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THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE AS EDUCATIONAL BOOK DURING THE RUSSIAN MIDDLE AGES

Abstract: Medieval Russia, connected to Byzantine culture through numerous works that came via the southern Slavs, derived part of its general knowledge from the Novel of Alexander, known in the Russian cultural milieu in its Bulgarian and Serbian versions. Valuable historical, geographical or mythological information allowed medieval Russians to regard the world in new ways, a fact that turned Alexander Romance into the second most read book of that time (after the Bible). The diversity of knowledge provided by this novel made it a veritable Encyclopaedia of Russian Middle Ages.

Keywords: Medieval Russia, Alexander the Great, Alexander Romance, history, geography, mythology.

In late 10th century, Russia adopted not only Christianity, but also written language. This fact greatly affected the concept of culture, which assumed a religious-Orthodox and bookish form. Even traditional ideas, genetically linked to the heathen world, embraced, after the conversion to Christianity, a written frame. Thus, despite the numerous losses caused by conflicts, fires or the mere natural degradation of physical materials, scholars can now analyse a rich collection of manuscripts, which still puzzle experts with their wealthy and diverse content. This phenomenon expanded the cultural horizon of educated Russians, who had the chance to familiarise themselves with the values of Antiquity, alien to this Eastern cultural area. Byzantine literature, which entered Kievan Rus' via the southern Slavs, offered them works from which the Russians could assimilate

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1 D. S. Lihaciov discussed the possibility that writing might have appeared in Kievan Rus before the adoption of Christianity, starting from the remarks done on the margin of the text Povesti vremennyh let, where it is stated that several treaties between Russians and Greeks (911, 941) had been written in two languages and were preserved by both parties; see D. S. Lihaciov, Prošloe – buduščemu: stat’i i očerki (Leningrad, 1985), p. 149.
2 We include here neither the speakers of Greek, who benefited of Yaroslav the Wise’s cultural activities, in the half of the 11th century, nor the small number of speakers of Latin, who could get information directly from the sources which penetrated Russia via the south-western principalities (in present-day Ukraine and Belarus), which got under the influence of the Great Duchy of Lithuania and implicitly of Polish culture. For a more detailed presentation, see W. F. Ryan, The Bathhouse at Midnight: an historical survey of magic and divination in Russia (Sutton, 1999), p. 9-11.

philosophical, historical, anthropological, medical, astronomical, geographical or ethical notions, that contributed to the development of Russian civilisation and intellectual level.

The Church maintained the contact between Russian culture, then in its infancy, and Byzantine culture by means of translations. Naturally enough, as these translators were clerics, the works they were interested in were mainly religious writings. Although the works of Byzantine profane culture were not tempting for these translators, and sophisticated literary, philosophical or scientific texts were, most often than not, ignored by clergymen, knowledge regarding classical Antiquity or the Byzantine world became accessible in the Russian cultural environment via less scholarly works, mostly translated in 10th century Bulgaria. Besides the Physiologist, Cosmas Indicopleustes’ Hristianskaja Topografija (Christian Topography), the popular Byzantine chronicles of Ioannes Malalas and George Hamartolos or Flavius Josephus’ Iudejskaja Vojna (The Jewish War), a special place among these illuminating writings belongs to Alexander Romance.

This paper attempts to analyse how the Alexandrine novel contributed to enriching medieval Russians’ knowledge of the world and which was the romance’s role in consolidating and diversifying the interests of those daring to escape the intellectual patterns imposed by the Church and risked to be judged as heretics.

The inclusion of the novel in the category of chronographs attests its being considered a historical work. In medieval Russia, the making of historical concepts and notions was influenced, to a great extent, by the Christian–Orthodox vision of historical evolution, though it was not always limited to this view. The progress of history remains graved in certain literary monuments that reflect the work of the

