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The Wonders of Historiography: The Medieval Latin Alexander Narratives and Manuscript Contexts of Justin, Orosius, and the *Historia de Preliis*

In the early 14th century, Alexander the Great takes his place as one of the Nine Worthies.¹ Together, this selection of three pagans, three Jews, and three Christians constructs a picture of complete chivalry, uniting its ideals across different historical periods and religious beliefs. In this context, Alexander has become an exemplar of medieval chivalric prowess, who defeats Darius and destroys Babylon before conquering “everything to be found beneath the heavens”.² He is no longer primarily a figure from classical antiquity, but a model of medieval knighthood; in literary terms, history has given way to romance. This narrative of movement away from a historical Alexander towards what would now be recognised as a fictional version of the conqueror appears to be supported by the explosion of interest in his story in 12th-century Europe. His increasingly fantastic adventures feature in some of the earliest works ‘en romanz’ – for example, the mostly lost version of Alberic of Besançon (ca. 1100), the French *Roman d’Alexandre* (ca. 1180) and the Anglo-Norman *Roman de toute chevalerie* (ca. 1175) – that help to establish this compositional mode as the romance genre, and then spread into other European languages as well as those of the Middle East.³ The generic movement from history to romance is thus paralleled by linguistic proliferation, which in north-western Europe appears as a shift from mainly Latin to increasingly numerous vernacular treatments of Alexander. Genre, language and interpretative approach thus appear to be interlinked, suggesting that as the Macedonian moves from antiquity to the

1 The Nine Worthies appear for the first time in Jacques de Longuyon’s *Le voeux du paon* (1312–1313), composed for the bishop of Liège, Thibaut de Bar. The text survives in French in 40 medieval manuscripts of the 14th century. See Leo (2013) 1–2.

2 The Nine Worthies section of *Le voeux du paon* is translated in Wauquelin (2012) Appendix 3, 305–306.

3 On the development of romance in the 12th century, see Green (2002).

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Middle Ages, his history becomes increasingly like romance, both linguistically and hermeneutically, ultimately resulting in his presence as one of the Nine Worthies alongside romance figures like Arthur.

Yet this appealing narrative of classical fact becoming medieval fiction is over-simplified from a generic, hermeneutic, and historical perspective. Firstly, most of the 'historical' accounts of Alexander dating from his era are lost or extant only in quotations used by later authors, and from a very early stage his story is disseminated most widely in what has become known as the 'romance tradition', primarily via the textual phenomenon that is the *Alexander Romance*.⁴ The concept of an antique historical Alexander that is generically distinct from his later medieval fictional incarnations is thus inaccurate, since the two modes of discourse are blurred from the beginning (an important reminder that modern understandings of genre are frequently not shared by earlier literary works). Secondly, Alexander's hermeneutic transformation into a medieval chivalric *exemplum* is complex. His status as a non-Christian calls his exemplarity into question, for example in the *Roman d'Alexandre*, where anxiety about his paganism can be seen in the pervasive need to explain his meaning.⁵ This and other historical inconveniences (such as Alexander's occasional rage-induced murders, for example that of Cleitus) mean that it is difficult for medieval authors to portray Alexander as either a wholly positive or an entirely negative *exemplum* despite their attempts to do so. Gerald of Wales' use of the conqueror in both modes in close textual proximity is a good illustration of the issue, highlighting the hermeneutic difficulties such apparent contradictions can cause for Alexander's meaning.⁶ This in turn means that although he is portrayed variously as a rapacious conqueror or a generous victor, a degenerate pagan or a wise king tutored by Aristotle, in fact the Macedonian does not usually occupy the extreme ends of a 'good/bad' binary in medieval works; rather, he is a multifaceted figure, reflecting a variety of hermeneutic and textual processes. Finally, the historical or chronological perspective – one that sees a more straightforward Alexander, inherited from antiquity, becoming more complex in the Middle Ages due to linguistic and generic proliferation – is also too simple, since it relies upon the idea that Alexander's interpretation is more clear-cut because he is less plural in the classical era. The complexities of genre in the ancient world briefly referenced above would seem to contradict this idea, but in addition the complicated context of (for example) Hellenistic literature in relation to Alexander's earliest texts demonstrates that

⁴ See Bridges (2018) 28–31, for an overview of this historiographical and generic problem.

⁵ See Bridges (2018) 115–120.

⁶ For this and other examples of Alexander as an *exemplum* in the 12th century, see Bridges (2018) 66–67.

his *translatio studii* is already diverse before the Middle Ages' own hermeneutic needs emerge.⁷ From all three of these perspectives – generic, hermeneutic, and historical – it seems that a clear-cut movement from classical fact to medieval fiction is problematic, needing to be nuanced in any consideration of Alexander literature across its pre-modern history.

This point about greater nuance in relation to Alexander's journey from antiquity to the medieval period applies with special force to works that are composed and/or read in number at particularly pressurised historical moments. Such moments include the shift from what is known as 'late antiquity' to 'the Middle Ages' (roughly the 3rd to 7th centuries) and the transition to the so-called 'High Middle Ages' (11th–12th centuries).⁸ Both of these 'pressure points' are characterised by far-reaching societal and cultural changes that are inevitably reflected in literary contexts; late antiquity in western Europe sees the decline of the Roman Empire and the spread of Christianity (and Islam at its end), whilst the 11th and 12th centuries in contrast are characterised by greater political stability (both papal and dynastic), urbanization and the 'Renaissance' of the 12th century. They are therefore likely to be moments at which Alexander narratives are especially multifaceted in their composition (and potentially interpretation), as they react to the complications of history.

