets continued to have their place alongside Latin and Greek authors, which were usually present in vernacular

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<sup>99</sup> E.g., the now lost set of Alexander tapestries owned by Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, on which see D. S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and His Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483)*, London 1992, pp. 81-2 and 150, and also possibly by Francesco Sforza of Milan, for which see A. Rapp Buri, ‘La produzione d’arazzi a Tournai attorno al 1460’, in *Le imprese di Alessandro Magno in Oriente, Collezione Doria Pamphilj: presentazione dell’arazzo restaurato: atti della giornata internazionale di studi, Genova, 11 aprile 2005*, ed. L. Stagno, Genoa 2005, pp. 41-59. As far as is known, neither illustrated Alexander’s marvellous Indian adventures; but, like the Doria tapestries, they surely relied on the *Romance*.

<sup>100</sup> Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, p. 163 (I.6.1): [Leonello is speaking about Feltrino Boiardo’s vernacular version of Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*] ‘Equidem inter fabulosa recipiendum arbitror. Cuius stilus ideo varius, incompositus, rigidus, quod auctori Graeco minor fuerit nostri sermonis familiaritas. Denique cum iam in omnium media turba consistimus, huius *Asini* mentio, quoniam abs te vulgaris effectus est, menti subiecit eos nunc libros memorare, quos apud uxores et liberos nostros nonnunquam hybernis noctibus exponamus.’

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4 (I.6.2-3): ‘Caeterum vulgarium actorum frequentissima sunt Dantis, Petrarcae Boccaciique volumina. Sunt et gallica hispaniaque lingua intra nationem nostram advecta ... Alius quippe eis locus assignandus est cum Gualfredis Guateriisque similibus, cum Cassiodoris et Isidoris palatini stili lampade coruscantibus.’

<sup>102</sup> A. Tissoni Benvenuti, ‘Guarino, i suoi libri, e le letture della corte estense’, in *Le muse e il principe: arte di corte nel Rinascimento padano* (exhibition catalogue, Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, 1991), ed. A. Mottola Molino and M. Natale, 2 vols, Milan 1991, I, pp. 63-82, at p. 76: ‘tutti sprezzantemente al plurale.’ For Decembrio’s ideal library, as envisioned in *De politia litteraria*, see C. S. Celenza, ‘Creating Canons in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara: Angelo Decembrio’s *De politia litteraria*, 1.10’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 57, 2004, pp. 43-98 (see esp. pp. 60-1 for the passages discussed above).



translation such as the Italian version of Curtius Rufus by Angelo's brother Pier Candido.<sup>103</sup>

#### 3.2.4. Pier Paolo Vergerio

We have seen earlier that a Latin translation of Arrian's *Anabasis* and *Indike* was made by Pier Paolo Vergerio in the 1430s. Although it was neglected for nearly twenty years after its completion, this work is important for my discussion because of the dedicatory letter to his patron, Emperor Sigismund.<sup>104</sup> According to Vergerio, Arrian, in recounting the deeds of Alexander, 'followed the most reliable authors and therefore seems worthy of trust.'<sup>105</sup>

Immediately afterwards, Vergerio takes into consideration the tradition which had grown up around Alexander, with the aim of contrasting other accounts unfavourably with that of Arrian. Vergerio divides this tradition into three categories.<sup>106</sup> The first comprises writers who have reported popular legends and tales about Alexander as if they were true – Leonardo Smith, the editor of Vergerio's correspondence, suggested that this was a reference to the Pseudo-Callisthenes, his Latin translator Julius Valerius and probably other medieval authors associated with the *Romance*. Vergerio's second category consists of authors who either praised Alexander or detracted from his glory in accordance with their own personal interests – according to Smith, an allusion to Plutarch, but I would also suggest the name of Walter of Châtillon, whom Petrarch similarly accused of celebrating Alexander in order to hide his personal envy for Rome.<sup>107</sup> The third category, says Vergerio, includes those historians who cared little about the content of their work

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<sup>103</sup> See Tissoni Benvenuti, 'Guarino, i suoi libri'.

<sup>104</sup> Vergerio's dedicatory letter was included in appendix to Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 375-7; nevertheless, it seems not to have been studied.

<sup>105</sup> Vergerio, *Epistolario*, pp. 381-2: 'In eis describendis [*scil.* the deeds of Alexander] certiores secutos sit auctores, atque ideo fide dignus videatur.'

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382: 'Nam ex ceteris quidem historie scriptoribus, qui multi fuerunt multumque sibi invicem dissonantes, aliqui, vulgarem famam secuti, non que gessit Alexander, sed que de eo passim ferebantur, ea tanquam vere gesta conscripserunt. Alii favore gentis et domesticæ glorie studio in enarrandis ad laudem eius operibus modum excesserunt. Nonnulli e contra, odio vel invidia, sive ut aliis morem gererent, qui tanti nominis splendore offendebantur, detrahare rebus gestis conati sunt; quidam insuper, privatim ambitione querendi nominis et proprie laudis cupiditate, non quid gestum ab eo fuerit, sed quid decore de illo scriptum memorie posterorum mandari posset, hoc solum extimaverunt; nec tam veritatem rerum quam figmentorum lenocinium amplexi sunt.'

<sup>107</sup> See 3.2.1 above.

and paid attention only to the style – I agree with Smith, who identified these as Curtius Rufus and Justin.<sup>108</sup>

The end result, Vergerio concludes, is that readers of such stories about Alexander are unable to tell whether they are being presented with a legend or with a true history ('fabulaeue an historia vera').<sup>109</sup> The clear implication is that Arrian, whom Vergerio has chosen to translate, provides the most authoritative and reliable account of Alexander.

Vergerio was not alone in admiring Arrian, whose *Anabasis* is still regarded as the most accurate and trustworthy account of Alexander's life. But it is significant that, in presenting his translation to his patron, Vergerio ventured to judge the entire Alexander tradition available in his time, dismissing not only the legendary tradition deriving from the Pseudo-Callisthenes, but also Curtius and Justin, whom the previous generation had regarded as highly reliable historians of Alexander. His critical judgement may, however, have been influenced by a desire to promote his own translation of Arrian by denigrating the Greek author's Roman competitors.

Enea Silvio Piccolomini, happening on Vergerio's translation some twenty years after it was completed,<sup>110</sup> recommended, in his *De liberorum educatione*, that boys should read historians, among whom he included 'Justin and Quintus Curtius and Arrian, whom Pier Paolo Vergerio translated', stating that their 'writings contain truth, not fables.'<sup>111</sup>

I would like to conclude this chapter by mentioning two additional fifteenth-century references to the medieval tradition of Alexander as consisting of untruthful fables, lies and even laughable matters. Although these remarks do not come from humanist literature *per se*, they are nevertheless significant because they show the extent to which the categories of 'legend' and 'history', *fabula* and *historia*, untrustworthy and trustworthy accounts, spread outside humanist circles. The first

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<sup>108</sup> For Smith's comments, see Vergerio, *Epistolario*, p. 382, n. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 382: 'Atque hec tanta scribentium varietas perplexitatem legentibus afferre non modicam consuevit, cum essent incerti quibusnam fidem adhiberi pre ceteris conveniret, et fabulasve an historiam veram legerent.'

<sup>110</sup> See 3.1.2 above.

<sup>111</sup> Enea Silvio Piccolomini, 'De liberorum educatione/The Education of Boys', in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. C. W. Kallendorf, Cambridge MA and London 2002, pp. 126-259, at p. 224: 'Sunt et historici legendi pueris, ut Livius atque Sallustius, quamvis ad eorum intelligentiam profectu sit opus; Iustinus et Quintus Curtius et quem Petrus Paulus transtulit, Arrianus, in quibus vera, non fabulosa sunt. Alexandri gesta percurri debebunt.'

is a marginal note handwritten by a fifteenth-century Italian reader in a codex of the J<sup>3</sup> *Historia de Preliis* from the Montefeltro library of Urbino; at the point when the episode of the ‘Submarine Voyage’ is presented, the reader wrote: ‘incredible lie.’<sup>112</sup> The second is a codex of the J<sup>1</sup> *Historia de Preliis*, once belonging to Guarnerio d’Artegna and now MS 119 of the Biblioteca Guarneriana, San Daniele del Friuli. It consists of few leaves, comprising the initial section of the *Historia de Preliis* and excerpts of similar material seemingly organised for educational purposes. In an inventory of the library compiled in 1461, the manuscript is described as ‘Vita Alexandri et alique facecie in papiro.’<sup>113</sup>

In the next chapter, I shall examine the impact of the humanist recovery of historical sources on the visual tradition of Alexander, beginning in the first decades of the fifteenth century and becoming more evident around 1450. As we shall see, the earliest iconographic theme based on the new historical tradition emerged from the text of Curtius Rufus.

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<sup>112</sup> See Schmidt, *A Legend and Its Image*, p. 160 and n. 16: ‘immo quicquid hic dicitur incredibile mendacium est.’ For the manuscript, now MS Urb. lat. 892 in the Vatican Library, see M. Faini, ‘Un sole “docto e saggio”: aspetti del mito di Guidubaldo da Montefeltro’, *Humanistica*, 3, 2008, pp. 35-43, at p. 40.

<sup>113</sup> See L. Casarsa et al., *La libreria di Guarnerio d’Artegna*, 2 vols, Udine 1991, I, pp. 367-8. I thank Angelo Floramo, director of the Biblioteca Guarneriana, for allowing me to study the manuscript in person and for providing me with reproductions. The additional material incorporated in the fifteenth century into the manuscript after the fragmentary *Historia de Preliis* is particularly interesting; I hope to investigate this manuscript further in the future.

## Chapter 4

### The Emergence of a New Renaissance Iconography: The Historical Portrait of Alexander

The humanist recovery of ancient historical sources which I have discussed in the previous chapter had a significant impact on the iconographic representation of Alexander. Over the fifteenth century, the illustration of fabulous episodes based on the *Romance* was progressively replaced by an entirely different repertoire of themes drawn from the historical sources. In Chapter 2 I presented the limited number of artworks which show the persistence of the legendary Alexander in Quattrocento Italy; in this chapter I shall examine the emergence of the new historical iconography in that same century, while its definitive establishment in the Cinquecento will be the subject of Chapter 5.

In the course of my research, one fact has become apparent: the body of works featuring the image of Alexander in fifteenth-century Italian art is relatively small. When compared to the widespread popularity of the image of Alexander from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, which I explored in Chapter 1, and the rich variety of pictures made from the sixteenth century onwards, which I shall treat in the next chapter, the iconographic evidence from the Quattrocento is scarce and limited to only a few types of object, connected either to the furnishing of domestic interiors – panels belonging to *cassoni* (marriage chests) and *spalliere*, which were hung on walls at shoulder-height<sup>1</sup> – or to cycles of ‘Famous Men’ (bronze and marble reliefs, easel and fresco paintings). In manuscripts and early printed books, portraits of Alexander often appear in decorated initials, and, significantly, some of

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<sup>1</sup> Italian inventories and documents from the fifteenth century usually refer to marriage chests with the term ‘forziere/pl. forzieri’, whereas ‘cassone/pl. cassoni’ starts to be employed from the sixteenth century (as attested by a famous passage in Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, 6 vols, Florence 1966-87, III, pp. 37-8). Nevertheless, I shall use the term ‘cassone’ as it is usually adopted by scholars to indicate chests from both the fifteenth and the sixteenth century; see P. Thornton, ‘Cassoni, Forzieri, Goffani and Cassette: Terminology and its Problems’, *Apollo*, 120, 1984, pp. 246-51; G. Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni: Masterpieces of Early Italian Art: Painted Marriage Chests 1400-1550*, Polegate, Sussex, and London 1997, pp. 42-9 and 241-3; C. Campbell, *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence: The Courtauld Wedding Chests* (exhibition catalogue, London, The Courtauld Gallery, 2009), London 2009, pp. 12-4. On Renaissance domestic interiors, see *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (exhibition catalogue, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006-7), ed. M. Ajmar-Wollheim and F. Dennis, London 2006. For *spalliere*, see E. Callmann, ‘Spalliera’, in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, 34 vols, New York 1996, XXIX, pp. 359-63, and A. B. Barriault, *Spalliera Paintings of Renaissance Tuscany: Fables of Poets for Patrician Homes*, University Park PA 1994.

them are based on ancient numismatic effigies. Illustrations of stories about him, however, are very much the exception: one such is an illuminated codex in the Biblioteca Comunale of Siena, containing Decembrio's translation of the *Historiae Alexandri Magni* of Curtius Rufus, to which I shall return later on.

#### 4.1 Alexander on Cassone Panels

Three main types of *cassoni* were produced in Italy from the fourteenth to the end of the sixteenth century: *pastiglia*, painted and carved *cassoni*. Of these, only the painted *cassoni* are relevant for our purposes, since those which depict stories of Alexander fall into this category.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of painted *cassoni* were made in Tuscany, with Florence as the undisputed centre of this trade, followed by Siena.<sup>3</sup> Given the nature of these objects – ‘the fruits of the first batch production in the history of art’, as Graham Hughes put it<sup>4</sup> – it is not surprising to find a specific subject repeated several times with only minor variations. This repetitiveness, however, should not be confused with a lack of inventiveness. On the contrary, *cassoni* have long been recognised as an important means for introducing new subjects and iconographic themes into painting.<sup>5</sup> This is also true in the case of the representation of Alexander, as his appearance in episodes drawn from historical sources, rather than from the medieval literature, first occurs in a number of *cassone* panels.<sup>6</sup> Most of these works are dated to around 1450 and ascribed to the most fashionable workshop in Florence specialising in this branch of artistic

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<sup>2</sup> For the different types of Renaissance *cassoni*, see E. Callmann and J. W. Taylor, ‘Cassone’, in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, 34 vols, New York 1996, VI, pp. 1-7; Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni*, pp. 22-31. As far as I am aware, no representation of stories of Alexander can be found in Renaissance *deschi da parto* (birth trays): see C. De Carli, *I deschi da parto e la pittura del primo Rinascimento toscano*, Turin 1997, and C. Däubler-Hauschke, *Geburt und Memoria: zum italienischen Bildtyp der deschi da parto*, Munich 2003. Alexander can sometimes be identified among the knights accompanying the ‘Chariot of Fame’ in depictions inspired by Petrarch's *Triumph*, which frequently appear on Renaissance furnishings.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, *Love and Marriage*, p. 12, has pointed out that painted *cassoni* ‘were made throughout Italy, and for courts as well as cities. However, the largest single number of surviving chests can be associated with Florence.’

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> See Callmann and Taylor, ‘Cassone’, pp. 1-5. On the most popular themes depicted on *cassone* panels, Vasari, *Le vite*, III, p. 37, famously attests: ‘E le storie che nel corpo dinanzi [on the *cassone* front] si facevano, erano per lo più di favole tolte da Ovidio e da altri poeti; ovvero storie raccontate dagli storici greci o latini; e similmente caccie, giostre, novelle d'amore, ed altre cose somiglianti, secondo che meglio amava ciascuno.’

<sup>6</sup> It is notoriously difficult to establish the authorship and, even more importantly for my argument, the chronology of *cassone* panels with any degree of certainty. Since my intention is to discuss iconographic issues, I rely on the work of Ellen Callmann and other more recent scholarly contributions for matters concerning attribution and dating.

production: the prolific *bottega* run by Apollonio di Giovanni (c. 1416-65) and Marco del Buono Giamberti (1402-89).<sup>7</sup>

#### 4.1.1 The Battle of Issus and the Meeting with the Family of Darius

From this workshop came a *cassone* front which depicts two episodes from the life of Alexander and which ‘perhaps should be considered the progenitor of a successful series.’<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, this panel was the pride of the remarkable art collection of the Earl of Crawford in London, but its present whereabouts are unknown (**fig. 58**). Nearly three-quarters of the panel is occupied by a great battle scene, and a meeting between a group of women and a young man takes place before a military tent on the left-hand side. The subject matter can be discerned with the aid of inscriptions labelling the main characters of the story: a young knight fighting on a rearing horse on the right-hand side bears the name ‘[A] LESADR [OS]’, the king seated in a chariot next to the top frame of the picture is identified as ‘DARIUS’ and the young man depicted on the left-hand side, lifting a lady called ‘SAEGHAMBI’ from the ground, is labelled ‘ALESANDER’.<sup>9</sup> Of the three major battles fought by Alexander and Darius’s armies in Asia (Granicus, Issus and Gaugamela or Arbela), this one can be identified with certainty as the battle of Issus, won by Alexander in 333 BC. At Issus, Alexander and Darius met for the very first time; while Alexander engaged battle on horseback, shoulder to shoulder with his men, as he is clearly shown doing on the right-hand

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<sup>7</sup> E. Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, Oxford 1974, with bibliography; E. H. Gombrich, ‘Apollonio di Giovanni: A Florentine Cassone Workshop Seen through the Eyes of a Humanist Poet’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 18, 1955, pp. 16-34. For a useful summary of scholarship on Apollonio and on *cassone* painting, see Luisa Vertova’s review of Callmann’s monograph in *The Burlington Magazine*, 118, 1976, pp. 523-4. For Marco del Buono, who remains an enigmatic figure in art history, see E. Callmann’s entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LIV, Rome 2000, pp. 300-1. A copy of an account book recording the commissions given to the *bottega* between 1446 and 1463 was discovered in Florence by Heinrich Brockhaus and published by Paul Schubring, *Cassoni: Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen Frührenaissance: ein Beitrag zur Profanmalerei im Quattrocento*, Leipzig 1915, pp. 430-7 (with Aby Warburg’s annotations). For an emended and more accurate transcription of the account book, see Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, pp. 76-81. Of the *cassoni* listed in this book, only one has been matched to an extant piece, now at Oberlin, Ohio: see W. Stechow, ‘Marco del Buono and Apollonio di Giovanni Cassone Painters’, *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, 1, 1944, pp. 4-25, and P. F. Watson, ‘Apollonio di Giovanni and Ancient Athens’, *ibid.*, 37, 1979-80, pp. 3-25.

<sup>8</sup> *In the Light of Apollo: Italian Renaissance and Greece* (exhibition catalogue, Athens, National Gallery, 2003-4), ed. M. Gregori, 2 vols, Milan 2003, I, pp. 177-8, no. I.65, at p. 177 (C. Filippini).

<sup>9</sup> Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 70, no. 41.

side of the panel, the Persian king led his forces from his towering war chariot, before fleeing from the battlefield after a frontal attack by Alexander's cavalry. On the left-hand side of the panel is the meeting of Alexander with the family of the defeated king Darius, which in the literary sources is said to have happened immediately after the battle of Issus. Curtius Rufus (*Historiae Alexandri Magni* III.12.1-26) reports that in the aftermath of the battle, Alexander learned that the women of Darius's family – his mother Sisygambis, his wife and two unmarried daughters – were among the captives; he went to meet them and, deciding to show mercy, reassured them that Darius was alive and that their own lives would be spared and their royal status respected. In the panel, Alexander is shown raising the kneeling queen mother Sisygambis from the ground. She is surrounded by the rest of the royal family: two young women wearing Northern European-style headdresses, a girl with hair falling loose on her shoulders, as used to be the custom for brides-to-be, and a little boy, Darius's younger son, of whom Curtius Rufus, alone among the Alexander historians, speaks. From the virtue displayed by Alexander on this occasion, the episode is also known as the 'Magnanimity (or the Generosity or Clemency) of Alexander.'

The same composition is found on four other *cassone* panels, three of which are also attributed to Apollonio's workshop. While many details vary from one another, the iconographic structure remains identical in its essentials. A simplified version of the image on the Crawford chest appears on a *cassone* front panel in the British Museum (**fig. 59**), the only one in its holdings.<sup>10</sup> Despite the less refined quality of the piece and its poor state of preservation, the iconography can be easily read. The animated battle of knights and infantrymen is so closely packed that Alexander, in the absence of inscriptions or any distinctive features, cannot be identified for certain (**fig. 60**). But the similarity to the Crawford composition and the presence of the meeting with the Persian royal family leave little doubt as to the subject. In the British Museum panel, the entire royal family is prostrated before Alexander in homage, while the surrounding courtiers and attendants gesture towards this scene, drawing the viewer's attention to it as the meaningful core of the image (**fig. 61**).

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 71, no. 45; see also L. Syson and D. Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, London 2001, p. 73. I wish to thank Dora Thornton, curator of the Renaissance Collection at the British Museum, Department of Prehistory and Europe, for allowing me to study the panel, which is currently not on public display.

In the other three *cassone* panels, a variation in the figure of Darius is introduced: the Persian king, instead of sitting in his chariot, is depicted standing up in it, which makes a visually more effective representation of urging his troops to battle. Two of these panels have been ascribed to Apollonio's workshop: the first piece was in the George R. Hann Collection at Sewickley, Pennsylvania, until 1980 and is now in an unknown location (**fig. 62**).<sup>11</sup> The second panel passed from the art collection of the Hungarian-British painter Philip A. De László, where it was until 1937, through several private hands and a complex attribution history, before ending up in its present home in a private collection in Florence (**fig. 63**).<sup>12</sup> Although the disposition of the narrative is almost identical in the third *cassone* panel, it has never been connected to Apollonio, and its subject has only recently been identified as *The Battle of Issus and the Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius* (**fig. 64**). On stylistic grounds, the work has been ascribed to Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, called Lo Scheggia (1406-86), the younger brother of Masaccio who specialised in the painting of *cassoni* and whose work was appreciated by patrons as distinguished as Lorenzo the Magnificent.<sup>13</sup> Active in Florence in almost the same years as Apollonio and Marco del Buono, and pursuing the same trade, Lo Scheggia was in contact with their workshop.<sup>14</sup> The panel was first published in 1843 by its owner, Alexis François Artaud de Montor, who provided a detailed description of

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 71, no. 44. The panel was sold in New York in 1980: Christie's, New York, *Important Paintings by Old Masters*, 5 June 1980, lot. 82.

<sup>12</sup> The panel was sold at Sotheby's in 1938 (Sotheby's, London, *Paintings and Drawings Mainly of the Continental Schools*, 15 June 1938, lot. 119) with an attribution to Apollonio di Giovanni which was rejected by Callman in 1974 (*Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 86: the panel is listed as 'London, collection Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Merton, *Battle of Issus*'). Ascribed to the so-called 'Brucianesi Master' by Everett Fahy on occasion of the 1985 Christie's auction (Christie's, London, *Important Old Master Pictures*, 5 July 1985, lot. 68), the piece has been reassigned to Apollonio by Maria Pia Mannini (*Moretti. Da Bernardo Daddi a Giorgio Vasari* [exhibition catalogue, Florence, Galleria Moretti, 1999], ed. M. P. Mannini, Florence 1999, pp. 138-41). As a work by Apollonio, the panel is also discussed by Filippini in *In the Light of Apollo*, I, pp. 177-8, no. I.65. In such a controversial situation, it seems safer to me to hold to a more general attribution to Apollonio's workshop. The panel was presented at Christie's in 1985 alongside a second panel, also given to the Brucianesi Master, depicting 'The Triumph of a Roman Emperor (Julius Caesar?)', bearing inscriptions 'S.P.Q.R.' (Christie's, London, *Important Old Master Pictures*, 5 July 1985, lot. 67).

<sup>13</sup> The panel was given to Lo Scheggia by Everett Fahy in 1997: Christies', London, *Important Old Master Pictures*, 4 July 1997, lot. 74. On Lo Scheggia, see the entry by L. Cavazzini in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LVI, Rome 2001, pp. 222-6; L. Bellosi and M. Haines, *Lo Scheggia*, Florence 1999; *Il fratello di Masaccio: Giovanni di Ser Giovanni detto lo Scheggia* (exhibition catalogue, San Giovanni Valdarno, 1999), ed. L. Cavazzini, Florence 1999.

<sup>14</sup> For documentary evidence suggesting a close relationship between Lo Scheggia and the workshop of Apollonio and Marco del Buono, see M. Haines, 'Il mondo dello Scheggia: persone e luoghi di una carriera', in L. Bellosi and M. Haines, *Lo Scheggia*, Florence 1999, pp. 35-64, esp. pp. 41-2.



the scene but did not attempt to identify the subject; moreover, the etching of the panel which Artaud included in his book showed only the left-hand side of the panel, omitting the battle scene on the right.<sup>15</sup> This partial and therefore misleading picture induced Paul Schubring to label this picture ‘The Meeting of Salomon and the Queen of Sheba’ – a scene often depicted on *cassoni* and illustrating a similar theme, that is, the encounter of a king and a queen.<sup>16</sup> A resemblance to the iconography of the ‘Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius’ was first noted by Jerzy Miziołek more than eighty years later, and credit for restoring the correct identification goes to Everett Fahy and Andrea Staderini.<sup>17</sup>

Representations of battle scenes and moral themes are extremely common in fifteenth-century *cassone* paintings; so it is not surprising to find them in this series of *cassone* panels.<sup>18</sup> Yet, if we consider these works from a different perspective, that of the iconographic tradition of Alexander, they are of considerable significance. Battles between Alexander and Darius had long been part of the iconographic repertoire; but the ‘Meeting of Alexander with the family of Darius’ had never previously been illustrated and was an entirely new iconographic episode at that time, which made its first appearance on *cassone* panels.

The battles between Alexander and Darius were often illustrated in medieval manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance*, usually in a repetitive and standardised form. They were not meant to depict a specific event but instead a generic ‘battle scene’, either as single combat or a chaotic muddle of cavalymen.<sup>19</sup> The only way to

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<sup>15</sup> A.-F. Artaud de Montor, *Peintres primitifs: collection de tableau rapportée d’Italie et publiée par M. le chevalier Artaud de Montor*, Paris 1843, p. 40 and pl. 37 (with an attribution to Andrea Orcagna).

<sup>16</sup> Schubring, *Cassoni*, p. 266, no. 192, and pl. XLI. A. Schmarsow, ‘Maitres italiens a la galerie d’Altenburg et dans la collection A. de Montor’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 20, 1898, pp. 494-510, at p. 501, was of the same opinion.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Miziołek, ‘The Queen of Sheba and Solomon on Some Early-Renaissance *Cassone* Panels A *Pastiglia Dorata*’, *Antichità viva*, 4, 1997, pp. 6-23, at p. 20, n. 22: ‘There are some doubts about both the Artaud de Montor and the Schubring identification of the subject, as quite similar iconography can be found in some representations of the *Generosity of Alexander the Great*.’ As mentioned above (n. 13), Everett Fahy first suggested the attribution to Lo Scheggia and identified the correct subject matter. See A. Staderini, ‘Un contesto per la collezione di “primitivi” di Alexis-François Artaud de Montor’, *Proporzioni*, 5, 2004, pp. 23-62, at pp. 45-6, no. 27, and pl. 44.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview, see Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni*.

<sup>19</sup> In medieval illuminated manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance*, for example, the majority of battle scenes do not involve Darius. In the narrative of the text, as well as in its illustrations, preference is given to his encounters with the monstrous creatures of the East; the battle against the ‘exotic’ King Porus of India is also a favourite topic. As far as Darius is concerned, a certain emphasis is also put on Alexander’s pursuit of his murderers. See Ross,

tell these battles apart is by means of the accompanying captions or of the passage in the text which they illustrate.<sup>20</sup> The battles of Alexander depicted on the *cassone* panels seem to fall into the same category as their illuminated predecessors. While they differ greatly in terms of style, composition, function and purpose, manuscript illuminations and *cassone* paintings share the same generic way of depicting such battle scenes, so that the specific event can be precisely identified only when additional elements are present – a caption or the text in the case of the manuscripts, a complementary scene, as we shall see, in the case of the *cassone* panels.<sup>21</sup> On the panels under scrutiny here, the battle scenes have no distinctive features, apart from the presence of Darius himself on his chariot. According to the historical accounts, Darius was at the battles of both Issus and Gaugamela, riding in his war chariot and escaping on either on a horse or a chariot. The only feature, therefore, allowing us to identify these battles for certain is the proximity of the ‘Meeting of Alexander with the Family of Darius’, which happened after the battle of Issus and has no connection with Gaugamela.<sup>22</sup>

As mentioned above, the episode of the ‘Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius’ did not come into its own iconographically until the mid-fifteenth century. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the theme became hugely popular from the

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*Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books*. In the iconographic tradition, from the sixteenth century onwards the battle of Issus, in particular, came to be seen as the representation *par excellence* of Alexander’s military prowess.

<sup>20</sup> Battle scenes between Alexander and Darius from antiquity seem to be a synthesis of various battles. The most famous example is the second-century BC mosaic from the House of the Faun at Pompeii (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale). Since its excavation in 1831, it has been identified as the ‘Battle of Issus’; but scholars now largely agree that it is a combination of events from the battles of Granicus, Issus and Gaugamela; see A. Cohen, *The Alexander Mosaic: Stories of Victory and Defeat*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 130-8 and 224, n. 171, with further bibliography. For a different line of argument leading to its identification as the battle of Gaugamela, see P. Moreno, *Apelle, la Battaglia di Alessandro*, Milan 2000.

<sup>21</sup> These additional elements can also be crucial in identifying stories of other figures from ancient history such as Julius Caesar, Aemilius Paulus, Darius and Cyrus. See Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 46: ‘There are several panels of most of these battles and of the subsequent triumphs but none of them forms pairs, and the battles and the triumphs themselves can be identified only when the protagonists are labelled by inscriptions, when well-known symbols are displayed, or when related events are represented with them.’

<sup>22</sup> Despite the presence of Darius, which might have led to its identification as the battle of Gaugamela, two of the panels were first published as depictions of the battle of the Granicus: for the British Museum panel, see T. Borenius, ‘Unpublished Cassone Panels-VI’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 41, 1922, pp. 256-9, and Schubring, *Cassoni*, p. 260, no. 160; for the Crawford panel, see *ibid.*, p. 257, no. 150. It is, in fact, the presence of Darius which disproves the hypothesis that the scenes are of the battle of the Granicus – fought in 334 BC on the banks of the river by that name in present-day Turkey – since he did not fight there, sending his local satraps to repel Alexander instead. Also, in the British Museum panel there is no trace of the essential feature of the episode: a river or at least a watery area.

early sixteenth century onwards; but around 1450, when it was introduced into *cassone* painting, it was not a well-known story, and there were no models for the painters to rely on. In the Middle Ages the incident with Darius's family was not completely unheard of: it was touched on in the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.41), and sometimes illustrated in manuscripts. But it had no significance in the narrative and, what matters the most here, no iconographic tradition grew out of it.<sup>23</sup>

The key question of where this theme comes from – the sources, in other words, to which *cassone* painters turned when creating this new iconographic theme – has rarely been addressed in the scholarly literature and depends largely on the 1974 discussion of the topic by Ellen Callmann. She examined the possible influence of Plutarch and Arrian, who both recount the meeting of Alexander with the family of Darius; but she does not come to a clear conclusion about the sources used by Apollonio.<sup>24</sup> Callmann ruled out Plutarch because, in his *Alexander* XXI.1, Alexander did not actually meet the royal family: aware of the notorious beauty of Persian women, he deliberately avoided seeing them so as not to be tempted and instead sent his general Leonnatus as a messenger. Arrian, in the *Anabasis* II.12.3-8, reports this version of the story alongside another one, according to which Alexander went to see the women accompanied only by his bosom friend Hephaestion; the queen mother Sisygambis mistook the king's friend for the king himself and prostrated herself at Hephaestion's feet. The moral exemplarity of the episode comes at the end: forgiving her mistake and showing magnanimity and compassion, Alexander raised Sisygambis from the ground and told her that there was no mistake at all, for Hephaestion was, in fact, 'another Alexander' (*Anabasis*, II.12.7). This second version is clearly closest to the scene represented on the *cassone* fronts, and Callmann implicitly argues that Arrian is the most likely source of inspiration for Apollonio. Although this conclusion has generally won support,

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<sup>23</sup> The small number of illustrations of the episode in the manuscript tradition can be identified as depicting the meeting with the family of Darius only by the captions; as far as the iconographic composition is concerned, not much distinguishes this encounter from other meetings with noble ladies (i.e., Candace, or the Queen of the Amazons) also narrated in the *Romance*. Some examples are in Ross, *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books*. Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* (Book III) also includes the episode; but this work, which I discussed in Chapter 3 (3.1.3), was never illustrated.

<sup>24</sup> Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 44. She also noted that although Boccaccio, a source commonly drawn on by *cassone* painters, had a chapter in his *De casibus virorum illustrium* (IV.9) devoted to Darius king of Persia, he made no mention of the meeting of Alexander with the family of Darius.

some authors have continued to cite both Plutarch and Arrian as possible sources for the episode.<sup>25</sup>

The entire problem, however, needs to be reconsidered in light of the availability around 1450 of accounts of the meeting of Alexander and the family of Darius. In the absence of any significant mention of the episode in medieval literature, the newly recovered historical works of Plutarch, Curtius Rufus, Arrian and Diodorus Siculus are the likeliest sources. In Chapter 3 (3.1), I set out a chronology of their recovery in the course of the fifteenth century, and this will provide the basis for my discussion of the matter.

In the attempt to identify which source might have inspired *cassone* painters in their creation of a new iconographic theme, Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* should definitively be dismissed as a possible candidate. Even though it has sometimes been misinterpreted, the point made by Callmann in 1974 is correct:<sup>26</sup> Plutarch does not mention a meeting between Alexander and Darius's family, but, on the contrary, emphasises Alexander's resolution not to see the Persian women and, therefore, his role as an *exemplum pudicitiae*.<sup>27</sup> Arrian, too, should probably be ruled out: his version of the story in the *Anabasis* accurately matches the scene on the *cassoni*; but this work was not yet available around 1450. As we have seen, a Latin translation of the original Greek text was completed in 1461 and not printed until 1508.<sup>28</sup> True, a Greek manuscript of the *Anabasis* was in the possession of Giovanni Aurispa in Florence in 1423; however, it seems a remote and unlikely possibility that a painter such as Apollonio, or anyone from his circle, would have had access to it and been able to make use of a work which was virtually unknown until the

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<sup>25</sup> See Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni*, pp. 157-8, and J. Klein Morrison, 'Apollonio di Giovanni's *Aeneid* Cassoni and the Virgil Commentators', *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, 1992, pp. 27-47, at p. 44, n. 17: 'The source is probably either Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (XXI.1), or Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander* (II.12-14).' Earlier scholars most often name Plutarch alone, for example, Schubring, *Cassoni*, pp. 257, nos 150 and 151, pp. 259-60, nos 158 and 159 ('Quelle: Plutarch, Alexander').

<sup>26</sup> Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> This does not diminish, of course, the major role played by Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* in *cassone* painting. Known to have been circulating in Latin translation well before the 1470 Campano edition, the *Lives* remained the main point of reference for the stories of Roman rulers such as Julius Caesar, Pompey and Scipio, frequently depicted on this type of object. For Plutarch's impact on the visual arts of the Renaissance, see *Biografia dipinta: Plutarco e l'arte del Rinascimento: 1400-1550*, ed. R. Guerrini, La Spezia 2001; on *cassone* painting, in particular, see M. Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine nell'arte del Rinascimento: moduli plutarchei in fronti di cassoni e spalliere', in *ibid.*, pp. 209-344.

<sup>28</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3 (3.1.2), Vergerio's Latin version of 1433-7 remained completely unknown until 1454, when a new translation was undertaken by Bartolomeo Facio and Giacomo Curlo and completed in 1461.

second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Diodorus Siculus also reported the meeting with the family of Darius (*Bibliotheca Historica* XVII.37.3-38.7); but this portion of his work did not become available until 1539, and then only in Greek, making it of no relevance here.<sup>30</sup>

Although it has been neglected in the scholarly literature, there is a work which meets all the requirements needed to be the perfect candidate for the source of the iconography of the 'Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius'. The *Historiae Alexandri Magni* by Curtius Rufus was available in both the original Latin and the vernacular in the mid-fifteenth century and includes an historical account of the meeting which matches the depiction on the *cassone* panels.<sup>31</sup> As indicated in Chapter 3 above (3.1.3), this work, though not unknown in the Middle Ages, only began to circulate widely in Latin in the early fifteenth century and was translated into the vernacular by Pier Candido Decembrio in 1438. Curtius's account of the meeting of Alexander and the family of Darius is very similar to Arrian's second version of the story, since both historians were drawing on the same earlier source. It therefore seems far more plausible that the source of the new iconographic theme on the *cassone* panels was the widely accessible Curtius Rufus, available in Latin and the vernacular, rather than the still rare Arrian, available, at best, in Greek.<sup>32</sup>

This claim is strengthened by the fact that *cassoni* were normally produced in pairs (one for the bride, the other for the groom), and the companion to the

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<sup>29</sup> The copy of the *Anabasis* belonging to Aurispa is untraced and very little is known about it. As discussed in Chapter 3 (3.1.2, and n. 13), the codex was brought by Aurispa from Constantinople in 1423; mention of it is made twice in Aurispa's correspondence of 1421 and 1424, but the manuscript does no longer appear in the 1459 inventory of Aurispa's library. It remains pure guesswork whether the copy had some sort of circulation, and therefore influence, within the Florentine circle of humanists when he was in Aurispa's hands in the first half of the fifteenth century.

<sup>30</sup> As I have discussed in Chapter 3 (3.1.4), Pier Candido Decembrio's translation of Books XVI to XX (the 'Macedonian section' of the *Bibliotheca Historica*) stopped at chapter 49 of Book XVI, and so did not include Book XVII, in which the episode is reported.

<sup>31</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the only reference to Curtius Rufus as a possible source for the episode in the *cassone* panels is by Filippini, in *In the Light of Apollo*, I, p. 177-8, no. I.65, at p. 177. Discussing the panel in a Florentine private collection (**fig. 63**), she mentions Curtius Rufus along with Diodorus Siculus but does not expand further on this possibility.

<sup>32</sup> See the relevant passage in Pier Candido Decembrio's translation, which I quote from MS I.VII.23 of the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena, f. 31v: 'Le Regine Ephestione Alexandro esser credendo a sua mainera lonorareno. Doppo uno deli suoi schiavi et presoni quale er Re fusse monstrando i Sysigambi matre di Dario alipiedi dalexandro ingenochiata perche may veduto non lhavesse sincomincio ad excusare. Alexandro ley con la mano elevando. Non hay fallito dice matre perche costuy e come io Alexandro.'

representation of ‘The Battle of Issus and the Meeting with the Family of Darius’ was usually ‘Darius Setting Out for the Battle of Issus’ (sometimes inaccurately called ‘The Triumph of Darius’). Several examples of this scene attributed to Apollonio’s workshop survive, though none of them forms a pair with any of the extant Alexander panels. The best preserved of these works is today in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (**fig. 65**).<sup>33</sup> Inscriptions bearing the names of the protagonists and other symbolic features make the identification of the subject matter certain – Darius sitting on his chariot, his wife and mother on the cart behind him, the Zoroastrian sacred fire and a statue of Apollo leading what looks like a triumphal procession. Three similar compositions are known.<sup>34</sup> No doubt the choice of this subject has to be seen in light of the great popularity of triumphs and processional parades on *cassone* panels.<sup>35</sup> But Callmann has convincingly argued that the depictions on these panels of Darius, whose dishonourable flight from the battlefield would hardly earn him a triumph, show him setting out for the battle of Issus – that is, heading to the event represented in the companion panel. The analogy to a Roman triumph in the composition ironically illustrates Darius’s cowardice, as well as the biblical moral ‘pride goes before a fall’ (Proverbs 16.18), which is completed in the companion panel.<sup>36</sup> What is even more significant for my

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<sup>33</sup> Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, pp. 70-1, no. 42, with previous bibliography. A comprehensive study of the representation of Darius III in Renaissance art remains to be written; some useful material can be found in Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*.

<sup>34</sup> These panels have been labelled either as *Triumph of Darius* or as *Triumph of Alexander*, probably because of the lack of inscriptions, which are found only in the Amsterdam panel. In my view, the identification of Darius can be confirmed on the grounds of their similarities to the Amsterdam panel, in which the subject matter is certain. The panels are in: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Landau Finaly Bequest (see C. Acidini Luchinat, ‘Appendice V. I cassoni della donazione Landau Finaly’, in *Lorenzo dopo Lorenzo: la fortuna storica di Lorenzo il Magnifico* [exhibition catalogue, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, 1992], ed. P. Pirollo, Milan 1992, pp. 241-7, at p. 241, no. 2; for its attribution to Lo Scheggia, see Bellosi and Haines, *Lo Scheggia*, p. 80); Los Angeles, County Museum of Art (see *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance* [exhibition catalogue, Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum 2008-9, and Sarasota, The John and Marble Ringling Museum of Art 2009], ed. C. Baskins, Boston 2008, pp. 121-6, no. 8); and formerly in the Collection of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (see Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 70, no. 41). The difficulty in identifying the protagonist of these triumphal processions is shown by a panel ascribed to Lo Scheggia in the Luzzetti Collection, Florence, which has been labelled as *A Roman Triumph* (Christie’s, London, *Old Master Pictures*, 18 April 1997, lot. 154), *Triumph of Darius* (Bellosi and Haines, *Lo Scheggia*, p. 85) and *Triumph of Alexander* (Filippini in *In the Light of Apollo*, I, pp. 178-9, no. I.67). The identification with Alexander seems to me unsupported by sufficient proof. Dubious remains also a triumphant procession on a *cassone* front in Reggio Emilia, illustrated in *La Galleria Parmeggiani di Reggio Emilia: guida alla collezione*, ed. E. Farioli, Reggio Emilia 2002, pp. 110-11.

<sup>35</sup> See G. Carandente, *I trionfi nel primo Rinascimento*, Turin 1963.

<sup>36</sup> Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 44, points out that in the pair of *cassoni* formerly in the Earl of Crawford’s collection, the end panels depict two further episodes of pride humbled, both taken from mythology: Phaeton and Helios; and Apollo and Daphne.

argument is that the iconography of this triumph-like composition is based on a passage of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni* (III.3.8-28).<sup>37</sup> Among the historical accounts of Alexander's life, only Curtius Rufus describes at length Darius's preparation for the battle of Issus, picturing a chariot parade which corresponds exactly to the procession in the *cassone* panels, down to the last, and seemingly problematic, iconographic detail.<sup>38</sup> Curtius, therefore, provided the inspiration for the 'marriage sets' portraying the Alexander stories, not only those in the panels depicting his victory over Darius and magnanimity towards his family, but also the scenes illustrating the prelude to these events, in which Darius is the protagonist.

It seems to me, therefore, that there are very strong grounds to maintain that the representation of Alexander in this series of *cassone* panels depends on the *Historiae Alexandri Magni* of Curtius Rufus rather than on the accounts of Plutarch and Arrian, as is usually assumed. In comparison to Plutarch and Arrian (the recovery of the relevant section of Diodorus Siculus is too late to be taken into consideration here), Curtius provides a far more dramatic account of the life of Alexander: his narrative is full of *coups de théâtre* and moral lessons, and, most importantly, his stories are rich in the kind of detail which could easily be transferred to the visual arts. With these characteristics, Curtius's biography of Alexander must have appealed greatly to artists and especially painters. Arrian, with his balanced and critically measured narrative, focuses almost exclusively on military facts and therefore had only a limited influence on iconography. Plutarch, however, makes intentional use of episodes and events to underline virtues and to cast light on the personalities of his protagonists.<sup>39</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 5 below, from the late fifteenth century onwards, Plutarch, far more than Arrian, exerted a powerful influence on the Renaissance use of Alexander as a moral *exemplum*. Yet, as far as iconographic themes were concerned, Curtius offered a varied and detailed repository of material to select from; and, in the case of the

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<sup>37</sup> See *The Florentine Paintings in Holland 1300-1500*, ed. H. W. van Os and M. Prakken, Maarssen 1974, pp. 31-3, no. 3, esp. p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 32, where the two women accompanying Darius's chariot, the sacred fire and the statue of the winged Apollo being carried in the procession have been convincingly connected to Curtius's text. For a different, and rather confused, interpretation of these iconographic features, see S. L. Caroselli, *Italian Panel Painting of the Early Renaissance in the Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Los Angeles 1994, pp. 114-16, no. 15.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 3 above, n. 7.