3 For a general introduction to this topic, see the collection of essays Estestvennonaučnye predstavlenija drevnej Rusi, edited by R. A. Šimov (Moscow, 1978).
5 For an important study of the Slavonic texts from Bulgaria, see T. Ceolova, Estestvennonaučnite znanija v srednevekovna Bèlgarija (Sofia, 1988).
6 A synthesis of world history was compiled in 12th century Russia on the basis of translated written literature: the chronicles of Ioannes Malalas and George Hamartolos, Flavius Josephus’ Iudejskaja Vojna and the Bulgarian Alexander’s novel were reunited into a single chronograph, which greatly influenced the tradition of autochthonous Russian annals. Additional details can be found in A. S. Orlov, Drevnjaja russkaja literatura (XI–XVII vv.) (Moscow–Leningrad, 1945), p. 37-38; D. S. Lihaciov, Russkie letopisi i ih kul’turo–istoričeskoe značenie (Moscow–Leningrad, 1947), p. 370-378.
7 The general principles of the history of philosophy were propounded in Christianity starting with the Bible itself; according to them, the fate of humanity is preconceived, and history implacably heads towards its end. The principle of historicism, seen as a causal direction of events, was born due to Christianity, as history begins when God created this world. In a historical perspective, opened towards the future, the chain of events is regarded as having a reversed direction. History seems to degrade, and, according to the same Christian philosophy, the entire world and mankind, originating in the act of Creation, go to meet their own end, marked by the coming of the Saviour and of the Advent. The principles of Christian–Orthodox philosophy, as viewed in Russian medieval historical consciousness, are analysed by V. V. Milkov, Osmyslenie istorii v Drevnej Rusi (Sankt-Petersburg, 2000), p. 5-23.
mind, and which are not much integrated into the limits of the Christian philosophy of history. As it was not an autochthonous creation, the *Alexandrine novel* brought to the forefront values specific to the ancient world; at times, it doubted accepted Christian truths, though it did not completely shake their foundations. Thus, if in the Bulgarian version, Alexander is presented as an ideal king, always defeating his enemy through his mind and unique bravery, the Serbian edition depicts the Macedonian king as the worthiest defender and supporter of Christianity, having prophet Jeremiah as his guide.

Some of the most precious information that the public got when reading the novel were related to the field of history. Valuable details regarding the most important political, military and cultural centers of the ancient world completed the Russian readers’ general knowledge. One can find in its pages interesting aspects about the political and administrative organization of Macedonia, Rome, Egypt, the Persian Empire and India. It also mentions the names of numerous peoples which Alexander met during his campaigns in northern Macedonia, in the East, but also towards the South, against Rome, as well as bits of these peoples’ daily life. Famous characters, such as Philip II, Darius, Poros, Nectanebos, King Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar, Cleopatra, Alexander’s companions and great generals, captivated the Russian public. A special place belongs to the struggles between Alexander

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8 In medieval Russia, there were several works, part of them translations, part of them autochthonous writings, that are generically included in the category of historical literature. They narrate the history of mankind from Adam and Christ, the history of ancient states in the East and the West, the early history of the Church and its ascetics, bringing to the knowledge of literate men information on various regions, countries, peoples and characters. For Palestine, for instance, such events are presented in *Evanghelie Mira or Ecceev*, *Žitie Savvy Osvjašennogo*, Flavius Josephus’ history, *Sinaiskij Paterik* (*Pratum spirituale* in its Latin name – a collection of legends about the life of the monks from the monastic communities from Mount Sinai, also known in Russia as *Lug Duhovny*). Byzantium and Constantinople were presented in a series of hagiographies, such as those of Theodore the Studite, bishop Nifont of Novgorod, Theodore Stratelates, St. George, Nicholas of Myra or John Chrysostom. Rome and the Italic–German countries are mentioned in *Dialogi de vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum et de aeternitate animarum*, known in the Russian literature as *Rimskij Paterik*, whereas the events from the Slavic regions are covered in the hagiographies of Wenceslaus the Czech or Methodius of Moravia.

9 Thracians, Persians, Egyptians, Polish, Cumans, Jews, Pelagonians, Basilians etc. The names of the peoples mentioned in the novel are extremely diverse, but most of them do not have a historical correspondent. In the spirit of all vernacular adaptations, some peoples, the Cumans and the Polish in this case, are introduced or replaced in the text by the editors of the romance. Precious information on the names and origin of the peoples mentioned in the two known medieval Russian versions can be found in *Aleksandrija. Roman ob Aleksandre Makedonskom po russkoj rukopisi XV veka*, edited by I. S. Lurie, O. V. Tvorogov (Moscow–Sankt-Petersburg, 1965) [henceforth *Aleksandrija* (1965)].

