

THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE IN THE EAST AND WEST¹

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AN anonymous work composed at some time in the third century A.D. has probably been translated into more languages than any other book except the Bible. This is the Alexander Romance, sometimes referred to as Pseudo-Callisthenes because in one manuscript it is attributed to Alexander's official historian, the nephew of Aristotle. From two Latin versions made respectively in the fourth and the tenth century this work found its way during the Middle Ages into all the vernacular literatures of Western Europe.² From the Greek text there was made a very early (fifth-century) translation into Armenian, which is still extant and was recently made available in an English version.³ A Pahlavi (Middle Persian) translation made during the first half of the seventh century has not survived; it formed however the basis of a nearly contemporary Syriac version, which in turn was translated into Arabic, and to this Arabic text, itself unfortunately lost, are to be traced back all the innumerable *rifacimenti* of the Romance in the various Islamic languages from Ottoman Turkish to Malay as well as an Ethiopic version, which,

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² On the medieval derivatives of Julius Valerius and Leo of Naples see George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 28-29 and 375-7; D. J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus* (London, 1963), pp. 9-27 and 47-65.

³ Albert M. Wolohojian (transl.), *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes* (New York and London, 1969).

apart from certain Christian interpolations, appears to provide a very faithful rendering of the lost Arabic original.¹ Finally, there was recently discovered, amongst the Turfan texts preserved in Berlin, a fragment of a Mongolian version of the Alexander Romance made during the first half of the fourteenth century, based apparently upon a Turkish text.²

Of the author of this much-translated work we know only what can be deduced from the internal evidence of the work itself. A Hellenized Egyptian resident in third-century Alexandria he has been described by a modern authority as "a very uneducated and ignorant man".³ Certainly he is guilty on almost every page of historical and geographical blunders of the most glaring kind; and his own inventions are often in poor taste, as when, for example, he causes Alexander to approach Darius disguised as his own ambassador and then, at a banquet, to pocket the gold cups from which the guests were drinking and then, finally, when his identity is discovered, actually to make off with the cups!

The story begins with Nectanebes, the last of the Pharaohs, seeking refuge, not as in historical fact in Ethiopia, but in Macedonia, where, in the guise of a magician, he enters the service of Philip's wife Olympias and, assuming the form of the Egyptian god Ammon, becomes the real father of Alexander. As his first campaign the young conqueror is made to lead a totally un-historical expedition into Sicily and Italy, where he receives the submission of the Romans. He then crosses into Africa, is hailed in the temple of Amman as the god's son, founds Alexandria and then marches into Asia to attack Darius. The campaign is carried up to Alexander's first victory over Darius

¹ On the Syriac version and its Islamic derivatives see Theodor Nöldeke, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans", *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Philosophisch-historische Classe xxxviii (1890), Abhandlung V. On the Ethiopic version see E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, London, 1896.

² See Nicholas Poppe, "Eine mongolische Fassung der Alexandersage", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, cvii. 105-29; Francis W. Cleaves, "An Early Mongolian Version of the Alexander Romance", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, xxii. 1-99.

³ Reinhold Merkelbach, *Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans* (Munich, 1954), pp. 56 and 121-51.