Although these two periods differ from one another markedly, it is important to note that they share a common feature, namely the importance of Latin as the main literary language of western Europe.⁹ Latin Alexander works are thus potentially widely disseminated in this era, and may be influential not just for later vernacular adaptations of the Macedonian's narrative but also in their own right. The three major Latin works of this era are: Marcus Junianus Justinus's *Epitome* of Pompeius Trogus' *Philippic Histories* (pre-AD 226/7; possibly 4th century); Paulus Orosius' *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII* (ca. AD 385–after 418); and the three versions of the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni* (10th–13th centuries). All these works are found in numerous medieval copies, indicating that they were widespread during the later period despite their varied dates of origin: Justin's *Epitome* exists in 207 copies, Orosius' *Historiae* in 245, and the *Historia de*

7 On Hellenism and its literatures, see Bowersock (1990) and Claus/Cuyper (2010); also Bridges (2018) 25–27.

8 Periodization is subjective and frequently differs from one scholarly discipline to another, so these temporal divisions should be seen as suggestions rather than definitions.

9 The timescale of Latin's linguistic change from classical times to 'medieval Latin' is a debated topic, but on the general point about continuity made here see Mantello/Rigg (1996) 3.

preliis in 94.¹⁰ Interestingly, the 11th and 12th centuries are especially well represented by all three texts' surviving manuscripts, indicating this period's increased literary focus.¹¹ Despite their apparently frequent medieval presence, however, these Latin works have received less Alexandrine scholarly attention than would be expected, in part perhaps because of their Latinity and their chronological position; neither definitive early works nor late vernacular ones, they have fallen between various scholarly disciplines in terms of language and period.¹² Yet these works may be important in nuancing the view that Alexander's movement from classical fact to medieval fiction (already critiqued here) is a steady and well-defined one; situated as they are in periods of transition, their approaches to the conqueror may demonstrate his greater literary and interpretative complexities. In addition, their survival in medieval manuscripts, particularly those of the High Middle Ages, may show how such complexities continue to influence new Alexander works in other contexts. In short, comparing these works' historiography and their manuscript histories will provide invaluable insight into the hermeneutic tendencies of both writers and readers across the centuries, and will help to nuance their interpretation.

Despite their mutual language and wide dissemination, these works vary in their sources and structures. Justin's *Epitome* and Orosius' *Historiarum adversum paganos* both include Alexander's narrative as part of wider universal histories, but differ in the space and emphasis that they give to the conqueror's exploits, whereas the *Historia de preliis* is a prose account of Alexander's history based on a translation of the Greek *Alexander Romance*. A key moment for interpretative focus is the end of Alexander's life and his sudden death, and so it is on the conclusion of his narratives that the following analysis will focus.

¹⁰ The numbers are taken respectively from Munk Olsen (1982) 537–551; Ross (1956); Batelly/Ross (1961); Hilka/Magoun (1934).

¹¹ It is important to note that wider patterns of medieval manuscript survival and loss affect these numbers. There are peaks of production in the 12th and 15th centuries across most literary genres, for example Mortensen (1999–2000) 106. For the numbers of MSS surviving from the 11th and 12th centuries, see the individual tables in this article.

¹² Orosius' *Historiae* has naturally been studied from a wider non-Alexander perspective by late antique historians and theologians, given that only one part of its narrative focuses on the conqueror; to some extent the same applies to Justin's *Epitome*. Scholarly analysis of the *Historia de preliis* by medievalists is far less frequent than are interpretations of its vernacular descendants.

1 Historiography

1.1 Justin, *Epitome*

The popularity of Justin's *Epitome* appears to have eclipsed its source, Pompeius Trogus' *Philippic Histories*, which may be why the latter does not survive. The *Epitome* was read by Jerome and Augustine, and used by Orosius, Cassiodorus, and Isidore in late antiquity; the 8th-century scholar Alcuin mentions a copy in the library at York.¹³ Given the work's influence on such historical and intellectual heavyweights, it is notable that Justin has been described in modern times as "more orator than historian", since "what interests him are sudden reversals of fortune, marvels, fabulous events, scenes that evoke pity"; moreover, he has been criticised for a lack of "good historical method" as well as "unreliability and shoddy workmanship".¹⁴ Yet this assessment overlooks the fact that late antique historiography often had priorities beyond narrating events; the 'marvels' and pitiful scenes that are contrasted explicitly with 'historical method' here may well be a crucial aspect of Justin's historiographical approach. His interest in rhetoric (which he taught) and the dramatic possibilities of Alexander's narrative is combined with a desire for his history to be instructive beyond its factual basis. This desire is suggested by the Prologue to the *Epitome*, in which he claims to exclude material that *quae nec cognoscendi voluptate iucunda nec exemplo erant necessaria*, "did not make pleasurable reading or serve to provide a moral";¹⁵ pleasure and moral profit are the stated aims of Justin's rhetorical history. Although these aims might seem to prioritise the *Epitome*'s didacticism rather than its factual historiography, it is notable that the text does not include the extravagant adventures characteristic of the Greek *Romance*; there are no dog-headed peoples or fountains of immortality in Justin's work. It is not therefore a question of opposing 'historical' events with 'romance' ones, but rather one of understanding that the *Epitome*'s historiography is rooted in the desire to learn from the past, and that Justin's rhetorical techniques are intended to enable such didacticism.

Despite this stated ethical purpose, the *Epitome* does not often explicitly comment on Alexander's deeds or character, instead emphasising these via the text's rhetorical style.¹⁶ The moments at which such commentary does happen are nota-

¹³ Yardley/Heckel (1997) 8, and Reynolds/Marshall (1983) 197.

¹⁴ Yardley/Heckel (1997) 36 and 17.

¹⁵ *Epitome* praef. 4, trans. Yardley/Heckel (1997) 9. The Latin text of Justin's *Epitome* is always quoted from the critical edition by Seel (1972).