10 Confusions are, naturally, quite common with these famous characters. Nabucodonosor, for example, is presented, in the Serbian version, as tsar of the Persians. Other characters depicted in the narrative are not mentioned in the ancient sources of Alexander’s history, such as it is the case of a certain Filon, one of Alexander’s closest voivodes. On Filon’s role in Serbian *Alexandrine novel*, see E. I. Vaneeva, “Selëvk i Filon v Serbskoj Aleksandrii”, *Istočnikovedeni literature Drevnej Rusi* (Leningrad, 1980), p. 92-95.

11 The military episodes in *Alexander Romance*, but also in Josephus’ *Jewish War*, inspired the armed scenes in Russian historical annals and stories. Relevant for this aspect are *Jizn’ Aleksandra Nevskogo* and *Devgenievo dejanie*. For a detailed comparison of the different military episodes in these works,
and Darius, Poros or different tribes met during the hero’s campaigns. Although these descriptions do not always correspond to historical reality, the vast amount of historical details from this work certainly familiarised Russian readers with the world and its peoples.

No less important and relevant are the geographical references found in the novel. Most cities, rivers or battle places are rendered erroneously or are adapted with numerous references to Alexander’s novel, see M. Isoaho, *The Image of Aleksandr Nevsky in Medieval Russia* (Leiden–Boston, 2006).

12 None of the two versions presents the facts according to historical reality, but it should be underlined that, contrary to the Serbian novel, where historical realities are lost in a sea of fantastic elements, the Bulgarian version depicts the events, at least until Darius’ death, close to historical truth. The main historical errors are the insertion of the Greek revolt between the first two battles against Darius (Granikos and Issos) and the absence of Alexander’s campaign along the coast of Asia Minor. E. A. Kostiuhin makes an interesting remark regarding the veracity of such details: “...he reader in Kievian Rus’ probably believed everything written in *Alexander Romance*, even when the information lacked any credibility, on unseen places or Alexander’s birth. *Alexander Romance* is not original in this respect: the entire Russian literature of the 11th–16th centuries is full of a medieval historicity, which was fully believable for a contemporaneous reader. Nevertheless, *Alexander Romance* does not have the formal precision that characterises medieval chronicles. Freedom of thought and fantastic elements granted it a certain dose of attraction and secured it a long life”. (E. A. Kostiuhin, *Aleksandr Makedonskij v literaturnoj i fol’klornoj tradicii* (Moscow, 1972), p. 45).

13 The so called translated literature with a historical topic that penetrated Kievian Rus’ orbited from the very beginning round two poles of bookish attractions. One of these centres was represented by the chronicles, which contained the entire history, since Biblical times: history of Judea, Babylon, Persia, the Roman Empire, and the Byzantine Empire. In the 11th century, there was translated the chronicle of the Byzantine monk George Hamartolos, then the chronicles of Ioannes Malalas and George Synkellos. Their narrations were full of different stories about the fate of kings and emperors, amazing and interesting happenings of men, different natural calamities. Generally speaking, they contained the multi-secular history of mankind over a very large territory. The different historical works were either included in these chronicles, such being the case with Alexander’s novel, or were appended to it, as a sequel. The other pole of attraction was represented by the prologues, mainly made of the life of saints. The narrations, within these syntheses, were divided according to the feast days of saints and ascetics, which practically cover every day of the calendar. For details regarding these problems, see A. S. Demin, *O hudožestvennosti drevnerusskoj literatury. Očerki drevnerusskogo mirovidenija ot „Povesti vremennyh let“ do sočinenii Avvakuma* (Moscow, 1998), p. 131-150; *Povesti i skazanija Drevnei Rusi*, edited by D. S. Lihaciov (Moscow–Sankt-Petersburg, 2001).