at Issus, when, the author apparently realizing that he has given no account of the military operations in Greece at the commencement of Alexander's reign, he causes him to return to Macedonia and to resume the war against the Persians only after the pacification of Greece. The remainder follows more or less its historical course. Darius, defeated at Arbela, is murdered by rebellious subjects and Alexander seeks out the murderers and puts them to death. At this point the author inserts the first of three letters filled with the genuine folklore that had gathered round the name of Alexander : tales of wild men, fabulous beasts and talking trees. This first letter, addressed to his mother Olympias, tells of his journey to the ends of the world and, in particular, of a foray into the Land of Darkness, of which more anon. We return to history with his Indian campaign, in which he defeats King Porus in single combat. This he does by a foul blow ; for having already depicted Alexander stealing Darius's gold plate the author has no scruples about causing him to strike his opponent while his head is turned. There follows an account of Alexander's discussions with the Brahmins, which, like the three letters already mentioned, is based on much older material going back to the second century B.C. The second of the two letters is inserted here : addressed to his teacher Aristotle it describes the marvels of India and, in a longer version preserved in the Syriac text, concludes with an account of a journey across Central Asia to China. We come now to an episode that must be the anonymous author's own invention, for there is no trace of it in his sources : the visit of Alexander to Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, whom he approaches, as he does Darius, masquerading as his own ambassador. After this long and somewhat insipid episode the author interpolates some more ancient material, the correspondence of Alexander with the female nation of the Amazons. He then causes his hero to return, as in historical fact, to Babylon, and here follows, most incongruously, the third of the three letters already mentioned, in which Alexander writes to his mother of a totally fabulous visit to the Pillars of Hercules. The account of his last days is based not on the usual authorities but on a political pamphlet of 321 B.C.¹: the cause of his death is

¹ See Merkelbach, pp. 54-55.

not malaria but a poison dispatched from Macedonia by Antipater: a "gentian drug whose power he knew was very deadly. And he put it in the hoof of a mule and he boiled it in order to keep the strength of the drug alive. For no other dish, be it of copper or of clay, could support the strength of the drug, but was broken by it".¹ As Alexander lies dying from the poison he orders the reading of his will, the details of which are derived from the same political pamphlet. After recounting the transport of his body to its final resting place in Alexandria, the work concludes with a list of all the cities founded by and named after Alexander. His name, it may be noted, is preserved to this day in Alexandria itself and in Alexandretta (Iskenderun in Turkey), but Merv (Mary), Termez and Leninabad (formerly Khojend), now lying respectively in the Soviet Socialist Republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, once also bore the proud name of Alexandria.

The Islamic versions of the Alexander Romance are based, as we have seen, on the Syriac translation of a lost Middle Persian text, which contains an account, absent from all the recensions of the Greek original, of an expedition undertaken by Alexander across Central Asia to China. The following is a summary of that account, of which the English translation² is not readily accessible.

Setting out from "the country of Prasiakê",³ i.e. the great kingdom of Maghada, which in actual fact he had never seen or even heard of, Alexander journeys to the East, and after ten days comes to a high mountain in which, as he is told by the natives, there lives "a great god in the form of a dragon", who protects that country from its enemies and will not allow Alexander to cross the mountain. Having contrived the destruction of the monster Alexander continues his journey and comes to another high mountain, in which a river here called Barsâtîs, and later

¹ Wolohojian, pp. 149-50. The story was known to the historians. See Merkelbach, p. 126 and n. 2.

² E. A. Wallis Budge, *The History of Alexander, being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Cambridge, 1889), pp. 107-17. In the following *resumé* I retain Budge's system of transliteration.

³ See W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, ii (Cambridge, 1948), 275-6 and 281-3.

Bîrsâtôs and Bartêsîtôs,¹ in fact the Oxus, has its source. Here he founds a city, which he orders to be named "Alexandria, the queen of the mountains", presumably Alexandria of the Caucasus at the junction of the Panjshir and Ghorband rivers in what is now Afghanistan.² Advised by the gods of the mountain he leaves his troops in that place and goes forward accompanied only by twenty of his friends with the promise of seeing "a king, a son of the gods, from whose country an honoured priest goes to a number of countries",³ by which description, as appears from the sequel, is meant the Emperor of China. They come first to a place called Kâtôn, perhaps to be identified with Khotan, now Hotien in Sinkiang.⁴ Thence they travel for ten days "through mountainous roads and watery lands" and then for fifteen days through a desert and finally arrive on the confines of China (Şîn). Here Alexander gives himself the name of Pîthâôs⁵ and pretends to be his own ambassador. After a preliminary interview with the Emperor's commander-in-chief, Gundâphâr,⁶ he is received in audience by the Emperor himself, who finally dismisses him with many gifts. Alexander now returns to the body of his troops, presumably at Alexandria of the Caucasus, and they set out through the mountains to a desert which it takes them twelve days to traverse and in which they encounter "numbers of wild animals which were like our gazelles but their heads and their teeth were different, and they were like foxes"⁷; they also see "the animals from whose