¹⁶ An exception is 9.1.9, in which Alexander's youthful potential is mentioned. It is of course difficult to judge for which aspects of the text and its approaches Justin is responsible, given the

ble by their relative scarcity, and are thus more emphatic. One such is the description of Alexander's increasingly violent temper, which is linked to his adoption of Persian customs (12.5.1–2) and leads to his murder of Cleitus. This killing, which illustrates Alexander's immoderate behaviour, does not explicitly comment on Alexander in moral terms, but its position (before the conqueror fights Porus and after his defeat of Darius) makes it a key moment in his narrative as it moves towards his increasing despotism and death. To claim, therefore, that in Justin's *Epitome* an ethical hermeneutic is less strong (despite the stated aims of the Prologue) than in other works is not to state that it is wholly absent, but rather to highlight its relatively lower priority.

One place where an ethical commentary does occur more clearly in combination with Justin's rhetorical interests, however, is at the end of Alexander's narrative. Firstly, the dying conqueror is himself pictured as a 'marvel' for his stoical acceptance of Fortune's reversal:

*Cum lacrimarent omnes, ipse non sine lacrimis tantum, uerum sine ullo tristioris mentis argumento fuit, ut quosdam impatientius dolentes coinsolatus sit, quibusdam mandata ad parentes eorum dederit: adeo sicuti in hostem, ita et in mortem inuictus animus fuit.*¹⁷

While they all wept, he not only did not shed a tear, but showed not the least token of sorrow; so that he even comforted some who grieved immoderately, and gave others messages to their parents; and his soul was as undaunted at meeting death, as it had formerly been at meeting an enemy.

This sense of Alexander as a wondrous, extraordinary being is continued in the epilogue, which describes his miraculous conception and the omens at his birth before concluding in rhetorically demonstrative style:

*Itaque cum nullo hostium umquam congressus est quem non uicerit, nullam urbem obsedit quam non expugnauerit, nullam gentem adiit quam non calcauerit. Victus denique ad postremum est non uirtute hostili, sed insidiis suorum et fraude ciuili.*¹⁸

He, in consequence, never engaged with any enemy whom he did not conquer, besieged no city that he did not take, and invaded no nation that he did not subjugate. He was overcome at last, not by the prowess of any enemy, but by a conspiracy of those whom he trusted, and the treachery of his own subjects.

loss of his source the *Philippic Histories*, but his active role in choosing what to include or omit is here taken to mean authorship in the wider sense.

¹⁷ 12.15.3.

¹⁸ 12.16.11–12.

In addition to this depiction of the Macedonian as a ‘marvel’, the epilogue constructs an ethical interpretation of Alexander as an *exemplum* of the potency of treachery. This reading would seem to contrast with the relative lack of explicit ethical emphasis in the rest of the narrative. However, it is notable that Alexander himself is not presented here as an ethical *exemplum* (positive or negative) in terms of his own character; it is what happens to him, rather than what he himself has done, that provides the lesson about human betrayal. The moral valency that is undoubtedly present here still constructs Alexander as a ‘marvel’ first and foremost.

The *Epitome*’s historiography is therefore a complex phenomenon that combines several approaches, ending with an Alexander who is an *exemplum* indeed, but primarily as a rhetorically described ‘marvel’ rather than as an ethical model. However, the manuscripts may indicate that the *Epitome*’s interpretative history differs from this textual analysis.

1.2 Orosius, *Historiae*

Orosius’ *Historiae* was composed “to refute the current accusation that the collapse of West Roman civilisation was to be attributed to the anger of the Gods of Olympus at the apostasy of their worshippers to Christianity”, but it transcended its immediate confessional purpose to become “the standard universal history text of the Middle Ages”.¹⁹ Although Justin’s *Epitome* is one of the 5th-century historian Orosius’ key sources, the *Historiae* takes a different approach to Alexander. Orosius’ narrative of Alexander is part of a universal history with an explicitly apologetic hermeneutic and function. The *Historiae*’s Christianity therefore defines its historiography, since Orosius seeks to demonstrate that paganism is a threat to the Christian Rome that is God’s instrument for peace on earth. In his view, Rome is thus vital to the continued flourishing of Christianity, despite its recent sack by the Goths in 410, because it is the final worldly empire prophesied in the Bible, a Christian form of *translatio imperii et studii*. Orosius’ historiographical approach is to highlight the suffering of pre-Christian times in order to show that, in contrast to such times, even Rome in its darkest days is still an emblem of the ‘true’ faith to come. As such, his Alexander narrative, which occupies chapters 16 to 20 of book III, provides a grim picture of the pre-Roman (and pre-Christian) past. Historiography here has become salvation history, potentially combining Christian and moral readings of the past (the former being frequently dependent on the latter).

¹⁹ Bately/Ross (1961) 329.

This approach is evident from Alexander's first mention (in chapter 7), when he is introduced at birth as a bloodthirsty warmonger: *uere ille gurgis miseriarum atque atrocissimus turbo totius orientis*, "truly a whirlpool of sufferings and an ill-wind for the entire East".²⁰ This damning portrait is consistent throughout Alexander's narrative, which covers the same material as that of Justin, but from a much more rhetorically dramatic and negative perspective. Alexander is cruel, full of *pertinaci furore* ("insatiable fury"), greedy for wealth, and *sanguinem sitiens* ("thirsty for blood"); even his burial of Darius' body and his kindness towards Darius' female relatives, which Justin recounts, here become *inani misericordia* ("an empty gesture of pity") and an act of *crudeli captiuitate* ("cruel captivity").²¹ Another contrast with Justin is that in Orosius' version there is no sign of degeneration as Alexander moves further East; he is consistently violent throughout, as bad at the beginning as at the end of his life.

