

THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE TRADITION: AHMEDİ, HIS SOURCES, AND  
THE RECEPTION OF HIS SOURCES IN THE 15<sup>TH</sup>-16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

by  
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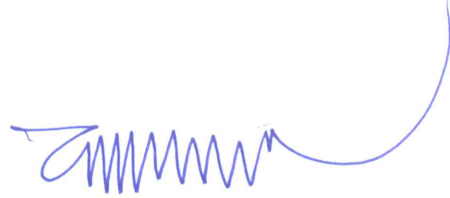
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RECEPTION OF HIS SOURCES IN 15<sup>TH</sup>-16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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## ABSTRACT

### THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE TRADITION: AHMEDİ, HIS SOURCES, AND THE RECEPTION OF HIS SOURCES IN THE 15<sup>TH</sup>-16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

YEŞİM ÇETİN

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Keywords: Literature, Translation, Alexander romance

From Antiquity to modernity, Alexander lived his second life as a legendary hero in the Alexander Romances composed around the third century CE that quickly promulgated all over the world and its languages from East to West. Alexander the Great is discussed in several cultures including Muslim literature, both Arabic and Persian. One of the most important representation of the Alexander Romance is in 10th century, Firdawsi's Shahnama that presents some details about Alexander the Great. In the Ottoman Empire, one the earliest accounts are found in Ahmedî's work, İskendername. Ahmedî was the greatest poet of the late fourteenth century and also of Turkish Divan Literature and one of the crucial representations of Alexander Romance tradition. This thesis is firstly to investigate the scholar Ahmedî and his source of information on Alexander the Great. Briefly, what was the reason for Ahmedî Alexander Romance tradition appearance in the Islamic world? Secondly, in the fourteenth century Ahmedî authored the first İskendername, which later became a tradition and there are receptions of the Ahmedî's İskendername by Ahmed-i Rıdvân and Figânî. In 16th century these works were written and presented and one of the parts of this thesis is investigates the translation issue of these texts. Following the Ahmedî's tradition did they receive Ahmedî's İskendername roughly or did they adhere to some other Persian version?

## ÖZET

### İSKENDERNAME GELENEĞİ: AHMEDİ, KAYNAKLARI VE 15.-16.'INCI YÜZYILLARDA İSKENDERNAME GELENEĞİ

YEŞİM ÇETİN

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Edebiyat, Tercüme, İskendernâme

Antik dönemden modern döneme kadar, İskender, İskender yazımları içerisinde üçüncü yüz yıldan itibaren doğudan batıya birçok dilde ve dünyanın birçok yerinde derlenen eserlerde adeta ikinci bir yaşam sürmüştür. Büyük İskender hem Arapça hem Farsça olan eserlerde Müslüman kültür dahil olmak üzere birçok kültüre konu olmuştur. İskender yazımını en iyi temsil eden eser 10. Yüzyıldaki Firdevsi'nin Şehname'sindedir ve bu eser Büyük İskender hakkında oldukça detay vermektedir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda ise en erken bulunan kayıt Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme eserindedir. Ahmedî on dördüncü yüzyılın ve Türk Divan Edebiyatı'nın en önemli şairidir aynı zamanda İskendernâme geleneğini temsil eden önemli kişiliklerden biridir. Bu sebeple, bu tez çalışması öncelikle Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme'sinin bilgi kaynaklarını inceleyecektir. Özetle, Ahmedî'nin İslam Dünyasındaki İskendernâme geleneğinde kendini gösterme sebebi nedir? 14. yüzyılda Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme'sinin ardından bu yazım bir gelenek oluşturmuş ve Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme'sinden sonra 16. yüzyılda Ahmed-i Rıdvan ve Figani tarafından İskendernâme örnekleri yazılmıştır. Bu tezin bir kısmı da bu metinlerin çevirileri üzerine odaklanacaktır. Ahmedî'nin geleneğini takip ederken bu şairler Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme'sinin bir tercümesi midir yoksa diğer Farsça versiyonlarını da incelemişler midir?

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Everyone uses him as a projection of his own private truths, his own dreams and aspirations, fears and power-fantasies. Each country, each generation, sees him in a different light. Every individual biographer... inevitably puts as much of himself, his own background and convictions, into that Protean figure as he does of whatever historical truth he can extract from the evidence”* (Green 1991, 480).

### **Alexander the Great: Two Horns, Thousand Identities**

Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia, was born in 356 B.C. and died aged thirty-three in 323 B.C. (Stoneman 1991, 6-7). He was the son of Olympias of Epirus and Philip II of Macedon (Stoneman 1991, 7). His life and achievements made him a legendary hero. While merely in his twenties he led his army on several major campaigns, defeating sprawling empires from the Mediterranean to India. The significance of Alexander’s skills and courage became apparent especially after his death. Alexander Romances lauding his life were composed in different languages and across geographies from Europe to the East.

Aristotle is a very important figure for all Alexander Romances. Save for one, all of the romances which I will present here describe Aristotle as a teacher or advisor of Alexander the Great. Alexander’s alleged relations with Aristotle took on a variety of meanings in the centuries after his death as the figure of Alexander oscillated between positive and negative perceptions. In several of the romances, Alexander is said to have

consulted Aristotle to update him on his progress. In Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*, Aristotle was represented as an advisor and guide to Alexander the Great. Nizâmî examines the teachings; and their relationship is displayed in the second part of his *Iskandarnāma*. In Ahmedî's text, several dialogues with the philosopher that led to discussions are included. According to İsmail Ünver, Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* created characters to represent the certain notions of Islam and, while Aristotle represents wisdom, Alexander represents the soul (Ünver 2000, 24). These two characters' struggle represents the struggle between reason and the psyche (Maroth 2006, 11). Here, Alexander's curiosity and temerity was counter to Aristotle's wisdom.

The letters allegedly exchanged between Aristotle and Alexander are one of the essential reflections of Alexander's achievements. The letters cover Alexander's travels through and conquests of the East, especially India, and his encounters with various creatures, animals and people (Maroth 2006, 12). According to Miklos Maroth, the letters generally refer to historical events and also address Aristotle's alleged teachings on practical and theoretical philosophy (Maroth 2006, 13). In effect, the letters provide an account of Alexander's life story and the system of philosophy of Late Antiquity. Maroth, for example, investigates the first Arabic prose and aims to describe the Arabic translation of the letter. By the end of his analysis he arrived at three key conclusions: that the letters were written originally in Greek and contain the aforementioned correspondence between Alexander and Aristotle, that the date of the Greek version of the biography of Alexander by an unknown author whom certain manuscripts falsely called Callisthenes might be from circa 6th century BC, and that this account, "a pseudo-historical narrative interspersed with an 'epistolary novel', later came to be known as Pseudo-Callisthenes, is one of the most important examples of the schools of rhetoric in Late Antiquity<sup>1</sup>.

From Antiquity to modernity, Alexander lived his second life as a legendary hero in the Alexander Romances composed around the third century CE that quickly promulgated all over the world and multiple languages from East to West (Stoneman 2017, 26). In several European literary traditions, Alexander the Great represents the respective culture. Likewise, one of the most crucial examples of this epic in the

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudo-Callisthenes is the name of a Greek historian of the period of Alexander the Great. A History of Alexander of romantic and legendary character has been incorrectly ascribed to Callisthenes. It is commonly referred to as "Pseudo-Callisthenes" or the Alexander Romance. The work was written in Greek and several recensions is known. For more information: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/callisthenes-the-name-of-a-greek-historian-of-the-period-of-alexander-the-great->.

Persianate world is the portrayal of Alexander as a great hero in Persian poetry. On the other hand, in the Middle Persian texts of Late Antiquity, Alexander symbolized the “accursed one” because of his destruction of Persepolis nearly a millennium previously (Wickham 2007, 69-71).

During the revelation of the Qur’an in the seventh century, the stories about and depictions of Alexander began to morph, and Alexander was shaped into the character of “Two Horns (*Dh’ul Qarnayn*)”, who is a prophet who explored the entire world for the sake of God and journeyed to where the sun sets (Wickham 2007, 57). The historical identity of this figure has been hotly debated. Despite differing opinions, the association with Two Horns survived in pre-modern and Islamic folk history. (The debate about Alexander’s identification as a Persian king and a prophet of Islam will be analyzed in the following chapter.)

Alexander’s military campaigns are expressed in conflicting manners; at times admiringly, while simultaneously being the subject of condemnation in other pieces due to his destruction of Ancient Persia (Wickham 2007, 45). According to the first-century Greek biographer Plutarch (d. 120 AD), when Alexander conquered Persia, he compromised between the Persian and Median identity because of his inclusion of Persian generals into his army and his encouragement of his generals to intermarry with the Persian population (Wickham 2007, 46). According to Plutarch, both in Persia and other places which Alexander conquered, he synthesized a syncretic culture to foster world peace through cosmopolis, the “world-city,” in which all individuals are bound to one another, regardless of country, race, or religion (Wickham 2007, 46-47). It is known that the word “cosmopolitanism” has different meanings in different fields. Alexander’s universality is produced through literary, philological, material, scientific, and cultural explorations not only in the Persian Alexander epic but also in other epics involving the Macedonian Kin (Wickham 2007, 47). One of the common aspects of these epics is the attempt to set new conditions for Alexander’s universality, and therefore, the trans-regional culture-power of cosmopolis.

This thesis has limited its scope to the study of the corpus of the Alexander Romances written by the Ottoman litterati in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, namely the *Īskendernâmes* of Ahmedî (d.1412), Ahmed-i Rıdvân (d.1528-1539) and Figânî (d.1532).<sup>2</sup> There is another early sixteenth century Ottoman *Īskendernâme*, the one by

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<sup>2</sup> A number of Ottoman *Īskendernâmes* are found appended to other works of literature or compiled in miscellanies. A full list of independent Ottoman *Īskendernames* would include a number of authors some

Behiști (d. 1511-12), which I failed to study because it did not come to my attention in the earlier phases of my explorations (Ayçiçeği 2013, 129-204). However, to better understand the Islamic historiography on Alexander Romances, Firdawsî's (d.1010) *Shahnāma* (The Book of Kings) and Nizâmî's (d.1209) *Iskandarnāma*, one of the mesnevis in his *Khamsa* (Quintet), will also be taken into consideration here.

Alexander's genealogy gets complicated primarily due to Firdawsî's argument about Alexander as a Persian, son of Darius the Great and, therefore, legitimately a Persian king (Stoneman 1991, 56). All this can be summarized as an outcome of the Persian cosmopolis: as the political universe changed so did the definitions of the universal. The first Persian Alexander epic is found within the *Shahnāma* composed by Firdawsî and completed in 1010 (Stoneman 1991, 58). Firdawsî's *Shahnāma* played a significant role in solidifying Alexander the Great as a legitimate Persian king, and is one of the crucial works with regards to understanding the Persian cosmopolis. Firdawsî penned his work at the court of Ghaznavids in Ghazni, a city in the South of modern-day Afghanistan (Stoneman 1991, 58-59). In the first decades of the eleventh century, Firdawsî's patron, Mahmud of Ghazni (d.1030), made annual raids into India (Sawyer 1997, 94-98). The importance of *Shahnāma* lies in its association of Alexander with the Persian king and the Qur'anic figure of Two Horns (Sawyer 1994, 96-99). Pivoting from the particular to the universal, Firdawsî's depiction on Alexander's Persian birth story illustrate a broader argument to shape his historical judgement (Sawyer 1994, 96-99).

A century later another Alexander romance was written in Persian, in the Caucasus region. In 1194, Nizâmî of Ganja (d.1209) completed his work, *Khamsa*, and re-wrote the tale of Alexander's universality. Nizâmî changed the way the Islamic empire was imagined. In Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma*, Alexander was not considered Persian by birth but rather as someone who, by upholding the customs of a Persian king, attained the status of a sovereign (Sawyer 1994, 96-99). Nizâmî lived in Seljukid Azerbaijan. Ganja was a cultural center in a politically unsettled region. Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma* covers five stories in the mesnevi format, and it became very popular. The first four stories (Makhzan al-Asrar ("The Treasury of Mysteries"), Khosrow o Shirin ("Khosrow and Shirin"), Layli o Majnun (Layli and Majnun), Haft Paykar ("The Seven Beauties") were themselves well-known but the last one, *Iskandarnāma* is Nizâmî's masterpiece. This Alexander epic

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of whom would be associated with manuscripts in library catalogues, while others would known only from biographical dictionaries. For such a list see: İsmail Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler ve Ahmed-i Ridvân'ın İskendernâmesi* (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2013), 38-39.

consists of over ten thousand of the thirty thousand lines total in the Khamsa. In the processes of his work, Nizâmî radically re-imagined Alexander. One of the most important examples is his insistence that Alexander was not the son of Darius I, but the son of the Philip the Macedon. More importantly, Nizâmî portrayed him as a metaphorical everyman on an allegoric journey of the human soul, connecting him even more firmly to the story of Two Horns in the Qur'an (Sawyer 1997, 63). Nizâmî provided a new model for the court cultures of the largest early modern Islamic empires such as Mughals, Ottomans and Safavids. He tried to depict Alexander with reference to Christian, Pahlavi and Jewish sources written in different languages (Venetis 2006, 101-5). Nizâmî articulated the new model for the Persian emperor as a perfect ruler whose spiritually was cultivated through discourse with ascetics as well as with a saintly retinue of philosophers (Venetis 2006, 106).

In the first chapter of this thesis Firdawsî and Nizâmî will be discussed in detail. All in all, a review of Firdawsî's *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma* will explain how the Alexander epic in Persian augments the perspective on the rich historical Alexander Romance and integrates both the theory and practice of cosmopolitanism at work in the Persian cosmopolis.<sup>3</sup>

The Ottoman's rendering of the Alexander Romance is best exemplified in the *İskendernâme* of Taceddin İbrahim b. Hızır, an Anatolian scholar known by his pen-name Ahmedî, produced at the cusp of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Kut 1989, 165-67). Written between 1403 to 1409 under the patronages of both Mir Süleyman Şah of Germiyanid dynasty (1363-1388) and the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I (1389-1402), the aim of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* was to bring a new perspective to the Ottoman relationship to Alexander the Great as a cultural model (Banarlı 1939, 56-60). It was presented to Emir Süleyman (d.1411), the son of Bayezid I. *Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman* (An Epic of the History of the Kings of the Ottoman House) appended to Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is one of the oldest accounts of information about the emergence of the Ottoman dynasty and shed light on the literary and cultural history of the period at the earliest stages.

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<sup>3</sup> *Cosmopolis* refers to a cluster of ideas and schools of thought that sees a natural order in the universe (the cosmos) reflected in human society, particularly in the polis or city-state. More broadly, it presents a political-moral philosophy that posits people as citizens of the world rather than of a particular nation-state. For more information: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cosmopolitanism-international-relations>

The *İskendernâme* covers an imagined history, a narrative reconstruction of historical events between two chronologically distant periods: the 4<sup>th</sup> and the fifteenth centuries (Banarlı 1939, 56-7). Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* exemplifies Alexander as a shining model ruler and world conqueror. When Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is analyzed as Ottoman historiography dealing with the past and the present, the importance of Alexander as a bridge of sorts is self-evident. The legendary and the universal prestige of Alexander left his legacy in Ottoman historiography as well and it is one of the most important testaments to the intercultural connections of Arab, Persian and Greek literature.

In *İskendernâme*, Ahmedî introduced Alexander in the part on Ottoman history and made additions and modifications to his composition in line with the political conditions and changes of time in Anatolia. As such, Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* became one of the major historical sources of the Ottoman State with regards to understanding the perception of the fifteenth century and Ahmedî's role in defining the relationship between past and present as it displays different aspects of various genres of history and epic literature. In addition, the selection of Alexander the Great, and re-writing about the past in the pre-modern can be not indifferent to the past but, must be understanding over memories of the historian (Banarlı 1939, 59).

The major point here is that Alexander's narrative and visual representations exist from West to East, from West Europe to India (Sılay 2004, XII). In other words, Alexander conquered the world by bringing "East and West" into a single imperial formation (Sılay 2004, XII). From Europe to the Middle East nearly every political entity with imperial aspirations took Alexander as a model. Medieval and Early Modern Muslim emperors, too, portrayed themselves as successors to Alexander's universal empire. Alexander the Great is portrayed in several cultures as the birth of inter-nations (Sawyer 1997, 61-66). In the case of Persian Alexander Romance, the controversy over Alexander's Persian birth story reveals a tension between local and trans-local identities that was characteristic of trans-regional culture and power in the Persian cosmopolis around the turn of the eleventh century (Sılay 1994, 70). The representations of Alexander in multiple languages also resonate with local cultures and local interests; at times personal names given to characters in different languages played a role in adjudicating cultural authenticity and identity.

Depending on one's perspective it can be seen that it is possible to represent Alexander the Great as a philosopher and an explorer of new lands, a champion of



Christianity, a Byzantine Emperor or a Muslim king. In Byzantium, following a tradition that had developed gradually over the course of the Middle Ages, Alexander the Great was represented as a Christian King who had visited Jerusalem and destroyed pagan temples (Venetis 2006, 96). In other cultures, he was represented with different characteristics (Kastritsis 2016, 243).

In all cultures and traditions in which Alexander the Great is known, there is substantial scholarly literature on the subject. So, I argue that precisely because of the existence of such a large, multilingual corpus of stories, texts and images related to Alexander the Great, these became the ideal medium for the formulation and communication of a wide range of messages in the increasingly global late Middle Ages. Alexander had become all things to all people and so his exploits were the subjects of intense interests and contestations.

### **The Alexander Romance Tradition**

Already a century after the death of Alexander the Great, his life and deeds had begun to assume legendary qualities (Kastritsis 2016, 245).<sup>4</sup> Dating to Hellenic times, a distinct tradition grew around the hero, conqueror and the emperor Alexander in written form. The Alexander Romance, a heroic narrative loosely based on the life of Alexander the Great, was one of the most widely copied texts throughout pre-modern European and the Islamic world. In the Roman Empire, Alexander the Great was set to the tune of both historical and romanticized narratives. The first Roman accounts of Alexander's campaigns were penned by those closest to him (Stoneman 1991, 4). Many of the efforts to create these early narratives took place in Egypt and several Egyptian tales were integrated into the narration of Alexander's adventures (Stoneman 1991, 6-9). The transmission of the legend of Alexander the Great spread through the oral and literary media in the Late Antiquity and the early Islamic period (Stoneman 1991, 7).

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<sup>4</sup> "These included Egyptian tales about Alexander's descent from the last Pharaoh of Egypt; a cycle of letters supposedly representing his correspondence with the Persian King Darius III (d. 330 BCE); a Jewish tradition describing his visit to Jerusalem; and a fictional letter to his mother describing fabulous adventures at the ends of the Earth."

The Greek Alexander Romances followed an Egyptian model of kingship through Antiquity into the Pre-Modern world (Lytton 1973, 14). Plutarch (CE 46-120), the Greek biographer and essayist from Chaeronea, was a Roman citizen. He studied in Athens, one of the most prestigious education centers of his day, and traveled in Asia Minor, Greece, and Egypt (Lytton 1973, 14). Plutarch read and lectured in Rome and wrote several works including *Moralia*, a prelude to his *Parallel Lives* of Greeks and Romans (Lytton 1973, 17). Both were written in Greek, but intended for both Greek and Roman readers (Browne 2013, 6-7). In his *The Parallel Lives* he offers an account of Alexander's campaigns and discusses the personality of Alexander. He made significant use of Aristobulus and Ptolemy as his sources (Browne 2013, 17). Another Greek historian of the Roman period, Arrianus (d. c.160 BC) of Nicomedia, also reputed as a public servant, military commander and philosopher was more methodical. His *Anabasis of Alexander* was written in the second century and it is considered the best source on the campaigns of Alexander the Great. He searched for the most rigorous sources regarding Alexander's life. According to him, the most trustworthy sources are the men who were on the campaigns with Alexander the Great (Baynham and Bosworth 2000, 16).

The primary Greek source about Alexander the Great was written by a certain Callisthenes who was believed to be a nephew of Aristotle (Steward 1993, 65). His *Deeds of Alexander* was a panegyric written in the court tradition (Steward 1993, 67). The mixture of fiction and inaccurate historical material was later translated into several languages and thus the Pseudo-Callisthenes literary tradition was established in the East and West, having a catalytic influence on the literary production concerning Alexander in several cultures (Stoneman 1991, 78). In other words, the earliest Greek version of the Alexander Romance is a romanticized biography of Alexander's life; first as a posthumous praise of an important personality and second, as an ideal model of a person in a didactic manner (Stoneman 1991, 78).

