Faustina Doufikar-Aerts (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

“Passing Away under Suspicious Circumstances: Arabic and Islamic History, Iconography, and Lore about Alexander’s Death”

The death of a king is a momentous event and it is often followed by fear of upheaval and turmoil. Alexander the Great died, completely unexpected at the young age of 32, in the year 323 BCE, far from home in Babylon. The circumstances of this sudden death have been the object of rumours and suspicion from the very beginning. On the one hand this was the cause for a multitude of opinions, up to this day; on the other hand it generated a continuous production of writings focussing on revealing the truth, but also in the form of elegies, mourning rituals, burial and ceremony. It became a fundamental part of the reconstruction of the life of a prodigy.

In this paper I want to address the aftermath of the death of the most ever cited king in history, Alexander the Great, in Arabic and Islamic tradition.

I will give attention to al-Iskandar, as he was called in Arabic, and the reports on his death, which are characterized by four recurring elements;

1) The circumstances of his death,
2) His burial in Alexandria in Egypt,
3) Funeral Sentences spoken by philosophers at his bier,
4) Letters of Consolation to his mother.