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Telling a Different Story: Redeployment of the Narrative Alexander Tradition in a Medieval Persian *Dāstān**

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Abstract

This article explores the *remaniement* of three episodes current in the Perso-Arabic Alexander tradition—i.e., Eskandar's confrontation with the Indian king Fur; Eskandar's visit to Queen Qeydāfeh; and Eskandar's encounter with the Gymnosophists—in the anonymous Persian *Eskandarnāmeh*, a medieval epic narrative in prose (*dāstān*; *ca.* 12th–14th c.). Through extensive comparative evidence from other genres, primarily narrative poetry (Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, Nezāmi's *Sharafnāmeh* and *Eqbālnāmeh*), mirabilia ('*ajāyeb*), and exegetical works (*qesas al-anbeyāʾ* and *tafsir*), this study engages with how the modalities of the *dāstān* genre, with its strong leaning towards traditional oral storytelling, affect the narrative choices *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author makes in treating these themes. In so doing, this article attempts to develop a more informed assessment of the strategies and devices which, activated both on the production and reception planes, generate competing interpretations of well-known plots recast in different narrative modes.

Invigorated by the third-century CE appearance of the *Greek Alexander Romance* (also known as Pseudo-Callisthenes), Alexander's deeds have bourgeoned into a multi-cultural and multiform narrative tradition spanning centuries, religions, languages and literary genres. The Perso-Arabic branch of this tradition has emerged as particularly fecund and influential, catalyzing the proliferation of the Alexander *matière* from Ethiopia to Southeast Asia. This wide dissemination suggests the easy translatability of the motifs and stories comprising the Alexander tradition to diverse cultural and literary environments, which in turn allows for meaningful examination of possible narrative shifts and ramifications along inter-genre and intertextual lines. Thus, taking three episodes current in the Perso-Arabic Alexander tradition—i.e., Eskandar's confrontation with the Indian king Fur (Porus of the *Greek Alexander Romance*); Eskandar's visit to Queen Qeyd(h)āfeh[1] (Candace of the *Greek Alexander Romance*); and Eskandar's encounter with the Gymnosophists—this article explores the *remaniement* these episodes undergo in the anonymous Persian *Eskandarnāmeh*, a medieval epic narrative in prose (*dāstān*). In the process, I provide extensive comparative evidence from other genres, primarily narrative poetry (Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*, Nezāmi's

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* I am grateful to the anonymous readers for their suggested improvements. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[1] Qeydhāfeh is an alternative spelling of the Queen's name.

Sharafnāmeh and *Eqbālnāmeh*), mirabilia (*ʿajāyeb*) and exegetical works (*qesas al-anbeyāʾ* and *tafsir*). However, while I examine transmutations in three *Eskandarnāmeh* episodes vis-à-vis other sources, my goal is not to participate in the textual archeology of this *dāstān*, though the case studies presented here do, *ipso facto*, aid in a more accurate evaluation of the relation between this poorly-studied text and its possible sources, first and foremost Ferdowsi's chapter on Eskandar. Instead, I engage with how the modalities of the *dāstān* genre, with its strong leaning towards traditional oral storytelling, affect the narrative choices *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author makes in treating shared themes. Throughout, I also touch on the applicability of the varieties of intertextuality, pivotal to the Perso-Arabic literary tradition, to the *dāstān* genre.[2] Thus, although not comprehensive, this study has an exploratory character and attempts to develop a more informed assessment of strategies and devices which, activated both on the production and reception planes, generate competing interpretations of well-known plots recast in different narrative modes.

1. The Anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*: genre characteristics, dating, and relation to the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition

The anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh* belongs to a distinct corpus of lengthy medieval fictional narratives in prose, referred to interchangeably by their authors as "tale, story" (*dāstān, revāyat, hekāyat* or *qesseh*) or "book" (*ketāb*).[3] Their branching plots relate the heroic-romantic adventures of their eponymous heroes—be they Samak, Eskandar, Dārāb, Firuzshāh, Abu Moslem, Amir Hamzeh or others—often with a religious, Islamic emphasis. The composition and transmission of these narratives are anchored in traditional oral storytelling, promulgated in the Persianate domain by professional or semiprofessional storytellers (known in different historical periods and cultural milieux as *mohaddesun, qesseh-khᵛānān, naqqālān* or *dāstānguyān*).[4] From the position of their making, *dāstān*s do not represent the product of oral composition-in-performance: they do not constitute transcriptions of concrete storytelling events or the outcome of dictation. In contrast to a work composed in a purely oral manner, the production of *dāstān*s was removed in time and space from the phase of transmission and reception. At the same time, oral antecedents must have played a considerable role in their evolution. It is highly probable that, thematically and structurally, *dāstān*s are based on the cycles of folktales or legends crystallized around the eponymous heroes and transmitted orally in the course of multiple storytelling events. At a certain point, these fragmentary narrative traditions were unified into a coherent narrative framework; hence the conventional self-identification of *dāstān* authors as

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[2] The emic normative tradition offers a subtle view of the relationship between the source and its offspring, first and foremost in connection with poetry. The most basic term in Arabic and Persian for imitation is *tatabboʿ* ("following behind, succeeding"), when the same rhyme and meter as the imitated poem are used and the imitator remains inferior to or dependent on the original. Another common relationship pattern is *nazireh* ("similar, parallel"), when the model's formal (e.g., meter), compositional and some thematic features are retained but new material is also introduced and the topic given an original treatment. The *javāb* ("reply") type of relationship implies debate across time with the model. Finally, *esteqbāl* ("welcoming") suggests "a dialectical give and take between reception and revision, between the demands of the literary tradition and individual poetic intention" (Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*, 112). While the imitator acknowledges the power of the original, he also "takes charge" over it, incorporating it into his own poetic world. For a comprehensive and nuanced discussion of types of imitation, see Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*, esp. 100-133.

[3] There is a caveat to my observations in this section with regard to medieval *dāstān*s: they mostly pertain to texts originating in the fifth/eleventh through tenth/sixteenth centuries. It stands to reason that works produced from the late Safavid and Mughal periods onwards could vary in formal and thematic specifics from earlier *dāstān*s, especially given the changes in their production, distribution and consumption brought about by the advent of printing. For the later developments of the genre in Persian and Urdu, see Khan, *The Broken Spell*.

[4] The evolution of the institution of professional storytellers is discussed in Mahjub, "Tahavvol-e naqqāli va qesseh-khᵛāni"; Safā, "Eshāreh-i kutāh be-dāstāngozāri va dāstāngozārān tā dowrān-e safavi"; Omidsalar, "Storytellers in Classical Persian Texts"; and Marzolph, "Professional Storytelling (*naqqāli*) in Qājār Iran."

"compilers/gatherers" (*jamʿ-āvarandeh, jamʿ-konandeh*) and their activity as "compiling/gath-ering" (*jamʿ kardan*).[5] While piecing the parts into the whole, *dāstān* authors expanded their narratives with miscellaneous extraneous material from geographical and historical works, epic poems, hagiographical collections of "Stories of the Prophets" (*qesas al-anbeyāʾ*), Qurʾanic commentaries (*tafsir*s), compendia of mirabilia (*ʿajāyeb*), and oral folk tradition.[6]

Historically, we know next to nothing about the transmission and reception of medieval Persian *dāstān*s, nor their intended addressees. The examination of meta-communicative markers in the texts coupled with indirect historical evidence points to the aural aspects of these works: it is reasonable to believe that performance, or performative situations rang-ing from re-enacting a memorized text with varying degrees of improvisation to reading aloud, was their principal mode of transmission and reception. Besides the modalities of communication, *dāstān*s' anchoring in the oral storytelling tradition manifests in the mech-anisms of traditional referentiality at work at both the production and reception ends.[7] The concept of traditional referentiality implies that the oral tradition-oriented text's meaning can be successfully inferred only if one takes into account—i.e., "refers" to—motifs, narrative patterns, protagonists, characters and other background information accumulated and stored in the reservoir of a particular oral narrative tradition. The competent addressee should easily recognize this kind of information, fill up lacunae, decipher allusions and bridge seeming chronological inconsistencies in the narrative. Similar to the popular Arabic *siyar* and Turkish *dāstān*s, the *dāstān*s' audience seems to be diverse and heteroge-neous, ranging from professional storytellers themselves to courtly circles.[8] At the same

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[5] For a discussion of the aspects of *dāstān* production with extensive bibliography, see Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," 660–66; Mahjub, "Motāleʿeh dar dāstān-hā-ye ʿāmmeyāneh-ye fārsi"; and Salimov, *Nasri rivoyatii forsu tojik*, 8–56. For the comprehensive treatment of specific works, see Gaillard, *Le livre de Samak-e ʿAyyâr* (on *Samak-e ʿayyār*); Gaillard, *Alexandre le Grand en Iran*, 9–88 (on the second part of the *Dārābnāmeh*); Hoseyn Esmāʿilī's extensive introductions to *Abu Moslemnāmeh* and *Joneydnāmeh* (see Abu Tāher Tartusi, *Abu Moslemnāmeh*, I, 19–198), *Ḥātamnāmeh* (see *Ḥātamnāmeh*), and *Zamjināmeh* (see *Zamjināmeh*, 13–142); and the "Central Asian" *Eskandarnāmeh* (see Bāqi Mohammad b. Mowlānā Yusof, *Eskandarnāmeh*, I, 121–54).

