

**The *Alexander Romance* in the Persian Tradition:
Its Influence on Persian History, Epic and Storytelling**

Submitted by Haila Manteghi Amin to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

This study aims to explore how the *Alexander Romance* entered the Persian literary tradition and to understand precisely its influence. The main question addressed is whether the *Alexander Romance* was part of the pre-Islamic Persian tradition and, if so, what its key characteristics were. Because of the dearth of pre-Islamic Persian sources, this thesis is necessarily mostly based on early Arabic and Persian sources written in the early Islamic period, some of which were derived from pre-Islamic traditions.

Aside from the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, the Arabic histories (Ṭabarī, Dinawarī, the anonymous *Nihāyat al-‘arab*, the *Ghurar al-Sayr* of Tha‘ālibī) included Alexander in their chapters on the Kayānid kings, presenting him as the half-brother of Dārā (Darius III). My examination of these histories largely focuses on their understanding of the Persian descent of Alexander, which is derived from the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag*. Most scholars have looked askance at the presence of a positive perspective on Alexander in the Persian world because the Zoroastrian tradition usually presented him as a cursed figure and one of Persia’s worst enemies. Perhaps one of the original contributions of this thesis will thus be its demonstration of the existence of a very positive view of Alexander in the classical Arabic and Persian sources that is not just the result of biases derived from the Islamic era, but which also reflects the viewpoint of numerous pre-Islamic Persian sources on Alexander.

Current research in the field also focuses on the influence of the *Alexander Romance* on Persian epics, romances and storytelling. In this respect, I have focused mainly on the two key literary genres: the popular romances, mainly in prose, and the epics, mainly in verse. Of great interest to this study are the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī (twelfth century), the epic of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī (tenth–eleventh century), besides the *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī (twelfth century). These works all preserve stories about Alexander the Great from the pre-Islamic Persian tradition.

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Table of Contents

System of Transliteration	7	
Definitions	7	Elimina
Abbreviations	8	Jose Fr
Introduction	9	Elimina
A Review of Key Secondary Sources on the <i>Alexander Romance</i>	13	Jose Fr
Chapter One: Greek and Syriac Versions of the <i>Alexander Romance</i> and their Development in the East	19	Elimina
I. The Greek Background.....	19	Jose Fr
II. The Syriac Sources Relevant to this Study.....	24	Elimina
III. The Development of the <i>Alexander Romance</i> in the East.....	29	Jose Fr
Chapter Two: Arabic Accounts of Alexander the Great and the Legacy of Sasanian Historiography	33	Elimina
I. Arabic Sources and the Historical Tradition in Pre-Islamic Iran.....	36	Jose Fr
II. The <i>Khudāynāmag</i> , its Content and Sources.....	37	Elimina
III. Alexander the Great in the <i>Khudāynāmag</i>	55	Jose Fr
Conclusion: The Origin and Development of the <i>Alexander Romance</i> in the Arabic/Persian Tradition.....	57	Elimina
Chapter Three: Alexander the Great in the <i>Shāhnāma</i> of Firdawsī	60	Jose Fr
I. Sources and Contents of the <i>Shāhnāma</i>	61	Elimina
II. Summary of the <i>Alexander Romance</i> in the <i>Shāhnāma</i>	62	Jose Fr
III. Distinguishing Characteristics and Motifs of Firdawsī's <i>Alexander Romance</i>	68	Elimina
Conclusion: Firdawsī's Sources and his Portrayal of Alexander.....	87	Jose Fr
Chapter Four: Alexander the Great in the Arabic and Persian Popular Romances	89	Elimina
I. The <i>Dārābnāma</i> : A Hellenistic Romance in the Persian Language.....	92	Jose Fr
II. The <i>Sīrat al-Iskandar</i> and the <i>Khudāynāmag</i> Tradition.....	98	Elimina
Conclusion.....	99	Jose Fr
Chapter Five: Alexander in the <i>Iskandarnāma</i> of Nizāmī Ganjavī (1141–1209) ..	101	Elimina
I. Literary and Historical Contexts of Alexander's Personality in Nizāmī's <i>Sharafnāma</i>	102	Jose Fr
II. Alexander's Birth and Early Years in Nizāmī's <i>Sharafnāma</i>	120	Elimina
III. Of Banquets and Battles (<i>bazm u razm</i>): Alexander as Warrior.....	125	Jose Fr
IV. Further Adventures of Alexander: Journeys to China, Russia, India and the Land of Darkness.....	142	Elimina
Conclusion.....	159	Jose Fr
Chapter Six: Alexander in the <i>Iqbāl-nāma</i> of Nizāmī Ganjavī	163	Elimina
I. Alexander in Islamic Wisdom Literature.....	166	Jose Fr
II. Alexander in the Dhū'l-Qarnayn Tradition.....	173	Elimina
III. <i>Mirabilia</i> : Alexander and the Marvels of the World.....	177	Jose Fr

Conclusion.....	<u>192</u>	Jose Fr Elimina
Conclusion	<u>196</u>	Jose Fr Elimina
Appendix I: Summary of the Syriac <i>Alexander Romance</i>.....	<u>206</u>	Jose Fr Elimina
Appendix II: Summary of Alexander’s letter to Aristotle about the wonders of India and China in the Syriac <i>Alexander Romance</i> (Book III, 7).....	<u>212</u>	Jose Fr Elimina
Appendix III: Maps	<u>216</u>	Jose Fr Elimina
Appendix IV: Alexander’s Persian Genealogy	<u>218</u>	Jose Fr Elimina
Bibliography.....	<u>219</u>	Jose Fr Elimina Jose Fr Elimina

System of Transliteration

CONSONANTS			VOWELS	
ب	'	ض	d	Long: آ ā
پ	b	ط	t	أ ū
ت	p	ظ	z	إ ī
ث	t	ع	'	Doubled: عِئ iy
ج	th	غ	gh	وِئ uww
ح	j	ف	f	Diphthongs: أ aw
خ	ch	ق	q	إ ay
د	h	ك	k	Short: ا a
ذ	kh	گ	g	و u
ر	d	ل	l	ي i
ز	dh	م	m	
ژ	r	ن	n	
س	z	ه	h	
ش	zh	و	w	
ص	s	ی	y	
	sh	ة	-a (-at in construct state)	
	ṣ			

N.B. Known Iranian scholars' names are written without any transliteration, e.g. Khaleghi-Motlagh, Yarshater, etc. The *izāfa* is rendered as *-i* after consonants and as *-yi* after vowels. Transliteration of Arabic words follows the transliteration table of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Definitions

Pahlavi/Middle Persian: The term “Pahlavi” denotes the Middle Persian language derived from Old Persian. It was spoken during the long period between the third century to the ninth century AD and continued to exist in Iran as a dead language kept alive only by the religious tradition, cultivated by the Zoroastrians up to the tenth century. Today the term “Middle Persian” is preferred since it is less ambiguous than “Pahlavi”, which is derived etymologically from Old Persian *pathava*, and has the exact meaning of “Parthian”, a language from north-eastern Iran corresponding roughly to the region of Khurāsān today. In the early Islamic times, this term developed the meaning of “earlier, older” with respect to the culture of this period and the figurative sense of “ancient, heroic”.

Rūm: The term *Hrōm* in Middle Persian indicates the western territories of the Persian world, identified with Anatolia, and remained in use as *Rūm* in the Islamic period. Every kingdom which had this region under its power was called *Hrōm/Rūm* in Middle Persian/Arabo-Persian. Hence *Rūm* is generally identified as the Byzantine Empire during the Sasanian and early Islamic period. Later, the Seljuk kingdom was also known as the Kingdom of *Rūm*. In particular circumstances and texts cited below, however, *Rūm* can indicate Greece, and the adjective *Rūmī*, Grecian.

Dhū’l-Qarnayn: The Bicorn or the Two-Horned One in the Qur’ān, the Hellenistic representation of Alexander the Great with the ram’s horns of the Egyptian god Amon-Ra.

Persian Alexander Romance: When speaking of the Persian *Alexander Romance*, we are referring to the sources in which there are motifs derived from the Pseudo-Callisthenes’s Alexander biography.

Abbreviations

Full details for the books and articles cited in the thesis are given in the notes on their first appearance, and also in the Bibliography. The following works of reference are abbreviated in the notes:

EI² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition (eds.) P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs, 12 vols (Leiden, 1960–2005).

EIr *Encyclopædia Iranica*, general ed. E. Yarshater, 17 vols (London, 1982-2013)

PC Pseudo-Callisthenes

Introduction

حدیث آن که سکندر کجا رسید و چه کرد
ز بس شنیدن گشته است خلق را از بر

The *dicta* and *exempla* of Alexander,
The tale of his exploits and of where he went
Have so much been heard by men wide and far,
His story now is known to all by heart.

-Farrukhī Sīstānī (d. 1037)¹

Although many of the great works of Greek literature remained unknown to the Muslims, some forms of Greek literature persisted and re-emerged in Arabic (and Persian) guise.² One of the most influential works of the literature of late Greek antiquity, the *Alexander Romance* attributed to the so-called Pseudo-Callisthenes (PC), had a deep impact on the Persian world. This impact is mainly attested in popular romances, epic literature, heroic cycles and historical sources of the Islamic era. As indicated by the verses quoted above from the Persian court poet Farrukhī Sīstānī,³ by the eleventh century Alexander's story was so famous that it was known intimately and recited from memory. To give an example of the popularity of Alexander's story in the Persian tradition, it is worth mentioning that in Khāqānī's (twelfth century), Farrukhī's (eleventh century) and 'Unṣurī's (eleventh century) *Dīvāns* alone, Alexander and his deeds are mentioned more than 30 times.⁴

¹ Farrukhī Sīstānī, *Divān*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Sīyāqī, (Tehran, 1335/1957 [4th ed. 1371/1992]), p. 66. I thank Dr Leonard Lewisohn for the poetic translation of this verse. I am indebted to Dr Stoneman for mentioning that the quote from Sīstānī bears a great resemblance to Chaucer's (d. 1400) lines in "The Monk's Tale". See *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1951; repr. 2003), pp. 208–9:

[The story of Alexander is so famous
That it is known to everyone at least
In part, unless he be an ignoramus.
He conquered the wide world from west to east
By force of arms, and as his fame increased
Men gladly sued to have him for their friend.
He brought to naught the pride of man and beast
Wherever he came, as far as the world's end.]

² Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein (London/New York, 1975, reprinted 1994), p. 255.

³ For more information regarding this Persian poet see Dh. Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt dar Irān*, 12th ed. (Tehran, 1371/1992), vol. I, pp. 531–46; F. de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey, V/1: Poetry to ca. A.D. 1100* (London, 1992), vol. V/1, pp. 108–12.

⁴ See M. Kayvānī, "Iskandar dar adab-i Fārsī", *Dānishnāma-yi zabān va adab-i Fārsī*, ed. Ismā'īl Sa'ādāt (Tehran, 1384/2005), vol. I, p. 404.

One of the key aims of this study is to trace back the origins of the Alexander legend in the Persian tradition in order to determine how the *Alexander Romance* entered that tradition and what was its impact upon Persian literature.

Alexander as a literary figure is one of the most popular figures in the Persian literature and many books are dedicated to his stories. Unfortunately, all known versions of the legend of this great Greek hero were written down in the Islamic period in Arabic or Persian, as a result of which most are highly Islamised. However, it is still possible to detect and trace some of the pre-Islamic Persian stories about Alexander in these sources.

Because of the lack of pre-Islamic Persian sources, it is difficult to tell the extent to which these *Alexander Romances* actually reflect pre-Islamic traditions and history, or articulate later Islamic hagiographical biases. As mentioned above, it can be stated that all extant Pahlavi texts represent Alexander as a cursed figure who set fire to the holy scriptures of the Persians, razed their fire temples and generally destroyed the entire country, thus viewing him as one of the greatest enemies of historical Iran. This negative vision further complicates the study of the Alexander legend in the classical Persian tradition. However, it should be recalled that the Persian kings dominated a vast territory that was home to many different ethnic and religious groups, each with their own languages and traditions, so this negative vision of Alexander in the Pahlavi sources, which primarily reflects the Zoroastrian tradition, is not always uniform. The heroic and historical traditions, which mainly present Alexander as a Persian king or hero, are reflected in later Arabic and Persian sources.

While the Greek and Latin literatures of the Roman Empire, the Persians' main rival, were substantially preserved by later generations according to their own peculiar historical circumstances, Persian literature of the same period is almost completely lost. Middle Persian was displaced by Arabic after the Arab conquest and for the next two centuries Arabic superseded written Iranian languages almost entirely. However, despite the lack of pre-Islamic literature in Middle Persian, some scholars have proven that a number of Greek books were first translated into Middle Persian during the Sasanian period and then translated from Middle Persian into Arabic during the early 'Abbāsīd period (second half of the eighth century to the early ninth century).⁵ Nearly all of the

⁵ For translation from Greek to Middle Persian and then to Arabic see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia* (New Haven, 1975); Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Baḡdād", *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 231–67; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (London/New York, 1998), especially pp. 25–7; Gutas, "The 'Alexandria to Baghdad' Complex of Narratives: A Contribution to the Study of Philosophical and Medical Historiography among the Arabs", *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 10 (1999), pp. 155–93. For translations from Middle Persian into Arabic see Antonio Panaino, "L'influsso greco nella letteratura e nella cultura medio-persiana", *Autori classici in lingue del Medio e Vicino Oriente* (Rome, 2001), pp. 29–45; F. de Blois, "Tardjama: Translations from Middle Persian (Pahlavī)", *EF*, X, 231b–2b; Shaul Shaked, "From Iran to Islam: Notes on Some Themes in Transmission", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), pp. 31–67; Shaked, "*Paymān*: An Iranian Idea in Contact with Greek Thought and Islam", in

original Middle Persian versions have been lost along with most of that language's literature, but some survive in Arabic translation and also in Persian. Their survival in Arabic is, in fact, the only reason we know of the Middle Persian stage. In our search for texts in Middle Persian, these Arabic texts suffice to prove that some form of Middle Persian literature existed.

Within this framework, the Persian Alexander tradition is an important but little-discussed component of the Persian literary tradition. Although the Alexander literature in Persian is part of a very widespread Arabic tradition, the latter itself belongs to a tradition developed in the Middle East and Central Asia and consists of several branches. A great number of these branches are based on Syriac and Middle Persian sources. Therefore, the content of the different Arabic and Persian sources lies at a crossroads of two areas of investigation: that of the Syriac sources and that of Middle Persian literature, reflected in the Arabic and Persian literature. The Syriac traditions on Alexander the Great played a fundamental role in the development of his legend in the Islamic world. For this reason, this study focuses on Syriac sources as well as the better-known Arabic and Persian texts.

Almost all Arabic and Persian sources which treated Alexander are based on the PC tradition. Furthermore, in the first chapter, this study investigates the different hypotheses that have been proposed to explain the historical origins and different versions of the PC in Greek. The chapter also endeavours to set out the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Syriac sources to investigate which elements, from the various areas within the Alexander literary corpus, were influential in the Persian tradition.

The second chapter deals with the Arabic historical sources which are supposed to be influenced by the *Khudāynāmag* (*Book of Sovereigns*) tradition. My contribution to this debate has been to focus on the Sasanian sources which comprise a fundamental part of the background of the Arabic historical works. In the preliminary stages of my research, I gathered what evidence I could find on the pre-Islamic Persian *Alexander Romance* and explored those traditions that pointed to the transmission of the work into Middle Persian. I have thus attempted to study the different hypotheses regarding the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the East.

It is vital, of course, to establish, if possible, each component part of this *Alexander Romance* that the historians incorporated into their universal histories from the *Khudāynāmag* or from other Persian legends concerning Alexander the Great. There is no doubt that among the Arabic Alexander traditions there was an important Persian line of transmission of the seventh-century text that was in circulation in the territories that had belonged to the Sasanians before the Arab conquest. My intention here has been to rebuild the components of this Persian line of transmission through highlighting the similarities shared by the *Romance* with various Arabic histories written by

Transition Periods in Iranian History. Actes du Symposium de Fribourg-en-Brisgau (22–24 mai 1985), Studia Iranica 5 (Paris, 1987), pp. 217–40.

historians who were generally Iranian in origin or lived in eastern Iran, especially in Khurāsān, juxtaposing these to accounts found in the Persian *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī (tenth–eleventh century). All these sources treated the story of Alexander as a part of “Persian history”, an issue that is thoroughly explored in chapters two and three. In this process, the story of Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* is a very important clue because it represents certain characteristics, as we will see in chapter three, that have not survived in any other source. Therefore, the *Shāhnāma*, as a representative of the *Khudāynāmag* tradition, will shed light on the development of the *Romance* in the pre-Islamic Persian tradition.

On the other hand, some of the Persian sources treated the *Romance* as part of the literary genre of storytelling. In this respect, a popular romance known as the *Dārābnāma* (*Book of Dārāb*) of Ṭarsūsī⁶ is significant, being a unique source in Persian literature that presents an unprecedented Hellenic trend in the Persian language. Since it is important to take into account the oral background of the Persian tradition, chapter four is dedicated to the oral tradition and its contribution to the preservation of some of the oldest traces of the Alexander legend reflected in the popular romances.

Chapters five and six are dedicated to the study of the first and second parts of the *Iskandarnāma* (*Book of Alexander*) of Nizāmī Ganjavī (twelfth century), the *Sharafnāma* (*Book of Honour*) and the *Iqbāl-nāma* (*Book of Fortune*) respectively. In the *Iskandarnāma*, Nizāmī compiled a large number of stories on Alexander from the Sasanian period. The poet of Ganja had already showed his knowledge of Sasanian literature in two other works, the *Khusraw o Shīrīn* (*Khusraw and Shīrīn*) and the *Haft Paykar* (*The Seven Beauties*), which deal with the adventures of two Sasanian kings, Khusraw II (r. 590–628) and Bahrām V Gōr (r. 420–38). The *Iskandarnāma* is thus a valuable work in the pre-Islamic Persian tradition on Alexander. Since there is almost no comprehensible translation of the *Iskandarnāma* in English, these chapters are inevitably descriptive. However, they are important because this is almost the first time that the *Iskandarnāma* has been studied deeply and in comparison with the Greek *Alexander Romance* in the English language. This study of the *Iskandarnāma* shows the great variety of fields and genres in which the *Alexander Romance* influenced the Persian tradition (*mirabilia*, wisdom literature, especially the “mirror for princes” genre, etc.).

In terms of methodology, my basic approach has been to compare Greek, Syriac and Arabic sources with Persian sources in an attempt to establish the transmission line of the *Alexander Romance* from its earliest origins in Alexandria in the third century BC to its appearance in the Persian world in the tenth century AD (i.e. in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī). Apart from tracing the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition, this study has aimed to reveal the *Romance*’s influence upon various genres of classical Persian literature (historiography, epic, romance and the mirror for princes genre), both verse and prose.

⁶ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, ed. Dh. Šafā (Tehran, 1344–6/1965–8).

Various studies have been dedicated to delineating the varieties of the different *Alexander Romances* in Persian literature.⁷ My own contribution to this debate is novel in several ways. First, my research has led me to postulate – and, hopefully, demonstrate – that the negative perspective on Alexander in the pre-Islamic Persian tradition was just one of many views. Secondly, this study endeavours to demonstrate that the *Alexander Romance* was included in the *Khudāynāmag* and that this is why the Arabic historical accounts (e.g. Ṭabarī, Dīnawarī, etc.) and Firdawsī represented Alexander in the Kayānids’ cycle. Thirdly, this thesis makes use of the latest material in Persian (published over the past three decades) in terms of critical editions of historical texts, scholarly monographs, encyclopaedia articles and recent academic research published in various journals in Iran and the West. Most previous studies of the legend and romance of Alexander were undertaken at a time when critical editions of many of the Persian sources studied here were still unavailable, existing only in manuscript form and so largely unknown to scholars. The main sources utilised in this research are the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, the *Sharafnāma* and the *Iqbāl-nāma* of Niẓāmī, and the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī. All these books have been carefully compared with the Greek *Alexander Romance* as well as with the important Syriac and Arabic sources.

A Review of Key Secondary Sources on the *Alexander Romance*

One of the most interesting aspects of the Persian sources on Alexander the Great is their particular “Iranian” standpoint, which seems to reflect the view of a conquered people remembering their conqueror. As mentioned above, most of the Persian sources were composed retrospectively many centuries later, and written down in the Islamic period. It is thus quite interesting to observe how even after more than a thousand years, the memory of Alexander as a hero, conqueror and founder of a dynasty stubbornly persisted, being continuously retold and recast in the popular oral tradition, in historical chronicles and literary accounts, both in prose and verse. The variety of Persian legends and stories about Alexander is proof of the great impact he had upon Persian culture. To understand this peculiar “Iranian” image of Alexander found in the Persian sources, it will first of all be helpful to provide an overview of the important recent scholarly research on the Persian *Alexander Romances*.

Recent studies on the Persian Alexander legends are almost as numerous as the various versions of *Alexander Romances* (*Iskandarnāmas*) themselves. The pioneer of studies of Persian accounts of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran was the late Īraj Afshār (d. 2013), who published and edited the anonymous *Iskandarnāma-yi manthūr* (*The Book of Alexander in Prose*),⁸ which probably dates from the fifth/thirteenth century.⁹ In

⁷ The next section (A Review of Key Secondary Sources on the *Alexander Romance*) offers a review of important studies in this field.

⁸ *Iskandarnāma*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran, 1343/1964; repr. Tehran, 1387/2008).

⁹ On its dating, see Muḥammad Taqī Bahār, *Sabk-shināsī ya tarīkh-i taṭavvur-i nathr-i fārsī* (Tehran, 1942), vol. II, pp. 128–51.

the introduction to his edition of this text, Afshār explains the development of the *Alexander Romance* based on Nöldeke's theory of its transmission.¹⁰ Minoos Southgate's translation of Afshār's edition of the *Iskandarnāma* constitutes one of the first studies of the Persian sources on Alexander in English.¹¹ Southgate's work on the *Romance* also concentrates on the Iranian Islamic image of Alexander in the Persian tradition, providing a detailed analysis of the content, language and historical framework of this Persian *Alexander Romance*, briefly and succinctly comparing the portrayals of Alexander featured in various Persian accounts.¹²

Another Iranian scholar of similar calibre and importance to Afshār is the great literary historian Dhabīḥu'llāh Ṣafā, who edited the *Dārābnāma* of Abū Ṭāhir Ṭarsūsī (or Ṭartūsī). In his introduction to this text, Ṣafā briefly compares the content of Ṭarsūsī's *Dārābnāma* with the account of Dārā and Alexander given by Firdawsī in the *Shāhnāma* and, like Afshār, details the development of the *Romance* in the East based on Nöldeke's theory.¹³ Ṣafā belongs to the camp of Iranian scholars who reject the possibility of the existence of any positive image of Alexander in pre-Islamic Persia, an opinion that he expresses in various works.¹⁴ Ṣafā strongly advocates the view that Firdawsī's version of the *Alexander Romance* was not included in the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag* and was an independent work, incorporated into the *Shāhnāma* from an Arabic source. It may be noted that this is the view of the majority of Iranian scholars.¹⁵

In the study of the development of the *Alexander Romance* in Persian tradition, the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī occupies a very important place, insofar as it preserves archaic, semi-mythological Iranian legends about Alexander that we cannot find in other sources because of the later Islamisation of Alexander's image. Furthermore, the text sheds valuable light on the process of reconstruction and the reception history of the Alexander legend in Persia.

The first scholar to detect these "Iranian" characteristics in the *Dārābnāma* was William Hanaway. In his 1970 thesis on pre-Safavid romances, he contributed further to the study of this twelfth-century Persian prose romance, albeit in a limited fashion.¹⁶ In particular he included the *Dārābnāma* in a comparative study of five pre-Safavid prose romances, all of which he termed "popular". Concerning the *Dārābnāma*, this

¹⁰ Nöldeke's theory, based on a philological examination of the Syriac translation of the PC, launched the hypothesis that the Syriac *Romance* must have been translated from a lost Middle Persian version, which in turn depended on a Greek recension of the text. See Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans* (Wien, 1890), pp. 11–17. For more information regarding the different theories on the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the East, see chapter one of this thesis.

¹¹ See Minoos S. Southgate (trans.), *Iskandarnamah: A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance* (New York, 1978), which is a translation of the Persian text edited by Afshār (published in 1964 under the title *Iskandarnāma*).

¹² See also M. S. Southgate, "Portrait of Alexander the Great in Persian *Alexander Romances* of the Islamic Era", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97 (1977), pp. 278–84.

¹³ Abū Ṭāhir Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, ed. Dh. Ṣafā, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 2536 Shāhanshāhī/1977), vol. I, pp. 13–19.

¹⁴ Dh. Ṣafā, *Ḥamāsa-sarāyī dar Irān* (Tehran, 1363/1984), pp. 89–90.

¹⁵ See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Jā-yi Rustam, Arash, Isfandīyār, Gushtāsp, Jāmāsp va Iskandar dar Khudāynāma", *Nāma-yi Irān-i Bāstān* 9.1–2 (2009–10), pp. 19–24; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Az Khudāynāma tā Shāhnāma", *Nāma-yi Irān-i Bāstān* 7.1–2 (2007–8), pp. 29–30.

¹⁶ William L. Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances before the Safavid Period" (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1970; published by UMI Dissertation Services, 1972).

comparison mainly involved motifs relating to the Persianisation of Alexander in Persian literature. Hanaway's thesis was the first serious contribution towards the formulation of a basic knowledge of the contents of the *Dārābnāma*. He observed elsewhere that there was a relationship between Alexander and the goddess Anāhītā in the work.¹⁷ In addition, Hanaway's entry on the *Iskandarnāma* in the *Encyclopædia Iranica* provides a general introduction to the Persian *Alexander Romance* as well as useful information on the different hypotheses about the provenance of Eastern translations of the work.¹⁸ Hanaway also explored the contents of different versions of the text both in poetry and prose and in this respect his work is very complete.

Three decades later, Marina Gaillard translated into French selections from the *Dārābnāma*, in the introduction to which she presented a valuable study of the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition. Gaillard posited that Alexander was introduced in the *Khudāynāmag*, although she did not analyse the possible portrayal of him presented in this Sasanian chronicle.¹⁹

Among other extensive studies on Alexander in Persian literature should be mentioned the Persian monograph *Alexander and Persian Literature and his Religious Personality* (1985) by Ḥ. Şafavī.²⁰ This study is divided into four principal chapters that explore different aspects of Alexander in Persian literature from historical, literary, mythological and religious points of view. Şafavī summarises and compares stories and legends concerning Alexander the Great based on Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, Niẓāmī's *Iskandarnāma* and the Arabic historical accounts. The main focus of Şafavī's chapter on the religious aspect of Alexander concerns his role in the Qur'ān as the Bicornous/Two-Horned One and prophet (Dhū'l-Qarnayn).

Another study, published by Gh. Bīgdilī in 1991, is dedicated to the image of Alexander in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* and Niẓāmī's *Iskandarnāma*.²¹ This study is essentially a comparison of these two poems and explores neither the historical sources utilised by the two poets nor the development of the *Romance* of Alexander in Persian literature. Regarding the latter, two excellent studies by Majd al-Dīn Kayvānī on Alexander's place in Persian literature are worth mentioning.²² Kayvānī examines the figure of Alexander as it appears in the possible Pahlavi translation of the PC tradition down to various versions of the *Romance* composed during the Islamic period. The novelty of his study lies in his analysis of the image of Alexander in Persian poetry, especially Sufi mystical poetry, and in the genre of the panegyric ode (*qaṣīda*). Kayvānī explores how different motifs from the *Alexander Romance* were used as similes and metaphors by various poets during their versification of the great deeds of a certain

¹⁷ W. L. Hanaway, "Anahita and Alexander", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102 (1982), pp. 285–95.

¹⁸ W. L. Hanaway, "Eskandar-Nāma", *Elr*, VIII, p. 611.

¹⁹ Ṭarsūsī, *Alexandre le Grand en Iran. Le Dārāb Nāmeḥ d'Abū Ṭāḥir Ṭarsūsī*, trans. and annotated Marina Gaillard (Paris, 2005), p. 14.

²⁰ Şafavī, *Iskandar va adabīyāt-i Irān va shakhsīyat-i madhhabī-yi Iskandar* (Tehran, 1364/1985).

²¹ Gh. Bīgdilī, *Chihra-yi Iskandar dar Shāhnāma-yi Firdawsī va Iskandarnāma-yi Niẓāmī [The Portrait of Iskandar in Firdawsī's Book of Kings and Niẓāmī's Book of Alexander]* (Tehran, 1369/1991).

²² Majd al-Dīn Kayvānī, "Iskandar dar adabīyāt-e Irān" and "Iskandar-nāmahā", *Dānishnāma-ye zabān va adabīyāt-e fārsī*, ed. Ismā'īl Sa'ādat (Tehran, 1384/2005), vol. I, pp. 402–10.

monarch or lamenting the transient nature of the world. His brief study on the different Persian *Iskandarnāmas* and their contents is also extremely useful.

Two other articles that must be mentioned here are the brief lemma on “Al-Iskandar” by Montgomery Watt, and the almost equally brief article by A. Abel on “Iskandar Nāma” both in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.²³ Though useful for any scholar’s general knowledge of the Alexander legend in Islam, neither article contributes much to the subject under discussion in this dissertation.

The pioneer of the study of the Persian *Alexander Romances* in Western languages was Yevgeni Edvardovich Bertels. In his *Roman ob Aleksandre*,²⁴ Bertels examined the development of the Persian legend of Iskandar, incorporating into his study a detailed discussion of the contents of the important poetic renditions of the *Romance* by Firdawsī, Nizāmī, Amīr Khusraw, Jāmī and Alī Shīr Navā’ī. Unfortunately, he wrote his study before important works such as the *Dārābnāma* had been discovered. Not only does Bertels’s study explore the different sources and versions of the legend of Iskandar in classical Persian poetry, it also offers a brief survey of different aspects of Alexander’s image, such as his religious portrayal as Dhū’l-Qarnayn in the Qur’ān and his depiction in Persian *adab* literature.

Regarding Alexander in Persian literature, it is important to mention the recent Ph.D. thesis by Yuriko Yamanaka, which is dedicated to examining Alexander’s image from antiquity to the Islamic era.²⁵ She has also authored various studies on similar topics,²⁶ in which she gives a good summary of various approaches to the romance adopted by Persian poets.

It is also worth mentioning two essays by Éve Feuillebois-Pierunek²⁷ and her contribution to this debate. She devoted her essays “L’épopée iranienne: le *Livre des Rois* de Ferdowsi”²⁸ and “Les figures d’Alexandre dans la littérature persane. Entre assimilation, moralisation et ironie”²⁹ to different aspects of Alexander in the Persian literature, although generalised.

²³ *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. E. Van Donzel, B. Lewis and Ch. Pellat, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1997), vol. IV, pp. 127–8. The article on the *Alexander Romance* (“Iskandar-Nāma”) explores the *Romance* in (i) Persian and (ii) Turkish literature, examining the Alexander legend in the poetic versions of Firdawsī and Nizāmī, which are compared to the Qur’ānic version.

²⁴ Bertels, *Roman ob Aleksandre* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1948).

²⁵ Yuriko Yamanaka, *Arekusand^a henso: kodai kara chusei isur^amu e [The Allegoresis of Alexander the Great: From Antiquity to Medieval Islam]* (Nagoya, Japan, 2009).

²⁶ Yuriko Yamanaka, “From Evil Destroyer to Islamic Hero: The Transformation of Alexander the Great’s Image in Iran”, *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 8 (1993), pp. 55–87; Yamanaka, “Ambiguïté de l’image d’Alexandre chez Firdawsī”, *Problematics of Power: Eastern and Western Representations of Alexander the Great*, ed. M. Bridges, and J. Ch. Bürgel (Bern/New York/Paris, 1996), pp. 341–53; Yamanaka, “The Philosopher and the Wise King: Aristotle and Alexander the Great in Arabic and Persian Literature”, *Proceedings of the International Congress Comparative Literature in the Arab World*, ed. A. Etman (Cairo, 1998), pp. 73–88.

²⁷ Éve Feuillebois-Pierunek (ed.), *Épopées du monde: pour un panorama (presque) général* (Paris, 2011).

²⁸ Feuillebois-Pierunek, “L’épopée iranienne: le *Livre des Rois* de Ferdowsi”, *Épopées du monde: pour un panorama (presque) général*, ed. Éve Feuillebois-Pierunek (Paris, 2011), pp. 143–79.

²⁹ Feuillebois-Pierunek, “Les figures d’Alexandre dans la littérature persane. Entre assimilation, moralisation et ironie”, *Épopées du monde: pour un panorama (presque) général*, ed. Éve Feuillebois-Pierunek (Paris, 2011), pp. 181–202.

In this field, one cannot forget the impressive study by U. Marzolph³⁰ in which he demonstrates the vast influence of the *Alexander Romance* upon Persian literature. He explores how the *Romance* influenced the composition of an Islamic epic called *Hamzanāma* (*The Book of Ḥamza*).

Similarly, it is well worth mentioning the work of Faustina Doufekar-Aerts who, in *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, produced a valuable study of Alexander in Arabic literature and history.³¹ She explores the different aspects of the personality and legend of Alexander in the Arabic tradition, detecting four principal branches: the PC tradition, wisdom literature, portrayals of Alexander as Dhū'l-Qarnayn and the *Sīra* tradition (popular romances). *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* is a valuable contribution to the subject, covering the Alexander tradition through seven centuries. Nonetheless, such a study, I believe, remains incomplete without considering the legacy of the pre-Islamic Persian sources on Alexander in the Arabic historical accounts of the ninth and tenth centuries of the Islamic era. Doufekar-Aerts regards possible texts derived from Pahlavi intermediaries as being outside the scope of her research and affirms that “Middle Persian influence appears to play no role in the romances of the Arabic Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition.”³² However, the study of the Persian Alexander tradition, especially that of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī, as I hope to show in this thesis, sheds light on the development of the *Alexander Romance* and indicates the legacy of the pre-Islamic Persian sources in the Arabic tradition on Alexander.

In the present study, I try to demonstrate that, in contrast to Doufekar-Aerts’s opinion, there is indeed a Persian line of transmission in the Arabic PC tradition through Middle Persian sources. This line of transmission from Greek to Syriac, Arabic and Persian can, I would argue, be clarified and exposed by analysis of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī and the *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī, besides taking into consideration the Middle Persian background of the Arabic materials. In this respect, examining the case of the so-called Pahlavi translation of the PC both complements and completes some of Doufekar-Aerts’s conclusions (as indeed is shown below). It is clear that the Iranians displayed a particular interest in the life of Alexander and that this Pahlavi version must have influenced the compilation of the *Khudāynāmag*. This account influenced the early literary tradition in the Muslim world and, indirectly, later on, Firdawsī’s compilation of the *Shāhnāma*.

However, Jalāl Khaleghi-Motlagh believes that the Pahlavi translation of the PC is an independent work that was translated into Arabic in the Islamic period. He also believes that the legend of Alexander was not included in the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag* in the same form as it can be seen in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī,³³ but he does not clarify

³⁰ U. Marzolph, “The Creative Reception of the Alexander Romance in Iran”, *Foundational Texts of World Literature*, ed. Dominique Jullien (New York, 2012), pp. 69–83.

³¹ F. Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition through Seven Centuries: From Pseudo-Callisthenes to Šūrī* (Louvain, 2010).

³² Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 80.

³³ Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Jāy-i Rustam, Arash, Isfandiyār, Gushtāsp, Jāmāsp va Iskandar dar *Khudāynāma*”, pp. 19–24.

what form Alexander's story might have taken in the pre-Islamic Persian sources. He affirms that the authors of the *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manṣūr added the story to the work through this Arabic version based on a Pahlavi translation of the PC, following Nöldeke's hypothesis, and that it was through this source that the legend of Iskandar entered the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.³⁴ However, our study of the legend of Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* (chapter three) will show the complex structure of Firdawsī's account, which is derived from various sources.

In the present study, therefore, Firdawsī's account is analysed as a key account which received and transmitted much of the considerable pre-Islamic literary influence and in particular the influence of the PC tradition. The possible Middle Persian source of Firdawsī will be discussed considering all the theories mentioned here. This subject has not been adequately studied, as is shown by the lack of scholarship on the Persian Alexander tradition, both in terms of content (stories, motifs, profile of the hero and general concepts concealed in the narrative) and of connecting the materials with the periods in which they were compiled. It is hoped that this dissertation will advance research in both of these areas. Emphasis is given to literary connections between the Greek PC tradition and the Persian versions. The analysis of themes divided into main and secondary stories is an important contribution regarding the internal construction and the folk elements of the Persian *Alexander Romances*.

The works of Nöldeke, Frye and certain other Western scholars who have written about the Alexander legend and provided different theories on the Middle Persian translation of the PC during the early and mid-twentieth century, will be introduced in the first chapter of this thesis.

³⁴ Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Az *Khudāynāma* tā *Shāhnāma*", pp. 29–30.

Chapter One: Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Alexander Romance* and their Development in the East

فسانه گشت و کهن شد حدیث اسکندر سخن نو آر که نو را حلاوتیست دگر

The history of Alexander
Is all an ancient fable now.
– Go bring on what is novel, new,
For novelty's more savoury.

Farrukhī Sīstānī (d. 1037)¹

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the origin of the *Alexander Romance*, its contents and its development from Greek into Eastern languages, in particular Syriac, Arabic and Persian. In this thesis we will make mention of various motifs and different versions of this tradition, and it is thus necessary to discuss their background.

Furthermore, this chapter first offers a survey of the composition and different versions of the *Alexander Romance* in Greek, pointing out the different motifs to which we will refer in subsequent chapters. These motifs help us to understand on which source the later versions of the *Alexander Romance* in other languages are based. Second, this chapter presents a brief description of the most representative Syriac sources which influenced the Arabic and Persian versions of the tale. Lastly, we provide an outline of different theories regarding the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the East, indicating the contribution of this thesis.

I. The Greek Background

It seems that the Persian and Arabic authors of the Islamic period had no access to the so-called historical sources on Alexander the Great (i.e. the apparently historical accounts of Arrian, Plutarch, Diodorus, Curtius and Justin – some of which are not historical, at least in a straightforward sense).² The Arabic and Persian sources which deal with Alexander's history are based on a Greek work of popular literature known as the *Alexander Romance*. It is also known as PC (Pseudo-Callisthenes) because the work has erroneously been attributed to Callisthenes, the historian in Alexander's court, on the grounds of several fifteenth-century manuscripts.³

¹ Farrukhī, *Dīvān*, ed. Dabīr-Sīyāqī, p. 66. I thank Dr Lewisohn for the English translation of this verse.

² For the Greek and Latin historical sources on Alexander see E. Baynham, "The Ancient Evidence for Alexander the Great", *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. J. Roisman (Leiden, 2003), pp. 3–29. See also A. B. Bosworth (1994), "Alexander the Great, Part 1: The Events of the Reign", *The Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. D. M. Lewis et al. (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 791–845.

³ R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans* (Munich, 1954; 2nd ed. 1977), pp. 88–92; R. Stoneman (trans.), *The Greek Alexander Romance* (London/New York, 1991), p. 8.

The formation of the *Alexander Romance* was a gradual process. The traditional view is that the composition of the work as a single entity did not take place until the third century A.D., shortly before its translation from Greek into Latin by Julius Valerius.⁴ The anonymous author of the *Romance* is believed to have been “a competent speaker and writer of Greek” from Alexandria.⁵

The textual history of the Greek *Alexander Romance* is a very complicated one. However, as in the present thesis we make frequent references to different versions of the *Romance*, there is no option but to provide a synopsis of its textual tradition. The Greek work attributed to PC which appeared in the Middle Ages survives in three major versions known as “recensions”:⁶

- 1) **The α -recension:** represented by a single manuscript⁷ dated to the eleventh century.⁸ It is the source of the Armenian version⁹ (about the year 500)¹⁰ and the Latin version by Julius Valerius (by 340).¹¹

- 2) **The β -recension:** the author of the β -recension wrote some time after the Latin translation of Julius Valerius (by 340), but he was apparently unaware of the variants in the Greek source of the Armenian version.¹² The β -recension is represented by four “sub-recensions”:
 - I. *Sub-recension* ϵ : (MS *Bodl. Barocc.* 17, thirteenth century): with strong interest in Judaism (it contains the visit to Jerusalem).¹³
 - II. *Sub-recension* λ : a variant of the β -recension, preserved in five manuscripts. The most substantial additions are in Book III.¹⁴

⁴ For a study of the production of this *Romance* see Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans*; G. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge, 1956. repr. 1967), p. 9; R. Stoneman, “Primary Sources from the Classical and Early Medieval Periods”, *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden/Boston, 2011), pp. 1–9; Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (New Haven, 2008), pp. 2–3; Stoneman, *Il Romanzo di Alessandro*, trans. T. Gargiulo (Milan, 2007); Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 1–23.

⁵ See R. Stoneman, “The Author of the *Alexander Romance*”, *Readers and Writers in the Ancient Novel*, eds. M. Paschalis, S. Panayotakis and G. Schmeling (Groningen, 2009), pp. 142–54.

⁶ Stoneman, “Primary Sources”, pp. 3–9; Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 8, 28–32.

⁷ In the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Parisinus graecus 1711).

⁸ W. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni* (Berlin, 1926).

⁹ It was edited and translated into English by A. Wolohojian, *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes* (New York, 1969).

¹⁰ See Appendix I in Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 232.

¹¹ Julius Valerius, *Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis translatae ex Aesopo Graeco*, ed. M. Rossellini, 2nd ed. (Munich, 2004). See also Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 230, 236; Stoneman, “The Latin Alexander”, *Latin Fiction*, ed. H. Hofmann (London, 1999), pp. 167–8.

¹² It was edited (with full details of all the manuscripts) by L. Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman rezension Beta* (Stockholm, 1965). See also Stoneman, “Primary Sources”, p. 7; Stoneman, *A Life in Legend* (Appendix I), pp. 230–1.

¹³ Edition of Epsilon: J. Trumpf, *Vita Alexandri regis Macedonum* (Stuttgart, 1974).

¹⁴ Edition of Lambda: H. Van Thiel, *Die Rezension Lambda des Pseudo-Kallisthenes* (Bonn, 1959).

III. *Sub-recension* γ : the longest of the Greek recensions. It follows the basic structure of α and β , but incorporates new material from ϵ .¹⁵

IV. Manuscript *L* (*Leidensis Vulcanianus* 93): a unique variant of β with more adventures, in particular the episodes of the diving bell and the flying machine (II, 38–41).¹⁶

- 3) **The δ -recension:** not represented by any Greek manuscript. However, it is generally believed to be the source of oriental versions (in particular Syriac, Arabic, Persian and Ethiopian). It is also the source of the Latin translation of Leo the Archpriest (tenth century) known as *Historia de Proeliis*.¹⁷

In order to facilitate comprehension of the complicated contents of each recension, we first provide a brief summary of the text,¹⁸ and second point out their differences and variants using the visual aid of a table.¹⁹ The text is divided into three books.

Book I (47 chapters):

Book I deals with Alexander's birth, childhood and youth up to his succession to the throne. Alexander is the son of Nectanebo, the last Pharaoh of Egypt, who flees in disguise to Pella in Macedon because he has seen, through his magic arts, that his country will fall to Persian conquest. Nectanebo seduces Olympias when Philip is away on campaign. Olympias becomes pregnant and Philip accepts the child as his own since he considers him to be the son of the god Zeus-Amon. When Alexander is twelve years old, he kills Nectanebo by pushing him down a well. Then he learns that Nectanebo is his real father.

Chapters 15–24 deal with Alexander's youth. His teacher is Aristotle. He goes to the Olympic Games at Pisa near ancient Olympia. He also takes part in various military campaigns. Philip is murdered by a neighbouring king, Pausanias.

Chapters 25–36: Alexander succeeds to the throne and assembles a great army to continue Philip's planned campaign against the Persian Empire. There are various campaigns against Sparta, Athens and Thebes. Alexander moves to Egypt, where he founds the city of Alexandria and establishes the cult of Sarapis (I.30–34). He then

¹⁵ For editions see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 232; for description and editions see Stoneman, "Primary Sources", p. 9.

¹⁶ For an edition and German translation see H. Van Thiel, *Leben und Taten Alexanders von Makedonien: Der griechische Alexanderroman nach der Handschrift L* (Darmstadt, 1983); for an English translation see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*.

¹⁷ See Stoneman, "Primary Sources", pp. 17–19; Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 237; Stoneman, "The Medieval Alexander", *Latin Fiction: The Latin Novel in Context*, ed. H. Hofmann (London, 1999), pp. 238–40.

¹⁸ There is a summary of the *Romance* in its all variants in the different recensions in Stoneman, "Primary Sources", pp. 3–5.

¹⁹ The variations are added as supplements to Stoneman's English edition of the *Romance*; see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 161–88.

moves to Tyre and establishes a satrap there. He receives a letter from Darius, the King of Persia (I.35–36).

Chapters 37–46 deal with the first Persian campaign and other battles in Troy, northern Greece and Thebes (again). There is an exchange of boasting letters with Darius (I.38), and Alexander returns to Asia Minor (I.40).

Book II (44 chapters):

Chapters 1–6 deal with a debate in Athens about how to react to Alexander's campaigns.

Chapters 7–15: Darius assembles the Persian leaders and they discuss what they should do with Alexander. Meanwhile, Alexander is found in Cilicia (II.8). There are exchanges of letters with Darius. Alexander goes in disguise to the Persian court. He is recognised but escapes over the frozen River Stranga, which thaws as soon as he has crossed, so that his pursuers are swept away (II.13–15).

Chapters 16–20: A second battle with Darius is followed by the latter's death, murdered by his own commanders. Alexander finds him dying. The Persian king asks Alexander to marry his daughter Roxana and succeed him as king (II.20).

Chapters 21–44: Alexander exchanges letters with Darius's mother, wife and daughter, and becomes king. He also sends a letter to his mother Olympias, describing his adventures and then his travels into the Land of Darkness and an encounter with pygmies.

Book III (35 chapters)

The book begins with the Indian campaign: Alexander marches against Porus the Indian king and defeats him in single combat. He then encounters the Naked Philosophers of Taxila and questions them about their customs. Here the "Letter to Aristotle about India" (III.17) is inserted, focusing on strange beasts, the night when the army is attacked by monstrous animals and a visit to the talking trees, which predict Alexander's early death. (Other recensions add more marvellous adventures.)

Chapters 18–24 continue with Alexander's visit to Queen Candace of Meroe. He goes to her in disguise but is recognised because she has secretly had his portrait painted. Some adventures with Candace's sons take place.

Chapters 25–28: Alexander exchanges letters with the Amazons, who describe their way of life. He sends a letter to his mother describing his adventures, which have already been told, and also his visit to the City of the Sun (III.28).

The last chapters deal with Alexander's last days. He arrives in Babylon (III.30), where omens foretell his death. He is poisoned by Antipater, the regent of Macedon. He tries to drown himself but is prevented by Roxana. He writes his will, outlining the disposition of his empire after his death (III.33). He dies and his body is taken to Memphis, and then to Alexandria in Egypt. The text is concluded by a brief account of Alexander's deeds and the (twelve) cities he built during his "thirty-two years" of life.

Different variants, to which we will return through the analysis of the Arabic and Persian sources, are pointed out in the following table. As can be seen, later recensions omitted passages which take place in Greece (mainly the campaigns and the debate in Athens) and replaced them with more marvellous adventures. They also added extra material whose nature depended on the millennium in which they were compiled (Jewish or Christian materials). The δ -recension will be discussed in relation to the Syriac translation of the *Romance* and other oriental versions (Arabic and Persian) since no Greek version is extant.²⁰

Motif/Recension	α (by AD 338)	β (by AD 550)	γ ($\beta + \epsilon$) (9 th c.)	ϵ (8 th c.)	λ (8 th c.)	MS <i>L</i> (composition 14 th c.)
Olympic games at Olympia	✓	✓	At Rome	✓	✓	✓
Theban episode (the end of Book I)	✓					
Debate in Athens	✓					
The end of book II (21–44)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sirens dancing around a lake			✓	✓		
Diving bell and flying machine					✓	✓
Campaign to conquer Rome				✓		
Alexander in Judaea and Egypt			✓			
Visit to Jerusalem			✓	✓		
Alexander's conversion to Judaism				✓		
The Unclean Nations (from Ps.-Methodius) ²¹			✓	✓		
Palladius's <i>On the Life of Brahmans</i> (III.7–16) ²²	✓		✓			

²⁰ The existence of this recension is taken as a datum by scholars; see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 32, n. 9.

²¹ The *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius was translated into Greek from Syriac. The motif of Alexander enclosing Gog and Magog entered into western versions of the *Alexander Romance* through this text. See F. J. Martínez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius* (Ann Arbor, 1996), pp. 18–19; G. J. Reinink, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac ‘Apocalyptic’ Texts”, *Byzantinorossica* 2 (2003), pp. 150–78; Stoneman, “Alexander the Great and the End of Time: the Syriac contribution to the development of the *Alexander Romance*”, A Paper Given at Mardin Artuklu University, April 2012.

The motifs mentioned in this table are only those added to the later versions of the *Romance*. The table helps us to understand on which recension the later versions are based. For instance, the Persian poet Nizāmī (d.1202) is the only author who included the motif of mermaids dancing on the banks of a lake at night.²³ This leads us to conclude that his source was probably based on the ε or γ sub-recension. Another example is the *Ā'īna-yi Iskandarī* (*Alexander's Mirror*)²⁴ of Amīr Khusraw of Delhi (d. 1336), in which the motif of the diving bell appears.²⁵ Thus this implies that Amīr Khusraw had access to an ultimate source similar to the manuscript *L* or λ sub-recension.

II. The Syriac Sources Relevant to this Study

The most widespread Arabic and Persian traditions about Alexander are adaptations of three Syriac works, the *Romance*, *Legend* and the *Poem*, which were translated at unknown but evidently early dates.²⁶ This chapter also provides a brief description of other two Syriac texts: the *Laments of Philosophers at Alexander's Funeral* and the *Khuzistān Chronicle* (4 and 5, below). We consider the *Laments* in this thesis because, although it was not originally included in the *Alexander Romance*, it appears as an integrated part of the tale in Arabic and Persian versions. The *Khuzistān Chronicle* is not related to the *Alexander Romance* but it demonstrates the Nestorian influence at the end of the Sasanian period, when the *Alexander Romance* was introduced into Persian literature.

It is believed that all these textual traditions became commonplace in the Syriac context within Christian communities from the seventh century A.D. onward.²⁷ Here I should add a brief presentation of the relevant Syriac sources which influenced the Arabic and Persian versions. Different hypotheses regarding the source of the Syriac translation of the PC and its development in the Islamic period will be discussed separately in this chapter.

1. The Syriac *Alexander Romance* (*Taš'ītā d-'Aleksandrōs*)

²² This originally independent treatise is a fifth-century Christian rewriting of a Cynic diatribe written before the second century AD. See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 97–102, for editions and a translation see p. 232.

²³ See chapter six of this thesis on the *Iqbāl-nāma* (*Book of Fortune*).

²⁴ Due to the limit of this thesis this work is not studied here.

²⁵ Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, *Khamsa*, ed. A. Aḥmad Ashrafī (Tehran, 1362/1983), pp. 533–9.

²⁶ K. van Bladel, “The Syriac Sources of the Early Arabic Narratives of Alexander”, *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in South Asia*, ed. H. Prabha Ray and D. T. Potts (New Delhi, 2007), pp. 54–75.

²⁷ See J. P. Monferrer-Sala, “Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition”, *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden/Boston, 2011), p. 42.

Without doubt, the Syriac version of the PC is the most influential of all oriental versions of the *Alexander Romance*, harking back to the seventh century.²⁸ Wallis Budge edited and translated it into English in 1889.²⁹ It consists of three sections that coincide with the Greek textual tradition of the PC. As mentioned above, the source text was related to the Greek α -recension but differs so considerably that it has generally been reckoned a witness to a lost Greek recension known as the δ -recension, mentioned above. The first section contains forty-seven chapters, the second only fourteen, and the third consists of twenty-four chapters.³⁰

Two important aspects of this version relating to the Arabic and Persian sources are: 1) the Syriac text offers a fairly complete and accurate account of Olympias's affair with the Egyptian pharaoh Nectanebo, as related in the Greek version, which is not found in most of the Arabic and Persian sources; and 2) it tells about the expedition carried out by Alexander beyond the River Oxus, in Central Asia and China,³¹ visiting the Emperor of China and his adventures there (e.g. the dragon episode), which are also standard features of the Persian versions.³²

2. The Syriac Alexander Legend

The *Exploits of Alexander* (*Neṣḥānā d-'Aleksandrōs*), translated into English by Budge as *A Christian Legend Concerning Alexander*, is a short appendix attached to Syriac manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance*.³³ It was probably composed by a Mesopotamian Christian in Amid or Edessa.³⁴ It was written down in 629–30 after the glorious victory of Emperor Heraclius over the Sasanian king Khusraw II Parvīz.³⁵

²⁸ S. Gero, "The Legend of Alexander the Great in the Christian Orient", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 75 (1993), pp. 1, 5.

²⁹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great Being the Syriac Version* (New York/London, 1889 [reprint. New Jersey, 2003]).

³⁰ Due to the important influence of the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* in the Arabic and Persian sources, this thesis provides a detailed summary of each chapter in Appendix I. In addition, a summary of the Syriac PC with a reordering of its structure can be found in J. P. Monferrer-Sala, "Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition", pp. 60–63.

³¹ This part of the Syriac PC bears a great resemblance to the parallel stories of Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. Hence we provide a summary of this part in the Syriac PC in appendix II.

³² Other episodes only found in Syriac versions, as Stoneman points out, are "Aristotle's advice to Alexander about the building of Alexandria; Nectanebo's and Olympias's discussion of Philip's disaffection from his wife (I.14); the metaphor of the golden eggs (I.23); and the symbolic gifts of the mustard seeds (I.36 and 39). The commissioning of a painting of Alexander by the ambassadors from Darius is properly motivated only in this version, where it is shown to Darius's daughter. But there is a large lacuna at II.6–14, presumably the result of a defective Greek original" (Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, Appendix I, p. 233).

³³ For an English translation see W. Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 144–58. In this thesis I will refer to this work as the *Christian Legend*.

³⁴ K. Czeglédy, "The Syriac Legend Concerning Alexander the Great", *Acta Orientalia* 7 (1957), pp. 245, 249.

³⁵ Reinink underlines the political setting of the *Legend*, which clearly displays pro-Byzantine propaganda. See G. J. Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios' Kirchenpolitik", *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History, Offered to Professor Albert van Roey for His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. C. Laga, J. A. Munitiz and L. van Rompay (Louvain, 1985), pp. 263–81.

In this *Christian Legend*, Alexander becomes a Christian king who acts through God's will. The most important role of this text in the development of the *Alexander Romance* is the fact that the fusion of the motif of Alexander's barrier with the Biblical tradition of the apocalyptic people, Gog and Magog, appears for the first time in this text.³⁶ The story of Gog and Magog and the Gates of Alexander became a very important component of the Arabic and Persian sources.

3. The Syriac *Alexander Poem*: A metrical discourse (*mēmra*) concerning Alexander attributed to Jacob of Serūgh (d. 521).

The *Christian Legend* was the source for a metrical homily entitled "Poem on the pious king Alexander and on the gate, which he built against Gog and Magog".³⁷ The *Poem* was composed probably between 630 and 640 by an anonymous Christian author³⁸ in Northern Mesopotamia, probably in the neighbourhood of Amid.³⁹

In this text, Alexander appears as a wise and pious king who is only God's instrument in his divine plan. This is said to be the text alluded to in the Qur'ān, which explains how a pagan conqueror managed to be praised in the Muslim holy book.⁴⁰

The main content of the *Alexander Poem* deals with Alexander's travel to the Land of Darkness and his search for the Fountain of Life. Here Alexander starts his journey in Egypt and after sailing for four months, arrives in India, where the Fountain of Life is. However, Alexander's cook manages to bath in the Fountain when he wants to wash fish in it. Alexander does not obtain immortality because he does not find the Fountain. The other important element of the *Poem* is the "brass and iron door" which Alexander builds to enclose Gog and Magog. Both motifs are important components of the Arabic and Persian versions of the *Alexander Romance*.

4. The *Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander* in Syriac

This is a piece of Alexander literature not known in Syriac, but familiar from other Oriental sources as well as from Western European versions. In the early Middle Ages, collections of sayings of various "wise men" came to be attached to the story of Alexander's death, and in the course of time these gained enormous popularity both in the East, where they originated, and in the West, translated from Arabic.⁴¹

³⁶ See E. Donzel and A. Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Syriac and Islamic Sources: Sallam's Quest for Alexander's Wall* (Leiden, 2010), p. 17.

³⁷ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. lxxix–lxxxiii, 163–200. In this thesis I will refer to this work as the *Alexander Poem*.

³⁸ The authorship of Jacob of Serūgh (d. 521), to whom the text is ascribed by the majority of the Syriac manuscripts, is definitely out of the question. See Reinink, *Das Alexanderlied: Die drei Rezensionen* (Louvain, 1983), vol. II, pp. 1–15.

³⁹ Reinink, "Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac 'Apocalyptic' Texts", pp. 165–8; Reinink, *Das Alexanderlied*, vol. II, p. 12.

⁴⁰ See van Bladel, "The Early Syriac Sources", p. 58; Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, p. 22.

⁴¹ S. P. Brock, "The Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander in Syriac", *Journal of Semitic Studies* (15/1970), pp. 205–18; see also J. P. Monferrer-Sala, "Alexandri magni de anima dictum fictitum apud

This Syriac text, which was originally an independent work, was subsequently incorporated into the *Alexander Romance* cycle. The Arabic texts of Ya‘qūbī (d. 897),⁴² Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 940),⁴³ and Mas‘ūdī (d. 956),⁴⁴ and the Persian *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī (completed in 1010)⁴⁵ contain the *Laments*. Furthermore, it is likely that the *Laments* were an integrated component of the *Alexander Romance* by the tenth century.

5. The *Khuzistān Chronicle*

In 1889, the Italian scholar Guidi edited an East Syrian chronicle that covers the late Sasanian and very early Islamic period. Four years later, Theodor Nöldeke translated the text into German, and dated it to the late seventh century, arguing that it was probably composed around 652 or very soon afterwards, because the last reported event is the death of Yazdgird III, the last Sasanian king (632–51). He also argued that its provenance was southern Iran.⁴⁶ Thus, the text is known as the *Khuzistān Chronicle*.⁴⁷ It fills twenty folios at the end of a manuscript (*Borg. Syr.* 82) of the *Synodicon Orientale* or collection of the records of councils held by the Nestorian Church in Persia.

This single and very brief Syriac text is not related to the *Alexander Romance*. However, its contribution to knowledge of the present subject is considerable in two respects: first, it shows the position of extraordinary influence achieved by Yazdīn, Khusraw Parvīz’s (r. 590–628) Christian minister, which indicates the Christians’ power in the Sasanian court in the seventh century;⁴⁸ second, it contains some brief information on Alexander which can demonstrate what was known about Alexander the Great in Persia in the seventh century. The first passage is prefaced by a brief description of the city of Merv⁴⁹ and a note about the conquests and death of its founder, Alexander the Great. The passage, according to Guidi’s Latin translation,⁵⁰ is as follows:

philosophos enuntiavit”, *Hikma* 5 (2006), pp. 155–69. For editions and translations see Monferrer-Sala, “Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition”, p. 50.

⁴² Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī* (Beirut, 1960), vol. I, pp. 143–4.

⁴³ See Brock, “The Laments”, pp. 211–14.

⁴⁴ Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut, 1966–79), vol. II, pp. 11–13.

⁴⁵ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh and M. Omīdsālār, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 1389/2010), vol. VI, pp. 125–8.

⁴⁶ Th. Nöldeke, “Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik übersetzt und commentiert”, *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Classe* 128 (1893), pp. 1–48.

⁴⁷ It is also occasionally referred to as the *Anonymous Nestorian Chronicle*, see S. P. Brock, “Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources”, *Journal of the Iraqi Academy* (Syriac Corporation), 25.302 (1979–80), 5; Pierre Nautin, “L’auteur de la ‘Chronique Anonyme de Guidi’: Élie de Merw”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 199.3 (1982), pp. 303–14.

⁴⁸ The influence of Yazdīn in the Sasanian court is discussed in James Howard-Johnson, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 130–3. We will discuss the importance of the influence of the Nestorians in the Sasanian court in the development of the *Alexander Romance* through the thesis.

⁴⁹ The building of Merv is attributed to Alexander in the *Syriac Romance* and also in the *Legend*; see Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 116, 142, 160.

⁵⁰ This Latin translation of the Syriac *Khuzistān Chronicle* can be found online at <http://booksnow1.scholarsportal.info/ebooks/oca7/52/chronicaminorapa00guid/chronicaminorapa00guid.pdf>.

[Merv] was built by Alexander, son of Philip, and it was called Alexandria. Having defeated and subjugated many peoples of the East, he undertook to return to his country, but he was poisoned by his servants, [near] the Euphrates, at a place called Bāgniḡyā in the Babylon area. He reigned twelve years and six months.⁵¹

The text also informs us that Alexander built Alexandria in Egypt on the advice of his tutor, Aristotle.⁵² This kind of brief reference to Alexander's deeds and death can be found in later sources from the Islamic era too. He was particularly recorded as a founder of cities in Central Asia. For instance, the historian Ṭabarī also mentioned the names of the cities that Alexander founded all around the conquered territories.⁵³

The fact that Christians had influence in the court at the end of the Sasanian period is important because it can show that the *Alexander Romance* survived and was introduced into the Persian tradition thanks to the Nestorians. Some scholars⁵⁴ have doubted the existence of a Middle Persian version of the PC for ideological reasons. They base their theory on the idea that Pahlavi literature is a faithful mirror of the political and religious ideology of the Sasanian era, which depicts Alexander as the “cursed one” (*gujastak* in Pahlavi) and equivalent to the greatest enemies of Irānshar (i.e. Daḡḡāk and Afrāsīyāb).⁵⁵ Thus, they argue that the Sasanians would not have tolerated the translation of a text that represents one of the greatest enemies of Iran so positively. However, on the one hand, the presence of the Christians and their influence in the Sasanian era⁵⁶ can shed new light on the development of the PC tradition in Persia before the Arab conquest. On the other hand, as far as the translation of Greek works (in particular scientific and philosophical texts) into Middle Persian during the late Sasanian era is concerned, though none of these works have come down to us, it is virtually certain that they existed, as Byzantine and Arabic sources bear witness to them.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the pre-Islamic Persian tradition needs to be studied by taking into account all the various historical elements, and not only the content of the Arabic and Persian sources which are based on

⁵¹ Ignacio Guidi, “Chronicon anonymum”, *Chronica Minora* (Paris, 1903), vol. I, 15–39 (Syriac text); vol. II, 15–32 (Latin trans.), pp. 28–9.

⁵² Guidi, *Chronica Minora*, p. 22.

⁵³ Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, An Annotated Translation*, Vol. IV: *The Ancient Kingdoms*, trans. Moshe Perlmann, notes by Shaul Shaked (New York, 1987), p. 94.

⁵⁴ For instance see Ṣafā, *Ḥamāsa-sarāyī dar Irān*, pp. 198–200; R. N. Frye, “Two Iranian Notes”, *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (Leiden, 1985), vol. I, pp. 185–8.

⁵⁵ On the passages of Pahlavi sources where Alexander appears see the Appendix in Touraj Daryaei, “*Imitatio Alexandri* and its Impact on Late Arsacid, Early Sasanian and Middle Persian Literature”, *Electrum* 12 (2007), pp. 93–5. See also M. R. Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians: Political Ideology in Post-Hellenic and Late Antique Persia* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 295–7; Yuriko Yamanaka, “From Evil Destroyer to Islamic Hero: The Transformation of Alexander the Great's Image in Iran”, *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 8 (1993), pp. 55–87.

⁵⁶ This fact is also pointed out by C. Ciancaglini, in her article “The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance”, *Le Muséon, Revue d'Études Orientales* 114.1–2 (2001), pp. 136–7.

⁵⁷ See K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 30–9; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 25–7.

the Sasanian sources. This is the point of view followed in this study of the different Persian *Alexander Romances*.

III. The Development of the *Alexander Romance* in the East

Now that we have provided a brief background of the relevant Greek and Syriac sources relating to Alexander the Great, it is worth reviewing relevant theories on the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the East.

Theodor Nöldeke laid the foundations for research on the Eastern versions of the PC tradition. His most important contribution was his explanation, through a philological examination of the Syriac text, of what led to the development of the literary forms of the *Alexander Romance* found in Syriac, Arabic, Persian and Ethiopic literature. Nöldeke proposed the theory that a Pahlavi version must have preceded the Syriac version of the PC, because on the one hand the Syriac text contains some discrepancies with the Greek PC and on the other there are a certain number of errors in the Syriac transliteration of Greek proper names.⁵⁸ He dated the lost Middle Persian intermediary to the late Sasanian era (c. sixth–seventh century A.D.).

Nöldeke's argument, which claims that the Syriac version must have been based on a lost intermediary Middle Persian translation of the original Greek, has been generally accepted ever since. However, Richard N. Frye⁵⁹ cast doubt on Nöldeke's theory by arguing that the Syriac version probably descends from a much older Syriac translation of the Greek PC. He based his theory mainly on three points: first, the philological evidence does not reflect a Pahlavi source but might be the result of reference to tales from folklore or oral tradition which were probably current throughout the Middle East and the Iranian world; second, because the Syriac version of the PC makes no mention of Alexander having Persian ancestry, mentioned by Ṭabarī and Firdawsī, which legitimized Alexander by making him the stepbrother of Darius III. Lastly, Frye argued for ideological reasons that a Middle Persian version of the PC could not have existed.⁶⁰

Nöldeke's theory has also been challenged by Claudia Ciancaglini, who believes that the Persian influence in the Syriac PC must be ascribed to Neo-Persian rather than Middle Persian. She argued that:

Part of the history of the Syriac Pseudo-Callisthenes takes us back to northern Iraq, where we know that, at least before around 1500, the predominant language of culture was Persian. The Oriental Christians in this region addressed a public that was educated in Persian, not in Arabic: it is therefore highly likely

⁵⁸ Th. Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*, pp. 11–18.

⁵⁹ Frye, "Two Iranian Notes", pp. 185–8.

⁶⁰ The last reason has been mentioned before.

that quite a large number of Persian elements, especially the glosses, entered the text long after the time of the first translation from the Greek.⁶¹

Kevin van Bladel does not accept Ciancaglini's arguments against Nöldeke on this issue.⁶² He believes that "the only explanation for the confusions in Greek names by the Syriac translator is to propose that there was a Middle Persian antecedent in Pahlavi script."⁶³ In the same context, it is worth mentioning Monferrer-Sala's argument who also believes, for textual reasons, that: "the Syriac version cannot be considered a translation of any of the Greek PC texts".⁶⁴

Besides the different hypotheses on the translation of the Syriac PC, whether it came through a Middle Persian *Vorlage* or was based on a Greek original, we have to consider the analysis of another branch of the *Alexander Romance* tradition. As very few texts of pre-Islamic Persian literature have survived, the only piece of evidence we have for the existence of such a Middle Persian *Vorlage* is through the Arabic and Persian sources. Thus, in the study of this "lost Middle Persian" version of the *Alexander Romance*, it is necessary to examine the Arabic and Persian sources which mention different motifs from the PC tradition.

Here another problem arises: "the Arabic PC, if indeed it had ever existed, had been lost."⁶⁵ However, it is believed that such an Arabic version did exist, because various elements from the PC tradition can be found in historical and geographical works in Arabic.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is also important to point out the hypothesis regarding the development of the PC tradition in Arabic. According to Doufekar-Aerts, which is the hypothesis generally accepted:

It is now clear that three Syriac texts dating from the early seventh century were the sources for a great amount of Arabic material. In the seventh century, there was a Syriac translation of the Greek δ -recension of Pseudo-Callisthenes. The *Romance* was mediated by Middle Persian, according to Nöldeke, and it acquired a veneer of Iranian names during this stage. The two other texts were original compositions in Syriac, written between 628 and 640, and they reflect the political ideologies of their period. It is from these latter texts that the Arabic Alexander derives his character as a prophet. An Arabic translation, based on this Syriac Pseudo-Callisthenes, was probably made in the ninth century. Then,

⁶¹ Ciancaglini, "The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance", p. 140. See also the original Italian chapter: "Gli antecedenti del Romanzo di Alessandro", *La diffusione dell'eredità classica nell'età tardoantica e medievale, Atti del Seminario internazionale tenuto a Roma-Napoli*, ed. R. B. Finazzi and A. Valvo (Alexandria, 1998), pp. 55–93.

⁶² Van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources", pp. 61–4.

⁶³ Van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources", p. 62.

⁶⁴ Monferrer-Sala, "Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition", p. 47.

⁶⁵ Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ On the Arabic PC tradition see chapter one of Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 13–91, where she examines different historical and geographical Arabic sources, beside the Arabic popular romances which deal with the *Alexander Romance*. She determines the main motifs, sources and the transmission of the PC tradition in Arabic literature.

between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, an adaptation of this *Alexander Romance* was made in Ethiopic, based on an Arabic *Vorlage*. Because of the similarity between the Ethiopic Romance and the Syriac Pseudo-Callisthenes, the Arabic translation is generally believed to have been the intermediary between the Syriac and the Ethiopic Romance. This is just a hypothesis, since the Arabic translation has never been found and is thought to have been lost.⁶⁷

My contribution to this debate lies in two different areas:

- 1) The scholars mentioned above (Nöldeke, Ciancaglini, van Bladel and Monferrer-Sala) based their hypotheses on philological examination of the Syriac PC. This causes some problems due to the date and origin of the Syriac manuscripts, the oldest of which dates only to 1709.⁶⁸ The influence of scribes, and the possible elements they might have added to the manuscripts, causes confusion when it comes to a textual and philological examination. In order to solve this problem, I suggest that we should leave aside the philological examination of the Syriac text and instead explore its content in parallel with the Arabic and Persian texts. In this study it is highly important to consider the significance of the Sasanian legacy in these sources.
- 2) The examination of the extensive Arabic tradition on Alexander shows two different branches: the versions which presented Alexander as a Persian king of the Kayānid dynasty, by making him half-brother of Darius III (Dārā), and the versions which did not. Doufekar-Aerts's excellent study on the different branches of the Arabic Alexander tradition missed an important element: the legacy of the Sasanian sources, especially in Arabic historiography. Due to this omission, she did not offer any solution to the problem of the "lost Middle Persian *Vorlage*" in the transmission of the PC in the Arabic tradition. In this thesis, I will examine the content of relevant Arabic and Persian sources in which it is possible to trace the PC tradition in a new light, which is the influence of Sasanian sources on Arabic and Persian literature, especially in the field of historiography. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

In order to point out how this chapter sets up the argument for the rest of the thesis, we need to highlight the following points. The Greek *Alexander Romance* originated in Alexandria (Egypt) in the third century A.D. and became the most influential source for the deeds and adventures of Alexander, especially in the east. This thesis endeavours to study its influence in the Persian versions of the tale. However, there is a huge gap between its composition in Alexandria in the third century and its appearance in the Persian tradition represented in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī (completed in A.D. 1010),

⁶⁷ Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ For a detailed study of the Syriac manuscripts see J. P. Monferrer-Sala, "Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition", pp. 45–8.

the first complete exemplar of the PC tradition. In order to fill this gap of seven centuries and provide a hypothesis regarding how this Greek work appeared in the Persian sources, we need to consider first the historical environment in which national Persian history was formed. Since Arabic replaced Middle Persian after the Arab conquest (circa A.D. 636),⁶⁹ Sasanian literature was mainly rewritten in Arabic until the tenth century, when it began to be produced in Persian. It is also essential to study the Arabic sources which share the motifs from the PC tradition with the Persian versions. In the next chapter, we will study the Arabic accounts of the ninth to eleventh centuries in order to trace our way back to a “Middle Persian” version of the *Alexander Romance*.

