

**ALEXANDER RE-MAPPED: GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY IN THE *ALEXANDER ROMANCE* IN
ARMENIA**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the reception of legendary traditions of Alexander III of Macedon in a region peripheral to his historical empire: Armenia. Its interest is in the relationship between the edges of the world in the *Alexander Romance*, and Alexander's place and identity in Armenian literature. The central question is: to what extent did writers in the Armenian language adopt, alter or subvert the image of Alexander and the geographical ideas expressed in the *Alexander Romance*?

It finds that the complexity of the Armenian response to Alexander is located particularly in a literary tradition of the medieval period: the composition of *kafas* (short monorhymed poems) to accompany the *Alexander Romance* narrative, starting in the late 13th, early 14th century by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i and continued in the 16th century primarily by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and his pupil Zak'aria Gnunec'i.

This thesis first seeks precursors to the *kafas*' contents in three genres of Armenian text relevant to Alexander: geography, history and apocalypse. Particular attention is paid to the use of Alexander as marker of geographical extremity, pursuing the ways that these texts presaged the *kafas* – and highlighting how often they did not. The second and larger section of the thesis turns to the *kafas* about Alexander's encounters with remote regions and foreign kings as multifarious Armenian responses to the *Alexander Romance*. It translates and analyses their contents, as well as drawing lateral lines across text networks in and beyond the Armenian language that situate the *kafas* in the full breadth of their contexts. This thesis answers its central question: through these poetic interventions, Armenian traditors re-mapped the world of the *Alexander Romance* to suit a medieval Christian Armenian cosmological understanding.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION AND MANUSCRIPT REFERENCE

This thesis transliterates Armenian according to a modified version of the Hübschmann-Meillet-Benveniste (HMB) system used in *Revue des Études Arméniennes*. The modification is the transliteration of ջ as 'j' and ձ as 'dz'. Where it quotes other scholars, this thesis does not alter their transliterations.

All translations from the Armenian *Alexander Romance* and its *kafas* are original to this thesis. The Armenian text is provided, either in the body of the thesis or in the footnote. Where an English translation exists of other Armenian texts, it is used. The typical citation format in the footnote is: '*Name of Text*, Section/Chapter where applicable (Translator's surname and year of publication: page number[s])'. Where no published English translation exists, an original translation is provided in the body of the thesis, with the Armenian text provided in the footnote, and its source cited. All translations from other languages are taken from published scholarship and cited accordingly.

Armenian manuscripts are referred to following the system of Coulie 2014. Where the abbreviations of the repository are less well-known, their own shelfmark systems are also given, eg: LOB4580 (British Library Or. 4580).

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“More especially we entreat you on behalf of the rude writing and errors of this book, for we were busy from autumn until Easter, and it was only finished then. For we were delayed by the quantity of snow and excessive cold.”

– colophon to manuscript LOB2608 (British Library Or. 2608),
no. 54 in Conybeare 1913.

INTRODUCTION

“I subdued Media and Armenia, Ebesia and all the kingdom of Persia that had formerly belonged to Darius. Then I took guides, intending to go deep into the desert, in the direction of the constellation of the Plough. They counselled against going that way because of the numbers of wild beasts that live in those regions.”

– Greek *Alexander Romance* II.31-31 (Stoneman 1991: 115)

Thus does Alexander III of Macedon (356 – 323 BCE) leave the world of his historical conquest and enter a remote landscape beyond reality. There he encounters men with saws for hands, fleas as big as tortoises, trees that grow and shrink with the passing of each day – a panoply of unnatural beings that clearly define his distance from the real, known world of Macedon, the Greek states and Achaemenid Persia. Imagined as a map (as, indeed, came to be the case in medieval *mappae mundi*), this narrative describes a central world of civilisation with lands populated by wild peoples and impossible creatures at its edges, with Armenia at the boundary between the two zones.

Coming to Armenia in the *Alexander Romance*

Reports of Alexander’s invasion and conquest of Achaemenid Persia (336 – 323 BCE) developed alongside the campaign and in the centuries following his death. Some, considered more or less historical, survive via the later works of Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*, 1st century CE), Quintus Curtius Rufus (*Histories of Alexander the Great*, 1st century CE), Plutarch (*Life of Alexander*, 1st – 2nd century CE) and Arrian (*The Anabasis of Alexander*, 2nd century CE), as well as the epitome of Justin (*Philippic Histories* of Pompeius Trogus, made c. 2nd century CE), all of which drew on earlier sources. Even in the earliest times, it is clear that the extraordinary life of Alexander lent itself to legend: Plutarch recounts a story in which “Onesicritus was reading aloud the fourth book of his history, which contained the tale of the Amazons, at which Lysimachus smiled and asked quietly, ‘I wonder where I was then.’”¹ Another version of his history, rich in legendary material, coalesced into

¹ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 46 (Scott-Kilvert 1973: 302-303).

textual form in Greek by the 3rd century CE at the latest: this is the text now commonly called the *Alexander Romance*, though it was usually known in history by such names as *The History of Alexander*, and falsely attributed to the historian Callisthenes, now referred to as 'Pseudo-Callisthenes'. Over the centuries subsequent to its initial composition, the text was subject to expansion – usually of the legendary material – and revision in Greek, as well as translations into numerous languages. This included an Armenian translation in c. 5th century CE.²

The *Alexander Romance* follows the conventional narrative of Alexander's conquest, with the addition of fictional childhood episodes – such as the birth story that makes him the son of Nectanebo II, final pharaoh of Egypt before the Achaemenid reconquest, rather than Philip II of Macedon – and a number of experiences at the edges of the world, ranging from Alexander's encounter with the naked philosophers in real but unfamiliar India to assaults by and on impossible creatures in places that could not exist at the very edge of the world. In history, he failed to go so far: Quintus Curtius Rufus has the general Coenus speak on behalf of the weary army at the Hyphasis River to convince Alexander to turn back, saying, "We stand almost at the end of the earth; you are preparing to enter another world and you seek an India even the Indians do not know. You wish to flush out from their coverts and lairs men who live among wild animals and serpents, so that you may traverse in victory more land than the sun looks upon!"³ His failure in reality to reach the end of the earth transformed distant regions into another world, full of mythic possibilities, that in legend he could enter.⁴ That place is populated in some cases by peoples living in unfamiliar ways – more extreme than any lifestyle encountered in foreign kingdoms – such as nude asceticism or rule by women, and in other cases by peoples who are not people at all, but monstrous, inhuman. Elsewhere, there are only wild creatures of outlandish proportions or features. The separate nature of the worlds is articulated in one version of the *Alexander Romance* when Alexander and his army

² Stoneman 2011; Moennig 2016; Nawotka 2017: 4-5. For the global reach of the *Alexander Romance*, a useful overview is provided by Stoneman 2008. The translation and development of *Alexander Romance* traditions in many other languages, though by no means all, is well covered in the chapters of Zuwiyya 2011.

³ Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander* IX.3.8 (Yardley 2004: 218).

⁴ Romm 1994: 121.

encounter horse-men: “Alexander wanted to capture some of them and bring them back to our world.”⁵ The cartography of this remote world is complex, resisting neat delineation, not only because of its disparate accretion from a variety of texts, but because it is a literary motif: though inspired in part by real, known (to a certain extent) places such as India, its function is not scientific geography in any modern sense but the creation of a signifier of distance. Like the later visual *mappae mundi* of the Christian and Islamic traditions, their edges fringed with the fantastic, it creates a narrative map of the familiar and the unfamiliar through which Alexander journeys, which endures even as knowledge about the real world changed over the centuries of the *Alexander Romance*’s reception.⁶

This narrative map was not new. From the earliest times, geographical ideas as expressed in Greek literature were bounded by experience. The Homeric epics reveal a map of the familiar – mainland Greece, the Aegean and its coastlines, and Egypt – beyond which the landscape shaded into myth: as Daniela Dueck writes, “one can almost mentally map the zones where solid information becomes vague.”⁷ Over the subsequent centuries, knowledge of the world expanded and Greek literature featured first-hand and second-hand reports of far-off regions from Herodotus of Halicarnassus (c. 484 – c. 425 BCE, primarily Persia, Egypt and Scythia), who somewhat set the stage for what followed⁸ – and then later writers including Ctesias of Cnidus (5th – 4th century BCE, Persia and India), Megasthenes (c.350 – c.290 BCE, India) and Pytheas of Massalia (4th century BCE, northwestern Europe). Such texts continued to populate the world’s edges with the fantastic: monstrous peoples, improbable animals and the incomprehensibility of complete darkness. Some of this reflected real differences, such as animal species unknown to the Mediterranean and the drastic shifts in daylight hours of the polar north, but knowledge never made the whole world known. A narrative map endured of a central area (the Greek world) bordered by ethnographically curious but

⁵ Greek *Alexander Romance* II.41 (Stoneman 1991: 125).

⁶ Casari 2012: 177.

⁷ Dueck 2012: 22.

⁸ Hartog 1988.

nonetheless human cultures (such as Persia) bordered by the remote, with the location of the latter merely moving in line with literary reports of the truth, as C. H. Roseman notes of Thule:

“The important point, however, is that whatever geographical point Pytheas called ‘Thoule’, whether Iceland, western Norway, some uninhabited rock, a distant land mass seen in temperature inversion, or even some island eroded away centuries ago by Atlantic storms, he immortalized Thoule as the very last of named places: a place at the limits of the cosmos. The lure of such an island fired the imagination, and as knowledge of northern lands expanded, so Thoule retreated, staying always just beyond the familiar. All maps based on Ptolemy show it near the Shetlands in the Atlantic; on modern maps the name today marks a remote outpost on the western coast of Greenland, and now, after lunar exploration, an area on the moon also bears the name.”⁹

The Greek *Alexander Romance* develops its version of this Greek narrative map in its various versions, typically set out into recensions.¹⁰ The earliest, called α , represented in a single manuscript known as A that dates from between 1013 and 1124 CE and resides in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, already contains some of the episodes that define the edges of the map in Alexander’s letter to Aristotle about India: attacks by terrifying animals and his experience at the oracular trees of the sun and moon. Later Greek recensions from β onwards add more features in his letter to Olympias about a journey to remote regions after the death of Darius: his journey into the Land of Darkness, his search for the Water of Life and eventually his ascent to heaven and descent to the bottom of the ocean. The neatness of these recensions is questionable. The Armenian translation of the *Alexander Romance*, made in c. 5th century CE, is considered to be based on the α recension but uses a fuller version than that represented in A and already includes a version of the Letter to Olympias.¹¹ Differences such as this have led Giusto Traina to propose that the Armenian translation be considered its own recension, rather than merely a translation of α .¹² This instability in the delineations of the recensions is valuable: it highlights the danger of centring the *Alexander Romance* rather than seeing the literary legends of Alexander as a far wider network of ongoing developments, translations, regional differences and independent regional compositions (all

⁹ Roseman 1994: 158.

¹⁰ Stoneman 2011 provides an overview of the Greek recensions and their Latin translations.

¹¹ Nawotka 2017: 30-33.

¹² Traina 2016a.

reflecting only the scribal component of oral networks) to which the Greek text in its various forms belongs but is only a part. The place of the Armenian translation and its subsequent developments in an Armenian context, as well as other appearances of Alexander in Armenian literature, is better examined by discarding any fixation on neat schema.

What, firstly, of Armenia *within* the *Alexander Romance*? Alexander did not conquer the Armenian highlands in reality, though he inherited the Achaemenid satrapy and appointed a satrap.¹³ In legend, however, he subdued Armenia and journeyed beyond it into the first region of the remote world, as described in the Letter to Olympias. The Armenian translation of the *Alexander Romance* clarifies the location of Armenia and the wider Caucasus right at the boundary between his real defeat *in absentia* of Darius III (and, in person, the usurpers who murdered Darius III) and his entry into the wild country:

I built in the Breasts of Isi a city, Alek'sandria Kattios, and from that place I expelled Dareh up to the entry of the land of the Armenians, where the Dklat' [*Tigris*] and the source of the Ep'rat [*Euphrates*] are, which had been taken by Dareh and his soldiers... [*Darius is killed and his murderers punished.*] Then, setting off, we hastened and travelled to a thick forest, in which I commanded a sign be set up [to commemorate] the submission of Besos and Zarivardan and the Mazk kingdom and the Medes and Armenians and Georgians and all the Persian lands that the great Dareh reigned. From there, taking many guides, I wished to enter further into the country of the wilderness of the Medes.¹⁴

This is followed by Alexander's swift arrival in a forest inhabited by men standing 24 cubits tall with hands and fingers like saws, which is only the beginning of his encounters with monstrous peoples and animals.

Elsewhere in Greek literature, the location of the Armenian highlands and the greater Caucasus

¹³ Hammond 1996.

¹⁴ Simonyan 1989: 252. Եւ յԻսի գոգն շինեցի քաղաք Աղէքսանդրիա զԿատտիոս, որ և անդուստ հալածական արարի զԴարեհ մինչև ի մուտս Հայոց աշխարհին, ուրանաւր է Դկլաթ և Եփրատայ աղբերն, գոր ի բունն անկեալ Դարեհի և յիւրոց զաւրականացն... Ապա և անդուստ խաղացեալք ղիմեցաք և յածեալ ի թաւ մայրիս, յորում և նշանակ իմն և անուանս հրամայեցի դնել առ հնազանդեալսն զԲեսոսի և զՋարիվարդանայ և զՄազկայ թագաւորութիւն և զմարս և զհայս և զվրացիս և զամենայն զՊարսկաստան աշխարհ, որում և թագաւորեաց մեծն Դարեհ: Եւ անտից առեալ բազում առաջնորդս՝ կամեցայ մտանել յետոյ կողմանն անապատին Մարաց...

is uncertain.¹⁵ Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c.276 – c.194 BCE) struggled with the region, as reported in the *Geography* of Strabo: “he cannot say how much further the distance is to Armenia and the northern mountains, as it is unmeasured.” Other features of Armenia are “unknown”.¹⁶ The Caucasus is moved – confused with the invented Rhipaeian Mountains or attached to the Hindu Kush – its consistent location being its place at the edge of the central world in the Greek narrative map. In one Caucasus: “Visibility in these parts was further reduced by a rain of feathers which perpetually filled the air.”¹⁷ It is always remote. Later developments of legends about Alexander in Greek, Syriac and Arabic in particular see him wall up the apocalyptic forces of Gog and Magog somewhere in the north: a location often associated with Armenia or the two major passes – Darial and Derbent – in the Greater Caucasus mountains.

Darius’ death at the edge of Armenia and Alexander’s subsequent departure from there places Armenia in a dangerous cartographical position: at the place where Alexander crosses from the central world to the remote landscape. This danger is to be considered from a literary perspective. What is under examination here is the literary experience of encountering and describing the remote. How did Armenians write on the register of geographic-descriptive legendary literature like the *Alexander Romance*, in relation to their own location in its narrative map? The question that initiated this research project was: did Armenian traditors¹⁸ subvert their border-zone placement?

This line of enquiry was rooted in a perception of the various Armenian kingdoms, principalities and disparate polities as subject to various empires in reality – from Achaemenid Persia and the Successor states at the time of Alexander to the later division of the Armenian kingdom between Rome and Sasanian Persia approximately a century before the *Alexander Romance*’s likely translation and, as the text continued to be copied over the centuries, the various invasions and political manoeuvrings that saw Armenians subject to powers such as the Arabs, the Byzantines, the

¹⁵ Traina 2016b.

¹⁶ Fragment 83 (Roller 2010: 87-89).

¹⁷ Bolton 1962: 74.

¹⁸ ‘Traditor’ is being used here in its folkloristic sense: a person who holds and passes on an oral or literary tradition.

Seljuks, the Khwarazmians, the Mongols – and the relationship of this reality to the text of the *Alexander Romance*. Would Armenian translators and literary traditors want to see themselves in literature at the edge of a ruling empire, next to the monsters? Daniel L. Selden argues that: “Text networks on the scale of the *Alexander Romance* united readers across Eurasia, without homogenizing them, in a utopian vision of the world”¹⁹ – a utopia he earlier describes as a “Levantine-Mediterranean empire fantasmatically at its finest ... a differentiated world pacified and united where each community finds its proper place within the whole – although not without internal tension – as part of an ideal tributary order”.²⁰ Thus, the multilingual nature of the narrative’s diffusion simultaneously typified the breadth of the empires based within the Mediterranean and Near East and, so Selden’s argument goes, “aided readers in negotiating the political, economic, and ethnological complexities of tributary rule, in particular its peculiar dialectic between the persistence of local communities under government protection, and their concomitant negation by the apparatus of the state” via the utopian ideal of the text.²¹ This “utopia” that Selden sees in the legendary Alexander traditions is contingent upon the reality of empire: its unavoidable existence, the need for affected regions to adjust to their reality – and, most interestingly, the desire to imagine varied narratives in which communities survive imperial negation. The Alexander traditions spread like an empire, but were not retold passively.

Receiving and retelling imperial narratives is critical to the experiences of regions subject to imperialism. The power of narratives of empire has been laid out by Edward W. Said in his 1993 work *Culture and Imperialism*, where he writes in the introduction of the importance of the “power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging” for developing the cultural support for imperialism in the dominant region(s) and suppressing resistance in the subject region(s).²² Throughout the book he traces the development of imperial narratives in the 19th and 20th

¹⁹ Selden 2012: 49.

²⁰ Selden 2012: 39.

²¹ Selden 2012: 49.

²² Said 1994: xiii.

centuries CE – those narratives that present the empire as a constant, whether in the backdrop or foreground, as a necessity, as a beneficial situation, its existence entirely unquestioned or only partially questioned – as well as narratives of resistance. Many of the literary legends of Alexander share functions with those supporting later imperialism: presenting his conquest as an adventure, his empire as a divinely ordained inevitability. He is praised for being a great leader and conqueror in ways that transcend violence: “It is not by fighting that you have overcome so many enemies and cities, but by your cleverness.”²³ To those conquered, he is simply a conqueror.

Not only that: he is a mapmaker, too. The narratives of Alexander’s conquest describe the “proper place”²⁴ of peoples he encountered in a narrative map of his empire. Said again: “Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control.”²⁵ Alexander’s narrative map exerts spatial control over the geography it encompasses: exploring and charting a central world of familiar civilisations and a remote world at its edges. Though the latter is defined in its descriptions by traits of real uncontrollability – Alexander enters and leaves, but builds no cities, appoints no satraps, garrisons no troops – the act of putting it on the narrative map figuratively sets it in its place. It is this imperial idea of the world that Armenian traditors received in the *Alexander Romance* – how did they react?

This question is not unprecedented. Other traditions of the *Alexander Romance* and other Alexander legendary material took the narrative – including the map itself – and altered it to suit their setting. A geographic realignment occurred in the most literal sense in east Asian legends of Alexander, where the unfamiliar west became the remote region entered and explored by Alexander. This is seen, for instance, in Chinese geographies inspired by Islamic traditions of Alexander/Dhu ’l-Qarnayn that set a fortress – akin to that he constructed against Gog and Magog –

²³ Greek *Alexander Romance* III.23 (Stoneman 1991: 142).

²⁴ Selden 2012: 39.

²⁵ Said 1994: 271.

in “Şa-piet-şa ... the land where the Sun sets in the West.”²⁶ The Malay *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* has the alterity increase as Alexander journeys west, until he reaches the Maghrib where he is greeted by a man who stands “his feet above and his head below” and speaks no known language.²⁷ This propagation of Islamic Malay and Sumatran versions of the *Alexander Romance* took place in a context of increasing Portuguese belligerence in southeast Asia: traitors used Iskandar’s legend in this way and others to participate in wider Islamic culture – a legend that assimilates and neutralises the dangers of the world with conversion to Islam – and thereby build up an identity aimed at providing safety from the Portuguese.²⁸ Identity-building in Iranian literature also used Alexander. The Iranian situation is complex, with multiple takes on Alexander circulating, but one text provides an illustrative case. The *Dēnkard*, a Zoroastrian text compiled by Aturpāt ī Emētān in the 9th century CE, retells the (apocryphal) story of Alexander destroying the sacred Zoroastrian texts as part of a tripartite narrative that culminates in the restoration of order. Selden stresses that “what the tale has to say about the Avesta it says in Avestan terms, a decentering” – one in which “Iskander remains not only dialectically indispensable to the emergence and ideological formation of the historico-political entity that we still know today as Iran: for Pahlavī writers, he constitutes the pivot around which the history of *Ērānšahr* turned.”²⁹ What Selden shows is that this decentering of Alexander from his usual place was put to the task of contributing to a literary creation of the idea of Iran at the time that Islam was ousting Zoroastrianism as the major religion of the region. These examples of localised uses of Alexander in Chinese, Malay and Iranian literature helped inspire the key question of this project: did similar inversions or subversions happen in the Armenian literary tradition?

The Armenian translation of the *Alexander Romance* is considered largely unchanged from its

²⁶ Yamanaka 2012, citing Zhou Zhizhong, *Record of Strange Countries* from 1366 CE.

²⁷ Ng 2006: 297-301.

²⁸ Ng 2016. Other uses of Alexander included claiming descent from him, which took place in regions including Melaka, Minangkabau, Palembang, Aceh, Deli, Johor and Pahang. Alexander traditions also reached Javanese and Buginese literature.

²⁹ Selden 2013: 156-158.

lost Greek *vorlage*. There is some element of uncertainty here, as the gap between the initial translation – if indeed it was as early as c. 5th century – and the first two surviving manuscripts of the late 13th, early 14th century is up to 800 years long: ample time for alteration. However, as much as it is possible to ascertain, the earliest surviving *Alexander Romance* in Armenian reflects the Greek.³⁰ Mentions of Armenia are not greatly expanded upon in the text. A slight elaboration is found upon Alexander’s entry to the region: “he travelled for many days through waterless places and snake-infested valleys, and have gone through Ariakē, he arrived at the river Aracani, which flows from the flowery mountains of the province Angl and is the source of the Ep’rat (Euphrates) opposite the mountain Ararat.”³¹ A little later elaboration is also given on the flow patterns of the Dklat’ and Aracani rivers: “In Mesopotamia and Bablyon, the great rivers are the Dklat’ and the Aracani, which flow to the river Nile. They say that when the Nile annually overflows to soak the world-nourisher Egypt, then these rivers Dklat’ and Aracani become empty, but when it relents and leaves Egypt, they overflow.”³² This suggests an Armenian traditor’s care for regional detail, but says little else. Seeking the location of Armenia in relation to the legends of Alexander requires an expanded search.

Armenian-language writing, from its initial efflorescence after the invention of the Armenian alphabet c. 400 CE to the medieval period, locates Armenia variously: in the north, in the east, in the world’s centre. A short summary with a few examples suffices here. Sebēos in the 7th century writes

³⁰ Cowe 1996; Lombardi and Uluhogian 1998.

³¹ Simonyan 1989: 199. անցեալ գնաց շատ աւուրս ընդ անջրդի տեղիս և ընդ խորաձորս աւձուտս և ընդ Արիակէ գնացեալ, եկեալ հասանէր ի գետն Արածանի, որ հոսի ի ծաղկաւէտ լերանցն Անգղայ գաւառին. և ակունքն է Եփրատայ՝ հանդէպ լերինն Արարատայ... Compare to Greek *Alexander Romance* II.9 (Stoneman 1991: 96): “he marched on for many days through waterless country full of ravines, until he eventually came via Ariane to the river Euphrates.”

³² Simonyan 1989: 200. Է Դկլաթ մեծ գետ և Արածանի ի Միջագետս և ի Բաբելոնի, որք հոսին ի Նեղոս գետ: Զի ասեն, յորժամ Նեղոս տարևորական ժամանակաւք գեղանի արբուցանել զաշխարհաբոյժն Եգիպտոս, յայնժամ գետս այս Դկլաթ և Արածանի թափուր լինեն, իսկ յորժամ զիջանէ և ի բաց ելանէ յԵգիպտոսէ՝ սոքա գեղուն: Compare to Greek *Alexander Romance* II.9 (Stoneman 1991: 96-97), which is entirely lacking these lines in any recension besides α. In the notes to his translation of this section in the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, Wolohojian already notes this apparent Armenian addition (Wolohojian 1969: 88-89, with notes).

that “[Heraclius] travelled through the regions of the north, making directly for the city of Karin.”³³ This location is shared by other earlier writers such as Erišē (410 – 475), Agat’angelos (c. 4th – 5th century) and Movsēs Xorenac’i (c. 8th century, though this date is contested), though not without the knowledge of people – usually threatening – from further north in or beyond the mountains of the Caucasus. By the 10th and 11th centuries the idea of Armenia as belonging to the east emerges, typically expressed in relation to Byzantium, while in the time of the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia (12th – 14th centuries), Greater Armenia is in the east from the Cilician perspective. Concurrently, a Christian idea of Armenia at the centre of the world is expressed. The 10th-century historian T’ovma Arcruni, who places Armenia in the north in relation to the general Bugha, writes: “After the fulfillment of the divine command, the billowing waters brought the ark from the East to the middle of the earth; it came to rest on the mountains of Korduk’...”³⁴ The 7th-century *Geography* of Anania Širakac’i describes Upper Armenia (the Armenian highlands) as:

...the highest, not only of Armenia but of the whole world and this is why it is called the ‘summit of the earth’. It issues waters to the four corners of the earth, giving rise to four very powerful rivers: the Euphrates to the west, the Arax to the east, the *Gayl* to the south and the Acampis, i.e., the *Voh*, to the north.³⁵

This centralises Armenia according to already-ancient Mesopotamian ideas of geography that informed the Book of Genesis and subsequent commentaries on the story of Adam and Eve, where the Garden is described as being in a high place and the origin of four rivers.³⁶ Armenian writings on Genesis share these features, though the Garden is typically situated to the east.³⁷ Elsewhere in his text, meanwhile, Anania Širakac’i labours to locate Jerusalem at the centre of the world.³⁸

³³ *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* 38 (Thomson, Howard-Johnston and Greenwood 1999: Volume 1, 81).

³⁴ T’ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Arcrunik’* I 1 (Thomson 1985: 81).

³⁵ *Geography* L1881: V.22.i (Hewsen 1992: 59).

³⁶ The description of the world as having four corners – thereby centring what lies between them – is ancient. Scholarship on Mesopotamian geography is extensive. See, for instance, Michalowski 2013 for the earliest stages of the “four corners” concept.

³⁷ Stone 2013: 21, 50-52, 99, 101, 139-141, 161. Some Western European exegetes took up the notion of Armenia as the location of Eden and the origin of the four rivers (Euphrates, Tigris, Phasis and Araxes) in the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods (Scafi 2006: 317-322).

³⁸ Zuckerman 2002.

This multiplicity of Armenian narrative maps highlights some of the dangers in attempting to describe the reception of the *Alexander Romance* in Armenia. Foremost among them is looking for a singular Armenian response to the figure of Alexander. Related dangers lie in questions of identity. What is Armenia? Who is Armenian? Mention of “Armenia” and “Armenians” in texts like the *Alexander Romance* or histories obscures authorial intent on what precisely is meant by these terms. A. E. Redgate has highlighted, for instance, the danger in seeking Armenian unity from historians who built up the image of specific *naxarar* families such as the Mamikoneans, Bagratunis and Arccrunis and their followers under the word “Armenian”.³⁹ Elsewhere, the idea of a unifying anti-Chalcedonian Armenian Christian identity hides the other ways in which it was possible to be both Armenian and Christian.⁴⁰ Attempting to deal in depth with the politicised subject of Armenian identity is beyond the scope of this project, but the impossibility of an easy definition underlies it. The flux of Armenian political entities and group and individual identities throughout the many centuries of Alexander’s reception calls for a polyvalent outlook, as indicated by the realities of international relations and concepts of geography suggested by the placement of Armenia in Armenian-language writing. The Greek narrative map, likewise, proves a sticking spot, as looking at the world through a Greek lens of a centre and a periphery elides the perspective – in fact, the many perspectives – of that so-called periphery. As Nizar F. Hermes documents for the Muslim world a rich tradition of describing alterity in the Occident over the centuries that Western Europeans constructed their Orient⁴¹ à la Said, so too were Armenian traditors not necessarily encumbered by where ancient Greeks thought they lived vis-à-vis the monsters. Selden writes of the Greco-Roman and Iranian historiographers that they “figured Alexander/Iskander within two entirely different tropological frameworks, whose asymmetry it is not possible to resolve”.⁴² This has turned out to be prescient for the examination of the Armenian tradition undertaken over the course of this project.

³⁹ Redgate 2007: 289-296.

⁴⁰ Redgate 2007: 282-289.

⁴¹ Hermes 2012, in conversation with Said 2003.

⁴² Selden 2013: 158-159.

The complexity of the Armenian response to Alexander is located particularly in a literary tradition that grew up in the Armenian language in the medieval period: the composition of *kafas* (short monorhymed poems) to accompany the text translation of the *Alexander Romance*, starting in the late 13th, early 14th century by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i and continued in the 16th century primarily by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and his pupil Zak'aria Gnunec'i. Later, from at least the 16th century onwards, the *kafas* are also copied separately in *taġaran* (anthology of poetry and hymns) and *žoġovacu* (miscellany) collections.⁴³ They elaborate on the *Alexander Romance* narrative, sometimes adding original details or commentary on events, and in doing so reveal how Armenian traditors thought about the text. This includes the sections describing what Alexander encounters once he has crossed from Armenia to remote spaces at the edges of the world. There, the authors re-map the *Alexander Romance*, not setting Armenia or Armenians against Greek delineations of centre and periphery, but fitting Alexander's experiences within their own view of the world: turning the remote regions into a Christian space, a knowable and wonderful reflection of the Creator's prowess. This space inspires contemplation and, at its height, imparts moral teachings to its identifiably Armenian audience(s). Additionally, the *kafas* break out from the bounds of neat recension schema: though they appear to have a clear starting point with Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i and a direct continuation with Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i, their lives in *taġaran* and *žoġovacu* manuscripts are overlapping and distinct, each manuscript making its own collection of Alexander poetry in individual settings. The *kafas* show that the reception of Alexander in the Armenian language is far greater than the *Alexander Romance* narrative – and, while the much-copied *Alexander Romance* was clearly very popular, in its *kafas* are found the ways in which Armenian traditors re-mapped the *Romance*.

The journey through Greek narrative maps into Armenia has therefore led to this point: not quite a decentring of the *Alexander Romance* and its imperialist map by Armenian traditors, but a refiguring of the text through the medium of the *kafas* – a re-mapping of its world to fit their own

⁴³ Simonyan 1975: 41-134 is a valuable study of the Alexander *kafas*. Maranci 2003-2004 provides a preliminary consideration in English of the *kafas'* role in the *Alexander Romance*.