[6] The same amalgamation of heterogeneous materials, including from scholarly works, can be seen in the Arabic *sīra shaʿbiyya*; see, e.g., Herzog, *Geschichte und Imaginaire*, 358–92.

[7] For the definition and an elaboration of the concept of traditional referentiality, see Foley, *Immanent Art*, 6–8.

[8] Defining authorial intent in the compiling of *dāstān*s and their audience is difficult due to the overwhelming lack of a paratextual apparatus. From bits of internal textual evidence, one can deduce, for example, that the story of Firuzshāh must have been written down by a professional storyteller, Mohammad Bighami (late ninth/fif-teenth century), for "internal consumption" in professional storyteller circles, either to enrich their repertoire or provide a manual for the training of apprentices (for discussion, see Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," 663–64). The third volume of the same *dāstān* was prepared by a scribe to present to a local prince, in the hopes of receiving a reward (see Mahjub, "Jeld-e sevvom-e dāstān-e Firuzshāh," 43). One of the *Dārābnāmeh* manuscripts (dated 992/1584) was transcribed from a copy borrowed from the Royal Library of the Emperor Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556-1605; see Tarsusi, *Dārābnāmeh*, II, 598). Altogether, the Mughal period provides far more substantial evidence on the currency this type of literature gained among court and elite circles, although it is unclear to what extent this evidence can be projected back to earlier periods. Akbar is known to have been especially fond of listening to the adventures of Hamzeh from the *Hamzehnāmeh* as performed by Mollā ʿEnāyat Darbār Khān (see Sharma, "Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Persian Texts," 288–90). In *Terāz al-akhbār* (compiled ca. 1041/1631-2), ʿAbd al-Nabi Fakhr al-Zamāni, himself a professional storyteller specializing in reciting the *Qesseh-ye Hamzeh*, enumerates the story's potential addressees, including rulers (*salātin*), members of court and military elites (*vozarā va umarā va umarā-zādegān*), and people of discerning taste (*mardom-e qābel-o fāzel*) who are difficult to please (*doshvār-pasand*), i.e., most probably learned literati (see Mahjub, "Tahavvol-e naqqāli va qesseh-khʷāni," 1086–87). For an inspection of *Terāz al-akhbār* from a broader perspective, see Khan, "A Handbook for Storytellers." Instructive in this connection is evidence from the *Munesnāmeh* manuscript (compiled late sixth/twelfth century) and *Ketāb-e dāstān* manuscript (dated 972/1565). These are two collections of popular stories, which, although couched in unornamented language and comprised of seemingly entertaining content, targeted the elite audience and functioned as advisory literature (see Askari, "Élite Folktales"). Similar cases in this respect are the Turkish *Saltuqnāmeh*, compiled on the order of the Ottoman Prince Jim Sultan (d. 1494) (Ebū'l-Hayr Rūmī, *Ṣaltuḳ-nāmē*, fols. 617r-v; and *Battalname*, I, 43), and the Turkish translation of the *Sirat ʿAntar*, made at the behest of Sultan Mehmet (Heath, *The Thirsty Sword*, 241).

time, however, *dāstān*s were discarded from the contemporary literary frame of reference due to their mode of writing, which was characterized by: reduced syntactic and linguistic complexity; specific patterns of discourse segmentation, including the structuring of narration through storytelling formulas; the ample use of performance-oriented markers; "frugality" in description and character exposition; and a peculiar attitude—grounded in the oral tradition—towards the written word and the notion of a book.[9] In other words, from a modern researcher's point of view, *dāstān*s were relegated to the non-canonical stratum of prose, thus forming a periphery in the polysystem of medieval Persian literature.

The anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh* seems to be one of the earliest examples of the *dāstān* genre. On lingua-stylistic grounds, it is variously dated to the middle or end of the fifth/eleventh century; from the end of the fifth/eleventh to the beginning of the sixth/twelfth centuries; or to the second half or end of the sixth/twelfth century.[10] Its only—and defective—manuscript dates, most likely, from the ninth/late fourteenth-fifteenth centuries.[11] Regarding its production, the *Eskandarnāmeh* is far from homogenous: in the time between its composition and the copying of its extant manuscript, the *dāstān* had already passed through several stages of production. In these stages, at least three agents contributed to its multilayered making: the author/compiler(s), the redactor, and the copyist(s).[12] The earlier *dāstān* was clearly much bulkier in size and incorporated extraneous narrative material lifted by the original author/compiler from various oral and written sources, among which *qesas al-anbeyā* and *ʿajāyeb* loom large. The medieval redactor, who could also have been a copyist, boldly interfered with the original text, deleting and abridging the stories that, in his mind, did not have direct bearing on Eskandar's adventures.[13]

In the meager scholarly literature on the subject, the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh* is taken as an indirect offshoot of the extinct δ* recension of the *Greek Alexander Romance*, through

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[9] For medieval Persian *dāstān*s' mode of writing, which emphasized the communicative (versus lingua-ornamental) function, see Rubanovich, "Beyond the Literary Canon," 223-97; Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," 666-71; Gaillard, *Le livre de Samak-e ʿAyyâr*, 85-97; and Hanaway, "Formal Elements." On the perception of the written word and books, see Rubanovich, "At the Juncture of Orality and Textuality."

[10] See, respectively, Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsi*, II, 132; Lazard, *La langue des plus anciens monuments de la prose persane*, 127; and Mahjub, "Eskandarnāmeh," 455. See also n. 12 below.

[11] Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, Introduction, 22-23.

[12] The last copyist has the most salient presence, as he overtly interrupts the flow of narration some two-thirds of the way through the book by inserting a separate chapter (*fasl*). In it, he seeks to explain discrepancies (*tanāqoz-i chand*) in the plot-line that might "cause nuisance to the discerning ones" (*az ān ʿāqelān-rā malālat-i hāsel āyad*; Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 496), as well as apologetically asks his readers to excuse these inconsistencies, for which he was not to be blamed, as they were present in the initial text (*in tanāqoz dar avval oftādeh-st*; ibid., 497). We learn that our conscientious scribe relied on an antigraph prepared by a certain ʿAbd al-Kāfi ebn Abi al-Barakāt, whom he introduces as *moharrer-e in ketāb*. The scribe reveals that ʿAbd al-Kāfi examined quite a few manuscripts (*mabālegh-e noskheh-hā motāleʿeh kard*), including the protograph (*noskheh-ye asl*) kept in the library of the Jāmeʿ Mosque on the market's outskirts (*dār al-kotob-e jāmeʿ-e bon-i bāzār*; ibid., 497). We also learn that all the manuscripts collated by ʿAbd al-Kāfi contained the same discrepancy in the story-line. The recent identification of the antigraph copyist as ʿAbd al-Kāfi ebn Abi al-Barakāt ebn Abi al-Ghanāʾem ebn Zafar of Hamadān, who is known to have copied two other unrelated works in 582/1186-87 and 599/1202-3 (see Imāni, "Pardāzandeh-ye Eskandarnāmeh," 17), suggests that during his time, i.e., the end of the sixth/twelfth – beginning of the seventh/thirteenth centuries, the *Eskandarnāmeh* must have circulated in multiple copies, thus pointing to its relative popularity. Whether he was the first compiler of the *dāstān* in the form as we know it today, cannot be substantiated.

