



URN:NBN:NL:UI:10-1-114276 - Publisher: Igitur publishing
Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License
Anno 28, 2013 / Fascicolo 2 - Website: www.rivista-incontri.nl

Excelsa monarchia

Alexander the Great in Italian Narrative Poems (14th-16th centuries)

Michele Campopiano

Introduction

Alexander the Great is one of the most popular figures in medieval literature. Several texts in different medieval literatures have focused on the character of the Macedonian conqueror. These texts often originate from the tradition of the Greek Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes, one version of which was translated into Latin by the Neapolitan archpresbyter Leo in the tenth century. From this translation three narratives were derived, which are known as *Historia de preliis* J1 (11th century), J2 (beginning of the 12th century), and J3 (1186-1234).¹ Scholars have dedicated little attention to the success of the figure of Alexander the Great in medieval and Renaissance Italy.² However, numerous prose texts can be found in Italy that are essentially adaptations of the *Historia de preliis*,³ as well as four heroic poems which range in origin from the middle of the fourteenth century to the second half of the sixteenth century. Despite being connected to different periods and contexts, these texts all share a common feature: they are all redacted in *ottava rima*.

The *ottava* is a strophe of eight lines, the first six of which are couplets in *rima alternata* (alternate rhyme), with the last two in *rima baciata* (a rhyming couplet), thus following the pattern ABABABCC. This metrical scheme became very common in narrative poetry, also due to the fact that the last two lines in *rima baciata* give a sense

¹ The research for this paper was made possible by the project 'La création d'un mythe d'Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures européennes (XIe siècle-début XVIe siècle)', funded by the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche and directed by Prof. C. Gaullier-Bougassas (University of Lille 3). I also would like to thank Dr. Henry Bainton for his suggestions. See: G. Cary, *The medieval Alexander*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1956; D. Ross, *Alexander historiatus. A guide to medieval illustrated Alexander literature*, London, University of London, 1963; M. Liborio (ed.), *Alessandro nel Medioevo Occidentale*, Milan, Mondadori, 1997; P. Rinoldi, (2008), 'La circolazione della materia "alessandrina" in Italia nel Medioevo (coordinate introduttive)', *Quaderni di studi indo-mediterranei*, I (2008), pp. 11-50; M. Campopiano, 'Parcours de la légende d'Alexandre en Italie. Réflexions sur la réception italienne de l'Historia de Preliis, recensio J2 (XIIe-XVe siècles)' in: C. Gaullier-Bougassas (ed.), *L'historiographie médiévale d'Alexandre le Grand*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2011, pp. 65-83 (Alexander Redivivus, 1).

² A crucial reference is still J. Storost, *Studien zur Alexandersage in der älteren italienischen Literatur*, Halle, 1935. Other scholars are now dedicating attention to this topic, including C. Bologna, G. Borriero, M. Campopiano, C. M. Leone, Marco Milani, I. Zamuner.

³ Campopiano, 'Parcours de la légende', cit.

of completeness and a pause in the rhythm of narration, allowing the author to stress individual episodes of the narrative. It has been suggested that this scheme is a creation of Boccaccio himself, as he used it in works including *Filostrato*, *Teseida* and *Ninfale fiesolano*.⁴ The *ottava* is the metrical scheme for *cantari*, which are narratives in poetry originally recited in public spaces, such as at fairs or similar events.⁵ The *ottava* is also the metrical scheme adopted by most of the great heroic poems of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as *Morgante*, *Orlando Innamorato*, *Orlando Furioso*, and *Gerusalemme liberata*. The *ottava* proved to be a flexible tool for writing narratives in verses within different intellectual contexts and even within different performance practices: texts in *ottave* could also be read aloud in small groups or silently by individuals. The texts in *ottave* that focused on Alexander the Great were also conceived for and within different intellectual contexts which, as it will become clear below, expressed very different ideological portraits of the Macedonian monarch.