¹ See Budge, *The History of Alexander*, pp. 108, 110 and 115. In the last of these passages it is identified with the Behrôt, i.e. Vehrôt, the Middle Persian name of the Oxus, on which see Nöldeke, p. 15, Josef Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang* (Leiden, 1938), pp. 34-35. In Barsâtis etc. Nöldeke (pp. 15 and 22) sees transliterations of Borysthenes, a name unknown to the Orientals and therefore indicative of the Greek origin of this whole episode. With the use of the classical name of the Dnieper to designate the Oxus compare the similar use of the name Tanais (the modern Don) for the Jaxartes, on which see Tarn, pp. 7-10.

² See Tarn, p. 246.

³ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 109.

⁴ The identification is made by Davoud Monchi-Zadeh, *Topographisch-historische Studien zum iranischen Nationalepos* (Wiesbaden, 1975), p. 176, n. 14.

⁵ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 109, n. 2, suggests with a query Πυθέας or Πύθιος. See also Nöldeke, p. 40 and n. 4.

⁶ On the Parthian king of this name who ruled in Eastern Persia at the beginning of our era see Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassani des* (Copenhagen and Paris, 1936), pp. 26 and 2.

⁷ Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 113.

navels they take the musk", this latter detail showing that the "desert" is to be located in Tibet.¹ On the farther side of the desert they come upon an encampment of "savage barbarians", with whom they do battle and who are finally put to flight when Alexander slays their leader. He and his army come next to a country called Şəbâzâz, probably to be identified with Chaghāniyān,² the region to the north of Termez in present-day Uzbekistan, the inhabitants of which, together with their priests, approach them with "offerings and spices". They remain there ten days, and Alexander orders the priests to offer up sacrifices. From Şəbâzâz Alexander and his men come to Sogdiana (Sôd), where they see "a large river going forth on the south-west quarter, and that river was difficult to cross; indeed there was no means of crossing it whatsoever". Alexander sacrifices to the gods and vows that if they help him to cross it with his troops he will build a city on the other side and set up a temple in it. The river in question must be the Jaxartes or Syr Darya, but there is evidently, as Marquart recognized,³ some confusion with the Zarafshan, which would not of course have presented an obstacle. There is no mention, be it noted, of Alexander's actually crossing the river but only of his capturing a town. He is then represented as entering Sogdiana, founding the city of Samarqand (which is not in fact one of his foundations)⁴ and building in it a temple to the goddess Rhea, "whom they call Nânî".⁵ From Samarqand they come to the River Barţêsîôtôs,

¹ See Nöldeke, p. 46 and n. 8.

² See Boyle, "Alexander and the Turks", p. 113, n. 12.

³ *Wehrot und Arang*, p. 153.

⁴ In its list of Alexander's foundations the Syriac version of the Romance (Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 246) also refers to the "Alexandria which is in the country of Sôd, that is to say Samarkand", but, as Tarn has shown (pp. 235, 244 and 258), this is a mistake for Alexandria-Tirmidh.

⁵ On Nana or Nanai, a goddess of non-Iranian origin who figures on Indo-Scythian coins, see Christensen, p. 152 and now G. Azarpay, "Nanâ, the Sumero-Akkadian Goddess of Transoxiana", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, xcvi/4, pp. 536-542. In the Armenian pantheon Nanai (Nane) was assimilated to Artemis and (in the Greek text of Agathangelos) to Athene. See René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071* (Paris, 1947), p. 120; A. Carrière, *Les huit sanctuaires de l'Arménie payenne d'après Agathange et Moïse de Khorên* (Paris, 1899), p. 19.

