

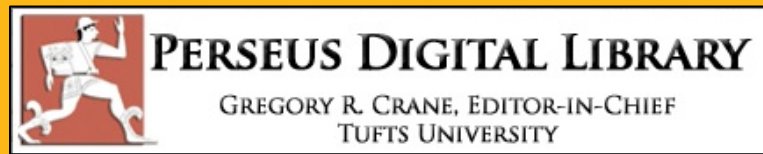
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# Alexander the Great and Aristotle in the *Libro de Alexandre*

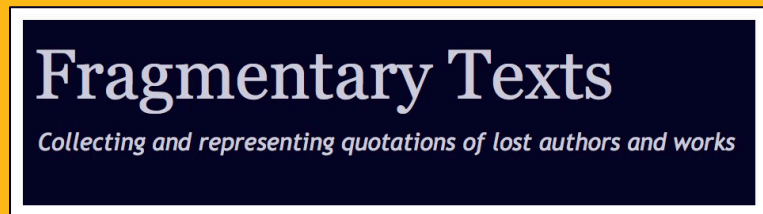
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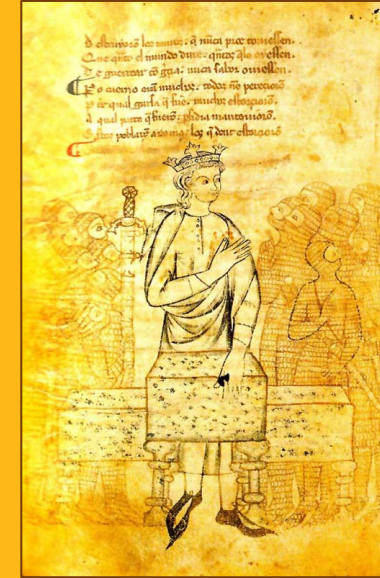
## The Ancient Library of Alexandria

A Project on the Ancient Library of Alexandria, its History, and its Place in Western Culture

<http://www.alexandrianlibrary.org/>

## Aim of this paper

- read the text of the medieval Spanish poem *El libro de Alexandre* from the perspective of a **Classicist**
- focus on the relationship between **Alexander the Great** and his **master Aristotle**
- read the text as a sort of mirror of fragments of Classical literature reflected from a Medieval surface, where echoes of the past live again in a **chivalry scenario**
- the image of Aristotle and his pupil Alexander offers interesting elements for exploring the complex phenomenon of **intertextuality** that interrelates: **sapiential statements** (Aristotle's teaching and guidance) and **exemplary literature** (Alexander as a scholar and warrior)



## Ancient sources on Alexander the Great

- royal *ephemerides* (ἐφημερίδης)  
personal notes of Alexander (the ‘war journal’)
- contemporary Greek authors (preserved in fragments)
  - Callisthenes of Olynthus (FGrH 124)
  - Chares of Mytilene (FGrH 125)
  - Nearchus of Crete (FGrH 133)
  - Onesicritus of Astypalaea (FGrH 134)
  - Ptolemy son of Lagos (FGrH 138)
  - Aristobulus of Cassandreia (FGrH 139)
  - Cleitarchus of Alexandria (FGrH 137)
  - Ephippus of Olynthus (FGrH 126)
  - Polyclitus of Larissa (FGrH 128)
  - Medeios of Larissa (FGrH 129)

## Ancient sources on Alexander the Great

- later authors (1st century BC - 2nd century AD)
  - Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* (book 17)
  - Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historia Alexandri Magni*
  - Plutarchus, *Alexander* and *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute*
  - Flavius Arrianus, *Alexandri anabasis*
  - Justine, *Epitome* of Pompeius Trogus, *Historia Philippica*
  - Strabo, *Geographica* (books 15-17)
- *The Greek Alexander Romance* (3rd century BC - 3rd century AD)

## Main Latin sources on Alexander

(Classical and early Medieval periods)

- Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historia Alexandri Magni*
- *The Alexander Romance* (translated into many languages)  
4th century AD Latin translation by Julius Valerius (*Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis*)
- *Itinerarium Alexandri* (340-345 AD)
- the “Metz Epitome” (4th-5th century AD)  
*Epitome of the Deeds of Alexander the Great*  
*On the Death and Testament of Alexander*
- Fulgentius, *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* (late 5th century AD)
- Aethicus Ister, *Cosmographia* (8th century AD)
- *The Letter to Aristotle* (8th-10th century AD)
- *The Letter of Pharasmanes* (7th-8th century AD)
- Leo the Archpriest, *Historia de proeliis* (10th century AD)

## Other important sources for the *Libro de Alexandre* (12th century AD)

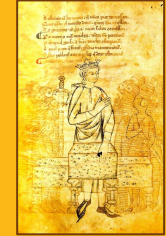
- *Roman d'Alexandre* (vast assemblage in verse)
- Gautier de Châtillon, *Alexandreis*
- Latin accounts of the Trojan war
- Alexander texts from Islamic literature
- Alexander iconography



(Venice, St. Mark's Basilica, 12th century)



## *Libro de Alexandre*



- poem written by an anonymous Spanish author of the clergy
- context and date: the world of school or university studies in the first two or three decades of the 13th century
- programmatic claims of the author in the opening *stanzas*:

2 Mester traigo fermoso, non es de joglaría,  
mester es sin pecado, que es de clerecía:  
fablar curso rimado por la quaderna vía,  
a sílabas contadas, ca es grant maestría.

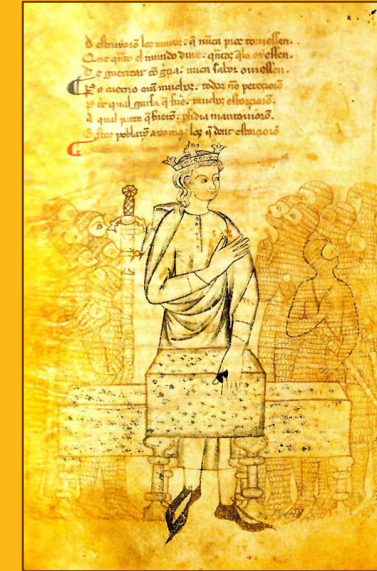
*The craft I bring is refined, it is no minstrel's work,  
a craft without fault, born of the clergy's learning:  
to compose rhyming verse in the four-line form,  
with counted syllables – an act of great mastery.*

5 Quiero leer un livro d'un rey noble, pagano  
que fue de grant esfuerço, de coraçon loçano:  
conquiso tod' el mundo, metiólo so su mano.  
Ternéme si lo cumplo non por non mal escrivano.

*I want to read a book about a worthy pagan king,  
about a great-hearted man of highest valour.  
He conquered the whole world and held it in his grip.  
If I succeed, I shall hold myself no mean writer.*

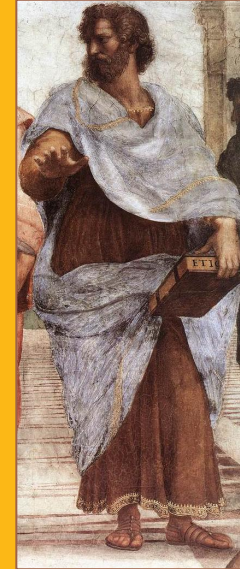
## Synopsis of the *Libro de Alexandre*

- 2675 stanzas:
  - birth and childhood of Alexander
  - campaigns in Greece
  - expedition to Asia
  - capture of Sidon, Tyre, and Gaza
  - visit to the shrine of Ammon at the Siwah oasis in Egypt
  - capture of Babylon and Susa
  - plans to conquer India
  - the death of Alexander
  - burial and remembrance of Alexander