The Pseudo-Callisthenes account is a collection of tales from the Middle East, produced mainly in Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic-speaking regions about the life of Alexander the Great in written form (Stoneman 1991, 79). This genre can be used as a supplement by historians but not as a reliable historical source reflecting on the real person of Alexander (Venetis 2006, 46). The romance reflected the legends and the local tradition of the Middle Eastern region concerning Alexander's personality. The supernatural elements in the story are numerous and the author maintains a generous tone with regards to Alexander's character; pointing out his positive features while balancing

the negative ones (Venetis 2006, 46). Despite the folk style, the romance has a strong historical core. (Venetis 2006, 46). The historical frame of the romance is straightforward: the linear route of the narration agrees with the linear historical sequence of the events of Alexander the Great's life, namely his birth, childhood, enthronement in Macedon, and campaigns against the Persians (Venetis 2006, 47). The Pseudo-Callisthenes romance is a classic example of accounts influenced by the syncretic spirit of Late Antiquity: it is a combination of ancient Graeco-Roman notions and Christian cultural context of Late Antiquity. Such syncretism became a trademark in the creation of the figure of Alexander in all cultures and languages.

The Alexander Romance Tradition in the East extended back to the Sassanian period (Venetis 2006, 47). In the tenth and eleventh centuries a conception of kingship occurred which created a new Persian Model of Kingship (Venetis 2006, 46-7). Here, Alexander the Great stood close to the mythic and historic Persian kings and Central Asian conquerors, such as Mahmud of Ghazna, ruling from 998 to 1030 (Stoneman 1991, 10-1).

In the Armenian context, the Alexander Romance served different educational and pious purposes because Peter Cowe argued that one of the earliest secular Armenian narratives fulfilled a late antique and the early medieval educational aim as a text to be broadly disseminated (Cowe 2013, 320). Cowe argues that the Armenian Alexander Romances into the larger debate on Armenian statehood and ecclesiastical polity and the church's denial of the validity of earthly kingship may have helped forge a unique Armenian ethnic identity (Cowe 2013, 320).

In the Islamic tradition in Arabic, (Alexander as) Dh'ul Qarnayn appears in Sura 18 of the Qur'an as he travels from East to West to the end of the world and erects walls against Gog and Magog (Goth and Magoth), the kings of the Unclean Nations whose people engage in the habit of eating worms, dogs, human cadavers and fetuses, to protect "a people who scarcely understood a word" (Fox 1982, 55). The Gog and Magog legend is not found in earlier versions of the Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes. Furthermore, the association of the Qur'anic *Dh'ul Qarnayn* with Alexander the Great has been debated (Fox 1982, 56). *Tarikh al-rasul wa al-muluk* (The History of Prophets and Kings) by Abu Jafar ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923) and *Tarikh-e Bal'ami* by Abu Ali Muhammad Bal'ami (d.954-961), the author of the Persian rendering of al-Tabari's work, both contributed to the historical analysis of the Alexander romance (Fox 1982, 56-9). In their works, the depiction of Alexander the Great follows the Iranian and Islamic

tradition. The importance of the work of Bal'ami lies in its depiction of Alexander the Great as both Dh'ul Qarnayn and as a king (Beaudoen 2017, 92). Representing him as Dh'ul Qarnayn, Bal'ami portrays Alexander as a prophet or a saint who leads and saves the Muslim world at the end of time, the Doomsday. Bal'ami focused on the Quranic rendition of Dh'ul-Qarnayn and noted that Tabari only mentioned what was recorded in the Qur'an. Bal'ami himself, however, displayed two traditions: in one Alexander the Great was both a king and a (Islamic) religious leader, in another he was just a king (Beaudoen 2017, 93).

The Persian tradition of the Alexander Romance is crucial in seeing the connection of Middle Persian texts with those produced by the early Ottoman litterati. Firdawsî's *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma* in his *Khamsa* along with several other *mesnevis* explored themes of Persian kingship and revisited literary depictions of past Persian kings. Firdawsî formulated the earliest appearance of the Alexander cycle in the New Persian context (Sawyer 1997, 87). Many manuscripts written in the pre-Islamic Persian language of Pahlavi were in the process of being translated into New Persian during the era in which Firdawsî lived. In all likelihood, like many poets of his time, Firdawsî began by penning lyrics and eulogium but later acquired an interest in and began studying Pahlavi works in order to better understand ancient Persian history. It is thought that he began writing the *Shahnāma* in 990 yet it is unclear who his patrons or benefactors were. Firdawsî, having penned his works piecemeal, finished his first compilation in 1003. Desiring to present his masterpiece to Sultan Mahmud, he collected an additional compilation in 1010. The importance of *Shahnāma* is in the discussion of kingship and Alexander's combined link from the Greek into the Persian worlds. Its portrayal of Alexander is both mythical and historical. Therefore, Alexander is shown in Persian tradition as a conqueror, king, and also adventurer.

Nizâmî was both a poet and a mystic. His first *Iskandarnāma* was dedicated to the Atabeg of Mosul (d.1128), and later he dedicated his revised *Iskandarnāma* to Atabeg Nusrat al-Din (d.1186) (Sawyer 1997, 88-90). Nizâmî divided his *Iskandarnāma* in two parts: the first part is called *Sharafnama*, and it provides account of Alexander's life story and his adventures (Sawyer 1997, 990). The second part, *Iqbalnama*, covers the dialogues on statecraft between Alexander and the philosophers gathered at his court. Hence, the Persian tradition of Alexander Romance was established as the poets began to play a crucial role as prominent courtiers. The common features of poetry produced at the Persian courts lies in their depiction of Alexander along the lines of Arabic and the Middle

Persian models which conjured an image of Alexander the Great as world conqueror and king. In other words, while Alexander was represented as a prophet and protector of the world in the Arabic tradition, the model of Alexander was updated to a worldly conqueror and king in the Persian tradition. For example, in Nizâmî's Alexander Romance, Alexander is upheld as an archetype for what a king should be.

The Ottoman rendering of the Alexander Romance is best represented by Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* at the turn of the fifteenth century. *Ahmedî's İskendernâme* included *Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman* (*An Epic of the History of the Kings of the Ottoman House*), the oldest source of its kind that has come down to us. For a better understanding of the context of its production, the historical background of the period will also be presented here.

The *Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman* covers the beginnings of Ottoman history up to Emir Süleyman, which indicates that the poet attached this final version to his *İskendernâme* completed in 1390, sometime between 1403 and 1409 (Ünver 1983, 49). Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* takes its image of Alexander from Firdawsî and Nizâmî but he innovated his Alexander Romance with a new conception of Ottoman kingship that legitimated the Ottoman Empire during a turbulent period of transition (Ünver 1983, 44-8). Ahmedî also devoted several chapters of his work to the exchange between Alexander and Persian-Arab philosophers (Turna 2009, 267). In order to examine pertinent ethical and philosophical issues, he covered some subjects in his work such as the ethical issues surrounding the royal office, model of kingship, and the education of a ruler. In his work he created a comprehensive narrative combination, centered around the dynastic crisis.

**Studies on Alexander and Ahmedî's *İskendernâme***  
**(including the section on Ottoman History, Ahmedî's *Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman*)**

In the 1950s, George Cary published his monograph entitled *The Medieval Alexander* which provided a comprehensive look on the Alexander Romances from the twelfth century through the sixteenth century in its various European recensions (Cary 1956, 59-67). Providing us with a comprehensive literary survey of manuscript production and dissemination in the West, Cary focused on the French, German, Castalian,

Aragonese and English recensions of Alexander Romance to understand which one of these narratives have been studied as European national literatures.

A decade later, in 1969, Albert Wolohojian published an English translation of the *Pseudo-Callisthenes* in Armenian. Wolohojian explored the earlier Armenian scholarship on Alexander Romances.<sup>5</sup>

In 1991 bore witness to Richard Stoneman advancing modern scholarship on Alexander the Great. He published a comprehensive study on the Alexander Romance, and provided a translation from Greek into English. In 2008, Stoneman explored the Greek recensions of the Alexander Romances; in the recent years he focused on the recensions of Alexander Romances in other languages and has extended his work to include the Persian accounts. He has, however, given less attention to Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*.

Faustina Doufikar-Aerts worked on the Arabic tradition of the Alexander Romances in 2010 (Doufikar 2010, 67-9). In *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* she studied and discussed the Arabic biography of Alexander which can establish a link between the understanding of the Greek recensions and the Ottoman and Persian *İskendernâmes* (Doufikar 2010, 69).

At the turn of the twentieth century, Elias John Wilkinson Gibbs, a prominent Ottoman literary historian, studied Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* and explored both the cultural themes and his poetic style in his "*A History of Ottoman Poetry*". According to Gibbs, Ahmedî was the first Ottoman romanticist who must have followed the tradition of Aşık Paşa and Yunus Emre (Gibb 1900-1909, 35). Gibbs describes Ahmedî's work as an encyclopedia which covers, in abstract, all human knowledge. In addition to that, Gibbs highlighted Ahmedî's building on the Sufi tradition (Gibb 1900-1909, 35-36).

Joseph Thury, in his "*XIV. Asır Türk Dili Yadigarları*" discussed the work of Ahmedî. According to him, *İskendernâme* should be analyzed as a cultural theme related to the foundation of the Ottoman State (Thury 1903, 81). Less than a decade later, in 1938, Nihad Sami Banarlı published his work "*Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman*" (*An Epic of the History of the Kings of the Ottoman House*) and argued that "with the remarkable truthfulness as to his age and also sensibility for historiography, Ahmedî

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Wolohojian, *The Romance of Alexander the Great by the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, translated from the Armenian version. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 88–90. See also: Richard Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erikson and Ian Richard Netton, *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* (Eelde: Barkhuis, 2012).

wrote Ottoman History devoid of fables and legends” (Banarlı 1936, 67). According to Thury and Banarlı, the *İskendernâme* penned for Bayezid I is likely to have played a role in encouraging Ahmedî to start working on an epic history of the Ottoman dynasty, the *Dasitan* (Banarlı 1936, 77-79). However, this argument is criticized by Pal Fodor. Pal Fodor’s work in 1984 is one of the earliest and most important works on the *Dasitan*. Fodor’s *Ahmedî’s Dasitan As a Source of Early Ottoman Historiography* mainly focused on the author’s agenda. Pal Fodor characterized the Ottoman rulers as depicted in the *Dasitan* and discussed their attitudes towards their subjects and their reactions against the enemy. Hence, he explains the *gaza* ideology (Fodor 1984, 41-54). According to Pal Fodor, the couplet that Banarlı and Thury expounded on did not refer to Bayezid I but to Emir Süleyman (Fodor 1984, 47). On the other hand, Ahmedî might have dedicated his work to more than one patron, including Bayezid I, but the proof for this argument can not be found in those couplets that Banarlı and Thury referred to. According to Pal Fodor, Ahmedî’s *Dasitan* should be connected with Bayezid I because elsewhere the work itself produces such evidence (Fodor 1984, 48). In time, Ahmet Ateş studied the new transcription of the *History of Ottoman Empire* of Ahmedî in 1942. In his *Metin Tenkidi Hakkında (Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman Münasebeti ile)*, Ateş argues that Banarlı’s work is flawed and insertion of Persian headings and sub-headings is misleading (Ateş 1942, 253-67).

Four years later, Kemal Silay provided a transcription and studied Ahmedî and his *Dasitan*. In the work *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage* Silay’s approach is rather different than the other scholars. He emphasized the *gaza* notion. According to him, the foundation of the Ottoman Empire is one of the most important pious representations of its founders and the worship of militant Islam as their ideology (Silay 2004, 66-7). Silay’s analysis facilitates an understanding of cultural themes of the time including legends which were circulating in the court circles in Anatolia.

According to Paul Wittek, *İskendernâme* has very crucial place because Ahmedî placed the strong emphasis on the Ottoman’s role as *gazi*, namely religiously motivated raiders (Wittek 2012, 94). He argues that during the course of the fifteenth century the Ottomans developed a dynastic myth to compensate for their lack of a prestigious lineage (Wittek 2012, 94).

İsmail Ünver’s facsimile publication provides a listing of the crucial extant copies of Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme*. In his Introduction Ünver explains the *İskendernâme* structure in detail. According to İsmail Ünver, Ahmedî has some innovations in his work

such as Alexander and Gülşah story, travel around the Indian islands, the section of *mevlid*. He argues that these innovations gave the newness to Ahmedî and for that reason Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is not the copy of the other *İskendernâmes*. Yaşar Akdoğan published a transliteration of selections from Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, those which stress Islamic values. Akdoğan's selections include the "Mevlid" part of the work that covers the Prophet's life and ascent to the Seven Heaven<sup>6</sup>. In 1999, Hasan Akçay made a transcription of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* for an MA thesis which dwelled on which İsmail Ünver had studied. Despite its shortcomings, Akçay's transcription was vital for my thesis and introduced me to Ahmedî's poetic world (Akçay, 1999). Finally, based on the facsimile published by Ünver, full translation was made in 2018.<sup>7</sup> Due to time constraints, I was not able to study this edition. Here, it should be noted that not all manuscripts of Ahmedî contain the same text.<sup>8</sup>

In his 2009 study on *Dasitan* Babür Turna discussed the perception of time and history in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* as well. "Perception of History and the Problem of Superiority in Ahmedî's *Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman*" deals with the understanding and portrayal of the past and present. The importance of Turna is his attempt to investigate the Ahmedî's work to understand how early Ottoman historians dealt with the historical past and the problems of their time. In order to display this problem Turna investigated the narrative strategy of *Dasitan* in *İskendernâme* and argued that after the Battle of Ankara (1402) Ahmedî became embroiled in struggles, dynastic politics and intrigues because of new contestants to power in Anatolia (Turna 2009, 267-79).

Dimitri Kastritsis, in his 2016 "*Alexander Romance and the Rise of the Ottoman Empire*", argues that Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* and other *Alexander Romances* are connected when one analyzes their structure and language.<sup>9</sup> He displays issues of

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<sup>6</sup> Yaşar Akdoğan, *İskendernâme'den Seçmeler* (T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 1988), 11. Akdoğan then published the selections from Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* as an ebook: Yaşar Akdoğan, Ahmedî. *İskender-Nâme*. e-kitap, T. C. Kültür Ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kütüphaneler Ve Yayınlar Genel Müdürlüğü: 1556-Ahmedî-İskendernâme-Yaşar\_Aghdoghan-505s.pdf (no date)

<sup>7</sup> *Ahmedî, İskendernâme*, haz. Furkan Öztürk, İstanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2018. The transliteration, based on the copy that was studied by Ünver (İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi Yazma Eserler T 921), is appended by life story of Ahmedî, notes, and glossary.

<sup>8</sup> Sawyer has compared the best-known manuscript of the *İskendernâme* (the facsimile published by Ünver, dated 14 Ramadan 847/ 3 January 1444) to one copied 45 years later (894/1488–89): Caroline G. Sawyer, "Revising Alexander: Structure and Evolution in Ahmedî's Ottoman *İskendernâme* (c. 1400)," *Edebiyat* 13 (2003): 232.

<sup>9</sup> Kastritsis, "The Alexander romance and the rise of the Ottoman Empire," 243-283. Stressing the Alexander Romance's adaptability to different cultural contexts, Kastritsis begins by briefly examining the



intertextuality transcending religious and linguistic divides and examines Ahmedî's text according to several different interpretational levels. Taking a critical historical approach to the development of the Alexander Romance in the early Ottoman Empire, he argues that Ahmedî's version is a didactic work of philosophical and even cosmographic nature (Kastritsis 2016, 245). He explores the text and its popularity in the light of the contemporaneous events and political struggles. For example, on Ahmedî's presentation of Darius's conflict with Caesar, Kastritsis claims that it "should not be seen merely on the level of two warring kingdoms, but rather on that of a larger struggle between two competing religions and world orders" (Kastritsis 2016, 246-7). Kastritsis discussed the organization of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* and argued that the organization is a reference to its engagement with worldly knowledge. He also argued that the main source for Ahmedî could not have been Firdawsî's *Shahnâme* because he could not have had access to the written version. He must have heard it recited at gatherings at the courts or elsewhere (Kastritsis 2016, 246).

In the same volume with Kastritsis is Şevket Küçük hüseyin's *The Ottoman Historical Section of Ahmedî's İskendernâme: An Alternative Reading in the Light of the Author's Personal Circumstances* (Küçük hüseyin 2016, 285-311). In contrast to Kastritsis' study of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* set in the broad context of the medieval Alexander Romance tradition, Şevket Küçük hüseyin, in his "The Ottoman Historical Section," focuses on the Dasitan. Following a critical reading of past studies which focused on Dasitan's literary, linguistic and ideological features, but neglected to study it from a historical perspective, Küçük hüseyin highlights Ahmedî's personal experiences at the Ottoman court of both Bayezid I and Emir Süleyman.

Based on Tunca Kortantamer's biographical study, Küçük hüseyin provides a brief overview of Ahmedî's life and career. He argues that if one wants to understand Ahmedî's *oeuvre*, the first thing that should be done is to attempt to understand the author, his personal history and personality, and his life experiences at the time of his writing *İskendernâme* (Küçük hüseyin 2016, 287-8). He claims that the moral emphases of the narrative as well as its historiographical shortcomings resulted from the author's life story as well as the generic necessities and rhetorical devices characteristic of the *advice literature* format. Behind this argument is the aforementioned conception that

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prose vernacular Greek version, demonstrating how its narrative took shape in the context of contemporary culture, politics, and textual communities.

İskendernâme was composed as a work of advice specifically addressed to Emir Süleyman, warning him of his father Bayezid I's excesses (Küçükhüseyin 2016, 286).

One of the most comprehensive studies on Ahmedî and his *İskendernâme* was by Caroline Sawyer. In her 1997 PhD dissertation, Sawyer explored the image of Alexander the Great as a model ruler. She argued that Ahmedî chose to represent Alexander the Great for the legitimization of his patron(s) (Sawyer 1997, 70-7). Ahmedî chose to represent him both in secular and sacred realms. She argued that Ahmedî represented both a secular and a sacred image for Alexander. Furthermore, Sawyer's analysis pointed out the importance of the Islamic mythical characters in the Alexander Romance. For example, Sawyer discussed the role of Hızır in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*.<sup>10</sup> In general, the figure of Hızır in Islamic societies represented the helping hand of the God for the spiritual needs of people (*The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Khidr). Sawyer described Hızır as the representative of the sacred knowledge for Alexander the Conqueror and the Emperor and argued that Hızır in *İskendernâme* is a courtly figure. Sawyer argues that in the later version, there is a stronger emphasis on Islam and empire, which suited the needs of Ahmedî's Ottoman patrons around 805/1402. This is evident in the historical section presenting the Ottomans as ghazis, the *Mevlid* which is the first of its kind in Turkish, as well as other parts of the work. Although Sawyer's study is comprehensive, but according to Beaudoen she fails to understand the *İskendernâme* as a part of the multilingual genre of literature that circulated around from the Middle East to the Eastern coasts of Africa in the case of variations in the existing narrative of *İskendernâme* (Beaudoen 2017, 24).

Kamil Erdem Güler's 2013 Master's Thesis, entitled *Thirst for Wisdom, Lust for Conquests: Ahmedî's 14th Century Ottoman Alexander Romance*, presents the intellectual paradigms of fourteenth-century Anatolia based on Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*. He focused on the political fiction of Ahmedî as it served an intellectual and ideological implementation of the emergence of the Ottoman Empire (Güler 2013).