i.e. the Oxus, which they cross on a bridge of boats constructed by Hephaestion.¹ Having crossed the Oxus and travelled for two days Alexander comes upon "a river that was copious and abundant in its flow, and towns with numerous hamlets and country houses were about it, and the people of that country were simple in mind, and the country was rich in crops and there was plenty of corn and fruit therein".² Here Alexander and his army remain for five months, and he orders a town to be built, to which he gives the name "a part of Cûsh", which is called in Persian "Behli", i.e. Alexandria-Bactra, the later Balkh. From Balkh he proceeds to a river, apparently the Murghab, where his encampment is attacked by "Paryôg the Bactrian³ and his band". He sets out in pursuit of them, vowing to the god Ammon that if he overtakes them he will build a city in the god's name and erect in it a temple dedicated to him. Paryôg being defeated and slain Alexander builds the city, which he calls "Margiôs, that is Mârô", i.e. Alexander-Merv.⁴ From here he now returns to Persia, and there follows, as in the Greek text, the story of his visit to Candace, queen of Ethiopia.

This lengthy episode is obviously based on a Greek text⁵ and may once have been an integral part of the Romance: it certainly includes a favourite device of the anonymous author, Alexander being made to adopt his usual disguise in approaching the Emperor of China. The episode, in an abridged or expanded form, is found in all the Islamic *rifacimenti* of the text. The lost Arabic version had also incorporated the whole of a curious apocalyptic work known as the *Christian legend concerning Alexander*, of which the Syriac text, compiled at some time in the early sixth century, was discovered and published only in modern

¹ The correct reading is due to Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang*, p. 154, n. 2.

² Budge, *The History of Alexander*, p. 116.

³ There is a blank in Budge's translation (p. 117). The corrupt word is read by Nöldeke, p. 16, n. 4, as *marzbân* "the margrave" and by Marquart, *Wehrot und Arang*, p. 144, as *Balhîqâyâ* "the Bactrian". On the Kushan chieftain Paryôgh see Christensen, p. 441, Markwart, *Ērânšahr* (Berlin, 1901), pp. 65 and 83-84. On the significance of the mention of his name for the dating of the Pahlavi text see Nöldeke, pp. 16-17.

⁴ On Alexandria-Merv (Alexandria in Margiane), the existence of which has often been doubted, see Tarn, pp. 234-5 and 246-7.

⁵ See Nöldeke, p. 22.

times.¹ It tells the story of how "Alexander, the son of Philip the Macedonian . . . went forth to the ends of the world, and made a gate of iron, and shut it in the face of the north wind, that the Huns might not come forth to spoil the countries . . .". By the Huns the anonymous Nestorian author seems to have meant the Sabir, a Hunnish people who invaded the Caucasus area in 514²: he identifies them with the people of Gog and Magog. It is he too who first depicts Alexander as having horns on his head. Episodes from the *Christian Legend* found their way into the Koran, where Alexander is referred to as Dhu'l-Qarnain "the Horned-one". We read of his journey to the east to the land of the troglodyte people who could not support the heat of the sun and also of the gate of brass and iron which he built to keep out Gog and Magog.³

The lost Arabic version of the Romance is the main, if not the only, source of what the Arab historians have to tell us about Alexander. It is also the only source drawn on by the great Persian poet Firdausī (934-1025) in his *Shāh-nāma* or "Book of Kings", in which he recounts the history of Iran from mythical times down to the overthrow of the Sassanian Empire by the Arabs in the middle of the seventh century. The story of Nectanebes' adultery with Olympias was still retained in the Middle Persian translation of the Romance; but Firdausī follows a version, known also to the Arabs, in which there is substituted a quite different account of Alexander's birth invented to salve Persian pride. He is represented as being the son, not of Philip, but of Philip's daughter by a king of Persia, the father of his rival Darius, who was in consequence his younger half-brother. In invading Persia and vanquishing Darius he was therefore only asserting his rightful claim to the throne. In an attempt to give local colour to the story, Firdausī, who naturally equates the Greece of the fourth century B.C. with contemporary Byzantium, is guilty of some grotesque anachronisms. Darius's father (also, incorrectly, called Darius) is shown beleaguering

¹ For a *resumé* of its contents see Boyle, "The Alexander Legend in Central Asia", pp. 217-19.