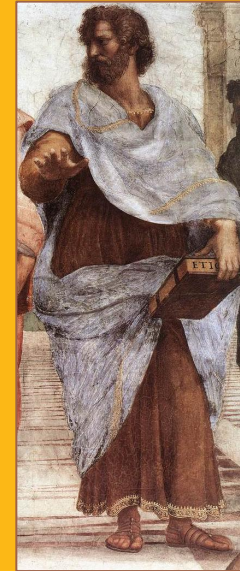
## Aristotle in the *Libro de Alexandre*

- 1-6: prologue
- 7-18: Alexander's birth and childhood
- 19-20: the death of Nectanebo
- 21-88: Alexander's lament about Persian domination;  
→ Aristotle's teachings and Alexander's response
- 89-107: Alexander determined to be knighted: description of his arms
- 108-119: Bucephalus
- 120-126: Alexander knights himself



## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

- 32-35: Aristotle meets Alexander
- 36-47: Aristotle begins to question Alexander. Alexander replies showing his learning, but lamenting about Persian domination
- 48-86: Aristotle's response



## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

stanzas 32-35

- Aristotle (the master)

- is forming syllogisms working the whole day and night
- he sets out to see his pupil around the hour of None

- Alexander (the pupil)

34 Los ojos tenié blancos e la color mudada,  
los cabellos en tuerto, la maxilla delgada.  
Nos' le tenié la çinta, yuso yazié colgada;  
podrié caer en tierra de poca empuxada.

*His eyes were white and his face looked pale;  
his hair was dishevelled and his cheeks were fallow;  
the band he wore on his head hung loose;  
with a gentle push, he would have fallen to the ground.*



## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 36-47

- Alexander replies to the questions of his master and exposes Aristotle's teaching

32 Maestre Aristótiles, que lo avié criado,  
seyé en est' comedio en su casa çerrado.  
Avié un silogismo de lógica formado;  
essa noche nin es' dia nunca avié folgado.

*Master Aristotle, who had educated him,  
was, at that time, shut away in his home;  
he had formed a syllogism using his logic  
and had taken no rest on that night or that day.*

33 Más era de medio día, nona podrié seer;  
exió Aristótiles a su criado veer.  
Quis quier' gelo podrié por uista coñoçer  
que veló al cresuelo do vinié de leer.

*It was after midday, perhaps the hour of None,  
when Aristotle set out to see his pupil;  
anyone could tell, on account of his appearance,  
that he had been reading, sat up by an oil lamp.*

34 Los ojos tenié blancos e la color mudada,  
los cabellos en tuerto, la maxilla delgada.  
Nos' le tenié la çinta, yuso yazié colgada;  
podrié caer en tierra de poca empuxada.

*His eyes were white and his face looked pale;  
his hair was dishevelled and his cheeks were sallow;  
the band he wore on his head hung loose;  
with a gentle push, he would have fallen to the ground.*



## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 36-47

- Alexander replies to the questions of his master and exposes Aristotle's teaching

35 Quando vio al diçiplo seer tan sin color,  
sabet que el maestro ovo muy mal sabor.  
Nunca pesar le vino quel' semejas' peor,  
pero ovo el niño, quandol' vio, grant pavor.

*When he saw his disciple had become so ashen-faced,  
I can tell you that the master was deeply upset;  
he did not think he had ever felt a deeper sorrow;  
but the youth, when he saw him, was greatly afraid.*

36 Empeçol' el maestro al infant' demandar:  
"Fijo, ¿vos qué oviestes o quién vos fizo pesar?  
Si yo saberlo puedo, non me lo podrá lograr.  
Vos non melo devedes a mí esto çelar".

*The master began to question the Prince:  
"My son, what has ailed you? Who has upset you?  
If I may know what it is, it cannot trouble me.  
You must not keep this hidden from me".*

37 El infant' al maestro non l'osava catar;  
daval grant reverençia, nol' querié refertar.  
Demandóle liçençia que le mandas' fablar.  
Otorgóla de grado e mandól' empear.