The crucial moment of Alexander's death shows this consistency clearly, since he dies of poison whilst *sanguinem sitiens male castigata auiditate* ("still thirsting for blood with a lust that was cruelly punished").²² Like Justin's *Epitome*, Orosius here follows this with an interpretative epilogue, although this is much longer and more detailed (occupying the remainder of book XX). It bewails the evils of the past and then seeks to demonstrate that, although Alexander's brutalities are in the past, they are vitally instructive for the present. Interestingly, part of the approach is to highlight the opposing point of view (that Alexander's conquests were praiseworthy) in order to demolish it (by claiming he was a *fugax latro* or "fugitive robber" who gained only one part of the world and is not worthy of remembrance).²³ This tacitly admits the inconvenient fact that Alexander could also be seen as a positive *exemplum* (at least in terms of conquest), and thus complicates Orosius' historiographical polemic by suggesting that other views are possible. Overall, however, Alexander is a consistently negative example of pagan power throughout Orosius' work, with no redeeming qualities, an appropriate historiographical embodiment of Christian salvation history based on his bloodthirsty behaviour. This ironically situates him as an 'anti-marvel', since his demonizing depiction is the mirror image of Justin's portrayal; both authors are engaged in the same discourse of interpretation.

Despite the fact that Orosius relies on Justin's earlier account, the two authors' works have different historiographical priorities. For Justin, Alexander is primarily an opportunity to demonstrate his skill in the rhetoric of 'marvels' and dramatic

²⁰ Oros. 3.7.5. The Latin text of Orosius' *Historiae* is always quoted from the critical edition by Arnuaud-Lindet (1990–1991).

²¹ Oros. 3.16.12, 3.17.5, 3.20.4 and 3.17.7.

²² Oros. 3.20.4.

²³ Oros. 3.20.9.

reversals, with ethical exemplarity being less important (although still present), even though his Prologue claims his approach is for pleasure and profit; his Macedonian is an embodied ‘marvel’ constructed by his oratorical skill. For Orosius, Alexander’s negative ethical portrayal is fundamental to his text’s Christian eschatological historiography, which leads to even greater rhetorical flights than Justin’s work and which also constructs Alexander, ironically, as a hideous wonder. Although these two authors’ works therefore differ from one another, the distinction is mostly one of emphasis; for example, both Justin and Orosius are concerned with ethical exemplarity, but to varying degrees and for seemingly different reasons. These varied presentations (and their different moral/ethical valencies) provide the later Middle Ages with creative possibilities for Alexander’s interpretation and adaptation.

1.3 *Historia de preliis*

The influence of Justin, and particularly Orosius, in the Middle Ages is matched (if not outweighed) by that of the *Alexander Romance* (AR), a phenomenon that is best understood as a network rather than an individual text.²⁴ Originally composed in Greek in the 3rd century BC, the *Romance* plays a huge part in later medieval textual culture across Europe and into the east, spreading into over 30 languages.²⁵ Its narrative begins with Alexander’s miraculous conception and birth, then moves on to tell of his conquest of Darius before describing his encounter with Porus and adventures in the East, ending with the conqueror’s death. A notable feature is the inclusion of many letters (e.g. between Alexander and Olympias, Alexander and Darius). The *Romance* survives in two well-known medieval Latin translations, the second of which is the *Nativitas et victoria Alexandri Magni* (known as the *Historia de preliis*), composed in the 10th century by the Archpriest Leo, who discovered a copy of the Greek *Alexander Romance* in Constantinople and translated it. Despite being described as a “wretched little book”, “clumsy and inelegant”, it was the inspiration for many of the European vernacular reworkings.²⁶ Leo’s work gave rise to three separate textual traditions, with the third of these being the most influential. This third tradition in turn pro-

²⁴ See Konstan (1998) 123.

²⁵ For a brief overview of the Greek *Alexander Romance* see Bridges (2018) 32–37, and for more textual details Stoneman (1991) 28–32.

²⁶ See Ross (1956) and Pritchard (1992) 7.

duced three different (and independent) versions, the J1 recension composed ca. 1100, J2 (no later than the second half of the 12th century), and J3 (late 12th/early 13th century).²⁷ Since it is the earliest version, the following analysis will focus on J1.

The J1 version of the *Historia de preliis* contains Leo's text interpolated with other material: Josephus, Jerome, Orosius, Solinus, Isidore, and various works describing Alexander's travels in the East (*On the Brahmins, Alexander and Dindimus, Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*).²⁸ It was less influential than J2 and J3, as it seems to have been eclipsed by their popularity: 18 manuscripts survive, as opposed to 37 and 39 for J2 and J3 respectively.²⁹ However, J1 is important given its composition date of around 1100, since it appears just before the explosion of the romance genre in Europe during the early 12th century (firstly in French, then in other vernaculars, as described above). Like its ultimate source the Greek *Alexander Romance*, and in marked contrast to Justin's and Orosius' works, the J1 *Historia de preliis* includes Alexander's more fantastical adventures in the East (his submarine and aerial exploits, for example), as well as the strange men and beasts found in the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*. The work's interest in marvels and 'fictional' adventures is intriguingly paralleled by the features of developing romance, making the Latin work an apt companion for, if not part of the inspiration behind, that genre, and thus giving it a particular importance in this literary-historical context.

The J1 version of the *Historia de preliis* has a complex relationship to both Leo's work and to the *AR* that has been discussed in detail elsewhere, but broadly J1 tends to elaborate and expand upon its sources.³⁰ Like Justin's *Epitome*, but to a greater extent, the text presents Alexander as a marvel in line with the other wonders (peoples, cities, adventures) that frequent the text. The natural phenomena that occur at his birth and his unusual physical appearance set the tone from the outset,³¹ which is also strikingly unadulterated by exemplary treatment; Alexander appears to be beyond the range of usual humanity in every sense (physical and ethical). Without assuming a hard division between 'romance' and 'history', this pervasive sense of the marvellous moves the work further away from historiography, since it prioritises what is now known as 'fiction' over the narration of historical events. Alexander's lack of exemplarity also moves the work away from

27 See Stoneman (1991) XXIX, for a useful table of texts and dates. The J1, J2 and J3 versions are edited separately by Hilka/Steffens (1979); Hilka (1976–1977) and Steffens (1975).

