CHAPTER TWO

ALEXANDER THE GREAT IN MEDIEVAL HEBREW TRADITIONS

Saskia Dönitz

Of all non-Jewish material that entered Jewish tradition, the story of Alexander the Great more than any other found its way into Hebrew literature. Alexander "as a gentile king and exemplary world conqueror who journeyed to places beyond human imagination"[1] captured the imagination of Jewish authors since Antiquity.

The medieval Jewish Alexander tradition as well as other material in Hebrew literature was translated from Greek (sometimes via Arabic). This translation activity began in Late Antiquity and continued to flourish during the Middle Ages.[2] Narratives and texts of philosophy, science, medicine, astrology, and astronomy found their way into the Hebrew tradition by means of translations from Greek and Arabic. Beside the Alexander romance, the *Tales of Sendebar, Kalīlah wa-Dimnah*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the legend concerning the famous king Arthur were translated into Hebrew. These texts were meant to amuse and to instruct in moral matters. Thus, the medieval Hebrew Alexander romance belongs to the genre of medieval Hebrew didactic literature.

The tradition about Alexander in Jewish literature is very old. We find accounts of his life in the Bible, in the works of Flavius Josephus, and in rabbinical literature. In the Book of Daniel 8:20–22 he is not mentioned by name, but his coming into power as well as his decline is foreseen in these verses.[3] Thus, the rule of Alexander was adapted into the concept of the four empires in the Danielic vision. Alexander the Great became part of God's plan for the salvation of the Jewish people.

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[1] W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance According to MS London, Jews' College no. 145* (Louvain, 1992), p. 12.

[2] See M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893; reprint Gratz, 1956).

[3] See also Dan 8:5 and 11:4.

A clearly negative view of the Greek ruler is expressed in the First Book of Maccabees: "Alexander of Macedon, the son of Philip, marched from the Land of Kittim, defeated Darius, King of Persia and Media, and seized his throne, being already King of Greece. In the course of many campaigns he captured fortified towns, slaughtered kings, traversed the earth to its remotest bounds, and plundered innumerable nations. When at last the world lay quiet under his rule, his pride knew no limits" (I Macc 1:1–3).

This is the beginning of the First Book of Maccabees, which tells the story of the Jewish rebellion against the wicked Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who tried to eliminate the Jewish religion. Already in the Book of Daniel there are parallels in the description of Alexander and Antiochus.[4] Thus, a direct line is drawn from Alexander to Antiochus, and Greek rule is clearly seen as hostile to the Jews. Similar negative views on Alexander are found in the Sibylline Oracles (3:381–392; 4: 88–94). He is described as a greedy conqueror bringing the end to several empires, especially characterized by his hubris, vanity, and pride. This view changes with Flavius Josephus's description of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem in Antiquitates 11.317–345.[5] The fictional visit is placed in the context of the discussions between the Samaritans and the Jews about the legitimacy of the temple on Mount Garizim.[6] Alexander supported the Jews. He even prostrated himself before the high priest of Jerusalem and sacrificed to the Jewish God. Finally, the high priest showed Alexander the Book of Daniel in which the prophecy concerning his victory over Darius is written. Josephus changed the negative biblical view into a positive conception of Alexander the Great. The king recognized the power of the Jewish God and granted the Jews the right to keep their own laws. In Contra Apionem 2.35 Alexander is said to have given civil rights and religious freedom to the Jews of Alexandria. In Josephus's works, the

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[4] U. Rappaport, *The First Book of Maccabees: Introduction, Hebrew Translation, and Commentary* (Jerusalem, 2004), commentary to I Macc 1:3, p. 94 (Hebrew); see Dan 8:4 and Dan 11:36.

[5] For more references to Alexander in Josephus's writings see Antiquitates 2.347.

[6] A. Momigliano, "Flavius Josephus und Alexanders Besuch in Jerusalem," in A. Momigliano (ed.), *Die Juden in der Alten Welt*, (Berlin, 1992), pp. 57–66.

Greek ruler Alexander is described as a supporter and friend of the Jews.[7]

Rabbinic literature shows an ambivalent attitude towards Alexander. The parallels to the story of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem also emphasize Alexander's favorable attitude toward the Jews in the conflict with the Samaritans.[8] The historical context however is lost. The name of the high priest in the Talmud is Simon the Just, referring to two historical high priests who actually served after Alexander's time, whereas in Josephus it is Jaddus (Jaddua) who was high priest during the rule of Alexander. The rabbinic versions seem to be independent from Josephus, maybe both stem from a common oral source. Two other versions tell the story of a meeting between Alexander and Gabiah, son of Qosem, at the temple in Jerusalem.[9] The idea conveyed here is that even a great ruler like Alexander is not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. On another occasion, these texts depict Alexander as a Solomonic judge who listens to the discussion between Jews and Ishmaelites, Canaanites and Egyptians. It is again Gabiah, son of Qosem (in the Talmud he is called Gabiah, son of Pesisa) who represents the Jewish side.[10]