² On the incursions of the Sabir into Armenia and Asia Minor see Christensen, pp. 346-7.

³ See Koran, xviii, 85-89.

Philip in his capital Amorium, a town in Central Anatolia, for centuries a Byzantine bastion against Muslim attack but, of course, in Achaemenid times a part of the Persian Empire.¹ And it is from Amorium that Philip sends Darius his bride—with an escort of bishops and monks! In general Firdausī keeps remarkably close to the Romance, even retaining the cup-stealing scene; he interpolates after the Candace episode (the Ethiopian queen's realm is transferred from Africa to Spain) an account, obviously of Muslim invention, of an expedition by Alexander to Arabia, in the course of which he performs the pilgrimage to the Kaaba. The fiction that Alexander was of royal Persian blood must also be of Muslim origin. The older Zoroastrian tradition speaks of "the accursed Alexander the Roman, who, urged on by the evil spirit, brought havoc, destruction, and slaughter into Persia, burned Persepolis and the Zoroastrian scriptures . . . and finally 'self-destroyed fled to hell'".²

It has been mentioned that all the Muslim versions of the Romance contain an account of a journey by Alexander across Central Asia to China. In the course of such a journey he must of necessity have passed through the country of the Turks, and in the eleventh-century Turkish-Arabic lexicon of Kāshgharī we do in fact find some account of Alexander's adventures in the Turkish lands. The stories have an aetiological content. Alexander, who is everywhere referred to as Dhu'l-Qarnain, utters a phrase in Persian (it being quite logically assumed that this was his native tongue), and from this phrase is derived the name of a Turkish tribe.³ We find a similar aetiological story in an eleventh-century Persian writer Gardīzī,⁴ and he and Kāshgharī may well have derived their material from a common source: a *rifacimento* of the Alexander Romance compiled by an author living on the eastern fringes of the Iranian world and so

¹ On the expedition of the Caliph Mu'tašim, son of Hārūn al-Rashīd, against 'Ammurīya (Amorium) in 838 see Guy le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1905), pp. 137-8; William Muir, *The Caliphate; its Rise, Decline and Fall*, 3rd edn. (London, 1899), p. 519.

² E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, i (London, 1902), 118.

³ See Boyle, "Alexander and the Turks", pp. 109-11; Robert Dankoff, "The Alexander romance in the *Diwān Lughāt at-Turk*", *Humaniora Islamica*, i (1973), 233-44.

⁴ See Boyle, "Alexander and the Turks", p. 111.

possessing some knowledge of the geography and ethnology of Central and North Eastern Asia.

Of greater interest and significance is the introduction of themes from the Alexander Romance into the Turks' own popular literature. In one thirteenth-century version of the *Oghuz-nāma*, i.e. the history of the eponymous ancestor of the Oghuz Turks or Turcomans, Oghuz, like Alexander, is depicted as penetrating into the Land of Darkness and as securing his safe return by employing the same stratagem. The Turkish hero and his chief officers are advised to mount four mares and nine she-asses, all of them accompanied by their foals; the foals will then be tethered on the edge of the Land of Darkness, and the animals, impelled by their maternal instinct and following the scent of their young ones, will bring their riders safely back into the daylight. Adopting this advice Oghuz and his men ride for three days and nights through the darkness. Suddenly on left and right they hear voices saying "Whoever enters this darkness and picks up something of what he finds there will regret it, and whoever picks up nothing will likewise regret it." Many of them take nothing, but a few take a little, and when, guided by their mounts, they make their way back into the light these latter look at the objects they have picked up and find them to be precious jewels. And both they and the others regret their mistake, the mistake of those that picked up the jewels being of course that they did not pick up more!¹

The motif of the mares or she-asses (as indeed the whole episode of the expedition into the Land of Darkness) is an obvious borrowing from the Alexander Romance and has long been recognized as such.² There is another less obvious borrowing. When Oghuz first sets out on his career of conquest he gives orders for the old and feeble amongst his followers to be left behind in Central Asia. One of these men pleads with his son to take him secretly along with him. The army, he says, will be advancing into unknown territory, and there will be no old and experienced men amongst them to whom they can turn for advice in an emergency. The son is finally persuaded to

¹ See Karl Jahn, *Die Geschichte der Oğuzen des Rašid ad-Dīn* (Vienna, 1969), p. 26.