*The Prince did not dare look his master in the eye;  
he greatly revered him and would not contradict him;  
he asked him for permission to be allowed to speak;  
Aristotle gave it willingly and told him to begin.*

## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 36-47

- Alexander replies to the questions of his master and exposes Aristotle's teaching

38 “Maestro, tú me crieste, por ti sé clerecía.  
Mucho me as bien fecho, graçir non te lo sabría.

A ti me dio mi padre quand' siet' años avía  
porque de los maestros aviés grant mejoría.

39 Assaz sé clerecía quanto me es mester;  
fuera tú, non ha ome que me pudies' vençer.  
Coñosco que a ti lo devo gradeçer  
que m' enseñaste las artes todas a entender.

40 Entiendo bien gramática, sé bien toda natura;  
bien dicto e versifico, coñosco bien figura;  
de cuer sé los actores, de libro non he cura;  
mas todo lo olvido, tant' he fiera rencura.

*“Master, you have taught me and through you I have learning;  
you have done me much good - I would not know how to thank  
you;  
my father entrusted me to you when I was seven years old  
because among all the masters you were the finest.*

*I have sufficient learning, as much as is my need;  
besides you there is no man who could outdo me.  
I recognise that I must thank you for this,  
since you taught me to understand all of the arts.*

*I understand grammar well, I know soundly the whole art,  
I compose and write verse well and am familiar with the figures;  
I know the authors by heart, I find no book difficult.  
But I am forgetting it all, so great is my ire.*



## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 36-47

- Alexander replies to the questions of his master and exposes Aristotle's teaching

41 Bien sé los argumentos de lógica formar,  
los dobles silogismos bien los sé yo falsar,  
bien sé yo a la parada a mj contrario levar;  
mas todo lo olvido, tanto he grant pesar.

*I know well how to form arguments from logic  
and am skilled in refuting double syllogisms.  
I know well how to leave my opponent without riposte.  
But I am forgetting it all, so great is my sorrow.*

43 Retórico so fino: sé fermoso hablar,  
colorar mis palabras, los omes bien pagar  
sobre mi adversario la mi culpa echar;  
mas por esto lo he todo a olvidar.

*I am a fine rhetorician, I know how to speak with grace,  
to colour my words and give great pleasure to men,  
and I know how to lay blame on my adversary.  
Yet because of this I am going to forget it all.*

43 Apris' toda la física, so mege natural;  
coñosco bien los pulsos, bien judgo orinal;  
non ha, fueras de ti, ome mejor nin tal;  
mas todo non lo preçio quant' un dinero val'.

*I learnt all about medicine; I am a natural physician,  
I know all about pulses and interpret urine well.  
There is, other than you, no man better or comparable,  
but I consider all of this worth not a single penny.*

## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 36-47

- Alexander replies to the questions of his master and exposes Aristotle's teaching

44 Sé por arte de música por natura cantar;  
sé fer sabrosos puntos, las voces acordar,  
los tonos cóm' empieçan e cóm' deven finar,  
mas non me puede esto un punto confortar.

*Through music's art, through nature, I know how to sing;  
I know how to make sweet melodies, make voices sing as one,  
I know how tones begin and how they have to end;  
but all of this cannot comfort me in the slightest.*

45 Sé de las siete artes todo su argumento;  
bien sé las qualidades de cada elemento;  
de los signos del sol, siquier' del fundamento,  
nos' me podrié çelar quanto val' un açento.

*I know the full explanation about the seven arts;  
I know well the qualities of each one element;  
about both the signs of the sun and those of the earth  
what could be hidden from me is not worth a straw.*

46 Grado a ti, maestro, assaz sé sapiençia;  
non temo de riqueza aver nunca fallençia;  
mas bivré con rencura, morré con repentençia,  
si de premia de Dario non saco yo a Greçia.