Tractate Tamid, 31b–32b, in the Babylonian Talmud narrates four episodes about Alexander the Great. First, Alexander holds a dialogue with the elders of the south concerning several philosophical questions. Alexander is described as a typical Greek philosopher. The "elders of the south" are identified with the Brahmans.[11] The *Pseudo-Callisthenes* (*PC*) gives a different version of the dialogue between Alexander and

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[7] R. Stoneman, "Jewish Traditions on Alexander the Great," *Studia Philonica Annual* 6 (1994), pp. 49–52. For more discussion about Alexander and the Jews see R. Marcus, "Alexander the Great and the Jews," in R. Marcus (ed.), *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities: Books XIX–XI*, (Cambridge Mass., London, 1937; reprint 1995), pp. 512–532; S.J. Cohen, "Alexander the Great and Jaddus the High Priest according to Josephus," *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982/83), pp. 41–68; C.T. Fletcher-Louis, "Alexander the Great's Worship of the High Priest," in L.T. Stuckenbruck and W.E.S. North (eds.), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, (London, New York, 2004), pp. 71–102.

[8] Babylonian Talmud, tractate Yoma 69a. See also the medieval scholium to Megillat Taanit, chapter 9.

[9] Genesis Rabbah 61.7, and the medieval scholium to Megillat Taanit, chapter 3.

[10] Babylonian Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin 91a; Genesis Rabbah 61.7 and the medieval scholium to Megillat Taanit, chapter 3.

[11] Already Plutarch mentions Alexander's meeting with the Gymnosophists of India; see Plutarch, Lives 4.241–242.

the wise men of India (Book 3.6).[12] Second, Alexander travels into the Land of Darkness. The third story refers to Alexander meeting the Amazons. In the last part, Alexander arrives at the gate of the Garden of Eden and is given an eyeball symbolizing the human being that is never satisfied (Prov 20:27).[13] The message of all the stories in the tractate Tamid seems to be that Alexander tries to push the limits of human capability by traveling to forbidden places on earth and is reminded of his hubris and mortality.

More accounts of Alexander's experiences are found in rabbinic literature. The Palestinian Talmud mentions Alexander's ascent into the sky as an example that only God rules over land and sea.[14] Alexander tries to explore the depths of the ocean with a diving bell, a story that Midrashic sources tell about Hadrian.[15] It is also found in Arab history books as well as in the Latin *Cosmographia* by Aethicus Ister (8th century), and in the Latin translation of Leo the Archpriest, the German *Annolied* (11th–12th century), and the Old French Prose Alexander (12th century). The relation of this motif in the Latin, German, French and Midrashic versions is still under discussion.[16] Both stories demonstrate Alexander's hubris and his arrival at the limits of human power.[17]

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[12] I. Lévi, "La Légende d'Alexandre dans le Talmud," *REJ* 2 (1881), p. 293; I. Lévi, "La Légende d'Alexandre dans le Talmud et le Midrash," *REJ* 7 (1883), p. 78; L. Wallach, "Alexander the Great and the Indian Gymnosophists in Jewish Tradition," *PAAJR* 11 (1941), pp. 48–52; compare now S. Bowman, "Alexander and the Mysteries of India," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 2 (1999), pp. 71–111.

[13] See *PC*, Book 2.39; the question about the relation between the Talmud and *PC* is answered with a common source. Lévi argues that the story about Alexander's arrival at the Gate of the Garden of Eden is of Jewish origin stemming from a text that is anterior to the Talmud; see I. Lévi, La Légende (1881), 293–300. In the twelfth century it is elaborated in the Latin *Alexandri Magni Iter ad Paradisum*; see Stoneman's Introduction to this book, and R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 164–169 as well as pp. 218–226. Whether or not the author of this Latin text indeed was Jewish needs further discussion; see W.J. van Bekkum, "Alexander the Great in Medieval Hebrew Literature," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986), 218–226.

[14] Palestinian Talmud, tractate Avodah Zarah 3:1 (42c); similar stories are found in Numeri Rabbah 13.14; Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer 11.

[15] Yalqut Shimoni, Ps. 93; Midrash Psalms 93:6.

[16] F. Pfister, "Alexander der Große und die Würzburger Kiliansfahne," in F. Pfister (ed.), *Kleine Schriften zum Alexanderroman,* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1976), pp. 292–295, R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (New Haven, Conn., 2008), pp. 112–114.

[17] The story of Alexander's flying machine is one of the most widespread motives in iconography; see I. Michael, *Alexander's Flying Machine: the History of a Legend*

Also in the Palestinian Talmud, Alexander's greed for gold is evoked: he visits King Katzia and listens to his decision concerning a dunghill that is sold containing a treasure not known to its former owner. In the course of the narration Alexander is shown the worthlessness of the love of gold.[18] Two more stories are told in later midrashic literature about Alexander bringing important Jewish relics to Egypt. In the Targum Sheni to Esther Alexander removed the throne of Solomon from Babylonia to Egypt.[19] In Midrash Aggadah he buried the bones of the prophet Jeremiah in Alexandria.[20]

In sum, it seems as if the Rabbis included the narratives of Alexander into their teachings because, on the one hand, they wanted to show the greatness and wisdom of a Greek ruler who supported the Jews. Moreover, he was an exemplary king and conqueror. On the other hand, Alexander's journeys served as illustrations for moral lessons: even to a king like Alexander the Great the limits of power and mortality are shown.

