CHAPTER TEN
THE ALEXANDER TRADITION IN SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION

If news of Alexander’s life and deeds did not already circulate in Roman or Visigothic Spain, it almost certainly arrived in the Peninsula during the first hundred years of Arab rule (beginning in 711). This is because the figure of Alexander was closely scrutinized among Muslim scholars as protagonist of a Quranic episode. Furthermore, two of the surviving Arabic Alexander romances cite important sources from North Africa, pertaining to the eighth century, suggesting that the legend traveled from east to west with the expansion of the Islamic Empire and the flow of oriental culture from Baghdad to Cordoba. Quranic commentaries, legends, and fiction associated with Alexander as a sort of Islamic sacred figure constituted a major body of literature present in Spain from the ninth through the seventeenth century. At the same time, we do not find definitive intertextual relationships between this literature of Arab Spain and the surviving romances in the vernacular, which show a strong influence of literature traveling south from France. The two most important romances concerning Alexander in medieval Christian Spain are the Libro de Alexandre and the Historia novelada de Alejandro Magno. The first is an anonymous poem, much more famous than the second work of prose, which remained buried in the unpublished Part 4 of Alfonso X’s General Estoria, only fairly recently printed. The first pages of our essay will discuss the Libro de Alexandre and then we will turn our attention to Alfonso X’s version. Finally, we give an overview of Spanish wisdom literature concerning Alexander wherein we do indeed find the influence of the Arabic tradition.

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1 See the above chapter on the Arabic tradition of Alexander.
3 The General Estoria: Cuarta Parte has still not been printed.
Part I. The Libro de Alexandre

I. Authorship

Despite many efforts to attribute authorship to the Libro de Alexandre, the work remains anonymous.4 One position identifies the clergyman Juan Lorenzo de Astorga as author based on the fact that in manuscript O, the explicit reads

Se quisierdes saber quien escreuio este ditado
Johân Lorenço bon clêrigo & ondrado
Natural de Astorga: de mañas bien temprado
El día del Iuyzio: Dios sea mio pagado Amen

Menéndez Pidal argued as late as 1961 for Juan Lorenzo’s authorship.5 Lida de Malkiel (1952) accepted Menéndez Pidal’s position. However, Michael’s discovery6 of a scribe by the name of Juan Lorenzo in the Leonese Monasterio of Otero de las Dueñas between the years 1286 and 1297 is strong support for the opinion that Juan Lorenzo was the copyist.7 One of the pillars of Menéndez Pidal’s argument was that the Libro de Alexandre was originally written in the Leonese dialect. But the discovery of manuscript P led most modern editors to agree that Leonese was not the original language.8 Undeniably, the work has characteristics from the Leonese dialect, but these are from the scribe.9

A second position, stronger than the first, draws from the explicit of the 15th-century manuscript P, which reads

Sy queredes saber quien fiço esti ditado
Gonçalo de Berçeo es por nonbre clamado
Natural de Madrid en Sant Myljan criado
Del abat Johan Sancheç notario por nombrado.

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4 Michael reviews the scholarship on authorship as well as on other points of contention regarding the Alexandre (1965): 581–595. For authorship see pp. 585–586.
5 I am indebted to J. Casas Rigall for the part of this study dealing with the authorship and, more broadly, for the present chapter in very many ways.
6 Michael, “The Alexandre ‘Enigma’: A Solution,” p. 120.
7 See Ware, N.J. “Gonzalo, Lorenço, Lorente, an Alexandre enigma,” BHS 44 (1967): 41–43.
9 For a survey of Leonisms, see Llorach (1948), pp. 17–38.