Most recently, in his 2017 PhD dissertation Lee Andre Beaudoen, entitled *Mirrors of the World: Alexander Romances and the Fifteenth Century Ottoman Sultanate* explores Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* as a genre of *Nasihatname* (Books of Advice). In addition, he

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<sup>10</sup> Hızır/Khidr is Quranic figure presented as possessing great wisdom or mystic knowledge. In various Islamic and non-Islamic traditions, Khidr is described as a messenger, prophet, slave and angel, who guards the sea, teaches secret knowledge and comes to the aid of those in distress. The figure of Khidr has been syncretized over time with various other mystical figures including Sorūshin Iran, Saint Sarkis the Warrior, Saint George and John the Baptist in Armenia, Asia Minor and the Levant. See more: <http://khidr.org/encyclopedia.islam.khidr.htm>

attempts to investigate the link between Alexander the Great and Ottoman cultural model and delineates the fifteenth-century Mediterranean literary world under the Ottoman patronage. One of the most important keys in Beaudoen's dissertation is the stress on the cultural and ideological connections between two chronologically distant periods: the fourth century BC and fifteenth century CE with two important concepts for structural analyses: *translatio imperii* and *circumstantial parallelism*.<sup>11</sup> He takes the Mediterranean as a nexus for both Alexander the Great and the Ottoman rulers to understand the cultural continuity from third century to fifteenth century. In doing so, he attempted to show how the distant past enters the early modern world. My thesis is highly engaged with Beaudoen's dissertation in the case of representation of the link between Alexander the Great and Ottoman cultural model.

### **Ahmedî's Illustrated *İskendernâmes***

One of the earliest illustrated copies of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* that has been preserved until today is a copy by Muhammed Ibn Mevlana pir Hüseyin el-Haci Baba el-Sivasi, completed in Amasya in 1416 (Bağcı 1989, 51-4). Sawyer describes the illustrations as crude but supports that Amasya was an important cultural center from the very beginning of fifteenth century and that it would not be incorrect to assume that many books were produced there for the ruling elite (Bağcı 1989, 52).

Another early Ottoman illustrated *İskendernâme* copy is found in the Venetian Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana; it has 66 miniatures (Bağcı 1989, 67-8). According to Boudoen the importance of this manuscript is providing an example of how the Ottoman and Byzantine Greek tradition engaged with each other (Beaudoen 2017, 116-7). This manuscript is one of the crucial examples of Alexander Romance and the manuscript gave visual representations for almost every episode (Beaudoen 2017, 117).

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<sup>11</sup> *translatio imperii* (*transfer of power*) and *circumstantial parallelism* is an opportunity to explore ways in which the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East engaged with Antiquity. The model of *translatio imperii* to show how such transitions of power present a fertile ground for a literary narrative such as the Alexander Romances to take root in the Ottoman context. Using *translatio imperii* as an analytic framework for understanding the fifteenth century underscores the importance of several instances of circumstantial parallels with the Alexander Romance narrative that resonate with the Third century and fifteenth century BC. For more information see: Beaudoen, "Mirrors of the World," 22-3.

A third illustrated copy of Ahmedî's work is located in Berlin. (Bağcı 1989, 67-73). This copy which contains relatively fewer miniatures compared to the other two and was produced between 1475-1476 by Hacı Fahri al-Kirmanî (Bağcı 1989, 74). Despite the likelihood that this work was made for the Akkoyunlu court, Bağcı states that, following detailed analysis of the miniatures, they were found to display early Ottoman stylistic influences. Early Ottoman *İskendernâme*, then, are seen to have made use of varying literary and artistic styles according to the regions and cities in which they were produced (Bağcı 1989, 75). It is the artwork invested in this copy that makes it one of the most remarkable *İskendernâmes*. It is believed that this luxurious copy was produced in Edirne (Çağman 1980, 97-100). According to Çağman, it is possible that a painting workshop (*nakkashane*) would have had existed in Edirne before İstanbul.

There are many illustrated copies executed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, mainly Shiraz and Heart (Bağcı 1989, 136). Two of them belong to the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg branch of the Oriental Institute of Oriental studies. The manuscript illustrated in Shiraz around 1541 by the prominent Shirazi calligrapher Muhammad Katib for Khazan Shah Kuli Beg (Bağcı 1989, 136). According to Petrosyan the manuscript's miniatures represent the mature and exquisite late Shirazi style, greatly influenced by the Heart school of painting (Bağcı 1989, 136).

## Thesis Outline

Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is the earliest in the Ottoman Alexander Romance tradition. When Ahmedî produced his epic, he created an ideological link between the Ottoman Sultanate and Alexander the Great, extending to the Sasanian-Persian kingship (Sawyer 1997, 79). The image of Alexander encapsulated a model conqueror and resonated with the fifteenth century themes of ruler as conqueror. Ahmedî's work is both a philosophical and an encyclopedic work with a broad historical selection of which the Ottoman dynasty forms only the final part (Sawyer 1997, 80).

The main aim of this thesis is to explore Alexander Romances written in Ottoman Turkish in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Two of these are of particular interest. The first is a crucial work by Ahmed-i Rıdvan, an author who was active at the end of the period under examination namely, in the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512) (Avcı 2013,

45). Ahmed-i Rıdvan's *İskendernâme*, is written in verse previously thought to have survived only as a single copy (Avcı 2013, 46).

Another Alexander Romance representative of Ottoman tradition is Figânî's (1505-1532?) *İskendernâme* written both in prose and verse (Altuğ 2014). Gibb, in his *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, said that Figânî's *İskendernâme* had been a failure and quickly had been forgotten, can no longer be located (Ünver 1983, 322).<sup>12</sup> Recently, a copy, titled *Târih-i İskendernamenün Tevârihi*, has been located.<sup>13</sup> There is no reliable information about Figânî's life, but we do know that he lived in the first half of the sixteenth century. According to some accounts, he was from Trabzon and his real name was Ramazan (Kaya 2007, 47). In Figânî's work, with regard to the life of Alexander the Great and his conquests, Figânî especially focused on Alexander's Eastern conquests and he describes the difficulties Alexander faced during his life specifically when he ruled (Kaya 2007, 47).

The compositions of these two authors represented the tradition in this era. Previous studies on Ahmedî drew significant attention to epics written earlier by Firdawsî and Nizâmî and argued for their role as models for Ahmedî, both structurally and with respect to the content. The aim of this thesis, in contrast, is to examine Alexander Romances which were produced after Ahmedî and to study the degree to which they were influenced by Ahmedî and/or other Persian Alexander Romances. Which part or parts did these authors make use of as resources in creating their own texts? I will then analyze whether or not the texts used as resources were in fact simply translated and copied or if they were used as a muse to create novel work while building on a new Alexander Romance tradition. This is an early example of "Ottomanization", later to be seen in various other cultural and artistic explorations.

This thesis is divided into three main chapters in addition to the Introduction and the Conclusion. The first chapter will be a general overview and will provide information on Ahmedî's biography and *İskendernâme* as a historical source reflecting on the social and political developments in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In this thesis, I will be focusing on solely the *İskendernâme* part. Not only the text, but its modern analyses will be studied. What is the function of this text and how is the period in question

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<sup>12</sup> Ünver, in his doctoral thesis confirmed that the *İskendernâme* by Figani had been lost: Ünver, "Türk Edebiyatında Manzum İskender-nâmeler," 322.

<sup>13</sup> *Târih-i İskendernamenün Tevârihi*: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi Yazma Bağışlar 4201; the catalogue entry reads that the author is Figânî Ramazân b. Abdullah Trabzonî.

represented, what was the political power behind the text and what was the relationship between Ahmedî and his patron?

In the second chapter, I will focus on the theory of kingship and analyze the themes of kingship in the period. After this, the specific aspects of Ahmedî's model of kingship will be investigated. With regard to this, the most important thing is to analyze is the methodology with which Ahmedî constructed this model while considering what the position of the ruler was at that time. Following this chapter, the sources of Ahmedî and the impact of the Persian historiography on Ottoman historical writing will be examined. The problematic issue of translation meant that his account is a re-writing of the Islamic history and a rough translation of material culled from chroniclers.

In the third chapter, I will present two other *İskendernâmes*, penned by Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî. Did they follow or present their works as following in Ahmedî's tradition or some other Persian version? If they followed Ahmedî, do we have to read them as reflections of the success of the Ottoman court to project cultural prestige and sovereignty on a popular level? Did they write something new or are they re-writings of Ahmedî's Alexander Romance?

## 1. AHMEDÎ'S ALEXANDER EPIC AND THE OTTOMAN WORLD IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

### 1.1. Ahmedî's Personal Circumstance and His Work: *İskendernâme*

#### 1.1.1. Ahmedî's Life

The Ottoman recension of the *İskendernâme* tradition was a delicate fusion of the Greek Alexander Romance and Persian medieval models of kingship with the Persian *İskendernâme* tradition (Stoneman 1991, 23-6). This subsection will be composed of an investigation of the Ottoman rendering of the *İskendernâme*, best exemplified in Ahmedî's narration of Alexander's achievements. The composition and the content of such historiographical narratives depend, as is widely recognized, on the needs and tastes of princely courts or other audiences, and the existence of sources providing historical information. The critical point which must be deliberated upon when attempting to explicate such narratives is the figure of the author and the author's personal circumstances. One of the most pertinent examples of keeping the author and context in mind is found in the earliest extant Ottoman history, the *Dasitan-i Tevarih-i Müluk-i Al-i Osman* (Beaudoen 2017, 56-9).

The traditional sources for the poet's biography are the Ottoman *tezkires*, the biographical chronicles, all of which were written after Ahmedî's lifetime. The earliest known Ottoman *tezkire*, the *Heşt Behişt* by Sehi, was completed in 1538<sup>14</sup> and served as a model. Two scholars, Tunca Kortantamer studying Ahmedî's *Divan* and Nihad Sami Banarlı exploring the making of the *Dasitan*, compiled information about his life

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<sup>14</sup> Sehi Bey, *Hişt Behişt*, Yk.112b. *Hişt Behişt* is one of the most important documents to find life of several authors and the work covers 241 authors. This work presented to Süleyman I, around 1538. For more information: [www.turkedebiyatilisimlersozlugu.com/index.php?sayfa=detay&detay=231](http://www.turkedebiyatilisimlersozlugu.com/index.php?sayfa=detay&detay=231) (accessed in March 29, 2019).

trajectory. Almost no details are known about Ahmedî's origins but he was most likely a native of Amasya (Banarlı 1939, 51). He completed his *medrese* education in Egypt where he studied with the Hanafî scholar Akmal al-Din Muhammad al-Babarti al-Rumi al-Miṣri (1384), a teacher of other illustrious figures in early Ottoman history (Kut 1939, 165). His education with al-Babarti introduced him to religious sciences, Qur'an commentary, hadiths, and Arabic grammar (Kut 1939, 165). However, in his epic it can be seen that Ahmedî also had broad knowledge and interests in medicine, philosophy, grammar, poetics and mysticism. According to Sawyer, Ahmedî travelled to Egypt, preferring it to cultural centres in Syria and Persia (Sawyer 1997, 67-9). Sawyer argues that, while artistic production in Mamluk Cairo has received considerable attention, more research is needed on the intellectual life therein and on the relationship between its courts and those of Turkic Anatolia during the early Ottoman period (Sawyer 1997, 68). Sawyer explains that Ahmedî was in Egypt with Hacı Paşa and a certain Mulla Şems Al-Din Fenari and repeats details given in Taşköprülüzade's tezkire, *Eş-Şakâiku'n-Numaâniye fi Ulemâ'i'd-Devleti'l-Osmâniyye*:

“... the three friends, who were then studying under the famous teacher Akmal al-Din Muhammad al-Babarti al-Rumi al-Miṣri, being anxious to learn something of the fortune that awaited them, repaired one day to the cell of a certain professor of the occult arts who had a high reputation as a reader of the future. This gifted personage 'looked into the mirror of their auspicious destiny, ' and turning to Hacı Paşa, said, 'Thou shalt busy thyself with medicine,' then to Fenari, 'Kindling thee at the light of learning, thou shalt shine, and from thee shall many light the lamp, many stir the fire of guidance on the way of salvation, ' and lastly to Ahmedî, 'Thou shalt waste thy time over poetry; and neglecting the universal sciences, thou shalt turn thee to the particular arts such as prosody and rhetoric;' all of which prophecies of course duly came to pass”(Sawyer 1997, 71).

Ahmedî probably returned to Anatolia from Egypt around the 1360s but there exists a serious lack of definitive knowledge about his early career (Sawyer 1997, 71). Ahmedî's life in Egypt was exceedingly important training for his intellectual production. His first employment was at the court of the Germiyanid Prince Süleyman Şah. The duties of Ahmedî at the court are also unclear but, in his account, he referred to the fact that he had authored some textbooks and acted as an advisor and tutor. It can be seen that he began to compose his *İskendernâme*, which would affect his life and would become the source of his fame, at the suggestion of Süleyman Şah. There is no certain information regarding when *İskendernâme* in its original form was completed; it was likely circa 1390.



After the death of Süleyman Şah the negative economic and political effects on the Germiyanids caused Ahmedî to leave the court (Turna 2009, 267-9). In *İskendernâme* he explains his life and difficulties:

“Teng-idi gönlümüz nitekim gonca gussadan  
Yaş akar-ıdı gözümün lāle-reng-idi  
Sınmış-idi gönüllerimiz şişesi ki çarh  
Atduğu āb-gīneye peyveste seng-idi  
Şādīlg-ila ney bigi hoş demdür ol gönül  
Kim gam keş-ā-keşinde sana-y-dun ki çeng idi” (Turna 2009, 267-9)

*Sorrow had constricted our spirit like the bud of a flower, my eyes shed bloody tears.  
The stones of fate thrown ceaselessly at the window of the heart had broken the glass of our souls.  
That very soul, which had been bawling in the chaos of grief, was now singing like a ney from joy.*

Another significant and unknown problem is how Ahmedî made a living between quitting Süleyman Şah’s court and his employment and appointment in Ottoman service. One of the crucial pieces of evidence about patron and poet is a poem which Ahmedî wrote for Emir Süleyman. Süleyman composed in Bursa shortly before the prince’s capture of the city in around 1404 (Gibb 1900-1909, 245-7). Even so, it is unclear how he earned his livelihood. It is suggested in a poem that upon Ahmedî’s arrival in Edirne, he found a patron (Gibb 1900-1909, 245-7). The Battle of Ankara (1402) was one of the most important turning points in early Ottoman history. The details of this battle will be given in the following chapters in order to understand the rivalry between Ottoman princes. The struggles between brothers, especially Emir Süleyman’s victory over his brother Mehmed in 1405 and the emergence of his brother Musa in Rumelia which forced Emir Süleyman to leave Anatolia are worth noting here. Under these circumstances, Ahmedî was unable to cope with the difficulties that Musa’s revolt imposed on Süleyman (Fodor 1984, 46-7). After some time, Ahmedî remained in Bursa and then moved on to settle at the court of Mehmed Çelebi who was to become the ultimate victor among the sons of Bayezid (Fodor 1984, 48).

### 1.1.2. Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*

Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is composed of 116 pages and includes 8754 couplets (Istanbul University Library T. 921). It represents a broad literary and historical spectrum and is one of the earliest attempts at Ottoman historiography; this composition is his masterpiece and his most important literary legacy (Ünver 2000, 54-55). *Dasitan* is the conclusion of an entire universal history and that history, in turn, is embedded in a distinctive account of Alexander's life (Fodor 1984, 52). The importance of this manuscript is that it is the first biography of a non-religious subject who is among other things a political ruler, an empire builder, who lived long before the Ottoman Empire's existence, and the figure of whom linked the Greek, Persian, and Islamic traditions (Kastritsis 2016, 26-7). Alexander's relationship with Islam is crucial and may have some answer as to why Ahmedî chose to write about this historic character and portray him as a model ruler. His possible patron(s) may have admired Alexander because of his knowledge, aspirations, and achievements.

Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* reflected both the literary taste and the political environment of the author's time. After articulating the history of the world, it ends with the chronicle of the Ottoman dynasty. Throughout, Alexander undertakes several adventures; some fantastic and some spiritual (Kastritsis 2016, 27-9). He fights against dragons, monsters and demons; rescues thousands of people and provides them a life of prosperity. When Alexander the Great travelled to Egypt, he constructed a city and a great lighthouse and whenever enemy forces approached the city, the statue was turned towards the direction of the looming armies (Kastritsis 2016, 28-31). One of Alexander's most crucial adventures is his voyage with Hızır to the land of Darkness in search of the Water of Life. Here, near the end of the journey, Alexander encounters a tree that foretells his death. From this point onward, Hızır (not Aristotle) played a crucial role in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*.

Ahmedî's ascription of an enhanced the role for Hızır throughout the manuscript is an innovation, a stroke of genius, connecting Islam and Alexander the Great.<sup>15</sup> After the voyage, Alexander the Great comes upon a large dome containing a corpse adorned with a crown. Inside, he finds a great message: "I am Dh'ul Qarnayn who lived 4,400 years ago. I search for the water of eternal life like you but the death found me eventually. Take a lesson from me and my faith!" (Sawyer 1997, 120).

So, Ahmedî relays the philosophical aspects of Alexander's education and adventures. His epic devoted several chapters to asking and answering the questions in order to elaborate on ethical and philosophical issues (Sawyer 1997,120). These include: the image of a king and how one should rule, which qualities a king must have, the ethical issues around the royal office of kingship, and how a ruler should be educated. Ahmedî aimed to examine a compelling combination of these traits; especially important during a time of dynastic crisis in the early fifteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2. Historical Background

In such a world, the Alexander Romance in all its manifestations represented a common cultural heritage. Stories about the legendary empire-builder's travels,

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<sup>15</sup> In Turkish folk belief Hızır/Khidr is portrayed as a saint who provides aid to people in danger or need, suddenly and in disguised appearances. In Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, the birth of Hızır and Alexander the Great is around the same time. Hızır appears at crucial points in Alexander's life to help him with his worldly agenda and he is unbound by time. See detail in: Sawyer, "Alexander, History and Piety," 192. See also: Sibel Kocaer, "The Journey of an Ottoman Warrior Dervish: The *Hızırnâme* (Book of Khidr). Sources and Reception," Unpublished PhD thesis, SOAS, 2015. See note 10 above.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmedî has other works besides *İskendernâme*. *Cemşid ü Hurşid* is an important example of *mesnevi*; he also presented this to Emir Süleyman. Kortantamer discussed this piece with some translations. It concerned the prince of China, Cemşid, who falls in love with a Byzantine princess, Hurşid upon seeing her portrait. It has been proposed that the story is based on a Persian narrative by the same name, written by Salman Sajavi, whom Ahmedî was reported to have admired. Another composition which was presented to Emir Süleyman is *Tervih ü 'l-ervah*, a kind of a book of medicine. *Bedayi u's-sihr fi sanayi 'ş-ş-i'r* is another of his writings and is about literature<sup>16</sup>. He also has an Arabic-Persian dictionary to his name that concludes in two different eulogiums which give details about the grammar of these languages. It's important to note that Alexander the Great is a symbolic character of Ahmedî's work. It is not a simple writing about Alexander's biography, it is a kind of world history of sorts which contains other kinds of symbolic characters besides Alexander.

conquests, and diplomatic engagements with real and imaginary nations resonated strongly in different segments of the society (Kasritsis 2007, 23-6). Depending on one's perspective, Alexander the Great can be received as a philosopher, an explorer of new lands, a champion of Islam, a Byzantine Emperor, or a Muslim King (Kasritsis 2007, 27).

The geo-political background of fourteenth and fifteenth century Anatolia provided an important frame to understand how the Ottoman Empire developed from a regional power to a world-spanning empire in the course of the sixteenth century (Kasritsis 2007, 30). By the 14th century when the Ottoman State was on the rise, the breakdown of Seljuk, Byzantine and Mongol authority presented problems of legitimacy to those wielding political superiority. Over the course of the fifteenth century, the gradual but uneven process of Ottoman State formation resulted in the creation of a complex and sometimes contradictory discourse and dynastic legitimacy (Kasritsis 2007, 33-8). This was founded on the conquest of new territories for Islam and transfer of power from the Seljuks to Ottomans.