[13] I have dealt with the issue of the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s making, including the inserted stories, in detail in Rubanovich, "Storytelling and Meta-narration in Medieval Persian Folk Romance," 71-79; and Rubanovich, "The Reconstruction of a Storytelling Event in Medieval Persian Prose Romance," 218-47. Venetis (*The Persian Prose Alexander Romance*, 81-117) attempted to identify different chronological strata in the text's original composition, arguing for three stages: the first, during the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 387-421/997-1030); the second, under his successors; and the third, during the Seljuqs (late fifth/eleventh – early sixth/twelfth centuries). Venetis's attempt, however, is highly problematic and unconvincing, for it is based on a far-fetched and at times outright inaccurate interpretation of meager historical hints found in the text.

the mediation of the Eskandar chapter in the *Shāhnāmeh*.[14] Indeed, the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler preserves the general geographical axis of the hero's movement from the West to the East, like in the *Shāhnāmeh*.[15] In addition, it seems at first sight that in the first third of the text (around p. 306 of the printed edition), the author adheres to the familiar thematic skeleton of the Eskandar story as fleshed out in Ferdowsi's version. We read of Eskandar's birth from Dārāb, including the bad smell motif, which signals our author's adoption of the Iranian account of Eskandar's origin promulgated by the *Shāhnāmeh*, versus, for instance, Nezāmi's fidelity to the historical version.[16] The *Eskandarnāmeh* also tells of the discord between Eskandar and his half-brother Dārā, the latter's assassination, Eskandar's voyage to India and his dealings with Fur and Keyd. It further incorporates Eskandar's encounter with Qeydhāfeh, his pilgrimage to the Kaʿba, his search for the Water of Life, and some more episodes. However, the "content padding" of the overwhelming majority of such episodes correlates poorly with their supposed parallels in the epic, raising considerable doubts about the affinity of this *dāstān* to the *Shāhnāmeh*'s Eskandar chapter, its purported direct source of borrowing. Adding to these doubts, the bulk of the *Eskandarnāmeh* narrates the hero's fabulous adventures in the lands of *div*s and *pari*s; content completely unrelated to the *Shāhnāmeh*. Thus, gauging the nature of the affinity between these two works is also a valuable by-product of the three comparative case studies presented below.

2. The Storyteller at Work

a) Eskandar's confrontation with the Indian king Fur

In the *Shāhnāmeh*, the first mention of Fur occurs in the section on the reign of Dārā, when, after his third defeat by Eskandar, Dārā sends a letter to the Indian ruler (*mehtar-e hendovān*), imploring him for help.[17] The next appearance of the Fur character is set in a full-fledged narrative describing Eskandar's campaigns in India: having related a story of the dreams of the Indian king Keyd and of his marvelous gifts,[18] Ferdowsi takes his hero to Qannuj, the realm of Fur. Eskandar sends Fur an ultimatum to surrender, only to receive an insulting reply imbued with arrogance and condescending admonitions. After a trying march through harsh terrain and an unsuccessful attempt by Eskandar's warriors to convince him to retrace his steps, the two armies face each other on the battlefield. Eskandar employs the stratagem of the iron-built horses and riders filled with burning naphtha and mounted on chariots, which is well-known from most of the versions of the *Greek Alexander Romance*;[19] the

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[14] See, e.g., Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances," 100-101; Southgate, *Iskandarnamah*, 185; and Venetis, *The Persian Prose Alexander Romance*, 59-74. Venetis bases his conviction that the *Shāhnāmeh* was a direct source of the anonymous *dāstān* on several explicit mentions of Ferdowsi's epic in the text. However, Venetis is completely oblivious to the editorial process the *Eskandarnāmeh* underwent: it is the later redactor who references the *Shāhnāmeh*, not the original compiler who remains silent on his sources (on these references, see Rubanovich, "Tracing the Shahnama Tradition," 24-29).

[15] In both texts, the turning point in Eskandar's movement from West to East occurs after his emergence from the Land of Darkness. Thus, *Shāhnāmeh*: "When [Iskandar] saw the West (*khāvar*), he turned towards the East (*bākhtar*); / he chose travel over other things in the world" (Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, VI:96, line 1421); *Eskandarnāmeh*: "The king (i.e., Eskandar) told the sage (*hakim*, i.e., Aristotle): 'We have completed [our travels] in the West, and all the marvels were written down. Now, start a new volume, where the adventures and the marvels of the East will be registered' [...]" (Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 220). However, the arrangement of the narration around the division West/East is not unique to the *Shāhnāmeh*, it is typical of almost all versions of the Alexander/Eskandar story, whether they derive from the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition or not; it is influenced by Dhu al-Qarneyn's schematic progress from the West to the East in relevant Qurʾanic verses (Q 18: 86, 90) (cf. Genequand, "Sagesse et pouvoir," 130).

[16] For various accounts of Eskandar's origin in Perso-Arabic tradition and their import, see Rubanovich, "Why So Many Stories?"

[17] Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, V:552-53, lines 293-302.

[18] Ibid., VI:11-36, lines 105-460.

[19] See note 21 below.

stratagem frightens Fur's formidable elephants into disarray. Finally, single combat between the slender Eskandar (*sovār-i be-sān-e qalam*; "a quill-like horseman") and his elephantine (*tan-e pil-e mast*; "[possessing] the body of an incensed elephant") adversary fortuitously resolves the battle in favor of the former: Eskandar chops off Fur's head when the latter turns away, startled by a sudden shout from amongst the warriors. Eskandar then shows mercy to the surrendering Indians, lavishing riches on them; he spends two months in the region, passes the reins of government to the noble Indian Sovorg and then departs for the Ka'ba.[20]

Ferdowsi's version of the story definitely stems from a recension of the *Greek Alexander Romance* and reproduces the motif skeleton replicated in various other versions of the Fur/Porus episode in Arabic and Persian, as well as European, sources.[21] In the *Eskandarnāmeh*, however, the tale deviates significantly from the *Shāhnāmeh* and similar versions, both in its motif backbone and narrative emphasis.

According to the *Eskandarnāmeh*, Fur is not an independent king; rather, he is a vassal of Keyd, the mighty ruler of all of India, who possesses 70,000 elephants, a huge army, enormous riches and a royal seat in Sarandib (i.e., Ceylon), or, "according to some," in Kashmir.[22] To assess Fur's strength, Eskandar goes to court disguised as his own messenger. However, when Eskandar realizes that Fur suspects his real identity, he makes a narrow escape back to his camp dressed in woman's attire: chador and boots. The next day, Eskandar's army has the upper hand in battle, killing and dispersing Fur's elephants with a fire-and-arrow ruse, on which I elaborate below. Fur is captured and faced with three conditions for his life to be spared and his kingdom restored: to renounce idolatry (*bot-parasti*) and accept monotheism;[23] show the place of his buried treasures; and persuade Keyd to surrender and fight him if he refused. The captive readily agrees to show Eskandar the hidden treasure-hoards, which Eskandar avidly appropriates, but refuses to ally with the conqueror against his sovereign or renounce his religion.[24] Eskandar makes a second attempt to

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[20] Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, VI:37-48, lines 461-626.

[21] Although the exact chain of transmission of the Pseudo-Callisthenes's materials into Ferdowsi's chapter on Eskandar is still subject to debate (summarized in Manteghi, *Alexander the Great in the Persian Tradition*, 17-20, 42), the close affinity of his account to the extant Syriac recension is beyond doubt. For the Porus episode in various recensions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, cf., e.g., the Greek version in Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, 127-31; the Syriac version in Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, 87-92; the Ethiopic version in Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, 107-26; early detailed Arabic retellings in *Nihāyat al-irab fī akhbār al-Furs wa-l-'arab* (Pseudo-Asma'i, *Nihāyat al-irab*, 124-27); and al-Tha'ālibī's *Ghurar akhbār mulūk al-Furs* (al-Tha'ālibī, *Ghurar*, 416-21). For the enumeration of other Arabic sources comprising the episode, see Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, Index, 411, *s.v.* Porus. For detailed Persian versions, although not identical to Ferdowsi, see Tusi, *'Ajāyeb al-makhluqāt*, 283-84 (translated in full in Yamanaka, "Authenticating the Incredible," 334-35); and Tarsusi, *Dārābnāmeh*, II, 197-228. See also the references in Beyhaqi, *Tārikh*, 118-19; and Anonymous, *Mojmal al-tavārikh va-l qesas*, 55-56. Significantly, in the European Alexander tradition, side by side with the Porus episode similar to Ferdowsi's version, there exists a parallel tradition unattested in "oriental" sources that reflects the endurance of the Greek historiographical strand. See, for example, Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (§60) and Arrian's *Anabasis* (5.18-19), where Porus surrenders to Alexander, they become friends, he serves Alexander as a guide in the Indian lands and finds his death only late in the narrative, if at all. This variant is found, for example, in the vernacular French *Roman d'Alexandre* (compiled between 1185 and 1190) of Alexandre de Paris (see Gaullier-Bougassas, *La fascination pour Alexandre le Grand dans la littératures européennes*, IV, 88-89), in the Anglo-Norman *Le Roman de toute chevalerie* (*ca.* 1175) by Thomas of Kent (see ibid., IV, 217), in the Middle English anonymous *Kyng Alisaunder* (end of the 13th c.; see ibid., IV, 344), in the German *Alexander* by Ulrich von Etzenbach (late 13th c.; see ibid., IV, 451) and more. See also Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 76-77.

[22] Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 15; in the two English translations of the *dāstān*, the referent of the passage is erroneously taken to be Fur and not Keyd (Southgate, *Iskandarnamah*, 17; Venetis, *The Persian Alexander*, 16).