28 For an overview, see Pritchard (1992) 1–12.

29 These numbers are taken from Hilka/Magoun (1934), supplemented by those listed on *ArLiMA – Archives de littérature du Moyen Âge*, Pritchard (1990) and Bergmeister (1975).

30 Pritchard (1992) 10–11 gives a helpful overview.

31 See J1 1.9–11.

historiographical approaches that are dependent upon his moral interpretation, for example Orosius' *Historia*. The J1 *Historia de preliis* occupies a different position on the historiographical-fictional spectrum from either of the texts discussed so far.

However, there is a point of similarity between all three works, since like the *Epitome* and the *Historia* the J1 *Historia de preliis* also contains an epilogue. This passage, which is an addition in J1, describes Alexander's physical appearance:³²

Fuit enim Alexander statura mediocri, cervice longa, letis oculis, illustribus malis ad gratiam rubescentibus, reliquis membris corporis non sine maiestate quadam decoris, victor omnium, sed vino et ira victus.

Alexander was of fairly small size. He had a long neck and sparkling eyes, and a distinguishing feature were the cheeks that blushed to confer grace. Yet the other limbs of his body were not without some majestic beauty. He overcame all, but was himself overcome by wine and anger.

Alexander's small stature has been a feature elsewhere in the work and in the AR, but here it is prioritised as the first item of his portrait. The effect is to make him seem less of a marvel, more on a human scale, in contrast to his presentation thus far. The moralistic sentence about being overcome by wine and anger is another intriguing addition found only in J1, which also seems to contrast with the lack of an ethical approach elsewhere in the text. It is reminiscent of the phrase in Justin's epilogue *Victus denique ad postremum est non uirtute hostili, sed insidiis suorum et fraude ciuili*, "He was overcome at last, not by the prowess of any enemy, but by a conspiracy of those whom he trusted, and the treachery of his own subjects".³³ In contrast to Justin's epilogue, however, the J1 text does not blame the external forces of conspiracy and treachery for Alexander's downfall, but rather lays the blame on his own characteristics of greed and anger. Although the moralistic tone and sense of reversal of fortune is similar in both texts, the J1 version of the *Historia de preliis* takes this further in terms of making a judgement about Alexander's own ethical character. In this sense, the J1 *Historia de preliis* exacerbates the approach of Justin's work and that of the AR. Alexander is a marvel until he suddenly becomes all too human, and as such an example of humanity's common fate.

Although the contrast between the lack of an ethical hermeneutic throughout J1 and its sudden, stark appearance at the work's end is startling, there are some subtle anticipatory hints of this contrast in the narrative of Alexander's death

³² J1 3.35, trans. Pritchard (1992) section 130 and 123.

³³ *Epitome* 12.16.12.

that immediately precedes the epilogue. In another addition, the J1 text includes some small details that emphasise Alexander's humanity for the first time. At his poisoning, for example, Alexander drinks the toxin mixed with wine instead of on its own, and is visibly physically affected, leaning over to his right-hand side (3.127).³⁴ These may seem like insignificant additions, but they mark an important shift in the narrative, as they depict Alexander in human terms (drinking wine, reacting to physical pain), whereas the tale up to now has constructed him as super-human and invincible. This humanising of Alexander increases the sense of contrast between his past glory and his present deathly weakness; it is a rhetorical and dramatic effect that adds to the scene's pathos. The weeping and wailing of Alexander's soldiers is also heightened in J1, to the same effect.³⁵ The subtly increased humanity of Alexander that here intrudes on the super-hero story thus sets the scene for the more explicit contrast, and ethical interpretation, of the epilogue.

Although the J1 *Historia de preliis* differs markedly from the *Epitome* and the *Historia* in content, its presentation of Alexander as a marvel followed by his humanising is somewhat reminiscent of Justin's work, meaning that the *Historia de preliis* (at least in this example) develops some of the approaches seen in the late antique text. In addition, Alexander's increased humanity is perhaps a covert reflection on the complex issue of his paganism in a medieval Christian context, although it should be noted that Orosius' Christian history takes a different hermeneutic approach to this issue in its vituperation of the conqueror.

These three texts therefore demonstrate Alexander's hermeneutic possibilities by the 12th century. It is clear that, when compared, their approaches trouble the idea of a one-way movement from history to fiction, and also problematize the concept of a steadily increasing exemplarity from a chronological perspective. Yet it is also important to note that there are broad similarities across all three works, such as the depiction of Alexander as extraordinary from different perspectives. These works' preoccupations with varied historiographical approaches suggest that their existence in manuscripts may reflect a similar diversity. A further vital observation is that there is not necessarily a complete correlation between a text's hermeneutic approach (or approaches) to Alexander and the nature of the manuscript *compilatio* in which it is found (if the latter is identifiable); whilst this study will assume that there is some perceptible relationship between the two, it should be noted that such a relationship may be obscure. With

34 J1 1.31b, trans. Pritchard (1992) section 127 and 119.

35 J1 1.32.4, trans. Pritchard (1992) section 129 and 123.

these caveats in mind, the second part of this essay will consider the *Epitome*, the *Historiae* and the *Historia de preliis* in their manuscript contexts.

2 Manuscripts

2.1 Justin, *Epitome*

According to Munk Olsen, there are 39 manuscript copies of Justin's work datable to between the 9th and 12th centuries, and another 164 originate in Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries.³⁶ Together, these manuscripts account for the majority of the known copies (203 of 207). It seems, then, that there are two distinct medieval periods of interest in Justin's work. The following analysis will focus on the first, since this is the period in which medieval Alexander texts begin to appear in number.

Of the 39 witnesses dated to this first period, at least 20 contain the *Epitome* alone, three pair it with Justin as the only other text, and 12 juxtapose it with other works (some including Orosius). This group of 12 witnesses may suggest medieval compilers' and readers' interpretative approaches to Justin in terms of the texts that appear alongside the *Epitome*.³⁷

Tab. 1: Multi-text manuscripts of Justin, *Epitome* (9th-13th centuries).