The dispute among historians on the subject of the emergence of the Ottoman State is almost always limited to *gaza* and the similarity of Osman's tale as a *gazi* warrior who desired to explore and conquer new lands (İnalçık 2000, 27-9). The resemblance of Alexander the Great's desire of conquest and knowledge to the Ottoman *gazi* warrior in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is readily apparent. This connection may present an answer to the question of why Ahmedî chose to write about Alexander. Modern interest in Ahmedî's treatment of the Ottoman *gazi* rulers stems from Paul Wittek's controversial account of Ottoman origins, the so called *gaza* thesis. Wittek argues that Ahmedî placed a strong emphasis on the Ottomans' role as *gazis* – i.e. religiously motivated raiders bent on expanding the 'Abode of Islam' (*dar-al Islam*) (Wittek 1938, 56-8). In his critique of Wittek, Heath Lowry (Lowry 2003, 35-9) made the argument that Ahmedî's account of Ottoman history was written as a 'mirror for princes' (*Nasihâtname*) aimed at dissuading Bayezid I from attacking other Muslim powers.<sup>17</sup>

So, what were the social and political developments in Ottoman lands that swayed Ahmedî to write his *İskendernâme* within the frame of the dispute on the foundation of the Ottoman State? The foundation of the Ottoman State is a heated debate today;

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<sup>17</sup> *Mirror for Princes* is a genre of advice literature which outlines the basic principles of conduct for the rulers and of the structure. In Islamic world this genre emphasized the pragmatic guidance and the administrative aspect of governance. See detail in: [İskender Pala, İslam Ansiklopedisi, cilt.32, s. 409.](#)

historians that are presently mired in the topic generally complain about the scarcity of sources. The first critique is Gibbons' thesis on mixed race. He argues that Osman, the political leader of the Ottomans, was actually a polytheist (Gibbons 1916, 26-8). This would not be surprising since political formation brings along social and cultural change. At this point, Giese claimed that although it is certain that many people converted from Christianity to Islam, the idea that the conversion was compulsory is wrong (Gibbons 1916, 27-8). Ömer Lütfi Barkan mentioned the mystical Sufis in converting Christian elements to Islam (Barkan 1941, 47-9). Wittek, as we have noted above, suggested that the reason behind the Ottoman emergence was the *gaza* against the infidels and the Ottomans' unique location on the border of Byzantium facilitated this process. Following Wittek's argument, Köprülü, in his ambition to refute Gibbon's mixed-race theory, argues that the Ottoman Empire was established by Turks— a conglomerate of Seljukids, Danishmends and Anatolian principalities. (Köprülü 1943, 59-61).

Wittek explained the *gazi* attributes of Ottoman warriors motivated by holy war against the infidels across the Ottoman borders (Wittek 1938, 66). In contrast, Köprülü argues the tribal features of that new political unity (Köprülü 1943, 67). Therefore, the tribal unity and their relations with the frontier and the other side of the frontier provided the Ottomans with important instruments to establish political unity (İnalcık 2000, 57-9). Halil İnalcık, too, argued that the Ottoman State was a small principality dedicated to *gaza*, the holy war against the infidel Christianity (İnalcık 2000, 58-9). Paul Lindner criticized the *gaza* thesis and according to him, the *gaza* notion was not related to religion because Ottomans launched holy raids against the Germiyanids as well (Lindler 1983, 83-7). According to Halil İnalcık, the use of two important stages in the gradual achievement of Ottoman conquests can be detected from the beginning of the Ottoman history. Initially, the Ottomans sought to establish some sort of suzerainty over the neighbouring states which was followed by establishment of direct control over these countries by the elimination of the native dynasties (Lindler 1983, 84).

Whatever the origin of the Ottomans was, Osman was inarguably abandoning his struggle with the Byzantines. Osman's contribution seems to have been primarily limited to establishing the dynasty, Osman spent the remainder of his reign expanding in two important directions: Northward up to the Sakarya river toward the Black Sea and Southwest toward the Sea of Marmara. He isolated the city of Bursa which eventually fell to the Ottomans (Kastritsis 2007, 222-42). This step was crucial due to the resulting shift from a nomadic existence to a state with a capital city.

After Osman's death, Orhan institutionalized the policies of conquest that had been set into practice by his father. Shortly after, Orhan turned his direction to the Marmara Sea; he took most of the Nicaean Peninsula and the coasts of the Gulf of Nicomedia as far as Yalova (İnalçık 2000, 48-9). In the following years, Orhan occupied most of the remaining Byzantine lands in North-Western Anatolia (İnalçık 2000, 57-63). Orhan provided a base in Europe and the means and methods for further conquests. Murat I, commander of the Ottoman forcer over Europe, used the base left by his father in Gallipoli to conquer Thrace and Macedonia (İnalçık 1998, 113-21). His actions in Europe demonstrated his considerable knowledge of its strategic geography, and his first objective was Edirne. The capturing of Edirne in 1361 was of great consequence for the Ottomans and Murat made it his new capital. Murat's Balkan conquests started in 1366, and continued to the end of his reign (İnalçık 1998, 112). Like Osman and Orhan before him, he organized the frontier areas. During that time, the situation in Anatolia was complicated: first Murat's enemies were principally established at Sivas by Kadı Burhaneddin who used his position as chief vizier of the Eretna Turkoman principality to take it for himself (İnalçık 1998, 112). The Akkoyunlu Turkomans also were extending their power from Erzincan and Diyarbakir in Eastern Anatolia (İnalçık 1998, 113-4). Ultimately, a battle was fought at Kosovo in 1389 and Murat was killed, but his son Prince Bayezid assumed leadership and led the Ottomans to final victory (Kastritsis 2007, 67-70). Some sources claim that the victory was led by Murat but in any case, the Battle of Kosovo was the first Ottoman success against a major allied European military force (Kastritsis 2007, 68).

### **1.3. Interregnum Period (1402-1413)**

The manner in which Bayezid came to power determined what followed. While Bayezid was busy in Europe, the Turkoman principalities surviving in Southwestern Anatolia joined the Karaman and Kadı Burhaneddin who had influence among the Turkoman nomads in the East (Kastritsis 2007, 68-9). After several campaigns, during which Bayezid was given the title *Yıldırım* (thunderbolt) because of the rapidity of his marches, he advanced into Anatolia in 1393-94 to confront the rising power of Kadı Burhaneddin. Bayezid turned his direction to Bursa to amass his forces (Kastritsis 2007,

68). Kadı Burhaneeddin expanded, captured Amasya, Niğde and Kayseri and reached the Black Sea coast in 1393 (Kastritsis 2007, 77-8). Bayezid was forced to respond to maintain his prestige but, as he advanced toward Amasya, Kadı Burhaneddin retreated to Sivas because he realized that he could not defeat Bayezid in open battle (Kastritsis 2007, 77).

On 28 July 1402, a major battle was fought on a plain called Çubuk Ovası, North of Ankara (Kastritsis 2007, 78). On one side amassed the army of Timur who had spent much of his reign creating a powerful empire in central Asia. Facing him were the forces of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I who had decided to spend his time to building a centralized empire in the region between the Danube and Euphrates Rivers. At that time, Bayezid I had gained control over Albania and Bulgaria and had crushed a crusader army at Nicopolis in 1396 (Kastritsis 2007, 81-3). In the East, he had annexed the Turkish principalities of Karaman and Kadı Burhaneddin and, since 1394, he had been besieging Constantinople (Zachariadou 1983, 268-9). During the rule of Bayezid I, the Ottoman threat over the neighbouring powers was at its high point, threatening mostly the existence of Byzantium (Zachariadou 1983, 269). However, the Ottoman expansion in Anatolia brought Bayezid I into conflict with Timur and at the end of the march towards Ankara, Bayezid's army was defeated and the sultan himself was taken prisoner (Zachariadou 1983, 269-70). The dynastic crisis that followed the brief reign of Bayezid I precipitated a collapse and a period of confusion in which no single leader ruled the empire, the so-called Interregnum (*Fetret Devri*).

In the aftermath of the Battle of Ankara, Timur restored the principalities to their former emirs and took Mustafa and Musa, the sons of Bayezid I, prisoner (Zachariadou 1983, 271). Süleyman, İsa and Mehmed were three of the sons of Bayezid who were able to escape from the battlefield. Emir Süleyman ascended to the Ottoman throne in the year 1402-1403 and ruled for nine years (Kastritsis 2007, 67-9-). He was accompanied by İsa and, with a sizeable army, managed to make his way to Gallipoli (Kastritsis 2007, 71-3). Upon his arrival he took control of Rumelia which remained unscathed from the Timurid invasion and began negotiations with the Christian rulers (Kastritsis 2007, 72). This negotiation was very important because of the regional powers in the area. The Ottoman Empire was surrounded by many powers that were eager to gain some advantage from its downfall (Kastritsis 2007, 71-2). At that time, Timur was still in Anatolia and plundering. So, Süleyman was prepared to make a significant concession and finally he offered his navy, Gallipoli and a large stretch of land in Rumelia to Byzantium for peace (Kastritsis

2007, 72). Eventually, the treaty was signed by Ionnes and was reaffirmed by Manuel upon his return to Constantinople (Kastritsis 2007, 73).

The years following the Battle of Ankara were difficult for the Ottoman State. The territories of the Ottoman Empire were divided among the sons of Bayezid I: Süleyman was in Rumelia, İsa had established himself in Bursa, while Mehmed was in province of *Rum* where he had been appointed as a governor during his father's reign (İnalçık 2000, 168). Timur's army was withdrawing in Anatolia and there were three Ottoman princes contending with each other for the rule of the Ottoman State (İnalçık 2000, 170). At first, Mehmed defeated İsa who took refuge in Constantinople, but he was released by the Emperor Ioannes VII after an intervention with Süleyman. In the following period, İsa had a series of confrontations with Mehmed which ended with his defeat and death (İnalçık 2000, 171-5). After the elimination of İsa, Süleyman changed his route to Bursa and Ankara to his brother Mehmed (Kastritsis 2007, 79-80).

In 1409, only when Süleyman emerged victorious from the Ottoman civil war, did a fourth brother named Musa make his appearance (Kastritsis 2007, 81). Musa appeared in Rumelia and took concerted actions against Mehmed who had kept him under his custody since 1403. Süleyman renewed his alliance with Emperor Manuel II by promising him some regions and offering his son Orhan as hostage (Kastritsis 2007, 86). Süleyman and his army were ferried across the straits on Byzantine ships and the first great military confrontation between the two brothers took place near the Byzantine capital (Kastritsis 2007, 86-7). At first, Süleyman succeeded in advancing on Musa, however, later the military balance shifted and Süleyman was caught by Musa's men and killed in 1411 (Kastritsis 2007, 81).

After the death of Süleyman, Musa was the sole ruler of the Ottoman territories in Rumelia. Musa's primary aim was to maintain peaceful relations with his subordinate rulers and his policy at first supported frontier lords, and raiders of the area (Kastritsis 2007, 83). At that time, Manuel supported Mehmed and offered him alliance against Musa (Kastritsis 2007, 86). Mehmed considered this alliance on his advantage and came to Constantinople from where he was ferried to Rumelia. Eventually, Mehmed defeated and killed his brother Musa and this was the end of the Ottoman civil wars, the period of interregnum since the Ottoman State had been united under the rule of sole sultan. The Ottoman Sultan Mehmed I spent the couple of years in Anatolia and returned back to Rumelia. Shortly after, he fell ill and asked his son Murad, the *sancakbeyi* of Amasya, to come to his side (Kastritsis 2007, 89-90).



#### 1.4. Ahmedî's Patron(s)

The use and appropriation of narratives on the accomplishments of Alexander the Great creates a historical imagination that varies between different historical periods and linguistic media. Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* incorporated universal traditions and themes. The themes of dynastic legalization, world conquest, empire, and his integration of two distant periods – from Late Antiquity to fifteenth and sixteenth century- circulated under the topic Alexander the Great (Kastritsis 2007,94).

The background and simple tendencies of political and economic life portrayed by Ahmedî reflect the events of that time; destruction of the states, death of sultans, ordinary people, life, mysticism. However, the problem of determining patronage becomes particularly vexing with the *İskendernâme*.

Banarlı describes that *İskendernâme* was written for the Süleyman of Germiyan and completed after his death in 1388. Süleyman Şah was not as powerful as his grandfather Yakup but maintained principality of the Germiyan vis-à-vis the assault of Karamanoğlu till he had to convey his lands to the Ottomans (Kastritsis 2007, 65). Medieval Anatolia was in turmoil because small principalities strove to dominate one another (Kastritsis 2007, 67). After fighting continual battles against the Karamanids, the Germiyanids came to the understanding that they could not triumph over them and, eventually, Süleyman Şah decided to assist other principalities to avoid fighting against their common enemy, the Karamanids. (Kastritsis 2007, 65-7). In time, Süleyman Şah called on his son Yakup to create an alliance with the Ottomans. But Yakup was suppressed and he eventually fled to Timur, the Turco-Mongol Persianate conqueror and the founder of the Timurid Empire, and requested his assistance in winning his land back. Ultimately, he marched with Timur during the Battle of Ankara and regained the aforementioned lost territory.

Ahmedî enjoyed patronage of a few sovereigns. He remained at the court of Süleyman Şah of Germiyanids until his patron's death in 1388 (Kortantamer 1980, 46-7). While it is generally believed that Ahmedî entered the court of Bayezid I and served there until the Ottoman sultan's capture and death in 1402, some scholars expressed doubt whether he served Bayezid I (Banarlı 1939, 49-176). Kortantamer, based on the Ahmedî's compositions, argued that he had only two patrons: Süleyman Şah of the Germiyanids and Emir Süleyman of the Ottomans (Kortantamer 1980, 47). While Ahmedî's *Divan*

praises his other patrons, it completely omits Bayezid I and thus the historical record provides no evidence that the men ever met each other (Banarlı 1939, 49-176). On the other hand, Ahmedî was also silent during Bayezid's victory in Nicopolis and his siege of Constantinople. Followingly, Kortantamer explained that the calmer and more mystical verses in tone belong to Süleyman Şah of Germiyan and those verses which were created under the reign of the Emir Süleyman referred to earlier Ottoman rulers such as Orhan, Murad I, Bayezid I (Banarlı 1939, 48). The verses on wine-drinking and carousing refer to activities in which Ahmedî expressed no positive interest before joining the Ottoman court during the reign of Emir Süleyman (Kastritsis 2007, 67-71). According to his *İskendernâme*, the manners and customs at Emir Süleyman's court differed significantly from that of the Süleyman Şah (Kastritsis 2007, 71). Emir Süleyman, like his father, is portrayed as addicted to drinking and debauchery (Kastritsis 2007, 72-4). Here, Ahmedî's role was, though it was painful to him, no more than being a companion. Ahmedî composed poems where he seems to have approved the hedonism of his patron Emir Süleyman:

“Yesterday has gone, who knows what will happen tomorrow,  
Then take this day a prize, oh friend.  
Take the wine cup in your hand! Leave behind (the idea of) the end!  
There is no trace in the world of security and grace.  
O King, if it is in your power, spend time enjoyable!  
Don't postpone until tomorrow what is possible, today, there is no time for that.  
Do you know what gain we from the world?  
It's wine and entertainment and a suitable friend!” (Sawyer 1997, 35-6)

It can be seen that Ahmedî perceived himself as a companion of his patron. Sawyer argues that the relationship between the patron and intellectual was basically based on the financial as much as it was on the political stability. When the political situation in Anatolia is considered, Ahmedî, born into this dynamic turning point, must have been desparately searching security.

The period underscored Ottoman expansion in Bithynia including the cities of Nicaea (İznik), and Bursa, across the Dardanelles straits and into the Balkans (Sawyer 1997, 74). Ahmedî's innovations in the Alexander Romance genre were meant to advance

a new conception of Ottoman kingship that served the successive generations of Ottoman Sultans and legitimated the Ottoman Dynasty during this turbulent period.

## 2. TRANSITION OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

*“Indeed, what a transient world!  
The person who passes here inevitably must leave.”<sup>18</sup>*

### 2.1. Ahmedî’s Sources

Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme* is one of the most important representations of the Alexander Romance in the Ottoman Empire and presents numbers of features that make it a valuable source for the scholars of Ottoman cultural and literary history. The importance of the work is known and when this narrative is analyzed the question of just which sources and tradition(s) Ahmedî received and reworked into the *İskendernâme* arises. Two important strands of literary tradition demand closer investigation in connection with the *İskendernâme*: Firdawsî’s *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî’s *İskandarnāma*.

The *Shahnāma* (*The Book of Kings*) (1010 CE) is revered as a national epic; the story that most fully articulates the shared history of the Persian people and their heritage. The author of *Shahnāma*, Firdawsî (d.1020) was born in Tus in Khorasan around in 935 and in the course of centuries many legends have arisen regarding the poet’s name but little is known about the facts of his life (Kanar 1996, 125-7). Firdawsî’s masterpiece was presented to Mahmud of Ghazna in Khorasan. Firdawsî first started to write his composition in the Samanid era in 977 CE and during his lifetime the Samanid Dynasty was conquered by Ghaznavid Empire (Kanar 1996, 126). The *Shahnāma* was completed after 30 years at which point Firdawsî travelled to Ghazni to present his work to sultan

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<sup>18</sup> Caroline G. Sawyer, “Revising Alexander: Structure and Evolution in Ahmedî’s Ottoman *İskendernâme* (c. 1400),” *Edebiyât* 13 (2003): 231.

Mahmud (Kanar 1996,126). Although the *Shahnāma* is known to have been derived from Zoroastrian sources, the material for its representations of Alexander must come, by whatever route, from the Greek sources (Sawyer 1997, 44). Moreover, Firdawsî's account would seem to reflect the preexisting trend of exalting Alexander's status, suggesting a more complicated situation than the common view that the positive Muslim representation supplanted the negative Zoroastrian one (Sawyer 1997, 45). Firdawsî mainly depicted Alexander the Great as a legitimate Persian king, who conquered the world and brought its diverse population together into one single polity (Beaudoen 2017, 55-6). The modern scholarly edition of the epic as a whole consists of eight volumes and over sixty thousand couplets (Beaudoen 2017, 57). Though the Alexander the Great part is only a small part of Firdawsî's work but it is crucial for conceptualizing the story as a whole, and for understanding how Alexander's empire provided the imperial model for the Persian cosmopolis in its totality, extending from the Balkans to North India. According to this text, Alexander is represented as a conqueror who subdued the world by bringing East and West into a single imperial formation (Stoneman 1991, 59-61).

One of the parts in *Shahnāma* established Alexander's relevance to Persian literature in particular: the birth story of Alexander the Great. Firdawsî and many medieval Arabic chroniclers claimed that, although Alexander the Great was raised by Philip of Macedon, he was in reality the secret son of the Persian Emperor Darius the Great and thus Persian royalty. As a consequence, when Alexander conquered the world, he did so as a Persian king with legitimate genealogical claim to Persian kingship (Kastritsis 2017, 240-42). So, medieval and early modern Muslim emperors claimed themselves as successors to Alexander's universal Persian Empire, using this Persian epic tradition as a model (Kastritsis 2016, 62). Before representing Alexander the Great as a world conqueror and of Persian origin, one of the most important topics here is the linguistic relations between the Old, Middle, and the New Persian concerning the portrayals of the Alexander the Great (Kastritsis 2016, 63). The birth of Alexander provides a unique lens for the newness of New Persia (Sawyer 1997, 54-5) . Here, there is a shift of perspective regarding the portrayal of Alexander the Great from the "accursed one" in Pahlavi to the "blessed one" in New Persia.<sup>19</sup> This situation played a very important role for producing the trans-regional cultural phenomenon of the Persian

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 78–9. The history of the Persian language is divided into three distinct periods: Old Persian, Middle Persian and finally New Persian. Each of these eras broadly refers to a similar version of Persian distinct from the others. See detail in: [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/persian-language-early-new-persian](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/persian-language-early-new-persian) (accessed in March 29, 2019).

cosmopolis. After the conquest of Iran by Arab Muslim armies in 642, the story of Alexander as a Persian king began to be drafted in medieval Arabic histories (Beaudoen 2017, 77-8). During the period of converting from Zoroastrianism to Islam, the memory of Alexander began to be a problem. The Pahlavi Persian sources demonized Alexander because of his razing of the city of Ctesiphon and destruction of Zoroastrian fire temples (Kastritsis 2007, 67-8). Alexander the Great was also venerated as Dh'ul Qarnayn in the Qur'an (Ünver 2000, 47). (More below) However, after Persians converted to Islam, the new genealogy for Alexander the Great assuaged rage against the Macedonian conqueror and inculcated a veneration of him with Islamic historical memory (Ünver 2000, 47). The image of Alexander the Great as a Persian King and prophet of Islam exemplified a new cultural synthesis of large-scale cultural identities. Due to the depiction of Alexander as a hereditary Persian king, the conquest of Persia was deemed rightful rather than detestable (Ünver 2000, 48). On the other hand, Alexander conceived as a prophet of Islam, established a place of pride for Persians within the Muslim community (Ünver 2000, 48). Early Arabic histories and later Persian epics depicted Alexander's conquest of Persia as an attack on the supposed heresy of Zoroastrianism, rather than on Persian government and customs (Sawyer 1997, 54-7). Therefore, Alexander shifted from the accused one in Pahlavi sources to the blessed one in the tenth century New Persian (Sawyer 1997, 55).