‘Meeting of Alexander with the Family of Darius’, his account is richer than Plutarch’s.

Finally, we need to bear in mind the destination and function of these objects. *Cassoni* were made on the occasion of a marriage and, therefore, always present stories with a moral appropriate to this event. What Curtius highlights in the episode of the meeting with the family of Darius is Alexander’s continence and clemency – virtues which make this *cassone* appropriate for a bride and a groom.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the juxtaposition on the same panel with the Battle of Issus, where Alexander won the day, strengthens the moral value of the story, as Callmann has rightly pointed out: ‘Here the message is that the all-powerful male is to be praised for his forbearance and kindness to the weaker sex.’<sup>41</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Two Sienese Panels Based on Plutarch

As we shall see in Chapter 5, from the beginning of the sixteenth century there was a considerable increase in the number of episodes from the life of Alexander which entered the iconographic repertoire. Among these, the ‘Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius’ was one of the most popular and continued for the most part to be based, as it had from its very first appearance in *cassone* painting, on the text of Curtius. But there are exceptions to every rule; and two representations of the ‘Meeting’ from the last decade of the fifteenth century were based, not on Curtius, but instead on Plutarch, resulting in an unconventional illustration of the subject. The first example is the *Alexander* painting belonging to the series of Famous Men and Women known as the ‘Piccolomini (or Spannocchi-Piccolomini) cycle’, today in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham (**fig. 66**).<sup>42</sup> The other is a *spalliera* panel acquired alongside its companion in 1874 by the Fourth Marquess of Bath and

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<sup>40</sup> Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* III.12.21: ‘Tunc quidem ita se gessit ut omnes ante eos reges et continentia et clementia vincerentur.’ See Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 44: ‘It is because of this scene [the *Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius*] that the pair of panels deserve such a prominent position within the context of marriage.’

<sup>41</sup> E. Callmann, ‘The Growing Threat to Marital Bliss as Seen in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Paintings’, *Studies in Iconography*, 5, 1979, pp. 73-92, at p. 82.

<sup>42</sup> On the *Alexander* panel and the notoriously problematic Piccolomini cycle, see *Renaissance Siena: Art for a City* (exhibition catalogue, London, National Gallery, 2007-8), ed. L. Syson et al., London 2007, pp. 234-45 (L. Syson); J. Dunkerton et al., ‘The Master of the Story of Griselda and Paintings for Sienese Palaces’, *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 27, 2006, pp. 4-71, at pp. 18-61, with bibliography.



since then displayed in the family residence at Longleat House, Wiltshire (**fig. 68**).<sup>43</sup> Although the first painting is ascribed to the Master of the Story of Griselda and the second to the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio, the paintings have a similar provenance and date: they were both made for Sieneese patrician families in about 1493-4 on the occasion of a marriage. If the circumstances of the commission of the Longleat panel are now clear (see below), those of the Piccolomini cycle are less so.<sup>44</sup> What can be said for certain is that the two paintings belong to the same artistic and cultural milieu: the closely connected Piccolomini and Spannocchi families in Siena.

Later in this chapter (4.2.2.3) I shall discuss the Birmingham *Alexander* painting as part of one of the most remarkable cycles of Famous Men and Women to have survived from the fifteenth century. For now, I would like to focus on the background of the picture, where a scene split in two at either side of Alexander's body takes place (**fig. 67**). Marilena Caciorgna has shown that the usual identification of the episode as *The Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius* is imprecise, since no meeting of Alexander with the Persian women is actually taking place. Rather, she argued, a more appropriate title would be 'The Family of Darius Treated with Great Respect'.<sup>45</sup> The source for the event painted here is not Curtius Rufus, but Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* XXI.1: on the left-hand side of the picture Alexander is shown talking to his general Leonnatus, while on the right the Persian women are respectfully accompanied out of their military tent. The reason

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<sup>43</sup> Accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax in 2005 and allocated to the Victoria and Albert Museum, the *Alexander* panel and its pendant remain on permanent loan to Longleat House. See Christie's, London, *Catalogue of the Renowned Collection of Works of Art Formed by that Distinguished Connoisseur, Alexander Barker, Esq.*, 6 and 8-11 June 1874, lots 82 and 83. More on the panel is in *Siena e Roma: Raffaello, Caravaggio e i protagonisti di un legame antico* (exhibition catalogue, Siena, Santa Maria della Scala, Palazzo Squarcialupi, 2005-6), ed. B. Santi and C. Strinati, Siena 2005, pp. 199-205, at pp. 201-3 (L. Syson); and in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 275-7.

<sup>44</sup> See Dunkerton et al., 'The Master of the Story of Griselda', p. 24, and *Francesco di Giorgio e il Rinascimento a Siena 1450-1500* (exhibition catalogue, Siena, Church of Sant'Agostino, 1993), ed. L. Bellosi, Milan 1993, pp. 462-9, no. 103 (R. Bartalini).

<sup>45</sup> Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine', pp. 298-313, esp. pp. 310-11: 'Le donne di Dario trattate con estremo riguardo.' A similar suggestion was made by V. Tatrai, 'Il Maestro della Storia di Griselda e una famiglia senese di mecenati dimenticata', *Acta historiae artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 25, 1979, pp. 27-66, at p. 32: 'Dame prigioniere trattate con ogni riguardo.' See also R. Guerrini, 'Alessandro Magno: il conquistatore del mondo', in M. Caciorgna and R. Guerrini, *La virtù figurata: eroi ed eroine dell'antichità nell'arte senese tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Siena 2003, pp. 17-27, at pp. 17-21. The first scholar to draw attention to the background scene, labelling it as 'Alexander spares the family of Darius', was R. L. Mode, 'Ancient Paragons in a Piccolomini Scheme', in *Hortus Imaginum: Essays in Western Art*, ed. R. Enggass and M. Stokstad, Lawrence 1974, pp. 73-83, at p. 80, n. 7.

behind the choice of this unusual iconography was, no doubt, Plutarch's presentation of the episode as an *exemplum pudicitiae* – Alexander expressly avoids seeing the female prisoners so as not to be tempted by their beauty. Visually exemplified in the background of the panel, Alexander's chaste behaviour is verbally praised in the foreground in the verses inscribed on the pedestal on which his towering statue-like figure stands. Because this episode is based on Plutarch rather than the more conventional Curtius Rufus, Caciorgna concluded that the iconography of the Birmingham *Alexander* was not merely rare, but very possibly unique.<sup>46</sup> I believe, however, that I have found another example of this uncommon iconography in the *Alexander* panel at Longleat House (**fig. 68**).<sup>47</sup>

The identification of the subject matter of this painting puzzled several connoisseurs and art historians,<sup>48</sup> before the first accurate analysis of it (along with its pendant, also at Longleat) was made by Luke Syson in 2005.<sup>49</sup> He argued that the subject was 'episodes from the life of Alexander the Great, taken from Plutarch's *Lives* (XX.5-XXI.5): his magnanimity towards the family of the defeated Darius'.<sup>50</sup> In addition, he connected the *Alexander* panel and its pendant, representing *Julius Caesar Crossing the Rubicon*, with a passage in Vasari's 1568 life of Ghirlandaio, where a commission for the Palazzo Spannocchi in Siena is recorded on the occasion of the sumptuous double wedding of Ambrogio Spannocchi's sons and heirs, Antonio and Giulio, to Alessandra Placidi and Giovanna Melisi, held on 17-19

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<sup>46</sup> Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine', p. 311: 'Allo stato attuale delle conoscenze, sembrerebbe allora di poter concludere che l'*Alessandro* di Birmingham costituisce una rarità iconografica, se non una sorta di vero e proprio *unicum*.' There is another, much later depiction of the 'Meeting' based on Plutarch: the 1641-2 lunette by Pietro da Cortona in the Sala di Venere in the Pitti Palace of Florence. Cortona's picture differs greatly from the examples discussed here, as it combines the visual tradition based on Curtius Rufus with Plutarch's emphasis on Alexander's chastity. It cannot therefore be connected to the Sienese paintings and remains, as far as I am aware, an unprecedented rendering of the episode of the 'Meeting'. For more on the lunette, see M. Campbell, *Pietro da Cortona at the Pitti Palace: A Study of the Planetary Rooms and Related Projects*, Princeton 1977, pp. 100-3 and fig. 35.

<sup>47</sup> On the iconography of the Longleat panel, see my 'Tra *fabula e historia*: sulla ricezione del mito di Alessandro il Grande nel Quattrocento', *Schifanoia*, 42-3, 2012, pp. 227-39.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: A List of the Principal Artists and Their Works with an Index of Places: Florentine School*, I, London 1963, p. 26, who presented the panel as a 'Feast'; or Hughes, *Renaissance Cassoni*, pp. 46-7 and 224, who entitled the painting 'The Lapiths and the Centaurs'. For a complete list of suggested identifications of the subject, see Daniotti, 'Tra *fabula e historia*', pp. 229-30.

<sup>49</sup> First presented in *Siena e Roma*, pp. 201-3, Syson's research is also discussed in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 275-7, Dunkerton et al., 'The Master of the Story of Griselda', pp. 6-7, and *Renaissance Siena*, p. 231.

<sup>50</sup> *Siena e Roma*, p. 202: 'Episodi della vita di Alessandro Magno, presi dalle *Vite Parallele* di Plutarco (XX.5-XXI.5): la sua generosità verso la famiglia dello sconfitto Dario.'

January 1494.<sup>51</sup> This suggestion has been widely accepted – though the panel is usually described merely as a *Magnanimity of Alexander* without reference to the ‘episodes’ mentioned by Syson, which, in my view, are crucial for establishing what exactly the Longleat painting is about.<sup>52</sup> The composition follows the text of Plutarch closely, which allows us to identify, reading from the right to the left of the panel: the battle of Issus; the chariot taken from Darius and surmounted by his armour and bow (**fig. 69**); the royal treasures displayed in Darius’s tent as part of Alexander’s booty; an imposing banquet table ordered by Alexander and ready for the guests to arrive; and the captive women from the royal family escorted before Leonnatus, who is speaking to them (**fig. 70**). An important piece of evidence, confirming the almost *verbatim* use of Plutarch, is provided by an overlooked iconographical detail.<sup>53</sup> It is a Latin inscription on the tablecloth covering the banquet table, at the left-hand side of the painting, next to Alexander (**fig. 71**), which reads: ‘OCCINEMPERAR / ERAT’; but according to Martin Davies, it should be emended to: ‘HOCCINE IMPERARE ERAT’ (‘Is this what it was to rule?’). The emended inscription corresponds to a passage from the Latin version of Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander*, which, as we have seen in Chapter 3 (3.1.1), was translated from the Greek by Guarino before 1408 and later included in the 1470 Campano edition of the *Lives*.<sup>54</sup> In the text, these words are spoken by Alexander at a precise

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<sup>51</sup> Vasari, *Le vite*, III, p. 495: ‘Domenico [Ghirlandaio] e Bastiano [Mainardi] insieme dipinono in Siena nel palazzo degli Spannocchi, in una camera, molte storie di figure piccole a tempera.’ The Spannocchi coat of arms (three ears of corn quartered with the crescent moons of the Piccolomini) was identified by Syson, *Siena e Roma*, p. 202, on Alexander’s tent at the centre of the panel. On the 1494 wedding and the artistic commissions of the Spannocchi, see Tátrai, ‘Il Maestro della Storia di Griselda’; A. Lisini, ‘Medaglia d’Antonio Spannocchi’, in *Fascicolo-omaggio per il primo centenario del R. Gabinetto Numismatico e medagliere nazionale di Brera in occasione delle onoranze a Solone Ambrosoli*, Milan 1908, pp. 79-86; U. Morandi, ‘Gli Spannocchi: piccoli proprietari terrieri, artigiani, piccoli, medi e grandi mercanti-banchieri’, in *Studi in memoria di Federigo Melis*, 5 vols, Naples 1978, III, pp. 91-120; I. Ait, ‘Mercanti-banchieri nella città del papa: gli eredi di Ambrogio Spannocchi fra XV e XVI secolo’, in *Mercanti stranieri a Roma tra ‘400 e ‘500 [=Archivi e cultura, XXXVII, n.s., 2004]*, pp. 7-44.

<sup>52</sup> Labelled as *The Magnanimity of Alexander the Great*, the panel was exhibited in London in 2006 alongside its pendant: *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, p. 359, no. 111 and pp. 275-7. The painting is briefly discussed by N. Pons, ‘Problemi di collaborazione e compagnie di artisti: cassoni e spalliere di Jacopo del Sellaio, Biagio d’Antonio e Bartolomeo di Giovanni’, in *Virtù d’amore. Pittura nuziale nel Quattrocento fiorentino* (exhibition catalogue, Florence, Galleria dell’Accademia-Museo Horne, 2010), ed. C. Paolini et al., Florence 2010, pp. 127-37, at p. 136. It is also mentioned in C. Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù: Paolo Veronese, Alessandro Magno e il patriziato veneziano*, Venice 2009, pp. 45-6.

<sup>53</sup> For an earlier discussion, see Daniotti, ‘Tra *fabula* e *historia*’, pp. 235-6.

<sup>54</sup> Guarino’s translation reads: ‘Post hec sublime cubiculum magnifice conditum subiens ubi stratum ad socios conversus [ed.: conversos] hoccine inquit imperare erat’ ([Plutarch, *Vitae illustrium virorum*], ed. Campano, II, f. 379v) (Plutarch, *Alexander* XX.8).

moment: having contemplated the Persian riches now in his hands and the magnificent banquet just about to start, he turns to his companions and asks: 'Is this what it was to rule?' After these words have been spoken, Alexander learns that Darius's women have been captured and later decides to send Leonnatus in his place and show them mercy.

The appearance of these words in the panel is remarkable, firstly, because no other example of a similar inscription is known,<sup>55</sup> and, secondly, because the phrase puts the emphasis of the entire composition, not on the magnanimity shown to the Persian women, which takes place in the background, but rather on Alexander's contemplation of the booty lawfully acquired in war from Darius, which is displayed in the foreground across the length of the panel. The words spoken by Alexander and inscribed on the banquet table provide a focal point for the painting and also serve as a moral commentary, reminding the viewer of the illusory value of worldly goods. This episode and its accompanying inscription, combining a display of splendour with a moral lesson from antiquity, was very well suited to the occasion for which it was commissioned: the lavish wedding of the Spannocchi brothers.

#### 4.1.3. The Meeting of Alexander and Diogenes

The episode of the 'Meeting of Alexander with Diogenes' also made an appearance in *cassone* painting, though there is only one example of it. A side panel detached from its original marriage chest was published by Schubring in 1915 (**fig. 72**): ascribed to the so-called Master of the Judgement of Paris,<sup>56</sup> the painting was later in the collection of Baron Lazzaroni in Paris, but its current whereabouts are unknown.<sup>57</sup> The encounter between Alexander and Diogenes of Sinope is recounted

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<sup>55</sup> Inscriptions with the names of the protagonists on *cassone* paintings are intended for an entirely different purpose and cannot therefore be compared to the Longleat inscription.

<sup>56</sup> Named after a *desco da parto* illustrating this subject in the Bargello, Florence, the Master of the Judgement of Paris was active in the first half of the fifteenth century and has sometimes been identified with Cecchino da Verona; see E. Neri Lusanna, 'Aspetti della cultura tardo-gotica a Firenze: il "Maestro del Giudizio di Paride"', *Arte cristiana*, 77, 1989, pp. 409-26.

<sup>57</sup> Schubring, *Cassoni*, p. 263, no. 178 and pl. XXXVII. The panel is also listed in A. Pigler, *Barockthemen: eine Auswahl von Verzeichnissen zur Ikonographie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols, Budapest 1974, II, p. 386. K. Herding, 'Alexander Visits Diogenes: Civilian Courage and Royal Virtue in Conflict', in *Alexander the Great in European Art* (exhibition catalogue, Thessaloniki, Organisation for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997-8), ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Athens 1997, pp. 84-103, provides a picture of the panel, which is said to have been 'formerly' in the Lazzaroni Collection. Baron Michele Angelo Lazzaroni (1863-1934) was a collector and unscrupulous art merchant, who notoriously used to repaint

in several sources, the most accurate of which is Plutarch (*Alexander* XIV.1-3). Other significant accounts of the meeting are in Valerius Maximus's *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri* (4.3 ext. 4) and Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (II.6.32 and 37).<sup>58</sup> The story goes that while in Corinth, Alexander, wishing to meet the famous Diogenes, went to see the wise man and found him in an out-of-the-way place. Diogenes was lying on the ground in his barrel, enjoying the heat of the sun. When Alexander asked if there was anything that he, the most powerful of all men, could do for him, Diogenes replied that he could stand a little to the side, so as not to prevent the sunshine from reaching him. Alexander, surprised but not angered by this unexpected answer, acknowledged Diogenes's wisdom and told his Macedonian soldiers that had he not been Alexander, he would have liked to be Diogenes.<sup>59</sup>

The moral of humbled pride – in this case, Alexander's – would make this episode appropriate for a *cassone*. We can only speculate, however, about what might have been depicted on the front of the chest to which the Lazzaroni panel once belonged – in other words, what accompanied the *Meeting of Alexander and Diogenes*. In the Lazzaroni panel, the episode is set in an airy countryside, bathed in sunshine: Alexander, dressed in contemporary fashion like his fellow soldier, approaches Diogenes, who is depicted as a bearded and naked man seated in a barrel. The attempt to present Diogenes as a Cynic philosopher who lives in poverty and who disregards the habits of civil society is clearly visualised in his naked or

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cheap or deteriorated Renaissance works to make them look more appealing to prospective buyers. This practice has led scholars to mistrust the authenticity of the paintings once belonging to his collection. Although the possibility that the *Alexander* panel is a forgery cannot be excluded in principle, the only photograph available shows that the panel is no masterpiece and can hardly be compared to the more refined appearance of the paintings we know to have been reworked by Lazzaroni. So, I shall treat the painting as an original fifteenth-century work, which may or may not have been retouched and, even if so, not enough to have altered its iconographic composition, which is what concerns us here. On Lazzaroni, see M. Ferretti, 'Falsi e tradizione artistica', in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, III: *Situazioni momenti indagini*, III. *Conservazione, falso, restauro*, Turin 1981, pp. 113-95, at pp. 169-70.

<sup>58</sup> Reference to Alexander's encounter with Diogenes is made, usually with a moralising intent, in many Greek and Roman authors; for a list, see Herding, 'Alexander Visits Diogenes', p. 85, n. 3. Of the four main historians of Alexander, only Plutarch and Arrian, *Anabasis* VII.2.1, report the episode.

<sup>59</sup> Diogenes's blunt reply earned him Alexander's admiration and respect. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* II.6.79, reports that their reciprocal esteem grew to such an extent over time that it was believed that 'on the same day on which Alexander died in Babylon Diogenes died in Corinth.'

shoddily dressed appearance – which is how he is depicted in the vast majority of later pictures of the subject.<sup>60</sup>

The ‘Meeting of Alexander and Diogenes’ seems not to have been illustrated either in antiquity or in the Middle Ages.<sup>61</sup> The popularity of the theme began in sixteenth-century Italian art and reached its highest point in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in Italy and France, in a variety of media from easel paintings to sculptures, from fresco cycles to drawings and prints.<sup>62</sup> As for the Quattrocento, I have been able to find only one other example of the episode. Dissimilar in many respects to the Lazzaroni panel, not least in coming from the world of the small courts of northern Italy, it is a card from the Este Tarot Deck (or Ercole I d’Este Tarot), today in the Yale University Library (**fig. 73**).<sup>63</sup> The differences between the Lazzaroni panel and this playing card – with regard to the nature, purpose and size of the two works – are evident: the panel’s three-dimensional space, the naturalistic sensibility, as well as the attempt to represent Diogenes specifically as a Cynic and not generally as a wise man, are completely lost in the tarot card. Instead, the composition is crammed into a much smaller space

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<sup>60</sup> His unkempt appearance is what identifies Diogenes even when he is depicted on his own and not involved in any of the emblematic episodes of his life. The most famous example is in Raphael’s *School of Athens* fresco in the Stanza della Segnatura (see an illustration in A. Emiliani and M. Scolaro, *Raffaello: la Stanza della Segnatura*, Milan 2002, p. 149), where a meagrely clad Diogenes sits in solitude on the steps leading to the loggia, filled with ancient philosophers and thinkers.

<sup>61</sup> While several busts and sculptures of Diogenes survive from antiquity, his meeting with Alexander is not attested. A second-century marble relief in the Villa Albani, Rome, once regarded as a representation of the episode, was long ago proved to be the result of an extensive eighteenth-century restoration, which reconstructed the entire right-hand side of the relief, where the figure of Alexander now stands; this means that the original iconography of the marble cannot be determined for certain. For an overview of the representation of Diogenes in antiquity, see D. Clay, ‘Picturing Diogenes’, in *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, ed. R. Bracht Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, Berkeley and London 1996, pp. 366-87. On the Villa Albani relief, see *ibid.*, pp. 377-9, and Herding, ‘Alexander Visits Diogenes’, pp. 100-1. For the medieval literary tradition of the ‘Meeting’, see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 83-5, 146-8 and 275-8; selected passages from thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Italian literature are in S. Schmitt, *Diogenes: Studien zu seiner Ikonographie in der niederländischen Emblematik und Malerei des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Hildesheim and New York 1993, pp. 89-93.

<sup>62</sup> For an overview of the European artistic tradition between 1500 and 1750, see *Alexander the Great in European Art*, pp. 104-12, and Herding, ‘Alexander Visits Diogenes’.

<sup>63</sup> See W. B. Keller, *A Catalogue of the Cary Collection of Playing Cards in the Yale University Library*, 4 vols, New Haven 1981, II, pp. 51-2 (ITA 103), where the tarot deck is dated to around 1450. According to a more convincing hypothesis, the deck was commissioned on the occasion of the wedding in 1473 of Ercole I of Este and Eleonora of Aragona, whose arms appear on six of the sixteen extant cards: see *I tarocchi: le carte di corte, gioco e magia alla corte degli Estensi* (exhibition catalogue, Ferrara, Castello Estense, 1987-8), ed. G. Berti and A. Vitali, Bologna 1987, pp. 36-7. I thank Emilia Maggio for bringing the Este Tarot deck to my attention.

(the card measures 14 x 8 cm), shimmering in golden leaf, and the story is reduced to the bare essentials. The meeting is represented as if it were a well-mannered conversation between two courtiers in a meadow; in particular, Diogenes, with his pointy beard and richly decorated robe, is portrayed in accordance with the established iconography of the wise ancient philosopher,<sup>64</sup> rather than as a man who despises worldly riches. In the Este tarot card, Diogenes can only be identified by his barrel and by the presence of Alexander.

What really stands out in the card is the sun. Within the Este deck, it is the trump card of the sun, the image of which is therefore framed separately from the main scene, as the symbol of the card, and does not play a functional role in the scene depicted below.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, it remains a central feature of the card – after all, the role of the sun in this episode is ultimately the reason why the encounter of Alexander and Diogenes was chosen in the first place. In fifteenth-century Italian tarot decks, the trump of the sun is represented by the figure of one of the three Fates (Clotho, or possibly Lachesis, in the deck at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, mistakenly referred to Charles VI of France) surmounted by the disk of the sun or a *putto* holding it (as in the Visconti-Sforza tarot in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York).<sup>66</sup> The narrative composition in the Este Tarot card is, as far as I am aware, unique, and the reasons behind such an exceptional iconographic choice remain to be established.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See L. A. Scatozza Höricht, *Il volto dei filosofi antichi*, Naples 1986, pp. 125-8. It is also worth consulting, even though it concentrates on a later period, O. Ferrari, 'L'iconografia dei filosofi antichi nella pittura del sec. XVII in Italia', *Storia dell'arte*, 57, 1986, pp. 103-81 and plates (at p. 160 there is a list of seventeenth-century Italian paintings of Diogenes's meeting with Alexander).

<sup>65</sup> In later representations of the *Meeting of Alexander and Diogenes*, the sun is not always included in the picture. Over time, the episode came to serve as an allegory of philosophy, for instance, in Giovanni Stradano's 1559-61 frescoed ceiling of Cosimo I de' Medici's Tesoretto in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, designed by Giorgio Vasari (illustrated in *La Sala delle Carte geografiche in Palazzo Vecchio: 'capriccio et invenzione nata dal Duca Cosimo'*, ed. A. Cecchi and P. Pacetti, Florence 2008, p. 33). For the Tesoretto, see E. Allegri and A. Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e i Medici: guida storica*, Florence 1980, pp. 191-2, no. 44.

<sup>66</sup> For the Paris deck, arguably produced in northern Italy around 1480, see H. Farley, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, London 2009, pp. 18-19; for colour reproductions of the deck, see M. Dummett et al., 'Di Trionfo in Trionfo', *FMR*, 30, 1985, pp. 49-64 (the Sun card is at p. 63). For the Visconti-Sforza deck of c. 1450-80 (Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 630), see M. Dummett, *The Visconti-Sforza Tarot Cards*, New York 1986.

<sup>67</sup> The meeting of Alexander and Diogenes depicted on the Este tarot card shows some similarities to the illustration of the episode in *Les ditz et faitz des philosophes*. This text, like the *Secretum Secretorum*, belongs to a group of Arabic works which had some bearing in the medieval Alexander tradition; it was translated into French in 1402 and later on into English, enjoying great success throughout the fifteenth century. *Les ditz et faitz des*

To sum up: the emergence of a new representation of Alexander based on recently recovered historical sources began around 1450 and is found in a series of *cassone* panels produced in Florence and largely indebted to the work of Apollonio di Giovanni. The number of episodes appearing in these works is very small: the ‘Battle of Alexander and Darius at Issus’; the closely related ‘Meeting with the Family of Darius’; and, with the fewest examples, the ‘Meeting of Alexander and Diogenes’.<sup>68</sup>

## 4.2. Alexander and the Cycles of *Uomini famosi*

### 4.2.1. The *Uomini famosi* Cycles in Italian Art: An Introduction

In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Alexander appeared in cycles of *Uomini famosi* (‘Famous Men’), an iconographic theme which has long been recognised as one of the most prominent in the secular art of Renaissance Italy.<sup>69</sup> The majority of these cycles were made in the Quattrocento, but the chronological span of their popularity was much longer: the earliest documented painted cycle dates to the 1330s, and notable series of *Uomini famosi* were still being commissioned some 600 years later.<sup>70</sup>

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*philosophes* consists of a number of lives of ancient philosophers, including Aristotle, Diogenes and Alexander himself. At the opening of Diogenes’s life, his meeting with Alexander is sometimes illustrated (e.g., Houghton Library, MS Typ 207, f. 6r): the philosopher is elegantly dressed and seated in or by his barrel, while Alexander approaches and listens to him. The sun plays no role at all here and, indeed, is nowhere to be seen. Given the vogue that *Les ditz and faitz des philosophes* had in medieval European courts of the Quattrocento, it seems possible that there is some connection between these representations and the tarot card from the Este court of Ferrara. In general, see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 22-3. For a valuable list of illuminated manuscripts, see Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 7-8 (listing 17 manuscripts of the French version and 4 of the English one). See also *The Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers: The Translations made by Stephen Scrope, William Worcester and an Anonymous Translator*, ed. C. F. Bühler, London 1941, pp. IX-LXVIII, esp. pp. XIII- XXIX.

<sup>68</sup> It has been suggested that a panel ascribed to a ‘pittore peruginesco fiorentino’ representing an enthroned ruler receiving a crown from a king kneeling before him depicts a story from Alexander’s life. The identification seems dubious to me and further research is needed in order to confirm or disprove it. See *Moretti. Da Bernardo Daddi*, pp. 170-3 (L. Bellosi).

<sup>69</sup> Attention was first drawn to this subject by Julius von Schlosser, ‘Ein veronesisches Bilderbuch’, and by Paul Schubring, ‘Uomini famosi’, *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 23, 1900, pp. 424-5.

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., the ‘Uomini famosi aretini’ painted by Adolfo De Carolis in 1922-3 in the Palazzo della Provincia at Arezzo. Late cycles such as this are usually localized versions of the *Uomini famosi* theme, including memorable figures from the distant and recent past of a city or of a particular area. The famous eighteenth-century Cafè Florian on St Mark’s Square in Venice has a ‘Sala degli Uomini famosi’, lined with ten medallion portraits of illustrious Venetians, from Marco Polo to Carlo Goldoni, by painter Giulio Carlini.



The subject has been studied extensively,<sup>71</sup> but an examination devoted specifically to the presence of Alexander among the *Uomini famosi* has not previously been attempted. To carry out such an investigation, I shall focus only on those cycles which include Alexander. There are, however, only a few of these, since Alexander was more often absent from, than present in, *Uomini famosi* series. Also, many of the cycles which I will be taking into consideration are now lost, so that we know about them exclusively through literary or archival sources, which only occasionally preserve drawings or other visual records. In one case, moreover, the only thing we know about the cycle is that Alexander was included in it. Even though the presence of Alexander among *Uomini famosi* is sporadic and the evidence fragmentary, the subject is worth exploring. As we shall see, with regard to the iconography of Alexander, this is a transitional theme, and his inclusion in or exclusion from these series helps us to trace a significant change in the tradition.

The phrase ‘Uomini famosi’ is customarily used in connection with both the literary genre of biographies of famous men (and women), favoured by humanists, the origins of which go back to antiquity,<sup>72</sup> and an iconographic theme largely indebted to these humanist collections of lives, above all Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus*, which will be my main concern here. In the painted cycles of *Uomini famosi*, selected famous men are represented side by side in succession, usually standing upright and on a larger-than-life, if not monumental, scale. Under the figures, there was often a *titulus*, giving the name and a short biographical account of the person; sometimes one of their deeds or a memorable event from their life was also depicted.

We know that many of these cycles are nowadays lost: countless references to *Uomini famosi* series no longer in existence appear in contemporary treatises, collections of *tituli*, archival material and inventories. Apart from such evidence, for instance, nothing remains of the ‘Uomini famosi’ of Lorenzo di Bicci in the old Casa Medici in Florence, Paolo Uccello’s ‘giganti’ in Casa Vitaliani at Padua, or the

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<sup>71</sup> For a general overview and further bibliography, see the survey of Donato, ‘Gli eroi romani’, and R. W. Scheller, ‘Uomini Famosi’, *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 10, 1962, pp. 56-67.

<sup>72</sup> C. L. Joost-Gaugier, ‘The Early Beginnings of the Notion of “Uomini Famosi” and the “De viris illustribus” in Greco-Roman Literary Tradition’, *Artibus et historiae*, 6, 1982, pp. 97-115.

‘capitani che meritavano eterna fama nei secoli’ painted for the Malatesta in the Castle of Gradara.<sup>73</sup>

There are, in addition, several painted cycles which survive only in fragments. There is very little one can say about them, however, since what remains is usually a depiction of men in armour so generic or badly damaged that any attempt at identification is almost entirely speculative. In the Sala degli Affreschi of the Ducal Palace in Urbino, for example, figures of warriors were discovered along the walls in 1939. Attributed to the painter Giovanni Boccati, who worked in the palace for Federico da Montefeltro in 1459-60, the murals are in a bad state of preservation, so that the warriors cannot be easily identified, though two of them have been tentatively identified as Horatius Cocles and Mucius Scaevola.<sup>74</sup> Finally, a considerable number of easel paintings depict a ‘Warrior’ or a ‘Roman Hero’ which may originally have formed part of a *Uomini famosi* cycle. One such painting, now in the Fogg Art Museum, has been attributed to the circle of Antonio Vivarini and is a unique witness to the popularity of this theme in Venice.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with an iconographic theme, and not a prescriptive canon. In general, we can say that the men included in these series came from Greco-Roman antiquity or the Bible, that they were sometimes paired with a selection of *Donne famose* (‘Famous Women’) and that they were depicted in both princely homes and public spaces such as the civic

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<sup>73</sup> See Vasari, *Le vite*, II, pp. 315-16 (Lorenzo di Bicci), and III, p. 69 (Paolo Uccello). For Casa Vitaliani, see G. Fiocco, ‘I Giganti di Paolo Uccello’, *Rivista d’arte*, 17, 1935, pp. 385-404, and C. L. Raghianti, ‘Casa Vitaliani’, *Critica d’arte*, 2, 1937, pp. 236-50. For the Gradara cycle, known to us only through a poem, see A. Campana, ‘Poesie umanistiche sul castello di Gradara’, *Studi romagnoli*, 20, 1969, pp. 501-20, at p. 507. Fragments of what appears to have been a similar cycle survive in the ‘Sala dell’Imperatore’ of the Castle of Montefiore Conca, also belonging to the Malatesta, on which see P. G. Pasini, ‘Jacopo Avanzi e i Malatesti: la “camera picta” di Montefiore Conca’, *Romagna arte e storia*, 16, 1986, pp. 5-30. Other examples of lost cycles are in Donato, ‘Gli eroi romani’, pp. 99-100.

<sup>74</sup> P. Rotondi, *Il Palazzo Ducale di Urbino*, 2 vols, Urbino 1950-1, I, pp. 155-60, 427-8, nn. 102-3, and II, pls 40, 48, 52-6. For colour pictures of the frescoes, see D. Diotallevi, ‘I rapporti con la cultura urbinata nei dipinti d’arme di Raffaello giovane’, in *Raffaello e Urbino: la formazione giovanile e i rapporti con la città natale* (exhibition catalogue, Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, 2009), ed. L. Mochi Onori, Milan 2009, pp. 84-9, at pp. 85-6, figs 2-4.

<sup>75</sup> C. L. Joost-Gaugier, ‘A Rediscovered Series of *Uomini famosi* from Quattrocento Venice’, *The Art Bulletin*, 58, 1976, pp. 184-95, suggests the possible identification of the warrior as Julius Caesar; this hypothesis has been accepted only by M. Lucco, ‘Venezia’, in *La pittura nel Veneto: il Quattrocento*, ed. M. Lucco, 2 vols, Milan 1989-90, II, pp. 395-480, at p. 400.

palaces.<sup>76</sup> As the label 'uomini famosi' clearly indicates, they were chosen, above all, by virtue of their fame, which in itself made them worthy of being remembered. But once this criterion of selection had been fulfilled, there were no rules as to who should, or should not, be included. This resulted in innumerable variations within a broad iconographic framework, each of which needs to be understood in light of the particular circumstances and motives which gave rise to its commission.

Many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century cycles of *Uomini famosi*, which continued to be influenced by representations of the Nine Worthies, made no distinction between mythical or legendary figures, on the one hand, and historical ones, on the other. They included famous men as diverse as Hercules and Achilles, Samson and Scipio Africanus, Julius Caesar and an array of consuls and commanders of the Roman Republic. The selection could be wide-ranging, as in the Sala del Consiglio of the Palazzo Comunale of Lucignano (Arezzo), now converted into the local museum;<sup>77</sup> or a depiction of the Madonna and Child might be placed next to images of angels and saints, as in the so-called 'scrittoio' of the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Croce at Montalcino (Siena).<sup>78</sup> Politicians and *condottieri* from the recent past can also be found among the *Uomini famosi*, as in Andrea del Castagno's cycle of 1448-51 in Villa Carducci di Legnaia, Florence, which include Pippo Spano, Farinata degli Uberti and Niccolò Acciaiuoli.<sup>79</sup> Although the emphasis

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<sup>76</sup> Comparing the series of Nine Worthies at La Manta castle with Renaissance cycles of *Uomini famosi*, Roberto Longhi, 'Un intervento raffaellesco nella serie "eroica" di casa Piccolomini', *Paragone Arte*, 175, 1964, pp. 5-8, at p. 6, wrote: 'Il "gotico" spaziava più ampiamente nei campi della mitostoria arcaica ed esotica, mentre è logico che il "rinascimento" ne sfolnisse la serie, scegliendo in prevalenza dalla storia greca e romana di età classica, non senza qualche inserto giudaico.'

<sup>77</sup> The cycle, which is unattributed, was painted between 1438 and 1479 and now comprises twenty-three figures (out of an estimated thirty-one) from the Bible and the Roman history, as well as Virgil and Boethius, Lucretia and Judith. It is also an unusual variation on the theme because of its source: C. L. Joost-Gaugier, 'Dante and the History of Art: The Case of a Tuscan Commune', I-II, *Artibus et historiae*, 21, 1990, pp. 15-46, has shown that the images are closely connected to Dante's *Commedia*. See also E. Hlawitschka-Roth, *Die "Uomini Famosi" der Sala di Udienza im Palazzo Comunale zu Lucignano: Staatsverständnis und Tugendlehre im Spiegel einer toskanischen Freskenfolge des Quattrocento*, Neuried 1998.

<sup>78</sup> The cycle, painted by Vincenzo Tamagni in 1507-10, depicts *en grisaille* Aristotle, Cicero, Judith, Lucretia, Scipio, Plato, David and Joshua. A Madonna and Child with angels, alongside St Jerome and St Gregory, complete the decoration. See R. Guerrini, *Vincenzo Tamagni e lo scrittoio di Montalcino*, Siena [1991], esp. pp. 15-38.

<sup>79</sup> See C. L. Joost-Gaugier, 'Castagno's Humanistic Program at Legnaia and Its Possible Inventor', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 45, 1982, pp. 274-82, and C. Gilbert, 'On Castagno's Nine Famous Men and Women: Sword and Book as the Basis for Public Service', in *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, ed. M. Tetel et al., Durham 1989, pp. 174-92. The frescoes, discovered in 1847 on the walls of the main hall of the Villa under a coat of

was usually on warriors and commanders, other types, most notably learned men, sometimes made an appearance. Apart from the famous cycle on panels in the Studiolo of Federico da Montefeltro in the Ducal Palace of Urbino,<sup>80</sup> however, the inclusion of poets among the *Uomini famosi* seems to have been a speciality of Tuscany and, particularly, of Florence.<sup>81</sup> Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio are part of the series of Villa Carducci, and they were also present in the lost cycle of the Aula Minor in Palazzo Vecchio, alongside Claudian and Zanobi da Strada.<sup>82</sup>

Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* had a significant impact on these cycles. The composition of this historical work was notoriously lengthy: largely written around 1341-3, as mentioned in Chapter 3 (3.2.1), it was still unfinished at Petrarch's death in 1374; and it fell to his disciple and secretary, Lombardo della Seta, to complete it by producing a *Supplementum* in 1379.<sup>83</sup> The conception of history underpinning *De viris illustribus* was not only widely influential, but also affected the *Uomini famosi* theme.<sup>84</sup> In Petrarch's view, not all famous, wealthy or powerful men of the past could lay claim to the title *vir illustris*, since fame and power were not enough to make them memorable to future generations.<sup>85</sup> He maintained instead that only

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whitewash, have been detached and are now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. A century later, three additional figures (Adam and Eve, and a Madonna and Child with angels) were also recovered: they remain *in situ*.

<sup>80</sup> The panels, depicting a total of twenty-eight philosophers, poets and Church Fathers, have been attributed to Justus of Ghent and dated to around 1473-6; they are now split between the Studiolo and the Louvre. See L. Cheles, 'The "Uomini famosi" in the Studiolo of Urbino: An Iconographic Study', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 102, 1983, pp. 1-7, and id., *Lo studiolo di Urbino: iconografia di un microcosmo principesco*, Modena 1991, pp. 15-20 and 37-54.

<sup>81</sup> See M. M. Donato, 'Famosi cives: testi, frammenti e cicli perduti a Firenze fra Tre e Quattrocento', *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, 30, 1986, pp. 27-42, who also presents some comparisons with portraits found in manuscript *marginalia*.

<sup>82</sup> Although born in Alexandria in Egypt, Claudian was firmly believed to be of Florentine origin and was therefore included among the Florentine poets; see Donato, 'Gli eroi romani', p. 133. A similar group was also depicted in the Palazzo del Pronconsolo (Palazzo dell'Arte dei Giudici e dei Notai) in Florence. Starting with the discovery in 1882 of traces of paint on a lunette, subsequent restoration campaigns have revealed a larger, though fragmentary, decorative scheme, including the earliest known portraits of Dante and Boccaccio; the identity of two other badly damaged figures remains uncertain. The frescoes, dated to the late fourteenth century, were probably repainted in the fifteenth: see ead., 'Famosi Cives', pp. 35-40.

<sup>83</sup> For Lombardo della Seta, see E. Pasquini's entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XXXVII, Rome 1989, pp. 481-5.

<sup>84</sup> On Petrarch's conception of history, see R. G. Witt, 'The Rebirth of the Romans as Models of Character', in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. V. Kirkham and A. Maggi, Chicago and London 2009, pp. 103-11.

<sup>85</sup> Petrarch ('Prohemium', p. 222) writes that 'neque enim quisquis opulentus at potens confestim simul illustris est; alterum enim fortune, alterum virtutis et glorie munus est; neque ego fortunatos sed illustres sum pollicitus viros.'

those who had distinguished themselves by their virtue, or their vice, merited a place in his *De viris illustribus*.<sup>86</sup> His basic assumption was that the figures from the past which he had selected had something to teach us, encouraging us to imitate virtuous behaviour and warning us to avoid the path of evil.<sup>87</sup>

Petrarch's category of *virii illustres* applied only to generals and statesmen, that is, men of action; so, writers, philosophers and other thinkers – as well as women – were excluded.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter 3 (3.2.1), the past Petrarch was talking about was not a generic and undistinguished flow of time, but a precise moment in history: the history of Rome, especially the Roman Republic. This conception of Rome as the summit of antiquity (his own times were so decadent that they were not even worth considering) is articulated in a famous passage from his *Invectiva* against Jean de Hesdin, written in 1373: 'What else, then, is all history if not the praise of Rome?'<sup>89</sup> The inclusion among Petrarch's series of Roman heroes of three *externi* – Alexander, Pyrrhus and Hannibal – who are presented in a highly unfavourable light merely serves to demonstrate the indisputable and unparalleled superiority of the Romans. In conclusion, the canon of famous men established by Petrarch in *De viris illustribus* was not only restricted almost exclusively to Rome, but also, in open disagreement with the previous tradition, allotted no place to women, contemporary figures, philosophers or learned men.

While the iconographic tradition of *Uomini famosi* did not turn into a visual transposition of Petrarch's ideas, it is undeniable that it was powerfully influenced by them. In the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the focus of these cycles tended to become Rome, with a number of long-forgotten heroes from the Roman Republic, recovered by Petrarch from Livy, entering the decorative repertoire of Renaissance Italian art. More significant for my argument, however, is that, in this shift of balance towards Roman history, the figure of Alexander was

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 224: 'apud me nisi ea requiruntur quae ad *virtutes vel virtutum contraria* trahi possunt' (my emphasis).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 'his enim, nisi fallor, fructuosus historici finis est, illa prosequi que vel sectanda legentibus vel fugienda sunt, ut in utranque partem copia suppetat illustrium exemplorum.'

<sup>88</sup> These categories are however, included in Petrarch's *Rerum memorandarum libri*, ed. M. Petoletti, Florence 2014. On a larger scale than the one considered here, Donato, 'Gli eroi romani', p. 115, has noted that Petrarch's drastic limitation to a specific category of famous men resulted in the exclusion of figures like Cicero and Cato the Younger, who had been regarded as venerable authorities throughout the Middle Ages.

<sup>89</sup> Petrarch, 'Invectiva', p. 790: 'Quid est enim aliud omnis historia, quam romana laus?'

lost. Included in the earliest cycles of *Uomini famosi* from the fourteenth century, he increasingly disappeared from those painted in the second half of the fifteenth century; and I know of no series from sixteenth-century Italy in which Alexander appears.