*Thanks to you, master, I have wisdom in abundance;  
I do not fear ever having a shortage in my store;  
but I shall live with rancour and die in repentance  
If I do not free Greece from the oppression of Darius.*

## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### *stanzas 36-47*

- Alexander replies to the questions of his master and exposes Aristotle's teaching

47 Non serié pora rëy vida tan aontada;  
ternía por mejor en morir muert' honrada;  
mas, si tú lo vïeres por cosa aguisada,  
contra Poro e Dario irié una vegada”.

*Such a shameful life would not be right for a king,  
I would think better of myself if I died a noble death.  
But if you were to judge it a fitting thing for me to do,  
I would ride once and for all against Porus and Darius.*

## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 48-86

- Aristotle's response

49 Respuso el infante – nunca viestes mejor –:  
“Yo so tu escolar, tú eres mi doctor;  
espero tu consejo, como del Salvador;  
aprenderé lo que dixieres müy de buen amor”.

*The Prince replied – you have never seen a better student –:  
“I am your scholar and you my learned teacher,  
I await your advice like that of the Saviour,  
and shall learn from what you say with the greatest affection”.*

52 Fijo eres de rëy, tú as grant clereçia;  
en ti veo aguça qual para mí querría:  
de pequeño demuestras muy grant cavallería;  
de quantos öy biven tú as grant mejoría.

*Your are the son of a king and possess great learning;  
in you I see a sharpness I would wish for as my own;  
in your youth you display great qualities of chivalry  
and are outstanding among all men alive today.*

55 En poder de vil onbre non metas tu fazienda  
ca dart'a mala çaga, nunca predrás emienda;  
falleçert'a a la cueita, como la mala rienda,  
echart'a en lugar onde Dios te defienda.

*Do not place your affairs in a base man's power,  
for he will repay you ill and you will never gain your right.  
In hard times he will let you down like untrustworthy reins  
and may God defend you from the place where he will cast you!*

## Aristotle and Alexander in the *Libro de Alexandre*

### stanzas 48-86

- Aristotle's response

60 Fijo, a tus vasallos non les seas irado;  
nunca comas sin ellos en lugar apartado;  
e nunca sobre vida les seas denodado;  
si tú esto fizieres, serás d'ellos amado.

*My son, do not show anger towards your vassals,  
and never eat without them, in a separate place;  
never on your life take out your feelings on them.  
If you do as I say, you will be loved by them.*

66 Qui los regnos agenos cobdiçia conquistar,  
menester ha que sepa de espada bien ferir;  
non deve por dos tantos nin por demás fuir  
mas ir cab' adelante o vençer o morir.

*A man who desires to conquer foreign kingdoms  
needs to know well how to strike with a sword;  
he must not flee men twice his number or more  
but press on forwards, to victory or death.*

70 Éctor e Dïomedes, por su cavallería,  
ganaron prez que fablan d'ellos oy en día.  
Non farián de Aquiles tan luenga ledanía  
si sopiessen en él alguna covardía.

*Hector and Diomedes, through their knightly exploits,  
won such fame that they are still talked about today;  
so great a litany of tales would not be told of Achilles  
if some act of cowardice were to be known of him.*

## Aristotle and Alexander in Plutarch's *Alexander*

7 (3) σχολὴν μὲν οὖν αὐτοῖς καὶ διατριβὴν τὸ περὶ Μίεζαν Νυμφαῖον ἀπέδειξεν, ὅπου μέχρι νῦν Ἀριστοτέλους ἔδρας τε λιθίνας καὶ ὑποσκίους περιπάτους δεικνύουσιν. ἔοικε δ' Ἀλέξανδρος οὐ μόνον τὸν ἠθικὸν καὶ πολιτικὸν παραλαβεῖν λόγον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἀπορρήτων καὶ βαθυτέρων διδασκαλιῶν, ἃς οἱ ἄνδρες ἰδίως ἀκροατικὰς καὶ ἐποπτικὰς προσαγορεύοντες οὐκ ἐξέφερον εἰς πολλούς, μετασχεῖν.