14 Due to the inaccuracies regarding the itinerary of the Macedonian troops, the novel mentions cities, areas and rivers which do not have a historical correspondent, such as, for example, the region of Tafosirea (?), the city of Paratonion (?) or the river of Atlutu (?), all from the Bulgarian version of the romance. In the same edition we find that: “[...] Alexander got to Sicily and Italy, and thence to Africa. He enters Carthage, and thence, by Libya, gets to Ammonicia [?]. There he bowed to Ammon, who guaranteed that he (Alexander) was his son and advised him to built a city on the island of Protideea (?), if he wanted to be cherished forever [...]. Alexander founded Alexandria [...]. Bringing sacrifices to god Serapis [...], Alexander headed to Egypt” (V. M. Istrin, *Aleksandrija ruskih kronografov* (Moscow, 1893), p. 74) (henceforth V. M. Istrin, *Aleksandrija*). Besides the unidentifiable toponyms, this episode presents the worship and founding places as being outside Egypt. In the Serbian edition, this episode is presented differently: “Alexander sailed personally to Egypt, where the Eastern river Nile flows into the sea, and here he founded a city and named it after his name – Alexandria. Seleucus also founded his own city, which he called Seleucia. Antiochus landed at Licapros and founded a city which he named in honour of his name – Great Antiochia” – *Aleksandrija* (1965), p. 87.
according to the editor’s general knowledge\textsuperscript{15}, but one can easily recognise the places referred to when following the narrative.

If references to the main centres of ancient civilisations are found in several other medieval literary masterpieces, especially in the so-called translated literature, the *Alexander Romance* distinguishes itself by vast and novel information on India\textsuperscript{16}. Firstly, it provides clear information on India’s geographical position\textsuperscript{17}. The Bulgarian version mentions Alexander’s entry into the territories of the Indian king...

\textsuperscript{15} “From here Alexander headed towards Asia, and getting here, built a city which he called Tripoli” – *Aleksandrija* (1965), p. 87. According to V. M. Istrin, *Aleksandrija*, p. 42 the form Tripoli appears in several southern-Slav manuscripts, whereas in several Greek manuscripts it is Πεντάπολεον or Πεντάπολις. There were several cities called Tripoli in Asia Minor and Africa, but their foundation is not usually related to Alexander’s campaigns.

\textsuperscript{16} India was not completely alien to the Russian people. The historical contacts between the two civilizations date in the earliest stages of the trade between Kievan Rus’ and the East (10\textsuperscript{th} century) – S. M. Soloviev, *Istorija Rossii*, vol. 4/II (Moscow, 1960), p. 555; A. A. Vigasin, “Pредставления об Индии в Древней Руси”, *Indija*, 1981–1982 (Moscow, 1983), p. 275; Rossija i Indija. 1986 (Moscow, 1986), p. 41. But even earlier information on India could reach the Russian readers from several other categories of texts, excellently presented by V. K. Sohin, *Drevneaja Indija v kul’ture Rusi* (XI-seredina XV v.) (Moscow, 1988), p. 8: among hagiographic texts, in *Sinakary i minejskie jitija apostolov Fomy i Varfolomeja* there are references to India of the apostolic preaches; in the works of Christian missionaries, such as *Slovo o zakone i blagodati*, the apostolic preaches in India are also mentioned; “scientific” works, such as *Hronika Gheorgihija Amartola*, refer to India from the time of Alexander’s campaign, to Indian Brahmans and to India in general, in the context of presenting the ancient peoples and their habits; in the same category we can include Kosmas Indicopleustes’ *Hristianska Topografia*, which provides information on the memory of Alexander’s campaign to India; lay literature, represented, besides Alexander’s novel, by *Raskaz Palladija* (with detailed presentations of the country of Indian Brahmans and their dialogues with the Macedonian king) and *Povest v Varlaame i Iosaf* (with a variety of information, such as the history of the second post–apostolic mission to India, the consecration of Christians and enchanting stories of ancient India); 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Poros, coming directly from Persia, after his victory against Darius. In the Serbian edition, this episode is described as Alexander’s new historic initiative after conquering Persia, although in between these two campaigns the Macedonian king reaches unknown areas, where he experiences various fantastic events. Alexander himself boasts, in a letter sent to the Amazons, that, defeating Darius, “оттуда же на Инды воевахом”.

Russian scholars from the 11th–16th centuries usually mentioned India in their debates on spiritual, speculative topics. When they questioned the way this world should be imagined, India came to the forefront. In medieval Russia, India was perceived not only as a part of the world, but as the farthest and most difficultly accessible part of the earth – “the end of the world, where heaven meets earth”. This was one of the elements that nourished this perception in Russia until the 17th century.

