

Dimitri J. Kastritsis

The Alexander Romance and the Rise of the Ottoman Empire

To appear in A. C. S. Peacock and S. N. Yıldız, eds. *Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-century Anatolia*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, Istanbul Texts and Studies (in press)

In the fragmented world of post-Fourth Crusade Byzantium and the post-Mongol 'Lands of Rum', the fictional hero of the medieval Alexander Romance functioned as familiar if contested cultural currency. The Crusades and the rise of the Mongol Empire had created a much larger world, which despite endemic violence and political instability offered hitherto unprecedented opportunities for trade and communication. In such a world, the Alexander Romance in all its manifestations represented a common cultural heritage. Stories about the legendary empire-builder's travels, conquests and diplomatic engagements with real and imaginary nations resonated strongly in different segments of society, and books recounting them came to function both as 'mirrors for princes' and as literature to be publically performed. Depending on one's perspective, it was possible to represent Alexander as a philosopher and explorer of new lands, a champion of Islam or Christianity, a Byzantine Emperor, or a Muslim king (*shāh*, *pādishāh*). In Byzantium, following a tradition that had developed gradually over the course of the Middle Ages, Alexander was presented as a Christian who had visited Jerusalem and destroyed pagan temples. In Islam, he was a sacred personage identified with the Quranic Dhū'l-Qarnayn ('the two horned one'). In Iran, his conquest and destruction of the country was mitigated by the idea that he was a half-brother of his enemy Darius, and therefore a legitimate ruler. These traditions are well known, and there is a substantial scholarly literature on each of them.¹ What is often missing, however, is a broader historical perspective, especially for the period in which the Ottoman Empire came to replace the worlds

I would like to thank the following for their help and ideas at various stages of writing: Kristof D'hulster, Jan Dumolyn, Hilmi Kaçar, Zeynep Oktay Uslu, Andrew Peacock, Jo van Steenbergen, Sara Nur Yıldız. Needless to say, any errors are entirely my own.

¹ See especially Richard Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (New Haven, 2008); Faustina C. W. Doufikaar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition through Seven Centuries from Pseudo-Callisthenes to Şūrī* (Paris, 2010); Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton, eds., *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* (Groningen, 2012).

of Byzantium and medieval Anatolia. The chief aim of this contribution is therefore to move beyond the existing treatments of the subject and examine it more broadly. In light of this rich cultural landscape, there is much to be gained by taking a critical historical approach to the development of the Alexander Romance in the early Ottoman Empire, while also bearing in mind the intertextuality of the works in question.

By the fourteenth century when the Ottoman Empire was founded, the breakdown of Seljuk, Byzantine, and Mongol authority presented problems of legitimacy to those wielding political authority. An increasingly global but fragmented world forced rulers to justify this authority in a bewildering variety of ways. Over the course of the long fifteenth century (ca. 791–918/1389–1512), the gradual but uneven process of Ottoman state formation resulted in the creation of a complex and sometimes contradictory discourse of dynastic legitimacy. This was founded on the conquest of new territory for Islam; a purported transfer of power from the House of Seljuk to that of Osman; and even fictional genealogies connecting the Ottomans to Hebrew prophets and prestigious Central Asian tribes.² In the years leading up to and following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (an event of enormous religious and political significance), ever present apocalyptic and millenarian expectations were reinterpreted in the context of what appeared to some contemporaries like the cosmic struggles of endtimes.³ Once again, the Alexander Romance was highly relevant. For had the ancient conqueror not gone to the ends of the Earth and built a wall against the so-called ‘unclean nations’, identified in the Islamic tradition with Gog and Magog?

In the pages that follow, the argument will be made that precisely because of the existence of such a large, multilingual corpus of stories, texts and images related to the ancient conqueror, in the increasingly global late Middle Ages these became an ideal medium for the formulation and communication of a wide range of messages. Alexander had become all things to all people, and so his exploits

² For the development of the main elements, see Colin Imber, “The Ottoman Dynastic Myth,” *Turcica* 19 (1987), 7-27. An interesting example of how such elements could be combined may be found in the ‘Oxford Anonymous’ Ottoman history (Bodleian Library, MS Marsh 313). My translation and commentary is forthcoming (Translated Texts for Byzantinists, Liverpool University Press).

³ On the important but still poorly understood place of apocalypticism in the early Ottoman period, see especially Stéphane Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris, 1990); Stéphane Yerasimos and Benjamin Lellouch, eds., *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople* (Paris, 2000); Cornell H. Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” in Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, eds., *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, D.C., 2009), 231–43, 329–30; Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan’s Eschatology Revisited* (Asch, 2011).

were the subject of intense interest and contestation. Needless to say, it is still essential to consider each text within its own tradition. Without the foundation established by the existing scholarship on different versions and aspects of the Alexander romance, comparative historical assessment would be an impossible task. But there are also dangers in an excessively piecemeal approach. By limiting ourselves to disciplinary perspectives or specific aspects of the Romance, we risk ignoring important aspects of its broader historical and cultural significance. These include its role in the formulation and expression of complex messages about politics and history.

In order to begin the systematic exploration of such questions for the foundation period of the Ottoman Empire, it is necessary to compare different versions of the Romance from different languages, genres and traditions. We will therefore begin with a brief examination of the prose vernacular Greek version made in this period, to show how it was clearly influenced by the culture and politics of the time. Then we will turn to a more detailed examination of some Turkish works composed around the same time. As we will see, the period in question was a golden age for the genre in Turkish, and some of these works can be understood along similarly historical lines.

The Byzantine Alexander romance in the period of Ottoman expansion

The formation and development of the Greek Alexander Romance is a large and complex topic which has received a great deal of scholarly attention over the years.⁴ Most of what is contained in the many medieval works on Alexander in different eastern and western languages can be traced to distinct textual traditions dating to Hellenistic times. In some form or other, the majority of these traditions were already in existence a century after Alexander's death.⁵ These included Egyptian tales about Alexander's descent from the last Pharaoh of Egypt; a cycle of letters supposedly representing his correspondence with the Persian King Darius III (d. 330 BCE); a Jewish tradition describing his visit to Jerusalem; and a fictional letter to his mother describing fabulous adventures at the ends of the Earth. As was the case with other ancient literature, much of this entered the Islamic tradition through Syriac, which was then translated into Arabic. Eventually, in the hands of Firdawsī, the poet of the Persian 'Book of Kings' (the

⁴ For a comprehensive study and bibliography by the world expert, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*. For an English translation of the Greek Alexander Romance with a brief but useful introduction, see Richard Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (London, 1991).

⁵ Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance*, 8–17.

Shāhnāma, completed ca. 400/1010), Alexander would become the half-brother of his enemy Darius and a legitimate ruler of Iran.⁶ This development parallels the original Greek Romance, which had made him the son of a Pharaoh and a legitimate ruler of Egypt. As we will see below, treatments of the Alexander legend in Turkish were based largely on the Persian tradition as developed by Firdawsī and Nizāmī (d. 613/1217?), in whose work Alexander became a philosopher.⁷

As these transformations were taking place in the Islamic world, in Byzantium the Greek version of the Romance was undergoing its own evolution. By the 8th century, Alexander had become a Christian who visited Jerusalem, destroyed pagan temples, and constructed a wall against the unclean nations.⁸ By the late medieval period, further mutations had produced an extensive text. Among the manuscripts containing it is a richly illustrated volume produced for an Emperor of Trebizond, now in Venice.⁹ This manuscript contains extensive Turkish captions, which were probably added in an Ottoman court of the fifteenth century,¹⁰ offering an example of how one textual tradition may have influenced another, at a time when the two are usually thought of as completely distinct. But aside from issues of intertextuality, another important factor to consider is the influence on these texts of contemporary events and historical conditions. As we will see below, the *İskendernāmes* of Ahmedi and other authors contain many elements that can be read in light of the historical context in which these works were written. The same is true of two late Byzantine recensions of the Romance, which like the Ottoman ones are in a vernacular language. Both recensions, one

⁶ Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 24–33. For a translation of the relevant section of the *Shāhnāma*, see Dick Davis, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* (London, 2007), 454–528.

⁷ On Nizāmī’s treatment of the Alexander Romance, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 33–38; P. J. Chelkowski, “Nizami’s Iskandarnāmah,” in *Colloquio sul poeta persiano Nizami e la legenda iranica di Alessandro Magno* (Rome, 1977), 11–53.

⁸ This element is taken from the Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius and also present in the Islamic tradition. See note 98 below for more details.

⁹ Venice Hellenic Institute, MS Gr. 5. High resolution digital images of the entire manuscript are available on the website of the Institute. For a facsimile edition, see Nikolette S. Trachoulia, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (Athens: Exandas, 1997). Trachoulia’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis is the most detailed study of the original Greek manuscript: Nikolette S. Trachoulia, “The Venice Alexander Romance, Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5: A Study of Alexander the Great as an Imperial Paradigm in Byzantine Art and Literature” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1997).

¹⁰ See Dimitris Kastritsis, “The Trebizond Alexander Romance (Venice Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5): The Ottoman Fate of a Fourteenth-Century Illustrated Byzantine Manuscript,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 36 (2011): 103–31; Giampiero Bellingeri, “Il ‘Romanzo d’Alessandro’ dell’Istituto Ellenico Di Venezia: Glosse Turche ‘Gregarie’,” in *Medioevo Romanzo E Orientale: Il Viaggio Dei Testi* (Catanzaro, 1999), 315–340.

rhymed and the other in prose, can be dated approximately to the years around the Battle of Kosovo (1389).¹¹ As Corinne Jouanno has shown, in both of these the rise of the Ottoman Empire has influenced the presentation of the Persians.¹²

The presentation of the Persians as Ottomans is most striking in the case of the prose vernacular version, a text that entered vernacular Greek from Serbian.¹³ This is the work that would become popular in the early modern period in printed editions under the title ‘the Chapbook of Alexander’ (*Fyllada tou Alexandrou*). Jouanno has spoken of a Byzantine nationalist perspective and “a portrayal under Turkish influences.” She has in mind passages such as the following, in which Darius responds to Alexander’s accession by sending him this letter:

Ὁ Τάρειος ὁ βασιλεύς, ἴσα μὲ τοὺς ἐπίγειους θεοὺς, εἰς ὅλην τὴν οἰκουμένην βασιλεύει, ὅπου λάμπει ὡσάν ὁ ἥλιος τῶν βασιλέων βασιλεύς καὶ τῶν αὐθεντάδων αὐθέντης, εἰς τοὺς ἠύρισκομένους εἰς τὴν Μακεδονίαν γράφω. Ἦκουσεν ἡ βασιλεία μου καὶ ἔδειξάν μου ὅτι ὁ βασιλέας ὁ ἐδικός σας ὁ Φίλιππος ἀπέθανεν· παιδί μικρὸ ἄφηκεν εἰς ἐσᾶς νὰ βασιλεύει ... Καὶ τόμου νὰ δεκτῆ<τε> τὸ πιττάκι μου, ἐγλήγορα νὰ μοῦ στείλετε [τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον]. Καὶ τὸν Καταρκούση ἔστειλα εἰς ἐσᾶς ἐνεπιστεμένον καὶ πολλὰ ἠγαπημένον καὶ νὰ ὀρίζει τὸν τόπον τὸν ἐδικό σας καλὰ καὶ ἔμορφα· καὶ τὸ φουσάτον τὸ ἐδικό σας, ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ ταξιδίου, νὰ στείλετε καλὸν στρατὸν καὶ τὸ λιζάτον ὅλον νὰ μοῦ τὸ στείλετε. Καὶ τὸ παιδί τοῦ Φιλίππου ἐμὲ νὰ μοῦ τὸ φέρετε ἐγλήγορα μὲ ὅλα τὰ βασιλικά σημάδια. Εἶναι βασιλέων παιδία εἰς ἐμένα καὶ ἕως σαράντα, ὅπου δουλεύουν· καὶ ἐὰν αὐτὸν ἰδῶ ὅτι ἔστι ἀξίος διὰ βασιλείον, ὀλίγους χρόνους τὸν θέλω κρατήσῃ κοντά μου, καὶ πάλιν τὸ θέλει στείλει βασιλέα εἰς σ’ ἐσᾶς. Εἰ δὲ πάλιν οὐδὲν τὸν ἰδῶ ὅτι ἀξίος οὐδὲν εἶναι, ἄλλον θέλω στείλει εἰς σ’ ἐσᾶς βασιλέα.

Darius the king, equal to the terrestrial gods, who rules in the entire inhabited world and shines like the sun, king of kings and master of masters, writes to the people who are in Macedonia. My royal highness has received word and it has been indicated to me that your king Philip has died, leaving a small boy to rule over you ... As soon as you receive my epistle, you should send me Alexander immediately. For I have sent my trusted and much beloved Katarkouses to you, in order to rule your land for you in a good and seemly manner. As for your army, with the coming of the campaign season you should send me a good contingent, along with the tribute in its entirety. Bring Philip’s son to me quickly, along with all the royal insignia. For here at my court there are as many as forty sons of kings serving me. If I see that [Alexander] is worthy of a kingdom, after keeping

¹¹ Siegfried Reichmann, ed., *Das Byzantinische Alexandergedicht nach dem Codex Marcianus 408*. Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 13 (Meisenheim, 1963); Anastasios Lolos and Vasilis L. Konstantinopoulos, eds., *Zwei Mittelhellenische Prosa-Fassungen Des Alexanderromans*. Beiträge Zur Klassischen Philologie 141, 150 (Königstein, 1983). On the development of the prose vernacular recension, see Ulrich Moennig, *Die Spätbyzantinische Rezension *ζ des Alexanderromans* (Köln, 1992).

¹² Corinne Jouanno, “The Persians in Late Byzantine Alexander Romances: A Portrayal under Turkish Influences,” in Stoneman et al., *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, 105–15.