7 (3) Well, then, as a place where master and pupil could labour and study, he (sc. Philip II) assigned them the precinct of the nymphs near Mieza, where to this day the visitor is shown the stone seats and shady walks of Aristotle. It would appear, moreover, that Alexander not only received from his master his ethical and political doctrines, but also participated in those secret and more profound teachings which philosophers designate by the special terms 'acroamatic' and 'epoptic,' and do not impart to many. (trans. Perrin)

## Aristotle and Alexander in Plutarch's *Alexander*

8 (1) Δοκεῖ δέ μοι καὶ τὸ φιλιατρεῖν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ προστρίψασθαι μᾶλλον ἑτέρων Ἀριστοτέλης. οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὴν θεωρίαν ἠγάπησεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ νοσοῦσιν ἐβοήθει τοῖς φίλοις, καὶ συνέταττε θεραπείας τινὰς καὶ διαίτας, ὥς ἐκ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν λαβεῖν ἔστιν.

8 (1) Moreover, in my opinion Alexander's love of the art of healing was inculcated in him by Aristotle preeminently. For he was not only fond of the theory of medicine, but actually came to the aid of his friends when they were sick, and prescribed for them certain treatments and regimens, as one can gather from his letters. (trans. Perrin)

## Aristotle and Alexander in Plutarch's *Alexander*

8 (2) ἦν δὲ καὶ φύσει φιλόλογος καὶ φιλομαθὴς καὶ φιλαναγνώστης, καὶ τὴν μὲν Ἰλιάδα τῆς πολεμικῆς ἀρετῆς ἐφόδιον καὶ νομίζων καὶ ὀνομάζων, ἔλαβε μὲν Ἀριστοτέλους διορθώσαντος ἦν ἐκ τοῦ νάρθηκος καλοῦσιν, εἶχε δ' αἰεὶ μετὰ τοῦ ἐγχειριδίου κειμένην ὑπὸ τὸ προσκεφάλαιον, ὥς Ὀνησίκριτος ἱστόρηκε.

8 (2) He was also by nature a lover of learning and a lover of reading. And since he thought and called the *Iliad* a viaticum of the military art, he took with him Aristotle's recension of the poem, called the *Iliad of the Casket*, and always kept it lying with his dagger under his pillow, as Onesicritus informs us. (trans. Perrin)



## Aristotle and Alexander in the Greek *Alexander Romance*

1 (16) εἶπε δὲ καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ· ‘Καὶ σὺ τέκνον, εἰ παραλάβῃς τὸ βασίλειον παρὰ τοῦ πατρός σου, πῶς μοι χρήσῃ τῷ καθηγητῇ σου;’ Ὁ δὲ εἶπε· ‘Περὶ μελλόντων μου πραγμάτων πυθάνῃ, τῆς αὔριον ἐνέχυρον μὴ ἔχων; τότε δώσω, ἐάν μοι δόξῃ, τοῦ καιροῦ καὶ τῆς ὥρας τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν τοῦ παρασχεῖν ἐπιτρέχόντων’. Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης· ‘Χαίροις κοσμοκράτωρ· σὺ γὰρ εἶ βασιλεὺς μέγιστος’.

1 (16) Then he (sc. Aristotle) asked Alexander. ‘And if you, child Alexander, inherit the kingdom from your father Philip, what will you do for me your teacher?’. Alexander replied. ‘Are you already asking me about things that will happen in the future, when you have no certainty about what will happen tomorrow? I will give you a present when the time and the occasion arise’. Then Aristotle said, ‘Hail, Alexander, ruler of the world: you will be the greatest king’.  
(trans. Stoneman)



Thank you

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