⁶⁹ Until the eleventh century A.D., Zoroastrian priests wrote in Middle Persian though Persian and Arabic had become current. As Daryaei points out: “We can firmly believe that there was a larger amount of Middle Persian literature in various genres, but because of the hardship on the Zoroastrian community throughout the ages, only those books that were of utmost importance for the religion and communal solidarity were copied by the priests and the rest were lost.” (*Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (New York/London, 2010), pp. 102, 108).

Chapter Two: Arabic Accounts of Alexander the Great and the Legacy of Sasanian Historiography

آینه ی سکندر جام جم است بنگر تا بر تو عرضه دارد احوال ملک دارا

The holy grail of Jamshid is just
the same as Alexander's looking glass;
So look therein if you would contemplate
the affairs of the kingdom of Darius.

Hāfiz (d. 1390)¹

Introduction

The general purpose of this chapter is to examine the passages on Alexander in the classical Arabic historiographical accounts written between the ninth to twelfth centuries in order to trace them back to what I believe to be a Middle Persian *Vorlage*. This chapter will thus focus on the influence of Sasanian historiography on the Arabic historical sources, the origin and contents of a lost Sasanian chronicle, and the place of Alexander in the pre-Islamic Persian tradition.

As mentioned in chapter one, no complete Arabic version of the PC has ever been found. It is assumed that “if indeed it had ever existed, it had been lost”.² Instead, what we have in different historical and geographical accounts is only brief motifs from the PC tradition.³ Although Doufīkar-Aerts's study of the Arabic sources relating to Alexander did shed new light on this tradition, she doubted the existence of a Middle Persian intermediary and omitted it from her stemma of Arabic Alexander literature.⁴ This chapter tries to complete Doufīkar-Aerts's work by examining the Arabic sources from another point of view and considering an alternative possibility.

Although no version of the *Alexander Romance* from the pre-Islamic Persian tradition has survived, the evidence of the Arabic and Persian sources which include selections from this work leaves no doubt that the legends about Alexander did exist in written form, at least in the Sasanian period. The *Alexander Romance* is mainly reflected in the works of early Islamic historians and geographers and in the Persian versions of *Alexander Romance*, in particular in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. Some of the

¹ Hāfiz, *Dīwān: bih taṣṭīḥ-i Muḥammad Qudṣī bā maqābala-i chahār nuskhā-i chāpī mu'tabar: Qazwīnāi, Khānlarī, Sāyih va Naysārī*, ed. Hasan Dhū'l-Faqār and Abū'l-Faḍl 'Alī Muḥammadī (Tehran, 1381/2002), *ghazal* 3; translated by Leonard Lewisohn.

² Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 13.

³ On the Arabic PC tradition see Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 76–90, where she discusses in detail various motifs and characteristics of this tradition.

⁴ Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 79.

characteristics of these versions (e.g. the proper names, Alexander's Persian ancestry, etc.) indicate a Middle Persian source. It is impossible to make stylistic judgements based on these details, but together they probably give an excellent idea of its content.

In order to demonstrate that the early Arabic historical accounts of Alexander's life do indeed reflect a Middle Persian intermediary, below I have tried to examine some of the Arabic works of the ninth-twelfth centuries. In these works, the following common characteristics are visible:

- 1) These sources deal with the history of Iran up to the Arab conquest, dividing it into four principal dynasties: the Pīshdādiyān (the first Persian kings), Kayāniyān (or Kayānids), Ashkāniyān (Arsacids) and the Sasanians.
- 2) Most of the authors of these sources are Iranian or of Iranian ancestry, which indicates that Persian sources were accessible to them.
- 3) They all include Alexander in the Kayānid dynasty, making him the legitimate King of Iran and half-brother of Darius III (Dārā).
- 4) The proper names mentioned in these sources indicate a Persian source and coincide with the equivalent names found in the Pahlavi texts (for instance Dārā for Darius III). They also contain certain Persian words or explanations based on the Persian meaning of a word, as will be discussed below.
- 5) The oldest historical accounts do not apply the Islamic epithet Dhū'l-Qarnayn ("the Two-Horned One"), mentioned in the Qur'ān, to Alexander. This indicates that their source predated the identification of Dhū'l-Qarnayn with Alexander during the Islamic period.

The Arabic works with the above-mentioned characteristics are the historical accounts of Dīnawarī (d. 895),⁵ Ṭabarī (d. 923),⁶ the anonymous *Nihāya*⁷ (possibly c. 850)⁸ and Tha'ālibī Nīshābūrī (d. 1038)⁹. This list does not include of course, the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, which is in Persian. In addition, Bīrūnī's (d. after 1050) brief mention of Alexander in the *Āthār al-bāqīya* (*Chronology of Ancient Nations*),¹⁰ Ḥamza Iṣfahānī's

⁵ Dīnawarī, *Akhbār al-ṭīval*, ed. 'A. 'Āmir (Cairo, 1960).

⁶ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. Dodge (Leiden, 1879–81). I have quoted English passages from Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)*, Vol. IV: *The Ancient Kingdoms*, ed. E. Yarshater, trans. and annotated Moshe Perlmann and Shaul Shaked (New York, 1987).

⁷ *Nihāya al-'arab fī tārikh al-furs wa al-'arab*, ed. M. T. Dānishpazhūh (Tehran, 1374).

⁸ See Grignaschi, "La *Nihāyatu-l-'arab fī akhbāri-l-Furs wa-l-'arab*", *Bulletin d'études orientales* 22 (1969), pp. 15–67; Grignaschi, "La *Nihāyatu-l-'arab fī akhbāri-l-Furs wa-l-'arab* et les *Siyaru mulūki-l-'aḡam* du Ps. Ibn-al-Muqaffa'", *Bulletin d'études orientales* 26 (1973), pp. 83–184. However, Yarshater states that it was probably written in the eleventh century. See Yarshater, "Iranian National History", *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater (Cambridge, 1983), vol. III/1, p. 363.

⁹ Tha'ālibī Nīshābūrī, *Tārīkh ghurar al-sayr*, ed. H. Zotenberg (Paris, 1900 [reprint. Tehran, 1342/1963]).

¹⁰ Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī, *Āthār al-bāqīya 'an al-qurūn al-khālīya*, ed. E. Sachau (Leipzig, 1923).

(d. after 961) *On the Kings and Prophets*¹¹ and the geographical work *Kitāb al-Buldān* (*Book of Countries*) of Ibn al-Faqīh Hamadānī (d. c. 903)¹² provide some evidence for the existence of a Middle Persian version of the *Alexander Romance*. Dīnawarī, Ṭabarī and Firdawsī do not apply the epithet Dhū'l-Qarnayn to Alexander, which is very significant due to the identification of Alexander with this Qur'ānic figure in the Islamic period.¹³

In comparing these Arabic accounts in order to investigate and find any evidence for the existence of a Middle Persian version of the *Alexander Romance*, I follow the same methodology applied by Professor Yarshater in his chapter on “Iranian National History” in the *Cambridge History of Iran*¹⁴ and Professor Khaleghi-Motlagh's article “From *Shāhnāma* to *Khudāynāma*: An Inquiry into the Direct and Indirect Sources of the *Shāhnāma*”.¹⁵ Drawing on their methodology, the main purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the components of this lost version through the common motifs mentioned by almost all of these Arabic works, as well as in the Persian *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. In order to simplify the comprehension of these common motifs from the PC tradition, they are presented below in Table 2.

Before analysing the content of the Arabic accounts of Alexander, it is necessary to provide some background regarding the influence of Sasanian historiography in the Arabic tradition. In this respect, I aim to address the following questions:

- 1) Why do they have the same framework, dealing with Iranian history by dividing it into four principal dynasties?
- 2) Why do they include Alexander among the Persian kings of the Kayānid cycle?
- 3) Why do they use Persian proper names (e.g. Dārā for Darius)?

The following three sections will attempt to give, or at least posit, probable answers to the above questions. The fourth and concluding section of the chapter ends with discussion of the development and sources of the *Alexander Romance* in the Arabic/Persian tradition.

¹¹ Ḥamza Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbīyā* (Beirut, 1961).

¹² This work has been lost but a summary of it is preserved by Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Shayzārī (about 1022). See Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadānī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-Buldān*, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, Vol. V: *Compendium Libri Kitāb al-boldan*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1885 [repr. 1967]).

¹³ For instance, while Ṭabarī dedicated a whole chapter to the identification and meaning of Dhū'l-Qarnayn in his *Tafsīr* (*Commentary on the Qur'ān*), in his *Tārīkh* (*Annals*) he did not even mention this name. This indicates that in his *Tārīkh* he was working with sources older than the compilation of Qur'ān.

¹⁴ Yarshater, “Iranian National History”, pp. 359–477. See also his entry “Iran iii. Traditional History”, *Elr*, XIII/3, pp. 299–307.

¹⁵ J. Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāma*”, *Nāme-yi Irān-i Bāstān*, *The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies*, 7.1–2 (2007–8), pp. 3–119. See also Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Jāy-i Rustam, Ārash, Isfandīyār, Gushtāsp, Jāmāsp va Iskandar dar *Khudāynāma*”, *Nāme-yi Irān-i Bāstān*, 9.1–2 (2009–10), pp. 3–24.

I. Arabic Sources and the Historical Tradition in Pre-Islamic Iran

Although no historical works survive from the pre-Islamic Persian tradition,¹⁶ the existence of divergent texts is attested in later sources which point to different versions of an official chronicle relating the history of Iran from its mythological beginnings (the creation of the world and the first man/king) up to the time of its compilation during the Sasanian period. This chronicle is known by the standard designation *Khudāynāmag* (in Middle Persian *Xwadāy-nāmag*, meaning the *Book of Sovereigns*, the *Shāhnāma* in New Persian).¹⁷ As to the date of this work, some scholars attribute its compilation to Khusraw I, Anūshīrvān (A.D. 531–79),¹⁸ though others, like Shahbazi, maintain that the compilation of a national history was already well under way at the time of the Sasanian king Bahrām Gūr (A.D. 421–38) and had definitely taken a coherent form by the time of Khusraw I.¹⁹ In any event, by the end of the sixth century, a national history of Iran existed in the royal archive at Ctesiphon, from which Agathias²⁰ derived his account of Sasanian history.²¹

None of the Middle Persian versions of this great Sasanian chronicle have survived, but it survives in Arabic derivatives and, notably, in the Persian *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.²² An Arabic translation of this work is attested in later sources which cite more than twenty versions of the chronicle,²³ called *Sayr al-mulūk* (*Lives of the Kings*) or *Tārīkh al-mulūk* (*History of the Kings*).²⁴ Although all of these Arabic translations have also been lost, their content is known from the summaries of Arabic historiographers who based their histories of the Iranians on this material. It is from this material in Arabic, and Persian adaptations of the ninth to eleventh centuries, as well as the remains of historical records, legends and myths in Avestan and Pahlavi texts, that a reconstruction of the contents of the lost *Khudāynāmag* has been undertaken.²⁵

¹⁶ See Yarshater, “Iranian National History”, p. 359.

¹⁷ See M. Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature”, *Iranistik II: Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1. IV. 2.1 (Leiden, 1968), pp. 57–59; A. Tafāḍḍulī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islam*, ed. Zh. Āmūzgār (Tehran, 1376/1997), pp. 269–74.

¹⁸ Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia, the Rise and Fall of an Empire* (London/New York, 2009), p. xvii.

¹⁹ Sh. Shahbazi, “On the Xwadāy-Nāmag”, *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 218–23.

²⁰ Agathias (c. 530–82) was a Greek poet and historian of the Roman emperor Justinian I. For a detailed and comprehensive treatment of Agathias’s life see Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 1–11.

²¹ See Averil Cameron, “Agathias on the Sasanians”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23–24 (1969–70), p. 128.

²² See Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāma*”, pp. 3–71; Vladimir Minorsky, “The older preface to the *Shāhnāma*”, *Studi Orientalistici in onore di G. Levi della Vida* (Rome, 1956), vol. II, pp. 159–79.

²³ Eight Arabic recensions of the text are referred to by Ḥamza al-Isfahānī alone, including the two earliest translations of the *Khudāynāmag*, the first by Ibn al-Muqaffa’, the second by Muḥammad b. Jahm al-Barmakī, probably a client of the Barmakids. On the Arabic translation of *Khudāynāmag* see W. Barthold, “Zur Geschichte des persischen Epos”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 98 (1944), pp. 144ff; Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen, 1944; repr. Osnabrück, 1971), pp. 59ff. Bīrūnī and Bal’amī name other translations; see Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, p. 61. See also Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāma*”, pp. 34–37.

²⁴ See Ḥamza Isfahānī, *Tārīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbīyā*, pp. 15, 19, 43.

²⁵ See Yarshater, “Iranian National History”, pp. 359–66.

II. The *Khudāynāmag*, its Content and Sources

The *Khudāynāmag* has been the subject of a great number of investigations.²⁶ It represented a historical tradition that combined myth, legend, and factual history. Its origins can be traced to the oral traditions relating to Avestan figures in north-eastern Persia, which assumed a national character with the spread of Zoroastrianism and continued to be orally transmitted until towards the end of the Sassanid period, when they were committed to writing.²⁷

The compilers of the *Khudāynāmag* divided the Iranian past from the creation and appearance of the first man, into four dynastic periods, as has been attested in many Arabic historical accounts and the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.²⁸ Among these four dynasties the second, that of the Kayānids or Kayānīyān, is the one which interests us because it ends in Alexander's conquest. Noteworthy is the fact that among these four dynasties there is no mention of the Achaemenids. The omission of the Medes and Achaemenids from the accounts of Persian history has given risen to certain theories among scholars.

Some decades ago, the great Iranian scholar Ehsan Yarshater published an article in which he discussed why the Medes and Achaemenids did not appear in the *Shāhnāma*.²⁹ He argued that the Sasanians were unaware of the Achaemenids and did not have any historical memory of them; and if the Sasanians were heirs to anyone, it was the Parthians (247 B.C.– 224 A.D.).³⁰ On the other hand, Shahbazi argued that the early Sasanians knew about the Achaemenids but, for ideological reasons, especially during the time of Shāpūr II (309–79 A.D.), they claimed to be descendants of the kings in the *Avesta* (in particular the Kayānids) rather than the Achaemenids.³¹ This debate has been recently revisited and re-examined by Touraj Daryaee, who explained the omission of the Achaemenids from the official history as being a consequence of the nature of Iranian historiography.³² Daryaee rightly claims that the “Sasanians did not

²⁶ Barthold, “Zur Geschichte des persischen Epos”, pp. 121–57; Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, pp. 59ff.; Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1920); Shahbazi, “On the Xwadāy-Nāmag”, pp. 218–23; Yarshater, “Iranian National History”; Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature”, pp. 31–66; Tafadūlī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islām*, pp. 269–74; M. Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature”, *The Literature of pre-Islamic Iran: Companion Volume I to a History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (London/New York, 2009), pp. 172–77.

²⁷ See Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature”, pp. 31–66; E. Yarshater, “Iranian National History”, pp. 359–66; Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature”, pp. 172–76.

²⁸ See Shahbazi, “Historiography ii. Pre-Islamic Period”, *EIr*, XII/3, pp. 325–30. See also Yarshater, “Iran iii. Traditional History” in *EIr*, XIII/3, pp. 299–307.

²⁹ Yarshater, “Chirā dar *Shāhnāma* az pādīshāhān-i mād va hakhāmanishī dhikrī nīst?”, *Shāhnāma-Shināsī* (Tehran, 1357/1978), vol. I, pp. 268–301.

³⁰ Yarshater, “Were the Sasanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?” in *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Problemi attuali di scienza e cultura. Atti convegno internazionale sul themo La Persia nel medioevo* (Rome, 1971), pp. 517–31.

³¹ Shahbazi, “Early Sasanians' Claim to Achaemenid Heritage”, *Nāma-yi Irān-i Bāstān. The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1.1 (2001), p. 69.

³² Touraj Daryaee, “National History or Keyanid History: The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography”, *Iranian Studies*, 28.3–4 (1995), pp. 129–41; Daryaee, “The Construction of the Past in

forget, but must have ignored the Achaemenids purposefully to construct a sacred history which connected them not to the Achaemenids, but to the Kayanids. This meant a construction of the past which was sacred and removed from the Greco-Roman historiographical tradition”.³³ A similar pattern may be seen in the development of Christian Roman historiography, where Christianity became a focal point and a background to the history of the late Roman Empire.³⁴

Therefore, in the history of Iran, the Achaemenid dynasty was replaced with the Kayānid dynastic cycle into which the episode of Alexander is incorporated. It is worth briefly studying the origin of the Kayānid cycle of epic and Alexander’s place within this dynasty.

Boyce³⁵ and Tafaddulī³⁶ both traced the Kayānid cycle back to Parthian times. Macuch also points out that:

The central position of the *pahlawāns*, “champions” or “heroes” or “Parthians” in the original sense of the word, and the outstanding features attributed to the House of Kārēn [one of the Parthian families] in the national epic indicate that members of important families, who claimed descent from the Arsacid house, had created a version³⁷ of the national history favourable towards themselves.³⁸

Pourshariati has also studied the influence of Parthian families on the creation of an Iranian “National history”.³⁹ She points out that the production of two of the most authoritative versions of the *Khudāynāmag*, namely the *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manšūr (in prose) and the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī (completed in verse in 1010),⁴⁰ cannot be understood except in the context of their patronage by families of Parthian ancestry, or at least by families with pretensions to this ancestry, in the tenth century.⁴¹

Why, it may be asked, is the Parthian influence relevant to the appearance of Alexander in the Kayānid cycle? It is simply because the clue to understanding such a vast variety of legends on Alexander in the Persian tradition must be sought in the Parthian period. From the material culture, mainly the coinage, it appears that the

Late Antique Persia”, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 55.4 (2006), pp. 493–503, especially pp. 500–1.

³³ Daryae, “Memory and History: The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia”, *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1.2 (2001–2), pp. 12–13.

³⁴ Daryae, “National History or Keyanid History”, pp. 129–41.

³⁵ Boyce, “Some Remarks on the Transmission of the Kayanian Heroic Cycle”, *Serta Cantabrigiensia*, ed. R. N. Frye et al. (Wiesbaden, 1954), pp. 45–52; Boyce, “The Parthian *Gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 89.1–2 (1957), pp. 10–45.

³⁶ Tafaddulī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islām*, p. 271.

³⁷ Christensen discerns two traditions, a religious one, and a national one. See A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides* (Copenhagen, 1931), pp. 35ff; Christensen, *Les Gestes des Rois dans les traditions de l’Iran antique* (Paris, 1936), pp. 33ff. See also Yarshater, “Iranian National History”, p. 395ff.

³⁸ Macuch, “Pahlavi Literature”, p. 176.

³⁹ P. Pourshariati, “The Parthians and the Production of the Canonical Shāhnāmas. Of Pahlavī, Pahlavānī and the Pahlav”, *Commutatio et Contentio. Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Zeev Rubin*, ed. Henning Börm and Josef Wiesehöfer (Düsseldorf, 2010), pp. 347–92.

⁴⁰ On these two *Shāhnāmas* and their compilation see the next chapter.

⁴¹ Pourshariati, “The Parthians and the Production of the Canonical Shāhnāmas”, p. 347.

Arsacids called themselves *Philhellenos* (φιλελληνοσ).⁴² Their philohellenism is also brought to fore in the legends on their coins which were usually in Greek.⁴³ In this context, it is worth pointing out that according to Tacitus (*Annals*, 6.31), the Arsacid king Ardawān II legitimised his claim over Roman territories by associating himself with Alexander and the Seleucids on one hand and with the Achaemenids on the other.⁴⁴

In addition, in a recent study Daryae points out the Arsacids' Irano-Hellenic cultural setting represented in a Middle Persian manuscript (MU29),⁴⁵ in which they are connected with Alexander and his legacy in Iran.⁴⁶ Thus, if we consider the possibility that Alexander's positive image in Persian literature has its origin in the Parthian period, the divergence between Alexander's negative image in the Zoroastrian tradition reflected in the Pahlavi texts⁴⁷ and his positive character in the national epic (i.e. the *Khudāynāmag* tradition, as this study endeavours to prove) makes better sense. However, this is just a hypothesis because unfortunately no known Parthian-language literature survives in its original form⁴⁸ since the Parthian tradition was an oral one and, being bardic in nature, was usually sung or recited with music by the court minstrels called *Gōsāns*.⁴⁹ The discrepancies in the characterisation of Alexander between the Kayānid and Sasanian parts of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsi⁵⁰ may also be explained by the different sources (Parthian and Sasanian) of these two parts or the existence of more than one *Khudāynāmag* tradition.⁵¹

It has long been recognised that the various *Khudāynāmag* traditions were incorporated into the classical Arabic histories that were composed in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁵² The *Khudāynāmag* chronicles played an important role in Arabic historiography, especially in the 'Abbāsīd period.⁵³ Below I will examine these Arabic accounts in order to reconstruct the content of Alexander's appearance in the

⁴² The Parthian coins were stamped with the Greek language and the epithet *philhellene* remained in use until the end of the Parthian period. See D. Sellwood, "Parthian Coins", *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater (Cambridge, 1983), vol. III/1, pp. 279–98; Sellwood, *Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*, 2nd ed. (London, 1980).

⁴³ Huyse, "Parthian Inscriptions", *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. R. E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (London/New York, 2009), p. 86.

⁴⁴ Quoted from Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 294–5.

⁴⁵ For more information on this manuscript see Jamasp-Asa and Nawabi, *Ms. MU29. Stories of Kersāsp, Tahmurasp & Jamshed, Gelshah & other texts* (Pahlavi Codices and Iranian Researches 26) (Shiraz, 1976) cited from Touraj Daryae, "Alexander and the Arsacids in the Manuscript MU29", *Dabir, Digital Archive of Brief Notes & Iran Review* 1/1 (2015), p. 8, note 7.

⁴⁶ Daryae, "Alexander and the Arsacids in the Manuscript MU29", pp. 8–10.

⁴⁷ On the Pahlavi texts where Alexander appears see Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 295–8; Daryae, "Imitatio Alexandri and its Impact on Late Arsacid, Early Sasanian and Middle Persian Literature", *Electrum* 12 (2007), pp. 93–5.

⁴⁸ See Boyce, "Parthian Writings and Literature", *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater (London/New York, 1983), vol. III/2, pp. 1154–5.

⁴⁹ See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition".

⁵⁰ Regarding these discrepancies see Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Jāy-i Rustam ... va Iskandar dar *Khudāynāma*", pp. 19–24.

⁵¹ See Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature", pp. 175–7.

⁵² See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 25–7, 54–5; C. E. Bosworth, "The Persian Impact on Arabic Literature", *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 483–96.

⁵³ See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 54–7.

Khudāynāmag. The following survey only includes the extant Arabic histories of the first centuries of the Islamic era (ninth to twelfth centuries), which, it can be deduced, used a derivation of the *Khudāynāmag* as their source. The majority of the authors of these Arabic histories were Persians who wrote in Arabic. The Sasanian sources were therefore available to them, though indirectly.

Beside these Arabic accounts – those of Dīnawarī, Ṭabarī, Tha‘ālibī’s *Ghurār akhbār*, the anonymous *Nihāya*, Bīrūnī and Iṣfahānī – where needed, we will mention Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma* (in Persian), the most representative source for the *Khudāynāmag* tradition. However, since the passages on Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, being the first complete and the most extensive representation of the PC tradition in the Islamic world, is worthy of an independent analysis, this will be studied in detail in the next chapter.

The following sections study different motifs in the *Alexander Romance* found in these Arabic histories from the PC tradition. In order to simplify our understanding of these common motifs, a table (Table 2 below) presents the main motifs in these sources.

1. Alexander’s Persian Ancestry and the Etymology of His Name

The first thing that the Arabic historical accounts deal with is different traditions concerning Alexander’s ancestry. In his *Kitāb al-Akhhār al-ṭiwāl* (*Book of Extensive Histories*), Dīnawarī (d. 895) offers one of the fullest accounts of the *Alexander Romance* written during the Islamic era. Dīnawarī discusses at length the Persian variant of Alexander’s ancestry.

He mentions that “the people of Fārs” believe that Alexander was the son of Dārā and Philip’s daughter. According to Dīnawarī, in a war between the Persian king Dārā son of Bahman, and Philip (Fīlifūs), the latter was defeated. Philip agreed to pay an annual tribute of one hundred thousand golden eggs, and gave his daughter in marriage to Dārāb. The Persian king detected an unpleasant odour on Philip’s daughter, and had her cured with a herb called *sandar*. The night he was supposed to consummate the marriage with the Greek princess, he smelled the herb and cried out “āl sandar”, which means “the *sandar* is strong” because, according to Dīnawarī, “āl” in Persian means “strong”.⁵⁴ Dārā thus eventually lost interest in her and sent her back to Rūm unaware of her pregnancy. She gave birth to a boy and called him “Ali[k]sandar” (*āl + sandar*).⁵⁵ The explanation given by Dīnawarī is very close to Alexander’s name in the Middle Persian, Aleksandar. This etymology of his name gradually became obsolete in later sources, where the herb was simply turned into “iskandar”, as we will see below.

This, I suggest, must have been the heart of Alexander’s legend in the *Khudāynāmag* tradition, for it is repeated in other of the sources mentioned, with some variation. Ṭabarī’s (d. 932) *Tārīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk* (*History of Prophets and Kings*)

⁵⁴ According to Boyce, this word might refer to the Middle Persian word *ahr*, which means “strong”. Mario Grignaschi has discussed this issue. See M. Grignaschi, “La *Nihāyatu-l-‘arab fī akhbāri-l-Furs wa-l-‘arab* et les *Siyaru mulūki-l-‘aḡam* du Ps. Ibn-al-Muqaffa’”, p. 100.

⁵⁵ Dīnawarī, *Akhhār al-ṭiwāl*, pp. 28ff.

contains four different versions of Alexander's name and ancestry.⁵⁶ In the third version, Ṭabarī's account reports material from sources he claims are "told by persons knowledgeable about the stories of the ancients". He reports that Alexander and Dārā were brothers. Alexander's mother was Philip's daughter Halāy.⁵⁷ She married the Persian king Dārā the Great (*Dārā al-akbar*) son of Bahman after Philip was defeated in a war. Ṭabarī's etymology of Alexander's name explains that he was named after the herb *sandarūs*, which cured his mother's bad breath. According to Ṭabarī, the origin of his name is "Halāy-Sandarūs", which became Iskandarūs.⁵⁸

The anonymous author of the *Nihāya*, in agreement with the other historians whose source was a derivation of *Khudāynāmag*, places Alexander within the Kayānid dynasty. The passage on Alexander is handed down by the author in the name of Ibn al-Muqaffa', which indicates that he probably had access to the Arabic translation of the *Khudāynāmag* done by Ibn al-Muqaffa'.⁵⁹ It begins with a story about Alexander's Persian descent, although the author remarks that the Arabs do not agree with the Persians about Alexander's ancestry. The author adds that the people of Rūm believe that Alexander was the son of Filibūs (Philip). Here, the herb that cured Alexander's mother is simply called "Iskandar",⁶⁰ as it is in Firdawsī's account, where it burnt her palate.⁶¹ Stoneman suggests that the word might be σκάνδιξ (chervil, a relative of parsley),⁶² while Grignaschi suggests sandal, the well-known fragrant wood, which in the Pahlavi script can be read as *sandar*.⁶³ On the other hand, Warner argues that the word derived either from the Greek σκόποδον (garlic) or the Latin *ascalonium* (shallot).⁶⁴ According to Dihkhudā, *sandar* or *sandarūs* is of Greek origin, from "σανδαράκη", and is identified as the Arar tree, which produces a yellow resin.⁶⁵

Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī's *Āthār al-bāqīya* (*Chronology of Ancient Nations*), written in 1000, also contains the Persian descent variant mentioned above although he claimed: "That Alexander was the son of Philip is a fact too evident to be concealed."⁶⁶

In any case, through such creative elaborations in the Persian tradition, Alexander becomes the son of Dārā(b), son of Bahman Ardaxshīr, son of Isfandīyār. This invented Persian genealogy of Alexander links him to the greatest Persian kings

⁵⁶ For a discussion concerning all of these accounts, see El-Sayed M. Gad, "Al-Ṭabarī's Tales of Alexander: History and Romance", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. R. Stoneman, K. Erickson and I. Netton (Groningen, 2012), pp. 219–31; Southgate, *Iskandarnamah: A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance*, Appendix III, pp. 193–94.

⁵⁷ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 692. According to Firdawsī, Alexander's mother was called Nāhīd. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 521.

⁵⁸ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, pp. 692ff.

⁵⁹ See Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yaddāsh-t-hā-yi Shāhnāma*, part II (Tehran, 1389/2010), p. 353.

⁶⁰ *Nihāya*, p. 99. The herb is also called "Iskandar" in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and the *Ghurar of Tha'ālibī*.

⁶¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 523.

⁶² Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 25.

⁶³ Grignaschi, "La *Nihāyatu-l-'arab fī akhbāri-l-Furs wa-l-'arab* et les *Siyaru mulūki-l-'aḡam* du Ps. Ibn-al-Muqaffa'", pp. 100–1.

⁶⁴ Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner (trans.), *Shahnama of Firdausi* (London, 1912), vol. VI, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma [Encyclopaedic Dictionary]*, ed. M. Mu'in and J. Shahīdī (Tehran, 1993–94), vol. VIII, p. 12158, s.v. sandal.

⁶⁶ Bīrūnī, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, trans. C. Edward Sachau (London, 1879), pp. 44, 48.

(e.g. Bahman Ardaxshīr/Artaxerxes I) on one hand⁶⁷ and, on the other, to the great hero of Iranian epic, Isfandīyār who, like Alexander, had a Greek mother and was the grandson of a “Caesar of Rūm”.⁶⁸ This genealogy legitimised Alexander’s kingship as a Persian of the Kayānid dynasty.

The legend of Alexander’s birth contains certain symbols that show the double attitude of the Persian world towards the Macedonian king. In the Avestic tradition, bad odours (*gantāy/gaintī*) are related to Ahrīman,⁶⁹ with whom Alexander is associated in the Pahlavi sources. Furthermore, the identification of the herb *sandar/Iskandar* as garlic, “which was so esteemed by the Iranians as a medicine and a means of warding off the evil eye and demonic power”,⁷⁰ can be interpreted from the point of view that the bad breath of Alexander’s mother is a sign of the *ahrīmanī* (demoniac) character of Alexander. According to Davis, since Alexander’s mother is a Greek, the bad odour can also be linked with two Greek festivals (the Skirophoria and Thesmophoria),⁷¹ which associated a ritual sexual abstinence with the stinking breath of the female partner.⁷²

Davis also drew attention to historical data which may have influenced the invention of Alexander’s Persian ancestry. In the fifth century B.C., a Macedonian princess married a Persian. Her brother, who was the king of Macedonia at the time, was called Alexander.⁷³ Davis argues that it is possible that this story of Macedonian-Persian intermarriage, involving a king of Macedonia called Alexander, was then combined with the patriotic stratagem of the PC to produce its own version of Alexander’s paternity.⁷⁴

In the abovementioned Arabic accounts, the proper names are of Persian origin. Some of them also coincide with their equivalents in Pahlavi sources. For instance, Darius III is represented as Dārā-i Dārāyān (Dārā son of Dārā). According to Firdawsī, Alexander’s mother is called Nāhīd, which is the modern Persian form of the name of the goddess Ānāhītā.⁷⁵ Ṭabarī gives the name of Alexander’s “wondrous steed” as Būkefārasb,⁷⁶ which ends with the Persian *asb* (horse). In conclusion, the invented etymology of Alexander’s name indicates a Persian source although it is difficult to decipher the original Middle Persian origin and original of the name. This etymology,

⁶⁷ According to Khaleghi-Motlagh, King Bahman Ardaxshīr represents both Artaxerxes I and Cyrus the Great. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Bahman”, *EIr*, III/5, pp. 489–90.

⁶⁸ When Gushtāsp, Isfandīyār’s father, went to Rūm, he married Caesar’s daughter, Katāyūn, and from this union Isfandīyār was born. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 12–24.

⁶⁹ God’s adversary in the Zoroastrian religion; see J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Ahriman”, *EIr*, I/6–7, pp. 670–3.

⁷⁰ Sh. Shahbazi, “Haft sīn”, *EIr*, XI/5, p. 525.

⁷¹ On these Greek festivals see M. Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, trans. Janet Lloyd (London, 1977), pp. 80, 93.

⁷² D. Davis, *Panthea’s Children: Hellenistic Novels and Medieval Persian Romances* (New York, 2002), p. 76, n. 59.

⁷³ See Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, trans. Philip L. Kohl (Cambridge, 1989), p. 296.

⁷⁴ Davis, *Panthea’s Children*, p. 77.

⁷⁵ In the *Shāhnāma*, there is no reference to the goddess. However, her role in relation to Alexander is obvious in a popular romance known as the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarṭūsī (see chapter 4). Regarding the goddess Ānāhītā and Alexander the Great in the *Dārābnāma* see W. Hanaway, “Anahita and Alexander”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102.2 (1982), pp. 285–95.

⁷⁶ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 666.

which makes him a legitimate king of a Persian dynasty by linking him to the greatest kings such as Artaxerxes I and Darius the Great, must have been originated in the *Khudāynāmag* tradition represented in the Arabic histories and the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.

2. Iskandar *Rūmī*, Alexander the Roman

In the Middle Persian Zoroastrian writings, and in the Arabic accounts discussed here, Alexander the Great figures with the epithet *hrōmāyīg/rūmī* (Roman). According to Touraj Daryaee, it was the effects of Roman propaganda from the time of Caracalla to Alexander Severus that brought into existence an initial “Alexander” story and memory, in which *imitatio Alexandri* played a central role and galvanised a Persian Alexander tradition which lasted to the end of the Sasanian period.⁷⁷ The appearance of this epithet in the historical Arabic accounts must have been due to the influence of the Middle Persian writings too. It seems that the effects of *imitatio Alexandri* of the Roman emperors in the second and third centuries AD, on Middle Persian literature, has also a consequence for Arabo/Persian historical memory in the Islamic period. This explains the association of Alexander with the epithet *rūmī* in Arabic/Persian texts (*Hrōmīg* – Roman- in Middle Persian, that is, the Roman foe) as an influence of the Sasanian period.

3. The Tribute of Golden Eggs

According to the Arabic histories and Firdawsī, Philip paid his annual tribute to the Persian king Dārā(b) in form of golden eggs. After Dārā(b)’s death, his son, also called Dārā, ascended the throne and wrote a letter to Alexander, demanding the tribute that Philip used to pay. Alexander, who had also succeeded his own father, refused to pay the tribute and replied that “the hen that laid the golden eggs had died”. In fact, this sentence, which is repeated quite intact in all versions (Ṭabarī⁷⁸ and Firdawsī⁷⁹ in particular), corresponds to the Syriac *Alexander Romance*.⁸⁰ Curiously, although there is no war between Philip and the Persian king mentioned in the Greek PC, the tribute of the golden eggs is mentioned there (I, 23). According to the Greek PC, when Alexander returned from Methone and went to visit his father Philip, he saw Darius’s ambassadors asking for the tribute of “one hundred golden eggs, each weighing 20 pounds of solid gold”. According to the *Shāhnāma*, the golden eggs numbered “one hundred thousand, each one weighing forty *mithqāl*” (roughly 6oz, i.e. 40x4.25 grams).⁸¹ According to the

⁷⁷ See Touraj Daryaee, *Imitatio Alexandri* and Its Impact on Late Arsacid, Early Sasanian and Middle Persian Literature, *Electrum* (Krakow, 2007), vol. XII, pp. 89–97 especially pp. 92–3. The effect of *imitatio Alexandri* on the Middle Persian literature is also studied by Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 295–8.

⁷⁸ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, pp. 692ff.

⁷⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 532.

⁸⁰ See Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 31.

⁸¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 521.

Arabic accounts and the *Shāhnāma*, Alexander's refusal to pay the tribute caused the war between Dārā and Alexander.⁸²

4. Exchange of Symbolic Gifts⁸³

After the well-known sentence “I have slain the hen which used to lay those eggs”, some sources add a passage on the symbolic exchange of gifts between Dārā and Alexander. The origin of the motif of symbolic gifts is rather confusing (whether it was included in the *Khudāynāmag* or not) because it is absent from Dīnawarī's account and the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, while Ṭabarī, the *Nihāya*, and the *Ghurar* of Tha'ālibī contain it.⁸⁴ In the Greek PC (I, 36), Darius sends the gifts, a whip, a ball and a chest of gold, along with a letter. However, the passage in the Arabic accounts bears a great resemblance to the Syriac PC.⁸⁵ In the *Nihāya*, the author adds two more gifts: a golden coffin and a pure pearl.⁸⁶ Below, I present in parallel the episode as seen in Ṭabarī's *History*⁸⁷ and the Syriac PC to highlight their resemblance.⁸⁸

The answer to the question why this passage is absent from the *Shāhnāma* and Dīnawarī's *Akhbār* can be found in Ṭabarī's account. As mentioned before, Ṭabarī includes four different variants on Alexander's history. The motif of symbolic gifts appears in a different version from the one in which the Persian descent variant is mentioned. The first variant is credited to “a source other than Hishām”,⁸⁹ while the second is based on “some authorities on ancient history ... those who say that Alexander was the brother of Dārā the Younger and the son of Dārā the Elder”.⁹⁰ Furthermore, it is likely that in the source in which Alexander is said to have possessed Persian ancestry, the motif of symbolic gifts did not appear, and so consequently it is likely that this motif was not in the *Khudāynāmag*. It seems that this motif was incorporated into the version with the Persian ancestry afterwards, and thus appears in Tha'ālibī's *Ghurar*, the *Nihāya*, the *Sharafnāma* of Nizāmī and Bal'amī's *History*. This indicates that Firdawsī and Dīnawarī were working with an older source.⁹¹ In the Arabic accounts, the word “whip”, whatever it was in their original source, is translated as “a polo mallet”. Ṭabarī used the word *ṣawljān*, which is an Arabised form of the Persian word for “polo”, *chawgān*.⁹² It is worth mentioning that two recensions of the Hebrew

⁸² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 533.

⁸³ This motif is studied in chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁸⁴ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 694ff.; Tha'ālibī, *Ghurar*, p. 403ff., *Nihāya*, p. 116ff. Bal'amī, in his *History* (vol. I, pp. 485ff.), and Nizāmī Ganjavī, in his *Sharafnāma*, also dedicates a whole passage to the exchange of symbolic gifts. See chapter 5 of the present thesis. Instead of “mustard seeds”, Nizāmī and Bal'amī have *sependān* (wild rue).

⁸⁵ Budge, *The History of Alexander* (Book I, chapters: XXXVI–XLI).

⁸⁶ *Nihāya*, pp. 116ff.

⁸⁷ Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. IV, pp. 89–90.

⁸⁸ See Budge, *The History of Alexander* (I, XXXVI–XLI), pp. 46–54.

⁸⁹ Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, IV, p. 89.

⁹⁰ Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, IV, pp. 90–3.

⁹¹ This will be discussed further in the next chapter, where the *Shāhnāma* provides more proofs of the authenticity and antiquity of its source.

⁹² See Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (London, 1963), 403a.

*Alexander Romance*⁹³ translated from the same Arabic exemplar⁹⁴ used this Arabic word, adding the explanation that this is “the stick with which young men engage in sport”, implying that the Arabic exemplar had *al-ṣawljān* here.⁹⁵

⁹³ W. J. van Bekkum (ed. and trans.), *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS London, Jews' College no. 145*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta* 47 (Leuven, 1992), pp. 16–33; van Bekkum, *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS Hébr. 671.5 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale*, Hebrew Language and Literature Series 1 (Groningen, 1994).

⁹⁴ W. J. van Bekkum, “Medieval Hebrew versions of the Alexander Romance”, *Medieval Antiquity*, ed. A. Welkenhuysen, H. Braet, W. Verbeke (Leuven, 1995), p. 296.

⁹⁵ W. J. van Bekkum, *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS Hébr. 671.5 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale*, p. 32 [fol. 249a, line 6]).

Ṭabari

Darius sent Alexander a **polo mallet**, a **ball** and a load of **sesame**. In a written message he started that Alexander was a boy, and that he should play with the polo mallet and ball. Should he not confine himself to this order, Darius would send an emissary to fetch him in shackles; and [he stated] that the soldiers of Darius were as numerous as grains of sesame seeds. In reply, Alexander wrote to Darius that he understood the message. He saw therein a good omen. He likened the Earth to the ball, and declared that he would drag the realm of Darius to his own kingdom ... He viewed the sesame seeds in the same light, though abundant, they were neither bitter nor pungent. Along with his letter, he sent Darius a sack of **mustard** seeds and told him that what he was sending was small in size but in pungency, bitterness and strength, it equalled the gift of sesame, and that his army fully fit this description.

Syriac PC

Darius sent Alexander a **whip** and a **ball** and a box full of **gold**, and ten measures of **sesame** seed, and wrote him a letter: the whip was to train himself, the ball to play, the gold for his expenses to retire and go back to his country, and the sesame seeds [represented] the number of Darius's troops. Alexander accepted the gifts as a good omen and interpreted them: the whip to smite and subdue his enemies, the ball as a sign that he would hold the whole world and the box of gold signified his subjugation of Darius in war and was a sign of the tribute that Darius would pay to Alexander. The sesame seeds signified that Darius's troops were numerous but tasteless. Thus Alexander sent Darius a bushel of **mustard** seeds as a description of Macedonian troops. Darius put a handful of the mustard seeds into his mouth and said: "They are small but very
pungent".

As can be seen in these parallel episodes, apart from the disagreement over the gift of the polo mallet/whip, the Arabic version is close to the Syriac source. It is not clear how the “whip” turned into a “polo mallet”, but once it was translated from Syriac, the word appears as the Arabised Persian word *chawgān* (polo), as it does in the Hebrew version. Due to the Persian origin of *chawgān*, and the fact that it fits very well in the context of “playing”, the Arabic intermediary may be based on a Middle Persian *Vorlage*.

5. The Battles between Alexander and Darius

While the Greek *Alexander Romance* only describes the actual battle at Gaugamela, the Arabic and Persian accounts give more details. The anonymous *Nihāya* and Ibn al-Faḳīh Hamadānī report that in preparation for battle, Dārā lodged his family in the city of Hamadān in what is now western Iran.¹⁹⁹ According to one of the traditions mentioned by Ṭabarī, the contenders met in the Jazīra,²⁰⁰ and battled there for a year. Firdawsī mentions the bank of the Euphrates²⁰¹ as the first battlefield. According to Firdawsī and the *Nihāya*, there were three battles between Alexander and Dārā.²⁰² In the *Shāhnāma*, the poet’s emphasis on historical information is remarkable. It seems very important for the poet to report where each detail happens. For example, Jahrum is where the royal treasure is located,²⁰³ the royal family resides in Iṣfahān and Alexander is crowned in Iṣṭakhr (with a *Kayānī* crown). There is no such interest in the Greek and the Syriac versions.

6. Darius’s Murderers

All the Arabic and Persian accounts, along with the Greek and Syriac PCs,²⁰⁴ agree that Darius was murdered by his own men. Disagreement emerges, however, over whether his assassins were generals (*sarhang*),²⁰⁵ Zoroastrian priests (*mubad*)²⁰⁶, chamberlains (*ḥājīb*)²⁰⁷ or ministers (*vazīr*, *dastūr*).²⁰⁸ According to Ṭabarī and Dīnawarī, they were guards from Hamadān (Ecbatana).²⁰⁹ Firdawsī mentions their names as Jānūspār (or

¹⁹⁹ Ibn al-Faḳīh, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, vol. V, p. 219.

²⁰⁰ Indeed, it is not incorrect to say that the battle took place in al-Jazīra, which is Arbela. This indicates that Ṭabarī’s source contained more reliable historical information than any other Arabic account. In concordance with Ṭabarī, Bal’amī and Nizāmī also mentioned the land of Jazīra (*Mūṣul*), “which is near the banks of the Tigris”, as is the first battlefield. See Bal’amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal’amī, Tarjoma-yi Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, ed. M. T. Bahār and M. P. Gunābādī, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1353/1974), vol. II, p. 696. See also the chapter five of this thesis.

²⁰¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 541.

²⁰² In general, four battles take place, the first by the Euphrates, over eight days; the second in a vast camp, over three days, and the third battle near Iṣṭakhr (Persepolis). Dārā is defeated and fled to Kirmān. In the fourth battle Dārā is murdered by his own guards. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 540–54.

²⁰³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 392.

²⁰⁴ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 79–80.

²⁰⁵ This word is used by Nizāmī in the *Sharafnāma*, see chapter 5 of this thesis.

²⁰⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 554.

²⁰⁷ Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, IV, p. 91.

²⁰⁸ *Nihāya*, p. 121; Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 554.

²⁰⁹ Dīnawarī, *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, p. 32; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 696; Tha’ālibī, *Ghurur*, p. 408.

Jānūshyār) and Māhyār.²¹⁰ Khaleghi-Motlagh identifies the name “Jānūspār” as the Middle Persian *gyān-abespār*, which means “bodyguard, soldier”.²¹¹ Bīrūnī also affirms that Dārā was killed by his chief bodyguard, Nawjushānas son of Ādharbakht.²¹²

Firdawsī and the *Nihāya* affirm that Darius’s murderers acted on their own in order to gain Alexander’s favour and good grace, while Dīnawarī, Nizāmī and Bal‘amī report that Alexander agreed to make a compact with the murderers, but having arranged a deal with the generals to have Darius murdered, repented of the agreement and instead punished the traitors.²¹³ Ṭabarī reports both versions.²¹⁴ In the *Nihāya*, Alexander tricked them into making themselves known with the clever pretext that “they will be elevated above the armies”. When Alexander wants to punish them, they protest. Alexander responds: “I elevate you by hanging you”.²¹⁵

7. Alexander Weeps at Dārā’s Deathbed

A well-known motif from the PC is the scene in which Alexander finds the dying Darius, hears his last words and laments his death (II, 20).²¹⁶ Bīrūnī affirms that Alexander called Dārā “brother”.²¹⁷ Many details of this passage in the Arabic and Persian versions stick closely to the version in the Greek *Romance*. For instance, Alexander’s sentence begins in a similar way in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and the Greek PC.

The Greek *Romance*: “Placing his hands on Darius’s breast, he spoke these words, pregnant with pity: ‘Stand up, King Darius. Rule your land and become master of yourself. Receive back your crown and rule your Persian people ...’”²¹⁸

The *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī: “Alexander places Darius’s head on his knees ... and says: ‘Stand up and sit on [your] golden throne ... I shall restore your kingdom to you ...’”²¹⁹

Although this poignant scene is based on the Greek *Alexander Romance*, what is perhaps particularly interesting here is that the story hardly seems to have any motivation in the PC’s narrative, the incident (I mean Alexander’s pained reaction to the death of Darius) comes as a surprise, while in the Arabic and Persian accounts

²¹⁰ The names in the Greek PC are Besso and Ariobarzanes, satraps of Darius (II, 20). In the Syriac PC, their names are Bagiz and Anabdeh (II, XII). No other source names the murderers.

²¹¹ He adds that it is ironic that a murderer should bear such a name. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yāddāsh-t-hā-yi Shāhnāma* (Tehran, 1389/2010), vol. II, p. 364.

²¹² Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 44.

²¹³ See chapter five of this thesis.

²¹⁴ Ṭabarī, *The History*, vol. IV, pp. 91–2.

²¹⁵ *Nihāya*, p. 123.

²¹⁶ According to Arrian, Darius was already dead when Alexander found him. Alexander did not find Darius alive, as the *Romance* describes.

²¹⁷ Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 44.

²¹⁸ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 109.

²¹⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 555–6. Bīrūnī affirmed that Alexander called Dārā “brother”. See chapter four of *Chronology*, p. 44.

Alexander's reaction is given an elaborate motive: he is crying for the death of his brother. Thus, although the Arabic versions and Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* were composed in a far later historical period, the tale of Darius's death seems to be more fully integrated into these texts than the tale of Alexander's sorrow into the *Alexander Romance*.²²⁰

8. Dārā's Last Will

In the Greek *Romance* (II, 20), Darius asks Alexander to bury him with his own hands, he commits his mother and wife to Alexander and gives his daughter Roxana²²¹ to Alexander for wife. To these personal deathbed gestures, the Arabic and Persian sources mentioned in this chapter add others that might seem to belong purely to a Persian version since they make out Alexander to be the legitimate successor of the dying king. According to Ṭabarī, Dārā requests that Alexander "should marry his daughter Rawshanak, and perpetuate Persian nobility and not to impose foreign rule upon the Persian nobility".²²²

In the *Shāhnāma*, Dārā expresses the hope that a descendant of Alexander and Rawshanak will re-establish the glory of Zoroastrian feasts and customs. This passage shows Firdawsī's knowledge of the important Iranian feasts and also mentions important figures in the Zoroastrian tradition, such as the great hero Isfandiyār and King Gushtāsp:

Of her you might have a famous descendant who would revive the name of Isfandiyār, tend the fire of Zoroaster, gather up the *Zand-Avesta*, observe the presages and feast of Sada, also the glory of Nawrūz, of the fire temple and the feast of Mihrigān. He would wash his soul and face with the water of wisdom. He would revive the rites of Luhrāsp and follow the religion of Gushtāsp [Zoroastrianism].²²³

9. Alexander's Translation Movement

According to Ṭabarī, Alexander destroyed Persian fire temples, killed Zoroastrian priests and burned their books.²²⁴ He remarks that "it is said that Alexander carried away the books of knowledge of the people of Persia, comprising their sciences, astronomy and philosophy after translating them into Syriac and the *rūmī* [Greek] language."²²⁵

²²⁰ However, this scene can be an alleged feature of Greek tragedy; For similar examples see David Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (London, 2001), especially chapter 3: "Pity and Power", p. 91, n. 36.

²²¹ Alexander did indeed marry a girl called Roxana, but nearly three years after the death of Darius (in spring 327 BC) and she was not the daughter of Darius, but of a Bactrian chieftain named Oxyartes.

²²² Ṭabarī, *The History*, vol. IV, p. 91.

²²³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 559. Tha'ālibī also makes a brief mention of preserving the Zoroastrian texts and faith. See Tha'ālibī, *Ghurur*, p. 411. On the interpretation of this passage in the *Shāhnāma* see Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 299–303.

²²⁴ This is developed by Niẓāmī in the *Sharafnāma*, the first part of his *Iskandarnāma*. See chapter 5 of the present thesis.

²²⁵ Ṭabarī, *The History*, vol. IV, p. 93.

The report about Alexander's acts of pillage and the translation of Persian books into Greek is derived from the late Sasanian (early seventh century) period, recorded in various Middle Persian writings²²⁶ and Arabic works. For instance, according to the *Book of Nativities* (*Kitāb al-Mawālīd*), “when Alexander conquered the kingdom of Dārā the King, he had them all translated into the Greek language. Then he burnt the original copies which were kept in the treasure-houses of Dārā, and killed everyone whom he thought might be hiding away any of them.”²²⁷ Another example of the transmission of the Zoroastrian sciences is presented by Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht in his *Book of Nahmuṭān on the Nativities*:

He [Alexander] had, however, copies made of whatever was collected in the archives and treasuries of Iṣṭakhr [Persepolis] and translated into Byzantine [Greek] and Coptic. After he was finished with copying whatever he needed from that [material], he burned what was written in Persian ... These books, along with the rest of the sciences, property, treasures, and learned men that he came upon, he sent to Egypt.²²⁸

Another variant of this tale is narrated by Ḥamza Iṣfahānī (d. after 961), according to which the reason Alexander burned the Persian books after their translation into Greek was because “he envied the fact that [the Persians] had gathered together sciences the like of which no other nation had ever gathered.”²²⁹

According to these sources, any Greek book is by definition part of the Zoroastrian canon; and hence the translation and study of Greek works would mean recovering ancient Persian knowledge. As Daryaei rightly points out, “these narratives suggest that there was probably a construction of an ‘Alexander plunder’ story in the Sasanian period, elaborated and used by the Persians to justify the incorporation of ‘foreign’ knowledge in the name of replacing the Persian heritage stolen or destroyed by Alexander.”²³⁰

10. King Frīdūn's Sons

Ṭabarī mentions a source in which Alexander speaks of “close relations” between Dārā and himself. Ṭabarī adds: “He meant, so this source maintained, the closeness between Salm and Īraj, the sons of Afrīdhūn.”²³¹ We come across this story in Middle Persian texts. It relates the division of the world by king Frīdūn among his three sons. He divided his kingdom (the world) between his sons, Salm, Tūr and Īraj. Īraj is given the

²²⁶ See Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 295–8; and the appendix in Daryaei, “*Imitatio Alexandri*”, pp. 93–5.

²²⁷ Quoted in S. M. Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology in Arabic and Persian* (Leiden, 1964), pp. 77–8.

²²⁸ Quoted in D. Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar* (London, 1968), pp. 9–10.

²²⁹ Ḥamza Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l-anbīyā*, p. 24.

²³⁰ Daryaei, “*Imitatio Alexandri*”, p. 90.

²³¹ Ṭabarī, *The History*, vol. IV, p. 92.

best land (Irānshahr), while Salm ruled over the land of Rūm (Anatolia) and Tūr over the land of Turkistān (Central Asia).²³²

Thus, as Alexander rightly maintained, according to this story, the Persian kings and the kings of Rūm are indeed relatives, both descending from the same king (i.e. Frīdūn). Ṭabarī is the only historian who quotes this anecdote, which is very important in the epic tradition. Hence, according to Persian tradition, even if Alexander and Dārā were not brothers, they were related, being descendants of King Frīdūn. In any case, Alexander's kingship was legitimised in the epic tradition of ancient Persia by a variety of sources.

11. Alexander's Speech on Accession to the Throne of Persia

According to the *Shāhnāma*, when Alexander acceded to the throne of Persia, he gave a speech and wrote a letter to the Persian nobles.²³³ The contents of his letter and speech legitimised his rule as a Persian king. According to Tafāḍḍulī, this type of speech on the occasion of accession to a throne is a stylistic characteristic of the *Khudāynāmag*.²³⁴ Throughout the Arabic and Persian historical accounts there are examples of kings making speeches on ascending the throne, in particular the Sasanian kings.²³⁵

12. Alexander's Adventures

Some other motifs from the PC tradition appear in the Arabic accounts mentioned in this chapter, and also discussed in detail in later chapters. Dinawarī mentions Alexander's journey to India, the single combat between Alexander and Porus (the Indian king), the episode with Queen Candace's (here called Qandāqa), the journey to the Land of Darkness, the journey to China, the land of women (Amazons) and Alexander's journey to Mecca.²³⁶ Ṭabarī also cited a number of these motifs from the *Alexander Romance*. After the campaign in India, for instance, he relates Alexander's journey to China and his journey into the Land of Darkness in search of the Water of Life.²³⁷

The *Nihāya* also contains a passage on the Indian King Porus and his duel with Alexander, as well as the account of Alexander's journey to Mecca, an extensive episode concerning Queen Qandāfa (Candace), a Brahman story and the story of Amazons. Some other motifs from the letter to Aristotle also appear in this book: tales

²³² On the Middle Persian version of this tale see T. Daryaei, "Šegafty va Barjestegī-ye Sīstān, Matn-e be zabān-e pahlavī", *Iranshenāsī* 8.3 (1996), pp. 534–42. The *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī provides the epic narrative of this division of the world. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. I, pp. 270–80.

²³³ See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 562–5.

²³⁴ Tafāḍḍulī, *Tārīkh adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islām*, pp. 238–9.

²³⁵ For instance, Ṭabarī provides Khusraw I Anūshīrvān's speech (*Tārīkh*, vol. I, pp. 896–7); Dinawarī reports the speech of Hurmuz, Khusraw I's son (*Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, p. 77) and the *Nihāya* contains Ardaxshīr's speech (*Nihāya*, pp. 193–6).

²³⁶ Dinawarī, *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, pp. 34–9.

²³⁷ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. II, pp. 696ff.

of monsters, the talking tree and a version of the episode of the temple of Dionysus. The journey to China is also mentioned.²³⁸

Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, which contains the most extensive narrative on Alexander's adventures, will be examined in the next chapter. Firdawsī's work is a crucial source for casting light on whether these adventures were a part of the *Khudāynāmag* or added afterwards during the Islamic period.

13. Alexander, Founder of Cities

In the Arabic and Persian sources, Alexander is recorded as the founder of many important cities, especially in Central Asia. According to the Greek *Alexander Romance*, he founded twelve cities (III, 35). In the Syriac *Romance*, thirteen are enumerated.²³⁹ Dīnawarī reports the foundation of twelve cities in agreement with the *Nihāya* and Ṭabarī. Ṭabarī also adds that each of them was named after Alexander (for instance, three in Khurāsān – Hirāt, Merv and Samarqand).

14. Tribal Kingdoms

According to Dīnawarī, Alexander feared that the nations whose kings he had killed would rebel when he died. He therefore decided to slay the nobles of Iran. Following Aristotle's counsel, he divided Iran among the tribal princes.²⁴⁰ This political division of the Persian Empire is attested in the Middle Persian texts as a destruction of the unity of the Persian kingdom, Alexander "splintering it into a number of feudal orders [*kadag-xwādāy*]"²⁴¹ or *mulūk al-ṭawā'if*, "the kings of the territorial divisions", as they appear in the Arabic and Persian sources.²⁴²

This frequently recorded tradition was the official Sasanian reckoning and is attested in both the Arabic historical accounts and the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.²⁴³

15. Alexander's Death

In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, Alexander is said to have died in Babylon, poisoned, having lived only thirty-two years (III, 35). In the Syriac *Alexander Romance*, he had lived thirty-two years and seven months when he died in Babylon (III, XXIV).²⁴⁴ According to Ṭabarī and Bīrūnī, Alexander died in a city near Babylon called Shahrazūr. This may be the city identified in the Syriac *Khuzistān Chronicle* as

²³⁸ *Nihāya*, pp. 117ff.

²³⁹ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 142.

²⁴⁰ Dīnawarī, *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, pp. 39–40.

²⁴¹ See Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 295–7; Daryaei, "Imitatio Alexandri", pp. 90, 93–95.

²⁴² See Shahbazi, "Arsacids: vi. Arsacid Chronology in Traditional History", *EIr*, II/5 (New York, 1987), p. 542. See also M. Morony, "Mulūk al-ṭawā'if 1. In pre-Islamic Persia", *EIr*, vol. VII, pp. 551–52.

²⁴³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 116–18.

²⁴⁴ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 142–43.

“Bāgniḡyā” in the Babylon area.²⁴⁵ The Arabic and Persian sources both agree that Alexander died of an illness, but they disagree on his age when he died (see Table 2).

²⁴⁵ Guidi, “Chronicon anonymum”, *Chronica Minora* (Paris, 1903), I, 15–39 (Syriac text); II, 15–32 (Latin trans.), pp. 28–29.

Table 2. Motifs of the *Alexander Romance* in the Arabic and Persian Sources

Motif/source	Dīnawarī (9 th c.)	<i>Nihāya</i> (11 th c.)	Ṭabarī (10 th c.)	Firdawsī (11 th c.)	Tha'ālibī (11 th c.)	Syriac PC (7 th c.)	Greek PC (3 rd c.)
Tribute of golden eggs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
The herb	Sandar	Iskandar	Sandar	Iskandar	Iskandarūs	-	-
Alexander's mother	-	-	Halāy	Nāhīd	-		Olympias
Exchange of symbolic gifts	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	
The first battle	Euphrates	Euphrates	Jazīrah (Arbela)	Euphrates	Euphrates	River Strangas	Issus in Cilicia
Darius's murderers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Translation movement	-	-	✓	-		-	-
King Porus	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brahmans			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Queen Candace	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alexander in China	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Gog and Magog	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Land of Darkness/ Fountain of Life	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
a half-human half-animal creature	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Alexander dies in	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Shahrazūr near Babylon	Babylon	Shahrazūr near Babylon	Babylon	Babylon
Alexander's age when he dies	-	-	36	-	38	32 years and 7 months	32
<i>The Laments</i>	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-
Alexander's cities	12	12	12	10	-	13	12
Alexander's reign			14 years	14 years	14 years	12years, 7months	10 years
Tribal kingdoms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Dhū'l-Qarnayn	-	✓	-	-	✓	-	-

As a result of the above analysis and survey of the diverse Arabic and Persian texts relating to Alexander, a clear picture has emerged of the characteristics of the PC tradition in the pre-Islamic Persian world. It is clear that certain motifs in the Middle Persian tradition acquired a specific form that distinguishes them from other traditions. Taking Dīnawarī, the anonymous *Nihāya*, Firdawsī, Tha‘ālibī and Ṭabarī as the main bases for our account, I will try to summarise the contents of the *Alexander Romance* in Middle Persian tradition in the following section.

III. Alexander the Great in the *Khudāynāmag*

As we have seen in the two foregoing sections of this chapter, early Islamic historiography, composed by authors of Iranian origin, was influenced by the PC tradition, but also contained various motifs (e.g. Alexander’s Persian ancestry) that must have been based on a Middle Persian source. These motifs indicate that the legendary life of Alexander was adopted into the general body of the Iranian historical tradition.²⁴⁶ The Iranian adaption of the *Romance* not only accepts the positive image of Alexander, but links him to the last Kayānid kings by making the first Dārā his father and the second Dārā his half-brother, thus bestowing upon him the legitimacy of kingship. Judging from the common motifs discussed in this chapter, we can assume that the Alexander’s episode in the *Khudāynāmag* may have run as follows:

Philip was defeated by the Persian king Dārā and accepted to pay an annual tribute in the form of golden eggs. He also gave his daughter in marriage to the Persian king. However, Dārā lost interest in her because she had bad breath. She was cured by a herb that in the Greek language was called *sandar* (or a similar word). She was sent back to Rūm without revealing that she was pregnant. There, she gave birth to a son whom she named after the herb that cured her bad breath. Philip accepted the child as his own and engaged Aristotle as his tutor. When Philip died, Alexander ascended the throne of Rūm.

After sending back the Greek princess, Dārā had another son with another woman and gave him his own name, Dārā. The son then ascended the throne when his father the first Dārā died. He sent ambassadors to Alexander in order to claim the annual tribute. Alexander refused and said: “The hen which used to lay the golden eggs has died, thus there is no tribute to pay.”

This caused war between the two brothers. Alexander bribed two men of Hamadān who were Dārā’s guards, and induced them to kill the Persian king. Thus, Dārā was killed by his own guards. Alexander found the dying king and heard his last words. Dārā asked him to marry his daughter Rawshanak, preserve the Iranian feasts and noble families, and punish his murderers.

²⁴⁶ Yarshater, “Iranian National History”, p. 377.

Alexander buried Dārā according to Persian custom, punished the murderers and married Rawshanak. He sent a letter to the Persian nobles and made a speech on ascending the throne, which was the custom among the Persian kings. In his speech and letter, he legitimised his claim as the rightful King of Persia. Then he ordered the translation of Persian books into Greek and sent them to Rūm.

He built many cities, among which Samarqand, Merv and Bukhāra had a vivid memory of their founder. When he knew that his death was near, he wanted to kill the Persian nobles because he was afraid of their rebellion. But Aristotle advised him to separate the Persian Empire into local kingdoms, inaugurating the period known as *kadag-xwadāy* in Middle Persian.

Something like this summary of Alexander's deeds must have been included in the *Khudāynāmag* because all the Arabic historical accounts mentioned in this chapter more or less repeat it.²⁴⁷ However, the question whether the other motifs from the PC tradition, such as the battle with the Indian King Porus and the search for the Water of Life, existed in the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag* or were incorporated into the Arabic historical accounts after the Arab conquest remained unanswered and a matter of controversy among scholars. In this regard, there are two principal theories:

- 1) Khaleghi-Motlagh, following Nöldeke's hypothesis,²⁴⁸ believes that the *Khudāynāmag* did not contain the account of Alexander (as it is reflected in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī), but that it was an independent work translated from Middle Persian to Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa'.²⁴⁹ He affirms that this Arabic translation was based on the Middle Persian version of the PC, as argued by Nöldeke.
- 2) Tafaddulī and Boyce both affirm that "the compilers of the *Khudāynāmag* used written foreign sources ... notably a Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance*".²⁵⁰ But they do not specify why and how they reached such a conclusion. If there had been a Middle Persian translation of the PC, as Nöldeke argued, why would they need the Syriac translation?

In sum, in this chapter, we have tried to clarify what the basic issues are in the study of the influence of Sasanian historiography on the Arabic historical sources of the *Alexander Romance* based on the historical background of the translation movement in the Sasanian period. In the ensuing final section of this chapter, some conclusions are ventured.

²⁴⁷ This summary of Alexander's deeds is also found in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, the best representation of the *Khudāynāmag* tradition. See chapter three of this thesis.

²⁴⁸ See chapter one, section III of this thesis.

²⁴⁹ Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāmag*", pp. 29–30; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Jāy-i Rustam ... va Iskandar dar *Khudāynāmag*", pp. 19–20.

²⁵⁰ Tafaddulī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islām*, pp. 270–71; Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", p. 59.

Conclusion: The Origin and Development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Arabic/Persian Tradition

From the foregoing survey of the Arabic sources that relate the *Alexander Romance*, firstly we may conclude that legends concerning Alexander the Great must have existed in the Iranian world from the Parthian period.²⁵¹ The era of Khusraw Anūshirvān (Chosroes I, r. 531–79) must be considered the time when these oral legends were amalgamated with the *Alexander Romance* and were written down by the authors of the *Khudāynāmag*, mainly because this is when Khusraw I accepted refugees from the Eastern Roman Empire when Justinian closed the Neoplatonist schools of Athens in 529.²⁵² There were also refugees from Alexandria in Egypt where, curiously, the *Alexander Romance* originated. Khusraw I's welcome of these refugees could be the moment when the *Alexander Romance* entered the Persian tradition and completed a part of the history of Iran.²⁵³ Stoneman and Daryaee also affirmed that it is likely that the Greek tale became known to the Persians as a result of the interest of this Sasanian king.²⁵⁴ It is furthermore possible that the Syriac *Alexander Romance* was also translated under the patronage of Khusraw I. It is at least curious that Budge mentioned that Syriac was not the translator's native language.²⁵⁵

In addition, there are other pieces of evidence for the possibility that the Syriac translation of the PC was undertaken in the Sasanian court. For one, every time we find the names of the Achaemenid kings they are referred to with the title Khusraw.²⁵⁶ For instance, Xerxes is referred to in the Syriac version by the name of Khusraw, and Darius assumes titles that were used by Shābuhr II post-fourth century AD.²⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is likely that the Syriac and the Middle Persian versions were prepared almost at the same time and probably in the same court, but for different audiences and different purposes.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Middle Persian version was modified and included in the *Khudāynāmag* in order to create a continuous history of Iran.

²⁵¹ Yarshater points out that the fame of the Alexander legend was due to the relations between the Iranian and Greeks living in the Greek cities in Asia Minor during the Parthian period. See Yarshater, "Chirā az pādishāhān-i mād va hakhāmanishī dar *Shāhnāma* dhikrī nīst", p. 194. See also Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, p. 306.

²⁵² Agathias, *The Histories*, trans. J. D. Frendo (Berlin, 1975), II.31. See also Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia*, p. 30.

²⁵³ Ḥafiz's verses, cited in the epigraph of this chapter, explain this subject very well: Alexander's story was a means to remember what happened to Darius III. It was regarded as a part of Persian history.

²⁵⁴ Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 31; Daryaee, "Imitatio Alexandri", p. 89.

²⁵⁵ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. lx.

²⁵⁶ See C. Ciancaglini, "The Syriac version of the Alexander Romance", *Le Muséon, Revue d'Études Orientales* 114.1–2 (2001), p. 139.

²⁵⁷ Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 32; Daryaee, "Imitatio Alexandri", p. 90.

²⁵⁸ It is possible that the Syriac version was prepared for the Nestorians and non-Zoroastrian audience and the Middle Persian translation was a courtly version and was used in the Persian historiography in order to create a continuous history of the Persian empire.

Secondly, the enormous variety of works on Alexander the Great in the Islamic world indicates that the PC tradition was translated into Arabic through two different channels:

- 1) The historical accounts (the *tārīkh* genre), which include Alexander among the Persian kings and claim that he was Dārā's brother, are, I postulate, based on the Middle Persian translation of the PC. This translation was included in the Sasanian chronicle *Khudāynāmag* (*The Book of Sovereigns*), translated into Arabic as *Sayr al-Mulūk* in the eighth century, of which the Ibn al-Muqaffa' translation is the most well known. The reason why we claim such a conclusion is because the oldest representations of the *Alexander Romance* (Dīnawarī, the *Nihāya* and Ṭabarī) include it in Persian history. Alexander's tale is always part of the Kayānids and there is no independent version of this work until after the twelfth century.
- 2) The PC account was also translated into Arabic directly from Syriac, possibly in the ninth century,²⁵⁹ and was the source for the works which contained motifs, such as the tale of Nectanebo and the foundation of Alexandria among others (e.g. the *Mujamal al-tavārīkh*, the Ethiopian version, etc.).

Thirdly, there is no doubt that the Arabic translation of the *Khudāynāmag* by Ibn al-Muqaffa' contained the Alexander episode through which it became known to the historians of the ninth and tenth century, because the *Nihāya* quotes Ibn al-Muqaffa' at the beginning of the passage on Alexander.²⁶⁰ In addition, we have the testimony of the anonymous *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* (*The Sīstān Chronicle*),²⁶¹ which reports:

Iskandar *Rūmī*, after Dārā's death and his marriage with Rawshanak, Dārā's daughter, decided to go to India. First he went to Sīstān and decided to build a castle, where there is another one built by Ardashīr Bābakān. Iskandar remained there for seven days ... but left Rawshanak in the castle until he returned from India. When he returned, the castle was finished. So he remained there one month and claimed: "This castle must be named *ark*." And *ark* in the *rūmī* language²⁶² means "fort" and this is the reason why the castle of Sīstān is called "Ark" [*Arg*]. This account is attested in various sources, one in *Akhbār-i Sīstān*, and another in Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Sayr al-mulūk 'ajam*.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ See Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 77–9.

²⁶⁰ *Nihāya*, p. 110; See also Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 30.

²⁶¹ This anonymous work, written in the eleventh century, but subsequently altered with later additions, provides some popular tales about the ancient epic from the Sīstān cycle. See *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, ed. M. T. Bahār (Tehran, 1314/1935 [2nd ed. 1352/1973]), pp. j–! (introduction).

²⁶² The word in Latin is actually *arx*.

²⁶³ *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, p. 11.

The *Nihāya* and the *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* prove that the Arabic translation of the *Khudāynāmag* of Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ contained accounts of Alexander.²⁶⁴ The ensuing chapters of this thesis, especially the next on the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, help us to understand the complex development of the PC tradition in Persian literature. The various scholarly hypotheses (Boyce, Tafaddulī and Khaleghi-Motlagh) mentioned above regarding whether the PC was included in the *Khudāynāmag* and through which language (Syriac or Middle Persian), will be discussed in the next chapter.

The *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī features some characteristics of the *Alexander Romance* that did not survive in any other source and thus helps to clarify these questions. Furthermore, Firdawsī’s grand poetic narrative of the history of ancient Persia, as we will see, is a valuable source in which it is possible to trace the “missing link” between the appearance of the PC in Alexandria in the third century AD and its reappearance in Khurāsān (in ancient Parthia) in the tenth century.

²⁶⁴ On the existence of the *Alexander Romance* in the *Khudāynāmag*, see also chapter four.

Chapter Three: Alexander the Great in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī

کهن دولت به اقبال جوانان بر نمی آید قیاس از حال دارا و سکندر می توان کردن

Timeworn kingdoms don't cope well when juveniles
in the flush of fortune strut upon the scene.
One can conjecture and surmise this is the case
from Darius's and Alexander's circumstances.