¹³ Moennig, *Die Spätbyzantinische Rezension*, 29–31.

him by my side for a few years, I will send him back to you as your king. But if I see that he is unworthy, I will send someone else to you to be your king.¹⁴

What is striking about this passage is the strong resemblance between what Darius is demanding and the vassalage arrangements on which the Ottoman Empire was built. These are well known and attested in many contemporary sources.¹⁵

The above passage demonstrates how difficult it can be to disentangle long-standing textual traditions from changing historical circumstances. Since these traditions were living and organic, they could be reinterpreted to take on new meaning in the context of the times. For Darius's letter to Alexander with its boastful imperial pretensions is an element already present in the earliest recensions of the Romance. However, in the period of Ottoman expansion, it took on new meaning and could be embellished and reinterpreted in line with the vassalage arrangements of the time. This was a period when it was common for Byzantine authors and orators to make use of the familiar literary topos of the arrogant barbarian in describing Ottoman rulers.¹⁶ In this context, it was obvious that Darius should be interpreted as an Ottoman ruler, and that the rest of his letter should be modified to reflect the demands Ottoman rulers were making of their Christian vassals. These included military assistance and the payment of tribute, called here *lizaton* (cf. *liege*). In a world still heavily influenced by the Fourth Crusade, the use of a Latin feudal term should come as no surprise. The same recension also contains several Serbian terms, which are proof of its translation from Serbian, but also of the influence of Stefan Dušan's 'Empire of the Serbs and Greeks'. In the later 'Chapbook of Alexander', *lizaton* was changed to *kharadzion* (from *kharāj*); for by the early modern period, Ottoman culture was well established and the Crusades had become a distant memory.

¹⁴ My translation. Original in Lolos and Konstantinopulos, *Zwei Mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen*, vol. 1, 142–44. The version presented here is that of the F manuscript.

¹⁵ One example is the chronicle of Chalkokondyles (e.g. books 1.55, 2.6). See Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, tr. Anthony Kaldellis (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2014), 82–85, 100–01. Manuel Palaiologos describes his experiences as an Ottoman vassal in his letters: see G. T. Dennis, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus: Text, Translation, and Notes* (Washington, DC, 1977).

¹⁶ The many examples include John Kananos's description of Murad II in his account of the 1422 Ottoman siege of Constantinople: "He came, wild and savage in manner, and he swaggered arrogantly, swollen with pride and haughty of bearing; as he gazed superciliously at the heavens, he considered himself to be far above all men." Tr. Margaret H. Purdie, "An Account by John Cananus of the Siege of Constantinople in 1422" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Western Australia, 2009), 5. See also Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge, 2009), 208 et passim.

After this brief look at the development of the Greek Alexander romance in the period of Ottoman expansion, it is now time to turn to the Turkish *İskendernāmes* written around the same time. As we will see, similar references to historical circumstances can be detected there too.

The Turkish *İskendernāme* tradition

While the vernacular Greek Alexander Romance was evolving along the lines discussed above, parallel developments were taking place on the other side of the Christian-Muslim divide. It has been alleged that “in classical Ottoman literature the Alexander legend was used relatively rarely, perhaps because its subject matter gave little scope for the allegorical treatment of the theme of love.”¹⁷ As is so often the case in the field of Ottoman studies, this rather dated assessment is based on an imperfect knowledge of extant manuscripts and the perspective of late and post-sixteenth century Ottoman literary culture. If one chooses to focus instead on the long ninth/fifteenth century, a rather different picture will begin to emerge. In fact, most attested Turkish versions of the Alexander Romance date from this time, when the Alexander legend was clearly very popular indeed. The most important Anatolian Turkish *İskendernāme* was that of Ahmedi, composed around the turn of the fifteenth century and presented to the Ottoman prince Süleyman (d. 813/1411).¹⁸ The fact that this work survives in over one hundred copies attests to its wide appeal, both within and outside the borders of the burgeoning Ottoman state.¹⁹ Known to most historians today mainly from its epic account of early Ottoman history, in fact Ahmedi’s poem is a philosophical and encyclopedic work with a broad and important historical section, of which the Ottoman dynasty forms only the final part. The importance of Ahmedi’s presentation of history in the universalist terms of the Alexander romance is evident from the fact that later histories, such as the anonymous *Chronicles of the House of Osman* published by Friedrich Giese, were framed in terms of his work and embellished with his verses.²⁰

¹⁷ E. van Donzel et al., “Iskandar Nāma, iii. In classical Ottoman literature,” *EI*² 4, fasc. 61–64 (1973), 128–29.

¹⁸ There is still no critical edition of Ahmedi’s *İskendernāme* in its entirety. The closest to a reliable edition is a facsimile: İsmail Ünver, *İskender-Nāme: İnceleme, Tıpkıbasım* (Ankara, 1983). The section on Ottoman history is available in critical edition with English translation: Kemal Sılay, ed., *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raids Against the Infidels*. Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 64 (Cambridge, Mass., 2004). Sılay’s translation is not always reliable.

¹⁹ İsmail Ünver, “İskender (Edebiyat),” *TDVİA* 22 (2000), 559.

²⁰ Friedrich Giese, ed., *Die Altosmanischen Anonymen Chroniken* (Breslau, 1922), 1–3.

Ahmedi's *İskendernâme* will be treated in more detail in the following section. But first, in order to place the work in the proper context, it is necessary to consider at least in passing some other works on Alexander composed during the long fifteenth century. Two of these are of particular interest. The first is an extensive work by Hamzavi, an author best known for his *Hamzanâme* who was supposedly Ahmedi's brother.²¹ Like Ahmedi's work, Hamzavi's *İskendernâme* was composed in the early fifteenth century, and some of its verses are taken directly from Ahmedi. It is part prose and part verse (*menşür-manzûm*), and will also be considered below. The second is by Ahmed Rıdvan, an author who was active at the end of the period under examination under Bayezid II (r. 886–918/ 1481–1512).²² Ahmed Rıdvan was from Ohrid in Macedonia and was apparently of Christian origin. After serving the state in important posts (including *defterdar* and *sancakbey*), he retired to a village near Dimetoka granted to him by the sultan and died early in the reign of Süleyman I (r. 926–74/ 1520–66) Ahmed Rıdvan's *İskendernâme* is a rhymed work which takes Ahmedi as its model. It was previously thought to survive only in a single copy, but according to its editor İsmail Avcı is in fact represented by at least two manuscripts. Although Ahmed Rıdvan's *İskendernâme* is clearly modelled on that of Ahmedi, there are important differences in style and content. These have been studied by Avcı, but the work has yet to receive a serious historical interpretation—which is hardly surprising, considering that even Ahmedi's more famous and important work has no received such a treatment. While there is no space here for a detailed discussion of Ahmed Rıdvan's *İskendernâme*, it is worth pointing out that its relationship to that of Ahmedi is similar to a theme and variations in music. If nothing else, the fact that someone at the end of the fifteenth century would take the trouble to produce an 'improved' version of Ahmedi shows that by that time, the earlier work had already achieved the status of a classic.

The three *İskendernâmes* discussed above constitute some of the most important treatments of the Alexander legend in Turkish. A full list would be much longer and would include other Ottoman authors, some associated with manuscripts in library catalogues, others known only from biographical dictionaries. The only way to gain a clear picture of the number and nature of these works is by systematic examination of the many manuscripts bearing the title of *İskendernâme*, both inside and outside Turkey.²³ Such an examination

²¹ On Hamzavi, see Franz Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig, 1927), 13–14; İsmail Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler ve Ahmed-i Rıdvân'ın İskendernâmesi* (Ankara, 2014), 54–59.

²² Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler*, 161–77.

²³ The closest we have to such a list is the long introductory section in Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler*. This is based in part on İsmail Ünver's unpublished Ph.D. thesis "Türk Edebiyatında Manzum İskender-nâmeler" (Ankara University, 1975).

would reveal the true nature and authorship of these manuscripts, as well as any further relationship of intertextuality connecting them to Ahmedi and other influential works. Finally, no list of Turkish works on Alexander would be complete without mentioning the *Sadd-i Iskandarī* ('Wall of Alexander') of the great Chaghatay poet Mīr °Alī Shīr Navā°ī (d. 1501). Although it may seem odd to consider a Chaghatay poet alongside authors writing in Anatolian Turkish, in fact there is every reason to believe that Navā°ī's poetry was important and influential in the Ottoman world. Like that of Ahmedi, it was read across political and dialectal boundaries, and was imitated by Ottoman poets as late as the nineteenth century.²⁴

Even as late as the second half of the sixteenth century, a time beyond the 'golden age' being considered here, the name *İskendernāme* appears under the title of an Ottoman 'History of Hungary' (*Tārīḫ-i Ungurus*). The author of the work in question was a certain Mahmud Bey, an Ottoman dragoman of Hungarian origin, who claimed to be translating from a Latin manuscript discovered in a captured castle in Hungary.²⁵ This is not the place to speculate at length about this intriguing case. Nonetheless, it is worth drawing attention once more to the universal appeal of the Alexander legend, which must have been especially strong for converts like Ahmed Rıdvan and Mahmud Bey. The 'History of Hungary' also brings to the fore the association between the Alexander Romance and history, which as we will see is clearly evident in the works of Ahmedi and Hamzavi. But in the period under consideration, the genre of history was not yet clearly defined in the Ottoman world and shared much with other forms of representing the past. For this reason, before discussing Ahmedi and Hamzavi in earnest, a few words about the wider literary context are in order.

The long fifteenth century was a golden age not only for the Alexander Romance, but for Old Anatolian Turkish storytelling in general.²⁶ Since tales

²⁴ M. E. Subtelny, "Mīr °Alī Shīr Nawā°ī," *EI*² 7 (1991): 90–93 (p. 91: "The impact of Nawā°ī's works on all Turkic peoples and languages cannot be overestimated..."). See also Eleazar Birnbaum, "The Ottomans and Chaghatay Literature: An Early 16th Century Manuscript of Navā°ī's *Dīvān* in Ottoman Orthography," *Central Asian Journal*, 20 (1976), 157–90.

²⁵ Tijana Krstić, "Of Translation and Empire: Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Imperial Interpreters as Renaissance Go-Betweens," in Christine Woodhead, ed., *The Ottoman World* (Milton Park, 2012), 134–36.

²⁶ It is impossible to provide a full bibliography here. For a description and historical interpretation of some key works, see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, 1995), 62–117. A recent case study pointing to some some key issues is Zeynep Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire: The Politics of Bektashi Shrines in the Classical Age* (Farnham, 2012) 51–79. See also Yorgos Dedes, *The Battalname, an Ottoman Turkish Frontier Epic Wondertale: Introduction, English Translation, Turkish Transcription, Commentary and*

about the real or legendary past were represented in a variety of epics, hagiographies, and didactic literature, the *İskendernāmes* of Ahmedi and other authors should be considered alongside such works. These are not always easily categorized as belonging to one or another distinct genre. Works usually thought of as hagiographies are not always easy to distinguish from epics, which may themselves deal either with legendary heroes or contemporary events. To complicate matters further, especially toward the end of the period, such material also found its way into compilations bearing the title of history (*tārīḥ*, pl. *tevārīḥ*). It is clear that in the fifteenth century, history was not incompatible with an epic style; for in his famous account of Ottoman history, Ahmedi used the term *tārīḥ* ('history') alongside *dāstān* ('ballad').²⁷ By the turn of the sixteenth century, such epic accounts were being reworked to conform to more classical models of dynastic and universal history.²⁸ However the epic style was not abandoned, as proven by the fact that Ahmed Rıdvān's *İskendernāme* also contains a historical section similar to that in Ahmedi's work. In fact, the telling of stories (*hikāyet*, *kıssa*) about the real or legendary past was kept alive in Ottoman society by professional story tellers (*rāvī* or *qıssa-ḥ'ān*, Tk. *kıssa-ḥ'ān*), who played an indispensable role in a largely illiterate society.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate why the literary production of the long fifteenth century defies easy categorization. The chronicle of Aşıkpasazade presents itself as a history (*tārīḥ*) but in fact combines descriptions of events witnessed by the author with legendary accounts supposedly derived from a lost book of exploits (*menāqıbnāme*).²⁹ The prose epic *Şaltuḡnāme* ('Book of Saltuk') was allegedly compiled in the 1470s from various oral accounts at the request of the Ottoman prince Cem. It contains among other material supernatural tales and echoes of the Fourth Crusade and Ottoman conquest of the Balkans.³⁰ Around the

Facsimile, Sources Of Oriental Languages and Literatures 33 (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*.

²⁷ For the different manuscripts, see Silay, *History of the Kings*, 25. Although Silay has not included it in his edition, the word *dāstān* appears in the heading of most of these, and is also used elsewhere in the *İskendernāme*.

²⁸ A classic study of this reworking is Paul Wittek, "The Taking of Aydos Castle: A Ghazi Legend and Its Transformation," in George Makdisi, ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H. A. R. Gibb* (Leiden, 1965), 662–72.

²⁹ On this source, see V. L. Ménage, "The Menāqıb of Yakhshī Faqīh," *BSOAS* 26 (1963): 50–54. See also Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 99–105.

³⁰ For an excerpt in English, brief presentation and bibliography, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Sarı Saltuk becomes a Friend of God," in John Renard, ed. *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley, 2009), 136–44. See also Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 63, 190–91 (n. 63). According to Ebu'l-hayr-i Rumi, the compiler of the *Şaltuḡnāme*, the Ottoman prince Cem preferred to listen to stories about Sarı Saltuk than to those about Hamza, because they were set closer to home. The popular

same time, a mystical work known as the *Hızırnâme* ('Book of Khidr') was composed in the Anatolian town of Eğirdir.³¹ This is essentially a mystical cosmography, presented in the form of the author's journey to different metaphysical spheres under the guidance of the holy figure Khidr (*Khidr*, Tk. *Hızır*, on whom more below). During the course of his mystical journey, the author meets the 'guardians of the lands of Rum', who are holy warriors in the tradition of the *Şaltuknâme*. Finally, the *Halilnâme* is a romance on the life of the prophet Abraham which also contains a historical description in verse.³² In this respect, it is not unlike Ahmedi's *İskendernâme* which was completed less than a decade earlier. However, unlike Ahmedi's historical section which is broad and didactic, that in the *Halilnâme* concerns a single battle, and is therefore detailed and descriptive.