The *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* by Scolari

The *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* is the only heroic poem focused on Alexander the Great written in fourteenth-century Italy. The poem has been transmitted in a single manuscript written in semi-gothic script.⁶ It is essentially based on the *Historia Alexandri Magni*, an epic poem based on the *Historia de preliis* J3 by Quilichinus de Spoleto, a poet linked to the court of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. The poem was probably written in Veneto, and completed in 1355 in Treviso, near Treviso, by Domenico Scolari, who belonged to a Florentine family that migrated to the region. This is affirmed in the last *ottava* of the poem, and confirmed, according to Concetta Meri Leone, by a linguistic analysis of the text, which establishes that it is a text from the Veneto whose language contains Tuscan influences.⁷ The *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* is therefore one of the oldest poems to be written in *ottave* on an epic or heroic subject, being almost contemporary to Boccaccio's works or to an early *cantare* like *Fiorio e Biancifiore*.

Scolari's text cannot be seen as a *cantare*, although it shares other aspects of the *cantari* in addition to the use of the *ottava*, such as the invocation of the divinity at the beginning and the reference to an authoritative written source. However, it omits those references to oral performance that characterize the *cantari*, such as the call for the audience's attention.⁸ Rather, this text should be seen as written for a learned public, probably for individual reading. This is confirmed by the characteristics of the manuscript – an illuminated parchment codex written in an elegant semi-gothic script with pen-flourished initials. The text also includes the Latin verses supposedly engraved

⁴ P. Beltrami, *La metrica italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991, pp. 92-93; D. Del Corno Branca, *L'Orlando furioso e il romanzo cavalleresco medievale*, Firenze, Olschki, 1973; M. Tavoni, *Il Quattrocento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992, pp. 105-106; F. Bruni, *L'Italiano letterario nella storia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007 (2nd edition), pp. 125-126.

⁵ M. Picone & L. Rubini (eds.), *Il cantare italiano fra folklore e letteratura. Atti del convegno internazionale di Zurigo (Landmuseum, 23-25 giugno 2005)*, Firenze, Olschki, 2007.

⁶ Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms II.II. 30.

⁷ M.C. Leone, 'La trecentesca *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* di Domenico Scolari', in: *Il cantare italiano fra folklore e letteratura.*, cit., pp. 65-79, pp. 69-74. Concetta Meri Leone has prepared a critical edition of the text, soon to be published.

⁸ *Idem*, pp. 76-77.

on the tomb of Alexander, and his genealogy in Latin.⁹ The political background of the author may have directly influenced his ideological representation of Alexander the Great. The Scolari family had been exiled from Florence with other White Guelph families in 1302 by the Black Guelph party, the latter party being in Florence the one closest to the papacy and its French allies. In 1355 Emperor Charles IV helped members of the Scolari family, such as Ciupo degli Scolari, to reacquire the properties that they had lost in Florence as a result of their exile.¹⁰ In his manuscript, Scolari follows his source, Quilichinus, in stressing the role of the empire in the history of mankind and in the divine plan. The empire of Alexander is placed within the line of succession of the four empires universally present in history: ‘furono nel mondo quatro gran monarcha/ io dicho regni inanzi che la fe/ fosse de Christo data per scritto’.¹¹ With Alexander begins the domination of the Greeks, to whom the Romans also submitted.¹² The Romans had ‘gli quori alti e superbi’.¹³ The attention given to the submission of the Romans stresses the fact that the Universal Monarchy plays a role in and of itself, independent from the creation of a Roman Empire or a specific Roman ‘mission’ in the history of mankind. This differs deeply from the perspective of the most illustrious of the White Guelph exiles, Dante Alighieri, who saw Alexander more as a competitor of the Romans in the foundation of a Universal Monarchy rather than as their predecessor. This vision stresses the independence of the role of the Universal Monarchy from the role of the Romans and it is therefore connected with the idea of the *translatio imperii*, which shows how the authority of the Roman Empire was transmitted to the Germanic emperors.¹⁴

The divine role of Universal Monarchy is confirmed by the peculiar relationship which Alexander establishes with God. This is evident in the episode on the arrival of Alexander in Jerusalem: Scolari affirms that Alexander worships the God of the Universe (*Dio de l’Universo*) in the Temple of Jerusalem.¹⁵ It is also evident after the defeat of Darius and the ascent of Alexander to the throne of the Persians. Alexander says that divine power (*potenzia divina*) has elevated him to this position.¹⁶ The Macedonian, who embodies the authority of the Universal monarchy, also confirms that his mission is motivated by the necessity to re-establish peace and justice, which fits very well with the ideology of the pro-imperial party in Italy: ‘Volem che faciam giusticia a chacun/ e che ve tegnian tutti in ferma pace/ razione diritta rendano a ognuno/ oservi gli statuti’.¹⁷ The mystical role of the Monarchy is stressed by the death of Alexander. The emperor commands that his body shall be embalmed to protect it from corruption: his corpse is then placed in a golden sarcophagus.¹⁸ He lived for 32 years and 7 months, which could remind the reader of the death of Christ, thereby strengthening the

⁹ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale II.II.30, ff. 1 r and 7 r. I will refer to the numeration in the manuscript.