Şā'ib Tabrīzī (d. 1676)¹

Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, completed in 1010, though conceived as a historical work, is closer in mode to epic poetry.² Its register is highly sophisticated, and bears comparison with Homeric language, particularly in the use of what has been called the "Homeric simile".³ It reflects the pre-eminently Persian perception of history as focused on the deeds of the kings who ruled ancient Iran. Owing to its richness of detail, the *Shāhnāma* remains the most important source for the history, literature and culture of pre-Islamic Persia.⁴

The story of Alexander the Great in the *Shāhnāma* is the first complete representative of the PC tradition in the Islamic world.⁵ Like the sources which follow the *Khudāynāmag* tradition, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Alexander episode in the *Shāhnāma* covers three different reigns, those of Dārāb and his sons Dārā and Alexander (Iskandar or Sikandar), and contains 2,458 verses in the Khaleghi-Motlagh edition.⁶

As Dick Davis points out, the Alexander story in the *Shāhnāma* is a bridge from legendary to quasi-historical material,⁷ and thus deserves particular attention. This might be due to a change of perspective which marked a turning point in the Persian conception of history. Given this context, the purpose of this chapter is to study the Alexander episode in the *Shāhnāma* in relation to the PC tradition in order to find

¹ Şā'ib Tabrīzī, *Dīvān*, ed. Muḥammad Qahrimān (Tehran, 1370/1991), vol. VI, pp. 3011–12. This verse is translated by Dr Leonard Lewisohn.

² On the historical value of the *Shāhnāma* see J. S. Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia", *Poetics Today* 14.2 (1993), pp. 252–72.

³ J. S. Meisami, "History as Literature", *A History of Persian Literature, Vol. X: Persian Historiography*, ed. Ch. Melville (London/New York, 2012), pp. 8–10.

⁴ See Yarshater, "Iranian National History", *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater (Cambridge, 1983), vol. III/1, p. 361.

⁵ The other works antedating the *Shāhnāma*, which deal with Alexander's legend, normally contain a summary and a brief mention of motifs from the PC tradition as discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 518–65 and vol. VI, pp. 3–129.

⁷ D. Davis, "The Aesthetics of the Historical Sections of the *Shahnama*", *Shahnama Studies*, ed. Ch. Melville (Cambridge, 2006), vol. I, p. 115.

answers to some of the questions that remain unanswered from the previous chapter (in particular regarding the Middle Persian *Vorlage*).

In order to analyse the Alexander episode in the *Shāhnāma*, this chapter first provides a brief background of the poem's compilation and its possible sources, followed by a summary of Alexander's story in the *Shāhnāma*. Secondly, this chapter focuses on its characteristics and motifs, especially those which distinguish Firdawsī's *Alexander Romance* from the other versions. Thirdly, the chapter focuses on Syriac materials that appear in the *Shāhnāma*, and what the presence of these materials tells us about the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic period.

I. Sources and Contents of the *Shāhnāma*

Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* is based primarily on a Persian prose work compiled in 957/958 by order of Abū Manşūr 'Abd al-Razzāq Ṭūsī (the governor of Ṭūs, in Khurāsān, north-eastern Iran), of which the only part preserved is the glossary.⁸ Derived ultimately from Sasanian sources, this prose work, which was also named *Shāhnāma (Book of Kings)*, seems to have been independent of the Arabic translations and was probably based on Pahlavi material, since the names of the compilers are all Zoroastrian and they are also called *mubeds*, Mazdean priests.⁹ This prose work incorporated not only the *Khudāynāmā* but also a number of historical fictions, popular tales and legends.¹⁰

Although some scholars have tried to demonstrate that Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* is based on oral sources,¹¹ as De Blois rightly points out, there can be no doubt that the poem is based on written sources, though we cannot necessarily presume that it is all based on one single source.¹² This last point is more obvious in the case of the chapter featuring Alexander in the *Shāhnāma*, which is an amalgam of independent sources, but

⁸ See M. Qazwīnī, "Muqaddama-yi qadīm-i *Shāhnāma*", *Bīst Maqāla* 2 (1313/1934), pp. 20ff; V. Minorsky, "The Older Preface to the *Shāhnāma*", *Studi Orientalistici in Onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* (Roma, 1956), vol. II, pp. 159–79; Th. Nöldeke, "Ein Beitrag zur Schahname-Forschung", *Hizāra-yi Firdawsī*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1362/1983), pp. 58–63; A. Khaṭībī, "Yikī nāma būd az gah-i bāstān: justārī dar shinākht-i manba'-i *Shāhnāma*-yi Firdawsī", *Nāma-yi Farhangistān* 3.5 (1381/2002), pp. 54–73.

⁹ See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Dar pīrāmūn-i manābi'-i Firdawsī", *Irānshināsī* 3 (1377/1998), pp. 512–13.

¹⁰ See J. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāmā*", *Nāme-yi Irān-i Bāstān, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 7.1–2 (2007–2008), pp. 3–119.

¹¹ Olga M. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (London, 1994); Davis, "The Problem of Ferdowsī's Sources", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1996), pp. 48–57.

¹² F. de Blois, *Persian Literature, A Bio-Bibliographical Survey: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period* (London/New York, 2004), vol. V, p. 110. De Blois also affirms that: "... the *Shahname* as it was written by Firdausi, was not oral poetry, but book-literature. However, almost as soon as it was written down, it most certainly did turn into oral poetry on the tongues of the rhapsodists, who developed and elaborated the epic orally and have continued to do so to the present. The tremendous degree of disagreement already between the oldest manuscripts of the poem cannot be explained purely in terms of the carelessness and unscrupulousness of generations of scribes. It is quite clear that from a very early date the scribal and oral textual traditions have constantly influenced one another. But this is an oral tradition which does not (as is assumed to have been the case with the Homeric poems) culminate and end with a book. In Iran the book is the point of departure." See De Blois, *Persian Literature, A Bio Bibliographical Survey. Vol. V, part I: Poetry to ca. A.D. 1100* (London, 1992), p. 58.

nevertheless uniform and coherent, as we will discuss in this chapter. In order to analyse the sources and origins of Alexander's chapter in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, we first need to provide a brief summary of its contents.

II. Summary of the *Alexander Romance* in the *Shāhnāma*

Dārāb's reign

- I. In a war between Philip and Dārāb, Philip is defeated and accepts to pay tribute in the form of golden eggs.¹³ He also gives his daughter, Nāhīd, in marriage to the Persian king. From this union, Alexander is born, but Dārāb is unaware of this because he had sent Nāhīd back to Philip on account of her bad breath. Meanwhile, Dārāb has another son with another woman, and calls him Dārā.

Dārā's reign

- I. Dārā's discourse on ascending the throne of Persia.
- II. Alexander ascends the throne after Philip's death and makes Aristotle his advisor.¹⁴
- III. Dārā's ambassadors demand the tribute of golden eggs.¹⁵ Alexander refuses and replies: "The hen that laid those golden eggs has died." This leads to war between Dārā and Alexander.
- IV. Alexander goes to Dārā's court disguised as his own ambassador. At a banquet, he hides some golden cups inside his clothes. When Dārā realises this, he asks Alexander why. Alexander answers that it is a Greek custom.¹⁶ Thus the Persian king gives the golden cups to Alexander, full

¹³ Curiously, this motif is not in the Greek *Alexander Romance*. However, the tribute of golden eggs is mentioned in one scene (PC, I, 23). See Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 54: "One hundred golden eggs ... each weighing 20 pounds of solid gold". According to Herodotus (V. 17–20), Xerxes's ambassadors demand that Amintas, the Macedonian king, pay tribute to the Persians. Plutarch (*Alex.* 5, 1) affirms that the Persian king demands tribute, considering himself the king of all lands by divine right.

¹⁴ Aristotle is mentioned three times in the *Shāhnāma*, the first time at Alexander's ascent to the throne, as his counsellor; the second time almost at the end of the story, when Alexander sends him a letter telling him that he wants to kill the Persian nobles; and the third and the last time, where Aristotle is one of the philosophers who speaks at Alexander's tomb.

¹⁵ There is a similar scene in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (PC, I, 23). However, Philip is still alive in this scene in the Greek PC. For an English translation see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 54–5.

¹⁶ Stoneman's commentary on the *Alexander Romance* (II. 15. 5–6) gives several parallels, see Richard Stoneman, *Il Romanzo di Alessandro, Vol. II*, trans. Tristano Gargiulo (Milan, 2012), p. 399.

of jewellery. The ambassadors who were sent to demand the tribute are present; they recognise Alexander and he has to flee.¹⁷

- V. The exchange of letters between Dārā and Alexander.¹⁸
- VI. The first battle takes place on the bank of Euphrates and lasts eight days. Dārā is defeated and has to flee the battlefield.
- VII. Dārā tries to gather more troops and a second battle takes place over three days. However, he is defeated again and flees to Jahrum and then to Iṣṭakhr (Persepolis).
- VIII. In a third battle, Alexander defeats Dārā and conquers Iṣṭakhr. Dārā flees to Kirmān (south-eastern Iran).
- IX. Dārā writes a letter to Alexander offering him the treasures of Persia. At the same time, he also writes a letter to Fūr (Porus), the Indian king, in order to ask him for help against Alexander.¹⁹
- X. In a fourth battle, the Persians surround Alexander. Dārā is killed by two of his own men. According to Firdawsī, they are Māhyār and Jānūsyār,²⁰ one a *mubed* and the other a *vazīr* (“minister”).²¹
- XI. Alexander finds the king as he lies dying and weeps for his misfortune.²² He hears Dārā’s last words and accepts to marry his daughter, Rawshanak (Roxana), punish the king’s murderers and allow Persian customs and Zoroastrian feasts.²³
- XII. Alexander punishes the murderers. He is accepted as a legitimate king of Persia. He writes a letter to the Persian nobles.²⁴

¹⁷ Exactly the same scene features in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (PC, II, 14).

¹⁸ The letters are an important component of the *Alexander Romance* from its origin. There are some papyri containing the correspondence between Alexander and Darius, which demonstrates the antiquity of letters as a component of the *Alexander Romance*. See Papyrus Italian Society 1285, Florence, edited by Dino Pieraccioni in 1951, and the Papyrus Hamburg 129, studied by Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans* (Munich, 1954), pp. 193ff.

¹⁹ There is also a similar letter to Porus in the PC (II, 19).

²⁰ According to Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Janūsyār must be the term *gyān-abespār* in Pahlavi, which means guard. The fact that Darius is killed by his own guard is an irony.” See Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yāddāsht-hā-yi Shāhnāma [Notes on the Shāhnāma]*, vol. II, p. 364.

²¹ In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, the two assassins are Darius’s satraps, Bessus and Ariobarzanes (PC, II, 20).

²² On the moralistic content of Alexander and Darius’s dialogue in this passage of the *Shāhnāma* see Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, *Moralia: Les notions morales dans la littérature persane du 3/9 au 7/13 siècle* (Paris, 1986), pp. 57–79.

²³ There is a similar passage in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (PC, II, 20), without the Persian elements. Shayegan studied this scene of the *Shāhnāma* in parallel with the Pahlavi texts. See Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 299–300.

²⁴ On the content of this letter and its comparison with Pahlavi texts see Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 300–2. There is a similar letter from Alexander to the Persians in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (PC, II, 21).

Alexander's reign

- I. Alexander gives a discourse on ascending the throne.²⁵ He also writes a letter to Rawshanak (Roxana) and her mother.²⁶
- II. Alexander asks his mother, who is in Amorium, to come to Iran and prepare the wedding.²⁷ There is a detailed description of Rawshanak's dowry.
- III. The episode of Kayd, the Indian king, and his four fantastic gifts to Alexander. During ten nights Kayd, the King of Qānūj, has different dreams. Mihrān, his vizier (*vazīr*) interprets them to mean that Alexander will attack Kayd's kingdom unless he gives Alexander four marvellous things the like of which no noble has ever seen in all the world (Kayd's daughter, a philosopher, a physician and a magic cup). The two kings exchange letters and finally Alexander sends nine wise men to examine the gifts. Having had the authenticity of the gifts appraised and verified by the wise men, they bring them to Alexander, who personally tests them too. He marries Kayd's daughter according to Christian custom.²⁸
- IV. Alexander writes a letter to the Indian king Fūr.²⁹ A battle takes place between the two kings in which Alexander uses iron horses, with iron saddle and iron riders, filled with black oil. They are mounted on wheels and look like cavalry. Alexander orders that the iron horses be set on fire on the battlefield.³⁰ Alexander challenges Fūr to single combat in which he manages to kill the Indian king.³¹
- V. Alexander marches towards Mecca to liberate the descendants of Ismael son of Abraham.³²

²⁵ There is a similar passage in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (PC, II, 21).

²⁶ In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, Alexander writes a letter to Darius's mother, wife and daughter (PC, II, 22).

²⁷ In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, Alexander writes a letter to his mother and asks her to send back the jewellery, garments and robes of Darius's mother and wife to Roxane as bridal gifts on his behalf (PC, II, 22). See also Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 114.

²⁸ According to Firdawsī, this tale came from a Pahlavi source (*Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 11). In this chapter we will claim that this story was an independent tale integrated into the Persian Alexander romances through a pre-Islamic Persian source.

²⁹ There is a similar passage in the Greek version (PC, III, 2).

³⁰ A similar passage in the Greek version (PC, III, 3) reads: "Alexander had all the bronze statues he possessed and all the armour he had taken as booty from the soldiers heated up thoroughly until they were red-hot, and then set up in front of the army like a wall." Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 129.

³¹ There is a similar passage in the Greek version (PC, III, 4).

³² This passage may be an imitation of Alexander's journey to Jerusalem as told by the γ -recension.

- VI. From Jidda he sails to Egypt where he stays for one year. Here he learns of the Queen Qaidāfa (Candace) of al-Andalus (Spain) and decides to visit her kingdom.³³
- VII. A very detailed account of Alexander’s visit to Queen Candace and her sons, very close to the Greek *Alexander Romance*, is given.³⁴
- VIII. Alexander meets the Brahmans in order to learn from these ascetics of the ancient practices.³⁵
- IX. Alexander marches east and undergoes strange and marvellous experiences (fabulous tales are related belonging to the *mirabilia* genre).³⁶
- X. Alexander reaches the “western sea” and Abyssinia (Ḥabash). The battle with Abyssinians takes place.
- XI. Alexander visits the land of *narm-pāyān*, creatures with “soft feet” (with no bones).³⁷
- XII. Alexander slays a dragon by feeding it five oxen, which he had killed and filled with oil and poison.³⁸
- XIII. Alexander sets out to visit Harūm, the land of women.³⁹ Marching towards this land, he has to face many adventures.
- XIV. Alexander enters the Land of Darkness.⁴⁰ His adventures in the Land of Darkness comprise four stories:
- 1) His search for the Water of Life,
 - 2) His dialogue with two enormous green birds which speak the Greek (*rūmī*) language.
 - 3) His encounter with the angel Isrāfīl (Angel who trumpets the Day of Resurrection).

³³ In the Greek version she is the Queen of Meroe (PC, III, 18).

³⁴ PC, III, 18–23.

³⁵ There is a similar passage in the Greek version (PC, III, 5–6).

³⁶ In the Greek version, this is a letter to Aristotle about the wonders of India (PC, III, 7–16) added as Supplement I in Stoneman’s English translation (*The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 181–85). On the *mirabilia* genre see chapter six of the present thesis.

³⁷ This passage is based on the Syriac *Alexander Romance* (Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, Book III, VII, p. 99). The Syriac version describes these creatures as “the people whose feet are twisted”.

³⁸ This passage is also based on the Syriac version (Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 107–08). In the Syriac version there are two oxen instead of five.

³⁹ There is a similar passage in Alexander’s journey to the land of the Amazons in the Greek PC (III, 25–26).

⁴⁰ This passage is in the β- and γ-recensions, and manuscript *L*, but absent from the α-recension (see chapter one). This passage is also found in the Syriac *Poem* edited by Budge (*The History of Alexander*, pp. 163–76).

- 4) His visitation to the Valley of Diamonds.
- XV. Alexander builds the wall against Gog and Magog.⁴¹
- XVI. He sees a corpse in the Palace of Topaz⁴² and also a talking tree,⁴³ which foretells his death.
- XVII. Alexander marches towards Chīn (China); he writes a letter to the Chinese Emperor and receives a response. He goes to the Chinese court disguised as his own ambassador.⁴⁴
- XVIII. The battle against the people of Sind.⁴⁵
- XIX. Alexander reaches Yemen.
- XX. Returning to Babylon, he comes across a creature called Gūsh-bastar (literally “ear-bed”), who has ears so large that he sleeps on them. He describes a city in which the houses are adorned with portraits of Afrāsiyāb and Kay Khusraw – two ancient kings from the Persian tradition.
- XXI. Alexander writes a letter to Aristotle informing him that he wants to kill the Persian nobles. Aristotle advises him not to, instead advising him to divide the Persian kingdom among the Persian nobles so that they will not rebel against Rūm.
- XXII. A woman bears a child that is half-human half-monster, with a lion’s head, hooves and a bull’s tail. It dies at birth. Alexander’s astrologers interpret it as a sign of Alexander’s death.⁴⁶
- XXIII. Alexander writes a letter of consolation to his mother.⁴⁷
- XXIV. Alexander dies in Babylon. The Persians and the Greeks argue about where they should bury him. At last, a man advises to ask a mountain

⁴¹ This passage is based on the Syriac sources. See Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 176–200 and also chapter one of this thesis.

⁴² This passage may be based on a scene in the Greek version (PC, III, 28) in which Alexander goes to the palace of Cyrus and on the top of a high mountain sees a circular temple ringed by a hundred columns of sapphire. See Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 147–8.

⁴³ In the Greek version there is a similar passage (PC, III, 17).

⁴⁴ This is based on the Syriac version (III, VI, Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 109ff.).

⁴⁵ The older Indian Sindhu, the name for the region around the lower course of the Indus River. On Alexander’s campaigns in this region see Pierre H.L. Eggermont, *Alexander’s campaigns in Sind and Baluchistan and the siege of the Brahmin town of Harmatelia* (Leuven, 1975).

⁴⁶ There is a similar passage in the Greek version (PC, III, 30) in a letter to Olympias. See Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 148–9.

⁴⁷ In the Greek version, Alexander writes a similar letter to his mother (PC, III, 33). This part of the *Shāhnāma* contains some elements from Alexander’s will (PC, III, 32), such as the destiny of Roxane’s child or how the funeral is to be organised.

which responds to each question by way of an echo. The mountain answers that they should bury him in Alexandria, in Egypt.⁴⁸

XXV. The philosophers lament Alexander's death with wise sayings.⁴⁹

XXVI. Firdawsī concludes that Alexander killed thirty-six kings, established ten cities and reigned for fourteen years.⁵⁰

From this summary of the contents of Firdawsī's *Alexander Romance* we may conclude that the story of Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* has some important characteristics that can help us understand the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition and its transition from the pre-Islamic period to the Islamic era. Firdawsī's account represents an amalgam of various sources (as mentioned above), which contains different parts, the five key points of which can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) The chapter on Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* represents the first complete adaptation of the *Romance* and contains detailed parts of the Greek original not found in any previous source. The best example is the scene in which Alexander goes disguised as his own envoy to Darius's court, where he tries to take the golden wine cups. A comparison between the Greek and Persian versions demonstrates an astonishing similarity. Another example is the episode of Queen Candace and her sons. The *Shāhnāma* is the most complete version and the closest to the Greek original extant in the Arabic/Persian tradition.
- 2) The *Shāhnāma* contains parts from the *Khudāynāmag* discussed previously (Alexander's Persian ancestry, the tribute of golden eggs, etc.) and elements that must be based on a Persian source, such as Gūsh-bastar (the creature with enormous ears), the city with Kay Khusraw's portraits, etc.
- 3) The *Shāhnāma* also contains parts from the Syriac sources discussed in chapter one of this thesis: the Syriac *Alexander Romance* (e.g. dragon slaying, the journey to Chīn), episodes from the Syriac *Legend* and *Poem* (i.e. Gog and Magog, the Water of Life, etc.) and the philosophers' laments over Alexander's tomb.

⁴⁸ In the Greek version it is Ptolemy who suggests consulting an oracle of the Babylonian Zeus. The oracle says that Alexander should be buried in Memphis, in Egypt (PC, III, 34).

⁴⁹ This part was originally an independent source in Syriac; see chapter one of this thesis and also S. P. Brock, "The Laments of Philosophers over Alexander in Syriac", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 15 (1970), p. 207. There is a similar passage in Nizāmī's *Iqbāl-nāma*; see chapter six of this thesis.

⁵⁰ The Greek *Alexander Romance* also finishes with a similar passage (PC, III, 35) in which, "Alexander lived thirty-two years. He was king for ten years. He made war for twelve years. He overcame twenty-two barbarian nations and fourteen Greek peoples. He founded twelve cities." See Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 158.

- 4) Beside the Syriac material, Firdawsī's version contains stories which must have been independent tales in circulation, especially in the eastern parts of the Iranian world (i.e. the story of Kayd, the Indian king), which will be discussed in detail in this chapter.
- 5) In addition, Firdawsī's text contains episodes which must have been developed only during the Islamic period (Alexander's journey to Mecca, al-Andalus (Muslim Spain), etc.).

Furthermore, it is clear that Alexander's story in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* contains various layers which must have been incorporated gradually into the *Khudāynāmag* version after the Arab conquest of the Persian world. Therefore, in order to better trace the development of the *Alexander Romance* from pre-Islamic Persian literature to the *Shāhnāma*, below we need to examine the most important characteristics of Firdawsī's version, although it will obviously be impossible to analyse the related legends in their entirety within the limited space of this chapter.⁵¹

III. Distinguishing Characteristics and Motifs of Firdawsī's *Alexander Romance*

The figure of Alexander in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* has some of the following distinguishing characteristics which are not found in any other Arabic or Persian source of the Islamic period:

- 1) He is Christian and a legitimate Persian king whose descent is traced back to the great hero Isfandīyār. Firdawsī's Alexander is well integrated into the Persian legends; his ancestor Isfandīyār has much in common with certain figures from Greek mythology, in particular Achilles.⁵² On the other hand, it is also interesting that Isfandīyār, like Alexander, is descendant of a "Caesar of Rūm" by his mother.⁵³
- 2) The name Dhū'l-Qarnayn ("the Two-Horned One") is an essential component of Alexander's legend in the Islamic world. However, Firdawsī's Alexander is a Christian and the epithet Dhū'l-Qarnayn is not attributed to him in the *Shāhnāma*. The prophetic side of Alexander is not dealt with at all by

⁵¹ Some of the common tales which are also told by Nizāmī in his *Iskandarnāma* will be studied in depth and detail in chapters five and six of this thesis in order to avoid repeating them, such as the story of Water of Life, the Valley of Diamonds, etc.

⁵² Some scholars have devoted studies to the similarity between the two figures. See Ismaelpūr, *Barrīsī taṭbīqī shakhsīyat-i Ashīl va Isfandīyār* (Teheran, 1388/2009); Omīdsālār, "Isfandīyār va Ashīl", *Irānshināsī* 4 (1377/1998), pp. 734–44; Amīrqāsīmī, "Ashīl va Isfandīyār du hamzād-i usṭūrī", *Adabiyāt va zabān-hā*, Mashad 86–7 (1368/1989), pp. 433–48.

⁵³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 12–24: Isfandīyār's father Gushtāsp is angry at his father, so he goes to Rūm, where he marries the Caesar's daughter, Katāyūn, who falls in love with him through a dream.

Firdawsī. Nevertheless, we can assume that the source Firdawsī used belonged to a period when Islamic legends concerning Dhū'l-Qarnayn had not yet mixed with the *Alexander Romance* tradition. Through closer study of the *Alexander Romance* in the *Shāhnāma* we will hopefully be able to identify this period, which may be at the end of the Sasanian period or very early in the Arab conquest of Persia (seventh–eighth centuries).

- 3) It is obvious that Firdawsī's source had definitely passed through an Arabic intermediary, for example because of the usage of Arabic terms such as *tanīn* for dragon instead of the Persian *izhdahā*,⁵⁴ or *muḥibb-i ṣalīb* ("lovers of the Cross", i.e. Christians).⁵⁵ Even though his source was written in Arabic, it must have belonged to a period in which Islamic legends about Alexander had not yet been formed: firstly, because his account is Christianised and not Islamised, and secondly, because Alexander is not called Dhū'l-Qarnayn in any part of the *Shāhnāma*, as mentioned in the previous point.

Based on the appearance of the above words, motifs and references in the story and the information that Firdawsī himself gives us, we can now divide Alexander's story in the *Shāhnāma* into three principal layers which show the historic transmission of the legend. All three contain Christian references.

- 1) The parts which contain the same common accounts also reported in Arabic by historians (Ṭabarī, Dīnawarī, etc.), which were discussed in the previous chapter. These parts were originally in the *Khudāynāmag* tradition and formed the basis of the legend.⁵⁶
- 2) The material from Syriac sources, which also contains elements from the Persian tradition such as the creature Gūsh-bastar, the city with Kay Khusraw's portraits, etc.
- 3) There are also certain inherently Islamic phrases, motifs and other elements, such as Alexander's journey to Mecca, al-Andalus (Muslim Spain), etc., but which have no specifically Islamic reference. For example, even in the story of Candace, who is Queen of al-Andalus, there are only Christian references.

How can we explain such a combination of materials? What do they reflect of Firdawsī's sources in Alexander's chapter in the *Shāhnāma*? When and how was all this material brought together? In the ensuing sections of this chapter we have tried to answer these questions.

Firdawsī's Christian references

⁵⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 98.

⁵⁵ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 533.

⁵⁶ These parts were discussed in the previous chapter.

Beside the Persian proper names (e.g. Nāhīd, Alexander's mother), there are some references in the *Shāhnāma* to Christian customs (i.e. in the weddings, taking an oath, etc.), which can be seen throughout the tale from beginning to end. The first Christian reference appears in the marriage of the Persian King Dārāb to Nāhīd, Philip of Macedon's daughter. She is accompanied by churchmen: "The beautiful Rūmī [princess] remained in her litter, guided by a bishop and a monk."⁵⁷ The poet also claims that the bishop handed over the princess to Dārāb: "The bishop gave the beautiful princess[']s hand] to Dārāb / And the treasures [of her dowry] were counted out to the king's treasurer."⁵⁸

Another Christian reference appears in the episode of Kayd, the Indian king: Alexander marries King Kayd's daughter according to Christian custom: "he asked her [in marriage] with proper ceremony according to the custom of the Messiah."⁵⁹

In the episode relating his visit to Queen Qaidāfa (Candace), Alexander offers a very Christian oath that he will not send his army to invade her kingdom:

By the faith of the Messiah and Truthful speech, by the knower who stands witness to my words, by the rites and the faith of the Great Cross, by the life and head of the mighty prince, by the deacon's belt (*zunnār*) and by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰

He also holds the Cross in reverence: "Your well-wisher will be my brother; your throne will be as the Cross to me."⁶¹ It is even said that after his death, "a Christian priest" washed Alexander's body and prepared him for the funeral: "A bishop washed the corpse with musk and rosewater and sprinkled pure camphor over his body."⁶²

Such Christian references appear throughout the poem's account of Alexander and it seems that Firdawsī quoted them directly from his source.⁶³ If we consider the

⁵⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 522:

دلای رومی به مهد اندرون سکویا و راهب و راهب و راهب و راهب

⁵⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 522:

سقف خوب رخ را به دارا سپرد گهرها به گنجور او برشرد

⁵⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 28:

نشستند و او را به آیین بخواست به رسم مسیحا و پیوند راست

⁶⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 69:

به دین مسیحا و گفتار راست به داننده کو بر زبانم گواست
به آیین صلیب بزرگ به جان و سر شهریار سترگ
به زنار و شماس و روح القدس

⁶¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 69:

برادر بود نیک خواست مرا به جای صلیب ست گاهت مرا

⁶² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 123:

سکویا بپوششش به روشن گلاب پراگند بر تنش کافور ناب

⁶³ As Qamar Āryān points out, "as a native of Tūs, Firdawsī must have been in touch with the Christian community, which in his time had a quarter of its own, called *kūy-i tarsāyān* ("the Christian town") in the city. Nevertheless, the Christian references in the *Shāhnāma* generally echoed statements and sentiments

Persian proper names (e.g. Dārā, Nāhīd, etc.) in conjunction with these Christian references, it is likely that the original Middle Persian version was also Christianised. Regarding Christian writings in Middle Persian, it is important to point out that they consisted largely of translations from Syriac.⁶⁴ This means that the Middle Persian *Vorlage* must have been based on Syriac source(s). This supports Boyce and Tafaddulī's claims that the authors of the *Khudāynāmag* used Syriac materials for Alexander's chapter.⁶⁵ The most interesting proof is that these Christian references generally appear in the episodes that have a Persian context, like the wedding of Nāhīd and the Persian king or in the episode of Kayd, the Indian king, as we will discuss next.

The Indian King Kayd

According to Firdawsī himself the episode of the Indian King Kayd and his marvellous gifts to Alexander has a Pahlavi source and origin.⁶⁶ It consists of two principal parts: King Kayd's dreams and their interpretation, and the gifts whose authenticity Alexander examines. This narrative, which is found neither in the Greek nor in the Syriac *Alexander Romance*, also appears in three Arabic sources: the *Qiṣṣat al-Iskandar (The Story of Alexander)*⁶⁷ of 'Umāra (possibly d. 902 A.D.),⁶⁸ the *Murūj al-dhahab* of al-Masūdī (896–956),⁶⁹ and the *Tārīkh Ghurar al-sayr wa Akhbār mulūk al-Fars* of Tha'ālībī Nīshābūrī (961–1038).⁷⁰ However, only Firdawsī and 'Umāra include King Kayd's dreams.

Here I would like to study this story by comparing its various sources in order to verify whether Firdawsī's claim that the source of this story was derived from "Pahlavi" sources is true. In this comparison I will mainly focus on the *Shāhnāma* and 'Umāra's tale because they are the most complete versions.

King Kayd in the *Kār-nāma ī Artakshshīr (The Deeds of Ardashīr)*

that the poet found in his sources." See Qamar Āryān, "Christianity vi. In Persian Literature", *Elr*, V/5, pp. 339–42.

⁶⁴ See N. Sims-Williams, "Christian Literature in Middle Iranian Languages", *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London/New York, 2009), pp. 266–70.

⁶⁵ Tafaddulī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islām*, pp. 270–71; Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", *Iranistik* II, p. 59. See also chapter two of this thesis.

⁶⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 11. The story begins with this verse:

چنین گفت گوینده ی پهلوی (Thus the Pahlavi narrator told ...).

⁶⁷ On the characteristics of this Arabic romance see Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great* (New York, 2001), pp. 24–7; Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 35–45.

⁶⁸ Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, p. 25. I would like to thank Dr Zuwiyya for letting me have a copy of 'Umāra's manuscript, Codex London B.M. Add. 5928, ff. 2–81. Although I use the Arabic manuscript to compare 'Umāra's text with the *Shāhnāma*, the English translation of 'Umāra's tale is based on Zuwiyya's translation which is included as Appendix I in his *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, pp. 163–6.

⁶⁹ Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar [Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems]*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut, 1966), vol. I, pp. 14–23.

⁷⁰ Tha'ālībī, *Ghurur Akhbār Mulūk al-Fars*, ed. and French trans. H. Zotenberg [*Histoire des Rois des Perses*] (Paris, 1900), pp. 424–31.

As an initial step in this research, it will be necessary to indicate some important points concerning King Kayd's name and his appearance in the Pahlavi book *Kārnāma ī Artakshshīr ī Pāpakān* (*The Deeds of Ardashīr, Son of Bābak*). In the Pahlavi text (chapter XI, number 4)⁷¹ he appears as *Kāit Hindū* (which is similar to his name in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī: *Kayd-i hindī*). The Pahlavi transcription *Kaitān Kandākān konūshkān*⁷² without doubt refers to Kidara, the founder of the Kidarite dynasty,⁷³ who emerged in Khurāsān around 380 A.D. with the Sasanian title *Kushānshāh* "King of the Kushans".⁷⁴ He is attested in Sanskrit as Kidara or Kidāra,⁷⁵ and in Persian as Kīdār or Kaydar,⁷⁶ which explains the transformation of the name into Qaydar in 'Umāra's work. Kayd also appears in the story of Ardashīr in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, where he is a wise man who foretells Ardashīr's destiny.⁷⁷ The appearance of King Kayd in the Pahlavi *Kārnāma* and the *Shāhnāma* proves that this personage existed in pre-Islamic Persian literature.

Kayd and Dandamis

Nöldeke⁷⁸ was the first scholar to establish that the story of Kayd is linked to Alexander's meeting with the *gymnosophist* Dandamis.⁷⁹ However, it is not correct because Alexander's meeting with the Brahmans is another tale in the *Shāhnāma* in which Dandamis does not appear.⁸⁰ On the other hand, as Doufīkar-Aerts points out: "It is still not clear, however, by which channel this motif reached the Arab author; as Dandamis does not appear in the Syriac Pseudo-Callisthenes."⁸¹ The reason is that the story of Kayd was an independent tale in Pahlavi, as Firdawsī affirms,⁸² which was added to the *Alexander Romance* tradition after the Arab conquest, as we will discuss.

⁷¹ According to the edition of Dastur Darab Pashutan (Bombay, 1896–; reprinted in Tehran in 1369/1990). *Kārnāma-yi Ardashīr-i Bābakān*, ed. Muḥammad Javād Mashkūr (Tehran, 1369/1990). The references in this chapter belong to this edition.

⁷² *Kārnāma*, p. 98.

⁷³ The Kidarities, a dynasty which ruled a residual North Indian kingdom, perhaps in Swat, until 477 A.D. See E. V. Zeimal, "The Kidarite Kingdom and Central Asia", *History of Civilizations in Central Asia*, ed. B. A. Litvinsky, (Paris, 1996), III, pp. 119–33.

⁷⁴ His name appears as Kidaro on Greco-Bactrian script on Kushano-Sasanian type gold coins. See A. D. H. Bivar, "Hephthalites", *Elr*, XII/2, pp. 198–201.

⁷⁵ See Frantz Grenet, "Regional Interaction in Central Asia and Northwest India in the Kidarite and Hephthalite Periods", *Indo-Iranian Languages and Peoples*, ed. N. Sims-Williams, Proceedings of the British Academy, 116 (London, 2002), pp. 203–05.

⁷⁶ *Kārnāma*, p. 102.

⁷⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 204–05.

⁷⁸ Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*, p. 47.

⁷⁹ On this character see Beverly Berg, "Dandamis: An Early Christian Portrait of Indian Asceticism", *Classica et Mediaevalia* 31 (1970), pp. 269–305.

⁸⁰ This tale will be studied later in this chapter.

⁸¹ Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 22, n. 34.

⁸² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 11. On the other hand, the phrase at the beginning of this story in the *Shāhnāma* ("Thus the Pahlavi narrator said") recalls the manner in which some Buddhist *sūtras* ("It is heard thus by me") and Sogdian texts ("It is heard thus") begin. See Y. Yoshida, "Buddhist Literature in Sogdian", *The Literature of pre-Islamic Iran, Companion Vol. I to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (London/New York, 2009), p. 312.

King Kayd's Dreams and Their Interpretation

It is worth mentioning that the study of dreams and their interpretation were an integral part of the Persian worldview.⁸³ In the *Shāhnāma*, eighteen dreams are reported and the episode involving that of Kayd is the most elaborate one.⁸⁴ King Kayd recounts his dreams in the *Shāhnāma* as follows:

- 1) I dreamed of a huge room like a palace in which there was a huge elephant. It had a door like a tiny hole. The formidable elephant passed through the hole without damaging its body. Its body managed to get out but its trunk was trapped inside the room.
- 2) Another night, I dreamed that I was not on my throne, instead a monkey⁸⁵ was sitting on my ivory throne with the shining crown on its head.
- 3) The third night, I dreamed of a canvas. Four men were pulling the canvas and the effort of stretching it made their faces blue. But neither did they become tired nor did the canvas break.
- 4) The fourth night, I dreamed of a thirsty man by a river. A fish poured water on him but the man turned his face and ran away from the water. He was running and the water was following him. O wise man! What is the interpretation of this dream?
- 5) The fifth night, I dreamed of a city by the sea. All its inhabitants were blind but yet they were not angry at being blind. They were buying and selling [in such a way] as if there was a battle in the city.
- 6) The sixth night, I dreamed of a city in which all the people were ill. They went to greet healthy people, and looked at their urine to diagnose the sicknesses.

⁸³ H. Ziai, "Dreams and Dream Interpretation, ii. In the Persian Tradition", *EIr*, VII/5, pp. 549–51. See also A. Sh. Shahbazi, *Ferdowsi: a critical biography* (Costa Mesa, 1991), p. 81 n. 20.

⁸⁴ Khaleghi-Motlagh doubted the authenticity of the dreams episode, but as it was included in almost all of the *Shāhnāma* manuscripts, he finally included it in his edition. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāma*", p. 60. However, a comparison of the dreams mentioned in the *Shāhnāma* with 'Umāra's version demonstrates that the dreams episode was an original part of this story.

⁸⁵ Khaleghi-Motlagh reads this word as *Kapī* (in Pahlavi *kabīg*), which means "monkey", while in the Moscow edition it is read as *kasī* ("someone"). See Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yaddāshthā-yi Shāhnāma* [*Notes on the Shāhnāma*] (Tehran, 1389/2010), vol. III, p. 5.

- 7) In the middle of the seventh night I dreamed of a horse with two heads, two hooves and two paws. It was rapidly eating all the plants because it had two mouths. But in its body there was nowhere for which the food to come out.
- 8) The eighth night, I dreamed of three jars, all of them similar. Two were full and the one in the middle remained empty for many years. Two men poured cold water from full jar into the empty one, but they never became empty and the empty jar never became full.
- 9) The ninth night, I dreamed of a cow lying on the grass in the sun. There was a thin calf beside it. The thin calf was feeding the fat cow.
- 10) The tenth night, I dreamed of a spring on a vast plain. The plain was full of water but everything was dry around the spring.⁸⁶

The interpretation of the second dream is very interesting, for Firdawsī refers to four religions:

Regarding the canvas and four men, in the future a renowned man will rise from “the plain of lancer riders”. A good man who will cause the division of God’s religion into four branches. One is the *dihqān*, the old fire worshipper, another is Moses’s religion called *juhūd* (Judaism), which says that no other religion deserves to be worshipped. Another is the Greek (*yūnānī*) religion, which will bring justice to the king’s heart. The fourth is the religion of that benevolent man⁸⁷ who will cause the wise men up from the dust.

While Firdawsī describes ten dreams, ‘Umāra’s text reduces them to six, as follows:

- 1) Kayd dreamed of his demise and the end of his kingdom.
- 2) Another of his dreams involved a calf nursing a cow.
- 3) He dreamed of blind people in a city buying and selling, eating and drinking, and fighting.
- 4) He dreamed of people obliging a huge man with two heads, who ate everything in his path.

⁸⁶ Unfortunately, this tenth part is not included in the English translation of Dick Davis, so I have provided a translation here. I number the dreams in order to be able to compare them more easily with ‘Umāra’s version. This part of the story is translated in full in the French translation of the *Shāhnāma* by Jules Mohl (Paris, 1877), vol. V/1, pp. 88–97.

⁸⁷ It is not clear what the fourth religion referred to is. There is no direct mention of it, but I suppose that it is probably Christianity. Mohl translated “that benevolent man” into “Arab” supposing that the fourth religion was Islam, but there is no reference to Islam nor is an Islamic phrase used here.

- 5) He dreamed of an elephant enclosed in a small space that managed to get out, all but its tail. He was surprised to see that the elephant's head and body were able to come out but its little tail could not.
- 6) He dreamed of a thirsty man who was dying from thirst as he drowned in water.⁸⁸

But it is notable that during his interpretation of the above six dreams, 'Umāra mentions the existence of a few more dreams, such as the three jars, the middle one of which was empty or the water was flowing dry. This means that in 'Umāra's own source there were other dreams similar to those seen in the *Shāhnāma*.

The man who interprets the dreams is described in 'Umāra's text is described as "a spiritual leader" while in the *Shāhnāma* he is called "Mihrān", a man who has reached the heights of knowledge and lives far from people among wild and domestic animals. Firdawsī's description of Mihrān coincides with the figure of the Indian ascetic monk, a spiritual leader mentioned by 'Umāra.

King Kayd's Four Marvellous Gifts

The second part of the story of King Kayd comprises a description of the four wonders or marvellous gifts given by the king to Alexander, during which Alexander and Kayd exchange letters and Alexander assesses the four gifts. All four sources agree on the nature of the four wonders: Kayd's daughter (although according to Mas'ūdī, she is his servant), his philosopher, his physician and a goblet which is always full. Tha'ālibī is the only source which gives names to the three people among these marvellous gifts: Kayd's daughter is called *Kanka*, the philosopher is *Shanka* and the physician *Manka*.⁸⁹

1) King Kayd's daughter

Kayd's first marvellous possession is his daughter. According to Firdawsī and Mas'ūdī, when the wise men sent by Alexander to verify the gifts' authenticity saw Kayd's beautiful daughter, they were so astonished that each of them could only write a description of a single part of her body for Alexander.⁹⁰ Khaleghi-Motlagh rightly points out that the similarity of Firdawsī's and Mas'ūdī's accounts indicates that this story is based on a written source.⁹¹

2) King Kayd's philosopher

In order to verify the knowledge of King Kayd's philosopher, Alexander puts him to the test by sending him several objects within which are secreted a special message. Each

⁸⁸ Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, Appendix I, pp. 163–4.

⁸⁹ In this regard see 'A. Parīsh-rūy, *Barābar-nahād-i Shāhnāma-yi Firdawsī wa Ghurar al-sayr Tha'ālibī* (Tehran, 1390/2011), pp. 643–5.

⁹⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 26.

⁹¹ See Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yaddāsh-t-hā-yi Shāhnāma [Notes on the Shāhnāma]*, vol. III, p. 8.

time, by means of a gesture or an alteration to the object, the philosopher shows that he has outwitted Alexander.

For instance, during the exchange of symbolic objects, Alexander sends a dark piece of iron to the Indian philosopher, who turns it into a mirror. In the *Shāhnāma*, the dialogue between Alexander and the Indian philosopher presents the symbolic meaning of a mirror as a reflection of heart.⁹² In these encounters with the philosopher, Alexander is always reproached for his greed for warfare and bloodshed, which “darkened his heart”.⁹³ The Indian philosopher is the first person to offer him a solution to “brighten” Alexander’s heart: like a dark piece of iron that becomes bright mirror by polishing, his heart can become as crystal clear as water by polishing it with divine knowledge (*dānish-i āsmān*).⁹⁴ The mirror motif indeed becomes an important element of later Persian *Alexander Romances*.⁹⁵ In fact, it would appear that from this basic motif later Persian poets derived and developed the mystical aspect of Alexander.⁹⁶

3) The Magic Goblet

Among the wondrous objects Kayd gifted to Alexander was a magic goblet which never ran dry. Firdawsī gives the following explanation of why it never runs dry:

Think of what happens here as analogous to magnetism, which attracts iron. In a similar way, this cup attracts moisture from the turning heavens, but it does so in such a subtle fashion that human eyes cannot see the process.⁹⁷

The magic goblet or cup became a component of Alexander’s legend in the later Persian poetic tradition.⁹⁸ The most famous magic cup is that of Kay Khusraw, in which he was able to contemplate the whole world. In the first part of his *Iskandarnāma*, the poet Nizāmī has Alexander find Kay Khusraw’s magic cup, whose secrets enabled the Greeks to invent the astrolabe.⁹⁹

4) The Indian physician

According to the *Shāhnāma*, King Kayd’s physician was able to diagnose any illness by examining the sufferer’s urine.¹⁰⁰ This part of the story contains advice on eating and drinking and resembles Alexander’s dialogue with the Brahmans.¹⁰¹ Alexander asks the

⁹² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 30–1.

⁹³ In the *Shāhnāma* there is constant reproach of Alexander’s greed; for instance, see Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 30, 78, 95, 101. In the Greek *Alexander Romance* there are various passages in which Alexander is reproached for his avaricious behaviour too; for example, see *PC*, III, 6.

⁹⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 30.

⁹⁵ See chapter five of this thesis on the *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī of Ganja.

⁹⁶ See chapter five of this thesis.

⁹⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 35. See the English translation of Dick Davis (*The Book of Kings*, p. 482).

⁹⁸ See M. Murtaḍavī, *Maktab-i Ḥāfiz, Muqaddama bar Ḥāfiz-shināsī* (Tabriz, 1383/2004), pp. 207–25.

⁹⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, ed. V. Dastgirdī, re-ed. S. Ḥamidīyān, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 1378), pp. 335–6. See also chapter five of the present thesis.

¹⁰⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Alexander’s encounter with the Brahmans will be studied later in the present chapter.

Indian physician: “What is the most painful illness?” The physician’s reply in the ‘Umāra and Tha’ālibī versions is “indigestion”; in the *Shāhnāma* he replies, “Whoever overeats and does not watch what he consumes during meals, will grow ill; a healthy person will not eat too much, and a great man is the one who seeks to be healthy.”¹⁰²

The Indian physician is able to prepare a remedy that prevents any kind of illness and disease, including old age.¹⁰³ Thanks to this remedy, Alexander remains healthy for years. However, the most important part in this story relates to Alexander’s sexual affairs and the illness caused by them. The story according to Firdawsī is as follows:

Then the king began to devote his nights to carousing rather than to sleep. His mind was filled with the desire for women, and he sought out soft, enticing places to be with them. This way of life weakened the king, but he gave no thought to the harm he was doing to his body.¹⁰⁴

‘Umāra’s text does not include this part of the story but there is a sentence which symbolically expresses the same theme: the physician warns Alexander that “there is no sickness worse than torture by fire. You indulge yourself in your desires more than you should.”¹⁰⁵

The *Shāhnāma* links Alexander’s illness directly to his devotion to over-indulgence in sexual relations. In ‘Umāra’s text the illness is called *sulāl*, which means “consumption or tuberculosis”.¹⁰⁶ The word Firdawsī uses is *kāhish*, which means literally “decrease” and indicates an illness which consumes the body and causes the sufferer to lose weight.¹⁰⁷

In both Firdawsī’s and ‘Umāra’s texts, the physician prepares a remedy against Alexander’s illness. In the *Shāhnāma*, Alexander sleeps alone one night, unaccompanied by any of his beautiful women.¹⁰⁸ When the physician examines Alexander’s urine the next day, he finds no sign of illness. He thus throws away the remedy he had prepared for the sovereign.

¹⁰² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 32. There is similar advice in Tha’ālibī’s *Ghurar*: Alexander asks the physician: “What is the best method to preserve someone’s health?” The physician replies: “Eating, drinking and engaging in sexual relations with moderation.”

¹⁰³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 32–3.

¹⁰⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ It is worth noting a similar argument that Palladius (d. AD 341) puts into the speech of Dandamis, as follows: “You indulge your greed. Your greed makes you ill.” See Stoneman, “Who are the Brahmans? Indian Lore and Cynic Doctrine in Palladius’ *De Brahmanibus* and its Models”, *Classical Quarterly* 44.2 (1994), p. 507. For the edition of Palladius’s *On the Life of the Brahmans* see J. Duncan M. Derrett, “The History of Palladius on the Races of India and the Brahmans”, *Classica et mediaevalia: revue danoise de philologie et d’histoire* 21 (1960), pp. 64–135, especially pp. 100–35. See also Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 97–8.

¹⁰⁶ Zuwiyya, “The Riddles of Kings and Philosophers in ‘Umāra ibn Zayd’s *Qiṣṣat al-Iskandar*”, *Legendaria Mediaevalia*, ed. R. G. Houry, J. P. Monferrer-Sala and M. J. Viguera Molins (Cordoba, 2011), p. 293.

¹⁰⁷ Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yāddāshthā-yi Shāhnāma*, vol. III, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 33.

In ‘Umāra’s *Qiṣṣat al-Iskandar*, the physician prepares a medicine against *sulāl*. There are some sentences similar to the above account in this narrative. ‘Umāra says:

Before drinking the medicine, Dhū’l-Qarnayn had to go to relieve himself. While in the toilet, a vision came to him and said: “I am the *sulāl* that was planning to stay inside you for four years. However, I saw the medicine the doctor had prepared and decided to leave you instead of being tortured by his medicine.”¹⁰⁹

Alexander’s sexual affairs are omitted in ‘Umāra’s account and the story finishes in a completely different way. ‘Umāra is the only source in which the disease called *sulāl* causes Alexander’s death:

Once the doctor returned to India, the disease quickly returned with a vengeance. Now *sulāl* became personified and told Alexander: “I shall torture you, making you weep as you cause the weeping of mothers and fathers over the deaths of their children.” Soon Alexander felt the burning fire which the doctor told him was the worst of deaths, and he dies in Babylon.¹¹⁰

Zuwiyya interprets this denouement as a moral:

The lesson Alexander could have taken away from the Angel of the Horn, and from his disputations with the Brahmans did not improve his character. The trio of the Indian king, the philosopher and the physician with their humble wisdom, and some divine aid in the way of *sulāl*, managed to trick Alexander with a riddle he could not solve. Consequently, he died and they kept their kingdom.¹¹¹

It is not clear which version, Firdawsī’s or ‘Umāra’s, constitutes the original form of the tale. As we have tried to show above, the original form of this story must have been added to the *Alexander Romance* tradition through a Pahlavi source, just as Firdawsī claimed. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the fact that Kayd is mentioned in the Pahlavi *Kārnāma ī Artakhshīr ī Pāpakān* indicates the possibility that this character was known in Sasanian literature. Secondly, as this story appears in Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūj* as an independent chapter on Alexander in India, it is probable that Kayd’s tale was originally an independent story which was integrated into the *Alexander Romance* tradition during the Islamic period. Khaleghi-Motlagh postulates that this passage was an independent story preserved in Sanskrit, which was added to the *Alexander Romance* that had been translated into Pahlavi.¹¹² However, as this Kayd episode is not mentioned by Ṭabarī, Dīnawarī or the anonymous *Nihāya*, it did not feature in the *Khudāynāmag* tradition. On the other hand, it is included in Tha’ālibī’s *Ghurar*, which is also based on the same prose text of the *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manṣūr as

¹⁰⁹ Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, p. 166.

¹¹⁰ Zuwiyya *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, p. 166.

¹¹¹ Zuwiyya, “The Riddles of Kings and Philosophers in ‘Umāra ibn Zayd’s *Qiṣṣat al-Iskandar*”, p. 294.

¹¹² Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāma*, Jastārī darbāri-yi ma’khaz-i Mustaqīm va ghayr-i mustaqīm-i *Shāhnāma*”, *Nāma-yi Irān-i Bāstān*, 7.1–2 (2007–2008), p. 60.

the verse composition of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.¹¹³ In sum, based on the above research, I believe it probable that this independent story was added to the Alexander episode of the *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manṣūr from a Pahlavi source.

Syriac Materials in the *Shāhnāma*

Most of the parts of the Alexander episode in the *Shāhnāma* are based on the Syriac sources mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. The main theme of most of these stories can be divided into two categories:

- 1) Alexander's adventures in wondrous lands, which were originally part of his letter to Aristotle about the wonders of India.¹¹⁴
- 2) Alexander's concern with his death.¹¹⁵ Alexander is not just a world-conqueror. His expeditions become a campaign in search of something more: knowledge, wisdom and immortality. The tone of the last parts of Alexander's legend in the *Shāhnāma* changes and there are high moral themes and mentioned and reprimands addressed to Alexander for his greed (*āz*) and insatiable desire for conquest.

Below we will study these materials so as to shed light on the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic period.

1-a) Alexander in the Land of Creatures with “Soft Feet”

Alexander's adventure with the soft-footed creatures appears in the Syriac *Alexander Romance* as part of his letter to Aristotle about the marvels of India.¹¹⁶ In the Persian tradition these creatures with soft feet or legs are also known as *davāl-pā* (“hidden/leather foot or leg”).¹¹⁷ The *Shāhnāma* seems to be the earliest source in which

¹¹³ See Omidsalar, “Could al-Tha‘alibi Have Used the *Shāhnāma* as a Source?”, *Der Islam* 75.2 (1998), pp. 338–46.

¹¹⁴ See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 73–7; on the *mirabilia* genre and the *Alexander Romance* tradition see chapter six of this thesis.

¹¹⁵ This theme is also studied by Olga M. Davidson, “The Burden of Mortality: Alexander and the Dead in Persian Epic and Beyond”, *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub (Oxford, 2010), pp. 212–22.

¹¹⁶ Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, p. 99.

¹¹⁷ An imaginary evil anthropoid creature characterised by flexible legs (*pā*) resembling leather straps, which he uses as tentacles to grip and enslave human beings, who then have to carry him on their shoulders or back and labour for him until they die of fatigue. See H. A‘lam, “Davāl-pā(y)”, *EIr*, VII/2, pp. 128–9.

there are references to such creatures: they feature not only in the Alexander section of Firdawsī's epic poem but also in another story, in the adventures of another Kayānid king, Kay Kāvūs, in Māzandarān, where they are also called *sust-pāyān* ("limp-footed creatures").¹¹⁸

1-b) Alexander the Dragon-Slayer

The story of Alexander slaying a dragon in the *Shāhnāma* is based on an episode in the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance*. In the Syriac PC the story takes place in a region close to Prasiake in India.¹¹⁹ Fighting a dragon is an archetypal labour of many kings and heroes in the *Shāhnāma*, including Alexander's ancestors Isfandīyār and Bahman Ardashīr among others.¹²⁰ However, as Ogden points out, "it is possible to find Greek precedents" behind these dragon-slaying tales in the *Shāhnāma*.¹²¹ Ogden studied the origins of this motif in the α -recension and earlier Greek dragon-slaying narratives,¹²² and also examined the symbolism of the dragon in the Zoroastrian tradition.¹²³ The *yasht* collection of Avestan hymns lists various types of dragons and killers of dragons, transmitted mainly from the Indo-Iranian period.¹²⁴ According to the later Zoroastrian scriptures of the *Vidēvdāt* (or *Vendidād*), the "law against the *daevas*" divided "creation into two mutually antagonistic halves – the creatures of the Ahūrā Mazdā (the Great Wisdom) on the one hand and the creatures of the Ahrīman (the evil power) on the other".¹²⁵ According to this understanding, serpents or dragons (Av. *azhi-*, Pahl. *azh-*) were identified as creatures of the "hostile spirit" Ahrīman. They were defined as evil, noxious and harmful to man and his animals and crops (Av. *khrafstra*),¹²⁶ and thus deserving of death.¹²⁷ Firdawsī indeed uses the Avestic term *khrafstra*¹²⁸ in the tale of the "night of terror"¹²⁹ when, having pitched camp in India by

¹¹⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. II, p. 46.

¹¹⁹ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 107–8.

¹²⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 42–7, 232–6.

¹²¹ See Daniel Ogden, "Sekandar, Dragon-slayer", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (Groningen, 2012), pp. 277–94. On the archetype of the dragon-slayer hero, see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, 1949 [2nd ed. 1968]), pp. 352–53.

¹²² See Ogden, "Sekandar, Dragon-slayer", pp. 279–83. Ogden claims that "the motif of the killing of the dragon by feeding it burning or combustible material may well be best considered a folktale motif"; see Ogden, "Sekandar, Dragon-slayer", p. 290.

¹²³ Ogden, "Sekandar, Dragon-slayer", pp. 288–90.

¹²⁴ See M. Rastigār Fasāyī, *Azhdahā dar asāfir-i Irān* (Tehran, 1379/2000), pp. 259–62. See also Christensen, *Les Kayanides* (Copenhagen, 1931), trans. F. N. Tumboowalla (Mumbai, 1993), p. 23.

¹²⁵ Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961), p. 162.

¹²⁶ Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: The Early Period* (Leiden, 1975; repr. 1996), vol. I, pp. 90–1. The custom of killing *khrafstras* is also mentioned by Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 46; *De Invidia et Odio* 3.537B).

¹²⁷ This is expressed in the *Vidēvdād* (14.5; 18.73), one of the divisions (*nask*) of the *Avesta*, the holy book of Zoroastrianism. The *Vidēvdād* is a priestly code concerning purity laws and demons; see M. Shākī, "Dād nask", *Elr*, VI/5, p. 549.

¹²⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

a fresh-water lake, Alexander's army has to endure scorpions, huge beasts and serpents (PC, III, 7–16).¹³⁰

However, the dragon-slaying legends in the later epic tradition of Persian poetry seem to have largely lost their religious (i.e. Zoroastrian) importance. In the national legends, the meaning of the dragon slaying motif becomes a royal or heroic act required as proof of the king's/hero's legitimacy.¹³¹ As Khaleghi-Motlagh affirms:

The requirement that every king or hero should demonstrate the legitimacy of his status by slaying a dragon or doing some other fabulous deed or receiving miraculous aid prompted not only the tendency to historicize mythology but also a contrary tendency to mythologize history ... In the case of Alexander, unlike the Zoroastrian priests who never acknowledged the Macedonian conqueror, the court historians attempted to justify Alexander's rule in Iran with all sorts of arguments for his legitimacy ... from stories which the Iranians themselves had invented for the purpose of legitimizing Alexander: Alexander's Iranian lineage and his slaying of a dragon.¹³²

The method used by Alexander to slay the dragon is also found in other Persian legends. In the *Shāhnāma*, Alexander kills the dragon by feeding it five oxen stuffed with poison and naphtha.¹³³ This method is also used by the hero Rustam in the *Shāhnāma*, curiously in India, where he slays a dragon called Babr-i Bayān.¹³⁴ According to Firdawsī, Rustam fills oxhides with quicklime and stones and carries them to the place where the dragon comes out of the sea once a week. The dragon swallows them and its stomach bursts. Rustam then has the dragon flayed and makes a coat from its skin, which is also called *babr-i bayān*.¹³⁵ A similar method is also used by Farāmarz, Rustam's son, to slay a dragon called *Mār-i jawshā* ("the hissing snake"), which lives on a mountain in India. Farāmarz slays the dragon with the help of another hero (Bīzhan). They hide in two boxes and allow themselves to be swallowed by the

بگشتند چندان خراستر که راه

به یکبارگی تنگ شد بر سپاه

¹²⁹ Stoneman identified this term a part of Alexander's letter to Aristotle about India. See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 74.

¹³⁰ See Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 183–4.

¹³¹ See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Farāmarznāma", *Irānnāma* 1.1 (1361/1982), p. 43 n. 23.

¹³² Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Aždahā, ii. In Persian Literature", *Elr*, III, pp. 199–202.

¹³³ According to the Syriac *Alexander Romance*, Alexander slays the dragon with quicklime, bitumen, lead and sulphur. Daniel Ogden points out the similarity of the Syriac version to the story of Daniel slaying a dragon with balls of bitumen, dough and hair, and the killing of the snake-king Sapor (Shāpūr?) through use of camel hides stuffed with straw and charcoal. See Ogden, "Sekandar, Dragon-slayer", pp. 281–82.

¹³⁴ Babr-i Bayān, might mean "Tiger of the Indian city of Bayāna" (suggested by Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Babr-e Bayān", *Elr*, III/3, pp. 324–5). On the other possible meanings of this word see M. Omidsalar, "Babr-i Bayān", *Irānnāma* 3 (1362/1983), pp. 447–58. For an edition of this story see Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Babr-i Bayān", *Irānnāma* 6.1 (1988), pp. 200–27 and *Irānnāma* 6.2 (1988), pp. 382–416.

¹³⁵ "It may be significant that in Greek mythology, the lion which Hercules strangled (because its skin was invulnerable), and whose skin he thereafter wore (like Rustam's *babr-i Bayān*) on his shoulders, is called the Nemean lion after the place (Nemea) the lion had infested. Cited from Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Babr-e Bayān", p. 325.

dragon.¹³⁶ In general, as Ogden points out, “the motif of the killing of the dragon by feeding it burning or combustible material may well be best considered a folktale motif.”¹³⁷

1-c) Gūsh-bastar and Apocalyptic Figures

Creatures with enormous ears appear constantly in the Persian tradition, not only in various stories of Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma*, but also in other epics.¹³⁸ In the *Shāhnāma*, on his return to Babylon, Alexander finds the aforementioned creature Gūsh-bastar,¹³⁹ who has such huge ears that he uses one as a mattress and the other as a blanket. Curiously, in many sources, Gog and Magog are described with enormous ears and also referred to as *pīl-gūsh* (“elephant ears”) or *gilīm-gūsh* (“carpet ears”).¹⁴⁰ Firdawsī also uses this description for Gog and Magog: “their breast and ears are like those of an elephant. If they go to sleep, one of the ears serves as a bed, while the other is folded over their bodies”.¹⁴¹

It is also worthy of mention that similar creatures appear in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* (*Memorial of Jāmāsp*), a Zoroastrian apocalyptic work¹⁴² in Middle Persian,¹⁴³ also known as the *Jāmāspnāma*. This figure is called Bargūsh (or Vargūsh), which means people with long ears or with ears on their chest.¹⁴⁴ Firdawsī also uses the same word (i.e. Vargūsh) for Gūsh-bastar in a verse where Alexander calls the creature Gūsh-var.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁶ Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Farāmarznāma”, pp. 22–45.

¹³⁷ Ogden, “Sekandar, Dragon-slayer”, p. 290.

¹³⁸ Asadī Ṭūsī in the *Garshāspnāma* describes some creatures called *sagsārān* (“dog-headed”) with two enormous ears as big as those of an elephant. He also calls them *pīl-gūshān* (“elephant-eared”). See Asadī Ṭūsī, *Garshāspnāma*, ed. Ḥ. Yaghmāyī, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1354/1975), pp. 174–5. In the anonymous prose *Iskandarnāma*, Alexander fights against creatures called *pīl-gūshān* (*Iskandarnāma-yi manthūr*, ed. I. Afshār (Tehran, 1343/1964), pp. 701–4.) These creatures also appear in the *Kūshnāma*. See Irānshāh Ibn abī al-Khayr, *Kūshnāma*, ed. Jalāl Maṭīnī (Tehran, 1377/1998).

¹³⁹ Aḥmad Ṭūsī, ‘*Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt wa gharāyib al-Mawjūdāt*, ed. M. Sutūda (Tehran, 1345/1966), p. 169) and Qazwīnī (*Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt wa gharāyib al-Mawjūdāt*, ed. N. Sabūḥī (Tehran, 1340/1961), p. 458) indeed speak of creatures with enormous ears which they use as a bed.

¹⁴⁰ See A. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, F. C. Wilhelmina and F. Doufekar-Aerts, *Gog and Magog: The Clans of Chaos in World Literature* (Rozenberg, 2007), p. 58; E. Van Donzel and A. Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources, Sallam’s Quest for Alexander’s Wall* (Leiden, 2002), p. 231.

¹⁴¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 97–8:

بر و سینه و گوش هاشان چو پیل
بخسبند یکی گوش بستر کنند
دگر بر تن خویش چادر کنند

¹⁴² See M. Boyce, “Apocalyptic i. In Zoroastrianism”, *EIr*, II/2, pp. 154–6.

¹⁴³ For editions and content of this work see M. Boyce, “Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg”, *EIr*, III/2, pp. 126–7.

¹⁴⁴ See Jalāl Maṭīnī, “Kūsh yā gūsh?”, *Irānāma* 21 (1366/1987), p. 7; Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Yaddāsh-t-hā-yi Shāhnāma*, vol. III, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 115:

بدان گوش ور گفت: رو
بیاور کسی تا چه بینم نو!

Another interesting issue regarding the Persian aspects of the tale of Gūsh-bastar appears on Alexander's way to Babylon when Gūsh-bastar creature speaks of an island on which there are images of Afrāsīyāb and Kay Khusraw painted on bones. It is an island where the only food is fish. In the Greek *Romance* (PC, III. 7), Alexander's letter to Aristotle about the wonders of India recounts that when they reached the city of Prasiake, they discovered people on "a conspicuous promontory in the sea" who looked like women and fed on fish. Alexander also discovered that they were barbarian in speech. They pointed out an island where there was the grave of an ancient king.¹⁴⁶ This passage appears in two different parts of the *Shāhnāma*. In the passage "Alexander travels to the East and sight of its wonders", after his encounter with the Brahmans, he reaches a deep ocean where "lived men who veiled themselves like women. Their language was not Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chinese or Pahlavi. Their diet consisted of fish".¹⁴⁷ In another passage, in Gūsh-bastar's tale, there is a similar description of a city whose buildings are covered with fish skins and fish bones and the people eat fish.¹⁴⁸ Curiously, here the grave of "the ancient king" from the Greek *Romance* becomes in the *Shāhnāma* the faces of Kay Khusraw and Afrāsīyāb, two ancient kings from the Persian tradition, whose portraits were painted on bones.

As we can see here, in these fabulous legends and tales the description of Gog and Magog is mixed with the apocalyptic figures of Persian tradition (i.e. Vargūsh). The legends also feature other Persian elements such as the mention of ancient Iranian kings. It is thus possible to deduce that these legends were added to the Persian PC tradition at an early point when the tale of Gog and Magog was not yet linked to the Qur'ānic figure of Dhū'l-Qarnayn.

2-a) Alexander's Encounter with the Brahmans

The narrative of Alexander's encounter with the Brahmans is found in a papyrus now preserved in Berlin (*Pap. Berol.* 13044 = F. Gr. Hist., 1539) as well as in all extant works of the historians of Alexander.¹⁴⁹ In the Greek *Alexander Romance* (III. 5–6) it

¹⁴⁶ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 182.

¹⁴⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p.79:

بسان زنان مرد پوشیده روی...
زبان شان نه تازی و نه خسروی
نه ترکی، نه چینی و نه پهلوی
ز ماهی بدی شان همه خوردنی...

¹⁴⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 115.

¹⁴⁹ See R. Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995), pp. 99–114.

features between the battle with Porus and the talking tree episode,¹⁵⁰ and is expanded in the work of the fifth-century Palladius, *De gentibus Indiae et de Bragmanibus*.¹⁵¹

The structure of this episode in the *Shāhnāma* coincides with the Greek PC. In the *Shāhnāma*, the Brahmans write Alexander a letter which is similar in content to that in the Greek PC. Firdawsī also describes the Brahmans as naked (*birahna*), and their diet as consisting of seeds, fruits and plants.¹⁵² Alexander visits them asking a series of riddles. At the end, he offers them the chance to ask him for whatever they want. They ask for immortality. He explains that this is impossible since he himself is a mortal and justifies his greed as being his fate.

The *Shāhnāma* contains all the same riddles and questions that Alexander poses to the Brahmans in the Greek PC. However, the questions and the answers become more sophisticated in the *Shāhnāma*, where they cover more than thirty verses. They contain Persian beliefs and demonstrate the familiarity of Firdawsī's source with such profound Persian concepts as *khirad* ("wisdom") and *āz* ("greed"), terms of a pre-Islamic derivation.¹⁵³ The best example of the similarity and yet greater sophistication of the Persian version is Alexander's question about kingship. The question in the Greek PC is simply: "What is kingship?" (PC, III, 6). In the *Shāhnāma*, the poet develops the theme further: "Who is the king of our souls? Who always accompanies us towards evil?" to which the Indian ascetic answers:

Greed is the king, the ground of vengeance and the place of sin ... Greed and need are two demons (*dīv*), wretched (*patyāra*) and malevolent; one is dry-lipped from longing, the other passes sleepless nights from excess. Time passing hunts down both, and blessed is the man whose mind accepts wisdom (*khirad*).¹⁵⁴

Henceforth, Alexander's story in the *Shāhnāma* contains constant concern with the vanity of this world, and with death, and takes on a cautionary tone of reproach about Alexander's greed. As Charles-Henri de Fouchécour observes, Firdawsī's story of Alexander is really, to a certain extent, "an anthology of counsels woven into the weave of a narrative that gives it sense ... each king is placed in the presence of a vanity in which there is the desire to possess a world that death will strip from him".¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix II in Van Thiel, *Leben und Taten Alexanders von Makedonien* (Darmstadt, 1983), pp. 242–5. For an English translation see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 131–3.

¹⁵¹ See Stoneman, "Who are the Brahmans?", pp. 500–10. On Palladius (d. AD 341), the Bishop of Helenopolis and his work *On the Life of the Brahmans* see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 97–8; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The History of Palladius on the Races of India and the Brahmans", pp. 64–135.

¹⁵² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 75.

¹⁵³ These are terms which can be found in Pahlavi writings, for example in the *Dēnkart*. See R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (New York, 1972), pp. 173–4.

¹⁵⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 77; see also the English translation of Dick Davis (*The Book of Kings*, p. 504).

¹⁵⁵ De Fouchécour, *Moralia*, p. 79.

2-b) Alexander's Dialogue with Two Giant Green Birds

According to the Greek PC, these two birds have human faces and speak Greek (PC, II, 40). In the *Shāhnāma*, Firdawsī also mentions that the birds speak in Greek (*rūmī*). The green birds live on top of two ebony columns that reach into the clouds, beside a high mountain. While in his encounter with the Brahmans, it is Alexander who asks the questions, in his dialogue with the birds, it is he who is the one interrogated. In this scene, the birds ask Alexander certain questions to verify his wisdom in order to decide whether he has the aptitude and capability to ascend to the heavens. The focus of their dialogue is on mundane pleasures and worldly lifestyles. This passage is so vivid and explicit that when reading the verses, the scene comes alive in one's imagination. Having verified Alexander's knowledge, the birds let the king ascend to the heavens, mounting "up to the summit of that mountain, without any companions to see something that would make any happy man weep."¹⁵⁶ The terrible sight Alexander sees on the top of the mountain is the angel Sirāfil (Isrāfil),¹⁵⁷ waiting for God's order to blow his trumpet and start the Day of Resurrection.

2-c) Alexander's Encounter with the Angel Isrāfil

In the Greek PC, after speaking with the birds, Alexander constructs a flying machine in order to explore the skies (PC, II, 41). Although in the *Shāhnāma* the same method of flying is used by Kay Kāvūs,¹⁵⁸ it is absent from Firdawsī's treatment of Alexander. Instead, after speaking with the birds, Alexander also attains to the heavens when he climbs the mountain where the birds live. In the Greek PC, he comes across a "flying creature in the form of a man", who reproaches him that "... you have not yet secured the whole earth, and you are now exploring the heavens?"¹⁵⁹ In the *Shāhnāma*, this "flying creature" is transformed into Isrāfil, "the Angel of the Trumpet of Judgement Day",¹⁶⁰ who reproaches Alexander "with a voice like thunder" to: "Stop struggling, slave of greed!"¹⁶¹ The angel also warns him to prepare himself for death.

¹⁵⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 95.

¹⁵⁷ Firdawsī uses the name of the angel as Sirāfil due to the rhyme of the poem.

¹⁵⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. II, pp. 95–7. See also Dick Davis's comparison of these two scenes in the Greek and Persian versions (*Pantheas' Children, Hellenistic Novels and Medieval Persian Romances* (New York, 2002), pp. 81–2). Kay Kāvūs's flight is probably modelled on Alexander's, but its meaning is quite different; see Firuza Melville, "Kingly Flight: Nimrūd, Kay Kāvūs, Alexander, or Why the Angel has the Fish?", *Persica* 23 (2009–10), pp. 129; Melville, "A Flying King", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, pp. 40–59.

¹⁵⁹ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 123.

¹⁶⁰ The name of this angel is probably to be traced to the Hebrew *Serāfīm*, as is indicated by the variants *Sarāfil* and *Sarāfin*. See A. J. Wensinck, "Isrāfil", *EF*, IV, p. 211.

¹⁶¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 95.