#### 4.2.2 Representations of Alexander in *Uomini famosi* Cycles

Three cycles of *Uomini famosi* from the fourteenth century included Alexander, as did three from the fifteenth. Though limited in number, we can say that in all the areas throughout the peninsula where such cycles appeared – Naples, Padua, Florence, Rome and Milan – there was at least one which included Alexander. As we shall see, the earliest cycle featuring Alexander (Castel Nuovo, Naples) was still strongly under the influence of the medieval tradition of the Nine Worthies, discussed in Chapter 2 (2.4) above. The cycles of the Aula Minor in Florence and of Montegiordano in Rome can be categorised as transitional in that they introduced new elements of Petrarchan origin but combined them with the lingering presence of a medieval conception of history. Finally, the cycles painted for the Reggia Carrarese in Padua, for the Arengo Palace in Milan and for the Piccolomini family in Siena signal the beginning of a significant change in the tradition, with the image of Alexander now based on the ancient sources recovered by humanists.

Mention should also be made of a fragmentary cycle of 1391 in the Palazzo Datini in Prato near Florence, the residence of the wealthy merchant Francesco di Marco Datini (1335-1410).<sup>90</sup> Part of this larger decoration was a lunette, painted *a secco* by Niccolò di Pietro Gerini in the courtyard, which has been detached and is now displayed in a room nearby. It shows a series of four *Uomini famosi*, including an armoured figure, holding a sword and an orb and wearing a crown, who has been identified as either Julius Caesar or Alexander.<sup>91</sup> It is difficult to find conclusive proof one way or the other, not least because the patchy survival of the courtyard decoration means that the reconstruction of its iconographic programme remains a

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<sup>90</sup> On the decoration of the Palazzo Datini, see B. Cole, 'The Interior Decoration of the Palazzo Datini in Prato', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 13, 1967, pp. 61-82; Dunlop, *Painted Palaces*, pp. 15-41; T. Bastianich, 'An Illustrious Man and his Uomini Illustri: Francesco di Marco Datini and the Decoration of His Palace in Prato', DPhil dissertation, Oxford 2000. The most recent contribution on the frescoes is M. Romagnoli, 'Gli ambienti esterni: proposte per una lettura iconografica', in *Palazzo Datini a Prato: una casa fatta per durare mille anni*, ed. J. Hayez and D. Toccafondi, 2 vols, Florence 2012, I, pp. 124-39. I thank Sonia Cavaciocchi for kindly providing me with a copy of this article.

<sup>91</sup> For Julius Caesar, see Cole, 'The Interior Decoration', p. 74, n. 32, who is followed by Donato, 'Gli eroi romani', p. 126. For Alexander, see Dunlop, *Painted Palaces*, p. 30, Bastianich, 'An Illustrious Man', pp. 212-3, and Romagnoli, 'Gli ambienti esterni', p. 129.

subject for speculation. An *in situ* examination of the lunette has reinforced my belief that neither the generic features of this figure nor his conventional attributes as a ruler are sufficient to identify him beyond doubt as Alexander.

#### 4.2.2.1. Medieval Cycles

##### The Castel Nuovo Cycle, Naples

The earliest of the cycles, now lost, is especially important in the iconographic tradition because it is the first documented *Uomini famosi* cycle in Italian art. It was painted by Giotto around 1333 in the Sala Maior of Castel Nuovo (also known as Maschio Angioino) in Naples.<sup>92</sup> Commissioned by King Robert of Anjou, the frescoes were probably made in connection with the marriage of his granddaughter and heiress to the throne, Giovanna, to Andrea of Hungary in 1333: an occasion which would explain the inclusion of famous women accompanying their male counterparts.<sup>93</sup> The cycle, which was recorded by Lorenzo Ghiberti and Giorgio Vasari among other sources, was destroyed in the mid-fifteenth century, when the Sala Maior was demolished as part of the building works undertaken in the castle by Alfonso the Magnificent.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the loss of the frescoes, we know something about them thanks to a collection of nine sonnets surviving, partially or fully, in nine Florentine manuscripts.<sup>95</sup> The sonnets, written in Italian, have been attributed to Giovanni Fiorentino, *alias* the jester Malizia Barattone, who was active in Naples at the court of Queen Giovanna I in the 1360s and who, later in his life, wrote the collection of

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<sup>92</sup> See P. Leone de Castris, *Giotto a Napoli*, Naples 2006, pp. 217-33, and P. Di Simone, 'Giotto, Petrarca e il tema degli uomini illustri tra Napoli, Milano e Padova: prolegomeni a un'indagine - 1', *Rivista d'arte*, 5, 2012, pp. 39-76, esp. pp. 44-62. Still essential is C. L. Joost-Gaugier, 'Giotto's Hero Cycle in Naples: A Prototype of Donne Illustri and a Possible Literary Connection', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 43, 1980, pp. 311-18.

<sup>93</sup> The hypothesis that the cycle was commissioned to celebrate Giovanna's marriage was suggested by Joost-Gaugier, 'Giotto's Hero Cycle', p. 317, and discussed further by Leone de Castris, *Giotto a Napoli*, pp. 222-4.

<sup>94</sup> Leone de Castris, *Giotto a Napoli*, pp. 217 and 226, n. 3.

<sup>95</sup> The sonnets were first published by G. De Blasiis, 'Immagini di uomini famosi in una sala di Castelnuovo attribuite a Giotto', *Napoli nobilissima*, 9, 1900, pp. 65-7; they can also be read in Dunlop, *Painted Palaces*, pp. 263-6, n. 76 (with an English translation) and Leone de Castris, *Giotto a Napoli*, pp. 228-9, n. 13 (with a list of the nine extant manuscripts).

*novelle* known as *Il pecorone*.<sup>96</sup> As the heading of one of the manuscripts states, the sonnets were directly inspired by Giotto's cycle in the Sala Maior. Having admired the frescoes, Giovanni Fiorentino resolved to write sonnets dedicated to each of the nine *Uomini famosi* painted on the walls: Alexander, Solomon, Hector, Aeneas, Achilles, Paris, Hercules, Samson and Julius Caesar.<sup>97</sup>

In the scholarly literature, it is often said or assumed that Giotto's *Uomini famosi* were accompanied by *tituli* and that Giovanni Fiorentino's sonnets are merely a transcription of these.<sup>98</sup> This idea can be dismissed, first and foremost on linguistic grounds, which seem not to have been taken into consideration so far. No evidence exists of the presence of *tituli* painted below the famous men of the Castel Nuovo cycle; but even if Giotto's figures were actually accompanied by *tituli*, these would surely have been in Latin or possibly in French, the language of the ruling family of Anjou. They would certainly not have been written in the Italian vernacular of the sonnets.<sup>99</sup> All we know for sure about Giotto's cycle is the identity of the *Uomini famosi* he painted. It is reasonable to assume that the sonnets preserve Giovanni's memory of the frescoes he had seen with some degree of accuracy. But the extent to which these verses give us glimpse of the iconography of the cycle or instead reflect Giovanni's own knowledge of the figures painted by Giotto remains unclear.

The only illuminated manuscript containing the sonnets, MS Strozzi 174 in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, is, unfortunately, of no use for our purposes. Ascribed to Apollonio di Giovanni, the three pictures of famous men paired with the sonnets are the only visual record connected, though indirectly, to

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<sup>96</sup> See F. Pignatti, 'Giovanni Fiorentino (da Firenze)', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LVI, Rome 2001, pp. 29-34.

<sup>97</sup> De Blasiis, 'Immagini di uomini famosi', p. 65, states that in MS Laur. Red. 184, dated to the first half of the fifteenth century, the sonnets are accompanied by the following heading: 'Sonetti composti per [blank] il quale essendo nella sala del re Roberto a Napoli vide dipinti questi famosi huomini. E lui fè a ciaschuno il suo sonetto chome qui apresso.' This codex is the only one to mention the 'sala' in Castel Nuovo as the location of the frescoes; the absence of this information in the other manuscripts suggests that they are likely to be copies; see C. Gilbert, 'Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes', in *The Documented Image: Visions in Art History*, ed. G. P. Weisberg and L. S. Dixon, Syracuse NY 1987, pp. 225-41, at p. 232.

<sup>98</sup> See, e.g., Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle', p. 167; M. Ceccanti, 'Un inedito Plutarco laurenziano con note per il miniatore', *Rivista di storia della miniatura*, 1-2, 1996-7, pp. 69-76, at p. 76, n. 36; Bodon, *Heroum Imagines*, p. 17, n. 54.

<sup>99</sup> Credit for this linguistic argument is given to Lorenzo Bonoldi, whom I thank for sharing his thoughts on this point with me.



Giotto's cycle which has come down to us; but, despite what has been suggested, Alexander is not among them. On f. 2v there is an image of a bearded old man, looking downwards in sadness and holding a book in his hands with three others scattered at his feet. The figure has been identified as Alexander;<sup>100</sup> however, this hypothesis is untenable, not least because the sonnet of Giovanni Fiorentino to which this image is paired (quoted below) describes Alexander in a totally different way. The picture on f. 2v, instead, matches perfectly the description in Giovanni's sonnet on Solomon,<sup>101</sup> and I therefore suggest that it should be identified as an image of him.

A plausible reconstruction of the arrangement of the figures in the Sala Maior was suggested in 1987 by Creighton Gilbert: by analysing the (variable) order of the sonnets in the different manuscripts, he concluded that Alexander was depicted at the beginning of the sequence and Julius Caesar at the end.<sup>102</sup> The sonnet on Alexander, which has not previously been discussed in detail, deserves attention. Giovanni describes Alexander as a bold conqueror and lord of the world:

Sono Alessandro, e mostro in questa storia  
 Signor del mondo, e non senza cagione,  
 Ché, combattendo in ver settentrione,  
 Di tutto l'universo ebbi vittoria.  
 Sazia non fu l'ardita mia memoria:  
 Avendo vinte tutte le persone,

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<sup>100</sup> See the image, with the caption 'Alessandro Magno', in Ceccanti, 'Un inedito Plutarco', p. 74. Doubts about this identification have been raised by Leone de Castris, *Giotto a Napoli*, p. 232, n. 30: 'Un sovrano dotto e circondato di libri la cui identificazione col grande condottiero [*scil.* Alessandro] risulta per lo meno dubbia.' MS Strozzi 174 contains the text of Petrarch's *Triumphs* preceded by a collection of sonnets, among which are three of the nine composed by Giovanni Fiorentino on the Castel Nuovo cycle.

<sup>101</sup> For the text, based on a comparative study of the manuscripts, see De Blasiis, 'Immagini di uomini famosi', p. 66: 'Io fui ultramirabil Salamone, / di cui saver riluce tutto il mondo: / molte question solvetti di gran pondo, / e 'l tempio edificai per mia ragione. / Tengon le genti elloro opinione, / s'io sono in cielo o s'io gravai giù al fondo: / a questo punto, lettor, non rispondo, / ma vo' che 'l ver ne sia mio testimone. / Molti libri scriss'io di mia dottrina: / trattai di Re e recai in figura/ el cielo, el mondo e ciò che ne diclina. / Ma questa maladetta creatura, / nemica della spezie masculina, / mi fe creder per mia disavventura: / onde mia fama luce assai più scura.'

<sup>102</sup> Gilbert, 'Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes': the author made a few interesting points on the cycle, despite the disputable general conclusions to which he came. According to him, the Castel Nuovo cycle does not belong to the *Uomini famosi* theme; in reason of the presence of famous women alongside the nine men, the cycle should rather be connected to the imagery of the power of women and the 'Slaves of Love' motif (see *ibid.*, pp. 235 and 240-1, n. 17). I strongly disagree with this conclusion.

Oltre all'umana abitazione  
 Insino all'Uzian mostrai mia gloria.  
 Ancor più fece l'animo mio magno:  
 Salii nell'aria e mostrai ch'io non volli  
 A mia gran signoria par né compagno.  
 Quivi, cresciuto il mio voler sui colli,  
 Entrai nel mare, e nel più chiuso stagno,  
 E vidi tutto il fondo e pesci molli.  
 Lettor, se pigro sei, mio esempio tolli.<sup>103</sup>

In these verses it is said that Alexander, after making his victorious way through to the northern regions of the earth, triumphed even beyond the areas permanently inhabited by men and reached as far as 'Uzian', a reference, I believe, to the battle won by Alexander shortly after Gaugamela against the still unconquered Uxian tribe.<sup>104</sup> After the account of his military deeds, the sonnet goes on to mention Alexander's two most famous legendary adventures: the 'Flight to the Heavens with Griffins' ('salii nell'aria') and the 'Submarine Voyage' into the ocean ('entrai nel mare, e nel più chiuso stagno, / e vidi tutto il fondo e pesci molli').<sup>105</sup> While the 'Flight' is presented as the ultimate proof of Alexander's unparalleled power and universal sovereignty, his 'Descent into the Sea' in a vessel is envisaged as undertaken on account of his curiosity to see the bottom of the ocean and the wonders there.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> De Blasiis, 'Immagini di uomini famosi', pp. 66-7.

<sup>104</sup> On the episode, see Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* V.3.1-16. A discussion of its sources is in Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>105</sup> Gilbert, 'Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes', pp. 236-7, sees in the mention of the 'Submarine Voyage' an indirect reference to the unfaithful mistress of Alexander, who, according to an anomalous, thirteenth-century German version of the episode, which has been mentioned in Chapters 1 (1.2), nearly caused his death during the descent into the sea. According to Gilbert, the submarine adventure is merely an excuse to include an untrustworthy woman in Alexander's story, which confirms his interpretation of the Castel Nuovo cycle as a representation of 'Slaves of Love'. I find this hypothesis far-fetched, and I would argue instead that the episode was included in the sonnet because it was one of the best-known of Alexander's legendary adventures; my interpretation is bolstered by its pairing with the most popular adventure of all, the 'Flight with Griffins'.

<sup>106</sup> The expression 'nel più chiuso stagno' has been translated as 'closed tight in tin' (Dunlop, *Painted Palaces*, p. 263, n. 76) and 'in a closed tin' (Gilbert, 'Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes', p. 236). In my opinion both these translations are inaccurate. In no version of the 'Submarine Voyage' is the vessel in which Alexander is lowered into the sea made of tin or of any other metal, which would prevent Alexander from achieving the aim of his adventure: *viewing* and admiring the bottom of the sea. For this reason, in both the literary and the iconographic tradition, the vessel is invariably made of transparent and water-repellent glass. The Italian word 'stagno' means not only 'tin', but also 'waterproof, water-resistant'

It is possible that these episodes were somehow alluded to in the fresco, but less likely that they were actually depicted. The opening verse of the sonnet ('Sono Alessandro, e mostro in questa storia') suggests a strong connection between what is related in the text and what was shown in the picture. All the nine *Uomini famosi* introduce themselves in the first person ('Io fui il magnifico Achille', 'Ercole fui, fortissimo gigante') and also refer to their own painted image ('Son per Enea qui figurato e scorto', 'I son Paris dell'alto re Priamo / Qui figurato'). Furthermore, seven of them – the two exceptions are Alexander and Caesar – mention women who may have been depicted as their companions (Solomon calls on 'questa maledetta creatura', while Hector points to Penthesilea as 'costei qui, che sì fiso mi mira').<sup>107</sup> These features indicate that the sonnets were not intended for independent manuscript circulation, but rather as a commentary on Giotto's fresco cycle – it is conceivable that Giovanni Fiorentino intended to use them in his performance as court jester.

Whatever the case, it is remarkable that, as far as we can tell from the evidence of Giovanni's sonnets, Alexander, in the Castel Nuovo cycle, which is regarded as the first example of the humanist theme of *Uomini famosi*, seems to have been portrayed as the hero of the medieval legend: the *kosmokrator* who, after subjugating the entire earth to his power, explored both the heavens and the depths of the sea. The sources on which Giovanni drew are not easy to determine. For Paris and Aeneas, Gilbert has shown that there are specific references to Dante and Boccaccio.<sup>108</sup> As for Alexander, any version of the *Alexander Romance* could well have supplied the material. It is worth pointing out, however, that the reference to

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and therefore 'perfectly sealed' (see S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, 24 vols, Turin 1961-2009, XX, p. 47); so, a more appropriate translation of the expression 'nel più chiuso stagno' would be 'in a perfectly sealed vessel.'

<sup>107</sup> For the first person as the standardised form of texts accompanying a visual composition, see N. De Blasi, 'Iscrizioni in volgare nell'Italia meridionale: prime esplorazioni', in *Visibile parlare: le scritture esposte nei volgari italiani dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, ed. C. Ciociola, Naples 1997, pp. 261-301, at pp. 261-5. In general, see also C. Ciociola, "'Visibile parlare': agenda', *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 7, 1989, pp. 9-77, at pp. 29-32. Despite the fact that no woman is mentioned by either Alexander or Julius Caesar, F. Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli 1266-1414 e un riesame dell'arte nell'età fridericiana*, Rome 1969, p. 220, claimed that they may have had female companions and suggested Roxanne for Alexander and Cleopatra for Caesar. This hypothesis, which has been further elaborated by Gilbert, 'Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes', remains insufficiently supported by evidence to be convincing.

<sup>108</sup> Gilbert, 'Boccaccio Looking at Actual Frescoes', p. 235. A general 'Dantesque atmosphere' underpinning all the sonnets has been detected by De Blasi, 'Immagini di uomini famosi', and it does not seem accidental that in MS Magliab. II.IV.114, f. 26 the sonnets are entitled: 'Sonetti di Dante Alighieri di Firenze'.

the Uxians (in the text, 'Uzian') is quite unusual: the episode appears in Curtius Rufus,<sup>109</sup> as well as in Walter of Chatillon's *Alexandreis* VI. 63-76.

The conclusion of the sonnet is also significant: 'Lettor, se pigro sei, mio esempio tolli' ('reader, if you are idle, take up my example'). Alexander's *pothos* and achievements are not merely presented in a positive light – which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, is characteristic of the medieval conception of Alexander – but put forward as an example to be admired and emulated. A few years after the Castel Nuovo frescoes were painted, Petrarch firmly rejected the belief that Alexander was lord of the world and thought that his wondrous adventures were so obviously fanciful that they did not even deserve to be mentioned.<sup>110</sup> Yet, in Giotto's cycle, to the extent that Giovanni Fiorentino's sonnets allow us to reconstruct it, there was no trace of Petrarch's sceptical and dismissive attitude. Furthermore, Alexander is the only figure who presents himself to the reader of the sonnets – and, arguably, to the viewer of the *Uomini famosi* in the Sala Maior – as a moral exemplar and a model for combatting one of the Seven Deadly Sins: laziness or *acedia*.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2. Transitional Cycles

##### The Cycle in the Aula Minor, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

In the 1380s, a fresco cycle of *Uomini famosi* was painted in the so-called 'Aula Minor' or 'Saletta', a room located on the second floor of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence; it was used for the meetings of the Signoria, and possibly as waiting room for visitors and petitioners.<sup>112</sup> Restored in 1451, the frescoes were destroyed in the

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<sup>109</sup> See n. 104 above.

<sup>110</sup> See Chapter 3, n. 61 above.

<sup>111</sup> After the destruction of Giotto's paintings in the 1450s, stories of Alexander were included in the new decoration of the Sala Maior. A poem dated to about 1475, written by Pier Andrea da Verrazano in honour of soon-to-be queen of Hungary, Beatrice of Aragon, contains a description of the room; while there is no mention of the lost cycle, some tapestries are recorded, depicting 'diverse historie, maxime di Alexandro Magno, di Alcibiade, di Sansone e d'altri principi famosi'; see T. De Marinis and C. Dionisotti, 'Un opuscolo di Pier Andrea da Verrazano per Beatrice d'Aragona', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 10, 1967, pp. 321-43, at p. 331.

<sup>112</sup> N. Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298-1532: Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic*, Oxford 1995, p. 52, dated the cycle to after 1385. An earlier date, not after 1380, was put forward by A. M. Bernacchioni, 'Alcune precisazioni su un perduto ciclo di "Uomini illustri" in Palazzo Vecchio', *Paragone Arte*, 44-6, 1994, pp. 17-22, esp. pp. 18-19. According to Bernacchioni, a payment made to the painters Cecco Lapi and Piero di Giovanni on 30 December 1380 for a 'pittura della saletta del palazzo de' Signori' refers to the *Uomini famosi* frescoes in the Aula Minor; this provides not only a date *ante quem* for the completion of the cycle, but also identifies the artists

1470s,<sup>113</sup> when the ‘Aula Minor’ was demolished in order to make space for the Sala dei Gigli and the adjacent Sala delle Udienze.<sup>114</sup> Despite the absence of any visual record of the cycle, an early fifteenth-century manuscript survives (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Conv. Soppr. 79), which contains copies of the *tituli* once accompanying the twenty-two figures along the walls. The *tituli* are in the form of Latin epigrams in hexameters and have come down to us with an attribution to Coluccio Salutati, Chancellor of the Florentine Republic from 1375 until his death in 1406.<sup>115</sup> The iconographic programme, which is also assumed to have been devised by Salutati, included generals from the Roman Republic (its founder Brutus and those who fought against tyranny) as well as non-Roman leaders (Pyrrhus and Hannibal), emperors (e.g., Augustus, Constantine and Charlemagne) and five Florentine poets (Claudian, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Zanobi da Strada). Alexander was also included in the series, and one of the epigrams is devoted to him.<sup>116</sup>

For the composition of the programme, Salutati drew on Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus* (over half of the twenty-two figures in the Aula Minor, mainly from the Roman Republic, are found in this work) and Filippo Villani’s *De origine civitatis*

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responsible for it. The archival document is published in G. Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d’artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, 3 vols, Florence 1839-40, I, p. 530.

<sup>113</sup> Filippo Lippi himself carried out the restoration, which suggests that the cycle was highly valued at the time; if not, he would certainly have entrusted the job to a pupil from his workshop, as was common practice in such cases. For the document of payment, dated 19 April 1451, see J. Ruda, *Fra Filippo Lippi: Life and Work with a Complete Catalogue*, London 1993, p. 526, no. 12.

<sup>114</sup> See Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio*, pp. 52-4, and id., ‘Classical Themes in the Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 50, 1987, pp. 29-43, at pp. 29-33. See also G. Lensi Orlandi, *Il Palazzo Vecchio di Firenze*, Florence 1977, pp. 76-8. Archival evidence shows that the ‘Aula Minor’ was still extant in 1468, when work was done on the image of a Madonna placed above the door: see Bernacchioni, ‘Alcune precisazioni’, p. 20. The stories of great men of the past were the subject of the decoration of both the Sala dei Gigli (Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Roman Heroes*, 1482-5) and the Sala delle Udienze (Francesco Salviati, *Stories of Furius Camillus*, 1550s).

<sup>115</sup> The epigrams are attributed to Coluccio by his friend Domenico di Bandino (c. 1335-1418), who transcribed seventeen of them in his encyclopedia, *Fons memorabilium universi*. On the miscellaneous MS Conv. Soppr. 79, see *Coluccio Salutati e l’invenzione dell’Umanesimo* (exhibition catalogue, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 2008-9), ed. T. De Robertis et al., Florence 2008, pp. 185-6.

<sup>116</sup> T. Hankey, ‘Salutati’s Epigrams for the Palazzo Vecchio’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 22, 1959, pp. 363-5. Some of the epigrams, but not the one for Alexander, were first published by L. Mehus, ‘Vita Ambrosii Traversarii generalis Camaldulensis’, in A. Traversari, *Latinae Epistolae*, ed. L. Mehus, 2 vols, Florence 1759, I, pp. CXLV-CCCXXXVI, at pp. CCCXIII-CCCXV.

*Florentiae et eiusdem famosis civibus*, his source for the local poets.<sup>117</sup> *Salutati* had also an iconographic model: the cycle of *Uomini famosi* painted in the Reggia Carrarese in 1368-79 under the direct inspiration of Petrarch, to which I shall return below. There are, however, several differences between the two cycles. In contrast to the Paduan frescoes, the selection of *Uomini famosi* in the Aula Minor is not limited to military leaders of Roman antiquity: Constantine and Charlemagne, who were well beyond the chronological framework of Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, were included, as were literary figures such as Cicero and the Florentine poets.<sup>118</sup> In the Aula Minor, the historical perspective and the local dimension intertwined, resulting in a cycle which is essentially a pictorial celebration of Florence – as opposed, in Padua, to the illustration *per figuras* of the history of Rome. In the Aula Minor, the heroes of the Roman Republic, who defeated its internal and external enemies, are followed by the Roman and Christian emperors, whose legacy finds its way to Florence, a city celebrated for its culture (hence the presence of her poets) as well as for its political institutions.<sup>119</sup> Alexander is part of this iconographic context, but the role he plays in it has barely been touched on in the scholarly literature.<sup>120</sup> A starting point for its examination is the epigram on him:

*Magnus Alexander rex Macedonum*

Clarus Alexander patris ultus fata, rebelles

Evertit Thebas, doctisque pepercit Athenis.

Persas, et Scithios, Bactrasque subegit, et Indos,

Qui sacra deposcens periit Babilone veneno.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See Rubinstein, 'Classical Themes', p. 30, who proved Coluccio's first-hand knowledge of both works – and, in the case of Villani's, his direct intervention in the correction of the text.

<sup>118</sup> The inclusion of Charlemagne in the Aula Minor cycle would certainly have displeased Petrarch, who, in his *Familiare*s, ed. V. Rossi, 4 vols, Florence 1933-42, I, p. 25 (I.4.7), said that he was unworthy of sharing the title of 'magnus' with Alexander and Pompey.

<sup>119</sup> For the iconographic interpretation of the cycle, see Donato, 'Gli eroi romani', pp. 126-48, esp. pp. 135-6, and R. Guerrini, 'Orbis moderamina. Echi di Claudiano negli epigrammi del *Salutati* per Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze', *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia. Università di Siena*, 13, 1992, pp. 319-29, esp. pp. 323-4. In contrast to the medieval tradition, which also influenced the iconography of *Uomini famosi*, Julius Caesar appears in the Aula Minor as a victorious general and not as the first emperor of Rome; see Rubinstein, 'Classical Themes', p. 31.

<sup>120</sup> See, e.g., R. Guerrini, 'Effigies procerum: modelli antichi (Virgilio, Floro, *De viris illustribus*) negli epigrammi del *Salutati* per Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze', *Athenaeum*, 81, 1993, pp. 201-12, and G. Tanturli, 'Postilla agli epigrammi e ritratti d'uomini illustri nel Palazzo della Signoria a Firenze', *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 19, 2008, pp. 23-31. Both authors make interesting points about the epigrams, but not on the one for Alexander.

<sup>121</sup> Hankey, 'Salutati's Epigrams', p. 364 (I have altered the capitalization where necessary). For an Italian translation of the epigram, see M. Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine', p.

[*Alexander the Great, King of Macedon*. (This is) the famous Alexander, who vindicated his father's fate, destroyed rebellious Thebes and spared learned Athens, subdued the Persians, the Scythians, the Bactrians and the Indians; (this is) he who, demanding sacred honours for himself, died of poisoning in Babylon.]

In these verses, the main deeds of Alexander are related in chronological order: after vindicating the murder of his father Philip, he repressed the revolt of the Greek city states, burning Thebes to the ground, but showing mercy to Athens, which he spared. He then conquered Persia, Bactria, the Northern lands of the Scythians and reached as far as India. In the concluding verse of the epigram, Alexander's claim to divine honours is mentioned ('qui sacra reposcens'): a reference, I believe, to his assumption of the title 'son of Ammon' after the visit to the Oracle of Siwa in 331 BC. It may also refer to his later attempt to introduce the Persian practice of *proskynesis* (or prostration) at court, which failed, as we shall see, because the Macedonians, who regarded it as a gesture of respect towards the gods, refused to perform it before Alexander. The epigram ends by mentioning his death in Babylon, which was generally believed to have been caused by poison.<sup>122</sup>

The cycle of the *Aula Minor* has been often considered as a sort of expanded version of the *Paduan cycle*; and yet the figure of Alexander plays a very different role in the two compositions. In the *Sala Virorum Illustrium* of the *Reggia Carrarese*, Alexander is part of the group of the *externi*, including also Pyrrhus and Hannibal, whose prowess succumbed to the military valour of Rome. In the *Aula Minor*, Alexander does not appear as a non-Roman leader, but rather as one of the world emperors. We know that the order of the epigrams in MS Conv. Soppr. 79

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310; see also R. Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*. La figura di Alessandro Magno tra Medioevo e Rinascimento', in *L'Histoire d'Alexandre le Grand dans les tapisseries au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: fortune iconographique dans les tapisseries et les manuscrits conservés: la tenture d'Alexandre de la collection Doria Pamphilj à Gênes*, ed. F. Barbe et al., Turnhout 2013, pp. 135-50, at pp. 136-8.

<sup>122</sup> Rumours as to the cause of Alexander's sudden death (fever, excessive drinking, poison) spread immediately, and the problem has been debated since antiquity; for a useful summary, see E. Visser, 'Alexander's Last Days in Hellenistic and Roman Tradition', in *Alexander the Great in the Middle Ages: Ten Studies on the Last Days of Alexander in Literary and Historical Writing (Symposium Proceedings, Groningen, Interfacultaire Werkgroep Mediaevistiek, 12-15 October 1977)*, ed. W. J. Aerts et al., Nijmegen 1978, pp. 1-20.

followed the arrangement of the figures on the walls of the Aula Minor;<sup>123</sup> as the epigram of Alexander comes after that of the mythical king Ninus, we can be sure that their images were painted side by side, with Ninus preceding Alexander. According to a well-established tradition, Ninus, the king of Assyria, was regarded as the founder of the city of Nineveh and, more importantly, of the first world empire.<sup>124</sup> The association between Alexander and Ninus in the Aula Minor is reinforced by the text of the epigrams. In his *titulus*, Ninus is described as the conqueror who ruled over all the Asians, except for the Indians – death preventing him from achieving this ultimate goal.<sup>125</sup> Alexander succeeded where Ninus failed, for his hexameter verse says that he conquered not only the Persians, the Scythians, the Bactrians but also the Indians. Alexander's achievements, therefore, complete and surpass those of Ninus. The cycle of the Aula Minor illustrates the *translatio imperii*, the transfer of power vested in a person or institution, moving from the Assyrian (Ninus) to the Greco-Macedonian empire (Alexander), to Rome (Octavian-Augustus), Constantinople (Constantine) and the Holy Roman Empire (Charlemagne).

With regard to Alexander, the cycle of the Aula Minor is an example of what I call a 'transitional cycle' of *Uomini famosi*. On the one hand, the influence of the new approach to history championed by Petrarch, and the emphasis on the Roman Republic in particular, is apparent.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, the representation of the world emperors, among whom Alexander is depicted, belongs to a medieval tradition reflecting a different conception of history, which goes back ultimately to the biblical-patristic theory of the Four Monarchies. In his *Commentarius in Daniele*, St Jerome interpreted chapters 2 and 7 (relating Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue with parts made of different metals and Daniel's vision of four beasts emerging from the sea) as an allusion to four great kingdoms: the Assyrian-Babylonian empire of Ninus, the Medo-Persian empire of Cyrus, the Greek empire

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<sup>123</sup> In the manuscript, the heading to the epigrams states that the hexameters follow the order of the figures along the walls: 'epigrammata Virorum illustrium posita in aula minori pal[ati]i florentini. Ut sunt per ordinem. Tetrasticon monocolor' (my emphasis).

<sup>124</sup> On the semi-legendary figure of Ninus and his spouse Semiramis, see D. Levi, 'The Novel of Ninus and Semiramis', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 87, 1944, pp. 420-8.

<sup>125</sup> Hankey, 'Salutati's Epigrams', p. 364: '*Ninus Assiriorum rex. / Assirium belli proles clarissima Ninus / Imperium genui, mundi turbando quietem. / India restabat magico coroaestre preempto / Quam solam ex Asia vincendam morte reliqui.*'

<sup>126</sup> The influence of Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* has been also detected in the general tone of Coluccio's epigrams – occasionally, in the phraseology as well: see *ibid.*, p. 363.



of Alexander and the Roman empire (whose representative varied).<sup>127</sup> As far as we can tell from Salutati's epigrams, there was no intention in the *Aula Minor* to depict the four monarchs as a series – the Persian king Cyrus, for one, is not present. But the inclusion of the founders of empires in the iconographic programme – from the earliest, Ninus, to the Christians Constantine and Charlemagne – reflects a providential conception of history, based on Scripture and the Church Fathers, which is peculiar to the Middle Ages.<sup>128</sup>

As I have indicated, Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* provided a crucial reference for Salutati in the composition of the epigrams, not only in terms of the selection of the *Uomini famosi*, but also stylistically, in the tone of the verses and in many expressions and *formulae* which are borrowed from it. In the case of the epigram on Alexander, the similarities to Petrarch's biography have recently been examined in detail: the choice of episodes from Alexander's life and their order closely follow Petrarch's text, and several terms and expressions come directly, though not exclusively, from him.<sup>129</sup>

The only two scholars who have commented on Salutati's description of Alexander have interpreted it in conflicting ways. According to Teresa Hankey, his portrait of Alexander is far milder than Petrarch's.<sup>130</sup> Roberto Guerrini, however, stresses Salutati's 'bare' enumeration of Alexander's deeds and conquests, with no explicit mention of any virtue.<sup>131</sup> I believe that neither of these interpretations is

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<sup>127</sup> On the theory of the Four Monarchies, see M. A. Travassos Valdez, *Historical Interpretations of the 'Fifth Empire': The Dynamics of Periodization from Daniel to António Vieira, S.J.*, Leiden 2011, esp. pp. 53-71 and 157-66; still important are H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories*, Cardiff 1935, and A. Momigliano, 'Daniele e la teoria greca della successione degli imperi', *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 35, 1980, pp. 157-62. In Byzantium, patristic commentaries on Daniel's prophecy of the four beasts gave rise to depictions of the Last Judgement which include Alexander and the other three kings, either standing or riding a monstrous creature. For examples of this iconographic tradition, see G. Galavaris, 'Alexander the Great Conqueror and Captive of Death: His Various Images in Byzantine Art', *RACAR/Revue d'art canadienne*, 16, 1989, pp. 12-8, at pp. 15-6, with further references.

<sup>128</sup> See Donato, 'Gli eroi romani', p. 136.

<sup>129</sup> See Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', pp. 136-8.

<sup>130</sup> Hankey, 'Salutati's Epigrams', p. 363, who says that the life of Alexander 'is more gently handled by Salutati than by the poet [sc. Petrarch].'

<sup>131</sup> Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', p. 137: 'Da Petrarca sembrerebbe derivare anche la valutazione "asettica" delle imprese del re macedone, descritte senza che emerga esplicitamente qualche virtù, come accade nella tradizione degli *Uomini famosi* e come si verifica nella stessa *Aula Minor*.'

entirely correct. While it is doubtless true that the harsh criticism expressed by Petrarch in his life of Alexander – one of the most severe and venomous attacks ever made on him – is absent from Salutati's epigram, he does nonetheless criticise Alexander on one specific count: his claim to be treated with divine honours.

I have already explained that the expression 'qui sacra reposcens' in the last verse most likely refers to Alexander's assumption of the title 'son of Ammon' after Siwa and to his wish, which remained unfulfilled, to be greeted at court with the Persian *proskynesis*, which, for Greeks and Macedonians, meant to be worshipped as a god. In levelling this criticism, Salutati went beyond a 'bare' account of Alexander's deeds. His claim to divinity had been a controversial issue since antiquity;<sup>132</sup> and Petrarch had discussed in some detail the boldness which led him to equate himself to the gods. In *De Alexandro Macedone* 16-25, he treats the episode of the visit to the Oracle of Siwa as a sort of prelude to his account of the death of Callisthenes, the historian and friend of Alexander (and kinsman of Aristotle) who fiercely opposed the introduction of *proskynesis* at court. Callisthenes paid for this opposition with his life: falsely accused of connivance in the so-called 'squires's conspiracy' of 328 BC, he was imprisoned, tortured and finally put to death without trial. His murder, which has been regarded since antiquity as one of the cruellest and cold-hearted crimes committed by Alexander,<sup>133</sup> was recounted by Petrarch in all its horrific details, largely taken from the dramatic account of Curtius Rufus (*Historiae Alexandri Magni* VIII.5.5-8.23). According to Petrarch, the death of Callisthenes – as well as those of his generals and friends Cleitus, Philotas and Parmenion, which are recounted in the same section of *De Alexandro Macedone* – was the result of Alexander's *hybris* and blasphemous desire to be worshipped as a god. Medieval commentators also argued that Alexander's pride finally caused his own death by poison.<sup>134</sup> It is significant that Boccaccio, as already noted, did not include a biography of Alexander in his *De casibus virorum illustrium*, but instead wrote an account of Callisthenes's

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<sup>132</sup> See E. Fredricksmeyer, 'Alexander's Religion and Divinity', in *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. J. Roisman, Leiden and Boston 2003, pp. 253-78, esp. pp. 270-8, with bibliography.

<sup>133</sup> See, e.g., Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones* VI.23.2-3, who comments upon Callisthenes's death as follows: 'Hic est Alexandri crimen aeternum, quod nulla virtus, nulla bellorum felicitas redimet' ('The murder of Callisthenes is the everlasting crime of Alexander, which no virtue, no success in war, will redeem').

<sup>134</sup> See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 110-17 and 290-2, who also discusses the important contribution of Vincent de Beauvais to the transmission of the story of Callisthenes. See also his 'Petrarch and Alexander the Great'.

downfall.<sup>135</sup> In doing so, he presented Alexander as a tyrant who acted out of vanity and was disrespectful of the sacred bond of friendship.

All in all, the Alexander of the Aula Minor is shown in a positive light: the epigram celebrates him as a conqueror who created one of the greatest empires in history and began his career by vindicating the murder of his father. Nevertheless, Salutati also took into account the severe judgements on Alexander voiced only a few years before by Petrarch and Boccaccio – particularly with regard to an issue in which he, as the author of a treatise on tyranny, would certainly be interested.<sup>136</sup> His representation of Alexander would be consistent with the context to which the frescoes belonged, as decorations of the Republic of Florence's main palace, in a room which was also a celebration of two of the city's leading literary figures, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Painted in a civic hall, moreover, this image of Alexander had the status of a public statement.

#### The Cycle in the Orsini Palace of Monte Giordano, Rome

Alexander was also among the *Uomini famosi* painted in 1430-2 by Masolino da Panicale for Cardinal Giordano Orsini (c. 1360/70-1438) in the Sala Theatri of his family palace at Monte Giordano in Rome.<sup>137</sup> The room was decorated with an impressive cycle of over three hundred figures, ranging from Adam to Tamerlane (d. 1405).<sup>138</sup> The full-length portraits illustrated the entire history of the world and,

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<sup>135</sup> See Chapter 3 (3.2.2) above.

<sup>136</sup> Salutati's *De tyranno* (in his *Political Writings*, ed. S. U. Baldassarri, Cambridge MA and London 2014, pp. 64-143), written in 1400, however, makes no mention of Alexander and focuses on Julius Caesar instead.

<sup>137</sup> See M. Ferro, 'Masolino da Panicale e gli affreschi perduti di Montegiordano', *La Diana: annuario della Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia e Storia dell'arte dell'Università degli studi di Siena*, 1, 1995, pp. 95-124, with a *status quaestionis* of the studies, and M. Ciccuto, 'Le cronache universali illustrate', in his *Figure d'artista: la nascita delle immagini alle origini della letteratura*, Fiesole 2002, pp. 201-12. See also B. Degenhart and A. Schmitt, *Corpus der italienischen Zeichnungen 1300-1450*, 4 vols, Berlin, 1968-82, I.2, pp. 590-621; Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle'; id., 'Masolino, Uccello and the Orsini "Uomini famosi"', *The Burlington Magazine*, 114, 1972, pp. 369-78; Scalabroni, 'Masolino a Montegiordano'; P. Joannides, *Masaccio and Masolino: A Complete Catalogue*, London 1993, pp. 452-5, no. L9; A. Delle Foglie, 'Leonardo da Besozzo e Masolino: un dialogo tra Roma, Castiglione Olona e Napoli', *Arte lombarda*, 140, 2004, pp. 56-63. The long-awaited monograph by K. A. Triff, *Patronage and Public Image in Renaissance Rome: The Orsini Palace at Monte Giordano*, has recently been announced as forthcoming.

<sup>138</sup> R. L. Mode, 'The Orsini Sala Theatri at Monte Giordano in Rome', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 26, 1973, pp. 167-72, has convincingly suggested that the Sala Theatri served as a reading room adjoining the cardinal's library, which was also open to humanists of his circle.

given their number and monumental size, were probably arranged in three bands running all around the four walls of the room. Nothing of them remains today, however: the frescoes were destroyed fifty years after their completion, during one of the attacks on the Orsini palace by their longstanding enemies, the Colonna family in 1482 and 1485.<sup>139</sup> Six illustrated copies and two manuscript descriptions of the cycle survive, dating from the 1440s to the 1530s. None of them records the disposition and setting of the frescoes; but they nevertheless allow us to reconstruct the iconographic programme of the room.<sup>140</sup>

Four out of the six illustrated copies, even though most of them are fragmentary, preserve the image of Alexander.<sup>141</sup> They are: the so-called Crespi chronicle (Milan, Crespi Collection), illuminated by Leonardo da Besozzo between 1442 and 1449 on commission from Alfonso the Magnificent of Naples;<sup>142</sup> a sketchbook of the 1440s, made up of 16 leaves and known as the *Libro di Giusto*, now in Rome, Istituto Centrale per la Grafica;<sup>143</sup> a manuscript of the 1450s auctioned at Sotheby's in 1984 (which I shall refer to as the 'Sotheby's chronicle');<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> For the reports by a contemporary chronicler of the two attacks, which reduced the palace to a pile of rubble, see Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle', pp. 34-7.

<sup>140</sup> For the two descriptions, see W. A. Simpson, 'Cardinal Giordano Orsini (d. 1438) as a Prince of the Church and a Patron of the Arts: A Contemporary Panegyric and Two Descriptions of the Lost Frescoes in *Monte Giordano*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 29, 1966, pp. 135-59. The six illustrated copies are listed and discussed by Ferro, 'Masolino da Panicale', esp. pp. 95-100 and 108. The popularity of the cycle is suggested by the fact that it was described by Giovanni Rucellai in 1459 and mentioned by both Vasari and Filarete: see Simpson, 'Cardinal Giordano Orsini', pp. 136-7.

<sup>141</sup> There is no image of Alexander in two of the illustrated copies of the frescoes: the Cockerell chronicle, today scattered in a number of public and private collections (see Sotheby's, London, *Important Old Master Drawings and Paintings*, 2 July 1958, lots 15-22, with previous bibliography); and some twenty-fives leaves derived from it which are now in France (see N. Reynaud, 'Barthélemy d'Éyck avant 1450', *Revue de l'Art*, 84, 1989, pp. 22-43).

<sup>142</sup> On Leonardo da Besozzo, the son and collaborator of the more famous Michelino, see G. Toscano's entry in *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani: secoli IX-XVI*, ed. M. Bollati, Milan 2004, pp. 371-6. For the chronology and circumstances of commission, I follow the convincing argument made by Ferro, 'Masolino da Panicale', p. 109, n. 7.

<sup>143</sup> See A. Venturi, 'Galleria Nazionale e Gabinetto delle Stampe in Roma: il Libro di Giusto per la Cappella degli Eremitani in Padova', *Le Gallerie Nazionali italiane*, 4, 1899, pp. 345-76, and id., 'Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Roma: il libro dei disegni di Giusto', *ibid.*, 5, 1902, pp. 391-2 + pls I-XXXIII. Venturi mistakenly believed that the sketchbook belonged to the painter Giusto de' Menabuoi, hence the name by which the codex is known.