Christian cosmology and edifying purposes. This thesis covers the end steps of that journey.

Past Scholarship

The Armenian *Alexander Romance* has interested scholars throughout history. Arguably, the earliest scholarly inventions were by writers such as the 10th-century historian T'ovma Arcruni, interpreting events in the *Alexander Romance*. The composition of *kafas* represent another scholarly intervention: learned *vardapets* reading the ancient text for their own modern audiences.

Subsequent generations carried out their own work along diffuse strands. This typically took place in the Armenian language. The first publication of the Armenian *Alexander Romance* was in 1842 by the Mxit'arist Fathers of Venice, utilising the late 13th, early 14th-century manuscript V424 (held in the monastery of the Mxit'arists on San Lazzaro degli Armeni, in the Venetian lagoon, Italy) that contains the earliest *kafas* and illuminations for the Armenian text. At the time, the translation of the *Alexander Romance* was attributed to the historian Movsēs Xorenac'i, an assertion that has subsequently been disproven. Another monumental 19th-century work was the study by J. Dashian/Tashean, a Mxit'arist Father in Vienna.⁴⁴

Though the significance of the Armenian *Alexander Romance* as an early translation of the Greek text was recognised in the 19th century, international scholarship about it has been hampered up to the present time by the language barrier: many scholars of the *Alexander Romance* are already proficient in numerous languages – such as Ancient Greek, Latin, Syriac, Persian, Arabic and the European vernaculars, depending on their areas of expertise – but lack the time or institutional resources to devote to learning a more 'obscure' language such as Classical Armenian. This is by no means a criticism of their many linguistic skills – in part, it reflects the impossibility of any scholar mastering all the languages required to study the entirety of the *Alexander Romance's* global transmission and circulation. Richard Raabe in 1896 attempted a recreation in Greek of the

⁴⁴ Wolohojian 1969: 5-8 outlines the early scholarship on the Armenian *Alexander Romance*.

Armenian *Alexander Romance*, which enabled some attempts to reconstruct the lost Greek *vorlage*, while a translation of the Armenian *Alexander Romance* into English in 1969 by Albert Mugrdich Wolohojian opened up the contents of the narrative to study – but it did not include any of the *kafas*.⁴⁵

Study of the *Alexander Romance* has developed at an exciting rate in the past decades, but publications have often neglected the Armenian translation of the Greek *Alexander Romance* and the impact of the legendary traditions on Armenian literature more widely for the above-mentioned reason. Though *La diffusione dell'eredità classica nell'età tardoantica e medievale: il Romanzo di Alessandro e altri scritti* edited by Rosa Bianca Finazzi and Alfredo Valvo (1998) included a substantial number of essays on the Armenian literature, more recent publications have not continued this breadth of coverage. Richard Stoneman's *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (2008) mentions the Armenian translation only briefly; *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages* edited by Z. David Zuwiyya (2011) does not dedicate a chapter to the Armenian tradition, while *L'historiographie médiévale d'Alexandre le Grand* edited by C. Gaullier-Bougassas (2011) has only one chapter; in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* edited by Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (2012) the Armenian translation and tradition is not the subject of direct study. A new volume, *The Alexander Romance: History and Literature* edited by Richard Stoneman, Krzysztof Nawotka and Agnieszka Wojciechowska (2018), has not yet been available to me for consultation, but its table of contents does not suggest any chapters focused on the Armenian material.

Several scholars of Armenian history and literature have studied the *Alexander Romance*. This includes the significant work of Hasmik Simonyan, who produced an updated Armenian edition of the *Alexander Romance* in 1989, presenting three versions of the text: a critical edition, based primarily on M5472 and also using V424, manuscript 2 from the A. Kiurdian collection (held in the monastery of the Mxit'arists on San Lazzaro degli Armeni), J473 and M10448, of prose and *kafas*; an

⁴⁵ Wolohojian 1969.

edition of M10151, a 13th-century manuscript lacking *kafas* that she proposes as an exemplar of the first eight or so centuries of the *Alexander Romance*'s format in Armenian; and a translation of the later folk tradition, an abbreviated version of the *Alexander Romance* and *kafas*.⁴⁶ She also produced a significant monograph on the *kafas*, discussing their appearance in the *Alexander Romance*, the tale of the *City of Bronze*, the *History of P'ahlul the King* and the *Story of the Boy and the Girl*.⁴⁷ Her work is a giant without whose shoulders this thesis could not stand. Giusto Traina *et alii* published in 2003 a splendid facsimile of Venice 424, accompanied by an Italian translation of the prose narrative and the *kafas* that appear in that manuscript, the first significant translation of the *kafas* into a modern Western European language.⁴⁸ Christina Maranci has devoted two articles to the illuminations of the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, Dickran Kouymjian has likewise examined the illuminations and their connections to other traditions, Aram Topchyan (in the C. Gaullier-Bougassas volume mentioned above) has summarised many of the textual dependencies on the *Alexander Romance*, Robert Thomson is the most recent scholar to thoroughly outline the ways in which Movsēs Xorenac'i made use of the *Alexander Romance* in his *History of the Armenians*.⁴⁹ These and other writings on the Armenian *Alexander Romance* are engaged with throughout the thesis.

However, their excellent work has not been exhaustive, and the subject remains open to further research, particularly from scholars who combine knowledge of the wider legendary traditions with a specialism in Armenian literature. This thesis comes from that position. The extent of the Alexander legends makes evident the fact that the text popularly known now as the *Alexander Romance* is only a part of the wider network of prose and poetry about Alexander, a perspective essential to understanding the *kafas* as both integral to the Armenian *Alexander Romance* and as a separate set of circulating texts. This project's concerns with how the edges of the world are mapped and re-mapped brings a focused approach to the *kafas*. Distance puts Alexander at his most

⁴⁶ Simonyan 1989; Topchyan 2011: 100-101 describes the folk tradition.

⁴⁷ Simonyan 1975.

⁴⁸ Traina et al. 2003.

⁴⁹ Maranci 2003-2004; Maranci 2009; Kouymjian 2012; Kouymjian *forthcoming*; Topchyan 2011; the introduction to Thomson 2006.

extreme: as larger-than-life in his combat against giant animals and impossible people, as furthest from his literary audiences both literally in miles and more figuratively in comprehension. His experiences must be explained, whether as flights of fancy or as – in the *kafas* – evidence of the divine Creator’s miraculous works. In reality, Alexander was turned back from his invasion of the Indian subcontinent by a discontented army. In legend, he is turned back by angels, prophetic trees and the knowledge of his impending death, and thus becomes a lesson: the question of what he finds, in a version of his story where he succeeds in reaching to Ocean, to the Land of Darkness, almost to the Christian Paradise, invites instructional answers. What is even the point of his endeavours? These are enormously popular concerns in literature about Alexander across the world. How the *kafas* contributed to and were a part of these centuries-long musings about the ancient Macedonian king from the perspective of traditors working in the Armenian language has not yet been thoroughly investigated.

The Present Work: Re-mapping the *Alexander Romance*

This thesis strives to understand the work done in the *kafas* to re-map the *Alexander Romance*. In doing so, it will answer its central question: to what extent did writers in the Armenian language adopt, alter or subvert the image of Alexander and the geographical ideas expressed in the *Alexander Romance*?

SECTION ONE seeks Alexander in Armenian geographies, histories and apocalypses. The project started by looking for Alexander in other texts to understand his place in Armenian literary thought before the composition of the first *kafas*. It is not only the Armenian *Alexander Romance* and *kafas* that write about Alexander and, at times, consider his actions at the world’s edges or the geography of those distant places. Texts such as geographies, histories and apocalypses grapple with the weight of Alexander in their worlds. Though manuscripts of these texts are typically as late – if not later – than those containing the *kafas*, they preserve earlier writings than the *kafas*, providing insights into

pre-13th-century ideas of Alexander in Armenian. In other cases, they reveal what was being written at around the same time as the first *kafas*. Particular attention is paid to the use of Alexander as marker of geographical extremity, pursuing the ways that these texts presaged the *kafas* – and highlighting how often they did not.

This section comprises three chapters, detailing the role of Alexander in three genres of Armenian literature – geography, history and apocalypse – up to the Mongol era of the 13th-14th centuries, when the first *kafas* were composed. **Chapter 1: Alexander in Armenian Geographical Texts** focuses on this subject in the two main geographical texts in Armenian: the *Geography* of Anania Širakac’i and the *Geography* of Vardan Arewelc’i. It finds that although Armenian literature has a paucity of geographies, their contents are somewhat relevant to the development of the *kafas*. Anania Širakac’i used the *Alexander Romance* to explain unlikely peoples at the edges of the world as allegories – however, he approached his subject with a desire to describe the world in rational terms and frequently disdained the fantastical features of his inherited classical geography as fabrications. This is an entirely separate concern to that of Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunec’i, whose *kafas* turn such miraculous sights into prompts for Christian awe of the Creator’s work. It is clear that Anania Širakac’i defined the world in Christian terms, as he centred Jerusalem for its religious significance in the Christian Bible, but took a different path in his understanding of that world. Meanwhile, Vardan Arewelc’i saw geography as a tool to understand the divine Creation, but made minimal use of Alexander as a marker of remote regions. The chapter sees that it is apparent that there are multiple ways to map the world as a Christian Armenian.

Chapter 2: Alexander in Armenian Historical Texts explores the myriad and by no means unified uses of Alexander in historical literature, noting with special interest the instances of Alexander being utilised to help explain or understand distant places. There existed no singular Armenian or wider Caucasian project of putting Alexander into local histories – in many texts he is not present at all, while in others he is mentioned briefly for his conquests in antiquity. However, three aspects of his appearance in historical texts point towards the later concerns of the *kafas*’

authors. The first is how the presence or actions of Alexander define a particular place as remote: marvel-filled India in Het'um the Historian's *The Flower of Histories of the East*, Paradise in T'ovma Arcruni's *History of the House of the Arcrunik'*. The second is the appropriation of Alexander by T'ovma Arcruni to give his *naxarar* house an ancestor who faced up to Alexander. If anywhere there appears a response to Alexander's legendary world-conquest that repositions Armenia in relation to the conqueror, it is here. The third aspect is the inclusion of Alexander's walling up of Gog and Magog in historical texts. The chapter concludes that Alexander appeared a significant number of times as a marker of space and distance – most significantly in T'ovma Arcruni's *History of the House of the Arcrunik'*, the first surviving text to fit Alexander within a Christian understanding of the world by interpreting his encounter with human-headed birds as meeting the angels that guard Paradise. It is possible that this directly presaged the *kafas'* Christianising work.

Chapter 3: Alexander in Armenian Apocalyptic Texts concentrates on the apocalyptic legend of Alexander's walling up of Gog and Magog, typically located in the Caucasus, and its Armenian permutations in apocalyptic texts. It focuses specifically on the geography delineated by the Gog and Magog tradition in Armenian literature: the location of the barrier, moved far from the familiar Caucasus, and to what extent this story contributed to an understanding of Alexander's place – his own location and his role – at the edges of the world. The chapter finds that while the *Alexander Romance* and the apocalyptic story share in a geography where people in remote regions are monstrous and threatening, Alexander's encounter with Gog and Magog did not presage the ways that Xač'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunc'e'i used the *kafas* to fit the landscape through which Alexander journeyed into a Christian cosmology.

Taken together, texts of these three genres provide context for the later development of the *kafas*: they indicate some precursors to the contents of the *kafas*, as well as showing in their silences that the *kafas'* authors drew on a wider set of sources than Alexander's previous appearances in Armenian writing. Xač'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunc'e'i could not harvest their content from the rich orchard of Armenian geographic, historical and apocalyptic literature

alone. The discussion in the following chapters will draw the lateral lines across text networks in and beyond the Armenian language that situate the *kafas* in the full breadth of their contexts.

SECTION TWO comprises the longer part of the thesis, exploring the *kafas* in depth. It starts with **Chapter 4: Introduction to Part Two** that introduces the *kafas* as a poetic form – their origins and their proposed audiences – and provides biographical information about the three main poets who composed *kafas* about Alexander: Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i (1260-1330), Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i (c.1478-c.1550) and Zak'aria Gnunec'i (16th century). It discusses the oral life of the *kafas* alongside their written attestations. While it is impossible through the silence of the page to identify precisely who sang and spoke the *kafas* aloud, some probable modes of orality are considered.

Chapter 5: *Kafas* in *Alexander Romance* Manuscripts examines the *kafas* that appear in manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance*, in the late 13th, early 14th century and in the 16th century, written by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i. In the manuscript tradition of the *Alexander Romance*, the *kafas* accompany text and illumination. They perform multiple functions, repeating information from the main narrative, elaborating upon it, or interpreting it – including attempts to see Alexander's experiences at the edges of the earth through a scriptural lens, with reference to other texts (such as the *Physiologus* and fables) that seek to place marvels within Creation. Thereby, the creatures that Alexander sees can be used to inspire contemplation of the Creator's great works, while the prophecies of Alexander's approaching death ask questions about the right, moral way for a mortal to live. This chapter traces the process by which the three poets carried out this interpretative work in their *kafas* and the likely connections to other texts, whether by proposed direct knowledge of those writings or by a shared thematic or methodological approach to their subject matters.

Chapter 6: *Kafas* separated from the *Alexander Romance* examines *kafas* copied in *tataran* and *žoťovacu* manuscripts independently from the *Alexander Romance*, taking three manuscripts as case studies of this phenomenon. Each manuscript is different and instigates its own subject of discussion in the chapter. The first, M3668 (held in the Mesrop Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts,

known and referred to throughout the thesis as the *Matenadaran*, in Yerevan, Armenia), contains its own mini-cycle in a ‘mirrors for princes’ mode about the entwined fates of Alexander and Darius. The second, M7726, is used to show how the composers and compilers of the Alexander *kafas* drew on other poetry such as the works of Frik. The third, M7709, is an out-of-sequence set of *kafas* about Alexander copied at the base of the tale of the *City of Bronze*, which focus primarily on Alexander’s death to heighten the shared moral lessons about mortality in the two tales. Together, these three case studies show how the *kafas* about Alexander functioned in multiple ways: they continued to use the edges of the world as an instructional space, they used Alexander as a focal point for talking about universal themes of fate and good living. They also show the diverse lives of the *kafas*, from short, discrete cycles to un-ordered marginalia on another tale. This chapter concludes that such variety is integral to understanding how the *Alexander Romance* was received in the Armenian language.

Throughout, these chapters of the second section also seek to contextualise the *kafas* in the rich Armenian literary tradition and the wider cross-textual landscape of the South Caucasus, Anatolia and Middle East from the late 13th, early 14th century onwards. The *kafas* are a unique phenomenon of the Armenian-language tradition about Alexander: they are not translated from another language (unlike the *Alexander Romance*), nor are they known to be translated into other languages. Yet to view them as an isolated Armenian phenomenon is to misunderstand and misrepresent the literary and cultural settings in which they were written, transmitted and circulated. In a field known for its nationalistic tendencies, stating this from the outset is key. This thesis will show that the authors of the *kafas* drew on literature composed in Armenian, literature translated into Armenian from multiple other languages, and probably literature circulating in other languages, to create poetry that situated Alexander within a Christian cosmology. Rachel Goshgarian talks about this taking place in the 13th-century *futuwwa*-like constitutions written by Yovhannēs Erznkac’i (1230-1293), which she views as “managing multiple identities ... [to] ... incorporate themes and organisational patterns that were being used in a regional Islamicate (and political) context and,

on the other hand, articulate them within the framework of Armenian Christianity.”⁵⁰ Xač’atur Keč’arec’i, continued two centuries later by Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunc’i, likewise navigated polyvalent cultural materials to fit Alexander into their need to understand Creation and edify their fellows. Later composers and compilers of *kafa* collections in *tataran* and *žoťovacu* manuscripts similarly shaped variegated material to suit individual purposes.

The **Conclusion** then describes the new point of understanding that this thesis has reached: that the *kafas* of Alexander’s encounters with foreign kings and remote regions function as multifarious Armenian responses to the *Alexander Romance* – thereby providing an answer to the central question of the thesis, namely that the *kafas* are the means by which Armenian traditors re-mapped the world of the *Alexander Romance* to suit a medieval Christian Armenian cosmological understanding. Additionally, the Conclusion highlights the next possible steps for research – particularly into the *kafas* of not only the *Alexander Romance*, but other tales of wonders and wisdom such as the *City of Bronze* and the *History of P’ahlul the King*, with a view to further exploring the connections between these varied texts.

This thesis cannot claim to be conclusive. Alexander features in innumerable works of literature in the Armenian language, not to mention his appearances in materials of other languages to which connective lines could be drawn. The focus of this thesis is on the sections where Alexander journeys to the edges of the world, but this leaves largely un-discussed the other parts of the *Alexander Romance*, for which many *kafas* were written. Some Armenian texts are not fully considered here – these include the *Vita* of Makarios the Roman, translated into Armenian by Grigor II Vkasasēr (1066-1105), who translated many hagiographical works. This *Vita* describes the journey of three monks into the east to discover the extent of the earth. In so doing, they encounter the titular Makarios, but also marvellous sights and an arch built by Alexander III of Macedon. The geography of the *Vita* is clearly related to that of the *Alexander Romance*, redacted through a Christian lens, and its translation into Armenian in the late 11th century is another potential insight into the earlier

⁵⁰ Goshgarian 2012: 251.

reception of the Armenian *Alexander Romance* and, more broadly, legends of Alexander in Armenian.⁵¹ While it is brought into the discussion in Chapter 5 of this thesis, I intend to prepare a separate in-depth study of this text's Armenian rendition. Other texts not considered at all include the letters of Grigor Magistros (c. 990-1058), which draw on the legendary history of Alexander among the author's many references to Greek literature.⁵² Alexander is even mentioned in the *Law Code* of Mxitar Goš (1130-1213).⁵³

In its focus on Alexander at the edges of the world, this thesis aims to deepen an understanding of the specifically 'wonder tale' aspects of the *Alexander Romance* in the Armenian language: a constructed geographical space of marvel and instruction. The re-mapping and re-uses of this space by medieval and early modern Christian Armenian traditors through the *kafas* provides a cohesive discussion. It also contributes to wider research into the transmission and circulation of tales across the medieval and early modern world. Like each *kafa* about Alexander, it is at once much-connected and a discrete text.

⁵¹ Nersessian 2007 and Cowe 2011 provide overviews of Armenian hagiography. The *Vita* of Makarios the Roman is collected in the Armenian *Vitae Patrum (Vark' srboč')*, printed as early as 1641 in Isfahan. The later 1855 printing of Venice, edited by Nersēs Sargisean, has been digitised and can be accessed via the Bodleian: http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:LSCOP_OX:oxfaleph015847845 [accessed 16 July 2018]

⁵² Muradyan 2013 provides an introduction to this area of research, with pages 38-39 providing some examples of legendary Alexander material in the letters. van Lint 2016: 207 includes another reference to the Alexander legends, namely the connection of Nectanebo with the lineage of Grigor's correspondent Amir Abrehim.

⁵³ Thomson 2000: 114, 266.

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER ONE: ALEXANDER IN ARMENIAN GEOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

The thirty-eighth country of Asia is [that of] the Sinae near the Chinese. It is bounded by them on the north, on the east and south by the Unknown Land and on the west by India and the Green Sea [extending] as far as the Unknown Land. Five nations live here with rivers which bear the same names [as themselves]. Between the rivers and the sea live the fish-eating people called Ethiopians, who appear to have immigrated there. It is said that near the Unknown Land dwell humanoids: men with half a body, men with two faces, men with six hands, men with seal's feet, with dragon's feet; half bird, half beast, half man [and half beast], headless men, dog-headed men and all that sort of thing.

– Anania Širakac'i, *Geography* L:38⁵⁴

Armenian literature, rich in many genres, does not possess a great number of geographies. For the purposes of this chapter, such texts are defined as those that describe some or all of the world – typically 'the world' as known to human experience or rumour – and divide it by its countries, kingdoms or other polities (real or imagined). This definition is necessarily arbitrary. Geographical ideas existed in many texts: many histories are deeply concerned with the places in which they occur, and many hagiographical texts create a spiritual map of the world between monasteries and remote holy deserts and caves (among other landmarks). Cosmologies – texts that typically describe the entire world and its position in the universe, examining “the nature of the physical universe”⁵⁵ – are much more plentiful in Armenian literature, and clearly have the most in common with geographies: cosmologies detail the world's regions by various means, while geographies can share cosmologies' interest in the divinely created universe.

Geographic concerns are present throughout this thesis – this chapter is concerned with texts that specifically identify themselves as geographies or closely adjacent materials. Two principal geographic texts survive in Armenian literature: the *Geography* ascribed to Anania Širakac'i (c.610-685)⁵⁶ and the *Geography* of Vardan Arewelc'i (c.1200-1271). The first is a translation, substantially adapted with additional material pertaining to the Caucasus, of the now-lost Greek work by Pappus of Alexandria, which in turn drew on Ptolemy's *Geography*. The second Armenian geography is a

⁵⁴ Translation from Hewsens 1992: 76.

⁵⁵ Thomson 2012: 25 (see 25-30 for a useful overview of cosmological texts in Armenian).

⁵⁶ Hewsens 1992 provides an English translation with commentary of the two recensions.

short, original summation of the world, also focusing particularly on Armenia and the Caucasus.

Other Armenian texts of interest include a small set of short itineraries and some late maps.

Taken as a whole, these geographical works reflect a medieval view of the world with its roots in the classical conceptions that informed these texts as much as the narrative map of the *Alexander Romance*. These ideas – though by no means fixed – were to be gradually superseded in the early modern period, through processes that also resulted in the production of maps recognisable to the 21st-century viewer. This chapter gives a brief consideration as to whether these early geographical texts presaged the efforts of the *kafas* to fit the *Alexander Romance* within a Christian cosmological map.

Geographies

The first *Geography* in the Armenian language survives as an anonymous text, but Robert Hewsen has concluded that its authorship ought to be ascribed to Anania Širakac'i in the 7th century.⁵⁷ It is a descriptive geography in the mode of Strabo and Pliny, rather than a mathematical work like Ptolemy's *Geography* – its dependence on Ptolemy's work comes through the intermediary source, the lost Greek work of Pappus of Alexandria, which Hewsen concludes must be assumed to have been “an adaptation of Ptolemy recast along the lines of Marcian's *Periplus* or that of similar works which have not come down to us.”⁵⁸ There are two recensions of the *Geography* of Anania Širakac'i, known as the long (L) and short (S) recensions for their respective lengths.⁵⁹ Hewsen's assessment is that the L recension was the older one, now surviving in a defective and late copy, while the emended S recension was copied more commonly in the Armenian scriptoria over the

⁵⁷ Hewsen 1992: 7-15. This supersedes prior attributions of the text to Movsēs Xorenac'i, with a 5th-century dating.

⁵⁸ Hewsen 1992: 16.

⁵⁹ Zuckerman 2002: 265-268 refines the dating of the long recension to the early 660s and the short recension to around 670.

centuries.⁶⁰

Anania Širakac'i explicitly states that Jerusalem is the centre of the world, but the text also operates in the classical mode of centring familiar, 'civilised' regions. The placement of Jerusalem owes to the Armenian author's Christianity, as he disagrees with Ptolemy on the matter:

As to the center of the earth, the habitat of man, Ptolemy says it is Arabia Felix [located] towards the southern end of the Persian Sea, which is [also] called the Sea of the Fish-eaters. But I do not believe this because the Gospel calls Arabia Felix, from whence came the Queen of Sheba, the extremity of the earth rather than Ethiopia which is nearer to the isthmuses. But by the center [of the earth] I understand Jerusalem which is equidistant from the extremities of the earth as was said by the Lord himself, and by David: 'He makes the redemption in the center of the earth.'⁶¹

There follows an attempt at engaging with the mathematical geography of Ptolemy, which Constantine Zuckerman interprets as being conducted via the intermediary of a map not derived from Ptolemy's calculations but with a practical schematic similar to that of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*.⁶² The key point for the purposes of this chapter, however, is that Anania Širakac'i explicitly placed Jerusalem at the world's centre. At the same time, he perpetuated a description of the world conceptually similar to many other geographies of antiquity, including his text's direct Greek sources: the familiar central world and the strange peripheries. Alongside Jerusalem at the centre of the world, his *Geography* prioritises what is known to him: Armenia, the wider Caucasus and Iran. Here he leaves behind Pappus and Ptolemy, supplying the text instead with his own gathered information about the regions he knows best.⁶³ In this way he moves the map to better belong within it. Beyond these familiar-to-him areas, however, the remote-to-him regions are still populated with the mythical, from the Gymnosophists, who "feed only on fruit, rice and sugar ... are called the Shaman and Brahmin nation by the Persians ... abstain from women and meat and in the

⁶⁰ Hewsens 1992: 16-32 provides a detailed discussion of the contents of the two recensions and their differences.

⁶¹ *Geography* L II:9 (Hewsens 1992: 46, also present in the S recension for which see Hewsens 1992: 46A).

⁶² Zuckerman 2002: 269-274.

⁶³ Hewsens 1992: 27.

morning they worship the sun..."⁶⁴ – and who were found in the *Alexander Romance* from its earliest stages – to the outright marvellous.⁶⁵ Impossible or absurd rivers, animals and peoples abound. At the world's edge, in Taprobane (Sri Lanka), Alexander is found.

They say that one nation which dwells in this country is made up of women and that at a certain time of the year dogs come among the elephants and have intercourse with the women who give birth to twins, one [male] puppy and the other a [human] girl. The sons cross the river to their fathers while the girls remain with their mothers. But I believe this is just an allegory for they say the same about the Amazons in the Book of Alexander. The allegory means they are a quick-turning (?) people.⁶⁶

Anania Širakac'i is dubious of these details throughout this section of the *Geography*, repeating the Greek inventory of what dwells at the edges of the world while questioning the veracity of the most fantastic features. He ends the *Geography* with his disdain for the "Unknown Land" near China, the farthest place, with which this chapter of the thesis opened: "To me these things are quite unbelievable; as for others, they may believe as they wish."⁶⁷

Nonetheless, the use of Alexander – and the 'Book of Alexander', namely the *Alexander Romance* – reveals the association between Alexander and these curiously populated remote regions. It is amid elephant-pasturing people who procreate with dogs in distant Taprobane that Anania Širakac'i refers to Alexander's life for understanding. Though Alexander did not encounter these specific people (nor travel to Taprobane/Sri Lanka), in legend he met the Amazons, who practiced a similar separation of the sexes, coming together only to reproduce. The applicability of the *Alexander Romance* to reading this variant on the Amazon myth as an allegory also provides a possible insight into the early centuries of the *Alexander Romance* in Armenian, from a time when

⁶⁴ *Geography* L V:35 (Hewsen 1992:75, also present though much abbreviated in the S recension for which see Hewsen 1992: 75A). The Gymnosophists will be discussed in the second section of this thesis.

⁶⁵ *Geography* L V:28-38 (Hewsen 1992: 72-76, also present in the S recension for which see Hewsen 1992: 72A-76A) covers parts of Asia such as Arabia, Media and extending out to India and China.

⁶⁶ *Geography* L V:36 (Hewsen 1992: 76, not present in the S recension).

⁶⁷ *Geography* L V:38 (Hewsen 1992: 76, also present in the S recension for which see Hewsen 1992: 76A, where the wording is similarly cutting: "What is said about the Unknown land is not worthy of credence: unknown animals with human faces, half a body, two faces, six hands, seal's feet or dragon's feet, half-bird, and half-limbed or headless men. Thus we end our narration and the description of the earth.")

manuscript copies do not survive. Anania Širakac'i is able to see the people in the *Geography* as allegorical because of the similar Amazons in the *Alexander Romance*, with the implication that there too they are more allegory than real ancient women. Later, with the composition of *kafas* starting in the late 13th, early 14th century, what Alexander saw and experienced at the edges of the world in the *Alexander Romance* would be interpreted as part of Christian cosmology: the unusual flora and fauna perceived as creations of God to instigate contemplation of the Creator's prowess and potentially to provide instruction. The reference to the 'Book of Alexander' in the *Geography* of Anania Širakac'i raises the question of whether he directly drew on the *Alexander Romance*. Is the allegory of the dog-fornicating women in the *Geography* taken from the Amazons of the *Alexander Romance*, in some form? No *kafas* are known to have existed this early, but perhaps Anania Širakac'i knew commentaries of another nature – even if simply the discussion points of a pedagogical setting – that explicated the Amazons as allegories. This is an unanswerable question without further textual material, but it affirms the place of Alexander in a geography of the entire known world. It reinforces, too, the kind of wonder-edged world through which Alexander journeyed in legend, even if to already posit that its details were instructional rather than factual. This, to a certain extent, presaged the later *kafas*. However, though Anania Širakac'i took the Amazons as allegory much as the *kafas*' authors used Alexander's legendary exploits to illuminate Creation, their concerns were different: Anania Širakac'i makes clear his interest in rational explanations for the world's features, drawing a line between what he perceives as fact and fancy. He is quite dismissive of the latter. In the *kafas*, such science is unnecessary to the authors' endeavours. If what Alexander sees defies belief, it is an incentive to contemplate the remarkable power of divine to create such things. Both *Geography* and *kafas* explain and teach through the use of the marvellous, but the paths to instruction – and its lesson – are quite different.

Another geographical text associated with Anania Širakac'i is the *Mtonač'ap'k*, a set of eight itineraries that give the distances along a journey, from starting point to intermediary cities and then

to final destination, in miles.⁶⁸ The readiness to associate any medieval scientific text with Anania Širakac'i and his educational compendium the *K'nnikon* has been questioned by several scholars, including Tim Greenwood, who raises doubts about the pedagogical value of the itineraries.⁶⁹ The authorship of the *Młonač'ap'k* remains unknown. What they have to say about medieval Armenian geography is also slight. Their Armenian perspective is clear: five begin in Dwin, one in Gandzak (Gəncə), one in Naxijewan and one in the holy city of Jerusalem. They set out a practical view of the world in no doubt real journeys through the Caucasus, Anatolia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean littoral. One goes as far as the Atlantic:

From Jerusalem to the city of Alexandria – 500, from there to the Pentapolis – 1,000, from there to Tripolis – 350, from there to Africa – 1,500, from there to Septe – 900, from there to the Ocean – 2,000.⁷⁰

Two of Hewsens' three models for his translation write “to the Unknown Ocean” – terminology known in ancient Greek conceptions of the world, encircled or bordered by an uncrossable sea. That choice of word persists. The double-hemisphere map of the world printed in Amsterdam by T'ovmas Vanandec'i in 1695 continues to use Okeanos (ՕԿԷԱՆՈՍ) for known oceans.⁷¹ Like that map, which represents the world as understood scientifically in Western Europe at the end of the 17th century, the eighth itinerary of the *Młonač'ap'k* provides a real route across North Africa to the Atlantic coast, not a journey of legend like Alexander's. Interestingly, though, the *Młonač'ap'k* was first published in the *Ałvesagirk*⁷² [Book of the Fox], a collection of fables that will be discussed in Chapter 5 for the proximity of the fables' contents to the *kafas*. Geography and instructional animal-tales are rarely very far apart.