While in the Greek PC, Alexander does not attempt to justify himself or defend his deeds when faced by the flying creature's reproaches; in the *Shāhnāma*, he says to Isrāfīl: "I will never know another fate than this incessant wandering around the world."¹⁶²

2-d) Alexander in the Topaz Palace

Another passage in which Alexander receives an oracle about his death occurs on a mountain whose crest is of lapis lazuli, in a palace built of topaz (*yāqūt-i zard* = yellow ruby). The palace is filled with crystal chandeliers and in the middle there is a fountain of salt water, next to which there is a throne. On the throne stretches a wretched corpse whose head is like that of a boar. Anyone who goes there to take something, or even simply sets foot within the palace, finds himself rooted to the spot; his whole body begins to tremble and he starts to waste away. A cry comes from the salt water: "O king, still filled with longing and desire, don't play the fool much longer! You have seen many things that no man ever saw, but now it's time to draw rein. Your life has shortened now, the royal throne is without its king."¹⁶³

This scene is probably based on a similar passage in the Greek version (PC, III. 28), in which Alexander comes to the harbour of Lyssos. On top of a high mountain there is a circular temple ringed by a hundred columns of sapphire. In the Greek *Romance*, there is also a precious stone that lights up the whole place. However, instead of a saltwater fountain, it is a bird that warns Alexander in "a human voice, in Greek" to return to his own palace and not strive to climb the paths of heaven.¹⁶⁴

2-e) Alexander and the Talking Tree

As we have seen from the last three of Alexander's encounters with fabulous beings possessed of oracular wisdom, oracles were important to the historical Alexander.¹⁶⁵ In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, the most extended encounter with an oracle occurs in the course of Alexander's adventures in India when the wise men of Prasiake (Porus's kingdom) invite him to visit two talking trees.¹⁶⁶ Firdawsī's narration of the story is very

¹⁶² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 95.

¹⁶³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VI, pp. 100–1. The English translation is by Davis, *The Book of Kings*, pp. 516–17.

¹⁶⁴ See PC, III, 28. For an English translation of this passage see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 147.

¹⁶⁵ See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 187.

¹⁶⁶ See PC, III, 17. For an English translation of this passage see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 133–35.

close to the Greek version. In the *Shāhnāma*, the talking tree is found at the end of the world (*karān-i jahān*). Instead of two trees, there is one tree that has two separate trunks, one female and the other male. At night the female trunk speaks and when the daylight comes, the male speaks. When Alexander approaches the talking tree, he sees that the soil is covered with the pelts of wild animals. The guide (interpreter) explains that the tree has many worshippers, and that when they come to worship, they feed on the flesh of wild animals. The interpreter tells Alexander that the tree says: “However much Alexander wanders in the world, he has already seen his share of blessings, when he has reigned for fourteen years, he must quit the royal throne.” At midnight the female trunk says: “Do not puff yourself up with greed; why torment your soul in this way? Greed makes you wander the wide world, harass mankind and kill kings.” Alexander asks: “Will this fateful day come in Greece, will my mother see me alive again, before someone covers my face in death?” The female trunk tells him: “Few days remain ... neither your mother nor your family in Rūm will see your face again. Death will come soon and you will die in a strange land ...”¹⁶⁷

After all these passages full of warnings and reproaches, Alexander finally dies in Babylon. Alexander’s last days in the *Shāhnāma* take a very similar form to the Greek *Romance*. Firdawsī’s version even contains such interesting details as Alexander’s order to position his bed where all the army will be able to march past and see him (PC, III, 32).¹⁶⁸

Conclusion: Firdawsī’s Sources and his Portrayal of Alexander

From this description of Firdawsī’s narrative we may definitely conclude that it supports the case for a Middle Persian intermediary. Firdawsī’s account of Alexander is not only the first version of the *Romance* in New Persian, but also the work in which most of the Syriac sources, Persian legends and independent stories concerning Alexander the Great are reflected. It follows the *Khudāynāmag* tradition, including Alexander in the Kayānid cycle. In addition, its Christian references besides Persian elements indicates that the authors of the *Khudāynāmag* used Syriac sources, as Boyce and Tafadžulī affirmed.¹⁶⁹ It also indicates that the motifs of Gog and Magog and the Water of Life were also added to the *Romance* in an early stage (e.g. at the end of the Sasanian period) from Syriac.¹⁷⁰ Hence, the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī is the closest version to what the Middle Persian *Vorlage* of the *Alexander Romance* might be. It is probable

¹⁶⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VI, pp. 102–5. For an English translation see Davis, *The Book of Kings*, pp. 517–18.

¹⁶⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VI, pp. 122–3.

¹⁶⁹ Tafadžulī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islām*, pp. 270–1; Boyce, “Middle Persian Literature”, p. 59.

¹⁷⁰ According to N. Sims-Williams, the Middle Iranian Christian literature may be regarded as a branch of Syriac literature. See Sims-Williams, “Christian Literature in Middle Iranian Languages”, *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran, Companion Volume I to a History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London/New York, 2009), p. 266.

that Abū Maṣṣūr¹⁷¹ combined in his prose *Shāhnāma* all the material which was in circulation, in particular in Greater Khurāsān, the land of the Parthians.

As Meisami points out, Firdawsī was working with an older model of history writing in which an authentic bloodline conferred virtue on kings.¹⁷² However, Firdawsī's Alexander has two different characteristics. The first parts of the story concern the legitimacy of Alexander's kingship, putting emphasis on his Persian lineage and his deeds following Dārā's advice. However, after Alexander's ascent to the throne of Persia, Firdawsī was no longer concerned with whether the king was legitimate, but rather with what his life shows about royal legitimacy. In this portion of the legend Alexander is presented as the son of the demon Āz (greed). This part deals mostly with reproaches of Alexander's greed and warnings of his death, which make Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* a source of metaphors and exemplary anecdotes that would later be the stock-in-trade of authors of mirrors for princes, as we will see in chapters five and six below on the *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ In the episode of the search for the Water of Life, Firdawsī mentions his source as *dihqān* ("the noble landowner") and *Pahlavān*. In general, when Firdawsī identifies his source as *dihqān*, he is referring to the prose *Shāhnāma* of Abū Maṣṣūr.

¹⁷² J. S. Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia", *Poetics Today* 14.2 (1993), p. 254.

¹⁷³ Chapter five of this thesis deals with the *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī as a mirror for princes.

Chapter Four Alexander the Great in the Arabic and Persian Popular Romances

از ما به جز حکایت مهر و وفا میرس

ما قصه ی سکندر و دارا نخوانده ایم

The yarn of Alexander and Darius is not
A tale I have read. Do not ask me to relate
Aught but romances of fidelity and love.

Ḥāfiz¹

Introduction

In the verse quoted above, it is not at all odd that Persia's supreme poet of erotic love, Ḥāfiz of Shīrāz (d. 1389), should profess his complete disinterest in the violent quarrels and epic warfare between Alexander and Darius (referring to a specific epic called *Sikandar o Dārā*), and claim instead to be exclusively preoccupied by erotic romances and tales of faithful love. It is worthy of note, however, that in Ḥāfiz's second hemistich there is an allusion to a little-known romantic epic called *Love and Fidelity (Mihr o vafā)*² by Rashīdī Samarqandī (c. 1100).³ Ḥāfiz's verse demonstrates that the story of Alexander and Darius was not just familiar enough to everyone in his medieval Persian audience to immediately grasp the allusion, but could also be suitably juxtaposed to the sort of epic verse which celebrated the arts of love rather than the exploits of war. The heroic deeds of Alexander were most likely sung and read in *qahva-khānas* (coffee houses) and public places of entertainment in every corner of the Persian world; coffee houses of the kind that still exist today, as can be observed in Michael Wood's documentary, *In the Footsteps of Alexander* (1997).⁴

According to Nafīsī, storytelling was one of the main pillars of Pahlavi literature.⁵ However, the main obstacle that confronts any student aspiring to investigate the state of literature in pre-Islamic Persia is that our knowledge of popular literature in

¹ Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān*, ed. S. Ş. Sajjādī and 'A. Bahrāmīyān (Tehran, 1379/2000), p. 384. See also Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī (Tehran, 1359/1980), *ghazal* 264:7.

² Although this title means literally "love and fidelity", it also references the names of the protagonists of the romance (the lovers), Mihr and Vafā. Ḥāfiz's use of this title thus has a double meaning, creating a contrast with the story of *Alexander and Darius*, which deals with war and quarrels.

³ On whom, see F. de Blois (begun by Ch. Ambrose Storey), *Persian Literature: Poetry to ca. A.D. 1100 to 1225* (London, 1994), vol. V, part 2, no. 272, pp. 507–8. For an excellent interpretation of this verse, see H. 'Alī Haravī, *Sharḥ-i ghazal-hā-yi Ḥāfiz* (Tehran, 1367/1988), vol. II, pp. 1125–6.

⁴ Also detailed in the book accompanying his documentary: Michael Wood, *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great* (Berkeley, 2001). On coffee houses and the tradition of storytelling see Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epic* (Leiden, 2003), especially chapter two. On various storytelling traditions underlying the *Dārābnāma*, see also W. Hanaway, "Dārāb-Nāma", *EIr*, VII, p. 9.

⁵ S. Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Naẓm va nathr dar Irān* (Tehran, 1344/1965), vol. I, p. 256.

Persia before the tenth century is to all intents practically nil. There are almost no contemporary records from pre-Islamic Iran to indicate what popular literature was like, what it concerned itself with and how it was transmitted. Scraps of information regarding Persia appear in the works of the classical historians but these tell us little about popular literature.⁶ Of course, there is some evidence that stories from the Parthian period have come down to us, according to Khares of Mytilene, as recorded by Athenaeus (13.575), who mentions the story of Zariadres and Odatis,⁷ and in the *Vis o Rāmin* of Fakhr al-Dīn As‘ad Gurgānī, in which the author describes how he took a popular story in the Pahlavi language and put it into verse.⁸ As William Hanaway points out:

stories, tales, legends and traditions had been kept alive by the *dihqāns*,⁹ so had they been preserved by the common people in an enormous body of oral literature which was passed from father to son and from storyteller to his audience in public. Storytelling has a long history in Iran, even if the details of it are not known.¹⁰

In the course of oral transmission, these narratives became mixed with other kinds of popular lore, both religious and secular. In the Islamic period, some of these stories were written down, set down in prose and have survived to the present.

Knowledge of these romances can add a new dimension to the study of the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian literature. Two of these popular romances regarding Alexander in the Persian language in particular deserve mention here:

1) The *Iskandarnāma-yi manthūr* (*The Book of Alexander in Prose*),¹¹ which probably dates from the thirteenth century.¹² It was edited by Īraj Afshār and translated into English by Minoos Southgate.¹³ I have decided not to include this work in the present study because, besides Southgate’s study, it is the main subject of a Ph.D. thesis submitted by Evangelos Venetis, “The *Iskandarnama*: An Analysis of an Anonymous

⁶ J. Cejpek, “Iranian Folk-Literature”, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. J. Rypka et al. (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 617–19.

⁷ Mary Boyce, “Zariadres and Zārer”, *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 17 (1955), pp. 463–77; Athenaeus XIII.

⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis o Rāmin*, ed. M. Maḥjūb (Tehran, 1337/1958), pp. 20–1; V. Minorsky, “Vis U Ramin, A Parthian Romance”, *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1946), pp. 741–64; Minorsky, “Vis U Ramin, A Parthian Romance”, *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 12 (1947), pp. 20–35.

⁹ The term *dihqān* was used in the late Sasanian period to designate a class of landed magnates who, aside from their political and social significance, played an important cultural role. Most of the credit for preservation of the stories in the national epic, the *Shāhnāma*, the pre-Islamic historical traditions, and the romances of ancient Iran belongs to the *dihqāns*. See A. Tafadḍulī, “Dehqān i: In the Sasanian Period”, *Elr*, VII/2, pp. 223–4.

¹⁰ See Hanaway, “Persian Popular Romances”, chapter V, n. 3.

¹¹ *Iskandarnāma*, ed. Īraj Afshār.

¹² On its dating, see Bahār, *Sabk-shināsī*, vol. II, pp. 128–51.

¹³ Southgate, *Iskandarnamah: A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance*.

Medieval Persian Prose Romance”.¹⁴ Venetis concentrates on the Muslim image of Alexander in the popular Persian tradition, conducting a detailed analysis of the content, language and historical framework of this Persian *Alexander Romance*.

2) The second popular romance, which is the main subject of this chapter, is Ṭarsūsī’s *Dārābnāma* (*Book of Dārāb*), based ultimately on the PC tradition and Persian legends.¹⁵ The present chapter considers the role of the oral tradition contained in this work in preserving certain Persian legends¹⁶ concerning Alexander the Great. This study of Ṭarsūsī’s *Dārābnāma* will constitute, as will be seen below, one of the most important elements of my argument about the development of *Alexander Romance* in the Persian world, particularly in pre-Islamic Persia.

Beside the Persian *Dārābnāma*, a brief analysis of an Arabic popular romance called the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* (*The Life of Alexander*), composed towards the end of the thirteenth century and attributed to Ṣūrī, apparently a citizen of Tyre in southern Lebanon,¹⁷ helps us further understand the degree to which the *Khudāynāmag* tradition influenced the transmission of the *Alexander Romance* in the Islamic world. In addition, it also demonstrates the extent to which the story of Alexander was integrated into the history of the Kayānid kings, especially the lives of Dārāb and his son Dārā, even in popular Arabic lore.

Furthermore, this chapter proposes to examine the *Dārābnāma* from the point of view of its motifs, patterns of storytelling, and the ways in which this romance created the figure of Alexander, and then to apply the same approach to the work of Ṣūrī, the *Sīrat al-Iskandar*. What this analysis endeavours to show is that the popular romances did indeed preserve some pre-Islamic Persian motifs relating to Alexander. Therefore, one key purpose of this chapter is to fill the gaps between the pre-Islamic Persian *Alexander Romance* (sixth–seventh century) and the versions of the Islamic period (up to the thirteenth century) and thus restore, and hopefully reconstitute, the probable evolution of the romance in full. This chapter attempts to demonstrate that the portrait of Alexander in the *Khudāynāmag* tradition not only influenced the historiography of the Islamic period (as discussed in chapter two of this thesis) but also penetrated the common culture and was thus preserved in the oral tradition, as reflected in the popular romances.

In order to achieve the above objectives, we first provide a brief survey of the contents, patterns of storytelling, literary characteristics and the background of the

¹⁴ E. Venetis, “The *Iskandarnama*: An Analysis of an Anonymous Medieval Persian Prose Romance” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2006).

¹⁵ See R. Stoneman, “Persian Aspects of the Romance Tradition”, *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. R. Stoneman, K. Erickson and I. Netton (Groningen, 2012), pp. 14–17; Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*.

¹⁶ Major motifs like warlike women and the survival of a popular belief in Ānāhītā as represented by one of the female characters (Būrāndukht, Darius’ daughter), Darius rejecting the daughter of Philip because of her bad breath, and Alexander, a foreign hero who becomes Persianised in both personality and genealogy.

¹⁷ See F. Doufīkar-Aerts, “*Sīrat al-Iskandar*: An Arabic Popular Romance of Alexander”, *Oriente Moderno, Studies on Arabic Epics* 22.2, 83 n.s. (2003), pp. 505–20; Doufīkar-Aerts, “The Last Days of Alexander in an Arabic Popular Romance of al-Iskandar”, *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, ed. Stelios Panayotakis, Maaïke Zimmerman and Wytse Keulen (Leiden, 2003), pp. 23–35; Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 201.

Dārābnāma, followed by a discussion of the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* and its relationship to the Persian *Khudāynāmag* tradition. Some conclusions are advanced at the end of the chapter regarding the significance of both stories for the evolution of the *Alexander Romance* in general.

I. The *Dārābnāma*: A Hellenistic Romance in the Persian Language

The oldest manuscript of the *Dārābnāma*, on which the printed edition is based, was written by or at the order of a Zoroastrian of Iranian origin (*Pārsī*) in India,¹⁸ and is dated 992/1584–85, having been copied from a manuscript in the possession of the Moghul Emperor Akbar.¹⁹ It is ascribed to a certain Abū Ṭāhir Ṭarsūsī (or Ṭartūsī) whose *nisba* (name of origin) can be linked with either Ṭartūs in Syria or Tarsus in Cilicia. Either place could have preserved Greek traditions well into Islamic times. The date of the compilation of this romance is quite uncertain. However, according to the editor, its compilation belongs to the twelfth century A.D.²⁰

The *Dārābnāma* has been the focus of various important studies and synopses, on which my remarks here are dependent, and which make it unnecessary to summarise the rather complex details of the entire story.²¹ First among these studies is William Hanaway's Ph.D. thesis on the *Dārābnāma* among other popular romances of the pre-Safavid period, which provided a detailed summary of this romance in English.²² Secondly, Marina Gaillard studied and translated parts of this work into French and analysed the rich compilation of traditions it preserved.²³ Finally, in his book on the historical figure of Darius III, Pierre Briant made use of the *Dārābnāma* in order to reconstitute a biography through parallel inquiry and the contrasting images of Dārā in the Arabo-Persian tradition and Darius III in the Graeco-Roman sources.²⁴

What this chapter endeavours to add to these studies is a reconstruction of the development of the *Alexander Romance* from pre-Islamic Persian literature. The *Dārābnāma* preserved certain elements relating to the Persianised Alexander that illuminate the state of knowledge of Alexander literature in the pre-Islamic period. In addition, this popular romance furnishes further evidence of the influence of the *Khudāynāmag* tradition on the Persian *Alexander Romances*.

¹⁸ According to its French translator Marina Gaillard, the fact that the manuscript was copied by a descendant of Iranian Zoroastrians is important because we could suppose that the rather un-heroic image of Alexander which is found in this story might have appeared acceptable and entertaining enough for them to order a copy of the manuscript. See Gaillard, "Hero or Anti-Hero: The Alexander Figure in the *Dārāb-nāma* of Ṭarsūsī", *Oriente Moderno, Studies on Islamic Legends* 89.2 (2009), p. 328.

¹⁹ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. I, pp. 24–5.

²⁰ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. I, pp. 26–7.

²¹ For a synopsis of the story, see Hanaway, "Dārāb-nāma", pp. 8–9.

²² Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances", pp. 291–305. See also Hanaway's entry on the *Dārābnāma* in *Elr*, VII, pp. 8–9.

²³ Ṭarsūsī, *Alexandre le Grand en Iran*.

²⁴ Pierre Briant, *Darius dans l'ombre d'Alexandre* (Paris, 2003); Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, trans. J. Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA, 2015), especially chapter IV, pp. 357–93.

Patterns of Storytelling and the Content of the *Dārābnāma*

The form of the *Dārābnāma* gives clear signs of its oral background. Very similar to a modern TV serial, each chapter ends at the most exciting part, while the next begins with a review of the important parts of the previous one. As the story was recited by popular storytellers, it was of course related in a language that the common people could understand. The *Dārābnāma* is thus composed in a simple style, without any of the rhetorical devices and stylistic conventions of polite literature. Its language is quite natural and close to that of everyday speech. As Hanaway puts it, “The text is based on romantic stories derived from older epics, stories which were evidently neither related nor interpreted as fables or allegories. Its emphasis is on action, not ideas. It is full of popular religious and secular lore, superstitions and folklore.”²⁵

This romance, though first and foremost the story of the life of Dārāb, begins with the story of Bahman and his revenge on Rustam’s family.²⁶ In the *Dārābnāma*, Bahman is frequently called Ardashīr, thus identifying him with the Achaemenid kings, especially Artaxerxes I and Cyrus.²⁷ It also contains legends about Bahman’s daughter-wife Humāy (Dārāb’s mother), about Dārā, and about Alexander the Great and Būrāndukht, Dārā’s daughter, and their adventures. The editor divided the book into three different stories, that of Dārāb and his sons, that of Alexander and Dārā, and that of Būrāndukht and her adventures with Alexander.

In general, the *Dārābnāma* follows the *Khudāynāmag* tradition (e.g. in terms of Alexander’s Persian ancestry), being similar in this respect to the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and the Arabic histories discussed in chapter two. However, comparing the story of Alexander in the *Dārābnāma* with the other sources, we find certain secondary accretions which show us that the *Dārābnāma* is a repository of deep Iranian historical memories which reflect some of the most primordial mythological motifs of the Iranian people. Six of these mythological motifs merit highlighting here:

- 1) King Philip (Fīlāqūs) belongs to the race of Frīdūn (Fraydūn), the mythical Iranian king who divided his kingdom among his three sons.

In the *Dārābnāma* we read that in a battle between the Qayṣar of Rūm²⁸ and Queen Humāy, Dārāb forces the Qayṣar, who is Philip’s brother here, to surrender. Dārāb and Humāy decide to free the Qayṣar on the grounds that they are related. Humāy says: “we will pardon you because you are of the race of

²⁵ See Hanaway, “Dārāb-nāma”, pp. 8–9.

²⁶ Rustam killed Bahman’s ancestor, Isfandīyār. As a consequence, Bahman seeks revenge on Rustam’s family.

²⁷ See E. Yarshater, “Were the Sassanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?”, *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: La Persia nel Medioevo, Roma, 31 marzo–5 aprile 1970* (Rome, 1971), pp. 521f. According to Khaleghi-Motlagh, it is historically more accurate to regard Bahman as essentially a mixture of Cyrus and Artaxerxes I rather than as a Kayanian king. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Bahman”, *EIr*, III/5, pp. 489–90).

²⁸ In the Persian Alexander Romances, Philip (and Alexander too) is normally identified as the Qayṣar of Rūm, i.e. the Byzantine Caesar. However, the author of the *Dārābnāma* invented a new personage out of this title and presented him as Philip’s brother.

Fereydūn, and Dārāb is a descendant of Kay Qubād. On the Day of Judgement there should not be enmity between Frīdūn and Kay Qubād.”²⁹ Later it is established that Philip, the grandfather of Alexander, is the brother of the Qayšar.³⁰ Thus it is made clear even before the birth of Alexander that the ruling family of Rūm had links to the Iranian royal line. Accordingly, Alexander is related to the Iranian royal house on both his father’s and his mother’s side back to Frīdūn. In this version, the families are more closely related than in the other versions, in which Alexander’s mother is only Philip’s daughter and has no Iranian genealogy.

2) Alexander is exposed as an infant.

According to the *Dārābnāma*, Alexander’s mother gives birth to him in secret, and to avoid a scandal she leaves him on the mountain where Aristotle lives in a retreat. Alexander is nourished by a goat and guarded by a lion until an old woman eventually finds him. The woman nourishes him and rears him under the guidance of Aristotle.

This motif of the exposed child is familiar in the Mesopotamian and Persian traditions (e.g. Sargon of Akkad and Cyrus the Great).³¹ In the *Dārābnāma*, this motif is also applied to the birth of Dārāb, who, like Moses, was set adrift in a box on the Euphrates.³² According to Donald B. Redford, stories employ this motif for reasons that fall into different categories.³³ The legends of Dārāb’s and Alexander’s births fall into the same category: the child is exposed through shame at the circumstances of its birth. Given the mythological context of this motif, one may deduce perhaps that since the original evolution of the Dārāb story would have taken place in the context of a living oral tradition, it was transferred to Alexander in this manner.

A similar story was told about the births of Kay Khusraw (in the *Shāhnāma*)³⁴ and Cyrus (Herodotus 1. 107–8).³⁵ In this context, we may

²⁹ Tarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. I, p. 350.

³⁰ Tarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. I, p. 358.

³¹ According to Robert Drews, in Mesopotamian folk tradition the entire story of Sargon was transferred to Cyrus by the late fifth century. See Drews’ article “Sargon, Cyrus and Mesopotamian Folk History”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33.4 (1974), p. 390. See also Amélie Kuhrt, “Making History: Sargon of Akkad and Cyrus the Great of Persia”, *Achaemenid History* 13 (2003), pp. 347–61.

³² The story of Dārāb’s birth is not specifically Persian, but is probably Indo-Iranian or even Indo-European in origin (in which case, perhaps the Jews could have picked it up in Babylon and applied it to Moses?). The subject is highly controversial. The hypothesis of an Iranian influence on Judaeo-Christian tradition has been discussed mainly by M. Boyce, “Persian Religion in the Achaemenid Age”, *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein (Cambridge, 1984), vol. I, pp. 298ff. See also Duchesne-Guillemin, “Apocalypse juive et apocalypse iranienne”, *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’Impero Romano. Atti del Coloquio Internazionale*, ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (Rome/Leiden, 1982), pp. 753–61; Ph. Gignoux, “L’apocalyptique iranienne est-elle vraiment la source d’autres apocalypses?”, *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 31 (1985–8), pp. 67–78.

³³ Donald B. Redford, “The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child”, *Numen* 14.3 (1967), p. 211.

³⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. II, pp. 364–72.

³⁵ Khaleghi-Motlagh compares the story of Kay Khusraw’s birth with that of Cyrus in the Greek sources of Herodotus and Xenophon. He concludes that the legend of Kay Khusraw’s birth in the *Shāhnāma* and

emphasise the parallels between the births of Alexander and Kay Khusraw/Cyrus as a representation of the process of Persianisation. The purpose of the Kay Khusraw and Cyrus stories was to justify the emergence of a new dynasty on the throne of Persia. In addition, and more striking, transferring the legend of Cyrus's birth to Alexander recalls the latter's attempt to connect himself with the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia*.³⁶ It may be that the *Dārābnāma* fits Alexander within a heroic structure which emphasised an idealised kingship. Nizāmī develops this concept in his *Sharafnāma*, the first part of the *Iskandarnāma* where the most fully realised picture of Alexander as an "ideal king" appears. In Nizāmī's work, the parallel between Alexander and Kay Khusraw is even more obvious in several passages.³⁷

3) Alexander's abilities.

In the *Dārābnāma*, Alexander works in his youth as an astrologer and dream interpreter. However, in a violent argument with Aristotle, Alexander threatens his teacher, who then curses him and asks that all his wisdom be taken away.³⁸ According to Hanaway, this is a symbolic loss of his *farr* (divine glory),³⁹ because after this episode, he never shows any real sign of intelligence or imagination.⁴⁰

4) There is an attempt to link Alexander with the Iranian heroic past by having him find the treasure of Kay Khusraw, having him kill a Central Asian king in revenge for the death of Siyāvash, and visiting Afrāsiyāb's city and the Brass Castle (*Rū'īn Dizh*).⁴¹

5) Survival of the role of the goddess Ānāhītā in the Persianisation of Alexander.

William Hanaway was the first scholar to draw attention to the representation of the goddess Ānāhītā in the *Dārābnāma* through the character of Būrāndukht,

the Greek versions of the legend of Cyrus's birth are based on a common source. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Kay Khusraw va Kūrūsh", *Irānshināsī* 1.7 (1374/1995), pp. 158–70.

³⁶ On the idea that Alexander was imitating the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia* see Stark, *Alexander's Path* (New York, 1958), pp. 203–10; James Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On the Education of Cyrus* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 11–12, 238–9.

³⁷ See chapter five.

³⁸ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. I, pp. 444–6.

³⁹ *Farr* (Avestan *x'arənah* and Middle Persian *xwarrah*) literally means "glory", associated with the concept of royal fortune and charismatic kingship. In the Persian epics of the Islamic period, the concept of *farr* was understood as the divine glory bestowed upon the king by God. For more information on this concept from its early origins and the idea of kingship in the Iranian world see Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, 2003).

⁴⁰ Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances", p. 116.

⁴¹ For further study of the Alexandrian motifs in the *Dārābnāma* and other *Alexander Romances* in relation to the wider Persian heroic tradition, see John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* (Columbia, 1993), pp. 13, 19–20, 81–2, 86–92.

Dārā's daughter.⁴² Ānāhītā was closely connected with royalty and the legitimacy of kingship. She was identified on Sasanian coins as being present at the investiture of some of the Sasanian kings.⁴³ The association of this goddess with Alexander may have been another way to legitimise his kingship. The function of conferring legitimacy or divine approval upon a king is clearly depicted in the *Dārābnāma* through the character of Būrāndukht.⁴⁴

6) Alexander's dependence on Būrāndukht.

Būrāndukht saves Alexander in various episodes throughout the story. She does so when he has been thrown off his horse. She also rescues him from captivity, leads the army, fights in single combat and is a model of the brave and warlike hero, while Alexander generally manages to surmount the various obstacles by virtue of his cleverness, charisma, charm and good looks rather than any exercise of manliness or courage. In order to explain Alexander's lack of heroism in the *Dārābnāma*, Gaillard suggests that Būrāndukht might best be understood to be the true hero (or rather heroine) of the story and that the glorification of Iran is the main theme, not Alexander. She concludes that:

Thus Alexander could be an imperfect man for an audience of Muslim combatants but nevertheless a hero for the Islamic faith; and for a more hostile audience, possibly Zoroastrian, he would be a laughable anti-hero who certainly destroyed their religion but who was not even able to succeed in the religious mission which is supposed to be his greatest claim to fame.⁴⁵

Literary Characteristics of the *Dārābnāma*

The *Dārābnāma* is a unique example of Hellenistic literature in the Persian language in which the influence of three Greek novels can be detected: the first and most obvious of which is the PC. Secondly, most of the adventures of the *Dārābnāma*'s heroes in the Greek islands bear a great resemblance to the adventures of Odysseus and other sea-wandering heroes in Greek romances such as *Leucippe* and *Aethiopica*. Lastly, elsewhere in the *Dārābnāma* there are fragments of the *Metiochus and Parthenope* (*Vāmiq o 'Adhrā* in Persian).⁴⁶ In general, the *Dārābnāma* demonstrates great

⁴² William Hanaway, "Anāhītā and Alexander", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102.2 (1982), pp. 285–95.

⁴³ See R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Cleveland, 1963), p. 92.

⁴⁴ For example see Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. II, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Gaillard, "Hero or Anti-Hero", pp. 328–9.

⁴⁶ On the frequent echoes of Hellenistic novels in the *Dārābnāma* see Davis, *Panthea's Children*, pp. 29–36. See also Tomas Hägg and Bo Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover: Fragments of an Ancient Greek Novel and a Persian Epic Poem* (Leiden/Boston, 2003), pp. 144–9.

knowledge of Greek tales, presenting the characteristics of a Greek novel (e.g. travelling in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East).⁴⁷

On the other hand, every Hellenistic romance has at least one scene set in Egypt.⁴⁸ Thus in the *Dārābnāma*, as a Hellenistic romance, parallels between Egyptian lore and motifs in the romances have been pointed out. One example of such Egyptian traditions concerns the lineage of Humāy (Alexander's grandmother); the oldest is the same as that which appeared in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and major sources which describe her as the daughter of Bahman/Ardashīr. Also, in the *Dārābnāma* she is mostly called *Humāy bint Ardashīr* (Ardashīr's daughter). However, there is another account, which appears in just one manuscript of the *Dārābnāma*,⁴⁹ according to which Humāy is identified as the daughter of King Sām Chārash of Egypt. A similar tradition regarding Humāy's descent is given in the epic narrative *Bahmannāma* (*The Book of Bahman*).⁵⁰ Bahman was driven out of Iran by the conspiracy of his first wife (a princess of Kashmir called Katāyūn)⁵¹ and lived incognito in Egypt, where he met Humāy, the warrior daughter of Hārith, the king of Egypt. After engaging in several armed campaigns and trials of combat against her, he married her and regained his throne with her help. Later, when Bahman felt his time had come, he appointed Humāy as his successor, and she reigned justly.

Alexander also spends most of his childhood in Egypt because his mother, after her rejection due to her bad breath, married Fīrūz Shāh, the king of Egypt. This story obviously recalls the story of Nectanebo, the last Pharaoh of Egypt, and Olympias.⁵² On his march to Egypt, Alexander kills his stepfather.⁵³ When Alexander arrives with his army, Fīrūz Shāh goes to him disguised as an ambassador in order to find out whether he is indeed Alexander. But Alexander recognises him and takes him to Amorium, where he is strung up on the gallows.

The *Dārābnāma* not only contains an abridged version of the *Metiochus and Parthenope* (*Vāmiq o 'Adhrā*) and allusions to other Greek stories and legends (such as adventures in the Greek islands) but also a wealth of other references and various Greek personages and names. For instance, Dārāb falls in love with a widowed queen of Greek origin called Ṭamrūsīya. Their adventures in the Greek islands are unique in the Persian literature. They have to face storms at sea, talismans, cannibals and sea monsters, and are saved from trouble by prophetic dreams, magical cures and divine intervention.

⁴⁷ For examples in the Greek novels, especially in the *Alexander Romance*, see James Romm, "Travel", *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 109–26.

⁴⁸ Barns has examined the Egyptian contribution to the development of Greek romance. See J. W. B. Barns, "Egypt and the Greek Romance", *Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek* 5 (1956), pp. 29–36.

⁴⁹ See the introduction in Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. I, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Irānshān b. Abū'l-khayr, *Bahmannāma*, ed. Raḥīm 'Afīfi (Tehran, 1991), pp. 591–603.

⁵¹ According to the anonymous *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, Bahman first married the princess of Kashmir (Katāyūn or Kasāyūn) but she fell in love with a man from Kashmir called Lo'lo' and took power. Bahman was forced to escape to Egypt, where he met Humāy, the daughter of the Egyptian king, before returning to Iran and killing Katāyūn. See *Mujmal al-tavārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, ed. M. T. Bahār (Tehran, 1318/1939; repr. 1389/2010), p. 30.

⁵² On the role of Nectanebo in the *Alexander Romance* see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 13–24.

⁵³ In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, Alexander kills Nectanebo, his real father. See PC, I, 14.

Ṭamrūsīya's brother, Mihrāsb, marries a mermaid (*dukhtar-i ābī*). In revenge, the mermaid's sea-husband captures Ṭamrūsīya and abducts her. The mermaid returns to the sea after four years. Mihrāsb sets sail, reaching an island of one-eyed people.

All this material is new and unique in Persian literature. The *Dārābnāma* forms a specific amalgam of elements originating from the Greek and Persian narrative traditions. When Iran was conquered by Alexander the Great at the end of the third century B.C., the area had long been dominated by cultures of Indo-Iranian origin. It then soon became part of the Hellenistic sphere of influence, which resulted in a number of Persian parallels to classical Greek narratives that may date from this period.⁵⁴ Any attempt to delineate exactly what was contributed by each of these traditions is beyond the scope of this thesis, and certainly there is a large amount of overlap between the different categories of narrative elements.⁵⁵

In any case, as Stoneman affirms, "Alexander's conquest of Iran, besides being a historical turning point, was a turning point in the development of Persian storytelling, which started the flow of Greek story-patterns into Persia where before it had gone the other way."⁵⁶ The *Dārābnāma* is certainly the best representation of this exchange between Greek and Persian literatures among all the extant *Alexander Romances*.

II. The *Sīrat al-Iskandar* and the *Khudāynāmag* Tradition

The *Sīrat al-Iskandar* is a popular romance in the Arabic language found in scattered manuscripts and comparable to the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī in terms of genre.⁵⁷ It would appear that both romances follow the *Khudāynāmag* tradition regarding the narrative of the lives of the Persian kings. These can be enumerated as follows.

The content of the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* bears some characteristics that demonstrate that this romance was based on the *Khudāynāmag* tradition:

- 1) Similar to the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī, the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* begins with the legend of three generations of the Persian Kayānid dynasty: Bahman, Humāy (here called Humānī) and Dārāb.
- 2) The narrator also refers to a certain *Siyar al-mulūk* (*Lives of the Kings*) as one of his sources.⁵⁸ This title is the Arabic translation of the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag* attested in many Arabic and Persian sources.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ See Rundgren, "Arabische Literatur und orientalische Antike", *Orientalia Suecana* 19–20 (1970–71), pp. 81–124.

⁵⁵ On the specific elements in the Persian popular romances see Hanaway, "Formal Elements in the Persian Popular Romances", *Review of National Literatures* 2 (1971), pp. 139–61.

⁵⁶ Stoneman, "Persian Aspects of the Romance Tradition", p. 17.

⁵⁷ According to Doufikar-Aerts, it seems that the only complete manuscript of the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* is found in the manuscript Cambridge, Arab. Ms. Qq. 4, 202r.–203r. See Doufikar-Aerts, "King Midas' Ears on Alexander's Head", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. R. Stoneman, K. Erickson and I. Netton (Groningen, 2012), p. 65.

⁵⁸ Doufikar-Aerts, "*Sīrat al-Iskandar*", p. 510.

- 3) The genealogy of Alexander in the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* is closely related to that in the *Shāhnāma* and other Arabic histories (the Persian ancestry variant). Indeed, the introductions of some manuscripts refer to the *Shāhnāma* as one the *Sīrat al-Iskandar*'s sources,⁶⁰ representing the *Khudāynāmag* tradition.
- 4) There are a number of Persian terms and proper names,⁶¹ which shows that some parts of the romance are derived from and influenced by the Persian tradition.

The similarity between the Persian *Dārābnāma* and the Arabic *Sīrat al-Iskandar* has already been noted by Doufīkar-Aerts.⁶² However, she affirms that “there is no reason to adjust Alexander’s reputation as a wicked invader and violator of Persian national pride, for an Arab audience.”⁶³ In this regard, it is worth mentioning that many of the legends from the Persian national epic were well-known even among the Arabs. It is said that at the beginning of the Islamic era the stories of Rostam and Isfandiyār were related in Mecca by Naṣr Ibn al-Ḥārith, who heard them in Mesopotamia from Persian storytellers.⁶⁴ It is thus possible that the Arab audience became familiar with the Persian ancestry of Alexander in the same manner and related stories about the Kayānid kings (Bahman and his daughter Humāy, Dārāb and Dārā). As Hanaway points out: “Ṭārsūsī’s written text of the *Dārāb-nāma* is simply one version of a long tale, the second part of which (the *Alexander Romance*) is known to have been recounted by many different storytellers over hundreds of years.”⁶⁵ Therefore, it may be supposed that through its performance and recital by these storytellers in the Islamic world, certain motifs from the Persian tradition of *The Book of Kings* naturally came to influence even an Arabic romance such as the *Sīrat al-Iskandar*.

Conclusion

The *Dārābnāma* preserves some of the characteristics of Persian Alexander. In the process of Persianisation, Alexander came to be associated with the goddess Ānāhītā, bestowing upon him divine legitimacy. He was also linked to the Persian kings to give him royal legitimacy. In addition, the application of the motif of the exposed child to Alexander established a parallelism between him and Kay Khusraw/Cyrus the Great.

⁵⁹ Only eight Arabic recensions of the text are referred to by Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, including the two earliest translations of the *Khudāynāmag*, the first by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, the second by Muḥammad b. Jahm al-Barmakī, probably a client of the Barmakids. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Az *khudāynāma* tā *Shāhnāma*”, *Nāma-yi Irān-i Bāstān, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 7.1–2 (2007–8), pp. 34–9.

⁶⁰ Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 204.

⁶¹ See Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 225.

⁶² Doufīkar-Aerts, “King Midas’ Ears on Alexander’s Head”, pp. 75–6.

⁶³ Doufīkar-Aerts, “King Midas’ Ears on Alexander’s Head”, p. 76. See also Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 258–9.

⁶⁴ See Dh. Ṣafā, *Tārikh-i Adabiyāt dar Irān*, 12th ed. (Tehran, 1371/1992), vol. I, p. 20; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra al-Nabavīya*, ed. M. Saqā (Cairo, 1355/1936); Dh. Ṣafā, *Hamāsa-sarāyī* (Tehran, 1363/1984), p. 74. See also M. Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (New York, 1983), p. 89.

⁶⁵ Hanaway, “Dārāb-Nāma”, pp. 8–9.

This may reflect a shadow of a memory of Alexander imitating the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia*. This concept is well developed by Nizāmī in his *Iskandarnāma*, where one finds more parallelisms between Alexander and Kay Khusraw. On this point, while in the Greek tradition it is Cyrus the Great who became one of the most developed models of how to rule,⁶⁶ in the Persian tradition it is Alexander who became the idealised king, especially in the work of Nizāmī, as we will discuss in the next chapter.

The study of these two popular romances concerning Alexander shows the extent to which various traditions became mixed in the development of the story: features of the Biblical tradition and Graeco-Roman myth (e.g. the motif of the exposed child), the Persian tradition (e.g. association with the goddess Anāhītā) and the Greek tradition (e.g. the voyage in the Greek islands, mermaids, etc.), a characteristic that is not seen in any other Persian work. Such a fusion indicates the different stages of the development of the *Alexander Romance* during a period in which the Persian legends were mixed with other traditions.

In the first stage, one can speculate that under Jewish influence (after the Jews' liberation by Cyrus the Great in Babylon), the Persian legends came into contact with the Babylonian traditions.⁶⁷ As a result, common motifs emerge, such as that of the exposed child, indicating that the nature of a king is what matters. If a king is abandoned as a child and the throne is denied him, it is only temporarily so for his right to rule is inherent. As Lynette Mitchell affirms, although speaking of a Greek context, "Birth and the *basilikos* nature belong together, but the *basilikos* nature is an indication of birth, even if that is temporarily hidden. Therefore if one proved one was fit to rule, it was a only a small step further to prove that one's forebears were also heroic rulers."⁶⁸

In the second stage, after Alexander's conquest, Persian tradition came into close contact with the Greek canon. As a consequence, certain figures that are relatively rare in Persian narratives (mermaids, voyages through the Greek islands, pirates, etc.) appear in the *Dārābnāma*, making it one of the most interesting examples of Hellenistic romance extant in Persian.

On the other hand, analysis of the popular *Alexander Romances* shows that the *Khudāynāmag* tradition not only influenced the historiography of the first centuries of the Islamic period, but also affected the composition of the popular romances and even penetrated the popular audience. As Hanaway affirms, the *Dārābnāma* is a repository of deep Iranian historical memories, flickers of light which, as it were, that reflect some of the most ancient myths of the Iranian people. We encounter examples of deeper levels of the Iranian psyche emerging briefly in the tale of a medieval Persian storyteller.⁶⁹ We may therefore suggest that through the assimilation of Alexander into the oral epic tradition, his favourable portrayal was preserved in spite of the hostile literary priestly (Zoroastrian) tradition of the early Sasanians.

⁶⁶ On Cyrus as a model for kingship in the Greek tradition see Lynette Mitchell, *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* (London/New York, 2013), pp. 10–16.

⁶⁷ On the impact of aspects of Babylonian and Iranian culture on Biblical tradition see Howard Clark Kee, *The Beginnings of Christianity: An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York/London, 2005), pp. 5–10.

⁶⁸ Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, p. 60.

⁶⁹ Hanaway, "Dārāb-Nāma", p. 9.

Chapter Five: Alexander in the *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī Ganjavī (1141–1209)

دو گوهر بود در یک انگشتی

چنان دان که شاهی و پیغامبری

You should know this: that monarchy and prophecy
Are like two precious stones set in a single ring.

Firdawsī¹

Almost two centuries after Firdawsī (940–1019 or 1025), on the other side of the Persian world, in the trans-Caucasian city of Ganja (in modern-day Azerbaijan) on the border of Byzantium, another Persian poet chose to recast the life of Alexander the Great as his last work.² Nizāmī Ganjavī is known primarily for his five long narrative poems,³ known collectively as the *Khamsa* (*Quintet*) or *Panj Ganj* (*Five Treasures*), which were composed in the late twelfth century. They were widely imitated for centuries by poets writing in Persian as well as Urdu and Ottoman Turkish.⁴ In particular, his *Iskandarnāma* became an inspiration for poets in every corner of the Persian world, including Amīr Khusraw of Delhi in India (1253–1325) with his *Ā'īna-yi Iskandarī* (*Alexander's Mirror*)⁵ and Jāmī (1414–92) with his *Khirdnāma-ye Iskandarī* (*The Alexandrian Book of Wisdom*)⁶ among others.

The purpose of this chapter is to study Nizāmī's version of the *Alexander Romance* in order to explore its sources, contents and characteristics. Thus, we first provide a summary and a general description of the *Iskandarnāma*.⁷ Secondly, we study its possible sources, taking into account the region where Nizāmī came from and spent

¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VIII, p. 458.

² De Blois has doubted the traditional chronology of the poems of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*. Through the comparison of the manuscripts, identification of the dedicatees and other textual data, he suggested 590/1194 as the date of completion for the *Iskandarnāma*. See François de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey, Begun by the Late C. A. Storey, V/2: Poetry ca. A.D. 1100 to 1225* (London, 1994), pp. 438–46; de Blois, V/3 London, 1997, pp. 585–91. However, in the preface to the *Sharafnāma* (pp. 78–9), Nizāmī declares that he has already completed four *mathnawīs*. This would indicate that the *Iskandarnāma* was the fifth and last of his epic poems, composed after 593/1197, the date of completion of *Haft paykar*. At the end of the *Iqbāl-nāma*, Nizāmī mentions his age as 60 (p. 290). Taking the year 1141 as his birth, the completion of the *Iqbāl-nāma* would be c. 1200.

³ They are the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, *Khusraw o Shīrīn*, *Laylī o Majnūn*, *Iskandarnāma*, and *Haft Paykar*

⁴ F. de Blois, "Nizami", *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (1994), pp. 438–95; see also Šafā, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Irān*, 13th ed. (Tehran, 1373/1994), vol. II, pp. 808–9.

⁵ This work is edited by J. Mirsaidov (Moscow, 1977).

⁶ For more detail on this work see J. C. Bürgel, "Jāmī's Epic Poem on Alexander the Great: An Introduction", *Oriente Moderno* 15.76 (1996), pp. 415–38; Ch.-H. de Fouchécour, "Djāmi, conseiller des princes, ou Le Livre de la Sagesse Alexandrine", *Kārnāma* 5 (1999), pp. 11–32.

⁷ This descriptive section is necessary since there is almost no detailed research on Nizāmī's *Alexander Romance* and no critical English translation of the *Iskandarnāma*.

almost his entire life. The first part of the chapter provides a general description of the tale, comparing it with the *Alexander Romance* tradition (especially the Greek and Syriac), followed by an exploration of Niẓāmī's sources in order to illustrate the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition. Thirdly and lastly, an effort is made to demonstrate how the *Iskandarnāma* served as a mirror for princes.

The *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī contains many pre-Islamic stories concerning Alexander, in particular from the Sasanian period. In this regard, it is an important component of the overall intention of the present thesis to show how pre-Islamic Persian stories about Alexander persisted and were elaborated during the Islamic period.

I. Literary and Historical Contexts of Alexander's Personality in Niẓāmī's *Sharafnāma*

The first poetic treatment of the tale in Persian, Niẓāmī's *Iskandarnāma* is a heroic romance based on the Greek PC tradition. But, as this study endeavours to show, it also contains political and ethical advice for rulers,⁸ to whom it was evidently dedicated, explicating the ideal of perfect kingship in the first part of the work (i.e. the *Sharafnāma*) and correlating that with the concept of the Perfect Man (*insān-i kāmil*) as the true vicegerent of God (*khalīfat Allāh*) in the second part (i.e. the *Iqbāl-nāma*). Thus, this chapter seeks to argue that Niẓāmī's version of the tale is in fact a multilayered work of practical ethical wisdom incorporating major elements of the Perso-Islamic tradition of advice literature,⁹ particularly that ascribed to the Sasanians, which had the

⁸ On the subject of Niẓāmī's patron of the *Iskandarnāma*, confusion has been created among scholars by the various dates given for the completion of the poem, as well as by the various people to whom the work or parts of it are dedicated in the available manuscripts. Those whose names have come down to us associated with the manuscripts are: Nuṣrat al-Dīn Jahān Pahlawān from among the rulers of Azerbaijan, 'Izz al-Dīn Mas'ūd from among the rulers of Mawṣil, and Nuṣrat al-Dīn Abū Bakr Pīshkīn (1195–1210) of the Ildeñizids from among the rulers in the Caucasus. On the problems connected with the dedication of the two parts of the *Iskandarnāma*, see Minorsky, "Caucasica II", *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 13.4 (1951), pp. 872–3. See also V. Dastgirdī, *Ganjīna-ye Ganjayī*, ed. S. Ḥamīdiyān (Tehran, 1376/1997), p. 71; Rypka, "Poets and Prose writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods", *Cambridge History of Iran, V: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 582–3.

⁹ The most well-known work of this tradition is the famous *Kalīla o Dimna*, whose Middle Persian translation of the Sanskrit original (the *Panchatantra*) was commissioned by the Sasanid Khusraw I Anūshirvān, the Just. Its translation on the order of Anūshirvān, a type of the ideal ruler, established its importance at the outset. Niẓāmī gave it a prominent role in Khusraw's education in his work *Khusraw o Shīrīn*. On the importance of Sasanian sources in the genre of advice literature during the Islamic period see C. E. Bosworth, "Mirrors for Princes", *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (New York, 1998), vol. II, p. 527; J. S. Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature", *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Brujin (New York, 2009), pp. 254–60; on the medieval Perso-Islamic mirrors for princes in general see A. K. S. Lambton, "Quis Custodiet Custodes? Some Reflections on the Persian Theory of Government (Part 1)", *Studia Islamica* 5 (1955), pp. 125–48; Lambton, "Quis Custodiet Custodes? Some Reflections on the Persian Theory of Government (Part 2)", *Studia Islamica* 6 (1956), pp. 125–46; Lambton, "Justice in the Medieval Persian Theory of Kingship", *Studia Islamica* 17 (1962), pp. 91–119; Lambton, "Islamic Mirrors for Princes", *Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema, La Persia nel medioevo* (Rome, 1970), pp. 419–42; Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists* (New York, 1981); Lambton, "Changing Concepts of Justice and Injustice from the Fifth/Eleventh

most significant bearing on the subsequent development of Perso-Islamic mirrors for princes.¹⁰

In order to establish that the *Iskandarnāma* fits within the literary genre of Persian mirrors for princes,¹¹ the influence of four essential works on Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma*, all written during the Saljūq period, should be underlined here:¹²

- 1) The earliest known Persian mirror, the *Qābūs-nāma* (1083), written by the Ziyarid ruler Kay Kāvūs b. Iskandar b. Qābūs for his son.¹³
- 2) The *Siyar al-mulūk* (also known as the *Sīyāsatnāma*) commissioned by the Saljūq Sultan Malikshāh and written by his powerful *vazīr* Nizām-al-Mulk¹⁴ (d. 1092), which was designed to instruct the sultan in statecraft and governance.¹⁵
- 3) Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (1109), possibly written for the Saljūq Sultan Sanjar (1118–57) or Muḥammad b. Malikshāh, or both.¹⁶
- 4) The *Sindbādnāma* or the *Seven Sages* of Ḥāshimī Samarqandī, a book of counsels contained within a frame story, written some time after 1157.¹⁷

These books all combine moral counsel with a variety of other materials – pious sayings, exemplary anecdotes, practical advice – to form a condensed exposition of all

Century to the Eighth/Fourteenth Century in Persia, The Saljuq Empire and the Ilkhanate”, *Studia Islamica* 68 (1988), pp. 27–60.

¹⁰ It is during the early ‘Abbāsid period that the genre of advice literature crystallised around Arabic translations of prose works of Sasanian origin, e.g. the Advice of Ardashīr, Anūshirvān and Buzurgmihr, the letter of Tansar, etc.; see C. E. Bosworth, “Mirrors for Princes”, vol. II, p. 527.

¹¹ Meisami believes that Nizāmī's concern with ideal kingship culminates in his *Iskandarnāma*. See J. S. Meisami, “Genres of Court Literature”, *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (New York, 2009), p. 254. See also C. H. de Fouchécour, *Moralia* (Paris, 1986), especially pp. 79–80. On the ideas of kingship in Nizāmī's romances see J. S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, 2014), pp. 192–236.

¹² On Saljūq mirrors for princes, see the introduction in Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī, *Ghazālī's Book of Counsel for Kings (Nasihat al-muluk)*, trans. F. R. C. Bagley (London, 1964), pp. xiii–xvi; Lambton, “Islamic Mirrors for Princes”, *Quaderno dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 160 (1971), pp. 424–38; Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, pp. 106–29. Although most of Nizāmī's works are dedicated to local rulers of Transcaucasia and northern Iraq, he had a connection to the Saljūqs in so far as he dedicated the first of his romantic epics, *Khusraw u Shīrīn*, to the Atabeg of Azerbaijan, Muḥammad Jahān-Pahlawān b. Eldigūz.

¹³ ‘Unṣur al-Ma‘ālī Kaykāvūs Ibn Iskandar Ibn Qābūs ibn Vūshmgīr, *Qābūs-nāma*, ed. Gh. Yūsifī, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1352/1973).

¹⁴ The influence of Nizām al-Mulk on our poet of Ganja is such that he chose his pen name “Nizāmī” in honour of the Saljūq *vazīr*. Michael Barry, “Nizāmī: Mirror of the Unseen World”, a lecture given at *The Kamran Djam Annual Lectures*, Centre for Iranian Studies, University of London, 2 Feb. 2015.

¹⁵ Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk or Siyāsatnāma*, ed. Hubert Darke, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 2535 Shāhanshāhī/1976).

¹⁶ Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, ed. J. Humā'ī (Tehran, 1351/1972); Ghazālī, *Ghazālī's Book of Counsel for Kings*. The influence of this work is much more relevant to the second part of the *Iskandarnāma* (i.e. the *Iqbālnāma*).

¹⁷ Ḥāshimī Samarqandī, *Sindbādnāma*, ed. A. Qawīm (Tehran, 1333/1954). The influence of this work will be studied in the next chapter, which focuses on the second part of the *Iskandarnāma*, the *Iqbālnāma*.

that an upright nobleman of the twelfth century could wish to present to a Muslim ruler. In all of them, Alexander is a fertile source of exempla and is frequently mentioned in various anecdotes.¹⁸ Highlighting their common statements concerning such concepts as kingship, religion, justice and counselling, these manuals of practical advice will be treated as antecedent expressions of some of the ideas contained in the *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī.

Given the lack of a good critical English translation of the *Iskandarnāma*, the most important verses (sometimes entire sections) have been translated into English here,¹⁹ and their significance for the subsequent development of the *Alexander Romance* in Persian Literature commented on.

Regarding earlier translations of the *Iskandarnāma* into Western languages, the following merit mention here:

- 1) There is a literal, but barely readable translation of the *Sharafnāma* (the first part of the *Iskandarnāma*) into English prose, with copious extracts from Indian commentators, by H. Wilberforce Clarke.²⁰
- 2) There are complete translations of both parts of the *Iskandarnāma* in Russian verse²¹ and prose.²²
- 3) J. Christoph Bürgel also published a poetic translation of the *Iskandarnāma* in German²³ with some omissions in both the prologues and epilogues.

Although I have on occasion drawn on the first and third versions above in the translation of selected passages from the *Iskandarnāma* in this and the following chapter, I have undertaken my own independent interpretation of its text.

Aspects of Alexander's Personality in Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma*

The *Sharafnāma* comprises about 6,800 couplets and the *Iqbāl-nāma* about 3,680 couplets, making the *Iskandarnāma* the longest poem in Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, constituting about 10,500 couplets penned in the *mutaqārib* meter.²⁴ The *Iskandarnāma* is considered to be Nizāmī's final and most mature poetic work. The *Sharafnāma* can be

¹⁸ Kaykāvūs Ibn Iskandar, *Qābausnāma*, pp. 130, 140, 148–9, 238; Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-Mulūk*, pp. 41–2, 81; al-Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, pp. 85, 87, 93, 128, 153, 159, 166, 188–9, 226, 336–8, Zāhīrī Samarqandī, *Sindbādnāma*, p. 29.

¹⁹ I owe the beautiful poetic translation of Nizāmī's verses quoted in this chapter to Dr Leonard Lewisohn, to whom I am very grateful. Given the fact that there is no previous intelligible English translation of the *Iskandarnāma* – Wilberforce Clarke's translation being so convoluted as to be almost incomprehensible – these translated selections represent a valuable contribution to Nizāmī studies.

²⁰ H. Wilberforce Clarke, *The Sikandar Nāma e Barā* (London, 1881).

²¹ Nizāmī, *Iskandarnāma*, trans. K. Lipskerov (Baku, 1953).

²² Nizāmī, *Iskandarnāma*, trans. Y. E. Bertels and A. K. Arends (Baku, 1983).

²³ Nizāmī, *Das Alexanderbuch*, trans. J. Christoph Bürgel (Zurich, 1991).

²⁴ This is the same meter Firdawsī used in the *Shāhnāma*. It is usually used for epics. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Pīrāmūn-i vazn-i Shāhnāma", *Irānshināsī* 5 (1369/1990), p. 48; Sa'īd Nafīsī, "Vazn-i Shāhnāma-yi Firdawsī", *Dānishnāma* 2 (1326/1947), pp. 133–48.

ascribed to the years between 1196 and 1200, and the *Iqbāl-nāma* to the years between 1200 and the poet's death (1209).²⁵ The *Sharaf-nāma* (*The Book of Honour*)²⁶ recounts Alexander's adventures during his conquest of Asia, from the Persian Empire to India and China. Nizāmī states that he chose this title because he considered it “the most honourable, and the best” of his works:

And thus, by the mighty points of these witty quills,
This book has honour [*sharaf*] over all other books.
That royal Khusrawian wine that in this book's cup was poured,
Has made it the “Book of Honour” [*Sharaf-nāma*] of kings.²⁷

In the second part, the *Iqbāl-nāma* (*The Book of Fortune*) or *Khīradnāma-yi Iskandarī* (*The Book of Alexandrian Wisdom*), Alexander is represented as a sage and prophet who assembles a great library and is surrounded with the greatest philosophers of the ancient world. Through their guidance and instruction, he is transformed from a king into a sage, effectively becoming the “Perfect Man”. The dual aspects of kingship – temporal and spiritual – can thus be found in the portrayal of Alexander in both books of the *Iskandarnāma*.

In general, Nizāmī develops three different aspects of Alexander's legendary personality in the *Iskandarnāma*: as a world-conqueror or *Kosmokrator* (κοσμοκράτωρ), as a sage or king constantly surrounded by philosophers and, finally, as a prophet in the Islamic tradition. Two distinct but interrelated structural patterns provide complementary ways of organising events in the poem, in both its narratives and tales, and of unifying its tripartite form (the account of Alexander's life being divided into two unequal portions): the first being the linear pattern of Alexander's life through time, the second paralleled by his spiritual progress towards realisation of wisdom and, thirdly and lastly, the process of the evolution of his character from the stage of temporal kingship to that of spiritual kingship.²⁸

Nizāmī expounds his methodology as well as his reasons for choosing Alexander as his main subject at the beginning of the *Sharaf-nāma*. After a dream he found himself “ablaze and inspired”:

It thus became necessary for me to make this my task,
To compose such a lovely book as this.²⁹

²⁵ See Rypka, “Poets and Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods”, pp. 582–3. Şafā dedicated almost two pages on the date of the *Iskandarnāma*'s compilation. However, he does not clarify his opinion. See Şafā, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Irān*, vol. II, pp. 805–6. See also note 1 in this chapter.

²⁶ In India it is known as the *Iskandarnāma-yi barri* (*The Adventures of Alexander by Land*) because most of the adventures take place on land, while the *Iqbāl-nāma* is known as the *Iskandarnāma-yi bahārī* (*The Adventures of Alexander by Sea*) due to the fact that the adventures occur on the sea.

²⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharaf-nāma*, p. 50. He calls the book *Sharaf-nāma-yi Khusrowān*.

²⁸ On the distinction between wilful and lawful kingship, see Lambton, “Islamic Mirrors for Princes”, pp. 426–36.

²⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharaf-nāma*, p. 49.

He gives three key reasons for choosing Alexander as his principal theme. Firstly, Nizāmī claims to have had an encounter with the enigmatic immortal prophet-saint Khidr³⁰ after forty days' seclusion in which Khidr inspires him:

“I’ve heard you plan to write a book of kings,” he said,
“With verse that runs as smooth as a stream.
Do not repeat what the ancient sage [Firdawsī] said,
For it is wrong to pierce a single pearl twice.
Except when a passage is reached where thought
Demands you repeat what’s been said before.
You’re of the avant-garde, fresh in this business of verse:
You must not mimic any bygone master’s works!
You are a miner of jewels in the Alexandrian mine;
Alexander himself shall come to you to shop for jewels.”³¹

The main thing that Khidr insists on here is poetic originality. We may speculate that Nizāmī himself was probably worried that he would be considered an imitator, especially because an earlier poet, Firdawsī, had already set Alexander’s story to verse.³² Indeed, many modern scholars fault him for this.³³ This is Nizāmī’s second reason, as he himself notes on various occasions:

That great poet of yesteryear, the sage of Tūs [Firdawsī],
Who’d painted the countenance of belles-lettres in bridal hues,
Who in his book [– *Shāhnāma* –] had pierced so many pearls of verse,
Yet left unsaid many things that need be said.
If he had writ down all he’d heard from the ancients,
Indeed this romance [of Alexander] would have become long.
He left unsaid whatever was not pleasing to him;
And just that which demanded telling wrote down.
For his friends some of the banquet’s leftovers he saved,
Ill-suited as it is to consume sweet desserts in private.
Though Nizāmī here has strung many a pearl on the thread of verse,
Those tales’ pearls that pens of yore have writ he’s left unstrung.
He took those pearls he found in the treasury unpierced,

³⁰ On the role of al-Khidr/al-Khaḍir/al-Khaḍīr in early Near Eastern mythology, see A. J. Wensinck, “al-Khaḍīr”, *EP*, IV, pp. 902–5. On the significance of Khidr in Nizāmī’s poetry, see P. Franke, “Drinking from the Water of Life: Nizāmī, Khizr and the Symbolism of Poetical Inspiration in Later Persianate Literature”, *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī’s Khamsa*, ed. J.-C. Bürgel and Christine van Ruymbeke (Leiden, 2011), pp. 77–125.

³¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 51, 52, 53.

³² Three of Nizāmī’s epics (*Khusraw u Shīrīn*, *Haft Paykar* and the *Iskandarnāma*) share themes with the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, and in composing the *Haft Paykar* and *Khusraw u Shīrīn* Nizāmī shared similar historical concerns with Firdawsī. In *Khusraw u Shīrīn* he thus claimed that he would relate the part of Khusraw’s life that was untreated by Firdawsī (*Khusraw u Shīrīn*, 11:46–9, p. 137); in the *Haft Paykar* he likewise declared that he would say what his predecessor had left unsaid (*Haft Paykar*, 4:18–32).

³³ Şafā, *Hamāsa-sarāyī dar Irān*, p. 333; Şafā, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt dar Irān*, vol. II, p. 807.

And so appraising pearls obtained his balance weighing his verses' worth.³⁴

Nizāmī wanted to complete what Firdawsī left unsaid.³⁵ He claimed to write something new, which would differ from the work of the older poet:

He [Nizāmī] made the *Sharafnāma* famed far and wide,
And so made a tale grown old, fresh and new!³⁶

In this regard, Khidr's instructions to Nizāmī on how to recount the legend of Alexander is very significant. Khidr enables Nizāmī to create a new story. However, Khidr's appearance is not insignificant: he plays a prominent role in the Islamic legend of Alexander for he is Alexander's guide in the expedition into the darkness in the episode of the Fountain of Life (see below). Thus, Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma* is not simply a repetitive reproduction of Alexander's tale, but a complete poetic recreation and inspired reconsideration of the old material under the eternal prophet's guidance.

Finally, Nizāmī also affirms that he chose this subject because:

Since none of the good and great deride this tale,
By design, I've set my hand to tell this romance.
There is no tale more pleasing, more right and apposite
That enjoys the approval of those who're upright.
Other legends you may seek and study, but from the start,
You'll find that all the various nations disagree on their wrong and right.
But of such a tale as this no perplexity may be raised,
Writ down as it was by so many quills sharp of wit.³⁷

On another occasion, he insists on the importance of Alexander's legend:

Helpless in that place where I was dazed and dazzled,
I cast my lot and found Alexander's name among the great and grand.
Every mirror that I burnished bright in thought of him,
Alexander's imaginal form I found reflected therein.
Do not regard that ruler with a perfunctory, thoughtless gaze,
for he was both a swordsman and one who wore the crown.³⁸

In general, in the *Iskandarnāma*, under the protective shade of Khidr's inspiration, Nizāmī tries to tell tales of Alexander that are fresh and original. In this process he combines three aspects of the Macedonian king as exemplar of the ideal

³⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 50.

³⁵ He advanced the same reason for his composition of the tale of Sasanian King Bahrām V in the *Haft Paykar* (4:18–32).

³⁶ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 50.

³⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 49.

³⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 54.

king: the conqueror (*vilāyat-sitān*), the philosopher (*hakīm*) and the prophet (*payghambar*):

One company calls him holder of the insignia of the royal crown,
A conqueror of kingdoms, or rather, one who secured frontiers.
Another company, due to the minister he had at court [Aristotle],³⁹
Have writ him down as having the philosopher's mandate.
Another group regard his spotless character and cultivation of religion
And so accept him among the prophets.⁴⁰

He then affirms that:

From all these grains of truth these sages have sown,
I shall plant a tree bearing many abundant fruits.
First I will knock on the door of royalty and kingship;
I will discourse on the conquest of lands far and wide.
Next will I speak of wisdom and philosophy;
I'll make ancient histories seem like a fresh statement.
Then shall I pound my fist on the door of Prophethood –
For God Himself has called him a prophet.
I have made three pearls, in each a mine full of treasures;
Many pains and cares have I taken to create each pearl.
For each door I've knocked upon, and for each pearl of verse,
All the limits of the Earth I'll fill with treasure.⁴¹

From these verses we can assume that Alexander's kingship thus incorporates the dual function of prophet and king, echoing both the ancient Iranian ideal of kingship and the Islamic Sufi concept of the king as a Perfect Man.⁴² Following the lead of Fārābī's works on political philosophy,⁴³ Niẓāmī incorporates not only the qualities of a philosopher but ultimately those of a prophet into the personality of Alexander. In this respect, in the *Iskandarnāma* Niẓāmī puts flesh on the figure of Alexander as the ideal ruler who then became, in later centuries, the symbol of the perfect king.⁴⁴

³⁹ The poet refers to the fact that as Aristotle reportedly acted as his counsellor and minister, Alexander is considered a philosopher too.

⁴⁰ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 54, VIII, 42–4.

⁴¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 55, VIII, 45–50.

⁴² The ideas of the king as Perfect Man and the ruler as the regent of God, and the concept of man as microcosm (the king embodying the highest level of mankind), are reflected in Fārābī's ideal of the philosopher-king. See Lambton, *State and Government*, pp. 69–82, 288–306, 316–25.

⁴³ Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī is known as Alfarabius or Avennasar in medieval Latin texts. His ideas on ideal kingship are reflected in *Aphorisms of the Statesman [Fuṣūl al-madani]*, ed. D. M. Dunlop (Cambridge, 1961); *On Political Government [al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya]* (Hyderabad, 1346/1927); *On the Perfect State [Mabādī' āra' ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍilah]*, trans. Richard Walter (Chicago, 1985).

⁴⁴ On the political usage of Alexander in the Islamic world, see Paul Weinfield, "The Islamic Alexander: A Religious and Political Theme in Arabic and Persian Literature" (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 2008).

Nizāmī also penned these interesting verses on the chronology of his account of Alexander in the *Iskandarnāma*:

I spoke in such a way [in my verse] concerning what I regarded as wondrous
Such that all hearts would take it on faith and be convinced.
Yet I did not feel compelled to set in verse
Accounts that seemed far-fetched or irrational.
I garnered a grain of truth from each idle pearl.⁴⁵
I ornamented my poem like an idol temple.
I thus laid down that temple's foundations from the start
So its walls, raised up, would remain upright and straight.
Criticism me not about the events' antecedence or subsequence
For no historian you'll find who's flawless in chronology.⁴⁶

Sources of Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma*

Nizāmī also draws attention to the fact that composing the *Iskandarnāma* was an onerous task because of the great diversity and wide variety of sources available:

As I planned to tell this tale [of Alexander], my speech came out
Simple and straightforward, yet the way tortuous and meandering.
The works of that king who'd trekked to the corners of the globe
I could never find written down in a single book or tract.
The discourses I found were full of precious treasures,
A myriad pearls strewn about in every text.⁴⁷

He emphasises how carefully he picked and chose tales and *topoi* from his sources:

From each and every book I adopted different material
And decked them out in the ornament of verse.⁴⁸

Regarding those same sources, he adds:

Not only the recent, modern histories did I peruse:
I studied Jewish, Christian, and Pahlavi sources too.
I selected naught but the *crème de la crème* from these sources;
I took only the kernel from the husk of each and every text.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ The scattered chronicles are each likened to pearls strewn about ("each idle pearl"), which are then gathered and strung together by the poet on the necklace of his poem.

⁴⁶ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 68, X, 10–16.

⁴⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 69, X, 17–18.

⁴⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 69, X, 19.

⁴⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 69, X, 20–1.

These verses are as important as they are ambiguous. On one hand, they do not refer to any specific source by name. On the other, the poet affirms that besides contemporary histories, he consulted a great range of texts. The main question here is *which sources* he is referring to in this statement. In order to answer this question, we have to consider the region where Nizāmī lived. It is important to take into account the fact that he lived almost his entire life in his home town of Ganja located in the Caucasus on the border of Byzantium. This crossroads town was home to diverse peoples, a cultural beehive where many languages were spoken and various religions practised. That is why, in the episodes set in the Caucasus (see below), the *Iskandarnāma* features a great deal of local colour.

Given his geographical location, it is likely that the poet would have been familiar with Byzantine sources, as well as those of Armenian and Georgian provenance or language. We may well speculate too that it is probable that Nizāmī's "Jewish and Christian" sources were the Armenian and Georgian legends about Alexander in circulation in the Caucasus. Stories and legends about Alexander the Great were probably very popular in Nizāmī's home town.⁵⁰ The Caspian Gates, as well as Darband (in Persian) and *Bāb al-abwāb* (in Arabic),⁵¹ are often identified with the Gates of Alexander.⁵² Its thirty north-facing towers, which used to stretch for forty kilometres between the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, effectively blocked the passage across the Caucasus. Alexander actually marched through Darband⁵³ in pursuit of Bessus, a manoeuvre described by Arrian (*Anabasis* 3.20), although he probably did not stop to fortify it.⁵⁴ In this respect, it may be pointed out that *Dar-band*, which means "pass" in Persian, is often identified with the wall of Gog and Magog. We will revisit this point later on in this chapter.

It was also believed that the legendary "City of Women" (Harūm in the *Shāhnāma* and Barda' in the *Iskandarnāma*) was located in the Caucasus, which is actually found in modern Azerbaijan.⁵⁵ Nizāmī even replaced Queen Candace of al-Andalus with Queen Nūshāba of Barda',⁵⁶ perhaps because the latter name was more

⁵⁰ This point is mentioned by Bertels in his work *Nizāmī, the Great Poet of Azerbaijan*. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the original version of this book. However, I made use of its Persian translation: Bertels, *Nizāmī: shā'ir-e buzurḡ-e Adharbāyjān*, trans. H. Muḡammadzāda Ṣadīq (Tehran, 1357/1978), p. 132.

⁵¹ It is necessary to insist that the ancient sources mistakenly identified the pass at Darband with the Dar'yal Pass in the central Caucasus. See Erich Kettenhofen, "Darband", *EIr*, VII/1, pp. 13–19.

⁵² See A. R. Anderson, "Alexander at the Caspian Gates", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 5 (1928), pp. 130–63; Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Enclosed Nations* (Cambridge, 1932).

⁵³ Darband, through which Alexander passed, was in the vicinity of Ray. The confusion arises because there are several cities with the same name. See the discussion below in this chapter and the references cited, especially Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 77–8.

⁵⁴ The Darband fortress was certainly the most prominent Sasanian defensive construction in the Caucasus. See M. I. Artamonov, *Istoriya Khazar [History of the Khazars]* (Leningrad, 1962), p. 122.

⁵⁵ This point will be discussed later on.

⁵⁶ Nizāmī did the same with another female character in the *Haft Paykar*: he changed the name of the female harpist who appears in the *Shāhnāma* from Āzāda (Noble) to Fitna (Mischief). Not only did he change her name, he also reversed the roles of the male and female participants in the drama, making the female its heroine. For more information on this episode in the *Haft Paykar* and its parallel in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 213–19.

familiar to his audience and perhaps because, according to François de Blois, she “belongs to that area, as does the Armenian princess who is the heroine of *Khusraw u Shīrīn*”.⁵⁷ In conclusion, it is highly probable that many episodes in the *Iskandarnāma* were well-known and popular among the Caucasian people, and that Niẓāmī took full advantage of all these local materials.