Several versions of the Greek *PC* include anecdotes and stories parallel to those in the rabbinic sources. Alexander's visit to Jerusalem, the story about the bones of Jeremiah, his meeting with the Amazon women, his journeys into the Land of Darkness and to paradise as well as the flying machine and the diving bell are found in manuscripts of recension γ of the *PC* written in the eighth century (in the letter concerning the wonders of India in Book 2.23–44; Alexander's meeting with the Amazons is told in Book 3.25–26).[21] In the foundation story of Alexandria Alexander proclaims monotheism and dismisses the pagan religions.[22] The text in the *PC* is very elaborate, while in the Talmud the stories are short. Therefore it was supposed that recension

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[18] Palestinian Talmud, tractate Bava Metziah 2:5 (8c); see also the versions in Genesis Rabbah 33.1; Leviticus Rabbah 27.1; Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 9.24; Midrash Tanhuma, Emor 6; Yalqut Shimoni, Ps 36, section 727; I.J. Kazis, *The Book of the Gests of Alexander of Macedon* (Cambridge Mass., 1962), pp. 20–23.

[19] Targum Sheni 1.2.

[20] Midrash Aggadah II, Numeri 30.15 (ed. Buber, Vienna, 1894), p. 157. This story has a parallel in Ps-Epiphanius' Vitae Prophetarum; see Kazis, *The Book of Gests of Alexander*, p. 24; R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 57ff.

[21] R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans: Zweite neubearbeitete Auflage unter Mitwirkung von Jürgen Trumpf* (München, 1977), pp. 132–138; see Stoneman's Introduction to this book.

[22] *PC*, recension ε 2.24; recension γ 2.28.

The preceding footnote begins above the rule:
(Southampton, 1974); F. Pfister, "Alexander der Große in der bildenden Kunst," in F. Pfister (ed.), *Kleine Schriften zum Alexanderroman*, (Meisenheim am Glan, 1976), pp. 165–172; R. Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, pp. 114–120.

γ, or at least the section in Book 2.23–44, was written by a Jewish author who worked the stories into the *PC* by extending the motifs of the Talmud.[23] But since the discovery of recension ε, which also has these motifs, this view is no longer held, because it was shown that the redactor of recension ε formed the text on the model of Christian hagiography.[24] Yet, the problem of the relationship between the Greek romance and the rabbinic sources will remain difficult to answer.

Medieval Alexander Traditions

The medieval Hebrew traditions show a broad interest in the life and deeds of Alexander. As a gentile king, a world conqueror, and a traveler to fantastic places in heaven as well as on earth, he occupies a special position in Hebrew literature. His personality is described in various ways. On the one hand, his wisdom and justice as well as his friendliness toward the Jews is emphasized. On the other, he is depicted as a proud and greedy conqueror of far away countries. While the rabbinic stories tend to reveal a moralizing intention, some of the medieval versions show a special interest in the marvelous places and fantastic figures that Alexander encounters during his extensive journeys.

It is possible to divide the medieval texts on Alexander into groups. First, there are the exegetical texts which continue the rabbinic discussions.[25] Since their relevance was discussed in the first part of this essay we will not pursue them here. The second group contributes traditions representing Alexander as a Greek philosopher. The Hebrew translation of Hunayn Ibn Ishaq's *Book of the Sayings of the Philosophers* by the Spanish poet and translator Judah al-Harizi [Heb. Sefer Musere

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[23] A. Ausfeld, *Der griechische Alexanderroman* (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 8–23; F. Pfister, "Eine Gründungsgeschichte Alexandrias und Alexanders Besuch in Jerusalem," *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, 11. Abhandlung* (1914), pp. 17–19; 30–32; see summary in I.J. Kazis, *The Book of Gests of Alexander*, p. 3, 17f. Lévi thought that either the talmudic stories derive from *PC* or both from a common source; cf. I. Lévi, La Légende (1881), pp. 293–300; I. Lévi, La Légende (1883), pp. 78–93.

[24] J. Trumpf, *Anonymi Byzantini Vita Alexandri regis Macedonum (Alexandri Magni)* (Stuttgart, 1974); W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance MS London*, p. 14. The narrations of the diving bell and the flying machine even appear in recension λ; for a detailed analysis see R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans*, pp. 132–138.