The second *Geography* written in Armenian comes in the 13th century, from the same Vardan Arewelc'i who also wrote a *Historical Compendium*, as well as biblical commentaries and a study of

⁶⁸ Hewsens 1992: 320-321 provides an English translation.

⁶⁹ Greenwood 2011: 135-136.

⁷⁰ *Młonač'ap'k* 8 (Hewsens 1992: 321)

⁷¹ Koeman 1967; van Lint and Meyer 2015: 214-217 provides high-resolution images of the map.

⁷² Hewsens 1992: 320.

grammar. Robert W. Thomson describes this *Geography* as a “sketchy presentation of names, primarily devoted to Armenia and the Caucasus”⁷³ and “a compendium of place names with anecdotes concerning the most famous”⁷⁴. Here Alexander is associated with places from his history: “It is Macedonia, whence came Alexander of the Macedonians”⁷⁵ and “The city Alexandria is in Egypt, which Alexander the king of the Macedonians built, where the throne of the Evangelist Mark is.”⁷⁶ There is no notable use of Alexander in relation to remote space, but the text as a whole exhibits geographic concerns relevant to later writings about Alexander. The preface states that it is possible to learn about the Creator through the created things of the physical universe.⁷⁷ Thus the purpose of geography is knowledge of the divine works. This is a mindset that will be seen, in the second part of this thesis, to permeate the poetic outputs of Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunc’i in composing *kafas* for the *Alexander Romance* to fit the wondrous sights of the world into the Christian cosmos.

Maps

The earliest surviving map in the Armenian language is a single folio in a compilation manuscript (M1242, held in the Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia) that depicts Europe, Africa and Asia in the T-O format known famously from European maps such as the Hereford Mappa Mundi.⁷⁸ The T-O designation refers to: T = the shape of the water-bodies that divide the three continents, with the Mediterranean dividing Europe from Africa, while the Nile and Tanais (Don) typically divide Asia from the other two continents; and O = the circle of the Ocean surrounding the three

⁷³ Thomson 1989: 128.

⁷⁴ Thomson 1989: 140.

⁷⁵ Pērpērean 1960: 64. Մակեդոնիա է, ուստի էր Աղեքսանդր Մակեդոնացին: Translation is my own.

⁷⁶ Pērpērean 1960: 66. Աղեքսանդրիա քաղաքն յԵգիպտոս է, զոր շինեաց Աղեքսանդր արքայն Մակեդոնացոց, ուր աթոռն է աւետարանչին Մարկոսի: Translation is my own.

⁷⁷ Thomson 1989: 140.

⁷⁸ Galichian 2008 describes the Armenian T-O map, with English transcriptions/translations of the Armenian captions. The same is repeated in Galichian 2017: 15-19. For the Hereford Mappa Mundi in particular, as well as Western European medieval maps generally, see the collected articles of Harvey 2006.

continents. Jerusalem is at the centre. The Armenian T-O map deviates from this standard slightly, but sufficiently copies the expected layout that it likely derives from the European model. It has two particularly noteworthy features. The first is the absence of significant monuments from Greater Armenia such as Mount Ararat and Noah's Ark, frequently depicted in European T-O maps for their biblical significance.⁷⁹ The second, and which likely explains the first, is the inclusion of cities specifically relevant to an Armenian situated on medieval trade networks that spanned Central Asia and the Mediterranean: Kaffa, with Constantinople and Venice to the south and west, Baghdad and Damascus to the south, and Zayt'un (the Arabic name for the port of Quanzhou or Tseu-Tung in Fujian, China) in the east.⁸⁰ Rouben Galichian proposes an individual based in 14th-century Kaffa who saw a T-O map brought to the city by Italian (Genoese) traders, who wished to make a copy of this kind of map that reflected his world.⁸¹ Much of the map would have been familiar, from its Christian core to its continent-crossing scope, and this Armenian T-O map's creator took it to use for his own intellectual pursuits.

A manuscript dating to 1617-1621 (M1780, held in the Matenadaran), which contains Apianus' *Cosmographia* of 1524 translated into Armenian, alongside other texts, also includes several maps.⁸² One of these is more cosmographical than geographical, depicting the Earth at the centre of the universe, ringed by planetary spheres. Another shows the eastern hemisphere, according to Apianus: a simple outline, but recognisable as Europe, Africa and part of Asia to the 21st-century eye. A third shows the climes of ancient Greek thought: bands across the earth, each containing a different climate with subsequent consequences for the nature of the peoples dwelling within it.⁸³ This map has five climes: southern extreme, southern temperate, central hot zone, northern temperate (the only known habitable region) and northern frigid. A fourth map has more climes,

⁷⁹ Galichian 2008: 91.

⁸⁰ Galichian 2008: 90-91; Galichian 2017: 19.

⁸¹ Galichian 2008: 91; Galichian 2017: 19.

⁸² Galichian 2017: 19-24 contains descriptions of these maps, along with reproductions of the relevant images (which he unfortunately does not give the folio numbers of), on which the following summaries are based.

⁸³ Dueck 2012: 84-90 provides an overview of climes' development in ancient Greek thought.

nine each for the northern and southern hemispheres, named for places they contain.

The copying of maps like these points to the connections between Armenians and the wider world. The ideas they contained were not new, but remained ready currency in the minds and repertoires of literary traditors. This transmission, use and re-use of ideas about the world from across cultures was essential to the ways Armenians wrote about Alexander.

Conclusion

Though the Armenian geographical tradition is sparse, it points to literary ideas about geography that are pertinent to the eventual innovations of the *kafas* composed about Alexander. Geography as a way of understanding the created world will underlie the remapping of the *Alexander Romance* from the late 13th, early 14th century onwards. As Anania Širakac'i uses the 'Book of Alexander' to explain the elephant herders of Taprobane who reproduce with dogs and Vardan Arewelc'i fits the earth within the celestial spheres, so too will Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunc'ic'i see the divine – and the lessons of Christianity – in the history of Alexander. However, the overlap is far from complete. Anania Širakac'i especially is concerned with a scientific understanding of the world that questions the veracity of marvels, while the authors of the *kafas* use the wondrous to inspire contemplation of God's incredible works. These are not the same Christian views of the world.

CHAPTER TWO: ALEXANDER IN ARMENIAN HISTORICAL TEXTS

For the present I must be content with what I have felt to be adequate simply for the illustration of Alexander's achievements: namely, that the boundary of Asia is the Taurus range, beginning at Mycale opposite the island of Samos, running north of Pamphylia and Cilicia, and thence to Armenia, whence it continues by way of Parthia and Chorasmia to Media, and in Bactria joins the Parapamisus range. It was this latter range which Alexander's men called the Caucasus, apparently for the purpose of magnifying his achievement by the suggestion that he reached the further side of the Caucasus in his triumphant advance.

– Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 5.5-6

On a map of Alexander III of Macedon's conquests, Armenia and the Caucasus lie at the periphery. According to the surviving historical texts that describe the campaigns of Alexander, written in Greek and Latin, he did not enter the Armenian highlands or cross the mountains of the Caucasus: he passed by this region, only inheriting the satrapy as part of the greater Achaemenid Empire at the death of Darius III and, in all likelihood, letting the local Orontid dynasts continue their control.⁸⁴ From the perspective of Arrian, writing his *Anabasis of Alexander* in Greek in the 2nd century CE, placing Alexander in or beyond the Caucasus (whether or not it was the real Caucasus) represented an unnecessary attempt to glorify him beyond his real achievements. The situation in the historical texts of the Caucasus, written from the 5th century CE onwards in Armenian and Georgian and representing in particular the peoples of Armenia, K'art'li (central-eastern Georgia) and Ałuank (known as Caucasian Albania), is multifarious. Alexander's actions are many: a king in the succession of kings in world history, invader of Armenia and K'art'li, constructor of Darband and prisoner of Gog and Magog, journeyer to Paradise.

With the translation of the *Alexander Romance* in approximately the 5th century CE, Armenian writers from virtually the dawn of Armenian-language literature had access to a history of Alexander's campaigns in their own tongue. Some directly utilised it.⁸⁵ Others referred to Alexander

⁸⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.7 (De Sélincourt 1971: 158); Diodorus Siculus, *Library* XVII 64.6 (Welles 1963: 300-303); Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History* 4.9.14, 5.1.44 (Yardley 2004: 71, 96); Hammond 1996; Redgate 1998: 56-62; Khatchadourian 2016: 115-152.

⁸⁵ Topchyan 2011 summarises the use of the *Alexander Romance* in Armenian historical texts. A more limited selection – only Movsēs Xorenac'i and T'ovma Arcruni – is given in Skinner 1940: xxxii-lvi.

in ways that obscure a specific source, but indicate awareness of Alexander’s historical – and ahistorical – actions. Many, focusing on a particular historical era, did not mention Alexander at all. However, where a text covers the historical period of Alexander’s life, it nearly unfailingly mentions him, while others add references to him out of historical sequence. What becomes readily apparent, though, is that Alexander is not a vital figure in Armenian historical texts: while historians are evidently conscious of his presence, he does not loom large in their writing. This stands at a contrast to the rich tradition of the *Alexander Romance* itself in Armenian. The Armenian translation has been lauded as the – or a – first secular text to be translated amid the early wave of religious translations after the creation of the Armenian alphabet.⁸⁶ Calling it ‘secular’ simplifies its position and obscures its closeness to Christian writing and thought, particularly in the second millennium after Christ – when it was copied, illuminated and interpolated with *kafas*. The number of manuscripts and the extent of their illumination cycles⁸⁷ indicates the significance of the *Alexander Romance* to a number of people. Histories were not thus illuminated.

What, then, of Alexander in histories? The purpose of this chapter is not to chart the ‘accuracy’ of Armenian and Caucasian writers’ references to Alexander, as such a project is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, it asks how histories up to the 14th century, as one genre of Armenian literature, provide an insight into early receptions of the *Alexander Romance* and the perceptions and shaping of Alexander’s identity, presaging the blossoming of the illumination and *kafa* traditions from the late 13th century, early 14th century onwards. It seeks trends that will be fully manifested in *kafas* about Alexander at the edges of the world, particularly the use of Alexander to mark space. This chapter provides context and complexity to the Armenian *Alexander Romance* and its *kafas*.

Early histories (5th-11th centuries)

⁸⁶ Topchyan 2011: 85; Kouymjian 2015: 151.

⁸⁷ Kouymjian forthcoming: 151-154.

Starting with the first half-millennium of Armenian historical writing, from the 5th to the 10th centuries, references to Alexander are initially scarce. The *History* of Łazar P'arpec'i, written c. 500 CE, contains the first, reporting that: “[Vaxt'ang] had scouts from the Georgian and Armenian armies sent out. They went down to various areas in the plains, and he had them light numerous fires and set up tree-trunks to resemble armed men, like the trick of Alexander of Macedon.”⁸⁸ This trick – the use of fires to deceive the enemy about the army's location and size – appears in the Greek and Latin histories of Alexander as well as the *Alexander Romance*, but it is a widespread tactic not unique to Alexander.⁸⁹ Given the early date of Łazar P'arpec'i in relation to the Armenian translation of the *Romance*, which it may precede, it is impossible to say with surety whether this reference owes its existence to that text's tradition in particular. In its brevity it indicates only that Łazar P'arpec'i knew of Alexander as a notable tactician and considered him a fitting comparison for Vaxt'ang.

The next text to refer to Alexander – and the first to make definite use of the *Alexander Romance* – is the *History of the Armenians* by Movsēs Xorenac'i, contentiously dated to the 8th century.⁹⁰ Here, Alexander is included in the sequence of kings over the Armenian people: “Now the first of [Zareh's sons] was Armog; he [begat] Bagam, he Vahan, he Vahē. The last rebelled and was killed by Alexander of Macedon.”⁹¹ Not much detail of Alexander's reign is given, only that he ruled “over the whole world”.⁹² In Book II, mention is made of “Mihrdat, the satrap of Darius, whom Alexander brought and left as prince over the captives from among the Iberian peoples”⁹³, and again “a certain Mithridates, satrap of Darius, whom Alexander had set over the prisoners from Iberia”⁹⁴ – likely a reference to the real satrap Mithrines, known in the Greek and Latin histories. Other facts about Alexander are elsewhere included by Movsēs Xorenac'i: that he ordered a book of history

⁸⁸ Łazar P'arpec'i, *History* III.73 (Thomson 1991: 189).

⁸⁹ A similar trick – the use of mules to augment the mass of the army – is reported in the 10th-century *The History of Tarōn* attributed to Yovhannēs Mamikonean (Avdoyan 1993: 147-148). Alexander is not mentioned. While the use of a trick perhaps recalls Alexander, there is no evidence that the author had Alexander in mind.

⁹⁰ For recent arguments on both sides, see Topchyan 2006 (5th century) and the introduction to Thomson 2006 (c. 8th century). I find the later dating convincing.

⁹¹ Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians* I.31 (Thomson 2006: 120).

⁹² Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians* II.1 (Thomson 2006: 127).

⁹³ Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians* II.8 (Thomson 2006: 138).

⁹⁴ Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians* II.11 (Thomson 2006: 145).

translated from Chaldaean to Greek, that some consider him the son of the Egyptian pharaoh Nectanebo – a detail that owes its origin to legendary traditions – and that he was only three cubits tall. In addition, Movsēs Xorenac’i makes use of the *Alexander Romance* as a rhetorical repository, repurposing certain phrases to enrich unrelated scenes in his own narrative.⁹⁵ Noteworthy is the fact that Movsēs Xorenac’i uses the reign of Alexander as a structural dividing point: Book I of the *History* ends with Alexander, while Book II begins with him. This is the strongest indicator that Movsēs Xorenac’i perceived Alexander as a significant figure in the ancient past, with his life and world-conquest as perhaps a dividing point in history as well as in his *History*, but the minor role played by Alexander in the text suggests that he was not considered significant for Armenian history specifically.

This historical information about Alexander is largely repeated in the 10th-century *History of Armenia* of Yovhannēs Drasxanakerc’i, who drew on Movsēs Xorenac’i as a source: “Zareh begot Armog, Armog begot Baygam, Baygam begot Van, Van begot Vahē. The latter was killed by Alexander the Macedonian, because he was indignant with him.”⁹⁶ Alexander is said to have “conquered the world” and ordered the translation of the same book from Chaldaean to Greek, but an additional historical detail is added: “the city of Amaseia, which Amasia, the nephew of Nek’tanib had built a long time ago at the order of Alexander son of Nek’tanib.”⁹⁷ Yovhannēs Drasxanakerc’i gives Alexander no structural role in the text: he, even more so than Movsēs Xorenac’i, points to the presence of Alexander in historical consciousness, but nothing further.

Another historian who drew on Movsēs Xorenac’i for his information about the earlier history of Armenia and the world is Uxtanēs of Sebastia, who wrote his *History in Three Parts* in the 10th century. In Book II, Uxtanēs makes his source material clear in referring to Alexander: “And as the truthful Movses tells us ... Mihrdat, a prefect of Darius, whom Alexander of Macedonia brought, says [Movses], and assigned him prince over the slaves of the Iberian nation; those slaves were forced

⁹⁵ See the introduction to Thomson 2006, as well as Topchyan 2011: 89-95.

⁹⁶ Yovhannēs Drasxanakerc’i, *History of Armenia* III (Maksoudian 1987: 72).

⁹⁷ Yovhannēs Drasxanakerc’i, *History of Armenia* V (Maksoudian 1987: 75).

into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, by the powerful forces of the Libeac'ik'.⁹⁸ Movsēs Xorenac'i and Uxtanēs associate Alexander with K'art'li through his appointment of Mithrines over Iberian captives or slaves, but do not develop a narrative of Alexander in K'art'li. That must wait for Georgian histories.

Returning to the 8th century, the *History* of Łewond reports – or creates – a response to Alexander among the Chenk', a remote ethnic group, who are said to state with pride that: "Neither the king of Babylon, who ruled the entire world, nor the kings of Macedonia or Persia were able to rule our country."⁹⁹ Here, at contrast to some of the texts under consideration later in this chapter, Alexander met a limit: the northern Caucasus would never be his, even in text.

Step'anos Tarōnec'i includes another strand of Alexander legend in the chronologies of Book I of his *Universal History*, completed in 1004-1005 CE: "Jaddua, son of Yovhannēs, in whose time Alexander built Alexandria and having come to Jerusalem, worshipped God."¹⁰⁰ His source for this is Eusebius' *Chronicle*, probably through the intermediary of the *Anonymous Chronicle*, where marginal entries in the *Chronological Canons* state separately that Alexander built Alexandria and that he sacrificed to the Jewish God and honoured the High Priest.¹⁰¹ This story in turn derives from Josephus' *Antiquities*, though he may represent the first surviving written form of an earlier story.¹⁰² The *Antiquities* is not known to have been translated into Armenian. The story of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem gained great traction in the Hebrew literary tradition, but its brief appearance in Armenian literature courtesy of Eusebius, the *Anonymous Chronicle* and Step'anos Tarōnec'i does not appear to have inspired any subsequent development of the narrative among Armenian traditors. Other references to Alexander in the *Universal History* include the familiar motif of

⁹⁸ Uxtanēs of Sebastia, *History in Three Parts* II.18 (Arzoumanian 1985: 62-63). It has not been possible to consult Book I of Uxtanēs' *History* to determine if it includes further references to Alexander.

⁹⁹ Łewond, *History* (Arzoumanian 1982: 67-68). Bernadette Martin-Hisard reportedly identifies the Chenk' as the Chinese in the latest translation, *Lewond Vardapet. Discours Historique: Avec en Annexe la Correspondance d'Omar et de Leon* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), but due to COVID-19 lockdown during the corrections stage of this thesis, I was unable to consult the translation myself.

¹⁰⁰ Step'anos Tarōnec'i, *Universal History* I.3 (Greenwood 2017: 109).

¹⁰¹ Aucher 1818: volume 2, 222-223; see Greenwood 2017: 34-43 for the sources of Book I of the *Universal History*.

¹⁰² Cohen 1982; Fletcher-Louis 2004; Dönitz 2011.

comparison: here, Ibn Xosrov is like “Alexander, who used birds to overcome the wooden palace on the high rocky cliff”.¹⁰³

Until the 10th-century *History of the House of the Arcruni* by T’ovma Arcruni, which will be examined separately, references to Alexander in historical texts in the Armenian language are sparse and hew closely to the history found in the Greek and Latin narratives. They show an awareness of Alexander’s place in ancient times, but that he possessed no special significance in an Armenian historiographical setting. Though this could be seen as an indicator that the translated *Alexander Romance* saw limited circulation in Armenia during these early centuries, it is also important to factor in the nature of the early Armenian histories. Many are not universal histories: they cover a specific time period, not inclusive of Alexander’s era, with the primarily local focus of describing the histories of their people and to extol their successes and virtues – in certain cases, of a particular region or *naxarar* house – and to lament their suffering. They were “part of a larger movement”¹⁰⁴ to tell the early history of Armenia, sometimes even consciously picking up where a predecessor left off to write a continuous narrative. The centrality of Christianity to the creation of an Armenian history in the Armenian language is apparent in such formative histories as those of Koriwn, Agat’angelos and Eliše, as well as the work of Eznik, and from these and others were images of Christian Armenia created.¹⁰⁵ Alexander was put to little use in this project. The later Christianisation of Alexander seen in the *kafas* is not yet apparent: this might, therefore, suggest that Alexander did not in the early stages of Armenian literature possess this quality that would later so profoundly colour the *Alexander Romance* tradition, though arguments *ex silentio* are limited. Certainly the contrast is of note. However, T’ovma Arcruni immediately (and rightly so) discredits any notion of unity in Armenian literature, as his 10th-century work perhaps directly presages the later *kafa* tradition.

T’ovma Arcruni (10th century)

¹⁰³ Step’anos Tarōnec’i, *Universal History* III.16 (Greenwood 2017: 246).

¹⁰⁴ Thomson 2001: 94.

¹⁰⁵ van Lint 2012: 182-190.

The *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* by T'ovma Arcruni begins at the creation of humanity and narrates Armenian history up to the author's time, the early 10th century, focusing on the *naxarar* house to which he belonged. Though similar to its predecessors in many of its narrative concerns, it is notable for its multiple uses of Alexander. Of particular interest are the use of the *Alexander Romance* in both a scriptural interpretation of Alexander's action and a development of the idea of Alexander as a geographical demarcator, and a description of Alexander facing resistance from an Arcrunik' hero.

The first mention of Alexander in the *History* is in Book I, where T'ovma Arcruni describes Paradise through an excerpt from a section of the *Alexander Romance* that is presented as a letter from Alexander to his mother, Olympias, describing the hardships and mirabilia encountered by Alexander and his army in remote lands near the edges of the world. T'ovma Arcruni suggests that Alexander, without knowing it, "perhaps ... reached a place outside the borders of paradise" where he mistook angels for birds with human faces, who told him to turn back.¹⁰⁶ Events in the *Alexander Romance* leading up to the encounter with the human-faced birds are also included as a description of that land: the tree that grows rapidly and shrinks within a single day, the invisible creatures that torment the soldiers who attempt to cut the trees, a land without the sun or any living creatures, a lobster or crab that drags 54 soldiers into the sea. This is the first evidence of appealing to scripture to understand the fantastical experiences of Alexander in remote regions: rather than encountering monstrous, impossible human-faced birds, Alexander in his pre-Christian ignorance was merely unable to correctly identify angels. T'ovma Arcruni fits Alexander into the familiar and comprehensible world and, further, provides an interpretation that sheds light on the specifically Christian world by giving readers a description of the lands near Paradise, a type of response that is seen in the *kafa* tradition starting several centuries later. His *History* indicates that in the 10th

¹⁰⁶ T'ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* I 3 (Thomson 1985: 90-93). For the Letter to Olympias in the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, see Simonyan 1989: 251-264 (English translation in Wolohojian 1969: 111-116).

century it was already possible to approach the *Alexander Romance* through a Christianising lens.

This episode also points to an understanding of the world that utilises Alexander as a geographical marker. From around two centuries prior to T'ovma Arcruni, in the *History of the Armenians* of Movsēs Xorenac'i, it has been stated that Alexander ruled the world (or, in the *History of Lewond*, a significant portion of the world as far as the Chenk'). This notion of Alexander as a world-conqueror, rather than the invader and inheritor of only the Achaemenid Empire's territory, is of course key to the *Alexander Romance*, which depicts his armed journey into fabulous lands up to the edges of the world. The association between Alexander and remote regions is clearly demonstrated in T'ovma Arcruni's *History*: in describing Paradise, he chooses to draw on Alexander's experiences nearby. Why use Alexander? The answer lies, most likely, in the perceived exceptionality of Alexander as promulgated especially by the *Alexander Romance*: who else went so far? In descriptions of extreme spaces, Alexander is one of the very few figures available.

In another section of the *History*, Alexander marks closer locations. T'ovma Arcruni writes that: "Ashot went to wage war with the people who live on the lakeshore called Ut'manik, and who were secure in the impregnable rock of Amiuk. For according to the demarcation of Ptolemy and Alexander, or of our Artashēs son of Sanatruk, that province was reckoned among the provinces of Vaspurakan..."¹⁰⁷ Though Alexander is not the only demarcator of the province, as many more figures are available here for use as reference points, he is used here to mark – joined by Ptolemy (presumably the geographer) and the king Artashēs – a part of the world.

The other notable role of Alexander in the *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* involves his opposition from a local Arcrunik' hero. As in texts such as the *History* of Movsēs Xorenac'i, T'ovma Arcruni includes Alexander in a historical sequence of kings. Here, it is the Achaemenid line: "Now the reigns of the Persian kingdom begin with Cyrus [and go down] to Dareh, who was killed by Alexander of Macedon, and the years of anarchy (which followed)..."¹⁰⁸ Earlier, T'ovma Arcruni also

¹⁰⁷ T'ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* III 18 (Thomson 1985: 227).

¹⁰⁸ T'ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* II 4 (Thomson 1985: 170).

refers to Alexander's divine parentage: "[who] through the deceit of some magus and magicians said he was a son of Ammon and Aramazd, although he did not deny he was mortal."¹⁰⁹ It is the addition of a further episode to the *History* that arrives at a uniquely local reaction to and use of Alexander: an invader who meets Armenian resistance.

At that time reigned Alexander the Macedonian, ruling over the whole world. He rapidly attacked Dareh and killed him, exterminating the kingdom of the Persians. Then after Dareh, Asud son of Arshavir waged war against Alexander's generals. Attacking them with Herculean valour, like a hero he warded off the powerful generals of Alexander for a long time, amazing their armies, who let him retreat – until Alexander appeared before his haughty opponent. Looking into Alexander's face as that of heroic gods, he lowered his eyes and gazed at the ground. Then rapidly descending from his armoured horse before Alexander, reckoning, as naught his impetuous deeds, he made haste to greet the king and say: "When valiant men meet valiant men, audacious deeds need no excuse, lest cowardice be more renowned than valour – which is more appropriate for the effeminate – even if they turn their soldiers' lives into torrents of blood." Astonished at his stoutheartedness and his wise argument, Alexander's generals Ptolemy and Seleucus requested Asud as a gift from the king. For although Alexander was full of wisdom and exceedingly intelligent, yet he was furious at the banditti who opposed him.¹¹⁰

Ptolemy subsequently receives Asud, while Asud's companion-in-arms, Vahagn Haykazean, is "established at the royal court".

In this narrative, T'ovma Arcruni brings Alexander into the Caucasus: conquering not only the world, but a specific – here, Armenian – region. This geographical transposition of Alexander is not for the conqueror's benefit. Asud son of Arshavir, listed in a line of princes whose descendants would become the Arcrunik'¹¹¹, represents an Armenian *naxarar* family's presence in the 4th century BCE: an ancestor worthy of standing before Alexander. Though eventually confronted, Asud is not killed. Armenia is taken under foreign control – not an unfamiliar fate – and Asud is taken to Egypt, his line to be continued. This episode is not attested in any other extant text: it is likely a legend of the Arcrunik', either recorded or invented by T'ovma. The only other attested Asud is in the *History* of Movsēs Xorenac'i, and is a Bagratid.¹¹² Given that Alexander has already been described as "ruler

¹⁰⁹ T'ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* I 2 (Thomson 1985: 83).

¹¹⁰ T'ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* I 6 (Thomson 1985: 104-105).

¹¹¹ Thomson 1985: 104, fn.1.

¹¹² Thomson 1985: 104, fn.1.

of the world”, it is not his fame that the episode serves primarily to boost. By appropriating and relocating the figure of Alexander – famed enough to appear in nearly every Armenian history that encompasses his era, as well as other histories and more besides – and by narrating an encounter between him and Asud, T’ovma provides for the Arcrunik’ a prestigious past: an ancestor who stood up to the world-conqueror and survived. This belongs to his goal in *History of the House of the Arcrunik’* of providing the family with a past equal to that of the Bagratunis.¹¹³ In doing so, he questions the details of Alexander’s traditional role as world-conqueror. If T’ovma Arcruni has in mind a ‘map’ of Alexander’s conquests, he is adding details that position Armenia as a notable point within the conquered world.

Other Caucasian Texts (10th-13th centuries)

The presence of Alexander continues in texts written about other regions of the Caucasus. Some appeared in the Armenian language, whether as original compositions or translations. Particularly in the literary traditions of K’art’li (eastern Georgia), the use of Alexander is rich: in different ways to T’ovma Arcruni’s *History*, it contains a geographical transposition of Alexander utilised to benefit the authorial region. Though this section focuses primarily on texts in Armenian, it does not neglect those written in Georgian and not translated (into Armenian), as they provide context for the Armenian texts and insights into changes made in translation. Moreover, the complexity of cultures and languages in the wider Caucasus region makes it vital to consider Armenia – and texts written in Armenian – as only a part of a greater whole: the Caucasus is diverse, but not neatly divided, just as Armenia itself is variously identified by its authors throughout history.¹¹⁴

The first text concerns Ałuank, where, despite the possession of their own language(s) and a

¹¹³ Thomson 1984: 74; Thomson 2000.

¹¹⁴ Redgate 2007; Garsoïan and Martin-Hisard 2012.

script, learned people wrote predominantly in Armenian.¹¹⁵ The surviving historical text of Ałuank is the *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, written in Armenian by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i (also known as Movsēs Kałankatuac’i)¹¹⁶ and reaching its final form by perhaps the 12th century, though a 10th-century date is popular.¹¹⁷ In it, Alexander’s actions in the Caucasus are restricted to the movement of populations, but this past event is used by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i to describe the boundaries of the lands reached by the Christianising mission of Mesrob Maštoc’ in the early 5th century.

[Mesrob Maštoc’] revived the Church and strengthened the Faith and spread the teaching of the gospel to the land of the Utiac’ik’, the Albanians, the Lp’ink’, the Kaspk’, up to the Č’ołay Pass, and to other foreign tribes whom Alexander of Macedon had captured and settled around the great Mount Caucasus, namely, the Gargark’ and the Kamičik Hep’t’alkk (Hephthalites).¹¹⁸

As in the *History* of T’ovma Arcruni, Alexander’s past presence marks geographical features in a later time. This continues the tradition reported by Movsēs Xorenac’i and Uxtanēs of Sebastia of Alexander controlling the fates of peoples in the Caucasus region, but Movsēs Dasxuranc’i uses it explicitly for a geographical purpose.

In the histories of K’art’li, Alexander’s activities in the Caucasus are more extensive. *K’art’lis C’xovreba* (*The Life of Georgia*) was perhaps composed in Georgian in the 11th century – or compiled then, by Leonti Mroveli, using texts including *History of the Kings of K’art’li* that may have been first written as early as the 8th century¹¹⁹ – and translated into Armenian in the late 12th century.¹²⁰ The Armenian translation, known as *The History of the Georgians*, is not direct: it abbreviates the text,

¹¹⁵ For the script of Ałuank and the Biblical nature of the scant surviving texts, see Gippert and Schulze 2007 and Gippert 2011. Hacıkyan et al 2002: 164-169 describes the historical relationship between Armenia and Ałuank that led to the use of Armenian, but with a reductive approach to ethnicity and identity. For a more nuanced discussion, see Hewsén 1982.