Besides the Jewish and Christian (or, as Niẓāmī said, “*Naṣrānī*/Nestorian”) sources, Niẓāmī refers to “Pahlavi” works. This is ambiguous. It is not clear whether he is referring to Persian sources relating to the pre-Islamic era or indeed to Pahlavi texts themselves. Through our study of the *Iskandarnāma* below we will venture to identify the possible pre-Islamic Persian sources of Niẓāmī. From the determined and confident tone used by Niẓāmī in the following verses, there can be no doubt, at least in the poet’s own mind, of the historical reliability of these sources:

I selected naught but the *crème de la crème* from those sources;
I took only the pith from the husk of each and every text.
My discourse from the tongues of many treasures of speech was knit;
I created a unified whole from all these motley tongues.
Whosoever’s acquainted with these different tongues
Will hold his own from finding fault with my tale.
I crumpled and pleated my speech like curly locks
From those historical scenarios I found factual and true.⁵⁸

However, he admits that there is one fault in his work, though one which encapsulates the very essence of the poetic art:

But if it’s “truth” and “facts” you’d seek,
It’s wrong to look for the plain truth in embellished verse.⁵⁹

In another passage, he clarifies this assertion by adding:

My labour’s to make gracious, beauteous speech –
This poetry of mine’s an art of lies and deviance –.⁶⁰

However, he affirms that:

But yet, indeed, whatever seemed incredible in the tale
Or unreliable, I dismissed at once from my verse.
I gazed within myself to assess what should be said,

⁵⁷ F. de Blois, “Eskandar-Nāma of Neẓāmī”, *Elr*, VIII/6, p. 614.

⁵⁸ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 69.

⁵⁹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 74. For an extended discussion of the place of truthfulness versus falsity in Islamic poetry, see Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden, 1975), chapter three (“Poetry: Lie or Truth”), pp. 27–40.

Apprising what the readers would think delectable.
If one concentrates on wonders overmuch
The reins of speech run to extravagance.
Tales that don't dazzle, related without marvel,
Make the antique fable seem nothing novel.
So speak your speech with care and moderation
So it carries the weight of faith and corroboration.⁶¹

Therefore, in an attempt to balance historical fact and poetic fiction, he states:

But should I reduce the poetic ornaments and frills,
The whole romance would come to but one meagre verse.
Thus all the deeds of that errant king who traversed the Earth
I have wrapped up *in toto* within a single vellum roll.⁶²

Near the beginning of his poem, Nizāmī offers to furnish a précis of the history of Alexander on a single sheet (*Fihrist-i tārikh-i Iskandar dar yik varaq*). Here, he gives us a shortlist of the key exploits, feats and accomplishments attributed to the Macedonian king by legend or history. Before studying each chapter of the *Iskandarnāma* in detail, it will be helpful to look at the following translation of the key verses of this important passage.

Précis of the History of Alexander

Alexander, who journeyed to the farthest reaches of the Earth, in the business
Of travel was adept; the wares of all his voyages were well prepared.
He journeyed and beheld all four corners of the world
For no kingdom without four directions can be bought.
In whatever kingdom's capital he set his foot,
He upheld the rites of the Great Kings.
He never paid homage to any other rite or ritual
Except the custom and religion of Zoroaster, votary of fire.
He was the first person to establish the use of jewellery;
The first to mint golden coins in the land of Rūm [Anatolia].
At his command the agile goldsmith
Embossed sheets of silver with golden leaves.
He commanded that translations of texts of Persian philosophy
Be made so that they were attired in Greek robes.
He directed drumbeats to mark the watches of dusk and dawn,
And thus gave time its substance by his court's watches.
It was he who invented the mirror by which he led men –

⁶¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 74–5.

⁶² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 70.

Which brought that brilliant gem forth from darkness.
 He freed the world of the revolt of Zanzibar;
 He snatched both crown and throne from Darius.
 He cleansed the Earth both of the fury of India
 And Russia's irascibility and made it like a bridal palace.
 His judgements were as bright and clear as a Chinese mirror;
 He set up his kingdom in the canton of Cyrus's throne.⁶³
 When at first the book of his life turned its leaf to twenty
 The kettledrum of kingliness with mighty strokes was struck.
 In the second place, when he came to twenty-seven years of age
 He broke camp and set out on the way of prophecy.
 The very day he adopted the rite of prophecy,
 The calendar of Alexander recorded its first date.
 As he became learned in God's religion, like a gracious kingdom
 His conquests came to stretch to the ends of the Earth.
 He adduced abundant proofs to substantiate the true Faith;
 He constructed numerous edifices over the Earth's face.
 He laid down the foundations of several capital cities
 With the rotation of each cycle of the compass of time.
 In every land and clime he founded cities
 From the lands of India all the way to Anatolia [*Rūm*].
 It was he who gave Samarqand its fabled loveliness –
 Not Samarqand alone, but many such cities.
 The founding of cities like Herat was his deed.
 How fabulous it is to establish cities such as these!
 It was in Darband that he built his first great wall;
 He set its foundation down with wisdom and reason.
 Go beyond Bulgaria, whose founding was his doing:
 Its original foundation was the pit of his cave [*bungār*].
 He constructed walls to fend off Gog
 By coupling mountains together as a barrier.
 Above and beyond this, he established many institutions –
 The size and sum of which excel all mention.
 When that well-framed man made his will and pleasure
 To divide and share out the face and frame of the Earth,
 Across the world's face he drew a line like a cross –
 Long before either cross or Christian ever were!
 Like an atlas of maps composed of four directions
 He set up geometry's scores, figures and calculations.
 Tent-like he divided up the Earth's surface into four parts;
 His reign struck the drum of the nine heavens in five watches.
 One peg of his reign was hammered into the North Pole;

⁶³ Literally, he says: "Kay Khusraw's throne".

Another peg struck deep to transverse the south.
 One rope of the tent he pulled eastward hither;
 Another tent-rope was stretched westward thither.
 Who else like him has reigned and held court
 In this atelier of the Earth's length and breadth?
 When he betook himself to voyage about the Earth
 He undertook to compute its length by yardstick tape.
 He surveyed the Earth by mile, furlong, waystation – gauged
 All bounds and left not one spot of the Earth uncalibrated.
 He had cartographers and topographers measure its bounds;
 A myriad inspectors were charged with checking and fixing standards.
 By log-lines the Earth's coordinates were marked up,
 The distances between each waystation plotted out.
 Wheresoever on the earth he planted his royal tent
 He'd count and calibrate each stage and station of the way.
 Then, when a voyage by sea became his lot in life,
 He calculated water's ways and surveyed the waves!
 Once upon the water, he'd lash two ships together –
 Between the two he strung a rope for measurement:
 Ship one, anchored on the seafloor, stood firm in place,
 And ship two tugged forward to the log-line's end.
 And so it went – the second ship now moored itself,
 And ship one weighed anchor, and took up her lead.
 He compassed waves with ships' ropes as micrometers
 Who's ever seen any ropewalker enact such wild play?
 Alexander the oceanographer well knew these stages and degrees:
 He marked out the sea's width and breadth from shore to shore.
 By fixing standards and coordinates through geometry,
 He turned the world's grief and woe to joy and cheer.
 With wise deliberation he made the earth's crooked calculations straight,
 Assessed aright how far each road, how long each highway stretched.
 He showed us what the earth's "inhabited quarter" was.
 Who else amongst us attained the domain that he's attained?
 In every land and clime through which he drove his steed
 He brought weal and welfare to all and sundry.
 Upon both hill and dale, he lent help and succour to all,
 He was – alas! – succourless at the advent of death.
 What's said above must suffice to recount the history
 Of that king endowed with crown and diadem.
 To say aught else just makes the pen gnaw and fret;
 More or less than this is mere captious giddiness.
 I took the path of verse to pen this romance
 Albeit in verse deviance is always found.
 ... Now Alexander, the sovereign of the seven climes, has gone.

When Alexander passed away, no man of worth was left.

The key deeds that Nizāmī attributes to Alexander in the above passage may be enumerated as follows:

- 1) Alexander was the first man who established the use of jewellery.
- 2) He was the first king to mint golden coins in the land of Rūm (Anatolia) and the first to emboss sheets of silver with golden leaves.
- 3) He order the translation of texts of Persian philosophy into Greek.
- 4) He directed drumbeats to mark the watches of dusk and dawn, and thus first measured time.
- 5) He invented the mirror from dark iron.
- 6) He battled against Darius, the natives of Zanzibar, the Russians and the Indians.
- 7) At the age of twenty he became a king and at twenty-seven, became a prophet.
- 8) The Alexandrian calendar begins with his becoming a prophet.
- 9) He established many cities from western Anatolia to southern India, including Samarqand, Herat and Darband. He is presented as the founding father of Bulgaria, Tbilisi and the builder of the wall against Gog.
- 10) Through geometrical methods he divided the Earth into four quarters by drawing a cross. He also discovered that only a quarter of the Earth was inhabited. While travelling around the world, he measured its length and breadth by various methods of mathematical calculation. He measured distances at sea.

Most of the accomplishments, feats and inventions that Nizāmī attributes to Alexander here are discussed and analysed over the following pages, where I examine his construction of various cities and conduct of warfare.

Alexander's Mirror

One motif crucial to comprehending the prophetic aspect of Alexander and his progress towards realisation of spiritual kingship is the “invention of the mirror” attributed to him. Alexander's mirror has two meanings. In Platonic terms, it symbolises the mirror of the Unseen World in which Reality is reflected, being analogous to the Cup of Kay Khusraw or Goblet of Jamshīd (*jām-i jam*), a *topos* upon which Nizāmī elaborates in some detail in the *Sharafnāma*. In Sufi mystical terms, the mirror symbolises theophany (*tajallī*) in the mystic's polished heart where the Divine is reflected.⁶⁴ Plato informs us

⁶⁴ See A. Qamber, “The Mirror Symbol in the Teachings and Writings of Some Sufi Masters”, *Temenos* 1 (1990), pp. 163–79; Michael Ferber, “Mirror”, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 124–5.

that “Looking at God we should be using the best mirror of mortal things for the virtue of the soul, and thus we should best see and know ourselves.”⁶⁵

As we will see, Alexander’s first step in his inner journey in the *Sharafnāma* towards the attainment of spiritual kingship is to obtain self-knowledge. Once he becomes aware of the qualities of his soul, he is able to enter the Land of Darkness for forty days, where he remains like a Sufi in *chilla-nishīnī* (forty-day seclusion), not to achieve immortality, but to realise self-knowledge in order to be ready for the final step of his inner journey towards becoming a prophet. Stoneman rightly points out: “Nizāmī’s account of Alexander’s life (among other things) is a reflection of a divine unchanging truth, not of the ephemera of the visible world. The world is in fact God’s mirror, a projection of the active intellect, sometimes perceived as an angel.”⁶⁶

Therefore, the fact that Alexander possesses this magic mirror signifies his possession of *gnosis* and the power of insight into the Unseen World and the Divine, which is a characteristic of the prophets – as indeed he is. It also signifies his possession of a polished heart and that, at the same time, he is able to polish the hearts of others – his erstwhile subjects and followers – through summoning them to monotheism. Understanding the philosophical and mystical significance of the motif of Alexander’s mirror is essential if we are to comprehend the spiritual formation of his personality.

Four Stray Motifs: Jewellery, Coinage, Alexander’s Calendar and the Visit to Jerusalem

Turning back now to the historical dimension of the tale, before plunging into the actual text of the *Sharafnāma*, it may be useful to briefly examine the historical veracity, or lack thereof, of four motifs mentioned in the above *précis* that are absent from the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī but present in Nizāmī’s version of the *Alexander Romance*. Here I will investigate the question of the texts and sources from which Nizāmī obtained his information.

As far as jewellery is concerned, it is true that the conquests of Alexander the Great (between 333 and 322) transformed the economy of the Greek world. With his conquests and, later, during the Hellenic period of domination of the Middle East, gold became more plentiful in Greece, and the artistic designs, motifs and techniques of Persian court artists were widely imitated there.⁶⁷ Thus, Nizāmī’s claim that Alexander introduced jewellery to Greece may perhaps relates to the fact that many types of

⁶⁵ Plato, *Alcibiades*, 133c, cited by R. Stoneman, “Alexander’s Mirror”, paper given at the conference “Alexander the Great and the East”, University of Wrocław (Poland), 14 September 2013. In this paper, Stoneman analyses various types of Alexandrian “mirrors” and provides an impressive interpretation of each tale ascribed to Alexander concerning mirrors in the *Alexander Romance*, and their Greek and Byzantine parallels. I would like to thank Professor Stoneman for kindly providing a copy of this paper.

⁶⁶ Stoneman, “Alexander’s Mirror”.

⁶⁷ See the introduction to Herbert Hoffman and Patricia F. Davidson, *Greek Gold: Jewellery from the Age of Alexander* (Von Zabern, 1965). There are also interesting remarks on the jewellery of the Hellenistic period in Reynold A. Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, 1980), p. 153; D. Williams (ed.), *The Art of the Greek Goldsmith* (London, 1998).

jewellery became popular in the Hellenistic period when Greek goldwork is seen to be at its best.⁶⁸

Regarding the issue of minting coins, Philip II was the first Greek ruler to issue gold coins uninterruptedly due to the wealth of the gold mines of the Pangaeum district.⁶⁹ However, Nizāmī's statement may reflect the fact that prior to the Macedonian conquest, silver, which abounded in Greece, was the only currency used for commercial transactions. It was only after Alexander's conquests, which raised the Greek economy (in both its Asian and European provinces) to a higher level, that one finds the minting and circulation of gold coins, not to mention silver, or a mixture of the two.⁷⁰

On Alexander's calendar, al-Bīrūnī affirms in his *Chronology* that it was established in the year Alexander entered Jerusalem at the age of twenty-seven. Thus the Jewish calendar was replaced with Alexander's calendar.⁷¹ In the passage in question, al-Bīrūnī writes:

... This era is based upon Greek years. It is in use among most nations. When Alexander had left Greece at the age of twenty-six, prepared to fight with Darius, the king of the Persians, and marching upon his capital, he went down to Jerusalem, which was inhabited by the Jews. Then he ordered the Jews to give up the era of Moses and David, and to use his era instead, and to adopt that very year, the twenty-seventh of his life, as the epoch of this era.⁷²

As we can see, Nizāmī's statement about the origin of Alexander's calendar more or less coincides with al-Bīrūnī. However, the historical accuracy of both accounts is doubtful because we know that when Alexander was twenty-seven, that is in 329, he was in Central Asia, and nothing obviously prophetic seems to have happened. His supposed visit to Jerusalem, if it happened, would have been in 332, when he was twenty-four.⁷³

This visit to Jerusalem is certainly not among Alexander's deeds as narrated in the PC. However, this episode was included in the Latin *Historia de Preliis* and in the various vernacular Alexander traditions based upon it.⁷⁴ The connection between Alexander's entrance to Jerusalem and his prophethood must have had its origin in the Jewish tradition, since one can find a prophetic aspect of Alexander's personality already in the Book of Daniel (7.8; 8.3–26). Likewise, the story of Alexander's visit to

⁶⁸ See Hoffman and Davidson, *Greek Gold*.

⁶⁹ S. Perlman, "The Coins of Philip II and Alexander the Great and their Pan-Hellenic Propaganda", *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 7th Series 5 (1965), p. 57.

⁷⁰ On this issue see Martin Price, *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus* (London, 1991); H. A. Troxell, *Studies in the Macedonian Coinage of Alexander the Great* (New York, 1997).

⁷¹ Al-Bīrūnī, *Athār al-Bāqīya*, trans. A. Dānīshīrīshī (Tehran, 1363/1984), pp. 45–6. See also the English translation of this text by C. E. Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (London, 1879), pp. 32–3.

⁷² Al-Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, p. 32.

⁷³ R. Stoneman, personal communication.

⁷⁴ See David J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus: A Guide to Medieval Illustrated Alexander Literature* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), p. 50, n. 85; p. 87, n. 120.

Jerusalem features among passages in the Talmud that concern Alexander.⁷⁵ However, the best-known version of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem is in a narrative by Josephus.⁷⁶ It thus seems likely that, as Niẓāmī himself stated, the Jewish religious tradition influenced his work.

* * *

Some of the other points relevant to the history, legend and romance of Alexander will be discussed in the following pages in order to illustrate precisely how Niẓāmī presented them in his poem. In order to provide a structured analysis of the *Sharafnāma*, I have divided its contents into four different categories:

- 1) Information already mentioned by Firdawsī or other sources with some variants (e.g. Persian campaigns, Dārā's murder by his own officers, etc.)
- 2) Information on Alexander's lineage, tutors, his conquests and battles.
- 3) The Caucasian episodes (e.g. Alexander in Azerbaijan, Abkhaz, his visit to Mount Alburz, Darband, etc.)
- 4) Marginal stories (e.g. invention of the mirror, the competition between the Rūmī and Chinese painters, etc.)

Although for reasons of space it has not been possible to cover each and every tale and detail of Niẓāmī's version of the Alexander legend, a fairly comprehensive overview of the poem's view of the conqueror has been attempted.

Episodes Common to the *Sharafnāma*, Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* and Other Sources

As Niẓāmī himself admitted in the prologue of the *Sharafnāma*, though he wanted to compose a new version of Alexander legend, sometimes there was no choice but to repeat what was said before him.⁷⁷ His poem thus shares certain passages with the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, which Niẓāmī tried to complete and "correct." He added some other variants to the Alexander legend which had been left unsung by Firdawsī.

⁷⁵ W. Jac. Van Bekkum, "Alexander the Great in Medieval Hebrew Literature", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986), p. 219.

⁷⁶ Josephus, *Ant. Xi*, pp. 314ff. See also A. Kleczar, "The Kingship of Alexander the Great in the Jewish Versions of the Alexander Narrative", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (Groningen, 2012), pp. 342–3.

⁷⁷ In the *Sharafnāma* (p. 51), as mentioned above, Niẓāmī's muse, the Prophet Khiḍr admonished him:

Do not repeat what the ancient sage [Firdawsī] said,
For it is wrong to pierce a single pearl twice.
Except when a passage is reached where thought
Demands you repeat what's before been said.

It should be taken into account that at the time Nizāmī was writing his version, Alexander’s image had become highly Islamised in the Muslim historical imagination. The epoch of Persian nationalism, which had flourished centuries earlier, during Firdawsī’s era, vanished in later centuries.⁷⁸ The point in this new Islamised depiction of Alexander first appears in the *Sharafnāma*. Nizāmī’s Alexander destroyed fire temples and liberated people from Persian oppression. He is no longer portrayed as a descendent of Darius nor is he linked to the great Persian heroes such as Isfandīyār. This change of view is not unique to Nizāmī but can be seen in other authors, such as Bal’amī, in his *History*.⁷⁹ Indeed, Nizāmī and Bal’amī⁸⁰ coincided on most points of the Alexander legend (some of which will be mentioned in the following pages), and both added supplementary material to their sources, some of which is not found elsewhere.

In order not to repeat discussion of the episodes treated in previous chapters, in what follows I summarise the passages common to the *Sharafnāma*, the PC and Firdawsī. Nizāmī’s account of the Persian campaigns are the only part of his work that coincide with Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma*. More interestingly, these common episodes are also the only parts also found in the Greek *Romance*. The various common motifs can be enumerated as follows.

Sixteen Motifs of the *Alexander Romance* also found in Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma* and Nizāmī’s *Sharafnāma*

	Pseudo-Callisthenes	Firdawsī	Nizāmī
1. Tribute of golden eggs	✓	✓	✓
2. Alexander in disguise at Darius’s court	✓	✓	-
3. Exchange of letters	✓	✓	✓
4. Exchange of symbolic gifts	✓	-	✓
5. Darius’s retreat	✓	✓	-
6. Darius writes to the Indian King Porus	✓	✓	-
7. Darius killed by his own generals		✓	✓
8. Alexander’s reaction to Darius’s death	✓	✓	✓
9. Darius’s will	✓	✓	✓
10. Alexander marries Rawshanak	✓	✓	✓
11. Alexander in Mecca	-	✓	✓
12. Queen Candace	✓	✓ (Qaidāfa)	✓ (Nūshāba)
13. Alexander in India	✓	✓	✓
14. The Indian King Kayd	-	✓	✓
15. Alexander in China	-	✓	✓
16. Alexander and the Water of Life	✓	✓	✓

⁷⁸ Safā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, vol. II, pp. 68–130.

⁷⁹ Bal’amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal’amī*. The episode on Alexander is in the second volume (pp. 692–720).

⁸⁰ Bal’amī is best known for his Persian translation of Ṭabarī’s history, which was done for Manšūr b. Nūḥ. Because he adds supplementary material, some of which is not found elsewhere, the work is called *Tārīkh-i Bal’amī*. According to the *Mujmal al-tawārīkh*, Bal’amī began his translation in 352/963 (see *Mujmal al-tawārīkh*, ed. M. T. Bahār (Tehran), p. 180). It is therefore the oldest New Persian prose work, after the preface (all that has been preserved) of the prose *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manšūr. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Amīrak Bal’amī”, *Elr*, I/9, pp. 971–72.

While these motifs will be examined in the present chapter wherever they appear in the narrative, my emphasis will be on the differences and novelties that Nizāmī added to his work. As we shall see, each episode represents an increasingly advanced stage in Alexander’s progress towards perfect kingship. At the heart of Alexander’s progress from temporal to sacred kingship lies an inward journey symbolised by his worldly achievements. The following passages focus on the narrative of the *Sharafnāma* in order to highlight firstly the development of the tale in the Persian tradition and its sources, and secondly to analyse Alexander’s progression towards enlightenment.

II. Alexander’s Birth and Early Years in Nizāmī’s *Sharafnāma*

The purpose of the following section is to study the key elements that Nizāmī includes in his work on Alexander’s life, comparing them with other sources in order to determine Nizāmī’s sources. The question of the identity of Alexander’s father and whether he was divine or human, was an important component of the Alexander legend in the sources from antiquity.⁸¹

Alexander’s Ancestry and Birth

Nizāmī opens his narrative with this theme, providing different narratives or variant readings regarding Alexander’s ancestry: the Roman variant (Alexander as an exposed child), the Persian variant (Alexander as a descendent of Darius) and the Greek variant (as Alexander as Philip’s son). Commencing with the Greek variant, Nizāmī begins his story by introducing Alexander’s father as Philip of Macedonia, whom he calls Fīlikūs.⁸² The rulers of Greece and Anatolia (Rūm) and Russia (Rūs), he declares, followed Fīlikūs’s command. Nizāmī describes him as “the world’s best king”, a “descendant of the grandson of Esau, the son of Isaac”.⁸³

Such a Biblical ancestry for Philip of Macedonia can also be found in Bal’amī’s (the *vazīr* of the Samanids) *History*.⁸⁴ Al-Bīrūnī also mentioned this version of Alexander’s ancestry as agreed on by “the most celebrated genealogists”, adding definitively: “that Alexander was the son of Philip is a fact too evident to be concealed”.⁸⁵ Al-Mas’ūdī mentioned this variant too.⁸⁶ This Old Testament genealogy of Philip is probably based on the identification of Edom/Edumea as Rome in the Jewish tradition,⁸⁷ which made Philip (of Rūm) a descendant of Esau.⁸⁸

⁸¹ On Alexander’s birth myths in the Greek tradition see the first chapter in Daniel Ogden’s *Alexander the Great: Myth, Genesis and Sexuality* (Exeter, 2011), where he analyses their content and chronology. On the Egyptian and Persian origins of Alexander in the *Romance* tradition see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 6–26.

⁸² The name also appears as Fīlqūs, Fīlfūs or Fīlifūs in the manuscripts of the *Sharafnāma*.

⁸³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 80, XV, 2–5.

⁸⁴ Bal’amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal’amī*, vol. II, pp. 692–93.

⁸⁵ Bīrūnī, *Athār al-bāqīyya*, pp. 48–49.

⁸⁶ Mas’ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. I, p. 124.

⁸⁷ Avishur, Isaac, Moshe David Herr and Carl Stephen Ehrlich, “Edom”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit, 2007), vol. VI, p. 158. The name Edom means

After presenting the Greek variant of Alexander's ancestry from Philip, Nizāmī continues:

How many claims and counterclaims on Alexander's birth
Exist, to each of which I've lent my ear to find the truth.⁸⁹

He then provides two other variants of Alexander's ancestry. Firstly, he cites a Greek (*rūmī*) variant:

As has been related by the wise sages of that land,
There was once the wife of a pious man in Greece⁹⁰
Who found herself distressed in pangs of childbirth
Outcast from hearth, home, husband – in dire straits.
When the time to give birth approached, the strain
And labour's woe overmastered her with pain,
She crept off into a corner, gave birth and died.
She fret to death in the distress of childbirth and cried:
“Who shall nurse and nurture you, I know not;
What beast or brute will devour you, who knows ...”⁹¹

Philip then finds the abandoned child on his way back from a hunting expedition:

One day while hunting game, King Philip surveyed
The plain and saw a dead woman lying there
Before his feet, a living baby boy's head rose up
From his mother's deathbed; in want of her breast
And milk the infant bit his thumb in grief.
Philip ordered his men to take the lady's corpse
They gave to her last rites as she deserved.
The servants of the king took the child from
The dust of the way and bore him away –
All were left to marvel at the game of that day.
So Philip took, reared and raised the boy,
And in the end anointed him his heir.⁹²

“red” in Hebrew, and was given to Esau, the elder son of Isaac (Genesis 25:30). The Torah, Tanakh and New Testament thus describe the Edomites as descendants of Esau. The identification of Edom with Rome was very widespread, and the overwhelming majority of homilies about Edom speak explicitly of Rome. Thus it was stated that Rome was founded by the children of Esau, and Rome was identified as one of the cities of the chiefs of Esau listed at the end of Genesis 36. At a still later period the term became a synonym for Christian Rome.

⁸⁸ See K. Aḥmadnezhād, *Taḥlīl-i athār-i Nizāmī Ganjavī* (Tehran, 1375/1996), p. 64.

⁸⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 81, XV, 15.

⁹⁰ Nizāmī uses the term “Hūshyārān-i Rūm” (lit. wise Anatolian/Roman? sages) here, but given the context it seems more likely that his reference is to Greek or Byzantine historians who wrote about Alexander.

⁹¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 81, XV, 16–20.

Nizāmī next explains the Persian variant which, he adds, he does not believe. Considering Nizāmī’s reference to “the *dihqān* who adore the fire”, I think one may speculate that this version is based on his “Pahlavi” source, a Zoroastrian version preserved by the noble *dihqāns* (landowners of noble Sasanian families)⁹³ mentioned in the verses:

The *dihqān* who adore the fire relate the legend
Of Alexander a different way: they say he was kith
And kin to Darius through ties of blood. Yet when
All these tales and yarns I perused, then regarded
What Firdawsī, the holy master, had to say, those two
Romances appeared like chimera, flights of fancy
Or foolish fictions made of dream and moonshine.⁹⁴

Lastly, Nizāmī cites the Greek variant, which he believes to be the “true history” of Alexander’s birth:

In every tongue what’s right and true of this legend
Of Alexander is this – that he was of Philip’s kin.
Since other tales are incredible and lack veracity,
No poet can pledge his word on them.
That hoary-headed elder relates a tale
He’d read in the history of the kings of yore
That in the revels of King Philip there was
A stainless young bride of alluring loveliness,
Promising in appearance, exalted in eminence,
Whose fetching glances, shot from her eyebrow’s
Bow, felled men – her tresses all like lassos.
... One night the king took her in love’s embrace –
A date palm then arose from his royal seed,
A pearl of great price from his spring rains
Made the ocean oyster engender majesty.
When all nine months of her pregnancy were up
The infant sought his way from out the womb ...⁹⁵

Alexander’s Horoscope

Nizāmī relates in detail the astronomical information⁹⁶ of the horoscope for the moment of Alexander’s birth. He tells us that King Philip ordered his astrologers to determine

⁹² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 81–2, XV, 25–30.

⁹³ See A. Tafadḍolī, “Dehqān”, *Elr*, VII/2, pp. 223–4 and VII/3, p. 225–6.

⁹⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 82, XV, 31–3.

⁹⁵ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 82, XV, 34–47.

the infant's star sign, which might reveal his child's future. Deciphering the mysteries of the heavenly constellations, the astronomers examined what the stars held in their balance,⁹⁷ finding that:

The ascendant star Leo ruled the day
And blinded with envy every enemy's eye.
The sun in Aries gained lustre and glory,
Attesting a man of practice, not theory.
As Mercury hastened towards Gemini,
The moon and Venus consorted in Taurus;
By Jupiter, Sagittarius was embellished,
Saturn caroused in Libra's Balance
While Mars in Capricorn took his place
Just like a lackey employed in chores.
Such a horoscope so radiant with fortune
Outloud I'd say: "Preserve him from the Evil Eye!"⁹⁸

According to these verses, Leo, the sign of power, was in the ascendant at the moment of Alexander's birth, while the sun was located in Aries, the sign of wisdom and its practice. Plutarch (*Alex.* 3.3) indicates that Alexander was born in the Greek month Hecatombaeon (July/August).⁹⁹ We can also find similar details (on measuring the courses of the heavenly bodies when Alexander's mother went into labour) in the PC (I, 12).¹⁰⁰ However, according to the PC, Jupiter was in the ascendant when Alexander was born, "turning into horned Ammon between Aquarius and Pisces".¹⁰¹ Nizāmī also mentions the constellations of other signs of the horoscope indicating Alexander's future fortune and prosperity, concluding that:

The constellations of heaven's seven stars proclaim:
The world had given him the key to fortune and fame.¹⁰²

The horoscope given by Nizāmī is quite different from the Greek account with

⁹⁶ Regarding the influence of astrology in Nizāmī's works see Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 233, n. 63. There is useful information on the usage of science in general in Nizāmī's work in Christine van Ruymbeke, *Science and Poetry in Medieval Persia: The Botany of Nizami's Khamsa* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 13–14. However, the best example of Nizāmī's astrological knowledge is found in his *Haft Paykar* (*The Seven Princesses*), on which, see Julie Scott Meisami (trans.), *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance* (Oxford, 1995), pp. xxxi–xxxvii.

⁹⁷ Here Nizāmī uses the term "tarāzū-yi anjam" (balance of stars) which, curiously, is the translation of the Greek word ἀστρολάβος (star-taker).

⁹⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 83, XV, 48–56.

⁹⁹ Indeed, the name of this month in the Persian calendar is derived from the constellation of Leo, which is *amurdād* in Persian and *Asad* (lion) in Arabic. See M. Akramī, *Gāh-shumārī-yi irānī* (Tehran, 1380/2001), p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 43–4.

¹⁰¹ There is a discussion of Alexander's horoscope according to the PC in R. Stoneman, *Il Romanzo Di Alessandro*, trans. T. Gargiulo (Milan, 2007), vol. I. pp. 478–9.

¹⁰² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 83, XV.

which it has been compared. The passage on the conqueror's horoscope in the Syriac PC (I, 12) is quite different too, attesting that Alexander was born "over Aquarius and Pisces of Egypt". Comparing this horoscope in the *Sharafnāma* with certain horoscopes found in the Zoroastrian *Bundahishn* (e.g. the fifth and sixth chapters in which the birth of Gayomarth is discussed), it seems evident to me that Niẓāmī's method was based on Sasanian genethliology (natal astrology), which was itself "essentially an imitation of the Hellenistic, onto which were grafted some Indian features".¹⁰³ Alexander's horoscope was typical of a great man, with all the planets aligned in the best astrological positions.¹⁰⁴

One source that may have been accessible to Niẓāmī was the *Kitāb al-mawālīd al-kabīr* (*Book of Great Births*) by Māshā'allāh ibn Atharī (d. c. 815), a Jew (perhaps a Persian Jew), that is known only from its Latin translation.¹⁰⁵ It is possible that Niẓāmī based his version of Alexander's horoscope on this book. In general, as S. H. Naṣr points out, Niẓāmī had an impressive knowledge of traditional astronomy and astrology, such that his references to the principles of astronomy throughout his *Quintet* are unique among the poets of the Persian language.¹⁰⁶

Alexander's Education

The next piece of biographical information that Niẓāmī provides concerns Alexander's education. It is interesting that Niẓāmī's *Sharafnāma* is the only source in the Persian tradition where a so-called Naqūmājus is mentioned as Alexander's tutor. According to Niẓāmī, he was Aristotle's father, while Aristotle was Alexander's classmate.¹⁰⁷ Nicomachus (Νικόμαχος; fl. c. 375 BC) was indeed the father of Aristotle. However, he was the physician in Philip's court and not Alexander's tutor. According to Plutarch (*Alex.* 5.5), the man who assumed the character and title of tutor of Alexander was a

¹⁰³ See David Pingree, "Mashā'allāh: Some Sassanian and Syriac Sources", *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George F. Hourani (Albany, 1975), pp. 5–14, especially p. 6; Pingree, "Historical Horoscopes", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82.4 (Oct.–Dec., 1962), pp. 487–502; On the Zoroastrian parts of *Bundahishn* see W. B. Henning, "An Astronomical Chapter of the *Bundahishn*", *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 74.3–4 (1942), pp. 229–48; D. N. MacKenzie, "Zoroastrian Astrology in the *Bundahishn*", *Bulletin School of Oriental and African Studies* 27 (1964), pp. 511–29.

¹⁰⁴ In the casting of a horoscope it was necessary to evaluate the significance of each sign within the system of twelve constellations (i.e. the twelve Zodiacal "houses of the signs"). Niẓāmī's horoscope of Alexander resembles this method. He interprets the significance of each sign in relation to each specific house, as for instance where he claims that the sun being in Aries implied the putting of wisdom into practice.

¹⁰⁵ The Latin translation was made by Hugo de Santalla under the title *Libellus de navitatibus 14 distinctus capitulis* (Oxford, Bodl. Savile 15, 72 fols). See L. Thorndike, "The Latin Translations of Astrological Works by Messahala", *Osiris* 12 (1956), pp. 49–72; E. S. Kennedy and D. Pingree, *The Astrological History of Māshā'allāh* (Cambridge, 1971).

¹⁰⁶ See S. H. Naṣr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, ed. Mehdi Amin Razavi (London: Curzon 1996), p. 184.

¹⁰⁷ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 86, XVI, 15 and 23.

certain Lysimachus. These two names (Nicomachus and Lysimachus) may have been conflated in their Arabic transcriptions in the sources.¹⁰⁸

According to the *Sharafnāma*, Naqūmājus/Nicomachus asked Alexander to accept his son (Aristotle) as his minister and counsellor when he became king. Nicomachus gave Alexander “geometrical letters” (*hindisī ḥarf*), that is a talismanic ring (circle) based on the occult sciences¹⁰⁹ in which the name of the conquered and the conqueror would magically appear.¹¹⁰ Thus, even before each battle, Alexander already knew whether he would win or lose. Nevertheless, despite this foreknowledge, Alexander was always conscious of the power of Fate over his successes and failures, states Niẓāmī:

Through what he wrote upon that magic diagram
He'd gain news about his triumph and success
And thus with wisdom and intelligence he lived.
From every art he gleaned some lore fit for use.
Although his will was omniscient in expertise,
He also kept on hand the counsel of the wise.
He followed the commands of the erudite: in this
Way Fortune favoured him through his own mindfulness.¹¹¹

III. Of Banquets and Battles (*bazm u razm*): Alexander as Warrior

A major part of the *Sharafnāma* deals with the battles through which Alexander tries to liberate the people of various lands, or else guide them on the path of the primordial religion of Abraham (*dīn-i ḥanīfī*).¹¹² Before each battle there are episodes in which letters are exchanged between Alexander and the enemy king. The exchange of letters between the kings before and during the battle is a characteristic of the *Alexander Romance* tradition from its very beginning.¹¹³ However, Niẓāmī only includes two

¹⁰⁸ Neither of these names, Nicomachus nor Lysimachus, appears in the Syriac PC. It is not clear on which source Niẓāmī based his information. As far as this study is concerned, there is no Arabic source where this information appears either!

¹⁰⁹ This probably refers to *Sīmiyā'* (from the Greek σιμεία), one of the branches of occult science in the Islamic tradition concerned with “the science of the secret powers of letters”. See D. B. MacDonald [T. Fahd], “Sīmiyā’”, *EF*, IX, pp. 612–13.

¹¹⁰ The use of occult sciences associated with Alexander the Great is normally found in the works attributed to Aristotle and not Aristotle’s father; for example in the *Secret of Secrets*, Aristotle sent four magical stones to Alexander, one of which would always rout the enemy. There are also stones that prevent any army withstanding Alexander. It is also worth mentioning the *Lapidary* of Aristotle, another work devoted to the marvellous properties of stones and tales of Alexander the Great. Regarding Aristotle and Alexander in these two works and the use of occult science see Lynn Thorndike, “The Latin Pseudo-Aristotle and Medieval Occult Science”, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 21.2 (Apr., 1922), pp. 229–58.

¹¹¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 88, XVI, 49–52

¹¹² In Islamic texts and contexts, *ḥanīf* refers to one who follows the original and true monotheistic religion, and is used especially of Abraham. See W. Montgomery, “Ḥanīf”, *EF*, III, pp. 165–6.

¹¹³ Two extant papyri contain the correspondence of Darius and Alexander: the first is in Florence and belongs to second century AD (*Pap. Societas Italiana* 1285) edited by Dino Pieraccioni in 1951. The

letters (Darius sends a letter to Alexander, to which he responds).¹¹⁴ In the *Sharafnāma*, Darius's letter contains material from a pre-Islamic Persian tradition, which indicates that it is based on Nizāmī's "Pahlavi" source: Darius swears on "bright fire", on "*Zand* and *Avestā*" and "Zoroaster";¹¹⁵ he compares himself with the great heroes and kings of the Persian tradition (Isfandiyār and Bahman).¹¹⁶ Alexander's response also contains material that indicates that it was derived from the Persian tradition, as for example where he warns Darius that if he compares himself with Isfandiyār, Alexander is Rustam.¹¹⁷

During every battle and normally after, there are episodes of feasts and symposia. The main point of these banquets is to remind the conqueror – and by extension, the reader – of the moral lessons to be gleaned from the practice of warfare and conduct on the field of battle. In this respect, the *Sharafnāma* can be seen to have been composed quite deliberately as a mirror for princes.

Overall, Alexander waged three great wars. The first was against the *Zangīs* (black people, known as Zanj in Arabic, the African population of the western part of the Indian Ocean);¹¹⁸ the second against the Persians; and the third against the Russians (altogether there were seven battles waged against the Russians). After his conquest of Persia, Alexander conducted some other minor battles or wars, especially in the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Abkhaz, Armenia, etc.). The important passages that memorialise these wars are discussed below.

The Battle Against the Africans

According to Nizāmī, because the fame of Alexander's justice reached everywhere, people wanted him to liberate them from the tyranny of their kings. Nizāmī emphasises that Alexander owed his fame to the wise counsel of Aristotle, who was his "court minister" (*dastūr-i dargāh*) and confidant in all matters. Following Aristotle's wise

second (*Pap. Hamburg 129*) belongs to the first century BC. In the introduction to his translation of the PC (*Pseudo-Calístenes, vida y hazañas de Alejandro de Macedonia* (Madrid, 1988), pp. 15–16, 19–20), C. Garcia Gual analysed the origins of the letters and quoted C. Erwin Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und sein Vorläufer*, 4th ed. (Darmstadt, 1960) and R. Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans* (Munich, 1954), pp. 193ff.) among many others. It is believed that the letters probably belong to an "Epistolary novel" about Alexander. See also R. Stoneman's introduction (*The Greek Alexander Romance*, pp. 10–11).

¹¹⁴ On the correspondence between Darius and Alexander in the *Shāhnāma* and the PC see chapter two of this thesis.

¹¹⁵ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 185:

به رخشنده آذر به استا و زند
به خورشید روشن به چرخ بلند
به یزدان که اهریمنش دشمن است
به زردشت کو خصم اهریمن است

¹¹⁶ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 188:

به من می رسد بازوی بهمنی
که اسفندیارم به رویین تنی

¹¹⁷ In Persian epic, although Isfandiyār was immortal (*rūyīn-tan*, which means "iron-body"), Rustam managed to kill him by consulting the fabulous mythological bird, the Simurgh, who knew that Isfandiyār had a weak point, his eyes. Alexander wisely uses this comparison to warn Darius of the consequences of the war.

¹¹⁸ I. Lewis, "Berberā", *EF*², I, pp. 1172–3.

counsel, in only a few years, Alexander’s conquests extended over all the boundaries of the world.”¹¹⁹

In the passage on the relationship between Alexander and Aristotle, Nizāmī insists on the indispensability of a good counsellor (*vazīr*) for the aspiring prince. He states that the greatest kings owed their fame to their *vazīrs*,¹²⁰ citing a series of illustrious advisers who served their princes with sound advice, and referencing authors of courtly mirrors. In this respect, it should be remembered that Aristotle’s letters to Alexander the Great on matters of kingly conduct were well known in their Arabic versions and would have been familiar to the poet.¹²¹ Other great *vazīrs* known to Nizāmī include Buzurgmihr, minister of the Sasanian king Khusraw I Anūshīrvān the Just (r. 531–79), to whom was attributed a work preserved in Arabic known as the *Ādāb Buzurjmīhr* (*The Ethics of Buzurgmihr*);¹²² and Nizām al-Mulk, minister to the Saljūq King Malikshāh, Nizāmī’s predecessor by some hundred years and author of the *Siyar al-Mulūk* (*Rules for Kings*). Justifications for counselling rulers are abundant in the Persian mirrors for princes: Nizām al-Mulk devoted one of the chapters of the *Siyar al-Mulūk* to the importance of “consulting with wise and experienced men”,¹²³ while Ghazālī recommended that the good king constantly study the books of counsel (*pandnāma*) given to the kings who preceded him, referring to anecdotes about Khusraw I Anūshīrvān and his minister.¹²⁴ This episode of the *Sharafnāma* explores the relationship between counselling and kingship, and specifically the role of the *vazīr* as the source of that wisdom which leads both to justice and harmony.

According to the *Sharafnāma*, Alexander’s first battle followed the Egyptians’ accusation of tyranny against the people of Zang, upon hearing which Aristotle advised the king to help:

Perchance the king may gain strength should he lend
To this affair of Egyptians a helping hand,
Thus Egypt and all its surrounding lands to him would
Become subject, his name as champion become
Renowned and all his foes in dust cast down,
All his friends triumph, his foes be overthrown.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 93.

¹²⁰ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 93. There is a similar passage in the *Iqbāl-nāma* (p. 40) and in the *Haft Paykar* (6:35–40).

¹²¹ See Simon Swain, *Themistius, Julian and Greek Political Theory under Rome: Texts, Translations and Studies of Four Key Works* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 110–23, and the translation of the text at pp. 180ff. See also Emily Cottrell, “An Early Mirror for Princes and Manual for Secretaries: *The Epistolary Novel of Aristotle and Alexander*”, *Alexander the Great in the East* (Wrocław, forthcoming); M. Maróth, *The Correspondence between Aristotle and Alexander the Great: An Anonymous Greek Novel in Letters in Arabic Translation* (Piliscsaba, 2006).

¹²² It is preserved in Miskawayh’s *al-Ḥikmah al-Khālidah*. See Daniel Gimaret, *Le livre de Bilawhar et Būdāsf selon la version arabe ismaélienne* (Paris, 1971), pp. 38–41.

¹²³ Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyar al-mulūk*, pp. 138–40; English trans., pp. 95–96.

¹²⁴ Ghazālī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, p. 112; English trans., p. 63.

¹²⁵ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 96, XVIII, 31–3.

Among the sources to which Niẓāmī might have had access, Bal‘amī is the only author to mention Alexander’s battle against the people of Zang (Zangistān).¹²⁶ In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, there is an episode devoted to Alexander’s voyage to Africa and traversal of Libya (PC, I, 30) before hastening towards Egypt (PC, I, 34), although there is no account of any war against the African people. Niẓāmī offers much more detailed information about the African campaign: he relates that “Alexander, following the counsel of his guide (*dastūrī rahnamūn*) took the battle standard from Macedonia ... He ordered his troops to leave the banks of the River Nile and march towards the desert.”¹²⁷ Niẓāmī then describes the battle with the African army in a single verse as follows:

On the right flank the Abyssinians fought; on left
The men of Barbary and at the battle’s heart
The wild African army [the Zangī] raged, a demon horde.¹²⁸

The episode of the war against Zangistān in the *Sharafnāma* contains more than 430 verses in which Niẓāmī developed the story with details of individual battles and their heroic acts. Just as in the *Alexander Romance*, each battle usually starts with an exchange of letters between the two leaders; in Niẓāmī’s version, one also finds episodes in which Alexander sends a message to the other king before a battle and receives an answer.¹²⁹ Normally, victory is not easy and Alexander must personally exert himself on the battlefield to ensure success.¹³⁰ At the end of one of the battles against the Africans, Niẓāmī provides some interesting information on how Alexander ordered that the Abyssinians be branded because they helped the people of Zang in a battle in which the Zang army suffered defeat, which is why (according to Niẓāmī) the Abyssinians were slaves.¹³¹

After the battle against the people of Zang, Alexander rested in a camp near the battlefield for about a week.¹³² Niẓāmī also relates how Alexander built bridges over the Nile in order to transport the treasure he obtained as tribute from the people of Zang.¹³³ The *Sharafnāma* is one of the few sources in Persian¹³⁴ that mentions the foundation of the city of Alexandria. The poet mentions how “he came to Egypt and cherished the

¹²⁶ Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal‘amī*, vol. II, p. 694.

¹²⁷ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 96, XVIII, 34 and 38.

¹²⁸ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 119.

¹²⁹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XIX.

¹³⁰ I mentioned above that Aristotle’s father gave a magical alphabetical ring to Alexander to foretell the outcome of a battle. This is curious because the idea of Alexander using magic to defeat the enemy seems to have aroused some scepticism among medieval readers; one can mention Geoffrey of Waterford (d. c. 1300), in particular, who translated the *Secret of Secrets* into French. Thorndike notes: “He wonders why Alexander had to win his battles by hard fighting when Aristotle is supposed to inform him in his book of a stone which will always rout the enemy” (“The Latin Pseudo-Aristotle”, p. 257).

¹³¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XX, p. 131. Curiously, in the Greek *Romance* (PC, I, 35), there is a similar sentence regarding the Tyrians: “To this day the miseries of Tyre is a proverbial expression” (Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 70).

¹³² Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXI, p. 135.

¹³³ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXI, p. 136.

¹³⁴ The *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī does not mention the foundation of Alexandria.

Egyptians, building a city there according to his own rule and custom (*ā'īn-i kh^wud*).” He then went down to the sea and rested a while, and “everywhere he planted his standard, some edifice or structure was built.” “Many a city was built there,” says Niẓāmī, “according to the Greek style (*bih rasm-i rūm*)”, thus making much of the barren land of Egypt prosperous:

The first city he built was by the ocean’s side,
Raised up as lovely and delightful as spring,
It was as spacious and luminous as paradise
With bustling markets and fields with farms.
When Alexander finished work on the city
The name they gave to it was Alexandria.¹³⁵

According to PC (I, 35), after founding Alexandria, Alexander led his army on to Syria; in the *Sharafnāma*, however, Alexander returned to Greece.

Comparing this episode in Niẓāmī’s *Sharafnāma* with the Greek *Alexander Romance* suggests that Niẓāmī replaced Alexander’s battle against the Tyrians found in the PC with the battle against the Zang. This seems a reasonable supposition since this episode in the PC is interpolated between the episode of Alexander in Egypt and his Persian campaigns.¹³⁶ This motif was most likely inserted in the Alexander literature before the eighth century, through Arabic channels, since a letter in the work known as *Rasā’l (Epistolary Romance)*¹³⁷ deals with “fighting the Zanj”. Thus it appears possible if not probable that Niẓāmī based his account of the battle against the people of Zang on the *Rasā’l* or on a common Hellenistic source.

Persian Campaigns: Alexander’s Battle with Darius and Conquest of Persia

According to Niẓāmī, Alexander’s second battle was against the Persians. Most of his account of the Persian conquest coincides with that of Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma* with some minor divergences. Following his successful campaign against the people of Zang, in the *Sharafnāma* Alexander distributes the treasures he obtained from the war:

The countless treasures from the African campaign
In plunder that he gained, he sent away at once

¹³⁵ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXI, pp. 136–7.

¹³⁶ The episode of the battle against the Tyrians in the PC (I, 35) comes after Alexander hastened towards Egypt (I, 34), and his first battle against Darius. The episode of the battle against the people of Zang also appears between these two episodes in the *Sharafnāma*.

¹³⁷ The *Rasā’l* is one of the earliest works of Arabic literature and was translated or edited by Sālim Abū l-‘Alā’, Secretary to the tenth Umayyad caliph, Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Mālik (r. 724–43). It consists of approximately sixteen letters and treatises. See Simon Swain, *Themistius, Julian and Greek Political Theory under Rome*, pp. 110–23, and his translation of the text at pp. 180ff; M. Grignaschi, “Les *Rasā’l d’Arisṭūṭālisa ilā-l-Iskandar* de Sālim Abū-l-‘Alā’ et l’activité culturelle à l’époque omeyyade”, *Bulletin d’études orientales* 19 (1965–6), p. 31. It looks as if the epistolary novel came to Arabic through a version in Syriac. See Brock, “The Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander in Syriac”, pp. 215–18; Van Bladel, “Syriac Sources of the Early Arabic Narratives of Alexander”.

Without taking weight or measure of their worth
To other lands. With those treasures Providence
Favoured him, all other treasuries he enriched.¹³⁸

Nizāmī records how as a matter of kingly courtesy and royal largesse, Alexander sent booty from his campaign to the Persian king Dārā (Darius), who treated his gifts contemptuously: “Darius took fright at this largesse, for the barb of envy just pricked him sharper,” the poet relates. Although Darius accepted these gifts from Alexander, he failed to acknowledge them with due thanks. Darius’s lack of appreciation was expressed in “an improper answer [*nih bar jā-yi kh^wud*]” sent to Alexander, thus opening “the door of his secret rancour”. Although he kept his feelings hidden, this offhand acknowledgement of his gifts sorely distressed Alexander. Nizāmī identifies Darius’s ingratitude and lack of courtesy as what soured their relationship and filled the young conqueror with spite and malice towards him.¹³⁹ Partly because of Darius’s ingratitude and lack of appreciation for his gifts, Alexander decided to stop paying tribute to the Persian king:

To Darius he now refused all gifts and boons –
And he recanted his tribute of former times.
For being as he was in the glow of youth
And filled with lust for conquest of lands
To buckle off the Persian armour, his men
He turned, and girt his loins to subdue Iran.¹⁴⁰

The Symbolic Gifts of Darius and Alexander

A crucial episode establishes both protagonists’ character. This is a scene in which Nizāmī narrates several interesting episodes concerning the exchange of symbolic gifts between Alexander and Darius (see motif 4 mentioned above). The gifts mentioned in the Greek *Romance* (PC, I, 36) are a whip, a ball and a chest of gold, while in the Syriac version¹⁴¹ the episode is more elaborate. The Syriac version added some sesame and mustard seeds to the other gifts (that is, to the whip, ball and chest of gold of the Greek version). The motif of symbolic gifts is altogether absent from the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. In the *Sharafnāma*, the gifts mentioned are a ball, a polo mallet and sesame seeds. Nizāmī elaborates the episode as follows:

Despite all his excuses, Alexander knew that the messenger
Brought with him a coarse, rude message from King Dārā.
“Bring on the message,” he cried with contempt.
The messenger unclasped his lips to express his purpose

¹³⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXI, p. 137.

¹³⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXI, p. 139.

¹⁴⁰ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXII, p. 142.

¹⁴¹ Budge, *The Syriac PC*, pp. 46–52.

And brought forth the wares he had in his case:
 He laid them out, one by one, before the king.
 When he'd laid each and every item before Alexander,
 He opened his lips to relay the message of Darius.
 First he spoke of polo mallet and ball, saying
 "You're just a child – so learn to play with these aright;
 But if war be your wish, you'll naively fill your heart with woe";
 – A myriad sesame seeds he then cast before the king –
 "We'll urge against you an army more plentiful than these."
 Alexander the wise, discerning judge of the world's ways,
 Saw augury of great victory in those symbols manifest –
 And voiced this maxim: "Whoever flees away
 With this same mallet may be caught and snared." –
 The king bestowed this polo mallet upon me perchance
 That I may wrest his kingdom away from him!
 – As for this ball, since masters of geometry reckon
 The earth itself has a ball's form and shape, it seems
 Quite clearly the king has offered this globe up to me:
 I'll win this sport! I'll carry off the ball from the field of war!"
 Once that mindful man duly honoured these two favours
 Bestowed on him, he turned to meditate on the sesame.
 Upon the palace courtyard stones he strewed its seeds
 And saw how birds pounced at once upon them
 And instantly cleared the yard of every grain.
 "What clear guidance is betokened by this portent!" he exclaimed,
 "For just as sesame seeds compressed make oil,
 When Darius drives an army vast as a myriad sesame seeds
 At me, just like those birds my troops shall devour them."
 He rewarded the messenger with a handful of wild rue seeds,
 And said: "The king's army may be a battalion of sesame seeds,
 Yet know my troops are abundant as the wild rue."¹⁴²

As can be seen from these verses, the "whip" in the Greek and Syriac versions has in the *Sharafnāma* been transformed into a polo mallet (*chawgān*). The Greek version has Darius affirm in a letter, "Alexander needs still to play. Therefore, the whip and the ball are to show that he ought still to be at play" (PC, I, 36). The transformation of the "whip" into a *chawgān* in the Persian tradition¹⁴³ seems to have a more genuinely historical ring to it, and also makes more sense in being an appropriate gift to express Darius's contempt for Alexander's youth.

¹⁴² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIV, p. 160–1.

¹⁴³ Bal'amī also translates the word as "chawgān" in order for Alexander to play polo (Bal'amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal'amī*, vol. II, p. 695).

The motif of the sesame and mustard seeds was not originally in the Greek *Romance*, although it was added to later Greek narratives.¹⁴⁴ In the Syriac version, there is a similar episode in which Alexander took a handful of the sesame seeds and put them into his mouth, saying, “they are numerous, but they have no taste.”¹⁴⁵ In response, Alexander sent Darius a bushel of mustard seeds as a symbol of his Greek and Macedonian troops. Darius, in turn, put the mustard seeds into his mouth and reportedly said: “they are small, but pungent”.¹⁴⁶ Although the interpretations vary slightly, the same passage and motif also can be found in the histories of Ṭabarī,¹⁴⁷ Bal‘amī¹⁴⁸ and the anonymous *Nihāyat*.¹⁴⁹

Omens, Oracles and Auguries

In order to take an augury of the future and determine whether he would be victorious in his battle with the Persian king, Alexander resorted to divination through the observation of two fighting mountain partridges. He interpreted the outcome of their struggle as a sign of success in his impending conflict with Dārā:

One partridge he betokened with his own name,
 – That bird’s success was an omen of good outcome.
 The name of Darius he gave the other bird.
 Intent as to how befell their lots, he gazed:
 Both bold birds scratched and pecked their opponent;
 The king took judgement from their bitter contest.
 The partridge whose feathers and pinions won
 The match was the bird of Alexander in the end.
 The monarch, seeing the day was won by that
 Brave bird, understood at once his army’s fate:
 From the bird he’d thrashed, in victory
 That strutting partridge happily flew away –
 Aloft he soared to perch upon a mountain ridge;
 An eagle then pounced on him and split his head.¹⁵⁰

Taking this as an omen, Alexander understood that he would defeat the Persians. However, he realised that despite that victory, he was still subject to mortality, and his life would not be long-lasting. Nevertheless, this omen was not enough to give Alexander full assurance of his victory, so he visited a sacred mountain considered an

¹⁴⁴ See García Gual, *Pseudo-Calístenes*, p. 94, n. 67.

¹⁴⁵ Budge, *The Syriac PC*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁶ Budge, *The Syriac PC*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of this passage in Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh* see Gad, “Al-Ṭabarī’s Tales of Alexander”, p. 221.

¹⁴⁸ Bal‘amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal‘amī*, vol. II, pp. 695–6.

¹⁴⁹ *Nihāyat al-‘arab fī tārikh al-fars wa al-‘arab*, ed. M. T. Dāneshpazhūh (Tehran, 1374/1995), pp. 116ff. Here the author also adds a golden coffin and a pearl to the symbolic gifts.

¹⁵⁰ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXII, p. 143.

oracle. Nizāmī describes the oracle as built “atop a granite mountain, its temple had a lofty vaulted turret of heavenly grandeur.” Pilgrims came to the oracle and “with their own voices asked about the outcome of mysterious events of their own lives”. From the echo that came back from the mountain they then performed a divination and so discerned their future fortune.¹⁵¹

The answer Alexander received from the mountain oracle was again definitive: that he would conquer the world and defeat the Persian King Dārā.¹⁵² Oracles and omens are an important component of the *Alexander Romance* throughout its transmission (e.g. PC, I, 30, 32). Alexander’s visit to Delphi (PC, II, 1) may also be cited in this context. In the Greek *Romance*, other episodes following the foundation of Alexandria feature Alexander resorting to oracles and omens to divine the outcome of conflicts with his enemies, such as, for example, his contemplation of an eagle upon a mountain (PC, I, 33), although this account is different from the episode above in the *Sharafnāma*. In the Syriac PC (I, 45) Alexander went to the temple of Apollo, where he took an augury from an oracle there. It is unclear whether these episodes in the *Sharafnāma* are Nizāmī’s own inventions; to my knowledge they are not found in any other source for the *Romance* in any language or literature.

Alexander’s Battle with Darius

Nizāmī affirms that the Persian army was composed of “nine hundred thousand fighting horsemen, skilful [firm] of stirrup”.¹⁵³ Darius first reached Armenia and caught Alexander off guard, unaware of his approach.¹⁵⁴ When Alexander received the news, he prepared an army of 300,000 men of Rūm, Egypt, *Afrang*¹⁵⁵ and Russia (Rūs).¹⁵⁶ According to Nizāmī, Darius was destined to be defeated because he was an oppressor:

The iniquity of Darius was a cosmic curse. The glad news
Of Alexander’s march made the world renewed.
All Iran lay upon the rack and suffered sorely
From Darius’s evil ways and lack of equity.
Since for their king the Persians held no esteem,
With love they made Alexander welcome.¹⁵⁷

Most of the classical Islamic sources mention the tyranny of Darius, including Bal’amī¹⁵⁸ and the *Letter of Tansar*¹⁵⁹ among others. Both kings asked for advice from

¹⁵¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXII, p. 144.

¹⁵² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXII, p. 144.

¹⁵³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIV, p. 162.

¹⁵⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXV, p. 163.

¹⁵⁵ Nizāmī uses the word *afranja* (the Arabised form of *Afrang*, which in Persian means “Europe”). According to Yāqūt Ḥamavī (*Mu’jam al-Buldān*), one of the *Afrang* cities was Rhodes, which lay in front of Alexandria. See Mu’in, “Afrang”, *Farhang-i Fārsī*, 10th ed. (Tehran, 1375/1996), vol. I, p. 314.

¹⁵⁶ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXV, p. 164.

¹⁵⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXVI, pp. 170–1.

¹⁵⁸ Bal’amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal’amī*, vol. II, p. 696.

¹⁵⁹ *Nāma-yi Tansar*, ed. M. Mīnavī, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1354/1975), p. 86.

their counsellors. While Alexander's courtiers urged him to attack Darius, the Persian counsellors kept silent.

Interestingly, in Niẓāmī's account of Darius's final war, there is a man, Farīburz by name, who counselled him against fighting Alexander, alluding to an old prophecy. Farīburz' grandfather had told him that before Kay Khusraw went off to his death by disappearing into the cave (upon Mount Alburz), whence he was seen no more, the king used his magic goblet to look into the future. He uttered a prediction that:

In the heavens I see a star constellated that will soon appear in the heavens of our empire and descend from zenith to nadir. Out of Greece shall come an arrogant ruffian who will set all Iran's fire temples alight. He will conquer the entire land of Iran and then reign on the throne of the Kayānid kings. Although he may seize the entire world, what he's gained will not last, and one day he will be cast down.

At the end of the passage, Farīburz then moralises:

It's wrong if Iran from him should stagnate
Like some poor wretch who loses life for treasure's sake.
I counsel you to dupe him and try to take him in
So that one Greek kingdom might sate and surfeit him.
... One may rule the earth by law and reason [*nāmūs*]¹⁶⁰
And thence raise high the standards of good custom.¹⁶¹

Such omens of the impending catastrophe issued by the ancient kings of Persia can also be found in the Greek *Romance*, as for example when a statue of King Xerxes suddenly falls through the ceiling of Darius's court (see PC, II, 15). However, no counsel could dissuade the Persian king from calling off his battle against Alexander. While Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*¹⁶² has three battles between Alexander and the Persians, according to Niẓāmī there was only one – just as in the PC's account. He describes how, after the customary exchange of letters, the two armies met in “the land of *Jazīra*,¹⁶³ which is Mosul [*Mūṣul*],¹⁶⁴ a delightful place of rest and sweet relaxation”. As Richard Stoneman points out: “indeed, it is not incorrect to say that the battle took place in al-Jazīra, which is Arbela. This indicates that Niẓāmī's source contained more reliable historical information than Firdawsī,”¹⁶⁵ who mentioned the banks of the Euphrates¹⁶⁶ as

¹⁶⁰ This Persian word is derived from the Greek νόμος (law, reason, order, tradition, etc.).

¹⁶¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXVI, pp. 172–3.

¹⁶² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 541ff.

¹⁶³ According to Canard, *Jazīra* “is the name used by Arab geographers to denote the northern part of the territory situated between the Tigris and the Euphrates”. See “al-Djazīra”, *EF*², II, pp. 523–4.

¹⁶⁴ *Mawṣil* – modern-day Mosul – (or al-Mawṣil) is a city in northern Mesopotamia (Iraq), some 400km north of Baghdad. The original city stands “on the west bank of the Tigris River and opposite to ancient Ninevah”. See E. Honigmann [C. E. Bosworth], “al-Mawṣil”, *EF*², VI, pp. 899–901.

¹⁶⁵ R. Stoneman, personal communication.

¹⁶⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, p. 541.

the first battlefield. Bal'amī mentioned the land of Jazīra (*Mūṣul*) as the first battlefield too.¹⁶⁷ It is thus possible that Bal'amī and Niẓāmī had a common source.

Niẓāmī describes the contest between the two armies, a battle that made mountains tremble, before concluding dryly:

Now would you seek for sign of both those kings
Upon that ground are strewn about the bones!¹⁶⁸

Contrary to most of the sources,¹⁶⁹ in which Darius is usually portrayed as cravenly fleeing from the battlefield, in the *Sharafnāma* he appears as a brave warrior:

Commanding his legions from the centre, Darius
Raged on like a dreadful black lion on the loose.
He wielded his sword about his head and cut
And cast his foes headlong before his feet.
He passed nobody by and left no body alive –
In that mad frenzy so much Greek blood he shed
A thousand scarlet Greek corpses lay there dead.¹⁷⁰

Alexander was injured and about to lose the war. Niẓāmī describes how “he took fright at his fearless foe, and reckoning his enemy’s courageousness, decided to turn his reins and flee his foes, and so save himself from their spears.” At this juncture, the poet tells us that battle-hardened Persian troops cut off the Greek army’s advance, so that it seemed that all was lost:

The Greeks were trounced and crushed by Persian troops.
Persians made Greeks captive by Death’s good auspices.¹⁷¹

However, Alexander knew that he would defeat the Persians thanks to the numerological diagram that Nicomachus had given him:

Once more he pinned his hopes on Providence
And pressed on there and held his ground and place.
He knew his luck was great; against the enemy
He would prevail – thus had said the augury.
He knew by fate the upper hand was his
And so he reinforced his arms and forces
To overwhelm Darius in the balance.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Bal'amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal'amī*, vol. II, p. 696.

¹⁶⁸ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXVIII, p. 197.

¹⁶⁹ PC, I, 41–2; Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. V, pp. 541, 547.

¹⁷⁰ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIX, p. 202.

¹⁷¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIX, p. 204.

¹⁷² Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIX, p. 204.

Darius's Betrayal by his Generals

At this desperate moment, two of Darius's generals (*sarhang*; see motif 7 above) proposed to Alexander to kill their king in return for financial recompense that would reward their "golden work with gold".¹⁷³ Although Alexander could not believe that "the unjust officers would commit such a crime against their own lord", he agreed to make a compact with them: "anyone will gladly obtain the jewel by which he may defeat his enemy." Such iniquity appeared to be justified. Nizāmī has Alexander cite a well-known Persian proverb to assuage his moral misgivings: "In that path where justice seemed obtained only by means of injustice, an ancient adage sprang to his mind":

No marvel it is that the hare of every clime
Is only caught by dogs of that same domain.¹⁷⁴

Darius is slain by his two generals. Alexander reaches at the moment of his death and listens to his last words. The passage in which Darius is slain by his own generals appears in the *Romance* (PC, II, 20) as well as in the *Shāhnāma* and most of the Arabic histories.¹⁷⁵ The difference between the accounts is that neither in the Greek version nor in the *Shāhnāma* is there any mention of a deal for his murder negotiated between Alexander and the rebel generals. In fact, in the PC, when "the traitors heard that Alexander was coming, they fled, leaving Darius dying."¹⁷⁶ In the *Sharafnāma*, having arranged the deal with the generals, Alexander regretted it and punished the traitors:

Alexander gave them all the gold he'd promised them
From his treasury just as he had first of all agreed.
But when he put before them the coin in cash
He gainsaid his pledge; he broke his oath
And commanded they be treated with contempt,
And had both of them strung up on the gallows.¹⁷⁷

At Darius's Deathbed: Alexander the Great and Darius's Last Will

Nizāmī also relates an elaborate and poignant dramatic dialogue between the two kings in which Alexander appears to hear his last words (motifs 8 and 9 above) before the Persian monarch was murdered by his two generals, apparently basing his narrative on a

¹⁷³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIX, p. 206.

¹⁷⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIX, p. 206.

¹⁷⁵ For a detail analysis of this passage in the Arabic histories and the *Shāhnāma* see chapters two and three of the present study.

¹⁷⁶ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, II, 20, p. 109.

¹⁷⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXI, p. 228.

passage that originally appeared in the Greek *Romance* (PC, II, 20–1) and the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī. However, Nizāmī’s *Sharafnāma* describes Darius’s will in less detail than the *Shāhnāma*. In the former, Darius begs Alexander to grant him three wishes:

Since you asked about my will, to make my last wish
At this time when over me tears should be shed:
There are three things I secretly desire to have from you
By your good fortune – now king of my realm –
The first regards the slaying of innocent men: I ask
That you be just and fair in all your judgements.
Second, I ask you: let not the Persian throne
And Iran’s crown that now you wear, fall into disrepute;
Make your heart devoid of spite and malice;
Do not eliminate my offspring from the earth.
And third and last, I entreat you take care of all
My servants, my wives treat well, don’t violate them,
And take my daughter Rawshanak, nurtured by me
With human tenderness in hand to share your bed
And be your wife. Kingdoms are made for the flexible.¹⁷⁸

Several of the ancient sources concur on Darius’s will and last words, and coincide with the account given by Nizāmī in the *Sharafnāma*.¹⁷⁹

The Destruction of Zoroastrianism by Alexander

However, according to Nizāmī, despite his promise not to hurt the Persians, Alexander’s first deed as King of Persia is to destroy the fire temples and wipe out the Zoroastrian religion.¹⁸⁰ Nizāmī relates the episode according to “the narrator of former tales who spoke of earlier epochs.” He states:

when a fire was set in the Zoroastrian faith [*dīn-i dihgān*], so that its flame was snuffed out and the fire’s votaries themselves set ablaze, Alexander commanded that the Persians cease to obey the precepts of their fire-worshipping faith [*ātash-parastī*]. They should instead [he ordered] regenerate their ancient faith [*dīn-i dīrīna-yi kh^wud naw kunnad*], and adopt the faith of their king [i.e. Alexander]. He ordered the Magians to throw all their goods and wherewithal

¹⁷⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXIX, p. 219.

¹⁷⁹ Bal’amī also reports these three wishes (*Tārīkh-i Bal’amī*, vol. II, p. 696). See also Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 43; J. S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 79.

¹⁸⁰ In this regard see the important discussion of C. Ciancaglini, “Alessandro e l’incendio di Persepoli nelle tradizioni greca e iranica”, *La diffusione dell’eredità classica nell’età tardoantica emedievale: Forme e metodi di trasmissione*, ed. A. Valvo, (Alexandria, 1997), pp. 59–81; K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*, pp. 33–6; Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 301–2.

into the fire, and instructed the Iranians to hinder the activities of the [votaries of] the fire temple.¹⁸¹

This passage is largely based on a Zoroastrian tradition frequently mentioned in the Middle Persian texts,¹⁸² where Alexander is presented as responsible for two important calamities: the destruction of *Ērānšahr* (the Land of the Aryan Iranians) and the burning and/or stealing of the *Avesta* and its commentary.¹⁸³ These Middle Persian texts say that he slew many Zoroastrian priests (*herbads* and *mobads*) and quenched the sacred fires of many Zoroastrian temples.¹⁸⁴ However, since Niẓāmī writes from a Muslim point of view, the destruction of Zoroastrianism and its scriptures and institutions is presented as an admirable act in the *Sharafnāma*. Niẓāmī also reports two interesting customs in the Zoroastrian tradition. The verse passages concerning these customs, being long and convoluted, have been translated into prose below:

During that age [of the Kayānid kings], according to custom taught [by their religious tradition], in all the fire temples of the day treasures were secured and stored to which no one had access. Men of wealth who had no heirs [upon death] would donate their money, dedicating their goods to the keepers of these temples. This tradition created discontent and desolation in every direction, and filled the fire temples houses with useless treasures. When Alexander laid waste to those temples, the treasures, thus released, flowed out like a sea. He tore down every temple he passed, dug up its treasures and carried them away.

Another misfortune [*āfāt*] was that the [priests among the] fire worshippers would take a different bride to wed each year. At the royal festivals of Nawrūz and Saddah,¹⁸⁵ during which the religious practices of the fire temple were revived and reanimated, every virgin bride who had never seen a husband would hasten out of their houses into the street [to visit the priests at the fire temple]. From the hearths of the Zoroastrians and through the conjuring cant of the *Zend-Avesta*, smoke thus rose up into the highest firmament. Everything those virgins did was alluring and captivating, charming at times by voice, enchanting sometimes with the flesh ... For a whole day, from every mountainside and palace seraglio they flocked and filled the streets to play around and do as they pleased. Every girl caroused and made merry in her own way, from which arose much wickedness and trouble.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, pp. 238–9.

¹⁸² Regarding Pahlavi texts in which Alexander is mentioned, see the appendix to Touraj Daryaei, “*Imitatio Alexandri* and Its Impact on Late Arsacid, Early Sasanian and Middle Persian Literature”, *Electrum* 12 (2007), pp. 93–5; Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 295–7.

¹⁸³ See T. Daryaei, “*Imitatio Alexandri*”, pp. 90–3, where he analyses the content of passages of Middle Persian texts in which Alexander appears. In addition, see Stoneman, “Alexander the Destroyer”, in his *A Life in Legend*, pp. 41–4.

¹⁸⁴ M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London, 1979), p. 78.

¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately, I could not find any reference to either of these festivals in any source.

¹⁸⁶ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, pp. 239–40.

Thus, according to Nizāmī's source, Alexander destroyed the fire temples because he wanted to obtain the treasure hidden in the shrines. From a Muslim point of view, perhaps Nizāmī perceived the second custom regarding the freedom of women among the Zoroastrians to stand in contrast to the religion of Alexander's ancestor (Abraham).¹⁸⁷ This view is attested in the following verses of this passage, in which Alexander ordered "that darling chaste girls should display their face only to their mother or husband".¹⁸⁸ As far as historical factuality is concerned, no attribution of any such act to Alexander appears in any extant Middle Persian,¹⁸⁹ Persian or Arabic source.¹⁹⁰

Apollonius and the Sorcery of the Dragon Zoroastrian Girl¹⁹¹

According to the *Sharafnāma*, following his successful campaign against and defeat of Darius, Alexander left the area of Mosul in Iraq and headed towards Babylon, where he battled with and subdued the sorcerers who were followers of Hārūt, the great Magician of Babylon. He then quenched the sacred fire and destroyed "the sorcery-book of *Zand*".¹⁹² Alexander also "offered religious guidance to the Babylonians by proffering them the faith of his ancestor [Abraham], wiping clean the soot and smoke of fire [worship] from their hearts".¹⁹³ Then he marched towards Adharābādīgān (Azerbaijan, Nizāmī's homeland), where he also destroyed and extinguished "that fire of ancient times".