[25] Yalqut Shimoni on Ps 93, section 848; Yalqut Shimoni on I Kg 18, section 211; Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer 11, 28b–29a; Midrash Tanhumah, Emor 6.

ha-Philosophim] in the 13th century belongs to this group.[26] It contains apothegms and contemplations of life. Even more popular was the Hebrew translation of the Arabic *Secret of the Secrets* [Heb. Sefer Sod ha-Sodot], which functions as a *Fürstenspiegel* dealing with the art of government as handed down from Aristotle to Alexander. It was also attributed to Judah al-Harizi, because it was often transmitted together with the *Book of the Sayings of the Philosophers* and because of similarities in style and language.[27]

Third, there are translations of the Greek Alexander romance. We can distinguish four different types of translations: The first (type 1) is represented by three manuscripts of an Alexander romance based on different recensions of the Greek *PC* and its medieval Latin or Arabic translations. Closely related texts were integrated as interpolations into the medieval Hebrew paraphrase of Flavius Josephus, the so called "Sefer Yosippon" [Book of Yosippon]. A second version (type 2) was written by Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils in France. The third medieval Hebrew Alexander romance concentrates on the fantastic and legendary aspects of the story and is transmitted in the large collection of Hebrew narratives called "Sefer ha-Zikhronot" [Book of Memories] compiled by Eleazar ben Asher ha-Levi and in two more manuscripts (type 3). The fourth version (type 4) is only transmitted in two fragments that were recycled as book bindings.[28] In the following, we will focus on these translations of the Greek Alexander romance.

I. *Authorship, Dating and Sources*

Manuscripts Parma 2457, London 145 and Paris 657 contain translations of the Alexander romance into Hebrew belonging to type 1. MS Parma 2457 was translated from the Greek; the *Vorlage* of the anonymous

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[26] A. Loewenthal (ed.), *Honein Ibn Ishak: Sinnsprüche der Philosophen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1896); M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen*, pp. 248–253.

[27] M. Gaster, "The Hebrew version of *Secretum Secretorum*," in *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha, and Samaritan Archaeology. Collected and Reprinted by Moses Gaster,* vol. 1 (New York, 1971), pp. 246–278; M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen*, pp. 245–259; I.J. Kazis, *The Book of Gests of Alexander*, pp. 37–39. While Gaster argues in favor of al-Harizi, Steinschneider rejects the view that he translated this text.

[28] E. Yassif, "Hebrew Traditions about Alexander the Great: Narrative Models and their Meaning in the Middle Ages." *Tarbiz* 75 (2006), pp. 359–407 (Hebrew).

translator was recension β of the *PC*.[29] The manuscript presents a
shortened version of the Alexander romance. The final pages contain
a chronicle which enumerates the kings that ruled after Alexander
until the emperor Augustus, probably citing from Eusebius of
Caesarea's *Chronicon*.[30] Then the scribe copied the end of a text that
dealt with the rites of the Brahmans—Palladius's text was possibly
the source—as well as an excerpt of the story about Alexander's
arrival at the Garden of Eden told in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate
Tamid 32a.

Manuscripts of the *Book of Yosippon* contain two interpolations
about Alexander's life (Interpolations A and B). There was a lively
discussion concerning the question whether MS Parma 2457 was
the source for Interpolation A inserted into the *Book of Yosippon* or
whether it was an excerpt from the book.[31] The fact that MS Parma
2457 is more complete than the text of the Interpolation may be an
argument in favor of Flusser who states that the source for Interpola-
tion A in the *Book of Yosippon* was the Parma manuscript. If this is
the case, it must have been written before the 12th century, because
a recension of the *Book of Yosippon* including Interpolation A was
known by this time. Flusser assumes that MS Parma 2457 was written
in southern Italy in the 10th or 11th century.[32]

The version of Alexander's life in MS London 145 and MS Paris
657 goes back to an Arabic translation of the J[2] recension of the *His-
toria de preliis* (*HP*), probably made in Spain. This can be shown by
Arabic terms and names that were left in their Arabic form in the
Hebrew text.[33] A terminus post quem for the Arabic translation can be
derived from the fact that the J[2] recension was composed in the 12th
century.[34]

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[29] D. Flusser, *The Josippon [Josephus Gorionides]: Edited with Introduction, Com-
mentary and Notes* (Jerusalem, 1980–81), vol. 2, pp. 237–241 (Hebrew); D. Flusser,
"An 'Alexander-Geste' in a Parma MS," *Tarbiz* 26 (1956–57), pp. 165–184 (Hebrew).

[30] This chronicle is also integrated into the *Book of Yosippon* as well as into
Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils' text.

[31] M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen*, pp. 490ff.; D. Flusser, *The
Josippon*, vol. 2, pp. 229–231.

[32] D. Flusser, *The Josippon*, vol. 2, pp. 232–236; see also my forthcoming Ph.D. on
Sefer Yosippon.

[33] W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance MS London*, pp. 30–34.

[34] A shortened version of this text entered the *Book of Yosippon* described as Inter-
polation B; see W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance MS London*,
p. 17.

In the colophon of MS London 145, Samuel ben Judah Ibn Tibbon (1150–1230), the famous translator of Maimonides works into Hebrew, is mentioned as a copyist of the text.[35] Since MS London 145 was a source for the reworking of the interpolations about Alexander in recension C of the *Book of Yosippon* which was dated before 1160, Samuel Ibn Tibbon's authorship was highly disputed.[36] Yet, recent research has shown that recension C of the *Book of Yosippon* was probably composed only in the 14th century. Thus, it actually could have been Samuel who copied MS London 145 or even translated the life of Alexander into Hebrew at the end of the 12th or beginning of the 13th century.[37] Unfortunately, nothing is known about the writers of MS Parma and MS Paris.

