The famous *Alexander Romance* by Pseudo-Callisthenes (PC) and its derivatives form one of the most widespread, long lasting and influential traditions in literary history. Apart from its dissemination in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Hebrew and the vernaculars of medieval Europe, the Romance also became part of the cultural history of the Middle East, North Africa and the entire Islamic world.

The primary source for this 'oriental' tradition was the Syriac translation of the *Alexander Romance*. In this chapter the focus will be on the forms, varieties and aftermath of the PC in Syriac and Arabic literature and culture.

### A. The Syriac *Alexander Romance*

#### 1. Research History

The history of research on the Syriac *Alexander Romance*, Taš’īta d-ʾAleksandrōs, goes back to the 19th century. The text was first edited and translated by E.A. Wallis Budge in 1889. The publication was prefaced by a substantial introduction. Wallis Budge based his edition on five manuscripts, the earliest of which does not predate the 18th century, while the translation is considered to have been made around 600. He was of the opinion that the Syriac PC was not translated immediately from Greek, but by way of an intermediary Arabic translation – a theory that he shared with W. Wright. The assumption, however, did not stand up for long, because, shortly after, Nöldeke launched the hypothesis that the Syriac text was based on a Middle Persian (Pahlavi) inter-

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1. Some parts of it had been published earlier by Perkins/Woolsey, "Notice", pp. 357–440.
2. For a survey of the manuscripts see Wallis Budge’s Introduction to his edition and the summary in Monferrer-Sala, ‘Alexander the Great’, pp. 45–47. Currently, J. van Ginkel has traced up to seventeen manuscripts in total. See below, note 10.
mediary translation. According to Nöldeke, the aberrations of the Greek names could only be explained by the use of letters of the Pahlavi alphabet. Hence, he assumed that the Greek Romance had been translated, quite faithfully, into Middle Persian shortly before the 7th century, and that this translation had been transposed into Syriac by a Nestorian Christian.

Subsequently, in 1891, S. Fraenkel expressed some reservations with regard to Nöldeke’s argumentation. Since then, however, Nöldeke’s theory has not seriously been challenged until 1985, when R. Frye raised some objections – mostly of a socio-cultural nature – against the hypothesis of a Middle Persian intermediary translation.

The antecedents of the Syriac ROMANCE came under renewed consideration and the discussion is in full swing after publications by C. Ciancaglini and K. van Bladel. A recurring point of debate is whether a Middle Persian translation of the Alexander Romance in Sassanian times that was so ‘ill-disposed to Persia and the Achaemenids’ is at all conceivable.

The discussion about the coming about of the Syriac text touches on an array of aspects which involve linguistics, orthography, philology, socio-cultural matters, and transmission. Since the question of the antecedent of the Syriac translation as yet has not been satisfactorily answered, the issue will receive new attention, within the current research program *Beyond the European Myth*.

When we reflect on the Syriac Romance in the present state, as it has come down to us, we can observe certain distinct features. The text has preserved much of the character of the original Romance in Greek (3rd century AD); it shares this feature with the 4th century Latin translation (Iulius Valerius) and

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4 Nöldeke, *Beiträge*, pp. 11–24. He came to this conclusion, mainly, on the basis of the specific features of the corruption of the Greek proper names in the Syriac text.

5 This had been briefly considered and rejected by Perkins/Woolsey, “Notice”, p. 385 and p. 388.


7 Frye, “The Pahlavi Alexander Romance”.


10 The Syriast, Jan van Ginkel, re-investigates this theory within the framework of the research program: *Beyond the European Myth. In Search of the Afro-Asiatic Alexander Cycle and the Transnational Migration of Ideas and Concepts of Culture and Identity* at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, supervised by Doufikar-Aerts. I thank van Ginkel for his useful comments and some additional bibliographical information to this paper.