

We have, however, already expressed our own view that in the Geographic Text we have the nearest possible approach to a photographic impression of Marco's oral narrative. If there be an exception to this we should seek it in the descriptions of battles, in which we find the narrator to fall constantly into a certain vein of bombastic commonplaces, which look like the stock phrases of a professed romancer, and which indeed have a strong resemblance to the actual phraseology of certain metrical romances.* Whether this feature be due to Rusticiano I cannot say, but I have not been able to trace anything of the same character in a cursory inspection of some of his romance-compilations. Still one finds it impossible to conceive of our sober and reticent Messer Marco pacing the floor of his Genoese dungeon, and seven times over rolling out this magniloquent bombast, with sufficient deliberation to be overtaken by the pen of the faithful amanuensis!

73. On the other hand, though Marco, who had left home at fifteen years of age, naturally shows very few signs of reading, there are indications that he had read romances, especially those dealing with the fabulous adventures of Alexander.

Marco's
reading embraced the
Alexandrian
Romances.
Examples.

To these he refers explicitly or tacitly in his notices of the Irongate and of Gog and Magog, in his allusions to the marriage of Alexander with Darius's daughter, and to the battle between those two heroes, and in his repeated mention of the *Arbre Sol* or *Arbre Sec* on the Khorasan frontier.

The key to these allusions is to be found in that Legendary History of Alexander, entirely distinct from the true history of the Macedonian Conqueror, which in great measure took the place of the latter in the imagination of East and West for more than a thousand years. This fabulous history is believed to be of Græco-Egyptian origin, and in its earliest extant compiled form, in the Greek of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, can be traced back to at least about A.D. 200. From the Greek its marvels spread eastward at an early date; some part at least of their matter was known to Moses of Chorene, in the

* See for example vol. i. p. 338, and note 4 at p. 341; also vol. ii. p. 103. The descriptions in the style referred to recur in all seven times; but most of them (which are in Book IV.) have been omitted in this translation.