[23] The demand to convert is put by Eskandar as follows: *be-khodāvand-e zamin-o āsmān imān āvar va begu dar haft āsmān-o zamin khodāvand yeki-st ki zan-o farzand-o ambāz-o nazir nadārad* ("Convert to the Creator of Earth and Heaven and say, 'There is but one Creator in the seven spheres, and He has neither wife nor child, neither associate nor equal'"; Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 21).

[24] Interestingly, Fur describes his faith as *din-e Jamshid* ("the religion of Jamshid"), which "had been spread in India already since Jamshid's times" (*az ruzgār-e Jamshid bāz in din dārand dar Hendustān*; Anonymous,

regulate his prisoner's religious status, offering that he retain his kingdom by becoming sub-servient and paying *kharāj* and *jezya*; the proud Fur pejoratively declines and is decapitated. Eskandar then marries Nāhid, Fur's daughter, and sets off for Kashmir.[25]

Besides the proper name (Fur) and the general location of his kingdom in India,[26] the only motif common to the *Shāhnāmeh* and *Eskandarnāmeh* is Eskandar's ruse against the elephants. However, even this motif, which in other versions of the Alexander/Eskandar story often metonymically stands for the whole of the Porus/Fur episode, is subject to significant mod-ification in the *dāstān*. In the *Eskandarnāmeh*, instead of Ferdowsi's iron statues of multihued horses and riders filled with naphtha, which are set on fire during the battle, we read of Eskandar picking two thousand chosen bowmen from amongst the warriors of Pārs and one thousand young strong camels (*shotor-e bisorāk*). He orders boxes (*sanduq*) constructed, puts a bowman into each box and places the boxes on the camels daubed with pitch and mounted by two dark-skinned Arabs (*do mard-e ʿarab-e seyāh*); a simple calculation shows that two boxes are attached to each camel, probably on either side of the beast. During the attack, the Arab camel-drivers equipped with bottles (*qārureh*) of ignited naphtha shout the *takbir* and ride the camels into the row of elephants, throwing the bottles at the terrified beasts, while the archers shoot their arrows from inside the boxes, thus dispers-ing the Indian army. Although besides the general fact of Eskandar's victory, a weak echo of Ferdowsi's version might be discerned in the narrator's description of the elephants as a "mountain of iron" (*kuh-e āhan*),[27] which inversely refers to the "iron army" concocted by Eskandar, the description of the stratagem itself starkly contrasts with the one described in the *Shāhnāmeh*, as well as with other known versions for that matter.[28]

Did the *Eskandarnāmeh* storyteller borrow this variant from a source I failed to trace? Was he unaware of the characteristic depiction of the ruse, typified in the *Shāhnāmeh*? Did his variant result from misunderstanding the original, be it Ferdowsi's or some other version? In light of the relative stability of the Fur/Porus episode and its ubiquity in numerous sources across genres, these alternatives seem unlikely. Rather, the scene looks to be an intentional modification on the storyteller's part, for which several explanations can be adduced, all hinging on the *dāstān*'s prevailing religious portrayal of the Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn figure as a relentless *ghāzi* converting infidels to the Muslim faith.

The storyteller seems to have forsaken the fantastic iron statues for what he might have perceived as an allegedly verisimilar description, reinforced by stereotypical elements: brave Iranian marksmen and dark-skinned Arab cameleers on camels smeared in tar so as to look like an inseparable, and hence threatening, unit.[29] The storyteller may have used this

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Eskandarnāmeh, 21). Afshār sees here a mistake typical of ill-informed folk storytellers (ibid., Introduction, 24-25). Even if this is the case, it still might be indicative of the medieval Muslim storyteller's attitude towards Zoroastrianism as a sort of idol-worship, possibly hinting at religious intolerance in his circle. Or, perhaps, the name of Jamshid is indiscriminately used to indicate all things ancient and non-Islamic?

[25] For the whole episode, see Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 16-23. Employing the name Nāhid, usually associated with Eskandar's mother, for a different character—a character incidentally absent from any other version of the Alexander Romance—signals the ease with which the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler reshuffles conventional motifs.

[26] Note the absence of a more exact toponym such as Ferdowsi's Qannuj; the same place-name is given also in Nezāmi's *Sharafnāmeh*, 376, line 79, who, incidentally, glides by Fur's episode in seven uninformative *beyts*. In *Āʾineh-ye Eskandari* (45, line 668), Amir Khosrow is even more terse, only mentioning Eskandar's victory over Fur.

[27] Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 18.

[28] The motif is reviewed through a comparative lens in Norozi, "The 'Metal Army' of Alexander," although no attempt is made to explain the differences. See also Voigt, *Recherches sur la tradition arabe du Roman d'Alexandre*, 192-98, for an additional comparison of the treatment of this motif in two Arabic sources (al-Yaʿqūbī's [d. 897] *Taʾrīkh* and Mubashshir ibn Fātik's [d. 1097] *Mukhtār al-ḥikam*) versus different recensions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes.

[29] This last detail could reverberate Ferdowsi's description of iron horses and riders fastened together (cf. *yek-i bāregi sākhtand āhanin / suvār-ash az āhan ze-āhan-sh zin*; Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, VI:43, line 555). At the same time, as far as I can verify, the depiction does not bear a verisimilitude to any known practice of medieval warfare and even seems counterproductive and illogical.

depiction to stop his listeners/readers from inadvertently going astray and construing the people- and animal-shaped figures as polytheistic idols.[30] The religious sensitivities of our storyteller are further borne out in the Fur episode through the absence of the famous motif of Fur's death at Eskandar's fortunate blow, when Fur is distracted by a cry from one of the armies.[31] Instead, enraged by the sight of Fur worshipping the golden idol, Eskandar impels his army to act as *ghāzi*s and annihilate the infidels, and the army attacks the Indians with the *takbir* cry. The choice given to Fur between conversion to monotheism and the *jezya* payment, i.e., the *ahl al-dhimma* status, further indicates that in the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*, the Eskandar-Fur confrontation is permeated with Islamic religious emphases typical of this *dāstān*'s overall purport.

If I am not reading too much into this episode and the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler was indeed driven by conscious narrative choices rather than ignorance of the material, then his decision to alter the most salient and intertextually recognizable motifs of the Fur episode is quite exceptional, idiosyncratic even. His is not the only work in the Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn tradition that portrays its hero as an adamant missionary guiding the unbelievers towards the Muslim faith. Eskandar is endowed with the same function, for instance, in the Persian *Dārābnāmeh* attributed to Abu Tāher Tarsusi and the Arabic *Qiṣṣat Dhū al-Qarnayn*, both of which do not shy away from retelling expanded versions of how the metal statues were devised, fabricated and operated on the battlefield against Indian elephants.[32] Putting aside the issue of these texts' fidelity to the Alexander subject matter—which, incidentally, might be pivotal to their preservation of the motif—its deployment vis-à-vis the *Eskandarnāmeh* is instructive. The *Dārābnāmeh*, which, *inter alia*, is replete with depictions of various marvelous devices, refers to the metal statues as *telesm/telesmāt* ("talisman(s)"),[33] thus articulating their provenance as automatons and alluding to Muslim audiences' fascination with Hellenistic mechanical engineering.[34] By the same token, the expanded description of preparing the brazen images of the beasts in *Qiṣṣat Dhū al-Qarnayn* appears to betray the Arabs' interest in the process of metallurgy used to make animal figures.[35] On his part, the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s raconteur is not interested in either facet whatsoever, and instead develops the Islamic *ghazv* idea along the lines of folk religiosity.

In addition, in contrast with Ferdowsi and other versions, the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s Fur episode is infused with *ʿayyāri* motifs: Eskandar's visit to a ruler disguised as his own envoy and narrow escape in women's attire highlights the importance of a picaresque element in the *dāstān*.

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[30] My interpretation here differs entirely from Norozi, who suggests that the choice of "apparently harmless" camels intends to highlight Eskandar's cunning and mislead Fur, who "mistakenly avoids using his breakthrough units, the elephants, underestimating the level of threat the camels could pose." She further speculates that "[e]vidently these camels were prepared in such a way as to seem (although the text does not explicitly say so) in the distance almost a normal caravan of merchants" (Norozi, "The 'Metal Army' of Alexander," 915). However, this suggestion is untenable, for there is nothing in the *Eskandarnāmeh's* text or overall conceptual framework to corroborate it.

[31] Interestingly, unlike other versions, Beyhaqi stresses in *Tārikh* the intentional character of the noise: because Eskandar "was a sly and cunning man" (*mard-i mohtāl-o gorboz bud*), he set up a ruse (*hilat-i sākht*) to cause a comotion among the Indians so that Fur would turn his back (Beyhaqi, *Tārikh*, 118-19).