Firdawsî's composition is one of the most important examples which achieved such a massive popularity that it effectively established Alexander's Persian birth story as a standard narrative in the Persian cosmopolis. (Beaudoen 2017, 89). The portraiture of Alexander as a Persian King can be explained with an odd story. In the early medieval Arabic chronicles, the Persian emperor Darius the Great defeats Philip of Macedon in battle and demands tribute (Beaudoen 2017, 90). At the negotiation table, Philip offers his daughter's hand in marriage and Darius takes Philip's daughter back to Persia. When Darius consummates the marriage, he finds that his new bride has a foul odor (Stoneman 1991, 123). He orders his physicians to cure the problem but the physicians instead treat Philip's daughter with a fragrant plant which can help to hide her smell but not sufficiently (Stoneman 1991, 123-4). When Darius meets her after this treatment, he smells a sickly mix of the plant and her odor (Stoneman 1991, 124). Finally, Darius's heart cools of her and he sends her back to Philip. Back at Philip's court she gives birth to a boy. Therefore, in the narrative structure, Alexander's Persian birth story was a solution to understand the problem of Alexander's heritage.

According to Firdawsî, after Darius impregnates Alexander's mother and sends her back to Philip, he takes another wife and has another son whose name is Darius II, a half-brother of Alexander the Great (Stoneman 1991, 125). When Alexander and Darius II inherit their respective kingdoms, they remain ignorant of their blood relationship (Sawyer 1997, 54-7). Eventually, Alexander the Great bridles at Persian control and refuses to pay tribute. He musters an army and marches on Persia (Sawyer 1997, 56). After several battles, Alexander defeats Darius II who flees with his two advisors but the advisors betray the Persian king (Güler 2013, 35-8). While Darius II lies dying, Alexander the Great gently cradles his half-brother's head in his lap and begins to weep (Beaudoen 2017, 67-8). They speak and finally Alexander takes Darius's final requests: to kill his advisors and marry his daughter, Raushanak (Beaudoen 2017, 68). With Darius's blessing, Alexander's marriage to this true Persian princess solidifies his claim to the Persian throne (Kastritsis 2007, 67-8). So, the birth story of Alexander the Great also sheds light on the theme of fratricide (Kastritsis 2007, 70). The origin story of Alexander the Great in Firdawsî's *Shahnāma* speaks of the tension between the local and trans-local identities that was characteristic of transregional culture and power in the Persian cosmopolis around the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Kastritsis 2007, 72).

Firdawsî produced one of the earliest appearances of the Alexander the Great cycle in the New Persian context and gave details about Alexander's adventures and kingly aspects. Firdawsî is a crucial connection, joining the Greek and Persian worlds. He aligned Alexander with the extensive tradition of both mythical and historic Persian kings. In this manner, the Persian tradition appropriated Alexander as a world conqueror, king, and adventurer. So, the Persian *Iskandarnāma* is a link to the Persian romantic tradition of the *mesnevi*. While Firdawsî sets his Alexander the Great narratives among the history of kings, Nizâmî sets his composition among the romantic legends of conquests represented in the poetry of the Persian epics (Kastritsis 2007, 78-80). The common issue of *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma* (*The Book of Alexander*) represents the literary procession of a worthy Persian (Kastritsis 2016, 243-7). Nizâmî wrote his epic nearly two hundred years after Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*, which was a collection of five tales in the rhyming couplets of the *mesnevi* genre. Nizâmî's Alexander epic is distinguished from the Persian Alexander Romances in terms of style, theme, and reception (Kastritsis 2016, 247-8).

Nizâmî of Ganja (d.1204) was both a mystic and a poet. The importance of Nizâmî is in his *Khamsa*, which was penned in the Persian Romance tradition like Firdawsî's

*Shahnāma*. Nizāmî's *Iskandarnāma* was the fifth and final section of his *Khamsa*.<sup>20</sup> Nizāmî divided his *Iskandarnāma* into two sections: the *Sharafnama* which covers the adventures and account of Alexander, and the *Iqbalnama* which covers Alexander's philosophical assembling at his court. Nizāmî's Persian Alexander epic (1194), and his imperial imagination are an important shift in the development of the Persian cosmopolis. In Persian cosmopolis, the representation of Alexander the Great responded to new perspectives: for example, Nizāmî responded to a new universalization of Persian Empire by re-thinking Alexander the Great and his relationship to universal conquest, universal philosophy and religion (Stoneman 1991, 72).

After the patronage of the Seljukids over the Persian literary culture in Anatolia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Persian epic circulated through networks connecting Asia Minor, the Caucasus, Iraq, Central Asia and India (Kastritsis 2007, 67-71). The composition of an allegorical epic verse by Nizāmî of Ganja, the *Iskandarnāma*, changed the way the Islamic empire was imagined. In his piece, Nizāmî articulated the new model for the Persian Emperor as a perfect ruler whose spiritually was cultivated through discourse with ascetics as well as a saintly retinue of philosophers (Beaudoen 2017, 111). His allegories represent a model of sacred Persian kingship based on mustering the blessing of ascetics which played an important role in the court cultures of the largest early modern Islamic empires such as Mughals, Ottomans, and Safavids (Beaudoen 2017, 111-3). So, the treatise of Nizāmî profoundly represents the intellectual reconfiguration of sacred kingship. Nizāmî's is a complex text because of the challenges of strict epistemological distinctions between religious and sacred knowledge and awareness of the historical transitions. His second part of his book portrays Alexander's spiritual ascent to prophethood and he titled this section "*The Reason for Versifying this Book*". It begins as follows:

“In every period of time the revolving of the age  
Desires instruction in a new style  
The old leading songs are unpalatable.  
Another tune is made new in the world.  
When the player starts a game,  
He brings forth an idol out from behind a veil.

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<sup>20</sup> His other creations include *Khosrau and Shirin*, *Layla ve Majnun*, *the Haft Paykar* and *Makhzan al-asrar*.



With that idol, through magic,  
He steals the hearts of the people for a period of time.  
When old age shatters that idol,  
He brings forth another, younger, idol.  
In this manner, with new lines of poetry  
Ancient histories are made fresh” (Cornwall 2016, 45)

Nizâmî took several stories from Firdawsî’s *Shahnāma* and reframed them around allegories of spiritual ascent (Cornwall 2016, 45-6). Both of these sources depicted Bahram Gur as a Persian king who was involved in myriad adventures but Nizâmî saved the most important story for last (Sawyer 2003, 230-3). In the final part of his narrative, one encounters the adventures of Alexander as Persian King who traveled the world, demanding the tribute from various peoples in the name of the Islamic Empire. Firdawsî depicted Alexander as a world-traveler and a world conqueror but Nizâmî’s Alexander epic indexed what was perceived as most universally relevant for his time, the most suitable allegory for the universal soul (Sawyer 2003, 236).

While Firdawsî’s epic was a reference for Nizâmî, Nizâmî claimed to have collected narratives about Alexander from variety of sources in variety of languages (Cornwall 2016, 45-6). Firdawsî claimed Alexander’s father was the Persian king Darius I; Nizâmî contended that Alexander’s father was Philip of Macedon (Cornwall 2016, 47). Nizâmî maintained that Alexander’s Macedonian heritage never threatened his status as a legitimate Persian King. After all, Alexander marries Darius’s grand-daughter, Raushanak (Roxana)<sup>21</sup> and continues the dynasty through his bride (Stoneman 1991, 98-9). According to Nizâmî, being a world conqueror and universal king required universal knowledge and universal language. For Firdawsî, however, royal blood alone is well enough to be defined as a legitimate dynastic heir. In conclusion, Nizâmî established his epic verse allegory as a distinctive feature of the Persian cosmopolis by re-using the distinctive meter of Firdawsî’s *Shahnāma* and re-writing the Persian Alexander epic as a tale of the universal soul on a universal journey. His composition is also articulated as a model of royal patronage of ascetics that was adopted by most of the early modern Islamic Empires.

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<sup>21</sup> Because of the use of several sources, the interpretation of names can vary. For example, Roxana became Raushanak, a Sogdian princess of Bactria whom the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, married, after defeating Darius III, the Achaemenian king, and invading Persia.

I have discussed the importance of the Persianate tradition as the one of the important representations of Alexander the Great and his new identity. In this section I will analyze how Ahmedî designed his *İskendernâme*, the sources that he made use of, and the subsequent influence from Persian historiography. Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* offered a point of convergence between the cultural history of the 14th and fifteenth century Anatolia and Ahmedî's life. (Stoneman 1991, 99). It was a separate literary production that concluded with the Ottoman dynastic history and which was dedicated to several sovereigns, reflecting the chaotic political climate in which it was written. While Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* draws on Firdawsî's *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma*, he introduced several innovations. When compared to its Persian antecedents, it reflects both the literary and political characteristics of the author's life time (Sılay 1992, 57-8). As Kastritsis argued, Ahmedî's romance introduces a new conception of the Ottomans and aims to legitimize the Ottoman Dynasty during the turbulent period of transition. Kastritsis, too, evaluates *İskendernâme* in the context of Ottoman identity formation within a world order still largely dominated by the Chinggisid legacy (Kastritsis 2016, 57).

In Firdawsî's account, the hero's worldly conquests came to an end when he stopped conquering lands and he arrived at a place beyond which only the setting sun can go (Kastritsis 2016, 58). Here, Hızır appears to guide him on his search for the water of life which will grant him immortality. Alexander was unsuccessful in this pursuit and his mortality was sealed, however Hızır finds and drinks the water of life and becomes immortal (Kastritsis 2007, 71-3). In both of Nizâmî's versions, this story culminates with Alexander's worldly adventures and concludes the *Sharafnama* (Kastritsis 2007, 73-5). In Nizâmî's prose, Hızır is described as a mythical character who interacts with Alexander and assists him in finding the water of life (Kastritsis 2007,75). He is also represented as a real-life adviser to Alexander. Nizâmî examines Hızır as teacher and adviser and explains:

“Recently, Hızır told me in secret confidence something  
that no other ear had heard: ‘Oh private servant of my intentions;  
my wine-tester of the goblet of the words... You who, like the lily,  
hold your hand free, sprinkled with the water of the Spring of Life!<sup>22</sup>”

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<sup>22</sup> Sawyer, “Alexander, History and Piety,” 110.

In the *Iqbalname*, a messenger appeared to Alexander and confers on him the status of a “prophet” called Dh’ul-Qarnayn but his practice of Islam is not mentioned (Sawyer 1997, 110). After being ennobled by this status, Alexander continued his travels around the world and witnessed more spiritual elements. Unlike Nizâmî’s Alexander, Ahmedî’s portrayal initially resists the awareness of the insufficiency of worldly dominion but eventually embarks upon the same search, the pursuit of the Water of Life (Sawyer 1997, 116-7). Ahmedî relates to the religious approach of Nizâmî’s version in the second part of his text and integrates Alexander by adding some new religious elements (Hasanov 2016, 9136-43). Another innovation of Ahmedî’s involves the personification of Hızır (Sawyer 1997, 298). Ahmedî describes Hızır as a teacher who helps Alexander to understand Islam’s superiority and future (Kastritsis 2007, 79-81).

This advisory role, unique to Ahmedî’s version, brings further elements of Turkish popular tradition and mystical tradition into the narrative, as well as consolidating its Islamic aspect (Beaudoen 2017, 99-111). Caroline Sawyer explains the relationship between Alexander and Hızır by saying that Alexander is a mortal and historical figure who held the power of the outer world while Hızır is an immortal, mythical character who doesn’t have the power to rule the world but still his spiritual insight allows him to bestow authority on a ruler (Sawyer 1997, 211). Sawyer discusses that the two characteristics of power and authority reflect the political concerns of the audience of the ruler’s time as the Ottoman Empire’s extension of authority had just begun (Sawyer 1997, 211-14).

Another clearly important issue in the *İskendernâmes* is the romance between Alexander and Gülşah. Ahmedî doesn’t reveal Alexander’s emotional side (Stoneman 1991,67). Nizâmî examines the emotional side of Alexander the Great in detail and describes his marriage to Roxana. Unlike Nizâmî, Ahmedî doesn’t talk about Alexander’s marriage with Roxana, instead, he replaces this event with the marriage between Alexander and a princess of Sistan named Gülşah and leaves Alexander’s softer side unmentioned.<sup>23</sup>

There is dream episode unique to Ahmedî’s version. In Ahmedî’s *İskendername*, this is the prophetic dream on the part of the hero and an angel’s conferring of a sword on Alexander is reminiscent of Ottomans accession ceremonies which symbolically legitimized the sovereign’s power by girding him with a sword (Hasanov 2016, 9136).

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<sup>23</sup> Hasanov, “About Comparative Research of Poems “Treasury of Mysteries” and “İskandernâme”,” 9136-9157. See also: Robert Dankoff, “The Romance of İskender and Gülşâh,” in Sabri M. Akural (ed.), *Turkic Culture: Continuity and Change* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 95–103.

On the other hand, this prophetic version of writing hasn't examined in the narrative of Firdawsi or Nizami.

In conclusion, the Persian tradition of *Iskandernâme* is engrained with the central role of the poet in the royal court (Kastritsis 2007, 67-9). The Persian Alexander the Great emerged out of the royal court sponsored poetry production that began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Sawyer 1997, 54-7). It was derived from the Arabic and Middle Persian models to make Alexander the Great a king, prophet, and a world conqueror (Sawyer 1997, 55). In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the image of Alexander emerged within the context of the Persian *Shahnāma*. In Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma*, Alexander is portrayed as the archetype for how a king should be as well as a world conqueror. Here, it is not incorrect that some of Ahmedî's writing was similar with Firdawsi's *Shahnāma* like Alexander's birth, his origin, the expedition to India, and visiting Ka'ba. There are also some parts which are similar to Nizâmî's interpretation --such as the relations with philosophers and identification of Dh'ul Qarnayn. The analyses of these narratives help to enlighten the textual image of Alexander the Great in different periods. The tradition of Alexander Romance in its Persian manifestation offered the rich source beginning from the *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma*, who rendered Alexander the Great as Persian king and then as a model king fit to stand next to the great kings of Persian history and legend. The innovation of Ahmedî is related to his time and the cultural patterns of Anatolia and, under the influences of these situations, his representation of Alexander the Great's life and career has a strong allegoric character. Ahmedî rewrote Alexander's romance, advancing the conception of Ottoman kingship that served the successive generations of Ottoman sultans and legitimated the Ottoman Dynasty during the complex period of transition. He represented the Sultan as a warrior and listed the critical characteristics of a ruler. According to Ahmedî, a sovereign must both be just and enforce justice before all else. Its purpose was to highlight the steps of the military campaigns of a ruler and conqueror.

## 2.2. The Question of Dh'ul-Qarnayn

*"The world is not a place to be valued. Its faithlessness is no secret."*

*"All those who have been caliph, have died by one another's swords".<sup>24</sup>*

The identification of Alexander the Great as a prophet of Islam is derived from the Arabic and Persian literary tradition. In the Arabic tradition Alexander the Great is portrayed as Dh'ul-Qarnayn and it may be helpful to discuss the treatment of representing him in the Qur'an. According to Arabic historiography, Alexander the Great appears as Dh'ul Qarnayn, "the two-horned one", who travels from West to East and walls out the forces of Gog and Magog (Akçay 1999, 47-9). In the Qur'an, Dh'ul Qarnayn is presented as a prophet- or saint-like figure; however, the identification of Alexander as Dh'ul Qarnayn has given rise to much debate. Alexander the Great's representation as Dh'ul Qarnayn in the Qur'an is between Sura 18:83 and 18:98.<sup>25</sup> He travelled toward the rising sun and found a people who had no protection from the sun who asked and begged him to protect them (Kastritsis 2016, 76). He continued East until he found the two mountains where he found people who could understand him (Kastritsis 2016, 77-8). Here, these people asked him to build a wall that could keep out the armies of Gog and Magog (Kastritsis 2016, 78). Dh'ul Qarnayn asked the people to help him with labor and they set to building the wall out of iron which is impossible to scale and dig under (Sawyer 2003, 237-8). The Gog and Magog theme is significant in Persian and Arabic recensions of the Alexander Romance (Sawyer 2003, 237). It represents an overwhelming concern that armies from the East might threaten and conquer the territories of Persia and Arabian Peninsula (Sawyer 2003, 237-8).

Various nations and peoples in history were identified as Gog and Magog (Ya'juj and Ma'juj). At one point, it was the Seljukids (1040-1157 AD), who threatened the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad and Northern Iran; later, when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad in 1258, it was the Mongols who were conceived as Gog and Magog. The wall dividing them from civilised peoples was normally placed Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Persian Alexander Romances tended to take a more ambivalent view of Alexander, sometimes admiring his military successions, and sometimes condemning

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<sup>24</sup> Hasan Akçay, "Ahmedi'nin İskender-name'si," (MA Thesis, Harran University, 1999), 47-9.

<sup>25</sup> "And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about Dhul-Qarnayn. Say, I will recite to you about him a report. Indeed, we established him upon the earth, and We gave him to everything a way. Until, when he reached the setting of the sun, he found it [as if] setting in a spring of dark mud, and he found near it a people. Allah said, 'O Dhul-Qarnayn, either you punish [them] or else adopt among them [a way of] goodness.' Until, when he reached [a pass] between two mountains, he found beside them a people who could hardly understand [his] speech. They said, 'O Dhul-Qarnayn, indeed Gog and Magog are [great] corrupters in the land. So, may we assign for you an expenditure that you might make between us and them a barrier?'" For more information: <https://quran.com/18/83-98>.

him because of destroying ancient Persia (Stoneman 1991, 116). In late antiquity Middle Persian texts, Alexander the Great was represented as the “accursed one” because of the aforementioned destruction of Persepolis but, during the revelation and canonization of the Qur’an in the seventh century, stories of Alexander the Great were drawn up that identified him as the character of “Two Horns” who explored the entire world (Stoneman 1991, 117-8). However, in modern pre-Islamic historiography, Dh’ul Qarnayn was the mostly widely acknowledged characterization of Alexander. Accepting Islam was one of the most important shifts necessary for Alexander’s identification as “Two Horns”. During this period, Arabic histories conceived Alexander the Great as a secret son of Darius and while the Persia epic tradition largely assumed “Two Horns” was Alexander, it continued to be debated outside the realm of epic Persian literature (Stoneman 1991, 118).

In Firdawsî’s *Shahnāma*, examining Dh’ul Qarnayn is indirectly invoked in his narrative but, in Nizâmî’s *Iskandarnāma*, he directly invoked and identified Alexander with Two Horns, strengthening Alexander’s connection to Islamic prophethood (Stoneman 1991, 94). In Nizâmî’s verses, there is a chapter about why Alexander the Great was called Dh’ul Qarnayn and the associated numerous concepts of synthesis for merging the two into one. He explained the linguistic connections such as examining that the name is derived from the Arabic verb, *qarn*, which means to bring together (Kastritsis 2016, 86). The reasons behind these had to do with the cultural process of unification: Alexander conquered East to West from Greece to Persia and brought people together in Alexander’s cosmopolis. According to Nizâmî, Alexander wielded the sword in both hands, he had two long locks of hair down his back, in his dream he captured the sun with two rays and he lives two hundred years (Kastritsis 2016, 89-91). Therefore, all of these names come from the various meanings of *qarn*: horn, lock of hair, sun ray, century.

So, unlike Firdawsî, Nizâmî re-wrote the Alexander epic and represents Alexander as the prophet Dh’ul Qarnayn as well as the universal soul on a journey for universal knowledge (Kastritsis 2016, 61). In his opus, Ahmedî describes Alexander’s worldly figure of conquests and seeks to draw out the moral lessons inherit in the adventure. For instance, when Alexander defeated Darius Ahmedî says that:

Nefsdür Darius Zülkarneyn ruh

Ruha nefsi kil zebun k’oldur futuh

*Darius is the self and Dh’ul Qarnayn is the sou*

*Weaken the self, for that is victory for the sou* (Sawyer 1997, 119)

The identification of Alexander the Great as Dh'ul Qarnayn has been debated and there is no agreement in this discussion. For example, Ali Arpaslan argued that this is a misidentification because Alexander never constructed the wall (Alparslan 1994, 513). Some of these ideas could be the result of approaching the subject with religious bias. The wall of Alexander the Great could not be found but Alexander's mercy cannot be evidence against the identification with Dh'ul Qarnayn.