Manuscript	Date and provenance	Texts
Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 582-II	Start of 12 th century	2: Boethius, <i>Arithmetica</i> ; Justin, <i>Epitome</i>
Cambridge, Clare College, 19 (Kk.4.5)-II	Start of 12 th century; England	3: Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; Vegetius, <i>Epitoma rei militaris</i> (extracts)
Cambridge, Trinity College, B.1.29 (27)-III	12 th /13 th century; England?	5: Historical compilations, including extracts from Justin, <i>Epitome</i>
Cambridge, University Library, Dd.IV.11	12 th /13 th century	3: William of St Denis' Latin <i>Vita</i> of philosopher Secundus; Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; manual of penitence

³⁶ Munk Olsen (1982) 537–551; Ross (1956) 261. See also Reynolds/Marshall (1983) 197–199.

³⁷ For the purposes of this study, I am assuming that these books, whether copied at one time or over several periods, construct an interpretative *compilatio* out of their texts (intentionally or otherwise). On the questions of definition raised by reading anthologies, see Bridges (2015).

Tab. 1 (continued)

Manuscript	Date and provenance	Texts
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 601-II	10 th century; south Germany or Switzerland	3: Dares, <i>De excidio Troiae</i> ; Justin, <i>Epitome</i> (extracts?); Greek-Latin glossary and grammar
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Selden B. 16	ca. 1130; England	5: Dares, <i>De excidio Troiae</i> ; Justin, <i>Epitome</i> (extracts); Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; a triple history made up of Eutropius, <i>De gestis Romanorum</i> (including Paul the Deacon's additions), another history of the same name by Jordan bishop of Ravenna, and a digest made by William from Haimo of Florence; a legal text compiled of various works
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 4952	Start of 12 th century; France, probably east	2: Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; letter from Arnauld bishop of Halberstadt (996–1023) to Henri bishop of Wurtzburg
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 6256	Second quarter of 12 th century; western France	5: Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; a commentary on Caesar, <i>De bellum civile</i> ; extracts from Sallust; “de libro Egesippi” (Hegesippus) and extracts from Josephus
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 15425	12 th century; France	6: Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; Seneca, <i>De beneficiis</i> ; Thégan, <i>Vie de Louis le Debonnaire</i> ; Eginhard, <i>Vie de Karoli Magni</i> ; annals; <i>Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem</i>
St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 623	Second half of 9 th century; St Gall	2: Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; ecclesiastical vestment inventory
Sélestat, Bibliothèque municipale, 99-I	12 th century; France/Germany	2: Justin, <i>Epitome</i> ; <i>Historia Trevirorum</i>
Vatican City, Vatican Library, Pal. lat. 927	End of 12 th century; Verona	More than 7, all historical works: Justin, <i>Epitome</i> (extracts) are nos. 6 and 7; other contents are extracts from Bede, Cassiodorus, Isidore, Eutropius, Paul the Deacon

These 12 manuscripts highlight that Justin's *Epitome* is being read alongside a variety of mainly historical texts, often in the form of extracts juxtaposed with similar works to form narrative histories (Cambridge, Trinity College, B.1.29 (27)-III; Vatican City, Vatican Library, Pal. lat. 927; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Selden B. 16). This is not surprising, but it is an indication of how highly the text was thought of to find it alongside such stalwarts as Dares and Isidore, not to mention the manuscripts in which it is found with Orosius' *Historia*; Lars Boje Mortensen has demon-

strated that pairing Justin and Orosius was a particular speciality of northern France and southern England in this period, clearly indicating the *Epitome*'s prestige.³⁸ The *Epitome* is also found with *vitae* of saints and kings (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 15425) in a slightly different form of historiographical *compilatio*, one that is apt for the text's interest in Alexander as a superhuman 'marvel'. These manuscripts, then, demonstrate that Justin's *Epitome* was viewed as an important part of medieval historiography, integrating its version of Alexander into a capacious historical narrative that included Troy texts and Christian eschatology (Orosius) as well as saints' and kings' lives. The *Epitome*'s high-medieval manuscript anthologies thus indicate Alexander's useful range of hermeneutic possibilities.

2.2 Orosius, *Historiae*

Of the 249 surviving manuscripts of the *Historiae*, 204 date from the 11th century onwards, which indicates a high level of later medieval interest.³⁹ In addition, Orosius' work was translated into several vernacular languages, disseminating its material more widely.⁴⁰ Given the numbers of manuscripts involved, the following analysis focuses on those now held in the British Library.

There are ten complete or abbreviated copies in the British Library collection that date from the 12th to 15th centuries. They are as follows:

Tab. 2: Manuscripts of Orosius, *Historiae*, held in the British Library (12th–15th centuries).

Manuscript	Date and provenance	Texts
Burney 214	ca. 1434; Basel	1: Orosius, <i>Historiae</i>
Burney 215	ca. 1235; France	2: Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; Old Testament compilation
Burney 216	Second or third quarter/ late 12 th century; Yorkshire	5: Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; Dares, <i>De excidio Troiae</i> ; Constantine the African, <i>De melancholia</i> ; William of Conches, <i>De philosophia mundi</i> ; Abelard, <i>Carmen ad Astralabium</i>

³⁸ Mortensen (1990) 389.

³⁹ The figures are taken from Mortensen (1999–2000), to whom I am deeply indebted for this analysis. There are more MSS dating from the 12th and 15th centuries – a third of all the copies are from the 1400s, as ascertained by Mortensen (1999–2000) 108.

⁴⁰ The Old English version of Orosius' text is a good example.