The Hebrew Alexander romance of type 2 was written by Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils, a physician, mathematician, and astronomer living in France in the middle of the 14th century. His name is not mentioned in MS Paris 750, the only surviving manuscript of this version. There was another manuscript lost due to a fire that destroyed the library in Turin in 1904. Fortunately, the title on the first folio of this manuscript was transcribed by Israel Lévi before its destruction and there Immanuel is said to have written this text.[38] Immanuel used recensions J^1 and J^2 of the *HP*, the *Book of Yosippon* as well as the Old French Prose Alexander Romance and the *Book of the Sayings of the Philosophers* to create his version of the Alexander romance. Especially in numbers and translations that deviate from the Latin, the Hebrew text shows parallels to the Old French version.[39]

Type 3 of the Hebrew Alexander romance is included in the *Book of Memories* compiled by Eleazar ben Asher ha-Levi (also 14th century) who lived in the Rhineland. This book is a collection of antique and medieval texts telling the story of the Jews from the creation to the

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[35] W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance MS London*, pp. 204–205.

[36] Lévi thought that he could have been the author/translator of this version, but Steinschneider and van Bekkum believed that this is a case of Pseudepigraphy, see I. Lévi, "Les traductions hébraïques de l'histoire légendaire d'Alexandre," *REJ* 3 (1881b), pp. 238–275; M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen*, p. 899; compare W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance MS London*, p. 28.

[37] See my forthcoming Ph.D. on Sefer Yosippon.

[38] I. Lévi, "Les traductions, p. 245. The colophon of the Paris manuscript says that it was copied by Hayyim and his grandfather Josef in the year 1428; see I.J. Kazis, *The Book of Gests of Alexander*, p. 53.

[39] I.J. Kazis, *The Book of Gests of Alexander*, pp. 204ff.

messianic days, the largest compilation of Hebrew narrative texts in medieval times.[40] Since the book was finished by 1325, this Hebrew Alexander had to be composed before that year. Some of its motifs are found in rabbinic literature as well as in recension ε and γ of the *PC*. There are also parallels to the Syriac and the Ethiopian Alexander romance, but most of the narrative shows many alterations and changes, therefore it is not easy to determine its sources.[41] While Lévi and Steinschneider date this composition between the 11th and the 13th century, Gaster argues that this version of the Alexander romance represents one of the oldest known traditions about Alexander out of which all other traditions grew.[42]

The Hebrew Alexander romance of type 4 represents a very fragmentary translation from the French *Roman d'Alexandre* composed by Alexandre de Paris which was very popular in the 12th century. It is striking that the anonymous translator decided to transliterate some verses in Old French into his work. When Roxane grieves over Alexander she speaks a line in Old French written in Hebrew characters.[43] This way the source could be identified.

II. *Manuscripts*

In the following list are given: the name and place of the hosting library, the number of the microfilm in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the date and provenance.

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[40] For the special character of this manuscript and its content in medieval Hebrew literature see E. Yassif, "The Hebrew Narrative Anthology in the Middle Ages," *Prooftexts* 17 (1997), pp. 153–175; E. Yassif, *The Book of Memory: that is the Chronicles of Jerahmeʾel* (Tel Aviv, 2001) (Hebrew) and E. Yassif, "Hebrew Traditions about Alexander the Great: Narrative Models and their Meaning in the Middle Ages," *Tarbiz* 75 (2006), pp. 359–407 (Hebrew).

[41] M. Gaster, "An Old Hebrew Romance of Alexander," in *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha, and Samaritan Archaeology: Collected and Reprinted by Moses Gaster,* vol. 1 (New York, 1971), pp. 814–878; J. Dan, *Alilot Alexander Moqdon* (Jerusalem, 1969) (Hebrew); R. Reich, *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian* (New York, 1972).

[42] M. Gaster, "An old Hebrew Romance of Alexander," in *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha, and Samaritan Archaeology,* vol. 1 (New York, 1971), pp. 819f.

[43] E. Yassif, "Hebrew Traditions about Alexander" *Tarbiz* 75 (2006), pp. 359–407, especially p. 402 (Hebrew).

Type 1

London, Jew's College, No. 145 [F 4806][44] 15th century, Byzantine, fol. 1b–35b.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Héb. 671 [F 11550] 12th–13th century, Oriental/Byzantine, fols. 241r–280a.

Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Codex Parma 2457 (de Rossi 1087) [F 13461] 14th century, Italian, fols. 12a–19b.

Manuscripts of the *Book of Yosippon* containing the Alexander romance:[45]

Budapest, Kaufmann Collection A 355 [F 15131] 15th–16th century, Ashkenazic, pp. 18–34.

Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, I 67 Inf [F 41181] 15th–16th century, Sefardic, fols. 9b–19a.

Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, ebr. 408 [F 08636] 1443, Fano/ Italy, fols. 20b–29ª.

Vatican, Borgiana ebr. 1 [F 11654] 15th century, Ashkenazic-Italian, fols. 55b–66a.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Héb. 1280 [F 30898] 1472, Italian, fols. 53a–62b.

Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, H 70 inf, 15th century, Ashkenazic, fols. 29a–35b.