² See Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, i (Paris, 1963), 618.

disobey Oghuz's orders. He hides his father in a chest, which he loads on a camel, and so, without Oghuz's knowledge, the old man accompanies him on all his campaigns, tendering his advice in difficult situations through the mouth of his son : it is he who devises the stratagem for the successful penetration of the Land of Darkness.¹

The motifs of the old man and his son and the jewels picked up in the darkness do not occur in the *Shāh-nāma* of Firdausī but they are to be found in a later re-telling of the Alexander story by the twelfth-century poet Nizāmī²; and they are to be found also in the original Greek of the *Alexander Romance*, though only in one redaction of the text.³ We read here how an old man "of an inquiring turn of mind" persuades his *two* sons, with the same arguments as the old Turk persuaded *his* son, to take him along on the expedition : they do not conceal his person but merely disguise him by shaving his head and beard. Upon reaching the borders of the Land of Darkness, Alexander is at a loss as to how to proceed. He feels the need for an old man who might advise him in his predicament and offers a reward to anyone who can produce such a counsellor. The two young men then fetch their father, who proposes the device of the mares and their foals. He also instructs his sons (and apparently, as appears from the sequel, the army at large) to pick up whatever they find lying on the ground in the Land of Darkness and put it in their pouches. "And when we came out into the light they were found to have picked up fine gold and pearls of great price. And seeing this those that had taken it regretted that they had not taken more, and those that had not taken it regretted that they had not. Then we all praised the old man who had given us this advice."⁴

¹ See Jahn, pp. 23, 26 and 39.

² See the *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. Vahīd Dastgirdī (Tehran 1316/1937), pp. 504-7, 513 and 515.

³ Redaction λ, on which see Merkelbach, pp. 173-5.

⁴ Helmut van Thiel (ed. and transl.), *Leben und Taten Alexanders von Makedonien: der griechische Alexanderroman nach der Handschrift L* (Darmstadt, 1974), pp. 114-19. Van Thiel, p. 186, compares the story in Justin, xviii. 3. 6 ff. about the slave who conceals his master. Both stories are in fact, as he also points out, variants of Aarne-Thompson type 581 (*Wisdom of Hidden Old Man Saves Kingdom*).

It will be noted that it is here the old man himself, and not, as in the Muslim versions, a voice or voices from the unseen, that bids the soldiers pick up the stones that prove to be gold or jewels. Some trace of the latter motif is still preserved in the β recension of the Greek text,¹ and there can be little doubt that it was once an integral part of the work. Indeed one can perhaps go further and argue that the old man who gave this advice and who had previously suggested the device of the mares and their foals must also have figured in the archetype of the Romance. That archetype cannot of course be reconstructed, but we need not assume that what is absent from early recensions is necessarily a later accretion. Thus the seventh-century Syriac text contains, as we have seen, an account of Alexander's adventures in Central Asia and China which has survived nowhere else (except of course in the Arabic, Persian and Ethiopic versions ultimately dependent on the text) and yet which is undoubtedly derived from a Greek original. It may well be that a careful study of the Islamic sources, and in particular the "Alexander Books" of the Persian poets Niẓāmī, Amīr Khusrau and Jāmī, will reveal other motifs and episodes that once formed part of the Romance but have disappeared, almost or entirely without trace, in the extant recensions of the Greek text.

Such a motif has perhaps survived in a story related in the *Qābus-nāma* of Kai-Kā'ūs b. Iskandar, an eleventh-century "mirror for princes" addressed like Lord Chesterfield's *Letters* (to which it bears some resemblance) to the author's son.