The fluid and intertextual nature of fifteenth century Anatolian Turkish literature should not be taken to imply the absence of distinct categories of genre and style. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that authors were aware of different modalities and composed or compiled their works accordingly. A basic distinction was between poetry (*naẓm*) and prose (*neṣr*). Poetry was governed by forms and metres, mostly derived from the Persian tradition, and even in prose there were particular registers with distinct connotations.³³ In subject matter, too, there were modalities: stories recounting military exploits against infidels (*ğazavātnâme*) were distinct from ones describing more spiritual endeavours (*vilāyetnâme*). Needless to say, such distinctions could easily become blurred in a culture that venerated warrior saints and frequently viewed military struggles in strongly religious terms. There were also genres with a long pedigree in the Islamic world. These included the 'tales of the prophets' (*kıṣaṣü 'l-enbiyā*) and the 'wonders of the world' (*'acā'ib*, 'mirabilia').³⁴ This last category could cover a very broad terrain indeed, which included cosmography, descriptions of spiritual journeys attainable only through mystical contemplation, and accounts of the

Hamzanâme cycle concerned the Prophet's uncle; its compiler was Hamzevi, whose *İskendernâme* will be considered below.

³¹ On this work see Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography*, 5, 38–39, 65; Mehmet N. Bardakçı, *Eğirdir Zeyni Zaviyesi ve Şeyh Mehmed Çelebi Divanı* (Isparta, 2008); Sibel Kocaer, "The Journey of an Ottoman Warrior Dervish: The *Hızırnâme* (Book of Khidr). Sources and Reception" (PhD thesis, SOAS, 2015).

³² Abdülvasi Çelebi, *Halilnâme*. Ed Ayhan Gültaş (Ankara, 1996). For a translation on the Battle of Çamurlu (1413) see, Dimitris J. Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid* (Leiden, 2007), 221–32.

³³ For some intriguing albeit preliminary observations, see Barbara Flemming, "Notes on the {IsAr} Future and its Modal Functions," in Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Marek Stachowski, eds., *Laut- und Wortgeschichte der Türkischen Sprachen* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 43–57.

³⁴ For a published example of the 'tales of the prophets' genre, see İsmet Cemiloğlu, *14. Yüzyıla Ait bir Kıyas-ı Enbiyâ Nüshası Üzerinde Sentaks İncelemesi* (Ankara, 1994).

afterlife and the end of times. An important case in point is Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican's *Dürr-i Meknün* ('the Hidden Pearl', ca. 1453), a work of cosmology most famous for its sections on the Apocalypse and the foundation of Constantinople.³⁵ When we consider that this work was the main source for relevant sections of the anonymous 'Chronicles of the House of Osman', it becomes clear just how problematic such categories as 'learned' versus 'popular' can be for the Ottoman fifteenth century. There is little doubt that Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed was one of the elite intellectuals of his day; and in the words of the main authority on his work, the "apparent 'simplicity' of the language and the colloquial style of [the work] are not to be taken at all as indications that the intended audience was chiefly made up of simple folk, illiterate farmers and toothless old women."³⁶

In short, the culture of the early Ottoman Empire is still poorly understood, and its rich literature conforms poorly to modern Western literary categories or the stylistic conventions of later Ottoman authors.³⁷ In order to assess properly the literary production of the long fifteenth century, it is necessary to consider a wide range of texts composed and compiled during that time, whose relationship is largely intertextual. To complicate matters even further, these texts situated themselves not only in terms of each other, but also in the larger context of Arabic and Persian literature. Although language must clearly be taken into account, to do so properly requires giving up such modern categories as 'national literature' in favour of ones more suited to the period of study. For this was a time when Turkish had fully emerged as a literary language in Anatolia and the Balkans, but authors still viewed it as a vernacular 'language of the land' whose use required justification.³⁸

Questions of language and style are closely connected to those of genre and audience. All are essential when considering the *İskendernāmes* of Ahmedi and Hamzavi, to which we will now turn.

Alexander as philosophical meditation: Ahmedi's *İskendernāme*

³⁵ Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu, *Dürr-i Meknün*, ed. Laban Kaptein (Asch, 2007). See also the accompanying study: Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan's Eschatology Revisited* (Asch, 2011).

³⁶ Kaptein, *Apocalypse*, 25. On the connection between Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bican and the anonymous chronicles, see Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*, 60 ff.

³⁷ For stylistic changes in the sixteenth century, see the bibliography in Flemming, "Notes on the {IsAr} Future," as well as Kaptein, *Apocalypse*, 25 ("official Schrifttum... becomes the experimental garden for the application of new rules and voguish styles").

³⁸ One of many examples may be found in the 'Oxford Anonymous' Ottoman history (Bodleian Marsh 313, folios 4v–5r).

Ahmedi's *İskendernāme* has attracted interest mainly for of its epic treatment of the Ottoman dynasty, which is widely viewed as the earliest account of Ottoman history in Turkish. This has been described variously as an appendix to Ahmedi's longer work and a 'mirror for princes'. In fact, as we will see, there are problems with both characterizations. For if Ahmedi's account of Ottoman history is an appendix, then so is the entire account of history in which it is contained. And if it is a mirror for princes, then so is the *İskendernāme* as a whole, along with a large proportion of medieval Turkish and Persian literature in general.

Modern interest in Ahmedi's treatment of the Ottomans stems from its place in Paul Wittek's controversial account of Ottoman origins (the so-called 'gazā thesis').³⁹ Wittek was impressed by the fact that in this section of his work, Ahmedi placed a strong emphasis on the Ottomans' role as *gāzīs*, namely religiously motivated raiders bent on expanding the 'Abode of Islam' (*dār al-Islām*). In a critique of Wittek's use of the sources, Heath Lowry has made the argument that Ahmedi's account of Ottoman history was written as a 'mirror for princes' (*naṣīhat-nāme*) aimed at dissuading Bayezid I from attacking other Muslim powers.⁴⁰ While there are certainly problems with Wittek's interpretation, as we will see below, Lowry's theory does not hold up to scrutiny either. For while it is true that part of Ahmedi's account of Bayezid's reign is critical of the Ottoman ruler's attacks on other Muslims, it is almost certain that these verses were added after Bayezid's downfall at the hands of Timur.

In order to place in context Ahmedi's treatment of the Ottomans and other Islamic dynasties, it is necessary to take a broader look of the *İskendernāme*'s content and reception. Such an endeavour is hampered by the absence of a proper edition, as well as by still common misconceptions about the style and nature of the work. Some of these date back to the sixteenth century, when certain Ottoman intellectuals viewed Ahmedi's poetry with disdain, expressing the incorrect view that his *İskendernāme* was little more than a translation of Nizāmī's work on the same subject. In the words of Kınalızade Hasan Çelebi (d. 1015/1607), the author of a biographical dictionary, "although the *İskendernāme* by the above-mentioned is famous, nonetheless people know what kind of endeavor it is. It is even

³⁹ Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1938). This was recently republished with other material and a useful introduction: Colin Heywood, ed., *Paul Wittek, The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: Studies in the History of Turkey, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries* (Milton Park, 2012).

⁴⁰ Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: SUNY, 2003), 17: "A careful reading of the full text establishes that Ahmedi had initially envisaged the work for Bayezid, as an attempt to warn him away from the errors (his wars against his fellow Muslim rulers in Anatolia) which were ultimately (while the work was still in progress) to lead to his downfall." For a critique of this theory, see below.

rumored that when Ahmedi would present the above-mentioned book to notables of his century they would say that even a somewhat good *kaṣīde* [panegyric poem] was superior to a book of this kind.”⁴¹

Such statements tell us more about the literary tastes of the author and his circle than about the work’s original reception. A more accurate indication of this may be gained by the large number of extant manuscripts, as well as the fact that many of these are luxury copies prepared for Ottoman rulers and magnates. These include the earliest Ottoman illustrated manuscript in existence (819/1416), probably made for Mehmed I, as well as an impressive illustrated copy belonging to Mehmed II and others from around the same time probably commissioned by his viziers.⁴² Such elite patronage aside, as we will see below, Ahmedi’s verses were apparently also popular outside court circles, for they were included in various other works of a less courtly nature.

As for the question of the originality of the *İskendernāme*, as Ünver and others have pointed out, despite heavy influence from Nizāmī and other authors, Ahmedi’s work is not a mere translation or adaptation from the Persian.⁴³ Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out some of the main elements Ahmedi has borrowed from Nizāmī, Firdawsī and other authors, since an awareness of these is essential for any interpretation of the *İskendernāme*. One essential element Ahmedi has taken from Nizāmī is the dual character of the protagonist and his exploits. In both works there are two sides to Alexander, who is both conqueror and explorer, both king and philosopher. To a certain extent, this dualism reflects the critical distinction (established by al-Ghazālī, d. 505/1111) between the externals of religion and social life (*ẓāhir*) and inner or mystical spiritual truth (*bāṭin*).⁴⁴ Through his conquests and travels, Alexander moves from worldly conquest to philosophical enlightenment, which comes with the realization of the vanity of power. Alexander’s dual character is evident in the structure of both works; for Nizāmī’s is actually two works in one, and later recensions of Ahmedi’s conform to a similarly bipartite structure.⁴⁵ This has led Caroline

⁴¹ Sılay, *History of the Kings*, xiv, note 26 (tr. Sılay).

⁴² On these manuscripts and their illustrations, see Aysin Yoltar, “The Role of Illustrated Manuscripts in Ottoman Luxury Book Production: 1413—1520” (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2002), 37–74, 99–204.

⁴³ Ünver, *İskender-Nāme*, 12, 17–18.

⁴⁴ A useful basic introduction to this important distinction may be found in Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Vol. 2: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 180–200.

⁴⁵ The *Sharafnāma* and *Iqbāl-nāma* (or *Khirdnāma*) together constitute the fifth part of Nizāmī’s ‘quintet’ (*Khamsa*). Especially in the Indian subcontinent, Nizāmī’s two works are also known as the *Iskandarnāma* by land and by sea (*Iskandarnāma-yi barrī*,

Sawyer to compare Ahmedi's work to a *Bildungsroman* in which the main character gains knowledge through his experiences and becomes fully formed.⁴⁶ As Sawyer points out, in Ahmedi the point of transition is Alexander's explorations by sea. This element too is present in Nizāmī, as well as being a literary topos going back at least as far as the *Odyssey*. Another element from Nizāmī which is found in both Ahmedi and Hamzavi's works is Alexander's retinue of anachronistically selected ancient philosophers. Their names and characteristics vary by author, but all three works contain a who's-who of ancient thinkers.

Having acknowledged Ahmedi's basic dependence on Nizāmī, it is now time to consider what makes his work unique, both in literary terms and in the context of early Ottoman history and culture. To assess all this is a monumental task, so here a few general comments and examples must suffice. First, it should be noted that not all manuscripts of Ahmedi contain the same text. Sawyer has compared the best known manuscript of the *İskendernāme* (the facsimile published by Ünver, dated 14 Ramadan 847/ 3 January 1444) to one copied 45 years later (894/1488–89).⁴⁷ Based on a number of differences, most notably the fact that the later manuscript lacks both the poem in praise of the Prophet's birth (*Mevlid*) and that on Ottoman history, she concludes that it must represent a copy of an earlier draft. This is a reasonable assumption, which makes possible an examination of the development of the work under Ottoman patronage in response to key political challenges. Sawyer argues that in the later version, there is a stronger emphasis on Islam and empire, which suited the needs of Ahmedi's Ottoman patrons around 805/1402. This is evident in the historical section presenting the Ottomans as *ġāzīs*, the *Mevlid* which is the first of its kind in Turkish, as well as other parts of the work. She concludes that in the late recension, "Alexander has made himself a virtual Muslim by traveling to the Hijaz and visiting the two Holy Cities of Islam, constituting a precedent for the patrons' aspiration to take Al-Madinatayn, and thus the caliphate."⁴⁸ However, this is probably a stretch, since there is little evidence that the Ottomans' imperial aspirations at the turn of the fifteenth century were quite so lofty.⁴⁹

İskandarnāma-yi bahrī). For a brief description and references, see Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, 33–38.

⁴⁶ Caroline G. Sawyer, "Revising Alexander: Structure and Evolution in Ahmedi's Ottoman *İskendernāme* (c. 1400)," *Edebiyât* 13 (2003): 232.

⁴⁷ Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 230–42.

⁴⁸ Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 242.

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that in 817/1414, the court poet Abdülvasi Çelebi presented the Ottoman prince Musa (d. 816/1413) overcome with greed and ambition as saying, "my business will even take me to the Kaaba" (Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 223). However, this should not be taken as an indication of Musa's true imperial ambitions. If anything, it

Nevertheless, Sawyer is correct in noting the strong effect of the historical circumstances around 805/1402 on later recensions of Ahmedi's work, especially its historical section which is quite extensive in the later versions. In these, the account of Ottoman history is preceded by an equally extensive treatment of the Mongols rulers of the Middle East and their successors: specifically the Ilkhanids, Chobanids, and Jalayirids. The inclusion of such a section is striking on a number of levels. As has already been suggested, by the end of the fifteenth century, the 'Ottoman dynastic myth' had come to rely not only on legitimation through the conquest of new territory for Islam, but also on a transfer of authority from the Seljuks and the legendary tribe of Kayı, a prestigious branch of the Oğuz Turks.⁵⁰ But in the early part of the century when Ahmedi completed his work, that myth had not yet fully developed. It is precisely for that reason that the historical section in the *İskendernāme* is so interesting. In fact, as we will see later when we turn to Hamzavi, there is evidence of interest in Oghuz Turkic origins already in the early fifteenth century. Ahmedi also mentions the Oghuz, if only in passing. As for idea that the Ottomans were vassals of the Seljuks, this is also present in Ahmedi, probably because it was in a lost chronicle he was using as his main source for the Ottoman section.⁵¹ Despite the presence of these elements, however, in Ahmedi the focus is squarely on the ancient kings of Iran, classical Islamic history, and most intriguingly, Ilkhanid Mongols and their successors.