¹¹⁶ The identity of the author of the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* has been much debated; as a consequence, his (or their) origins are not precise, but it is likely that he was from Ałuank (Hacıkyan et al 2002: 171-172).

¹¹⁷ Dowsett 1961: xi-xx.

¹¹⁸ Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* I 27 (Dowsett 1961: 54-55).

¹¹⁹ Rapp 2003: 143-168 argues convincingly for an 8th-century composition of *History of the Kings of K’art’li*.

¹²⁰ Thomson 1996 provides parallel English translations of the Armenian text and only the corresponding Georgian sections. Met’reveli and Jones 2014 translates the Georgian text into English in full. Pogossian 2010: 82, 118-125 narrows down the dating of the Armenian translation to the late 12th century, where before it had been considered a 12th or 13th-century translation, citing its influence on the *Letter of Love and Concord*, which she dates to “the last five years of the 12th century, while retaining 1190 and 1204 as absolute *termini*”.

while making slight additions and alterations that elaborate on certain theological points and cast Armenia in a better light or are of particular interest to an Armenian audience.¹²¹ In the Georgian text and in the Armenian translation, Alexander's conquest takes him as far as K'art'li. In the Georgian text of the *History of Vaxt'ang Gorgasal* attributed to Ĵuanšēr¹²² – one of the texts that comprises *K'art'lis C'xovreba* – Alexander takes a less active role in demarcation, yet in his reign is the agent: "The emperor enquired about the Greek border, the land on the seashore which is Ap'xazet'i, and said as follows: 'From the river of Egris as far as the river of Lesser Xazaret'i: this has been the border of Greek territory from (the time of) Alexander's expedition.'"¹²³ This, however, is by no means the extent of his actions.

It is in *History of the Kings of K'art'li* that Alexander is described as conquering as far as K'art'li.

The Armenian translation provides an abbreviated version:

At that time arose Alexander the Great, son of Nectanebo an Egyptian, in the land of Macedon, who controlled the three corners of the world. He came from the west along the north, and having gone round through the east he entered the shady country and crossed the Caucasus mountain into the land of the Georgians. He was astonished at their dissolute life.¹²⁴

Alexander subsequently besieges and destroys many cities of K'art'li, kills many people, and leaves a Macedonian called Azon in control of the land. Through Azon, Alexander attempts to introduce a precursor religion to Christianity, but this fails after Alexander's death as Azon forgets this religion. Azon is a brutal ruler and, eventually, P'arnawaz successfully rises against him and inaugurates the first dynasty of K'art'li.

The Armenian translation abbreviates an account of Alexander's invasion of K'art'li that is far more developed in the Georgian literary tradition. In the Georgian version of *History of the Kings of K'art'li*, the dissolute ways of the people Alexander encounters are described: "For in marriage and

¹²¹ Thomson 1996: xlvii-l enumerates the additions.

¹²² Rapp 2003: 197-242 argues that the *History of Vaxt'ang Gorgasal* is best attributed to 'Pseudo-Ĵuanšēr' and dates its composition to around the year 800 CE.

¹²³ *History of Vaxt'ang Gorgasal* (Thomson 1996: 194).

¹²⁴ *The History of the Georgians* (Thomson 1996: 23-24).

fornication they paid no attention to family relationship, they ate everything that was living, they ate corpses like wild beasts and animals; the description of their way of life is inexpressible.”¹²⁵ The narrative of sieges and slaughter and the subsequent rise of P’arnawaz is similar, though the benefits of Alexander’s invasion and P’arnawaz’s rule are positioned in reference to the earlier condition of the people: “After Alexander went away no more did they eat humans, except those sacrificed as victims to the idol. There was tranquillity and joy for all K’art’li because of the reign of P’arnawaz...”¹²⁶ A similar history is also found in the second key chronicle of early Georgian history, *The Conversion of K’art’li*, which dates to perhaps the 9th century, and does not seem to have been translated into Armenian.¹²⁷ Alexander arrives in the region and is dismayed by the people’s habits, for they “eat every living thing, do not bury their dead, and eat dead flesh”.¹²⁸ He wages war and leaves Azo (the name of Azon in this text) in power. In the 14th century, the Armenian cleric Mxit’ar Ayrivanec’i preserves the roles of Alexander, Azon and P’arnawaz in a list of princes of K’art’li in his *Chronographia*, drawing on the narrative of *History of the Kings of K’art’li*.¹²⁹

Integral to understanding the Georgian narrative of Alexander’s invasion is a single line in *K’art’lis C’xovreba*. During the process of Alexander’s invasion, the Georgian text of the chronicle states: “But he spared the tribes descended from K’art’los...”¹³⁰ Sparing those descended from the eponymous ancestor sets Alexander at the foundation of the history of the people of K’art’li. At first reading, Alexander’s invasion shows K’art’li in a negative light: the ancestors of the people living in later K’art’li are not favourably described. They practice incest, they eat the dead. They are at a geographical remove from the world of ‘civilisation’ recognised by Alexander, who is disgusted and strives to kill many of them. However, the survivors – those descended from K’art’los – are left in a better position after Alexander’s presence: they have lost the way of life that defines them as

¹²⁵ *History of the Kings of K’art’li* (Thomson 1996: 23).

¹²⁶ *History of the Kings of K’art’li* (Thomson 1996: 37).

¹²⁷ Rayfield 2010: 62.

¹²⁸ *The Conversion of K’art’li* I 1 (Lerner 2004: 139-140).

¹²⁹ Rapp 2003: 449-468.

¹³⁰ *History of the Kings of K’art’li* (Thomson 1996: 25).

remote peoples.

This narrative must be considered in the context of a developing tradition from the 7th century onwards – with Syriac compositions such as the *Alexander Legend* and the *Book of the Bee* and, most productively, the *Apocalypse* attributed to Pseudo-Methodius – of Alexander walling up the peoples of Gog and Magog. The Syriac texts built on previous Biblical and other Christian traditions of sinful peoples and combined with legends of Alexander to create a text that gained immense traction, not only in the Syriac tradition but, through the translation of the Ps.-Methodius *Apocalypse* in particular, across the medieval world in numerous languages.¹³¹ In summary, the relevant part of the *Apocalypse* describes Alexander arriving in a remote land and encountering people who horrify him: they wantonly fornicate and eat anything, including the dead. He responds by imprisoning them behind a great Wall or Gate, where they will remain until they are unleashed upon the world at the end of times.¹³² The similarity between Gog and Magog and the peoples described in *K'art'lis C'xovreba* as well as *The Conversion of K'art'li* is apparent. The location of Alexander's Wall or Gate against Gog and Magog is not fixed, but two frequent locations are found in the Caucasus: at the Darial Gorge (at the border between modern Georgia and North Ossetia – Alania) and at Derbent (modern Dagestan). It is therefore striking that in the traditions of K'art'li, Alexander does not wall up the people he encounters.¹³³ Rather, he steers them towards their prosperous future within the 'civilised' world.¹³⁴ In these two historical chronicles, written in K'art'li and possibly in direct conversation with the Syriac tradition of Alexander walling up unclean peoples in the far North, the

¹³¹ van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 3-32. A Georgian translation of the *Alexander Romance*, some recensions of which include Alexander's walling up of Gog and Magog, was not made until the early 18th century, though awareness of its legends in some language and/or oral variant is clear in the reference to Nectanebo as Alexander's father being attributed to "the book of the Greeks" in the Georgian text of *History of the Kings of K'art'li* (Thomson 1996: 23; Rapp 2003: 118-120).

¹³² Witakowski 2014; for Pseudo-Methodius in the Armenian tradition, see Topchyan 2014; for Gog and Magog more widely in Armenian and Georgian literary traditions, see van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 38-49.

¹³³ Rapp 2014: 133-140 sees the absence of Gog and Magog in *The Conversion of K'art'li* as indicative of the text's initial development prior to the composition and dissemination of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. However, the similarities between the peoples of Gog and Magog and the peoples of K'art'li deserve further comment.

¹³⁴ Z. Aleksidze 2014 sees this as a specifically Greek world: Alexander functioning as the first point in a backdated history that points K'art'li culturally towards Byzantium rather than Iran.

people of K'art'li refuse to be placed on the wrong side of a Wall.¹³⁵ In *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, the author names the people who Alexander spares and elevates: those descended from K'art'los. It is thus possible to interpret this narrative as an appropriation of the figure of Alexander for the benefit of the history of K'art'li.

It is then of interest that in the Armenian translation of *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, the line about Alexander sparing the peoples descended from K'art'los is not included. In general, this part of the text is abbreviated in the Armenian translation: Alexander's siege of the Sarkinelians – which occurs immediately before this line – is reduced to under half the length of the original Georgian version. It is impossible to say exactly why the Armenian translator removed this line, but its removal indicates that it was not considered important to an Armenian audience. Certainly some Armenians understood the significance of the role undertaken by Alexander in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, as evidenced by the replacement of Alexander by ancestors of the Ōrbelean *naxarar* house in chapter 66 of Step'annos Ōrbelean's *History of the Province of Sisakan* for the clear purpose of furthering the historical glory of the author's house. The removal of this line in the Armenian translation of *K'art'lis C'xovreba* indicates not that the translator misunderstood the narrative significance of this moment for the people of K'art'li, but that he chose not to translate it. Perhaps, to an Armenian translator, what the writers of K'art'li do to the role of Alexander on a map of his conquests is not important. To the Georgian audience, however, the sparing of those descended from K'art'los – and, by contrast, the location of the un-spared Gog and Magog – is significant. The 8th-century *Martyrdom of Abo* written by Ioane Sabanisdze places the land of Magog to the north:

Though hard-pressed by the Saracen army the Lord saved him from their hands, and [Nersēs] passed through the gateway of the Ossetes, which they call Dari-Alan. Among the three hundred men of his escort was Abo, the blessed servant of Christ. Nersēs came as a refugee from his own country into the land of the north, where is the home and abode of the sons of Magog who are called the Khazars – wild men, fearsome of face, savage in character, drinkers of blood, without religion, except that they recognize a god the creator.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ N. Aleksidze 2016.

¹³⁶ Ioane Sabanisdze, *Martyrdom of Abo* (Lang 1976: 118-119). See also N. Aleksidze 2016: 234-236.

To the north, beyond the passes, lie the descendants of (Gog and) Magog, while in K'art'li are those spared by Alexander and enjoying a 'civilised' life under the dynasty of P'arnawaz and, later, Christianity. Alexander's role as a marker of distance is subverted: used to show that K'art'li is only far from other places in its past, not in its present – not since Alexander's visit. Though this does not directly presage his role in the later *kafas*, it belongs to the trend of using Alexander as a geographical marker and is a notable facet of his reception in the literature of the Caucasus.

Alexander's Gate and Distant Lands

From the 10th century onwards, the association of Alexander with distant lands and peoples, including the construction of his Gate (or Wall) against them, is increasingly apparent in some Armenian historical texts. Still, many do not mention him. Those that do intersect with apocalyptic traditions, most explicitly in Step'annos Ōrbelean's *History*, but also in witnesses to Alexander's association with Darial and Derbent. Other texts, without mentioning Alexander, compare the enemies of Armenia to Gog and Magog. It is worth noting here that the construction of Alexander's Gate does not appear in the Armenian *Alexander Romance* until considerably later: in 1940, Joseph Skinner translated an 18th-century manuscript of the *Romance* (Etch. 1664) that appended a short description of Alexander walling up Gog and Magog to the end of the text, as well as a minor interpolation within the narrative itself, but this is the earliest appearance of the Gog and Magog narrative in the *Romance* that I am aware of.¹³⁷ Nor are any of the *kafas* about a Gate or Wall. Instead, the episode enters Armenian literature from other sources, most likely – as discussed in the above section – via the Syriac apocalypses of the 7th century. It finds purchase as an apocalyptic topos across genres in Armenian literature. Full consideration of Alexander's role in Armenian apocalypsa will be carried out in the following chapter, but it is an essential aspect of these historical texts and cannot be ignored here. It also serves a geographic purpose. The location of the

¹³⁷ Skinner 1940.

Gates is highly potent, as authors of literature in K'art'li knew: it represents the edge of the world, of 'civilisation' or lands where 'civilised' people dwell, and the boundary beyond which the 'uncivilised' are found. Where Alexander is associated with it in Armenian historical texts – which, arguably, he always is implicitly after the success of the Pseudo-Methodius narrative, but it is more fruitful to consider his explicit associations – he is again seen to be taking on his role as demarcator. This role is developed even further beyond the Gate topos in *The Flower of Histories of the East*, where a greater number of Alexander's experiences in distant lands are drawn in to Het'um's descriptions of foreign countries. Alexander functions as a marker of remote geographic spaces.

The first trace of Alexander's construction activity is found in a text not yet mentioned: the so-called *Anonymous Tale*, which likely developed from the 9th to 12th centuries before its surviving composition around the latter century. Features such as its episodic structure, confused genealogies and variable diction between classical and popular medieval grammatical forms, with reported dialogue often in the more popular language, indicate its origins as a series of popular tales, likely with an oral component. In its surviving state as an accretion of these tales, it is clearly not a history designed for the usual lordly and monastic audience.¹³⁸ In it, reference is made to "Darband, which Alexander the Great had erected."¹³⁹ The real construction of the fortification complex at Derbent, in the eastern Caucasus (now in Dagestan), has been dated to 568-569 CE, carried out at the command of the Sasanians¹⁴⁰ – but the *Anonymous Tale*, as a reflection of popular stories about historical events rather than a formal history, potentially points to the early presence among Armenians of the legend that Alexander constructed it against Gog and Magog.

Many texts in the flourishing of historical literature around the 13th and 14th centuries do not include references to Alexander the Great. Of those that do, however, two include Alexander's construction work in the Caucasus as historical reality. The first example, the *History of the Province of Sisakan*, a 13th-century history by Step'annos Ōrbelean, makes its source material apparent:

¹³⁸ Thomson 1988-1989: 171-181.

¹³⁹ Thomson 1988-1989: 192.

¹⁴⁰ Gadjev 2008.

Ōrbelean translates a section of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius as part of the narrative of the *History*.

Then will come what is in the prophecy of Ezekiel, in the days of the final end of the world. Gog and Magog will come forth against the land of Israel, the gates to the North will be opened and powerful peoples, who had been confined in the North by Alexander, will start to move. Gog and Magog, and Anig, Agig, Ak'iaz, Dip'or, the P'orinac'ik', the Aghrenac'ik', Huns, P'arziac'ik', the Dekghimac'ik', the Sarmatians, the T'et'gheac'ik', the Zarmetac'ik', the Kak'onac'ik' the Amazardk', the Garmadac'ik', Mardakerk' (Cannibals), the T'arp'ac'ik', Alans, P'askghinkac'ik', the Argneac'ik', and the Satareac'ik'. These are the 22 kingdoms blocked by the door/gate which Alexander built [in the Caucasus]. Seeing them, people will flee in terror and hide in the mountains, in caves and in cemeteries. Many will be slain, and there will be no one to bury them, for the peoples of the North will eat the flesh of animals and drink their blood. They feed on all things foul, reptiles, scorpions, carrion, and human abortions. They will sacrifice children and give them as food to their mothers.¹⁴¹

Step'annos Ōrbelean situates this chronologically at the time of the Arab invasions. In the non-linear narrative of his *History*, he first mentions the Arabs in chapter 31 while describing the life of a Lord Step'annos who, when returning to Armenia from time in the west, "saw the land wrecked and ruined by the Tachiks [Arabs], and saw that all the princes of the Armenians – some 800 souls – had been immolated in [the churches of] Naxchawan"¹⁴² – an event that occurred in 705 CE, 65 years after the first attack on Armenia by Arab armies.¹⁴³ The chapter, however, focuses on the deeds and death of Lord Step'annos. The subsequent chapter comprises a translated excerpt of the Pseudo-Methodius *Apocalypse*, marked as such, which describes the coming – and eventual defeat – of the Arabs in purely eschatological terms. Chapter 33 then resumes a historical narrative with further Arab depredations in Armenia some time after the events at Naxijewan and Xram.¹⁴⁴ The translated Pseudo-Methodius excerpt therefore takes on the narrative role of relating the initial invasion of the

¹⁴¹ Step'annos Ōrbelean, *History of the Province of Sisakan* 32 (Bedrosian 2012-2015). It is not clear whether Step'annos Ōrbelean made his own translation of this Pseudo-Methodius excerpt or used an existing one (Topchyan 2014: 366-369).

¹⁴² Step'annos Ōrbelean, *History of the Province of Sisakan* 31 (Bedrosian 2012-2015).

¹⁴³ Redgate 1998: 166-170.

¹⁴⁴ Bedrosian 2012-2015 gives the date of these attacks as 727 CE. Brosset 1864: 95 gives the same date, but notes that other editions of the text have 827 CE, a date that certainly makes more sense for the subsequent role played by Babak, including his marriage to the daughter of Vasak Siwni in the early 9th century and later attacks on the region (Redgate 1998: 176; Dadoyan 2011: 94). The identity of Mrowan in Step'annos Ōrbelean's text is unclear, as none of the known historical persons with the name were active during this sequence of events; however, the emir Sawada is a possibility (Brosset 1864: 95, n.2; Redgate 1998: 176).

Armenia by the Arabs, though its details are ahistorical and at odds with the reality that Step'annos Ōrbelean otherwise attempts to faithfully depict in his *History*. Alexander's role falls purely into the eschatological scheme of Pseudo-Methodius: his historic walling up of Gog and Magog is simply part of the necessary sequence of events that lead to the end of times. No use is made of him by Step'annos Ōrbelean, beyond his Pseudo-Methodian context, and later invasions – by the Turks, the Khwarezmians, the Mongols and the Mamluks – do not receive the same treatment. Step'annos Ōrbelean writes of the harsh experiences during those latter times, including in his own lifetime, but the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius is not repeated or referred to. The edges of the world are of little concern in a history focused on this one *naxarar* house.

The Flower of Histories of the East (or History of the Tatars), a 14th-century text by Cilician Armenian statesman and general, Het'um, is far more concerned with the world's edges. Unlike the other texts under consideration in this chapter, Het'um's history was not written in Armenian, nor did it appear in that language until the 1842 translation of Mxit'arist father Mkrtič' Awgerean. Het'um dictated it in Old French, whereupon it was translated to Latin in 1307 by his secretary Nicholas Falcon. Several other translations pre-date the Armenian one, including the Tudor English *Lytell Cronycle* by Richard Pynson in c. 1520. However, as it was written by an Armenian and concerns Armenian affairs in relation to the incursions of the Mongols, it merits consideration here. Het'um opens the text with a series of ethnographic descriptions of nations, many of them far from Armenia or Europe. These are rich with details reminiscent of the *Alexander Romance*, including some that suggest borrowing. The description of Cathay (China), though not mentioning Alexander by name, perhaps recalls the sacred trees of the sun and moon that predict his death in the *Alexander Romance*: "The beleue of this people is moche dyuers: for some beleuyth in the sonne, some in the mone ... some in the trees."¹⁴⁵ In the description of India, naked idol-worshippers perhaps reflect the widespread tradition of the naked philosophers met there by Alexander:

¹⁴⁵ Burger 1988: 7. For the episode in the *Alexander Romance*, see Simonyan 1989: 292-297 (Wolohojian 1969: 128-131).

“Towarde the south part of this realme of Inde is thoccean see; and there about be many yles wherin Indyans or men of Inde inhabit, which be all blacke, and all go naked bycause of great heate, and all these worshippe ydols.”¹⁴⁶ Alexander is explicitly mentioned earlier in the description of India: “Towarde the north parte by the long and great desert of Inde, where Kynge Alexandre founde so great dyuersite of serpentes and of beestes as his hystorie recounteth, there be founde namely all the balayses.”¹⁴⁷ This inclusion of Alexander evokes his invasion of India, which is the furthest place he reached in history as well as a rich fount of legendary material – there, he encountered some of the mirabilia of far-off lands in the *Alexander Romance*, he faced his mortality at the prophecies of the sun and moon trees, and he was forced to turn back. India, for Alexander, is rich with connotations of distance. Het’um establishes the remoteness of India in part by Alexander’s historical presence within it. Though India is not the furthest place mentioned in *The Flower of Histories of the East* – Het’um describes lands including Cathay, the Mongol steppe and a place inhabited by the Nayngas people, which seems to be in southeast Asia – it is nonetheless far from the familiar for the text’s audience, and Alexander is readily associated with it.

The narrative map of the world conveyed by Het’um, in which its edges are populated with mirabilia and monstrous races that mark their physical and cultural distance from the ‘civilised’ parts of the world, belongs to a rich tradition. Its roots are in Greek geography and, even older, ideas of the world in Ancient Near Eastern texts.¹⁴⁸ In the case of Het’um, the western European context of *The Flower of Histories of the East*’s composition cannot be overlooked: a tradition of medieval European mapping with fabulous edges is famously visual, with notable examples including the Hereford Mappa Mundi, as well as textual. The role of Alexander in this tradition is particularly significant, as his exploits help to define the places, peoples and creatures found at the edges of the

¹⁴⁶ Burger 1988: 12. See Simonyan 1989: 276-282 (Wolohojian 1969: 121-123).

¹⁴⁷ Burger 1988: 11.

¹⁴⁸ The scholarship on this is extensive. See, for instance, Romm 1994; Dueck 2012; Haubold 2013.

world.¹⁴⁹ *The Flower of Histories of the East* belongs to this literary world – it even influenced the famous travelogue attributed to Sir John Mandeville.¹⁵⁰ However, Het’um existed in a Cilician Armenian context too, and this narrative map is also present in Armenian texts, not only the translated *Alexander Romance* but also the 13th-century *History of the Armenians* written by Kirakos Gandzakec’i of Greater Armenia, which contains passages such as the following – which repeats the Amazon-like legend of human women reproducing with male dogs in the *Geography* of Anania Širakac’i discussed in Chapter 1 (p.35):

There is a land beyond Ghatayik’ [Cathay] where women have the forms of natural women, while the men have the forms of dogs. They are mute, large, and hairy. The dogs let no one enter their land and the dogs hunt from which prey they and the women eat. From the comingling of dogs and women, the males are born in the shape of dogs, the females in the shape of women. There is, too, a sandy island where a type of bone (which is prized) grows like a tree. It is called Dzknatam [Fish Tooth] and when one is cut, another grows in its place, like horns.¹⁵¹

Armenian writers, through a long familiarity with Greek texts and more recent contacts with western European traditions, as well as presumed but untraceable oral elements, have access to and – in some cases – make use of this map of the world. In *The Flower of Histories of the East*, Het’um deploys Alexander to mark one of those distant locations in a manner that is not out of place in that context.

It is also notable that this presence of mirabilia is found in historical texts at around the time that Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i inaugurates the *kafa* tradition in the *Alexander Romance* and the first illustriously illuminated manuscripts are known to have been created. To this might be added the question whether, in an Armenian world that saw increased interconnectivity with western Europe especially since the Crusades and the establishment of the Cilician kingdom, there was an influence on Armenian reception of Alexander from the wider European romance tradition in which he played so pivotal a role?

¹⁴⁹ Stoneman 2008 is a valuable resource for Alexander’s role in legend. For Alexander on the Hereford Mappa Mundi as a specific example of Alexander’s place in Western European legendary cartography, see Kline 2006.

¹⁵⁰ Moseley 2005.

¹⁵¹ Kirakos Ganjakec’i, *History of the Armenians* 58 (Bedrosian 1986).

The Flower of Histories of the East also includes Alexander's historical actions when mentioning the Iron Gate – located in this text at Darial – on multiple occasions, firstly recalling its construction as a barrier against invasions and later demonstrating its ineffectuality. In the description of Armenia in Book I, Het'um writes:

The brede of Armeny towarde occedent begynneth at the great cytie which is called Port de Ferre, that is in Englysshe the Yren Gate – the which Kinge Alexander commaunded shulde be shytted for bycause of dyuers nations of people that resorted into the Depe Asye, the which he wolde nat that they shulde passe in the Great Asye without his commaundement. The sayd cytie is in the narrow of Caspis See, and recheth to the great mountayn of Cocas.¹⁵²

This fact is repeated several times. In Book III, the Mongols ahistorically¹⁵³ invade Asia through this region and break down the city's walls. Though this construction is not against the legendary enemies of Gog and Magog, it performs the same function: as a barrier against northern, remote peoples who pose a threat to the people on the 'civilised' side, who in other texts are explicitly rather than implicitly associated with Gog and Magog. It is more integrated into a specific point in historical reality than the gate in Step'annos Ōrbelean's *History*.

The association between Alexander and Gog and Magog and the Mongols is not, however, fixed. The 13th-century *Historical Compilation* of Vardan Arewelc'i situates Alexander only among historical sequences of kings, while describing the dire arrival of the Mongols from the land of Gog and Magog (here, Č'in and Mač'in) with no reference to the prior construction of a fortification. Of Alexander, it says, firstly: "Armog, Paygam, Van, Vahē whom Alexander the Macedonian slew".¹⁵⁴ Later, Vardan Arewelc'i includes a mention of "Dareh [son] of Aršam ... whom Alexander slew and then lived himself for another six years."¹⁵⁵ This line is expanded upon in a subsequent passage concerning the fate of the crown of the prophet David, which "had fallen into [the hands of] the Chaldaeans, and then to Cyrus, and from Dareh to Alexander. With it the Macedonians had been

¹⁵² Burger 1988: 13-14.

¹⁵³ Dashdondog 2010: 45.

¹⁵⁴ Vardan Arewelc'i, *Historical Compilation* 7 (Thomson 1989: 149).

¹⁵⁵ Vardan Arewelc'i, *Historical Compilation* 13 (Thomson 1989: 159).

crowned, down to Antiochus...”¹⁵⁶ Later in the text, the Mongols arrive: “A foreign-looking and alien-speaking army moved from the land of Č’in and Mač’in. Called Mułal and T’at’ar, they arrived in the territory of Gugarac’ik’, entering the plain from the regions of Ałuank’, about 20,000 strong. They slaughtered every living thing they found, and turned back in haste.”¹⁵⁷ Vardan Arewelc’i’s association between the Mongols and Gog (and Magog) is also found in his 1248 colophon to Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*, which he co-translated with the Syriac writer Išoḫ. In his colophon, Vardan Arewelc’i elaborates on the origins of the Mongols, with reference to Biblical genealogies, and in some manuscripts includes Gog: “they are from the remnants of Hagar, *and the Syrians say that they are of Torgom, as is known mixed with the nation of Gog, who is from Torgom, and the race of Hagar, who possesses the part of the world [that is] Scythia*”.¹⁵⁸ The colophon does not mention Alexander. Other authors, such as the 13th-century Grigor of Akanc’ in *History of the Nation of the Archers*, make the same association between the Mongols and Gog and Magog without reference to Alexander.¹⁵⁹

Reactions to the Mongols among the Armenians of Greater Armenia and Cilician Armenia varied, and developed over time. The depredations of the Mongol invasions have been widely reported, and there is no doubt that much violence befell the peoples of the Caucasus and Asia Minor. In literature, the depiction of the Mongols was complex. Their physical appearance is frequently described in dehumanising terms, such as in *History of the Nation of the Archers* by Grigor of Akanc’, where they are “terrible to look at and indescribable, with large heads like a buffalo’s, narrow eyes like a fledgling’s, a snub nose like a cat’s, projecting snouts like a dog’s, narrow loins like

¹⁵⁶ Vardan Arewelc’i, *Historical Compilation* 19 (Thomson 1989: 163).

¹⁵⁷ Vardan Arewelc’i, *Historical Compilation* 84 (Thomson 1989: 213).

¹⁵⁸ Pogossian 2014: 17-20, 46. Italics indicate the passage included in only some manuscripts.

¹⁵⁹ Blake and Frye 1949: 287-289. “St Nersēs, however, said [the Tat’ars] are the descendants of Hagar mixed with the stock of Gog, which is of the T’orgom who rule the part of the Scythian land which extends from the river At’l to Mt Emawon, as far as the Caspian Sea, where thirty-three nations dwell, which are called by the barbarous names of Xuž and Duž. These are separate nations. The chief of all of them is called Bušx, and of these nations one is called T’uyark’, which we believe are those called Tat’ars.” The names of Gog and Magog are many – often paired, as in Č’in and Mač’in, and accompanied by other nations – thus, Xuž and Duž as the names given for a multitude of nations signify Gog and Magog.

an ant's, short legs like a hog's, and by nature with no beards at all."¹⁶⁰ They are compared to or descended from Gog and Magog. Yet the role of Armenian literature in accompanying movements to ally with the Mongols, including early hopes that they would convert to Christianity and later calls for a joint Crusade, is apparent even in these same texts.¹⁶¹ This impacts on the role of Alexander and Gog and Magog: an association of the Mongols with a force that needs to be held back, hence the use of Alexander or Gog and Magog or both in a number of texts, alongside an impetus not to completely demonise the Mongols, hence – perhaps – the limited traction of this idea. The Mongols, when they come, might recall Gog and Magog, but the connection in histories does not linger.

Conclusion

Armenian historical texts use Alexander in a wide variety of ways: there was no singular Armenian or wider Caucasian project of putting Alexander into local histories. Indeed, in many texts he does not appear at all, and where he does he is present but not a pivotal figure in regional history. The great flourishing of the *Alexander Romance* tradition with *kafas* and extensive illumination cycles from the time of Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i in the late 13th, early 14th century does not appear to have a notable prologue in this genre. However, trends within historical texts do point towards the later concerns of the *kafas'* authors when working on sections of the *Alexander Romance* about the edges of the world. Beyond his inclusion as part of a straightforward historical narrative of the ancient past, what is notable is Alexander's association with space.

The first aspect of this is the straightforward use of Alexander as a marker of space. This appears briefly in the histories of Movsēs Xorenac'i and the 10th-century Uxtanēs of Sebastia of Alexander, with a more clearly stated purpose in the work of 10th to 12th-century Movsēs Dasxuranc'i and probable late 8th or early 9th-century Pseudo-Ĵuanšēr: the historical presence or

¹⁶⁰ Blake and Frye 1949: 295-297.