Tab. 2 (continued)

Manuscript	Date and provenance	Texts
Royal 6 C VIII and Cotton Vitellius C VIII	Second/third quarter of the 12 th century; Rievaulx	3: Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; Dares, <i>De excidio Troiae</i> ; <i>Cronica Anglorum</i>
Royal 7 D XXV	Late 12 th century; possibly copied by Adelard of Bath	6: Commentary on Matthew; Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> (abbreviated); Bede (extracts: actually Isidore, <i>Etymologiae</i>); <i>distinctiones</i> in Victorine style; Plato, <i>Timaeus</i> in Latin; Boethius, Aristotle commentary
Royal 13 A XX	13 th century with 14 th -century marginal notes; England	Orosius, <i>Historiae</i>
Egerton 639	15 th century; England	Orosius, <i>Historiae</i>
Harley 2765	First quarter of the 15 th century; Italy	4: Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; Livy, <i>Ab urbe condita</i> (abbreviated); Livy (full); Caesar's letters; Zenobia da Florencia, <i>Oratio</i>
Harley 654	14 th century	4: Eutropius, <i>Historiae Romanae</i> ; Paul the Deacon's additions to Eutropius; list of Roman emperors; Orosius, <i>Historiae</i>
Additional 26623	15 th century; England	Orosius, <i>Historiae</i> ; Bernard of Clairvaux; Jerome etc. ⁴¹

Of these, three (Burney 214, Royal 13 A xx and Egerton 639) contain the *Historiae* alone, and in the other seven witnesses, Orosius' work is accompanied by a variety of texts; both situations are usual across all the copies. The anthologies are of particular interest here, since they provide evidence of the kinds of works that were read alongside the *Historiae*, and thus may suggest the hermeneutic practices applied to the work. Three of the anthologies date from the 12th century, in line with patterns of copying and survival noted by Mortensen: Burney 216, Royal 6 C VIII and Cotton Vitellius C VIII, and Royal 7 D XXV. Interestingly, these manuscripts demonstrate the greatest variety of texts of the ten books: they contain narratives of Troy (Dares), Biblical texts and commentaries (Old Testament compilation, Commentary on Matthew), and many that relate to the theological and scientific culture of northern France in the 12th century (*De melancholia*, *De phi-*

⁴¹ The information is derived from Bately/Ross (1961); Mortensen (1999–2000), and the catalogues available on the British Library website. There are some small disparities in dating; where the sources differ, I have followed the website.

losophia mundi, Isidore, the Latin *Timaeus*, Boethius' commentary on Aristotle, *distinctiones*). It is more common to find Orosius' text alongside one or two other historically-focused texts, such as Dares' *De excidio Troiae*, Alexander material (e.g. *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*), Justin's *Epitome*, or Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana*;⁴² the number and variety of works in Burney 216 and Royal 7 D XXV are especially unusual. This Royal MS is particularly erudite; dating from the later 12th century, it may have been owned by the scholar Adelard of Bath. Here the *Historiae* is found with Plato's *Timaeus* in Latin and a commentary by Boethius on Aristotle, as well as with a Bible commentary and theological *distinctiones*. Burney 216 contains Orosius' text alongside Dares' Troy narrative, an 11th-century treatise on melancholy, William of Conches' *De philosophia mundi* and a work attributed to Abelard. These two (admittedly unusual) manuscripts demonstrate the 12th-century importance of the *Historiae* beyond its immediate historical contents. In Royal 7 D XXV, it is part of what looks like a collection of 'key' works covering the vital branches of knowledge: the *Historiae* takes its place alongside Biblical texts and studies, classical philosophy and science as a model for the historical understanding of the world. In Burney 216 (and also in the Royal and Cotton combination), Orosius' history is set alongside a rather different historical work, Dares' Latin prose tale of Troy, providing the reader with not just two separate narratives but two varying approaches to history (Dares' work is not written from a Christian eschatological perspective). The presence of a prestigious philosophical work, William of Conches' *De philosophia mundi*, locates the manuscript (like Royal 7 D XXV) within the exciting intellectual culture of the later 12th century.

These manuscripts of course provide only a couple of glimpses of Orosius' work at a specific point in the later Middle Ages, but they are illuminating nonetheless. They demonstrate that the *Historiae* was incorporated into the 12th-century scholarly culture that developed in northern France, valued both for its historical contents and also for its historiography; reading it alongside Dares' Troy narrative would have provided not just new factual material but, crucially, would have demonstrated a different approach to the writing and interpretation of history. Although Alexander's story forms only a small part of Orosius' *Historiae*, it is nevertheless incorporated into the varied historiographical possibilities developing in this period. Justin's *Epitome* is also part of this historiographical spectrum, but interestingly it is present in a less diverse range of manuscripts. This may be due to Orosius' greater ubiquity.

42 Mortensen (1999–2000) 119–165.

2.3 *Historia de preliis* (J1)

As mentioned above, the J1 version of the *Historia de preliis* is found in 18 surviving manuscripts, 11 of which are considered here.⁴³

Tab. 3: Manuscripts of J1 *Historia de preliis*.

Manuscript	Date and provenance	Texts
Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 105	12 th century	2: Josephus, <i>De bello Judaico</i> ; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1
Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 1520	12 th century	1: <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1 (beginning missing)
London, British Library, Royal 13 C XII	Early 15 th century; England?	3: Guido de Columnis, <i>Historia destructionis Troiae</i> ; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1; Hayto, <i>Flos Historiarum</i>
London, British Library, Arundel 123	First quarter of 14 th century; England	9: Bartholomeus Anglicus, <i>De proprietatibus rerum</i> , book XV; opening of Pseudo-Aethicus, <i>Cosmographia</i> , followed by material from Pliny, <i>Natural History</i> ; Honorius Augustodunensis, <i>De imagine mundi</i> , book I; Apollonius of Tyre, <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1; Johannes Hispaniensis, <i>Regimen sanitatis</i> (<i>Secretum secretorum</i> text); Bede, <i>De temporum ratione liber</i> (extract) with Aethicus Ister, <i>Cosmographia</i> , extract from book III; <i>Liber philosophorum moralium antiquum</i> ; dialogue between Hadrian and Secundus
Madrid, National Library of Spain, 9783	13 th century, with 15 th -century notes; France	18 items, including: Turpin, <i>Historia Karoli magni et Rotholandi</i> ; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1; <i>Iter Alexandri ad paradisum</i> ; <i>Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem</i> ; <i>Visio Tgnudali</i> ; <i>Visio monachi de Eynesham</i> ; <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> ; <i>Book of the BVM</i> ; <i>Gesta Francorum</i> ; <i>Descriptio sanctorum locorum in Hierusalem</i>
Munich, Bayerisch Staatsbibliothek, Clm 7843	1450	3: Augustine of Ancona, commentary on the <i>Magnificat</i> ; Jacobus de Cessolis, <i>Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium super ludo scacchorum</i> ; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1

⁴³ These are the MSS with accessible descriptions at the time of writing.

