



# Death in Babylon: Alexander the Great and Iberian Empire in the Muslim Orient

*Vincent Barletta*

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Though Alexander the Great lived more than seventeen centuries before the onset of Iberian expansion into Muslim Africa and Asia, he loomed large in the literature of late medieval and early modern Portugal and Spain. Exploring little-studied chronicles, chivalric romances, novels, travelogues, and crypto-Muslim texts, Vincent Barletta shows that the story of Alexander not only sowed the seeds of Iberian empire but foreshadowed the decline of Portuguese and Spanish influence in the centuries to come.

*Death in Babylon* depicts Alexander as a complex symbol of Western domination, immortality, dissolution, heroism, villainy, and death. But Barletta also shows that texts ostensibly celebrating the conqueror were haunted by failure. Examining literary and historical works in Aljamiado, Castilian, Catalan, Greek, Latin, and Portuguese, *Death in Babylon* develops a view of empire and modernity informed by the ethical metaphysics of French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas. A novel contribution to the literature of empire building, *Death in Babylon* provides a frame for the deep mortal anxiety that has infused and given shape to the spread of imperial Europe from its very beginning.

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