¹⁶¹ Pogossian 2014.

actions of Alexander defines a particular place. T'ovma Arcruni's inclusion of a passage from the *Alexander Romance* to describe Paradise also develops this trend, as Alexander is explicitly used to mark remote space. Alexander's encounter with human-faced birds – which T'ovma determines must have been angels – at the world's edges is also a sole surviving precursor to the Christianising work of the *kafas*. In the 13th century, Het'um uses Alexander to mark – and make more familiar – one of the distant lands he describes in a time when Alexander's association with miraculous lands may have been growing in Armenian awareness.

The second aspect derives partly from the first: the appropriation of Alexander by T'ovma Arcruni in Armenia and the author of *History of the Kings of K'art'li* in K'art'li (in Georgian and in the late-12th-century Armenian translation). In both cases, the authors alter historical reality to benefit their region. T'ovma Arcruni gives the Arcrunik' an ancestor who faced up to Alexander, while the author of the *History of the Kings of K'art'li* – alongside others writing in Georgian – refuses a narrative that would place K'art'li at or beyond the edge of the 'civilised' world. The power of using Alexander in these texts relies upon his association with remote space: only if he is usually seen as the one who invades and controls distant places do these narratives function. In this, they achieve the opposite of Arrian's concern at the opening of this chapter. Rather than magnifying the achievements of Alexander, they elevate the histories of the peoples of the periphery, where Alexander did not tread in reality.

The third aspect is Alexander's association with building a Wall or Gate against Gog and Magog, which is suggested in the 9th to 12th-century *Anonymous Tale* and explicit in the work of Step'annos Ōrbelean and (with only the construction activities) Het'um the Historian. Other histories utilise Gog and Magog as a way of describing invading forces without mentioning Alexander – and, of course, *K'art'lis C'xovreba* includes Alexander and excludes Gog and Magog. This too invokes distance, as Alexander's fortification is at the edge of the 'civilised' world and the peoples of Gog and Magog are the terrifying and 'inhuman' inhabitants of the world's edges. Though this narrative has a strong scriptural component in its development and apocalyptic use, it remains disconnected from the *kafa*

tradition, as the walling up of Gog and Magog does not appear in the Armenian *Alexander Romance* until very late.

Of historical texts written in Armenian up to the 14th century, it is thus possible to conclude that Alexander features a significant number of times as a marker of space and distance. How the different authors utilise Alexander in this role varies from the incidental to the descriptive or subversive. What remains open to question is to what extent this was entirely separate from the post-13th-century *Alexander Romance* tradition. Although, with the exception of T'ovma Arcruni, historians did not turn to scripture to understand Alexander, it is possible that an understanding of Alexander's role in – often remote – space affected that later development, in which the *kafas* sought to fit Alexander within a Christian cosmology. The small levels of significance accorded to Alexander in historical texts remain a contrast to the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, but the awareness of his association with space and the existence of texts subverting his control of that space is a potentially potent force. Contrary to Arrian's oft-vaunted conqueror, Alexander in Armenian-language historical texts is a versatile figure, caught between his familiar role as conqueror up to the world's edges and Caucasian writers' concerns for their own narratives.

CHAPTER THREE: ALEXANDER IN ARMENIAN APOCALYPTIC TEXTS

Then the gates of Armenia will be opened, and the descendants of Gog and Magog shall issue forth: they were twenty-four tribes, with twenty-four languages. When King Alexander saw these people eating the reptiles of the earth and all sorts of polluted things, including human flesh, eating the dead and every kind of unclean thing, performing magic rites and all kinds of evil deeds, he gathered them together, took them to the interior of these mountains, and confined them there. He then besought God that the mountains should come together, which came to pass, leaving a gateway [only] twenty cubits wide between the mountains.

– *The Edessene Apocalyptic Fragment*¹⁶²

To the unknown author of the Syriac *Edessene Apocalyptic Fragment* at the end of the 7th century CE, the Armenian mountains to the north were sufficiently far away to be the site of a legendary event: Alexander walling up Gog and Magog and a variable number of other nations, imprisoning them until their release upon the earth as part of the eschatological sequence. This story became arguably Alexander's most famous.¹⁶³ It notably appears in the Qur'an. In Sura XVIII:83-89, Alexander, under the name Dhu 'l-Qarnayn (the Two-Horned One), constructs a rampart against the harmful Gog and Magog, which in Sura XXI: 95-96 is stated will be opened during the Last Judgement. Its proliferation across the Christian and Muslim worlds is vast, ranging from the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius to the episode's eventual addition to the *Alexander Romance*. It was known, too, among Armenian literary traditors.

This chapter concentrates on the geography delineated in the Armenian tradition of Alexander and Gog and Magog: the location of the barrier, and how this story contributed to an understanding of Alexander's place – his own location and his role – in the world as understood and conveyed through literature. Much is familiar. Gog and Magog are recognisable by their vile characteristics, with a reprehensible diet and other ways of living, as well as their northern location. The pre-apocalyptic, scriptural origins of Gog and Magog created their association with that cardinal direction. In 1 Chronicles 1:5, the placement of Magog in a list of Japheth's sons is taken as an

¹⁶² Brock 1993: 246.

¹⁶³ van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 1-117 traces the development of the Gog and Magog story and Alexander's involvement across eastern Christian and Islamic traditions. Anderson 1932 is an older overview with a wider reach that remains valuable.

indication of his northernmost dwelling place.¹⁶⁴ Ezekiel's vision of an invasion "from the uttermost parts of the north" by Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 sets in place the essential apparatus of the apocalyptic tale, which was subsequently developed by many writers.¹⁶⁵ It found easy footing in Armenian literature, reflecting the reality of invasions through the Greater Caucasus mountains from the north. However, the location of Gog and Magog and Alexander's barrier against them are not typically in any Armenian mountains, nor in the Greater Caucasus, but further: an unspecified northern extreme of the world.

To what extent did Alexander's walling up of Gog and Magog presage the understanding of the world developed in the *kafas* composed by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunc'e'i? The episode, though it appeared in the *Alexander Romance* in other languages, did not enter the Armenian version with its initial translation. As noted at p.68, its first known occurrence in the Armenian *Alexander Romance* is in an 18th-century manuscript of the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, beyond the scope of this study, though further examination of individual manuscripts may reveal other, and earlier, instances.¹⁶⁶ None of the *kafas* I have collected contain it. This chapter examines the Armenian telling of the tale, starting with Armenian views of the north and then looking directly at Alexander's pre-apocalyptic actions there, as well as briefly considering a case where the location of the gates against Gog and Magog is unexpectedly specified.

The Threatening North

The north as a potential zone of danger is well-known in Armenian literature from centuries of incursions through the Caucasus mountains from peoples on the other side, as well as closer conflicts with mountain-dwellers. The two major passes through the Caucasus – at Darial, in the centre of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, and Derbent (also known in Armenian-language sources

¹⁶⁴ van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 4.

¹⁶⁵ van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 5-6.

¹⁶⁶ Skinner 1940.

as Čor/Čot), at the eastern side, on the Caspian Sea – are widely represented as the routes through which invading armies or raiding parties entered the South Caucasus, reflecting the reality of warfare in the region. Numerous historical texts describe such irruptions. Often, the histories depict northern peoples in similar ways to the writers and redactors of apocalyptic texts. In turn, the real dangers posed by peoples from the north is readily redacted in Armenian versions of apocalyptic texts. The two genres fed each other. Indeed, separating them into distinct genres is artificial and ought not to be considered rigid, as they shared many features, from the historical *ex eventu* presentation of many apocalyptic compositions to the fears of the world's imminent end expressed in many histories.

Movsēs Xorenac'i has many examples in his *History of the Armenians* of attacks that come from the north. In one example, "the hosts of the northern peoples united, I mean the Khazars and the Basilik', and passing through the Chor gate under the leadership of their king, a certain Vnasep Surhap, they emigrated and crossed to this side of the River Kura."¹⁶⁷ The combined threats of further away and closer northern peoples are shown in their complexity by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i in his *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (the Ałuank').

The news reached the court that the Khazars had emerged in large numbers through the gate of Č'olay into our country, and Šapuh assembled a numberless army of men from Asorestan, Xorasan, Xorazm, and many other brave Persians from the province of Atrpatakan, and Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians, and the twelve tribes of the wild peoples of Mount Caucasus, and with those countless forces he rose and marched against them.¹⁶⁸

Here, the degrees of difference are clear: the danger of invasion from beyond the Caucasus mountains by the Khazars, then the "twelve tribes of the wild peoples" – those mountain-dwellers not within the same sphere(s) as the Ałuank', Armenian and Georgian polities – who are close enough to not always pose a threat. Elsewhere, the northern peoples are described as hideous and wrong (from a perspective in which no army, even an enemy one, ought to look like women):

¹⁶⁷ Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians* II 65 (Thomson 2006: 208).

¹⁶⁸ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* II 1 (Dowsett 1961: 62).

“...terror increased at the sight of the ugly, insolent, broad-faced, eyelashless mob in the shape of women with flowing hair who descended upon them...”¹⁶⁹ Such dehumanising descriptions are commonly applied to Gog and Magog. At one point, Movsēs Dasxuranc’i out-and-out identifies northern peoples with Gog: “At that time the general and great prince of the Huns, Alp’ Ilit’uēr, assembled great numbers of his soldiers and those who came to join him from many places, the vigorous peoples of the land of Gog, all armed and equipped...”¹⁷⁰ Depending on the point in time, these invaders changed identity, from Khazars to Mongols (among many others). In the 13th-century *Historical Compilation* of Vardan Arewelc’i, a “foreign-looking and alien-speaking army moved from the land of Č’in and Mač’in called Mułal and T’at’ar ... [they entered] the plain from the regions of Ałuank’, about 20,000 strong. They slaughtered every living thing they found...”¹⁷¹ Č’in and Mač’in are among the many names of Gog and Magog.

These scant examples¹⁷² represent a widespread way of writing history in Armenian that is without a doubt influenced by the scriptural and apocalyptic depictions of northern peoples, as well as wider notions of foreign and monstrous races beyond the familiar regions of the world. In turn, apocalyptic texts in Armenian perpetuated the historical motif.

Armenian apocalypses ranged widely in their concerns and many mentioned neither Alexander nor Gog and Magog, but sufficient do to show a continuation of the northern threat. Nerses Lambronac’i, adapting the Greek commentary on *Revelation* by Andreas of Caesarea (565-614) in the 12th century to make his own commentary on *Revelation*, describes the origins of Gog and Magog: “from the four parts of the world” (Homily XVI), “from the regions of the Scyths” (Homily XVII), “the

¹⁶⁹ Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* II 11 (Dowsett 1961: 83-84).

¹⁷⁰ Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* II 36 (Dowsett 1961: 150).

¹⁷¹ Vardan Arewelc’i, *Historical Compilation* 84 (Thomson 1989: 213). The description of their arrival from Ałuank’ probably reflects an incorrect routing through mountainous Derbent, shared by Kirakos Gandzakec’i and other authors, whereas in reality they came through the Mughan Steppe. Though both routes could be included under the “regions of Ałuank’”, the description of the Mongols “entering the plain” makes more sense when coming from the mountains, especially given their origin in the “land of Č’in and Mač’in”. For the route, see Dashdondog 2010: 45.

¹⁷² van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 38-39 gives some others, though it too is not exhaustive.

Scythians from the north, whose name is called Niki” (Homily XXI).¹⁷³ The variously titled *Prophecies of Agat’on*, which has survived in a 12th-century Cilician redaction, includes the opening of Alexander’s gate as part of the prophesised events: “The northern gate, which the king Alexander raised up against the brutal and blood-spilling peoples of Ačuč and Mačuč, will fall.”¹⁷⁴ Texts derived from the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius similarly locate the gate and Gog and Magog. The apocalyptic chapter of Step’annos Ōrbelean’s *History of the Province of Sisakan* state that “the gates of the North will open, and the power of the nations whom Alexander had imprisoned at the extremities of the North will come out: Gog and Magog...”¹⁷⁵ while in *Question* he “expelled them to the northern extremes” until, at the end, “the northern gates will be opened” and the sons of Ham will spill out.¹⁷⁶ These texts will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. It is also possible that other Armenian manuscripts known to contain Gog and Magog material, thus far unedited, include further examples of this apocalyptic geography.¹⁷⁷

In one contrary case, the north is a source of aid. An apocryphal text called *Vision of Enoch the Just*, apparently a translation of an otherwise unknown Greek text, contains a vision in which certain features are interpreted as the forging of an alliance with a “prince of the north” that results in a “the northern nation and ... all the remnant of the peoples” marching against the people of the south (the Muslims).¹⁷⁸ As with any broadly defined genre tradition, apocalyptic texts in Armenian were not unanimous.

¹⁷³ Nerses Lambronac’i, *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*: Homily XVI, Homily XVII, Homily XXI (Thomson 2007: 145, 149, 176). Thomson notes that Niki is a misunderstanding of the Greek *Ounnika*, the Huns.

¹⁷⁴ Awger 1913: 400. Անկանի դուռն հիւսիսային, զոր կանգնեաց արքայն Աղեքսանդր ընդդէմ զազանաբարու և արիւնահեղ ազգացն Աճուճաց և Մաճուճաց. Translation my own. Pogossian 2014b: 479-499 discusses *Prophecies of Agat’on* and a contemporaneous apocalypse, *Sermo de Antichristo* – which includes the same expected opening of the gate, but does not locate it in any specific region (Frasson 1976: 106-107) – contextualising them both within the political climate of the 12th-century Cilician kingdom. A critical edition of *Prophecies of Agat’on* is currently in preparation by Zara Pogossian.

¹⁷⁵ Topchyan 2016: 22-23, 44.

¹⁷⁶ Stone 1996: 128-133; alternatively Topchyan 2016: 15-16, 35-37.

¹⁷⁷ Cowe 2014: 82 refers to a number of manuscripts containing texts about the end of the world in the Matenadaran, including one called ‘On the Coming of Gog and Magog’ (M3237), while Rosenstiehl 2014: 254, n.2 reports 20 texts about the “coming of Gog and Magog” in manuscripts in the Matenadaran.

¹⁷⁸ Reed 2014: 155-156.

While Armenian texts do not provide a specific location for Gog and Magog or the gate built to hold them back, they broadly agree on the cardinal direction: north. Certainly not in Armenian mountains. Traditions in other languages specifically identify the passes at Darial and Derbent as the primary options for the site of the gates.¹⁷⁹ As demonstrated, to Armenian authors these passes were the real entry points of invading and raiding forces into the South Caucasus. The *Letter of Love and Concord*, a forged 12th-century document produced in a similar political milieu to *Prophecies of Agat'on*¹⁸⁰ and about the meeting of Trdat and Constantine, including the apocalyptic promise that Constantine's descendent(s) will come to the aid of Trdat's at the end of times, points to the position of Darial and Derbent at the edge of the greater Armenian world. The limits of Trdat's dominion are described as "from the Gates of Byzantium till the gates of the Huns" (ie: Derbent)¹⁸¹ and Constantine commands that, if required, armies assemble for Trdat "like the sand at the seashore at the Watch of Huns – the Darband – and the Darial, since I trusted those to Trdat the Great as well."¹⁸² Gog and Magog make no appearance in the *Letter*, but its modern editor Zaroui Pogossian suggests an echo of the 24 kings that come through Alexander's gate once it is opened – of which Gog and Magog are two – in the same number of kings present at the acclamation of the concord.¹⁸³ This "apocalyptically charged number"¹⁸⁴ in the *Letter* makes its demarcation of Trdat's dominion potent: a drawing together of the eschatological tradition and the history of irruptions through the high range of the Greater Caucasus, which runs like a real barrier at the north of the South Caucasus region.

The Place of Alexander

¹⁷⁹ Stoneman 2008: 170-185; van Donzel and Schmidt 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Pogossian 2014b: 497.

¹⁸¹ *Letter of Love and Concord* 7 (Pogossian 2010: 348-349).

¹⁸² *Letter of Love and Concord* 7 (Pogossian 2010: 354-355). See also Thomson 1997 on the development of the alleged meeting between Trdat and Constantine at the beginning of Armenian Christianity, in which the eventual revival of the Armenian royal line after a great calamity is foretold.

¹⁸³ Pogossian 2010: 65.

¹⁸⁴ Pogossian 2010: 65.

Armenian literature of many genres is rich in apocalyptic concerns – a reflection of tumultuous political events across the centuries as well the influence of the strong tradition of apocalypse across numerous literary cultures, such as Syriac, Greek and Arabic, all with a strong scriptural component. However, little of it focuses on Alexander’s building activities.¹⁸⁵ Alexander can appear in the sequence of empires described in Daniel’s vision, but without any details of geographical interest.¹⁸⁶ Nor is he necessarily linked to Gog and Magog when they both occur. The *Book of Revelation* – though multiply translated, never a major feature of Armenian liturgical life¹⁸⁷ – contains both, but not together. The same is true of the 12th-century commentary on *Revelation* by Nerses Lambronac’i, not elaborating on any connection. Alexander and his empire are part of the sequence of kingdoms that will progress through human history (covered in Homily I and Homily VI of Nerses’ commentary), but he is not mentioned in the passages about Gog and Magog, not even when Nerses considers their origins.¹⁸⁸ It is enough to know that they come from the far north – beyond lands where Armenians lived.

Lorenzo DiTommaso provides an adroit summary of the process by which apocalypses were promulgated, applying terms such as “rebooting” and describing the “recombinant recycling of older material” as “an ideal vehicle” for the form.¹⁸⁹ Motifs recurred and were reshaped. These processes continued into the early medieval period, the time when Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i penned the first *kafas*, where concerns such as the revival of an Armenian monarchy in Cilicia interacted with the apocalyptic idea of the Last Emperor and an eventual liberation of Armenia.¹⁹⁰ Some authors perceived the portents of an imminent end in their time: Aristakēs Lastivertc’i, writing a *History* in the 11th century, describes the events of his time – the first incursions of the Turks – in apocalyptic terms. For instance, in chapter 9: “At the beginning of [Michael’s] reign, there was an eclipse of the

¹⁸⁵ The edited volume of Bardakjian and La Porta 2014 is the most up-to-date overview of apocalyptic themes in Armenian literature.

¹⁸⁶ Cowe 2014 summarises the Armenian reception of Daniel’s vision.

¹⁸⁷ Thomson 2007: v; Thomson 2014b.

¹⁸⁸ Thomson 2007.

¹⁸⁹ DiTommaso 2014: 134-135.

¹⁹⁰ Pogossian 2014b; Thomson 1997.

sun during the month Arac', on a Friday evening, in the year 482 of our [Armenian] era [1033 CE]. Many learned people, seeing [the eclipse] believed that the birth of the anti-Christ had occurred on that day, or that it presaged very great evils. Indeed, such [disasters] did occur in our day, and this narration is leading to [a description] of them."¹⁹¹ Other writers took a longer view: Nerses Lambronac'i, on *Revelation*, wrote that "When some people hear 'immediately', they suppose its prophecy to occur literally; but 'a thousand years in the eyes of the Lord are reckoned as an evening that passed.'"¹⁹² The rich repertoire of recombinant motifs allowed Alexander to reappear in multiple guises, and so too Gog and Magog – including together.

The enormously influential *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius was the starting point for apocalyptic literature in Armenian that did describe Alexander's construction of the gate against Gog and Magog.¹⁹³ Composed in Syriac in the late 7th century and already circulating in Greek by the end of that century, its date of translation into Armenian is unknown – it does not survive in its entirety in Armenian, but a translation was clearly made. An early recension of the Greek is considered the *vorlage*.¹⁹⁴ The excerpt in Step'annos Ōrbelean's *History of the Province of Sisakan* (written in the late 13th, early 14th centuries) attributes its translation into Armenian to a "Tēr Step'anos, bishop of Siwnik'", a name that has been widely ascribed to Step'anos Siwnec'i (died in 735 CE) or taken as a reference to Ōrbelean himself. It is impossible to say with certainty whether the prolific writer and translator Step'anos Siwnec'i – a good candidate – undertook the task, as no corroborating evidence survives. The presence of material inspired by Pseudo-Methodius in other Armenian texts contemporary to Ōrbelean's *History of the Province of Sisakan* makes it unlikely that he was the first to translate the *Apocalypse* (though he may have made his own, new translation), but the author

¹⁹¹ Bedrosian 1985.

¹⁹² Nerses Lambronac'i, *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*: Homily I (Thomson 2007: 47).

¹⁹³ Topchyan 2014 and the updated introductory section of Topchyan 2016 summarise the state of scholarship on the Armenian *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.

¹⁹⁴ Topchyan 2014: 368; Topchyan 2016: 8.

and date of the translation remain unknown.¹⁹⁵ There is also the possibility of its being a later interpolation into Step'anos Ōrbelean's *History*.¹⁹⁶

It is apparent, however, that an Armenian version of the *Apocalypse* disseminated widely. The 13th-century Franciscan friar William of Rubruck, on the return leg of his journey to the Mongol Khan, passed through Armenian lands in 1254. Meeting a bishop near Naxijewan, he learned that the Armenians have “two prophets”, the first of which was “the martyr Methodius, who belonged to their race and made a full-blown prophecy about the Ishmaelites which has come to fruition in the Saracens” – a term, at least in the case of ‘Ishmaelites’, which was coming to be applied to the Mongols by the 13th century.¹⁹⁷ To at least some Armenians, then, he was a significant figure worthy of indigenising. The name of the second prophet, Acacron, recalls the Agat'on of the abovementioned *Prophecies*, who wrote – like Pseudo-Methodius – of Alexander barring Gog and Magog in the north.¹⁹⁸ Assuming William of Rubruck's report is true, in some ways this is more interesting than the literary examples under discussion: it is a rare glimpse into the wider world of transmission and circulation within which scant texts – and their individual manuscripts – are the often-hard-to-connect nodes. It reinforces conclusions drawn from the texts with a greater sense of how their individual contents were not isolated testimonies.

From the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius came multiple strands of Armenian literature. The first is Step'annos Ōrbelean's *History of the Province of Sisakan*, which (as discussed in Chapter 2, p.57-59) inserts a section of the *Apocalypse* in the narrative as the Arabs invade, tinging the time with apocalyptic terror. In it, the final days of the earth are foretold, at which point “the gates of the North” open and the nations imprisoned by Alexander “at the extremities of the North” emerge, among them Gog and Magog.¹⁹⁹ Others include the Huns, the Alani and the “Man-Eaters”. The

¹⁹⁵ Topchyan 2014: 366; Topchyan 2016: 8; Bonura 2016 perhaps too readily accepts the identification of the translator as Step'anos Siwnec'i on the basis of its convenience.

¹⁹⁶ Topchyan 2016: 7.

¹⁹⁷ Jackson 1990: 266; Topchyan 2014: 368-369.

¹⁹⁸ Topchyan 2016: 8; Jackson 1990: 226-267.

¹⁹⁹ Topchyan 2016: 22-23, 44.

location of Alexander and his gates is unchanged from the Syriac original, in which Alexander “shut up behind the gates of the North” the nations of Gog, Magog and others, 22 in total.²⁰⁰

The second strand of *Apocalypse*-derived literature is a text simply titled *Question*. This contains passages based on Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse*, including the walling up of Gog and Magog and the other nations in the north. It was first identified, with the title *Question*, in a miscellany of 1686 by Michael Stone (M9100), but was later found in a manuscript of the same century (J587) by Roberta Ervine – without any title of its own – alongside the *Book of Questions* by Vanakan Vardapet (1181-1251).²⁰¹ It has also been found in an even older copy of Vanakan Vardapet's *Book of Questions*, dating to the 13th century (M5611).²⁰² Ervine sees its later title *Question* as a “a vestigial remnant of the original question in Vanakan”²⁰³ – as it survives, with Vanakan's questions-and-answers or alone, it lacks a question, launching straight into an answer comprising a history of Adam and Eve and their descendants, arriving at Alexander and “the filthy sons of Ham, whom Alexander pushes to the north and imprisons behind gates sealed with a magical, impregnable substance. Their release in the last days is foretold...”²⁰⁴ In Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse*, these filthy sons were of Japheth, but as the Armenians considered Japheth to be their forefather, Topchyan suggests that “it would have been shameful to have the same ancestor together with the ‘unclean nations’”.²⁰⁵ Details are changed where necessary: the Armenians are not behind the wall. It is, of course, further north. Much, however, is familiar.

Then, he [Alexander] saw the revolting and horrible-looking race of the sons of Ham. They used to eat creeping things and all disgusting vermin, flies and rodents and cat(s), (and) serpents. And they did not bury the bodies of the dead, but ate them. Alexander, having seen this, planned not to permit them to dwell in the Holy Land, since they had contaminated (it) by their disgusting acts. He sought of God earnestly, and he assembled all of them and their women and children. And, going behind them, he expelled them to the northern extremes, to which there is no entry from the East up to the West nor from any other place. At once he beseeched God, and He heard his prayers and commanded two

²⁰⁰ van Donzel and Schmidt 2010: 28-30.

²⁰¹ Stone 1998; Ervine 2000.

²⁰² Topchyan 2014: 369-370; Topchyan 2016: 9.

²⁰³ Ervine 2000: 424-425.

²⁰⁴ Ervine 2000: 424.

²⁰⁵ Topchyan 2014: 370.

mountains where were called Northern C'oyk', and they approached to one another to (a distance of) twelve cubits. And he arranged there also bronze gates... He impeded now this abominable race, smitten by intrigue and instructed by this sort of inhumanity, so that they would be unable to open these doors. According to the prophet Ezekiel, in the last days, in the end, Gog and Magog will issue forth to the land of Israel. These are 24 races and kings, which are the following. I did not want to write the names. At that time the northern gates will be opened suddenly and the races closed up inside will come forth, and the earth will tremble before their faces...²⁰⁶

The peoples are abhorrent in both appearance and culture, with a deleterious effect on the world, so Alexander – with God's assistance – confines them in the remote north. The precise location of Alexander's construction is not given by Step'annos Ōrbelean or by whoever compiled the text known as *Question* – reflecting the passages of Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse* being translated and adapted – but as a cardinal direction on an apocalyptic cartography it is readily legible.

The third strand of the *Apocalypse* in Armenian is a revision of the text, showing signs of having been reworked in the 16th or 17th century, but existing in an earlier form perhaps as soon as the 10th century as part of the *Life of St. Nersēs the Parthian, Patriarch of the Armenians* attributed to Mesrop Erēc'.²⁰⁷ Early on in a sequence of rulers that culminates in the Antichrist, this version of the *Apocalypse* again includes the release of Gog and Magog upon the world: "And the gate of the North, which Alexander had erected against the savage nation called Agog and Magog, will fall, and a numberless horde of barbarians will come out of there. Twenty-two kingdoms which had been imprisoned there, a countless multitude... For the prophet Jeremiah says: "Out of the north the disaster shall break out on the land."²⁰⁸ Again, the direction of danger is clear.

However, the cartography of apocalypse is only shared with the *Alexander Romance* in the broadest of terms: the edges of the world as the source of marvellous or monstrous non-human races. The appearance of Gog and Magog is frightful and their diet different to the point of alarm. The apocalyptic prophecy of their eventual release from behind Alexander's confinement serves a

²⁰⁶ Stone 1996: 128-133. Topchyan 2016: 15-16, 35-37 provides an alternative Armenian edition and English translation based on M5611 (the 13th-century *Book of Questions* of Vanakan Vardapet) and M9100 (the miscellany containing *Question* used by Stone).

²⁰⁷ Topchyan 2014: 370-371; Topchyan 2016: 10.

²⁰⁸ Topchyan 2016: 27, 49. The Biblical verse is identified as Jeremiah 1:14.

different purpose, however, to the events in remote regions – usually in the east, loosely defined – described in the *Alexander Romance*. Where the apocalyptic texts enable an understanding of current events through placing them within the divinely driven sequence of time ending in the eschaton, the *Alexander Romance* and its interpretations via the *kafas* provide wonders and wisdom for the immanent world.

Unexpected Proximity

In one case, Gog and Magog are worryingly close. Grigor Tat'ewac'i (1344-1409), in his *Book of Questions* (a different one to the book authored by Vanakan Vardapet about a century and a half earlier), wrote polemically against Jewish beliefs and provides a spiritual interpretation of Gog and Magog: "Seventh, 'Ezekiel says that 'the Messiah will do battle with Gog and Magog' [Ezekiel 38:2] which your messiah has not done.' We say that Gog and Magog are to be understood spiritually as the persecutors of the Church, all of whom the Lord Jesus will slaughter as the Psalm says, 'May you grind them to dust just as the vessel of a potter'.²⁰⁹ However, when he returns to Gog and Magog in a later chapter, Grigor Tat'ewac'i delves into more material concerns – eschewing some of the trickier theological points of the western source for his polemic against the Jews, which would not favour eastern Christians²¹⁰ – writing:

A question concerning Gog and Magog.

Q: What is Gog and Magog?

A: Some say that [they are] the ten tribes of Israel who were shut up in the mountains of the Caspian. The Jews say these will emerge at the end of the world and come to Jerusalem.

Others say that by Gog and Magog are to be understood the forces of the anti-Christ, who at the end of the world fight against the Church. For Gog are they through whom Satan secretly persecutes the faithful. And Magog [are they] through whom he manifestly persecutes the Church. But others say, Gog means the heathen and Magog, Satan. But at the end the lives of men will be shorter than ours, as ours [is shorter] than our predecessors'.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ La Porta 2009: 107-108.

²¹⁰ La Porta 2009: 121-122.

²¹¹ La Porta 2009: 122-123.

This passage does not originate with Grigor Tat'ewac'i. Rather, it depends on Hugh Ripelin's *Compilatio brevis theologicae veritatis* (VII: 10), a widely read book in western Europe, which was translated into Armenian as part of the Catholic conversion efforts of the Fratres Unitores. The Armenian translation of this passage in Ripelin's text reads similarly to its *Book of Questions* iteration: "Concerning Gog and Magog some say that they are the ten tribes of Israel who were shut up in the mountains of the Caspian, whom the queen of the Amazons – under whom are kings – does not permit to exit and they are under her dominion. The Jews say they will emerge at the end of the world and come to Jerusalem and will ravage the Church with their messiah."²¹²

Alexander is absent from this brief apocalypse, but his gates – and Gog and Magog – are given a specific location: by the Caspian (most likely at Derbent). Their proximity is unremarked on. The "apocalyptic charge" in the *Letter of Love and Concord* is not truly released here, as Grigor Tat'ewac'i's concerns lie elsewhere, and Ripelin's geography – whether in its own translation or redacted in Tat'ewac'i's text – is not taken up by other Armenian literary traditors.