¹⁰ Leone, ‘La trecentesca Istoria’, cit., p. 69.

¹¹ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.II.30, f. 7 r; See Quilichinus: ‘Post Abrahe legem, qua circumcisis habetur/ Quattuor in mundo regna fuisse ferunt’; Quilichinus de Spoleto, *Historia Alexandri Magni*, W. Kirsch (ed.), Skopje, Univerzitetaska Pecatnica, 1971, Prohemium, vv. 1-2.

¹² Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.II.30, f. 16 v.

¹³ *Idem*.

¹⁴ W. Goetz, *Translatio Imperii. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Geschichtsdenkens und der politischen Theorien im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1958.

¹⁵ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.II.30, f. 18 r.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, f. 45 v.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, f. 46 r.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, II.II.30, f. 92 r-v.

mystical aspect of his life.¹⁹

Alexandreida in Rima

The *Alexandreida in Rima* is another poem in *ottave* that is focused on Alexander. Linguistic analysis shows that the text has its origins in central Italy, possibly Umbria.²⁰ The work was probably written in the first half of the fifteenth century and it enjoyed considerable diffusion until the beginning of the eighteenth century: between 1512 and 1712 it was printed at least 15 or so times.²¹ It is essentially based on one J3 version of the *Historia de preliis*, but includes many episodes that could have been derived from other sources.²² Interestingly enough, the author of the *Alexandreida in Rima* says that he composed his poem from the adaptation of a Latin text (*vulgarizando el latino del doctore*).²³ However, this idea can be interpreted as a trope deployed to strengthen the veracity of his narrative: it must be understood in the general framework of the characteristics of the genre of *cantari*, which usually refer to a supposed (but mostly non-existent) Latin source for their work. The *Alexandreida* often makes reference to its source, with expressions such as, ‘se l’autore non mente’ and ‘come il libro spande’.²⁴ The links with this genre are also demonstrated by other elements: predominantly the use of the *ottave*, but also the invocations to the saints, to God and to the Virgin Mary that recur in the poem (*Omnipotente dio e la sua matre*).²⁵ It also makes several references to oral performance throughout the text by appealing to its *auditori*. The author also refers to his work as to a *cantare* ‘questo cantar mio’.²⁶ Like other *cantari*, this text was probably intended to be performed orally in public spaces, in order to reach a broad audience.²⁷

The representation of Alexander in the text is affected by its intended circulation among a wider audience, which probably included the lower classes. In the first *Canto* of the *Alexandreida*, the author says that he had never found such a virtuous king to whom to dedicate a poem.²⁸ Alexander reveals his virtues in the different episodes of the poem. After his victory against Darius, Alexander discovers some people who have been maimed and imprisoned in a tower by Darius. The Macedonian reveals his compassion in his treatment of them: ‘de la pietade prese a lachrymare. / Poi gli fece donare oro e argento/ tanto che ogniuno ricco podia stare’.²⁹ Alexander also shows how righteous he is in ruling the Persian Empire after his conquest: he establishes governors in all the provinces and castles in order to re-establish justice for all, both the magnates and the poor (*a grandi e a minori*).³⁰

¹⁹ *Ivi*, f. 93 r.

²⁰ A. Wilson Tordi, *Alexandreida in Rima: the life and deeds of Alexander the Great in an anonymous Italian Renaissance poem*, New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, pp. 26-28. About the possible identification of the poet with the author of a reworking of the *Fatti d’Enea*, see pp. 24-26.

²¹ *Ivi*, pp. 29-30.

²² For this episode (Canto III, *ottave* 72-83): *Ivi*, pp. 100-103.

²³ *Ivi*, p. 302.

²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 37.

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 38.

²⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 29-30.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 38.

²⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 168-169.