In an interesting passage here, Nizāmī narrates a story in which a Zoroastrian girl, who "lived in attendance and service of that fire temple according to the Zoroastrian religion and the custom of Magi",¹⁹⁴ turned into a dragon to protect her fire temple – no *Alexander Romance* should never be without an episode of dragon slaying.¹⁹⁵ The girl, called Azarhumāyūn, is a sorceress of the lineage of Sām. When Alexander's army prepares to destroy the fire temple, she appears as a dragon to fend them off. Alexander asks his chief minister for a spell to defeat the dragon. The minister replies that only Balīnās (Apollonius of Tyana),¹⁹⁶ "master of sorcery", knows the

¹⁸⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, p. 241.

¹⁸⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, p. 240.

¹⁸⁹ For English translations of fragments of Middle Persian texts mentioning Alexander, see T. Daryaei, "Imitatio Alexandri", pp. 93–5.

¹⁹⁰ For example, in Bal'amī's *Tārīkh*, which coincides with Nizāmī in the majority of its content, there is no mention of this custom.

¹⁹¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, pp. 242–5.

¹⁹² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, p. 241.

¹⁹³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, p. 241.

¹⁹⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, p. 242.

¹⁹⁵ On the dragon-slaying motif see D. Ogden, "Sekandar, Dragon-Slayer", pp. 277–94. See also chapter three of the present thesis.

¹⁹⁶ On the identification of Balīnās with Apollonius of Tyana see M. Plessner, "Balīnūs", *EP*, I, pp. 994–5. His role at Alexander's side will be studied in this and the next chapter. Piemontese believes that Balīnās is Eupalinus of Megara, an ancient Greek engineer who built the Tunnel of Eupalinus on Samos in the sixth century BC. See Amīr Khusraw of Delhi, *Lo specchio Alessandrino*, trans. Angelo M. Piemontese (Catanzaro, 1999).

remedy against this enchantment. Balīnās explains to Alexander that the dragon's appearance can only be sorcery. The following passage develops the idea:

That sorceress cast no end of magic spells that bewitched all and sundry. No spell, it seemed, worked against her, for all spells and imprecations cast on her were hurled right back at those who sent them. All wise and clever men were thus subdued and made captive by that sorceress's artifices. A time came, however, when these difficulties passed and that lucky star came to hand by which he [Balīnās] could subdue this sorcery. He commanded that a handful of rue seed be cast on the dragon, which quenched and quelled her like water does fire. By that single ruse he confounded all her tricks and overcame her deception and trickery.¹⁹⁷

When the dragon form was dissolved and Balīnās saw the beautiful girl, he fell in love with her. He stopped Alexander's soldiers from killing her and protected her. Then Balīnās presented the girl to Alexander, who gave her to him as his wife. Nizāmī says that from her "Balīnās learned all kinds of sorceries, and because of her today he bears the name of 'Balīnās, the Magician'."

According to these verses, Apollonius acquired his abilities as a magician from a Zoroastrian girl, and in this context it is worth mentioning that, curiously enough, in "Apollonius's two letters to Euphrates (Epp. Apoll. 16–17), where he tried to explain to Euphrates what being a magician really meant, he admits that the kind of religion held by the Persian Magi is closest to his spiritual needs. The Magi's persuasion is his religion."¹⁹⁸ According to Bidez and Cumont, "Similar contradictory opinions were expressed on Pythagoras, Orpheus, Plato and Socrates, who were also said to have practised magic and to have maintained contacts with the Magi."¹⁹⁹ As Nizāmī located this story in Azerbaijan, it is possible that he had set to verse popular lore and legends about Balīnās in circulation in his homeland.

Alexander Marries Rawshanak, Visits Mecca, Establishes Tbilisi ...

Alexander then marches towards Isfahan, where he formally marries Rawshanak, Darius's daughter (see motif 10 above).²⁰⁰ Finally, he is crowned in Ištakhr (Persepolis).²⁰¹ However, in contrast to the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, Nizāmī has Alexander send Rawshanak, accompanied by Aristotle, to Rūm, where she gives birth

¹⁹⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, pp. 243–4.

¹⁹⁸ See the chapter "Tradition on Apollonius' Magic" in M. Dzielska, *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History* (Rome, 1986), p. 89. See also J. Christoph Bürgel, "Occult Sciences in the *Iskandarnāmah* of Nizami", *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love and Rhetoric*, ed. K. Talattof and J. W. Clinton (New York, 2000), pp. 129–39.

¹⁹⁹ J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages Hellénisés, Zoroaster, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la Tradition grecque* (Paris, 1938), vol. I, pp. ix, 33; J. Gagé, *Basiléia, les Césars, les Rois d'Orient et les Mages* (Paris, 1968), pp. 339–45.

²⁰⁰ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXIII, pp. 245–56.

²⁰¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXIV, p. 258.

to a son called Iskandarūs.²⁰² Then he marches west, to Arabia.²⁰³ He visits Yemen and Mecca, where he performs a religious ceremony in the Ka‘ba (see motif 11 above), the account of which is similar to the *Shāhnāma*, although Nizāmī’s passage in the *Sharafnāma* is far more elaborate:

His face shining with joy, he marched then
 Towards the Ka‘ba with all due rites performed.
 He set his foot upon the navel of the earth
 – How many a knot indeed that navel unravels! –
 Like the circling compass of Heaven’s Wheel
 He stepped to its centre on devotion’s feet,
 Circumambulating the shrine that all adore
 He grasped the door ring of the holy house:
 First he kissed with reverence the Ka‘ba’s gate,
 Recollecting God-the-Protector with all his heart.
 He laid his head on that holy portal to pray
 And to the poor gave copious alms from his treasury.
 His coins flowed out like treasures manifold!
 How plentiful were the camels that he sacrificed!
 When his place in the House of the Righteous he’d made
 And showed his devotion to God with both heart and hand
 The Ka‘ba was filled with treasure and jewels galore;
 Its roof and door adorned with musk and ambergris.²⁰⁴

This motif is probably a literary imitation and parallel of Alexander’s entrance to Jerusalem recounted by Muslim authors. If Alexander went to Jerusalem according to the Jewish tradition, there is no reason why he shouldn’t go to Mecca in the Islamic tradition. However, Nizāmī does not use the word *hajj* (pilgrimage); nor does he attribute any pilgrimage to Alexander, nor yet the performance of any of the rituals at Mecca that traditionally form part of the Muslim *hajj*.²⁰⁵ This is important since the Arabic sources do use the word *hajj*.²⁰⁶ For instance, Dīnawarī in his *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* does say that Alexander performed the *hajj* to the House of God.²⁰⁷ It is more likely that what Nizāmī had in mind was a visit to the ancient shrine erected at Mecca by Abraham.²⁰⁸ Indeed, in the *Sharafnāma*, Alexander is portrayed as Abraham’s

²⁰² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 263.

²⁰³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXVI, p. 271. The direction of his travel was evidently south, but Nizāmī says west because, according to the Islamic tradition, Alexander reached both extremes of the world, East and West.

²⁰⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 272–3.

²⁰⁵ A. J. Wensinck, “Hadjj”, *EP*, III, pp. 31–3.

²⁰⁶ See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 31, 159.

²⁰⁷ Dīnawarī, *Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Amīr and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shiyal (Cairo, 1960), pp. 33–4.

²⁰⁸ Emel Esin, *Mecca the Blessed, Madinah the Radiant* (New York, 1963), pp. 18–22.

descendant. Nizāmī refers to Alexander’s religion as being *ḥanīfī* (which, according to the Qur’ān, is a kind of monotheism characteristic of Abraham).²⁰⁹

After his visit to Mecca, Alexander marches towards Iraq and then Azerbaijan, where he is informed that the people of nearby Armenia still follow Zoroastrianism. He then leads his army from Babylon to Armenia,²¹⁰ where he destroys the fire temples.²¹¹ Thence he makes “an assault against Abkhaz”, where the ruler, a Kurdish man called Dawālī, offers him his land and his loyalty.

Nizāmī then quotes from “the old *dihqān*” that Alexander founded the city of Tiflīs (Tbilisi, in modern-day Georgia) there.²¹² Traditionally, the foundation of Tbilisi is attributed to King Vaxtang Gorgasali (r. 447–522).²¹³ Brosset dated the city’s foundation to AD 455 or 458, when the capital of Georgia was transferred there from nearby Mtskheta (Ptolemy, *Geography*, 5.10: Μεστλήτα = Μεσχῆτα).²¹⁴ According to the medieval (ninth–fourteenth-century) collection of Georgian historical texts known as *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, a Sasanian force sent against Varaz-Bak’ar (379–93?), King of Georgia (Xuasrovanis, descended from the Sassanians),²¹⁵ built Tiflis “between the Gates of the Caucasus” (i.e. between Darial and Darband) “to serve as a bulwark against Mtskheta”.²¹⁶ Hence, it is likely that the designation of Alexander as Tbilisi’s founding father was simply a way to emphasise the city’s antiquity. According to the Georgian historical tradition, Alexander installed the first sovereign of Georgia at Tiflis after he had subjugated the country,²¹⁷ but there is no mention of its foundation by Alexander.

IV. Further Adventures of Alexander: Journeys to China, Russia, India and the Land of Darkness

Alexander at the Court of Queen Nūshāba (Candace)

The following passages in the *Sharafnāma* narrate the episode of Queen Nūshāba at some length. Queen Nūshāba replaces Queen Candace of the PC²¹⁸ (motif 12 above) and Queen Qaidāfa of Firdawsī.²¹⁹ Nizāmī located her kingdom in Barda’ (Partaw in Caucasian Albania), a city that was in Nizāmī’s neighbourhood. Khāqānī of Shirvān (c. 1127; d. between 1186–7 and 1199),²²⁰ a contemporary poet who lived near Nizāmī’s

²⁰⁹ See W. Montgomery Watt, “Ḥanīf”, *EF*, III, pp. 165–6.

²¹⁰ Actually, according to the *Greek Romance* (PC, II, 9), “Alexander was keen to conquer Greater Armenia” and so subdued it.

²¹¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXVI, pp. 273–4.

²¹² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXVI, p. 275.

²¹³ Stephen H. Rapp Jr, *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature* (Farnham, 2014), p. 269.

²¹⁴ M. F. Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie* (St Petersburg, 1849), vol. I, p. 140.

²¹⁵ On the Sasanians and Xuasrovanis see Stephen H. Rapp Jr, *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes*, p. 269.

²¹⁶ V. Minorsky [C. E. Bosworth], “al-Kurdj”, *EF*, V, pp. 487–98.

²¹⁷ Van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, p. 215.

²¹⁸ In the *Greek Romance* (PC, III, 18–23) she is renowned as the Queen of Meroe.

²¹⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, pp. 51–74. In the *Shāhnāma* she is known as the Queen of al-Andalus.

²²⁰ On Khāqānī’s life and works see Anna Livia Beelaert, “Kāqānī Šervānī”, *EIr*, XV/5, pp. 521–9.

home town, devoted many verses of his *Dīvān* to the story of Queen Candace.²²¹ Khāqānī's quotations indicate that the story of Queen Candace was popular in Azerbaijan, where both poets lived. That Khāqānī named the queen Qaidāfa (Candace) demonstrates that Nizāmī's naming her Nūshāba was deliberate, perhaps reflecting a choice to present a more familiar name to his audience.²²²

The tale consists of two parts. Firstly, Alexander goes in disguise to Nūshāba's court, but she recognises him because she has had his portrait painted. Secondly, there is a banquet in honour of the queen. Nizāmī dedicated more than fifty verses to the description of Nūshāba's country, palace and court:

A thousand virgin girls were at her service and, besides damsels skilful in riding, thirty thousand swordsmen in her army. However, no men had access to her court, except those who were close to her. Her counsellors were all women who had no husband ... Her throne was made of crystal [*bulūr*] embedded with so many precious stones that they shone at night like the moon. Besides worshipping God, they had no other occupation except drinking, eating and sleeping. She spent the night worshipping, and the day drinking accompanied by music and the songs of minstrels.²²³

Upon hearing the tale of this fabulous queen and her court, Alexander became eager to visit Nūshāba's country. Along with a small entourage, Alexander camped near the borders of her kingdom. When Nūshāba learned of this, every day she sent him a different kind of food made from local produce of her land. This charming and hospitable behaviour of course only increased Alexander's desire to visit her, although – typical military strategist that he was – he also wanted to obtain news of the secrets of her kingdom's administration in order, in Nizāmī's words, to “discover whether the tale was true or false”.²²⁴

To this end, he travelled in disguise to her court impersonating his own ambassador. When Nūshāba was informed that the “king of Rūm” (*shah-i rūm*) was in her country, she sat on her throne with a “ball of amber” (*ma'anbar turanjī*) in her hand.²²⁵ When she received Alexander, he neither removed his sword nor knelt before her, as was the customary protocol among messengers. Nūshāba, who had a painting of Alexander, immediately saw through his disguise. However, she did not show that she had recognised him until Alexander had delivered his “king's” message to her in a bold and arrogant manner. She then revealed to him that she knew who he was. When Alexander refuted her and continued to deny his identity, she became insistent and spoke sharply to the conqueror, commanding her courtiers to bring forth the piece of silk on which Alexander's image had been painted. Alexander turned pale and became

²²¹ Khāqānī Shirvānī, *Dīvān*, ed. Sajjādī, pp. 80, 177, 403.

²²² See F. de Blois, “Eskandar-Nāma of Nezāmī”, *Elr*, VIII/6, p. 614.

²²³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 277–8, 279–80.

²²⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 281.

²²⁵ According to S. Ḥamidīyān (editor of the *Iskandarnāma*) it was customary for kings (or queens in this instance) to hold amber in their hands for its fragrance. See Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXVIII, p. 282, n. 5.

frightened when he saw his own image, forced now to disclose his true identity. At this moment, Queen Nūshāba relented and softened towards him, speaking gently to him.

The first portion of the Nūshāba episode has crucial importance for Alexander's progress towards perfect kingship. The parallel episode in the *Shāhnāma* (which concerns Qaidāfa, Queen of al-Andalus)²²⁶ is very close to the Greek version (PC, III, 18–23). However, Nizāmī's treatment of the story differs both in the attention and importance accorded to the queen (i.e. Nūshāba) and in the alteration of some details. The ethical significance of this episode is indicated in Nūshāba's speech where she accuses Alexander of immaturity and arrogance.²²⁷ Nizāmī has her show "him first his own image so that he might recognise and appreciate hers".²²⁸

Without self-knowledge, one cannot perceive the Divine, here represented by the female character who represents the divine immanence: the Lady Beloved as theophanic receptacle.²²⁹ Thus, Nūshāba becomes a mirror in which Alexander may contemplate and apprehend the qualities of his own soul, which had first been symbolised by his painted image. As he finally accepts Nūshāba's superiority, Nizāmī presents her queenly wisdom as incarnating divine guidance for Alexander in his quest for moral perfection and self-knowledge.

Alexander in Darband

At this juncture, Nizāmī tells us that Alexander has assembled such a vast amount of treasure that it was becoming difficult for him to continue his expedition. Thus, after burying his treasure in the ground following Apollonius's advice, Alexander marches towards the Alburz Mountains, passing through Shirvān to Darband.²³⁰

When Alexander drove his troops towards the Alburz Mountains, in every place and province he set up an administrator. Through mountain passes difficult of access he pushed his army's supplies – he charged like a lion through Shirvān. The purpose of his forced march was to press on and reach the road to Darband.²³¹

²²⁶ See chapter three of this thesis.

²²⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXVII, p. 285:

نظر پخته تر کن که خام آمدی

²²⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXVII, p. 287:

به نقش تو زان نمودم نخست

که تا نقش من بر تو گردد درست

²²⁹ This motif of the Sophianic Feminine in Nizāmī's romances has been extensively treated by Michael Barry. See *Farīd-od-Dīn 'Attār: The Canticle of the Birds Illustrated through Persian and Eastern Art*, trans. A. Darbandi and Dick Davis, with commentary by Michael Barry (Paris, 2014), pp. 139–54, where Barry connects the motif of the theophany of the Lady Beloved throughout Nizāmī's various *mathnawīs* to that found in 'Attār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.

²³⁰ See Erich Kettenhofen, "Darband", *EI*, VII/1, pp. 13–19; D. M. Dunlop, "Bāb al-Abwāb", *EI*², I, pp. 835–6. To clarify the geography we provide some maps on the location of key regions mentioned in this chapter, see Appendix III.

²³¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLI, p. 316.

In Darband there is a fortress said to be full of treasure, which Alexander's army battles for forty days to open, to no avail, for "they could not knock down even one clod from its ramparts."²³² Wearying of the fruitless siege, Alexander summons a new meeting (*majlis*) of his generals and head officers. One of his men informs him that in a certain cave there was a pious devotee who might know how to conquer the fortress. The ascetic supplicates in such a way that the mountain is shattered and the fortress collapses.²³³

While Alexander is in Darband, the Khazar folk (Khazrānyān), who "dwelled in the vicinity of that mountainous fortress, accused the people of Qipchak [Qafchāq] of tyranny at the king's court", and entreated Alexander to build a gate against them.²³⁴ Thus the king ordered the Khazars together to close the mountain passes against the people of Qipchak:

they erected a barrier on that narrow pass, making use of granite, steel and tin. Master builders in stone, adept in the precepts of their trade, versed in the fortification of fortresses, were summoned. He called up a multitude of men and set them to the task of closing the mountain pass [from the Qipchak hordes].²³⁵

Darband (literally: "pass"), also known as the "Caspian Gate," and attested as *Bāb al-abwāb* ("Supreme Gate" or "Gate of Gates")²³⁶ in Arabic, is erroneously identified by some historians with the Gate of Alexander.²³⁷ The Darband fortress was certainly the most prominent Sasanian defensive construction in the Caucasus.²³⁸ The anonymous author of the twelfth-century *Mujmal al-tavārīkh* was aware of this fact and stressed that: "He who built the *Bāb al-Abwāb* [Gate of Gates] was Khusraw I, Anūshīrvān ... to protect [his kingdom] from the Turks. Of course, those who do not know the history well attributed that gate to Alexander."²³⁹ The Syriac traditions located Alexander's Gate in the Caucasus Mountains too.²⁴⁰

The *Sharafnāma* mentions two different gates or barriers and, according to Niẓāmī, Alexander's gate in Darband is not related to the wall he built against Gog and Magog. The passage on the construction of the Wall of Gog (Magog is not mentioned by the poet) comes in an episode in the *Iqbāl-nāma* (the second part of the

²³² Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLI, p. 317.

²³³ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLI, pp. 321–2.

²³⁴ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLI, p. 323.

²³⁵ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLI, p. 323.

²³⁶ D. M. Dunlop, "Bāb al-Abwāb", *EF*, I, pp. 835–6.

²³⁷ See A. R. Anderson, "Alexander at the Caspian Gates", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 59 (1928), pp. 130–63; Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, 1932). For a long discussion of the symbolism and history underlying (with translation of the *Sharafnāma*'s text concerning) Alexander's attack on the castle of Darband and his related adventures, see Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herāt* (Paris, 2004), pp. 291–300.

²³⁸ See R. N. Frye, "The Sasanian System of Walls for Defense", *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. M. Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 11–12.

²³⁹ *Mujmal*, ed. Bahār, p. 76.

²⁴⁰ See the study of Van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, p. 216. On Alexander's barrier in the Syriac tradition, see pp. 17–30.

Iskandarnāma), which will be discussed in the next chapter.²⁴¹ Thus, although Niẓāmī was indeed aware of the fact that Darband (the Caspian Gate) was not the same as the Wall of Gog and Magog, there was evidently some confusion in his sources.²⁴²

Historically speaking, while Alexander did indeed pass through the Caspian Gates, the “Caspian Gates” he went through – as described by Arrian (*Anabasis* 3.19.2) – are to be identified with a defile in the Alburz Mountains in the vicinity of Rhagāi (Ray).²⁴³ There is also, incidentally, an “Iron Gate” on the route from Termez to Shahrisabz in Uzbekistan, through which he probably passed.²⁴⁴

Niẓāmī’s mistake might have stemmed from the fact that the same name (Darband) was applied to two locations in Caucasus: the “Pass of Derbend” between the Caucasus Mountains and the western shore of the Caspian Sea and the “Dariel Pass” (from the Parthian *Dar i Alān*, Gate of the Alāns), which runs north–south through the Caucasus Mountains from Tbilisi to Ordzhonikidze. In classical Greek geography, the location of the Caspian Gates was fixed at the Dariel Pass.²⁴⁵ This is the tradition followed by the *Alexander Romance* of the PC, so that the movements of Alexander following the death of Darius are attached to mountains of the Caucasus region rather than to those of the Hindu Kush.²⁴⁶

This in fact corresponds exactly to the situation outlined in the *Sharafnāma*, which no doubt reflects Niẓāmī’s source. He rightly locates this episode in the Alburz Mountains, between the episode of Queen Nūshāba of Barda‘ (Partaw in Caucasian Albania), and Sarīr (in Dāghistān, ancient Albania). Thus, the word *Darband* in this episode most probably refers to the Dariel Pass (also known as the Gate of Alān). However, it is interesting that Niẓāmī clearly distinguishes it from the Wall of Gog and Magog.

Alexander and the Fortress of Kay Khusraw

After building the gate against the Qipchak, there is a beautiful passage in which Alexander goes to the fortress of Sarīr (located in ancient Albania), where he visits the mythical throne and magic goblet of Kay Khusraw. Niẓāmī affirms that during soirées (*shab-afsāna*) storytellers recited stories about that land to Alexander, informing him of the existence of a fortress in which Kay Khusraw’s throne (*sarīr* in Arabic) and goblet

²⁴¹ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, ed. V. Dastgirdī, re-ed. S. Ḥamīdiyān (Tehran, 1376/1997), pp. 220–32.

²⁴² On the confusion arising from the ancient sources’ mistaken identification of the pass at Darband with the Dar’yal Pass in the central Caucasus see Erich Kettenhofen, “Darband”, *EIr*, VII/1, pp. 13–19.

²⁴³ See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 77.

²⁴⁴ R. Stoneman, personal communication.

²⁴⁵ Particularly important is Suetonius’s remark in his biography of Nero (19.1) where the emperor prepares for war against the Albanians, which gives a clear indication that he identified the Caspian Gates with the Darband Pass. See D. C. Braund, “The Caucasian Frontier: Myth, Exploration and the Dynamics of Imperialism”, *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East*, ed. P. Freeman and D. Kennedy (Oxford: 1986), pp. 31–49; W. F. Standish, “The Caspian Gates”, *Greece & Rome* 17 (1970), pp. 12–24.

²⁴⁶ See R. Stoneman, “Romantic Ethnography: Central Asia and India in the *Alexander Romance*”, *Ancient World* 25 (1994), pp. 93–107.

were to be found.²⁴⁷ This is an important motif since it elevates Alexander to the rank of Kay Khusraw, a very important king in Persian myth and history.

Here a few issues need to be clarified. First of all, the anonymous *Hudūd al-‘ālam* (*The Limits of the World*) mentions both this fortress and its throne.²⁴⁸ The attribution of this fortress and its throne to Kay Khusraw is due to a tale in the *Shāhnāma* in which Kay Khusraw captures Afrāsīyāb around that region,²⁴⁹ having pursued him to Azerbaijan. Firdawsī also affirms that there was a cave near Barda‘ where Afrāsīyāb hid himself.²⁵⁰

The passage in the *Sharafnāma* is highly influenced by this episode in the *Shāhnāma*. Niẓāmī portrays Alexander as sitting on Kay Khusraw’s throne and drinking wine from his cup, and finally going into his cave. Here Niẓāmī compares Alexander’s mirror with Kay Khusraw’s cup²⁵¹ – two motifs which were often conflated and combined in later Persian poetry.²⁵² Through this parallelism, Niẓāmī transforms Alexander into another Kay Khusraw, combining his knowledge of the geography and local mythology of his homeland with other versions of this ancient tale.

On the other hand, according to the Iranian scholar Ḥasan Ṣafavī, Alexander’s visit to Kay Khusraw’s cave reflects a historical event (Alexander’s visit to Cyrus’s tomb), and the combination of Persian legends: the identification of Kay Khusraw with Cyrus the Great, Kay Khusraw’s disappearance in the Caucasus Mountains, and the identification of Yazdgird’s (the last Sasanian king) golden throne in Sarīr as Khusraw’s throne.²⁵³ Thus, as Ṣafavī points out, the foundational part of this story is Alexander’s visit to Cyrus the Great’s tomb. In the second stage, because in Persian tradition Kay Khusraw is identified with Cyrus the Great, most of the Persian legends attributed to him were added to the story. Finally, the last Sasanian king’s throne²⁵⁴ was erroneously identified as Kay Khusraw’s throne, and, according to Niẓāmī, this is what Alexander visited.

Another important anecdote in the same passage relates to the presence of Balīnās (Apollonius), who is portrayed as examining Kay Khusraw’s cup, “to seek out its full mystery”. According to the secrets of the cup, when Balīnās returned to Rūm, he invented the astrolabe.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁷ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLI, p. 324.

²⁴⁸ *Hudūd al-‘ālam min al-mashriq ilā maghrib*, ed. M. Sutūda (Tehran, 1362/1983), p. 192.

²⁴⁹ *Mujmal*, p. 50.

²⁵⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. IV, pp. 312–13.

²⁵¹ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 327–28:

The key that Kay Khusraw saw by the cup,
That key is in your mirror.
Save this is no spark of difference – for fame and name,
You see from the mirror; and Kay Khusraw, from the cup.

²⁵² See the lengthy study of the mirror and goblet symbolism in Persian poetry in M. Murtaḍavī, *Maktab-i Ḥāfiẓ* (Tabriz, 1383/2004), pp. 207–14; R. Stoneman, “Alexander’s Mirror”.

²⁵³ Ṣafavī, *Iskandar va adabīyāt-i Irān*, p. 178.

²⁵⁴ Mas‘ūdī mentions this throne in the *Murūj* (vol. I, p. 83). Also, in a fragment cited in Ibn al-Faqīh (*Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1885 [repr. 1967]), p. 291), al-Ya‘qūbī mentions a “Ṣāhib al-sarīr” (Master of the Throne). See Minorsky, *History of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th–11th Centuries* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 97ff.

²⁵⁵ Niẓāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLIII, pp. 335–6.

Then Balīnās examines Kay Khusraw’s cave and casts a spell on his throne. This passage bears a great resemblance to the episode in the *Shāhnāma* where Alexander reaches a palace made of topaz upon a high mountain.²⁵⁶ In the Greek *Romance*, there is a similar episode (PC, III, 28) in which Alexander enters the royal palace of Cyrus, where he sees, among other marvellous things, “a large engraved golden mixing bowl” and “a throne of gold”. It is no coincidence that this episode in Nizāmī’s work deals with Kay Khusraw, who is normally identified with Cyrus the Great.²⁵⁷ There are two interesting similarities between the Greek *Romance* and the *Sharafnāma* on the one hand, and the *Shāhnāma* on the other. In the *Romance* (PC, III, 28) it is said that Alexander’s army chanced upon a deserted palace on a mountain top:

We left there and came to the harbour of Lyssos. Here there was a very high mountain ... as we and the army settled down to dinner, there was a sudden tremendous sound, loud as thunder, of pipes and many cymbals ... the whole mountain began to smoke as if we had been struck by lightning. We were afraid and left the palace ...²⁵⁸

In the *Sharafnāma*, Alexander is likewise depicted upon a high mountain, in Kay Khusraw’s cave (rather than a palace or fortress), where he realises, after consulting experts in the caves of the area, that it was actually a sulphur mine (perhaps a volcano?):

After a moment became visible the fire that scorched all who approached it. He asked of one experienced in these affairs: “Whence spring these sparks? In this narrow cave how can there be such vaporous smoke?” The expert gazed down into the cave’s narrow shaft and saw how fire blazed from its granite stones. Deeper down therein he saw an endless burning pit, from which a marvellous light glowed. The source of that illumination was known to none, for no access to it could be had. However much the source of that light was sought, none could identify it. That brave man then tied a rope round his waist and boldly lowered himself down into that flaming pit. He sought a sign of the source of its brilliant combustion: of how and from where the light glowed forth from that pit. Scattered all round its sides fire burst out of the rocks. He gazed at this and realised that it was a sulphur mine.²⁵⁹

In the *Shāhnāma*, when Alexander approaches the throne he finds that it is enchanted: “Anyone who approached the throne for a drink or just set foot inside the palace, remained stuck in the ground and his entire body began to shake. He started to fall apart and turned to dust.”²⁶⁰ In the *Sharafnāma*, it is Balīnās who is responsible for

²⁵⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VI, p. 100.

²⁵⁷ On this issue see W. Duleba, *The Cyrus Legend in the Šāhnāme* (Krakow, 1995); Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Kay Khusraw va Kūrush”, pp. 158–70.

²⁵⁸ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, p. 147.

²⁵⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 337–8.

²⁶⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, VI, p. 101.

enchaining the throne and placing a talisman over it as protection from intruders – such that anyone unskilled in talismanic sorcery who attempted to sit atop that throne would be cast off.

The Competition between the Byzantine and Chinese Painters

Following in the virtual footsteps of Kay Khusraw, but in a contrary direction,²⁶¹ Alexander is then depicted by Nizāmī as marching towards Ray and Khurāsān, where he destroys many fire temples and founds the city of Herat.²⁶² He passes through Balkh, Ghazna, and Ghūr on the way to India. Nizāmī presents Alexander’s march to Tibet and then China.²⁶³ His account differs from that of the *Shāhnāma* insofar as Nizāmī makes the Chinese Emperor go to Alexander in disguise (as an ambassador) while the other sources have Alexander go to the Emperor in disguise. This episode permits Nizāmī to tell some lovely stories about Chinese painting and the prophet Mānī.²⁶⁴ It is worth mentioning that the Persian word *Chīn* is applied to Chinese or East Turkistan while *Māchīn* refers to Great China. Therefore, in the Persian literature, if and when Alexander is depicted as a traveller to Chīn (Turkestan), this theme (see motif 15) is probably simply an echo of his expedition in Central Asia. This explains why the building of such cities as Samarqand, Balkh and Merv is also portrayed in this episode.

This passage permits Nizāmī to insert into the narrative two beautiful tales that appear to be unconnected to the *Alexander Romance* in its original form.²⁶⁵ He had a philosophical purpose in doing so. The two tales narrate a competition between Chinese and Byzantine painters, on the one hand, and the tale of Mānī, the painter prophet, on the other. Both tales concern the role of imagination in Sufi *gnosis* and the mystical theme that spiritual “contemplation” and “reflection” of certain images leads to knowledge of the heart.²⁶⁶ Nizāmī’s source for the first tale is Ghazālī’s (1058–1111) allegory in *Ihyā ‘ulūm al-Dīn (Revitalisation of the Religious Sciences)*.²⁶⁷ Here follows the tale according to Nizāmī.

During Alexander’s banquet with the Emperor of China (*Khāqān-i Chīn*), the attendees praise the most famous experts of their respective lands. One proclaims that

²⁶¹ In the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, Kay Khusraw pursues Afrāsīyāb from Ray and Khurāsān and reaches Caucasia passing over the Caspian Sea. In the *Sharafnāma*, Alexander starts his journey from Caucasia and then reaches Khurāsān and Ray.

²⁶² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLIV, pp. 342–50.

²⁶³ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XLVII, p. 366.

²⁶⁴ The founder of Manicheism in the third century A.D. See Werner Sundermann, “Mani”, *EIr*, Online edition, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mani-founder-manicheism>.

²⁶⁵ These tales (e.g. the competition between the Chinese and Roman painters, the painting of Mānī, etc.) have been the subject of much learned research and many publications. The best of these studies, which covers all these motifs and their interpretation along with their Greek and Byzantine parallels is Stoneman, “Alexander’s Mirror”. On the comparison of Ghazālī, Nizāmī, Rūmī and other versions of the tale, see A. Kitābī, “Qiṣṣa-yi mirī kardan-i rūmīyān va chīmiyān dar ‘ilm-i naqqāshī va šuratgarī”, *Āyina-yi Mirāth*, 36–7 (1386/2007), pp. 258–71.

²⁶⁶ For a good study of the mystical themes of both these tales in the *Sharafnāma*, see Michael Barry’s “Nizāmī on Painters in the Book of Alexander” in his *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, pp. 263–8.

²⁶⁷ Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad Ghazālī, *Ihyā ‘ulūm al-Dīn, Vol. III: Rub‘ mahlakāt*, trans. M. Muḥammad Khwarazmī, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 1368/1989), p. 46.

the Byzantine (*rūm*) painters are the best in the world, while the other objects that the Chinese painters are better. An altercation arises. Finally, it is decided that a dome will be built, the two halves of the interior separated by a curtain down the middle, and on either side the Chinese and Byzantine painters would paint their half of the dome. When the curtain is removed and their images are revealed, they turn out to be identical in every respect. They are mirror images of each other (*ki īn mīpaḍīruft u ān mīnimūd*). Alexander is unable to judge which group of painters, Chinese or Byzantine, is the more expert. The mage Balīnās, Alexander’s wise minister, then interposes a veil once again between the two paintings in such a way that while the delineations of the Byzantine painters do not lose their lustre and colour, obscurity (*zang*) falls upon the polished surface of the Chinese. The secret of the two groups of artists is then revealed: while the Byzantine painters were actually engaged in painting, the Chinese were polishing their half of the dome into a mirror.²⁶⁸

According to Ghazālī, the story is an allegory of the difference between the theoretical knowledge of the philosophers (the Byzantine painters) and the intuitive wisdom of the Sufi mystics (the Chinese painters). While the philosophers try to explain the divine mysteries technically, the intuitive mystics perceive the same cosmic truth and vision immediately through the “reflection” of divine inspiration, “because they can contemplate the Divine mysteries in the polished mirror of their purified hearts”.²⁶⁹

The polished heart as a mirror on the Unseen world is one of the characteristics of the *awlīya* (friends of God, Sufi saints). This motif becomes a very important aspect of the *Alexander Romance* and the conqueror’s spiritual personality in the second part of the *Iskandarnāma* since it is a crucial stage in his process of attaining divine kingship.²⁷⁰

Alexander’s Russian Campaigns

We can now turn to examine Nizāmī’s account of Alexander’s campaign against the Russians. The poet relates that “after Alexander’s visit to China, he was keen to come back to his homeland”, “even though his dominions spanned innumerable lands”.²⁷¹ At this juncture, the ruler of Abkhaz comes to Alexander and complains to him about the tyranny of the Russians:

Those quarrelsome Russian tribes, the Alān and Gark
Ambushed and attacked us hard like a barrage of hail!
They’ve overthrown all Barda’s kingdom and carried
Off by pillage many cities full of wealth with them!
They’ve borne away in rapine Nūshāba, our queen.

²⁶⁸ The tale is also told by Rūmī (*Mathnavī*, ed. and trans. R. A. Nicolson (Tehran, 1356/1977), Book I, couplets 3459–99). However, in his version the roles of the Byzantine and the Chinese are reversed and Alexander is left out of the tale, replaced by an anonymous sultan.

²⁶⁹ See Stoneman, “Alexander’s Mirror”; Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, p. 262.

²⁷⁰ This point will be studied in the next chapter.

²⁷¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LV, p. 419.

Upon the stones of war her flagon lies broken!²⁷²

In order to release Queen Nūshāba and help the people of Abkhaz defend themselves against Russian attack, Alexander marches from the Jayhūn River – the Turkish name for the Amū Daryā (its Arabic name) or Oxus (its Greek name) – towards Khwārazm till he reaches the Steppe of Qipchak (*dasht-i Qafchāq*). There he engages the Russians in seven battles. In each battle, Nizāmī narrates the heroic acts of soldiers from both armies. However, perhaps the most interesting point²⁷³ here is Nizāmī’s description of the people of Rūs:

- 1) They are said to comprise seven tribes, five of which he names: the Burtās, Alāns, Khazars, Isū and Args.
- 2) They are renowned for their endurance and tolerance of difficult conditions.
- 3) Alexander describes them as renowned rogues and expert bandits: “Only when engaging in thieving, treachery and highway robbery do they display manliness or are battle-hardy.”²⁷⁴
- 4) They fight naked and without any weapons.

Nizāmī also mentions a hatred that prevailed between the Russians and the Turks, an enmity that Alexander used to his own advantage:

Although the Turks with Greeks are not allied by kinship ties, yet their rage and rancour towards the Russians is far greater than that towards the Greeks. On this strong battle footing, by the sharp darts of the Turks one may cast blisters on the feet of the Russians as they fly! Many a toxin there is that destroys the body, the cure of which is another kind of poison.²⁷⁵

Nizāmī describes the seven battles in detail; he even names the heroes of each army (e.g. Zarīvand of Māzandarān, an Alān called Faranja, a Russian called Ṭarṭūs who affirms that in the Russian language he is called “Rustam of Russia”).²⁷⁶ Nizāmī affirms that the people of Burtās wear helmets or hats of fox fur, adding that the fox fur of that land was very well known. He also tells us that they wear a fox-fur garment called a *purṭās*.²⁷⁷

²⁷² Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LV, p. 420.

²⁷³ Nizāmī’s description of the Russians and their customs is one of the first of its type found in the Persian literature, which gives it great historical significance.

²⁷⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LVI, p. 433:

به دزدی و سالوسی و رهزنی نمایند مردی و مردافگنی

²⁷⁵ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LVI, p. 434:

اگر چه نشد ترک با روم خویش هم از رومشان کینه از روس بیش

²⁷⁶ مرا مادر من که طرطوس خواند به روسی زبان رستم روس خواند

²⁷⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LVIII, p. 439:

The Giant Russian Ghoul

Among the accounts of these battles, the appearance of a giant ghoul in the Russian army during the sixth battle is worth mentioning. Nizāmī describes him as follows:

Like the Leviathan arising from the depths of the sea, one warrior came forth clad in an old hide. In the maelstrom of action he was huge as a mountain on feet and in bulk his might far greater than five hundred horsemen. As he flexed his gnarled, gritty fists to maul his foes, he made hard diamond seem soft as dough. He attacked like a bloodthirsty devil flying out of the mouth of hell. Although his legs were shackled by a chain, his stature and strength were immense. His sole weapon was an iron mace curved at the top, with which he could sweep up and cast down a mountain.²⁷⁸

Astonished at the sight of this wild giant, Alexander asks after his origins. One of his men, who knows the area quite well, describes the ghoul as follows:

Near the Land of Darkness lies a mountain, the way to which is narrow as the breadth of a hair. On that mountain live men of this immense bodily frame, their flesh of earthly origin but their strength like iron. No one really knows their true origin, their homeland or where was their first haunt and habitat. All have ruddy faces and blue eyes, and when enraged they fear not even lions. One of them can fight a whole battalion, so strong and sure-footed are they in battle. Whether these ghouls be male or female matters not: the day one goes to war with them one summons up the end of the world. Fighting fit, in every contest they come out on top, their religion is the art of combat. No one has ever seen one of these ghouls dead: only alive and even these one rarely sees. Each ghoul owns a herd of sheep, by which they make their living. Their strength in trade lies in marten pelts and wool; they value no other goods than these. None of them stores up any wealth, for the only thing they recognise and cherish as riches is the black sable, which can be found nowhere else but in that land. From each ghoul's brow springs a horn like that of the rhinoceros. And if the horn were not part of their bodily form, what difference would there be between their form and the ugly Russians' shape? When one of them is overcome by the desire to sleep, like the vagrant eagle he retreats to a tree where, driving his horn into its trunk, the ghoul falls asleep like a demon in devilish arrest.²⁷⁹

The man also explains that if the Russians manage to capture one of these wild men while asleep, they convey him with caution to Russia and use him in battle. It may be useful in this context to compare Nizāmī's account of Alexander's campaign against

ز روسی برون شد به آوردگاه ، یکی شیر پرتاس روبه کلاه

²⁷⁸ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LXIII, pp. 455–6.

²⁷⁹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LXIII, pp. 457–8.

the Russians with that of the *Shāhnāma*, where after the passage on Hārūm the land of women (Beroe in the PC), Alexander reaches a land of warriors with fair hair and ruddy faces.²⁸⁰ In contrast to Nizāmī's account of the Russian battle, the Russians all surrender to Alexander, so there is no war at all. This description coincides with the information of Viking traders available in the works of Arab geographers and travellers who wrote about northern lands and peoples.²⁸¹ In particular, comparison shows that Nizāmī's "Russian episode" in the *Sharafnāma* resembles the *Risāla* of Ibn Faḍlān,²⁸² probably because there were no other (or very few) sources on the Russians and their customs in the Islamic tradition. Regarding the giant ghoul in the sixth battle against the Russians, we find a parallel description in the *Risāla* of Ibn Faḍlān, who also mentioned the fur trade and the use of sable skin by this people.²⁸³

Alexander in Love: The Tale of the Chinese Slave Girl

In the seventh battle, Alexander falls in love with a warlike woman who is a Chinese slave. Nizāmī dedicates a whole episode to their love affair.²⁸⁴ In a beautiful long passage – quite unusual and remarkable in Persian epic poetry for its celebration of the domination and superior erotic power of the female over the male's martial prowess, and for its detailed descriptions of Alexander's lovemaking with her – Nizāmī describes her as an epiphany of the Eternal Feminine to whom even a world conqueror succumbs.²⁸⁵ Nizāmī thus claims that neither heroic actions nor clever statecraft is sufficient to make the perfect king. Rather, the true ruler needs the informing power of love to display valour and dispense justice. It is through love that he reaches self-knowledge, which is, after all, the explicit goal of the quest undertaken by the protagonist in his journey towards spiritual kingship.

* * *

Alexander finally defeats the Russians and releases Queen Nūshāba. He is very impressed by the fur trade that flourishes in that land.²⁸⁶ Historically speaking, we know

²⁸⁰ Firdawsī does not use the word "Russians", but he gives a similar description of the people Alexander visits in Hārūm, who are fair haired and red-faced (*Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 91): همه روی سرخ و همه موی زرد همه از درجنگ روز نبرد

²⁸¹ On the geographical/historical works in Arabic which describe the northern lands, especially the land of Rūs, see C. Stone and P. Lunde, *Ibn Faḍlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North* (London, 2012), part III.

²⁸² This work is of great historical, geographical and ethnographic interest and shows that Ibn Faḍlān offered a mass of extremely important information on the peoples, including the Rūs and the Khazars, whom he had been able to see himself or of whom he had heard accounts during his journey. On Ibn Faḍlān and his journey to Volga see M. Canard, "Ibn Faḍlān", *EP*, III, p. 759.

²⁸³ R. N. Frye (trans.), *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River* (Princeton, 2005), pp. 54–57.

²⁸⁴ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LXIV and LXVII.

²⁸⁵ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, pp. 486–98. For a study of the erotic content of this passage, see Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Tan kāma-sarāyī dar adab-i fārsī", *Majāla-yi Irānshināsī*, 8.1 (1375/1996), p. 20–22.

²⁸⁶ Nizāmī describes the inhabitants' opinion of these fur pelts as follows: "Do not regard with contempt these shrivelled skins, for they are the top currency of this land. This patched leather is in our opinion far

that Alexander never fought against the people of Rūs (including the Khazars, the Alāns, etc.), so it is unclear how this episode came to be interpolated in Nizāmī's *Alexander Romance*. In some sources prior to Nizāmī, Alexander's expeditions in the Caucasus are often mentioned in relation to the wall he built against the so-called "Unclean Nations"²⁸⁷ – who are normally identified with the pagan tribes of the Khazars, Huns and Turks.²⁸⁸ This motif emerged in the Jewish Hellenistic circles in Alexandria at the beginning of the Christian era.²⁸⁹

Flavius Josephus (d. c. 100) linked the Biblical Gog and Magog with the Hellenistic Alexander tradition in his *Jewish War (Bellum Judaicum, VII: 7, 4)*.²⁹⁰ St Jerome (d. 420) mentioned Hun invasions across the Caucasus and the barrier with which Alexander fended them off (Epistula 77, 6–8).²⁹¹ However, a fusion of the motif of Alexander's barrier with the uncouth, pagan "Unclean Nations" of the Caucasus Mountains appears in the Syriac Alexander legend (possibly composed in 629–30, after the victory of Emperor Heraclius over the Sasanian king Khusraw II Parvīz).²⁹²

A passage in Christian of Stavelot's commentary on Matthew (*Expositio in Matthaeum Evangelistam*) identifies the Khazars as those whom Alexander confined, and one of the seven tribes²⁹³ mentioned here by Nizāmī. In general, in the Persian and Arabic traditions there is much local lore and ethnohistorical information that amalgamates the Khazars, Alāns and other northern people with the Rūs folk.²⁹⁴ In conclusion, notwithstanding its nonexistence in Alexander's actual biography and the historical inaccuracy of Nizāmī's account of this episode, it is clear that it is a motif found in several early Christian sources relating to the Alexander legend.

Ibn Isfandīyār in his *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān (Chronicle of Ṭabaristān)* makes mention of the Rūs attack on the Caspian Sea as taking place in AD 909.²⁹⁵ Khāqānī Shirvānī (c. 1106–90), who lived in the vicinity of Nizāmī and also spent all his life in the Caucasus, mentions the Rūs's attacks (Rūs, Khazars, Alāns, Sarīr) quite frequently in his *Dīvān*.²⁹⁶ Especially relevant in this respect is the Persian geographic work the *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam*, which attests the Rūs's attacks on a large village on the outskirts of Barda' (which is, interestingly enough, the city of Queen Nūshaba in the

more valuable than the softest human hair, for many of those [slaves] with the most beautiful hair found here can be bought with this arid and hairless leather" (*Sharafnāma*, LXVI, p. 480).

²⁸⁷ On the Unclean Nations, see Andrew Colin Gow, "The Unclean Nations, Gog and Magog, and the Ten Tribes", *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in the Apocalyptic Age, 1200–1600* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 23–26, and Appendix B, especially pp. 319ff.

²⁸⁸ See A. Seyed-Gohrab, F. Doufikar-Aerts and A. McGlinn (eds.), *Gog and Magog: The Clans of Chaos in World Literature* (Amsterdam, 2007), pp. 69–79.

²⁸⁹ Van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, p. 10.

²⁹⁰ Van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, p. 11.

²⁹¹ Van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, p. 13.

²⁹² On this work see J. P. Monferrer-Sala, "Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition", *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden, 2011), pp. 54–5.

²⁹³ P. B. Golden, "The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism", *The World of the Khazars*, ed. P. B. Golden, H. Ben-Shammai and A. Róna-Tas (Leiden, 2007), p. 139.

²⁹⁴ See Dan D. Y. Shapira, "Iranian Sources on the Khazars", *The World of the Khazars*, ed. P. B. Golden, H. Ben-Shammai and A. Róna-Tas (Leiden, 2007), pp. 298–305.

²⁹⁵ Ibn Isfandīyār, *Tārīkh-i Ṭabaristān*, ed. 'A. Iqbāl (Tehran, 1320/1941), vol. I, p. 266.

²⁹⁶ Khāqānī, *Dīvān*, pp. 135, 139, 145, 476. See also V. Minorsky, "Khāqānī and Andronicus Comenus", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 9 (1943–6), pp. 550–78.

Sharafnāma).²⁹⁷ This mass of information has persuaded scholars of Nizāmī that the Rūs's wars related by the poet in the *Sharafnāma* reflect Russian attacks in the tenth century.²⁹⁸

In the Land of Darkness: Alexander's Quest for the Water of Life

We now come to the motif of the Water of Life, the last motif (no. 16) that the *Sharafnāma* shares with the *Shāhnāma* and the PC's *Alexander Romance* (II, 39–40). The quest for the Water of Life prepares Alexander for the transition from temporal to spiritual kingship and, as a didactic device, the tale functions to remind the reader of human mortality and the transience of worldly glory.²⁹⁹

Nizāmī relates the story of a banquet in which every man is tasked to tell strange tales of his own land. An old man informs Alexander that in the Land of Darkness there is a Fountain of the Water of Life, which he describes in these verses:

In what is called the "Land of Darkness" is found
Behind the scenes, the purest, limpid *aqua vitae*.
... From here to there the way is short: it's just
One tenth of the distance that you've come so far.³⁰⁰

The Greek *Romance* also locates the Water of Life "in the direction of the constellation of the Plough" (PC, II, 32), at "the end of the world" in a region where the sun never shines (PC, II, 39).³⁰¹ Mario Casari believes that this episode can be reconstructed as part of a collection of ancient themes concerning the exploration of the northern lands and seas of Eurasia.³⁰² I think it is most likely that Nizāmī had a mystical purpose in presenting this episode rather than any desire to discuss geographical phenomena,³⁰³ insofar as the tale occurs at a crucial moment in Alexander's progress towards spiritual kingship, as mentioned above. As a mystical motif, the journey to the Land of Darkness to find the Water of Life symbolises the inner journey of man through the darkness of his ego to the ultimate realisation of divine knowledge and acquisition of eternal wisdom (*philosophia perennis*).

As the tale in the *Sharafnāma* goes, on his way to North Pole in search of Water of Life, Alexander reached a cave, where he left most of his army and heavy equipment

²⁹⁷ See *Hudūd al-'ālam min al-mashriq ilā al-maghrib*.

²⁹⁸ For example see Bertels, *Shā'ir-i buzurg-i Āzarbāyjān*, p. 142; K. Aḥmad-Nizhād, *Tahlīl-i āthār-i Nizāmī Ganjavī*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1375/1996), pp. 123–4.

²⁹⁹ For an English translation of this tale, see Michael Barry's "Alexander Wends His Way into the Land of Darkness" in his *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, pp. 321–6; and on its mystical meaning, see pp. 321–30.

³⁰⁰ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LXVIII, p. 500.

³⁰¹ See M. Casari, "The King Explorer", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (Groningen, 2012), p. 179.

³⁰² Italian scholars have dedicated various works to discussing this subject; among them, see in particular: M. Casari, "Nizami's Cosmographic Vision and Alexander in Search of the Fountain of Life", *A Key to the Treasure of Hakim, Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī's Khamṣa*, ed. Johann-Christoph Bürgel and Christine van Ruymbeke (Leiden, 2011), pp. 95–105.

³⁰³ As elaborated by Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, pp. 327f.

behind. Nizāmī called it “*Bun-ghār*” (basement-cave), which, according to many sources, is the etymological origin of the name of Bulgaria:³⁰⁴

Because the conqueror [Alexander] gave it the name
Of “Bunghār”, the land of “Bulgaria” gained fame.
All men of rank and state who now reign there
Are all the royal sons and heirs of Alexander.³⁰⁵

Nizāmī offers three versions of the legend of Water of Life in the *Sharafnāma*. He indicates that the first version is derived from the *Tārīkh-i Dihqān* (*Sasanian Tradition*), which probably means his “Pahlavi” source, at least in its general framework. This version also coincides with Firdawsī’s version of the Water of Life episode.

The second version Nizāmī traces back to “Rūmīyān-i kuhan”, perhaps meaning an ancient Byzantine/Greek source, in which Ilyās (the Biblical Elijah)³⁰⁶ accompanied Khidr. Although Nizāmī claims that this is a “rūmī” tradition, no extant Greek or Byzantine author ever mentions Khidr.³⁰⁷ What does Nizāmī mean by referring to the “ancient rūmīs”? Nizāmī writes that Ilyās and Khidr found the Fountain accidentally because the salted fish they had for dinner fell into the water and came back to life. This version makes no mention of Alexander at all, or at least Nizāmī says nothing of him here. It is thus possible that Nizāmī is referring to a Biblical tradition. Ilyās corresponds to the Biblical Elijah and Khidr may be connected to Ahasuerus, the wandering Jew,³⁰⁸ (Greek: Ἀσουηρος or Latin: *Assuerus*).³⁰⁹ Does Nizāmī’s reference to the “rūmī” origins of this version perhaps indicate that he had access to the Greek or Latin version of the Jewish Bible?

Finally, the third version comes from the Arabic tradition (*Tārīkh-i tāzī*), the Qur’ānic tale of the fish that accidentally fell into the Fountain of the Water of Life and became alive.

However, Nizāmī maintains that the first two versions are incorrect for “Both the Zoroastrian (*majūsī*) and the Byzantine historians missed the path [of the true narrative].”³¹⁰ In the first version (the pre-Islamic Persian one), Nizāmī writes that

³⁰⁴ Among the sources which include the same etymology for the name of Bulgaria, we can mention Ibn Khalaf Tabrīzī’s *Burhān-i Qāṭi*. According to this source, Bulgaria is near the Land of Darkness and was founded in Alexander’s time. According to Ghīyāth al-Dīn’s *Ghīyāth al-lughāt*, the name Bulgār derives from the fact that the country is full of caves (*ghār* means cave in Persian). Both works are cited by Dihkhudā, “Bulghār”, *Lughatnāma*, vol. III, p. 4305.

³⁰⁵ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LXVIII, p. 501.

³⁰⁶ H. Schwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk Literature* (Walldorf-Hessen, 1982), p. 167.

³⁰⁷ R. Stoneman, personal communication.

³⁰⁸ A. J. Wensinck, “al-Khaḍīr”, *EP*, IV, p. 904.

³⁰⁹ A poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley (d. 1822) compares Khidr and Ahasuerus as does Shahrastānī’s *Majlis-i maktūb* (eleventh century). See: L. Lewisohn, “From the Moses of Reason to the Khidr of the Resurrection”, *Fortresses of the Intellect, Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftari*, ed. O. Alí-de-Unzaga (London, 2011), pp. 423–7.

³¹⁰ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 511:

که بود آب حیوان دگر جایگاه
مجوسی و رومی غلط کرد راه

Alexander enters the Land of Darkness in the first night of the month of *Urdābihisht* (21 April).³¹¹ Khidr, his guide, gives Alexander a magic stone³¹² which, he says, will start to shine when he comes close to the Fountain. Khidr finds the Fountain and bathes in it. The Fountain then promptly disappears from sight. The Arabic tradition, according to Nizāmī, relates the tale differently. After drinking from the Water of Life, Ilyās and Khidr desert Alexander and his army. Khidr goes to the sea and Ilyās to the desert, while Alexander wanders lost and in vain for forty days in the Land of Darkness. This version also contains the tale of the Valley of Diamonds found in the PC (II, 40).³¹³ Alexander marches on for forty days until at last he manages to leave the darkness. In none of these versions is Alexander able to find or partake of the Water of Life.

The episode of the Water of Life is one of the most studied motifs in the Alexander studies literature, and has also been frequently depicted in Persian miniature painting.³¹⁴ It is also a popular motif in various mythologies, from the Indian³¹⁵ to the Babylonian (in which it appears as a “Plant of Life”).³¹⁶ This passage in the *Sharafnāma* has been interpreted from different viewpoints: the mystical³¹⁷ and the cosmographical³¹⁸ among others.

However, since he writes as a Muslim, the true version of the legend for Nizāmī is (as he affirms) that of the Arabic tradition (*Tārīkh-i tāzī*), which is based on the Qur’ānic account of Moses and the Servant of God (*Sūrah* 18:60–82), who is identified by Qur’ānic commentators with the prophet Khidr in most of the canonical collections of commentaries.

Friedländer was the first scholar to use the fish to demonstrate the connection between the Alexander stories and the Qur’ān (18:60–5).³¹⁹ The earliest references to the fish episode are in the Greek β -recension and the Babylonian Talmud. The most important stage in the evolution of the *Alexander Romance* is the development of the commentaries on the Qur’ān (18:60–101). As Wheeler rightly demonstrates:

there is no evidence to make Q 18:60–82 dependent on a particular Jewish or Christian source ... earlier scholarship does not make an adequate distinction between the information contained in the Quran and what is said by the Muslim exegetes about these verses ... it is clear that, in time, the exegetes identified all

³¹¹ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, LXIX, p. 508.

³¹² According to classical Greek tradition, it is Aristotle who gives magical stones to Alexander. See Thorndike, “The Latin Pseudo-Aristotle and Medieval Occult Science”, p. 235.

³¹³ The valley of diamonds appears in Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma* (VI, pp. 95–6).

³¹⁴ The following sources may be cited here: Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 150–62; Casari, “Nizami’s Cosmographic Vision”, pp. 95–105; P. Franke, “Drinking from the Water of Life”, pp. 77–125.

³¹⁵ See A. Szalc, “In Search of Water of Life: The Alexander Romance and Indian Mythology”, *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. R. Stoneman, K. Erickson and I. Netton (Groningen, 2012), pp. 327–38.

³¹⁶ See the discussion on the myth of Gilgamesh in Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 152–3. Jalāl Sattārī compares the myth of Gilgamesh with the Alexander legend in his book *Ustūra-yi Gīlgamish va afsāna-yi Iskandar* (Tehran, 1384/2005).

³¹⁷ Ethé has shown that the episode in the *Iskandarnāma* is full of terms which could be understood as allusions to Sufi concepts; cited by Franke, “Drinking from the Water of Life”, p. 115.

³¹⁸ See Casari’s “The King Explorer” and “Nizami’s Cosmographic Vision”.

³¹⁹ See Friedländer, *Die Chadhirlegende und der Alexanderroman* (Leipzig, 1913), p. 330.

of Q 18:60–101 with the Alexander stories. The exegetes' source for the Alexander stories would have been Jacob of Serugh's sermon that contained the fish episode and Alexander's building the gate against Gog and Magog.³²⁰

With a more discerning look at the exegesis of such details as the fish and the journey to the ends of the Earth, Wheeler shows how Muslim exegesis purposefully incorporated these extra-Qur'ānic materials. The Muslim exegetes seem to have used these details to conflate the Moses of the Qur'ān (18:60–82) with the character of Dhū'l-Qarnayn in the Qur'ān (18:83–101) and stories associated with Alexander the Great and Gilgamesh.³²¹ *Sūrah* 18 (*Kahf*, "The Cave") in the Qur'ān relates legends that must have had their origin in Oriental Christian circles and Biblical tradition (the Seven Sleepers, the Bicorn Dhū'l-Qarnayn, and Moses in the Fountain of Life).³²²

In the *Romance* tradition, however, Alexander replaces Moses. In order to understand why Alexander replaced Moses, it is important to explain the association of Moses with elements from Alexandrian literature. One possible connection between Moses and Alexander is that both are said to have been "horned". The earliest known reference to Moses being horned is found in the Latin recension of the Bible.³²³ Alexander is also identified as the "Two-Horned One" (*Dhū'l-Qarnayn*) in the Qur'ān. Another similarity between Alexander and Moses is that just as Alexander searches and fails to obtain immortality, Moses is denied entry into Eden.³²⁴ In general, we can conclude that Nizāmī's version of Alexander's search for the Water of Life was highly influenced by his studies of commentaries of the Qur'ān.

Finally, as Nizāmī states, it seems that Alexander's search for the Water of Life was not in vain after all, for it drove him to advance to the last and most difficult stage of his career, that of becoming a prophet, effecting his transition from temporal to spiritual kingship. It is at this juncture that Nizāmī brings the *Sharafnāma* to a close and starts the second part of his poetic epic on Alexander, the *Iqbāl-nāma*, which deals with two general traditions: one deriving from Qur'ānic traditions and the other from the portrayal of Alexander in Islamic wisdom literature.

³²⁰ Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London/New York, 2002), pp. 17–18. Wheeler makes a very detailed study of the motif of "the lost fish" (pp. 11–19) and here I provide a brief summary of his conclusions.

³²¹ See Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, p. 8.

³²² This is mentioned by Aṣghar Mahdavi in a letter to Iraj Afshār, who included it in the prose edition of the *Iskandarnāma* (Tehran, 1387/2008), p. 632.

³²³ This reference seems to indicate that it originated from a linguistic fault of Bible translators in the Middle Ages. The Torah (Exodus 34:29–35) reports that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, the skin of his face was radiant. When the Bible was translated into Latin, the translators attributed "horns of light" to Moses because the spelling of the Hebrew verb *karan* (to shine) is identical to that of *keren* (horn). See Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, pp. 31–32.

³²⁴ Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, p. 117.

Conclusion

Although a number of important points covered in this chapter, a few, which I believe to be quite original and new, deserve highlighting.

One of the key discoveries made in this chapter (about which I wish to underline my surprise)³²⁵ is that the *Sharafnāma* indeed includes a great variety of *pre-Islamic* Persian stories about Alexander from the Sasanian period. We thus find Nizāmī drawing many if not most of the episodes of the *Sharafnāma* from a so-called “*Nāma-yi Khusrawī* (*Book of Kings*), a *Daftar-i Khusruwān* (*Register of Kings*), or a *guzāranda-yi darj-i Dihqān-navard* (*the narrator of the scroll of the Dihqān*), the *Tārīkh-i Dihqān* (*History of Dihqān*), the *guzāranda-yi dāstān-i Darī* (narrator of the Persian tale), or the *mūbad-i mūbadān* (the Great Zoroastrian priest),” etc. Nizāmī’s source or sources are certainly different from those found in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, to whom he normally refers as “*Dānā-yi Tūs*” (the Sage of Tūs). These sources may possibly be his “Pahlavi” source and the Zoroastrian texts from which he extracted his information concerning the destruction of the fire temples and Zoroastrian books (the *Zand* and *Avesta*).

Āzarbāyjān/Azerbaijan (Āturpātākān, as the province appears to have been officially named throughout the Sasanian period) was an important religious centre during the Sasanian period, being the homeland and hearth of one of the empire’s three most sacred fires.³²⁶ Because of this great fire temple, Azerbaijan must have had a powerful influence in the elaboration of Zoroastrian tales and the creation of Sasanian culture and religious lore. This may perhaps account for the great variety and novelty of Nizāmī’s information and tales which, I would argue, were probably based on Zoroastrian tradition and non-religious Sasanian/Azerbaijani literature which had not yet vanished in Nizāmī’s day.

Since Nizāmī normally provides three different versions of each tale (for example, the tale of Alexander’s ancestry, the Water of Life, etc.) throughout the *Sharafnāma*, I would posit that his sources were:

- 1) Sasanian tradition, religious (Zoroastrian) and non-religious (epic, folklore).
- 2) The Biblical tradition, referred to as “*tārīkh-i Rūm*” (Byzantine history) or as his Jewish and Christian/Nestorian (*naṣrānī*) sources.
- 3) The Islamic tradition (Arabic and Persian sources).

In sum, our study of the *Sharafnāma* proposes a powerful cumulative argument that a great deal of material from Pahlavi sources that is now lost to us was available to Nizāmī. It also demonstrates that Nizāmī’s account is much closer to the Greek

³²⁵ It is normally assumed that Nizāmī’s *Iskandarnāma* was highly Islamised; this point partially contradicts and subverts that assumption.

³²⁶ K. Schippmann, “Azerbaijan iii. Pre-Islamic History”, *EIr*, III/2, p. 224.

Alexander Romance than to his predecessor Firdawsī, and also that it contains more reliable historical information. The question that arises here is how and from where did Nizāmī manage to gather such a great variety of information? The local culture of the Caucasus was influenced by cultures that had a political influence in the region, that is, the Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Persian.³²⁷ Therefore, there was a considerable amount of bilingualism and multilingualism among ethnic minorities of adjacent communities.³²⁸ I believe that Nizāmī, as a native of Ganja, must have been multilingual. Furthermore, certain information gleaned from his works proves his familiarity with Greek and Byzantine culture and literature.³²⁹

In transferring part of Alexander’s exploits to the Caucasus, Nizāmī combines local lore with a large and extensive *Alexander Romance* tradition in order to create a hero who encapsulated his own ideas on kingship. The *Sharafnāma* illustrates not only the great diversity of Nizāmī’s sources and his knowledge of the *Alexander Romance* tradition, but also his underlying preoccupation with the veracity of his sources. As he points out rightly:

In this consummate verse of mine, I’ve always tried
To follow minds with acumen – men wise and shrewd;
So not a single work of history I left unread,
Each word of theirs I perused. Those legends of Alexander –
Are here collected in just one book of verse –
Those clustered treasures in quartos dispersed.
This wondrous treasure casket amazes all:
Behind these words there’s alchemy disguised.³³⁰

Another important point revealed by this chapter is the diversity of Nizāmī’s sources. To my knowledge, many pieces of information found in the *Sharafnāma* cannot be found in any other extant sources (at least neither in Persian nor Arabic). One can mention in this respect (among many other aspects), the depiction of Aristotle’s father as Alexander’s tutor and the foundation of Tbilisi and Bulgaria by Alexander. Whether this diversity of source material was derived from local folklore and tales of Nizāmī’s homeland is unclear and will probably remain so unless new manuscripts or unknown works are discovered that shed light on the motifs that do not appear anywhere else.

In this same context, one might cite the appearance of Balīnās (Apollonius of Tyana) accompanying and helping Alexander in his adventures. Regarding this story, which is not found elsewhere, I believe that, historically speaking, there was an “Alexander” (Alexander of Abonouteichos) who was pupil to a pupil of Apollonius of

³²⁷ Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (London/New York, 2010), p. 199.

³²⁸ Coene, *The Caucasus*, p. 69.

³²⁹ To cite one such example out of many, in the *Iqbāl-nāma*, Nizāmī uses the word “Uqyānūs” and affirms that it is a Greek word. From this statement, S. Ḥamīdīyān, the text’s editor, concludes that it is possible that Nizāmī knew Greek. See Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 171, n. 4.

³³⁰ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, XXXII, p. 241.

Tyana.³³¹ The confusion of these two “Alexanders” may have led to the appearance of Apollonius of Tyana in the *Alexander Romance* tradition. In addition, one may speculate that there were popular stories about feats of sorcery and magic attributed to Apollonius, now lost, and that Nizāmī applied them to the legend of Alexander’s deeds, exploits and journeys.

On the other hand, the appearance of Apollonius of Tyana in Nizāmī’s *Alexander Romance* indicates the possibility of his knowledge of Flavius Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (or the familiarity of his source),³³² which itself contains numerous motifs that also appear in the *Alexander Romance*. This is absolutely astonishing since it indicates that Philostratus’s work was known in Persian (probably Sasanian)³³³ literature, through which it reached Nizāmī. This is quite possible since Nizāmī paid special attention to neo-Pythagorean philosophy,³³⁴ through which he evidently became familiar with Apollonius of Tyana, who was a neo-Pythagorean.³³⁵

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Nizāmī’s *Sharafnāma* functions practically as a mirror for princes to provide useful moral advice for princes and kings, inculcating such vital qualities as justice, generosity and fairness. The poem also contains strong Sufi elements, emphasising *inter alia* the role of music as a means of achieving self-knowledge, the importance of love and the practice of various disciplines to perfect and refine the soul. Although the *Iskandarnāma* can and should be treated within the framework of the mirror for princes genre, Nizāmī’s ideal of kingship transcends simple statecraft and political strategy – the art of governance by temporal ways and means – to affirm the possibility of becoming a king in the spiritual realm.³³⁶

Finally, of all the diverse traditions relating to the *Alexander Romance* in the Persianate world (including the Caucasus), I would emphasise that it is clear that in his *Iskandarnāma* Nizāmī created a harmonious and attractive tale combining Christian and Jewish traditions while drawing on his local knowledge of life on the border of the Byzantine world. All these characteristics served to make Nizāmī’s *Book of Alexander* the most imitated *Alexander Romance* in Persian poetry and an inspiration for all later Muslim poets who aspired to recast the life of Alexander in verse. Nizāmī himself asserts that his *Iskandarnāma* is a source of immortality. Although Alexander did not manage to drink the Water of Life, Nizāmī has “made him immortal by his own Water of Life [his verse]”.³³⁷

³³¹ On these two characters see Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 61–8, 69–72.

³³² Flavius Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. C. P. Jones (London, 1970).

³³³ It must have been through the Sasanian tradition because the tales in which Apollonius appears feature many Persian elements: for instance, the protagonists’ names and the Zoroastrian girl, not to mention the goblet of Kay Khusraw.

³³⁴ According to S. H. Naṣr, “Nizāmī had dominated even such schools as the Hermetic and Neo-Pythagoreans by the hands of such giants as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.” See Naṣr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, p. 179.

³³⁵ Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, pp. 6, 11, especially 61.

³³⁶ See Lambton, *State and Government*, p. 55; Lambton, “Islamic Mirrors for Princes”, pp. 426–36.

³³⁷ Nizāmī, *Sharafnāma*, p. 79.

پس از دورهایی که بگذشت پیش
کنم زنده ش از آب حیوان خویش
سکندر که راه معانی گرفت

* * *

The next chapter is dedicated to the second part of the *Iskandarnāma*, the *Book of Fortune (Iqbāl-nāma)* or the *Book of Alexander the Wise (Khirad-nāma-yi Iskandarī)* and its motifs. Since some of the motifs mentioned in this chapter (e.g. Gog and Magog, Alexander the philosopher, etc.) have been left unexamined, the next chapter necessarily complements the present chapter and focuses on the two other important characteristics of Alexander in Persian tradition: that of the prophet and that of the wise ruler and philosopher-king. In this regard, while the *Sharaf-nāma* relates to Alexander's conquest and exploration of the external world, the *Iqbāl-nāma* presents Alexander as a voyager in the realm of the spirit, a man who seeks an "inner world" instead of wandering over the face of the Earth, and so prepares himself to receive God's message.

Chapter Six: Alexander in the *Iqbāl-nāma* of Nizāmī Ganjavī

تا سکندر روی در آینه اقبال داشت

زنگ ظلمت بود از آب زندگانی قسمت

From the water of immortal life his fate
And lot were but the rust of pitch-black night
Once Alexander turned his face to gaze
on Fortune's looking glass
Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī (d. 1676)¹

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, the *Iqbāl-nāma* (*Book of Fortune*),² otherwise known as the *Khiradnāma-yi Iskandarī* (*Book of Alexandrian Wisdom*), contains the new and ongoing adventures of Alexander. However, in this poem Nizāmī presents him as a seeker of Truth, not as a conqueror as in the *Sharafnāma*. At about 3,680 couplets, the *Iqbāl-nāma* is a little over half the length of the *Sharafnāma*, which is 6,800 couplets long.³

The *Iqbāl-nāma* is a heroic romance which, as discussed in the previous chapter, should be read, at least on the purely literary level, as part of the mirror for princes genre, to which all of Nizāmī's *mathnawīs* belonged.⁴ At the same time, the poem's mystical dimensions quite transcend the limitations of that genre, providing yet another perspective on its protagonist's actions by conveying his inner spiritual experiences. The *Iqbāl-nāma* also focuses on the problem of spiritual kingship and the manner in which this is established in the course of the protagonist's quest to become the Perfect Man.⁵ For this reason, the tale is organised around this theme and divided into two principal parts. The first part is dominated by lengthy philosophical discourses delivered by Nizāmī or the philosophers in his retinue, as well as extensive dialogues in which the characters declare their thoughts. Interspersed with such passages of discourse are marginal tales⁶ through which Alexander is inculcated with the required wisdom that will eventually enable him to become a prophet.

¹ Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī, *Dīvān*, vol. II, p. 664.

² This title recalls Plutarch's *The Fortune of Alexander* (*Moralia: De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute*). Is this a coincidence? We will briefly discuss this in the conclusion to the chapter.

³ See Peter Chelkowski, "Nizāmī Gandjavī", *EF*², VIII, p. 79.

⁴ See J. Scott Meisami's chapter "Romance as Mirror" in *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 191–234.

⁵ The idea of the king as the "Perfect Man" or "Universal Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is discussed in many different Islamic works. For a survey of some of these doctrines, see S. H. Naṣr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 66–70.

⁶ The contents of these tales can be divided in two categories: stories in which Alexander is the protagonist, and independent stories in which Alexander does not play any role or only an insignificant one. Christoph Bürgel examines some of the key stories in the *Iqbāl-nāma* (e.g. the tale of Archimedes and his Chinese Slave-girl, Mary the Copt, the Seventy Sages Who Deny the Doctrines of Hermes and

The second part of the poem consists of Alexander's further adventures and voyages around the world in order to call people to the true monotheistic faith. His quest here is to find Utopia, the perfect kingdom. His adventures contain tales from what is commonly known as the "marvels of the world" (*mirabilia*) or 'Ajāyib genre,⁷ much of which is derived from the Hellenic-Syriac tradition as discussed below.