I have been told, says Kai-Kā'ūs, how [Alexander] the "Two-Horned", having travelled about the world and subdued it to his power, set out on his homeward journey. On his arrival at Dāmghān he made a will, desiring that when he died he was to be placed in a coffin pierced with [two] holes, through which his hands were to be extended with the palms open. It was to be borne along in such fashion that men should see that although he had seized the whole world, he was departing from it with empty hands.²

The story was told afterwards by Niẓāmī³ and Amīr Khusrau⁴

¹ See Merkelbach, p. 199; van Thiel, p. 187.

² Reuben Levy (transl.), *A Mirror for Princes, the Qābus Nāma by Kai Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar, Prince of Gurgān* (London, 1951), pp. 136-7.

³ *Iqbāl-nāma* ed. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī (Tehran, 1317/1938), p. 259.

⁴ See Poppe, p. 124, n. 123; Cleaves, pp. 95-96, n. 428.

and by Nizāmī's contemporary the mystic poet 'Aṭṭār'; and is alluded to in a single sentence in the fourteenth-century Mongolian fragment.² The earlier version of Kai-Kā'us is especially significant for two reasons. Dāmghān, mentioned only here, probably stands for Hecatompylus,³ which of course figures in the career of the historical Alexander: it was here, three days' journey east of the scene of Darius's murder, that he harangued his troops, who had heard rumours of a return to Macedonia, and persuaded them that the campaign must go on until the conquest of the Achaemenid Empire had been completed. The mention of Dāmghān may then of itself indicate a Greek source. Kai-Kā'us, however, goes on to say that in his will Alexander "made the further request that his mother should be told that if she desired to please his soul, she should seek consolation for him from someone who had never lost a dear one by death".⁴ Now in the λ recension of the Alexander Romance we read how the dying Alexander orders a letter to be written to his mother in which he bids her prepare a splendid meal as a thanksgiving to the gods for having presented her with such a son. He goes on: "But if thou wishest to honour me go out and invite everyone, great and small, rich and poor, to this meal and say to them: 'Behold, the meal is ready, come and enjoy yourselves. But let none of you come that has suffered affliction either now or in former times, for I have prepared a meal not of sorrow but of joy.'" Olympias does as she is bid, but no one comes to her meal; there was no one, great or small, rich or poor, who had not known sorrow. Then she recognizes her son's wisdom: he had written to comfort her, to make her

¹ *Muṣibat-nāma* ed. Nūrānī Viṣāl (Tehran, 1338/1959), pp. 94-95.

² Poppe, p. 129; Cleaves, p. 61.

³ On the site of Hecatompylus see John Hansman, "The Problems of Qūmis", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1968 (parts 3 and 4), pp. 111-39. Dāmghān is not of course to be literally identified with Hecatompylus. Hansman, p. 116, quotes E. Schmidt's conclusion that "no pre-Islamic remains of consequence, certainly not Hecatompylus, are below the present town of Damghan"; and his own conclusion is that the ruin-site of Shahr-i Qūmis is the ancient Hecatompylus. Nevertheless Dāmghān can be identified with Hecatompylus in the sense that it superseded it as capital of the province of Kōmish or Qūmis, the Comisene of the Ancients.

⁴ Levy, p. 137.

realize that nothing extraordinary had happened to him but something that happens to everybody.¹ There are, as Greek scholars² have pointed out, parallels to this story in Lucian's *Life of Demonax* and Julian's *Letters*; but the author of the *Qābūs-nāma* can only have found it in some version of the Alexander Romance, where, it is reasonable to assume, he also found the motif of the hands protruding from the coffin.