³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 178. On this topic, see also; C. Bologna, ‘La generosità cavalleresca di Alessandro Magno’, *L’immagine riflessa*, 12 (1989), pp. 367-404

This seems to suggest a ‘demagogic’ monarch who was able to re-establish justice for all social classes: this would suit the feelings of the wide-ranging audiences of the *cantare*. Alexander is even revealed as having some similarities with popular saints. After his death, Ptolemy covered his body with an unguent, ensuring that his corpse remained intact.³¹ An example of the incorruptibility of a saint’s body is that of Saint Ubald, bishop of Gubbio, who is preserved in that city, and the audience is reminded of this at the beginning of the *Alexandreida*. Given this reference in the *Alexandreida*, it is very possible that the text originated in this city.³² The ideological model it represents fits the mutating political situation in Italy between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the ancient city-republics were being replaced by principalities that increasingly marginalized ‘popular’ (although usually limited to upper and middle classes) participation in favour of policymaking. Hopes for justice and political change in general had to be put in the hands of a possibly ‘righteous’ prince.

The *Triumpho Magno*

We have to wait another hundred years to find a new heroic poem in *ottave* that is focused on Alexander the Great: the *Triumpho Magno* by Domenico Falugio, published in 1521.³³ Falugio was a Tuscan poet, originally from Incisa-Val d’Arno, who was crowned *poeta laureato* by Pope Leo X and Pietro Bembo in recognition of his poem about the Macedonian.³⁴ In contrast to Scolari’s poem and to the *Alexandreida*, the material of which goes back to the Romanesque matter of the Greek Alexander Romance, Falugio essentially based his work on that of Quintus Curtius Rufus, a Roman historian who had increasingly been causing a stir in humanistic circles since Petrarch.³⁵ However, Falugio also referred to other sources. He particularly complained about the fact that Curtius Rufus’s work had reached him incomplete and that it lacked any information about the birth of Alexander.³⁶ Falugio solves the problem by going back to the most well-known materials on Alexander the Great, those which had their origins in the Greek Alexander Romance, particularly the *Historia de preliis*. This provided the writer with the chance to insert fantastical and wonderful elements into the work, in particular attributing the paternity of Alexander to Nectanebo, the last Pharaoh to whom necromantic powers were attributed: ‘Et non fu mai dal ponente al levanter/ Homo si divo che costui il passava/ Philosopho et astrologo prestante’.³⁷ Grotesque and fantastical elements permeate the poem, as we can see in the description of the troops that help Darius in his final war against the Macedonian. Here, for example, are the ranks of the Khan of Tartary (*Can de Tarteria*):

Et have seco dieci mila almeno
 Ch’aven un ochio nel mezo del pecto
 Et hanno can silvestri senza freno
 Et cantan dì et nocte per dispecto
 Pirreo mi dice nel suo canto ameno

³¹ Wilson Tordi, *Alexandreida in Rima*, cit., p. 300.

³² *Ivi*, p. 1.

³³ D. Falugio, *Triumpho Magno*, Impressum Romae per Marcellum Silber dictus Franck, 1521. A modern edition and commentary of this work will be soon provided by our research team.

³⁴ Storost, *Studien*, cit., pp. 231-234.

³⁵ E. Fenzi, *Saggi Petrarqueschi*, Fiesole, Cadmo, 2003, pp. 409-410.

³⁶ Falugio, *Triumpho magno*, cit., f. A 2 r.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

Che ve n'era anco con un piè soletto
Et come el grillo van saltabecando
Et l'un addosso all'altro aggraticciando.³⁸