<sup>144</sup> Sotheby's, London, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts and Miniatures*, 3 July 1984, lot. 64. According to S. Tomasi Velli, 'Scipio's Wounds', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 58, 1995, pp. 216-34, at p. 228, n. 74, the codex was bought by the dealer H. P. Kraus of New York; I do not know its present whereabouts.

and MS Varia 102, dated to 1460-80, of the Biblioteca Reale of Turin.<sup>145</sup> The Crespi chronicle is the most important surviving iconographic record, since it was made directly from the frescoes and is the only complete copy, reproducing the entire cycle of Monte Giordano, seemingly with great accuracy.<sup>146</sup>

In the four manuscripts which include his picture, Alexander is depicted standing upright, fully armed, holding a halberd and a shield, and wearing a crown.<sup>147</sup> The accompanying inscriptions give his name and the epoch in which he lived – 3618, counting from the origin of the world.<sup>148</sup> While the posture and the attributes remain identical in their essentials (except for the ornamentation of the shield), what changes is the age of Alexander: from an old man with a long grey-white beard in the Crespi chronicle (**fig. 74**), to a mature adult with a short beard in the *Libro di Giusto* (**fig. 75**), to a young man in the Sotheby's chronicle – the 1984 auction catalogue describes him as 'a handsome young king in golden armour'. It is likely that the Alexander depicted in the Sala Theatri was the old man shown in the Crespi chronicle, our most trustworthy copy. As we have seen in Chapter 2, depictions of Alexander as an elderly or middle-aged man are rare but not exceptional in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, usually influenced by his inclusion in the canon of the Nine Worthies. I believe that this is also the reason in

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<sup>145</sup> The existence of MS 102 was first reported by P. Toesca, *La pittura e la miniatura nella Lombardia dai più antichi monumenti alla metà del Quattrocento*, Milan 1912, p. 489, n. 1. It remains virtually unstudied to this day; some information can be found in Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle', pp. 52-4 and 281, with a list of the figures at pp. 261-77.

<sup>146</sup> There is no complete edition of the manuscript, which is in private hands and therefore not easy to access. A list of the miniatures was first given by H. Brockhaus, 'Leonardo da Bissucio', in *Gesammelte Studien zur Kunstgeschichte: eine Festgabe zum 4. Mai 1885 für Anton Springer*, Leipzig 1885, pp. 42-63, at pp. 52-8; see also Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle', pp. 261-77. On the exact correspondence between the fresco cycle and the arrangement of the Crespi chronicle, see Scheller, 'Uomini Famosi'.

<sup>147</sup> I have not been able to consult the Alexander picture in MS Varia 102 of Turin. Apart from presenting the figures of the *Uomini famosi* separately, one per page, the manuscript does not differ much from the other three copies iconographically. I shall not discuss or illustrate it here; but I think it can be safely assumed that it depicts Alexander very similarly to the other three codices.

<sup>148</sup> The figure of an emperor with sceptre, globe and a wreath of laurel, also named as Alexander in the inscription, is found in the Crespi chronicle (f. 17r), the *Libro di Giusto* (f. 7v) and in MS Varia 102. Its location among rulers and learned men of the second to the fourth century, however, makes me think that this is not Alexander the Great, but rather the Roman emperor Severus Alexander. Cf., however, Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', p. 138, who identifies him as Alexander the Great. For the picture in the Crespi chronicle, see Mode, 'The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle', p. 317, pl. XVIIIa; for the *Libro di Giusto*, see Venturi, 'Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Roma', pl. XII.

the case of the Montegiordano cycle,<sup>149</sup> especially since, in the Crespi chronicle, Alexander is represented with the same heraldic devices which traditionally identified him in a canonical series of the Nine Worthies (the rampant lion on his shield).<sup>150</sup> This also applies to the other eight Worthies, who are scattered throughout the Crespi chronicle and can be easily singled out by virtue of their distinctive coats of arms.<sup>151</sup>

We should also note that in the Crespi chronicle a few figures closely connected to Alexander are grouped together, as if clustering around his image.<sup>152</sup> At f. 10v, Alexander is preceded by Aristotle, Demosthenes and Philip of Macedon; on the following page, f. 11r, we find Darius, the high priest Jaddus, the Indian king Porus and Candace, queen of Meroe (in present-day Sudan). The name of Alexander also appears in two of the inscriptions: Darius is labelled as ‘rex Persarum qui victus fuit ab Alexandro’ and Jaddus as the ‘pontifex Judeorum qui adoratus fuit ab Alexandro’. In the library of Cardinal Giordano Orsini, there were several books about Alexander, most importantly Curtius Rufus’s *Historiae Alexandri Magni* and a ‘Ystoria Alexandri Magni’, which is probably one of the medieval versions of the *Romance*.<sup>153</sup> While no account of the life of Alexander fails to mention Aristotle, Philip, Darius and Porus,<sup>154</sup> only the *Romance* and its derivatives mention Queen Candace, who was famous for her beauty and often confused with the Queen of Sheba.<sup>155</sup> As for Demosthenes, whose notoriously harsh orations were directed as

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<sup>149</sup> As far as I am aware, there is no other explanation in the literature for this portrayal of Alexander as an old man; see, e.g., Mode, ‘The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle’, p. 127: ‘for some unknown reason the young conqueror [sc. Alexander] was given an almost completely white beard.’

<sup>150</sup> In the *Libro di Giusto*, the lion is replaced by roses – possibly an allusion to the Orsini family, whose heraldic device was the rose.

<sup>151</sup> See Donato, ‘Gli eroi romani’, p. 110 and n. 16.

<sup>152</sup> Only Mode, ‘The Monte Giordano Famous Men Cycle’, p. 128, seems to have noticed this, but without developing it further.

<sup>153</sup> Other minor sources for the life of Alexander such as Orosius’s *Historiae adversum Paganos* and Justin’s *Epitoma* were also in the cardinal’s library; in addition, there were three copies of Plutarch’s *Lives*, both in Greek and Latin, but it is hard to tell whether they included the life of Alexander. For the library inventory, see Ferro, ‘Masolino da Panicale’, pp. 120-4.

<sup>154</sup> In one of the descriptions of the frescoes published by Simpson, ‘Cardinal Giordano Orsini’, p. 155, Porus is recorded as ‘rex Indie nigerrimus’ – the dark colour of his skin alluding to the far distant, exotic lands he ruled over.

<sup>155</sup> The anonymous compiler of one of the descriptions of the frescoes calls her ‘Candax regina formosissima’: see *ibid.* According to the Pseudo-Callisthenes (III.18), Candace dwelt in the palace which once belonged to another beautiful queen of the past, Semiramis. For the story of Candace and its medieval tradition, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 134-8.

much against Philip as Alexander, he, too, featured in the medieval Alexander tradition: his name is mentioned in some versions of the *Romance*, one of which was later used to supplement the text of Curtius Rufus in the medieval interpolated versions of his *Historiae Alexandri Magni*.<sup>156</sup> Finally, although the main source for Jaddus, the high priest of the Jews, receiving Alexander's homage at the gates of Jerusalem is the account by Flavius Josephus in his *Antiquitates Judaicae* (XI.325-39), the encounter is also reported by Vincent of Beauvais, whose *Speculum historiale* Giordano Orsini possessed in two manuscript copies.<sup>157</sup>

In the Sala Theatri, the representation of Alexander as an aged man – so clearly in contrast with the fact that he died very young – surrounded by figures drawn partly from the historical sources and partly from the legendary tradition, is perfectly consistent with the general context of the Monte Giordano cycle as documented by the Crespi chronicle. The arrangement of the figures follows the medieval chronological scheme of the Six Ages of the World (*sex aetates mundi*) – each era being marked at the start by a roundel with an inscription.<sup>158</sup> Also, underneath each figure is a date calculated from the supposed Creation of the world. The Christian division of history into Six Ages originated in the works of the Church Fathers and was given a theoretical justification by St Augustine, Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede. It became the standard chronological framework in universal histories throughout the Middle Ages – including the most likely source of inspiration for the Montegiordano cycle, Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*.<sup>159</sup> It is therefore not surprising that, within an iconographic programme

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<sup>156</sup> See D. Tangri, 'Demosthenes in the Renaissance: A Case Study on the Origins and Development of Scholarship on Athenian Oratory', *Viator*, 37, 2006, pp. 545-82, at pp. 551-2. I am grateful to Paolo Sachet for bringing this study to my attention.

<sup>157</sup> For the presence of the book in the Orsini library, see Ferro, 'Masolino da Panicale', pp. 120-4, and Tomasi Velli, 'Scipio's Wounds', pp. 219-20. On the meeting of Alexander and Jaddus, see A. Momigliano, 'Flavius Josephus and Alexander's Visit to Jerusalem', in his *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Rome 1979, pp. 319-29, and S. J. D. Cohen, 'Alexander the Great and Jaddus the High Priest According to Josephus', *AJS Review*, 7-8, 1982-3, pp. 41-68.

<sup>158</sup> The Six Ages scheme is not strictly followed in the other five copies of the cycle. The most eloquent example of this is the *Libro di Giusto*: being conceived as a book of models for painting and not as a visual record of the frescoes, not only does it alter the order of succession of the figures, but it also includes totally unrelated materials (e.g., drawings from ancient monuments). See Venturi, 'Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Roma', p. 391.

<sup>159</sup> See Tomasi Velli, 'Scipio's Wounds', pp. 218-20. On the Six Ages, see B. Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris 1980, pp. 148-54; H. L. C. Tristram, *Sex aetates mundi: die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen und den Iren: Untersuchungen und Texte*, Heidelberg 1985; and P. Richet, *L'âge du monde: à la découverte de l'immensité du temps*, Paris 1999.

so deeply indebted to the medieval conception of history, Alexander is represented as the exemplary conqueror belonging to the medieval chivalric canon of the Nine Worthies. Many of the figures represented in the Sala Theatri are also found in contemporary humanist cycles of *Uomini famosi* (e.g., the heroes of the Roman Republic); and yet they, too, are placed into the chronological framework of the Six Ages, in which no distinction is made between characters from the myth, the Bible and history up to contemporary times. This helps to locate the cycle of Montegiordano halfway between the medieval tradition and the humanist recovery of antiquity.<sup>160</sup>

#### 4.2.2.3 Humanist Cycles

##### Alexander in the Sala dei Giganti, Padua

The most famous fresco cycle of *Uomini famosi* was doubtless the one commissioned by the lord of Padua, Francesco I il Vecchio da Carrara, for the great hall of his palace in the heart of the city, the Reggia Carrarese.<sup>161</sup> The cycle was probably painted between 1368 and 1379 by Jacopo Avanzi and Altichiero da Zevio;<sup>162</sup> but it was irremediably damaged by fire around the turn of the fifteenth century, so that only fragments of it were still extant when the hall was completely renovated in 1539-41.<sup>163</sup> The Venetian governor Girolamo Corner commissioned Domenico Campagnola and his workshop to execute the new fresco decoration, which was conceived as a *restitutio*, a restoration, of the earlier painted cycle.<sup>164</sup> The original theme of *Uomini famosi* was preserved and forty-four larger-than-life male figures were painted along the walls – their imposing size earning the hall the name

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<sup>160</sup> See Ferro, 'Masolino da Panicale', p. 101.

<sup>161</sup> T. E. Mommsen, 'Petrarch and the Decoration of the Sala Virorum Illustrium in Padua', *The Art Bulletin*, 34, 1952, pp. 95-116, and Bodon, *Heroum Imagines*.

<sup>162</sup> The question of the attribution of the cycle, in which the name of Guariento is also involved, is still debated; for a summary, see Bodon, *Heroum Imagines*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>163</sup> See G. Lorenzoni, 'L'intervento dei Carraresi, la reggia e il castello', in *Padova: case e palazzi*, ed. L. Puppi and F. Zuliani, Vicenza 1977, pp. 29-49, at pp. 29-45. After the end of the *signoria* of the Carraresi, conquered by the Republic of Venice in 1405, the Reggia became the seat of the Venetian governor and was renamed Palazzo del Capitano. For the vast campaign of renovation works undertaken in the palace during the sixteenth century, see L. Puppi, 'Il rinnovamento tipologico del Cinquecento', in *ibid.*, pp. 101-40, at pp. 110-19. Today the former great hall belongs to the University of Padua; see C. Anti, *Descrizione delle sale accademiche al Bo, del Liviano e di altre sedi*, Padua 1968, pp. 50-4.

<sup>164</sup> An inscription above the main door on the north wall, marking the conclusion of the works, states that Girolamo Corner 'hanc aulam vetustate pene collapsam in hunc egregium nitorem restituit'; see Bodon, *Heroum Imagines*, pp. 36-7.



‘Sala dei Giganti’.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, the original cycle and its sixteenth-century version differ in many respects, most notably the different selection of *Uomini famosi* included in the two series. From my perspective, the key change is the inclusion of Alexander in the earlier cycle and his exclusion from the later version.

Given the loss of the fourteenth-century cycle,<sup>166</sup> we can only speculate about the general scheme and arrangement of the *Uomini Famosi* in the hall. We do, however, know that the cycle was directly inspired by Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus*, and that this scheme received great support, in its final stages, from the patron of the frescoes, Francesco I da Carrara, to whom Lombardo della Seta dedicated his *Supplementum* in 1379. In his preface to the work, Lombardo gives us to understand that the hall in the Reggia Carrarese was conceived as a figurative counterpart to the text of *De viris illustribus* – a sort of visual transposition of Petrarch’s collection of biographies. Furthermore, two Paduan documents of 1382 and 1390 refer to the hall as ‘Sala Virorum Illustrium’, indicating that the parallel between the hall decoration and Petrarch’s text was obvious to contemporaries.<sup>167</sup> It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the thirty-six *Uomini famosi* written about by Petrarch were replicated in the frescoes.<sup>168</sup> This means that figures from Romulus to Trajan would have faced each other on the north and south walls and that Alexander would be among them.<sup>169</sup>

Nothing can be said about the physical appearance of Alexander in this first version. Nor am I able to conclude very much on the basis of the Alexander pictures in Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, MS 101, an illuminated manuscript of *De viris illustribus* which is likely to preserve some record of the

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<sup>165</sup> There is no hint that the heroes in the original fourteenth-century cycle were of monumental size; see *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>166</sup> The only surviving fragment is the portrait of Petrarch in his study, which completed the series of *Uomini famosi*, alongside an image of his disciple and secretary, Lombardo della Seta. The portrait of Petrarch was preserved during the 1539-41 restoration and can still be seen today, though it has been partially repainted.

<sup>167</sup> See Mommsen, ‘Petrarch and the Decoration’, pp. 95-101.

<sup>168</sup> Although this assumption is generally accepted, the parallel between text and decoration has recently been questioned by Bodon, *Heroum Imagines*, pp. 10-14.

<sup>169</sup> See the reconstruction, partially revising the one suggested by Mommsen, ‘Petrarch and the Decoration’, pp. 103-4, by L. Armstrong, ‘Copie di miniature del *Libro degli Uomini Famosi*, Poiano 1476, di Francesco Petrarca, e il ciclo perduto di affreschi nella reggia carrarese di Padova’, in *La miniatura a Padova dal Medioevo al Settecento* (exhibition catalogue, Padua, Palazzo della Ragione, Palazzo del Monte; Rovigo, Accademia dei Concordi, 1999), ed. G. Baldissin Molli et al., Modena 1999, pp. 513-22, at pp. 517-19.

episodes accompanying the figures of the famous men along the walls. In the case of Alexander, the rationale behind the selection of the five episodes from ff. 19r to 22r is by no means obvious.<sup>170</sup> Alongside traditional subjects like the siege of a city (Tyre?) and a battle against Darius, there are scenes which are less straightforward to understand: the meaning in this context of the finding of Darius's body is unclear; the identity of the prisoner being brought before Alexander (possibly Philotas or Bessus?) has to be ascertained before we can draw any conclusions; and the representation of Alexander kneeling in a temple before the statue of a goddess remains obscure. If we are to use MS 101 as a source of information about the fourteenth-century figure of Alexander in the Carrarese palace, further research on its contents will be needed.

As for the sixteenth-century cycle, the reasons for the exclusion of Alexander are unclear; but it is probably because the selection of figures was purposely limited to the history of Rome.<sup>171</sup> This new criterion is significant, in my view, because over the course of the Quattrocento, and more decisively in the sixteenth century, cycles of *Uomini famosi* generally tend to focus solely on Roman history – once again, following the lead of Petrarch. The result of this change of perspective on history was the disappearance of Alexander from later series of *Uomini famosi*: he is not present in the most important and famous sixteenth-century cycles. Nevertheless, as I shall show later on, Alexander would again be side by side with ancient Romans; but this was due to the influence of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

#### The Cycle in the Corte Ducale, Palazzo dell'Arengo, Milan

Around 1455, the duke of Milan, Francesco I Sforza, commissioned a fresco cycle of 'Famous Men and Women' for the courtyard ('Corte Ducale') of the Palazzo dell'Arengo, his residence, located by the Duomo in the heart of the city.<sup>172</sup> The work was entrusted to the court painter, Bonifacio Bembo, and to the chief poet and resident humanist, Francesco Filelfo, who devised the iconographic programme and

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<sup>170</sup> The pictures were published by Mommsen, 'Petrarch and the Decoration', figs 22-6, who, however, did not provide any commentary on them.

<sup>171</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 104, and Bodon, *Heroum Imagines*, p. 63.

<sup>172</sup> The palace was first the seat of the medieval commune and then the residence of the Visconti and the Sforza; today, the building known as Palazzo Reale stands on its site. A previous cycle depicting *Vanagloria* surrounded by six Famous Men (among whom was not Alexander) was painted in this palace by Giotto for Azzo Visconti in 1335. The cycle is lost but written and iconographic documentation survives: see C. Gilbert, 'The Fresco by Giotto in Milan', *Arte lombarda*, 47-8, 1977, pp. 31-72.

composed the *tituli* in the form of epigrams accompanying the figures on the walls. Completed in 1461, the frescoes were whitewashed in the seventeenth century; but Filelfo's epigrams survive in several manuscripts, enabling us to reconstruct the cycle.<sup>173</sup>

Eighteen figures – six men and twelve women – were painted in pairs on the walls of the courtyard, above the pillars of the loggia facing the central court. The predominance of female figures, unusual in such cycles, could possibly be an homage to the duchess, Bianca Maria Visconti, wife of Francesco Sforza.<sup>174</sup> The series of figures began with the couples Ninus and Semiramis and Cyrus and Thomyris, followed by Alexander and Myrina – a rather obscure mythical figure whose pairing with Alexander is, as far as I am aware, unique in the visual tradition.<sup>175</sup> In Filelfo's verses, Alexander is described as a great conqueror, without rival in glory or renown:

Magnus Alexander bellisque horrendus et armis,  
Qui terrore mei trepidantem nominis orbem  
Usque sub Eoum parvo cum milite Gangen  
Undique concussi, nulli sum laude secundus.

[(I am) the great Alexander, formidable for my deeds in battle and in war, who, with a small army, caused the entire earth, up to the Eastern Ganges, trembling in fear at my name, to shudder; I am second to none in glory.]<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> See F. Caglioti, 'Francesco Sforza e il Filelfo, Bonifacio Bembo e "compagni": nove prosopopee inedite per il ciclo di antichi eroi ed eroine nella Corte Ducale dell'Arengo a Milano (1456-61 circa)', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 38, 1994, pp. 183-217. On the whitewashing of the frescoes, by order of the local Spanish governor around the mid-seventeenth century, see *ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>175</sup> The name of Alexander appears also in the epigram of Timoclea ('me barbarus ille prophanus / novit Alexander'); as noted by Caglioti, *ibid.*, p. 216, n. 127, this Alexander, however, is not Alexander the Great, but a Thracian commander from his army, who raped the noble Timoclea of Thebes and was later murdered by her. This commander is usually left unnamed in the sources: only Plutarch, *Mulierum virtutes* 259E, says that he bore the same name as king Alexander.

<sup>176</sup> For the literary sources of Alexander's epigram and an Italian translation, see A. Ferranti, 'Ricerche sugli epigrammi latini di Francesco Filelfo (Reggia dell'Arengo, Milano, 1450 ca.): i sei eroi: Nino, Ciro, Alessandro, Cesare, Annibale e Scipione', *Fontes*, 27-8, 2011, pp. 15-32, at pp. 20-2; see also Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', pp. 138-41, who focuses solely on Alexander's epigram.

The presentation of Alexander as a conqueror of unparalleled fame is not surprising in a cycle of ‘Famous Men’ – his prodigious conquests were, after all, the primary reason for his inclusion in the series. Yet, the emphasis on Alexander’s name striking fear throughout the world is far less usual; and it has been claimed that this had a negative connotation.<sup>177</sup> I would argue, however, that the phrases in the epigram are not *stricto sensu* negative; rather, they are *vores mediae*, neither positive nor negative, reflecting the perception that military prowess and strategic skills are both heroic and frightening. This same attitude towards Alexander can also be found in Filelfo’s other writings, where Alexander is often mentioned, but never in negative terms.<sup>178</sup>

Filelfo’s use in the epigram of powerful expressions such as ‘horrendus’ and ‘orbem ... concussi’ presents the Alexander of the Palazzo dell’Arengo as a fearful warrior of epic proportions, whose achievements are as great as they are terrifying. I do not know any other example of Alexander being described as ‘horrendus’;<sup>179</sup> but it is worth remembering that the primary meaning of the Latin verb ‘horreo’ is ‘to stand erect, to bristle’: Alexander is therefore portrayed as a warrior who makes the hair on the back of the neck of his enemies stand on end.<sup>180</sup> In Filelfo’s epigram on Julius Caesar, moreover, Alexander is referred to as a ‘fierce young man from Macedon’ (‘Macedo ferox juvenis’) – the adjective ‘ferox’ is a *vox media* frequently used to refer to military men and meaning both ‘bold’ and ‘savage’.<sup>181</sup> It is in this intentionally ambiguous sense, I believe, that the figure of Alexander was presented in the cycle of the Palazzo dell’Arengo, where Filelfo makes no moral judgement on him – as opposed to the Aula Minor in Florence, where Coluccio’s reference to his blasphemous claim to divine honours is unambiguously negative.

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<sup>177</sup> See Guerrini, ‘Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*’, pp. 139-40.

<sup>178</sup> On only one occasion, while discussing the consequences of abusing wine, Filelfo refers to the murder of Cleitus: ‘When drunk, Alexander slew his best and closest friends’, in Francesco Filelfo, *On Exile*, ed. J. De Keyser, Cambridge MA and London 2013, p. 127 (I.174).

<sup>179</sup> Guerrini, ‘Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*’, p. 139, lists several occurrences of the adjective in the Roman literature, but none of them refers to Alexander.

<sup>180</sup> I am grateful to Guido Giglioli for this suggestion and for discussing this epigram with me.

<sup>181</sup> For the epigram on Julius Caesar, see Caglioti, ‘Francesco Sforza e il Filelfo’, p. 198. Cf. the similar but unquestionably negative references to Cyrus and Hannibal, who are both described as ‘ferus’ (‘wild, untamed’) in the epigrams on Thomyris and Scipio Africanus: *ibid.*, pp. 197 and 200.

Linguistically, Filelfo seems to have borrowed terms and expressions from a number of texts, some of them totally unrelated to Alexander, from the Bible and Tacitus to Virgil and the medieval chroniclers.<sup>182</sup> It is unsurprising that a humanist of his calibre was able to compose an epigram on Alexander by drawing on a variety of authors; but it is worth trying to investigate in greater depth those on which Filelfo specifically relied. The image of the earth trembling before Alexander, in the second verse of the epigram, recurs twice in Orosius's *Historiae adversum Paganos*, a vastly influential historical work completed around 416-17 AD, which includes a section on the life of Alexander (Book III, chapters 16 to 20).<sup>183</sup> Orosius depicted Alexander as a frightful character who relentlessly conquered and killed: a man driven by vengeance and behaving in a bloodthirsty manner towards enemies and friends alike.<sup>184</sup> He adds that, before such a terrifying figure, 'the whole world trembled either from death or the fear of death.'<sup>185</sup> He then concludes by saying that the Diadochi fought for power and tore the empire apart 'after Alexander had crushed the trembling world beneath his sword for twelve years.'<sup>186</sup> This potent image was perhaps influenced *a contrario* by the opening verses of the first book of Maccabees, where the earth, once subdued by Alexander, is represented as laying silently before him (v. 3: 'he reached the farthest point of the earth. He despoiled many nations, until the world lay quiet under his rule'). Orosius's portrait of Alexander derives ultimately from a negative tradition which existed in antiquity and which was mainly represented by Seneca the Younger and Lucan. They voiced the Stoic condemnation of Alexander as a ferocious and insane man, whose insatiable ambition resulted in innumerable crimes and caused the plundering of

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<sup>182</sup> See Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', pp. 139-40, and Ferranti, 'Ricerche sugli epigrammi', pp. 21-2.

<sup>183</sup> Much material from Orosius was interpolated into recension J<sup>2</sup> of the *Historia de Preliis*, which for this reason is also known as 'Orosius redaction'. The Alexander section in the *Historiae* also became a canonical reference for preachers and theologians who discussed the life of Alexander; see Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, pp. 118-62.

<sup>184</sup> See Orosius's famous description of Alexander as 'humani sanguinis inexturabilis sive hostium sive etiam sociorum' (III.18.10). For the Latin text, see Orosius, *Historiarum adversum Paganos*, ed. K. F. W. Zangemeister, Vienna 1882, p. 86; for a recent English translation, see Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, ed. A. T. Fear, Liverpool 2010, at p. 137.

<sup>185</sup> Orosius, *Seven Books*, p. 140 (III.20.5); the original Latin reads: 'vel morte ipsa vel formidine mortis accepta totus mundus intremuit' (ed. Zangemeister, p. 88).

<sup>186</sup> Orosius, *Seven Books*, p. 146 (III.23.6); the Latin passage ('igitur Alexander per duodecim annos trementem sub se orbem ferro pressit') can be read in the edition by Zangemeister, p. 92.

entire nations.<sup>187</sup> Despite his bitter criticism of Alexander, however, only occasionally does Orosius's tone become as harsh as that of Seneca and Lucan.

Orosius's main source of information for the life of Alexander was Justin's *Epitoma* of the *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus – which Filelfo may have known first-hand or via Orosius. In Justin's account, as in the second verse of Filelfo's epigram, the terror inspired by the mere sound of Alexander's name is mentioned. After his victory at the Granicus river, Alexander engaged in a series of battles with Darius's satraps, who were defeated, according to Justin (XI.6.15), 'more by the panic inspired by his name than actual force of arms' ('gessit et plura bella cum praefectis Darei, quos iam non tam armis quam terrore nominis sui vicit'). Further on (XII.13.2), Justin writes: 'so far had the terror of his name pervaded the whole world' that embassies of every nation began to gather in Babylon to pay homage to Alexander ('adeo universum terrarium orbem nominis eius terror invaserat, ut cunctae velut gentes destinato sibi regi adularetur').<sup>188</sup>

We would naturally expect a humanist like Filelfo to have employed newly recovered ancient sources for his epigram on Alexander. In the 1450s, when the epigrams were composed, the works of Plutarch and Curtius Rufus, as we have seen in Chapter 3 (3.1.1 and 3.1.3), were available. What is more, as one of the few scholars of his generation with an excellent command of Greek, Filelfo would also have had direct access to the accounts of Arrian and possibly of Diodorus Siculus – either in Italy or in Constantinople, where he spent several years.<sup>189</sup> Yet he drew on none of these authors and chose instead to rely on Orosius, the conventional authority on Alexander's life in the Middle Ages. As for Justin, we have seen in Chapter 3 (3.1.5) that he was one of the ancient authors recovered by humanists belonging to the generation of Petrarch or immediately afterwards; but in the mid-

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<sup>187</sup> See D. Lassandro, 'La figura di Alessandro Magno nell'opera di Seneca', in *Alessandro Magno tra storia e mito*, ed. M. Sordi, Milan 1984, pp. 155-68.

<sup>188</sup> The power both fascinating and terrifying of the name is of course a common place for military leaders. In the case of Alexander, however, this is eloquently exemplified by an episode reported by Plutarch (*Pyrrhus* XI.2): on the eve of battle for the conquest of Macedon, Alexander appeared in a dream to Pyrrhus and, when asked what help a ghost could provide, answered: 'I lend you my name.' I quote Alexander's reply from the account of the episode given by R. Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great*, London 1973, pp. 25-6.

<sup>189</sup> In the 1450s, neither Arrian nor Diodorus Siculus (including Book XVII on Alexander) were available in Latin: see Chapter 3 (3.1.2 and 3.1.4).

Quattrocento, it could no longer be considered a newly recovered text.<sup>190</sup> The portrait of Alexander in the Palazzo dell'Arengo cannot therefore be considered innovative or representative of a new iconography, as there is no indication that Filelfo drew on anything other than the customary authorities which had been used throughout the Middle Ages.

Nonetheless, there is a novel element in the cycle because Alexander is paired with an entirely new figure from antiquity, Myrina, the queen of the Amazons, who was totally unknown to medieval authors and was a humanist recovery of the fifteenth century. The story of a queen of the Amazons called Myrina is recounted by Diodorus Siculus in his *Bibliotheca Historica* III.52-5.<sup>191</sup> According to him, it was generally believed that the Amazons who reportedly dwelt around the Thermodon river on the Pontus in ancient times were the only representatives of this warlike race of women.<sup>192</sup> But this was not so, says Diodorus, for the Amazons of Libya were much earlier and accomplished great deeds which have unfairly been forgotten. These Amazons lived on the island of Hespera in the marsh of Triton, near Ethiopia and Mount Atlas; and Myrina was their queen. Diodorus recounted her glorious military conquests in detail, from North Africa and Egypt to the coast of the Asia Minor and the Greek islands, until her sudden death in battle against an army of Thracians and Scythians.

The epigram composed by Filelfo for her image in the Palazzo dell'Arengo follows the account of Diodorus Siculus closely and presents Myrina as a little-known figure ('If anyone says that he does not know Myrina ... he should declare himself unaware of a great glory').<sup>193</sup> She was, indeed, little known, for in the 1450s

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<sup>190</sup> Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', pp. 139-40, pointed out that the expression 'parvo cum milite' and the reference to the oriental Gange ('Eoum Gangen') in the epigram are found in Curtius Rufus and echoed in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*. This is not, however, conclusive proof that Filelfo relied on Curtius, since these expressions occur in several other authors and tend to get repeated in various texts about Alexander.

<sup>191</sup> The first mention of Myrina is in Homer, *Iliad* II.811-14, where a hill in the plain of Troy is identified as her tomb. The notion is reported by several authors, including Strabo, *Geography* XII.8.6 and XIII.3.6, whose work was much sought after in the Quattrocento. None of these texts, however, says much about Myrina apart from her name, and the only full account of her story remains that in Diodorus Siculus.

<sup>192</sup> For these more famous Amazons, see Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* II.44-6.

<sup>193</sup> For the text of the epigram, see Caglioti, 'Francesco Sforza e il Filelfo', p. 197: 'Inter Amazonidas, / quas insula celsa Tritonis / Hespera progenuit, qui me nescire Myrinam / Dixerit, ignarum sese fateatur oportet / Eximiae laudis: Libyamque Asiamque subegi.' The epigram has also been discussed by A. Ferranti, 'Gli epigrammi del Filelfo per il ciclo di uomini famosi nella corte dell'Arengo a Milano: tradizione letteraria e iconografica', tesi di

Diodorus Siculus was almost completely unheard of in Europe. The text could only be read in the original Greek:<sup>194</sup> apart from Filelfo, very few scholars could confidently tackle it.<sup>195</sup> The significant novelty of the cycle in the Palazzo dell'Arengo becomes evident not only in light of the inclusion of Myrina, an obscure figure taken from an obscure Greek author, but also, and more importantly for my purposes, because of her coupling with Alexander. There is, in fact, no connection between the two figures, nor is there any source (not even Diodorus Siculus, who mentions both of them) which puts them in relation with each other. It has been suggested that Myrina was included in the cycle of the Palazzo dell'Arengo as a mythical prefiguration of Alexander himself: her remarkable achievements, military valour and sudden death would make such a comparison with Alexander appropriate.<sup>196</sup> I think there is more to it than that, however, because Alexander did have an encounter with the queen of the Amazons – only that queen was not Myrina from Libya, but Thalestris from Pontus.

The meeting of Alexander with Thalestris, the queen of those Amazons who lived in Pontus, was a well-known episode in the tradition. Not only is it recorded in the main historical accounts of Alexander which Filelfo no doubt knew,<sup>197</sup> but it is

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laurea specialistica, Università degli Studi di Siena, 2008-9, pp. 75-8. Three other 'Famous Women' in the cycle (Panthea, Megisto and Timoclea) were introduced to the viewer as little-known figures: see their epigrams in Caglioti, 'Francesco Sforza e il Filelfo', pp. 198-200; as shown by Caglioti, *ibid.*, pp. 190-3, their lives were known to Filelfo through Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes*.

<sup>194</sup> As I have shown in Chapter 3 (3.1.4), Book III of the *Bibliotheca Historica*, which contains the story of Myrina, was translated into Latin by Poggio Bracciolini in 1454-5 for Pope Nicholas V and became available only after it was printed in 1472. It no doubt circulated in manuscript and, in that way, might have been known to Filelfo; but no evidence of this has turned up.

<sup>195</sup> The epigrams for the Palazzo dell'Arengo, which are anonymous in the entire manuscript tradition and were thought to be ancient, were first identified as the work of a humanist, and of Filelfo in particular, precisely because of the rarity of Diodorus Siculus in Western libraries before the fifteenth century; see C. Picci, 'L'*Anthologia latina* e gli epigrammi del Filelfo per le pitture milanesi', *Archivio storico lombardo*, 8, 1907, pp. 399-403, and Caglioti, 'Francesco Sforza e il Filelfo', pp. 206-7, n. 56.

<sup>196</sup> Caglioti, 'Francesco Sforza e il Filelfo', p. 213, n. 106.

<sup>197</sup> These are: Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* VI.5.24-32; Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* XLVI; and Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* XVII.77.1-3. Plutarch does not actually name the queen, simply referring to her as 'the Amazon'; but he clearly means Thalestris, because the meeting takes place in Scythia, at its border with Thalestris's dominion. The episode of the meeting is also briefly reported by Strabo, *Geography* XI.5.4 (where the queen is called 'Thalestria'). The version in the Pseudo-Callisthenes (III.25-6) is completely different: there is no meeting with any queen, but merely an exchange of letters between Alexander and 'the Amazons' as a whole; for the medieval tradition of Alexander and the Amazons, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 128-34.



also in Justin (*Epitoma* XII.3.5-7) and Orosius (*Historiae adversum Paganos* III.18.5) – his chief sources, as we have seen, for the epigram on Alexander. In light of this, I think that the unique coupling of Alexander and Myrina in the cycle of Milan was a case of scholarly one-upmanship on the part of Filelfo. Instead of the more famous Thalestris, queen of the Amazons *par excellence*, whose meeting with Alexander was renowned, he chose Myrina, the queen of an almost forgotten tribe of Amazons, whose story was told by a single author, to whom he, as one of the leading Greek scholars of the day, had privileged access. Furthermore, since Justin says that the queen was called ‘Thalestris or Minithya’ (*Epitoma* XII.3.5), and Orosius follows suit (‘Halestris or Minothea’: *Historiae adversum Paganos* III.18.5), it is possible that the similarity of the name Minithya/Minothea to Myrina suggested the unusual choice to Filelfo in the first place.

When discussed in the scholarly literature on Famous Men, the frescoes in the Palazzo dell’Arengo are often treated as a transitional cycle, in which the medieval iconography of the Four Monarchies (Ninus, Cyrus, Alexander and Julius Caesar are all included) is combined with heroines from the *Neuf Preuses* and with previously unknown or neglected figures from antiquity.<sup>198</sup> As far as the image of Alexander is concerned, the idea that he was included in the series as a representative of the Four Monarchies is consistent with his image being based, as I have shown, on medieval sources, while his pairing with Myrina introduces a previously unknown figure from antiquity. What is most surprising is that, when entrusted with the iconographic programme of an important decorative cycle, Filelfo, who had direct access to newly recovered Greek authors, did not use these sources to revise the medieval account of Alexander, one of the most prominent figures in ancient history, but used them instead to revive Myrina, a long-forgotten and insignificant figure.

#### The ‘Piccolomini Cycle’ of the Famous Men and Women

Among the fifteenth-century decorative schemes of ‘Famous Men and Women’ which include Alexander, the so-called ‘Piccolomini cycle’ is the only one that has been preserved to the present day in its entirety. Unlike those which I have discussed so far, it was not frescoed directly on the walls, but rather painted on

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<sup>198</sup> See, e.g., Donato, ‘Gli eroi romani’, p. 103, and A. Ferranti, ‘Ricerche sugli epigrammi latini di Francesco Filelfo (Reggia dell’Arengo, Milano, 1450 ca): tre eroine appartenenti alla tradizione delle *Neuf Preuses*: Semiramide, Tomiride, Penthesilea’, *Fontes*, 21-6, 2008-10, pp. 35-54.

wooden panels, one for each of its eight figures – four men and four women. Made in Siena by a team of painters whose identities are only partially known, the panels were probably hung on the walls together, as a sort of *spalliere*, and today are held in several museums in Europe and the United States.<sup>199</sup> The exact circumstances of the commission are still disputed, though it was probably around 1493-4, for a Piccolomini family wedding – their coat of arms, the crescent moon, appears on the majority of the paintings.<sup>200</sup>

The eight panels have the same compositional arrangement: each figure stands on a plinth bearing a Latin inscription, seemingly in imitation of an ancient polychrome statue, with an episode from his or her life in the background. Taken from classical history, mainly inspired by Valerius Maximus, as well as from the Bible, the eight ‘Famous Men and Women’ exemplify virtues which were highly appropriate for a couple about to wed, such as continence, chastity and marital love.<sup>201</sup> The most magnificent of the eight panels is the one placed at the beginning of the chronological series, which depicts Alexander.<sup>202</sup> As mentioned above, it has been ascribed to the so-called Master of the Story of Griselda and is now in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham (**fig. 66**).

Central to my thesis is the scene painted in the background of the panel – a rare representation of ‘The Family of Darius Treated with Great Respect’ which I have discussed earlier in this chapter – together with the inscription in elegiac

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<sup>199</sup> From the vast literature on the panels, see the bibliography cited in n. 42 above, and Roberto Bartolini’s entry in *Francesco di Giorgio*, pp. 462-9, no. 103. All the eight panels were briefly reunited in the Victoria and Albert exhibition *At Home in Renaissance Italy* of 2006-7.

<sup>200</sup> The marriage of Silvio di Bartolomeo Piccolomini and Battista Placidi on 18 January 1493 seems the most likely occasion for the commission, as suggested by Bartolini in *Francesco di Giorgio*, pp. 464-8. Cf., however, Dunkerton et al., ‘The Master of the Story of Griselda’, p. 24, who argue, as mentioned above, that it was commissioned in connection with the double wedding of the Spannocchi brothers on 17-19 January 1494.

<sup>201</sup> The eight figures are: Alexander, Joseph of Egypt (or Eunostos of Tanagra), Scipio Africanus, Tiberius Gracchus, Judith with the head of Holofernes (or Thomyris of Scythia with the head of Cyrus), Artemisia, Sulpitia and Claudia Quinta. The inclusion of Judith or Thomyris in a series exemplifying conjugal virtues might seem inappropriate; yet, as Bartolini in *Francesco di Giorgio*, p. 462, has pointed out, Judith appears as an example of chastity on several *cassone* panels; as for Thomyris, who is also among the ‘Famous Women’ of Andrea del Castagno’s cycle in Villa Carducci di Legnaia, ‘her virtue lay in her blood revenge of her son’s death at the hands of Cyrus’, according to Dunkerton et al., ‘The Master of the Story of Griselda’, p. 24.

<sup>202</sup> On the back of the panel, the word ‘primo’ (‘first’) is still legible, making it certain that it occupied the first position in the series. See Dunkerton et al., ‘The Master of the Story of Griselda’, p. 31.

distichs by an anonymous author which is placed on Alexander's plinth. The inscription praises him for his ability to control his passions and therefore reinforces the message of the scene in the background. It states that, driven by the conviction that it was more important for a king to conquer himself than his enemies, Alexander banished Cupid's flames from his heart and became an *exemplum continentiae*.<sup>203</sup> Although stylistic echoes of Ovid, Virgil and Lucan have been detected in the verses,<sup>204</sup> it is evident that the final section of chapter XXI in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, in which his encounter with the women of Darius is narrated, was the main source for both the inscription and the episode in the background: Alexander is said never to have laid a hand on the Persian women, since he thought that defeating himself was more important than conquering his enemies.<sup>205</sup> In the Birmingham panel (as in the closely connected one now in Longleat, discussed earlier in this chapter), the choice of presenting Alexander and the women of Darius according to Plutarch's version, as opposed to the more common account of Curtius Rufus, served to highlight Alexander's continence rather than his magnanimity. This is perfectly in keeping with the general context of the 'Piccolomini cycle', where the 'Famous Men and Women' were all selected as exemplars of continence and self-restraint.<sup>206</sup>

In the artistic and cultural milieu of Siena in the late Quattrocento, to which the 'Piccolomini cycle' belongs, the *Lives* of Plutarch were widely known and read, and provided an important visual repertoire for artists and patrons. The 1470 *editio princeps* of the *Lives* was associated with Siena, since the editor, Giovanni Antonio Campano, was secretary to Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini, later Pius III, to whom

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<sup>203</sup> See the Latin verses and their English translation in *Renaissance Siena*, p. 234: 'Alexander / Qui propriis totum superavi viribus orbem / excussi flammam corde cupidineas / nil iuvat externis belli gaudere triumphis / si mens aegra iacet interius que furit' ('[I am] Alexander, who with my own strength conquered the whole world and banished Cupid's flames from my heart. Rejoicing in the external triumphs of war is useless, if the mind lies sick and rages inside').

<sup>204</sup> See Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine', p. 303; Guerrini, 'Dagli *Uomini famosi* alla *Biografia Dipinta*', pp. 141-2.

<sup>205</sup> See Guarino's Latin translation of the passage in Plutarch, [Vitae illustrium virorum], ed. Campano, f. 379v: 'Alexander seipsum magisquam hostes domare regium opus existimans, non has ... attingit.'

<sup>206</sup> According to Syson, in *Renaissance Siena*, p. 242, Alexander's exemplary magnanimity and chastity were the reasons for his inclusion in the Piccolomini cycle: 'Alexander was selected for his magnanimous (and chaste) behaviour towards the women of the family of the defeated Darius.'

the edition was dedicated.<sup>207</sup> In this environment and in connection to a marriage, Plutarch's unusual treatment of the meeting of Alexander with the family of Darius, via an intermediary, as an *exemplum pudicitiae* would no doubt have seemed more fitting than that of Curtius Rufus, which was already on its way to becoming the standard iconography.

When compared to the images in the Aula Minor in Florence and the Palazzo dell'Arengo in Milan, the remarkable originality of the Birmingham *Alexander* is even more apparent. It is not only the reliance on Plutarch which earns this panel a place in my category of the 'humanist cycles of Famous Men', but also the new imagery of Alexander which resulted from it. In the *tituli* of both the Aula Minor and the Arengo the emphasis is on Alexander's conquests, to which he owes his fame. In the Birmingham panel, however, these military achievements are surpassed by the moral virtues he displayed, above all, continence, which are at the core of Plutarch's portrayal of Alexander. The Birmingham panel is the earliest significant instance of this Plutarchan image of Alexander as a moral *exemplum*, which was to become the dominant iconography in the sixteenth century, as we shall see in Chapter 5.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> On Campano, who had previously been secretary to Pius II, see S. de Beer, *The Poetics of Patronage: Poetry as Self-Advancement in Giannantonio Campano*, Turnhout 2013. Cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini was even credited with the commission of the 'Piccolomini cycle' by Longhi, 'Un intervento raffaellesco', p. 8; his suggestion has recently been revived by Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine', pp. 301-2.