Such references denote the existence of elements of mythological geography. Although India appears as the country closest to Paradise, other territories come after it: a cave that leads to the island of the dead, the Amazons’ country, the Marsidonian country and the episode when Alexander locks, inside the mountains, the uncivilized barbarians. Among them, the Gog and Magog peoples had a major role in the Russian culture. Associated to the barbarian world, they were usually

18 “Устроивъ персидскія дела Александръ обратился противъ Пора Индийскаго” (V. M. Istrin, Aleksandrija, p. 78).
19 Ibid., p. 228.
20 In most cosmographies, India appears in the description of the most diverse countries and peoples; in Povest’ vremenných let India appears for the first time in the story about the partition of the world between Noah’s sons; in Lucidarius India is mentioned in the discussion between master and disciple about heaven and earth; see M. N. Spersanski, “Indija v staroj russkoj pis’mennosti”, S. Ol’denburgu. K pjatidesjatiletiyu naučno-obščestvennoj deiatel’nosti 1882–1932, chief editor: S. E. Malov (Leningrad, 1934), p. 463-469; I. V. Vasil’kov, “Zemledel’českij mif v drevneindijskom èpose (Skazanie o Rišjašringhe)”, Literatura i kul’tura drevnej srednevekovoj Indii, chief editor: A. G. Zograf (Moscow, 1979), p. 99-133; G. M. Bongard–Levin, A. A. Viganin, The Image of India: the study of ancient Indian civilization in the USSR (Moscow, 1984).
21 Aleksandrija (1965), p. 112.
22 When Kniga glagolemaia Kozmografija refers to India in the terms под самым „востоком” солнца; see A. S. Demin, O hudožestvennosti drevnerusskoj literature, p. 669.
23 Contrary to the Serbian novel, in which the above mentioned events follow Alexander’s campaign to India, their development is somehow localised in the areas beyond India, the Bulgarian version presents these episodes as occurring at Alexander’s return from India to Persia.
24 The image of the world, in the Middle Ages, was only a revision of the late ancient vision, inherited from works such as The seven books of history against the Pagans by Paulus Orosius or Etymologiae by Isidore of Seville. Within this image, the margins of the world, generically associated to the Roman limes, but which were subsequently extended towards the East, suggested the idea of Barbaria. Beyond the Roman limes there was an unperceivable mixture of populations, whose behaviour was not predictable, though they had many qualities. The idealisation of the noble savage and negative stereotypes on ferocious barbarians coexisted in the Middle Ages as part of the same ancient heritage. The main direction of the barbarian attack on the Mediterranean civilisations was north and northeastern; see R. Tenberg, “Isidor, Erzbischof von Sevilla”, Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon, vol. II, edited by F. W. Bautz, T. Bautz (Hamm, 1990), coll. 1374-1379; D. Rohrbacher, The Historians of Late Antiquity (Routledge, 2002), p. 134-149; Etymologies of Isidore of Seville, translated by S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, O. Berghof (Cambridge UK, 2010).
confounded, in western medieval literature, either with the ten lost tribes of Israel\textsuperscript{25}, or with the Bulgarians, the Khazars\textsuperscript{26} and, consequently, the Russians\textsuperscript{27}. These associations originate in the references of medieval geographers, who situated the apocalyptical peoples of Gog and Magog in the area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea\textsuperscript{28}. Knowing the Biblical predictions about the end of the world, when the uncivilised peoples were to appear and invade their territory with numerous troops, the Russians identified the Gog and Magog peoples with the Mongols, who came from the East in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century and conquered most of Russia.

Alexander’s campaign in India, depicted \textit{in extenso} in both editions of the romance, contains significant data on the contacts between the young Macedonian king and several mythical peoples. They are mainly found in the episode when Alexander visited the Rohman\textsuperscript{29}. This mythical people from the Russian, Ukrainian