The presence of these fantastical and grotesque elements and the use of the *ottava* link the text with poems on chivalric matter from late medieval and Renaissance Italy, such as the famous *Morgante* of Luigi Pulci, the *Orlando innamorato* by Boiardo and the *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto. With many of these texts (and with the already mentioned *cantari*) the *Triumpho Magno* shares another feature, the supposed use of an historical source: for example, Boiardo says he uses the *vera istoria di Turpin*, hidden by Turpin himself,³⁹ while Falugio mentions *Pirreo*, a fictional source, which could be the same Pirreo as mentioned as a Macedonian officer in the text.⁴⁰ There are also several mentions of characters that belonged to the *matière de France*, the legends connected to Charlemagne and his paladins: Nectanebo is compared to Malagigi, a warrior sorcerer mentioned in the *Orlando Innamorato*, the *Orlando Furioso* and the *Morgante*.⁴¹ As in these poems, the narrative is fragmented into a series of adventurous and fantastic episodes. The grotesque and fantastic elements are particularly reminiscent of the *Morgante* by Pulci. A striking example of this is the meeting of Alexander with the giant Ulivante in the Arborea forest (an episode which is not in the Alexander Romance and, of course, is not in Curtius Rufus's history). The giant is defeated by the Macedonian and becomes his faithful friend and ally,⁴² just as Morgante, a central figure in Pulci's poem, is converted by Roland and becomes his devoted companion: the comparison between the two giants is evoked by the author himself, who says that Ulivante was buried by Alexandre in a tomb where Roland put Morgante.⁴³

Therefore, the *Triumpho Magno* appears to be related to a genre of poems in *ottave* which, rather than circulating in the hands of the *canterini* to be performed for wide-ranging audiences, were created for the court of late medieval and Renaissance Italy, where such poems constituted both an object of *divertissement* and also a representation of the aristocratic ideals of courtesy that were relevant then. These poems revive aspects and forms of the traditions of the *cantari*, particularly the use of the *ottava*, but they are written for a more learned and socially select audience.⁴⁴ The *Orlando Innamorato* was written for the Estensi court and the *Morgante* for the Medici one. Falugio dedicates his work to Ippolito de' Medici. Its circulation within the circles of the Medici papacy can be connected to the ideological representation of the Macedonian. From the first *ottava*, Falugio presents Alexander as a model monarch and military leader with *virtù*, *alta excellentia*, *gloria*, an *excelsa monarchia*, *somma prudentia* and *peritia*.⁴⁵ Falugio suggests that a lord loved by his subjects must possess *virtù*, *prudenza et gentileza*⁴⁶ and Alexander was indeed noble, wise and prudent.⁴⁷

³⁸ *Ivi*, f. G 1 r.

³⁹ M. M. Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, 2 Voll., R. Brusciagli (ed.), Torino, Giulio Einaudi, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Storost, *Studien*, cit., p. 237.

⁴¹ Falugio, *Triumpho magno*, cit., f. A 4 r.

⁴² *Ivi*, f. C 3 r-C 4 v.

⁴³ *Ivi*, f. R 2 r.

⁴⁴ M. Beer, *Romanzi di cavalleria. Il Furioso e il romanzo italiano del primo cinquecento*, Bulzoni, Roma, 1987; S. Jossa, *La fondazione di un genere: il poema eroico tra Ariosto e Tasso*, Roma, Carocci, 2002, pp. 67-104.

⁴⁵ Falugio, *Triumpho Magno*, cit., f. A 2 r.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, f. B 2 r.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, f. C 4 r.

Falugio stresses Alexander's desire for universal power, which is represented by a griffon who keeps in his claws a T-O *mappa mundi* painted in his tent.⁴⁸ Rather than being corrupted by the Orient, as has been stressed by several authors (notably Petrarch), Alexander becomes its ruler. The virtues of Alexander conflict with the grotesque representation of the barbarian hordes who fight on the side of Darius.⁴⁹ The ideological representation of Alexander therefore has a dual role: on the one hand to stress the virtues of good government by a righteous prince – relevant in a work written by a Tuscan writer for a Medici cardinal under the auspices of a Medici pope. On the other hand, the emphasis on the clash with the Orient could possibly, especially in papal Rome, evoke thoughts of the rising challenge of the Ottoman Empire. Interestingly enough, a work published some years later (1528) by another great writer linked to the papal court, Baldassare Castiglione, stressed the parallel between a possible crusade against the Muslim 'danger' and the conquests of Alexander, which were considered to bring civilization to a barbarian people.⁵⁰

The anonymous sixteenth-century Alexander poem

Another remarkable work which centres on the deeds of the Macedonian is an anonymous poem transmitted in the manuscript San Martino ai Monti 10 at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome. Through an analysis of the watermarks we can see that the manuscript probably dates to the 1560s or 1570s.⁵¹ The language does not show evident Roman influence: rather, it is definitely based on classic Italian lyric examples of Tuscan ascendancy, according to the models that also imposed themselves on the production of epics in the sixteenth century.⁵² We can view the recommendations of Pietro Bembo in the *Prose della volgar lingua*, published in 1525, as following the models of the *Trecento*, in particular Petrarch for poetry and Boccaccio for prose.⁵³ The poem, in *ottave* and divided into *canti*, has attracted little attention from the historians of literature.⁵⁴ The main historical source for this poem is Quintus Curtius Rufus, but the poem actually has a very weak relationship with this text, limited to the borrowing of a few names and main events, such as the siege of Tyros, which is central to the poem.