<sup>208</sup> See Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 47 and 98-105.

### 4.3 Images of Alexander in Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts

In the vast *corpus* of fifteenth-century Italian manuscripts and incunables, there are many images of Alexander. A systematic exploration of this field is far beyond the scope of my dissertation and would, in any case, be a Herculean task, given the scale and scattered nature of the material. There are, however, some points of reference, most importantly D. J. A. Ross's 1963 pioneering survey of the Alexander illustrated manuscript tradition;<sup>209</sup> since then, moreover, a number of studies have provided new information and further discussion on individual items.

I shall limit my discussion to manuscripts and printed books recounting the life of Alexander, that is, those containing the works of Curtius Rufus, Plutarch and Arrian.<sup>210</sup> Although there are also portraits of Alexander in texts loosely concerned with him such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>211</sup> or the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Rhetoric to Alexander*,<sup>212</sup> I shall not take these into consideration, since they mostly consist of generic portraits which are not relevant to the case I am trying to make in this chapter.

Manuscripts of Curtius Rufus, Plutarch and Arrian copied in the fifteenth century were not normally illustrated; but when they were, it was usually in the *all'antica* style of humanist book decoration, with ornamentation limited to initials and borders, frequently adopting the *bianchi girari* pattern.<sup>213</sup> Portraits of

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<sup>209</sup> Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 80-2 (on the visual apparatus of ancient historical texts on Alexander from the fifteenth century).

<sup>210</sup> I shall not take into account Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotheca Historica* because of the late recovery of Book XVII, where the life of Alexander is recounted, as I discussed in Chapter 3 (3.1.4).

<sup>211</sup> A fine example is a manuscript from the library of Duke Alfonso of Calabria, commissioned in Florence around 1480 and probably illuminated by Francesco Rosselli: the codex, a Latin translation of the Greek text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, has on its title-page images of Aristotle and his young pupil Alexander in laurel medallions; see C. De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London 1994, p. 247.

<sup>212</sup> See, e.g., the two standardized portraits of Aristotle and Alexander in a Greek manuscript of the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS plut. 60.18, f. 1<sup>r</sup>). The codex was copied in Constantinople for Filelfo, who brought it with him to Italy in 1427 and later translated the work into Latin; on his death in 1481, the manuscript entered the Medici library; see E. B. Fryde, *Greek Manuscripts in the Private Library of the Medici 1469-1510*, 2 vols, Aberystwyth 1996, I, p. 221 and II, pp. 792-3.

<sup>213</sup> On the emergence of humanist book decoration, see *The Painted Page: Italian Renaissance Book Illumination 1450-1550* (exhibition catalogue, London, Royal Academy of Arts, and New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994-5), ed. J. J. G. Alexander, Munich and New York 1994; and L. Armstrong, *Renaissance Miniature Painters and Classical Imagery: The Master of the Putti and His Venetian Workshop*, London and Philadelphia 1981.

Alexander, if present, were on the title-page: they differ greatly in their depiction of Alexander, so there is no iconographic consistency. By way of example, see a few manuscripts from the Medici library, now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence: in a rare illustrated exemplar of the Italian translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, Alexander is represented as an elderly man with a short white beard (MS plut. 61.11: **fig. 76**);<sup>214</sup> in another copy of Plutarch, in Latin, he is depicted as a full-armoured warrior with a sword, a globe identifying him as a *kosmokrator* and a fanciful helmet on his head (MS plut. 65.27);<sup>215</sup> finally, at the beginning of a manuscript of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae*, he appears as a young king, holding a globe, dressed in fifteenth-century *alla greca* fashion (MS plut. 64.28: **fig. 77**).<sup>216</sup> These diverse figures can be identified as Alexander solely because they illustrate texts which are about him. This applies to other equally deluxe but even more generic pictures of him such as, for instance, two manuscripts of Curtius Rufus, one from the library of Federico da Montefeltro (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. lat. 427: **fig. 78**),<sup>217</sup> and the other bearing the ex-libris of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS plut. 64.32: **fig. 79**).<sup>218</sup> They both present Alexander as a warrior standing in full armour; were it not for the fact that they illustrate the *Historiae Alexandri Magni* of Curtius Rufus, neither figure could be identified as Alexander, since they have no distinctive

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<sup>214</sup> On this codex, see Ceccanti, 'Un inedito Plutarco', esp. p. 74; see also C. Filippini, 'Plutarco istoriato: le *Vite parallele* nella miniatura italiana del Quattrocento e la morte di Cesare nei cassoni fiorentini', in *Biografia dipinta: Plutarco e l'arte del Rinascimento: 1400-1550*, ed. R. Guerrini, La Spezia 2001, pp. 155-208, at p. 188. A similar example is in a Curtius Rufus manuscript from the library of Federico da Montefeltro (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. lat. 887, f. 1v), illustrated in S. Poeschel, 'Alexander Magnus Maximus. Neue Aspekte zur Ikonographie Alexanders des Grossen im Quattrocento', *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 65, 1988, pp. 61-74, at p. 67, fig. 6.

<sup>215</sup> On the two-volume manuscript of Plutarch's *Lives* (MSS plut. 65.26 and 65.27) made for Piero de' Medici, see F. Ames-Lewis, *The Library and Manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, New York and London 1984, pp. 113-7 and 297-8, no. 56, and *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento 1440-1525: un primo censimento*, ed. A. Garzelli, 2 vols, Florence 1985, I, pp. 136-7. The image of Alexander is mentioned by Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 105, n. 439.

<sup>216</sup> See Ceccanti, 'Un inedito Plutarco', pp. 74 and 76, n. 34.

<sup>217</sup> Copied by Matteo Contugi, this codex was decorated by an unknown master close to Bartolomeo della Gatta; the lively figure of Alexander has been attributed to Bartolomeo himself. See *Ornatissimo codice: la biblioteca di Federico di Montefeltro* (exhibition catalogue, Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, 2008), ed. M. Peruzzi, Milan 2008, pp. 169-73, no. 8 (C. Martelli). See also C. Martelli, *Bartolomeo della Gatta: pittore e miniatore tra Arezzo, Roma e Urbino*, Florence 2013, pp. 282-4 and 340-1, no. 5. For a description of the manuscript, see *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae: codices Urbinates Latini*, ed. C. Stornajolo, I, Rome 1902, pp. 432-3.

<sup>218</sup> This codex was copied by Nicolaus Antonii de Ricciis; as far as I am aware, its decoration is still unattributed. See *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento*, I, pp. 431-2 and 519.

features or attributes. These conventional representations owe more to the iconographic tradition of the *Uomini famosi* than to a specific visual repertoire associated with Alexander.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> The same can be said of pictures of knights in full armour on horseback, which can be identified as Alexander riding Bucephalus only by the text they decorate. An example is a codex of the Tuscan translation of Curtius Rufus, illuminated by Francesco Rosselli, from the Biblioteca del Convento dei Gerolimini, Naples, MS P.VI.XV, illustrated in *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento*, II, p. 319, fig. 570.

#### 4.3.1 Images of Alexander Based on Ancient Prototypes

More interesting for my argument are the numerous portraits in fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts which are based on ancient coins or cameos bearing the effigy of Alexander – or believed to be of him. In antiquity, coins became an important vehicle for the widespread diffusion of Alexander’s likeness; from the mid-fifteenth century, portraits modelled on or inspired by these effigies started to appear in illuminated manuscripts and incunables – as well as sculptural reliefs and other similar artefacts. It has long been established that the main reason for using these numismatic effigies was the *auctoritas* which ancient coins and artefacts possessed in the eyes of humanists.<sup>220</sup> As for Alexander, interest in researching and reproducing his true likeness did not take off until much later – well into the sixteenth century and beyond, when the amount and variety of available material from antiquity grew substantially and a scientific method of approach slowly developed; it therefore lies largely beyond the chronological boundaries and scope of this dissertation.<sup>221</sup> Nevertheless, some fifteenth-century images of Alexander were modelled on ancient prototypes, reflecting the humanist desire to possess an authentic representation of him. As I shall show, the recovery of this ancient iconographic tradition made an important contribution to the creation of the new Renaissance portrait of Alexander.

#### Alexander Wearing the Lion-Skin of Hercules

One of the earliest and most famous examples of an image based on ancient models is contained in the monumental three-volume *Lives* of Plutarch now in the Biblioteca Malatestiana of Cesena, which was commissioned by Domenico Malatesta Novello and lavishly decorated by a team of illuminators between 1446

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<sup>220</sup> On the Renaissance use of Alexander images from ancient coins, see K. Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman Coins*, London and New York 2007, pp. 56-7, with bibliography; see also K. Fittschen, ‘Sul ruolo del ritratto antico nell’arte italiana’, in *Memoria dell’antico nell’arte italiana*, ed. S. Settis, 3 vols, Turin 1984-6, II: *I generi e i temi ritrovati*, pp. 381-412, esp. pp. 388-94. The earliest such examples (c. 1320) are the well-known effigies of Roman emperors drawn by Giovanni Mansionario in the margins of his *Historiae Imperiales* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Chig. I VII 259); see G. Bodon, ‘Interesse antiquario e numismatico nel primo Trecento veneto: i disegni nei codici delle *Historiae Imperiales* di Giovanni Mansionario’, in his *Veneranda antiquitas: studi sull’eredità dell’antico nella Rinascenza veneta*, Berne and Oxford 2005, pp. 203-17, with bibliography.

<sup>221</sup> The first step was, of course, compiling a *corpus* of ancient coins, e.g., those of Andrea Fulvio (*Illustrium imagines*, Rome 1517) and Sebastiano Erizzo (*Discorso sopra le medaglie antiche*, Rome 1559). For a recent overview, see Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander*, pp. 56-7.



and 1465.<sup>222</sup> The image of Alexander, because it appears on the first leaf of the first volume, has been somewhat damaged, but is still perfectly legible: the bust-length portrait shows Alexander in profile, wearing a cuirass, with his head covered by a lion-skin, which is tied around his neck (**fig. 80**).

The lion-skin is a distinctive attribute which Alexander borrowed from Hercules, the mythical ancestor of the Macedonian Argead kings. In order to encourage his own identification with Hercules for propagandistic purposes, Alexander adopted his main attribute, the skin of the Nemean lion, reportedly wearing it on special occasions. Moreover, Alexander issued silver coins bearing the head of a young Hercules with the lion-skin, on the obverse, and the figure of Zeus seated with eagle and sceptre, on the reverse. Shortly after Alexander's death, this 'Hercules/Zeus type' coin underwent a significant change: the features of Hercules were assimilated to those of Alexander, resulting in an idealized portrait, which survives in a vast number of specimens (**fig. 81**). The image of 'Alexander as Hercules' became extremely popular and is well attested in sculpture and terracotta.<sup>223</sup> Coins of this type, whether they depicted Hercules or an idealized Alexander, were widely accepted in the fifteenth century as portraits of Alexander;<sup>224</sup> and, as such, they were copied by artists like Pisanello (**fig. 82**), who probably turned for inspiration to the collection of his patron, Leonello d'Este, a famously avid collector of coins and gems and an admirer of Alexander.<sup>225</sup> Several

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<sup>222</sup> As ones of the treasures of the Biblioteca Malatestiana, the bibliography on the *Lives* is extensive; but see at least *Le muse e il principe*, II, pp. 121-9, no. 29 (G. Mariani Canova) and *Gli Este a Ferrara: una corte nel Rinascimento* (exhibition catalogue, Ferrara, Castello, 2004), ed. J. Bentini, Milan 2004, pp. 276-7 (F. Lollini), with a *status quaestionis* of the research and previous bibliography.

<sup>223</sup> For coins with the effigy of Hercules and of Alexander as Hercules, issued by Alexander and his successors, see M. Bieber, *Alexander the Great in Greek and Roman Art*, Chicago 1964, pp. 48-9; A. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics*, Berkeley 1993, pp. 158-61. Particularly useful is Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander*, pp. 39-41. A large number of sculpted heads of Alexander with the lion skin from as distant as Greece and Tajikistan survive; they provided an important model for the official portraits of Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors. For examples of these sculptures, see Bieber, *Alexander the Great*, pls XVIII-XX, P. Moreno, *Alessandro Magno*, esp. pp. 76-81, 137-9 and 294-7, and A. Trofimova, *Imitatio Alexandri in Hellenistic Art: Portraits of Alexander the Great and Mythological Images*, Rome 2012, pp. 59-80.

<sup>224</sup> See, e.g., a letter by Ambrogio Traversari to Niccolò Niccoli of 1432, where he mentions several ancient coins and gems which he saw in the houses of many friends in Venice; published in Ambrogio Traversari, *Latinae Epistolae*, ed. L. Mehus, 2 vols, Florence 1759, II, p. 412: 'argenteos nummos, sed nihil aeque, ac Alexandri effigiem sum admiratus, quam esse Macedonis illius Magni plurima sunt, qua suadeant, ante omnia vetustissimae literae graecae ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ... atque inferius M. praeterea leonis pelle obvolutum caput, et alia.'

<sup>225</sup> See *Pisanello* (exhibition catalogue, Verona, Museo di Castelvecchio, 1996), ed. P. Marini, Milan 1996, pp. 256-9, no. 37 (D. Cordellier), with bibliography. The other three medallion

depictions of Alexander in fifteenth-century manuscripts depend on the numismatic portrait of him wearing Hercules's lion-skin. These are either re-elaborations of effigies found on coins – for example, the portrait in the Biblioteca Malatestiana codex, where the head is worked into a cuirassed bust – or straight-forward transpositions such as the copy of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae* from the library of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Chig. H VII 228 (**fig. 83**).<sup>226</sup>

Similar portraits of Alexander were also used as a means of political iconography. An example is found on the portal of the Vimercati Palace in Milan, carved between 1450 and 1466 for Count Gaspare Vimercati, *condottiero* of the lord of Milan, Francesco I Sforza. The portal was designed as an homage to the military power of Francesco; his portrait in the centre of the arch is flanked by those of two ancient generals, whose lives had been paired by Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives* and who are labelled Julius Caesar and Alexander, the latter wearing a lion-skin, as in Hellenistic coins (**fig. 84**).<sup>227</sup> A comparable example is found in Wrocław, Poland, where the Italianate tomb of Canon Stanislaus Sauer (d. 1535) in the collegiate church of the Holy Cross is surmounted by a tympanum bearing the medallion

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portraits in the Louvre sheet depict Julius Caesar, Augustus and Hercules (in the mature, bearded type known mainly through ancient cameos). On Leonello's passion for antiquities, see Decembrio, *De politia litteraria*, p. 431 (VI.68.20-1). It has been convincingly argued that the mass of curly hair seen in official portraits, both in medals and paintings, of Leonello is not only a play on his name, which means 'little lion', but also a direct allusion to Alexander's leonine mane; see L. Syson and D. Gordon, *Pisanello: Painter to the Renaissance Court* (exhibition catalogue, London, National Gallery, 2001-2), London 2001, pp. 89-91, and B. L. Brown, 'Portraiture at the Courts of Italy', in *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini* (exhibition catalogue, Berlin, Bode-Museum and New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011-12), ed. K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann, New York, New Haven and London 2011, pp. 26-47, at p. 27.

<sup>226</sup> See *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento*, I, p. 534 and II, fig. 406. The decoration of the codex has been attributed to Raffaele Berti da Pistoia, who is documented in Mantua and Parma between 1456 and 1464: see G. Z. Zanichelli's entry in *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani: secoli IX-XVI*, ed. M. Bollati, Milan 2004, pp. 883-5; cf., however, Ceccanti, 'Un inedito Plutarco', p. 75, who attributes it to the Florentine Francesco di Antonio del Chierico. The manuscript, which I have not been able to see in person, is described as richly illuminated at the beginning of each book by Dosson, *Étude*, p. 350.

<sup>227</sup> See J. G. Bernstein, 'Milanese and Antique Aspects of the Colleoni Chapel: Site and Symbolism', *Arte lombarda*, 100, 1992, pp. 45-52, at p. 50; A. Burnett and R. Schofield, 'The Medallions of the Basamento of the Certosa di Pavia: Sources and Influence', *Arte lombarda*, 120, 1997, pp. 5-28, at p. 10, suggest that it is a head of Hercules interpreted as an Alexander. The question, which remains open, is however immaterial in my discussion.

image of Matthias Corvinus, accompanied by those of Alexander (this time of the ‘helmeted type’ discussed below) and Emperor Augustus.<sup>228</sup>

### The Helmeted Alexander

A particularly interesting case is the portrait of Alexander found in a copy of Arrian’s *Anabasis* from the library of Urbino, MS Urb. lat. 415 of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, bearing the coat of arms of Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Calabria, the most important patron of the arts in Naples from the 1480s to his death in 1495.<sup>229</sup> The dating, attribution and circumstances of commission of the manuscript are still unclear; but an epigram written on the last leaf, stating that the scribe finished copying the text after Alfonso’s death in 1495, suggests a post-1495 for the decoration as well.<sup>230</sup> It has been argued that the manuscript was intended as a double posthumous homage: to Bartolomeo Facio (d. 1457), who began the Latin translation of the *Anabasis* copied in the manuscript, and to Alfonso I the Magnificent (d. 1458), who commissioned the translation and was also eulogized at court as a new Alexander. The portraits of the two, Alfonso I on the left and Facio on the right, appear in two medallions placed in a prominent position at the top of the page (**fig. 85**).<sup>231</sup> Framed by a laurel wreath in the initial below, there is also a portrait of Alexander, with his name inscribed on a ribbon trailing around him: he has long curly hair, wears a helmet decorated with the figure of a Triton and a cuirass with the *gorgoneion* (Medusa’s head) on the breastplate (**fig. 86**). An identical image of Alexander is found in bindings, as shown by four vellum copies of the 1494 *editio princeps* of the Planudean Anthology, printed in Florence under the supervision of the most distinguished of the Byzantine émigré scholars in Italy,

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<sup>228</sup> See *Matthias Corvinus, the King: Tradition and Renewal in the Hungarian Royal Court 1458-1490* (exhibition catalogue, Budapest, Budapest History Museum, 2008), ed. P. Farbaky et al., Budapest 2008, pp. 85-6.

<sup>229</sup> For a description of MS Urb. lat. 415, see *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, p. 427, and De Marinis, *La biblioteca napoletana*, II, pp. 18-19.

<sup>230</sup> The epigram which provides this *post quem* date was pointed out by Poeschel, ‘Alexander Magnus Maximus’, p. 70, n. 20. Recent contributions on MS Urb. lat. 415, however, seem not to have taken this finding into account and suggest a much earlier date, around 1480, on stylistic grounds; see G. Toscano, ‘Le biblioteche dei sovrani aragonesi di Napoli’, in *Principi e signori: le biblioteche nella seconda metà del Quattrocento*, ed. G. Arbizzoni et al., Urbino 2010, pp. 163-216, at pp. 205-7, and the otherwise useful G. Albanese and D. Pietragalla, ‘“In honorem regis edidit”: lo scrittoio di Bartolomeo Facio alla corte napoletana di Alfonso il Magnanimo’, *Rinascimento*, 39, 1999, pp. 293-336, at pp. 322-3 (with an attribution of the illuminated title-page to Cristoforo Majorana and Nardo Rapicano).

<sup>231</sup> Other identifications, with Ferrante/Alfonso Duke of Calabria and Federico da Montefeltro, have been suggested; but the hypothesis that they represent Alfonso I and Facio, already in De Marinis, *La biblioteca napoletana*, p. 18, seems most convincing to me; see Albanese and Pietragalla, ‘“In honorem regis edidit”’, p. 323.

Janus Lascaris.<sup>232</sup> The medallion bindings of the four incunabula, among which is a beautiful copy owned by Matteo Battiferri of Urbino, are decorated with the same portrait, which is identified as Alexander by his name inscribed in Greek characters (**fig. 87**).<sup>233</sup>

These portrait busts of Alexander are clearly based on the same source: an ancient cameo, which in the late Quattrocento was in the Medici collection.<sup>234</sup> Images of this engraved gem appear in a number of works of Florentine origin, usually among other Renaissance cameos owned by the Medici. One is found, for example, in the border decoration of a lavishly illuminated manuscript made in Florence around 1480: a Latin translation of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* for Matthias Corvinus (**fig. 88**). A second version of the cameo, also in the Medici collection, was reproduced on the Missal of Thomas James, Bishop of Dol in Brittany, made in Florence and now in Lyon (Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 5123).<sup>235</sup> The two lost, or at any rate untraced, versions of the Medici cameo are known to us through several *all'antica* plaquettes, among which is a particularly fine example in Washington

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<sup>232</sup> My thanks are due to Anna Gialdini and Paolo Sacht for bringing this material to my attention and for sharing their knowledge of bindings and printed books with me.

<sup>233</sup> See A. Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders: The Origin and Diffusion of the Humanistic Bookbindings 1459-1559, with a Census of Historiated Plaquette and Medallion Bindings of the Renaissance*, Cambridge and New York 1989, p. 219, no. 12; similar examples of bindings with an Alexander plaquette are listed at pp. 219-21, nos. 13-14. On Matteo Battiferri, see the entry by P. Zambelli in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, VII, 1965, pp. 245-6. On his copy of the Planudean Anthology, illuminated by Attavante degli Attavanti, see M. J. Husung, 'Aus der Zeit des Übergangs von der Handschrift zum Druck', in *Mittelalterliche Handschriften: Paläographische, Kunsthistorische, Literarische und Bibliotheksgeschichtliche Untersuchungen: Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag von Hermann Degering*, Leipzig 1926, pp. 155-9.

<sup>234</sup> For a reassessment of the somewhat confused literature on the topic, see L. Fusco and G. Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici Collector and Antiquarian*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 102-3. On the importance of the Medici glyptic collection for Renaissance art, see N. Dacos, 'La fortuna delle gemme medicee nel Rinascimento', in *Il tesoro di Lorenzo il Magnifico: le gemme* (exhibition catalogue, Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 1972), ed. N. Dacos et al., Florence 1973, pp. 131-56; in general, see also T. Yuen, 'Glyptic Sources of Renaissance Art', *Studies in the History of Art*, 54, 1997 (= *Engraved Gems: Survivals and Revivals*, ed. C. M. Brown), pp. 136-57.

<sup>235</sup> On Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, from the workshop of Vespasiano de' Bisticci, see *Mattia Corvino e Firenze: arte e umanesimo alla corte del re d'Ungheria* (exhibition catalogue, Florence, Museo di San Marco, Biblioteca di Michelozzo, 2013-14), ed. P. Farbaky et al., Florence 2013, pp. 217-19, no. 65 (C. Denoël), with bibliography. On the Missal of Thomas James, illuminated by Attavante degli Attavanti in 1483, see *The Painted Page*, p. 56, no. 3a (J. J. G. Alexander). For the identification of the Medici cameos in these manuscripts, see N. Dacos, 'Saggio di inventario delle opere ispirate da gemme Medici nel Rinascimento', in *Il tesoro di Lorenzo il Magnifico: le gemme* (exhibition catalogue, Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, 1972), ed. N. Dacos et al., Florence 1973, pp. 157-67, at p. 158, no. 6, and pls 88-9.

DC.<sup>236</sup> The crucial point for my argument, however, is that these plaquettes do not, in fact, represent Alexander, but rather the warrior goddess Athena (**fig. 89**).<sup>237</sup>

That a portrait of Alexander, the god-like general of unrivalled prowess and courage, is based on an effigy of Athena, the fully armed goddess of war and wisdom, is by no means surprising; and we know that in the fifteenth century effigies of Athena found on ancient coins and gems were often mistaken for representations of Alexander. This is the case, for instance, with the golden staters issued by Alexander, which were well known in the Quattrocento; the head of the helmeted Athena on them was generally believed to be a portrait of Alexander, whose name was inscribed on the reverse (**fig. 90**).<sup>238</sup> A famous example of this misunderstanding concerns Cyriac of Ancona: while travelling on a Venetian ship off Crete in autumn 1445, he was offered an intaglio seal engraved with a head of Athena, which he mistakenly took for a helmeted Alexander.<sup>239</sup> Such errors can easily be understood: many images of Alexander and Athena in this style do look similar, since they both represent a beautiful young figure with long hair, a helmet and, in portrait busts, a cuirass often decorated with the *gorgoneion*. Among the rulers of antiquity, only Alexander could ever be confused with Athena – above all, because of his clean-shaven face, a distinctive feature of his portraits which set him apart, for example, from the bearded representations of the Roman emperors.<sup>240</sup> It

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<sup>236</sup> The Medici cameo was reproduced in engraving by A. Gori, *Museum Florentinum: exhibens insigniora vetustatis monumenta quae Florentiae sunt in thesauro Mediceo*, 3 vols, Florence 1731-4, I, pl. 60, no. 10. For its correct identification, see Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, p. 241, no. 209.

<sup>237</sup> See J. Pope-Hennessy, *Renaissance Bronzes from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation: Reliefs, Plaquettes, Statuettes, Utensils and Mortars*, London 1965, p. 76, no. 259; see also É. Molinier, *Les bronzes de la Renaissance: les plaquettes, catalogue raisonné*, Paris 1886, p. 22, no. 43 and pp. 23-4, no. 45. The image of Athena known through the Washington DC plaquette seems to have enjoyed considerable popularity, as it is reproduced alongside other Medici engraved gems in the 1497 silver shrine of Saint Simeon in Zadar; see S. Kokole, 'The Silver Shrine of Saint Simeon in Zadar: Collecting Ancient Coins and Casts After the Antique in Fifteenth-Century Dalmatia', *Studies in the History of Art*, 70, 2008 (= *Collecting Sculpture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. N. Penny and E. D. Schmidt), pp. 110-27, esp. pp. 112 and 114.

<sup>238</sup> For this coin type, known as 'Athena/Nike' type because of the figure of Nike on the reverse, see Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander*, p. 109; for its Renaissance identification with Alexander, *ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>239</sup> See B. Ashmole, 'Cyriac of Ancona', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 45, 1957, pp. 25-41, at pp. 38-9. The gem is now in Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Antikensammlung. See also P. Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past*, New Haven and London 1996, p. 85.

<sup>240</sup> Alexander was the first ruler to be portrayed as a beardless young man, his official portraits marking a significant change in the iconography; before him, kings were always portrayed as mature and bearded.

is also worth bearing in mind that Alexander's assimilation to Athena is attested very early on in the tradition: the *gorgoneion* borrowed from the goddess appears on Alexander's breastplate in the famous mosaic of the *Battle of Alexander and Darius* from the House of the Faun at Pompeii (now in Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale); and there are several statuettes of 'Alexander Aigiochos', which show him wearing Athena's *aegis* decorated with the *gorgoneion*.<sup>241</sup>

Yet, how precisely did this Renaissance portrait of the helmeted Alexander, based on the image of Athena, come about? According to a plausible hypothesis suggested by Anthony Hobson,<sup>242</sup> a crucial role was played by Janus Lascaris and the 1494 *editio princeps* of the Planudean Anthology. Regarding this text as an essential contribution to his larger programme of popularizing Greek literature among Western readers, Lascaris designed a special font for the book and choose an *alla greca* binding for the presentation copy to Piero de' Medici, so as to make it look like a product of classical antiquity. In line with that aim, Lascaris may have wished to decorate the covers with an image of Alexander – the 'zenith of Greek empire', as Hobson put it.<sup>243</sup> The natural place to look for such an image was the collection of ancient gems belonging to Lorenzo the Magnificent, but Lascaris had no luck in finding a portrait of Alexander; what he found instead, however, was the cameo of Athena, which was used as a model and transformed into an Alexander by adding his name in Greek lettering.

If Hobson's speculations are correct, Lascaris deliberately turned Athena into Alexander. The ground for this transformation was prepared by the common misidentification of the effigy on Alexander's staters; but the fact that Alexander's name was added to the portrait on the Planudean Anthology binding shows that, whatever the identity of the effigy taken as a model, the image was intentionally presented as a portrait of Alexander. A number of similar sixteenth-century plaquettes followed, representing the profile of Athena transformed into Alexander and labelled 'ALISANDRO'.<sup>244</sup> This image of Alexander as a helmeted young man

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<sup>241</sup> The 'Alexander Aigiochos' type, in which he is also holding a spear in one hand and the Palladion in the other, is connected with an Egyptian cult of Alexander as founder of the city of Alexandria, promoted by the Ptolemaic dynasty. For a discussion of the topic and a list of surviving statuettes, including two iconic examples in the British Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum, see Stewart, *Faces of Power*, pp. 246-52 and 421-2.

<sup>242</sup> Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders*, pp. 100-3.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>244</sup> See Pope-Hennessy, *Renaissance Bronzes*, p. 76, no. 261.

went on to become one of the canonical depictions of him and by far the most popular in Italian and European art from the early sixteenth century onwards.<sup>245</sup> Innumerable examples can be found, from Sodoma and Giulio Romano to Le Brun and Rembrandt, some of which will be discussed in Chapter 5. It is also significant that for many helmeted figures, bronze and marble busts in particular, it remains difficult to tell with certainty whether they represent Alexander or Athena.<sup>246</sup>

It is tempting to suggest, as Hobson does, that the iconographic tradition of the helmeted Alexander originating from the effigy of Athena was almost single-handedly down to Lascaris, a Greek refugee who strove to rescue his native culture by finding a safe harbour in the very centre of humanism, Florence.<sup>247</sup> This is not to say that the visual tradition depends on the particular effigy of Alexander devised by Lascaris after a Medici cameo, nor that images of Alexander wearing a helmet do not occur before the medallion on the Planudean Anthology binding. Nevertheless,

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<sup>245</sup> On the helmeted Alexander, see K. Kraft, 'Der behelmte Alexander der Grosse', *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte*, 15, 1965, pp. 7-32; J.-B. Giard, 'L'image d'Alexandre le Grand à la Renaissance', *Numismatica e antichità classiche* (Quaderni ticinesi), 20, 1991, pp. 309-15. The portrait of the helmeted Alexander taken from the Medici Athena is also found in Andrea Fulvio's repertoire *Illustrium imagines* (f. 5v of the *editio princeps*, Rome 1517), on which see J. Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious: The Numismatic Presence in the Renaissance*, Princeton NJ 1999, pp. 52-69.

<sup>246</sup> See, e.g., an Italian bronze bust of about 1550, known in several examples (London, Victoria and Albert Museum; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum; Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli; etc.); in all probability, it represents Alexander (and the Milan exemplar is, in fact, paired with a bust of Athena), but a number of replicas of lesser quality exist, which are usually identified as Athena. See *Alexander the Great in European Art*, p. 54, no. I.4 (M. Leithe-Jasper). A similar example is provided by a second-century porphyry bust of Athena in the Louvre, which is also known as 'Mazarin Alexander' because of a seventeenth-century identification. With regard to painting, the case of Rembrandt, although outside the geographical and chronological boundaries of this dissertation, is worth mentioning: the names of both Alexander and Athena have been put forward for the fully armed figures in his *Man in Armour* (1655; Glasgow, City Art Gallery and Museum) and *Pallas Athena* (c. 1657; Lisbon, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian). That doubts are occasionally raised about their current identification as Alexander and Athena testifies to the ambiguity of such representations. See E. van de Wetering, *Rembrandt's Paintings Revisited: A Complete Survey* (=Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, VI), The Hague and London 2015, p. 629, no. 239 (on *Alexander*) and pp. 380 and 639, no. 253 (on *Pallas Athena*, which is here suggested to be part of a triptych together with the goddesses Venus and Juno). On the Glasgow *Alexander*, see also J. Bikker, 'Contemplation', in *Rembrandt: The Late Works* (exhibition catalogue, London, National Gallery, 2014-15, and Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 2015), ed. J. Bikker et al., London 2014, pp. 214-33, at pp. 219-21. In addition, Aristotle in Rembrandt's *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (1653, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) is identified by the medallion hanging from his gold chain, bearing the image of his pupil Alexander, which is modelled on the effigy of the helmeted Athena. See T. Rousseau, 'Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 20, 1962, pp. 149-56; the identification of Aristotle's medallion as depicting Alexander was first made by J. Rosenberg, *Rembrandt*, 2 vols, Cambridge MA 1948, I, pp. 165-8.

<sup>247</sup> See Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders*, p. 103.

within the broader context of this iconographic type, Lascaris's contribution was vital: by adding the name of Alexander to an effigy which could conceivably have been of him and was largely accepted as such, he launched a new portrait of Alexander, which was all the more valued because it was based on an ancient model.

Profiles of the helmeted Alexander spread in late fifteenth-century manuscripts of relevant historical texts, particularly the *Historiae Alexandri* of Curtius Rufus and the *Anabasis* of Arrian. Alongside MS Urb. lat. 415 discussed above, two fine manuscripts deserve a mention: a Curtius Rufus from the library of Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F. 6.28; **fig. 91**);<sup>248</sup> and an important copy of the Latin translation of Arrian, made in Naples as a gift for Matthias Corvinus (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 5268; **fig. 92**).<sup>249</sup> While the decorative elements on the helmet and the facial features of Alexander are not entirely fixed, the iconography in its essentials remains stable. From these first illuminated examples, and more decisively from the early sixteenth century onwards, the image of a youthful Alexander, almost effeminate in appearance, becomes the standard Renaissance portrait of him, with the helmet serving as an important distinguishing feature. This imagery put paid to the variability of previous representations. The warrior's helmet comes to replace the royal crown, which Alexander had so often worn in the medieval tradition (both in the illuminated manuscripts and in the Nine Worthies cycles which I examined in Chapter 2). Furthermore, the occasional depictions in the past of Alexander as a mature or elderly man (e.g., in the La Manta frescoes and in MS plut. 61.11 of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence) become less and less frequent, as the new youthful type gains prominence.

Of the many fifteenth-century images of the helmeted Alexander, Andrea del Verrocchio's marble relief, now in Washington DC, is a particularly interesting case.<sup>250</sup> It was made in Florence, either by Verrocchio himself or his workshop, in

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<sup>248</sup> The manuscript was copied in Florence around 1430-40; in the late fifteenth century, when in possession of Cardinal Carafa in Naples, it had a historiated border added at f. 1, including a medallion portrait of a helmeted Alexander. See O. Pächt and J. J. G. Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford*, 3 vols, Oxford 1966-73, II, pp. 23, no. 226 and 37, no. 372, pls XX and XXXV.

<sup>249</sup> See *Matthias Corvinus*, pp. 235-6, no. 4.11 (D. Pócs); still essential is D. J. A. Ross, 'A Corvinus Manuscript Recovered', *Scriptorium*, 11, 1957, pp. 104-8.

<sup>250</sup> See *Mattia Corvino e Firenze*, pp. 156-8, no. 39 (A. Luchs); D. A. Covi, *Andrea del Verrocchio: Life and Work*, Florence 2005, pp. 138-43.



the same years and cultural context from which, as I have tried to show, the new Renaissance type of Alexander, based on the effigy of Athena, took shape (**fig. 93**). The work has long been connected to a bronze relief which, according to Vasari, was commissioned to Verrocchio by Lorenzo de' Medici and then sent to Matthias Corvinus in Hungary, together with its pendant of Darius.<sup>251</sup> The two reliefs are now lost, but we can get some idea of the appearance of Alexander from the marble relief in Washington and of Darius from a terracotta relief ascribed to the Della Robbia workshop which perished in Berlin in 1945 but is known through photographic documentation.<sup>252</sup>

The profile portrait in Washington bears all the features of the helmeted type mentioned above: Alexander has a youthful and effeminate appearance, long curly hair and a fanciful helmet and cuirass, on which the *gorgoneion* has been transformed into a screaming Fury. While his head is perfectly in profile, the bust is represented in three-quarters: a feature which has no parallel among contemporary reliefs of ancient 'paired captains' but which does appear in the Athena plaquette (**fig. 89**) and presumably in the Medici cameo on which it is modelled.<sup>253</sup> Although it is difficult to determine whether Verrocchio found direct inspiration in Lorenzo's collection of antiquities or in some intermediate source, this issue is not important for my interpretation, since it is evident that the Washington relief belongs to the group of Florentine artefacts deriving ultimately from the Medici Athena gem, which, as we have seen, was reproduced in another work made for Matthias Corvinus, the manuscript of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* now in Paris (**fig. 88**). According to Vasari, the reliefs for the Hungarian king differed from one another not only because of the decorations on their armour and helmets, but also because Verrocchio represented Alexander 'in profile', while he portrayed Darius 'according

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<sup>251</sup> Vasari, *Le vite*, III, p. 535: '[Verrocchio] fece anco due teste di metallo, una d'Alessandro Magno in proffilo, l'altra d'un Dario a suo capriccio, pur di mezzo rilieuo, e ciascuna da per sé, variando l'un dall'altro ne' cimieri, nell'armadure et in ogni cosa; le quali amendue furono mandate dal magnifico Lorenzo Vecchio de' Medici al re Mattia Corvino in Ungheria con molte altre cose.'

<sup>252</sup> On the two reliefs and other similar representations of ancient captains, see F. Caglioti, 'Andrea del Verrocchio e i profili di condottieri antichi per Mattia Corvino', in *Italy and Hungary: Humanism and Art in the Early Renaissance*, ed. P. Farbaký and L. A. Waldman, Florence 2011, pp. 504-51, with a *status quaestionis* of research and bibliography.

<sup>253</sup> For an alternative interpretation of Alexander's unusual posture, which is interesting but not entirely persuasive, see Caglioti, 'Andrea del Verrocchio', pp. 539-40. The expression 'paired captains' goes back to A. Chastel, 'Les capitaines antiques affrontés dans l'art florentin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Mémoires de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 3, 1954, pp. 279-89.

to his whim.<sup>254</sup> Vasari seems to be suggesting that although there was no ancient prototype for Darius, there was one for representing Alexander ‘in profile’.

The most striking decorations of Alexander’s helmet and cuirass – on the spaulder, an image of Triton and a Nereid embracing; and on the helmet, a winged dragon – have sometimes been interpreted as allusions to Alexander’s life and to his medieval legend. Triton and Nereid have been associated with the sea creatures admired by Alexander in his exploration of the ocean,<sup>255</sup> and the dragon with the report in the Pseudo-Callisthenes that he was fathered by Zeus Ammon disguised as a monstrous serpent or dragon.<sup>256</sup> Both these hypotheses, though intriguing, seem far-fetched to me. In my view, these images are generic *all’antica* elements, rather than decorations specifically connected to Alexander. Triton and Nereid belong to the common repertoire of ancient sarcophagi, coins and gems, and could have been adapted from material available at the time.<sup>257</sup> As for helmet crests in the shape of winged dragons, these are frequently found in Florentine art of the late fifteenth century, most famously in the representations of Mehmed II known as *El Gran Turco*. That these are generic decorative elements is further confirmed by their appearance in a number of representations of ‘paired captains’, as well as in surviving parade armour worn in jousts.<sup>258</sup>

In the Washington relief, however, there is a feature which is genuinely derived from an ancient effigy of Alexander: the shell-like decoration on the side of his helmet. I believe that it is taken from a Lysimachus coin bearing the image of the deified Alexander with the ram’s horns of Ammon (e.g., **fig. 94**). As I shall explain below, coins and cameos of this type were well known in Florence at the time. There is also evidence that this effigy circulated in Verrocchio’s circle: a leaf from a sketchbook ascribed to the workshop of Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, a pupil of Verrocchio’s, shows the profile of the horned Alexander copied from an ancient coin

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<sup>254</sup> Vasari, *Le vite*, III, p. 535; for the Italian text, see above, n. 251.

<sup>255</sup> Luchs in *Mattia Corvino e Firenze*, p. 158.

<sup>256</sup> L. Pisani, *Francesco di Simone Ferrucci: itinerari di uno scultore fiorentino fra Toscana, Romagna e Montefeltro*, Florence 2007, p. 42, no. 206.

<sup>257</sup> Also suggested in *ibid.*, and in *Mattia Corvino e Firenze*, p. 158.

<sup>258</sup> See *Bellini and the East* (exhibition catalogue, Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and London, National Gallery, 2005-6), ed. C. Campbell and A. Chong, London and Boston 2005, pp. 66-9, no. 14 (A. Chong).

or gem.<sup>259</sup> It therefore seems highly probable that images of the horned Alexander were taken into account when devising the relief for Matthias Corvinus. Of course, this type of shell-like decoration on helmets was greatly elaborated over the course of the Renaissance and was frequently employed as a generic feature in many military portraits, culminating in the fantastic helmets drawn by Marco Zoppo in a series of *all'antica* heads.<sup>260</sup> Nonetheless, it seems plausible to me that the origin of the motif, which also appears in the Washington relief, lies in the numismatic effigy of Alexander with ram's horns.

The Verrocchio relief of Alexander was warmly welcomed at the court of Buda, especially since Matthias Corvinus was known not only for admiring and emulating Alexander, but also for having his official portraits modelled on him.<sup>261</sup> For the Hungarian king, the example of Alexander was not just another Renaissance commonplace but had a special significance: just as Alexander had conquered and subdued the Persians, Matthias was seen (and saw himself) as the new Alexander who would eventually defeat the Turks and repel them for good from the Eastern frontier of Christianity. Lajos Vayer has shown that the idea of Matthias Corvinus as the new Alexander was cultivated at the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent, where poets and humanists, chief among them Angelo Poliziano, encouraged and reinforced this identification.<sup>262</sup> Matthias's court at Buda was, in fact, an Italian enclave at the borders of Europe, and its contacts with Florence, in particular, are well documented. But Hungary was not exceptional in its reception of the Florentine *all'antica* portrait of Alexander, which soon began to circulate far and wide.

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<sup>259</sup> The drawing is now at the Musée Condé in Chantilly, inv. 21v: see Pisani, *Francesco di Simone Ferrucci*, pp. 145-6 and fig. 165. In the Washington relief, a possible portrait of Ammon himself with ram's horns is carved on one of the pendent straps of Alexander's pauldronas, as is pointed out, though in a rather confused way, by Luchs in *Mattia Corvino e Firenze*, p. 156.

<sup>260</sup> See L. Armstrong, 'Marco Zoppo's "Parchment Book of Drawings" in the British Museum: Reflections on the "all'antica" Heads', in her *Studies of Renaissance Miniaturists in Venice*, 2 vols, London 2003, I, pp. 37-75.

<sup>261</sup> See E. Békés, *The Physiognomy of a Renaissance Ruler: Portraits and Descriptions of Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary (1458-1490)*, Saarbrücken 2009, esp. pp. 15-25, with bibliography.

<sup>262</sup> See L. Vayer, 'Il Vasari e l'arte del Rinascimento in Ungheria', in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista: atti del congresso internazionale nel IV centenario della morte, Arezzo, Firenze, 2-8 settembre 1974*, Florence 1976, pp. 501-24, esp. pp. 513-21.