Type 2—Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Héb. 750.3 [F 24842] 1428, Oriental, fols. 24a–90b.

Turin, (lost).

Type 3—Book of Memories

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hebr. 11 (Neubauer 2797/1) [F 16716] 14th century, Ashkenazic, fols. 265a–277b.

Modena, Estense Library, MS 53, Italian.

Damascus, (lost).

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[44] This is the number of the microfilm of the manuscript in collection of the Institute for microfilmed Hebrew manuscripts in the National Library in Jerusalem.

[45] For a detailed analysis of these manuscripts see PhD by S. Dönitz (forthcoming).

III. *Fragments*

Type 1
Genéve, Genizah Fragment 34 (same version as MS Parma), Oriental.

Type 4
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Codex Hebr. 419XX [F 31432]
    14th–15th century, Byzantine, folios

IV. *Modern Editions (and Translations)*

Today most of the medieval versions of the Alexander romance are available in a modern edition. The introductions by Wout van Bekkum and Israel Kazis provide detailed surveys concerning sources and scholarly discussions.

Type 1
W.J. van Bekkum (ed.). *A Hebrew Alexander Romance According to MS London, Jews' College no. 145*, (Louvain, 1992). Including English translation.
——. (ed.). *A Hebrew Alexander Romance According to MS Heb. 671.5: Paris Bibliothèque Nationale*, (Groningen, 1994). Including English translation.
D. Flusser (ed.). *The Josippon [Josephus Gorionides]: Edited with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes* (Jerusalem, 1980–81). See pp. 461–491 for MS Parma 1087. In Hebrew.

Type 2
I.J. Kazis. *The Book of the Gests of Alexander of Macedon*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1962). Including English translation.

Type 3
I) MS Oxford Heb. 11 (Neubauer 2797) [Book of Memories]:
J. Dan. *Alilot Alexander Moqdon*, (Jerusalem, 1969). In Hebrew.[46]
M. Gaster. "An Old Hebrew Romance of Alexander." In *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha,*

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[46] The work contains a version of type 1 as well. At the end the reader finds the Talmudic stories about Alexander.

and Samaritan Archaeology: Collected and Reprinted by Moses Gaster, vol. 1. (New York, 1971). pp. 814–878.

R. Reich. *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian,* (New York, 1972). Including English translation.

II) MS Modena 53:

I. Lévi. "Sefer Alexandros Mokdon." In *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstage Moritz Steinschneiders.* (Hildesheim, 1896 and reprint 1975), pp. 142–163.

Type 4

E. Yassif (2006). "Hebrew Traditions about Alexander the Great: Narrative Models and Their Meaning in the Middle Ages." *Tarbiz* 75: 359–407. In Hebrew.

V. *Structure and Plot*

Most of the research concerning the medieval Hebrew Alexander versions has concentrated on philology. There are few literary studies on the content and character of the various types of the Hebrew Alexander. Since such a proposal as a whole is beyond the scope of this article, we will focus on general assumptions concerning alterations of types 1, 2, and 3 compared to the sources and on the image of Alexander the Great in these texts.

Type 1

MS London 145 and MS Paris 657 represent translations of their Latin-Arabic source with some omissions, expansions, and changes.[47] These alterations were made with the intention to purge the text of its pagan characteristics. But not everything was removed: the names of the gods and the description of the rituals as well as the talking statues were not deleted although these must have presented a challenge for the rabbis.[48] Alexander makes offerings in the temples of Serapis, Apollo, and Diana and each of the these gods answers his requests or appears

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[47] W.J. van Bekkum (ed.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance MS London*, pp. 24–27.
[48] Ibid., pp. 6, 40.

in dreams.[49] On the other hand, on several occasions Alexander refers to his belief in the Judeo-Christian God.[50]

The first part of the romance describes Alexander's birth, youth, and his first wars, especially the conflict with the Persian king Darius.[51] Repeatedly, rulers deliver a warning to Alexander about the dangers of power, vanity, and arrogance.[52] The second part describes the more miraculous adventures of Alexander until his own death by poison.[53] In general, the structure conforms to the plot of the Latin *HP*.

Compared to the Greek source, the Alexander romance in the MS Parma is shortened and the order of the events is changed. It starts with the death of Philip and the beginning of the rule of Alexander omitting Alexander's birth. After Alexander makes war with Darius he sets out for his fabulous travels. First, he meets animals with very long necks, then he comes to the giants. After that, he arrives at the *kynokephaloi* where he sees trees that grow only in the sun and acephalous human beings with five legs. At the end of this journey he comes to the Land of Darkness and to the house of God.[54] The next part describes the war with the Indian king Porus and the dialogue with the Gymnosophists. A letter to Aristotle about the wonders of India follows. The last three chapters tell about Alexander's meeting with Candace and the Amazons, and finally Alexander's death. This manuscript represents a summary of Alexander's life and emphasizes his miraculous journeys. Most of the pagan elements are omitted.