Sawyer's comparative examination of the two recensions provides some indication of how the historical section in Ahmedi evolved over time. In the early draft version, this section appears to have consisted only of the ancient kings of Iran (both before and after Alexander) and the early history of Islam (the emergence of the Prophet, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and some key members of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties).⁵² This was later expanded to cover all of Islamic history down to the author's own time. But such a feat required bridging the significant chronological gap between the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'ataşim bi 'llāh (d. 227/815) and the rise of the Ottomans (ca. 700/1300). This posed an

is proof that at the time the holy sites of Islam were considered very distant, and a desire to control them was seen as a sign of madness.

⁵⁰ Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth."

⁵¹ Silay, *History of the Kings*, 27. On Ahmedi's treatment of the Mongols and Seljuks, see also Baki Tezcan, "The Memory of the Mongols in Early Ottoman Historiography," in H. Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, eds., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Bloomington, 2013), 23–38. While Tezcan notes these features of Ahmedi's presentation of history, he does not adequately explain them. This is not simply the case of making the transition from a world dominated by the Mongol world order to "a future that looked promising to Turcoman political power" (30). Ahmedi's presentation of the Mongols and Ottomans must be understood in the context of the Timurid challenge.

⁵² Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 237–38.

obvious problem, since following the fragmentation of Abbasid authority there were many possible dynastic lines to follow. It is intriguing to speculate about why Ahmedi made the choices he did. For rather than devote chapters to such important dynasties as the Seljuks, he chose to continue his account of the Abbasids down to the Mongol sack of Baghdad (656/1258), then turn to the Mongol Ilkhanids and their successors.⁵³ What this suggests is a focus on the ultimate source of political authority. This was a convenient view for the poet to take, since it made possible meditations about the cyclical nature of power moving back and forth between the strong and the weak, the just and the unjust. With the sack of Baghdad and the end of the weak Abbasid caliphate, power passed to the powerful but unjust Mongols who had sacked the city; and with the weakening of the Mongol Ilkhanate, to various interim rulers (and eventually the Ottomans, who were both strong and just.

Ahmedi had a further reason for placing an account of the Mongols before that of his Ottoman patrons. Doing so allowed him to focus on the fundamental challenge of his time: that posed by the Central Asian ruler Timur, a man whose authority rested on connections to the family of Chingis Khan.⁵⁴ It was convenient for Ahmedi's narrative that one of the factors precipitating the Ottoman conflict with Timur was the escape to the Ottomans of a member of the Jalayirid dynasty. For this connection provided the poet with a convenient bridge to link his history of the Ilkhanate with that of the Ottomans.⁵⁵ In discussing the fall of the Jalayirids, Ahmedi could mention Timur, whose injustice he could then contrast with the justice and piety of the Ottomans. Since Timur's authority was explicitly based on the Chingisid world order, his injustice was of a Mongol brand; and in the aftermath of 1402, whenever Ahmedi spoke about Mongol injustice, his audience would have thought of Timur.

Take for example the following couplets, which come at the beginning of the Ottoman section:

*Ol Moğol sulṭānlarınuñ ʿadlini
Niceyidi işit imdi şerhini*

*İtmediler anı kim Cingīz Ḥān
Zulmden ḥalka ider idi ʿayān*

⁵³ For a detailed table of contents and the relevant text, see Ünver, *İskender-nāme*, 44–45, 60b–65a.

⁵⁴ On the legitimation of Timur's power, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1989), 14–16. On the Jalayirids, see J. M. Smith, Jr., "Djalāyir, Djalāyirid," *EI*² vol. 2, fascs. 5–7 (1956), 401–02.

⁵⁵ The prince in question was Aḥmad (d. 813/1410) who had been ruling Baghdad.

Zulm itdiler veli k̄anūnula
Ellerin boyamadılar h̄ūnula

Listen now, and I will explain to you what the justice of these Mongol sultans was like.

They did not oppress the people in the same manner as Chingis Khan.

They oppressed them, but by the law; they did not paint their hands with blood.⁵⁶

Such references to oppression “by the law” would have made sense in a world dominated by Muslims claiming to represent a Mongol world order. In Ahmedi’s verses, such rulers are contrasted starkly with the Ottomans, who are distinguished for their genuine Muslim piety, generosity, and reluctance to oppress the people even in the name of law.

In fact, we know from other sources that in the Ottoman society of Ahmedi’s time, there was resistance to what was perceived as the government’s effort to oppress the people by legal means such as taxation.⁵⁷ However, these sources are generally careful to avoid placing the blame on the Ottoman dynasty itself. Instead, they blame its functionaries and especially the Çandarlı family of viziers. There are hints of such a negative view even in Ahmedi, but otherwise the poet’s account of the Ottoman dynasty is overwhelmingly positive until the middle of the reign of Bayezid I.⁵⁸ However, it changes abruptly when Bayezid learns of the death of the Mamluk ruler Barqūq and decides to attack his domains. Ahmedi criticizes Bayezid’s pursuit of empire at the expense of the Mamluks, presenting it as an act of vanity that goes against divine predestination. Such a view clearly reflects the perspective post-1402. For it was the pursuit of empire at the expense of other Muslim rulers that precipitated Timur’s invasion of Anatolia.

According to the poet, this event is terrifying even to contemplate, for its perpetrator is an oppressor entirely lacking in justice:

Çün Temürüñ h̄iç ‘adli yoğ-ıdı

⁵⁶ Ünver, *İskender-nāme*, verses 7541–43. See also Silay, *History of the Kings*, 25. My translation.

⁵⁷ The main source for criticism of early Ottoman taxation are the so-called Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles. See Friedrich Giese, ed., *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken* (Breslau, 1922), 21–33. For an English translation of the relevant passages, see Bernard Lewis, ed., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople* (Oxford and New York, 1987), 135–41, 226–27.

⁵⁸ See Silay ed., *History of the Kings*, 11, 36 (verses 143–46); Ünver ed., *İskender-nāme*, 66b (verses 7679–82). Some of these verses are missing in Ünver’s manuscript, perhaps because they were controversial; but Ünver’s numbering and Silay’s edition both include them.

Lā-cirem kim zūlm ü cevri çoğ-ıdı

For since Timur was completely devoid of justice, of course his tyranny and oppression were great.⁵⁹

Contrary to Lowry's view, a careful reading of the second part of Ahmedi's account of Bayezid's reign suggests that these verses could only have been written after 1402.⁶⁰ For as suggested already, this part is very different from what comes before. Thanks to the fundamental work of V. L. Ménage, it is accepted that most of Ahmedi's epic account of Ottoman history is derived from a lost chronicle, which is related to other historical narratives of the fifteenth century.⁶¹ This must have ended in the middle of Bayezid I's reign, so what came after must have been written by Ahmedi himself under the patronage of Bayezid's successor Emir Süleyman. From the tone of the negative verses on the late part of Bayezid's reign, it is impossible to accept that these could have been written as advice literature directed at Bayezid. Instead, the gradual evolution of the historical section should be seen as fulfilling the ideological needs of Ahmedi's patrons, who were changing and whose political needs were evolving over time. In the aftermath of 1402, Bayezid's aggressive policies vis-à-vis other Muslim rulers were out of favour. Ahmedi's new patron Emir Süleyman had every reason to distance himself from them, while also celebrating his ancestors' role as just rulers who expanded the realms of Islam at the expense of Christendom.

Now that the historical section of Ahmedi's *İskendernāme* has been discussed, it is time to turn to its remaining contents. For our purposes, what is of

⁵⁹ Ahmedi (ed. Ünver), *İskender-nāme*, 67b (verse 7831).

⁶⁰ Lowry's argument is as follows: "A careful reading of the full text establishes that Ahmedi had initially envisaged the work for Bayezid, as an attempt to warn him away from the errors (his wars against his fellow Muslim rulers in Anatolia) which were ultimately (while the work was still in progress) to lead to his downfall" (Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, 17). Lowry bases this assessment on the work of V. L. Ménage and Pal Fodor, however he has misunderstood both authors, who simply suggest that an earlier draft of the Ottoman section was already in existence under Bayezid. See V. L. Ménage, "The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography," in Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, ed., *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), 168–79, 170; Pál Fodor, "Aḥmedi's Dāsītān as a Source of Early Ottoman History," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 38 (1984): 41–54, 41–43. In fact, Ahmedi's presentation of the Ottomans as *gāzīs* served Bayezid's needs well, since this provided some justification for conflict with other Muslim rulers including the Mamluks and Timur. But at the time, that policy had not yet ended in disaster. On the Ottoman-Mamluk conflict, see Cihan Yüksel Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London, 2014), 65.

⁶¹ See V. L. Ménage, *Neshrī's History of the Ottomans: The Sources and Development of the Text* (London, 1964), xv. Like other surviving early Ottoman chronicles, this contained an account of Bayezid's reform of the qadis (ed. Silay, verses 273–78; ed. Ünver, verses 7809–7814). See Halil İnalçık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, 153–67, 161.

interest here is the reflection of contemporary events not only on passages where these are treated explicitly, but also on others describing the exploits of Alexander. Sawyer has already made some intriguing suggestions along these lines.⁶² One concerns Ahmedi's description of the wedding between Alexander and Gülşah, daughter of Zarasp, a part of the *İskendernâme* that stands out from the rest of the text and has been studied by Robert Dankoff.⁶³ Here Sawyer has suggested that the poet was drawing a parallel to an actual royal wedding of his own time, which he must have witnessed in person. This was the 1381 union of the Ottoman prince Bayezid (the future Bayezid I) and the Emir of Germiyan's daughter Devlet Hatun. The wedding was of great regional significance, since the Ottomans received as dowry the lion's share of the rival emirate, including its capital Kütahya. Its celebration in verse would have suited perfectly Ahmedi's patronage requirements when he began composing the *İskendernâme*; for at the time he was still at the Germiyanid court, and the changing power dynamic between the two emirates would have led him to consider a change of patron. But if Alexander and Gülşah's wedding alludes to a real event, we might expect to find similar reflections in other parts of the work. Indeed, it is highly rewarding to read different parts of the *İskendernâme* in light of the tumultuous events of the time. Sawyer has already provided several convincing examples of verses on the evils of internecine warfare, which would have resonated in the period of dynastic wars following 1402.⁶⁴

Many more examples may be added to those suggested by Sawyer, but two must suffice here. The first is Ahmedi's description of the death and succession of Alexander, where once again parallels may be drawn to the death of Bayezid I and the ensuing civil strife. The second is his account of Alexander's wars with Darius. Like the vernacular Greek Alexander Romance discussed above, this may be read in light of the Ottoman struggle against Byzantium. Let us begin with the first example, Alexander's death and succession. In late recensions of the *İskendernâme*, this comes toward the end of the work, following the historical section and various metaphysical meditations and voyages to the ends of the Earth.⁶⁵ Some of this material is already present in Sawyer's earlier recension, which contains a chapter entitled "Alexander Dhu'l-Qarnayn observes the tomb of the previous Alexander."⁶⁶ While it is impossible to discuss this in detail without reference to the manuscript in question, it is reasonable to assume that it also

⁶² Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 229.

⁶³ Robert Dankoff, "The Romance of İskender and Gülşâh," in Sabri M. Akural, ed., *Turkic Culture: Continuity and Change* (Bloomington, 1987), 95–103.

⁶⁴ Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 241.

⁶⁵ Ünver 45–46.

⁶⁶ Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 238.

refers to Alexander’s death and the vanity of the pursuit of power—themes already present in Nizāmī and the original Alexander Romance. However, in the later recension of Ahmedi, these themes receive much greater emphasis. Here the question of Alexander’s death and succession is intimately connected to the historical section, which is presented in terms of past and future kings, ending of course with the Ottomans.

The fundamental turning point in the narrative comes when Alexander asks his ‘vizier’ Aristotle to tell him about future rulers following his own death. Aristotle answers that he has reached the limits of his knowledge, and defers to Khidr, who becomes Alexander’s main guide from that point on. In Ahmedi’s work, the binary opposition between these two authorities plays a crucial role: for Aristotle represents the physical and seen (the ‘external’, *zāhir*) whereas Khidr stands for the metaphysical and unseen, that which can only be perceived through insight and prophecy (the ‘internal’, *bāṭin*). None of this is new to Ahmedi; Alexander’s quest for the water of life has an ancient and complex history, and Khidr’s role as his guide on the quest to find it can be traced to the Qur’an.⁶⁷ But once again, in Ahmedi’s work there are historical reflections specific to the time and place of composition. For just as the history of the rulers after Alexander’s death belongs to the realm of the unseen, so do the new lands to be conquered for Islam by the Ottoman *gāzīs*. If Ahmedi’s work is read alongside other early Ottoman literature, such as the *Saltuḡnāme*, it becomes clear that Khidr is not only Alexander’s guide, but also the guide and protector of the *gāzī* warriors in the Balkans, whose hero is Sarı Saltuk.⁶⁸

The realm of the unseen, accessible only through Khidr’s insight, also includes ruminations on life and death, the meaning of man, and the far reaches of the world. So how does Ahmedi present the part of the Romance dealing with Alexander’s mortality and posterity? We may consider the following verses, which follow funeral orations by the usual panoply of Greek philosophers:

*Her vaşıyyet k’itdi-di ol nīk-nām
Yirine getürdiler anı temām*

*Pes oradan anı alup gıtdiler
Ol didügi yirde penhān itdiler*

Renc tartup genc dirdi_itdi nihān

⁶⁷ On the water of life and Khidr’s role, see Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 152–56. On Khidr’s multiple roles, see John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley, 2008).