### Alexander with the Horns of Zeus Ammon

Another Hellenistic numismatic type needs to be mentioned here, since it had some influence on Renaissance art. This is the effigy of Alexander with the ram's horns of his fabled father, the Egyptian god Ammon (or Zeus Ammon). The image was devised by Lysimachus, Alexander's successor in Thrace, and also adopted by Seleucus I Nicator; and it, too, was known in the Quattrocento from coins and cameos. A numismatic specimen was in the Medici collection, where it was seen by Poliziano, who described it as an 'imago cornigera' (**figs 94 and 95**).<sup>263</sup> It is possible that this specimen was the one which Francesco di Simone Ferrucci copied in the drawing mentioned above.<sup>264</sup>

Unlike the portrait of the helmeted Alexander, which migrated freely from a numismatic effigy into a variety of artistic media, portraits with the ram's horns are found almost exclusively in intaglios and medallions,<sup>265</sup> as well as in decorative reliefs based on plaquettes and ancient gems. Examples are mostly found in Lombardy, a region where this style of decoration was particularly favoured in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>266</sup> An example is in the tomb of Ambrogio Longhignana, Ludovico Maria Visconti's castellan, at Isola Bella in the Lake Maggiore. On the four pillars at the base, there are medallions with *all'antica* profile heads; one of these, on the first pilaster from the right, has the effigy of Alexander displaying the *anastole* (that is, with his hair brushed up from his

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<sup>263</sup> Poliziano discussed at length whether the 'imago cornigera' he saw in the numismatic collection of Lorenzo was issued by Seleucus or, as suggested by D. Gionta, *Iconografia erodiana: Poliziano e le monete di Lorenzo*, Messina 2008, p. 34 and n. 1, by Lysimachus; in either case, it is clear that he was referring to a coin bearing the image of Alexander with the horns of Zeus Ammon. See V. Fera, 'Il dibattito umanistico sui *Miscellanea*', in *Agnolo Poliziano poeta scrittore filologo: atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Montepulciano, 3-6 novembre 1994*, ed. V. Fera and M. Martelli, Florence 1998, pp. 333-64, at p. 346. Several ancient cameos with this effigy are in the Cabinet des médailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris: see M.-L. Vollenweider, *Camées et intailles*, tome I: *Les portraits grecs du Cabinet des médailles: catalogue raisonné*, 2 vols, Paris 1995, I, pp. 45-50, nos. 29-32.

<sup>264</sup> See above, n. 259.

<sup>265</sup> There are several specimens in Florence; see R. Gennaioli, *Le gemme dei Medici al Museo degli Argenti: cammei e intagli nelle collezioni di Palazzo Pitti*, Florence 2007 (sixteenth-century *all'antica* cameos of Alexander: p. 164, nos. 30-1; an unidentified young boy with the horns of Zeus Ammon: p. 165, no. 32; an Athena wearing a helmet with decorative features from Zeus Ammon's horns is illustrated at p. 167, no. 38).

<sup>266</sup> On the use of plaquettes in Lombard architecture of the Renaissance, see M. Leino, *Fashion, Devotion and Contemplation: The Status and Functions of Italian Renaissance Plaquettes*, Oxford 2013; see also ead., 'Italian Renaissance Plaquettes and Lombard Architectural Monuments', *Arte lombarda*, 1-3, 2006, pp. 111-26.

forehead) and the horns of Ammon (**fig. 96**).<sup>267</sup> In conclusion, even though the image of Alexander with ram's horns had only a limited popularity, it contributed to Renaissance iconography in a significant way, but not specifically to that of Alexander, since it was often used as a generic feature in military portraits.<sup>268</sup>

#### 4.3.2 A Curtius Rufus Manuscript 'Illustrated Like a Romance Text'<sup>269</sup>

Among the many illuminated manuscripts mentioned or discussed in this chapter, a codex in the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati of Siena, MS I.VII.23, deserves particular attention, not least because, despite occasional references to it in the scholarly literature, it has not been studied in-depth. The manuscript contains Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni* in the Italian (Lombard) translation completed by Pier Candido Decembrio in 1438. As we have seen in Chapter 3 (3.1.3), Decembrio filled in gaps in Curtius's text with passages from Plutarch and supplemented the work with his own *Comparatione* between Alexander and Julius Caesar. The Siena codex is one of the few manuscripts containing the whole of Decembrio's work, which he referred to as 'Istoria d'Alexandro Magno'. While the owner of MS I.VII.23 and the circumstances of its commission have not been identified, even though there are several heraldic devices on the frontispiece, a Milan provenance is certain. The dating is problematic, but some time around 1450 seems most likely. The text has been corrected by Decembrio himself,<sup>270</sup> and the eleven illuminated scenes have been ascribed to a follower of the Master of the Vitae

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<sup>267</sup> On the Longhignana monument, see E. L. Longworth, 'The so-called 'Monumento to Camillo Borromeo'', *Arte lombarda*, 100, 1992, pp. 61-9. For an examination of the Alexander medallion in light of other Lombard examples, see Burnett and Schofield, 'The Medallions of the Basamento', p. 10. As pointed out by L. Damiani Cabrini, 'L'incanto delle "pietre vive": il monumento Longhignana e l'uso del marmo a Milano in età sforzesca', in *Scultura lombarda del Rinascimento: i monumenti Borromeo*, ed. M. Natale, Turin 1997, pp. 259-76, at p. 275, n. 98, there is another image of Alexander on the second pilaster from left of the Longhignana tomb, but this is merely a cast of the Alexander medallion under discussion.

<sup>268</sup> I will not take into consideration the numismatic type of Alexander wearing the elephant scalp (*exuviae elephantis*) on his head, in allusion to his conquest of India; the effigy, devised by Ptolemy I Soter of Egypt around 310-305 BC, was known in the fifteenth century but had no effect on the Renaissance Alexander iconography. The attribute of the elephant scalp came to be appropriated by the personification of the Roman province of Africa, and from there it came down to the Renaissance and beyond. See F. Salcedo, *Africa: iconografia de una provincia romana*, Rome and Madrid 1996, and L. Bonoldi, 'Exuviae Alexandri: slittamenti del significato allegorico della spoglia elefantina', *La rivista di engramma*, 44, 2005 (on-line journal).

<sup>269</sup> The quoted phrase is from C. Mitchell, *A Fifteenth-Century Italian Plutarch*, London 1961, p. 10.

<sup>270</sup> As reported by M. Pade, 'Curzio Rufo e Plutarco', p. 111.

Imperatorum (active in Milan between 1430 and c. 1453), who shows some influence from the regions north of the Alps.<sup>271</sup>

The decoration of MS I.VII.23 has been dismissed as the work of a not terribly gifted artist;<sup>272</sup> but the unique character of its iconographic programme is of considerable interest and is without parallel in any other Curtius, or Alexander related, manuscript of the time.<sup>273</sup> The decoration consists of eleven lively scenes, each covering a half page; ten of them are placed at the beginning of each of Curtius's books – with the exception of Book II, which has no illustration, since it was lost in Curtius's account, so there was no telling what episode should be depicted – while the eleventh appears at the opening of Decembrio's *Comparatione*.<sup>274</sup> It has been noted that the illustrations are closely related to the text, each illustrating a major episode from the book which it opens.<sup>275</sup> The exact content of the scenes has not, however, previously been analysed.<sup>276</sup> The identification of the subject matter of the illustrations is not always straightforward; and in many cases they do not rely on any existing visual tradition. Most are accompanied by a few lines of text, also in the vernacular, which are written in the margins and provide a brief description of the subject of the picture, as well as the reference to the chapter of the book where the episode is narrated.<sup>277</sup>

The illustration on the frontispiece, at f. 1r (**fig. 97**), shows the Greek and Persian armies facing each other, separated by a river. The Greeks on horseback are

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<sup>271</sup> See *ibid*, p. 110, n. 32. The Northern European influence was noted as early as 1912 by Toesca, *La pittura e la miniatura*, p. 534.

<sup>272</sup> Toesca, *La pittura e la miniatura*, pp. 533-4, speaks of a 'minuzioso e fanciullesco illustratore', while Mitchell, *A Fifteenth-Century Italian Plutarch*, p. 16, says that 'the little men in the *Alexander* book are no more than puppets.' The attribution to Giovanni Ambrogio de' Predis, put forward on stylistic grounds by M. Salmi, *Italian Miniatures*, London 1957, p. 73, is not convincing.

<sup>273</sup> Other richly decorated copies of Decembrio's translation of Curtius are known, but none of them has a comparably vast figurative cycle; see Pade, 'Curzio Rufo e Plutarco'.

<sup>274</sup> I thank Renzo Pepi of the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati for kindly providing me with a digital copy of the entire manuscript. Copies of the ten pictures at the opening of each of Curtius's books, but not the one at the beginning of the *Comparatione*, are held in the Photographic Collection of the Warburg Institute. My thanks are also due to Anna Melograni, who generously discussed the manuscript decoration with me.

<sup>275</sup> Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, p. 68.

<sup>276</sup> Mitchell, *A Fifteenth-Century Italian Plutarch*, pp. 10, 15-16 and 40, n. 34, gives a general description of the scenes, discussing the style but not the iconography.

<sup>277</sup> E.g., the picture at f. 11v, at the opening of the third book, is labelled 'Bataglia fra l'esercito del re Alexandro e del re Dario. Recorre al capitolo XX di questo libro.'

already half way across the water, with Alexander immediately identifiable among them on account of his crown. The Persian archers and cavalymen, who wear Oriental dresses and hats, are ready to engage in battle, though their king cannot be seen in the crowd. The presence of the river, in combination with the absence of the Persian king, indicates that this is the Battle of the Granicus, the first of the three fought by Greeks and Persians and the only one in which Darius did not take part. The episode does not rely on Curtius, whose text is lost for this part, but rather on Plutarch, whose description of the battle was inserted into the *Historiae* by Decembrio and then carefully followed by the manuscript illuminator. At the opening of Book III, f. 11v (**fig. 98**), there is a picture of the Battle of Issus, in line with the compositional arrangement discussed at length earlier in this chapter: Alexander on horseback pursuing Darius, who is fleeing from the battlefield on his chariot. The siege of Tyre (**fig. 99**), a city which in antiquity was considered to be impregnable, is represented with great accuracy at f. 34v, and a number of narrative details which Curtius describes at length in Book IV – including the Greek soldiers who, in an umpteenth attempt to build a causeway between the coast of the mainland and the island on which the city was located, began to throw whole trees, root and branch, into the water. The siege of Tyre, which took Curtius nearly half of Book IV to describe, was no doubt chosen to illustrate Alexander's exceptional military prowess. Medieval illuminated manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, which were based on far less detailed accounts, had showed only the bare essentials of the story – just a walled city, crested with towers and surrounded by turbulent waters. The episode was not very often represented in the fifteenth century and only acquired importance in the visual tradition from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. This means that the illustration in MS I.VII.23 was one of the earliest representations of the siege of Tyre to be based on an historical source.

The next picture, at f. 75r (**fig. 100**), presents three distinct episodes in the same frame: Alexander's entry into Babylon, on the left-hand side; a scene in an interior which I interpret as the seduction of Alexander by his mistress Thais, on the right; and the burning of Persepolis, in the background, a controversial event which was reportedly instigated by Thais herself. This is one of the most charming illuminations in the manuscript: the city gate of Babylon with the Hanging Gardens sprouting from the highest tower, the group of young men kneeling in *proskynesis* before the triumphant Alexander, Thais undressing and seducing Alexander with

her beauty, and finally the destruction by fire of Persepolis, in which Alexander himself, sceptre in hand, took part alongside Thais and several other Macedonians.

Alexander's encounter with the queen of the Amazons Thalestris occupies only a small section of Book VI in Curtius's *Historiae*; and yet, the visit paid to Alexander by the beautiful queen, who reached the Macedonian camp accompanied by three hundred Amazons and who expressed the wish to conceive a child with Alexander, was certainly too beguiling a story to be left out. At f. 100v (**fig. 101**), the meeting is represented on the left hand side, with the figure of Alexander partially rubbed out but still identifiable by his crown. On the right, a completely different episode is depicted, one which was very infrequently, if ever, represented in the visual tradition: the arrest of Philotas, commander of the cavalry, who is here being apprehended and was later unjustly put to death, for allegedly conspiring against Alexander.

At the opening of Book VII, at f. 127r (**fig. 102**), Philotas's father, the general Parmenion, is also assassinated on Alexander's orders. Most of the illustration, however, is taken up by the crossing of the river Tanais (present-day Don), which marked the boundary with the Steppes inhabited by the dreaded Scythians. According to Curtius, not only did Alexander manage to get his entire army across the river on rafts – which in the picture take the shape of small boats – but he also heavily defeated the Scythians, who are shown aiming their crossbows at Alexander and his men on the opposite river bank.

The opening illustration of Book VIII, at f. 156v (**fig. 103**), shows a lavish banquet, with exquisite food, goblets full of wine, elegantly dressed courtiers, musicians and even a falcon. It was, however, the occasion for one of the most terrible crimes committed by Alexander: the murder of his friend Cleitus, who had publicly questioned his military prowess and ridiculed his achievements, as well as his claim to divinity. Blinded by fury and completely inebriated, Alexander picked up a spear and ran it through him. The picture displays a specific version of the murder, which is recounted solely by Curtius, who claims that Alexander did not kill Cleitus in the middle of the banquet room, but rather by the door. Curtius says that Alexander pretended to forgive his friend's offences, but secretly hid outside the door and, spear in hand, waited for Cleitus to leave the banquet and killed him when he least expected. I do not know any other picture where the death of Cleitus is illustrated according to Curtius's account, that is, not as a rage-driven crime and



committed on the spur of the moment, but instead as a premeditated and cold-blooded murder.

The illustration at f. 191r (**fig. 104**) can be identified, I believe, as the moment when Alexander, determined to march further into India, is pleaded with by his general Coenus to change his mind and go back for the sake of his soldiers, who longed to return home – another episode which, to the best of my knowledge, is unique in the tradition. Book X has two pictures: the first at f. 217r represents the distribution of talents and riches to the army (**fig. 105**); the second at f. 224v depicts the last moments of Alexander's life, a section which is almost entirely lost in Curtius and was supplied by Decembrio from Plutarch's text (**fig. 106**). Plutarch says in his *Life* that when Alexander was ill with a high fever for several days, rumours started to spread that he had died. The Macedonian soldiers demanded to see him and were allowed into his room, where Alexander was lying on his deathbed. Following the text closely once more, the illustration shows a few people weeping outside the room, while the entire army files past Alexander, who had lost his voice but managed to welcome each man anyway. In the final picture of the manuscript, at the opening of the *Comparatione*, at f. 236v, Alexander and Julius Caesar are portrayed as two generic knights wearing fanciful parade armour; they can be told apart only by the labels with their names (**fig. 107**).<sup>278</sup>

At this point, I can offer a few considerations on MS I.VII.23. The distinctiveness of the manuscript was aptly summarized by Charles Mitchell: 'It is written in the *volgare*, and is illustrated like a romance text.'<sup>279</sup> While no work by an ancient author, written in either Latin or in Greek, would be illustrated with such a vast narrative cycle, the vernacular translations gave such books a different status. The meticulously drawn, carefully detailed and delightful pictures in manuscripts like MS I.VII.23 would have greatly appealed to the readership at which they were aimed. Alexander is depicted as a valorous commander in a fifteenth-century world still in the grip of late Gothic culture, with no attempt made to portray architecture, apparel or weaponry in the *all'antica* style; the cycle thus reflected the fashion of

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<sup>278</sup> A similar example, at the beginning of the *Comparatio* in another manuscript of Decembrio's 'Istoria d'Alexandro Magno', is in Catania, Biblioteca Regionale Universitaria, MS Ventimiliana 84, f. 1r; see A. Daneu Lattanzi, *I manoscritti ed incunaboli miniati della Sicilia*, 2 vols, Rome-Palermo 1965-84, II, p. 32, no. 12, and pl. V.

<sup>279</sup> See n. 269 above.

courts such as those of Milan, Mantua or Ferrara, which had not yet been influenced by the new humanist taste for classical antiquity.

In MS I.VII.23, there is a particular interest in the battle scenes and, more generally, episodes of military life. The illustration on the frontispiece seems to set the tone for the entire iconographic programme. Humanists may have lamented the loss of the first two books of Curtius's *Historiae*, in which the early life of Alexander was recounted; yet the illuminator of the Siena manuscript (and arguably the patron who commissioned it) took little advantage of the information about this period which Decembrio supplied from Plutarch. He did not illustrate, for example, the birth of Alexander (which would have been the perfect pendant to the depiction of his death at the end of the manuscript), nor the taming of Bucephalus (to which attention is drawn in a marginal annotation on f. 3v, stating: 'bella prova duno cavallo chiamato Bucephalo'). Instead of these potentially dramatic stories, the illuminator preferred to depict the Battle of the Granicus, even though another battle, Issus, was illustrated later on in the manuscript.

Another striking feature of the decorative scheme is that there is no attempt to conceal or downplay the most disturbing or problematic episodes from Alexander's life – the burning of Persepolis, the death of Philotas, the murders of Cleitus and Parmenion – which were not frequently represented in the visual tradition precisely because they cast him in a bad light. The reason for this, in my view, is the close connection between text and images, and the nature of Curtius's account, as supplemented by Decembrio, which is very dramatic and does not attempt to conceal the unattractive aspects of Alexander's character and actions. Yet there is more to it than that; for even though Book VIII is full of the glorious achievements of Alexander such as the siege of Aornos, the first glimpse of India and the battle against Porus, the episode chosen for illustration is instead his inglorious murder of Cleitus. The two illustrations of Alexander succumbing to female seduction – by Thais, who lures him into the sacrilegious act of destroying one of the capitals of the Persian Empire; and by Thalestris, a female ruler equal to him in power and strength – hardly convey a more positive image of him.

MS I.VII.23 is a remarkable and unique work, combining the revived text of an ancient author, in a modern vernacular translation, with a style of decoration which was on the verge of dying out. Moreover, the episodes chosen for illustration are unusual. Although the artist had a model for some of them (e.g., the Battle of

Issus), for the most part, they rely solely on the text, often creating iconographies with little contact to the visual tradition which was starting to develop from ancient histories of Alexander.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> I hope to carry out further research on the manuscript in the future.

## Chapter 5

### Development and Consolidation of the Renaissance Iconography: The Sixteenth Century

The Renaissance imagery of Alexander, grounded in ancient historical sources, which had begun to emerge in the Quattrocento, was developed and consolidated in the sixteenth century, quickly spreading across artistic media. As I have shown in Chapters 2 and 4, there was some persistence of the legendary tradition in fifteenth-century Italy; but in the course of the Cinquecento, the imagery of Alexander, as re-shaped on the basis of the ancient historical texts, became firmly established.

The varied and inconsistent depictions of Alexander still found in the Quattrocento (when he was portrayed as youthful or old, clean-shaven or bearded, dressed in contemporary or *all'antica* clothing) were finally put aside, and a single portrait type was established. Together with the underlying influence of the helmeted numismatic type, discussed in Chapter 4 (4.3.1), the description of Alexander's features by Plutarch (*Alexander* IV.1-4), based on works by Lysippus, Alexander's official sculptor, was crucial.<sup>1</sup> The material evidence progressively re-emerging from antiquity (coins and gems, but also sculptures) seemed to be perfectly in keeping with this description, and the new finds were often attributed to Lysippus or Pyrgoteles, Alexander's official gem-engraver.<sup>2</sup> In the attempt to restore Alexander's 'true' appearance, his reported features – the long and leonine hair,<sup>3</sup> the *anastole* (the lock of upraised hair over his forehead), the straight nose, the full lips, the melting look of his upturned eyes and the neck bent slightly to the left – played an essential role, firstly, in the creation of new portraits of him (for example, Giulio Romano's canvas, c. 1540, Geneva, Collection Dr Erich Lederer, and his fresco in Mantua, Room of the Emperors),<sup>4</sup> and, secondly, in identifying, sometimes mistakenly, ancient heads as Alexander's (most famously, the so-called 'Dying

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<sup>1</sup> Other sources are listed in Stewart, *Faces of Power*, pp. 341-50. On Alexander's ancient portraits, see also E. Schwarzenberg, 'The Portraiture of Alexander', in *Alexandre le Grand: image et réalité*, ed. E. Badian, Geneva 1976, pp. 223-67, and A. Trofimova, *Imitatio Alexandri*.

<sup>2</sup> No evidence remains of the work of Alexander's official painter, Apelles.

<sup>3</sup> The long and curly hair, likened to a lion's mane, was also an important trait of Alexander in the legendary tradition and was based on the description in the Pseudo-Callisthenes (I.13).

<sup>4</sup> On the Geneva painting, see F. Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, 2 vols, New Haven 1958, I, p. 218, and G. Rebecchini, *Private Collectors in Mantua, 1500-1630*, Rome 2002, pp. 57 and 81-3.

Alexander', in the Uffizi, which inspired several Renaissance artists before its identification as Alexander was disproved).<sup>5</sup>

Starting in the early sixteenth century, a vast, new iconographic repertoire of episodes from Alexander's life, taken from the ancient historians, took shape. As we have seen in Chapter 4, its first emergence dates to the mid-fifteenth century, when it appeared on *cassone* panels; but it was for the most part limited to a single episode, 'The Meeting of Alexander with the Family of Darius'. In the sixteenth century, the wider circulation of historical texts via printed editions resulted in the formation of an iconographic *corpus* of far greater proportions than ever before, with a large number of episodes to choose from. In contrast to what happened in the Middle Ages, this *corpus* did not arise as a visual apparatus accompanying the texts from which it originated, but rather developed independently from the pages of history books, which, in line with sixteenth-century fashion, were rarely illustrated and almost never decorated with narrative scenes. As I shall argue, the availability of authors such as Arrian and Diodorus Siculus who were previously either unknown or little read exerted only a limited influence on the visual arts. It did, however, help to create a new wave of interest in the figure and the life of Alexander; moreover, access to several, sometimes contradictory, accounts of the same story contributed to the production of a rich and diverse visual repertoire, in some cases with significant iconographic variations on the same episode.

An important novelty in the sixteenth-century visual tradition was the appearance of huge fresco cycles devoted to Alexander, firstly in Italy and then in the rest of Europe.<sup>6</sup> In the decoration of palaces and wealthy homes, the stories of Alexander became a favourite subject for wall paintings, recommended in art treatises like those of Filarete (c. 1465) and Lomazzo (1584).<sup>7</sup> No longer confined to

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<sup>5</sup> See G. A. Mansuelli, *Galleria degli Uffizi: le sculture*, 2 vols, Rome 1958-61, I, pp. 94-6, no. 62, and F. Haskell and N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900*, New Haven and London 1981, pp. 134-6, no. 2; see also E. Schwarzenberg, 'From the *Alessandro morente* to the Alexandre Richelieu: The Portraiture of Alexander the Great in Seventeenth-Century Italy and France', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32, 1969, pp. 398-405.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander cycles in tapestries or easel paintings are less frequently found and, at any rate, are too late to be taken into consideration here. See, e.g., the set of five tapestries in Palazzo Tursi at Genoa (c. 1675), for which see L. Tagliaferro, 'Per venticinque arazzi "genovesi"', *Bollettino dei musei civici genovesi*, 3, 1981, pp. 69-127, at pp. 76, 91, figs 9-10, and four canvases hanging over doors in the Palazzo Reale in Turin (Francesco De Mura, 1768), which are illustrated in A. Griseri, 'Francesco De Mura fra le corti di Napoli, Madrid e Torino', *Paragone Arte*, 155, 1962, pp. 22-43 and pls 50-1.

<sup>7</sup> See Antonio Averlino detto il Filarete, *Trattato di architettura IX* (ed. A. M. Finoli and L. Grassi, 2 vols, Milan 1972, I, p. 263), who speaks of the deeds of Alexander and Julius

*cassoni* and the domestic rooms where these were kept, the deeds of Alexander were displayed on the walls and ceilings of both private and public spaces, and sometimes even on external façades: many of the ‘Rooms of Alexander’ decorated from the early sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century were great palace halls meant to celebrate the owner and patron, as much as to impress his guests.<sup>8</sup> The Alexander cycles painted in Italy from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries should be examined one by one: the peculiarities of each, as well as the different choice of the episodes and their variable combinations, make every cycle unique. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to attempt such an enormous task; but there are a few elements which can be pointed out in relation to sixteenth-century cycles that also, for the most part, apply to later ones.

Some cycles were, of course, more important and more ingeniously conceived than others. One of the most complex and magnificent ‘Rooms of Alexander’ was commissioned by Pope Paul III for the Sala Paolina in the Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome (Perin del Vaga and workshop, 1545-7): an unusually large number of texts on Alexander were consulted in order to devise the iconographic programme, which introduced some new stories (such as ‘Alexander Burning the Carriages of Persian Booty’ or the ‘Triumphal Entry into Babylon’<sup>9</sup>) for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Other cycles included extremely rare episodes which are almost unique in the visual tradition: for instance, ‘Alexander in the Palace of Darius’ (Cola

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Caesar as ‘cosa memorabile e degna d’essere guardata’ and considers them appropriate to decorate a single room on opposite walls. Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell’arte della pittura, scultura ed architettura*, 3 vols, Milan 1844, II, p. 189 (VI.25), lists Alexander among the ancient commanders whose deeds are worthy of being displayed in royal palaces and princely homes; he recommends, in particular, the battles of ‘Alessandro contro i persj, e gl’indj.’

<sup>8</sup> It is known that painted ‘Rooms of Alexander’ existed in the Middle Ages (see, e.g. two well-documented but lost cycles in England: L. J. Whatley, ‘Romance, Crusade, and the Orient in King Henry III of England’s Royal Chambers’, *Viator*, 44, 2013, pp. 175-98), but none of them has survived. The fragmentary frescoes in the castle of Quart (see Chapter 1 [1.3] above) may prove to be the remains of such a room; but any conclusion should wait until the end of the restoration works.

<sup>9</sup> An earlier example of this subject, but on a much more limited scale, is in the Siena MS I.VII.23 of Curtius Rufus (see Chapter 4 [4.3.2] above).

<sup>10</sup> On the Sala Paolina, see *Gli affreschi di Paolo III a Castel Sant’Angelo: progetto ed esecuzione 1543-1548* (exhibition catalogue, Rome, Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant’Angelo, 1981-2), ed. F. M. Aliberti Gaudioso and E. Gaudioso, 2 vols, Rome 1981. R. Harprath, *Papst Paul III. als Alexander der Grosse: das Freskenprogramm der Sala Paolina in der Engelsburg*, Berlin and New York 1978, should be read in light of the review by C. Hope, *The Burlington Magazine*, 123, 1981, pp. 104-5.

dell'Amatrice, c. 1545, Città di Castello, Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera)<sup>11</sup> and the 'Conquest of the Town of Nysa' and the 'Exchange of Gifts with King Omphis, or Taxile'<sup>12</sup> from the detached frieze in Palazzo Vizzani at Bologna (Tommaso Laureti, c. 1560).<sup>13</sup> The stories of Alexander and his women, painted in the Chamber of the Duchess of Étampes at Fontainebleau (Primaticcio, 1541-4), had very little, if any, iconographic precedent – indeed, it has been suggested that this ground-breaking inventiveness was a deliberate attempt to bewilder the viewer.<sup>14</sup>

Painted programmes centred on Alexander clearly have to be understood in the wider context of the diffusion of historical cycles, often devoted to Roman history.<sup>15</sup> Alexander would, of course, be a perfect choice for any patron with the same name wishing to decorate his own residence (including the pope, as the Sala Paolina for Alessandro Farnese, Paul III, shows). Stories of Alexander, however, could also be depicted alongside those of other rulers and commanders, usually Romans, such as in the Salone (Room XI) of the Palazzo Vitelli at Città di Castello, with deeds of Alexander, Julius Caesar, Scipio Africanus and Hannibal in the painted frieze.<sup>16</sup> More frequently, however, a single Alexander episode was paired with an event from the life of a Roman, usually Julius Caesar (as in the so-called Casa Tallarino in Mantua)<sup>17</sup> or Scipio Africanus (Giulio Romano, Room of the Emperors, Palazzo Te, also Mantua).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See *Pinacoteca Comunale di Città di Castello: Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera*, ed. F. F. Mancini, 2 vols, Perugia 1987-8, I: *Dipinti*, p. 120 (R. Guerrini).

<sup>12</sup> A later example of this rare theme is in a canvas from the Alexander cycle for Cardinal Montalto; see D. Benati, *Sisto Badalocchi e i "giovani" di Annibale Carracci* (exhibition catalogue, Bologna, Galleria Fondantico, 2008), Bologna 2008, and B. Granata, *Le passioni virtuose: collezionismo e committenze artistiche a Roma del cardinale Alessandro Peretti Montalto (1571-1623)*, Rome 2012, pp. 120-6.

<sup>13</sup> See M. Marongiu, 'Le Storie di Alessandro Magno in Palazzo Vizzani a Bologna', *Fontes*, 13-16, 2004-5, pp. 29-51. On the ceiling of this 'Room of Alexander' there was a now lost 'Apotheosis of Alexander', which is the earliest appearance of a theme explored in the later tradition: the best preserved example is in the Private Audience Hall in the Gran Duke's Summer Apartments (now Museo degli Argenti) in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence (Agostino Mitelli and Angelo Michele Colonna, 1640); see M. Campbell, 'Medici Patronage and the Baroque: A Reappraisal', *The Art Bulletin*, 48, 1966, pp. 133-46, at p. 141 and fig. 9.

<sup>14</sup> See J. Koering, 'La visite programmée: le rôle de l'orateur dans la réception des grands décors', in *Programme et invention dans l'art de la Renaissance*, ed. M. Hochmann et al., Rome 2008, pp. 353-70. I thank Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini for bringing this essay to my attention.

<sup>15</sup> See E. Battisti, *Cicli pittorici: storie profane*, Milan 1981, and J. Kliemann, *Gesta dipinte: la grande decorazione nelle dimore italiane dal Quattrocento al Seicento*, Milan 1993.

<sup>16</sup> See *Pinacoteca Comunale di Città di Castello*, I, pp. 84-112, nos 11.1-4 (R. Guerrini).

<sup>17</sup> See G. Ferlisi, 'La mantegnesca facciata dipinta dell'antica piazza Purgo a Mantova', in *A casa di Andrea Mantegna: cultura artistica a Mantova nel Quattrocento* (exhibition

Given the variety and wealth of material available, an examination of a selected number of cycles would be of little use for understanding how the Renaissance imagery of Alexander developed in the Cinquecento. It seems more sensible, therefore, to proceed thematically. Rather than discussing the more than thirty episodes which appears in sixteenth-century art,<sup>19</sup> however, I shall focus on those which I consider to be most helpful for illustrating the way in which Alexander came to be envisaged in the sixteenth century, either because of their popularity or for the light they shed on the transformation of his portrayal from legend to history.

### 5.1. The Meeting with the Women of Darius

The starting point for the historical tradition of Alexander in Italian art of the sixteenth century is the bedchamber of Agostino Chigi in the Villa Farnesina in Rome, where stories of Alexander were painted by Sodoma in 1518-19 (**fig. 108**).<sup>20</sup>

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catalogue, Mantua, Casa del Mantegna, 2006), ed. R. Signorini, Milan 2006, pp. 70-83. An earlier example is the pair of *spalliere* for the Spannocchi family showing Alexander and Julius Caesar, now at Longleat House (see Chapter 4 above).

<sup>18</sup> See A. Belluzzi, *Palazzo Te a Mantova/The Palazzo Te in Mantua*, 2 vols, Modena 1998, II, p. 430, fig. 847 and p. 438, fig. 858. Many examples of the pairing of Alexander and Scipio are found in eighteenth-century painting (e.g., Sebastiano Ricci, Raleigh, North Carolina Museum; and Giambattista Tiepolo, Montecchio Maggiore, Villa Cordellina: see n. 28 below).

<sup>19</sup> In addition to the five discussed in this chapter, the episodes are: 'Timoclea Standing on Trial before Alexander', 'The Meeting of Alexander and Diogenes', 'Alexander's Visit to Achilles's Tomb', 'The Cutting of the Gordian Knot', 'Alexander and His Physician Philip', 'The Battle of Issus', 'Alexander Placing Homer's *Iliad* in a Golden Casket', 'The Siege of Tyre' (sieges of other towns such as Nysa and Halicarnassus are rarely illustrated), 'The Meeting of Alexander and the Jewish High Priest Jaddus at Jerusalem' (in the later tradition, it is also combined with the following episode, 'Alexander Being Shown the Book of Daniel in the Temple of Jerusalem'), 'Alexander Founding the City of Alexandria in Egypt', 'The Triumphal Entry into Babylon', 'Alexander in Darius's Palace Contemplating the Royal Treasure', 'The Courage Shown by a Macedonian Boy during a Sacrifice Performed by Alexander', 'The Burning of Persepolis at the Instigation of Thais', 'Alexander Sealing Hephaestion's Lips', 'Alexander Refusing a Helmet full of Water', 'Alexander Covering Darius's Body with His Cloak', 'The Meeting with the Queen of the Amazons Thalestris', 'Alexander Burning the Carriages of Persian Booty', 'Alexander Giving His Chair by the Fire to a Shivering Soldier', 'Exchange of Gifts with King Omphis, or Taxile', 'The Crossing of the river Hydaspes', 'The Battle against Porus', 'Alexander Building Twelve Altars in India', 'The Indian Philosopher Calanus Burning in the Fire before Alexander', 'Susa Weddings', 'Mount Athos Carved in the Form of Alexander, as Proposed by the Architect Dinocrates' (sometimes depicted as Dinocrates presenting Alexander with the project). Among other significant episodes developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are the battles of Granicus and Gaugamela (or Arbela), 'The Mercy towards the Indian King Porus', the 'Visit to the Temple of Zeus Ammon at Siwa', 'Alexander Being Rescued from the River Cydnus' and 'The Murder of Cleitus'.

<sup>20</sup> On Sodoma's frescoes at the Farnesina, see R. Bartolini, *Le occasioni del Sodoma: dalla Milano di Leonardo alla Roma di Raffaello*, Rome 1996, pp. 75-81, and id., 'Da Raffaello al Sodoma: sulla camera nuziale di Agostino Chigi alla Farnesina', in *Late Raphael:*



Roberto Guerrini considered this room to be ‘almost an archetype’ of Renaissance Alexander iconography;<sup>21</sup> and rightly so, for the two scenes depicted by Sodoma on adjacent walls – the ‘Marriage of Alexander and Roxane’ and his ‘Meeting with the Family of Darius’ – are not only the earliest examples on a monumental scale of themes which would become hugely popular from the sixteenth century onwards, but also served as an important iconographic model for later versions of the scenes. Of the two other scenes in the Farnesina room, the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ on the west wall, a slightly later addition to the cycle, will be discussed below, while the painting between the windows on the south wall is problematic: it is usually referred to as the ‘Battle of Issus’ – presumably because of its proximity to the ‘Meeting with the Family of Darius’ – but it lacks any distinctive attributes supporting this identification; since it can therefore be discussed only as a generic battle fought by Alexander, it contributes little to our understanding of the fresco cycle.<sup>22</sup>

With respect to its iconography, Sodoma’s depiction of the ‘Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius’ (**fig. 109**) does not differ much from the representations of the subject on *cassone* panels examined in Chapter 4. Before a makeshift tent in a military camp, an unusually large royal family – all of them women, with the exception of a little boy – witnesses the same event which was depicted on fifteenth-century *cassone* fronts: the queen mother kneeling before Alexander and Hephaestion, a eunuch under the tent pointing at the true Alexander and the king about to raise Sisygambis from the ground.

Sodoma must have relied on the existing iconographic tradition of the ‘Meeting’, based on Curtius Rufus, which, as we have seen, emerged in Tuscany around 1450. Having been a leading artist in Siena before moving to Rome, Sodoma was, no doubt, familiar with this tradition, since his patron Agostino Chigi was Sienese by birth who maintained strong connections with his hometown throughout

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*Proceedings of the International Symposium/Actas del congreso internacional* (Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2012), ed. M. Falomir, Madrid and Turnhout 2013, pp. 70-9. On the villa, see *La Villa Farnesina a Roma/The Villa Farnesina in Rome*, ed. C. L. Frommel, 2 vols, Modena 2003.

<sup>21</sup> R. Guerrini, ‘Dalla Soranza a Casa Pisani: la figura di Alessandro Magno in Veronese’, in *Nuovi studi su Paolo Veronese*, ed. M. Gemin, Venice 1990, pp. 371-9, at p. 371 (‘quasi un archetipo’).

<sup>22</sup> For the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’, ascribed to the French painter Guillaume de Marcillat, see N. Dacos, ‘Beccafumi e Roma’, in *Domenico Beccafumi e il suo tempo* (exhibition catalogue, Siena, Chiesa di Sant’Agostino and elsewhere, 1990), Milan 1990, pp. 44-59, at p. 58. The battle scene has been given to Bartolomeo di David by F. Sricchia Santoro, ‘Ricerche senesi. 3. Bartolomeo di David?’, *Prospettiva*, 29, 1982, pp. 32-40, at p. 37.

his life.<sup>23</sup> From the 1520s, the 'Meeting' became an increasingly popular subject and was almost always included in the cycles of stories of Alexander which continued to decorate great palaces and wealthy homes of Italy (and Europe) until the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

There are more iconographic variations on the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius' than of any other episode from the life of Alexander. This is because the story, as recounted in the ancient sources, has a very complex narrative; in addition, as is often the case in the Alexander tradition, while the four authors on whom we mostly rely (Curtius Rufus, Plutarch, Arrian and Diodorus Siculus) agree on the essential elements of the story, they disagree on some of the details, in particular, praising different virtues shown by Alexander. The 'Meeting' was thought to exemplify various virtues, including magnanimity, clemency, generosity, chastity and friendship; consequently, pictures labelled 'The Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius', depending on what part of the story is being illustrated, can vary quite a bit, and it is not always easy to identify which moment or combination of moments the artist has chosen to portray.

In the Sodoma fresco, as in the *cassone* panels which inspired it, the emphasis is on the central action of the episode: the *proskynesis* of Sisygambis and the reaction of the magnanimous and clement Alexander, who is helping (or about to help) her up from the ground. This model persisted for almost two centuries, appearing, for example, in a large canvas by Antonio Bellucci in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford<sup>25</sup> and in Giuseppe Bazzani's painting in the Palazzo d'Arco at Mantua, which is part of a set of seven stories of Alexander made in about 1740.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Agostino began his remarkable career as an apprentice at the Spannocchi bank in Rome, which was owned by the brothers Giulio and Antonio who commissioned the Alexander *cassone* panel now at Longleat, examined above in Chapter 4.

<sup>24</sup> The latest example of which I am aware is in the Villa Torlonia in Rome, where Alessandro Torlonia commissioned a room dedicated to his namesake: in 1837 Francesco Coghetti frescoed eight episodes on the vault of the room, among which there is the 'Meeting of Alexander with the Family of Darius', modelled on Charles Le Brun's famous painting of 1660-1 for Louis XIV. See B. Steindl, 'L'iconografia alessandrina nella Roma dell'800', in *Alessandro Magno in età moderna*, ed. F. Biasutti and A. Coppola, Padua 2009, pp. 315-48, esp. pp. 321-4.

<sup>25</sup> The painting was probably commissioned for a Venetian palace and is usually dated to around 1710; see *The Ashmolean Museum: Complete Illustrated Catalogue of Paintings*, ed. C. Casley et al., Oxford 2004, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> See R. Signorini, *La dimora dei conti d'Arco in Mantova: stanze di un museo di famiglia*, Mantua 2000, pp. 174-83. Highly emotional depictions of the subject are also found in the late eighteenth century, e.g., a small painting by an anonymous Venetian artist in the Pinacoteca Civica di Vicenza, where Sisygambis, having just been raised from the ground, is shown leaning on Alexander's chest; see *Pinacoteca civica di Vicenza: catalogo scientifico*

The spotlight sometimes, however, falls on the two friends, caught at the moment when Alexander says: ‘You were not mistaken, mother; for this man, too, is Alexander’ (Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* III.12.17). This moment is usually visualised as Alexander and Hephaestion pointing at each other (or Hephaestion at himself), while Sisygambis is still prostrated on the ground. An example is a fresco by the Zuccari brothers in the Castle of Bracciano (**fig. 110**);<sup>27</sup> and several similar works are found up to the eighteenth century such as Sebastiano Ricci’s painting in the North Carolina Museum of Raleigh, 1708-10, and Tiepolo’s magnificent fresco in the Villa Cordellina at Montecchio Maggiore, Vicenza, of 1743-4.<sup>28</sup>

In the Bracciano painting, the viewer’s attention is also drawn to the young princess, Darius’s daughter Stateira, who is shown approaching from the right; she steps forward, with the modest gesture of a Venus Pudica, hand in hand with her little brother, who resembles a Cupid. No textual source singles her out from the group of Persian women; but Stateira was to become Alexander’s wife (allowing him to secure his position as Darius’s rightful heir) in Susa in 324 BC, at a mass ceremony between Macedonian officers and Persian women known as Susa Weddings (Arrian, *Anabasis* VII.4.4-8 and Plutarch, *Alexander* LXX.2).<sup>29</sup> It seems likely that the prominence given to Stateira at Bracciano alludes to her future role as the wife of Alexander – a highly appropriate choice, as the fresco is part of the Alexander cycle painted on the vault of the bedchamber of Paolo Giordano I Orsini and Isabella de’ Medici, on the occasion of whose marriage the room was decorated. There are several representations of the ‘Meeting’ in which the young princess Stateira, rather than Sisygambis, holds the central place among the Persian women, among which it is worth mentioning a canvas of 1575-1600 by Maarten de Vos and

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*delle collezioni*, ed. M. E. Avagnina et al., 3 vols, Vicenza 2003-5, II: *Dipinti del XVII e XVIII secolo*, pp. 474-5, no. 467 (D. Tosato).

<sup>27</sup> On the Bracciano cycle, see C. Acidini Luchinat, *Taddeo e Federico Zuccari: fratelli pittori del Cinquecento*, 2 vols, Milan and Rome 1998-9, I, pp. 116-23.

<sup>28</sup> For Ricci’s painting, dated 1708-10 and a pendant to *The Contenance of Scipio* also in Raleigh, see *L’opera completa di Sebastiano Ricci*, ed. J. Daniels, Milan 1976, pp. 111-12, no. 257. On Tiepolo’s frescoes at the Villa Cordellina, see *Gli affreschi nelle ville venete: il Settecento*, I, ed. G. Pavanello, Venice 2010, pp. 416-23, no. 112 (A. Mariuz).

<sup>29</sup> According to Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* IV.5.1, after the battle of Issus Darius sent a letter to Alexander, offering him his daughter Stateira in marriage, but Alexander boldly refused. The princess should not be confused with her mother, and Darius’s wife, who was also called Stateira.

his workshop, clearly influenced by Italian examples, which is now in the Sanpaolo Collection.<sup>30</sup>

In some sixteenth-century paintings of the 'Meeting', the relationship between the king and his friend Hephaestion is given particular emphasis, as in a fresco of around 1565 in Villa Godi, near Vicenza (**fig. 111**). This is a very unusual depiction of the episode, because the artist, Giambattista Zelotti, has stripped the story down to its bare essentials, with only the three main characters present: Sisymbrius, kneeling on the ground; Hephaestion, with a spear in his hand; and Alexander, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder and pointing at him.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most beautiful and influential paintings of the 'Meeting', Paolo Veronese's monumental canvas, made for the Pisani Moretta family of Venice and now in the National Gallery, London (**fig. 112**), also illustrates the episode by combining these two distinct moments in the textual narrative: Sisymbrius's prostration and the misidentification, followed by the correct identification, of Alexander.<sup>32</sup> Veronese's depiction of the 'Meeting' is unconventional, with its unusual sequence of gestures and the apparent presence of members of the Pisani Moretta family disguised as figures from ancient history. Nevertheless, the double focus of the picture is clear: Sisymbrius and the Persian princesses kneel before Alexander, as he points at Hephaestion, who is pointing at himself.<sup>33</sup> From the

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<sup>30</sup> See *The Sanpaolo Art Collection*, ed. A. Coliva, Milan 2003, pp. 90-1. Other examples are illustrated in the Greek version of the catalogue *Alexander the Great in European Art*, pp. 418-67. A fresco scene painted by Polidoro da Caravaggio on the façade of Palazzo Milesi in Rome, known from drawings (e.g., Zurich, private collection) and engravings (e.g., British Museum, inv. 1856,1213.50), is usually labelled 'The Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius' and shows a young lady standing in the central position. Although it is certainly an episode illustrating clemency, I am not convinced that the protagonist is Alexander. See *ibid.*, p. 171, no. XI.1 (D. Ekserdjian), and P. Leone de Castris, *Polidoro da Caravaggio: l'opera completa*, Naples 2001, pp. 497-8, no. 18. Two additional copies of the fresco are in Chicago: *Italian Drawings before 1600 in the Art Institute of Chicago: A Catalogue of the Collection*, ed. S. Folds McCullagh and L. M. Giles, Chicago 1997, p. 367, nos 592-3 (L. M. Giles).