### **2.3. Alexander as an Ideal Ruler: Ahmedî's Model of Kingship**

It may be possible to see how it covers Ottoman historiography in terms of the past and present (Turna 2009, 270). In this section, *İskendernâme* will be analyzed with respect to the concept of kingship. The success of Alexander and his prestige in history left a rich legacy which has been passed on from one culture to another in Islamic literature and historiography (Turna 2009, 271). The name of Alexander the Great has been one of the strongest embodiments of a dynamic and celebrated ruler without an Islamic past (Turna 2009, 274-76). He was portrayed by some authors as an ideal monarch because of his popularity in the Islamic world (Turna 2009, 277).

Ahmedî's Alexander appears as a legitimate ruler, and he strongly characterizes the idea of justice and philosophical soul of kingship. This representation of Alexander could be adopted mainly under the influence of prevalent Islamic tradition on ideal kingship. Hence, the representation of the images of the ruler were derived from Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*. There are several themes in Ahmedî's work but these themes are not presented in the form of a treatise or chapter (Sawyer 1997, 54-7). They are instead introduced through the actions of the heroes, namely Alexander (Akdoğan, nd., 40-3). Some sources were consulted for the themes and kingship is a fundamental concept for the development of the narrative (Sawyer 1997, 73). In order to discuss the image of Alexander in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* it is necessary first to explain briefly the presentation of Alexander in the *Shahnāma* to understand the influence of his profile in Ahmedî's interpretation. The image of Alexander is predominantly positive but, in the sense, that the Firdawsî does not provide clear identification of heroic traits, positive or

negative (Beaudoen 2017, 156-8). However, it can be said that in the *Shahnāma* the heroes' characters are "alive" and their personae evolve in the plot (Kastritsis 2016, 74-7).

The positive image of Alexander represented by Firdawsî's one of a king of ordinary human and imperfect nature, having a pure heart who is searching for adventures. His representation as the son of Darius is crucial because, according to *Shahnāma*, when Alexander is raised at the court of the Macedon, he campaigns against the Persians. After becoming the king of Persia, he searches for Water of Life then builds the wall against the Gog and Magog and travels to the end of the known world; he adventured from the beginning of his life to the end.

In the light of the above findings, Alexander appears as a legitimate, primarily semi-Iranian king who is characterized by a deep concept of justice and a philosophical spirit of kingship (Kastritsis 2016, 77). The explanation of these positive models of Alexander were to be adopted by a poet under the influence of the prevalent Islamic tradition. Through *Īskendernāme*, Ahmedî seeks to prove that the rulers of his time as well as he himself have in their cultural experiences what it takes to govern in a civilized manner over both Islamic subjects and others.

Hence, he introduces the cardinal virtues of antiquity, that is to say, standards of moral excellence. A virtue is a trait or quality that is deemed to be morally good. Personal virtues are characteristics valued as promoting collective and individual greatness.<sup>26</sup> In Ahmedî's *Īskendernāme* courage is one of the fundamental features of kingship. Alexander is a revealing personification of a brave hero. Alexander is obligated to learn to be brave from childhood as courage is valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being (Kastritsis 2016, 91). In other words, it is a behavior that shows high moral standards. When Alexander was on a campaign he was challenged several times to prove his bravery and demonstrate what he learned in his youth (Stoneman 1991, 116-8).

Also highlighted in the Islamic rendition of Alexander's character is prudence, especially regarding the execution of his expansive campaign policy (Sawyer 1997, 61-4). So, in many cases, he must face difficult circumstances which demand quick and

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<sup>26</sup> The four classic cardinal virtues in Christianity are temperance, prudence, and justice. Christianity derives the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love (charity) from Corinthians. Together these make up the seven virtues. Buddhism's four "Divine States" can be regarded as virtues similar to those of the Antiquity. The Japanese Bushidō code is characterized by up to ten virtues including rectitude, courage, and benevolence. For more information: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/virtue-in-Christianity>



effective decisions (Sawyer 1997, 67-9). Alexander's prudence springs from his intelligence which, in the Islamic context, is considered as a gift of God to mankind and this wisdom can be strengthened in several ways – namely, by consulting with experienced and knowledgeable men (Beaudoen 2017, 116-8). So, by being able to rationally interpret the facts and accurately assess the results and reflections of his actions, Alexander demonstrates his prudence. According to Ahmedî, this is one of the most vital aspects of his character and has great effect on the success of his political and militaristic endeavors.

Piety is another important trait that was important for Ahmedî when he promoted the model of an ideal ruler. Ahmedî explained that Alexander the Great was well aware of his skills and power, and acutely cognizant of what he could and could not achieve. He knew that he could not do everything; could not explore and conquer the entire world. Therefore, he researched the ultimate goal, immortality for himself (Beaudoen 2017, 118). Thus, it is the Divine that helps to support his ambitious effort. *Iskendernâme* provides abundant examples of Alexander the Great's piety in order to verify the above concept (Beaudoen 2017, 119-20). Ahmedî examines that Alexander's pillar of piety is prayers because, in many cases, he performs his prayers in the Islamic way; by ablution, prostration, and imploration towards God (Beaudoen 2017, 61). Besides the formal way of practicing of praying, piety in the case of Alexander is closely associated with gratitude to God, often expressed through prayers (Stoneman 1991, 81). In several cases, Alexander the Great addressed God expressing his gratitude and praise to him concerning the secrets of the world and his protection (Stoneman 1991, 81). Hence, when his soldiers complained that they can not fight against the elephants of King Fur of India, Alexander said: "*Do not be afraid because God is on our side*" (Stoneman 1991, 123). In another instance, Alexander, aware of his imperfect nature when he enters the holy shrine of Ka'ba in Mecca, wept and implored God to forgive his sins (Sawyer 1997, 58-60). Here, his main worry is living a short life. According to Ahmedî, Alexander wrote a letter to his mother and asked her to pray to God to bestow him with more years to accomplish his main goal, immortality. Actually, that could be regarded as supreme impiety.

A sense of justice is one of the righteous facets of Alexander's character and this feature is of fundamental importance for a ruler in Ahmedî's *Iskendernâme*. In many cases, when he is challenged to make an important decision, his main consideration is to judge rightly and justly (Kastritsis 2016, 78). Many examples can be found in the narrative regarding the king's righteous profile: in the introduction of Ahmedî's text,

Alexander conquered the world through justice and he suppressed heresy and ended all causes of injustice (Stoneman 1991, 78). According to Ahmedî, humankind benefitted from his justice and equity that brought peace throughout the world (Stoneman 1991, 82-3). This part represents a framework for the righteous character of Alexander the Great. In some cases, Alexander equates justice with mercy however this is not always the case. When he encountered the pagans, he defeated the idolaters and finally brought justice to those lands (Stoneman 1991, 83-4). According to Ahmedî, he brings justice and Islam, which is the only righteous religio-political system. Alexander is a Muslim and his judgement is based on Islamic principles (Kastritsis 2016, 96). As such, the idolaters are characterized in a negative manner in accordance with Islamic law. According to Alexander, if they accept Islamic rule they will survive and enjoy Islamic privileges but if they do not do that they will pay the ultimate price – death (Kastritsis 2016, 101). Obviously, Alexander is painted as the model of the Muslim ruler who is expected to establish justice (Beaudoen 2017, 116-8). Ahmedî examines that it is necessary for a king to dole out justice and listen to his subjects' grievances twice a week (Beaudoen 2017, 117-9).

If above lines describe those features which contribute to the model of Alexander the Great as an ideal ruler, the analysis below aims to reflect on the other, more human and imperfect aspects of the Alexander's personality (Sawyer 1997, 176). The features which will be examined bring a ruler closer to the standards of the common people. However, the "ideal king" and the "human king" are successfully interwoven in the narrative thereby forming a model as king who pursues the highest values for humanity and simultaneously remains close to the daily needs and behavior of his subjects (Sawyer 1997, 176-7).

Cupidity, acquisitiveness, avarice, avariciousness, avidity, avidness, covetousness, graspingness, greed, greediness, mercenariness, rapaciousness, rapacity.

Fear is one of the most important reasons for the occasional lack of manliness in Alexander the Great. (Sawyer 1997, 177). This feeling is shown to compel him to have second thoughts concerning the decisions (Kastritsis 2016, 120-6). Terror about his future overcomes Alexander; when the angels warn Alexander that he will be punished for his sinful acts his fear concerning the future bests him and he weeps for his mistakes (Kastritsis 2016, 121). The fear of God is supposed to be the beginning of all wisdom.

In general, Ahmedî represents Alexander as a great champion and a brave hero who is ready to challenge (Sawyer 1997, 117-23). He is a leader who accompanies his

army into battles. On the other hand, he reaches great depths of thought over the issue of his impending and seemingly inescapable death (Sawyer 1997, 123). The search for immortality and the spread of Islam are two major aims of Alexander's that mobilize him in his campaigns and he knows that his life is finite unless he finds the Water of Life (Stoneman 1991, 88-98). This feature is not the primary motivator, however, but a later development in Alexander's character (Stoneman 1991, 56-7). His main aim is the spread of Islam for the sake of mankind and to find immortality for himself (Stoneman 1991, 57-9).

One of the basic features of Alexander's Muslim profile is that of the prophetic with the identification as Dh'ul Qarnayn (Sawyer 1997, 120). From the beginning, Ahmedî labels Alexander as Dh'ul Qarnayn and he suggests that Alexander and Dh'ul Qarnayn are one and the same (Sawyer 1997, 123). First, Ahmedî strives to define the meaning of Dh'ul Qarnayn (Sawyer 1997, 125-6). Second, attention must be paid to his intention to explain the attributes of Dh'ul Qarnayn (Beaudoen 2017, 116-7). So, he implies that the only justification of these attributions are the great deeds of Alexander. In general, the connection between Alexander and Dh'ul Qarnayn is the main body of the text and subtext, which creates an imposing image of excellence and magnitude for Alexander (Beaudoen 2017, 118). Obviously, there are various aspects of Alexander's behavior combined with Islamic lore, and Alexander's Muslim image is also reflected through his devout and pious character.

Ahmedî accomplished this by linking the Ottomans to Alexander the Great. His epic transcends the links asserted by the previous dynasties (Stoneman 1991, 89-91). This link asserted by ideological Ahmedî draws on the currents of inter-dynastic knowledge that extended Ottoman dynastic legitimacy to the distant past. This might have resonated with the needs of Ahmedî's patron(s). Just like the legends about Alexander the Great, the ideal credentials of a perfect ruler existed in Ahmedî's epic (Sawyer 1997, 63-6). So, Ahmedî describes the basic principles for kingship with reference to Alexander's personality as a device for the promotion of the righteous king (Sawyer 1997, 68). He paints Alexander as a conqueror and a king in every righteous sense of the word. In doing so, Ahmedî endeavored to create cultural continuity (Kastritsis 2016, 94). Ahmedî's prose, both historical and fantastic, offered a cultural bridge that connected on a global scale from Europe to the Middle East (Kastritsis 2016, 100). Ahmedî offered and presented rulers that these regions could aspire to (Sawyer 1997, 118). The importance

of the work is examining a model for how a person could conquer the known world and redefine it (Stoneman 1991, 136).

In conclusion, Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* delineates how a king should be and be represented for Ottoman dynastic legitimation. There is an obvious textual relationship between Firdawsî, Nizâmî and Ahmedî. Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* reflects the political crisis between 1402-13. One of the most significant aims of Ahmedî was to write a long-rhymed work of a mystical and didactic nature in this turbulent period. Here, the transmission of quintessential kingship is the center of the process in the social circles in which Ahmedî traveled. Ahmedî's explorations of the nature of power and authority through Alexander the Great and the figures he used may well reflect some of the political concerns of his audience, as his inclusion of a history of the Ottoman dynasty clearly does, at a time when the Ottomans was just beginning to define the extent of their authority.

### 3. BORROWED TEXTS OR NOT?

*“When asked a century later where is it?  
Each couplet would call out: “Here I am”.”<sup>27</sup>*

In the years following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, he was represented in the culture, politics, and epics transferred and transformed in many cultures. These representations are an opportunity to explore ways in which the world from Europe to the Middle East engaged with Late Antiquity (Hasanov 2016, 9152). In the Ottoman world, these works, Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî, were generally used to their Alexander Romance and to refer to their Sultan as the Alexander of the Age.

For the understanding of the relations of the most popular *İskendernâmes* in Ottoman, namely those by Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî, this chapter will investigate historical reality and narrative construction as well as the relations of sixteenth century poets with Ahmedî and earlier Persian *İskendernâmes*. How did Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî perceive their roles as authors and how did they present their texts as a reflection of their period. Were these texts a direct copy of Ahmedî’s or earlier Persian sources or were they entirely novel? How much did they borrow from earlier *İskendernâmes*? Before presenting these two later Ottoman *İskendernâmes*, it is useful to introduce the historical background about the period in question.

#### 3.1. Historical Background

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<sup>27</sup> Hasanov, “About Comparative Research of Poems “Treasury of Mysteries” and “Iskandername”, 9146-49.

The rise of Ottoman historiography over the course of the fifteenth century coincided with radical transformation of the Ottoman polity: The Battle of Ankara (1402), the interregnum period (1402-1413), and the conquest of Constantinople (1453) (İnalçık 1960, 57). The Alexander Romance tradition in the Ottoman Empire was also central to understanding the changing political climate in which they came into existence, wherein different factors competed to set the agenda for the future Ottoman enterprise. The representations of the Alexander Romance are not a unified or one-dimensional corpus within their mystically infused language and imaginary but rather varied and dynamic manuscripts with a common theme. Before analyzing the narrative of Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî one needs to analyze sixteenth century social and political order.

Sultan Mehmed II had striven throughout his reign to realize one main aim: the consolidation of the Ottoman State. After the conquest of Constantinople, he repaired the walls and repopulated the empty spaces of the new capital city with Muslims, Christians, and Jews from all parts of his realm (İnalçık 1969-70, 23-4). Furthermore, tensions had grown in the East (Freely 2004, 44-6). When Mehmed II died, he was survived by two sons: Bayezid and Cem. Bayezid was the elder son and was in Amasya while Cem was in Konya, the former capital of the Karamanids (Freely 2004, 45). As conflict between Cem and Bayezid grew, Bayezid gained possession of the Ottoman throne. Almost fourteen years of Bayezid II's reign was spent under the constant danger of the coalition of the Christian Powers. The Ottomans feared that the Europeans, using Cem as their instrument, may invade their kingdom at any time (Freely 2004, 45-6). However, neither in the West nor in the East could Bayezid II commit his forces to definite action (İnalçık 1969, 32). There were various armed enterprises but these were either raids due to the initiative of the governors in the frontier regions or campaigns strictly limited in scope (İnalçık 1969, 32-3). When Cem was alive the Ottoman military machine never engaged in a great war.

The clash between the Ottomans and the Mamluks arose around 1465 (İnalçık 1969, 33). In the following years, the Ottoman army occupied Adana and Tarsus as well as several other fortresses in the Anavarza, Sis and Kozan regions (İnalçık 1969, 34). Finally, a treaty was signed confirming the Mamluk occupation of Cilicia (Barkey 2008, 112). Here, both sides had, by then, valid reasons to terminate hostilities. After this alliance, and following the death of Matthias Corvinus in 1490, Bayezid II turned his attention to Hungary (Imber 2009, 59-60). For years, several expeditions had been organized by both sides and the Hungarian king Matthias had not sought to conceal his

intentions of taking advantage of the political instability in the Ottoman State (Imber 2009, 61). When Matthias died without an heir, Bayezid II in turn saw an opportunity take advantage of the interregnum in Hungary (İnalçık 1969, 23).

The Eastern borders of Ottoman State were indeed a serious reason for concern. Since the death of Uzun Hasan (1478), the Akkoyunlu state had been under strain because of the dynastic crisis among his sons (İmber 2009, 72). During the second half of the fifteenth century, the power of the Safavid leaders spread continuously mainly due to the Turkoman population of Iran and Eastern Anatolia (Imber 2009, 73). In 1499, Şah İsmail started to expand from Gilan (Barkey 2003, 121).

Bayezid II was not a forceful sovereign who would control the state under a tight rein and his moderate approach made room for effective administration and government (Barkey 2003, 122). Legislation and education received particular attention under Bayezid II. The production of historical works was also especially under conscious dynastic patronage. During this time, Ahmed-i Rıdvan presented his *İskendernâme* to Bayezid II. He, too, tried to describe and interpret a number of independent incidents he witnessed within a larger historical framework. The main aim of the narrative was to depict the Ottomans' wealth, glory, and image of kingship. Ahmed-i Rıdvan's *İskendernâme* was written in a more elaborate literary style and the fact that this work was produced at the special demand of the sultan resulted in the author's praise of his patron to ingratiate himself in his eyes and show loyalty to the person of the sultan along with displaying proof of the superiority of Bayezid II's rulership.

After the conquests of Bayezid II and Selim I, there was unrivaled strategic position on both fronts: East and West. The Mamluks were gone, the Safavids and Venetians were cowed and, while the Habsburg Empire were replacing Hungary as the main rival in the North of the Danube, its full strength had not yet been realized (Barkey 2003, 127). No other sultan came to the throne with such advantages as those left to Süleyman I in 1520 (Barkey 2003, 127). There was no competing prince to dispute his right to rule and no other challenger from divergent political groups that might attempt to secure their own power.

Süleyman I's reign began with a campaign to secure the justice and artisans and intellectuals brought to İstanbul from different places such as Egypt (Imber 2009, 69). Much of his life was devoted to a series of campaigns to build a world empire. His primary ambitions early in his reign turned him towards Europe but first he needed to deal with several problems that arose soon after the beginning his reign. One, in the East, was the

issue of the former Mamluks who had entered the service of Selim I in Syria. Led by Canberdi Gazali, the governor of Damascus, they wanted to take Egypt back and restore the Mamluk Empire when Süleyman I was busy in the West (Imber 2009, 70). However, while Damascus fell to the rebels, the Ottoman governor of Aleppo was able to organize the feudal forces of the areas to quell the uprising; the rebellion ended in 1520 (Pieterberg 2003, 70). The second problem that was occupying the Süleyman I's attention was the island of Rhodes, a dangerous outpost of Christianity in an otherwise the Ottoman sea (Pieterberg 2003, 71-3). So, during Süleyman I's reign, a number of military corps were stationed on both the Eastern and Western fronts. This presence was not only for military campaigns; several fundamental changes had happened in the politics of the Ottoman. The grand vizier İbrahim Paşa was very effective during this time (Pieterberg 2003, 72). İbrahim was given important positions and revenues making him the one of the great individual powers in the empire.

Not only campaigns, but also public celebrations served to demonstrate the power of the sultan and helped to legitimize his rule. In the beginning of the summer of 1530, Süleyman I ordered the preparation of festivities to celebrate the circumcision of his sons Mustafa, Mehmed and Selim. *Suriyye* of Figânî (d. 1532?), a *kaside*, was written on the occasion of this major event which lasted 20 days.<sup>28</sup> Figânî's "*Tevarih-i İskendernâme*", a narrative including both prose and poetry, also served to demonstrate the military might and success of Süleyman I with the aim to legitimize his rule. Thus, Figânî embraced, with regard to the life of Alexander the Great and his conquests, especially his Eastern conquests and described the difficulties Alexander was confronted with. Before discussing Figânî's "*Tevarih-i İskendernâme*", it is best to study first Ahmed-i Rıdvan's *İskendernâme* which takes Bayezid II as his hero.

### 3.2. Ahmed-i Rıdvan and his *İskendernâme*

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<sup>28</sup> For the motives, symbols, conventions, and arrangements of the sixteenth century urban ceremonies in İstanbul: Zeynep Yelçe, "Evaluating Three Imperial Festivals: 1524, 1530 and 1539," *Celebration, Entertainment, and Theatre in the Ottoman World* ed. by Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Ozturkmen, Kolkata, West Bengal: Seagull Books, 2014, 71-109; Kaya Şahin, "Staging an Empire: An Ottoman Circumcision Ceremony as Cultural Performance", *The American Historical Review* 123/ 2, 2018, 463-492.