\textsuperscript{26} L. S. Chekin, “Christian of Stavelot and the Conversion of Gog and Magog. A Study of Ninth-Century Reference to Judaism Among the Khazars”, \textit{Russia Medievalis}, IX/1 (1997), p. 13-35, who discusses the identification of Gog and Magog peoples with the Khazars, Bulgarians and Slavs, in medieval Hebrew, Arab and Byzantine writings, as well as in Western ones.
\textsuperscript{27} In a study on Cyril’s (Constantine) life and missionary activity, V. I. Lamanski discusses the hypothesis according to which the Khazars from the \textit{Life of Constantine} could be easily identified with the Russians, taking into account that the first could have lived anywhere in the northern–eastern area of the Gog and Magog peoples; see V. I. Lamanski, “Slavjanskoie zhitie svjatogo Kirila kak religioznogo-epicheskoe priznaniem i kak istoriicheskij istochnik”, \textit{Jurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Presveteniya}, 347 (1903), p. 358. Interesting details for a possible common origin of Russians and of Gog and Magog peoples are provided by A. S. Milnikov, \textit{Kartina slavjanskogo mira: vzgled iz vostochnoy Evropy} (Sankt-Petersburg, 1996), p. 21-25.
\textsuperscript{29} The novel, in its Serbian version, identify the Rohmans with the naked sages – nagomudri – an association which Nicolae Cartojan relates, for the Romanian version of the \textit{Alexandrine novel}, to the Serbian origin of the text. The Romanian scholar argues that the Ruthene form “Rahmans” is a corrupt form of the prototype “Brahmans”, from the Byzantine and Greek editions (N. Cartojan, \textit{Cărțile populare în literatură românească}, vol. I (Bucharest, 1974), p. 273-274, 287). For other information on the Rohmans, see Oșteanu, “Rohmans–Brahmanes. Le voyage d’un motif à travers l’espace et le temps”, \textit{Ethnologica} (Bucharest, 1983), p. 138-143; V. Demin, \textit{Tainy russkogo naroda} (Moscow, 1997); I. I. Ševčenko, “Obščiny pervovristian v proslavljanskom i rannoslavljanskom mir”, \textit{Obraz raja: ot mjha k utopii. Serija ‟Simposium”}, 31 (2003), p. 116-122. It seems that the original Greek text does not contain this episode, which was borrowed from the \textit{Raskaz Palladija}, but inspired from Alexander’s meetings with the Indian philosophers Kalanos and Dandameus (mentioned by Plutarchus, \textit{Alexander}, 47) before the struggle against Poros. The event, presented in several copies of the Bulgarian novel, describes the meeting between the Macedonian king and the Rohman wise men, with Alexander greatly impressed by their vast culture (V. M. Istrin, \textit{Aleksandrija}, p. 84-87, 111, 114-117, 121-123, 205-214). The Serbian novel – \textit{Aleksandrija} (1965), p. 108-113 – reproduces the discussion between Alexander and the master of the barefoot wise men – Ivant – on the origin of the Rohman, fact which brings light to the Rohmans’ origin. According to A. N. Veselovski, the Serbian edition links the virtues of the ancient gymnosophist Rohmans to the virtues of the Biblical Rehavits (Jeremiah, 35),
and Romanian legends would descend from Sif, one of Adam’s sons, and inhabited the oceanic island of the Blajini, situated beyond the world’s borders. Alexander’s visit during his Indian campaign put them in direct relation with the caste of Indian Brahmans. The episode mentions aspects regarding the Brahmans’ way of life, their spiritual accomplishments, with a presentation of the Rohmani’s virtues as opposed to the Greeks’ weaknesses.

Besides valuable data concerning geographical, historical, social, political, cultural and religious realities of the earthly realm, a great deal of information included in Alexander’s novel, which enriched and diversified medieval Russians’ knowledge of the world, belonged to the realm of fantastic imagery. Despite the historical character of old Russian literature, determined by the large number of chronicles, annals, chronographs or stories, the high level of fantastic content, specific to the entire medieval literature, remained one of the essential features of Russian literature during the 11th–17th centuries.