In what follows, I offer a survey of the key stories and motifs related to Alexander in the *Iqbāl-nāma*, analyse Nizāmī's probable sources for each, and attempt to highlight in my conclusion the poet's original contribution to the elaboration of the *Alexander Romance*. In order to put my analysis of the poem in context, a brief (but by no means comprehensive) "table of contents" of the various stories therein is presented below:

- 1) The poem begins with a discussion of why Alexander is identified with the prophet Dhū'l-Qarnayn (Bicorn or the Two-Horned One).
- 2) The encounter between Alexander and Socrates.
- 3) The dialogue between Alexander and the Indian sages.
- 4) The symposium with the seven philosophers on the Creation of the World: Aristotle, Wālīs/Vettius Valens,⁸ Balīnās/Apollonius of Tyana, Socrates, Furfūriyus (Porphyry),⁹ Hermes and Plato.
- 5) Alexander becomes a prophet and each of his three philosophers (Aristotle, Plato and Socrates) dedicates a Book of Wisdom (*Khīradnāma*) to him.¹⁰

Perish, Plato Composes Songs to Put Aristotle to Shame, etc.). For a study of some of these tales, see his "Occult Sciences in the *Iskandarnāmah* of Nizami", pp. 129–39. See also Carlo Saccone, "The Wasteland and Alexander, the Righteous King, in Nizāmī's *Iqbāl-nāma*", *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm*, ed. J. Christoph Bürgel and Christine van Ruymbeke (Leiden, 2011), pp. 165–79. Among the many interesting studies in Persian on these stories we may mention the following: 'A. Zarrīnkūb, "Falsafa-yi yūnān dar bazm-i Iskandar: Nazārī bi *Iskandarnāma*-yi Nizāmī", *Irānshināsī* 11 (1370/1991), pp. 482–98; K. Aḥmad-Nizhād, *Taḥlīl-i āthār-i Nizāmī Ganjavī* (Tehran, 1375/1996), pp. 142–218.

⁷ On the various works of this genre in Arabic see T. Lewicki, "al-Ḳazwīnī", *EF*, IV, pp. 865–7; C. E. Bosworth, "'Ajā'eb al-Maklūqāt: i. Arabic Works", *EIr*, I/7, pp. 696–8. On the Persian works of this genre see Ī. Afshār, "'Ajā'eb al-Maklūqāt: ii. Persian Works", *EIr*, I/7, pp. 698–9. See also the introduction of A. Tūsī, *'Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt va gharāyib al-mawjūdāt*, ed. M. Sutūda (Tehran, 1345/1966), pp. xv–xvii; P. M. Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven, 2011). On the different traditions of this genre see "'Ajāyib literature", *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. J. Scott Meisami and P. Starkey (London, New York, 1998), vol. I, pp. 65–6.

⁸ Vettius Valens was a Hellenic astrologer. For his works and their importance, see O. Neugebauer and H. B. Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 176–85.

⁹ On Porphyry (233–c. 304 CE), the renowned Neoplatonic philosopher, disciple, biographer and editor of Plotinus, see "Furfūriyus", *A Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh, 2nd ed. (Lahore, 1981), p. 80.

¹⁰ In fact, the reason the *Iqbāl-nāma* is also known as the *Khīradnāma* is the existence of these three "Books of Wisdom" within the book.

- 6) Alexander begins his journey around the world in order to summon people to monotheism. He comes across many wonders and marvels during his journey.
- 7) Alexander travels to the south, where he encounters the skull worshippers (*sar-parastān*).
- 8) Alexander returns to India and China, where he sails through seas in which he encounters marvellous marine wonders, and also enters and escapes from deadly deserts.
- 9) Alexander reaches the north and builds the wall against Gog (Magog is not mentioned).
- 10) He visits a utopian city in which everything is perfect and whose inhabitants live in harmony with their neighbours.
- 11) Alexander receives God's message to return to Greece from the north.
- 12) Alexander becomes ill and writes his will.
- 13) Alexander writes a letter of consolation to his mother.
- 14) Alexander dies in Shahrazūr, near Babylonia.
- 15) Alexander's son Iskandarūs weeps for his father's death and abandons his kingship.
- 16) The deaths of Alexander's seven philosophers (Aristotle, Hermes, Plato, Valens, Apollonius of Tyana, Porphyry, Socrates) are recounted.
- 17) Nizāmī closes the poem with a discourse on his own age, finally dedicating it to his patron, Malik 'Izz al-Dīn Mas'ūd Ibn Arsalān, the Governor of Muşūl.¹¹

As we can see from the above summary, the three key themes of the *Iqbāl-nāma* are separate yet related branches (which also figure as separate literary genres) of the *Alexander Romance*. The first of these is "Alexander in wisdom literature", the second is "Alexander in the Dhū'l-Qarnayn tradition" and the third is "Alexander's adventures in the marvels of the world genre". This chapter is thus divided into three principal parts, each of which provides a brief background study of one of the three branches of

¹¹ On the historical information about this patron see, C. E. Bosworth, "The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (A.D. 1000–1217)", *The Cambridge History of Iran, V: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 170–1. See also Ḥ. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī, *Ganjīna-yi Ganjajī*, ed. S. Ḥamīdīyān (Tehran, 1376/1997), p. 71.

literature from the *Alexander Romance*. In each part, I try to show how Nizāmī incorporated material from various historical and literary sources drawn from all three genres into his poem. Hence, a précis of the *Iqbāl-nāma* according to my understanding of the work, might take the following form.

Firstly, Nizāmī details how Alexander is prepared to become a prophet through his own efforts to achieve wisdom, and also by his assembling, associating with and consulting some of the greatest philosophers of ancient world.

Secondly, after Alexander has mastered all the sciences of the world, including the occult sciences (*'ulūm-i nahān*), he receives God's message telling him of his vocation, which is to travel throughout the world and liberate people from ignorance.

Thirdly, during this journey, Alexander encounters and experiences many wonders, which ultimately lead him to the final step of discovering the ideal city (utopia).¹²

Lastly, his spiritual quest now completed, there being no reason for him to continue to wander around the world, Alexander is ordered by the Divine to return to Greece. However, he does not manage to return to his homeland; he dies near Babylon, in a city called Shahrazūr.

* * *

In sum, the purpose of this chapter is, on one hand, to explore the many motifs related to Alexander in order to highlight their influence on Nizāmī's understanding of Alexander in the *Iqbāl-nāma*; while on other, the chapter aims to study the probable sources accessible to Nizāmī during the composition of his poem. The chapter also endeavours to explore the development of Alexander's personality and to discuss the meaning, historical background and sources of the various stories and anecdotes about divine kingship. Lastly, my conclusion highlights how the *Iqbāl-nāma* has contributed to the knowledge of the *Alexander Romance* in world literature in general and throughout the Islamic world in particular.

I. Alexander in Islamic Wisdom Literature

Traces of texts related to Alexander written in the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods in the genre known as "wisdom literature" can be found in Syriac and Arabic literature.¹³ Wisdom literature is encapsulated in the terms *andarz* (precept, instruction, admonition,

¹² On the Greek utopian tradition in relation to the *Alexander Romance* see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 97–100.

¹³ For more information on this genre in Arabic and the influence of Greek literature upon it see Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein (London/New York, 1975, reprinted 1994); Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation* (New Haven, 1975), pp. 436–51; Gutas, "Classical Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981), pp. 49–86; For examples of these texts, see Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 93–4; H. J. Gleixner, *Das Alexanderbild der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1961), p. 20.

advice, or counsel) and *pand* (counsel, advice), and denotes a popular branch of Pahlavi literature that was continued in classical Persian literature.¹⁴ The ethical content of a great number of Persian works in this genre shows the wide dispersal of ideas common to Iranian and Greek thought.¹⁵ These fundamental ideas, especially those based on Aristotle's *Politics*, reflect the principle that a just ruler requires an advisor to produce a virtuous society, the aim of all politics and all laws being "to accomplish what is good".¹⁶ The genre of the mirror for princes, to which Niẓāmī's *Iskandarnāma* belongs, is an important subcategory of this literature that comprises works explicitly designed for the instruction of rulers.¹⁷

Three main sources among the wisdom literature that had an important influence on the creation of Alexander's image as a wise ruler: 1) Yuḥanna Ibn al-Bitrīq's *Sirr al-asrār*,¹⁸ known in Europe under its Latin title, *Secretum Secretorum*; 2) Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq's *Kitāb Nawādir al-falāsifa*,¹⁹ which was translated into Spanish and introduced into Western literature as *Libro de los Buenos Proverbios*;²⁰ and finally 3) Ibn Fātiq's *Mukhtār al-Ḥikām wa Maḥāsin al-Kalim*,²¹ which was also translated into Spanish as the *Bocados de Oro*, known in Latin as *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum* and in English as *The Dicts and Saying of the Philosophers*, originally published in 1477.²²

Doufīkar-Aerts has summarised and described the main texts of the wisdom literature in Arabic in which Alexander figures.²³ As she points out, some of the motifs

¹⁴ On Pahlavi wisdom literature see M. Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature", *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. R. E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (New York, 2009), pp. 160–72. For examples of this genre in Persian literature see C. H. de Fouchécour, *Moralia. Les notions morales dans la littérature persane des 3^e/9^e au 7^e/13^e siècles* (Paris, 1986).

¹⁵ On Greek influence on the Persian wisdom literature see C. van Ruymbeke, "Hellenistic Influences in Classical Persian Literature", *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (New York, 2009), p. 358.

¹⁶ De Fouchécour, *Moralia*, p. 316.

¹⁷ See J. Scott Meisami, "Genre of Court Literature", *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (New York, 2009), pp. 255–60. Regarding the Greek wisdom literature in the *Iqbāl-nāma* of Niẓāmī see J. C. Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York/London, 1988), pp. 36–7; Niẓāmī, *Das Alexanderbuch. Iskandarnama*, trans. J. C. Bürgel (Zürich, 1991). The mirror for princes genre is discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁸ Yuḥanna Ibn al-Bitrīq, *Sirr al-asrār, al-uṣūl al-Yūnāniyya li naẓariyyat al-siyāsiyya fī'l-Islām*, ed. A. Badawī (Cairo, 1954).

¹⁹ Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq's original work (*Kitāb nawādir al-falāsifa*) has not been preserved. However, it is known through a version attributed to Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Anṣārī. The '*Ādāb al-falāsifa*' was edited by A. Badawī (Kuwait, 1985).

²⁰ Christy Bandak (ed.), *Libro de los Buenos Proverbios, Estudio y edición crítica de las versiones castellana y árabe* (Zaragoza, 2007).

²¹ Al-Mubashshir Ibn Fātiq, *Los Bocados de oro (Mukhtār al-ḥikām wa maḥāsin al-kalam)*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Madrid, 1958). On the relation of this work with the Alexander Romance see Emily Cottrell, "Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik and the α Version of the Alexander Romance", *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (Groningen, 2012), pp. 233–53.

²² On the role Alexander played in wisdom literature there are important annotations in Richard Stoneman, "The Legacy of Alexander in Ancient Philosophy", *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. J. Roisman (Leiden, 2003), pp. 325–46.

²³ Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 96–128.

in this genre later appeared in the *Alexander Romance* tradition.²⁴ According to Doufikaar-Aerts, the great variety of Arabic texts on Alexander in the wisdom literature “must rest on a tradition that already existed in the Byzantine collections of *apophthegmata*, drawing a clear line between Byzantine gnostic literature and Arabic Wisdom Literature”.²⁵ The stories found in the *Iqbāl-nāma* implicitly or explicitly drawn from this genre include the following.

The Library of Alexander

Nizāmī begins the *Iqbāl-nāma* by quoting “the head of the Greek philosophers” (*sar-i fīlsūfān-i Yūnān*),²⁶ who relates that when Alexander came back to Greece, with the guidance of a tutor,²⁷ he dedicated his life to knowledge or wisdom (*dānish*). In order to unveil the secrets of universe, Alexander commanded that the philosophers of “the Greek, Pahlavī and Darī languages” gather and translate every book regarding wisdom (*dānish*) from “that Persian Book of Kings” (*az ān Pārsī daftar-i Khusravān*) to “even any Greek or Latin book” (*chi az jins-i Yūnān ... chi Rūm*).²⁸

Nizāmī states that the fruits of this translation movement were three books: the *Gītī-shinās* (*Cosmography*), the *Daftar-i ramz-i ruḥānīyān* (*Book of the Secrets of Divine Beings*) and the *Sifr-i Iskandarī* (*Alexandrian Tome*).²⁹ In addition, he states that of all three translations only traces have survived in “[the work of] Antiochus” (*Anṭīyākhus*).³⁰ Nizāmī asserts that if Greece is well known for philosophy, this is thanks to Alexander’s love of wisdom (*ān Shāh-i dānish-pasand*), for even “after passing its glorious period”, Greece has maintained its fame.³¹

The three works identified by Nizāmī are probably general titles on geography/cosmography, occult science and philosophy. Regarding “Antiochus”, it is possible that the poet was referring to Antiochus of Ascalon, who had schools in Alexandria and Syria.³² On the other hand, since there were altogether thirteen Seleucid kings who bore this name, it is equally probable that Nizāmī’s source related to the role of Seleucids in transmitting Alexander’s legacy.

The next section on Alexander and the philosophers shows Nizāmī’s extensive knowledge of Greek philosophy in Arabic translation. At the time Nizāmī started to compose the *Iskandarnāma*, the Aristotelian school predominated but was to be

²⁴ These motifs are in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī and the *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī (e.g. Alexander’s letter of consolation to his mother, the philosophers’ funeral sentences around Alexander’s tomb, his relationship with his philosophers, etc.).

²⁵ Doufikaar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 130.

²⁶ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 36.

²⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 37.

²⁸ On the translation movement of Alexandrian texts attested in the Sasanian tradition and reflected in the Arabic and Persian sources see chapter two of this thesis.

²⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 37–38.

³⁰ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 38:

کنون زان صدفهای گوهر فشان
برون ز انطبایخس نبینی نشان

³¹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 38.

³² See Tiziano Dorandi, “Chronology”, *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed K. Algra et al. (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 49ff.

superseded by Neoplatonic Sufi movements represented by Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī (Shaykh al-Akbar, d. 638/1240) in the West and Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (‘Shaykh al-Ishrāq’, d. 1191) in the Persianate world.³³ The preparation of Alexander to reach the degree of philosophy detailed by Niẓāmī in the *Iqbāl-nāma* effectively represents the conqueror’s initiation into the judicious use of prophetic power and wisdom.

Alexander and the Philosophers

In the *Iqbāl-nāma* Niẓāmī has the opportunity to explore different philosophical discourses through the encounters he presents between Alexander and other philosophers and sages. Niẓāmī makes use of these encounters to discuss moral issues, in which Alexander, who utters wise maxims to make his points, himself becomes a fertile source of *exempla*. The poet thus provides a positive evaluation of Alexander’s kingship by admiring the depth of his wisdom and the scope of his achievements.

There is an encounter between Alexander and Socrates which recalls the meeting of Diogenes and Alexander.³⁴ The tale was well-known in the Middle Ages and was retold in various versions.³⁵ In some versions, which Niẓāmī probably drew upon, Socrates is indeed substituted for Diogenes. For instance, the *Disciplina Clericalis* and the *Gesta Romanorum* present an encounter between an unnamed king and Socrates, and between Socrates and Alexander respectively.³⁶ Niẓāmī includes a dialogue between Alexander and Socrates which contains some remarkable similarities with the Classical Greek and Latin sources.³⁷

Niẓāmī affirms that during the age of Alexander, the Greeks tended towards cultivating asceticism (*zuhd*).³⁸ They were dedicated to the philosophy of ascetical abstinence (*rīyādat-garī*) and ate very little. In the path of abstinence they reached such a stage of enlightenment that they vanished (because they did not have relations with women).³⁹ This affirmation is quite interesting, if not rather strange, because it is probable that Niẓāmī is referring to the Pythagorean ascetic tradition.⁴⁰ He may have

³³ H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique I: des origines jusqu’à la mort d’Averroës (1198)* (Paris, 1964), pp. 284–304. For Neoplatonic ideas in the Arabic world, see Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the “Theology of Aristotle”* (London, 2002).

³⁴ Plutarch, *Alex.*, 14.

³⁵ See M. Buora, “L’incontro tra Alessandro et Diogene. Tradizioni e significato”, *Atti dell’Istituto l’eneto de Scienze. Lettere ed Arti* 132 (1973–4), p. 247; S. Doloff, “Let Me Talk with This Philosopher: The Alexander Paradigm in *King Lear*”, *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 54 (1991), pp. 253–5; D. Pinski, *Aleksander un Dyogenes* (Vilne, 1930); Luis E. Navia, *Classical Cynicism: A Critical Study* (Greenwood, 1996), pp. 98–100.

³⁶ Cited from J. D. Burnley, *Chaucer Studies II: Chaucer’s Language and the Philosophers’ Tradition* (New York, 1979), p. 71.

³⁷ For instance, Niẓāmī describes Socrates “asleep, enjoying the sunshine” (*mashqūl-e khāb, barāsūda az tābish-e āftāb*), which recalls the famous sentence of Diogenes (Arr. *Anab.* 7.2; Diog. *Ep.* 33), telling Alexander “Please get out from between me and sun!”

³⁸ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 97.

³⁹ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 98.

⁴⁰ On the Pythagorean ascetic tradition and sexual abstinence in the pagan and Hellenistic periods see R. Damian Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 27–55.

come to know this tradition due to his interest in neo-Pythagorean philosophy⁴¹ or through Apollonius of Tyana,⁴² who appears in many episodes of the *Iskandarnāma* (both parts). On the other hand, there are also Greek sources that identify Alexander with views characteristic of the Cynic school,⁴³ though the Cynics did not abstain from sex.⁴⁴

Nizāmī continues the tale as follows. One morning, Alexander commands that a banquet be prepared for an assembly of sages.⁴⁵ He issues a command that Socrates be brought to the symposium (he has been invited several times, but has always refused). At last, Alexander has no alternative but to visit him in person. He finds Socrates asleep, enjoying the sunshine. At this juncture, Nizāmī offers a dialogue between the king and the philosopher, the theme of which is to illustrate the vanity of the conqueror, who is accustomed to boasting of his generosity. The message in this episode is that the less you possess in this journey (of life), the less you will suffer.⁴⁶ Socrates reproaches Alexander for his greed, telling him: “Although you possess this world, you would not be happy even if the entire tablecloth of the world belonged to you.”⁴⁷ He also affirms that he himself has great perseverance and high aspiration (*himmat*), while Alexander is a lowly slave of his own ambition and caprices. Socrates advises Alexander to polish his heart in order to realise “the divine secrets”.⁴⁸ This is evidently an allusion to the Sufi practice of polishing the heart through divine invocation (*dhikr*), as was elaborated by Nizāmī in the first part of the *Sharafnāma*, discussed in the previous chapter (see the sections “Alexander’s Mirror” and “Competition between the Byzantine and Chinese Painters”).

The ensuing tales also provide instances of how Alexander achieves just such ability by putting Socrates’s advice into practice. He stops drinking wine because now “he sees that there is no permanence to the joys [of this world].”⁴⁹ He gives so generously of his wealth to the people that poverty is eradicated throughout Greece

⁴¹ See Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, p. 184.

⁴² In Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Pythagoras was the model by which the author established the life of his protagonist. See Ewen L. Bowie, “Apollonius of Tyana: Tradition and Reality”, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Teil II: Principat, 16.2 (1978), pp. 3–41. The conclusion of the previous chapter suggests that Nizāmī might have known Philostratus’s work or the source(s) of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.

⁴³ For examples of texts which share the Cynic view of Alexander in Antiquity see R. Stoneman, “The Legacy of Alexander in Ancient Philosophy”, pp. 331–45.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Dr Richard Stoneman for drawing my attention to the fact that any matters concerning sexual asceticism must come from non-Cynic sources.

⁴⁵ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 103:

بران راهرو نیم جو بار نیست
که او را یکی جو در انبار نیست

⁴⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 104:

تو با اینکه داری جهانی چنین
نه ای سیردل هم ز خوانی چنین

⁴⁸ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 105:

دل پاک را زنگ پرداز کن
برو راز روحانیان باز کن

⁴⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 108:

دهن مهر کرد از می خوشگوار
که بنیاد شادی ندید استوار

(*Rūm*).⁵⁰ He reaches such a degree of wisdom that by the power of reason (*khirad*) he attains an intuitive understanding of the unseen realm.⁵¹ Nizāmī's presentation of Alexander's personality as an inspired Sufi mystic rather than a philosopher becomes more visible in the following tales of the *Iqbāl-nāma*.

The Seven Philosophers

According to Nizāmī, there were seven philosophers in Alexander's retinue, and he was the centre point of their compass.⁵² The origin and provenance of the motif of seven philosophers/sages surrounding a king is both ancient and obscure. To my knowledge, the earliest extant mention of it may be traced back to the Achaemenid period: Artaxerxes reportedly had seven counsellors.⁵³ There is also mention of the Seven Sages of Hellas in the Greek tradition.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the *Sindbādnāma* (*The Book of Syntipas, the Philosopher*) also played an important role in the development of the motif of seven philosophers counselling a king and may be the source of the motif of the so-called "Seven Sages of Rome".⁵⁵

In the *Iqbāl-nāma*, the seven philosophers in Alexander's court are named as Aristotle, Wālīs (Vettius Valens), Balīnās (Apollonius of Tyana), Socrates, Furfūrīyus (Porphyry), Hermes and Plato.⁵⁶ However, it might be said that the origin of this motif is less important than its significance for the study and understanding of the personality of Alexander in the *Iqbāl-nāma*. It is this last issue that this chapter is principally concerned with, since my focus will be on the reasons why Nizāmī's conception of Alexander in his poem places him in the realm of Sufi wisdom (*ma'rifa*) and wisdom (*khirad*) and effectively beyond the sphere of philosophy (*falsafa* in the Peripatetic sense of the word).

In this episode, a crucial characteristic of Alexander that Nizāmī establishes is that his belief and faith are mystical, transcending rationalistic philosophical discourse. In this context, Alexander asks the seven philosophers to discuss the causes of the First Creation (*āfarīnīsh-i nakhust*). Each philosopher advances a different philosophical

⁵⁰ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 120.

⁵¹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 135:

ز تعلیم دانش به جای رسید
که دادش خرد بر گشایش کلید

⁵² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 121:

چنین هفت پرگار بر گرد شاه
دران دایره شه شده نقطه گاه

⁵³ Ezra 7:14. The identification of Artaxerxes I or II depends on when we date Ezra; see the discussion in Stoneman, *Xerxes, A Persian Life* (New Haven/London, 2015), pp. 58–61.

⁵⁴ Plato, *Protagoras*, 343 A; Plutarch, *Mor.*, 146 Bff. See J. M. Dillon, *Morality and Custom in Ancient Greece* (Indiana, 2004), p. 190.

⁵⁵ See "The Seven Sages of Rome" in A. Grafton, G. Most and S. Settis (eds), *The Classical Tradition* (Harvard, 2010), p. 877.

⁵⁶ For a good overview of the motif of the philosophers surrounding Alexander in the Persian romance tradition, see Mario Casari, "The Wise Men at Alexander's Court in Persian Medieval Romances: An Iranian View of Ancient Cultural Heritage", *Iranian Identity in the Course of History*, ed. Carlo Cereti (Rome, 2010), pp. 67–80.

view, but Alexander trumps them all by humbly admitting his inability to understand either the ways of Providence or the causes of Creation, proclaiming:

It's lacking in propriety to state more than this:
"Without a Designer, no design in creation exists."⁵⁷

According to Nizāmī, Alexander has a pure heart (*rawshan-dil*)⁵⁸ and, consequently, is able to see the Unseen World. Alexander's knowledge is a key to unlock the supernatural mysteries, being of a magical nature and belonging to the "occult sciences" (*ilm-hā-yi nahān*).⁵⁹ This characteristic of Alexander is well-established in the episode of his encounter with the Indian sage (*hakīm-e Hind*),⁶⁰ during which Alexander's superiority becomes demonstrably apparent. The episode deals with certain theological dilemmas as the Indian sage asks Alexander questions on the nature of creation and the Creator, on the world after death, the soul, dreams, the evil eye, fortune telling and the reasons for different skin colours (black and white) among others. Alexander answers his questions in such a way that the Indian sage "became humbled" (*zabūn shud*) before Alexander's wisdom. In this episode, Nizāmī aims to show that practical worldly wisdom without divine knowledge has no merit. Alexander's wisdom represents a synthesis of knowledge and faith and that is why he is superior to the Indian sage, who represents mere sophistry and casuistry.

Alexander's encounters with the chief of the Indians (Dandamis) and the Indian Brahmans form an important episode of the *Alexander Romance* (PC, 3.5ff) as well as featuring in the extant accounts given by all historians of Alexander.⁶¹ However, Nizāmī's version of this episode is totally different from all the other historical accounts of Alexander that I have encountered to date, as well as the known legends relating to the *Alexander Romance*. While in the Greek sources it is always Alexander who poses a series of questions or riddles to the Indians, in Nizāmī's *Iqbāl-nāma*, it is the Indian sage who asks the questions and Alexander who delivers the wise responses.

In brief, it can be said that in the first part of the *Iqbāl-nāma*, Nizāmī establishes Alexander's character as an enlightened mystic and a sage who has mastered the occult sciences, an adept whose wisdom transcends the sort of rationalistic discourses that are normally associated with Greek philosophy. The Alexander of the *Iqbāl-nāma* no longer questions the causes of Creation; instead he seeks the Creator:

No longer did he talk of creation's causes
Because for him to seek the Creator sufficed.⁶²

⁵⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 131:

از این بیش گفتن نباشد پسند
که نقش جهان نیست بی نقشبند

⁵⁸ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 130.

⁵⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 135.

⁶⁰ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 108–20.

⁶¹ For references see R. Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995), p. 99, nn. 1 and 2.

⁶² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 135:

As a result, he becomes worthy to receive God's message (*wahy*) and becomes a prophet.

II. Alexander in the Dhū'l-Qarnayn Tradition

As has been noted, in the Islamic tradition, Alexander is identified with the prophet Dhū'l-Qarnayn mentioned in the Qur'ān (*Sūrah* 18:82). This identification created an important branch of Alexander literature in Arabic, and consequently in Persian, which Doufikaer-Aerts appropriately calls "the Dhū'l-Qarnayn tradition".⁶³ This genre, in contrast to the other branches of Alexander literature (Alexander wisdom literature, the *Alexander Romance* tradition, etc.), which are mainly based on the Byzantine and Greek works, represents a separate and independent development within the framework of Arabic literature itself.⁶⁴ The main motif of the Dhū'l-Qarnayn tradition, which can be partially traced back to the *Alexander Romance* tradition as well, is the wall built by the conqueror against Gog and Magog (mentioned in the Qur'ān, *Sūrah* 18:92–8).

The purpose of the present chapter is not to discuss the identification of Dhū'l-Qarnayn himself or the reliability of traditions ascribed to him. Rather, the more important point to be emphasised and explored here is that in the Islamic world, Alexander was identified as the prophet Dhū'l-Qarnayn in both the historical and Romance traditions from the ninth century onwards. According to Doufikaer-Aerts, the Dhū'l-Qarnayn tradition reflects a development which can be traced back to previous Middle Eastern Alexander traditions (e.g. the Syriac Christian legend)⁶⁵ alongside the γ-recension of the PC and the oldest Arabic commentaries on the Qur'ān (e.g. 18:82–98).⁶⁶

The first episode of the *Iqbāl-nāma* deals with the question of why Alexander was identified as Dhū'l-Qarnayn (Bicorn). Nizāmī identifies seven reasons, which take into account various connotations of the term *qarn*:

- 1) Alexander is Dhū'l-Qarnayn because he reached both extremes (*qarn*) of the world, east and west.⁶⁷
- 2) Alexander is Dhū'l-Qarnayn because he could fight with both hands (*qarn* as arm/hand).

نزد دیگر از آفرینش نفس
جهان آفرین را طلب کرد و بس

I owe the poetic translation of Nizāmī's verses in this chapter to Dr Leonard Lewisohn, to whom I am very grateful.

⁶³ See Doufikaer-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, chapter three.

⁶⁴ Doufikaer-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 135.

⁶⁵ See chapter one of this thesis.

⁶⁶ Doufikaer-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, p. 188.

⁶⁷ Bal'amī also commented this interpretation. See Bal'amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal'amī*, vol. II, p. 701.

- 3) Alexander is Dhū'l-Qarnayn because he fastened his hair (*qarn* as hair) into braids on both sides of his head.⁶⁸
- 4) Alexander is Dhū'l-Qarnayn because he dreamt that he held the two poles of the sun (*qarn* as pole).
- 5) Alexander is Dhū'l-Qarnayn because his life spanned two different centuries (*qarn* as century).
- 6) According to Abū Ma'shar (Albumasar) in his book *al-Ulūf* (*Book of Thousands*),⁶⁹ when Alexander died, due to the great love they felt for him, the Greeks drew or painted a portrait of him with two angels bearing horns on either side of his head. When the Arabs saw this painting they incorrectly thought that these angels were Alexander himself, and thus came to call him “the Two-Horned One” (*ṣāhib daw qarn*).⁷⁰
- 7) Niẓāmī also adds that “a wise man” (*khudāvand-i hūsh*) told him that Alexander was called “the Two-Horned One” because his ears were overlarge.⁷¹

In the verses in the first episode of the *Iqbāl-nāma* that discuss the epithet *Dhū'l-qarnayn* given to Alexander, Niẓāmī offers a thorough summary of the long tradition of dispute over its meaning.⁷² Similar summaries and explanations which hardly differ from the above have been given by different writers. For instance, Bīrūnī (d. after 1050) dedicated a whole chapter of his *Kitāb al-Āthār al-bāqī'a* ‘*an al-qurūn al-khālī'a* (*Book of Vestiges from Past Centuries*) to discussing “the different opinions of various nations regarding the king called Dhū'l-Qarnayn”.⁷³ Although Bīrūnī did not endorse the theory that Alexander should be identified with the prophet Dhū'l-Qarnayn, it is worth noting that most of the themes relating to Alexander as a historical personage in Niẓāmī's *Iskandarnāma* can also be found in this chapter of Bīrūnī's work. The account given in the *History of Bal'amī* also coincides with Niẓāmī's regarding the different

⁶⁸ Arrian (7.14.4) suggested that Alexander wore his hair long in imitation of Achilles. According to Olga Palagia, there are two silver decadrachm (medallions of Porus) on which Alexander appears with strands of hair hanging down from either side of his helmet over his chest. See Olga Palagia, “The Impact of Alexander the Great in the Art of Central Asia”, *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, p. 372.

⁶⁹ Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī (c. 787–886), is best known for his astrological writings. See Keiji Yamamoto, “Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī”, *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Astronomers*, ed. Thomas Hockey et al. (New York, 2007), p. 11.

⁷⁰ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 44–5.

⁷¹ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 45.

⁷² On this tradition and the background of various Dhū'l-Qarnayn legends in Islam, see Doufekar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, pp. 135–50; K. Aḥmad-Nizhād, *Taḥlīl-i āthār-i Niẓāmī Ganjavī* (Tehran, 1375/1996), pp. 153–8; Şafavī, *Iskandar va adabīyāt-i Irān*, pp. 279–310.

⁷³ Bīrūnī, *Āthār al-bāqī'a*, p. 31; English translation, p. 43.

connotations of the epithet Dhū'l-Qarnayn, and also enumerates a number of historical persons who might be identified with him.⁷⁴

It is interesting that the seventh interpretation above, that of Dhū'l-Qarnayn's ears being "overlarge", soon developed into a legend in which Alexander was said to have ears as long as a donkey's. The Persian poet Sanā'ī (d. c. 1130) commented on this motif in his epic poem *The Enclosed Garden of Truth (Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa)*.⁷⁵ Two of the greatest Persian poets, Niẓāmī and Sanā'ī, thus affirmed that Alexander used to hide his overlong ears under his crown. As the legend goes, the only person who knew Alexander's secret was his barber. One day, the barber went to a well and confided the secret of the conqueror's donkey-like ears to it. When reeds grew out of that well, a shepherd cut one of them to make it into a flute. The reeds, which had picked up the barber's words, exposed the secret: "King Alexander has donkey's ears." This legend is obviously based on the variant of the myth of King Midas in which he had donkey's ears.⁷⁶ During the transmigration of this legend into Persian poetry, Midas's long ears replaced Alexander's "horns". Taking into account Niẓāmī's words "juz īn guft bā man ..." (I was told in another manner ...), we deduce that his source was an oral one.⁷⁷

The Prophet Alexander

Once Alexander has mastered all the sciences, Niẓāmī informs us that he realises that what he was seeking was not there. The above-cited verse merits repetition here:

No longer did he talk of creation's causes
Because for him to seek the Creator sufficed.⁷⁸

Niẓāmī emphasises the transcendental scope of Alexander's knowledge, which enabled him to penetrate into the realm of the Unseen and apprehend what was beyond ordinary mortals:

In seeing the sights that are visible to the eye
His aim was but to find what was "impossible".⁷⁹

Finally, his attempt to reveal the "secrets" bears fruit. Alexander receives a summons from God informing him of his vocation, which henceforth is to travel around the

⁷⁴ See Bal'amī, *Tārīkh-i Bal'amī*, vol. II, pp. 701ff.

⁷⁵ Sanā'ī, *Kitāb Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa wa sharī'at al-ṭarīqa*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran, 1377/1998), pp. 351–52.

⁷⁶ In her article "King Midas' Ears on Alexander's Head", Doufīkar-Aerts explores these oral traditions reflected in the repertoires of preachers and storytellers (pp. 61–79).

⁷⁷ For instance, Doufīkar-Aerts quotes the Darī variant of this story, as preserved by an aged lady from Kabul, beside some Turkish variants. See "King Midas' Ears on Alexander's Head", pp. 70–1.

⁷⁸ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 135:

نزد دیگر از آفرینش نفس
جهان آفرین را طلب کرد و بس

⁷⁹ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 136.

world, calling people to the true religion and releasing them from tyranny and ignorance.⁸⁰

When Alexander asks the angel (*surūsh*) who has brought him news of his prophethood for some miracle or marvel that might serve as evidence or proof of his prophethood for those sceptical of his mission, the angel answers that his miracle will be his wisdom, and that he will be able to speak in and understand every language of the world.⁸¹

You will be aided, given guidance so by inspiration
You'll have foreknowledge of all dialects of men.
In every land for every tongue you'll be a dragoman,
No lingo, no parole there'll be that you don't know.
Likewise, whenever you talk to men in Greek
They will decipher all you say without an interpreter.⁸²

Nizāmī then relates how the three greatest philosophers of classical antiquity, namely Aristotle, Plato and Socrates, each writes a Book of Wisdom (*khiradnāma*) for Alexander. The contents of their tomes deal with the main themes of Islamic statecraft, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and also feature typical advice drawn from the mirror for princes genre (justice, fear of God, sending wise ambassadors, how to keep the army satisfied, eating little, modesty, etc.).⁸³

In order to fulfil his mission as a prophet and invite the people to the true path, Alexander leaves the throne to his son, Iskandarūs.⁸⁴ He leaves Macedonia and passes through Alexandria.⁸⁵ He reaches Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem ask Alexander to release them from the tyranny of their king who “was an enemy to the friends of God”. Alexander accedes to their wishes, kills the tyrant and hangs him on the gate of Jerusalem.⁸⁶ After liberating the people of Jerusalem, he continues his journey towards the West (*maghrib*) and reaches Europe (*Afranja*) and Spain (*al-Andalus*).⁸⁷

At this point, the *Iqbāl-nāma* details a number of Alexander's adventures that belong properly to the '*ajāyib (mirabilia)*' genre. Nizāmī narrates many of the marvellous adventures and wonders of the world which Alexander encounters during

⁸⁰ Alexander's prophethood is discussed in a similar way by Bal'amī (*Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 711).

⁸¹ There is a similar attribution to Alexander in the anonymous *Mujmal al-tavārīkh* (pp. 506–7).

⁸² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 139–40.

⁸³ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 142–64.

⁸⁴ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 166:

بفرمود تا عبره روم و روس
نیشتنند بر نام اسکندروس

⁸⁵ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 168:

ز مقدونیه روی در راه کرد
به اسکندریه گذرگاه کرد

⁸⁶ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 170:

چو بیدادگر دید، خون ریختش
ز دروازه مقدس آویختش

⁸⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 170:

بر افرنجه آورد از آنجا سپاه
وز افرنجه بر اندلس کرد راه

his travels as a prophet. The poet's recourse to the *mirabilia* genre here functions as a didactic device. The protagonist of the poem can only acquire both knowledge of himself and of the supernatural, divine realm through strange encounters and marvellous experiences that transcend rational understanding. Such incredible experiences not only serve to further his quest for divine kingship, but ultimately enable him, in his role as prophet and spiritual guide of the people, to interpret the laws of the cosmos and uncover higher laws sustaining both the natural and supernatural realms. As stated in the *Cosmography* of Aḥmad Ṭūsī (possibly written between 1160 and 1177),⁸⁸ man should exert himself to study the wondrous and wisely conceived creation of God, in order to reflect upon it in wonder and astonishment and to understand as much as is possible. In this way, man will gain the delights of both this world and the hereafter.⁸⁹

III. *Mirabilia*: Alexander and the Marvels of the World

The last part of the *Iqbāl-nāma* contains tales from 'ajāyib (*mirabilia*) genre, a genre which is influenced in great part, on the one hand, by the Greek sources of the great Hellenic scientists and philosophers,⁹⁰ and on the other by the Qur'ān, which points out the marvels of creation as a proof of God's power. The representative works of this genre in Persian and Arabic are mainly known under the standard titles of 'Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāyib al-mawjūdāt (*Prodigies of Things Created and Miraculous Aspects of Things Existing*) or *Cosmography*,⁹¹ or 'Ajāyib al-Buldān (*Wonders of the Lands*).⁹² At the time Niẓāmī was composing the *Iqbāl-nāma*, this genre had reached its peak in the Persian tradition at the hand of Aḥmad Ṭūsī in the twelfth century. The sources of Ṭūsī's *Cosmography*⁹³ may also have been used by Niẓāmī, since it contains various wondrous tales about Alexander that also appear in the *Iqbāl-nāma*.

The marvels are found in two parts of the Greek *Alexander Romance*. Firstly, the *Epistola Alexandri Magni ad Aristotelem de mirabilibus Indiae* (*Letter of Alexander to Aristotle about the Wonders of India*), which describes many monstrous beasts and strange races of men. The Greek original of this text is lost, although it is preserved in abridged or truncated form in all the Greek versions of the *Romance*.⁹⁴ Secondly, the letter to Olympias (II. 23–40) contains other marvellous adventures that took place

⁸⁸ Muḥammad Ibn Maḥmūd Ibn Aḥmad Ṭūsī, 'Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāyib al-mawjūdāt [*Prodigies of Things Created and Miraculous Aspects of Things Existing*], ed. M. Sutūda (Tehran, 1391/2012), introduction, p. xvi.

⁸⁹ See Aḥmad Ṭūsī, 'Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁰ Such as Megasthenes and Philostratus. See R. Stoneman, "The Marvels of India", *A Life in Legend*, pp. 69–72; K. Karttunen, *India and the Hellenistic World* (Helsinki, 1997); J. Romm, *The Edges of the World in Ancient Thought* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 82–120.

⁹¹ The most important work with this title in Persian is attributed to Aḥmad Ṭūsī (twelfth century) and that in Arabic to Abū Yaḥyā Zakarīyā b. Muḥammad Qazwīnī (c. 1203–83).

⁹² On the *Ajāyib al-Buldān* (*Wonders of the Lands*) attributed to Abū al-Mu'ayyid Balkhī (tenth century), see M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shināsī*, 7th ed. (Tehran, 1373/1994), vol. II, pp. 18–19; Dh. Ṣafā, *Tārīkh adabīyāt dar Irān*, vol. I, p. 618.

⁹³ Aḥmad Ṭūsī, *Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt*, introduction, p. xvi.

⁹⁴ Richard Stoneman, "Romantic Ethnography: Central Asia and India in the Alexander Romance", *Ancient World* 25 (1994), pp. 93–107; see also Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 73–7, 238.

mainly in Jerusalem and Egypt (γ-recension), while repeating adventures that take place in Book II.8.⁹⁵

The Lighthouse of Alexandria

The first marvel of Alexander mentioned in the *Iqbāl-nāma* is the Lighthouse of Alexandria from which the Alexandrian people can see an approaching enemy fleet a month before it arrives. This lighthouse thus effectively enables them to protect the city against any seaborne enemy.⁹⁶ Nizāmī attributes its construction to Alexander, who places his “mirror” on the Pharos.⁹⁷ Curiously, Abū Ṭāhir Ṭarsūsī relates a similar story in the *Dārābnāma* about a tower with a mirror that offers a view all the way to Constantinople. According to Ṭarsūsī, Ptolemy first tried to build it, but failed. Then Plato resumed the attempt to construct the Lighthouse. Its construction by Plato is described quite extensively by Ṭarsūsī.⁹⁸ Aside from being one of several quasi-supernatural “marvels” attributed to Alexander, the building of the lighthouse also demonstrates his military abilities, showing the conqueror as “a clever inventor of defensive stratagems which give him both knowledge and control of the world at large”.⁹⁹

The construction of the lighthouse of Alexandria also appeared in the ‘*Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt*’ of Aḥmad Ṭūsī, but he distinguished between “Alexander son of Philip” – to whom he attributed its construction – and “Alexander Dhū’l-Qarnayn.”¹⁰⁰

Marine Monsters and Deadly Deserts

Most of the other marvels related by Nizāmī about Alexander deal with the wonders he experienced while crossing oceans and deserts. Nizāmī reported that Alexander navigates seas for three months and visits many inhabited islands. He also comes across a desert that was composed entirely of sulphur. He crosses this desert for a month until he reaches an enormous sea which “the Greeks call *Uqyānūs* [ocean]”.¹⁰¹ There is no sunset on this ocean. Being eager to unveil the secret of this ocean and to explore what

⁹⁵ See Supplement F in Stoneman’s edition of *The Greek Alexander Romance*.

⁹⁶ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 168:

که از روی دریا به یک ماهه راه

نشان باز داد از سپید و سیاه

⁹⁷ Most of the Islamic sources attributed the construction of the lighthouse of Alexandria to Alexander. For Arabic sources, see F. Doufekar-Aerts, “Alexander the Great and the Pharos of Alexandria in Arabic literature”, *The Problematics of Power*, ed. J. Ch. Bürgel and M. Bridges (Bern, 1996), pp. 191–201. For Persian sources see *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, p. 494; Ṣafavī, *Iskandar va adabīyāt-i Iran*, pp. 214–17. See also Amīr Khusrāw Dihlavī, “A’īna-yi Iskandarī”, *Khamsa*, ed. A. Aḥmad Ashrafī (Tehran, 1362/1983), pp. 495–96.

⁹⁸ Ṭarsūsī, *Dārābnāma*, vol. II, pp. 531–4.

⁹⁹ See Stoneman, “Alexander’s Mirror”, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Aḥmad Ṭūsī, *Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt*, pp. 180–3, 146.

¹⁰¹ The text reads *ki Yūnānīsh uqyānūs kh’ānd*. The fact that Nizāmī uses the word *uqyānūs* (from the Ancient Greek Ὠκεανός, *Okeanós*) in this verse may indicate his knowledge of the Greek language, insofar as no other poets or authors in Persian literature had used this word before him. See the editor’s note to Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 171, n. 4.

lies beyond it, Alexander approaches it, only to find that its water is so dense that it does not evaporate and form cloud. It is likewise impossible to navigate the waters of this ocean. The experts warn Alexander that in that “silver” water is a fearsome sea monster, a whale as terrible as a dragon, whose name is “the Killer” (*Qaşşāša*).

Worse than this monstrous whale, however, they warn him about the dangers of the shore of an island on the far side of the ocean. This is a shining shore on which lie colourful stones. However, if any man gazes on these stones, he immediately starts to laugh and cannot stop, laughing himself to death. For this reason it is called the “deadly shore” (*pahna-yi jānguzāy*).¹⁰²

To protect himself from the dangers presented by this deadly shore, Alexander uses a ruse. He orders that men, mounted blindfold on drunken camels, should go to the island and bring some of its stones and its yellow soil. The stones are covered in canvas so they cannot hurt anyone’s eyesight. Then he orders that a castle be built with them covered with mud of the yellow soil. As the years pass, the canvas is worn away and the stones come to light. Everyone who enters the castle dies for the stones capture life like a magnet attracting metals.¹⁰³

A very similar story is told in the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De lapidibus*, a sober geological treatise. This describes a stone called Elbehecte, which is yellow in colour, and makes anyone who looks at it completely witless and unable to stop gazing at it.¹⁰⁴ In the Persian literary tradition, this story is known as *Shāristān-i rū’in* (City of Brass) and in Arabic as *Madīnat al-ṣifr*.¹⁰⁵ At the end of this tale, Nizāmī adds, “he heard that a ruler wanted to verify the existence of this city.” According to the author of the anonymous *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, that “king” was the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwān (d. 705), who after finding a book in which this tale appeared, sent his troops to find the city.¹⁰⁶

The construction of the deadly castle now complete, Alexander marches through deserts for a period of six months until he reaches the spring of the River Nile. He follows the flow of the river until he reaches a green musky mountain. The Nile cascades down from this mountain like a waterfall. The mountain itself is unscalable and covered in thorns. And even if a man managed to reach the mountain’s peak, he invariably went to the other side of the mountain, where he disappeared and never returned. In order to solve the mystery of the mountain, Alexander sends out various men as scouts to its top, but none of them returns. Eventually, he sends a father and son who are writers. The son follows his father a few steps behind. When the man reaches the peak, he writes down everything he sees on the far side of the mountain and sends his son back with his report. However, the writer himself does not return. The son gives

¹⁰² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 174–5.

¹⁰³ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 176. There is a similar story in the *‘Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt* of Aḥmad Tūsī (p. 357).

¹⁰⁴ Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁵ For instance see Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadānī, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, vol. V, p. 71; Mas’ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. I, p. 369; Yāqūt Ḥamavī, *Mu’jam*, IV, p. 45; Qazwīnī, *‘Ajāyib*, II, p. 375. See also A. Hamori, “An Allegory from the Arabian Nights: The City of Brass”, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, (Princeton, 1974), pp. 145–63.

¹⁰⁶ *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, pp. 501–11.

Alexander the report, which reveals that what lies on the other side of the mountain is Paradise. Alexander refrains from divulging the content of the report, fearing that all his followers would go to this Paradise and never return if they heard about it.

In addition to the above legendary episode, Alexander's search for the source of the Nile is based on historical sources.¹⁰⁷ The legend that the source of the Nile was in Paradise has its origin in a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and explained in the anonymous *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, that relates the tale of a man in search of the source of the Nile.¹⁰⁸ The story of Alexander's visit to Paradise was first told in the Talmud, then in the Arabic sources (Wahb Ibn Munabih) and was finally presented in a Western version in Latin as *Alexander the Great's Journey to Paradise* (twelfth century).¹⁰⁹

Nizāmī continues the poem with another paradise-like place. Alexander leaves the source of the River Nile, and traverses a desert until he reaches the Iram Garden.¹¹⁰ In this marvellous garden, he finds the tomb of Shaddād (son of 'Ād) on which there is an inscription made of rubies warning the reader to beware of human mortality and death. This story seems to echo the episode of Alexander's encounter with the dead King Cyrus in the City of the Sun (related in *PC*, III, 28) and his concern about death. The content of the inscription in the *Iqbāl-nāma* also bears a great resemblance with that on Cyrus's tomb.¹¹¹ This episode highlights the vanity of worldly goods and power. As R. Stoneman points out, "Alexander is the epitome of the man who has everything, yet it profiteth him nothing for he is doomed to die."¹¹²

Nizāmī next says that Alexander begins his journey through another desert, in which he encounters desert men, whose skin is blacker than tar and who live in caves. Their food is crocodile meat and they can survive without water. Alexander teaches them his customs and wisdom, and they guide him out of the poisonous desert towards a more prosperous land. Emerging from the desert, Alexander and his followers come to another sea. They build a ship for themselves and set sail. After a month's voyage, they reach a land where they rest for a month.

The Village of the Skull Worshippers (*sar-parastān*)

Next, Alexander marches south from the east, until he reaches a prosperous village "green as Paradise". However, its inhabitants worship skulls and all look insane. They have no king. Everyone has a vat full of sesame oil. When they come across a lost traveller, they kill him and put him in their vat. After thirty or forty days, they cut off the dead man's head and ask the skull to foretell the future, which it does, a prophetic

¹⁰⁷ S. M. Burstein, "Alexander, Callisthenes and the Sources of the Nile", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 17 (1976), pp. 135–46.

¹⁰⁸ *Mujmal al-tavārīkh*, pp. 474–5.

¹⁰⁹ Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 165.

¹¹⁰ This evidently refers to the "Iram of lofty pillars" mentioned in the Qur'ān (Fajr, 89:7) built by Shaddād, a legendary king of Arabia.

¹¹¹ On the comparison between Shaddād's inscription and that of Cyrus the Great see Şafavī, *Iskandar va adabīyāt-i Irān*, p. 221.

¹¹² See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 163–4.

voice issuing from it.¹¹³ When Alexander sees the evil of this practice, he realises that it is the work of demons (*dīv*). He orders that the vats be smashed and removes the sesame oil from their houses. Then he teaches them the correct way to worship God.

A similar tale is attested in the *Fihrist* of Ibn Nadīm (chap. IX), who reports it as “Hikāyat al-ra’s” (the Skull’s Tale). Ibn Nadīm attributed this custom to the *Ṣābi’ūn* (Sabians), a name applied in Arabic texts to the pagans of ancient Greece and other polytheists.¹¹⁴ Ibn Nadīm explains that:

The skull was that of a man whose appearance was that of Mercury, corresponding to what they believe regarding the appearance of stars. When they found a man whose appearance corresponded to that of Mercury, they captured him ... and placed him in oil for a long time until his joints softened ... They did this each year when Mercury was in ascension. Those people believed that the soul moved between Mercury and the skull, and thus could foretell the future and would respond to whatever one asked of it ...¹¹⁵

Ibn Nadīm quotes a book called the *Kitāb al-ḥātīfī*¹¹⁶ in which these people and their customs regarding the use of skulls are mentioned. This tale is also attested in the Hermetic *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*Goal of the Sage*) attributed to Majrīṭī,¹¹⁷ known in medieval Europe under its Latin title, *Picatrix*.¹¹⁸ “Talking heads” were used in the Greek and Roman necromancy.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, Niẓāmī’s reference to the *sar-parastān* and the notion of prophetic skulls might hark back to a Jewish tale, because the Teraphim consulted by the ancient Hebrews seem also to be dead heads.¹²⁰

Valley of the Diamonds

The *Iqbāl-nāma* presents Alexander as the first person to discover diamonds. In his *Mineralogy*,¹²¹ Bīrūnī called the diamond “the eagle-stone”, highlighting that it was discovered by Dhū’l-Qarnayn (whom he does not identify as Alexander) in the Valley of Diamonds. As is well known, all such tales of the discovery of diamonds have their

¹¹³ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 189–91.

¹¹⁴ According to Fahd, it is also applied to “a community following an old Semitic polytheistic religion, but with a strongly Hellenised elite, one of the last outposts of Late Antique paganism”. See T. Fahd, “Ṣābi’a”, *EF*, VIII, p. 676.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, trans. M. R. Tajaddud (Tehran, 1343/1964), p. 570.

¹¹⁶ On the possible identification of this book see T. M. Green, *The City of Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran* (Leiden, 1992), p. 180.

¹¹⁷ Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī (d. 1007), known in Europe as “Pseudo Picatrix” (the “Pseudo Hippocrates”). See J. Vernet, “al-Majrīṭī”, *EF*, V, pp. 1109–10.

¹¹⁸ See D. Pingree (ed.), *Picatrix, The Latin Version of the Ghayat al-hakim* (London, 1986); R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 133. For the version of prophetic skulls in the *Picatrix* see H. Ritter and M. Plessner, “*Picatrix*”: *Das Ziel des Weisen von Pseudo-Majrīṭī* (Studies of the Warburg Institute 27) (London, 1962), pp. 146–7.

¹¹⁹ See D. Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton/Oxford, 2001), pp. 210–16. For Greek texts on the use of skulls in necromancy see D. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, pp. 202–5.

¹²⁰ See Stoneman, *The Ancient Oracles*, pp. 67–9.

¹²¹ Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-jamāhir fī ma’rifat al-jawāhir* [*The Sum of Knowledge about Precious Stones*], ed. F. Krenkow (Hyderabad, 1355/1936), p. 99.

origins in *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle about India*.¹²² Niẓāmī relates that Alexander and his army reach a mountain which circumstances oblige them to cross. When the hooves of their animals are damaged by the hard stones, Alexander commands that they be wrapped in leather and felt. When his guides bring some of the mountain's stones to Alexander, he tries to strike them with his sword and its blade shatters into small pieces. None can break the stone except with lead, which in fact did not break it but only scratched it. Alexander names this stone *almās* (diamond).¹²³

Alexander's men are motivated to push on and scale the mountain when they are informed that this stone is the most precious of all minerals. Descending the mountain, they reach a valley full of diamonds and snakes. As Alexander meditates on a workable solution that might enable him to cross the valley, he notices black eagles with game in their beaks soaring in the air. He commands that some sheep be slain and their carcasses cut into small pieces. His men cast the mutton into the valley coated with diamonds, so that the diamonds stick to the meat like salt. At this point, the eagles descend into the valley and carry the meat up to the summits of the mountain. The eagles devour the meat, leaving behind the diamonds, which Alexander's men collect. In this manner, they manage to gather the diamonds without being bitten by the snakes.

Niẓāmī's account has certain resonances with the Greek *Alexander Romance* (II. 22), where we read that when Alexander and his army enter the Land of Darkness they pass through a valley where they pick up stones. Emerging from the darkness, they realise that they have picked up jewels. However, the story of the Valley of Diamonds in the *Iqbāl-nāma* is more likely based on a version of the tale known from the work of the Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis's *De gemmis (On Gems)* written in the fourth century.¹²⁴ The story is also retold by Qazwīnī in his *'Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt (The Wonders of Creation)*¹²⁵ and eventually found its way into the *Thousand and One Nights*, where it is mentioned in the second voyage of Sindbād the Sailor.¹²⁶

After riding for a month, Alexander and his army reach a prosperous land in which Alexander encounter a handsome young man working on a farm with a spade. Alexander, attracted by the noble character of his simplicity, offers to redeem him from manual labour and elevate him to become ruler of an entire kingdom.¹²⁷ The young farmer rejects the conqueror's proposal:

He said, "O you to whom all fame and fortune are subject
And by whom all unmanageable men are managed!
Let each one take up that task and work which best
Suits his nature, which requires of him no forethought.

¹²² See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 85–6.

¹²³ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 192. With "almās", Niẓāmī must be referring to the word *adāmas*, from the ancient Greek ἀδάμας (unbreakable).

¹²⁴ See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 85.

¹²⁵ Qazwīnī, *Kitāb 'ajāyib al-Makhlūqāt*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1849), vol. II, p. 375.

¹²⁶ See Y. Yamanaka, "Alexander in The Thousand and One Nights and the Ghazālī Connection", *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*, ed. Y. Yamanaka and T. Nishio (New York/London, 2006), pp. 93–115.

¹²⁷ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 195.

If this gross flesh, adept at hard labour, were treated gently
It would be like using gummy frankincense for honey.”¹²⁸

The young farmer is obviously not the average manual labourer, for he had foreknowledge of Alexander’s arrival, having dreamt of him. Alexander rests there for a night before continuing on his journey. He and his army then reach a green land which, however, is devoid of crops due to the storms and floods with which the farmers have been afflicted. Alexander commands that a dam be constructed to irrigate the land, which he called *Iskandarābād*, and declares its inhabitants free from payment of tribute and taxes.¹²⁹

Alexander’s Return to India

Upon his return to India, Alexander passes through a city that the Turks call *Kang-Bihisht*.¹³⁰ In this city is a temple called Qandahār, and in the temple is a huge golden idol as tall as the ceiling, its eyes two precious stones shining like lamps. Alexander orders that the idol be destroyed, states Nizāmī. The inhabitants of the city beg Alexander not to destroy it because of the ancient story behind its sculpture, which one of them relates as follows:

Before the temple’s construction in its present form, there had been a damaged dome there. One day, two birds came to that dome with two precious stones in their beak. They dropped the stones and left. In order to avoid the townsfolk battling over those stones, the people built the golden idol and used the stones for its eyes.

Taking heed of the idol’s marvellous origins, Alexander decides not to destroy it and instead commands that an inscription be set on the top of it: “This is a game hunted but let loose by Alexander.”¹³¹ The same story is told in the *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā* (*The Chronicle of Bukhārā*), which locates it in Bukhārā and makes no mention of Alexander.¹³²

¹²⁸ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 196:

چنان مان به هر پیشه ور پیشه ای
که در خلقتش ناید اندیشه ای

¹²⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 198.

¹³⁰ This must refer to the word mentioned in the *Avesta* (*Ābān Yasht*, 54, 57; *Zāmyād Yasht*, 4) and to “Kang Dizh” (which can be translated as the Castle of Kang), which appears in the *Bundahishn* (29.10) and in the *Mīnū-yi Khirad* (62.13–14). The castle was said to have been built by Sīyāvajsh, Kay Khusraw’s father. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. II, pp. 308–9.

¹³¹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 202:

نیشست از بر پیکر آن نگار
که با داغ اسکندر است این شکار

¹³² Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Ja‘far, *Tārīkh-i Bukhārā*, ed. Muddaris Raḍavī, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1363/1984), pp. 62–3.

Wonders of the Black Sea¹³³

Nizāmī then relates how Alexander is eager to set sail and behold the wonders of the seas, and embarks on maritime adventures. He continues his journey until he reaches China. The Chinese Emperor (*khāqān-i Chīn*) receives him at his court, and the poet tells us that he accepts Alexander's religion.

Alexander asks the Chinese Emperor to accompany him on his sea voyage, and he agrees. Alexander chooses 10,000 men from his army and provides with sufficient rations for the voyage. They sail for forty days until they reach the Black Sea (*āb-i kabūd*). They are informed that there is a land where mermaids (*'arūsān-i ābī*) gather on the shore every night,¹³⁴ and sing and play music all night. However, at "the scent of the dawn", they plunge back into the sea. Everyone who hears the mermaids' songs is struck unconscious. In order to verify the truth of this tale, Alexander goes to the shore alone at night and sees the mermaids coming out of the sea. Their long, dishevelled hair, which they let down freely, covers their bodies entirely.¹³⁵ When he hears their song, Alexander starts to cry and laugh simultaneously. Having confirmed the veracity of the story and experienced for himself the strange thrills evoked by the mermaids' nocturnal concert, he returns to his army.

In the Greek *Romance*, the *Letter to Aristotle* (22) features a similar encounter with marine women. This letter relates how women with long hair that covers their whole body emerged from a river and dragged men from Alexander's army into the water. Nizāmī's account of the legend seems to be based on the recensions of this text (ε 33.3 and γ II.41 only) in which sirens emerge from a lake and dance around it during the night.¹³⁶

Talismanic Statues

The *Alexander Romance* tradition presents several examples of statues located in remote areas of the world, or erected by Alexander at a turning point in his career.¹³⁷ This motif seems to symbolise – and indicate the conqueror's physical approach to – the borders of the inhabited world. Such statues normally bear inscriptions or talismans that serve to draw attention to the existence of imminent danger if a traveller tries to continue through the land or the sea beyond them. Indeed, one of the characteristics of Alexander

¹³³ Nizāmī uses "āb-i kabūd", which means the Black Sea:

چو نزدیک آب کبود آمدند
به پایین دریا فرود آمدند

However, it is ambiguous because in some verses he refers to a "Chinese Sea" (*daryā-yi Chīn*):

درا فگند کشتی به دریای چین

Thus, it is not clear whether he is referring to different seas or applying multiple names to the same one.

¹³⁴ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 205.

¹³⁵ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 205:

پراکنده گیسو بر اندام خویش
زده مشک بر نقره خام خویش

¹³⁶ See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 145–6.

¹³⁷ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 97; Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great: Being a Series of Ethiopic Texts* (London, 1896), p. 147.

as the prophet Dhū'l-Qarnayn is his reaching and surveying the farthest bounds of the Earth.

The *Iqbāl-nāma* includes two episodes in which Alexander builds such statues. In the first, following his encounter with the mermaids, Alexander orders the captain of his vessels to set sail because he has foreknowledge that God wishes him to undertake a maritime mission. At the same time, knowing the dangers of the voyage, he orders the Chinese Emperor to stay on the shore and wait for him. Among the philosophers in his retinue, Alexander chooses only the wise magician Balīnās/Apollonius of Tyana to accompany him on his voyage. They sail towards the deepest part of the ocean, where there is nothing but a vast expanse of salty water. The strong current almost carries them away, so they have no choice but to return. The sailors, being scared, consult their maps, which show that they have reached the very ends of the Earth. Suddenly, an island appears as shining like a light. Afraid of the strong currents, they rest on the island, where Alexander orders Balīnās to sculpt a talismanic statue of copper with an extended arm pointing to the dangerous area of the ocean. The statue warned all ships that it was not safe to sail beyond that island.¹³⁸ As they return from the ends of the Earth, Alexander realises that it was divine Providence that bore him to that dangerous spot in order to place a talismanic statue there and thus save all future sailors' lives.

In the second episode, ten days into their voyage home, Alexander's sailors realise that they are lost. Suddenly a mountain appears before them, rising up out of the sea, on the far side of which is a whirlpool. When the captain of the conqueror's navy sees this deadly whirlpool, he casts anchor and orders his sailors to disembark on the mountainous island. The commander informs Alexander that it is not possible to sail beyond the island because of this whirlpool, which was called "the Lion's Den" (*Kām-i shīr*)¹³⁹ because it had caused the death of many sailors. Alexander is also told that the only option is to reach a land called "Qaiṣūr" (or Qīṣūr), which was quite far from China.¹⁴⁰ At this juncture, Balīnās constructs a talisman on the island. He makes another copper statue around whose neck he hangs a huge drum, and places the statue atop a pillar. Henceforth, whenever a ship was trapped in the whirlpool, the sound of the drum pulled the boat out and so saved the sailors. With Balīnās's talisman, they pass beyond that sea and reach the land where the Chinese Emperor is waiting for them.

Nizāmī also provides another version of this story. According to the ancient maps, the "Lion's Den" was located near Babylonia.¹⁴¹ Nizāmī writes that he asked an

¹³⁸ Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadānī and Yāqūt mention that Alexander erected an equestrian statue. Others, such as Gharnāṭī and Ṭabarī, also mention this but do not link the statue with Alexander. See G. Ferrand, "Le *Tuhfat al-Albāb* de al-Andalusī al-Ġarnāṭī", *Journal Asiatique* 207 (1925), p. 64; Qazwīnī *Kitāb 'ajāyib al-Makhlūqāt* (1849), vol. I, p. 180; Ṭabarī, *Annales*, p. 684.

¹³⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 210.

¹⁴⁰ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 210:

به قیصور می گردد این راه باز
وز آنجا به چین هست راهی دراز

¹⁴¹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 212:

دگرگونه در دفتر آرد دبیر
ز رهنامه رهناسان پیر
که آن کام شیر از حد بابل است
سخن چون دوقولی بود مشکل است

expert in sculpture (*hay'at-shinās*) to explain the secret of the talisman and drum, and received the explanation that:

Whenever any ship approaches that mountain, a huge fish appears and moves in circles around the ship, thus creating a whirlpool down into which the ship is drawn. Once it has sunk the ship, the fish devours its crew. But if the fish hears the drum, it is frightened away and retreats deep down into the sea. Thus, any ship is able to escape from that whirlpool.¹⁴²

Interestingly, in the episode of the *Shāhnāma* in which Kay Khusraw crosses the Zarah Sea (in Sīstān), Firdawsī speaks of a similar place called “Fam al-asad” (the Lion’s Den, or Lion’s Mouth), corresponding to Nizāmī’s “Kām-i shīr” (lit. “Lion’s Gullet” in Persian).¹⁴³ But Firdawsī uses the Arabic equivalent of this term and puts it in a totally different place and tale. In the *Adventures of Amīr Ḥamza*, a popular Persian tale¹⁴⁴ originating in the eleventh century and known also in Urdu,¹⁴⁵ the “Lion’s Den” whirlpool becomes the “Whirlpool of Alexander”, and the drum constructed by Balīnās is transformed into the “*Timbal* of Alexander”.

After resting for a week, Alexander continues his journey for a period of ten days through a desert until he reaches a city as white as camphor which has mines of gold and silver. However, the city has only a few inhabitants, and when Alexander asks why, he is informed that every dawn, such a horrible, frightening noise is emitted from the sea that everyone who heard it fled the city. To counteract this noise, Alexander orders the construction of a loud drum to be struck vigorously every dawn until the sun rose, so the inhabitants would hear this and not the terrible noise from the sea.

There are two possible scientific reasons for the clamour from the depths of the ocean, Alexander claims. The first is that at dawn, the sunlight so heats the water that it turns the waves into domes. Thus, as the waves rise and fall, the crests of these dome-like waves smash against each other like mountains, making a horrible sound. His second explanation is that the water may contain mercury (*sīmāb*). Consequently, he speculates, when the water is heated by sunlight at dawn, the mercury floats to the surface. When the water cools, the mercury sinks and makes that terrible sound.¹⁴⁶ In this fashion, Alexander establishes the royal tradition of kings sounding the watches of day with drums in their courts.¹⁴⁷

In his *Cosmography* Aḥmad Ṭūsī quoted a book called *Tārīkh-i Rūm (History of Byzantium)* as the source of this tale. However, according to this version, the horrible

¹⁴² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 213.

¹⁴³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. IV, p. 297.

¹⁴⁴ *Qiṣṣa-yi Amīr Ḥamza*, ed. J. Shi‘ār (Tehran, 1347/1968). The whirlpool episode is absent from the Persian original and only appears in the Urdu version (see note below).

¹⁴⁵ See Gh. Lakhnavi and A. Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, trans. Musharraf Ali Farooqi (New York, 2007), pp. 220–4.

¹⁴⁶ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 217.

¹⁴⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 220:

شہ آن رسم را نیز بر جای داشت
کہ هر صبحدم با دهل پای داشت

sound was produced because there were tall trees on the shore. Strong winds blowing strongly through them caused the terrible sound. He also added that in those trees lived a kind of bird which had a human body and was decked out in exquisite colours.¹⁴⁸

Alexander's Construction of the Wall of Gog

The episode of the construction of the wall against Gog in the *Iqbāl-nāma* is very brief. The probable reason for this is that Niẓāmī, as he himself affirms at the beginning of the *Sharaf-nāma*,¹⁴⁹ did not want to repeat what Firdawsī had already put into verse. In the *Iqbāl-nāma* the episode takes place after Alexander leaves China heading towards Kharkhīz.¹⁵⁰ Niẓāmī describes how Alexander's army "marched for a month through a desert whose soil was silver (*sīm*) and whose water contained mercury (*sīmāb*)",¹⁵¹ such that many men in his army died of thirst.¹⁵²

Finally, they reach a land whose inhabitants, being "Muslims without a prophet",¹⁵³ gladly accept Alexander as their prophet.¹⁵⁴ Understanding him to be a king adept and skilful in providing solutions for various challenging circumstances, they reveal their problems to him in hope of finding relief and remedy. They tell him that behind a mountain pass in a stony place nearby is a plain as wide as the sea inhabited by a tribe known as the *Yā'jūj* (Gog).

Although the Gog are descendants of Adam, they have the appearance of demons. The poet describes them as having lions with hearts of iron and claws sharp as diamonds; they look as wretched as evil wolves. Their hair stretches from head to toe and is draped over their entire body, making it impossible even to see their face. They are semi-vegetarians who eat only plants (*rastanī*); in particular, they eat a plant hot as pepper (*pilpil*) found in that land. However, lest his verse lack marvels, Niẓāmī describes how they also eat a dragon that falls out of the sky in springtime, which gives them their lusty vigour and strength. The Gog folk apparently never fall ill until they near death. They possess miraculous powers of reproduction, each of them spawning no less than 1,000 children! Niẓāmī reports that they also eat the corpses of their dead kinsmen. To protect other human beings against this demonic race of men, Alexander builds a wall of steel around them that will hold them in till the Day of Judgement.

¹⁴⁸ Aḥmad Tūsī, '*Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*', p. 327.

¹⁴⁹ See chapter five of the present thesis.

¹⁵⁰ Kharkhīz is a city in Khutan (in Chinese Turkistan) famous for its musk and silk. See 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāma*, vol. VI, p. 8483, s.v. "Kharkhīz".

¹⁵¹ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 223.

¹⁵² This may refer to the crossing of the Gedrosian desert (Plutarch, *Alex.* 66.4–5). I would like to thank Prof. Lynette Michell for this information.

¹⁵³ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 224:

گروهی بران کوه دین پروران
مسلمان و فارغ ز پیغمبران

¹⁵⁴ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 224:

چو دیدند سیمای اسکندری
بذیرا شدندش به پیغمبری

The origin and many of the details of the tale of the Gog folk, as discussed previously,¹⁵⁵ can be traced back to two Syriac works, the first known as the “Christian Legend Concerning Alexander the Great”, and the second simply as the “Syriac Poem”.¹⁵⁶ As the tale of the enclosure of Gog and Magog by Dhū’l-Qarnayn appears in the Qur’ān (*Sūrah* 18 [*Kahf*]: 92–100), the story soon became one of the key characteristics of *Alexander Romance* literature in the Arabic tradition.

Alexander in Utopia

After building the wall against Gog, Alexander reaches a city which “many people seek, but few find”.¹⁵⁷ The city has no gate, and is full of decorated shops without door or lock. Its inhabitants welcome Alexander and take him to a castle to entertain him and serve him food. Alexander asks them how they are not afraid to leave their shops and houses open, and why they leave their possessions unprotected and unguarded. They respond:

The truth of the matter is this: we’re just one group
 Inhabiting these hills and plains and dales. Although
 A puny, weak and frail folk, yet still we don’t
 Swerve one hair’s breadth from what is meet and right.
 We’ll never bend ourselves to follow crooked ways,
 Nor have we knowledge of aught but what is fair and good.
 We don’t pursue the tortuous, errant ways of the world;
 Our foliage grows up by such right graces in this world.
 We’ll never tell a single lie – black or white – and thus
 We never have nightmares that haunt our dreams.
 We never ask about something unless it serves our good;
 We have no care for anything except that it please God.¹⁵⁸

Alexander has never encountered such a righteous and honest group of people, and is so impressed that he decides not to continue his journey, declaring that all he had ever wanted to learn through travel, he’d learnt from that people, and that the reason of all his voyages throughout the world, across deserts and seas, had been to meet this people and learn their customs. The poet puts the following words into the mouth of the world-conqueror:

I wish no more to travel throughout the world,

¹⁵⁵ See chapter three of the present thesis (my discussion of episodes concerning Alexander mentioned in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī).

¹⁵⁶ For the English translation see Budge, *The Syriac Alexander Romance* (reprnt. Amsterdam, 1976), pp. 144–58, 163–200. See also chapter one of the present thesis.

¹⁵⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 226:

از ان مرحله سوی شهری شناخت
 که بسیار کس جست و آن را نیافت

¹⁵⁸ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 228–31.