Ahmed-i Rıdvan is represented as “Ahmed Beg”, “Rıdvan”, “Ahmed-i Rıdvan”, “Tütünsüz” and “Biduhan” (Avcı 2014, 67). There was no specific discussion about where he came from or his origin, but Ünver argues that, on the basis of Rıdvan’s first couplets, he could be from Ohri (Avcı 2014, 67). In some sources it can be seen that Ahmed-i Rıdvan had important duties, the most important of which was his duty as a *sancakbey*. However, there exist no details about when and where. According to Ünver, he participated in the Moton campaign.

Ahmed-i Rıdvan presented his work to Bayezid II and referred to him in several occasions, with respect to justice, generosity and war in particular. His admiration for Bayezid II can be seen in detail in this work. Despite writing about Alexander and the cities which Alexander founded, he wrote that these cities became rose gardens during the time of Bayezid II (Avcı 2014, 69). Ahmed-i Rıdvan also writes about the general attributes which sultans must have in order to rule well. According to him, justice and bravery are among the most important characteristics (Avcı 2014, 78). Immediately afterwards, he explains that Bayezid II was very brave and generous (Avcı 2014, 78-80). His view is based on his own observations when he went on campaigns with him and at the end of he explains that he has written it for Bayezid II.

There are several important studies on Ahmed-i Rıdvan’s *İskendernâme*: one penned by Agah Sırrı Levend. Levend, first focused on the date of the work. He argued that Ahmed-i Rıdvan’s *İskendernâme* was written in 1500 and his *Hüsrev ü Şirin* was written in 1501 (Levend 2014, 45). According to him, *Leyla ve Mecnun* and Ahmed-i Rıdvan’s *İskendernâme* must have been written earlier than *Hüsrev ü Şirin* (Levend 2014, 47-9). On the other hand, İsmail Ünver who has another important study on Ahmed-i Rıdvan’s *İskendernâme*, suggests that the date of his *Hüsrev ü Şirin* reveals that his other two works were written earlier in 1498, not in 1501 (Ünver 2000, 76-9). On the other hand, Ahmed-i Rıdvan explains in his composition the order of his books;

“Didüm evvel Sikender-name’sini  
Tamam itdüm onun hengamesini  
İkinci Leyli ü Mecnun makalın  
Beyan itdüm ser-a-ser hal ü kalan  
Bu def’a Hüsrev ü Şirin diyeyim  
Ne denli telh isem şirin diyeyin.” (Avcı 2016, 56)

*First, I began with the Iskendername,  
Having completed that,  
I brought Leyla and Mecnun to life,  
Finishing that,  
I will now begin on Hüsrev and Şirin,  
No matter how discreetly I speak ill, make it well.*

Based on the couplets Ahmed-i Rıdvan included in his handiwork, we can say that Rıdvan wrote *İskendernâme* first, *Leyla ve Mecnun* second and *Hüsrev ü Şirin* last.

İsmail Avcı, in his 2013 study of Ahmed-i Rıdvan's *İskendernâme*, "*Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler ve Ahmed-i Rıdvan'ın İskendernâmesi*" examines the text in detail. He argues that the author adopted some part of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* and added that, apart from thematic similarities such as the depictions of war, kingship, how to rule and legitimization of the ruler, they bore similarities also in style and language.

When we analyze Ahmed-i Rıdvan's *İskendernâme*, we can see that Rıdvan modeled this work on Ahmedî; but sometimes he diverged and inserted his own ideas. When Ahmed-i Rıdvan refers to Bayezid II, he praises the sultan and describes him as a generous and just warrior. It can be seen that in both texts, wars between Darius and Alexander is crucial and it is discussed in detail. Besides this, wars with supernatural creatures are also depicted. Entertainment also has an important place in both texts -- to motivate soldiers before every war there was entertainment. After the war, they shared the spoils.

Similar as the two pieces are, there are many differences and innovations in Ahmed-i Rıdvan's work. The main difference between the two is Rıdvan's attribution of some of the conquests to alternate sultans and his omission of some conquests entirely. First of all, when the two authors write about the period of Orhan Gazi, Ahmedî argues that İpsala was taken by Orhan but Ahmed-i Rıdvan argues that it was captured by Süleyman Paşa (d.1316) (Avcı 2014, 56-8). Second, during the reign of Bayezid II, Ahmedî examines the Damascus campaign but Ahmed-i Rıdvan doesn't mention this campaign (Avcı 2014, 75). Third, while Ahmedî gives details about Timur and his defeat of Bayezid I, Ahmed-i Rıdvan doesn't make a single remark on this topic. Fourth, after the reign of Bayezid I, Ahmed-i Rıdvan turns his attention directly to Mehmed II, he never speaks of Emir Süleyman. Finally, the portrayal of the coronation of Alexander the Great is also another point of divergence. According to Ahmedî, Alexander was unaware

that he would become king until after his father's death (Levend 2014, 56). On the other hand, Ahmed-i Rıdvan argues that his father informed him that he would become the king (Levend 2014, 57-8).

The accounts of the relationship between Alexander and Gülşah are also different in these texts. According to Ahmedî, because of Gülşah's father, the couple eloped without her father's permission but, in Ahmed-i Rıdvan's account, Gülşah's father gave them his blessing. The differences continued and, in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, the Ottoman Empire is depicted from its foundation until Emir Süleyman's reign but in Ahmed-i Rıdvan's work, it is denoted until Bayezid II. From this, we are able to infer that each individual author penned his work in such a way as to include the specifics of the period in which they lived, in essence bringing the text up to date. In Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* there are several different accounts of Osman and his conquests, such as his capture of İnegöl and Gölhisar while Rıdvan only writes about the conquest of Bursa (Hasanov 2016, 9134). It can be said that Ahmed-i Rıdvan structured his composition as Ahmedî did and added sub-chapters to every chapter. At the beginning of his *İskendernâme*, Ahmed-i Rıdvan prayed to God to assist him in his writing. The main part of his work consists of legends which are organized into "introduction", "development" and "conclusion" (Avcı 2014, 45). All parts begin with a short explanation including a section on what the part is about. We can see that the love between Alexander and Gülşah has an important place in this *İskendernâme*. Rıdvan explains this love as being "one" in two different bodies.

In conclusion, although Ahmed-i Rıdvan was influenced by Ahmedî, it would be an injustice to say that his *İskendernâme* is a copy of Ahmedî. Ahmed-i Rıdvan took Ahmedî as a guide to legitimize his patron.

### 3.3. Figânî and his *İskendernâme*

There is no reliable information about Figânî's life or works. According to some accounts, he is from Trabzon and his real name is Ramazan (Altuğ 2014, 67). There exists no recorded specific birth place but, according to Aşık Çelebi, Figânî is "*Piramen-i kuh-ı Gürcistand'da Ermen'den Şehr-i Dırabzındandır*" (Altuğ 2014, 68). Thanks to *tezkires*, we know that he came to İstanbul and was educated in a *medrese* in literature, medicine

and grammar.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Kınalızade and Gelibolulu Ali claimed that Figânî made much effort to write his poems (Şentürk 2003, 47-9). Beyani describes Figânî in his work as follows:

*“His mastership can be seen in his words which flow like water.”*

The first extended study on Figânî was by Abdülkadir Karahan (Karahan 1966, 52-7). He collected studies of Figânî in different libraries and compared different copies to one another and published his Divan (Karahan 1966, 54). Karahan argues that Figânî was interested in several different disciplines because he didn't have enough self-discipline to focus on science and medicine but the freedom of poems allured and fascinated him (Karahan 1966, 34-5). Aşık Çelebi gives insight into the private life of Figânî. According to him, from a young age Figânî started to drink and spend most of his time in Galata and try to write poems to earn his own life (Kılıç 1994, 35-8).

Figânî is recognized in the Ottoman *İskendernâme* tradition but his popularity arose from his aforementioned kaside, “*Suriyye*”, an ode presented to the sultan (Karahan 1966, 36). Thanks to the circumcision festival (sûr) of Süleyman's sons in 1530, he gained a reputation at the courtly circles and came to the attention of the sultan and the grand vizier (Altuğ 2014, 45-7). Everyday there were different sets of events and shows. Figânî read his eulogium to the sultan on the eighteenth day of the celebrations (Altuğ 2014, 47). Such public ceremonies allowed opportunities for political and cultural interactions, hence Karahan argues that the relations of vizier İbrahim and Figânî may have started after the poet's success in praisal of the sultan. He adds that Figânî may have also presented his eulogium to the grand vizier after this event (Altuğ 2014, 47-8). Besides his affinity for entertainment, Aşık Çelebi argues that he was very intelligent and added that because of his close relations with the Grand Vizier İbrahim, Figânî gained the hostility of people around him (Karahan 1966, 36). **(Figure 1)**

Figânî's life was not too long and, according to some sources, after the battle of Mohac, when Süleyman I conquered Buda, the grand vizier İbrahim Pasha brought some

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<sup>29</sup> Sehî Bey, *Hişt Behişt*, Yk .112b–113a.; Latîfî, *Tezkire-i Latîfî*, 267-268; Ahdî, *Gülşen-i Şuarâ*, Yk,157a; Âşık Çelebi, *Meşâirü 'ş-Şuarâ*, Yk. 199a-202a; Kınalızâde Hasan Çelebi, *Tezkiretü 'ş-şuarâ*, 763–768; Beyânî, *Tezkire*, Yk. 67b; Riyâzî, *Riyâzîü 'ş- Şuarâ*, Yk.47b; Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, , Yk. 28a; Abdülkadir Karahan; *Figânî ve Divançesi*, İstanbul, 1966, XIII.

sculptures from Buda to Istanbul. There exists a poem which was attributed to Figânî during this period:

*“Dü İbrahim amed be dar-ı cihan  
Yek-i but-şiken şud digger but-nişan”<sup>30</sup>  
Two İbrahims came to this world: One of them devastated idols, the other one  
built them.*

When these words of Figânî reached the Pasha, he ordered that Figânî be killed (Karahan 1966, 46). According to Gelibolulu Ali and Sehi Bey these couplets did not belong to Figânî; Aşık Çelebi, too, argued that these couplets were not written by Figânî but written even earlier.<sup>31</sup> According to Aşık Çelebi, Figânî died in 1532. Hence Karahan argues that these lines were written earlier than Figânî, during the reign of Mahmud of Ghazna. According to Fuad Köprülü, Figânî was killed because of the slander of his entourage based on his fame and jealousy of his friends (Köprülü 1980, 57-8).

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 41-3.

<sup>31</sup> Sehî Bey, *Hişt Behişt*, Yk. 112b-113a.; Latîfî, *Tezkire-i Latîfî*, s.267-268; Ahdî, *Gülşen-i şuarâ*, Yk.157a; Aşık Çelebi, *Meşâirü’ş-şuarâ*, Yk. 199a-202a; Kınalızâde Hasan Çelebi, *Tezkiretü’ş-Şuarâ*, 763-768; Beyânî, *Tezkire*, Yk. 67b; Riyâzî, *Riyâzîü’ş- Şuarâ*, Yk.47b; Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, *Kühü’l- Ahbâr*, Yk. 28a; Abdülkadir Karahan, *Figânî ve Divançesi*, İstanbul, 1966, XIII.



Figure 1: The poet Figânî entertaining himself with a beautiful cup-bearer boy in a garden. Millet Library, Ali Emiri 722, fol. 534a.

The manuscript titled “*Tevarih-i İskendernâme*” includes both prose and poetry sections. With regard to the life of Alexander the Great and his conquests, especially his Eastern conquests, Figânî describes the difficulties Alexander faced. His language is fluent but contains many Arabic and Persian words.<sup>32</sup>

Kınalızade Hasan Çelebi (d.1546) claimed that Figânî took Firdawsî’s and Nizâmî’s versions as models, but did not Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme* as an example to follow or imitate (TTK 1978, 34-7). In order to dwell upon the similarities and differences between Figânî and Firdawsî and Nizâmî, we must take into consideration that language is an exceedingly important factor. First of all, Figânî’s use of Persian is very pointed

<sup>32</sup> Figani’s work is located in the Süleymaniye Library’s Manuscript section. See detail in: Altuğ, “16. Yüzyıla Ait Figani’nin İskendernamesi Üzerinde Bir Sentaks İncelemesi,” 45–62.

because, with headings and subheadings in Persian, Figânî engaged his text with Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*. Second, while Firdawsî and Figânî agree on the Persian origin of Alexander, Nizâmî's Alexander, however, is of Macedonian lineage. Third, rather than that of Ahmedî, Figânî's account rests on Nizâmî's portrayal of Alexander as a philosopher-conqueror and emphasizes Alexander's adventures and gatherings with philosophers. The fourth difference between Figânî and Ahmedî stems from Ahmedî's treatment of Hızır as the primary advisor to Alexander thereby downplaying Aristotle. Conversely, Figânî treads in the footsteps of Nizâmî, dedicating more and more important lines to Aristotle. The distinctive feature of Figânî's *İskendernâme* is his detailed and thorough accounts of warfare. He writes of flaming cannonballs and expounds on how the cannonballs were cast of copper by master craftsmen. Another distinctive characteristic of Figânî's is the fact that he, like Nizâmî, addresses Alexander's marriage with Roxana at length and does not mention Gülşah at all. Taking Nizâmî's account as a model, Figânî writes of the marriage between Roxana and Alexander as having occurred with her father's blessing. Alexander is depicted as a successful ruler, a Persian King, and a Prophet in Nizâmî's *İskandarnâme*. Figânî responded to Nizâmî and, in addition to taking up these themes, influenced Nizâmî's religious approach and integrated Alexander into it.

Like Ahmedî and Ahmed-i Rıdvan, Figânî does not conclude his narration at a period before his own, instead updated it to the reign of Süleyman I. He writes of the sultan at length and in glowing terms, depicting him as shining like the sun on the field of battle. Devoting many lines to Süleyman's grandeur and splendiddness, Figânî does not refrain from expounding on his regality.

“Çevresinde ol kadar adem dirilmiş kim sanasın divan-ı Süleymandır” (Altuğ 2014, 89)

*There are so many people there to surround him,  
That you could assume it is the court of Solomon*

At the beginning of Figânî's text there is a section in Persian bearing similarities to *Shahnāma*, but when analyzed carefully it is found that it is not a copy or translation of the entire text. Figânî simply quoted some of the parts possible to compare and contrast with his work. Gibb did not think highly of Figânî's *İskendernâme* and remarked that “in Turkish literature there is one more *İskendernâme*, except Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*. This

narrative doesn't have enough fame and eventually has been forgotten" (Gibb 1900-1909, 57-9). The relationship of Ahmedî and Figânî has not been established but at the end of the day it can be seen that while Ahmed-i Rıdvân took the model of Ahmedî's Alexander Romance, Figânî's reference point was Firdawsî's and Nizâmî's epics.

### 3.4. The "Living" Tradition

"The Alexander Romance tradition in its Persian manifestation offered a rich tradition that was rooted in the *Shahnāma* of the eleventh century and Nizâmî who juxtaposed their renderings of the Alexander Romance with the tales of the deeds of and adventures of past Persian kings. In this capacity, Alexander the Great stands as a model" (Beaudoen 2017, 208).

In the light of the rich cultural landscape, there is much to be gained by taking a critical historical approach to the development of the Alexander Romance in the Ottoman world, while also bearing in mind the textual relationships of the works in question. By the fourteenth century when the Ottoman principality arose, those wielding political authority faced legitimacy problems (Sawyer 2003, 134). This problem was in all actuality global but a fragmented world forced the rulers to justify themselves and their authority in different ways. When it comes to dynastic legitimacy, Ottoman state formation inspires a complex and often conflicting discourse. This was predicated on the conquest of new territory for Islam and the so-called transfer of power from the House of Seljuk to the Ottomans (Sawyer 2003, 135). After perhaps the most significant Ottoman conquest of all, the successful siege of Constantinople, both religiously and politically ever-present apocalyptic expectations were interpreted in the context of what had occurred by some contemporaries. Here, the Alexander Romance was highly relevant because the ancient conqueror had not disappeared and still was identified as an Islamic tradition. The important detail here is, because of the existence of such a large and multilingual corpus of stories, the images and texts related to the ancient conqueror became the ideal medium for the formulation and communication of a wide range of messages (Sawyer 2003, 136).

There is a lack of consensus or approval about Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* apropos the style and nature of the work. Some of these disagreements date back to the sixteenth



century because some Ottoman intellectuals viewed Ahmedî's poetry with disdain and expressed that his text was little more than a simple translation of Nizâmî.<sup>33</sup> The originality of the *İskendernâme*, as Ünver and other scholars pointed out, is not diminished by the elements Ahmedî translated from Firdawsî and Nizâmî and other authors, since the awareness of these is essential for any interpretation of the *İskendernâme*. The most important influence that Nizâmî had on Ahmedî was the dual character - both king and prophet- of Alexander the Great. In both texts, Alexander the Great was portrayed as a conqueror, adventurer, king and philosopher (Beaudoen 2017,178). This dual character is evident in the structure of the both texts. The influence of Firdawsî over Nizâmî is very important and there are commonalities and differences worth noting. Nizâmî was influenced by Firdawsî but he inarguably innovated some aspects of his *İskandarnâme* while depicting Alexander the Great as a dual character. Consequently, there is an obvious link between texts: the *Shahnâme* slots in between the pre-Islamic and Islamic literary tradition, Nizâmî had been influenced by Firdawsî, and finally Ahmedî was influenced by primarily Nizâmî and, to a lesser degree, by Firdawsî.

Whatever impact Nizâmî, Firdawsî, and other authors may have had on Ahmedî, it is time to consider how his *İskendernâme* is unique in both literary and historical aspects. There was a newness of sorts in Ahmedî's work based on the political challenges present at the time. Sawyer compared the best-known manuscript of the *İskendernâme* which was published by İsmail Ünver to one copy which was written nearly 45 years later.<sup>34</sup> Among the several differences, the most conspicuous disparity is that the latter lacks the poem in the praise of Prophet's birth. Sawyer argues that this particular text must be a copy of an earlier draft. It should not be difficult to infer that Ahmedî's Alexander Romance can be read as a reflection of the political crisis between 1402-13. On the contrary, one of the most significant assertions is that the aim of Ahmedî was to write a long-rhymed work of a mystical and didactic nature of his time and circumstances. The Alexander Romance and the conquests therein created a mirror for understanding the times and foundation pains of the Ottoman State (Beaudoen 2017, 172). When all the

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<sup>33</sup> Because of the some other writing examples occurs, for example Süleymanname and Selimname new examples of *İskendernâme* didn't exist in the late sixteenth century. See above: Ahmet Uğur, "Selimname", *Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* Vol. 36, (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı, 2000), 440.

<sup>34</sup> Sawyer, "Alexander, History and Piety," 69. According to İsmail Ünver there are several copies of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* in İstanbul Library and Süleymaniye Library. For some copies of *İskendernâme* the authors and dates are known but some aren't known. See detail in: İsmail Ünver, *Ahmedî, İskender-Name İnceleme-Tipkiyasım* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu,1983), 25-6.

studies are considered, we must think that we are dealing with a living tradition; not only the in the terms of the individual *İskendernâmes* but rather of a broader Alexander the Great cycle. This might be the best represented by the corpus of the manuscripts attributed to Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî.

It is broader cultural connections that contextualized the Ottoman contribution to the Alexander Romance. There are connections between various texts and these texts were compared to one another earlier in this thesis. It is known that the most important Ottoman *İskendernâme* was that of Ahmedî in the fifteenth century and the fact that this *İskendernâme* survived in over one hundred copies attests to its wide appeal, both within and outside of the borders of the Ottoman State. The three *İskendernâmes* discussed above constitute the most important treatments of Alexander Romance in Turkish and these are not easily categorized as belonging to one or another distinct tradition. Starting with Ahmedî, the other two authors Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî, participated in the production of *İskendernâme* as a part of Ottoman cultural, historical and literary representation of a late fifteenth and sixteenth century war hero. The Ottoman imperial pursuits accomplished more than a simple re-creation of the Alexander Romance as designed by their Persian predecessors (Sawyer 2003, 134).