Compared to Falugio's work, this poem should be seen as another point in the evolution of the heroic poems of Renaissance Italy, where the heritage of the medieval chivalric romances encounters renewed influence from the ancient epic. This evolution is theorized by the literati of the time. In his *Discorsi*, Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio, a functionary of the Estensi Court, compares the Greek and Roman singing of the deeds of heroes at their banquets with the collective reading of chivalric poems in the Italian courts.⁵⁵ The sixteenth century saw an increasing difference between the high epic and works of popular consumption, particularly after the publication of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*. Giraldi, for example, criticizes the *Morgante* because it tells 'piuttosto cose da burla'.⁵⁶ This differentiation is evident in the poem of San Martino ai Monti, with its lyric

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ R. Morosini, 'Alexander the Great in Italian Literature of the Middle Ages' in: D. Zuwyra (ed.), *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 329-364.

⁵⁰ B. Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, Torino, Utet, 1981, IV, xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁵¹ We can look, for example, at watermarks in nos. 42381, 42383 42384, of the Piccard archive.

⁵² P. Trovato, *Il primo Cinquecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994, pp. 131-132; Storost, *Studien*, cit., p. 293.

⁵³ P. Bembo, *Prose della Volgar Lingua*, Venezia, G. Tacuino, 1525.

⁵⁴ I am currently preparing a critical edition and commentary of this text, due to be published soon.

⁵⁵ G. B. Giraldi Cinzio, *Discorsi*, 1554, p. 5; see also Jossa, *La fondazione*, cit., pp. 25-65.

⁵⁶ Beer, *Romanzi di Cavalleria*, cit., p. 215.

style and its moderation of the use of fantastic elements, which all show its adherence to the 'high' style of epic.

The character of Alexander is also adapted to the lyric tone of the poem. He falls in love with Palmira, a woman who has 'più che di mortale/ sembianza di bellezze alme, e divine'.⁵⁷ This is also reminiscent of the evolution of chivalric poems in the sixteenth century: in the *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto, Roland falls in love with Angelica and he becomes enraged when she falls in love with the young Saracen Medoro.⁵⁸ In any case, Alexander is very conscious of his political purposes, which also include vengeance. In the speech he makes in the first *canto* he says that his first exploits are the result of blood and long labour (*col sangue, e con sì lunghi affanni*).⁵⁹ His conquests represent a universal mission: 'Già i nostri acquisti l'universo aspetta/ che non corriamo a soggiogarlo in fretta'.⁶⁰ Asia is his enemy (*nemica a noi da primi anni*).⁶¹ This clear perception of a conflict with the 'Orient' evokes the idea of the Ottoman menace in the Mediterranean. It is remarkable, for example, that the poem mentions some characters of Hungarian origins; Hungary had been an historical enemy of the Ottoman expansion (Buda fell to the Turks in 1541).

The fact that Alexander is also portrayed as in love, as we have seen, does not represent a handicap for using him as the model of a good prince. Political and philosophical thought in sixteenth-century Italy emphasized the importance of love as a nexus binding together human society,⁶² as exemplified in the *Asolani* by Bembo and the *Cortegiano* by Castiglione, in which love is called 'dolcissimo vincolo del mondo',⁶³ This school of political thought stresses the sociability of man and the importance of interpersonal relationships in ruling human society.⁶⁴ For this reason, social and political thought also emphasized the importance of manners in human relationships, as in the *Galateo* by della Casa.⁶⁵ This representation of Alexander could, therefore, easily evolve to offer a model for the civilized and well-mannered prince or courtier of the late sixteenth century.