⁶⁸ See the earlier discussion of the *Hızırnāme* and *Şaltuḡnāme*. For the role of Khidr as protector of the *gāzīs*, see Karamustafa, “Sarı Saltık becomes a Friend of God,” 141–42.

Anı daḡı_ıtdi nihān āḡır cihān

*İşbudur ki_ışitdūñ aḡvāl-i sipihr
Cehd eyle pes aña baḡlama mihr*

*Biñ yıl anda ḡalur-ısañ şād-mān
Çünki ḡitdūñ bir nefes durur hemān*

The testament of that renowned one was carried out perfectly.

They took [his corpse] and left, concealing it in the place he had indicated.

He toiled and amassed treasure, hiding it away; but in the end he himself was hidden away by the world.

For the condition of the celestial spheres is as you have heard; so strive not to attach your affections to them.⁶⁹

Even if you are able to stay happy for a thousand years, when you are gone what remains is like a breath of air.⁷⁰

It is tempting to read such verses as referring to the fate of the Ottoman ruler Bayezid I after his defeat at Ankara. Of course, a valid argument may be made that at the time when Ahmedi was composing the verses, the ephemeral nature of worldly power had long been a major topos in Persian and Turkish poetry. And in fact, even Ahmedi's comparison of Alexander's reign to a breath of air is already present in Firdawsī's *Shāhnāma*. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that when hearing such verses, Ahmedi's audience would have thought among other things of the fate of Bayezid I. After defeating and capturing Bayezid, Timur had spent an entire winter in Anatolia dismembering his empire before his eyes. This ordeal proved too much for Bayezid, who eventually died in captivity, probably by his own hand. Bayezid's corpse was left behind by Timur when he left the region. Then it became the object of political struggles between his sons İsa, Mehmed and Süleyman, each of whom wanted to gain legitimacy by presiding over its burial in the Ottoman capital Bursa. In the end, the prince who buried Bayezid was Mehmed I, who carried out "the testament of that renowned one [...] perfectly," taking Bayezid's corpse and "concealing it in the place he had indicated," namely his pious foundation in Bursa. But despite the elaborate funeral ceremonies carried out by Mehmed, a year later Ahmedi's patron Emir

⁶⁹ Thanks to the double meaning of *mihr* (which means 'affection' but also 'the sun') it is possible to interpret this couplet in terms of Ptolemaic astronomy: "strive not to fix your sun in the celestial spheres."

⁷⁰ Ahmedi (ed. Ünver), *İskender-nāme*, 75a (verses 8674–78).

Süleyman took credit for the burial by placing his own name on his father's tomb.⁷¹

In short, it would appear that Bayezid's funeral was every bit as memorable as his wedding, so it is not unreasonable to read Ahmedi's account of Alexander's funeral as an indirect reference to that event. Indeed, such a connection seems all the more likely in light of Ahmedi's description of his succession:⁷²

*Pes diledi İskenderūs'u Rūkiyā
Şāh Zū'l-Ḳarneyn tahtına koyā*

*Ol zamān olmuş idi bir feylesūf
Kim cihān hālīne bulmuşdı vukūf*

...
*Didi atam saltanat idüp taleb
Çekdi dürlü dürlü renc ile ta'ab*

...
*Renc-ile atam dirdi bunca genc ü māl
Ḳodı gitdi añā ne ḳaldı vebāl*

...
*Pādişāhlık ol kim çok renc ü belā
Çeküben bir kişi tāt u taht ala*

*Görmedin andan temettü' zār ola
Mülk andan şoñra ayruğa ḳala*

...
*Pes varup bir kūşe itdi ihtiyār
Tā'ata meşgūl olup leyl ü nehār*

...
*Çünki böyle oldu hāl-i saltanat
Düşdi halkuñ arasında şeytanat*

*Her gişi bir şehri duḫup oldu şāh
Bu anı ḳıldı vü ol bunu tebāh*

...
*Fitne vü āşüb doldı rüzīgār
Erdeşir-i şāh olunca āşıkār*

Then Rūkiyā wished to place İskenderūs on the throne of Shah Dhū'l-Qarnayn.

By that time, he had become a philosopher, who had gained awareness of the state of the world.

...
He said: "My father desired the sultanate, and suffered much toil and trouble."
...

⁷¹ On these events and their representation in a contemporary source, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 98–100.

⁷² Ahmedi (ed. Ünver), *İskender-nāme*, 75a (verses 8679–80, 8682, 8686, 8692–93, 8696, 8700–01, 8703).

“My father toiled to amass all that wealth and property, but abandoned it when he departed, and was left with nothing but the burden of sin.

...

Whoever through great pains is able to become Padishah, taking possession of the crown and throne,

Have you not seen that his profit becomes misery, sovereignty later ending up in the hands of another?”

...

So he went and chose a mountain [as his dwelling], where he busied himself with worship day and night.

...

When the sultanate came into such a state, the devil’s work manifested itself among the people.

Each person seized a town and became Shah, one eliminating the other.

...

The world was filled with trouble and confusion, until the appearance of Shah Ardashir.

Once again, there is an obvious intertextual relationship between Ahmedi’s verses and the works of Firdawsī and Nizāmī. It is to the second of these two Persian poets that we may trace Alexander’s philosophically inclined son Iskandarūs. Nonetheless, in light of the Ottoman succession struggles of 805–816/1402–13, it is not difficult to imagine what must have gone through the minds of Ahmedi’s audience when hearing his verses about civil strife and interregnum. Ahmedi’s patron Emir Süleyman was no ascetic on a mountaintop, but there is every indication that he was philosophically inclined, and many different sources present him as torn between the burden of rule and a preference for literary symposia.⁷³

So far we have considered how Ahmedi’s version of the Alexander Romance can be read as a reflection of the political crisis of 805/1402. Now it is time to turn to a different case: the conflict between the Ottomans and Byzantium. As has been suggested already, the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans carried profound significance for the larger Islamic world. Not only did they involve the conquest of new territory for Islam, but the period in which Ahmedi was writing witnessed the first Ottoman siege of Constantinople, a city whose potential conquest carried deep significance from an Islamic perspective. Given the religious and ideological importance of the struggle in question, we might expect it to be reflected in a work such as that of Ahmedi, with its focus on Islamic piety and history. Indeed, we have seen already that Ahmedi’s account of the Ottoman dynasty makes much of the Ottoman rulers’ piety and role as *gāzīs* expanding the territory of Islam. But might we not also expect the poet to represent the defining

⁷³ For the presentation of Emir Süleyman in Ottoman, Byzantine, and Serbian sources, see Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid*, 148–58.

conflict of his time in other parts of his *Īskendernāme*? We have already seen such reflections in the vernacular Greek Alexander Romance produced around this time. Should we not expect to find them also on the other side of the conflict?

Contrary to Sawyer's assertion that "it is not clear what inspired Ahmedī to choose an Alexander narrative" as the framework for a universal history, there is every reason to believe that the poet made a conscious choice to engage with the legend of Alexander.⁷⁴ By Ahmedī's time, the ancient conqueror had become the symbol *par excellence* of universal knowledge and world empire; and of course even in its original form the Alexander Romance included a conflict between the worlds of Persia and Greece. This must have suggested obvious parallels to the period in which Ahmedī was living, when a similar conflict was taking place between the Greek-speaking Christian rulers of Rum (namely Byzantium) and those other Rumis, the Muslim Ottomans. However, the matter was complicated considerably by the fact that in the Persian iteration of the Romance, the conflict had become one between two Persian kings. For in Firdawsī's version, Alexander is Darius's half-brother through Philip's daughter, sent as tribute to Darius's father and later sent back.⁷⁵ It is these two men who come into conflict after a dispute over tribute, which is presented in the form of an exchange of diplomatic letters—an element already present in the original Greek version of the Romance. But although Alexander is raised in Greece as Philip's son, his real father is Philip's overlord Darab; and he is later able to take the throne of Iran because of the murder of Darab's legitimate successor, his half-brother Dara (Darius III).

For several reasons, Firdawsī's version of the story was ill-suited to a presentation meant to evoke the Byzantine-Ottoman conflict. First of all, Alexander had to be identified with 'us' rather than 'them' (i.e. the Byzantines). In Islamic tradition, even when Alexander is called 'Iskandar of Rome' (*Iskandar-i Rūm*), he is not to be confused with the infidel emperors of Byzantium; he is a sacred personage who appears in the Qur'an. Even if Ahmedī had chosen to identify Byzantium with Philip, this posed its own problems; for he was writing at a time when Firdawsī's story of a tribute princess and foreign-raised usurper would have probably struck his audience as a bit too close to home. Already at the time of Orhan Gazi (d. 763/1362), Byzantium was following a policy of royal marriages in an effort to control the Ottoman succession. After 1402, the Byzantines went even further, attempting to take advantage of the Ottoman succession struggles by harbouring Ottoman princes as diplomatic hostages. For all of these reasons, Ahmedī must have felt a need to alter the account of

⁷⁴ Sawyer, "Revising Alexander," 229.

⁷⁵ Firdawsī (tr. Davis), *Shahnameh*, 452–55; Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*, 27–32.

Alexander's origins and conflict with Darius in order to provide a more satisfactory outcome. Ideally this would allow his audience to draw the right parallels to the Byzantine-Ottoman conflict, with no risk of associating Alexander with such negative elements as diplomatic marriages and rival pretenders to the throne. How could this be achieved?

As Ünver has pointed out, Ahmedi's version of the story closely follows that of Firdawsī, but with important differences.⁷⁶ In Ahmedi, Firdawsī's story is preceded by an unrelated conflict: that between Alexander's father the Persian king and Caesar of Rome (*Ḳayşar-ı Rūm*). This appears to be an element original to Ahmedi. Its significance is clear both from its placement at the very beginning of the story, and from the fact that Ahmedi has changed the names of Firdawsī's Persian kings in order to accommodate it. In Ahmedi, Alexander's father is called *Dārā* (or *Dārābīd*):

*Ol zamān ki Īrān'a Dārābīd Şāh
Dilegince seyr iderdi mihr ü māh*

*Nireye yüz tutsa bulurdi zafer
Toprağa el ursa olurdi güher*

...
*Ḳaşd itdi ki ĩlede Rūm'a sipāh
Rūm'ı feth idüp aña daħı ola şāh*

...
*Nireye uğrasa ğāretdür işi
Ḳanda irerse hasāretdür işi*

*Nirede ma'cūr yir balsa yıħar
Ḳanķı şehri kim alur-ısa yaħar*

...
*Ḳayşer'e çünkim irişdi bu haber
Gönli oldı ğuşşadan zır ü zeber*

*Bildi kim t̄ali' dönüp baħt oldı şūm
Gidiser bī-şekk elinden mülk-i Rūm*

*Zıra ol pīr-idi Dārā nev-cüvān
Ol za'ıf-idi vü bu nev-pehlivān*

*Pīrden hergiz yigitlik gelmeye
Yigid-ile pīr hem-ser olmaya*

...
*Düşdi atdan Ḳayşer u oldı esīr
Baħtı dönene kim ola dest-gīr*

...
*Ḳayşer için dikdi Dārā anda dār
Aşdı anı kaldı ansuz kaşr u dār*

⁷⁶ Ünver, *İskender-nāme*, 17.

...
Çünkü Kayşar öldi isüz kaldı Rūm
Oldı Dārā’nuñ kamu ol merzibūm

Diri kalan ger şerif ü ger vazîc
Oldılar mecmū’ı Dārā’ya muḫîc

When in Iran the course of Sun and Moon followed the wishes of Darabid Shah,

Wherever [Dara] turned, he would find victory; whenever he touched the ground,
gems would appear.

...
He resolved to dispatch cavalry against Rum. By conquering Rum, he would become
its Shah as well.

...
Wherever he went, his occupation was plunder; wherever he appeared, his work was
devastation.

Wherever he found cultivated land, he would ruin it; whenever he captured a city, he
would burn it.

...
When Caesar received news of this, out of grief his heart turned upside-down.

He knew his star had changed, his fortune turned ill-fated; without a doubt, he would
lose possession of Rum.

For he was old and Dara a young man; he was weak, [his adversary] a young
champion.

Heroic acts will never come from old men. These will never be the equals of young
warriors.

...
Caesar fell off his horse and became captive. For who will lend a hand to someone
whose fortune has turned?

...
And Dara set up a gibbet for Caesar and hanged him. Suddenly nothing was left but
his home and palace.

...
When Caesar died, Rum was left without a master. All that country⁷⁷ was left to Dara.

Those still alive, both noble and humble, all submitted to Dara’s will.⁷⁸

In verses such as the above, it is hard not to see a reflection of the conflict
between the Ottomans and Byzantium. It is particularly interesting to note the
emphasis on youth and old age, which is reminiscent of Ibn Khaldūn’s ideas,

⁷⁷ The use of the Persian term *marzbūm* is perhaps significant; although it can be
translated simply as ‘country’, it also implies a borderland belonging to a hostile power
(cf. *marzbān*, ‘marcher lord’).