[32] For the episode in the *Dārābnāmeh*, see note 21 above; for *Qiṣṣat Dhū al-Qarnayn*, see Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, 87-90 (Arabic text), 143-47 (English translation).

[33] Tarsusi, *Dārābnāmeh*, II, 225, 226.

[34] See, e.g., Yamanaka, "Les Mille et Une Nuits et les automates."

[35] See Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, 17. The *Qiṣṣat Dhū al-Qarnayn*'s author lexically distinguishes between the figures (*tamāthīl*) and the idols (*aṣnām*), thus offsetting any possibility of confusion. The "metal army" ruse as indicative of the Muslims' interest in technology and mechanization is also characteristic of the Malay *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* (see Ng, *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia*, 87-88). Curiously, the motif continued to be subject to modernization: in a miniature painting from the *Shāhnāmeh* manuscript produced in 1131/1719 in Punjab (BL Add. 18804), the metal statues are accompanied by cannons (see http://shahnama.lib.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/ceillustration:-202998356).

b) Eskandar's visit to Queen Qeyd(h)āfeh[36]

As with the Porus/Fur narrative, the episode of Alexander/Eskandar's visit to the realm of Queen Candace/Qeyd(h)āfeh belongs to the "narrative kernel" of the *Greek Alexander Romance*. It figures in all the Greek recensions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, producing a kind of self-sufficient *petit roman* within the larger narrative,[37] in later Latin versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes and in medieval European vernacular accounts, including Slavonic adaptations of the Alexander tale.[38] It also looms large in the oriental Alexander tradition, including the Islamic one.[39]

According to the gist of Ferdowsi's version, Eskandar, tempted by tales of the powerful kingdom in Andalos ruled by Qeydāfeh, a woman of remarkable judgment, writes her a letter demanding tribute from her, which Qeydāfeh refuses to pay. In the meantime, Qeydāfeh's son, Qeydarush, is captured and rescued by Eskandar in a finely staged charade in which Eskandar assumes the persona of his own vizier, Bitaqun. Eskandar/Bitaqun then goes as an envoy to Qeydāfeh and is cordially received by the Queen as her son's savior. Eskandar/Bitaqun is childishly stunned by the splendor of Qeydāfeh's palace, while "both Rum and Iran seemed to him worthless." Although Eskandar's disguise had worked well in other cases, Qeydāfeh quickly recognizes the young king. Having heard much of Eskandar's astounding conquests, she had secretly sent a Greek artist to paint a portrait of him, which she kept hidden. At the right moment, she shows the painting to the faux messenger. Confronted with proof of his identity, the abashed Eskandar launches into a tirade in defense of his injured honor. Qeydāfeh, however, smiles and relishes her moralizing response. In her admonition of Eskandar, Qeydāfeh lays out the didactic tenets that embody the model of an ideal ruler: success is not attained by a ruler's personal prowess, but is determined by the Guidance of God and Destiny; he who sheds the blood of kings deserves punishment in the Fire of Hell; and good deeds and generosity will earn a ruler a good name in generations to come. She keeps his identity secret, making him swear not to harm her kin and kingdom. She further warns him of her other son, Teynush, who is after Eskandar to avenge the killing of the Indian king Fur, Teynush's father-in-law. The account ends with Eskandar outwitting Teynush with the help of a ruse.[40]

Except for minor details, such as the idiosyncratic location of Qeydāfeh's kingdom in Andalos instead of Samrāyē,[41] Ferdowsi's version very closely follows the account as it appears in the Syriac recension. Its significance is, however, different: while in the Syriac recension the emphasis is on Alexander being subdued by a woman whose wisdom and resplendence are equal to his, in the *Shāhnāmeh* Qeydāfeh exemplifies the ideal sovereign,

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[36] This section partly draws on Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace."

[37] For this definition, see Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses*, 88-90, 152. For the Greek foundational recension, see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, 135-42.

[38] See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 24-61; also, Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 134-36. For further references, see Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace," 143-43, notes 7 and 8.

[39] For the tale in the Syriac recension, see Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, 118-26; for the enumeration of Arabic sources in which the episode appears, see Doufikar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, Index, 404, *s.v.* Candace. I discuss the treatment of this episode in Perso-Arabic historiography in Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace," 129-32.

[40] Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, VI:51-74, lines 671-1055.

[41] The information concerning Candace's ethnic identity and the localization of her realm already shows a great degree of instability and confusion in the Greek recensions and early versions of the Alexander Romance, such as the Latin and Syriac: Meroë, an historical Ethiopian kingdom on the Upper Nile, is conflated with the domains of the legendary Queen Semiramis, with Egypt, with the farthest eastern lands, probably India, with the extreme North and so on. This peculiarity appears to have originated in certain ancient Greek cosmographic notions (see Jouanno, *Naissance et métamorphoses*, 211 and 312). The significant fluctuation in geography is characteristic also of the Islamic versions of the tale: Arab historians place the queen's kingdom in the fortified town of Samura (or Samira), in the land of the Copts; Nezāmi "domesticates" it to Bardaᶜ in the Caucasus; all these, as well as al-Andalos, are underlain by the invariant signifying the extremities of *terra firma*. For the significance of such a location, see Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace," 136-40.

and her gender is of no importance. Ferdowsi concentrates on the essence of royal power, making Qeydāfeh explicate the didactic tenets that embody the model of an ideal ruler.

Before turning to the treatment of the Qeydāfeh tale in the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*, it might be beneficial to first chart the trajectory this episode took in Nezāmi's *javāb* ("reply") to Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*,[42] as well as in Perso-Arabic exegetical writings. Although retaining the famous episode of Eskandar being presented with his portrait, Nezāmi stretches the limits of the familiar material and introduces subject matter unknown to Ferdowsi. His essential modifications involve the heroine herself. The poet re-names the Queen, giving her a telling name—Nushābeh, "The Water of Life"—that is especially meaningful in the context of Eskandar's futile search for immortality. Nezāmi places Nushābeh's domain in the historical locality of Bardaᶜ (=Bardaᶜeh), situated not far from his native town of Ganja in present-day Azerbaijan, thus "domesticating" the geographical location of the episode. He includes the story of Eskandar's rescue of Nushābeh from Rus's captivity and her marriage to the King of Abkhāz, which might hint at a historical residue in Nezāmi's work.[43] In addition, Nezāmi fuses the Nushābeh tale with that of the Amazons, thus strengthening, in contrast to Ferdowsi, the feminine element in the story: the Queen is a virgin, a wise, pure, God-knowing soul surrounded by chaste damsels and "in no need to see men." Finally, Nezāmi inserts the motif of the "precious stone repast" into his version, which significantly alters the tale's purpose as a whole.[44]

Nezāmi punctuates his version with an account of a feast in honor of Eskandar, intended to communicate Nushābeh's ethical message to the king in the most tangible way possible. Two cloths are laid out in the banqueting hall, one for Nushābeh and her damsels, the other for Eskandar. That of Nushābeh holds food "beyond limit"—lamb and ox, spiced birds stuffed with almonds and pistachios, various kinds of bread, sweetmeats and fragrant wine. Eskandar's cloth is made of gold and has a tray with four crystal cups on it: "One full of gold, and the other of ruby; / the third full of cornelian, and the fourth of pearl."[45] Partaking of the meal at her table, Nushābeh addresses Eskandar: "... Extend your hand; eat of these victuals that are before you."[46] Eskandar, however, still not suspecting Nushābeh's intention, replies:

نوا کژ مزن تا نمانی خجل	به نوشابه شه گفت کای ساده دل
همه سنگ شد سنگ را چون خورم؟	درین صحن یاقوت وخوان زرم
طبیعت کجا خواهد این رنگ را؟	چگونه خورد آدمی سنگ را؟
به رغبت برو دست کردن توان[47]	طعامی بیاور که خوردن توان

The King told Nushābeh: "O simple hearted!
    Do not play out of tune in order not to disgrace yourself.
In my dish of cornelian and tray of gold
    all is stone; how may I eat stone?

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[42] Nezāmi's attitude towards his predecessor in terms of poetic competition is discussed in Bertel's, *Nizami i Fuzuli*, 360-93. Amir Khosrow scarcely mentions Eskandar's visit to Nushābeh of Bardaᶜ in two *beyt*s (Amir Khosrow, *Āʾineh-ye Eskandari*, 45, lines 659-660), while Jāmi is silent on the subject.

[43] Does the detailed description of Rus's assault on Bardaᶜeh echo the sporadic incursions and forays of the Scandinavian-Slavic Rus in the course of the tenth century, which eventually led to the decline of that flourishing area? (For the historical events, see Bosworth, "Bardaᶜa"). Does Eskandar's rescue of Nushābeh from Rus and arrangement of her marriage to the King of Abkhāz reflect a real historical event? Could it have been Nezāmi's intention to depict Eskandar as a local hero, a savior who restores justice?