Conclusions

The representations of Alexander in the poems reflect the different contexts of these works: the different discourses of genre in which the *ottava* are used are related to the different ideological perspectives of the works. Scolari adapts a Latin work which inserts the deeds of Alexander the Great into the perspective of universal history according to a pro-imperial ideology which represents the mission of the empire as universal. The *Alexandreida in Rima* depicts Alexander as a prince able to bring justice to all social groups, which is connected to the political developments of Late Medieval Italy when

⁵⁷ Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale San Martino ai Monti 10, fol. 99 v. I will refer to the numeration in the manuscript.

⁵⁸ L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, Torino, Einaudi, 1966, canto XIX; Trovato, *Il primo Cinquecento*, cit., pp. 131-132.

⁵⁹ Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale San Martino ai Monti 10, fol. 6 r.

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, f. 6 r-7 r.

⁶¹ *Ivi*, f. 6 r-v.

⁶² E. Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1994, pp. 146-148.

⁶³ *Il Libro del Cortigiano*, IV, LXX, p. 357.

⁶⁴ A. Villa, *Istruire e rappresentare Isabella d'Este: Il libro de natura de amore di Mario Equicola*, Lucca, Pacini Fazzi, 2006; D. Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁶⁵ Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, cit., pp. 193-196.

the birth of *Signorie* and principalities and the disempowerment of the middle classes took place. Falugio celebrates the figure of the good prince in a society in which the Italian dynasties are assuming a leading role in the development of cultural, and even religious, life. The representation of a conflict between Alexander and the 'Orient' is reminiscent of the papal conflict with the expanding Ottoman Empire. This may explain the continuity of the success of Alexander the Great in Roman milieux, which is confirmed by the anonymous poem in the manuscript at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome.

The figure of Alexander is adapted to different narrative genres based on the use of *ottava*. The narrative nature of these works explains the continuity of the use of the *ottava*, which, as we have seen in our introduction, offers a useful structure for narration. The *ottava* has been shown to be a flexible tool for composing narrative poems for different audiences, in different times and with different performance practices. This gives the *ottava* the possibility of being adapted for different works, and makes it a fundamental tool in narrative poetry throughout centuries of Italian literature. However, despite the dialogue among these different genres, the Italian heroic poems in *ottave* have been shown to have circulated in different intellectual milieux and historical contexts. The figure of Alexander the Great maintains its symbolic capital for different social groups, ranging from the urban patriciates and nobility which supported the pro-imperial faction to the disempowered middle classes which listened to the *cantari*, to the 16th century Renaissance courts. The narrative of the life and deeds of Alexander the Great is also expressed in the same metrical tool, the *ottava*, because of its narrative power. However, the transfer across different groups of producers/consumers of these narratives entails the move across different narrative genres, which respond to the different ideological expectations of these social groups.

Key words

Narrative poems, *ottava rima*, Alexander the Great

Michele Campopiano studied at the University of Pisa and at the Scuola Normale of Pisa under the supervision of Marco Tangheroni and Armando Petrucci. He is currently Lecturer in Medieval Latin Literature at the University of York, United Kingdom. He is a member of the research team 'La création d'un mythe d'Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures européennes (XIe siècle-début XVIe siècle)'. He is also a member of the Centre for Medieval Literature (York-Odense). He is also working with Guy Geltner (University of Amsterdam) on the research project *Cultural Memory and Identity in the Late Middle Ages: the Franciscans of Mount Zion in Jerusalem and the Representation of the Holy Land (1333-1516)* funded by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO).

University of York - Center for Medieval Studies
King's Manor
York, YO1 7EP (UK)
michele.campopiano@york.ac.uk

RIASSUNTO**Excelsa monarchia**

Alessandro Magno nei poemi narrativi italiani (secoli XIV-XVI)

Alessandro Magno, probabilmente la più popolare figura di monarca nell'Europa medievale, è anche la figura centrale di quattro poemi in ottava rima, uno schema metrico usato in Italia dal XIV secolo per la composizione di poemi narrativi. Questi poemi sono basati su fonti diverse, da Quilichino da Spoleto a Curzio Rufo. Questo articolo mostra come gli autori di questi poemi diedero rappresentazioni differenti di un monarca mostrato in ogni caso come esemplare. La figura di Alessandro è adattata a differenti generi narrativi basati sull'ottava, rivolti a un pubblico differente. Differenze di genere si traducono in differenti rappresentazioni ideologiche della figura di Alessandro Magno che è modificata a secondo dei diversi contesti politico-sociali.