⁷⁸ Ahmedi (ed. Ünver), *İskender-nāme*, 319–20, 326, 332–33, 338–41, 369, 371, 375:

although unlikely to have been influenced by them directly.⁷⁹ In fact, views of military success as proof of piety and correct faith were part of the culture of the time, both on the Byzantine and on the Muslim side.⁸⁰ Ahmedi's pitying description of Caesar in the above verses is reminiscent of a prose epic composed in Mehmed I's court around the same time, in which the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II is described as having "grown old and weak" and unable to accompany Mehmed as his vassal on campaign.⁸¹

As in the case of the vernacular Greek version discussed earlier, Ahmedi's presentation of Darius's conflict with Caesar should not be seen merely on the level of two warring kingdoms, but rather on that of a larger struggle between two competing religions and world orders. Viewed in such a light, it is probably no coincidence that Ahmedi changed the names of the two Persian kings (Darius father and son) so that the one who defeats and executes Caesar has the more immediately recognizable name of *Dārā*. By doing so, he is able to reverse the power dynamic inherent in the original Alexander Romance, fulfilling a wish of the Perso-Islamic east to defeat the Greco-Roman west.⁸²

Another striking aspect of Ahmedi's version of the story is his description of Darius's vassalage arrangements with Alexander's step-father and predecessor Philip (*Feyleḳūs*). As in the Greek vernacular version discussed earlier, these have a distinctly Ottoman flavour. After killing Caesar and conquering his land, Philip assigns parts of it to his own men, so that they may rule as his vassals. It is in this manner that Philip comes to be ruler of the province of Greece (*Yūnān*). Through such a presentation, the poet is able to echo Ottoman practices of the time as well

⁷⁹ For Ibn Khaldūn's ideas about the youth and old age of dynasties, see Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal, abr. N. J. Dawood (Princeton, 1969), 136–38. On the question of the influence of Ibn Khaldūn, see Cornell H. Fleischer, "Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and 'Ibn Khaldunism' in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 198–220.

⁸⁰ An interesting case in point is the debate between the captive Byzantine intellectual Gregory Palamas and a Muslim teacher (*dānişmend*) in İznik following the Ottoman capture of Gallipoli (755/1354). See Anna Phillipidis-Braat, "La captivité de Palamas chez Les Turcs: dossier et commentaire," *Travaux et Mémoires* 7 (1979): 109–222, 156–61. It is worth noting that as a counterexample to the Muslim teacher's point about the spread of Islam through world conquest, Palamas specifically mentions Alexander.

⁸¹ *Ben pīr oldum, mecālüm yoḳdur*. The text in question has survived as part of the 'Oxford Anonymous' chronicle (MS Bodleian Marsh 313, f. 99r, new tr. forthcoming) as well as the chronicle of Neşri. For a critical edition and translation, see Dimitris Kastritsis, *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed, Son of Bayezid Khan*. Sources Of Oriental Languages and Literatures 78 (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), 37, 84.

⁸² According to the Greek chronicler Kritovoulos, a few decades later Mehmed the Conqueror perceived himself not only as a new Alexander, but also as avenger of the Trojans and their Asiatic descendants. See Kritovoulos (tr. Charles T. Riggs) *History of Mehmed the Conqueror* (Princeton, 1954), 181–82.

as advance the plot. For to cement his vassalage agreement with Philip, Darius marries his daughter and becomes the father of Alexander. By killing Caesar and appointing Philip to rule as a Persian vassal over part of his kingdom, Ahmedi has introduced a crucial twist. He has ensured that Alexander, the man who will inherit the land of Rum and conquer Iran and the world, is descended not only from a Persian king (as in the earlier versions) but also from a Persian king's vassal with no ties of blood or loyalty to the deceased Caesar. Thus in Ahmedi, Alexander has been removed entirely from the realm of Byzantium. He has no ancestral claims to the lands of Rum apart from those bestowed on him by his father, the Persian king, to whom his maternal grandfather Philip owes his appointment as governor.

To conclude this brief discussion of Ahmedi's *İskendernāme*, we have seen that it is possible to read the work on several different levels. Firstly it is important to note that above all, this is a didactic work of a philosophical and even cosmographic nature. Even in its earliest form, it contained discourses on such fields and geography and astronomy, as well as history. Following in the footsteps of Nizāmī (the first to have divided Alexander's universalism into worldly and spiritual spheres) Ahmedi organized his poem broadly along the lines of worldly knowledge (represented by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers) and knowledge obtainable only through insight and inspiration (represented by Khidr). It is significant that the crucial turning point is located in the field of history. As with the rest of the *İskendernāme*, especially the second part of this history (including the account of the Ottomans) has an important religious dimension. Since Alexander is a proto-Muslim guided by Khidr, Ahmedi's history of future kings is essentially an Islamic history, containing among other elements a detailed account of the Prophet Muhammad's ascent to the heavens (*Mi'raj*). In earlier drafts of the work, the historical section was quite limited, but in the final version it came to include the Ilkhanids and their successors down to the Ottomans.

Although Ahmedi's *İskendernāme* is best known today for the Ottoman part of its historical section, it is a mistake to assume that the poet's motive was to write a history and that he simply chose the Alexander cycle as a vehicle to do so. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that Ahmedi's larger aim was to write a long rhymed work (*meşnevî*) of a mystical and didactic nature, a work in line with the intellectual and literary tastes of his time. Seen in this light, it is highly significant that the poet chose to give such an important place to history. The fact that this choice obviously served patronage needs makes it no less important. On the contrary, Ahmedi wrote his work at a time when the lands of Rum were gaining a new prominence in the Islamic world, and their recent and ancient history was considered of great importance. In the preceding decades, thanks to their conquests on the European side of the Straits (or to use Ahmedi's

own expression, “the opposite coast,” *aşra yaka*) the Ottomans had greatly enlarged the domains of Islam. They had defeated a large Crusader army and threatened Constantinople itself, an ultimate goal of Islamic conquest. Although their empire was not yet what it would become in the sixteenth century, they were hardly marginal as is sometimes suggested.⁸³ There is increasing evidence that not unlike the New World would eventually become for Europeans, in this period the lands of Rum were viewed by the rest of the Islamic world as rich in interest and opportunity. At the same time, Rumis themselves were becoming increasingly aware of their own uniqueness on the frontier of Islamic expansion. Although the Ottoman borderlands were in some ways marginal to the Islamic world, by the turn of the fifteenth century they were nonetheless important enough to attract scholars motivated by intellectual curiosity and other considerations. Moreover, although the new regions lacked much of the educational infrastructure of established Islamic centres, some of their native inhabitants were nonetheless able to attain the highest levels of learning and obtain the patronage of the Mamluks of Cairo and the Timurids of Samarqand.⁸⁴

For the new world created by the Ottoman conquests, the Alexander Romance provided an obvious mirror. Although Ahmedi’s work was the only one destined to become a true classic, the popularity of the theme would suggest that there must have been other Ottoman treatments of the Alexander legend dating from the same time. In her discussion of Ahmedi, Sawyer has pointed somewhat vaguely to the importance of “popular narratives transmitted orally” to earlier drafts of the poet’s work. She has suggested that the poet later reworked these drafts into a final version “based on written Alexander traditions” in a bid for court patronage.⁸⁵ While it is implausible as she suggests that Ahmedi “probably did not have much access to written versions of Persian *Shahnâmas*” when first compiling his work, she is nonetheless correct to point to the importance of an oral storytelling culture during the period in question. This does not necessarily refer to the oral poetry of Albert Lord and Milman Perry’s classic study, but

⁸³ See for example Helen Pfeifer, “Encounter after the Conquest: Scholarly Gatherings in 16th-Century Ottoman Damascus,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (2015): 219–20. Although the author’s main argument is valid, she exaggerates the extent to which the Ottoman lands and their intellectuals were marginal before the conquest of the Arab lands.

⁸⁴ For just a few cases among many, see Evrim Binbaş, “A Damascene Eyewitness to the Battle of Nicopolis: Shams Al-Dīn Ibn Al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429),” in Nikolaos G. Christis and Mike Carr, *Contact and Conflict in Frankish Greece and the Aegean, 1204-1453* (Farnham, 2014), 153-75; Dimitris Kastritsis, “The Revolt of Şeyh Bedreddin in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–13,” in Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Political Initiatives ‘From the Bottom Up’ in the Ottoman Empire* (Herakleion, 2012), 233–50.

⁸⁵ Sawyer, “Revising Alexander,” 241–42.

rather what Joyce Coleman has termed aurality, namely a culture of public reading.⁸⁶

Once a culture of public reading and storytelling has been taken into account, the study of the Alexander Romance in the early Ottoman period rises to a new level. For it is no longer possible to consider the Alexander Romances of Ahmedi and other Ottoman authors only with reference to such Persian classics as Firdawsī and Nizāmī. They must also be considered in the context of other Old Anatolian Turkish epics, hagiographies, and wondertales. Since everything that we know about these works suggests that we are dealing with a very lively tradition indeed, we must think not only in terms of the individual *İskendernāme*, but rather of a broader Alexander cycle. This is best represented by the corpus of manuscripts attributed to Hamzavi, the author to whom we now turn.

Alexander as story: Ahmedi's "brother" Hamzavi

According to Aşık Çelebi and other compilers of Ottoman biographical dictionaries, Hamzavi was Ahmedi's contemporary and even his brother.⁸⁷ His name is associated with an Ottoman history that has not survived, but he is best known from a romance on the Prophet's uncle Hamza, the *Hamzanāme*, from where his name Hamzavi is derived. Comparing his Alexander Romance to that of Ahmedi, Hendrik Boeschoten has called attention to "the very different style levels" of the two works.⁸⁸ He has stated that Hamzavi's work represents "a tradition very different from the aristocratic versified *İskendernāmes*, including Ahmedi's." However, considering our earlier observations about style and genre in Old Anatolian Turkish literature, such categorizations as 'aristocratic' or

⁸⁶ For the classic research of Lord and Perry, see Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960). On 'aurality' and public reading in western Europe, see Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁸⁷ Hendrik Boeschoten, "Adventures of Alexander in Medieval Turkish," in Stoneman et al., *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, 122. Boeschoten's article concerns a manuscript in St Petersburg, closely related to the one we will be discussing here. He has edited and published parts of it: H. Boeschoten, *Alexander Stories in Ajami Turkic* (Wiesbaden, 2009). The most up-to-date published treatment of Hamzavi's *İskendernāme* and its extant manuscripts (many of which have been misattributed) is Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernāmeler*, 54–59. On the Ankara manuscript discussed below (MS TKD 150) there is an unpublished MA thesis: Neşe Seçkin, "Hamzavi Kissa-i İskender (101a-200bv.): Metin, Sözlüğü ve Dilbilgisi Özellikleri" (Ankara University, 1991). See also Ünver, "Türk Edebiyatında Manzum İskender-nāmeler"; Franz Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig, 1927), 13–14; Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 94.

⁸⁸ Boeschoten, "Adventures of Alexander," 124.

‘popular’ appear inadequate. If Ahmedi and Hamzavi were indeed brothers, they would have come from the same social class. Moreover, both works would have been publically recited, although perhaps in different settings. We have already seen that verses from Ahmedi’s *İskendernāme* were included in such allegedly ‘popular’ works as the Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles; and in fact, they also appear with minor variations in Hamzavi’s work.⁸⁹ This much said, one might concede that the relatively rarified and philosophical nature of many parts of Ahmedi’s poem would have made at least some sections of his work inaccessible to uneducated classes of society. On the other hand, thanks to its focus on the straightforward narration of lively stories, Hamzavi’s work would have been accessible to a very wide audience indeed. This would have included the army and general public, but also members of more courtly circles who did not look down on such storytelling.

To get a better sense of the character and possible audience of Hamzavi’s *İskendernāme*, it is necessary to study it in detail. To do so is beyond our scope here—for Hamzavi’s is an extremely extensive work, even the number of whose extant manuscripts still remains to be determined.⁹⁰ Under the circumstances, then, some general comments must suffice, followed by an example from the work in question. This is taken from the last few pages of the best known manuscript, *Türk Dil Kurumu 150*. As indicated by its name, this is presently in the library of the Turkish Linguistic Society in Ankara. Based on a preliminary examination, Boeschoten has suggested that this partial manuscript which contains “some 900 pages of Alexander stories” is only a third of the entire work.⁹¹ More precisely, the manuscript consists of 442 folios, and each page contains thirteen lines of densely written, fully vocalized script.⁹² If Boeschoten is correct in his educated guess that this represents only a third of the entire work, this is indeed an opus of monumental proportions. Hamzavi’s work is in a style combining prose and poetry (*manzūm-mensūr*). The poetry is very similar to Ahmedi’s; indeed some of the verses are directly adapted from his work. Once again, this points to the common elements between the two works and the inadequacy of any facile dichotomies based on high and low style. As for the prose, its style and organization clearly suggests public performance. In this respect, it is typical of

⁸⁹ See Ünver, *Ahmedi İskender-nāme*, 13, and especially Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernāmeler*, 56, who provides a comparison of some verses in the two authors.

⁹⁰ Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernāmeler*, 57–58. A properly verified catalogue of manuscripts still remains to be made. It appears that some listed in the past in fact refer to other works, and there are probably many more not yet discovered.

⁹¹ Boeschoten, “Adventures of Alexander,” 122–23.

⁹² These are difficult to number without access to the actual manuscript, since its pages bear conflicting numbers.

the epic and performative culture of period. Its characteristics include a lively style, frequent use of the present tense, dialogue, and direct speech.