Nor place snares in the way to catch my prey.
 The lore and *savoir-faire* I've learned from these men
 Suffices me for labour and collaboration.
 How fine it is that before the Lord of Judgement Day
 The world remains in place through these good men!
 The mission I set out upon across desert and plain
 Had but this one end: that I should meet these men.¹⁵⁹

The unworldly justice, righteousness and harmonious cooperation of this people depicted by Niẓāmī is truly remarkable. Several similar tales can be found in medieval Islamic and ancient Greek sources of a “City of the Blessed”, a variant of the Brahman story (see below).¹⁶⁰ Much the same story of a just and harmonious city, for instance, is told by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 1126) in his Sufi commentary on the Qur’ān, *Kashf al-asrār wa ‘uddat al-abrār* (*Unveiling of Mysteries and Provision of the Righteous*), in the section pertaining to the prophet Dhū’l-Qarnayn.¹⁶¹ The tale recalls Alexander’s encounter and colloquy with the Brahmans or naked philosophers of India,¹⁶² versions of which are recounted in Greek historical works (e.g. Strabo 15.1.61; Plutarch, *Alex.* 64–5).¹⁶³ Considering the fact that Niẓāmī locates this utopian city in “the north”, its residents also resemble the legendary Hyperboreans, the people who lived beyond the North Wind, according to Herodotus (*Histories*, IV, 32–6).¹⁶⁴

The Last Days of Alexander

The final episode of the *Iqbāl-nāma* deals with the last days of Alexander’s life and the circumstances surrounding his death. Niẓāmī’s account does not include many of the typical motifs concerning Alexander’s death that are found in the *Shāhnāma* (such as the birth of a part-dead, part-alive creature, half-human, half-animal, and the philosophers’ lamentations over Alexander’s tomb, etc.). However, it does include Alexander’s final testament and the letter of consolation written by Alexander to his mother. Instead of the philosophers’ lamentations, Niẓāmī adds an entirely new episode – really a stroke of genius – that treats the final moments of the lives of the seven philosophers in his retinue.

Niẓāmī recounts Alexander’s last days as follows. Hearing an angel ordering him to stop his journeys and return to Greece (*Yūnān*),¹⁶⁵ Alexander turns back from “the farthest edges of the globe”. He finally reaches Kirmān, Kirmānshahān and then

¹⁵⁹ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 231–2.

¹⁶⁰ See Stoneman, “Tales of Utopia: Alexander, Cynics and Christian Ascetics”, a paper given at *ICAN IV: International Conference on the Ancient Novel: Crossroads in the Ancient Novel: Spaces, Frontiers, Intersections* (Lisbon, 21–6 July 2008). See also Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, p. 422.

¹⁶¹ Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa ‘uddat al-abrār*, ed. ‘A. A. Hikmat (Tehran, 1357/1978), vol. V, p. 75.

¹⁶² See Stoneman, “Naked Philosophers”, pp. 99–114; Stoneman, “Who are the Brahmans?”, pp. 500–10.

¹⁶³ For more discussion see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, pp. 92–102.

¹⁶⁴ See Timothy P. Bridgeman, *Hyperboreans: Myth and History in Celtic-Hellenic Contacts* (London/New York, 2005).

¹⁶⁵ Niẓāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 236.

enters Babylonia. When he reaches Shahrazūr, he falls ill.¹⁶⁶ Thinking himself poisoned, he falls into delusion and experiences hallucinations that make his body burn. He sends a messenger to Greece to summon Aristotle to his court. Aristotle reaches Shahrazūr in the company of several wise men of Greece and Rūm. He feels Alexander's wrist for a pulse and orders doctors to make an appropriate medicine. However, Alexander's body is burning, says the poet, because his corporeal being is like a piece of gold placed in an alembic to be purified and cleansed from the dross of this lower world.

The doctors in his entourage can find no remedy to cure Alexander, while the astrologers find that his star has waned. Since, Alexander possesses the miraculous mirror mentioned in the last chapter, however, and is thus quite aware of his own fate and state,¹⁶⁷ he gathers all his friends about him and informs them of his coming death. He has wandered throughout every corner of the world yet still his curiosity is not quenched, Nizāmī moralises:

This world, I've seen it all – far and wide, and high and low
And yet my eyes still hanker after more sights of this earth.
Not thirty-six years, nor thirty thousand years suffice
My greed for lands and spaces, my thirst for sights.¹⁶⁸

Alexander knows that there is no cure for death. Neither Apollonius with his sorcery¹⁶⁹ nor any of his other philosophers could save him.¹⁷⁰ At this juncture, Alexander orders a copyist to transcribe a letter to his mother in order to console her. He reminds her: "If there is anyone who remains alive forever in this world, thus you can continue in your mourning for me."¹⁷¹ He also suggests that she prepare a feast and invite "only people

¹⁶⁶ Alexander is also said to have died in a city called "Shahrzūr" by Bal'amī (*Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 700) and Bīrūnī (*Āthār al-bāqīyah*, pp. 60–1). The Persian verses in Nizāmī are as follows:

به کرمان رسید از کنار جهان
ز کرمان درآمد به کرمانشهان
وز آنجا به بابل برون برد راه
ز بابل سوی روم زد بارگاه
چو آمد ز بابل سوی شهرزور
سلامت شد از پیکر شاه دور

¹⁶⁷ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 242:

چو اسکندر آینه در پیش داشت
نظر در تنومندی خویش داشت

¹⁶⁸ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 245:

جهان جمله دیدم ز بالا و زیر
هنوزم نشد دیده از دید سیر
نه این سی و شش، گر بود سی هزار
همین نکته گویم سرانجام کار

¹⁶⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 246:

بلیناس کو تا به افسونگری
کند چاره جان اسکندری؟

¹⁷⁰ For an excellent survey (and partial translation) of the extensive literature in Arabic on "Sayings on Alexander's Death" see Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein (London/New York, 1975, reprinted 1994, pp. 120-4).

¹⁷¹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 255:

اگر ماندنی شد جهان بر کسی
بمان در غم و سوگواری بسی

who had never lost any loved one to dine. If anyone does attend her feast, only then should she be permitted to mourn his death”¹⁷².

The earliest appearance of the letter of consolation in Greek versions of the *Alexander Romance* is in the eighth-century manuscript L.¹⁷³ Stoneman suggests that it is possible that the motif of this “letter of consolation” entered the Greek tradition from Arabic and not the other way around.¹⁷⁴ He also draws attention to the possibility that this motif (i.e. inviting to dinner those who have never known sorrow) might originate in a Buddhist story. In this story, the Buddha tells a woman that he will restore her son to life if she will bring him a mustard seed from the house of one who has never known sorrow.¹⁷⁵

It is probable that Nizāmī has Alexander make use of a number of commonplace wise adages about death found in Stoic philosophy¹⁷⁶ which were inculcated by philosopher-kings such as Marcus Aurelius.¹⁷⁷ In two couplets, Nizāmī finally delivers his moral summarising the conqueror’s death:

When Alexander removed his chattels from this house,
Above and beyond this earthly tent his throne was raised.
None matched his righteousness and virtue in this world:
The world nettled him, yet still its harshness he endured.¹⁷⁸

When Alexander was dead, his men put him in a golden coffin, deliberately leaving one arm hanging over its side. This is because in his last testament, Nizāmī relates, Alexander had decreed that one of his hands should be displayed empty and open outside of his tomb in order to show that although he was the king of seven climes and possessed so many treasures, yet he left the world empty-handed.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 256:

که: آن کس خورد این خورشهای پاک
که غایب نباشد ورا زیر خاک
اگر زان خورشها خورد میهمان
تو نیز انده من بخور در زمان

¹⁷³ Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 191. On Manuscript L see chapter one of this thesis.

¹⁷⁴ Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 191.

¹⁷⁵ Stoneman also suggests the possibility that Democritus, who had travelled in the East, may have introduced the motif into Greek literature. See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 192.

¹⁷⁶ See Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, 2002), index, s.v. “death”, where a number of philosophical meditations from the Stoics and other Greek philosophical schools similar to these adages can be found.

¹⁷⁷ For adages resembling the maxims on death that Alexander addressed to his mother, see Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (Middlesex, 1964), Book II: 14; III: 10; IV: 5–6; VI: 47; 56.

¹⁷⁸ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p.258:

سکندر چو بر بست ازین خانه رخت
زدندش به بالای این خیمه تخت...
اگرچه ز ره نافتن تفته بود
رهی رفت کان راه نارفته بود

¹⁷⁹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p.259:

ز تابوت فرموده بد شهریار
که یک دست او را کنند آشکار...
که: فرمانده هفت کشور زمین

Nizāmī then informs us that Alexander’s body was carried from Shahrazūr to Alexandria in Egypt.¹⁸⁰ The poet also affirms that Alexander was not succeeded by one single king but rather by numerous princelings ruling divided kingdoms (*mulūk al-ṭawā’if*) because Iskandarūs had refused his father’s throne.¹⁸¹

Finally, Nizāmī concludes the *Iqbāl-nāma* with a number of anecdotes on the deaths of the seven philosophers in Alexander’s entourage. He also informs the reader that he was sixty-three years (and six months) of age when he finished the poem. Apparently, Nizāmī himself did not live long after his *Book of Fortune* reached completion.¹⁸²

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, a vast field of myth, legend and history relating to the themes of Alexandrian “wisdom literature”, “wonders of the world” and prophetology is covered in Nizāmī’s account of the world-conqueror in his *Iskandarnāma*.

On the one hand, in order to expand his investigation into the mythology of the Dhū’l-Qarnayn traditions relating to Alexander, Nizāmī drew attention to other genres such as wisdom literature and *mirabilia*, and made them part of his own original mythopoetic depiction of Alexander as a prophet. What linked these various genres together for the poet was their mutual use of similar ethical messages and morals at the service of political theories in order to produce the image of the “Perfect Man”, “Perfect Monarch”, “Wise Prince”, etc.

On the other hand, the various tales of the *Iqbāl-nāma*’s narrative act as vehicles to broach and expatiate on the *topos* of the Perso-Islamic concept of the king as the “Shadow of God on Earth”. In this respect, the *Iqbāl-nāma* can be considered a complex allegory containing various meanings and messages. In one sense, it can be read politically as a manual of moral advice, that is, simply as a mirror for princes. In another, it can be interpreted mystically as a poetic exegesis of the Sufi Path towards the ultimate goal of the acquisition of *gnosis* and divine knowledge (*khirad*). The mystical-political advice contained in the *Iqbāl-nāma* established the communication of ideals on medieval statecraft through the esoteric and mystical writings of the Sufis. This is indeed the main contribution of Nizāmī’s *Iqbāl-nāma* to the development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition. The *Khiradnāma-yi Iskandarī* (*The Book of*

همین یک تن آمد ز شاهان، همین

ز هر گنج دنیا که در بار بست

بجز خاک چیزی ندارد به دست

¹⁸⁰ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 259–60:

سوی مصر بردندش از شهرزور

که بود آن دیار از بدانیش دور

به اسکندریش وطن ساختند

ز تختش به تخته در انداختند

¹⁸¹ Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, pp. 263–8. This is also known from Ṭabarī (*Tārīkh*, vol. II, p. 494).

¹⁸² Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, p. 280 (see also n. 2):

فزون بود شش مه ز شصت و سه سال

که بر عزم ره بر دهل زد دوال

Alexandrian Wisdom) of the great Sufi poet Jāmī (1414–92) is the best representative of Niẓāmī’s legacy in this regard.

In my view, in both parts of his *Iskandarnāma* (the *Sharafnāma* and the *Iqbālnāma*) Niẓāmī combined these two senses, merging spiritual and political counsel to create, in the figure of his ideal hero Alexander, a true vicegerent of God on Earth, similar to a prophet who combines all the attributes of the Perfect Man. The tales and anecdotes in the *Iqbālnāma* indicate that achieving this degree of perfection requires that the ruler subdue his ego (*nafs*) by acquiring wisdom (*khīrad*) and purifying the soul, just as Socrates advises Alexander to do. According to the political and spiritual wisdom that the figure of Alexander represents in Niẓāmī’s poem, the true vicegerent of God is the ruler who combines political *savoir-faire* and justice with the mystical qualities of a prophet (the knowledge of the Unseen World). Alexander thus serves both as a symbol of ideal kingship and an exemplar of the mystical philosopher and prophet who, being divinely guided, is a true vicegerent of God on Earth.¹⁸³

As we have seen, Alexander’s goal throughout his adventures in the *Sharafnāma* is largely intellectual and psychological: the acquisition of self-knowledge. In the *Iqbālnāma*, however, his quest has entirely spiritual ends: the attainment of wisdom or divine knowledge. Alexander’s development as a prophetic hero, and his quest for divine kingship, could not have been completed and actualised in the *Iqbālnāma* without the acquisition of knowledge of God. Indeed, Alexander’s various encounters with monsters, strange creatures, talismanic statues, inexplicable phenomena and other wonders serve to amplify his moral and spiritual understanding and to actualise his perfection as a prophet.

* * *

Lastly, I would like to revisit and review some of the key points made in the chapter regarding Niẓāmī’s sources for his *Iqbālnāma*. One of the major focal points of my study in this chapter has been to explore and, wherever possible, to disclose the literary and historical origins of the tales and motifs used by Niẓāmī in his description of Alexander and the *Alexander Romance* in the *Iqbālnāma*. From my survey of the *Iskandarnāma* as a whole in this and the preceding chapter, it appears likely that while Niẓāmī was occupied in the composition of part one, the *Sharafnāma*, he used predominantly Sasanian sources, which is clear through the presence of Persian figures and names (e.g. Kay Khusraw, the Zoroastrian dragon-girl, etc.). However, in the *Iqbālnāma* – as we have seen throughout this chapter – he drew more upon Arabic lore and Islamic sources (as can be seen in Arabic names such as the whale *Qaşṣāṣa*, the king Shaddād, etc.), which is not at all surprising since here he was largely concerned with the *spiritual and Qur’ānic* dimensions of Alexander’s personality.

In particular, Niẓāmī’s depiction of Alexander seems to owe a great deal and, in fact, to share considerable similarity to the portrayal of the conqueror in Bal’āmī’s

¹⁸³ On this tendency see Lambton, “Sufis and the State in Medieval Persia”, *State and Islam*, ed. C. van Dijk and A. H. de Groot (Leiden, 1995), p. 23.

History and Bīrūnī's *Āthār al-bāqīya*. Both authors coincide with Nizāmī on when and where Alexander died, on the different meanings of Dhū'l-Qarnayn and both feature similar versions of the exchange of symbolic gifts between Darius and Alexander. It seems clear that this was due to the fact that Nizāmī was as much concerned with the historical accuracy of his narrative as with its poetic beauty and literary appeal. Nizāmī, like Bal'amī and Bīrūnī, did not simply transmit what his sources contained, he carefully appraised and verified them.

On the other hand, the Jewish influence in the *Iqbāl-nāma* (the visit to Jerusalem, the liberation of the Jewish people of Jerusalem, etc.) and some motifs, such as the mermaids dancing on the shore, indicate that Nizāmī had access to a version of the *Romance* close to the γ- or ε-recension. Indeed, he may have access to such sources through the Jewish works themselves as he affirmed at the beginning of the *Sharaf-nāma*.

In addition, among Nizāmī's possible other sources one can trace Hermetic works in which Aristotle and Alexander play a crucial role.¹⁸⁴ In particular, we can point out the Hermetic *Dhakhīrat al-Iskandar (The Treasury of Alexander)*,¹⁸⁵ Abū Ma'shar Balkhī's (d. 886) *al-Ulūf (The Thousands)*, which Nizāmī mentions once in the *Iqbāl-nāma*,¹⁸⁶ and other "Talismanic Pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica",¹⁸⁷ such as the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm (the Latin Picatrix)*, in which Alexander appears frequently.¹⁸⁸ Nizāmī also mentions a source called *Tārīkh-i Rūm (The History of Byzantium)* in various parts of the *Iskandarnāma* (both in the *Sharaf-nāma* and the *Iqbāl-nāma*), which I have so far been unable to identify among Greek, Latin or Arabic sources, although it is also cited in Aḥmad Ṭūsī's *Ajāyib al-makhlūqāt*.

At the beginning of this chapter, mention was made of the similarity of the titles of Nizāmī's *Iqbāl-nāma (The Book of Fortune)* and Plutarch's *Fortune of Alexander (Moralia: De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute)*. The dominance of the motif of "Fortune" in Alexander's career was always highlighted in the classical Greek sources (e.g. Quintus Curtius), and in fact underlies the long medieval and renaissance development of the idea.¹⁸⁹ It is unlikely that Nizāmī had read any of Plutarch's works. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that his attitude towards Alexander is similar to Plutarch's. Both authors bring out his great achievements. In his *Iqbāl-nāma*, like Plutarch in his *Fortuna*, Nizāmī demonstrates that Alexander was not Fortune's child but the product of his own qualities and efforts. Nizāmī also suggests that Alexander

¹⁸⁴ In these works Aristotle reveals talismanic secrets and Hermetic magic rituals to his pupil Alexander. See F. E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus: The Oriental Translations and Commentaries of the Aristotelian Corpus* (Leiden, 1961), p. 58.

¹⁸⁵ See J. Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina, Ein Beitrag Zur Geschichte Der Hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg, 1926), pp. 68–107. In this work Apollonius (Balīnās) also appears as a contemporary of Alexander the Great.

¹⁸⁶ See section two of this chapter.

¹⁸⁷ See K. van Bladel, "Hermes and Hermetica", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, 3rd ed. Brill Online.

¹⁸⁸ See Pingree, *Picatrix*, pp. 45, 97, 98, 140, 146, 150.

¹⁸⁹ R. Stoneman, "The Origins of Quintus Curtius' Concept of Fortuna", a paper given at the conference *Curtius Rufus The Roman Historian on Alexander Narrative Technique, Rhetoric, Psychology of Characters*, Wien, 4 October 2014. I am grateful to Dr Stoneman for this reference.

was superior to other sages who were mere “philosophers” because his deeds spoke louder than their words. Nizāmī’s notion in the *Iqbāl-nāma* that the purpose of Alexander’s prophethood was the emancipation of the masses from ignorance resembles Plutarch’s idea of the “mission of civilization” in his *Fortuna*.¹⁹⁰ Both authors urge upon us the view that Alexander represented the virtuous man *par excellence*.

¹⁹⁰ T. S. Schmidt, “Barbarians in Plutarch’s Political Thought”, *The Statesman in Plutarch’s Works, Vol. I: Plutarch’s Statesman and his Aftermath: Political, Philosophical, and Literary Aspects*, ed. L. de Blois, J. Bons, T. Kessels and D. M. Schenkeveld (Leiden, 2004), p. 229.

Conclusion

سکندر آینه و خضر آب حیوان یافت

به هر که هر چه سزاوار بود بخشیدند

To each and every one their just due:
Thus Alexander's lot was a looking glass
And Khiḍr was granted the *Aqua Vitae*.

Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī¹

The Greek *Alexander Romance* originated in Alexandria (Egypt) in the third century A.D. and became the most influential source for the deeds and adventures of Alexander, especially in the East. It took up Alexander's dreams and longings and treated them as if they were real.² As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, the composition of the Greek PC itself and its different recensions makes it a difficult source to trace. The work continued to be rewritten and modified throughout antiquity according to different needs and conditions. The vast literature on Alexander that was produced in the Greek East penetrated other literary traditions, among which the Persian corpus is but one of many interesting branches. This is the issue with which this dissertation has principally been concerned.

Questions have also been asked about the extent to which the *Alexander Romance* influenced Persian literature in general. Thus this thesis has refocused the debate on the following points:

- 1) The development of the *Alexander Romance* in the Persian tradition: was there any Middle Persian translation of the PC? If so, what would have been its characteristics?
- 2) What sort of Syriac and Arabic translations of the PC existed? What do the Persian sources tell us regarding the Syriac and Arabic sources?
- 3) The vast influence of the *Alexander Romance* on Persian literature: we have seen that the *Romance* had a great impact on historiography, epic, storytelling (popular romances), the *mirabilia* genre and wisdom literature – and in particular on the mirror for princes genre.

Although a number of important points are covered in the conclusions of each chapter, a few of them, which I believe to be quite original and new, deserve highlighting.

¹ Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī, *Dīvān*, vol. II, p. 902.

² Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 2.

The Genesis of the Persian *Alexander Romance*

Since the nineteenth century, when Theodore Nöldeke launched his theory about the development of the PC in Syriac, Arabic, Persian and Ethiopic versions, there have been many disputes around how, when and through which channels the Greek PC entered the Persian tradition.³ Nöldeke's theory was based on a philological examination of the Syriac text. He affirmed that a Middle Persian version must have preceded the Syriac version of the PC. His hypothesis is still generally accepted today despite some disagreements on minor points.⁴ However, despite different viewpoints regarding the transmission of the PC in the East, might it be possible to add a new argument to Nöldeke's hypothesis in light of the new materials have been discovered over the past century and recent decades? In this study, we have essayed to do precisely this, that is, to review the origins and explore the development of the PC tradition in light of these new materials.

The main problem in tracing the origins of the Persian versions of the *Alexander Romance* emerges when we consider that there is a vast gap between the pre-Islamic period and the appearance of the first example of this work in Persian in the tenth century – in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. This is because Arabic replaced Middle Persian for almost two centuries after the Arab conquest of Persia and next to no written works survived in Middle Persian. Thus, in order to determine whether there was a Middle Persian version of the PC, besides the Persian sources, we must rely primarily on the Arabic sources. However, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the Persian and Arabic sources studied in this thesis were written almost four centuries after the fall of the Sasanians.⁵ It is possible therefore that they contain elements and passages that were not in the pre-Islamic sources. In view of this, it may be asked to what extent the Arabic and Persian works really reflect the actual contents of the pre-Islamic sources? In order to address this question, we assume that only the motifs with the following characteristics might have been in the Middle Persian *Vorlage*: those mentioned in almost all of these sources, with Persian words and elements from Persian epic and mythology.

A second problem arises when we consider the hostility of the extant Middle Persian writings towards Alexander, which generally consider him one of the greatest enemies of Iran, a man who destroyed the country and eradicated its religion, destroying its sacred writings and fire temples. One must thus ask whether, since there is almost no extant source on Alexander from the pre-Islamic Persian tradition, is it possible that there was a Middle Persian version of the *Alexander Romance*? Is there any trace of a positive attitude towards Alexander in the pre-Islamic Persian sources? And if a Middle Persian version of the PC existed, what were its characteristics?

³ Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*.

⁴ Frye, "Two Iranian Notes", *Acta Iranica XI: Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 186–8; Ciancaglioni, "The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance", *Le Muséon, Revue D'Études Orientales* 114.1–2 (2001), pp. 135–40.

⁵ My reference here is to the historical accounts of Ṭabarī, Dīnawarī, the *Nihāya*, Tha'ālibī Nayshābūrī and Firdawsī.

As a first step towards resolving these questions, this thesis has endeavoured to explore the Persian versions of the *Alexander Romance*, not from a philological point of view but by examining different motifs and the actual *contents* of the legends relating to the conqueror in order to find answers. We have departed from the point of view which would focus solely on the Sasanians as an empire that dominated a vast territory of different people with different languages and religions, and was thus restricted to the Zoroastrian attitude towards Alexander. From the beginning, then, we have assumed that there was a great possibility that a Middle Persian version of the *Alexander Romance* did exist in the pre-Islamic period.

Here, I would like to revisit some of the key points made throughout the whole thesis regarding the existence and the development of the *Alexander Romance* from the pre-Islamic Persian tradition down to the twelfth century A.D. Our research has focused on the evidence found in the Arabic and Persian sources, particularly their historical formation and composition.

Firstly, we conclude that legends concerning Alexander the Great must have existed in the Iranian world from the Parthian period. It has already been said that the fame and popularity of the Alexander legends in the East was due to the contacts and relations between the Iranian and Greeks living in the Greek cities in Asia Minor during the Parthian period,⁶ the effect of which can be detected in the *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī (see below). Furthermore, apart from cultural materials such as coinage, some texts show that there was a positive attitude towards Alexander among the Parthians, who often tried to link themselves to Alexander's legacy in Iran. For instance, as Daryaeae points out, in the Middle Persian manuscript MU29, the Arsacids connected themselves to Alexander and the Irano-Hellenic cultural setting.⁷ In MU29 we are dealing with a unique text which shows that besides the hostile Zoroastrian attitude, there were Middle Persian sources with a positive view of the conqueror.

Thus the timeworn opposition between the Pahlavi tradition and the Arabic and Persian traditions should not lead us in the wrong direction. Despite the hostile attitude in the Pahlavi sources, Persian legends concerning Alexander's ancestry and his deeds as a legitimate Persian king might have had their origin among the Parthians. In this context, we also have the testimony of Tacitus (*Annals*, 6.31), who claims that the Arsacid king Ardawān II legitimised his claim over Roman territories by associating himself with Alexander and the Seleucids on one hand and with the Achaemenids on the other.⁸ Therefore, the so-called Persian ancestry of Alexander found in the *Alexander Romance*, which linked him with the Kayānid kings (especially Bahman Ardashīr, Dārāb and Dārā) on one hand, and Philip on the other, might have had its

⁶ See Yarshater, "Chirā az pādishāhān-i mād va hakhāmanishī dar *Shāhnāma* dhikrī nīst", p. 194. See also Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, p. 306.

⁷ Touraj Daryaeae, "Alexander and the Arsacids in the Manuscript MU29", *Dabir, Digital Archive of Brief Notes & Iran Review* 1.1 (2015), pp. 8–10.

⁸ Quoted from Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, pp. 294–5.

origin in the Arsacid period. These legends must have been circulating orally due to the nature of Parthian literature, which was mainly oral.⁹

Secondly, there appears to have been a distinct historical epoch in which the Sasanian Persian legends concerning Alexander the Great came into contact with the PC tradition. The period of Khusraw Anūshirvān's reign (Chosroes I, r. 531–79), I would postulate, must be considered probably the time when these oral legends were amalgamated with the *Alexander Romance*. During his reign, Khusraw Anūshirvān accepted refugees from the Eastern Roman Empire and Alexandria when Justinian closed the Neoplatonist schools of Athens in 529.¹⁰ Thus, it is likely that the Greek tale became known to the Persians as a result of the Hellenophilic interests of this Sasanian king.¹¹

Furthermore, as we have seen in chapter three, the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī incorporated the Arabic historical accounts of Ṭabarī, the *Nihāya* and Dīnawarī among others, which shows that he modified and adapted the *Alexander Romance* to the needs of his day in order to create a coherent history of Iran. As Ḥāfiẓ claims in the famous verse cited in the epigraph of chapter two,¹² Alexander's legend among the Iranians subsequently became emblematic of the downfall of the kingdom of Darius III. Thus, the *Alexander Romance* in general and his conquest of Persia in particular became regarded as an integral part of Persian history, impossible to ignore.

At this juncture, the question arises as to whether there was ever any independent “written” version of the *Alexander Romance* in Middle Persian? Alexander is always portrayed as part of the history of the Kayānid dynasty in the Arabic historical accounts and the Persian *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, the earliest sources in which motifs from the PC appear. These same sources deal with the *Alexander Romance* as a part of Persian history. It is not until the twelfth century that we find independent works on Alexander under the individual title of *Iskandarnāma* (*The Book of Alexander*). This does not mean that such a written text did not exist. The citation of motifs from the PC tradition in the poems of Persian poets of the tenth and eleventh centuries shows the popularity of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran, especially in Khurāsān and Sīstān.¹³ For instance, Farrukhī Sīstānī (d. 1037) affirmed in the eleventh century that Alexander's story was so famous that everyone knew it by heart.¹⁴ Therefore, it is likely that the *Alexander Romance* was known and circulated in oral form, as the popular romance of the *Dārābnāma* itself demonstrates. The romance achieved such popularity and fame

⁹ Boyce, “The Parthian ‘Gōsān’ and Iranian Minstrel Tradition”, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1.2 (1957), pp. 10–45.

¹⁰ Agathias, *The Histories*, trans. J. D. Frendo (Berlin, 1975), II.31. See also Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia*, p. 30.

¹¹ On the translations of Greek works into Middle Persian that were commissioned by Khusraw I, see Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 25.

¹² Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān*, ed. Hasan Dhū'l-Faḡār and Abū'l-Faḡl 'Alī Muḥammadī (Tehran, 1381/2002), *ghazal* 3.

¹³ See M. Kayvānī, “Iskandar dar adab-i Fārsī”, p. 404.

¹⁴ Farrukhī Sīstānī, *Dīvān*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1970). This verse was cited as the epigraph of my introduction above.

that it reached the Arabs, as reflected in the *Sīrat al-Iskandar*, in the same way that the story of Rustam and Isfandīyār was recited in Mecca.¹⁵

Keeping the above in mind, it is possible that the Middle Persian written version of the *Alexander Romance*, if indeed it existed, was included in the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag*, the historians dealing with it as a part of Persian history. This might be the reason why there is no mention of such an independent individual work in reference works such as the *al-Fihrist* of Ibn Nadīm. From this we may also deduce that the first translation of the *Alexander Romance* into Arabic was through this Middle Persian version in the *Khudāynāmag* since the earliest Arabic versions (Dīnawarī, *Nihāya* and Ṭabarī) contain the Persian ancestry of Alexander linking him with the Kayānids.

Here another question arises regarding the Syriac translation of the PC. Was it based on a Middle Persian translation of the Greek PC as Nöldeke argued?¹⁶ Or was it based on a Greek text, as Richard Frye and Claudia Ciancaglini have proposed?¹⁷ We know, for instance, that Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* contains Christian references – especially in those passages with a strong Persian element (e.g. Alexander's birth) – which would indicate that if the Middle Persian version also contained Christian references, it must have been based on the Syriac translation of the PC,¹⁸ which in turn would explain Boyce's and Tafāḍḍulī's affirmation that the authors of the *Khudāynāmag* used Syriac sources for the passage on Alexander.¹⁹ Does it follow that the Middle Persian version of the PC did not exist, so they had to use "Syriac sources"? In order to provide answers to these questions, we suggest the following possibility.

There is some evidence suggesting that the Syriac *Alexander Romance* was translated under the patronage of Sasanian king Khusraw I. Budge, for instance, suggests that Syriac was not the translator's native language.²⁰ The translator or translators might then have been Nestorian Christians who were Persian-speaking subjects of the Sasanian Empire and produced Persian and Syriac translations of Greek texts for the Persian court.²¹ If we consider this possibility, the presence of Persian elements and the author's familiarity with the history and geography of Iran in the Syriac *Alexander Romance* can be easily explained. A series of literary features, particularly the replacement of the Achaemenid kings' name with the Sasanian title Khusraw (an allusion to Khusraw I or II), which is evidently intentional,²² strengthens this theory.

¹⁵ See Safā, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyāt dar Irān*, vol. I, p. 20; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra al-Nabavīya*, ed. M. Saqā (Cairo, 1355/1936); Dh. Šafā, *Hamāsa-sarāyī* (Tehran, 1363/1984), p. 74. See also Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 89.

¹⁶ Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*.

¹⁷ Frye, "Two Iranian Notes", pp. 186–8; Ciancaglini, "The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance", pp. 135–40.

¹⁸ According to N. Sims-Williams, Middle Iranian Christian literature may be regarded as a branch of Syriac literature. See his "Christian Literature in Middle Iranian Languages", *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran, Companion Volume I to a History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London/New York, 2009), p. 266.

¹⁹ Tafāḍḍulī, *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i Irān pīsh az Islam*, ed. Zh. Āmūzgār (Tehran, 1376/1997), pp. 270–1; Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", *Iranistik II: Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1. IV. 2.1 (Leiden, 1968), p. 59.

²⁰ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. lx.

²¹ See also Ciancaglini, "The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance", p. 139.

²² Ciancaglini, "The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance", pp. 139–40.

Thus it is likely that both Middle Persian and Syriac versions of the *Alexander Romance* were translated by Nestorian(s) in the Sasanian court under the patronage of Khusraw (whether I or II, is not clear) in the second half of the sixth century. Since the first appearance of motifs from the *Alexander Romance* can be found in the works of Firdawsī and other historians, which are supposed to be based indirectly on the Sasanian *Khudāynāmag*, it seems that the Middle Persian translation of the PC was adopted and integrated into the *Khudāynāmag*. It is likely that an independent Middle Persian version of the *Alexander Romance* “in written form” did not exist since it always appeared as a part of Persian history, that is, until the twelfth century, when independent works on Alexander appeared. This is only a hypothesis, since neither the Middle Persian version of the *Alexander Romance* nor the original or Arabic translations of the *Khudāynāmag* have ever been found and are presumed lost.

The *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī

Khaleghi-Motlagh affirms in various studies that the story of Alexander, as we see it in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, was not included in the *Khudāynāmag*, but was based on an independent translation in Arabic which was itself based on the Middle Persian version of the PC according to Nöldeke’s hypothesis.²³ Our study of the Alexander passage in the *Shāhnāma* shows its complexity due to the different sources that inspired the story, which were evidently gradually added to it. The basis of the story of Alexander’s birth and the parts that deal directly with the “Persian history” (that is, the reigns of Dārāb and Dārā) must have been derived from the *Khudāynāmag*. In addition, the *Shāhnāma* contains most of the Syriac materials, which were independent sources in their original forms – such as the tale of Gog and Magog, the Water of Life and the philosophers’ lamentations. Firdawsī’s epic poem contains the story of the Indian King Kayd, which must have been an independent source in Middle Persian too, as the poet himself also claimed. It is not clear when all these materials were put together, but Firdawsī’s *Alexander Romance* is a coherent and well-integrated tale within the framework of the *Shāhnāma*. On the other hand, Tha’ālibī’s *Ghurār akhbār*, which was based on the *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manṣūr, contains almost all the same materials found in Firdawsī’s work. This indicates that in the *Shāhnāma* of Abū Manṣūr at least, that is, by the tenth century, all these materials had been probably collated in the form later seen in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī.

In addition, most of the Syriac materials in Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāma*, such as for instance the story of Gog and Magog and the apocalyptic figures, contain elements from the Persian tradition. This demonstrates that they may have been integrated into the tale from the Syriac tradition at an early stage, possibly at the end of the Sasanian period, that is, in the early seventh century. Thus, Firdawsī’s version of Alexander’s story represents a valuable clue to identify *terrae incognitae* in the Mappa of the *Alexander*

²³ Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Az *Shāhnāma* tā *Khudāynāma*”, *Nāma-yi Irān Bāstān (International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies)* 7.1–2 (2007–8), pp. 29–30; Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Jāy-i Rustam, Ārash ... va Iskandar dar *Khudāynāmag*”, *Nāma-yi Irān Bāstān* 9.1–2 (2009–10), pp. 19–20.

Romance.

The Popular Romances on Alexander

The *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī is another piece of evidence that demonstrates the full extent to which the *Alexander Romance* was treated as an integral part of Persian history. As Pierre Briant affirms, Dārā's reign and Iskandar's conquest are placed within a vast continuum of Iranian history in which the image of Dārā stood opposed to the figure of Alexander.²⁴ The struggles between Philip and Dārāb, and then between Alexander and Dārā, dominate the histories of these two Kayānid kings.

The *Dārābnāma* thus represents a large oral tradition that transmitted the stories of the last Kayānids kings, and hence preserved certain elements absent from other sources. While in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*, and in certain Arabic accounts that represent the *Khudāynāmag* tradition, the Persianisation of Alexander is limited to linking him with Persian kings by bloodline and by a few other archetypal heroic deeds – such as the slaying of a dragon, like the other great heroes and kings of Persian epic (Isfandīyār, Bahman Ardashīr, etc.) – in the *Dārābnāma*, the process is more complex. Not only is Alexander portrayed as the half-brother of Dārā, but his mother is also described as descending from the race of King Frīdūn. Genealogy always had much importance in the legitimacy of kingship amongst the Persians, as amongst most other nations.

The motif of the exposed child, a common *topos* in Near Eastern stories about rulers,²⁵ was also an important aspect of the process of Alexander's Persianisation. Mythologically speaking, the representation of Alexander as an exposed child allows him to approach the degree of the Persian kings, especially Kay Khusraw/Cyrus the Great. Although both kings were raised by a shepherd, they hailed from a ruling family, and would rule by birthright. As Lynette Mitchell points out, "it was nature not nurture that mattered ... A *basilikos* man could be revealed, whatever his apparent circumstances ... Birth and the *basilikos* nature belong together, but the *basilikos* nature is an indication of birth, even if that is temporarily hidden."²⁶ From this point of view, we can understand why Alexander had to be represented as an exposed child.

On the other hand, it is perhaps not altogether fanciful to speculate that the parallel between Alexander the Great and Kay Khusraw constituted an attempt to model Alexander on Cyrus the Great, especially the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia*,²⁷ who resembles

²⁴ See Briant, *Darius dans l'ombre d'Alexandre*, especially chapter four; Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (London, 2015).

²⁵ On this issue see Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece*, pp. 59–60; see also Drews, "Sargon, Cyrus and Mesopotamian Folk History", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974), pp. 387–93.

²⁶ Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece*, p. 60.

²⁷ On the suggestion that Alexander was deliberately imitating the Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia* see Lynette Mitchell, "Alexander the Great: Divinity and the Rule of Law", *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. L. Mitchell and Ch. Melville (Leiden/Boston, 2013), pp. 94–5; Freya Stark, *Alexander's Path* (New York, 1988), pp. 203–10; Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction*, pp. 11–12, 238–9.

the Kay Khusraw of the *Shāhnāma* in many respects.²⁸ The parallelism between Alexander and Kay Khusraw is even more obvious in the *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī, as discussed in chapter five. This is quite ironic since, while it is a Persian king, Cyrus the Great, who becomes one of Xenophon's most fully realised models of kingship in the *Cyropaedia*,²⁹ in the Persian tradition it is a *Greek* monarch, Alexander, who comes to represent the ideal king!

In the *Dārābnāma*, as we saw in chapter four, Alexander became associated with the establishment of both religious and royal legitimacy. He is frequently associated with the goddess Ānāhītā, who bestowed legitimacy and assumed the role of protector and conveyor of *farr* (*khvarnah*, divine glory) to kings.³⁰ In this manner, Alexander the Great is very much a Persian king and represents not only an ideal and charismatic leader but also a worthy foe, serving perhaps as the best example of a foreign ruler who became integrated and accepted within the conquered culture. He is a hero whose literary journey across the world from West to East and into the nether regions of the world's mythological imagination found him serving to legitimise the royal claims of any king who could trace his lineage back to a glorious past.

In similar fashion, the popular romance of the *Sīrat al-Iskandar* in Arabic offers further evidence of how Persian legends concerning the lineage of Alexander travelled and became popular in the Middle East. As part of the stories of the lives and adventures of Persian kings (the *Khudāynāmag* tradition), the *Alexander Romance* must have been popular among the medieval Arabs, for traces of it can be detected in the *Sīrat al-Iskandar*. The *Sīrat al-Iskandar*'s quotation of a so-called *Sayr al-mulūk* (*Life of Kings*), which is the Arabic title for the *Khudāynāmag*, refers to this long tradition, which must have been circulating in oral form.

The *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī Ganjavī

Our study of the contents of the *Iskandarnāma* in chapters five and six revealed that Nizāmī compiled and collated therein a great variety of pre-Islamic Persian stories about Alexander from the Sasanian period. Nizāmī demonstrates his knowledge of Sasanian tales in his other works, in particular his *Khusraw u Shīrīn* and *Haft Paykar*, which deal with adventures of two Sasanian kings (Khusraw II and Bahrām V Gōr). Thus it is not at all surprising that his *Iskandarnāma* also reflects Sasanian tales concerning Alexander the Great.

We must also take into account the historical relevance to Nizāmī's poem of his homeland, Azerbaijan, which was an important religious centre during the Sasanian

²⁸ On this issue see Duleba, *The Cyrus Legend in the Šāhnāme*.

²⁹ Mitchell, "Alexander the Great: Divinity and the Rule of Law", pp. 94–5; Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, pp. 10ff; Mitchell, "Remembering Cyrus the Persian: Exploring Monarchy and Freedom in Classical Greece", *Bringing the Past to the Present in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Period: Images of Central Figures*, ed. E. Ben Zvi and D. Edelman (Oxford, 2013), pp. 283–92.

³⁰ On the role of Ānāhītā in establishing the legitimacy of kings, especially in the Sasanian period, see Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings*, pp. 52–77.

period, the hearth and heartland of one of the Persian Empire's three most sacred fires.³¹ As a result, Azerbaijan must have had a powerful effect on the elaboration of Zoroastrian tales and the creation of Sasanian culture and religious lore. This may account for both the great variety and the novelty of Nizāmī's information and tales. These tales were probably based on Sasanian/Azerbaijani non-religious literature, which had not yet vanished in Nizāmī's lifetime. We thus find Nizāmī quoting a so-called *Nāma-yi Khusrawī* (*Book of Kings*), a *Tārīkh-i Dihqān* (*History of Dihqān*), a "guzāranda-yi dāstān-i Darī (narrator of the Persian tale)", or a "mūbad-i mūbadān (chief Zoroastrian priest)" in different passages of both parts of the *Iskandarnāma*. All these quotations can probably be taken as referring to his pre-Islamic Persian sources.

But Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma* contains even more surprises. While the Eastern versions of the *Alexander Romance* are supposed to be based on the δ-recension of the PC, the *Iskandarnāma* includes motifs from sub-recension ε, probably due to his use of Jewish sources. We may also assume that while Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma* reflects the Eastern (Khurāsānī/Parthian) legends concerning Alexander, which represented him as a Christian, Nizāmī's Alexander embodies the Western, in particular Caucasian, tales of the conqueror, and also reflects Jewish tradition, as he himself affirms at the beginning of the *Sharafnāma*.

Another important contribution of Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma* to the development of the *Alexander Romance* highlighted by this thesis concerns the parallelism and *rapprochement* of Alexander's character to Kay Khusraw/Cyrus the Great, as mentioned above. Not only does Alexander possess a magic mirror similar to Kay Khusraw's magic goblet (*jām-i jahānbīn-i Kay Khusraw*), he also experiences adventures similar to those found in the Kay Khusraw passages in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. For instance, Kay Khusraw confronts strange creatures and encounters supernatural phenomena similar to those met by Alexander as he approaches the confines of the known world. As mentioned above, these motifs may also be interpreted as signs of the deliberate assimilation of Alexander's personality with the character of Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia*.³²

On the other hand, such motifs can also be seen as indicative of the literary cross-fertilisation of various thematic elements – such as the story's protagonist travelling further eastwards or westwards and experiencing various fantastic adventures under similar circumstances. Dick Davis has examined (convincingly, I believe) the hypothesis that Greek and Persian literary cultures intermingled and borrowed from each other.³³ It is likely that these elements originate from a similar stock of mythological motifs which over time came to be applied to different heroes.³⁴ Alexander's celebrity among the Persians and in the Islamic tradition in general is a

³¹ K. Schippmann, "Azerbaijan iii. Pre-Islamic History", *EIr*, III/2, p. 224.

³² Mitchell, "Alexander the Great: Divinity and the Rule of Law", p. 101; Stark, *Alexander's Path*, pp. 203–10; Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction*, pp. 11–12, 238–9.

³³ Davis, *Panthea's Children*, p. 1.

³⁴ For examples see Ulrich Marzolph, "The Creative Reception of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran", *Foundational Texts of World Literature*, ed. Dominique Jullien (New York, 2012), pp. 74–9; Marjolijn van Zutphen, *Farāmarz, the Sīstāni Hero, Texts and Traditions of the Farāmarznāme and the Persian Epic Cycle* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 512ff.

measure of the esteem Hellenistic culture has always enjoyed in the Persianate world.

Study of themes from the *Alexander Romance* in Niẓāmī's *Iskandarnāma* thus highlights the striking extent to which religious traditions and cultures have interpenetrated. Alexander's personality seems to have developed into an amalgam of diverse literary, historical, mythological and religious personages. As John Renard points out, Alexander functions as a transitional figure between royal and religious character types.³⁵ Alexander's identification with the Dhū'l-Qarnayn of the Qur'ān (18:82ff.) is a crucial link that distinguishes the royal "Persian Alexander" from the religious "Muslim Alexander". In the Persian tradition, he had two different reception histories, which might even have existed in parallel. He was considered the "accursed one" who destroyed the country and religion of *Irān-zamīn*, and he was a Persian king and hero a slayer of dragons who had strange adventures resembling those of Isfandiyār and Kay Khusraw. In the Islamic period, he became a model of the ideal king. The most elaborate picture of Alexander as this ideal "good king" appears in the *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī, who turns the Macedonian king into a perfect philosopher and ideal monarch, a figure of sacral authority and a "law-giving" prophet!

In conclusion, there are very few legends in history that aspire to reach different audiences and yet harbour such vast thematic resonances and generic references as the *Alexander Romance*. As we have seen in this thesis, the tale of the Macedonian world conqueror gave rise to various interpretations in the long history of its reception in Persian history and literature. The *Alexander Romance* thus demonstrates, as Ulrich Marzolph affirms, "world literature is not only, and maybe not even primarily, defined by the appeal of a given literary work, but moreover by this work's capacity to link its basic narrative to different cultural contexts and thus become part of a web of tradition that is constantly woven by the creative combination of history and imagination."³⁶

³⁵ Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image*, p. 86.

³⁶ Marzolph, "The Creative Reception of the *Alexander Romance* in Iran", p. 79.

Appendix I: Summary of the Syriac *Alexander Romance*

Book I

1. Nectanebo, the last king of Egypt, protected his kingdom through sorcery.
2. A spy told Nectanebo that the enemy would attack Egypt, but he laughed because he thought that he would be able to protect his kingdom by sorcery as he always had.
3. While practising sorcery, Nectanebo saw through the sorcery that Egypt was betrayed by her gods. He left his kingdom and fled. He came to Pella of the Macedonians. There he dressed like an Egyptian prophet and astrologer. The people asked him questions and he became renowned. Hephaestus sent an oracle to the Egyptians announcing that a young man would come and subjugate all the enemies of Egypt in their service. The Egyptians carved that oracle under the brass tablet on the stone pedestal upon which the statue of King Nectanebo stood.
4. Queen Olympias desired to ask Nectanebo what her future held. Nectanebo fell in love with her. He told her that Ammon (with ram's horns on his head) the god of Libya would sleep with her.
5. Nectanebo used his magic to send Olympias a dream in which she slept with the god Ammon.
6. Olympias asked Nectanebo to make it possible for her to sleep with the god in reality. He said that the god would appear various times, firstly in the form of a serpent, secondly with ram's horns, then in the form of the hero Hercules, then in the form of Dionysus, and finally in Nectanebo's form.
7. Nectanebo slept with Olympias in all these forms.
8. Nectanebo sent Philip a dream in which he learned that Olympias was pregnant by the god Ammon.
9. Philip returned from the war. He told Olympias what he had dreamed.
10. Philip accused Olympias of being unfaithful. Nectanebo by his sorcery changed his own form and assumed that of a huge serpent. The serpent kissed Olympias and Philip saw it.
11. A hen laid an egg from which sprang a small serpent. The serpent crawled around the egg, and then went back into it and died immediately. The chief of the Chaldeans interpreted this prodigy to Philip as follows: "the child that is to be born will be a son. He will traverse the whole world and subjugate all men by his power. But when he returns to his own place, he will die".
12. Nectanebo calculated the stars of heaven at the time of Olympias's delivery (over Aquarius and Pisces of Egypt). The child's birth was accompanied by the sudden noise of thunder and lightning.
13. Philip named the child Alexander in remembrance of a son he had with a former wife. His hair resembled the mane of a lion, and his eye were different colours, one light and the other dark. His tutor was Lekranikos the Pellaeon. There were other tutors too: Āpos the Lemnian taught him letters, Philip was his tutor in geometry,

Ārespīmōn in the art of speaking, Aristotle the Milesian in philosophy; his instructor in war was Ardippos the Dmaṣḱian. The princes of the Cappadocians brought an offering to Philip, the horse Bucephalus (“Bull-head”), which devoured men.

14. When Alexander was twelve, he went to war with Philip and he practised horsemanship. Alexander killed Nectanebo by pushing him into a pit. He then realised that he was Nectanebo’s son.
15. Philip sent his servants to Polias the diviner at Delphi to ask who would be king after him. The answer was that the future king would make the mighty steed Bucephalus run through Pella.
16. Alexander managed to ride the “man-eating” horse. Philip realised that the Delphi oracle referred to Alexander.
17. When he became king, Aristotle asked Alexander what he would give him. Alexander replied that he would make him a ruler. The other tutors asked Alexander the same question. There is an exchange of letters between Aristotle and Philip regarding Alexander’s education because his parents had sent him some funds but Alexander gave them to his friends as gifts.
18. When Alexander was fifteen, he returned home from school. He went to Pisa to enter the horse and chariot races. There was a quarrel between Alexander and Nicolaus the King of Ārētā, who considered “Alexander small in stature”.
19. Alexander won the race.
20. He went back to Pella and discovered that his mother was divorced. Philip was going to marry Cleopatra. Alexander was angry with Philip.
21. Philip wanted to stab Alexander with a knife but he stumbled and fell.
22. Alexander reconciled his father and mother.
23. A certain city called Methone had rebelled against Philip. He sent Alexander to make an end of the inhabitants by war. He persuaded them by his words to return to Philip’s service. They obeyed. When Alexander returned, he saw the satraps of Darius demanding the customary tribute from Philip. Alexander answered: “When Philip had no children, his hens used to lay golden eggs, but since Alexander was born, they have become barren and no longer lay eggs.” The ambassadors hired a skilful painter to paint Alexander. They took the picture and went to their own land. Philip sent Alexander to subdue the Armenians.
24. A certain man called Theosidos tried to kill Philip because he was in love with Olympias. Alexander came back after victory against the Armenians and saw them together. He took the man to Philip, who was still alive. Philip killed Theosidos and then died himself.
25. Alexander announced that he would march against the Persians.
26. Alexander’s army numbered two hundred and seventy thousand men in all.
27. He made them embark in triremes and large ships over the sea from Dithoas and Thrace.
28. He came to Rome. The Romans received him with six hundred talents of gold, together with the golden crown of Zeus and other gifts. They asked Alexander to take vengeance for them upon Carthage. Alexander accepted to do so.

29. Alexander set out from Italy and came by sea to Africa. He fought against the Carthaginians.
30. Alexander went to Libya and offered sacrifices there to the god Ammon. In a dream Ammon affirmed that Alexander was his son. The god showed Alexander a place where he should build a city.
31. Alexander killed a stag. Around the spot where the stag died, there were fifteen (or twelve) towns. Alexander remembered his dream.
32. There he entered the temple of Zeus and Hera. He read a legend there and realised that the first god was Serapis. He also saw a golden cup that was made for Serapis. Furthermore, he decided to build the city where the first god dwelled as Ammon had showed him in a dream. He called it Alexandria.
33. Aristotle warned Alexander not to build such a great city because even if Alexander stored up all the foodstuffs in his dominions, it would not suffice for the nourishment of the people that were in it.
34. He went to Memphis and saw the statue of Nectanebo and the oracle in which it was said that Nectanebo's son would rule the world.
35. He went with his troops to Syria. There was a battle against the Tyrians. Alexander defeated them and built the city of Tripolis.
36. Darius's ambassadors showed him Alexander's painting. Roxana fell in love with Alexander. She carried the picture to her bedchamber. Then Darius sent Alexander some symbolic gifts (a whip, a ball, a box full of gold and a letter).
37. Alexander's troops were terrified. He first commanded that the ambassadors that brought the gifts be crucified but then he released them to show the superiority of Greeks over the barbarians. The motif of sesame seeds.
38. Alexander wrote a letter to Darius in which he interpreted the gifts as his own victory over Darius. He also sent a bushel of mustard seeds as a response to the gift of sesame seeds.
39. Darius sent a letter to his satraps ordering them to fight Alexander. The satraps replied that the king should come with a strong force to help them. Darius replies.
40. Darius heard that Alexander had reached the river called Estalraglos and wrote a letter to him.
41. Alexander's response. He received a message that his mother was sick. He decided to visit her; on the way he went to Arabia and fought against one of Darius's generals. Here the motif of sesame and mustard seeds is repeated.
42. Alexander went to Phrygia and offered sacrifices to Hector and Achilles. He gave a speech about Homer.
43. He returned to Macedonia and visited his mother. Then he went to Abdera and set fire to the city.
44. Alexander reached a city of cannibals. He ordered the horses to be killed in order to protect his troops.
45. Then he went to Locri, where he obtained food and horses. He marched towards Akrançis and went to the temple of Apollo. There he heard an oracle.

46. He began to march towards Thebes. He fought against Theban warriors and killed them all. A singer tried to enchant Alexander and his troops. Alexander expelled from the country those Thebans who remained alive.
47. These Thebans went to Delphi to ask the oracle about their city. The oracle told them that when three athletes held a contest with one another, their city would be rebuilt. Alexander went to Corinth to the Olympic Games. A Theban won the games and Alexander promised to rebuild Thebes.

Book II

1. Alexander set out from Corinth and came to Plataeae, an Athenian city. The Athenians were displeased that Alexander changed the ruler of that city because he had removed a priestess. Alexander wrote a letter to the Athenians.
2. Exchange of letters between Alexander and the Athenians.
3. The assembly of the Athenians.
4. Demosthenes's speech.
5. The Athenians sent Alexander a golden crown of victory but not the ten orators. Alexander wrote them a letter demanding the ten orators.
6. Alexander came to the border of Persia and encamped by the River Tigris. He went on an embassy to Darius. The Persian king thought that Alexander was the god Mithras who had come to assist the Persians. Alexander presented himself as an ambassador.
7. At the banquet, Alexander concealed the golden wine cups beneath his robes. When the Persians saw this, they asked him why he did it. He said that whenever Alexander gave a feast, he gave all the golden cups to his guests. Darius gave him the cups. Meanwhile, Alexander was recognised by Darius's ambassadors, who had been to Macedonia. He escaped. A picture of Xerxes in Darius's court fell to the ground.
8. Alexander filled his troops with courage to fight against Darius.
9. The war between the Persians and Macedonians on the banks of the River Strangas. Darius fled and many Persian soldiers drowned in the river or were slaughtered by the Macedonians. Darius wrote a letter to Alexander offering him the Persian treasures. Alexander ordered the palace of Xerxes burned but then repented.
10. Alexander saw the graves of the Persians, including the golden coffin of King Cyrus. He released the captured Greek prisoners.
11. Darius wrote a letter to Porus, the King of the Indians to ask him for help against Alexander.
12. Two generals of Darius, Bāgīz and Ānābdaeh, assassinated him because they thought that they might be rewarded with gifts by Alexander. The dialogue between the dying king and Alexander. Darius's last words to Alexander.
13. Alexander buried Darius with honour. Thus, the Persians were filled with love for him. Alexander wrote a proclamation to the Persians. He also ordered Darius's assassins raised up on stakes.

14. Alexander wrote a letter to the mother and wife of Darius. They sent answers to him. He also wrote a letter to Rawshanak and then he took her as his wife.

Book III

1. The war against Porus, King of the Indians.
2. Porus's letter to Alexander. Alexander's response.
3. Alexander and his troops were terrified of Porus's army, which had elephants. They fought for twenty days.
4. Alexander fought Porus alone and killed him.
5. The Brahmans, "the naked sages", wrote a letter to Alexander.
6. Alexander asked them some questions and they answered. Then they asked Alexander about immortality.
7. Alexander wrote a letter to Aristotle on the wonders of India and China (see Appendix II).
8. Alexander desired to go to the country of Samrāyē (Semiramis) and see Queen Kundāka (Candace). Thus he wrote her a letter. Candace sent him gifts with a letter.
9. A Greek painter painted Alexander's portrait for Queen Candace without his knowledge. A son of Candace called Ḳandāros (Candaules) went to the country of the Amazons with his wife. His wife was captured; he escaped and came to Alexander's camp. Alexander presented himself as Antigonus.
10. Alexander helped Candaules to rescue his wife and went with him to Queen Candace.
11. The description of Candace's land. The queen received Alexander and prepared a splendid feast for him.
12. Alexander saw the queen Candace as his own mother, Olympias. The description of Candace's palace. Candace told Alexander that she knew he was Alexander himself and not his ambassador.
13. Candace's other son, whose father-in-law was Porus, wanted to take revenge on Alexander by killing his ambassador. Alexander, in disguise, promised them to deliver Alexander into their hands if they did not kill him. The sons accepted.
14. Alexander saw an angel (Sesonchosis, the ruler of the world).
15. Alexander went to the country of the Amazons, who had one breast like a man's and one like a woman's. Exchange of letters between Alexander and the Amazons.
16. Exchange of letters between Alexander and the Amazons.
17. When Alexander was near the country of the Amazons, Zeus rained a great rain upon them. Then a fierce and powerful heat came upon them. Then came lightning and thunder and mighty sounds from heaven. The people said that it was all happening because of Alexander. They gave sixty mighty elephants to Alexander to abandon that land. He received a letter from Aristotle telling Alexander to sacrifice to the gods who had honoured him. He decided to return to Babylon. Near that city, he wrote a letter to his mother to tell her about his journey to the country of the Amazons.

18. The letter to his mother continues with the marvels Alexander came across through his journey.
19. A sign of Alexander's death: a certain woman gave birth to a child who from his buttocks upwards had the form of a man, and from his buttocks downwards the form of a number of animals – a lion, a leopard, a wolf and a wild dog, all the heads separate.
20. Olympias's letter containing an accusation against Antipater. Antipater tried to poison Alexander. Alexander drank the poison and felt great pain. He ordered a will to be written.
21. The Macedonians carried Alexander on his bed. They passed before him in their armour. They wept when they saw that Alexander was sick. Alexander gave a speech.
22. They carried Alexander to his palace. Alexander commanded that the will be brought and read before him.
23. When Alexander had given the commands (in his will), he died. Ptolemy made him a grave in Alexandria as he had been ordered.
24. A summary of Alexander's deeds: he waged numerous battles and great wars. He lived thirty-two years and seven months. He subdued twenty-two barbarian kings and thirteen of the Greeks. He built thirteen cities, including Samarqand, Balkh, Merv and many others. He had reigned as king twelve years and seven months.

Appendix II: Summary of Alexander's Letter to Aristotle about the Wonders of India in the Syriac *Alexander Romance* (Book III, 7)¹

Near to the place called Prasiakē, Alexander saw men with faces like horses who lived on fish.² Their speech was barbarian.³

Alexander desired to take a boat to an island but the horse-faced people hid their boats, leaving only twelve.⁴ Alexander wanted to use the twelve boats but his friends stopped him.⁵ The island turned out to be an animal.⁶ It sank and vanished suddenly in the sea.⁷

They drew near a city situated beside a river. In that river grew reeds thirty cubits tall and as thick as a garland which a man puts on his head.⁸ These reeds overshadowed the whole city and it was built upon them.⁹ The water of the river was more bitter than pungent herbs.¹⁰ Thirty-six soldiers wanted to bathe in it. When they had gone down to the water, a number of reptiles rose up and dragged them into the water.¹¹ Alexander and his men departed from that place. The foot soldiers and cavalry drank their own urine because they had no water.

¹ Since this part of the *Romance* bears a great resemblance to the parallel stories in the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, we include a brief summary of it here, providing the relevant parallel verses from Firdawsī's poem in footnotes.

² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 79:

ز ماهی بدی شان همه خوردنی
به جایی نبد راه آوردنی

³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 79:

زبان شان نه تازی و نه خسروی
نه ترکی، نه چینی و نه پهلوی

⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 79:

ز رومی و از مردم پارسی
بدان کشتی اندر نشستند، سی

⁵ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 79:

یکی گفت از آن فیلسوفان به شاه
که بر ژرف دریا ترا نیست راه

⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 79:

یکی زرد ماهی بد آن لخت کوه
هم آنکه چو تنگ اندر آمد گروه

⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 79:

فرو برد کشتی هم اندر شتاب
همان کوه شد نا پدید اندر آب

⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

یکی بر فزون بود پهنای اوی
چهل رش بپیمود بالای اوی

⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

همه خانه ها کرده از چوب نی
زمینش هم از نی فرو برده پی

¹⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

نشایست بد در نیستان بسی
ز شوری نخورد آب او هر کسی

¹¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

بخوردند و کردند آهنگ خواب
بسی مار پیچان برآمد ز آب

They drew near a lake and found therein every species of animal and reptile. Its water was sweeter than honey.¹²

“The Night of Terror”.¹³ It was about the third hour of the night, wild beasts of various kinds came forth from the jungle and down to the lake. The sand white and red scorpions,¹⁴ each of them a cubit long. Snakes with horns on their heads killed many soldiers.¹⁵ They saw a lion larger than an ox;¹⁶ beasts with horns on their noses, larger than elephants;¹⁷ wolves, leopards, panthers and beasts with scorpions’ tails.¹⁸ They set the forest on fire.¹⁹

Alexander and his men entered a wood with fruit trees. Their fruit was very luscious. Within the wood were wild men whose faces resembled ravens,²⁰ and they held spears in their hands; their clothing was made of skins. Alexander’s men slew six hundred and thirty-three of them. They fed upon the fruit of the trees.

They arrived in the land of the people with twisted feet.²¹ The twisted-foot people began to throw stones.²²

Dragon-slaying scene. They came to a high mountain and some of the people who lived on the mountain said, “King Alexander, you cannot cross over this mountain, for a great god in the form of a dragon lives on it ... the people feed it two oxen every day ...” When Alexander saw the dragon, he thought that it was a black cloud: the smoke that poured from its mouth was like the thick darkness which comes in a fog.

¹² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

جهان خرم و آب چون انگبین
همی مشک بویید خاک زمین

¹³ Stoneman identified this term as a feature of Alexander’s letter to Aristotle about India. See Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, p. 74.

¹⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

و زان بیشه گزدم چو آتش به رنگ
جهان شد بر آن خفتگان تار و تنگ

¹⁵ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

بخوردند و کردند آهنگ خواب
بسی مار پیچان برآمد ز آب

¹⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

ز دست دگر شیر مهتر ز گاو
که با جنگ ایشان نبد توش و تاو

¹⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

ز یک سو فراوان بیامد گراز
چو الماس دندان های دراز

¹⁸ Firdawsī uses the Avestic term *khrafstra* for the snakes, scorpions and reptiles. See Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

بگشتند چندان خراستر که راه
به یکبارگی تنگ شد بر سپاه

¹⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

سپاهش ز دریا به یکسو شدند
بدان نی ستان آتش اندر زدند

²⁰ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 80:

ز مردم زمین دید چون پر زاغ
سیه دیسه و چشم ها چون چراغ

²¹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 82:

چو نزدیکی نرم پایان رسید
نگه کرد و مردم بی اندازه دید

²² Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 82:

یکی سنگ باران بکردند سخت
چو باد خزان برزند بر درخت

Alexander gave orders to bring two oxen of huge bulk and had his men kill them, strip off their hides and remove their flesh, and then fill their skins with gypsum, pitch, lead and sulphur. The dragon swallowed them and as soon as the gypsum entered its belly, its head fell upon the ground and it opened wide its mouth. Alexander ordered heated balls of brass to be thrown into the beast's mouth. Thus the dragon died.

They reached a place where there were men with lion's heads and scaly tails.

Upon the bank of a river there was a tree with very pleasant smell. It grew from dawn until the sixth hour, and from then until evening it shrank until it could no longer be seen.

They arrived at the ocean which goes round the whole world. Alexander heard men speaking in Greek but did not see anybody, only an island. A number of the troops desired to swim to the island but beasts in the form of men with very large bodies came up from the deep and seized twenty of the soldiers.

They reached a place where the people had no head at all. They had eyes and a mouth in their breasts; they spoke like men and ate mushrooms they gathered from the ground. Each mushroom weighed twenty pounds. Mentally speaking, however, they were like children, and their way of life was very simple.

Alexander and his men set out and came to a desert waste. There was a bird sitting upon a tree without leaves or fruit; it had upon its head something like the rays of the sun, and it was called the "palm bird".

They came to a place amid groves of large trees, and in these woods there were wild beasts like the wild asses of Greece, each of them fifteen cubits long.

They marched for sixty-five days and arrived at a place called Obarkia. They saw two very large birds with faces like men, and one of them spoke in Greek:²³ "O Alexander you are walking in the land of the gods," and "Alexander, the victory over Darius and the subjection of King Porus are enough for you."

They arrived at the foot of a certain mountain. A temple had been built on the top of it.²⁴ When they went in, they found two thousand five hundred steps of sapphire, a very large chamber with gold windows in every wall, and in them there were thirty statues carved out of gems. The whole temple was made of gold. And over its windows there were golden images, figures of Pan and the Satyrs, who were musicians, and in the windows there stood dancers. Inside the temple was a golden altar, beside which stood two sapphire candlesticks forty cubits tall. And upon the altar, instead of fire was placed a lamp made of stone, which shone like a star.²⁵ In the temple was a forty-cubit couch of gold set with gems, and cushions of great value were laid upon it. The form of a huge

²³ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 94:

به آواز رومی سخن راندند
جهاندار پیروز را خواندند

²⁴ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 100:

یکی کوه دید از برش لاژورد
یکی خانه بر سرش، یاقوت زرد

²⁵ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 100:

یکی سرخ گوهر به جای چراغ
به زیر اندرش پایه چون پر زاع

man reclined thereon,²⁶ and a radiant light shot forth from him like a lightning flash. Over him was spread a garment worked with gold and emeralds and other precious stones in the form of a vine, the fruit of which were of gold set with gems, and before the couch stood an ivory table. A terrible noise warned Alexander not to enter the temple of these gods nor to reveal their mysteries.

A sign appeared continuously for three days (a dense black cloud with a fire burning in the middle).²⁷ For five days snow fell upon Alexander and his men,²⁸ forcing them to remain there for thirty days. And then they came to Prasiakāyē and took the treasury.

All the Indians of that city spoke to Alexander. He asked them if there were any renowned or marvellous things in that country that a king ought to see.²⁹

²⁶ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 101:

نهاده بر چشمه زرین دو تخت
برو خوابنده یکی شوربخت

²⁷ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 89:

برآمد یکی ابر و دودی سیاه
بر آتش همی رفت گفתי سپاه!

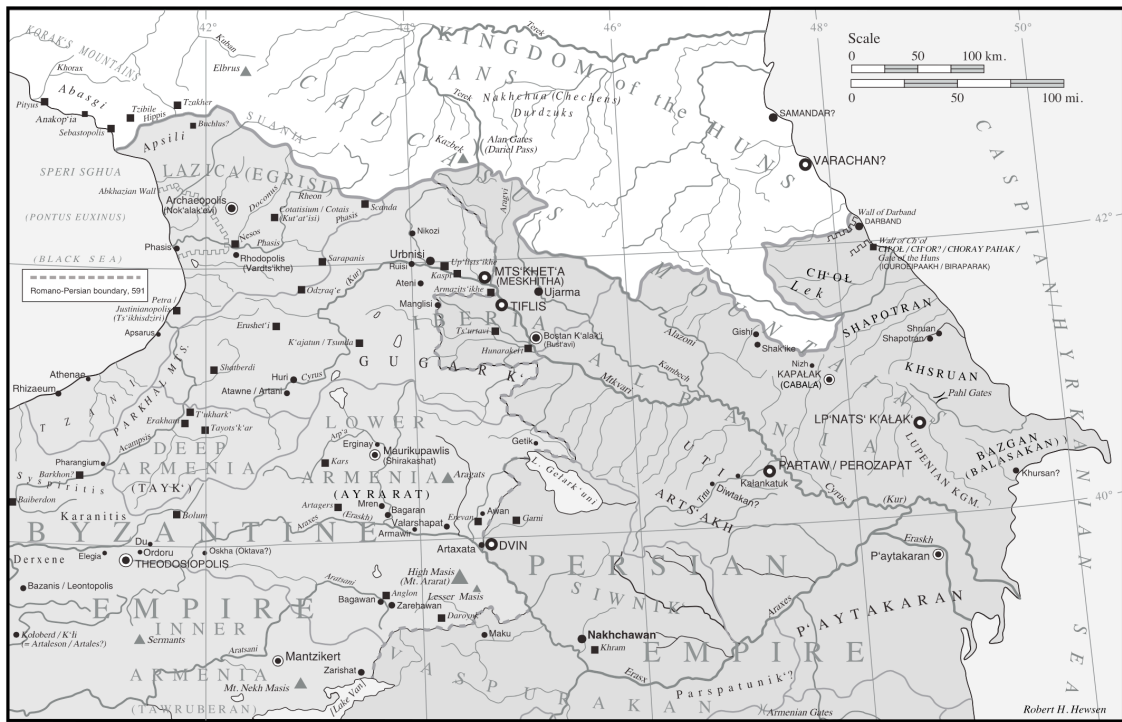
²⁸ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 89:

تبه شد بسی مردم پایکار
ز سرما و برف اندر آن روزگار

²⁹ Firdawsī, *Shāhnāma*, vol. VI, p. 102:

بپرسید از ایشان که ایدر شگفت
چه چیزست کاندازه باید گرفت؟

Appendix III: Maps



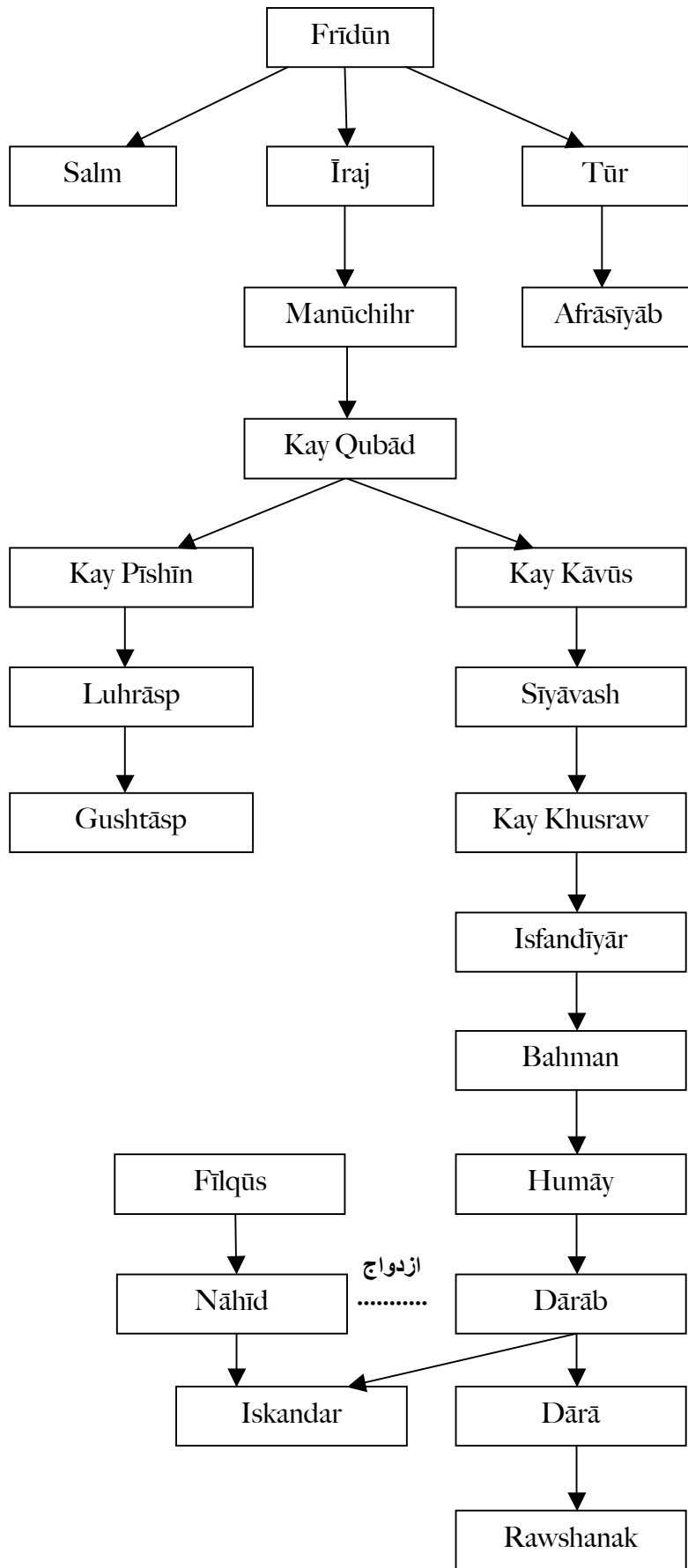
Transcaucasia, Nizāmi's Homeland¹

¹ Source: Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, Part II AD 363–630* (London/New York, 2002).



Alexander in the Caucasus According to the *Iskandarnāma* of Nizāmī²

² Source: Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, Part II AD 363–630* (London/New York, 2002).



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