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Two Horns, Three Religions: How Alexander the Great ended up in the Quran

The communication between the Islamic middle east and the Judeo-Christian west has been crippled since the time of the Crusades by suspicion and disdain. However, this was not always so. The interaction between the different cultures and the willingness to share knowledge brought about some of the greatest advancements of human society. Through these lines of communication and cultural exchange, the figure of Alexander the Great was translated from historical reality to culture-hero, and not only in the western tradition. The Jews and the Arabic peoples of late antiquity and the early middle ages also admired Alexander, incorporating him into their own legends. However, Alexander's transformation from Greek conqueror to the prophetic figure in Sura 18 of the Quran did not happen overnight. His legend underwent numerous changes with the result that the historic Alexander bears little resemblance to the later Alexander.

In the past much attention has been given by classicists to the western tradition of the Alexander Romance, especially in Medieval Europe. But few western (or eastern for that matter) scholars have discussed the Alexander legend in the middle east. Among classical scholars the focus in the east remains upon the historical Alexander. With the exception of a few German scholars in the late 1800–early 1900's and the work of Andrew Runni Anderson (TAPA 58 (1927) and *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*. Cambridge, MA 1932) and E.A. Wallis Budge (*The History of Alexander the Great*. Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1976 and *The Alexander Book in Ethiopia*. London: Oxford UP, 1933), the eastern renovation of the Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes has been largely ignored.

This paper begins with a brief look at the origins of the Alexander legend arising from the more fabulous elements of Alexander historians, focusing on passages from Arrian and Plutarch concerning Alexander's visit to the temple of Ammon. Next, it examines the Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes, which draws on the more fantastic elements of the Alexander historians. Along with the Jewish tradition as recounted by Josephus, these sources became the basis for the early Christian conception of Alexander. The Syriac and Ethiopian Christian legends of Alexander based on the Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes reflect the problematic and contradictory view of Alexander among the early Christians of the middle east. The conflict was resolved by slowly converting Alexander to the worship of the Judeo-Christian god. This Christian Alexander in turn provides the basis for the Dhul-Qarnain of the Quran.

The main purpose of this paper is not to comprehensively cover the Alexander legend in the middle east. Instead, its aim is to demonstrate to those who dispute the association of Alexander with Dhul-Qarnain, that the traditions of many cultures refute their denial. Alexander's association with two horns and with the building of the gate against Gog and Magog occurs much earlier than the Quran and persists in the beliefs of all three of these religions. The denial of Alexander's identity as Dhul-Qarnain is the denial of a common heritage shared by the cultures which shape the modern world--both in the east and the

west. The popularity of the legend of Alexander the Great proves that these cultures share a history which suggests that perhaps they are not so different after all.