As for the subject matter, much of what is contained in Hamzavi belongs to the ‘fabulous adventures’ strain of the Alexander Romance. Alexander travels the world with a large entourage, encountering strange nations, natural wonders, and supernatural creatures. He faces various challenges which he is able to meet with the help of his select advisors. In Hamzavi’s work, these include not only Khidr and the ubiquitous panoply of Greek philosophers, but also various kings, viziers, and other figures who are difficult or impossible to trace. Among others there is a handyman by the name of ‘Irāqī,⁹³ a wise man called Pīr Şīrgīr,⁹⁴ and a number of sultans and other rulers, including the kings of Greece and Cathay (*Şāh-ı Yūnān*, *Şāh-ı Hıfā*). The stories are divided into chapters bearing the title of ‘sitting’ (*majlis*) suggesting that they are meant to be performed on successive evenings, perhaps during the holy month of Ramadan. Finally, the text is interspersed with signposts in red ink to make the text easier to follow and read out loud. Apart from the standard headings “verse” (*naẓm*) and “prose” (*nesr*), these include such phrases as “according to the wise man” (*hekīm kavlıncā*), “according to the master” (*üstād kavlıncā*), and “the storyteller recounts the following story” (*rāvī şöyle rivāyet kıılır kim*).

What can a cursory examination of Hamzavi tell us about the reception and uses of the Alexander cycle in early Ottoman society? For one thing, the existence of such a massive corpus of stories written down in a form designed for oral performance points to the popularity of the Alexander cycle in the society in question. At a time when the domain of Islam was expanding into Europe under the Ottoman banner, the legend of Alexander as world conqueror and universal explorer of strange new lands was clearly a source of entertainment and edification. As we have seen already in the earlier section on Ahmedi, part of the legend’s appeal must have rested on the fact that Alexander and his conquests could be interpreted on both a worldly and a spiritual level. But Hamzavi’s work brings to the fore another possible source of the work’s popularity: the fact that Alexander’s conquests transcend social boundaries. For in Hamzavi, we witness a king on campaign fully reliant on a host of advisors and his entire army.

In the earlier discussion of the Greek Romance and Ahmedi, we have seen that the Alexander legend could be presented in terms of contemporary historical circumstances and political needs. Here too Hamzavi is highly suggestive. For at the end of the Ankara manuscript, we find an intriguing story rich in political and cultural implications, which is unfortunately cut short by the manuscript’s partial

⁹³ On this character, see Boeschoten, “Adventures of Alexander,” 122.

⁹⁴ MS TDK 150, folio 208V ff.

nature. Nonetheless, the story as it survives is sufficient to demonstrate both the character of Hamzavi's work and the complex issues raised by a serious examination of the Alexander legend in the long fifteenth century. In the course of his travels to the ends of the world, Alexander and his entourage come to a stone bridge on a river. The bridge is visible from afar, for it is flanked by two towers as tall as minarets. Upon closer examination, each tower turns out to be made of human heads. Alexander calls on his wise men to explain the strange structure:

... Şāh anı göricek eydür: "ÿ hekîmler! Bu kafadan mîlleri 'aceb kim yapdurmış ola?" didi. Andan Eflātūn hekîm eydür: "ÿ Şāh! Buncalayın nesne cengden nişāndur. Tārîhi vardur ola, görelüm" diyüp, gözleşdiler köpri üzere bir kara taşda bir kaç satır yazı gördiler. Eflātūn okıyup Şāh'a beyan kıldı, ne didi?

(Nazm)

*Dîñle imdi ne dimişdür ol zemān
köpriniñ taşında ol hañtı yazan*

*"ÿ cihān seyrānın iden pādişāh
Çün gelesin işbu köpri üzere taşā*

*Taşdağı hañtı temāşā kılasın
Okıyup ne dilcedüğün bilesin*

*Bilesin kim bendahı devrümde hem
Server idüm şāhibü seyf ü 'alem*

*'Āleme ādum dahı tolmış-idi
Nice şehler baña kul olmuş-idi*

*Adum añıldığı yirde iy güzīn
Nerre dīvler gēzleridi gendüzin*

*Adumı şorar-iseñ diyem saña
Rüstem ibn-i Zāl dirler-idi baña"*

...

Upon seeing this, the King says: "O wise men! Who could have possibly ordered the construction of these obelisks made from heads?" Then the wise man Plato says: "O Shah! Such a thing is a monument to a battle. It should have an inscription with the history, let's take a look." They looked around and saw that on the bridge was a black stone with some verses written on it. Plato read it and explained it to the Shah. So what did he say?

(Verse)

Listen now to what the person said, the one who wrote those words on the stone on the bridge.

"O world-wandering Padishah, when you reach the stone that is on this bridge,

you will view the writing on the stone, and read it, and understand what language it is in.

Then you will know that in my own time, I was also a commander with a sword and banner,

and that my name had also filled the world, so that many shahs had become my servants.

Where my name was mentioned, o distinguished one, Nerre and other *dīvs* would hide out of fear.

And if you ask my name, I will tell you I was called Rustam, son of Zāl...”⁹⁵

The versified inscription goes on to tell of how the bridge represented the site of a battle, in which Rustam was finally able to subjugate the only nation that had resisted his authority. In his anger, he killed many enemies with his bow and constructed towers out of their severed heads. When the poem is read out to him, Alexander asks Aristotle about the identity of the mysterious nation:

... (Nesr) Rāvī kavlinca, kaçan ki İskender Şāh ol köpri taşındağı yazudan Rüstem dāstān tārīhin kim işitdi, Rüstem birle ceng iden kavmuñ teşvīşine düşdi. Andan Ristaţālīs Hekīm’e eydür: “İy hekīm-i kārđān! Ol Rüstem birle ceng iden kavımdan henüz var mı ola?” didi. Vezīr-i hāşş eydür: “İy şāh! Ancılayın çokluk kavmuñ yā soñı qalmaz mı? Belki dahı var ola” didi. Andan İskender Şāh Kaķum Şāhu ilerü kığırđı, eydür: “İy Şāh-ı Hıttā! Ol kavım ki Rüstem vaşf kıldı, ol kavımdan henüz er midür?” didi. Andan Kaķum Şāh eydür: “İy şāh-ı cihān! Ol kavım Oğuzlardur. Teşrīn (?) diyārın yaylarlar ve kışın Kaķum Suyı’nuñ kenarın kışlarlar. Yā şāh-ı ‘ālem, Rüstem’e ol kavımı seyilden berü dahı bu su üzere gelüp inmediler. Ol kavım ğāyet bī-kıyās çoklukdur, şöyle ki vaşf kılurlar ol kavımı kim Nūh faşıtle birisi biñ olmayınca birisi ölmez. Çok zamandır kim ol Oğuzlar Hıttā diyārından harāc alurlar.”

According to the storyteller, when Alexander heard the epic history of Rustam which was written on the stone on that bridge, he became perplexed about the identity of the nation that had fought the battle with Rustam. He says to the wise man Aristotle: “O wise and experienced man! Could there still be people from that nation that fought with Rustam?” And the trusted vizier answers: “O shah, how could there not be descendants from such a large nation? It is probable that there are.” Then Shah Alexander summoned to his presence Kakum Shah. He says to him: “O Shah of Cathay! This nation described by Rustam, are there still men belonging to this nation?” And Kakum Shah replies: “O King of the World! This nation are the Oghuz. They summer in the province of (Teşrīn?) and winter on the banks of the Kakum river. O sultan of the world, since Rüstem crushed (?) this nation they have not moved beyond this river. They are numerous beyond estimation. For it is said that like Noah, each of them does not die until he has reached a thousand years of age. For a long time now, the Oghuz have been taking tribute from the land of Cathay.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ MS TDK 150, folios 432V–433R. My translation.

⁹⁶ MS TDK 150, folios 434R–434V.

Alexander then finds out from Kakum Shah that Kakum's brother Kademfer Shah had once refused to pay the tribute, and was attacked by 360,000 nomadic Oğuz fighters, each on a horse with two more animals (*kurbān*) in train.⁹⁷ He was barely able to avert disaster by paying the tribute when the nomadic army reached the bridge. Alexander determines that he must find the nomadic Oghuz, and eventually does so.

At that point, the partial Ankara manuscript ends, so it is not possible to find out the outcome of Alexander's encounter with the Oghuz. It would be worth looking for the remaining story in other manuscripts of Hamzavi—but to do so is beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice it to say that the description of the nomadic Oghuz is not entirely positive, as one might expect. As is well known from the research of Paul Wittek, Colin Imber and others, during the course of the fifteenth century the Ottomans developed a dynastic myth to compensate for their lack of a prestigious lineage.⁹⁸ This eventually came to include not only their role in conquering new territory for Islam, which as we have seen was already present in Ahmedi, but also the idea of a power transfer from the Seljuks of Rum and a genealogy linking them to the prestigious Kayı clan of the Oghuz Turks. The idea of descent from Kayı was probably introduced in the 830s/1430s. The author responsible for this development was Yazıcıoğlu (or Yazıcızāde) Ali, who compiled a work on the Seljuks and Oghuz, complaining that in his day the traditions of the Oghuz were all but forgotten.⁹⁹ But we must not take this statement at face value, for in fact it hints at an increased interest in the Oghuz which should be understood in the context of the Timurid *débaçle* of 1402. It was the need for legitimation created by that challenge that led to the compilation of a work on the history of the Seljuks and Oghuz Turks.¹⁰⁰

In light of the above, how can we interpret Hamzavi's story about Alexander and the Oghuz? Like everything else in the Alexander Romance, this can be read on different levels. Rustam is the main hero in Firdawsī's *Shahnāma*,

⁹⁷ What is implied by the word *kurbān* ('sacrifice') are animals to be eaten (sheep, etc.).

⁹⁸ The classic article is Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth." See also Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 96, 122, 184 n.4; Paul Wittek, "Yazıcıoğlu Ali on the Christian Turks of the Dobruja," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 14 (1952): 640–68.

⁹⁹ Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 122. Yazıcıoğlu Ali's *Oğuznāme* or *Selçuknāme* is a Turkish translation and compilation of three works in Persian: Rāvandī's *Rāḥat al-Şudūr*, a history of the Great Seljuks of Iran; Ibn Bībī's history of the Rum Seljuks; and the chapter on the Oghuz from Rashīduddīn Fażlullāh's *Jāmi' al-Tawārīḥ*, a world history dealing largely with the Mongols. For a recent edition of Yazıcıoğlu's work, see Abdullah Bakır, ed., *Yazıcızāde Ali, Tevarih-i Âl-i Selçuk* (İstanbul, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ For the rise of mythical narratives about the ancestry of the Oghuz, see İlker Evrim Binbaş, "Oğuz Khan narratives," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/oguz-khan-narratives>).

the champion of Iran against Turan—a nation generally interpreted in this period as corresponding to the Turks of Central Asia. But to accept this fact in no way detracts from the importance of the mention of the gh̄uz (or rather, their ancestors) in a story featuring Rostam. If anything, it shows a need to give the legendary Turanians a name more suited to the world of the time. And Turan would not have been the only association. For when hearing of a nation at the ends of the earth, whose threat to civilization is prevented only by a barrier (be it just a river with a bridge), Hamzavi’s audience must have thought first and foremost of Gog and Magog. These were the ‘unclean nations’ of the original Romance, later identified with the biblical Gog and Magog in pseudo-Methodius and the Qur’an.¹⁰¹ It is clear that in this part of Hamzavi we are dealing with apocalyptic themes, for after crossing the bridge on his way to meet the Oğuz, Alexander comes up against an army of snake-people. These are beasts one might expect to encounter in the same part of the world as Gog and Magog, as suggested by at least one miniature made around this time.¹⁰²

It seems that by the end of the fifteenth century, Alexander had become fully identified with the Oghuz and other Turks. At the beginning of the Ottoman chronicle of Neşri (compiled 892–98/1486–93), the eponymous progenitor of the Oghuz is presented as the first Muslim, a man who lived at the same time as Abraham. Then we find the following observation, whose author is presumably the chronicler himself:

*Etrāk zu‘m iderler ki Oğuz şol Zī ’l-ḳarneyndür ki Haḳḳ te‘ālā celle zikruhu
Kitāb-ı ‘Azīzinde añup sedd-i Yācūc’ı ve Mācūc’ı yapduğına taşrīḥ itdi.*

The Turks claim that Oghuz is that same Dhū ’l-Qarnayn (‘the Two-Horned One’, Alexander) mentioned by God in His precious Book (the Qur’an) as having built the barrier against Gog and Magog.¹⁰³

There is much more to say about the identification in the fifteenth century of Alexander with the Turks and their ancestral land. Around the same time Neşri was writing the above lines, the last Mamluk Sultans were beginning to wear two horns on their turbans, in an effort to claim Alexander’s legacy for themselves.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Qur’an 18: 92–99; 21: 96–97. For pseudo-Methodius, see Benjamin Garstad, ed. and tr. *Apocalypse, Pseudo-Methodius ; An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), 26–27: “...in the last day of the consummation of the world Gog and Magog, who are the nations and kings which Alexander shored up in the extremities of the north, will come out into the land of Israel.”

¹⁰² In the miniature in question, Gog and Magog are represented riding a dragon and enclosed by “Alexander’s wall.” See Farhad and Bağcı, *Falnama*, 25 (figure 1.8).

¹⁰³ Neşri, ed. Franz Taeschner, *Gihānnümā, Die Altosmanische Chronik Des Mevlānā Mehmed Neschrī* (Leipzig, 1951), vol. 1 (Codex Mz), 5.

¹⁰⁴ See Albrecht Fuess, “Sultans with Horns: The Political Significance of Headgear in the Mamluk Empire,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 12.2 (2008): 78–79.