<sup>31</sup> See G. Bodon, 'Alessandro eroe "platonico"? Una proposta di lettura del ciclo cinquecentesco nel salone di Villa Godi a Lonedo di Lugo Vicentino', in *Alessandro Magno in età moderna*, ed. F. Biasutti and A. Coppola, Padua 2009, pp. 95-116, at pp. 108-9. On the villa in general, see *Gli affreschi nelle ville venete: il Cinquecento*, ed. G. Pavanello and V. Mancini, Venice 2008, pp. 272-86, no. 68 (L. Crosato Larcher).

<sup>32</sup> See Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, along with X. Salomon's review in *The Burlington Magazine*, 151, 2009, pp. 845-7; N. Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings, II: Venice 1540-1600*, London 2008, pp. 354-87; and C. Gould, *The Family of Darius before Alexander by Paolo Veronese: A Résumé, Some New Deductions and Some New Facts*, London [1978].

<sup>33</sup> For the identity of the man in red on the right-hand side of the painting as Alexander, see Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 90 and 95-6. J. Fletcher, however, in her review of P. Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, *The Burlington Magazine*, 138, 1996, p. 135,

1630s, when the Pisani Moretta transferred the painting from their villa at Montagnana (Padua) to their recently acquired palace on the Grand Canal in Venice, Veronese's painting became a must-see attraction for visitors and artists alike.<sup>34</sup> Not only was it copied countless times, but it remained a crucial point of reference for painters depicting the 'Meeting' until the eighteenth century; this was true not only for Venetian artists such as Bellucci, Ricci and Tiepolo, but also for Charles Le Brun, whose highly influential *Tent of Darius* of 1660-1, part of an Alexander cycle for Louis XIV, drew on Veronese's composition.<sup>35</sup>

Another variation on the 'Meeting' also deserves to be mentioned, not least because it appears in one of the most remarkable Alexander cycles of the Renaissance, the Sala Paolina in the Castel Sant'Angelo (**fig. 113**).<sup>36</sup> At first glance, the scene depicted at the end of the east wall (**fig. 114**) seems to have very little in common with paintings of the 'Meeting' discussed so far. But, according to the main ancient source for the episode, Curtius Rufus (*Historiae Alexandri Magni* III.12.26), after Alexander raised Sisygambis from the ground and talked to her, he

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identified Alexander as the man in gold cloth standing next to him, who is usually, and I believe correctly, identified as Hephaestion.

<sup>34</sup> The painting was acquired by the National Gallery only in 1857; for the lengthy and troubled transactions which eventually led to its sale, alongside Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 29-39, see Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, pp. 371-4.

<sup>35</sup> See T. Kirchner, *Les Reines de Perse aux pieds d'Alexandre de Charles Le Brun: Tableau-manifeste de l'art français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 2013; I thank Jennifer Montagu for bringing this book to my attention and for lending me her own copy of it. On Le Brun's visual sources, including Veronese, see C. Grell and C. Michel, *L'École des princes ou Alexandre disgracié: essai sur la mythologie monarchique de la France absolutiste*, Paris 1988, pp. 106-8. For Le Brun's Alexander cycle and the series of tapestries based on it, see *La Tenture de l'Histoire d'Alexandre le Grand* (exhibition catalogue, Paris, Galerie des Gobelins, 2008-9), Paris 2008. A set of six paintings after Le Brun's cycle was made as far afield as Mexico: the 1767 series by Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz is now in Mexico City, Fomento Cultural Banamex; see I. Katzew, 'Valiant Styles: New Spanish Painting, 1700-85', in *Painting in Latin America 1550-1820*, ed. L. E. Alcalá and J. Brown, New Haven and London 2014, pp. 148-203, at pp. 187-8. Le Brun's composition was also copied on objects such as fans (a French example of 1720-40 is in Boston, Museum of Fine Arts) and pair-cases (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, LOAN: MET ANON.2:1 to 3-1992). A sheet added to a 1472 incunabula of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae* in Florence is decorated with a detail from Le Brun's picture: see *Incunaboli ed edizioni rare: la collezione di Angelo Maria D'Elci* (exhibition catalogue, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 1989), ed. A. Dillon Bussi et al., Florence 1989, tav. XXVIII (the entry, pp. 213-14, no. 104, does not, however, identify the source as Le Brun). I would like to thank Martin Davies for this reference.

<sup>36</sup> On the sources of the Alexander episodes in the Sala Paolina, see R. Guerrini, 'Plutarco e la cultura figurativa nell'età di Paolo III: Castel Sant'Angelo, Sala Paolina', *RACAR/Revue d'art canadienne*, 12, 1985, pp. 179-87. Strictly speaking, the Sala Paolina should not be considered a 'Room of Alexander', for it is not entirely devoted to Alexander's deeds but includes also episodes from the life of St Paul – the choice being a homage to the religious and secular namesakes of Paul III, whose birth name was Alessandro. Nevertheless the two cycles unfold independently one from the other in both the compositional and narrative respect, and can therefore be discussed separately without prejudice of my argument.

turned to the little son of Darius sheltering in his mother's lap and took him into his arms; and everyone was amazed to see the boy showing no fear at all of Alexander and cheerfully putting his arms around his neck. This is the scene illustrated in the fresco of the Sala Paolina, with Sisygambis still on her knees and Hephaestion taken aback with surprise. This version of the 'Meeting' is, however, unique in the sixteenth century: with its emphasis on the benevolent, almost fatherly, behaviour shown by Alexander towards Darius's child and the absence of any Persian girl who might tempt him with her beauty, this image was an appropriate iconographic choice for the papal apartments of Paul III.<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy that it does not appear in the Alexander cycles directly inspired by the Sala Paolina frescoes and commissioned by members of the Farnese entourage for their palaces in the outskirts of Rome (for example, the Palazzo Crispo in Bolsena), where the more conventional encounter with Sisygambis is preferred instead.<sup>38</sup>

When compared to the earliest representations of the theme on *cassone* panels, and even to Sodoma's fresco in the Farnesina, sixteenth-century depictions of the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius' show an unprecedented emphasis on the figure of Hephaestion. In the *cassone* panels, the focus of the episode is the encounter between Alexander and Sisygambis, and not her misidentification of Hephaestion as Alexander. While Alexander is usually accompanied by a group of gentlemen, Hephaestion, if present, is not identifiable for certain. By contrast, in the Farnesina fresco (**fig. 109**), Hephaestion stands prominently next to Alexander, though he is only a witness to the encounter with Sisygambis, without taking part in it. As we have seen, however, a central role is assigned to Hephaestion in other representations of the 'Meeting' such as the one in the Castle of Bracciano (**fig. 110**) and, above all, Zelotti's fresco at Lonedo di Lugo (**fig. 111**), where the mistaken identification of the two friends is the real core of the scene.

Valerius Maximus's inclusion of the 'Meeting' in his *Memorable Doings and Sayings* as an *exemplum* of friendship, highlighting Alexander's reference to Hephaestion as 'another Alexander', in line with the Aristotelian notion that a friend

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<sup>37</sup> See Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>38</sup> For the Bolsena palace, owned by Cardinal Tiberio Crispo, *castellano* of Castel Sant'Angelo during the decoration of the Sala Paolina, see A. De Romanis, *Il Palazzo di Tiberio Crispo a Bolsena*, Rome 1995, esp. pp. 1-6 and 13-16. For other palaces in the Lazio influenced by the Farnese decorations, and often including an Alexander cycle, see P. Picardi, *Perino del Vaga, Michele Lucchese e il Palazzo di Paolo III al Campidoglio: circolazione e uso dei modelli dell'antico nelle decorazioni farnesiane a Roma*, Rome 2012, pp. 107-40; I owe this reference to Jan L. de Jong.

is another self (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX.4), may have contributed to the growing visual importance of Hephaestion in the episode: from an indistinct figure on the marriage chests to a supporting actor – and, occasionally, a lead player – in the sixteenth-century tradition.<sup>39</sup> This might explain why in so many depictions of the episode Alexander and Hephaestion look as similar as twins and are at times not easily told apart: for instance, in the Sala Paolina and in Zelotti's fresco in Villa Godi, as well as later examples like the Tiepolo in Villa Cordellina and Francesco Trevisani's 1735 painting for the La Granja Palace in Spain.<sup>40</sup> Although this is clearly inconsistent with the written accounts – Sisymbrius's mistake is due to the fact that Hephaestion, taller and more handsome than Alexander, does *not* look like him – it was an effective way of expressing in visual terms the close bond of friendship between Alexander and Hephaestion.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> On the tradition of Valerius Maximus's *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, a work which was known since the Middle Ages, see D. M. Schullian, 'Valerius Maximus', in *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries: Annotated Lists and Guides*, 10 vols, Washington DC 1960-2014, V, ed. F. E. Cranz, pp. 287-403. See also R. Guerrini, *Studi su Valerio Massimo (con un capitolo sulla fortuna nell'iconografia umanistica: Perugino, Beccafumi, Pordenone)*, Pisa 1981, and M. T. Casella, *Tra Boccaccio e Petrarca: i volgarizzamenti di Tito Livio e di Valerio Massimo*, Padua 1982.

<sup>40</sup> Francesco Trevisani's canvas was commissioned as part of an Alexander cycle, devised by Filippo Juvarra for the La Granja Palace in Spain but never completed; see J. Alvarez Lopera, 'Philip V of Spain and Juvarra at La Granja Palace: The Difficulty of Being Alexander', in *Alexander the Great in European Art* (exhibition catalogue, Thessaloniki, Organisation for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997-8), ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Athens 1997, pp. 37-46 and pp. 182-3, no. XI.9 (J. Alvarez Lopera). Interesting remarks on the textual and visual sources used by the various artists who executed the cycle can be found in their correspondence with Juvarra: see *Filippo Juvarra a Madrid*, Madrid 1978, pp. 121-2 and 139-41.

<sup>41</sup> This interpretation is also suggested by Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 94-5.

## 5.2. The Marriage of Alexander and Roxane

Agostino Chigi's bedchamber in the Villa Farnesina is known today as 'The Room of the Marriage of Alexander the Great and Roxane' after the fresco by Sodoma on the north wall, the most famous and influential of the cycle. It shows Alexander approaching the Sogdian princess Roxane in her bedchamber and presenting her with the crown which seals and symbolises their marriage (**fig. 115**).<sup>42</sup>

Sodoma's painting is based on a composition by Raphael, which survives in a highly finished red chalk drawing in the Albertina (**fig. 116**), a rapid pen and ink sketch in the Teyler Museum of Haarlem and a number of slightly variant sheets attributed to his workshop.<sup>43</sup> While making use of Raphael's design, Sodoma introduced some changes into the composition: most significantly, in my view, he placed Alexander's helmet in the foreground, as if it were one of his essential attributes even when unworn. Thanks to the engraving by Gian Giacomo Caraglio (**fig. 117**),<sup>44</sup> Raphael's design rapidly became the most famous and authoritative model for the entire iconographic tradition of the subject.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The fresco is described by Vasari, *Le vite*, V, p. 384, as 'la storia d'Alessandro quando va a dormire con Rosana'. Vasari also mentions the figure of Vulcan in his forge, painted by Sodoma by the fireplace of the room, but not does refer to the 'Meeting' and the two other scenes on the walls. See *La Villa Farnesina a Roma*, I, pp. 121-5, and A. Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi: "Il Sodoma"*, New York and London 1976, pp. 32-6, 164-77.

<sup>43</sup> See *Raphael: Die Zeichnungen*, ed. E. Knab et al., Stuttgart 1983, p. 610, nos 539-40. Among the works ascribed to Raphael's pupils, the drawing by Tommaso Vincidor (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. 3885 recto) is worth mentioning. Following Oberhuber's suggestion, it is usually assumed that Raphael's study was made for the Villa Farnesina; it is certainly plausible that in the late 1510s, too busy to carry out the commission himself, he abandoned it and left his studio drawings to the painter who was asked to replace him: Sodoma.

<sup>44</sup> For Caraglio's engraving, see *Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century (The Illustrated Bartsch, XXVIII)*, ed. S. Boorsch and J. Spike, New York 1985, p. 201, no. 62; see also *Raphael invenit: stampe da Raffaello nelle collezioni dell'Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica*, ed. G. Bernini Pezzini et al., Rome 1985, pp. 160-1, nos 1-4. Among the contemporary copies of Raphael/Caraglio is a drawing in the Royal Collections, inv. 12756: see A. E. Popham and J. Wilde, *The Italian Drawings of the XV and XVI Centuries in the Collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle*, London 1949, p. 316, no. 809.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of the tradition, see K. Oberhuber and A. Gnann, 'The Depiction of the Marriage of Alexander and Roxana', in *Alexander the Great in European Art* (exhibition catalogue, Thessaloniki, Organisation for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997-8), ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Athens 1997, pp. 214-24, and following catalogue entries, pp. 225-43. R. Förster, 'Die Hochzeit des Alexander und der Roxane in der Renaissance', *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 1894, pp. 167-91, is still useful.



Before Raphael, there was no visual precedent for the ‘Marriage of Alexander and Roxane’.<sup>46</sup> The composition is an attempted reconstruction of Aëtion’s lost painting from antiquity, described by Lucian in one of his ekphrases (descriptions of artworks), in the dialogue *Herodotus or Aetion* 4-6 – a text which was still rare at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>47</sup> For Lucian, as well as for Raphael and Sodoma, the marriage of Alexander and Roxane represented the triumph of the power of love:<sup>48</sup> Roxane sits on the edge of her nuptial bed in the modest posture fitting for a bride, the unarmed Alexander is accompanied by Hephaestion and the god of marriage ceremonies Hymenaeus, while groups of *amorini* play with Alexander’s weapons, signalling both the romantic character of the scene and the temporary suspension of war-related activities. That Alexander instantly fell in love with the beautiful Roxane is recorded in the ancient historical sources (Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* VIII.4.23-5, and Plutarch, *Alexander* XLVII.4). In addition, Curtius (VIII.4.25) noted that Alexander, who had been able to resist the beauty of the Persian princesses captured at Issus, was powerless before the beauty of Roxane, a princess of inferior birth – the ‘Marriage of Alexander and Roxane’ and the ‘Meeting with the Family of Darius’ are juxtaposed *per figuras* in the Villa Farnesina.

An impressive number of artworks were based on Raphael’s composition, largely via Caraglio’s engraving. Among the paintings, it is worth mentioning: Girolamo Sicilante da Sermoneta’s mural of 1540-5, formerly in the Casino Olgiati

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<sup>46</sup> Some fifteenth-century Northern manuscripts of the *Romance* include a representation of the episode, but they are not comparable to the composition designed by Raphael: not only do they show a generic marriage scene in modern court dress, modelled on the ‘Marriage of the Virgin’ type, but also, in accordance with the legendary tradition deriving from the Pseudo-Callisthenes (II.22), they present Roxane as the daughter, not of the Sogdian baron Oxyartes, but rather of Darius himself. A particularly beautiful example of these Northern illustrations is in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.782, f. 210v; see Ross, *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books*, p. 144 and fig. 223.

<sup>47</sup> See Lucian, *Descrizioni di opere d’arte*, ed. S. Maffei, Turin 1994, pp. 113-15. For the availability in Agostino Chigi’s entourage of Lucian’s dialogue, in the 1503 Greek edition printed by Aldus Manutius, see Bartalini, ‘Da Raffaello al Sodoma’, pp. 75-6. For Lucian and the impact of his ekphrases on Renaissance art, see Sonia Maffei’s introduction to her edition of Lucian, *Descrizioni*, pp. XV-LXXXVI, esp. pp. LV-LXVI, and L. Faedo, ‘Le immagini dal testo: commento all’apparato iconografico’, in *ibid.*, pp. 127-42, esp. pp. 134-8; see also ead., ‘L’impronta delle parole. Due momenti della pittura di ricostruzione’, in *Memoria dell’antico nell’arte italiana*, ed. S. Settis, 3 vols, Turin 1984-6, II: *I generi e i temi ritrovati*, pp. 3-42, esp. pp. 23-42, and J. M. Massing, *Du texte à l’image: la calomnie d’Apelle et son iconographie*, Strasbourg 1990.

<sup>48</sup> On the different meaning which Aëtion’s painting may have had, see S. Maffei, ‘Una ricostruzione impossibile: le nozze di Alessandro e Rossane di Aezione’, *Ricerche di storia dell’arte*, 30, 1986, pp. 16-26, esp. pp. 23-5.

Bevilacqua in Rome, where the marriage scene is set in an open-air landscape;<sup>49</sup> Francesco Primaticcio's fresco of 1541-4 for the Chamber of the Duchess of Étampes at Fontainebleau;<sup>50</sup> and Taddeo Zuccari's fresco of around 1560, part of the Alexander cycle painted in Palazzo Mattei Caetani, also in Rome.<sup>51</sup> In the Sala Paolina, a pared-down version of the scene appears in one of the *celetti* above the windows – it is the crown handed by Alexander to Roxane which enables the scene to be identified.<sup>52</sup>

So popular was Raphael's composition that it was adapted to illustrate stories unconnected to Alexander. It served, for instance, as a model for a tapestry in the Metropolitan Museum of Art depicting the tale in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* of Hermes approaching Herse in her bridal chamber (**fig. 118**).<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Francesco Xanto Avelli made a number of ceramic plates based on Raphael's design, one of which illustrated the marriage of Ninus and Semiramis (**fig. 119**), and another, more surprisingly, Mutius Scaevola burning his hand in the presence of Porsenna (**fig. 120**).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The Casino Olgiati-Bevilacqua (the so-called Villa of Raphael) was destroyed in 1848; Siciolante's murals, including the 'Marriage of Alexander and Roxane', were detached in 1836 and are now in the Galleria Borghese: see P. Della Pergola, *Galleria Borghese: i dipinti*, 2 vols, Rome 1955-9, II, pp. 128-9, no. 180, and J. Hunter, *Girolamo Siciolante pittore da Sermoneta (1521-1575)*, Rome 1996, pp. 136-9, no. 15. Siciolante's painting gained considerable renown in the eighteenth century due to the inclusion of an etching after it in the *Schola Italica Picturae*, published in Rome in 1772; see *Alexander the Great in European Art*, pp. 242-3, no. XVIII.13 (A. Gnann). A painting auctioned in 2007, attributed to Girolamo da Santacroce and once in the Manfrin collection in Venice, also places the marriage scene in a greenery landscape; see Sotheby's, London, *Old Masters Paintings*, 6 December 2007, lot. 232.

<sup>50</sup> See M. B. Lossky, 'Sources d'inspiration d'une fresque bellifontaine: l'"Alexandre et Roxane" de Primaticcio', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français*, 1981, pp. 21-5.

<sup>51</sup> Acidini Luchinat, *Taddeo e Federico Zuccari*, I, p. 129.

<sup>52</sup> See R. Guerrini, 'Storia antica e iconografia umanistica (D. Zaga, *Episodi della vita di Alessandro Magno*, Sala Paolina, Castel Sant'Angelo)', *Athenaeum*, 63, 1985, pp. 37-43.

<sup>53</sup> See *Los amores de Mercurio y Erse: una tapicería rica de Willem de Pannemaker* (exhibition catalogue, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2010), Madrid 2010, esp. pp. 19-20.

<sup>54</sup> For the Semiramis plate, made for the marriage of Federico Gonzaga and Margherita Paleologo, see J. V. G. Mallet, *Xanto: Pottery-Painter, Poet, Man of the Italian Renaissance*, London 2007, pp. 128-9, no. 40. Other similar examples are discussed by A. Holcroft, 'Francesco Xanto Avelli and Petrarch', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 51, 1988, pp. 225-34, esp. pp. 232-4. For the Mutius Scaevola plate, see J. V. G. Mallet, 'A Maiolica Plate Signed "F.R."', *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, 17, 1976, pp. 4-19.

Raphael's attempt to reconstruct a lost painting from a written description clearly reflects the Renaissance attempt to rival and even surpass antiquity.<sup>55</sup> The erudite nature of this undertaking was, no doubt, partially responsible for the fascination which Raphael's composition exerted on sixteenth-century artists.<sup>56</sup> Yet the iconographic formula he created continued to influence the tradition well into the nineteenth century. I know of only few exceptions, all of them from the mid-eighteenth century, which rely instead on the account of Curtius Rufus (*Historiae Alexandri Magni* VIII.4.27), with the couple sharing a loaf of bread during a banquet – possibly an attempt to revitalise the theme but also, I believe, an opportunity for painters to stage a magnificent banquet scene, not coincidentally modelled on those of Antony and Cleopatra.<sup>57</sup> We can say, therefore, that the 'Marriage of Alexander and Roxane' is one of the very few episodes from the life of Alexander for which the artistic tradition drew on an author such as Lucian who was not among the ancient historians of Alexander. More importantly, it is the only theme in the Renaissance iconography of Alexander which is based on a visual, rather than a written, source. As well as displaying the power of love, to which even Alexander succumbed, the episode has connections, drawn by Curtius Rufus and often illustrated in painted cycles, to the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius' and stresses Alexander's respectful behaviour towards Roxane – a foreigner and a woman of lower social status whom he decided, unexpectedly and in defiance of convention, to marry. Despite the presence of other women in Alexander's life (for instance, Darius's daughter Stateira, whom he married at Susa), Roxane was his first wife and the mother of his only legitimate child and heir – Alexander IV, born a few months after his father's death.

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<sup>55</sup> See J. Cranston, 'Longing for the Lost: Ekphrasis, Rivalry and the Figuration of Notional Artworks in Italian Renaissance Painting', *Word and Image*, 27, 2011, pp. 212-19, with further bibliography; and R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, Aldershot 2009.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Faedo, 'L'impronta delle parole', pp. 31-2, for Taddeo Zuccari's awareness of the connection between Raphael's design and Aëtion's painting.

<sup>57</sup> The examples I know of are: an oil on canvas by Claudio Francesco Beaumont, c. 1740, Brighton and Hove Museums and Art Galleries (see *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in East Sussex* [The Public Catalogue Foundation], London 2005, p. 19); a painting by Giuseppe Bazzani, c. 1740, Mantua, Palazzo d'Arco (see Signorini, *La dimora dei conti d'Arco*, p. 182); a fresco by Giambattista Crosato, c. 1753, in the ballroom of the Villa Marcello near Padua, which is discussed in my 'Storie di Alessandro Magno in villa: intorno agli affreschi di Giambattista Crosato a Ca' Marcello, Levada di Piombino Dese', *Arte Documento*, 27, 2011, pp. 160-7.

### 5.3. Alexander, Apelles and Campaspe

Alexander, Apelles and Campaspe (or Pancaspe)<sup>58</sup> are the protagonists of a story which makes its first appearance in Renaissance art around the mid-sixteenth century. Like the ‘Marriage of Alexander and Roxane’, taken from Lucian, this story does not derive from one of the ancient historians of Alexander, but originates instead as an anecdote about art. The episode is recounted by Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* XXXV.86-7: Alexander commissioned his court painter Apelles to make a nude portrait of his favourite mistress Campaspe, but soon realised that Apelles, enchanted by the beauty of the model, had fallen in love with her; showing his magnanimity and self-restraint, Alexander sacrificed his own feelings for Campaspe and gave her to Apelles as a present.<sup>59</sup>

The theme of ‘Alexander Presenting Campaspe to Apelles’ was not very popular in the sixteenth century. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it became a favourite subject for private commissions and in art academy competitions, giving rise to various interpretations and largely developing independently of the tradition of Alexander iconography.<sup>60</sup> The story recounted by Pliny allowed artists to celebrate not only their patrons (in the figure of the magnanimous Alexander) but also themselves (in the figure of Apelles, with whom any painter was, of course, happy to be equated), so that many such works should be seen as allegories of painting. The beauty of Campaspe and the feelings she immediately provoked in Apelles sometimes turned the episode into a love story, with the modern painter (most famously, Giambattista Tiepolo) portraying himself as Apelles and giving face of his wife or mistress to Campaspe; in other cases, a little Eros aiming his arrow at Apelles’s heart is included in the scene (as in Giambattista

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<sup>58</sup> Several versions of the name are attested in the sources; I adopt here Campaspe because it is found most frequently. The matter was discussed at some length by Carlo Dati (Smarrito), *Vite de pittori antichi*, Florence 1667, pp. 130-2.

<sup>59</sup> Aelian, *Varia historia* XII.34, also mentions Campaspe as the mistress of Alexander who had been taken prisoner at Larissa in Greece and was greatly loved by Apelles, but does not report the episode referred by Pliny. Whether Campaspe reciprocated Apelles’s feelings is not known, but this seems not to have bothered Alexander, whose insensitive disregard for the matter Pliny deplored.

<sup>60</sup> See S. Ferino Pagden, ‘Alexander Apelles and Campaspe’, in *Alexander the Great in European Art*, (exhibition catalogue, Thessaloniki, Organisation for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997-8), ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Athens 1997, pp. 135-49; see also D. Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles: A Study in the Humanist Tradition*, New Haven and London 1981, pp. 187-91. Several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century plays and melodramas centring on Alexander, Apelles and Campaspe contributed to the widespread popularity of the story in the visual arts.

Crosato's fresco in Ca' Marcello near Padua).<sup>61</sup> But the encounter of Apelles, Alexander and Roxane in the artist's studio was also an unmissable opportunity for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painters to depict grand versions of their own studios.<sup>62</sup> Indeed in many cases, artists showed Apelles painting Campaspe in the presence of Alexander, with no reference to his magnanimous gesture.<sup>63</sup>

The theme of Campaspe emerges in the 1540s, when two of the three sixteenth-century examples known to me were made. A crucial influence was Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, published in 1528, in which the episode from Pliny was recounted.<sup>64</sup> The earliest representation of Alexander, Apelles and Campaspe is found in the Chamber of the Duchess of Étampes at Fontainebleau, where Primaticcio's fresco of 1541-4 shows Alexander and his lover seated naked on a bed, while Apelles is painting a portrait of them (**fig. 121**).<sup>65</sup> Drawing on passages in Pliny where Apelles is said to have made several portraits of Alexander in his capacity as official court painter, as well as the one of Campaspe, Primaticcio showed Apelles painting a double portrait of Alexander and Campaspe, which is unrecorded in the sources.<sup>66</sup> This unique iconographic choice can be readily explained in light of the overall programme of the room, which belonged to the mistress of King François I and was decorated with episodes from Alexander's life

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<sup>61</sup> Tiepolo's painting of about 1726, with his wife Cecilia Guardi posing as Campaspe, is in Montreal, Museum of Fine Arts (see *Giambattista Tiepolo* [exhibition catalogue, Venice, Museo del Settecento Veneziano, Ca' Rezzonico, 1996, and New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997], ed. K. Christiansen, London and Milan 1996, pp. 84-6, no. 11 [K. Christiansen]). For Crosato's fresco, see my '*Storie di Alessandro Magno in villa*'.

<sup>62</sup> This had a particular resonance in the seventeenth-century Dutch genre known as 'the collector's cabinet', where the story of Alexander, Apelles and Campaspe often provided the narrative pretext for showing the magnificent studio of a painter or the display of art collections. See T. Hoenselaars, 'Renaissance Collections of Alexander the Great', in *Culture: collections, compilations: actes du colloque de Paris 2001-2002*, Paris 2005, pp. 245-59.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., a painting by Sebastiano Ricci of c. 1705 in the Hermitage Museum (see A. Scarpa, *Sebastiano Ricci*, Milan 2006, pp. 296-7, no. 431, and p. 116, pl. XL. For another version in Parma, see *ibid.*, pp. 271-2, no. 363). Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* XXXV.85, also speaks of a visit paid by Alexander to Apelles's studio, during which the painter rebuked him for his ignorant remarks on art; because the episode showed Alexander – and therefore modern art patrons – in a bad light, it was rarely represented in paintings.

<sup>64</sup> See Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. V. Cian, Florence 1947, p. 128 (I. 52).

<sup>65</sup> See N. J. Vickers, 'Courting the Female Subject', in *The French Renaissance in Prints from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles, Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1994-5, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995, and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1995), Los Angeles 1994, pp. 95-107, esp. pp. 95-9 and 105-6, n. 15.

<sup>66</sup> By edict of Alexander himself, Apelles was the only painter allowed to portray him; the same privilege was granted to the sculptor Lysippus and the gem-engraver Pyrgoteles (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* VII.125 and XXXVII.8).

involving women (Roxane, Timoclea, Thalestris), often marked by a sensuality which is particularly apparent in the Campaspe episode.<sup>67</sup>

The first representation of Alexander offering Campaspe to Apelles dates to 1548, when Giorgio Vasari included it among the monochromes of the Sala del Camino in his own house at Arezzo (**fig. 122**).<sup>68</sup> As part of a cycle illustrating episodes from the lives of ancient Greek painters, it is not surprising that Vasari's composition has at its centre not Alexander but Apelles: the painter is shown presenting Alexander with the portrait of Campaspe he was commissioned to make, and receiving – 'in even exchange for the portrait', it has been recently suggested<sup>69</sup> – the girl herself as a gift from the king.

What became the standard iconography of 'Alexander Offering Campaspe to Apelles' did not usually, however, involve the presentation of the girl's portrait to the king, but instead focused entirely on Alexander's magnanimous gesture towards his court painter. The earliest example of this iconography is one of the oval paintings decorating the Studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (**fig. 123**): the hand of Alexander giving Campaspe to Apelles is significantly at the very centre of the composition.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> On the Chamber of the Duchess of Étampes in general, see L. Aldovini, 'La Chambre de la duchesse d'Étampes 1541-1544', in *Primaticcio maître de Fontainebleau* (exhibition catalogue, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 2004-5), ed. D. Cordellier, Paris 2004, pp. 226-40; K. Wilson-Chevalier, 'Alexander the Great at Fontainebleau', in *Alexander the Great in European Art*, (exhibition catalogue, Thessaloniki, Organisation for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997-8), ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Athens 1997, pp. 25-33; ead., 'Figures des femmes d'Alexandre à Fontainebleau sous le règne de François I<sup>er</sup>', in *Figures d'Alexandre à la Renaissance*, ed. C. Jouanno, Turnhout 2012, pp. 153-83.

<sup>68</sup> See S. Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance: The Legacy of the Natural History*, New Haven and London 2013, pp. 243-51, esp. p. 249; at p. 322 there is a list of occurrences of the Campaspe episode in Renaissance treatises on art. For the Sala del Camino, see A. Paolucci and A. M. Maetzke, *La casa del Vasari in Arezzo*, Florence 1988, pp. 45-88.

<sup>69</sup> Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture*, p. 249, who adds that 'the scene suggests that the likeness is so convincing that Alexander valued it as highly as the person.' Since Vasari's fresco was conceived as a praise of Apelles (and therefore of Vasari himself), this interpretation is persuasive; it should be noted, however, that the idea of offering Campaspe in exchange for Apelles's portrait is not found in Pliny nor in any source I know of, and is perhaps a visual invention of Vasari himself.

<sup>70</sup> See V. Conticelli, *'Guardaroba di cose rare et preziose': lo studiolo di Francesco I de' Medici: arte, storia e significati*, La Spezia and Lugano 2007, pp. 386-90, no. 14. A female portrait, that is the naked figure of Venus Anadyomene, is indeed displayed in this picture, but this is merely a reference to Pliny's statement (*Naturalis Historia* XXXV.87) that Campaspe posed for that painting, a famous work by Apelles.

The Campaspe episode, like the other stories from Alexander's life discussed in this chapter, entered the Renaissance iconographic repertoire as an example of his virtue. Like the 'Marriage of Alexander and Roxane', it was often paired with the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius', in this case because both stories displayed Alexander's magnanimity. In the Studiolo of Francesco I, for instance, facing the oval painting of Campaspe on the opposite wall, there is a version of the 'Meeting'.<sup>71</sup> Also worth mentioning is a copy from the mid-1650s of Veronese's *Meeting with the Family of Darius* by Francesco Minorello, who was commissioned at the same time to make a pendant of his own invention: the subject he chose was 'Alexander Offering Campaspe to Apelles'.<sup>72</sup>

#### 5.4. The Taming of Bucephalus

In the Renaissance iconography of Alexander, the 'Taming of Bucephalus' is a case apart; for unlike the majority of episodes from his life illustrated from the fifteenth century onwards, it had enjoyed vast popularity throughout the Middle Ages, as we have seen in Chapter 1. The story of how the fifteen-year-old Alexander managed to tame and ride the savage horse presented to his father Philip is told in both medieval versions of the *Romance* and, among ancient historians, in chapter 6 of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*.<sup>73</sup>

The 'Taming' is thus one of the very few episodes – and undoubtedly the most significant of these – found both in the legendary and the historical tradition. There is, however, a notable difference between the medieval and the Renaissance versions: in the *Romance* and its visual tradition, Bucephalus is portrayed as a

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<sup>71</sup> See Conticelli, 'Guardaroba di cose rare', pp. 329-31, no. 4; according to Conticelli, the painting by Jacopo Coppi has been identified by Marilena Caciorgna as 'Alessandro offre stoffe macedoni alle donne di Dario', an episode recounted by Curtius Rufus which follows the 'Meeting'.

<sup>72</sup> After several vicissitudes, on which see Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 37-8, the two paintings by Minorello now hang together in the Sala del Tiepolo in Palazzo Pisani Moretta, Venice. Minorello's *Campaspe* was first published by G. Pavanello, 'Dipinti seicenteschi in Ca' Pisani-Moretta: Luca Ferrari e Francesco Minorello', *Arte veneta*, 30, 1976, pp. 180-1; a colour reproduction is in I. Chiappini di Sorio, *Palazzo Pisani Moretta: economia, arte, vita sociale di una famiglia veneziana nel diciottesimo secolo*, Milan 1983, pl. 13. For Minorello, see M. Biffis's entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LXXIV, 2010, pp. 695-7.

<sup>73</sup> Neither Arrian nor Diodorus Siculus narrate the episode, since their accounts begin much later, with Alexander's accession to the throne. Although they do mention Bucephalus, it is merely to say that, on his death in India, Alexander founded a city in his honour (Alexandria Bucephala, on the Jhelum river, present-day Punjab, Pakistan). The episode of the 'Taming' was presumably included in one of the lost initial books of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae*.

monstrous, man-eating and almost hell-like creature, whereas the ancient historians, and consequently the artists of the Renaissance, describe him as a wild and magnificent animal, unusual in terms of his size and courage, but nevertheless a horse. As far as I am aware, the first representations of this Renaissance Bucephalus are found around 1450 on the group of *cassoni* panels illustrating the Battle of Issus examined in Chapter 4. Despite the difficulty of identifying the figures in such scenes, as in the case of the panel in the British Museum (**fig. 60**), there is no monstrous horse here.

The iconographic theme of the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’, based on Plutarch’s account, emerges in the 1520s and presents Alexander either attempting to tame the horse (holding him by the reins or about to mount him) or already riding him. A number of works, all made in Rome at about this time, illustrate the episode. On the west wall of Agostino Chigi’s bedchamber at the Villa Farnesina (**fig. 124**), a fresco of around 1525 shows a rearing Bucephalus of formidable size and frightening appearance mounted by the teenage Alexander.<sup>74</sup>

In the same years, stories of Alexander, including the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’, appeared on the façades of two Roman palaces; the cycles are both lost but are partially documented by sixteenth century drawings.<sup>75</sup> In Palazzo Gaddi Cesi, painted by Polidoro da Caravaggio in 1524 with stories and figures from ancient Rome, a series of incidents from the life of Alexander appeared between the windows of the top floor. A drawing of the entire façade, preserved in the Albertina (inv. 15462), shows seven scenes in the attic,<sup>76</sup> including the ‘Birth of Alexander’ (and possibly his ‘Begetting’ immediately before), the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ and the ‘Cutting of the Gordian Knot’.<sup>77</sup> A second much-admired façade, painted by

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<sup>74</sup> See Dacos, ‘Beccafumi e Roma’, p. 58. A precise date for the fresco is difficult to establish because the painter Guillaume de Marcillat sojourned frequently in Rome between 1517 and 1525: see ead., *Le logge di Raffaello: maestro e bottega di fronte all’antico*, Rome 1977, pp. 111-12. Nevertheless, a date around 1525 and in any case before 1529, when de Marcillat died in Arezzo, seems to me most likely.

<sup>75</sup> On the third palace, Palazzo Milesi, which is usually said to have included a depiction of the ‘Meeting with the Family of Darius’, see above, n. 30.

<sup>76</sup> Two additional scenes at the opening of the series were already lost at the time the drawing was made. For Palazzo Milesi, see Leone de Castris, *Polidoro da Caravaggio*, pp. 140, 170, n. 93, 498-9, no. 19; the Albertina drawing is illustrated at p. 145. For a description of the seven Alexander episodes, see Harprath, *Papst Paul III*, pp. 61-2.

<sup>77</sup> Despite its great renown, such that it has become a proverbial phrase for an impossible problem solved by a bold action, the ‘Cutting of the Gordian Knot’ was less popular in Renaissance art than we might expect and, for this reason, will not be discussed here. After Polidoro’s façade, the incident appeared in various sixteenth-century cycles, most importantly in Veronese’s lost decoration of 1551 in the Villa Soranza near Castelfranco



Maturino da Firenze and entirely devoted to Alexander, was executed around 1524-7 on a palace once standing in via di Ripetta near Piazza del Popolo and now destroyed.<sup>78</sup> A drawing in the Fondation Custodia in Paris has been identified as a partial copy of the frescoes and shows the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ flanked by the ‘Birth of Alexander’, on the left, and the ‘Cutting of the Gordian Knot’, on the right (**fig. 125**).<sup>79</sup> A similar composition of the Bucephalus episode, after Polidoro but from an unidentified source, is found in the verso of a sheet in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rennes (**fig. 126**).<sup>80</sup> In these examples, Bucephalus is clearly depicted as the fierce and majestic horse described by Plutarch, but with no trace of the marvellous features which characterised him in the legendary tradition. Nonetheless, the text of Plutarch was not followed to the letter in the visual tradition, for the Alexander who tames Bucephalus is seldom depicted as a young boy: an exception is the Farnesina, as well as a few paintings in the later tradition (for example, the painting from the previously mentioned series by Giuseppe Bazzani in Mantua, c. 1740, and an even later example, Edgar Degas’s *Alexander and Bucephalus* of 1861-2).<sup>81</sup> Polidoro and most painters who came after him (at least until the version by Giambattista Tiepolo, from the late 1750s, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais)<sup>82</sup>, portray Alexander as a young man, not as a fifteen-year-old boy; among sixteenth-century examples are the Alexander cycles of Fontainebleau (**fig.**

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Veneto (Treviso), where it was paired with the ‘Meeting with the Family of Darius’ and accompanied by the virtue of Justice; see D. Gisolfi Pechukas, ‘Veronese and His Collaborators at “La Soranza”’, *Artibus et historiae*, 15, 1987, pp. 67-108. Its real popularity, however, dates to the seventeenth century; see, e.g., the Greek version of the catalogue *Alexander the Great in European Art*, pp. 300-21, and Chapter 3 (3.2.2) and n. 68 above.

<sup>78</sup> See Vasari, *Le vite*, IV, p. 464: ‘Vicino al Popolo, sotto S. Iacopo degli Incurabili, [Polidoro e Maturino] fecero una facciata con le storie d’Alessandro Magno ch’è tenuta bellissima.’

<sup>79</sup> See Leone de Castris, *Polidoro da Caravaggio*, pp. 143 and 496, no. 10; see also J. Byam Shaw, *The Italian Drawings of the Frits Lugt Collection*, 3 vols, Paris 1983, II: *Polidoro Album*, pp. 19-20 and pl. 21 (Byam Shaw does not, however, identify the source of the sketches). A more legible rendering of the ‘Gordian Knot’ episode from Polidoro, possibly from the same fresco cycle, is in the Art Institute of Chicago; see *Italian Drawings before 1600*, p. 348, no. 532 (S. Folds McCullagh).

<sup>80</sup> See *Disegno: les dessins italiens du Musée de Rennes* (exhibition catalogue, Modena, Galleria Estense and Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1990), ed. P. Ramade, [Rennes 1990], p. 213, no. 159.

<sup>81</sup> For Bazzani’s ‘Taming of Bucephalus’, see Signorini, *La dimora dei conti d’Arco*, p. 175. On Degas’s lengthy preparation of the painting, now in Washington DC, see *Degas: Klassik und Experiment* (exhibition catalogue, Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 2014-5), ed. A. Heiling, Munich and Karlsruhe 2014, pp. 212-15, nos 86-91.

<sup>82</sup> See *Alexander the Great in European Art*, pp. 80-1, no. III.3 (G. Knox).

127)<sup>83</sup>, Palazzo Ricci Sacchetti in Rome,<sup>84</sup> and Palazzo Mattei Caetani, also in Rome.<sup>85</sup>

This visual readjustment can be understood, I believe, in light of the Renaissance interest in the representation of horses and particularly in equestrian statues<sup>86</sup> – both of which had some bearing on the popularity of the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ theme. By representing Alexander as a young man, rather than a teenage boy, the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ could be likened to the generic type of the ‘Horse Tamer’. It seems no coincidence that from the sixteenth century, the two ‘Horse Tamers’ on the Quirinale Hill were said to represent Alexander and Bucephalus,<sup>87</sup> nor that several Renaissance works representing a young man leading a rearing horse (as in Bambaia’s marble relief of 1531-2 from the Tomb of Gaston de Foix in the Victoria and Albert Museum) have been identified both as ‘Alexander Taming Bucephalus’ and as a ‘Youth Holding a Horse by the Reins’.<sup>88</sup>

I shall conclude this section with a fresco cycle commissioned around 1545 by the *condottiere* Alessandro Vitelli for his palace at Città di Castello, not far from Perugia. In homage to himself, he asked the painter Cola dell’Amatrice to depict stories of his namesake Alexander. The series of military episodes illustrated along the walls of the room presently known as Room IX (possibly, Alessandro Vitelli’s studiolo) are taken mainly from Curtius Rufus and Plutarch. The cycle begins, however, with the ‘Taming of Bucephalus’ (**fig. 128**), who is depicted as a unicorn. In the following scenes Bucephalus also has a brand with an ox-head on his

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<sup>83</sup> See Wilson-Chevalier, ‘Alexander the Great at Fontainebleau’, pp. 27-8.

<sup>84</sup> On the painted frieze by Ponsio Jacquio (c. 1555), see J. L. de Jong, ‘An Important Patron and an Unknown Artist: Giovanni Ricci, Ponsio Jacquio, and the Decoration of the Palazzo Ricci-Sacchetti in Rome’, *The Art Bulletin*, 74, 1992, pp. 135-56, at pp. 139 and 141-3.

<sup>85</sup> See Acidini Luchinat, *Taddeo e Federico Zuccari*, I, pp. 124-9; for an additional, but slightly different composition, see the drawing in an American private collection in *ibid.*, I, p. 25.

<sup>86</sup> See, in general, W. Liedtke, *The Royal Horse and Rider: Painting, Sculpture, and Horsemanship 1500-1800*, New York 1989, and A. Quondam, *Cavallo e cavaliere: l’armatura come seconda pelle del gentiluomo moderno*, Rome 2003.

<sup>87</sup> First suggested in 1558 by Onofrio Panvinio, this identification continued until the eighteenth century; although it is still a matter of debate, the statues probably represent the Dioscuri. See Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, pp. 136-41, no. 3; and P. P. Bober and R. Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London and Turnhout 2010, pp. 172-5, no. 125.