Type 2

The Alexander romance by Immanuel ben Jacob Bonfils consists of three parts. The first contains a description of Alexander's life from birth to death. The second part is a collection of apothegms taken from the *Book of the Sayings of the Philosophers*. The chronicle recording events from the time of Alexander's death to the capture of Jerusalem under Pompey, which is found in a longer version in MS Parma

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[49] Ibid., pp. 58, 78, 96.

[50] Ibid., pp. 54, 84, 114, 116.

[51] Ibid., pp. 36–116.

[52] E.g. ibid., p. 112, here the words of Darius to Alexander in the Hebrew version remind us of biblical wordings.

[53] Ibid., pp. 116–204. The Hebrew text is structured by numbers of the chapters not identical to the Latin chapters; part one of the Hebrew text comprises chapters 1–36, part two chapters 36–70.

[54] See Babylonian Talmud, tractate Tamid 32a–b.

2457, forms part three. The story of Alexander's life is told with a
lot of omissions and changes in the arrangement of the events
compared to the Latin source. On the other hand, there are rhetorical
and material embellishments, especially a tendency toward judaiza-
tion of the story. The punishment of the assassins of Darius does not
consist of crucifixion but of hanging. In the discussion with Dindi-
mus, Immanuel integrates an anti-Christian note on the confession
of sins.[55]

Type 3

This Hebrew Alexander romance differs widely from the Greek source.
The anonymous author integrated new motifs showing a special inter-
est in the miraculous parts of Alexander's life while the historical con-
text is mainly neglected. We will give a survey of the plot: the narrative
is set in Egypt, i.e. Philip is depicted as King of Egypt, and starts with
the seduction of queen Galopatra / Golofira (Olympias)[56] by the wiz-
ard Bildad (Nectanebus)[57] and the birth of Alexander.[58] Bildad comes
to the queen in disguise as the god Digonia who has two horns, one
of silver and one of gold.[59] Philip realizes the fraud and seeks out the
wizard everywhere, but Bildad flees into a cave where he dies.

The queen intends to kill Alexander, but Philip adopts him as a
son. After Philip's death Alexander's brothers want to kill him, but
instead he becomes king because of a prophecy made by magicians
and astronomers.[60] The episode recalls the biblical narrative of Joseph
and his brothers. The story immediately continues with Alexander's
journeys and completely omits his war against Darius and Porus.

Alexander's mother advises him to put together an army and set off
to make war, still thinking of how she can rid herself of her illegitimate
son. Starting his journey, Alexander encounters the dwarf king Antalo-
nia who helps him to find traitors among his people.[61] On a mountain,
Alexander meets an old man who watches a fabulous fortress where

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[55] See I.J. Kazis, *The Book of Gests of Alexander*, pp. 40–48, and Appendix II, pp.
206–210.
[56] The names Galopatra and Golofira—both are found in the manuscript—go back
to a misreading of the name Cleopatra whose story is not mentioned in this version.
[57] The name Bildad is derived from Job 2:11, he is one of the three friends of Job.
[58] See Reich, pp. 22–30; Gaster, pp. 828–831.
[59] Here the influence of the Islamic tradition of the two-horned Alexander is felt.
[60] Reich, p. 30; Gaster, p. 832.
[61] Reich, pp. 32–34; Gaster, pp. 833–835.

strange beasts live. There Alexander sees the grave of King Altinos who was anointed with balsam from Jericho. Alexander touches the corpse, becomes ill and is healed.[62] After that he travels through several countries (Quatrigonia, Altzil, Armenia, and Ofla)[63] and fights their inhabitants.[64] Again he meets King Antalonia who sends him to the mountains of darkness where he will see trees telling him his future,[65] referring to the trees of the sun and moon. On the way back through the mountains of darkness, Alexander encounters a king. Herein, follows the Talmudic story of the treasure that was hidden in a piece of land that was sold.[66] Alexander arrives at Afriq and Anishq where he meets the Amazons.[67] Alexander threatens the King of Hagar with war unless he pays him tribute,[68] then travels on to Jerusalem.[69] Later he meets the wise people from Kardonia and writes down information about the medical power of herbs and plants in the Book of Remedies [*Sefer ha-Refu'ot*].[70] He arrives at the land of Quartinia and hears the story of a woman who was seduced by the priest Matan disguised as a god.[71] His wife dies in childbirth and Alexander tries to commit suicide.[72] In the land of Ofrat he finds the Water of Life.[73] Having traveled to the most remote region of the earth, he arrives at the gate of the Garden of Eden where an human eye is given to him after he is circumcised.[74] Then he ascends into the sky and descends into the ocean.[75] It is an old man who asks him not to harm the Jews and brings him back to his army.[76] Next, he arrives at a land where the inhabitants look like dogs.[77] He crosses the sea and is threatened by a giant fish