[44] For a cluster of episodes comprising the Nushābeh tale, see Nezāmi, *Sharafnāmeh*, 290-320; 494, lines 67-76.

[45] Nezāmi, *Sharafnāmeh*, 307, line 255.

[46] Ibid., 307, line 257.

[47] Ibid., 307, lines 258-261. The motif of the feast of precious stones is probably of Jewish origin. For discussion, see Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace," 137-42.

> How does a man devour stone?
>> How can nature tolerate that?
> Bring a kind of food which one can eat,
>> to which one can extend his hand with delight."

Hearing this, Nushābeh laughs in the king's face and explains the true meaning of her actions: Why should one boast of things that cannot be turned into food? Why do we stretch out our hands so basely to obtain these mean stones? Why heap jewel upon jewel on this path through life when it ends with a stone (i.e., grave)? Eskandar agrees with Nushābeh: "A thousand praises on this woman with a sound judgment / who guides us (i.e., me) towards uprightness" (*hezār āfarin bar zan-e khub-rāy / ke mā-rā be-mardi shavad rahnomāy*).[48] Then the real feast starts.

It seems the motif of the repast of precious stones in connection with Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn circulated in the Perso-Arabic domain prior to Nezāmi's version. It appears, with distinct mystical overtones, in Meybodi's *Kashf al-asrār va ʿeddat al-abrār*, an early Persian Sufi *tafsir* completed around 520/1126, i.e., more than eighty years before Nezāmi's *Eskandarnāmeh*.[49] Meybodi makes use of this motif in commenting on the following Qurʾanic verses (Q 11:15, 16; *Sūrat al-Hūd*):

> 15. Whoso desireth the life of the world and its pomp, We shall repay them their deeds herein, and therein they will not be wronged.

> 16. Those are they for whom is naught in the Hereafter save the Fire. (All) that they contrive here is vain and (all) that they are wont to do is fruitless.

In Meybodi's version an unnamed queen of a country in the West (*belād al-maghreb*) invites Dhu al-Qarneyn to a feast, serving him pearls and precious gems in golden bowls. The queen reproaches him, saying:

> Since your portion in this world (*donyā*) is nothing but bread, what are you intending to do with your rule over the Universe? Your share in this world is two loaves of bread; all the rest is futile and vain.[50]

Meybodi works the tale into the third, last, level (*nowbat*) of his commentary, which deals explicitly with Qurʾanic exegesis in a mystical spirit in accordance with the "hints of the initiated and the allusions of the Sufis" (*romuz-e ʿārefān va eshārāt-e sufeyān*).[51] The story of Dhu al-Qarneyn's encounter with the queen is followed by Meybodi's reference to the interpretation of the above Qurʾanic passage by Abu Bakr al-Warrāq (d. 293/906), a Sufi sheikh active in Balkh: … *har ke donyā dust dārad az khodā khabar nadārad* … ("Whoever cares for *this* [my emphasis, J.R.] world, is unaware of God").[52] This purely mystic maxim is the crux of the queen's message to Dhu al-Qarneyn as well.[53]

The women protagonists of the Ferdowsi, Nezāmi and Meybodi versions all bring about Eskandar/Dhu al-Qarneyn's humiliation, challenging the exclusivity and invulnerability he claims for himself and lessening his insatiable desire for world conquest; they lead him to

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[48] Nezāmi, *Sharafnāmeh*, 308, line 278.

[49] To the best of my knowledge, the possibility that Nezāmi was aware of Meybodi's *tafsir* has never been explored.

[50] Meybodi, *Kashf al-asrār*, IV, 371.

[51] Ibid., I, 1. The first two levels involve, respectively, the literal translation of Qurʾanic verses into Persian and the traditional explanation according to the established authorities.

[52] Ibid., IV, 371.

[53] For additional reworkings of the story along mystical lines, see Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace," 135-36, 140-41.

realize the need for moderation and self-control, as well as his frailty in the face of Destiny and God. All three versions also share a similar message, which varies only slightly in accordance with the texts' genre and conceptual basis: True to the didactic aim of their epic poems, Ferdowsi and Nezāmi expound the moral-ethical example of proper and just kingship of a sagacious ruler to an arrogant conqueror. In addition, for Nezāmi, this is a key episode in Eskandar's transformation from conqueror to prophet. Meybodi's version, in his mystical *tafsir*, can be understood as demonstrating the relationship between a mystic and his/her ascetic discipline, renouncement of this world (*donyā*), and the uninitiated—so prominently symbolized by Dhu al-Qarneyn, with his cupidity and voracity for material wealth and forbidden knowledge—that is futile in revealing the true path to God.

In the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*, the Eskandar-Qeydhāfeh episode is much more concise than its Ferdowsi and Nezāmi counterparts. Eskandar learns of the woman-ruler of Andalos from the viceroy (*raʾis*) of Mesr and decides to pay her a visit disguised as his own messenger. Before setting off, he leaves Arastātālis (Aristotle) in his stead and promises BRQTISH (Barqatiseh?), his new wife and the daughter of the ruler of Mesr, whom Eskandar had killed, to spare—if the need should arise—her sister, who is married to Qeydhāfeh's son. Eskandar is welcomed by Qeydhāfeh, who receives him, veiled in a *borqaʿ*, in a magnificently embellished hall. The disguised envoy delivers a message demanding that Qeydhāfeh pay Eskandar a visit and provide provisions for his army's journey to the Land of Darkness. Qeydhāfeh promises to comply with both requests and lodges Eskandar in her quarters for the night. Suspicious, she checks Eskandar's portrait, painted while he was still in Mesr. Although assured of his real identity, she does not disclose the secret in order to protect Eskandar from her son, Teynush, who is eager to avenge the death of his father-in-law, the ruler of Mesr. The recognition scene occurs the next day, as Eskandar faces Qeydhāfeh's benevolence (*mardomi*) and wisdom, which surpasses that of more than one thousand men.[54] At night, Qeydhāfeh comes to Eskandar's chamber alone, dressed as a concubine. After concluding a kind of matrimonial union and spending three nights together, she makes Eskandar promise that he will send for her upon his return to Rum, and she will come live with him and leave her kingdom to her son. The rest of the story deals with Qeydhāfeh sending rich gifts to Eskandar and Eskandar's ploy against Teynush.[55]

In its plotline, the *Eskandarnāmeh* largely follows the outline of the story in the *Shāhnāmeh.* Among the changes on the motif micro-level, Teynush is made the son-in-law of the ruler of Mesr, instead of Fur—a seemingly minor alteration that in fact reveals the narrator's technique of stitching his narration together through freely reshuffling plot elements. Absent are the episodes of the put-up rescue of Qeydhāfeh's son, the lengthy letters the two rulers exchange, and the detailed description of Qeydhāfeh's fabulous palace; sections that could hinder the narrative tempo centered on action. Also lacking is Qeydhāfeh's didactic admonition of the humiliated Eskandar, which is a kind of "Mirror for Princes" in miniature, reflecting Ferdowsi's ethic-moralistic standpoint in his monumental work.[56]

Placing the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*'s Qeydhāfeh story against the backdrop of the three versions discussed above, the difference is all too evident. Qeydhāfeh is pictured as submissive and docile; her eagerness for sexual intercourse with Eskandar, her marriage to him and her readiness to relinquish her kingdom to her male offspring reinforce the perception of her character as a receptacle of men's wishes. Men, with all their shortcomings, still have the upper hand. Thus, the story's emphasis is shifted altogether: the motif of *victor*

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[54] *Chandin pādshāh-rā bedidam az in ʿāqel zan-i nadidam va in zan-i-st keh az hezār mard behtar-ast*; "I have met so many rulers, but I saw none wiser than she; she is a woman who is better than one thousand men"; Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 195.

[55] For the whole of the episode, see ibid., 190-98.