The intertwined connection of all these narratives meant that there is a cultural continuity that extended back to the fourth century. The Ottoman *İskendernâmes* offer a general framework for understanding the textual, historic, fantastic, visual, and folk narratives that involved the persistence of Alexander the Great. This continuation reflected varied cultural and political situations of the times; but the discussion of these narratives helps to highlight the appeal of the textual image of Alexander the Great in different periods, different socio-political settings. His depiction as a model ruler in Persian historiography set a precedent which the Ottomans followed by way of Ahmedî and later Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. After these centuries we cannot see the *İskendernâme* tradition because rulers legitimated themselves not using *İskendernâme* but instead the *Selimname*, *Süleymanname*.

When Ahmedî constructed his epic, he tried to connect two distant periods and created the ideological link between Ottoman rulers and Alexander the Great. In Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, it can be seen that he is dealing with both the past and present (Sawyer 2003, 135). In Persian literature, the name of Alexander had been one of the most popular names of an ideal, dynamic, impressive and prudent ruler and was derived from sources that weren't Islamic. However, Ottoman authors used this name to present or

portray an ideal Islamic monarch (Bürigel 1996, 151-4). Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî not only led to discussions of legitimization and attempted to legitimize their rulers but also gave important details about their political, economic, and social perspectives at respective periods of time.

Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* both using strategy of setting the narrative far in past, looking back on the origins of the things, and then foretelling a narrative the future that is the audience's present or recent past. This technique serves the historical significance. The narrative clarifies how distant periods in the past were recorded and viewed by contemporary audiences due to the fact that the authors, by continuing the Alexander Romance tradition, were in essence interconnecting the 4th and sixteenth centuries. While the two periods seem to be incredibly distant from one another, separated by more than a millennium, the geographic continuity and the continuity of the main characters and themes reveal that these eras are actually quite deeply connected. The importance of the Alexander Romance is found in its offering of a possible model for understanding the deeper historical imagination of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Ottoman State.

The continuation of the Alexander Romance allows us to see how the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were assessed through the eyes of different individuals/authors. They give us insight into the politics, military conquests, and administrative styles of the sultans of the era, but also about the aspirations of those individuals. As such, they reflect a sort of historical imagination. For example, they provide perspective as to the manner in which the conquests of the fifteenth and sixteenth century came about. The representation of Alexander the Great is as a model world-conqueror and this image resonated with the themes of the early modern era (Bürigel 1996, 157).

The late fourteenth, early fifteenth and sixteenth century context presented the opportunity for scholarly inhabitants of Anatolia to access several works (Beaudoen 2017, 187). Here, readers of Ahmedî and of Ahmedî-i Rıdvan and Figânî could have recognized *circumstantial parallels* presented between those compositions. The parallelism is akin to a hallway lined with mirrors reflecting and playing off one another (Beaudoen 2017, 188). The similarities between Alexander the Great and the Ottoman sultans under whose dominions the Alexander Romances in question were written stood out and became the building blocks of the period's historical imagination that equated these sultans and Alexander the Great (Beaudoen 2017, 188). The role played by the authors is to transform the knowledge into their time and re-shape the tradition with respect to both fiction and history. The change in social and political context may have

given authors the mission to start to develop a new literary direction and also continue on the basis of a new type of readership.

As we have seen above, in the texts of Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî, there is inter-textual connection and similarity between the themes, persons and events. For an interpretation of each text and case, cultural awareness is crucial; besides the parallelism, these texts also operate within the dominant cultural themes in their period. Despite the similarities, it should be noted that these texts may be retelling earlier narratives while narrating the most recent events.

This spry production through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries suggest that *İskendernâmes* enticed educated Ottoman circles. According to common events written of in Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî's versions, they describe events which encapsulate similar circumstance. These events offer meaningful insight into one or both base events (Beaudoen 2017, 187). Here, we know that the events themselves are not parallel but the context of one's birth can give rise to *circumstantial parallels* of events (Beaudoen 2017, 131). Beaudoen's concept of *circumstantial parallelism* can be instrumental also with the theme of the death and funerals (Beaudoen 2017, 114). For example, in Ahmedî's text the corpse of Alexander the Great was preserved; he was supposed to resist decay following his death (Sawyer 1997, 79). The preservation of the body of a king was shared by Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî as well. It is known that the death of several Ottoman sultans during the fifteenth and sixteenth century were concealed to delay the announcement of their passing away (Sawyer 1997, 83).

The functions of similar characters in these narratives also represent circumstantial continuity and parallelism (Beaudoen 2017, 156). These characters represent the parallel course that is significant to understand either one or both historical contexts. In other words, the role of the characters in these narratives can play an important role in understanding the continuity. Kingship in the narratives may not constitute a circumstantial parallelism but two kings who died on campaign attempting to conquer Persia would have circumstantial parallelism in the narratives.

Another common characteristic in these narratives is the geographic continuity; the settings are mainly in Anatolia, Rumelia, and the Middle East. The Balkans remained of common importance for Alexander the Great's kingdom and the Ottoman State in the fifteenth and sixteenth century (Beaudoen 2017, 157). Here, what is significant is the fact that *İskendernâmes* have an expansive circulation history which extends beyond the

fifteenth and sixteenth century. Such *circumstantial parallelisms* can provide us with parallels in two chronologically distant events.

All Alexander Romances follow similar tracks; the events told involve similar circumstances and may have similar outcomes. One of the most important features of *circumstantial parallelism* is that it provides us a better understanding of how fifteenth and sixteenth century audiences might have connected with Alexander.

Alexander Romances offer great opportunities to explore the length of the shadow that Alexander the Great cast on the Ancient, Medieval and Modern world. The Ottoman Alexander Romance tradition did not disappear until the first half of the sixteenth century. Through Ottoman reconstructions of the people and the events out of its own historical imagination, the concept of *circumstantial parallelism* may help to understand all narratives that were analyzed before separately because the *circumstantial parallelism* may examine the mentality of the Ottoman Empire when constructing its own historical imagination. The parallelism can be related in several ways such as places, events and persons. The context of Ahmedî shared the common features and certain circumstantial parallels with the political and cultural context of the reception of his *İskendernâme*. After analyzing Ahmedî's work and its role as being one of the most important sources for Ahmed-i Ridvan rather than Figânî. Because of dynastic legitimization, these *İskendernâmes* have very important roles because these authors tell of the deeds of Ottoman sultans as examples of world conquerors comparable to Alexander the Great. Each of these contexts offer themes that can explore the important roles that *İskendernâme*, kingship and the model world conqueror played in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century Ottoman historical imagination (Beaudoen 2017, 144).

One of the common arguments in these texts highlights the possible motivations for the active Ottoman participation in the tradition of Alexander Romance. All the Alexander Romances discussed here reflected the dynamic context of the fifteenth and sixteenth century as a "mirror". All these narratives underscored the periods of their time and the image of kingship at the courts where the authors were employed at -- simply because the relevant rulers are reflections of Alexander the Great. All of the authors gave their justifications regarding earlier *İskendernâmes*, drew a line between their period and the current political situation, then they wrote their work. All *İskendernâmes* are a circle around the past, present and the epic. From Ahmedî until Figânî, the main objective was to represent advisory literature rather than political conditions or concerns. This is the reason why they emerged from earlier texts and had some similar elements which made

them popular among sultans and audiences. Eventually, authors made efforts to find an equivalent meaning of a text in other languages. In this regard, the authors had a set of units of meanings in the form of sentences and even words. However, this doesn't mean that they translated the whole *İskendernâme* from the original language to the secondary one or that these compositions are a rough translation of each other. Their common characteristics give them ground to reflect on their genres and common trends. All *İskendernâmes* have their own understanding and representations.

The work that was written by Ahmed-i Rıdvan during the reign of Bayezid II covered the sultan's legitimacy and sovereignty (Avcı 2014, 16). Their common denominator was mainly their Islamic Persian or Turkish aspect. The key point for all authors was to write, impose and construct a grand history conception where the Ottoman Empire was an inevitable and important component. In history, Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî used this method to link their past into this global and universal history from the early Islamic ages to the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. The main aim was to justify the roots of the Ottoman Empire in order to prove their past to the future. The common point in the authors' works was to show that the past could be interpreted as a cluster for the perfect representations of their time's sultan. The present could only be grasped by way of the wisdom extracted from the past. Therefore, they tried to read, interpret and rewrite earlier texts in order to shape or follow the previous model of a moral ruler. Hence, this was the perception of the authors and was counterbalance between varying uses of the perceptions of the past. All authors used Alexander as the symbol of a ruler. Their main aim was to morally educate the ruling elite. Other similarities that can be observed in these texts are the designs of the *İskendernâmes*. As Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* represents one of the most important sources in representing the Ottoman Empire's early fifteenth century *gaza* thesis, other sources also explain this progress. We need to take into consideration that these kinds of works can be seen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries much more than other centuries. Then, it can be concluded that these kinds of works weren't written to promote Alexander but instead represented the gaining of power of the Ottoman Empire in these centuries where the authors didn't promote Alexander as a world conqueror but instead promoted the sultans in the empire. After these centuries we cannot see the *İskendernâme* tradition but instead the *Selimname*, *Süleymanname*.

In conclusion, this thesis has argued that the Alexander Romance tradition in the Ottoman Empire in fifteenth century to sixteenth century provided a significant transition

for the Ottoman State that reflected in theme and circumstances. It is clear that these *İskendernâmes* have similar contributions but we can't say that they are a directly translation of one to another when we analyze them in respect to the concept of *circumstantial parallelism*, they are very important and representative of one tradition from its beginning until its end. All these works are the authors' philosophical engagements with history as a manifestation of good values, manners and ideal rulers. The common themes of these narratives: dynastic succession, wars, and conquests weigh heavily in both contexts. The main point to understand these narratives that was mentioned in the chapter lies in one to one comparison between Ahmedî, Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî that were produced and circulated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* is of one of the most important part of Alexander Romance tradition that holds Alexander the Great as a model ruler and world conqueror and main narrative which connecting distant centuries. The concept of *circumstantial parallelism* may help to understand all narratives that analyzed before as the separately because with it, one can examine the mentality of the Ottoman Empire when constructing its own historical imagination. The literature of Alexander Romance exploits had grown so rich and diverse that it could be interpreted in a great variety of the ways depending on one's perspective and situation of their time. For ever since the death of the historic Macedonian king, tales of his distant conquests and discoveries never failed to capture the imagination. Depending on the needs of different patron or patrons and different audiences, pre-existing treatments could be adapted to a variety of contemporary messages, not all of which lend themselves to a simple interpretation. This continuity flowed from Ahmedî to Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Nizâmî to Figânî, where the context in which the epics were written was reflected in the varied accounts of what is, in effect, the same story. The similarities between the texts examined, while significant, do not condemn them to being considered copies of one another; rather, a case of a living, growing tradition of storytelling, sovereign legitimacy, and parallelism comes to light.

## CONCLUSION

This discussion began with the *İskendernâme* as a category for analysis. It contextualized the Ottoman participation in the Alexander Romance tradition. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire's Alexander Romance tradition started with Ahmedî and continued with Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî. Ottoman participation in the Alexander Romance went beyond the narrative as envisioned by their Persian predecessors. Throughout history, the Alexander Romance was presented as a common cultural heritage but in different ways and, depending on one's perspective, Alexander could be presented as a philosopher, adventurer for new lands, the king of the Byzantine Empire or a Muslim Sultan.

There were several portrayals of Alexander the Great in different cultures and, from ancient literature, it entered the Islamic tradition through the Syriac version, which was then translated into Arabic, and eventually through Firdawsî's *Shahnāma* and Nizâmî's *Iskandarnāma* into Persian. The work of Firdawsî *Shahnāma* provides a crucial source for the Persian rendering of the Alexander Romances and Firdawsî contributed the earliest appearance of the Alexander Romance cycle in the New Persian context. The transformation of Alexander the Great from Greek into the Persian world was provided by Firdawsî. Nizâmî depicts Alexander the Great as both adventurer and mystic. One of the most important sources for these descriptions were *Shahnāma*. Firdawsî described Alexander the Great as a legitimate Persian king and an adventurer who brought its diverse population together into a single polity. Nizâmî portrayed Alexander the Great as an archetype for what a king should be. Following the Persian historiography, the Ottoman rendering of *İskendernâme* was best represented by Ahmedî in the fifteenth century.

Another important source for Ahmedî was Nizâmî. Nizâmî wrote his *Iskandarnāma* nearly after two hundred years after Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*. He divided his composition in two sections and represents Alexander in two ways. The first covers his



adventures in the *Sharafnama*. The second side of Alexander, representing his philosophical assembling at his court, is found in the *Iqbalnama*. The importance of Nizâmî is in his portrayal of Alexander the Great in a new perspective; he prompts a re-thinking of Alexander the Great and his relationship to universal philosophy and religion. Nizâmî articulated the new model for the Persian ruler as a perfect emperor who was spiritually cultivated through discourse with ascetics as well as a saintly retinue of philosophers. Nizâmî was influenced by Firdawsî in several cases and his allegories of spiritual ascent but there are also several differences. The main differences between these texts were that, while Firdawsî depicted Alexander the Great as adventurer and world conquer, Nizâmî perceived Alexander as most universally relevant for his time and the most suitable allegory for the universal soul (Beaudoen 2017, 156). Another important difference is the origin of Alexander: in his *Shahnāma*, Firdawsî claimed that Alexander the Great's father was the Persian king Darius I, but Nizâmî asserts that the father of Alexander was Philip of Macedon and maintained Alexander's Macedonian heritage as Alexander's marriage with granddaughter of Darius Raushanak continued the Persian dynasty through his bride. The well-known and most popular Anatolian Turkish *İskendername* was written by Ahmedî and presented to Emir Süleyman. As time passed, there emerged several copies of *İskendernâme*. It should be noted that all the *İskendernâmes* represent the perception of their times and periods.

The first representative of this work was Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, which was very popular in Ottoman literary society. This popularity stems from the earlier kings and heroes (Beaudoen 2017, 156). The idea of these works in promoting the model of kingship through essential cultural symbols became a tool for different rulers who attempted to assert their legitimacy by presenting themselves as connected to the values of their main subjects. In order to legitimize their rulers, authors needed to write their works in conformity with the concept of a state. In doing so, rulers adopted new ideas about kingship so as to legitimize their power and to govern ideally. Whether these accounts are true or not, it indicates that the *İskendernâmes* were a guide book of behavior for the royal elites. Ahmedî's information on Alexander shows us that his *İskendernâme* was influenced by Nizâmî rather than Firdawsî. However, we cannot say that Ahmedî's composition was a direct translation of Firdawsî, Nizâmî or other Persian authors, despite the fact that Ahmedî obtained his information about Alexander from Firdawsî and Nizâmî. By analyzing Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, we can see that there were two sides of Alexander. The first side was that of a conqueror while the second was that of a

philosopher. While Ahmedî constructed his work, he drew its image of Alexander the Great from Firdawsî and Nizâmî with several innovations and the *İskendernâme* existed in the new conception with respect to its Persian antecedents, reflecting both the literary and political turbulence of the period. After Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* in the Ottoman Empire, there are receptions of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*: Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî.

The studies on Alexander between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were performed firstly by Ahmed-i Rıdvan who was under the reign of Bayezid II. Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* served as a model for Ahmed-i Rıdvan despite there being some important differences in terms of content and style. However, it is undeniable that Ahmed-i Rıdvan was a scholar who tried to write an improved version of *İskendernâme*, although the earlier compositions had a more popular status (Avcı 2014, 76). Ahmed-i Rıdvan presented his *İskendernâme* to Bayezid II and, based on his *İskendernâme*, it can be seen that he attended several campaigns with him. In this production Ahmed-i Rıdvan was influenced by Ahmedî and their compositions are similar in style and language. When Ahmed-i Rıdvan wrote his *İskendernâme* in the model of Ahmedî, he added his own ideas and constructed his own work. The common part of these texts was representing rulers until but not including Emir Süleyman, as Ahmed-i Rıdvan didn't mention Emir Süleyman and proceeded directly to Mehmed II. The explanation of the rulers has similarities under the themes of war and image of kingship. On the other hand, when Ahmed-i Rıdvan examines the rulers he added some new ideas such as the conquests of rulers. The main difference is, while Ahmedî mentioned Timur in his study, Ahmed-i Rıdvan didn't at all. So, it is known that Ahmed-i Rıdvan modelled Ahmedî in several parts but it would be an injustice to say that his production was a direct translation of Ahmedî. Although there are similarities in several parts, the main aim of Ahmed-i Rıdvan was also to legitimate his ruler and the events can be seen as parallel but it is not true that we must consider it a simple translation.

Another important *İskendernâme* in sixteenth century is Figânî. There was no reliable and certain works about his life and career. Figânî's *İskendernâme* includes both prose and poetry sections and he mainly focused on Alexander's campaigns and conquests; especially his Eastern conquests. Figânî modelled Firdawsî and Nizâmî rather than Ahmedî. In his *İskendernâme*, Alexander was represented as a successful ruler and as a prophet as in Nizâmî's piece and he integrated Alexander into his text by adding some religious elements related with Nizâmî's approach. So, development of this production under Ottoman patronage can provide us with reasonable assumptions about

the political situations and changes which affected this work. On this point, Sawyer argues that there was a very important emphasis on empire and Islam, which was crucial to Ahmedî's patron(s) especially around 1402.

The studies which have been mentioned before were similar to Ahmedî's *İskendernâme* and the authors of these compositions recognized the political dimension of the *İskendernâme* and made sure to put this important aspect in their work. Nizâmî's *İskandarnāma* was based on Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*. By reading and understanding Nizâmî and other authors we are able to establish their works. These compositions were not a direct translation of one another and each of them presented unique perspectives, aspects and events in their own contexts. In doing so, they formed connections between the characters and events of their own texts and those of the *İskendernâme* and hence increased the impact of their studies. They all dealt with the idea of kingship: how to rule and legitimize yourself as a ruler, the divine connection and the election of a sultan and how to organize the state and deal with revolts (Sawyer 2003, 225-43).

When the Ottoman Empire was founded, challenges forced the rulers to legitimize their power and authority in several ways (Sawyer 2003, 273). This situation affected the Ottoman Empire especially in the fifteenth century and resulted in the emergence of a complex and sometimes conflicting communication of dynastic legitimacy. The *İskendernâmes* reveal the characteristics of a ruler and ideal government based on Alexander the Great and Persian sources. These books also shed light on the socio-political environment of all the poets' lives which they wanted to illustrate in their works. Framed in a symbolic meaning of these compositions in Ottoman literary, *İskendernâmes* have provided deep-stated meanings of identity and legitimacy for those who assert themselves as true heirs to the sultan.

In conclusion, the tradition of Alexander Romance held up from Late Antiquity. From the Greek literature it transferred to several different cultures within Persian Historiography and eventually to Ottomans. The first recension of Alexander Romance is Firdawsî's *Shahnāma*, Nizâmî's *İskandarnāma*. Ahmedî, in Ottoman Empire influenced by them and the *İskendernâme* tradition holding up Ahmedî and after him Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Figânî. When Ahmedî was analyzed it was observed that Ahmedî modelled himself after Firdawsî and Nizâmî. This is one of the most important effects of the inter-dynastic reactions and how Ahmedî constructed his epic influenced by those that preceded him. Ahmedî innovated his compositions during this turbulent period and his main aim was to write a long-rhymed work of a mystical and didactic nature under his

circumstances. It is broader cultural connections: after Ahmedî, Ahmedî-i Rıdvan and Figânî the ideological and link between Ottoman Empire and Alexander the Great was also created. The name of Alexander the Great had been used for one of the most popular names of an ideal, impressive ruler and this gave Alexander a “living” tradition. In the Ottoman Empire, one can recognize the circumstantial parallels and similarities in these texts. Kastritsis explains the wide popularity of the medieval İskender/Alexander the Great as a result of its contested cultural currency as a “seeker of universal truth and empire,” as well as its motifs of conquest during a time when Ottoman armies were expanding the domain of Islam into Christian Europe (Kastritsis 2016, 248). The similarities of these works under the Ottoman domain stood out and became the building blocks of the period’s historical imagination that equated sultan and Alexander the Great. The crucial points are the transmission of knowledge of Alexander the Great from Late Antiquity as well as more recent interpretations into the author’s time and context and the resulting reshaping of the tradition with respect to both fiction and history in a manner that would be unjust to label as simple copying. These texts, while heavily influenced by their predecessors, were more than mere translations. From Ahmedî to Ahmed-i Rıdvan and Nizâmî to Figânî, each imbued the same story with the political, social, and geographic circumstances of their periods while yet retaining the parallels that make the Alexander Romance.

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