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[62] Reich, pp. 36–44; Gaster, pp. 836–840.
[63] A thorough analysis of the names of the countries mentioned in this version is highly desirable.
[64] Reich, pp. 44–48; Gaster, pp. 841–843.
[65] Reich, pp. 48–52; Gaster, pp. 843ff.
[66] It is the story of King Katzia, see above.
[67] Reich, pp. 54–62; Gaster, pp. 845–850.
[68] Reich, p. 62; Gaster, p. 850.
[69] Reich, pp. 62–70; Gaster, pp. 851–854.
[70] Reich, pp. 70–72; Gaster, pp. 854ff.
[71] Reich, pp. 72–78; Gaster, pp. 855–858. This is a common motif; see the seduction of Alexander's mother.
[72] Reich, p. 78; Gaster, pp. 858ff.
[73] Reich, p. 80; Gaster, p. 859.
[74] Reich, pp. 82–86; Gaster, pp. 860ff.
[75] Reich, pp. 86–88; Gaster, pp. 861ff.
[76] Reich, pp. 88–90; Gaster, p. 863.
[77] Reich, p. 90; Gaster, p. 863.

that sinks some of his ships.[78] A storm drives them into the Dead Sea. Alexander fights with the king of Togira and defeats him. He travels to the land of Yovila, whose people have the custom by which the father and mother lay in bed after a child is born.[79] On a mountain Alexander is attacked by a lion with human hands and feet. He is healed by a snake that anoints him with an herb.[80]

Alexander declares his nephew Tikosa to be King of Egypt in his absence.[81] In the land of Qalila Alexander and his army fight first against the men, then against the women.[82] After traveling through the lands of Amrisa and Lapish, Alexander's army comes to the region of the Ten Tribes.[83] They travel on to the land of Sidonia where manna keeps them alive and Alexander sees his end in the stars.[84] The cup-bearer Afiq poisons the king and he dies. Alexander's bones are brought to his mother who manages to reign after him for fifteen years before the country is divided.[85]

Some of the wondrous adventures do not have a parallel in the Greek or Latin versions of the *PC*, but are derived from Jewish motifs: Menahem, a Jewish scribe, is chief secretary of Alexander. The king prays to God and becomes circumcised. Alexander arrives at the Dead Sea and meets the ten lost tribes. His army is kept alive by manna. These deviations from the source material show the intention of the anonymous author: he wanted to recast Alexander's life into a Jewish framework. Moreover, the story is penetrated with prophecies and one appreciates the special interest in herbs and healing. Alexander becomes ill or is slain and heals or resuscitates several times. But at the same time, we also find some of the motifs from known rabbinical sources: Alexander comes to the Land of Darkness, he meets the Amazons, Alexander visits Jerusalem (designed after the version in the *Book of Yosippon*), he talks with the sages, he arrives at the Garden of Eden, he explores

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[78] Reich, p. 92; Gaster, p. 864.
[79] Reich, pp. 92–96; Gaster, p. 865.
[80] Reich, pp. 96–98; Gaster, pp. 866–868.
[81] Reich, p. 100; Gaster, p. 869.
[82] Reich, pp. 104–108; Gaster, pp. 870–872.
[83] Reich, pp. 108–114; Gaster, pp. 873–875.
[84] Reich, pp. 116–118; Gaster, pp. 875ff.
[85] Reich, pp. 118–120; Gaster, pp. 876–878.

the sky and the depth of the sea.[86] The anonymous author merged stories about Alexander that are found in the Talmud and the Midrash with fantastical motifs based on the romance of Alexander. Still the typical characteristics of Alexander as a greedy conqueror and a man of *vanitas* are present, but the moralizing intention seems to recede into the background while the author takes delight in inventing more fabulous and sometimes satirical elements.

Type 4

Only a very small portion of this Hebrew text is left thanks to the recycling of two folios of the manuscript as book bindings. The folios contain the end of an Alexander romance. It starts with a description of the speech that was given by Alexander upon his death. Thereby he divides his kingdom among five of his military leaders.[87] After his death, his wife Roxane and the military leaders mourn over the king. A statue of Alexander erected on his grave shows an apple in the king's hand symbolizing his dominion over the whole world. The twelve towns that he founded are enumerated. Antipater and Andoinos, the murderers of Alexander, are sought, but they escape and build a fortress called Arondil. There they are caught and tortured. The kingdoms that follow Alexander make war against one another until the rising of Judah the Maccabee.[88]

VI. *Style*

As is the case with most other medieval Hebrew narratives, the Hebrew Alexander romances are all composed in the narrative style of the rewritten bible called *melitzah*. The most important characteristic of this style is the integration of biblical verses into the narrative. Moreover, the verbs are used in the grammatical form of the *Imperfectum Consecutivum* which recalls the narrative style of the bible. Type 3 of the Alexander romance shows several parts that seem to use parody or satirical elements, e.g. after Alexander is healed by the snake he sneezes

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[86] R. Reich, *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian* (New York, 1972), pp. 52–71, 84–90. The stories of the exploration of the sea and the sky follow the versions in the rabbinic sources.

[87] There could have been more because the text of the fragment begins at this point.

[88] E. Yassif, "Hebrew Traditions about Alexander," pp. 403–407. In Hebrew.

three times.[89] The different versions of the Hebrew Alexander romance range from translations that follow the original with few alterations to reworkings of the romance with strong elements of Judaization. The reworkings do not focus on the personality of Alexander, but rather stress the many wonders of Alexander's fabulous adventures.

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[89] R. Reich, *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian* (New York, 1972), p. 98; M. Gaster, "An Old Hebrew Romance," p. 868.