Tab. 3 (continued)

Manuscript	Date and provenance	Texts
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson A 273	Second half of 14 th century; England	Multiple: Ps-Aristotle, <i>Secretum secretorum</i> , Ps.-Aristotle, <i>De pomo</i> , <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1; Lapidary; “texts on natural philosophy”, ditto on theology and religious texts, proverbs (Latin, Anglo-Norman, English), letters and charters of popes, English kings and bishops (mid 13 th -mid 14 th century), other letters
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 149	End of 14 th century; England	6: John of Hildesheim, <i>Historia trium regum</i> ; <i>Arthur and Gorlagon</i> (Latin); <i>Apollonius of Tyre</i> ; <i>Historia Meriadoci Regis Cambriae</i> ; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1; Ps-Aristotle, <i>Secretum secretorum</i>
Oxford, Bodleian Library, E. D. Clarke 27	15 th century; German/Austrian?	2: <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1; <i>History of Trojan War</i> (no more information)
Oxford, New College, 342	15 th century	3: Text “de regimine principum”; text “de consolatione humanae miseriae”; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 8501	13 th century; southern Italy	2: Versified adaptation of J3 <i>Historia de preliis</i> ; <i>Historia de preliis</i> J1

These manuscripts situate the J1 *Historia de preliis* in varied textual company. The presence of Troy material (Royal 13 C XII, Clarke 27) is familiar from Orosius’ manuscripts, but the intellectual treatises found alongside the *Historia* are not so prominent here. Instead of Plato, William of Conches and Bede, these manuscripts contain the more fantastical Alexander texts (Madrid 9783), saints’ lives, apocryphal gospels, visions and devotional works (Madrid 9783, Rawlinson A 273), and advice literature (Arundel 123, Rawlinson A 273, Rawlinson B 149, New College 342). Particularly noteworthy is the repeated presence of the *Secretum secretorum*, a natural companion to the *Historia de preliis* given its supposedly Aristotelian authorship (Arundel 123, Rawlinson A 273, Rawlinson B 149), and *Apollonius of Tyre* (Arundel 123, Rawlinson B 149); an advisory text and a late-antique romance, both works contextualise the J1 *Historia de preliis* in exemplary and fictional terms. Arundel 123 stands out as an explicitly Alexander-focused book, placing Alexander’s narratives in the wider context of an interest in travel, namely the geography and ‘marvels’ of the world (items 1–4); items 5–8 are all concerned primarily with the conqueror’s adventures, starting with the J1 *Historia de preliis* and then moving on to extracts

from the *Secretum secretorum*, Bede's *De temporum ratione liber* mixed with Aethicus Ister's *Cosmographia*, and the *Liber philosophorum*.⁴⁴ This sense of Alexander as a marvel is also found in Rawlinson B 149, albeit in a more 'fictional' context. Here Alexander's status as a superhuman marvel in much of the J1 *Historia de preliis* is reflected in the similar preoccupations of the book's Latin works, which are narratives of Apollonius, the three kings, Arthur, and a mythical king of Wales. This manuscript as a whole demonstrates "a delight in the adventurous and the fantastic"⁴⁵ to which the *Historia de preliis*'s wondrous Alexander contributes. Yet this pronounced tendency to associate the *Historia de preliis* with marvels (and thus generically with romance works) should not diminish the Alexander work's relevance in less fictional contexts. Its presence alongside theological and historical documents in Rawlinson A 273, Madrid 9783 and Arundel 123 demonstrates that the *Historia de preliis* remains part of a wide historiographical tradition that can encompass the apologetic eschatology of Orosius and the devotional histories of saints. Once again, we are reminded that there is no sharp distinction between 'history' and 'fiction'.

In these manuscripts, therefore, the J1 *Historia de preliis* is participating in a variety of literary contexts, demonstrating the point made above about the plural nature of Alexander's medieval interpretations. It is this multiple, even eclectic presence that has become more apparent when the medieval witnesses are considered, an eclecticism that stands out from the manuscript situations of the *Epitome* and *Historiae*.

Conclusion

In the light of these historiographical and codicological comparisons, Alexander's 14th-century presence as one of the Nine Worthies is not the triumph of medieval chivalric romance over historiography that it initially seems. Instead, it conceals a more complex historiographical perspective, one also found in these earlier Latin works themselves and their manuscript histories. It is a perspective that is intrigued by the 'marvellous' aspects of Alexander and his narrative, and alert to the exemplary opportunities (and difficulties) of interpretation that these present. This is less surprising in the *Historia de preliis*, since it draws its material from the fantastical Greek *Alexander Romance*, but it is interesting to find a comparable interest in wonders in the *Epitome* and the *Historiae*, admittedly in varying

⁴⁴ Hamel (1997) 2–8.

⁴⁵ Day (1990) 69.

ways. The three works' manuscript histories also demonstrate a similarly broad historiographical interest, judging by their *compilatio*; Alexander's story is unsurprisingly most often found amongst historical works of various kinds, but it is also accompanied by saints' lives, charters, letters, manuals of pastoral care, *gesta regum*, and even a treatise on the game of chess. Alexander has evidently been in diverse company even before the vast proliferation of his narrative in the late medieval vernaculars of western Europe.

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