The following story about Alexander occurs in the *Universal History* of the Persian historian Rashīd al-Dīn (1247-1318), who places it in the mouth of a Muslim minister addressing the Mongol Great Khan Möngke :

When Alexander had conquered most of the countries of the world, he wished to go to India, but his emirs and chief men set foot outside the highway of obedience and loyalty and each of them breathed the breath of despotism and autocracy. Alexander was at a loss and sent a messenger to Rūm to Aristotle his peerless vizier, to tell him of the refractoriness and arrogance of his emirs and to ask what measures he should take to deal with them. Aristotle went into a garden with the messenger and ordered the trees with large roots to be dug out and small, frail saplings to be planted in their stead. He gave no reply to the messenger and when the latter grew tired [of waiting] he returned to Alexander and said : " He gave me no answer." " What didst thou see him do?" asked Alexander. " He went into a garden " said the messenger, " and pulled out the large trees and planted small branches in their stead." " He gave his answer," said Alexander, " but thou didst not understand." And he destroyed the despotic emirs who had been all-powerful and set up their sons in their stead.³

The story is told also, more briefly, by two Arab historians, both of them Christians, al-Makīn and Ibn al-Rāhib⁴; it is of course the story of Tarquin the Proud lopping the heads off the tallest poppies or of Thrasybulus of Miletus plucking the ears from the tallest corn-stalks⁵ and as such unquestionably Greek in origin. It fits very well into the framework in which Rashīd al-Dīn places it, that is, the mutiny which in the Romance

¹ Van Thiel, p. 165.

² See Merkelbach, p. 111 ; van Thiel, p. 195. The story is found also in the Ethiopic version of the Alexander Romance, where, however, Olympias receives the advice in a letter, not from her son, but from his teacher Aristotle. See Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, pp. 306-8.

³ J. A. Boyle (transl.), *The Successors of Genghis Khan* (New York and London, 1971), p. 212.

⁴ See Budge, *The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, pp. 355-85 and 387-401. On Makīn see the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st edn., s.v. al-Makīn.

⁵ Livy i. 54 ; Herodotus v. 92 ; Dionysius of Halicarnassus iv. 56.

precedes the campaign in India and which is a conflation of two historical mutinies, one at Hecatompylus to which reference has already been made, and the other at Opis near Babylon in the summer of 324.¹

One gains the impression that there must have existed, in Arabic and Persian, as many recensions of the Alexander Romance as in the original Greek, none of them containing *all* the traditional material. The explanation is perhaps that the Romance, originally a blending of literary and oral sources, passed entirely, or almost entirely, into the realm of folklore and was preserved from generation to generation on the lips of professional story-tellers rather than in the pages of books, in much the same way as the lost Persian *Hazār Afsāna* ("A Thousand Tales"), the nucleus of the Arabic *Alf Laila wa-Laila* ("A Thousand and One Nights"), better known to us as the *Arabian Nights*.²

¹ See Merkelbach, p. 101 ; van Thiel, p. 188.

² Cf. the remarks of B. E. Perry, *The Origin of the Book of Sindbad* (Berlin, 1960), p. 25 : "The fact is well documented that a rich body of story-lore of all kinds, orally circulated for the most part, had been at home in the Near East ever since the time of the Assyrian kings. In the earliest period, when literature was either poetic or in theory scientific or historical, very little of this narrative material, other than what was epic in kind, could be admitted into books, and what was admitted into prose writing had to be summary and subordinated to a context which was historical or philosophic. In Hellenistic times, when the Greek novel was born on a low cultural level as a story dramatically told for its own sake and meant to be *read*, the number of short stories that were put into books by more sophisticated writers, on one formal pretext or another, was much larger than it had been previously ; because the taste of those later times favoured a story told on its own account, in spite of the conventions of formal and learned literature which forbade it. These formal conventions, by which story-books were outlawed and looked upon as unfit for polite literature, prevailed for centuries both in the East and in the West ; and when at last they were overcome, by the pressure of popular taste, the wealth of story-lore that suddenly blossomed forth into books, such as the *Arabian Nights*, *Sindbad*, and the *Gesta Romanorum*, was due to nothing else than the extension along its own lines into literature of artistic tendencies and narrative materials that had always been cultivated orally in the same regions."