Conclusion

Though the story of Alexander's barrier against Gog and Magog reached Armenian literature, it did not develop in abundance there. The redactions of the Pseudo-Methodius *Apocalypse*, the brief references in *Revelations* and its commentary by Nerses Lambronac'i, in the *Prophecies of Agat'on* and even in the western irruption of Hugh Ripelin's *Compilatio* – as well as the allusions in histories discussed in Chapter 2 – are all repetitions of a motif. There is little attempt to understand it. The gate is fit readily into the world: its northern location works in a reality in which invasions have historically often arrived from the north, while a more spiritual contemplation and fear of the eschaton suits all calamitous times.

Its precise location is mobile. Frequently, it is pushed further north. From a Syrian perspective,

²¹² La Porta 2009: 122-123.

it can be found in Armenia. From an Armenian perspective, the barrier against the monsters is unsurprisingly pushed further, up to or beyond the Greater Caucasus mountains. At least one Georgian writer, as seen in Chapter 2 (p.55), identifies Magog with the ancestors of the Khazars, in the steppe beyond the Caucasus, in the hagiography *Martyrdom of Abo*. That said, the map is not always so neatly moved. Among the Nart sagas of the Circassians, who lived in the northwest Caucasus and in the plains beyond the mountains, is one where a giant is chained Prometheus-style in the mountains beside a curious spring: “This spring has a miraculous power. Whoever drinks of it will live to the end of the world. The time will come when God will grow angry with all the sinful children of Adam and will set the one-eyed giant free from his bonds, set him free from the mountain depths. Woe will betide mankind, for he will avenge his sufferings on humanity!”²¹³ For the Circassians, the mountains do not represent a notable relocation, nor are the mountains (depending on where individual traditors were) to the north. Rather, this reveals the repeated use of mountains as thresholds, peripheries and *loci horridi* across cultures and centuries.²¹⁴ That, travelling through the Caucasus, no one can quite arrive at the right mountains to find Gog and Magog – it is for Gog and Magog to find them at the appointed hour – is due to the way that each one of these tales “transcends landscape”.²¹⁵

This unreal edge of the world shares in the same geography as the *Alexander Romance*, and it is no surprise that eventually the story of Gog and Magog made it into the Armenian version of Alexander’s experiences. The frightening features of Gog and Magog – “man-eating, and obscene, and eaters of carrion, whom we drove away and put to flight”²¹⁶ – are not unfamiliar among the other creatures and peoples encountered by Alexander, to be examined in the second section of the

²¹³ Colarusso 2016: 170. The Nart sagas are told among peoples of the North Caucasus, including the Circassians, Abaza, Abkhaz, Svan (whose language is related to Georgian) and Ossetians. A Promethean figure is a widespread motif among these tales, and indeed these tales are a likely origin for the Greek tale, but the inclusion of an apocalyptic element is not typical.

²¹⁴ della Dora 2016: 27-70.

²¹⁵ della Dora 2016: 55, on the *Life of Moses* by Saint Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395 CE), who asks “how then would [one] arrive at the sought-for boundary when he can find no boundary?” in seeking knowledge of God.

²¹⁶ Skinner 1940: xxiv-xxv. This is taken from the brief addition to the body of the *Alexander Romance* text in the 18th-century manuscript examined by Skinner, while the bulk of the Gog and Magog story – with some structure that recalls the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius – is added in the colophonic material.

thesis. However, this is a late addition, and it appears that in the late 13th, early 14th century and the 16th century, when Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunc'e'i worked, this multiplicity of Alexander motifs had not yet met. Their *kafas* betray no specific dependency on the apocalyptic tradition beyond a shared general geography.

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER FOUR: INTRODUCTION TO SECTION TWO

From the late 13th century survives the earliest attestation of a new phenomenon in the Armenian reception of the *Alexander Romance*: the composition of *kafas* (monorhymed poetry) to accompany the prose narrative, at the hand of Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i (1260-1331). The *kafas* are present throughout the narrative, including the area of this project's primary concern: Alexander's experiences at the edges of the world. Many were written on this subject. The next recorded irruption of *kafas* composed for the *Alexander Romance* comes in the 16th century, primarily authored by Catholicos Grigoris Alt'amarc'i (c.1478-c.1550) and his pupil Zak'aria Gnunec'i (16th century, exact dates unknown). At least one other poet, Hovasap Sebastac'i (c. 1508-1564), is known to have copied the *Alexander Romance*, in 1535.²¹⁷ Both Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i were involved in creating manuscript copies of the *Alexander Romance*, including *kafas* authored over two centuries earlier by Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, and both added their own.

The initial development of the *kafas* is traceable through the first two Armenian *Alexander Romance* manuscripts to survive, both dated to the late 13th or early 14th century. These are M10151, which has no *kafas*, and V424, which includes a full cycle of linked *kafas* and illuminations²¹⁸ – a difference that reveals a lot about this new literary direction. It was not absolute, with manuscripts containing *kafas* never taking the place of unadorned manuscripts, but – like the red-inked verses and spectacular images of V424 – it was a vibrant and significant part of the *Alexander Romance* tradition in the Armenian language. The extent and complete state of the *kafas* and illuminations in V424 indicate that it was not the first manuscript to contain such additions, but its attribution of changes to the *Alexander Romance* to Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i strongly argues for his

²¹⁷ Hacikyan 2002: 750-751. The manuscript is currently held in Berlin – it has not been possible to consult it for this project. Some information about the manuscript can be found in Rhodes 1959: 26, while Coulie 2004 provides an introduction to scriptoria of Sebastia.

²¹⁸ M10151 is edited as text B of Simonyan 1989. V424 has been reproduced as a facsimile with Italian translation in Traina et al. 2003, and is used in the creation of the critical text A of Simonyan 1989. The English translation of Wolohojian 1969 is based on V424, but does not translate the *kafas*.

inauguration of what became a new interest in the *Romance* among Armenian literary traditors. Additionally, no earlier authors are identified by surviving Armenian manuscripts as authoring *kafas* for this text. From the 16th century onwards, more Armenian *Alexander Romance* manuscripts survive, and the *kafas* are also found separately from the prose narrative in *taġaran* (anthology of poetry and hymns) and *Źoġovacu* (miscellany) collections copied in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Any copying that occurred between the late 13th, early 14th centuries and the 16th century onwards is lost.

Unfortunately, there is no global list of surviving manuscripts containing *Alexander Romance* material. The latest estimate by Dickran Kouymjian gives approximately 80 Armenian *Alexander Romance* manuscripts, with 14 of those bearing illuminations; he does not state how many contain *kafas*.²¹⁹ Hasmik Simonyan listed 31 manuscripts with *Alexander Romance* material in the Mesrop Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Yerevan, Armenia, whether the *Alexander Romance* narrative without *kafas* (2), the narrative with *kafas* (21, of which 5 also have illuminations), or *kafas* in *taġaran* and *Źoġovacu* (8).²²⁰ This rough indication that many – perhaps a majority – of the total surviving Alexander-related manuscripts included *kafas* is an indicator of their prevalence and importance after their innovation by Xač'atur Keč'ařec'i.

This section of the thesis begins by describing the poetic form of *kafas* and considering the historical context of their development (Chapter 4), and then traces the *kafas* about Alexander at the edges of the world in the late 13th, early 14th century through to the 16th century and beyond in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts (Chapter 5) and *taġaran* and *Źoġovacu* collections (Chapter 6). This separation into two chapters is designed to show how the Alexander *kafas* grew from their initial creation by Xač'atur Keč'ařec'i alongside the written narrative to, over the centuries, spread far more widely. The original cycle was added to by Grigoris Aġt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gñunec'i in the 16th-century manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance* (as will be discussed in Chapter 5), but also

²¹⁹ Kouymjian forthcoming.

²²⁰ Simonyan 1975: 41-134.

splintered into smaller, unique cycles with their own additions anthologised in *tataran* and *žoťovacu* collections (as will be discussed in Chapter 6). The geographical spread of the Alexander *kafas* extended from their place of creation in Keč'arīs, in Greater Armenia, to Lake Van, Kaffa, Constantinople and Rome. The great variety of the Alexander *kafas* discussed demonstrates their multivalency within Armenian-language literature. Another important aspect of the *kafas* is their rich connections to other literatures, whether composed in or translated into Armenian, or existing in other languages across the South Caucasus, Anatolia and Middle East. The Alexander *kafas* were embedded in a cross-textual, cross-cultural landscape from the late 13th, early 14th century onwards.

The history of *kafas*

The *kafas* of the *Alexander Romance* are monorhymed poems that take two metrical forms, with the name 'kafa' used collectively for both. The first of these, the *hayren* meter – itself a separate poetic form often used in lay, oral settings – has a syllable pattern of 2 + 3 + 2 / 3 + 2 + 3 per line, with the rhyme falling at the end of each line.²²¹ The second meter, that of the *kafa*, is found in lines of fifteen or sixteen syllables with the syllable pattern of 2 + 5 or most typically 3 + 5 per every half-line, with the 5 divided in a different way to the *hayren*, and rhyming at the end each half-line (a different rhyme pattern to the *hayren*). Both forms of *Alexander Romance kafa* are found in poems of two, four or more lines. Their visual presentation lacks breaks at line or half-line, as is to be expected in manuscripts, but is notable in other ways: they are typically written in distinct colours, often red or – remarkably – green in later, 16th-century manuscripts, in comparison to the black ink of the narrative. They intentionally stand out on the page.

Their origins lie at least partly in Arabic poetry: *kafa* derives from the Arabic *qafiya*, and these

²²¹ Hairapetian 1995: 472. Though attributed in the past to a 16th-century figure, Nahapet K'uč'ak, *hayrens* were authored by many individuals and across a much wider time period.

rhyming poems potentially entered the Armenian tradition with the first, abbreviated translation of the Arabic tale of the *City of Bronze* made for David of Tayk' in the late 10th century.²²² Like the *Alexander Romance*, this wonder tale is accompanied by *kafas* – initially a small selection, translating the poetic inscriptions found by the tale's protagonist, Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, governor of the Maghreb, throughout the journey to the City of Bronze, as well as his lamentations upon reading the inscriptions.²²³ It is unknown whether the metrical patterns of the *kafa* and *hayren* – the latter of which has a name stressing its Armenian usage, but not necessarily its origins – derive from indigenised outside influences or were an innovation of traditors using the Armenian language.

The use of monorhyme at a higher register was established by Grigor Magistros in 1045, in his verse abridgement of the Bible – possibly influenced by the *qasidas* of al-Mutanabbi – that rhymed entirely in *-i*.²²⁴ The *Book of Lamentation* of Grigor Narekac'i, completed several decades earlier at around 1001/1002, had also utilised a range of monorhymes. Subsequent poets of the 12th century, Nersēs Šnorhali and Grigor Tłay, developed the genre of long, monorhymed poems. Nersēs Šnorhali also knew of shorter, more lay forms and considered them worthwhile if used to Christian effect, saying that “if the false which [only] pretends can be rendered so beautiful by this means, how much more elegant will my word of truth become by utilizing the same form.”²²⁵ His statement also refers to a linguistic aspect of these shorter poems, which included the *hayren*: they were not written in Classical Armenian, but in the vernacular variations of Middle Armenian, reflecting – and actively using – the speech of their publics. The use of contemporary, local linguistic registers speaks strongly to the place of *hayrens* among various publics: the most familiar form of expression, used by people ranging from illiterate performers and audiences to the scholars who copied many of them. The *hayren* became widespread, with subject matters of daily life, love and exile.²²⁶ Their content makes apparent their oral nature:

²²² Russell 1983: 255; Cowe 2005: 383.

²²³ Russell 1983: 255-256.

²²⁴ Cowe 2005: 384-385.

²²⁵ Cowe 1995: 37.

²²⁶ For a recent treatment of the love *hayrens* in particular, see Melkonyan 2014.

And under it, with a pale-blue cup,
drinking sweet wine, sits she.
Drinking and singing a *hayren*:
“Love and wine — what ecstasy...”²²⁷

By the time Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i composed the first known *kafas* of the *Alexander Romance*, he adopted a well-established form to enrich the narrative of Alexander's life. Christina Maranci has described multiple uses of *kafas* in the *Alexander Romance*: they repeat information already given in the main narrative, they elaborate on it to add new information, they comment upon the actions of Alexander – at times directly addressing him – in a moralising tone, and they guide the audience in following the actions of both king and narrative. Much of this is in dialogue not just with text but with image, as some *kafas* act as captions.²²⁸ To this I propose adding a deeper understanding of how the *kafas* were composed to guide their audience, specifically – at the edges of the world – in fitting Alexander's experiences within a Christian cosmology, in order to understand the seemingly impossible landscape and thus to instigate religious contemplation of God's wide-ranging, wondrous works.

The setting: the late 13th, early 14th century

Christina Maranci, writing about the 14th century, has suggested that the *Alexander Romance's* “classical references, courtly themes, and emphasis on foreign diplomacy” might have resonated with audiences at this time.²²⁹ Certainly the 13th and 14th centuries saw what might almost euphemistically be called diplomatic relations – in reality, the violence of invasion – affecting the South Caucasus, eastern Anatolia and the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. In Greater Armenia, where Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i lived, people had endured conflict between the Ayyubids and the combined Georgians and Armenians, the invasion of the Khwarezmians and the invasion of the Mongols. By the

²²⁷ Mkrtschjan 1988: text 81, with English translation taken from Hacikyan et al 2002: 1047.

²²⁸ Maranci 2003-2004.

²²⁹ Maranci 2003-2004: 26.

time that Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i was born in 1260, Mongol rule defined the political situation in the region, bringing periods of great hardship.²³⁰

However, these centuries also saw in particular times and places a flourishing of life: monasteries in Greater Armenia continued to be important centres of cultural production. A century earlier, the sponsorship of the Mqargrdzeli (known in Armenian as the Zak'arian/Zak'arid family) and other families benefited many religious establishments in Lori and Širak.²³¹ Pšošan and Ōrbēlian patronage enabled monastic developments of “large-scale proportions”²³² at locations including Keč'aris, as well as Gefard, T'anahat and Gladzor. By the late 13th century, during periods of relative peace under Il-Khanid rule, the monasteries of Gladzor and Tat'ew in Siwnik' became centres of learning and the continuation of literary tradition. Scholarly programs of learning, first reported by Mxit'ar Goš in his *Lawcode* of 1184, were developed at Tat'ew to include 'internal' (*nerk'in*) and 'external' (*artak'in*) writings. The former were Scriptural, while the latter encompassed a wide range of texts, including the profane.²³³ This may point to the place of the *Alexander Romance* in monastic settings. Of course, this stability was not constant – but overall manuscript production in the late 13th and early 14th centuries remained high, testifying to the ongoing development of Armenian literature.²³⁴

A crucial feature of this literary landscape is its multiculturalism. Writing of the 13th century, Antony Eastmond in *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia* has created a rich picture of the political and material culture of Greater Armenia, using the life of an Armeno-Georgian woman – Tamta Mqargrdzeli – as his lens.²³⁵ An especially compelling point is the plurality of identity, exemplified through Tamta's life: her birth into a noble family with Kurdish roots, living in the marchlands where Georgian and Armenian territorial

²³⁰ Dashdondog 2011 provides an overview of Mongol-Armenian relations in the 13th and 14th centuries.

²³¹ La Porta 2016.

²³² Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 8-9.

²³³ La Porta 2016.

²³⁴ Kouymjian 1983: 429-434.

²³⁵ Eastmond 2017.

holdings met. Her father Iwanē converted to Georgian Orthodoxy, while her uncle Zak'arē remained in the Armenian Apostolic faith. Then, in her life, she became part of the Ayyubid court in the town of Xlat' (modern Ahlat) as the wife of al-Awhad and shortly afterwards of al-Ashraf Musa, and was later taken to the Mongol court before returning to a position of authority in Xlat', dying in about 1254. While Tamta's experiences as a member of the elite cannot represent regular life, she points to an important aspect of the 13th century: people lived in multiple and interconnected worlds. People, stories, architectural and artistic motifs all travelled in all directions across the greater region of the south Caucasus and eastern Anatolia, between people of different religions, kingdoms/principedoms, speaking languages that included Armenian, Georgian, Syriac, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, Persian and Greek. This situation was not new, only its details.²³⁶ It was equally true for Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, born at about the time that Tamta died.

There is much evidence of cultural interconnectivity in the literary and material culture of the 13th and 14th centuries. An earlier translation of the Arabic tale of the *City of Bronze* has already been mentioned – in the early 13th century, a *vardapet* Arak'el made a second, longer translation of the tale.²³⁷ Rūmī, who lived in Konya among people including Armenians between 1228 and his death in 1273, influenced their work, with S. Peter Cowe noting “the impact of Sufic imagery, tone, symbolism and the eroticism on the Christian mystical expression of poets like Konstantin Erznkac'i...”²³⁸ The development of the Rose and the Nightingale motif in Armenian poetry belongs to this same direction of Persian influence on Armenian literary output.²³⁹ In a different direction, the Turkish *Dānişmendnāme* – first written down in the 13th century – features a number of Armenian characters, reflecting the diversity of Cappadocia.²⁴⁰ Craftsmanship also travelled: in

²³⁶ Eger 2015 traces the polyvalent interactions across the Islamic-Byzantine frontier, focusing on the 7th to 10th centuries. The Iranian element of early Armenian culture has been deeply explored by Nina Garsoïan, with many of her studies collected in Garsoïan 1985, 1999 and 2010; continued Armenian and Georgian remembrance of the Sasanian and Parthian pasts into the period of Muslim control is illuminated by Vacca 2017.

²³⁷ Russell 1983: 255.

²³⁸ Cowe 2015: 88-90.

²³⁹ Cowe 2005: 391-396.

²⁴⁰ Cowe 2015: 81.

contextualising Tamta Mqargrdzeli's life, Antony Eastmond has collated evidence of buildings across Anatolia with inscriptions that identify their builders as having come from Xlat'. These include a caravanserai near Aksaray, the Sitte Melik (a tomb) in Divriği and a spectacular, carving-covered mosque-hospital also in Divriği, in central Anatolia, and the Mama Khatun complex in Tercan, in eastern Anatolia.²⁴¹ In the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, by the 1280s, artists incorporated Chinese motifs into manuscripts: an illuminated lectionary commissioned by Prince Het'um in 1286 included two lions flanking the bust of Christ Emmanuel in a protective role, a Buddhist Wheel of Law, Chinese dragons and phoenixes, while a single Chinese dragon is visible in the silk tunic of Archbishop John's portrait in a Gospel he commissioned in 1289.²⁴² Syrian-Armenian contacts in Cilicia, meanwhile, led to the translation of various Syriac texts in the 13th century, including the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian and 'On Nature' by Išōx.²⁴³

This is but a glimpse of the connectivity and complexity that existed around the lifetime of Xač'atur Keč'arec'i. It ranges across space, but so did individuals: monks, as well as builders, lived peripatetic lives, "crucial in the creation and maintenance of an intellectual network across the wide territory of Armenian inhabitation".²⁴⁴ They bore traditions, not only as physical texts but as mental knowledge to disperse orally.

Some people journeyed further. In 1243, the Cilician king Het'um I sent his brother Smbat to the Mongol commander Baiju to negotiate a treaty of submission and cooperation, after which Smbat went in 1246 to Qara-Qorum to submit to the Great Khan.²⁴⁵ In 1248, while he was in Samarkand, Smbat wrote to his brother-in-law Henry I Lusignan of Cyprus about his journey, detailing Christian churches in the east and the erroneous belief that the Khans had converted:

This last [Tanchat] is the land from which came the Three Kings to Bethlem to worship the Lord Jesus which was born. And know that the power of Christ has been, and is, so great,

²⁴¹ Eastmond 2017: 282-321.

²⁴² Kouymjian 2008: 121-129. Armenian use of these motifs was short-lived, however, with no attestations after 1300.

²⁴³ Cowe 2010; Ter Petrosian 1992: 19-22.

²⁴⁴ La Porta 2016: 342.

²⁴⁵ Dashdondog 2011: 79-89.

that the people of that land are Christians; and the whole land of Chata believes in those Three Kings. I have myself been in their churches and have seen pictures of Jesus Christ and the Three Kings, one offering gold, the second frankincense, and third myrrh. And it is through those Three Kings that they believe in Christ, and that the Chan and his people have now become Christians.²⁴⁶

Later, he expressed a contemporary hope in a Christian king of India:

Let me tell you, moreover, that in the land of India, which St. Thomas the Apostle converted, there is a certain Christian king who stood in sore tribulation among the other kings who were Saracens. They used to harass him on every side, until the Tartars reached that country, and he became their liegeman. Then, with his own army and that of the Tartars, he attacked the Saracens; and he made such booty in India that the whole East is full of Indian slaves; I have seen more than 50,000 whom this king took and sent for sale.²⁴⁷

This wishful Christianisation of the remote east is interesting in light of a tendency that will be seen in Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i's *kafas*. Other contemporaneous texts, as discussed in Chapter 2, described distant regions in terms of the wonders to be encountered there. The 14th-century *Flower of Histories of the East* by Het'um Patmič' mentions the "great dyuersite of serpentes and of beestes"²⁴⁸ found by Alexander in India, while the 13th-century *History of the Armenians* by Kirakos Gandzakec'i describes in lurid detail the cannibalism carried out by the Nayngas, a people dwelling in what seems to be southeast Asia: "Out of the skin they make a bag which they fill with wine and from which all of them drink using the [deceased's] male member. However, only relatives do this, and none other, since they alone were sired by the deceased and it is theirs alone to eat and drink of him."²⁴⁹ Though true knowledge of distant lands gradually developed among Armenians with access to knowledge gained by diplomacy and trade, the map detailed in such texts did not shed its fantastic edges. This too is important for understanding Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i's *kafas*.

From this world of travelling people and travelling cultures came the *kafas* written by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i to accompany the *Alexander Romance* – Christian poems with Arabic formal heritage in

²⁴⁶ Yule 1886: cxxvii.

²⁴⁷ Yule 1886: cxxviii; Osipian 2012 discusses the identity of this king, who is either Prester John of the famous letter or his son/grandson, David.

²⁴⁸ Burger 1988: 11.

²⁴⁹ *History of the Armenians* 60 (Bedrosian 1986).

vernacular Armenian to accompany a long-standing Armenian translation of a Greek text.

The author: Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i

Keč'ařis Monastery was established in the 11th century in the town of Keč'ařuyk' or Keč'ařis, now – as it was in its earliest days – known as Całkajor (more frequently transliterated as Tsaghkadzor), by Grigor Magistros of the Pahlawuni family. At that time, the church of St. Grigor Lusaworič' and the church of Surb Nšan (Holy Sign) were built; two centuries later, the Kat'olike church and a *gavit* for the church of St. Grigor Lusaworič' were added, and *xaç'k'ars* from this period remain around the site to this day. At this time, ownership of the monastery transferred to the Prořian (formerly Xałbakian) family.²⁵⁰ As the crow flies, it is near the monastic sites at Bjni and Lake Sewan, but the intervening terrain is not all easy to travel, even today. Tsaghkadzor is nestled up a valley of tree-covered hills that surround it on three sides, its name a testimony to its scenic location: ծաղիկ (flower) and ձոր (valley) combining to mean 'valley of flowers'. Writing about Keč'ařis Monastery, Mourad Hasratian and Adriano Alpago-Novello view it as belonging to that landscape, its buildings "a blown-up natural type of germination of shoots emerging from the soil in springtime" with its apparent lack of a boundary wall "the absence of an element which, apart from its purely practical function, would also contain and define space."²⁵¹ In those practical terms, this suggests something about the security concerns of the monks dwelling there. Tsaghkadzor was within the region of Il-Khanid control during Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i's life, which meant it was not far, in place or time, from various upheavals²⁵² – but its withdrawn location may have afforded it some peace.

Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, born in 1260 into the Prořian family, was based there from the late 13th

²⁵⁰ Sanjian 1987: 916.

²⁵¹ Hasratian and Alpago-Novello 1982: 12-13.

²⁵² Hewsen 2001: map 116.

century.²⁵³ He was keenly aware of the hardships experienced by many people during this time. His poem *Lament on the Destruction of the Eastern Realm*²⁵⁴ describes the death of princes and the cessation of peaceful Christian tradition: “Our enviable princes are gone, and their children as well...” and “The church doors we closed, the writings of the Law we forgot, and we became our own executioners.”²⁵⁵ While blaming a dire situation on sin is a common *topos* in medieval Armenian writing (and in many other language traditions, too) that evidently helped to shape Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i’s *Lament*, the poem clearly reflects a perceived reality of suffering. Nonetheless, his position at Keč’aris enabled him to carry out his work on the *Alexander Romance*, and networks of literary exchange between monasteries ensured its copying and thereby its perpetuation in his time.

The setting: the 16th century

The 16th century is considered a difficult period for most Armenians.²⁵⁶ No major polity had endured since the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in 1375, with only local princedoms in Siwnik’ and Lori claiming lordly power. While the church remained an important, long-lasting institution with the ability to fund architectural and scribal production, manuscript production fell.²⁵⁷ Much of the 16th century, especially in the region of Van where Grigoris Att’amac’i and (for part of his life) Zak’aria Gnunec’i were based, was characterised by war between the Safavid Persians and Ottoman Turks, fought across the South Caucasus and eastern Anatolia. Van was a major site of military campaigning: the city was subject to sieges, and the wider region to deprivations that led to famine. Hostilities did not end until the 17th century. At the same time, Van fared comparatively better than many other areas with large Armenian populations and thus manuscript production and

²⁵³ Hacikyan 2002: 567; Avdalbegyan 1958: 18-42.

²⁵⁴ Avdalbegyan 1958: 129-133; partial English translation in Hacikyan 2002: 569-571.

²⁵⁵ Hacikyan 2002: 569-571.

²⁵⁶ Kouymjian 2000.

²⁵⁷ Kouymjian 1983: 428-429.

the wider perpetuation of culture continued, albeit at a significantly reduced rate.²⁵⁸

This time also saw the emergence of the *xoja*, a wealthy class of merchants identifiable from the early 15th century in Armenian communities around the world. Dickran Kouymjian, tracing the appearance of the title *xoja* in manuscript colophons as sponsors, has noted its association with the Lake Van area and the town of Julfa on the Arax river in the 16th century (later, after the early 17th-century deportation of the Armenians from Julfa to Isfahan, the district of New Julfa in Isfahan would see the greatest concentration of *xojas*). These merchants had connections with Armenian communities in places such as Zeyt'un and Aleppo, as well as further away in Kaffa, Constantinople, the Indian Ocean littoral, southeast Asia and numerous European cities.²⁵⁹ This geographical extent of Armenian communities (not just *xojas*) is mirrored by the known origins of manuscripts relevant to this section: Kaffa, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Rome.

Early modern trade led to a growing understanding of the world, not least as small numbers of Armenians personally travelled to places unknown to them in previous centuries such as southeast Asia (including modern-day Myanmar/Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines) and even the Americas in the later 17th and 18th centuries.²⁶⁰ These remote spaces gradually became more real than their literary marvels: sites of trade, not only shocking penis cups. (That said, as the ongoing phenomenon of racism proves, it is entirely possible to know a place is real and still fixate on lurid, even wildly inaccurate, 'facts' about it.) Interest in wonder tales continued throughout this period, and from 1708 to 1911 a print anthology containing the tale of the *City of Bronze*, the *Wisdom of Ahigar* and others was published in Constantinople, Tbilisi and Kolkata.²⁶¹ However, it did not contain the *Alexander Romance*. Perhaps by this time, the tale had been superseded by the histories of Alexander written by the ancient Greek and Roman writers. With early book printing

²⁵⁸ Kouymjian 2000.

²⁵⁹ Kouymjian 1994; Aslanian 2011 details the Armenian trade networks rooted in New Julfa and extending across Eurasia.

²⁶⁰ Aslanian 2011: 56-64 for southeast Asia, 62 specifically for the Americas (with Manila in the Philippines as the staging point).

²⁶¹ Russell 2009: 77-78, where it is called the 'PPK anthology' for convenience, after its first tale, *Patmut'iw n P'ndzē K'atak'ī* [The History of the *City of Bronze*].

came the first translations into Armenian of works such as Diodorus Siculus' history of Alexander (taken from his *Universal History*), as well as modern European scholarship, perhaps signalling a shift in Alexander's position from genre-crossing king who could be the protagonist of a wonder tale to the more narrow constraints of modern, 'factual' history.²⁶²

Yet in the 16th century, and through the following two centuries, the *Alexander Romance* clearly flourished under the scribal pens of Armenians – and aloud. The oral element (to be discussed in this chapter's final subsection) becomes more essential when considering the *Alexander Romance* from the 16th century on, given that some of the *tataran* and *žolovacu* manuscripts are of a small enough size to fit in a person's hands as well as carry easily from place to place, and could thus be a *davt'ar*, the notebook that collected songs in the repertoire of an *ašut* (an oral performer). A martyrology from the previous century indicates the cross-cultural position of such individuals. In about 1438 CE, a twenty-year-old Christian Armenian young man called Yovhannēs of Xlat' (Ahlat) performed as a singer and musician for both Christian and Muslim audiences, including the emir Sayf al-Din.²⁶³ Unfortunately for him, Kurdish members of his audience grew displeased with him and he was summoned before the emir's son on the charge of having sex with a Muslim woman who was a dancer and singer. Though Yovhannēs insisted on his innocence and virginity, ultimately he was offered the choice of converting to Islam or the death penalty – he chose a Christian martyr's death. At one point in the proceedings, he managed to delay a confrontation over his religion – an invitation to share food with Muslim officials during a strict Armenian Christian fast – by saying that he was devoting himself for several days to Khidr, the 'patron saint' (though this is a simplifying

²⁶² The history of Alexander by Diodorus Siculus (Պատմութիւն Մեծին Աղեքսանդրի Մակեդոնացոյ, թարգմանեալ ի Մատենադարանէ Պատմագրութեանց Դիողորոսի Սիկիլիացոյ Մեծանուն Հեղինակի) was printed in Eĵmiacin in 1827. The British Library manuscript Or 15456 (LOB15456) is an incomplete 19th-century translation into Western Armenian of the French book *Examen critique des anciens historiens d'Alexandre-le-Grand*, most likely its 1804 second edition, made by an unknown translator in an exercise book. No colophon or other indication of where it was copied is present. For full catalogue information, see Nersessian 2012: 950-952.