[56] For the examination of the episode in this vein, see Kappler, "Alexandre dans le Shāh-nāmah de Firdousi"; and Kappler, "Le roi 'au cœur éveillé'"; Rubanovich, "Qaydāfa."

victus ("victor vanquished"), which is central to the episode in all recensions of the Alexander Romance,[57] is muffled significantly. Moreover, the encounter between the two heroes is devoid of any of the moral-ethical or mystical facets characteristic of the Ferdowsi, Nezāmi and Meybodi versions. Instead, it is tinged with distinct sexual overtones in line with this *dāstān*'s over accentuation of Eskandar's sexual prowess and general misogynist tinge.[58] If not for its overt sexual connotations, the story would have been yet another action-driven exposition in a row of Eskandar's numerous adventures.

c) *Eskandar travels to the Land of the Brahmans/the City of Equality*

Eskandar's meeting with the Brahmans, also traditionally known as the naked Gymnosophists, is a stock subject matter of all versions of the Alexander Romance.[59] According to the *Shāhnāmeh*, after leaving the realm of Qeydāfeh, Eskandar reaches the "land of the Brahmans" (*shahr-e barahman*). The Brahmans write him a letter explaining that if he has come for riches (*khᵛāsteh*), he will not find any, for their only possessions are forbearance and wisdom (*shakibāyi-vo dānesh*). Intrigued, Eskandar pays them a peaceful visit: in the company of his Rumi philosophers, he ascends the mountains to learn of the way of life of these ascetics (*parhizgārān*). He finds them naked, barely covered with leaves, feeding on seeds and plants and sleeping under the open skies. Eskandar poses riddle-like questions to one of them, whose loins are covered with a leather strap (possibly a sign of distinction): "Which are greater in number, the living or the dead? Which is larger, the sea or the earth?" Followed by: "Who is the most sinful creature in the world? Who dominates our soul?" (*be-bum-e zamin-bar gonah-kār kist? ... / beporsid bar jān-e mā shāh kist*). The last two questions lead the Brahman to moralize on Eskandar's lack of moderation and greed (*āz*) in worldly conquest. Deeply moved by the encounter, in a burst of magnanimity, Eskandar offers to fulfil any of their wishes. When cunningly asked, "Close the door of old age and death for us!" (*dar-e piri-vo marg bar-mā beband*), Eskandar painfully realizes his powerlessness and mortal nature, the leitmotif of the *Shāhnāmeh*'s entire Eskandar narrative.[60]

In the *Eskandarnāmeh*, after leaving Andalos and passing through the city of Seghā, Eskandar arrives at a place where rare dainty fruits grow. As is his habit, he asks the city's inhabitants about the wonders (*ʿajāyeb*) of the place. They respond that their city is situated at the end of the world, on the edge of the entrance to the Land of Darkness; it has twenty-four gates and a large population, but they have neither a king (*pādshāh*) nor a judge (*qāzi*), all residents are equal and the gates, warehouses and dwellings are never locked. When the amazed Eskandar begs for further explanation, the town-dwellers continue that since they have divided property equally among themselves, there is no point in stealing from one another and hence no need for the authority of a king or judge. They dig graves in front of their houses to remind themselves daily of death. Their only occupation is worshipping the God of Heaven and Earth, the religion they were taught by Khezr. Then, the latter suddenly appears and leads Eskandar to the Land of Darkness.[61]

While at first sight the story in the *Eskandarnāmeh* appears unrelated to the Brahmans episode of the *Shāhnāmeh*, its parallel location in the narrative—after the Qeyd(h)āfeh episode—signals its affinity with the Ferdowsi version. In addition, a comparative glance at

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[57] See Rubanovich, "Re-Writing the Episode of Alexander and Candace," 124-25.

[58] See Rubanovich, "Beyond the Literary Canon," 313-17.

[59] For the Greek version of the episode, see Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, 131-33; for the Syriac, see Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, 92-94. On the historical background of the episode, see Stoneman, "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance"; on its sources and offshoots, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 91-106. The comparison of early Arabic versions of the episode with various recensions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes appears in Voigt, *Recherches sur la tradition arabe du Roman d'Alexandre*, 198-221.

[60] Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeh*, VI:74-78, lines 1056-1133.

[61] Anonymous, *Eskandarnāmeh*, 201-2.

the evolution of the Brahmans tale in various literary traditions and genres shows that we are indeed dealing with the same episode, though modified: it was augmented with subsidiary motifs and became conflated with the utopian tale of the Land/City of the Blessed/Earthly Paradise.[62] A conspicuous example of this conflation in the Persian tradition is found in Ahmad Tusi's sixth/twelfth-century *ʿAjāyeb al-makhluqāt*, which is worth citing in full here:

> [...] When Alexander came there [to a city in the Maghrib], the inhabitants wrote him a letter: "In the Name of God the Graceful, the Almighty, from the poorest beings of God to Alexander the mightiest being of God. We are poor and have no possessions. Please withdraw from us." Alexander went there with one hundred horsemen. Between the Maghrib and these people was drifting sand, which the more one pursued it, the more one became engulfed in it. There were waves on it; but on Saturday nights it became quiet. Alexander saw a city there. It had houses of completely equal size, with graves at their gates. He asked about it. They said: "They (the graves) stay in front of our eyes so that we do not forget about death." He (Alexander) asked: "Who are the worst of men?" They answered: "Those who are content with the matters of this world and dismiss the matters of the afterworld." He (Alexander) said: "Which is more ancient: the desert (*barr*) or the sea?" They said: "The desert." He said: "Which is more ancient: the night or the day?" They said: "Night." He said: "Ask whatever you wish for." They said: "Eternal life." He said: "That is not in my hands. But I have gems to give you." They took Alexander's hand and brought him to a spring full of rubies. They said: "All these are mere stones for us."[63]

From the "mainstream" tradition reflected in the *Shāhnāmeh*, Tusi's version retains the Brahmans' letter to Eskandar, some of the conundrum-like questions, and Eskandar's inability to fulfil the wish for immortality. As for the motifs of the people's piety and equal standing, digging graves, the drifting sand (= the motif of the Sabbath river), and a ruby spring, these are all well-known components of the Islamic Perso-Arabic Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn tradition, which interpolates themes from *tafsir* and *qesas al-anbeyā* sources. Very close accounts to the one attested in the *Eskandarnāmeh* appear, in Arabic for example, in al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, Ibn Hishām's *Kitāb al-tījān*, and Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī's *Mirʾāt al-zamān*; and in Persian, in Meybodi's *Kashf al-asrār* and Nezāmi's *Eqbālnāmeh*.[64] The provenance of this tale in Islamic exegetical literature is notable, as it supports my assumption about the predilection of the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler for drawing on the *tafsir* and *qesas al-anbeyā* genres as his narrative reservoir.[65] Moreover, the fact that all three Persian texts that comprise this particular variant of the Brahmans story are dated to the sixth/twelfth century might point to the possibility that, during this period, Ferdowsi's account of Eskandar's travel to the Land of the Brahmans, which reverberated the Pseudo-Callisthenes Syriac recension, ceded to a "local," Islamic version imbued with ascetic and mystical overtones. This Islamic account allowed the development of a distinctly utopian

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[62] See Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 97-106; and Genequand, "Sagesse et pouvoir," 126-27.

[63] Tusi, *ʿAjāyeb al-makhluqāt*, 268; trans. by Yamanaka, "Authenticating the Incredible," 334.

[64] See respectively, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, XV, 19-20; Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb al-tījān*; and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zamān*. On the latter, see also Genequand, "Alexandre et les Sages de l'Inde," 142-43. A close variant is also found in the *Qiṣṣat Dhū al-Qarnayn*; see Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, 27-30 (Arabic text), 89-92 (English translation). For Persian versions, see Meybodi, *Kashf al-asrār*, V, 755-57; and Nezāmi, *Eqbālnāmeh*, 209-13, lines 84-175. The evolution of the interrelatedness of the Brahmans episode and the Perfect City tale in the Islamic tradition is discussed in Casari, *Alessandro e Utopia nei romanzi persiani medievali*, 30-43; and Casari, "Au lieu de traduction: Alexandre au paradis dans la tradition persane," 391-93.

[65] Without making claims of direct borrowing, I note thought-provoking instances of lexical similarity between *Kashf al-asrār* and the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*: both accounts speak of *darvish* ("poor") and *tavāngar* ("wealthy") who are *yek-sān* ("alike").

tale about the structure and precepts of the perfect society, as is the case in the Nezāmi version.[66]

To assess how the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s storyteller shapes his version of the tale, let me juxtapose it with the two other sixth/twelfth-century Persian rewritings found in Nezāmi's *Eqbālnāmeh* and Meybodi's *Kashf al-asrār.* To start, Nezāmi relates how Eskandar, towards the very end of his non-violent exploration of the world as a prophet, arrives at a cultivated and well irrigated country, whose flourishing gardens are not fenced in, herds are not guarded, and houses and shops have no locks on their doors. When the bewildered Eskandar asks why nothing is guarded in this paradisiacal (*cho ferdows-i*) place, the hospitable town-dwellers lay out the moral-philosophical principles of their existence: they do not lie, steal, harbor enmity, spread gossip or gloat over a neighbor's misfortune; they extend help to those in trouble; they possess equal wealth and avoid excess, content with the minimum needed to support a comfortable life; they are pious and just; they live long lives and are in no need of judges or rulers, as they are accountable to God alone. As a result of the encounter, Eskandar realizes the futility of his wanderings and recognizes the superiority of the way this community lives. He abandons his prophetic mission and returns to Rum.

