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Between hubris and magnanimitas: a common topica?

A few notes on Nizami's Iskandar and Dante's Ulysses

The paper proposes a comparison between the character of Iskander depicted by Nizami and some ancient and medieval examples of Alexander's character seen from Western perspectives. We will reflect on the ways in which the plural identity of this 'fantastic universal' (Vico) is shaped and is nourished by the different representations or self-representations of the identities of the peoples and cultures in which his adventures take place and are narrated. How are interpreted in the different geographical, historical-political, and religious contexts the common sources between East and West – starting from the Greek ones – reported by scholars of the immense narrative constellation of the Alexandreid? To what extent do the recurring topoi – folkloric, literary, philosophical, political – configure a common topica? Together with the constants and variants focused by historical poetics in the jagged Eurasian territory, what imaginative paths does Iskander / Alexander's journey translate and imprint on the map of such varied horizons of expectation? If the overcoming of the limit of the ecumene and of the very human possibilities is a constitutive trait of the figure of the travelling leader, the possibility to approach Iskander to Dante's Ulysses through the mediation of Alexander recalls and tests notions such as hubris and magnanimitas in non-Eurocentric contexts.

Keywords: Nizami, Dante, Iskander, Alexander, Ulysses, hubri, magnanimitas, topoi