In this sense, Anatoli Demin’s analysis of the textual witnesses of Old Russian literature is relevant. According to the Russian philologist, besides the real world, nine extra fantastic worlds can be discovered in the works that circulated in medieval Russia. The fantastic world, which circumscribes Alexander Romance, is represented, in the picture drawn by the Russian scholar, as the third world. Assuming a minimal involvement of religion, this magic world exists, almost completely, without the intervention of divine power, and manifests itself in the real world not through epiphanies at random, but as the very ontological structure which shapes the reality of certain areas of the earth. This is the favourite world of the old stories, apocryphal and pseudo–historical compositions alike. Thus, the novel presents the Egyptian king Nectonav, connected to Alexander through a fictitious paternal relationship, who, by magic cunning, entered a magic chamber, poured waters into a golden vessel, then called into being two armies of wax on the water surface and inspired them to fight. He also took upon himself god Ammon’s face, which are identified with the Esenians who lived on the western banks of the Dead Sea; see A. N. Veselovski, Iz istorii romana i povesti (Sankt-Petersburg, 1886), p. 256-303.

The novel presents the external features which distinguish them (Aleksandrija (1965), p. 43), food (Ibid., p. 143), environment (V. M. Istrin, Aleksandrija, p. 84-86, 109, 116, 122-124), ritual sacrifices (Ibid., 86-87; Aleksandrija (1965), 141), opposition to the temptation of body pleasures (Ibid., p. 45; V. M. Istrin, Aleksandrija, p. 79, 84-86, 201-206).


Relevant in this regard are the Rohmans’ ascetic way of life, presented in antithesis to the Hellene way of life, devoted to ephemeral, hedonist and vicious experiences – V. M. Istrin, Aleksandrija, p. 110-128.

According to the Russian scholar, this magic world was subsequently assimilated to the modern literary fantastic, but still seems far away from being completely assimilated: “Сказочно-волшебный, очень уж фольклорный мир довольно поздно стал осваиваться литературной фантастикой нашего времени, и он, кажется, ещё далеко не освоен. А в эпоху средневековья три изобразительных мира – реальности, чудес и волшебств – тесно сплелись и составили художественную основу древнерусской литературы, однако отнюдь не основу жанра фантастики” (A. S. Demin, O hudozestvennosti drevnerusskoj literatury; p. 697).

V. M. Istrin, Aleksandrija, p. 70-71; Aleksandrija (1965), p. 73.
with an eagle head, aspic horns, lion feet and gryphon wings\textsuperscript{35}. Here we are also told that young Alexander grabbed by the ear and tamed a stubborn horse, which distinguished itself by the long horn between its ears and the bull head on its right leg\textsuperscript{36} etc.

\textit{Alexander Romance} also represents the fourth world in the picture drawn by the Russian philologist. This is a world of extremely faraway and exotic realms, of fantastic animals and beings. Close to the confines of the world, Alexander meets gigantic ants, capable to catch a horse and take it to the anthill\textsuperscript{37}. Gigantic crabs could also catch horses and took them into the water\textsuperscript{38}. Dry fish, thrown into one of the lakes, were revived\textsuperscript{39}. Alexander also met several savage peoples and tribes: hairy, winged women, with very long, sickle–like nails\textsuperscript{40}, dwarfs a cubit high, cannibals, persons with six hands and six legs, men with dog heads, a men ten fathoms high, chained to a mountain, beings with horse body and human bust – centaurs, one–legged men\textsuperscript{41} etc.

After analysing the above mentioned cases, \textit{Alexander Romance} proves to be one of the most veritable sources of knowledge in medieval Russia. Despite many inaccuracies of an ethnological, toponymical or anthroponomical order, caused by the continuous adaptation of the text, the novel stands as one of the few works that offered an almost exhaustive approach of the ancient world. Historical knowledge intermingles with geographical information, providing a spatial–temporal image of Antiquity, and mythological elements come to complete this picture with new, attractive elements, a fact that turned the romance into one of the widely read works of the Old Russian literature. Numerous topics, scenes or real episodes from the novel were borrowed, directly or indirectly, into a great variety of works, which are part of the Russian and world literature as well. The popularity that Alexander’s novel enjoyed in medieval Russia reveals the novel as veritable Encyclopaedia of the Russian people in the Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 75; contrary to the Serbian version, this episode, linked to Nectaneos’ visit to the Macedonian queen’s bedroom, does not have in the Bulgarian novel too many details. The most curious element is that the visits of the Egyptian magician to the queen’s bedroom continued after Philip’s return from the battlefield.

\textsuperscript{36} V. M. Istrin, Aleksandrija, p. 72; Aleksandrija (1965), p. 77.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 105-106.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 107-108.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 112-113.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 106.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 112-113.