<sup>88</sup> J. Pope Hennessy, *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, 3 vols, London 1964, II, *Text: Sixteenth to Twentieth Century*, pp. 545-9; G. Agosti, *Bambaia e il classicismo lombardo*, Turin 1990, pp. 135-69, esp. p. 158, and pl. 132.

shoulder. It is very likely, as has been suggested, that Bucephalus was portrayed in this way in honour of Alessandro Vitelli's friend, Alessandro Farnese, whose family device was a unicorn. The ox-head brand on Bucephalus's shoulder may also be a visual pun on Alessandro Vitelli's surname, which means 'calves'.<sup>89</sup> Whatever the explanation, for my purposes, it is striking that, in a cycle illustrating Alexander engaged in the military scenes based on Greek and Roman historical sources, Bucephalus is depicted as he had been in the illuminated pages of the medieval *Romance*, discussed in Chapter 1. This is clearly a case in which the sharp distinction between the categories of legend and history, which I have been setting out in this dissertation, does not hold.

### 5.5. The Birth of Alexander

The 'Birth of Alexander', though not widely represented as an event from his life,<sup>90</sup> is noteworthy because the narrative contains a supernatural element which goes against the overall Renaissance tendency to portray Alexander as a historical figure. Like the 'Taming of Bucephalus', this episode from Alexander's childhood is found in the *Romance* (I.12) and, among ancient historians, only in Plutarch (*Alexander* II-III).

In the Middle Ages Italian illuminated manuscripts of the *Romance* did not often include pictures of the 'Birth of Alexander'.<sup>91</sup> When present, the episode resembled a conventional childbirth scene, with female attendants surrounding

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<sup>89</sup> See *Pinacoteca Comunale di Città di Castello*, I, pp. 114-23, no. 13, esp. pp. 116-17 (R. Guerrini).

<sup>90</sup> This probably explains why it is not listed among the episodes from Alexander's life either in Pigler, *Barockthemen*, or in the 1997 catalogue *Alexander the Great in European Art*. A remarkable ancient representation of the birth of Alexander is found in the famous Baalbek mosaic of the fourth century; see D. J. A. Ross, 'Olympias and the Serpent: The Interpretation of a Baalbek Mosaic and the Date of the Illustrated Pseudo-Callisthenes', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 26, 1963, pp. 1-21. On the myths concerning Alexander's birth in antiquity, see D. Ogden, *Alexander the Great: Myth, Genesis and Sexuality*, Exeter 2011, pp. 7-56. On the medieval tradition, see M. Lecco, "Amon, le dieu de Lybie, en vous l'engendrera": le leggende sulla nascita di Alessandro nei romanzi del Medioevo francese', in *Alessandro/Dhûl-Qarnayn in viaggio tra i due mari*, ed. C. Saccone, Alessandria 2008, pp. 91-108.

<sup>91</sup> The subject was, however, frequently illustrated in France. On the remarkable production from fifteenth-century Burgundy, see S. Hériché Pradeau, 'La conception d'un héros et sa naissance dans *Les Faicts et les Conquestes d'Alexandre le Grand* de Jean Wauquelin et dans *l'Histoire d'Alexandre* de Vasque de Lucène', in *L'Histoire d'Alexandre le Grand dans les tapisseries au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: fortune iconographique dans les tapisseries et les manuscrits conservés: la tenture d'Alexandre de la collection Doria Pamphilj à Gênes*, ed. F. Barbe et al., Turnhout 2013, pp. 165-79.

Olympias's bed and taking care of the new born Alexander.<sup>92</sup> Marvellous figures mentioned in the text of the *Romance* as present (Nectanebo or Zeus Ammon in the guise of a dragon) belong instead to the French and Northern European visual tradition and therefore are not relevant to my argument.<sup>93</sup>

According to Plutarch, it was rumoured that Olympias had conceived Alexander not with her husband Philip but rather with the god Zeus Ammon, disguised as a serpent, who in this form was repeatedly seen lying by her side at night. Philip himself once furtively witnessed the event by peeking into Olympias's chamber through a chink in the door; as the oracle of Apollo had foretold to him, however, he was to lose the eye with which he had looked through the door as a punishment for his impudence in spying on a god.

Despite the availability of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* in the fifteenth century, as described in Chapter 3, his account of the 'Birth of Alexander' did not enter the iconographic repertoire until the 1520s.<sup>94</sup> Two drawings after Polidoro da Caravaggio (**figs 129** and **125**) show how the event was envisaged: as in conventional birth scenes, Olympias is sitting on her bed, while an attendant bathes the baby; the only element identifying it as the birth of Alexander is the serpent of Zeus-Ammon, coiled on the bed next to the queen, to the consternation of a second attendant and of Olympias herself.<sup>95</sup>

A slightly different composition, with more attendants, is still visible in a badly damaged drawing in the British Museum, assigned to a follower of Giulio Romano (**fig. 130**).<sup>96</sup> A variation on this iconography is found in a drawing in

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<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 7190, f. 1v, illustrated in Ross, 'Olympias and the Serpent', pl. 4a. MS Correr 1493, f. 1r, shows the starry celestial vault above Olympias's bedchamber, an allusion to the astronomical portents which, according to the *Romance*, heralded Alexander's birth.

<sup>93</sup> On the most lavishly illuminated manuscripts of Jean Wauquelin's *Les Faicts et les Conquestes d'Alexandre le Grand*, see Hériché Pradeau, 'La conception d'un héros', with bibliography.

<sup>94</sup> I do not know of any representation of the 'Birth of Alexander' based on Plutarch's account in the Italian Quattrocento – even in manuscripts and books containing the *Life of Alexander* there is at most a portrait of Alexander at the beginning, with no narrative scenes at all.

<sup>95</sup> On fig. 129, see *Disegno: les dessins italiens*, p. 213, no. 158. For a third, more sketchy copy of Polidoro's fresco in Chicago, see *Italian Drawings before 1600*, pp. 367-8, no. 596 (L. M. Giles).

<sup>96</sup> See P. Pouncey and J. A. Gere, *Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum: Raphael and His Circle*, 2 vols, London 1962, I, pp. 170-1, no. 283; II, pl. 269.

Chicago, inscribed with the name of Polidoro but now attributed to the Florentine artist Andrea Boscoli (**fig. 131**).<sup>97</sup> The subject here is not the ‘Birth of Alexander’, as there is no baby; rather, the focus is on Olympias, who is approached by a huge, dragon-headed serpent, which coils itself around her leg, alarming the queen and her two serving ladies, who run out of the room screaming.<sup>98</sup> In my view, the reason for this dramatic change does not come from the iconography of Alexander but instead is connected to other contemporary representations of similar seduction scenes, modelled on the ‘Leda and the Swan’ type such as the ‘Begetting of Scipio Africanus’ (for example, in the painted frieze in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome).<sup>99</sup>

An extraordinary fresco of the ‘Begetting of Alexander’ was painted by Giulio Romano in 1527-8 on the east wall of the Room of Psyche in the Palazzo Te at Mantua (**fig. 132**). This is the most explicit sixteenth-century rendition of the encounter of Olympias and Zeus Ammon, who is shown both as a god in human form and as a serpent. Also, in a very accurate translation into painting of the text of Plutarch, on the right-hand side, Philip sneaks from behind the door and is blinded by Zeus’s eagle, which holds his thunderbolt. Giulio’s representation of the ‘Begetting of Alexander’ remained unique, despite the existence of a (censored) print made after it.<sup>100</sup> This unusual iconography can be explained by the nature of the palace in which it is located. Palazzo Te was built by Federico II Gonzaga as a suburban villa where he could enjoy the company of his mistress, Isabella Boschetti. The decoration of the Room of Psyche celebrates the irresistible power of love, which is exemplified by the mythical stories of, among others, Venus and Adonis, Polyphemus and Galatea, and Pasiphaë’s illicit desire for a bull. In this context, the story of Olympias and Zeus Ammon was an appropriate choice. A crucial fact has not, however, been given due attention in the scholarly literature: in 1520, Isabella

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<sup>97</sup> See *Italian Drawings before 1600*, p. 43, no. 46 (S. Folds McCullagh). See also A. Forlani Tempesti, ‘Boscoli, Andrea’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 13, 1971, pp. 213-5.

<sup>98</sup> For representations of the snake visiting Olympias in her bed on fourth-century Roman contorniates, see Ross, ‘Olympias and the Serpent’, pp. 17-21.

<sup>99</sup> On the model of Alexander, both Scipio Africanus and Emperor Augustus were rumoured to have been fathered by a serpent. For the fresco in Palazzo dei Conservatori, see N. Dacos, ‘Il fregio delle Storie di Scipione a Palazzo dei Conservatori: Jean Cousin il Giovane a Roma’, in *Scipione l’Africano: un eroe tra Rinascimento e Barocco: atti del convegno di studi, Roma, Accademia Belgica, 24-25 maggio 2012*, ed. W. Geerts et al., Milan 2014, pp. 79-95, esp. pp. 80 and 95.

<sup>100</sup> For the 1538 engraving by Giovanni Battista Scultori (Vienna, Albertina, inv. It I 29, p. 4), see *Giulio Romano* (exhibition catalogue, Mantua, Palazzo Te and Palazzo Ducale, 1989), Milan 1989, pp. 286-7 (B. Talvacchia).

Boschetti bore Federico his first natural son, who was given the name Alessandro.<sup>101</sup> Until 1533, when Federico's marriage to Margherita Paleologa produced a legitimate male heir, Alessandro seemed destined to inherit the title and the land from his father. It was during these momentous years, when everything was still possible for Alessandro Gonzaga, that the 'Begetting of Alexander' was painted: it was clearly intended not only as a celebration of the passionate love between Federico (Zeus Ammon) and Isabella (Olympias), but also as an augury of the greatness, equal to that of his namesake Alexander, which their son would achieve. The rare depiction of the blinding of Philip of Macedon can be explained as a reference to the husband of Isabella Boschetti, who, like Philip, was a cuckolded spouse and deceived father, and who, in the end, suffered even greater punishment than Philip for his meddling.<sup>102</sup>

The story of Alexander's begetting and birth is the only episode from his life with a supernatural element – the serpent of Zeus Ammon fathering Alexander with Olympias – to emerge in Renaissance art. Since, however, the other ancient historians of Alexander did not present any alternative versions to Plutarch's account of his birth, an artist wanting to depict this episode would be hard pressed to avoid the divine intervention of Zeus. True, unlike the *Romance*, Plutarch does not mention the involvement of the magician and trickster Nectanebo in Alexander's conception (on which, see Chapter 1), an absence which enables us to make a clear distinction between the legendary and historical accounts. Nevertheless, it is significant that, in an iconographic repertoire which stressed the exceptional, yet entirely human, qualities of Alexander, the depictions of his birth, drawing on the ancient authority of Plutarch, show the glint of divinity which made him a man like no other.

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<sup>101</sup> A possible connection between Alessandro Gonzaga (1520-80) and Giulio's fresco is noted, but not discussed further, by E. Verheyen, *The Palazzo del Te in Mantua: Images of Love and Politics*, Baltimore and London 1977, p. 26, and S. Cavicchioli, *Amore e Psiche*, Milan 2002, p. 143, n. 74.

<sup>102</sup> Boschetti's husband, Count Francesco Cauzzi Gonzaga of Calvisano, met a violent and mysterious death, for which Federico Gonzaga was rumoured to be responsible. I thank Lorenzo Bonoldi for discussing Giulio's fresco with me and for generously sharing his knowledge of the Gonzaga family.

## 5.6. Conclusion

In Chapter 4 I highlighted the instrumental role played by Curtius Rufus in the creation of the new Quattrocento Alexander imagery; in the sixteenth century, it was instead Plutarch who exerted the greatest influence on art.<sup>103</sup> Despite the manuscript circulation of his *Life of Alexander* in Guarino's Latin translation since the early 1400s (discussed in Chapter 3), it was not until the 1470s, following Campano's 1470 *editio princeps* of the *Parallel Lives*,<sup>104</sup> that the impact of Plutarch on the visual tradition started to be felt, and it was only in the early sixteenth century that it became decisive. Yet while many events from Alexander's life which were illustrated in the sixteenth century are found in Plutarch, only few of them occur in Plutarch *alone* – most importantly, the 'Birth of Alexander', 'Alexander Taming Bucephalus' and 'Alexander Covering Darius's Body with His Cloak' (*Alexander* XLIII.3).<sup>105</sup> Where the influence of Plutarch is more evident is in the general conception of Alexander which became dominant in the sixteenth century: in keeping with the aim and content of his writings – mainly the *Life of Alexander* but also *De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute* in the *Moralia* – the emphasis was increasingly placed on Alexander's moral virtues rather than his military prowess. This conception can perhaps best be seen in Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, where Alexander, the virtuous and learned pupil of Aristotle, is mentioned some twenty times and represents the perfect courtier.<sup>106</sup>

It was because of his moral virtue that Alexander was regarded as a suitable model for emulation by princes, rulers and aristocrats. In sixteenth-century art, this image, as I have tried to demonstrate, was based on a select number of episodes from his life which attained popularity in the new, historically grounded, iconography of Alexander: not only the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius', but also Alexander's compassionate behaviour towards the dead Darius, as depicted by Giambattista Zelotti, in his fresco of c. 1560-5, in the central hall of Villa Godi,

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<sup>103</sup> See, above all, *Biografia dipinta*.

<sup>104</sup> See Caciorgna, 'Immagini di eroi ed eroine', p. 229.

<sup>105</sup> Darius's death is variously reported in the sources, but only Plutarch mentions Alexander's merciful act of using his own cloak to cover the corpse. In imitation of Alexander, Antony did the same with Brutus's body at Philippi in 42 BC (Plutarch, *Antony* XXII.4).

<sup>106</sup> See M. Villa, 'Plutarco e Castiglione: il personaggio di Alessandro Magno', in *Uso, riuso e abuso dei testi classici*, ed. M. Gioseffi, Milan 2010, pp. 209-32, and Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 46-7.

Lonedo di Lugo (Vicenza).<sup>107</sup> In the later pictorial tradition, a similar episode concerning the valorous Porus, wounded and defeated in the battle of the Hydaspes in India but nevertheless granted his kingdom back by Alexander, was also illustrated from Plutarch (*Alexander* LX.7-8).<sup>108</sup> Even minor and infrequently depicted incidents helped to construct the image of Alexander as an exemplary moral figure: giving his chair by the fire to a shivering soldier (like in the so-called Casa Tallarino, Mantua);<sup>109</sup> refusing a helmet full of water during a march through the arid lands of the Gedrosian desert (Taddeo Zuccari, c. 1560, Rome, Palazzo Mattei Caetani);<sup>110</sup> and setting fire to the Persian booty, his own included, which was weighing down his army on its way to India (Marco Pino, 1545-7, Rome, Castel Sant'Angelo, Sala Paolina, ceiling).<sup>111</sup> The trust he showed in his doctor and old friend Philip, falsely accused of being a Persian spy and of trying to poison him, also contributed to this picture.<sup>112</sup> Another way of stressing Alexander's noble nature was to illustrate his respect, if not reverence, for the mythical past which he had attempted to imitate: placing Homer's *Iliad* in a golden casket which once belonged to Darius (Raphael's workshop, 1520s, monochrome in the Stanza della Segnatura,

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<sup>107</sup> See Bodon, 'Alessandro eroe "platonico"?', p. 100. As the partial list in Pigler, *Barockthemen*, p. 357 shows, the episode was especially popular in eighteenth-century Venetian painting (e.g., Zanchi, Pellegrini, Crosato, Piazzetta), where it was often paired with the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius'.

<sup>108</sup> The earliest Italian examples known to me are from the eighteenth century (e.g., Francesco Fontebasso, c. 1760, Bourg-en-Bresse, Musée de Brou: see *Settecento: le siècle de Tiepolo: peintures italiennes du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle exposées dans les collections publiques françaises* [exhibition catalogue, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts and Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 2000-1], ed. A. Brejon de Lavergnée and P. Durey, Paris 2000, p. 109, no. 25 [S. Loire]) and several works by G. A. Pellegrini, for which see *Antonio Pellegrini: il maestro veneto del Rococò alle corti d'Europa* (exhibition catalogue, Padua, Palazzo della Ragione, 1998-9), ed. A. Bettagno, Venice 1998, pp. 91-3, 120-3, no. 8, and 130-1, no. 12. Cf. the medieval tradition based on the Pseudo Callisthenes (III.4), where Alexander is said to have fought Porus in single combat and killed him; see, e.g., Ross, *Illustrated Medieval Alexander-Books*, figs 300 and 342.

<sup>109</sup> See Ferlisi, 'La mantegnesca facciata dipinta'. Another example in Mantua is found in the Apartment of the Secret Garden in Palazzo Te, illustrated in Belluzzi, *Palazzo Te*, II, p. 640, fig. 1158. The episode appears also in the Sala Paolina in the Castel Sant'Angelo: see Guerrini, 'Storia antica e iconografia umanistica'.

<sup>110</sup> See Acidini Luchinat, *Taddeo e Federico Zuccari*, I, p. 128, fig. 50.

<sup>111</sup> See Harprath, *Papst Paul III*, pl. 11.

<sup>112</sup> The episode was most often illustrated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; but it appeared as early as 1490 in the Bentivoglio chapel in the church of San Giacomo Maggiore at Bologna, among the ancient *exempla* of the *Triumph of Fame* frescoed by Lorenzo Costa; see E. Negro and N. Roio, *Lorenzo Costa 1460-1535*, Modena 2001, pp. 91-3, no. 12c. On the theme in antiquity, see F. Sisti, 'Alessandro e il medico Filippo: analisi e fortuna di un aneddoto', *Bollettino dei classici*, 3, 1982, pp. 139-51.



Vatican);<sup>113</sup> and the seventeenth-century theme of his sacrifice at the tomb of Achilles in Troy.<sup>114</sup> Episodes which displayed Alexander's military prowess and strength – the battles he fought and the sieges he laid (most importantly, against Tyre) – were also, of course, depicted. But the majority of episodes illustrated from historical sources were *exempla virtutum*.

An additional element stands out in this new portrait of Alexander: he was surrounded by women. The 'Meeting with the Family of Darius' is the most significant example, but it is not the only one. Roxane, Stateira, the queen of the Amazons Thalestris, Campaspe, Sisygambis, Timoclea:<sup>115</sup> none of these women had appeared in the medieval legend (and the Pseudo-Callisthenes allotted very little space to any woman at all);<sup>116</sup> during the Renaissance, however, they became essential figures in Alexander's life, towards whom he behaved with moral virtue and courtly behaviour.

The sixteenth-century image of Alexander, as it appeared in the artistic tradition, was entirely positive. The episodes which reflected badly on him and which are also recorded by ancient historians – the murders of his friend Cleitus; Callisthenes and Philotas put to death after unfair trials; the burning of Persepolis at the instigation of Thais – only began to be illustrated in the seventeenth century, and even then quite rarely. The image of Alexander as a virtuous prince, to be emulated for his magnanimity and compassion even more than for his military

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<sup>113</sup> See Emiliani and Scolaro, *Raffaello*, p. 199. For the print after it by Marcantonio Raimondi and the diffusion of Raphael's invention in other artistic media, especially ceramics, see *Alexander the Great in European Art*, pp. 188-9. The episode was also included in the programme of the Sala Paolina (see *Gli affreschi di Paolo III*, I, p. 177, fig. 118), as well as in the fresco cycles of the Sala di Apollo in the Palazzo Pitti (Pietro da Cortona, 1641: see Campbell, *Pietro da Cortona*, p. 114 and fig. 67) and in the Room of the Emperors in Palazzo Te (Giulio Romano, 1530-1: see Belluzzi, *Palazzo Te*, II, p. 430, fig. 847).

<sup>114</sup> On this subject and its overlapping iconography with the similar visit paid by Augustus to Alexander's tomb, see D. R. Marshall, 'Giovanni Ghisolfi and Achilles, Alexander, and Augustus', *Storia dell'arte*, 98, 2000, pp. 47-75.

<sup>115</sup> One of the first depictions of Timoclea of Thebes standing on trial before the magnanimous judge Alexander (Plutarch, *Alexander XII*) is Zuccari's painting in Palazzo Mattei Caetani (see Acidini Luchinat, *Taddeo e Federico Zuccari*, I, p. 129, fig. 54). The subject of a drawing in the British Museum assigned to Perin del Vaga (inv. 1860,0616.118: see Pouncey and Gere, *Italian Drawings*, I, p. 93, no. 158 and II, pl. 124) is still debated, but it should surely be identified as Timoclea before Alexander. Thanks to Guido Rebecchini for pointing out this work to me.

<sup>116</sup> See, e.g., M. Gosman, 'L'element féminin dans le *Roman d'Alexandre*: Olympias et Candace', in *Court and Poet: Selected Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society (Liverpool 1980)*, ed. G. S. Burgess, Liverpool 1981, pp. 167-76.

deeds, was largely based on Plutarch. The influence of Valerius Maximus can be detected in a few episodes; but Arrian and Diodorus Siculus seem to have had a very limited impact on the iconography of Alexander. Arrian's Alexander is essentially a military commander, a man of war who fights relentlessly to secure victory, with very little consideration of anything else, and therefore provided little material for a moral picture. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Diodorus Siculus's account became available too late to have any real influence on a visual tradition which was by then already established. As for Curtius Rufus, whose Latin text certainly lost ground when compared to the more fashionable Greek histories, his entertaining and dramatic narrative continued to be an invaluable source of anecdotal material; but his double-edged portrait of Alexander – as notable for his vices as for his virtues – was far less suitable for emulation than the exemplary figure presented by Plutarch.

Finally, it is necessary to give some consideration to the reasons why the illustration of moral examples became so popular in the course of the sixteenth century. This issue, which reaches far beyond the iconography of Alexander<sup>117</sup> and art history itself, is too large to be fully addressed here. Nevertheless, some observations about it can be made. The presentation of ancient history as a succession of moral *exempla* intended to teach and serve as model for the present has its roots in Cicero's 'historia magistra vitae' (*De oratore* II.36) and the humanist historiography based on it, especially the historical works of Flavio Biondo and Leonardo Bruni.<sup>118</sup> The illustration of selected moral episodes from the lives of ancient figures, including Alexander, can be seen as a visual equivalent to this didactic conception of history, which guided most humanist scholars. The importance of Plutarch in this process was crucial: as a sort of general reference on moral matters, his work also greatly influenced, as we have seen, the iconographic tradition.<sup>119</sup> As far as Alexander is concerned, it is this new moral evaluation which

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<sup>117</sup> The best-known example of this type of moral re-interpretation is Herakles, on which see E. Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst*, Leipzig and Berlin 1930.

<sup>118</sup> From the vast bibliography on the topic, see R. Landfester, *Historia magistra vitae: Untersuchungen zur humanistischen Geschichtstheorie des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, Geneva 1972; G. Ianziti, *Writing History in Renaissance Italy: Leonardo Bruni and the Uses of the Past*, Cambridge MA and London 2012, esp. pp. 7-60; B. Stasi, *Apologie umanistiche della 'historia'*, Bologna 2004; T. Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature*, Ithaca and London 1990; E. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago and London 1981, pp. 3-33; A. Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13, 1950, pp. 285-315.

<sup>119</sup> See *Biografia dipinta*, esp. the first chapter by Roberto Guerrini at pp. 1-98. The role played by Valerius Maximus was less important, but still noteworthy; see R. Guerrini, 'Dal

allowed him to survive the decline of the legendary tradition and to be reshaped into an *exemplum virtutum*, whose deeds made him relevant to the men of the Renaissance, showing them both what to pursue and what to avoid.

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testo all'immagine: la "pittura di storia" nel Rinascimento', in *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana*, ed. S. Settis, 3 vols, Turin 1984-6, II: *I generi e i temi ritrovati*, pp. 43-93, esp. pp. 45-73; with reference to the Alexander iconography, see Terribile, *Del piacere della virtù*, pp. 46-60.

## Conclusion

My aim in this dissertation was to shed light on a little-explored chapter in the tradition of the myth of Alexander: the transition from the medieval ‘Alexander of legend’ to the Renaissance ‘Alexander of history’, which happened in Italy over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By examining the iconographic production which developed around the figure of Alexander during this time, and by discussing it in dialogue with the textual and visual material which the Quattrocento inherited from the past, I hope I have demonstrated the significance of this transformation, not least because it marked a permanent turning point in the tradition, which completely eclipsed the previous imagery of Alexander.

The personality of Alexander the man is destined to remain elusive: his life is known to us from texts written centuries after his death;<sup>1</sup> and although his physical appearance is documented by a large number of ancient portraits, these are strongly idealised.<sup>2</sup> It is not merely a matter of lost or fragmentary sources: during Alexander’s own lifetime, and largely by his own initiative, divine features and qualities were already attributed to him, and his extraordinary achievements were recounted in various different forms, ranging from bare factual records to fanciful re-elaborations. Eventually two distinct but intertwined threads emerged: the legendary and the historical tradition of Alexander – in the terminology which I have adopted in this dissertation, ‘legend’ and ‘history’. As we have seen, the legendary tradition goes back to the late ancient Greek text conventionally known as the Pseudo-Callisthenes, put together in Alexandria in the third century AD from a variety of materials, some of which dated back to the decades after Alexander’s

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<sup>1</sup> See Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great*, p. 27, who states that, due to the almost complete loss of first-hand sources, the life of Alexander can be ‘the subject for a search, not a story.’

<sup>2</sup> This is even true for the earliest surviving portrait of Alexander, a tiny ivory head from a funeral couch, found in 1977 in the tomb of his father Philip at Vergina in northern Greece; see M. Andronikos, *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City*, Athens 1987, pp. 123-36 and fig. 83.

death. The historical tradition draws essentially on the four main ancient historians who wrote about Alexander – Curtius Rufus, Plutarch, Arrian and Diodorus Siculus – together with the third-hand account of Justin.

During the Middle Ages, when these historical accounts were not available, knowledge of Alexander was perpetuated almost exclusively by the legendary tradition based on the Pseudo-Callisthenes and its derivatives. In the pages of the countless reworkings and versions of this text, produced from the tenth century onwards in every European language, Alexander was transformed into a mythic figure and fearless explorer, the prototype of the chivalric knight and the conqueror who is driven to the ends of the earth by his insatiable thirst for the unknown. The vast iconographic *corpus* illustrating these Alexander romances includes the wars fought by Alexander in Asia, and the military nature of his expedition to the East was clear – in the manuscripts these accounts are usually entitled *Historia de preliis* ('The History of the Battles'). Even greater emphasis, however, was placed on Alexander's marvellous adventures in India – most importantly, the 'Flight with Griffins', the 'Submarine Voyage' and the 'Visit to the Oracular Trees of the Sun and the Moon' – which in some cases circulated outside the illustrated pages of manuscripts, attesting to the diffusion of the legendary stories of Alexander beyond the very restricted audience of those who had access to books. With the decline of the legend in the fifteenth century, these marvellous episodes from the *Romance* gradually died out, with the exception of the 'Taming of Bucephalus', which managed to survive and entered the new Renaissance iconographic repertoire of Alexander – though with notable changes to the appearance of Bucephalus.

The humanist recovery of the Greek and Latin historical texts had a groundbreaking impact on this legendary conception of Alexander: the marvellous stories, when confronted with the very different account of Alexander's life given by ancient historians, were called into question. Nevertheless, the medieval visual imagery did

not disappear at once, and some examples, discussed in the second chapter, can still be found in the fifteenth century. According to a widespread assumption in the scholarly literature, based on George Cary's *The Medieval Alexander*,<sup>3</sup> the medieval legend was never as rich and inventive in the Italian peninsula as it was in France and in northern Europe; so that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the legendary stories of Alexander lingered on in Italy as dry and repetitive imitations 'from which all real life had departed'.<sup>4</sup> The recent research of Roberta Morosini on the literary tradition has disproved Cary's view, demonstrating that elements of originality and inventiveness are also found in Alexander texts written in Italy such as those composed by Antonio Pucci and Domenico Scolari.<sup>5</sup> Her reassessment of the literary tradition is confirmed, I believe, by my re-examination of fifteenth-century visual treatments of the medieval legend. Evidence of the persistence of the older imagery is scattered among artistic genres (from illuminated manuscripts to drawings, from tarot cards to fresco cycles) and includes artworks which have not been previously discussed in the scholarly literature on Alexander (for example, the Curtius Rufus codex, now MS Vitr. 22.9 in Madrid). I have shown, however, that, despite the continuing appeal of the legend, hints of a change in the conception of Alexander can be detected. Alongside the Paris drawing of the 'Submarine Voyage' ascribed to Raphael, which reveals an interest in the technical challenges of the venture without parallel in previous representations of it, there are the cycles of the 'Nine Worthies', embodying the core values and ideals of the medieval courtly tradition *par excellence*, yet including an Alexander who, though mixed up among mythical and historical figures alike and still the fabled conqueror of the legend (as explicitly stated in the *titulus* accompanying his figure in the La Manta castle), has

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<sup>3</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, esp. p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> See Morosini, 'The Alexander Romance in Italy', and ead. "Perché Alessandro cercò molti strani paesi".

also regained his rightful historical place among the Heathens. These fifteenth-century artworks are located on the cusp of legend and history, for they present Alexander both as a hero belonging to a distant past (and yet anachronistically wearing contemporary dress) and as an ideal model for the present: at La Manta, the series of *Preux* and *Preuses* has been identified as a portrait gallery of the Saluzzo family, with Alexander standing for Thomas III of Saluzzo, father of Valerano, who commissioned the cycle.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the theme of the ‘Nine Worthies’, which flourished north of the Alps in the fourteenth century, is not documented in Italy until the fifteenth century, when the old chivalric canon was being replaced by the new humanist fashion for *Uomini famosi*, largely made up of figures from the history of Rome. And the first example of this renewal is found in the Palazzo Trinci of Foligno, where a visual *continuum* was created between the series of ‘Nine Worthies’ in the corridor and the Roman rulers and emperors painted in the ‘Sala degli Imperatori’.

The fifteenth century is the centre of my dissertation, since it was then that the humanist recovery of the historical sources on Alexander took place. This resulted, as we have seen, in the creation of a new Alexander iconography, which began to appear in the visual arts around 1450, running in parallel with the surviving legendary imagery until the end of the century. Among the historical sources on Alexander, Curtius Rufus and Justin were the first to become available, followed by Plutarch and Arrian, then finally Diodorus Siculus. Establishing this chronology was crucial, not least because it has often been dealt with in a confusing manner – if it is taken into consideration at all – in the scholarly literature on particular Renaissance artworks representing Alexander. By examining how these ancient sources were used by humanists in their writings, I have been able to gain a

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<sup>6</sup> The same happened in the Doria tapestries discussed in Chapter 3, where Charles the Bold of Burgundy is disguised as Alexander, as noted as early as 1913 by Warburg, ‘Airship and Submarine’, p. 336.

better understanding of how and why the received view of Alexander changed so dramatically in the transition from legend to history. A telling example is the recovery of the *Historiae Alexandri Magni* of Curtius Rufus, which was of great importance for Petrarch and the first generation of humanists. In this account, Alexander was presented as an ambiguous figure, commendable for his virtues but contemptible for his crimes; and this depiction, I believe, was a key factor in shaping the humanist conception of Alexander, whose name is often mentioned in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature in both positive and negative terms.

In order to explore how the new historical conception of Alexander developed, I selected a number of prominent humanist authors who seemed most relevant for my purposes, focusing on the way in which they presented Alexander and discussed the events in his life. What has emerged is that, in the first half of the fifteenth century, Curtius Rufus and Justin were generally regarded as the most trustworthy authorities on Alexander and were recommended to young boys in humanist educational treatises. Of particular note in this context are Pier Candido Decembrio, who in 1438 made the first vernacular translation of Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, and his brother Angelo, whose *De politia litteraria* of around 1450 provides a remarkable insight into the literary and iconographic representation of Alexander at the time, one which illuminates the central issue of my research: the transition from the legendary to the historical tradition. In a famous passage, Angelo not only testifies to the continuing popularity in the Italian courts of his day of Northern European tapestries illustrating the marvellous stories of Alexander from the medieval *Romance*; but he also attacks the legendary tradition on which those luxurious artworks depended by invoking the authority of Curtius Rufus. Pier Paolo Vergerio, however, recommended Arrian, whose *Anabasis* he translated into Latin, as the most reliable source on Alexander to have survived from antiquity. Whichever ancient historian was claimed to be the most



authoritative, it is clear that the humanist reassessment of Alexander brought about a heightened awareness of the difference between reliable and unreliable sources – between legend and history or, to use the terms employed by humanists, between *fabula* and *historia*. Even before the fifteenth century, Petrarch and Boccaccio, despite their different approaches to Alexander, made use of Justin's *Epitoma* and Curtius Rufus's *Historiae Alexandri Magni* to support their interpretations; and they both rejected the legendary tradition of the Middle Ages, which in the case of Petrarch amounted to passing it over in eloquent silence.

The fourth chapter, the longest in the dissertation, is devoted to the impact this reassessment had on the iconographic tradition, including works which have often been overlooked or inadequately dealt with in the scholarly literature. Reshaped in accordance with the newly available textual sources and the material evidence from antiquity which was continually being unearthed, eagerly collected and copied, the image of Alexander in the fifteenth century appeared in a number of artworks which were very different in nature and which, for the sake of my argument, I grouped into three categories:

1. Portrait heads cast from the numismatic effigies of Alexander (or believed to be of him), which were included in the decoration of manuscripts and reproduced in plaquettes, sculptures and reliefs. Employed in homage to the antiquarian taste of Quattrocento Italy, they contributed to the creation of an *all'antica* portrait of Alexander which, by the sixteenth century, turned into a recognisable, standardised portrait, thought to reflect the true likeness of Alexander.

2. Depictions of Alexander as part of the 'Uomini famosi' cycles, the humanist canon inspired by Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, which presented a selection of famous and virtuous men and which eventually replaced the series of 'Nine Worthies'. That only a limited number of these cycles included Alexander was due, as I explained, to

the focus of these cycles on figures from the history of Rome. Nevertheless, the six cycles with Alexander which I was able to identify – both extant and lost, but documented – revealed the variety of meanings attributed to Alexander in these representations and the originality of at least some of them (most notably, the cycle in the Corte Ducale of Palazzo dell’Arengo in Milan, devised by Francesco Filelfo).

3. Episodes from Alexander’s life which drew on historical sources rather than medieval legends. These are first detected in a group of *cassone* panels of around 1450, arguably produced in the Florentine workshop of Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Buono Giamberti. In addition to the one piece, today in the British Museum, which is usually discussed in the relevant literature on Alexander,<sup>7</sup> I have traced four other panels showing an almost identical arrangement, both in compositional and iconographic terms: the subject represented in all of these works is the ‘Meeting of Alexander and the Family of Darius’, which took place after the Battle of Issus, also illustrated in the panels. By comparing visual and written sources and by relying on the chronology of the recovery of ancient texts established in the previous chapter, I have been able to demonstrate conclusively that the literary source on which these panels, and the visual tradition that developed from them, depended was Curtius Rufus’s *Historiae Alexandri Magni*.

While in the fifteenth century the historical Alexander entered the domestic space of the Renaissance household in the form of *cassone* panels illustrating brand new episodes from his life, in the sixteenth century these stories spread to great halls and ceremonial spaces, appearing in frescoes on walls and ceilings on a much larger scale, which was unprecedented in the previous artistic tradition. In the course of the Cinquecento, this iconographic repertoire not only increased in size but was also consolidated, with ‘Rooms of Alexander’ displaying his deeds remaining fashionable for at least three centuries both in Italy and throughout

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, p. 379.

Europe. From the over thirty historically grounded episodes which I have found in sixteenth-century Italian art, I examined in detail only five, which were either very popular ('The Meeting with the Family of Darius', 'The Marriage of Alexander and Roxane' and 'Alexander, Apelles and Campaspe') or else helped me to clarify the relationship in this period between legend and history ('The Taming of Bucephalus' and 'The Birth of Alexander'). By the 1560s, when the time line of my dissertation ends, all the historical episodes contributing to the Renaissance iconography of Alexander had appeared. If I had to choose one painting to mark the culmination of my project it would be Paolo Veronese's *Meeting with the Family of Darius*, completed by 1567, now in the National Gallery in London, and one of the most beautiful and influential Alexander painting of the Renaissance.

Whereas the emergence of the Renaissance iconography of Alexander in the Quattrocento depended largely on the account of Curtius Rufus, from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century onwards, it was Plutarch's representation of Alexander which became dominant, overshadowing that of Curtius Rufus. The impact of Arrian on the visual tradition was quite limited, in any case before the end of the sixteenth century, while the recovery of the relevant parts of Diodorus Siculus's history came too late to influence Cinquecento Italian art.

Since Johann Gustav Droysen undertook the first modern scholarly studies of Alexander in 1833,<sup>8</sup> a vast and ever-growing bibliography has grown up around him. While the investigation of Alexander the man and the transmission of his myth in antiquity has always attracted scholarly attention, studies of the reception of the myth in the Persian and Eastern traditions have greatly increased over the last twenty years. As for the Western tradition, with which this dissertation is concerned, in contrast to the continuous appeal of the medieval legend, which is still the most extensively tilled field, the reception of the Alexander myth in the

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<sup>8</sup> J. G. Droysen, *Geschichte Alexanders des Grossen*, Berlin 1833 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1877).

Renaissance, the early modern period and the modern era, as noted by Mario Casari in 2012, is a 'huge mosaic, yet to be explored'.<sup>9</sup> I hope that my dissertation has added some tesserae to this mosaic, which will help scholars in the future to visualise the larger picture.

By discussing the two parallel and often overlapping iconographic traditions of the legendary and historical Alexander, my goal was to cast an original light on a vast and varied figurative repertoire, which, despite being for the most part well known to art historians, has often been perceived as fragmentary – a succession of particular objects treated individually and in isolation from each other. In addition to these familiar works, I have uncovered some unknown or little-known pieces, most notably, the Alexander fresco in the Castle of Quart in the Val d'Aosta and the illustrated Curtius Rufus manuscript in Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, MS I.VII.23. By taking into consideration a large number of wide-ranging artworks and associating them with the written sources on which they relied, I have been able to place the turning point in the visual tradition in around 1450, when the historically based themes of Alexander, and in particular the 'Meeting with the Family of Darius', first appear. As I have tried to show, this sea change in the tradition from legend to history took place first in Italy and from there spread to the rest of Europe. It was the result not merely of the recovery of the ancient historians of Alexander, but also of the critical approach of humanists towards these texts. We know, for instance, that the Greek historical texts about Alexander were well known at Byzantium and in the East alongside the *Romance*, and yet there seems to have been no sense of the opposition between legend and history. Writing to Cardinal Bessarion from Crete on 6 July 1453, Isidore of Kiev describes a scene which is also recorded by several Western witnesses: the enemy of Christianity and conqueror of

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<sup>9</sup> M. Casari, [review of *Alessandro Magno in età moderna*, ed. F. Biasutti and A. Coppola, Padua 2009], *Rivista di filosofia*, 104, 2012, pp. 145-8, at p. 148: 'Un mosaico enorme, ancora tutto da esplorare.'

Constantinople, Mehmed II, took delight in having the account of Alexander's life read to him every day 'in Arabic, in Greek and in Latin'.<sup>10</sup> Even though modern scholars have questioned Mehmed's knowledge of Greek and Latin, attempts have been made to identify these lives. The Greek text was certainly the *Anabasis* of Arrian, which was in Mehmed's library; the Arabic account was no doubt one of the Persian epic poems derived from the Pseudo-Callisthenes, most likely Amhedî's *Iskandarnama*;<sup>11</sup> as for the Latin text, I would suggest the name of Curtius Rufus, though it could well have been one of the many Latin versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes.

As I have emphasised throughout this dissertation, the oblivion into which the medieval legend fell after the humanist reassessment of Alexander was permanent and definitive – though in the mid-nineteenth century, scholars began to study the transmission of the myth of Alexander.<sup>12</sup> That the legend was well and truly dead by around 1580 is suggested by some anonymous verses accompanying a fresco portrait of Alexander in the Palazzo del Giardino at Sabbioneta: 'With the help of Mars, [Alexander] subdued both the sea and the earth to his dominion, and he would have conquered the heavens, if only that were possible'.<sup>13</sup> In the legendary tradition which had died out with the rise of humanism, Alexander did, of course, ascend to the sky with griffins and conquer the heavens; but in the late Cinquecento,

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<sup>10</sup> For the Latin text of the letter, accompanied by an Italian translation, further commentary and bibliography, see *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, ed. A. Pertusi, 2 vols, Milan 1976, I: *Le testimonianze dei contemporanei*, pp. 64-81 and 381-2.

<sup>11</sup> See F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, Princeton NJ 1978, pp. 499-500.

<sup>12</sup> See Centanni, 'Alexander the Great', pp. 30-1.

<sup>13</sup> The Latin verses read: 'Hic maris et terre imperium sibi Marte subegit / raptum coelum si licuisset erat', transcribed in M. Ruina, 'La Sala di Alessandro Magno e Giulio Cesare', in *Dei ed eroi nel Palazzo Giardino di Sabbioneta: miti e allegorie per un principe umanista*, ed. L. Ventura, Rome 2008, pp. 85-97, at p. 94.

no one apparently recalled this magnificent adventure. The memory of Alexander the ‘airman’, as David Ross dubbed him,<sup>14</sup> had completely faded by this time.

There is definitely scope for expanding the investigation which I have carried out in this dissertation. One important and so far unanswered question concerns the end of the Renaissance conception of Alexander, the emergence and consolidation of which I have examined. When we think of Alexander today, we have in mind a very different character from the virtuous prince celebrated throughout the sixteenth century as a model for emulation: our Alexander is, among other things, a war leader, a commander, an unsurpassed military strategist. When did this new conception replace the view of Alexander which had developed in the Renaissance? It is usually assumed that the *imitatio Alexandri* pursued by Napoleon Bonaparte throughout his life, and especially during his years in power, marked an important change in the tradition and eventually led to the modern idea of Alexander. Napoleon’s admiration for Alexander as an exceptionally successful general has also left iconographic traces such as the painting by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Napoleon I on His Imperial Throne* (1806, Paris, Hôtel des Invalides, Musée de l’Armée), modelled on a fresco of Alexander/Zeus from the House of the Vettii in Pompeii, or the so-called ‘Table of the Great Commanders’, now in the Royal Collections but made for Napoleon in 1806-12, with the top decorated with portraits of ancient commanders, painted in imitation of cameos: at the centre is the (horned) profile of Alexander. There is surely, however, more to the story than this. What part, for instance, might Arrian’s *Anabasis*, regarded as the most accurate ancient source on Alexander’s expedition to Asia, have played in shaping the view of Napoleon, given his profound interest in military strategy and tactics? The research methods which I have adopted in this dissertation, especially

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 1, note 29.

the combined study of both textual and visual evidence, could be profitably applied to this later period, while additional sources (for example, the school textbooks which help to create the ‘generally accepted view’ of Alexander) could also be exploited. The potential interest of such a study was mentioned some years ago by Emmanuèle Baumgartner;<sup>15</sup> maybe now is the time to undertake it.

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<sup>15</sup> E. Baumgartner, ‘La fortuna di Alessandro nei testi francesi medievali del secolo XII e l’esotismo del *Roman d’Alexandre*’, in *Le Roman d’Alexandre: riproduzione del ms. Venezia, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Correr 1493*, ed. R. Benedetti, Tricesimo 1998, pp. 9-28, at p. 17: ‘Alessandro non figura o non figura più nell’elenco dei nostri grandi miti letterari, e sarebbe certo interessante vedere quando e come la dimensione politica e ideologica del conquistatore ha in modo definitivo soppiantato la dimensione romanzesca.’ Baumgartner, however, leaves out the Renaissance view of Alexander at the heart of this dissertation, apparently believing that the medieval Alexander of legend and romance was supplanted by the modern conception with nothing intervening between them.

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