²⁶³ All details in the story of Yovhannēs are taken from Cowe 2013.

term) of the Turkish *'āšiq (ašut)*.²⁶⁴ S. Peter Cowe highlights how this martyrology shows the distinct Christian and Muslim worlds of the 15th century and how performers like Yovhannēs crossed between and existed in these worlds, and not superficially: Yovhannēs knew the tradition of Khidr.²⁶⁵ While Yovhannēs did not succeed in straddling these worlds for more than twenty years, the landscape in which he lived was clearly one of mobile individuals and traditions.²⁶⁶ This certainly informed the *kafas* about Alexander. They clearly belonged to a culturally connected world of shared stories, with shared moral – and entertainment – concerns. In this rich landscape, multilingual Grigoris Alt'amarci and his student Zak'aria Gnuneci worked.

The authors: Grigoris Alt'amarci and Zak'aria Gnuneci

Grigoris Alt'amarci was a member of the Arcruni *naxarar* house, which perpetuated itself at the catholicosate of Alt'amar at Lake Van, of which he was catholicos from 1512-1544.²⁶⁷ Alt'amar has a vaunted history as royal and monastic centre dating back to its foundation by King Gagik Arcruni in 915, continuously inhabited up to Grigoris' time.²⁶⁸

The church at Alt'amar is renowned for its beautifully decorated exterior, covered in stone relief carvings, which survives to this day. Originally, it must have been even more stunning: some figures retain the cut stones of their eyes.²⁶⁹ These reliefs are arranged in multiple registers that depict Gagik Arcruni, Adam and Paradise, and scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Paradisiacal

²⁶⁴ On the complex nature of Khidr and his relationship to the *'āšiq*, see van Lint 2005.

²⁶⁵ Cowe 2013.

²⁶⁶ The popularity of folktales and songs among Armenians about the tragedies of romantic relationships between men and women of different faiths – Christian Armenians and Muslim Kurds, Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks – testifies to the cultural realities of mixed communities where such relationships could be fraught and even impossible, though at other times must have worked. See Russell 1987:105-116 for some examples. This popularity was by no means unique to Armenian literature and storytelling: Niẓāmi Ganjavi wrote the famous 12th-century *Ḳosrow o Širin* about the doomed love between the Sasanian king Ḳosrow and the Christian princess *Širin* (an Armenian princess in his telling). Such tragic romances were widespread.

²⁶⁷ Hewsen 1984; Hacikyan et al. 2002: 724-727.

²⁶⁸ Der Nersessian 1965 remains an authority on Alt'amar. A new volume, Pogossian and Vardanyan 2019, collects the most up-to-date scholarship of the monument's material remnants and multidisciplinary insights into its many contexts.

²⁶⁹ Jones 2007: 57.

scenes continued inside, on now-damaged frescoes and the lost balustrade, with Lynn Jones

proposing that

scenes depicting God giving Adam dominion over the animals and Adam naming the animals were originally placed above the royal gallery at the Church of the Holy Cross at Aght'amar. The first of these scenes emphasizes the divine establishment of Adam's power, while the second emphasizes Adam's wise execution of this power, and the resultant peace and concord in his kingdom. Their proximity to the king's gallery would have suggested to the viewer a parallel between the king of Paradise and the king of Vaspurakan.²⁷⁰

The importance of Paradise to the iconographic program at Aht'amar continued with the placement of the Paradisiacal reliefs with Adam and the king on the eastern façade of the church, facing the direction of Eden. Notable among the figures is a bird with a human head. Such hybrid creatures are frequently found in Gospel manuscripts – adorning the header above Canon Tables or decorating margins – and were clearly a common type.²⁷¹ Their specific role guarding the approach to Paradise in T'ovma Arcruni's 10th-century interpretation of the *Alexander Romance* has already been noted in Chapter 2 (pp.47-48), and will be seen in Chapter 5 to belong to the most remote place that Alexander reaches in legend. Here, in stone, is their visual depiction at a church constructed soon after T'ovma Arcruni died and important to the life of Grigoris Aht'amarci about six centuries later.²⁷²

Grigoris Aht'amarci produced marvellous works despite the turbulence of his time. However, he was not unaffected by the troubles his people faced, and he travelled in order to offer guidance and support. This exposed him to performances of songs not only in Armenian but in languages including Persian and Turkish, too.²⁷³ Some of his poetry – of which there is much, on topics ranging from the divine to personal love and desire – contains words and phrases in those languages, suggesting the influence on his work of their lyric traditions either directly or via other Armenian poets such as Frik and Konstandin Erznkaci who used Arabic and Persian motifs.²⁷⁴ Given his peregrinations, both

²⁷⁰ Jones 2007: 74.

²⁷¹ Examples are numerous. One is British Library Or. 5761 (LOB5761), where human-headed birds are found in multiple places, including above Canon Tables (see f.3v, f.5r) and in margins (see f.35v).

²⁷² Der Nersessian 1965: plate 4.

²⁷³ Hacikyan et al. 2002: 724

²⁷⁴ Hacikyan et al. 2002: 727.

methods of transmission are plausible.

His student Zak'aria Gnunec'i, also known as Xžžec'i for his village of origin (Xžiž) and Lmec'i for his association with Lim, an island in Lake Van, has been theorised to be a member of the same Prošian family as Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, though this is not unanimously accepted.²⁷⁵ He studied at Ałt'amar, but left the region for Constantinople in 1544, a time when many Armenians were fleeing the depredations of the war.²⁷⁶ While in Constantinople he copied the *Alexander Romance* – manuscript MCR3 (Armenian MS 3 held in Manchester's John Rylands Library, UK). He later copied the *Alexander Romance* again in Rome – manuscript M5472 (in the Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia).²⁷⁷ His instruction and his wide-ranging life no doubt exposed him to a myriad of cultural resources that he could draw upon in his own compositions.

The audience(s) of the *Alexander kafas*

To whom did the *kafas* speak? Their first authors – Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i – were holy men, copying manuscripts in monastic settings, and that informed not only the contents of the *kafas* (as will be discussed in Chapter 5) but also their initial publics. The Christian audience of the Armenian *Alexander Romance* is an essential part of their place in Armenian literary culture – both textual and oral. John Miles Foley has discussed the importance of orality intertwined with textuality in numerous cultures past and present, and I suggest that this is essential to our understanding of the role of *Alexander kafas* such as the ones about monstrous creatures and moralising experiences at the edges of the world. Citing Brian Stock, Foley discusses one model of orality and textuality in a historical monastic setting: a text was 'read' by "assigning

²⁷⁵ Akinean 1910: 1-5.

²⁷⁶ Akinean 1910: 6; Kouymjian 1997; Bardakjian 2014.

²⁷⁷ Simonyan 1989: 362-363 contains the colophon from M5472, which includes the following: Իսկ զայս Պատմութիւնս աշխարհակալին Աղեքսանդրու, զոր գրեցի իմով ձեռամբս ի մեծ քաղաքն Հռոմ առ պապն Ֆրանկաց, յաթոռ նստեալ Պետրոսի և Պաւղոսի առաքելոցն = Truly this *History* of the conquering Alexander I wrote by my hand in the great city of Rome for the pope of the Franks seated on the chair of the apostles Peter and Paul.

principal interpretation to a single person.” This person “mastered” the text and subsequently shaped how others understood it. The fact that it was written did not result in easy access to the material – on the contrary, this textuality limited or filtered the text’s spread.²⁷⁸ Judith Waring has identified “mechanisms for controlling what was read and how it was read” in Byzantine monastic reading in the 11th and 12th centuries.²⁷⁹ These include scholia. She gives the example of three manuscripts of John Klimakos’ *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, in which proscriptions of the Song of Songs and Kings are marked in the margins: “Those misleading the mind. For a roamer is a wanderer. Indeed one must know this as there are some in Holy Writ where it does not benefit the young to read like the Song and the Kings and other such works.”²⁸⁰ In one of these manuscripts, the marginal text is in red ink, standing out against the brown ink of the main text²⁸¹ – like the red-inked *kafas* of the *Alexander Romance*. These models of reading may be of use in the Armenian clerical settings in which the *Alexander Romance* was probably long-ago translated from Greek and certainly copied, and in which Xač’atur Keč’arec’i composed the first *kafas* for it and Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunec’i continued that work. Whether read communally by Foley’s ‘master’ of the text (or following a different model) or by a lone individual enjoying the tale and contemplating its contents, the *kafas* led the reader(s) through the text.

In its earlier stages, including the Armenian translation, the *Alexander Romance* was a pagan text, reflecting the polytheistic beliefs of its various characters. This is only subtly modified in Armenian: when writing of a Greek or Indian god, the copyists often negated it in the narrative (as well as the *kafas*) as չաստուլած (չ- [negation] + աստուլած [god] = ‘false god’) rather than աստուլած (‘god’), or wrote the abbreviation, such as ած, with the *pativ* (the marker usually placed above a word to indicate that it is an abbreviation) put below rather than above the letters. A more profound Christianisation of the *Alexander Romance*’s landscape is to be found elsewhere. Like

²⁷⁸ Foley 2002: 69-70, citing Stock 1983: 90.

²⁷⁹ Waring 1997: 401.

²⁸⁰ Waring 1997: 413, translating a scholia from the manuscript Sakkelion 121, f.203v. All three manuscripts more or less repeat this information.

²⁸¹ Waring 1997: 414. Specifically, it is the manuscript Sakkelion 124.

Nersēs Šnorhali, utilising the poetic form to more “beautiful” ends, the poets Xač’atur Keč’arec’i, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunec’i appear to have been aware of the potential Christianising use of modern rhyme: their *kafas* interpret events in the remote regions of the *Alexander Romance* in language that moves away from Classical Armenian to the temporal and regional variations of Middle Armenian. While the narrative remains in Classical Armenian (also using some Graecisms due to its ‘Hellenising’ style of translation from Greek)²⁸² with only very rare Middle Armenian forms, the *kafas* speak in language closer to what people of 13th to 16th centuries used in daily life.

To a large extent, Classical Armenian remained the language of ‘high literature’ until the 19th century and more or less maintained its 5th-century grammar²⁸³ – but there were many texts partially or wholly composed in Middle Armenian. It is first important to note that the term ‘Middle Armenian’ encompasses many dialects and, as such, is impossible to define as a singular linguistic entity, though certain general traits may be described.²⁸⁴ The *History* of Smbat Sparapet and the poetry of Hovhannes Pluz Erznkac’i are two examples of its usage from the 13th century.²⁸⁵ The *Anonymous Tale* attributed to Pseudo-Šapuh (which developed over the 9th to 12th centuries) “exhibits medieval grammatical forms and western Armenian spelling more characteristic of the Cilician period ... side by side with classical forms and spellings.”²⁸⁶ Notably, in reported conversation the language tends towards the popular. Amirdovlat’ Amasiac’i (1420-1495) wrote the medical pharmacopeia *Useless to the Ignorant* in the vernacular because few people in his time were familiar with Classical Armenian, he had used many Turkish words for the benefit of Turkish speakers, and his

²⁸² Muradyan 2012: 16-24, 230-247.

²⁸³ Morani 2014: 210-211. There were, of course, notable variations on Classical Armenian throughout its many centuries of usage, including the heavily Hellenised versions used principally to translate certain Greek texts – for a recent study of this phenomenon, see Muradyan 2012.

²⁸⁴ No comprehensive grammar of ‘all’ Middle Armenian is therefore possible. For one intervention, see Karst 1901. The Middle Armenian to East Armenian dictionary of Łazaryan and Avetisyan 2009, which frequently notes a word’s *grabar* form and/or its origin in languages such as Persian, Arabic or Turkish where applicable, is an invaluable resource from a lexical perspective.

²⁸⁵ Hacikyan et al 2005: 61.

²⁸⁶ Thomson 1988-1989: 173.

work contained lexical forms of not only Turkish but also Arabic, Persian and Greek origin.²⁸⁷

Amirdovlat' Amasiac'i's decision speaks to authorial intent in linguistic choice: a desire to reach particular publics. Working in monastic settings, Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i knew Classical Armenian and could expect their immediate audiences to share that familiarity. Nonetheless, their *kafas* in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts use a more mixed language, blending *grabar* and Middle Armenian, and this is perpetuated in the Alexander *kafas* found in *tataran* and *žořovacu* collections.

Examples of Middle Armenian that will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6 include many uses of the modern -(ւ)եր plural in place of the Classical Armenian nominative plural -ք, which in turn comes to be used sometimes as an accusative plural (-ւ in *grabar*). The medieval construction of the indicative verb with կու, such as կու իսաւսին ('they speak', where the Classical Armenian form would simply be իսաւսին) and կու կենայ ('it lives', rather than simply կենայ), appears frequently. Other verbal innovations include the use of երես and ետուր for 'he gave' (in place of the Classical Armenian form ես) and տեսաւ as an active form for 'he saw' (in Classical Armenian, տեսաւ was mediopassive). The same *kafa* might exhibit multiple ways of forming verbs, presumably where meter contributed to the poet's choice of, in particular, including or excluding the կու. There is an instance of dialectal vowel harmony in Հունդուստանի (Hundustani, 'in India'), as well as evidence of the sound changes that characterise differences between the modern Armenian languages, such as դ > տ (d > t) in western dialects: Alexander's name is occasionally written with the letter տ rather than դ, as աղէկսանտը, indicating that տ was becoming recognised as representing a 'd' sound. Another reason for grammatical or orthographic variation within a single poem might be the scribe faithfully copying Classical or less familiar Middle Armenian forms, but occasionally using his own dialect version by habit, without intending to.

²⁸⁷ Sanjian 1999: 271 summarises the introduction to *Useless to the Ignorant*, where Amirdovlat' Amasiac'i explains his reasoning for using vernacular Armenian.

Following Foley's model of the textual 'master' who guides his companions through the text, with the *kafas* viewed as a tool used in that process, the more widely recognisable linguistic register becomes perceptible as another way of making the *Alexander Romance* more accessible. The *kafas* modernise the *Alexander Romance*, turning it from an ancient pagan text into a medieval Christian story. They also speak to more people than the Classical Armenian text. Once they break loose of the *Alexander Romance* and survive in *taġaran* and *žoġovacu* collections, they were certainly doing so in oral contexts outside the monastery. They take an additional direction, beyond the scope of this study, as part of an abbreviated, folk version of the *Alexander Romance* that continues to be punctuated by *kafas* that are no longer supplementary but integral to the development of the plot.²⁸⁸

The way the *kafas* of the *Alexander Romance* are written in manuscripts further points to the likelihood of their oral lives. The survival of musical notation for some *kafas* in the *taġaran* and *žoġovacu* manuscripts confirms that they were sung, which draws comparison to another Armenian genre, the *siravēp*: a 'love-epic' part prose and part sung poetry, accompanied by a *saz* (a stringed instrument).²⁸⁹ This prose-and-poetry structure has a rich and multicultural history, as evidenced by a later tale – *Ašuġ-ġarib* (The Wandering *Ašuġ*) – that circulated in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and similarly featured "prose pieces interwoven with verse at particularly heightened dramatic moments".²⁹⁰ The *Alexander Romance* itself underwent this transformation in its folk variant. The *ašuġ* (an oral performer) was an important part of the tapestry of tale-telling across the regions where Armenian speakers lived, using the multiple languages of the South Caucasus and Anatolia. The poetry of the *ašuġ* need not be understood to be felt: Xač'atur Abovean, the 19th-century novelist, described his reaction to *ašuġ* performances where "[t]he lyrics were in Turkish, and many did not understand a word, but the souls of those listening and watching went soaring up to heaven

²⁸⁸ Topchyan 2011: 100-101; Simonyan 1989 incorporates this version as Text C of her edition.

²⁸⁹ Cowe 2005; van Lint 2014: 383.

²⁹⁰ Danielyan 2018: 198-199.

and back.”²⁹¹ The multilingual, multicultural nature of *ašutš* was present from their beginning, as they worked in Armenian, Turkish, Georgian and Persian, drawing upon multiple traditions²⁹² – including, it is safe to say, at the period when the first Alexander *kafas* were composed by Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i. However, as evidenced by Nersēs Šnorhali, the use of the most understandable language – the vernacular – enabled the greatest communication with the poetry’s publics.

There is additional evidence of orality in even the *Alexander Romance* manuscript *kafas*, including the ones dated to Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i’s time. In places they include the letter ը (ě), omitted in traditional orthography but pronounced aloud between many of the consonants of Armenian words. The inclusion of ը in the *kafas* guides a reader of the manuscript towards an understanding of the meter, which sometimes requires words to be pronounced in atypical ways – although the presence of ը in this role is neither consistent nor complete. The variety seen in multiple manuscript versions of the same *kafa* across the centuries – the inclusion (or exclusion) of entirely different lines in an otherwise identical *kafa* or more subtle variations on individual lines – can be taken as evidence of orality: alteration can be accounted for in many ways, including written scribal choice (or error), but one factor that cannot be overlooked is the changes made to a poem by its passage through different mouths across time and space. The *kafas* were not written on only one particular occasion. Some were composed in the late 13th, early 14th century, some in the 16th century; some were rewritten. The survival of multiple versions of some *kafas* means that it becomes possible to see the poems as individual responses to the figure of Alexander and the narrative of the *Alexander Romance* in Armenian. Writing about scribes and transmission, Aidan Conti emphasises the individuality of every single act of copying a manuscript:

Every act of copying ... is an act of recomposition. ... The recomposed copy eclipses the original inscription for those who may not know what came before. Yet rather than pitting original and copy against one another, each vying for our limited attention, we might see in

²⁹¹ Danielyan 2018: 197, citing a translation by G.M. Goshgarian of the introduction to Abovean’s novel *Verk’ Hayastani*, available in Nichanian 2013: 244-250.

²⁹² van Lint 2005. Before the *ašutš* were the *gusans*, oral storytellers working in multiple languages in the South Caucasus with roots in Iranian oral traditions, whose existence among Armenian-speakers is attested in early historians such as P’awstos Buzand and Movsēs Xorenac’i; see Boyce 1957.

the copy proof of fecundity and generation, the copiousness of the original. ...each one facilitates our ability to apprehend its counterpart.²⁹³

This has also been stressed by Theo Maarten van Lint in the specific context of Armenian poetry:

Poems, whether transmitted orally, in written form, or both, may undergo deliberate changes as well as unintended ones – in length, through additions or abbreviations, in the order of lines and stanzas, in language or dialect – that make the new product into a verse worthy to be preserved on its own.²⁹⁴

All of the processes outlined by van Lint occurred in the multi-century development of the *kafas* about Alexander. Written and rewritten in different times and copied in different contexts – *Alexander Romance* manuscripts, *taġaran* and *žoġovacu*, the folk version – they can only be fully appreciated in their copiousness, as individual compositions and recompositions. Each manuscript was a personal object brought into the world for a specific purpose. Modern editorial concerns of *ur* texts and centralising single editions are at a disconnect from the dispersed history of the *kafas*. Treating the transmission and circulation of the *kafas* as multi-stage and multi-branching allows the greatest possible insight into this project's central concern: the different ways that Armenian traditors used *kafas* to write about Alexander at the edges of the world.

²⁹³ Conti 2012: 288.

²⁹⁴ van Lint 2014: 379.

CHAPTER FIVE: KAFAS IN ALEXANDER ROMANCE MANUSCRIPTS

There is a tree called peridexion which is translated 'side-cover'. And it is in India; and the fruit of the tree is sweeter than any sweetness. And the doves go and dwell upon the tree and eat the fruits. And the tree is hostile to the serpent, for it avoids the shade as well. So long as the doves live on it, the serpent cannot approach the doves, nor touch the shade of the tree; if the shadow is on the western side, the serpent escapes to the east and if on the eastern – to the west. If a dove leaves the tree and the dragon finds it, it kills it. The tree symbolises the Father of all, and the fruit – the Son, and the shade – the Spirit.

– Armenian *Physiologus*²⁹⁵

The edges of the world are unfamiliar: populated by plants, animals and peoples that, in appearance and action, are different – even impossible – compared to those known in the lands of home and closer countries. Yet it is possible to understand these places. Through various means – such as the *Physiologus*' comparison of an unfamiliar tree, the peridexion, and its fruit to the Father and the Son – they can be fit into a familiar Christian cosmology, to better comprehend the world or to serve as instruction. Such processes also took place in the composition of *kafas* to accompany the sections of the *Alexander Romance* narrative where Alexander goes to remote regions, starting in the late 13th, early 14th century and continuing into the 16th century.

The narrative map of the *Alexander Romance* requires this intervention. Its classical, pre-Christian features, minimally modified in the main text by negations of ՝՝՝՝՝՝՝ (see the discussion in Chapter 4, p.100), present potential problems for medieval Christian Armenian audiences. At the edges of the world, the impossible sights and species encountered by Alexander and his army defy medieval audiences' understanding of the world. What to make of the monstrous *břnažani* or giant fleas, foxes and lobsters? More than simply saying that such sights are to be expected in sufficiently foreign lands – a classical perception of the world that continued into many medieval cultures – this chapter will show that Xač'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Ał'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i provided the *kafas* as an exegetical guide: here is your awe, and here is how to comprehend it.

²⁹⁵ *Physiologus* 30 (Muradyan 2005: 133-134, 159-160).

Fitting even the incomprehensible parts of the world within a Christian view of Creation has a long precedent, and it is worth briefly exploring that before looking in-depth at the *kafas*. The Christian possibilities of marvels were considered early in the religion's literature. In just one example, Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE) wrote in *De civitate Dei*, in a section containing material on the so-called 'monstrous races': "Since the mortal is not able to overlook (and understand) the whole ... he may be offended by such deformities ... Therefore the true believer has to trust in God, the creator omnium, who knows himself at what place and time a given creature should be created."²⁹⁶ These peoples are difficult to understand, but Augustine insists that they have a place in Christian Creation.

The breadth of Christian Creation is considered in its entirety in another type of texts: cosmologies, which again date to the early centuries of the religion, as well as earlier, pre-Christian writings that were valued by Christian writers. Some cosmological texts were known by Armenian writers and some of these were translated into Armenian, from the first centuries of Armenian literature after the creation of the alphabet. These initial translations included Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron*, the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, the *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise* attributed to Zeno (also known to scholarship as *On Nature*), and others, though not all of these enjoyed equally great popularity.²⁹⁷ Armenian writers in turn wrote on the cosmos and its contents. For instance, a cosmology is attributed to the 7th-century polymath *Anania Širakac'i*, which considered the possible existence of the antipodes.²⁹⁸ Texts such as the early translations influenced Armenian compositions, as well as – by the 13th century – Syriac, Arabic and Persian texts, which themselves were influenced by many of the same Greek writers of antiquity (and each other).²⁹⁹ The ideas developed in all of this cosmological writing are not universally shared by all authors, but a drive to describe Creation

²⁹⁶ Schepens and Delcroix 1996: 442-445.

²⁹⁷ Thomson 2012: 25-30 provides a useful overview of the genre in Armenian. The possibility remains that Plato's *Timaeus* was among these early translations, but Irene Tinti has shown that a translation around the 11th century is more likely; see Tinti 2012.

²⁹⁸ Greenwood 2011: 156 notes that the cosmology attributed to Anania Širakac'i could fruitfully be compared to that of his contemporary Maximus the Confessor, but any work in this direction has not yet been published.

²⁹⁹ Thomson 2012: 31-49.

unifies them.

Some cosmology considers distant parts of the world, following the ancient Greek model of the climes.³⁰⁰ According to this theoretical map, extremes of heat and cold led to deficiencies in human character, while the temperate, middle zone – the Mediterranean – provided the ideal climate for the perfect balance of intellect, vigour and other desirable characteristics. One text that continued this tradition in Armenian was authored by Iřox, a Syrian priest who may have worked with Vardan Arewelc'i on the translation of Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle*, in the 13th century.³⁰¹ His "On Nature" describes the countries in each clime, lauding Mesopotamia in the central clime as the best of all, its people skilled and intelligent, and neither swarthy nor pale.³⁰² This way of organising the world has its commonalities with the more experiential geography of the *Alexander Romance*, where the shape of the world is not clearly delineated beyond the centre-periphery paradigm but the idea of spaces in which certain types of peoples exist is present – not in climes, but in distance, which is simply a less systematic approach to the same idea that peoples in remote places might be monstrous. Climes offer an explanation for this phenomenon – which the *Alexander Romance* does not need, being too busy relating the wonders and terrors of seeing it. Nonetheless, they exist in a similar conceptualisation of Creation.

What, then, of all that exists in the world? The Armenian translation of Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron*, a series of nine homilies on the story of creation in Genesis 1:1-28, is an illustrative example of another facet of cosmology: the assignment of every living thing to its place in Creation. The *Hexaemeron* was composed in 378-379 CE, the final years of the author's life, its homilies first delivered orally and shortly afterwards put into writing, and then translated into Armenian by the 7th century.³⁰³ It was much copied in Armenian.³⁰⁴ In it, the remote edges of the world are little

³⁰⁰ Dueck 2012: 84-90.

³⁰¹ Cowe 2010: 104-105 summarises the positions on Iřox's identity, with Takahashi 2001 [2010]: 52-53, 72, 74-75 additionally proposing an identification of Iřox with Joshua, father of Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita.

³⁰² Thomson 2012: 46.

³⁰³ Thomson 2012: 19.

³⁰⁴ Thomson 2012: 19-22.

considered. Basil writes: “What need is there to introduce as evidence for this homily the trees which occur in a foreign land, for right from the fig tree which is found here amongst us we can learn all the various transformations that take place in trees far away?”³⁰⁵ There is enough at hand for the purposes of edification, and Basil expresses the danger of lacking restraint in describing the works of God: “they would take us beyond the boundaries of satiety from their uncontrollable and impetuous course.”³⁰⁶ However, he spends Homily V on plants and Homilies VII-IX on the various types of animals created by God, and as part of this he is keen to show that all living things, even those that seem harmful to humans and thus ill-fitting within Creation, are intentionally crafted by God to have their different natures. He says: “Shall we ... agree to detract and blame [God] for those which are harmful to our lives? But if we wish, it is possible with truth-loving minds to understand what is appropriate, that not everything which was established was formed for the needs of our stomach.”³⁰⁷ Basil goes on to explain that while the hemlock root is poisonous to humans, it is safe for wood pigeons to eat, and so too can quails eat hellebore root. Such plants are “doubly worthy of praise, because the Creator established them for a helpful purpose.”³⁰⁸

Unlike Basil, the authors of the Alexander *kafas* are faced with the necessity of describing the works of God in foreign lands, and they struggle at times to set all these creatures within Creation. In a *kafa* about a cave full of giants and wild creatures, the poet writes:

Չարմանք մարդոյ ոչ է լսել

astonishment of which man has not heard

³⁰⁵ *Hexaameron* V.9 (Thomson 2012: 150). Basil is aware of the world’s known extent, relating such realities as the far north with its midnight sun, differences in climate and the distant eastern location of Indians, mixed in with some unrealities, like “a distant country which is beyond the land whence comes sweet incense, [where] the shadows of men’s figures are visible on both sides.” He does not mention climes. See *Hexaameron* V.8 (Thomson 2012: 172-174).

³⁰⁶ *Hexaameron* V.9 (Thomson 2012: 151).

³⁰⁷ *Hexaameron* V.4 (Thomson 2012: 139).

³⁰⁸ *Hexaameron* V.4 (Thomson 2012: 139-140).

Կամ աչք մարդոյ բնաւ չէ տեսել³⁰⁹ or the eyes of man have not ever seen

The wording echoes 1 Corinthians 2:9, which reads: “However, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’ – the things God has prepared for those who love him” and Isaiah 64:4, which reads: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.” Scriptural means of describing the unknowability of God are transferred to the giants and wild animals of the remote cave. Of the *břnažani*, a terrifying creature, Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i writes “Nothing like it exists in this temporal [world].”³¹⁰ Other creatures are outright evil, compared to Satan – a different approach to Basil’s insistence that even what appears harmful has a beneficent place. Clearly, the *Alexander Romance* is confronting the authors of the *kafas* with creatures that either they have never heard of or – from an authorial remove – are aware that their audiences will have never heard of. They must strive to understand them. Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunc’i individually or collectively offer no overarching cosmology of this remote landscape rooted in, for instance, the theory of climes, but they respond instead to the experiential narrative of the *Alexander Romance* by explaining each creature as it is encountered. This is perhaps a result of the practicalities of reading – to themselves or to others – the *Alexander Romance* as a text. Yet what they attempt belongs to the same drive as the hexaemerists’ to divine the place of all living things. Though they and Basil differ in the specifics of their interpretations, they all write about the same world.

That world is a Christian one, even its remote spaces. It is interesting, then, to consider again the placement of a Christian king in the east (see the discussion in Chapter 2, p.91) – whether Prester John or his son/grandson, King David, or the hoped-for conversion of the Mongols to

³⁰⁹ Simonyan 1989: 255. The *kafa*, or a variant of it, survives in the late 13th-, early 14th-century manuscript V424 at f.81r, but the text is very faded: զարմանք [որ] չէ[...] / աչք մարդոյ [...] so I have preferred Simonyan’s version, taken from a 16th-century manuscript copied by Grigoris Alt’amarc’i.

³¹⁰ V424 f.95r; Simonyan 1989: 289. ասայ բնաւ չէ նման [ն]մա յառարէիս

Christianity – and to see it as also belonging to a desire to impose a Christian order on those partially understood regions. Clearly, legends and rumours circulated, as expressed in historical texts like *Flower of Histories of the East* and Kirakos Gandzakec’i’s *History of the Armenians*. The former also mentions Indians who live nude and worship idols – it is easy to see how the *Alexander Romance* could be fit into such a world, as an earlier encounter with unfamiliar peoples and wildlife in India and elsewhere. The closeness of cosmology to the legends of Alexander is specifically demonstrated in the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, which – starting in the Greek original – is presented as a letter from Aristotle to Alexander, a tradition continued into its Armenian translation, as well as other languages.³¹¹ In two texts, Alexander is directly associated with Paradise: as discussed in Chapter 2 (pp.47-48), in T’ovma Arcruni’s *History of the House of the Arcrunik’*, Alexander’s encounter with birds who have human faces and tell him to turn back from “the house of the gods”³¹² is interpreted as angels turning him back from Paradise, an experience similar to that of the three monks in the hagiographical *Life of Makarios the Roman of Mesopotamia*³¹³ who find a commemorative marker left by Alexander at the most distant point of his historical journey, before they venture further into the remote landscape to meet Makarios and are warned away from the guarded border of Paradise by angelic voices. The protected place of Paradise at the edge of the world is shared by the hagiographical story of the six monks who seek out the Garden and are informed by an angel that it is atop a mountain that they cannot ascend until the Day of Judgement.³¹⁴ This multiplicity of ideas about distant regions current in the late 13th, early 14th century and continuing to the 16th century help us to see how *vardapets* like Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunc’i probably saw the world: as a place that was ultimately all comprehensible as God’s Creation. The

³¹¹ Conybeare 1892: 51 collates the Greek and Armenian titles. The Armenian is Արիստոտելի իմաստասիրի թուղթ առ Աղէքսանդրոս թագաւոր պատմութիւն յաղագս աշխարհի = “Letter of [the] philosopher Aristotle to King Alexander, an account of the world”. McCollum 2011: 167 translates the preface to the Syriac *De Mundo*, which opens: “The letter composed by Aristotle the philosopher for Alexander the King on the knowledge of the things that exist...”