Be that as it may, there are some further elements in Hamzavi worth pointing out. One is the fact that the King of Cathay (northern China) pays tribute to the Oghuz. Such a presentation of a Chinese king paying tribute to nomads makes sense in the post-Mongol period, when China was more closely connected to the Islamic world. Another is the towers made of severed heads, which call to mind the terror tactics of Timur. And finally, there is the stone inscription that must be deciphered. This reflects an interest in strange antiquities and scripts, present also elsewhere in Hamzavi as well as in other Ottoman sources of the fifteenth century, most notably the anonymous tales of the foundation of Constantinople and Ayasofya.¹⁰⁵

In light of all this, should we read the inclusion of a story about the Oğuz as a sign that at the time when Hamzavi combined his work the Oghuz were already becoming part of the Ottoman dynastic myth? Such an interpretation is problematic for several reasons. While it is true that even Ahmedi mentions the Oghuz in passing, Hamzavi's presentation of these people and their nomadism is far from positive.¹⁰⁶ In fact, such a negative presentation of nomads as sinister is also present in at least one other source composed around this time.¹⁰⁷ Instead, it appears that the story reflects an ongoing process of identity formation in a society still struggling to define itself. The terms of that struggle should be sought in the historical environment where Ottoman state and cultural formation was taking place: Byzantium and the Balkans, the Perso-Islamic heritage, and a world order still largely dominated by the heirs of Chingis Khan.

Conclusion

In the foundation period of the Ottoman Empire, the Alexander Romance functioned as a mirror and enjoyed near universal popularity. By the late Middle Ages, the literature on Alexander's legendary exploits had grown so rich and diverse that it could be interpreted in a great variety of ways depending on one's perspective. For Byzantines he could become a Christian ruler resisting vassalage to an Ottoman Darius, and to Ottomans he could be presented as the son of a young Darius who had defeated an aging Caesar. In other hands, Alexander might become a king-explorer intrigued by the news of an ancient nomadic nation called the Oghuz. To all he was a seeker of universal truth and empire, but the details

¹⁰⁵ Boeschoten, "Adventures of Alexander," 122; Yerasimos, *La fondation de Constantinople*.

¹⁰⁶ Ahmedi (ed. Silay), *History of the Kings*, 3, 27 (v. 34): *Dağı Gök Alp ü Oğuzdan çok kişi / Olmuşıdı_ol yolda anuñ yoldaşı* "Also, Gök Alp and many people from the Oğuz had become [Ertuğrul's] companions on that path."

¹⁰⁷ See Kastritsis, ed. and tr., *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed*, 7–11, 47–53.

were in the eye of the beholder. The result is a rich literature that has yet to be assessed in sufficient detail, especially with regard to the history of the time. When making any assessments, it is crucial to resist an urge toward easy categorization; for there is much more to the style and content of Ahmedi and Hamzavi's Alexander Romances than meets the eye. While it certainly possible to detect historical elements and political agendas in the works of these and other authors, what is perhaps most striking about the Alexander literature of the fifteenth century is how in one way or another, it responds to a very human need for historical truth, universal knowledge, and storytelling. For ever since the death of the historic Alexander, tales of his distant conquests and discoveries never failed to capture the imagination. Depending on the needs of different patrons and audiences, pre-existing treatments could be adapted to a variety of contemporary messages, not all of which lend themselves to a simple interpretation. In order to understand these works, they must be read intertextually, alongside a wide range of other literature in a variety of languages. This is a monumental task, but one that rewards the effort.

Bibliography

- Abdülvasi Çelebi. *Halîlnâme*. Ed. Ayhan Güldaş. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1996.
- Ahmedi. *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raids Against the Infidels*. Ed. Kemal Silay. Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 64. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of NELC, 2004.
- Ahmedi. *İskender-Nâme: İnceleme, Tıpkıbasım*. Ed. İsmail Ünver. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983.
- Avcı, İsmail. *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler ve Ahmed-i Rıdvân'ın İskendernâmesi*. Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2014.
- Babinger, Franz. *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke*. Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1927.
- Babinger, Franz. *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke*. Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1927.
- Bardakçı, Mehmet N. *Eğirdir Zeyni Zaviyesi ve Şeyh Mehmed Çelebi Divanı*. Isparta: Eğirdir Belediyesi, 2008.
- Bellingeri, Giampiero. "Il 'Romanzo d'Alessandro' dell'Istituto Ellenico Di Venezia: Glosse Turche 'Gregarie'." In *Medioevo Romanzo e Orientale: Il Viaggio Dei Testi*. Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 1999, 315–340.
- Binbaş, Evrim. "A Damascene Eyewitness to the Battle of Nicopolis: Shams Al-Din Ibn Al-Jazarî (d. 833/1429)." In Nikolaos G. Chrissis and Mike Carr, *Contact and Conflict in Frankish Greece and the Aegean, 1204-1453*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, 153-75.
- Birnbaum, Eleazar. "The Ottomans and Chagatay Literature: An Early 16th Century Manuscript of Navā'î's Dīvān in Ottoman Orthography." *Central Asian Journal* 20 (1976): 157–90.
- Boeschoten, Hendrik. "Adventures of Alexander in Medieval Turkish." In Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton, eds., *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*. Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012, 177-26
- Boeschoten, Hendrik. *Alexander Stories in Ajami Turkic*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2009.
- Cemiloğlu, İsmet. *14. Yüzyıla Ait bir Kısas-ı Enbiyâ Nüshası Üzerinde Sentaks İncelemesi*. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1994.

- Chalkokondyles, Laonikos. *The Histories*. Tr. Anthony Kaldellis (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- Chelkowski, P. J. “Nizami’s Iskandarnamēh.” In *Colloquio sul poeta persiano Nizami e la legenda iranica di Alessandro Magno*. Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1977, 11–53.
- Coleman, Joyce. *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Dankoff, Robert. “The Romance of İskender and Gülşāh.” In Sabri M. Akural, ed., *Turkic Culture: Continuity and Change*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, 95–103.
- Davis, Dick, tr. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*. London: Penguin, 2007.
- Dedes, Yorgos. *The Battalname, an Ottoman Turkish Frontier Epic Wondertale: Introduction, English Translation, Turkish Transcription, Commentary and Facsimile*. Sources Of Oriental Languages and Literatures 33. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Department of NELC, 1996.
- Doufekar-Aerts, Faustina C. W. *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition through Seven Centuries from Pseudo-Callisthenes to Šūrī*. Paris: Peeters, 2010.
- Farhad, Massumeh and Serpil Bağcı, eds. *Falnama: The Book of Omens*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian, 2009.
- Fleischer, Cornell H. “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries.” In Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, eds., *Falnama: The Book of Omens*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian, 2009, 231–43, 329–30.
- Fleischer, Cornell H. “Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and ‘Ibn Khaldunism’ in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 198–220.
- Flemming, Barbara. “Notes on the {IsAr} Future and its Modal Functions.” In Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Marek Stachowski, eds., *Laut- und Wortgeschichte der Türksprachen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995, 43–57.
- Fodor, Pál. “Aḥmedī’s Dāsītān as a Source of Early Ottoman History.” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 38 (1984): 41–54.
- Fuess, Albrecht. “Sultans with Horns: The Political Significance of Headgear in the Mamluk Empire.” *Mamluk Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2008): 78–79.

- Giese, Friedrich, ed. *Die Altosmanischen Anonymen Chroniken* (Breslau: privately published, 1922).
- Hamzavi. *Kıssa-yı İskender*. Türk Dil Kurumu, Ankara. MS TDK 150.
- Hodgson, Marshall G. S. *The Venture of Islam. Vol. 2: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Tr. Franz Rosenthal, abridged by N. J. Dawood. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
- Imber, Colin. “The Ottoman Dynastic Myth.” *Turcica* 19 (1987), 7-27.
- İnalçık, Halil. “The Rise of Ottoman Historiography.” In Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, eds., *Historians of the Middle East*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962, 153–67.
- Jouanno, Corinne. “The Persians in Late Byzantine Alexander Romances: A Portrayal under Turkish Influences.” In Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton, eds. *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*. Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012, 105–15.
- Kafadar, Cemal. *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Kaptein, Laban. *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan’s Eschatology Revisited*. Asch: privately published, 2011.
- Karamustafa, Ahmet T. “Sarı Saltık becomes a Friend of God.” In John Renard, ed., *Tales of God’s Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 136–44.
- Kastritsis, Dimitris J. *The Sons of Bayezid*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Kastritsis, Dimitris. “The Revolt of Şeyh Bedreddin in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–13.” In Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Political Initiatives ‘From the Bottom Up’ in the Ottoman Empire*. Herakleion: University of Crete Press, 2012, 233–50.
- Kastritsis, Dimitris. “The Trebizond Alexander Romance (Venice Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5): The Ottoman Fate of a Fourteenth-Century Illustrated Byzantine Manuscript.” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 36 (2011): 103–31.
- Kastritsis, Dimitris. *The Tales of Sultan Mehmed, Son of Bayezid Khan*. Sources Of Oriental Languages and Literatures 78. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Department of NELC, 2007.

- Kocaer, Sibel. "The Journey of an Ottoman Warrior Dervish: The Hızırnâme (Book of Khidr). Sources and Reception." Unpublished PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2015.
- Kritovoulos. *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*. Tr. Charles T. Riggs. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954.
- Krstić, Tijana. "Of Translation and Empire: Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Imperial Interpreters as Renaissance Go-Betweens." In Christine Woodhead, ed., *The Ottoman World*. Milton Park: Routledge, 2012, 130–42.
- Bernard Lewis, ed., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- Lolos, Anastasios and Vasilis L. Konstantinopulos, eds. *Zwei Mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen Des Alexanderromans*. Beiträge Zur Klassischen Philologie 141, 150. Königstein: Hain, 1983.
- Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- Lowry, Heath W. *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*. Albany: SUNY, 2003.
- Manz, Beatrice Forbes. *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Ménage, V. L. "The Beginnings of Ottoman Historiography." In Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, eds., *Historians of the Middle East*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962, 168–79.
- Ménage, V. L. "The Menāqib of Yakhshī Faqīh," *BSOAS* 26 (1963): 50–54.
- Ménage, V. L. *Neshrī's History of the Ottomans: The Sources and Development of the Text*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Moennig, Ulrich. *Die Spätbyzantinische Rezension *ζ des Alexanderromans*. Köln: Romiosini, 1992.
- Muslu, Cihan Yüksel. *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.
- Necipoglu, Nevra. *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Neşri, *Gihānnümā, Die Altosmanische Chronik Des Mevlānā Mehemmed Neschrī. Band 1: Codex Menzel*. Ed. Franz Taeschner. Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1951.
- Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles. *Die Altosmanischen Anonymen Chroniken*. Ed. Friedrich Giese. Breslau: self-published, 1922.

- Oxford Anonymous Chronicle. Bodleian Library, Oxford University. MS Marsh 313.
- Pfeifer, Helen. "Encounter after the Conquest: Scholarly Gatherings in 16th-Century Ottoman Damascus." *IJMES* 47 (2015): 219–39.
- Phillipidis-Braat, Anna. "La captivité de Palamas chez Les Turcs: dossier et commentaire". *Travaux et Mémoires (Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, Paris)* 7 (1979): 109–222.
- Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse, Pseudo-Methodius*. Ed. Benjamin Garstad. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Purdie, Margaret H., tr. "An Account by John Cananus of the Siege of Constantinople in 1422." M.A. thesis, University of Western Australia, 2009.
- Reichmann, Siegfried ed. *Das Byzantinische Alexandergedicht nach dem Codex Marcianus 408*. Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 13. Meisenheim: Hain, 1963.
- Renard, John. *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Sawyer, Caroline G. "Revising Alexander: Structure and Evolution in Ahmedî's Ottoman Iskendernâme (c. 1400)." *Edebiyât* 13 (2003): 225–43.
- Seçkin, Neşe. "Hamzavi Kissa-i İskender (101a-200bv.): Metin, Sözlüğü ve Dilbilgisi Özellikleri." Unpublished MA thesis, Ankara University, 1991.
- Smith, J. M. Jr. "Djalāyir, Djalāyirid." *EI*² 2, fascs. 5–7 (1956).
- Stoneman, Richard, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton, eds. *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*. Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012.
- Stoneman, Richard. *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend*. New Haven: Yale, 2008.
- Stoneman, Richard. *The Greek Alexander Romance*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- Subtelny, M. E. "Mīr °Alī Shīr Nawā°ī." *EI*² 7 (1991).
- Tezcan, Baki. "The Memory of the Mongols in Early Ottoman Historiography." In H. Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, eds., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, 23–38.
- Trachoulia, Nikolette S. "The Venice Alexander Romance, Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5: A Study of Alexander the Great as an Imperial Paradigm in

- Byzantine Art and Literature.” Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1997.
- Trachoulias, Nikolette S. *The Greek Alexander Romance*. Athens: Exandas, 1997.
- Ünver, İsmail. ‘İskender (Edebiyat)’. TDVİA 22 (2000).
- Ünver, İsmail. “Türk Edebiyatında Manzum İskender-nâmeler.” Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Ankara University, 1975.
- Van Donzel, E. et al. “İskandar Nāma, iii. In classical Ottoman literature.” EI² 4.61–64 (1973).
- Wittek, Paul. “The Taking of Aydos Castle: A Ghazi Legend and Its Transformation.” In George Makdisi, ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H. A. R. Gibb*. Leiden: Brill, 1965, 662–72.
- Wittek, Paul. “Yazijioghlu Ali on the Christian Turks of the Dobruja.” *BSOAS* 14 (1952): 640–68.
- Wittek, Paul. *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: Studies in the History of Turkey, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries*. Ed. Colin Heywood. Milton Park: Routledge, 2012.
- Wittek, Paul. *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938.
- Yazıcıoğlu, Ahmed Bican. *Dürr-i Mekkun*. Ed. Laban Kaptein. Asch: privately published, 2007.
- Yazıcızāde Ali. *Tevarih-i Âl-i Selçuk*. Ed. Abdullah Bakır. İstanbul: Çamlıca, 2009.
- Yerasimos, Stéphane, and Benjamin Lellouch, eds. *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000.
- Yerasimos, Stéphane. *La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques*. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1990.
- Yoltar, Aysin. “The Role of Illustrated Manuscripts in Ottoman Luxury Book Production: 1413—1520.” Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2002.
- Yürekli, Zeynep. *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire: The Politics of Bektashi Shrines in the Classical Age*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012.