In Meybodi's *Kashf al-asrār* the emphasis is placed on the community's intense piety in a mystical vein, and Sufi terminology is used to describe it. To Dhu al-Qarneyn's question, "How have this outer concord and inner intimacy of hearts of yours occurred?" (*in movāfeqat-e shomā be-zāher va nazdiki-ye del-hā-ye shomā be-bāten az kojā khāsteh-st*), the pious people reply: "In order to live in concord with each other and love each other, we ejected acrimony, envy, grudge and enmity from our hearts." Dhu al-Qarneyn also learns that, due to the townspeople's constant effort to worship God properly and lean on Him in every aspect of their lives, they enjoy longevity and are immune from all kinds of calamities that strike other people. The epitome of the mystical ethics Meybodi strives to convey through the City of Equality episode is encapsulated in the explanation the pious people offer Dhu al-Qarneyn towards the end of their meeting, when the latter takes an interest in how they came to practice this particular way of life:

> … We watched our forebears behaving like this. They used to welcome the destitute and to take care of the wounded, to extend help to the weak, to pardon murderers, and to return good for evil; they practiced sincerity and compassion; they used to pray on time and fulfil their covenants, so that the Almighty God kept them in rectitude and straightforwardness and took them out of this world with a good name and seated us in their place.[67]

Viewed in relation to the Nezāmi and Meybodi versions, it becomes clear that the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler, while in all likelihood drawing on the same motif pool as the above two, glosses over the ethical, didactic and mystical potential the material offers. Instead, he patterns his episode according to a blueprint frequently repeated in this *dāstān*: during his peregrinations, Eskandar arrives at a new location, inquires after the inhabitants' religion and the wonders (ʿ*ajāyeb*) of their place, listens to their enumeration, expresses his amazement and moves on to a new destination. In contrast with Meybodi's version, the motif of Eskandar's curiosity as to how the dwellers of the City of Equality came to practice their piety, rather than conveying a religious message, serves the storyteller in cementing—somewhat artificially—the building blocks of his narration through introducing

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[66] Ferdowsi's version was not completely replaced, however, and resurfaces, for example, in Jāmi's *Kheradnāmeh-ye Eskandari* (Jāmi, *Kheradnāmeh-ye Eskandari*, II:493-95, lines 1573-1623).

[67] Meybodi, *Kashf al-asrār*, V, 756-57. A very similar version is found in the Arabic *Qiṣṣat Dhū al-Qarnayn*, in which Dhu al-Qarneyn, impressed by the expounded tenets, performs a more active role: he shares his money with a poor man "because he was afraid he would come to covet wealth. He was afraid of falsehood because he knew that money corrupts and forces the rich to become false." See Zuwiyya, *Islamic Legends Concerning Alexander the Great*, 91.

a new character. As it turns out, the person who taught the inhabitants their faith is a man named Khezr; the same Khezr who would guide Eskandar in the Land of Darkness, the episode directly following the tale of the City of Equality. Thus, in the *Eskandarnāmeh*, Eskandar's encounter with the pious inhabitants neither brings about our hero's transformation, as in Nezāmi's version, nor functions to highlight ethical-mystical precepts, as in Meybodi. Its primary function is to propel the narration forward.

3. Threading our path through the minutiae: by way of conclusion

The three case studies, which can also include additional instalments, have shed light on the imaginative maneuverings of the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler with regard to the Islamic Perso-Arabic Alexander material. The most palpable characteristic of the Alexander subject matter in the anonymous *dāstān* is its tremendous mutability, which makes it difficult to see the relation between the *Eskandarnāmeh* and Ferdowsi's section on Eskandar in the *Shāhnāmeh*, or any other concrete source for that matter. Whereas the text seems to reference several episodes found in the poem, it defies a meaningful and clear-cut conclusion at the same time: the occasional refractions of Ferdowsi's version of the Qeydhāfeh tale hint at the author/compiler's familiarity with it, but the Fur and City of Equality episodes lead to the opposite assumption. Whether or not the *Shāhnāmeh*, in written or oral form, was among our anonymous author/compiler's direct sources, he clearly modified his materials considerably to make them fit his own narrative needs. The *dāstān* thus appears disengaged from any deliberate intertextual dialogue with earlier texts; such dialogue is typical of Persian ornamental prose and poetry, which are enmeshed in an interpretative dynamic between texts, writers and readers through *javāb*, *nazireh, esteqbāl*, etc. Instead, true to oral traditional aesthetics, the author/compiler of the *Eskandarnāmeh* treats the prominent motifs and themes of the Islamic Alexander tradition as one vast, indiscriminate reservoir to be drawn from without regard for their original provenance or function. To put it more broadly, while authors who belong to the canonical system of "high" literature forge intentional intertextual links with their precursors, the authors or compilers of *dāstān*s are not engrossed in paying tribute or claiming originality by surpassing earlier models through creative emulation; they barely recognize the existence of earlier models. Rather, *dāstān* authors/compilers aim to evoke the knowledge or memory of a particular collective oral narrative tradition amongst their audience.

The manner in which the tales of Qeydhāfeh and the City of Equality are inflected in the *Eskandarnāmeh* reflects the centrality of action (versus, e.g., characterization, description, didactic admonition) as the *dāstān*'s main narrative mode. This emphasis accounts for the narrator's tendency to override the conceptual complexity and layered meanings that distinguish these stories in other genres, such as, for example, epic didactic poetry or mystical Qurʾanic exegesis. Whereas in the *Shāhnāmeh* and *Sharafnāmeh*, the Qeydāfeh and Nushābeh episodes function as small-scale Mirrors for Princes, the Eskandar-Qeydhāfeh encounter in the *dāstān* is realized in staccato, action-driven dialogue between the two protagonists, obscuring the gravity of the didactic message. The Qeydhāfeh of the *Eskandarnāmeh* no longer exemplifies the ideal sovereign—just, noble, generous, restrained in her emotional reactions, possessing a lucid distinction between virtue and sin that places her above Eskandar, with his insatiable desire for conquest and riches. She is in no position to teach Eskandar an ethical lesson about what ideal kingship is, for she is portrayed as willingly submissive to his masculinity. Similarly, Eskandar's encounter with the dwellers of the City of Equality does not generate any shift in his character, unlike his reevaluation of the concept of sovereignty in Nezāmi, which results in him renouncing the efficacy of his world conquests and incessant peregrinations. The centrality of action thus accounts for the static nature of Eskandar's character in the *dāstān*. The paradox is clear enough: the more action-centered the plot is, the less movement there will be in character formation. At the level of narration, the centrality of action also explains the author/compiler's penchant for narrative

continuity in the plotline's disparate episodes, which he attains, among other devices, by ad hoc insertion of a character into an otherwise unconnected episode (for example, Khezr in the story of the City of Equality).

At the same time, it would be unjustifiably reductionist to view this and other *dāstān*s in a derisive light, as devoid of ethical-didactic constituents and intended for the unsophisticated entertainment of gullible listeners/readers alone. The opacity of the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s ethical-didactic makeup is only a seeming one, for it is all too divergent from the set of values instilled in the Eskandar figure in the Ferdowsi, Nezāmi, Amir Khosrow or Jāmi versions. The mindset of the anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh* reflects Islamic folk religiosity, which hails an unswerving conqueror who struggles against infidels, either to exterminate or enfold them into the one true faith. Eskandar the ideal ruler is entirely subsumed by Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn, the prophet, spreading monotheistic religion and celebrating God's omnipotence. This religious emphasis is grafted onto the Fur episode, which develops into a sacred war against the heathen Indian; Qeydhāfeh's figure is tamed to shelter in the Prophet Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn's prowess and superiority, adapting along the way to this *dāstān*'s prevalent presentation of women as inept and lustful; and the tale of the City of Equality is shifted to become an illustration of yet another of the many wonders (*ʿajāyeb*) of God's creation, which His prophet is bound to observe.

The anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh* thus offers a narrative of conversion, integrating, through Eskandar's conquests and journeys, all kinds of God's creatures—people of different ethnic origins (Iranians, Arabs, Greeks/Byzantines, Indians and Turks), alongside *div*s and *pari*s in the community of Islam. Unlike Ferdowsi and Nezāmi, who teach their hero—and readers —lessons in humility, the *Eskandarnāmeh*'s author/compiler does not impose limits on Eskandar Dhu al-Qarneyn's unbounded empire and thirst for traveling the world. It is almost symbolic that this *dāstān* has reached us truncated at its end: we are left in the dark as to Eskandar's death, or lack thereof, and the hermeneutic process thus remains incomplete. The anonymous *Eskandarnāmeh* affords us a glance into the realm of medieval Persian religious storytelling, entrenched beyond doubt in oral transmission and situated at the periphery of the Persian literary system. In this kind of literature, the predominant cultural valence of the Eskandar figure changes from world conqueror and paragon of the ideal ruler to a prophet-warrior enacting God's will.

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