³¹² Simonyan 1989: 262. գաստուածոց գտունն

³¹³ The *Life of Makarios the Roman of Mesopotamia* can be found in Sargisean 1855: 340-348.

³¹⁴ Stone 2008 [2019]: 148-152 summarises the tale and some of its connections to other texts, noting the widespread tradition from at least the 4th century that Paradise is atop a mountain.

Alexander Romance becomes in their hands a tool for contemplation and edification: more than an entertaining tale (though it is still that), it can be used to perpetuate medieval Christian Armenian ideas of the world.

They had a diverse set of texts to draw on for assistance in understanding some of the world's stranger features. Not only cosmologies, but animal-texts like the *Physiologus* and the fables of Vardan Aygekc'i and Mxitar Goš provided models for fitting particularly the unfamiliar living creatures of the *Alexander Romance* within Christian Creation. Further, the sections of the *Alexander Romance* that describe successive marvellous encounters and the *kafas* repeated and embellishing on these can be understood in comparison to narrative traditions not directly represented in the Armenian language. These include the Greek and Latin literary genre known to modern scholarship as paradoxography, in which marvels of the natural world are listed – lifted from assorted sources – with no pause for explanation, even if the original source contained an explanatory section.³¹⁵ Paradoxographical texts continued to be produced throughout the Byzantine period. Another tradition is the Islamic '*ajā'ib* (marvel literature), which proliferated particularly from the 12th century and especially shared in the cosmographical concerns outlined above. Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī (died 1283 CE), author of a text called '*Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* ('Marvels of Creation and Rarities of Existence'), wrote from a place of tension between the pleasure of the marvellous and the role of the real. In the introduction to his text, he offers a way of accepting these tall tales, by seeing at least some of them as belonging to the enormity of God's creative power.

I have mentioned in [this work] matters which the disposition of a negligent idiot might reject, but that the soul of a rational man could not deny. Although these affairs may be far from well-known customs and ordinarily witnessed events, nothing should be deemed too great for the power of the Creator or the cunning of creation and everything therein. They are the marvels of the art of the Creator, which are either perceivable by the senses or intelligible by the intellect, for which there can be no doubt or imperfection concerning them; or they are elegant tales ascribed to transmitters, for which I have no responsibility concerning their authenticity; or they are strange properties for which a lifetime would not be enough to test them, and thus it would make little sense to ignore all of them, since there is doubt concerning just some of them.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Schepens and Delcroix 1996.

³¹⁶ Translation taken from Zadeh 2010: 32.

The question of veracity occupied many writers of Arabic literature, far more so than can be considered here, but al-Qazwīnī's proposed understanding provides an illuminating parallel to how Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Ałt'amarci and Zak'aria Gnumec'i wrote about the edges of the world in their *kafas*. There is pleasure to be had in these marvels, but also an Aristotelian instigation of wonder as contemplation.³¹⁷

The use of animals as edification found fruit not only in fables and the *Physiologus*, but also in the text originally known as the *Panchatantra* in Sanskrit, as *Kalīla wa-Dimna* in its 8th-century Arabic translation, and eventually as *The Tale of the Emperor Frontianus and of His Wife and His Son Diocletian and of the Seven Philosophers* or simply *The Story of Seven Sages* when via Latin it was translated into Armenian in 1614 by Hakob T'ok'atec'i.³¹⁸ This greatly simplifies the vast, multilingual sequences of translation and transmission that this text underwent across the late antique, medieval and early modern periods, which also included versions in Syriac, Persian, Greek, Georgian, Turkish and numerous European and Southeast Asian languages – and while its translation into Armenian is too late for the Alexander *kafas'* authors to have directly drawn on an Armenian-language version, it attests to a cross-cultural value in the placing of, to quote from the introduction to the Arabic *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, “effective and eloquent speech in the mouths of four-footed beasts and birds ... [for] the work combines entertainment and wisdom: on account of the latter the philosophers choose it, on account of the former, those with simple tastes.”³¹⁹ Like *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, the *Alexander Romance* operates on multiple levels: as an exciting wonder tale, as a way to marvel – quite seriously, a marvelling at God's works – and as a way to learn of Creation's breadth.

Drawing on their varied sources, the Armenian *vardapets* Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris

³¹⁷ Zadeh 2010. On Aristotle in Arabic thought: “For instance, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, in his *al-Baṣā'ir wa-'l-dhakā'ir*, anecdotally links Aristotle with perplexity and wonder when relating a story of how Plato asked his students what the most amazing thing in the world was. Some of them replied the sky and the stars; some thought daily sustenance; while still others responded mankind. Then they turned to Aristotle. He answered that the most amazing of all things is that whose cause remains unknown...” (Zadeh 2010: 39.)

³¹⁸ Hacıyan et al 2002: 788. A printed edition of the Armenian text published in 1740 is available through the Library of Congress: <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/15055/> [accessed 16 August 2019]

³¹⁹ Translation taken from Krönung 2016: 427.

Alt'amarci and Zak'aria Gnumeci composed the *kafas* – putting their periods' linguistic and cultural complexity to use for a Christian purpose. This is known elsewhere in Armenian literary culture. It is time to mention again what Rachel Goshgarian wrote about the 13th-century *futuwwa*-like constitutions written by Yovhannēs Erznkaci (1230-1293): “managing multiple identities ... [to] ... incorporate themes and organisational patterns that were being used in a regional Islamicate (and political) context and, on the other hand, articulate them within the framework of Armenian Christianity.”³²⁰ So too the *kafas* about Alexander.

This chapter will follow the *kafas* at the edges of the world in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts through the late 13th, early 14th century and the 16th century to illuminate the ways in which Xac'atur Keč'areci, Grigoris Alt'amarci and Zak'aria Gnumeci sought to understand the remote spaces through which Alexander journeys and fit the wonders of the *Alexander Romance* into the modern world that they knew through experience and literature. First it will outline the manuscripts attributed to each *vardapet*, then the editorial approach taken to the *kafas* included in this chapter. The bulk of the chapter is then taken up by an examination of four crucial parts of the *Alexander Romance* narrative: (1) the Letter to Olympias, describing Alexander's journey to the edges of the world after the death of the Persian king Darius; (2) his encounter with the naked philosophers of India after his defeat of the Indian king Poros; (3) the Letter to Aristotle, describing his subsequent journey through remote regions of India; and (4) his meeting with the prophetic trees of the Sun and the Moon. Throughout, the chapter will demonstrate the ways that the three poets responded to Alexander's experiences and ultimately used *kafas* to re-map the *Alexander Romance* and fit these distant, impossibly populated places within a Christian cosmological understanding of the world.

Manuscripts

Late 13th century, early 14th century

³²⁰ Goshgarian 2012: 251.

The sole contemporary witness for the *kafas* of Xač'atur Keč'arec'i is manuscript V424 (held in the monastery of the Mxit'arists on San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Italy), which I have consulted for this project via facsimile.³²¹ It was produced by the pen of a scribe Nersēs, with a colophon that reads: "Remember him well, Xač'atur Keč'arec'i, and Nersēs."³²² The name Nersēs is presumably an addition to the original colophon, as 'him' (սորայ) is singular. Though V424 is not an autograph copy, it was produced not long after its exemplar. The surviving *kafas* of V424 number 100, with an unknown number lost to manuscript damage.³²³ Some folios reveal the edges of *kafas*, too little to guess at their content or exact number, but enough to say that they existed. The *kafas* run throughout the narrative, written in the same hand in red ink. Their typical appearance is within red-bordered boxes, written around the figures of illuminations, but at times they appear outside the borders or entirely without borders.

The origin of V424 is unknown. Dickran Kouymjian proposes Gladzor in the early 14th century, on the basis of the scribe's miniscule, the monastery's renown as a centre of high-quality manuscript production and some affinities in illumination style.³²⁴ Like Keč'aris Monastery, Gladzor was owned by the Prošians after being given to Prince Vasak I of the Xač'atur family.³²⁵ Xač'atur, as a member of that family, fits neatly into that topography of elites and monasteries. Though these connections lend support to Kouymjian's proposal, without confirmation from within the manuscript an origin of Gladzor remains only a possibility.

V424 presents an interesting visual similarity to the late-14th-century Greek manuscript Venice Hellenic Institute Gr. 5, produced in Trebizond most likely under the patronage of Alexios III

³²¹ Traina et al. 2003.

³²² V424: f127r. սորայ զԽաչատուր Կեչարուեցի եւ զՆերսէս գրիչս յիշեցէք ի բարի:

³²³ Avdalbegyan 1958.

³²⁴ Kouymjian *forthcoming*.

³²⁵ Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 8-9.

Kommenos (r. 1349-1390).³²⁶ This manuscript has a very developed visual cycle of 250 images, many of them quite complex, and presented within thick red frames with brief captions in red ink. This naturally raises the question of connections – whether in manuscript style more generally, or between (an) Armenian *Alexander Romance* manuscript(s) and the Trebizond manuscript in particular. Red borders and red-inked marginalia are not unique in either manuscript tradition, but the striking similarity between two *Alexander Romance* manuscripts in two different languages, separated by less than 100 years and a highly surmountable geographic distance, is worthy of note. The Trebizond manuscript also bears 15th-century Old Turkish captions: another window on the cross-cultural transmission of *Alexander Romance* manuscripts and their contents in medieval Anatolia.³²⁷

A second potential manuscript source of Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i's *kafas* comes from the 16th century: M3668 (held in the Matenadaran, Armenia), a *žolovacu* of unknown origin³²⁸ that contains 30 *kafas* about Alexander on folios 154v-159r, at the end of the manuscript, attributed in a red-inked header above the black-inked poems to Xaç'atur: "From the writings of Alexander by Xaç'atur vardapet of Keč'aris, saying..."³²⁹ Though this attribution is exciting, it is difficult to fully ascertain its veracity. Of the 30 *kafas*, 14 are found in V424 and so their authorship can be confidently ascribed to Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, while 6 are definitely not found in V424 – the relevant sections of the manuscript are intact and contain different *kafas* – so it is probable that they were composed by one of the later 16th-century authors and ascribed to Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, perhaps as he was recognised as the earliest author of Alexander *kafas*. The remaining 10 belong to parts of the narrative that are poorly preserved in V424: the relevant folios are severely damaged fragments – tattered borders with few letters remaining – so it has not been possible to confirm whether these *kafas* already existed in the

³²⁶ For a facsimile of the Trebizond manuscript, see Trahoulia 1997, with Trahoulia 2010 and Trahoulia 2017 for more discussion of the images specifically. Anette Mazur is preparing a PhD on the images of the Trebizond manuscript.

³²⁷ Kastritsis 2011.

³²⁸ Eganyan, Zeyt'unyan and Ant'abyan 1965: 1,061.

³²⁹ M3668: f154v. Յաղէքսանդրի գր[ո]ցն խաչատուր վարդապետի կէշառեցոյ սասցեալ:

late 13th, early 14th century.

These *kafas* have all been accepted by M. T'. Avdalbegyan, who includes them as part of Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i's corpus.³³⁰ As far as the sequence of Alexander's life is concerned, the *kafas* of M3668 create a mini-narrative that follows his clash with Darius, starting at his adolescent meeting with an emissary of Darius who has come to the Macedonian court to demand tribute from Philip, through Alexander's growth as a king to his defeat of Darius in battle. They will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6 (pp.166-186), as part of an examination of the life of the *kafas* beyond *Alexander Romance* manuscripts.

16th century

Two manuscripts evidence the direct involvement of Grigoris Alt'amarc'i: J473 (held in the library attached to the patriarchal Cathedral of Saint James in Jerusalem, Israel) and manuscript 2 from the A. Kiurdian collection held in the monastery of the Mxit'arists on San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Italy. J473, consulted by Hasmik Simonyan for her edition, was copied in 1536 CE by a monk called Margarē at the Monastery of Varag, above Lake Van, and partially illuminated by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i. Empty boxes remain where the illumination cycle was not completed.³³¹ Unfortunately, the difficulty of accessing the patriarchate's library in Jerusalem has prevented me from consulting this manuscript. The Kiurdian manuscript was also used comparatively by Simonyan, who notes that it dates to 1526 CE and features *kafas* copied and newly composed by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i.³³² I have also not had the opportunity to view this manuscript. I have thus depended on Simonyan's edition and its apparatus to ascribe *kafas* to Grigoris Alt'amarc'i.

At least two manuscripts copied by Zak'aria Gnunec'i survive: MCR3 (Armenian MS 3 held in

³³⁰ Avdalbegyan 1958: 184-188.

³³¹ Dickran Kouymjian in Bausi 2015: 126-127.

³³² Simonyan 1989: 25.

Manchester’s John Rylands Library, UK, fully digitised and available online)³³³ copied in Constantinople and M5472 (in the Matenadaran, Armenia) copied in Rome. MCR3 has a rich cycle of illuminations modelled closely on V424 (or an intermediary manuscript) in terms of the content: many images depict the same scene with the same placement of figures. Unlike V424, there are no borders around the images. The *kafas* appear above and below them, in red and green ink, in the same hand as the main narrative. The choice of red or green ink does not appear to be systematic – it is presumably an aesthetic matter. The latter manuscript, M5472, is the basis for text A in Simonyan 1989, which includes the colophon with the line added in the 16th century by Zak’aria Gnunc’i: “And I have ornamented [it] with gold and according to the dispensation of Jesus Christ and with verse for the glory of the Saviour”.³³⁴ This suggestion of verse additions evidences the development of the *kafas*. While I have not accessed M5472, I have consulted the digitised MCR3 and made use of Simonyan’s edition, in which she specifically marks *kafas* composed by Zak’aria Gnunc’i.

Editorial approach to *kafas*

Not every *kafa* set at the edges of the world in the *Alexander Romance* has been included in this chapter. Examples have been picked out to highlight the approaches taken by Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i, Grigoris Ałt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunc’i to describe and understand the events of the narrative, with indications given of what subjects are covered by those not included.

The following editorial approach has been taken with the *kafas* included in this chapter. What survives in V424 and MCR3 is used in the first instance, with Simonyan’s edition used to fill the gaps in *kafas* where the manuscript material appears to match the edition based on visible words, any

³³³ The digitised manuscript is available at:

<http://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Manchester~91~1~416825~147912> [accessed 28 July 2019]

³³⁴ Simonyan 1989: 362-363. Եւ զարդարեցի ոսկով եւ տնաւրինականով եւ ոտանաւորով՝ ի փառս Փրկչին

partially discernible faded letters and spacing on the page. All material added from Simonyan’s edition in these *kafas* is marked in the Armenian by square brackets, though if a whole *kafa* is taken from Simonyan’s edition the square brackets are not included. If the *kafa* in V424 or MCR3 is complete, the relevant page in Simonyan’s edition is still cited. *Kafas* not found in those manuscripts are cited from Simonyan’s edition without square brackets. Any specific deviations on these rules are noted.

Though this is not a critical edition, I have at times noted variants of a *kafa* or parts of a *kafa* where I find the difference worthy of discussion or of general interest as examples of the rich lives of the *kafas*: how they changed between manuscripts, continuously available for alteration across time and place.

“hurtful in the measure of Satan”: Christianising cosmology in the *kafas* of the *Alexander Romance*

Letter to Olympias

Late 13th, early 14th century

Here, where Alexander and his army enter the remote reaches of the world, the *kafas* surviving in V424 take on elaborative and explanatory roles.³³⁵ This part of the narrative is epistolary: Alexander’s Letter to Olympias details his journey into the fantastical place beyond Armenia and the Medean desert, where “there are wild men and evil beasts.”³³⁶ In the text, the creatures encountered in the letter are incomprehensible: Alexander and his army are travellers through an

³³⁵ Parts of the section about *kafas* at the edges of the world, particularly concerning the lobster, were first developed in MacFarlane 2019.

³³⁶ Simonyan 1989: 252. Կան մարդիկ վայրենի և չար գազանք: All translations from the *Alexander Romance* and *kafas* are my own.

episodic landscape of wondrous and fearsome beings. Their only agency is to progress.

The Letter to Olympias is not present in the surviving Greek manuscript of the earliest version, but appears in the Armenian text.³³⁷ This section of V424 is heavily damaged, with several folios completely lost and others surviving only in thin fragments that preserve two or three letters per line. It is enough, at times, to tell that a *kafa* and illumination existed on that folio, but identification remains impossible. Where the manuscript is more substantial, it is clear from disparities between V424 and Simonyan’s edition that writers in the 16th century added a number of *kafas* in this part of the narrative.

In the *kafas* surviving in V424, *Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i* does not yet turn to Christian cosmological ideas to understand what Alexander sees, instead amplifying the encounters to create a panoply of marvels for audiences of the *Alexander Romance* and its *kafas*. If he incorporated Christian elements in the Letter to Olympias *kafas*, these are among the ones lost by the large lacunae.

Immediately on Alexander’s departure from the central world and entry into lands at the edge of the world, he and his army are faced with monstrous impossibilities: plant-men twenty-four cubits tall with hands and fingers like saws, in a forest of apple-like trees. The soldiers and the “planted ones” engage in combat – the typical pattern of interaction in this remote space – and the plant-men flee. The sole *kafa* for this encounter in V424 describes the event, repeating information found in the prose narrative (albeit with slight distortions: the planted ones are now twenty-four times Alexander’s height, rather than twenty-four cubits tall).

[Այս տընկած]ոյք մարդիկս անբով,	These immense men, planted ones,
Ձև սըղոցի ձեռս ունելով,	with hands like saws,
[’ի քսան ու չորս չավոյ կա]նգնով,	standing at a height of twenty-four
Երկանութիւն ինքս ուն[ելով,]	times my own height,

³³⁷ Stoneman 2011: 4. Haight 1955 is an English translation of the Greek α recension.

[Խառնեալք ի զարբը]ն յապ[ահով,	engaged with the trustworthy soldiers.
Հարեալք հար]ան [սատակելով,	The beaten ones were killed by blows:
Փախըստ]ակ[ան անդրադարձով,	turning them to flight,
Ջայնիւ սաստիկ սատակելով:] ³³⁸	killing with an intense voice.

Simonyan’s edition preserves a second *kafa*, but V424 is damaged here; however, based on the proportions of the illumination, I judge that the second *kafa* was not in the manuscript, and can therefore be considered a 16th-century addition by Grigoris Alt’amarci’i.

Kafas repeating the events of the narrative with additional details continue as Alexander and his army meet other peoples and creatures: red-skinned hairy giants with circular chests and lions’ faces, three-eyed creatures, a flea the size of a tortoise, a cannibalistic goat-man. The *kafas* do not yet step back to reflect upon this panoply of impossibilities. Rather, the audience receives a barrage of wonders, many accentuated – for any audience of both prose and poetry – by their duplication in the *kafas*, an experience akin to that of Alexander and the soldiers, who similarly face one astounding sight after the other with little time for reflection. This listing of wonders is a common literary method employed in geographical and marvellous texts across linguistic traditions, what Travis Zadeh calls an “encyclopedic display” in an Arabic context, serving to set out and ultimately control what exists in the world.³³⁹ In Greek and Latin literature, it is found in paradoxographies (lists of marvels taken from other texts). That process of extracting and collecting the marvels results in a “‘fabrication’ of the marvellous”.³⁴⁰ Guido Schepens and Kris Delcroix perceive the presence of “paradoxographical passages” in the *Alexander Romance*, including the epistolary sections, where “we get an enumeration of paradoxa on gigantic snakes, strange people, monsters, etc. Yet it is a letter of a military hero, so the marvellous is always related to the heroic: Alexander has to fight

³³⁸ V424 f.79v; Simonyan 1989: 253.

³³⁹ Zadeh 2011: 48.

³⁴⁰ Schepens and Delcroix 1996: 409.

against these monsters.”³⁴¹ Alexander’s victories over the sequences of peoples and creatures he encounters certainly belong to a model of the conquering hero-king, but this part of the *Alexander Romance* is about more than unusual massacres, and the edges of the world are a stage not for his control over the world but his ultimate realisation that he is no better than any other mortal.

Scholarship considers a major purpose of the remote regions in the *Alexander Romance* to be an inversion of control: Alexander, who conquered so much, cannot incorporate these places into his empire. Though rooted in his real failure to fulfil his great *pothos* (longing) in India and reach the edge of the *oikoumenē*, this was developed in the *Alexander Romance* to belong to a philosophical consideration of worldly success, its merits, its impermanence and Alexander’s vanity in pursuing it when even he will be empty-handed in death.³⁴² Alexander’s conversation with the naked philosophers of India is an archetypal episode in this philosophical argument, but his entire experience at the edges of the world belongs to it. The Armenian tradition continues this. In the *kafas* of Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i, this philosophy is first glimpsed when Alexander and his army encounter trees that grow and shrink each day and yield a sap like Persian resin. Alexander orders the soldiers to cut down the trees and collect the sap, but a voice commands that this violence cease or else the men will perish. The first *kafa* in V424 repeats the narrative and remarks that this is “a miraculous matter for the eye to behold.”³⁴³ In the second *kafa*, the trees are given words not present in the *Alexander Romance* narrative. The use of third-person, rather than the first-person narration in the Letter to Olympias, further distances this *kafa* from the prose.

Ծառերն այլ ի դէմ դարձան,	The trees turned to face him,
խաւսեցան ձայնի բանական,	they spoke with a rational voice.
յուր երթաս մոլոր յիմար,	“Where do you go, erring fool,

³⁴¹ Schepens and Delcroix 1996: 440-442.

³⁴² Stoneman 2008 provides a rich exploration of this theme throughout, though he is unaware of the Armenian *kafa* tradition and its contribution to this use of Alexander.

³⁴³ V424 f.82r; Simonyan 1989: 257. բան հրաշալի տեսողական.

գեմ ունիս խելք ա[զ]դողական,	if you truly have a vigorous mind?
[Զաշխարհըն թողէր մարդկան,	You have left the world of men,
յառապար երթաս ցնորական.	you go to an illusionary wasteland.
Շուտով] այլ ի յետ դար[ձիր,	Now quickly turn back,
մի նենգէր զաւրացո ամենայն:] ³⁴⁴	do not deceive all your troops.”

The message of the *kafa* is clear, calling the remote region “illusionary”, no place for humankind, and any gains Alexander might present to his troops a deception. The trees will not be the last to voice this message.

After this, there is only one more *kafa* of the Letter to Olympias in V424 before the folios are so severely damaged that none can be read. The last surviving *kafa* is a simple one, describing how Alexander and his army encounter fish that are boiled in cold water and a bird that self-immolates if people approach, before they then pass on from that place.

[Ա]զգս այն ձկա[ն]ց հրով ոչ եփին	These types of fish are not cooked by fire,
այլ ցուրտ ջրով [հ]ա[ր]շեալ լինին	but are boiled in cold water.
մարդիկ այնպ[էս] ճաշակին,	The men thus relished them,
զ[որ] և փորձիւ շ[ատք] ճաշեց[ին]	eating many in this practised way.
[իս]կ հաւք [ն]ր[աս] որք հաւա[ք]ին	Those birds which were amassed here,
թէ [մերձենե]ա ոք հր[ով] այր]ին	if someone approaches, they are burnt by fire.
անհ[պե]լի [ն]ոքա մն[աց]ին	They remained inaccessible
[ե]ւ զաւրքն [ի բաց ա]նցել գն[աց]ին]: ³⁴⁵	and the army, passing them by, went away.

³⁴⁴ V424 f.82r; Simonyan 1989: 257.

³⁴⁵ V424 f.82v; Simonyan 1989: 258.

These are marvels, not morals – the audience is invited to imagine, say, a fish that boils in unheated water. One purpose of these events is certainly entertainment, the allure of the strange. But such sights can also be taken in on other levels, as the self-immolating bird was in texts like the *Physiologus*, where its ability to be reborn leads it to be compared to Jesus.³⁴⁶ The Christian perspective of the *Physiologus*, which will be discussed more extensively later, is important: what is potentially lost by V424's extensive lacunae here is an interpretative layer that Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i brings into the second epistolary section that will come under consideration, the Letter to Aristotle, where such sights are incorporated into a Christian understanding of the breadth of Creation. Later manuscripts from the 16th century attest to that layer's presence in the Letter to Olympias *kafas*. It is noteworthy that some of those later *kafas* are added to sections of the *Alexander Romance* that do survive in V424, making it reasonably certain that Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i did not author them. What of the rest, where comparison is rendered impossible by lacunae – did he only introduce the idea that these sights belonged to Creation in the Letter to Aristotle? Did he intend to emphasise the marvellous and the vanity of Alexander's incursion in the Letter to Olympias, setting the scene for the later events in India with the naked philosophers, with the Letter to Aristotle subsequently taking a different tone? The 16th-century manuscript copied by Zak'aria Gnunec'i, MCR3, which largely follows the same illumination cycle as V424 with many of the same *kafas*, preserves some of these Christianising *kafas* in the Letter to Olympias. However, though clearly modelled on V424 or an intermediary manuscript, it is not a direct copy and this is insufficient evidence to identify any of these *kafas* as definitely belonging to Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i. His intent for the *kafas* in the Letter to Olympias remains unclear.

In the narrative – and in *kafas* in later manuscripts – the journey of the Letter to Olympias culminates in birds with the faces of humans speaking Greek, telling Alexander – “errant slave” – to turn back because he was trying to enter “the house of the gods”.³⁴⁷ The *kafas* do not develop the

³⁴⁶ *Physiologus* 10 (Muradyan 2005: 102-105, 147).

³⁴⁷ Simonyan 1989: 262. զԱՍՏՈՒԱԾՈՅ զՄՈՒՆՆՍ

idea that he approaches heaven. Rather, the loss of life Alexander causes is questioned. He is encouraged instead to invade India and meet Poros in battle, so that he “will not be cast down unregarded”.³⁴⁸ This is considered a more worthwhile use of his time – it is the vanity of approaching the most remote regions of the world that both narrative and surviving *kafas* question, continuing the message spoken first by the growing-and-shrinking trees. Unfortunately, the lacunae mean it is unknown if Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i authored any of these *kafas*.

Alexander listens to these speaking, human-faced birds and turns back, leaving behind him only hints of other traditions: “Having taken the guide star, the one like the cart, we came out in twenty-two days. Making a gate with care I shut up this place, and I wrote on a rock how much we saw at one time.”³⁴⁹ The gate hints at the gate or wall he constructs against Gog and Magog in other texts, while writing on a rock recalls kings who came before Alexander: the well-documented practice of kings in the ancient Near East inscribing the boundaries of their conquests with stelae in cuneiform or hieroglyphs.³⁵⁰ These were known to Armenians: Movsēs Xorenac’i interpreted Urartian cuneiform monuments as belonging to ancient Assyria and the figure of Semiramis, while stelae of Artaxias I (ruled 189-160 BCE) in Aramaic lay about the landscape, commemorating a new dynasty’s demarcation of land.³⁵¹ Some of these objects were re-inscribed in the Christian era as *xaç’k’ars* (cross-stones). *Xaç’k’ars* were used to mark the dead and their place within the Christian universe, as well as to provide sites of worship or commemoration, and might also be placed at geographical –

³⁴⁸ Simonyan 1989: 263.

³⁴⁹ Simonyan 1989: 263-264. և կալաք զառաջնորդ աստղն ըստ սայլիդ և այնպէս ի դուրս եկեալ աուրս քսան և երկուս: Եւ դրունս արարեալ, ինամարար խցի զտեղիսն և գրեցի ի վերայ վիմի միոյ, որքան միանգամ տեսաք:

³⁵⁰ For instance, monuments of the Assyrian kings, carved on rock walls or stelae at the edges of their empire, such as the images and inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I (ruled 1114-1076 BCE) and Shalmaneser III (ruled 858-824 BCE) at the site considered to be the source of the Tigris, identified by Shalmaneser III in one of the inscriptions as the edge of his conquered world. Leaving his image and inscriptions in this “remote ... mytho-poetical landscape charged with associations of the world’s edge” (Harmanşah 2007: 197) contributed to the construction of the Assyrian world’s central and frontier locations (Harmanşah 2012: 55) and the king’s role of journeying to those frontiers. This was inherited by Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid kings, and eventually – I argue in an as-yet-unpublished article – by the legends surrounding Alexander.

³⁵¹ For Artaxiad stelae, see Khatchadourian 2007: 48-55.

both political and spiritual – boundaries.³⁵² By the time Alexander’s inscription reaches medieval Armenian traditors, this appears to draw no remark: no *kafas* are collected by Simonyan for this occasion. The Letter to Olympias ends and the third-person narrative picks up as Alexander enters India.

16th century

In the late 13th, early 14th-century manuscript V424, the *kafas* surviving in the Letter to Olympias only emphasised the marvels and horrors found in the remote region that Alexander and his army passed through. No attempt was made to fit these sights into Creation. Some of this lack may be a matter of manuscript lacunae, but, where folios survive, it is clear that Xaç’atur Keč’ārec’i’s *kafas* for this section did not begin the interpretation he developed in the Letter to Aristotle. Whether or not Xaç’atur Keč’ārec’i wrote interpretative *kafas* that are now lost, Grigoris Att’amac’i and Zak’aria Gnunec’i are certainly seen to develop this layer in their 16th-century additions. Contemplating the nature of Creation, which has led to the existence of such beings, they move to interpret events through knowledge of scripture – in doing so, the creatures are gradually understood. They even explicitly identify the Creator of these beings, remarking on the magnificent and miraculous natures of creatures at the far end of Creation, and inviting audiences to contemplate the divine Creator. In a particularly interesting instance, one of these animals – a giant lobster – is utilised as a pejorative to criticise the *kafas*’ Armenian audience.

The creatures encountered by Alexander and his army continue to be understood in the 16th-century *kafas* of the Letter to Olympias as frightful, as in Xaç’atur Keč’ārec’i’s *kafas*, and now they are also described as ‘evil’. Fleas the size of tortoises, which Alexander sees in a cave, are elaborated in a 16th-century *kafa* by Grigoris Att’amac’i to be more troublesome than even a regular flea, capable of not only disrupting a good night’s sleep but drawing out a person’s breath – presumably

³⁵² Azarian and Manoukian 1969.

fatally.

Այ լու դու ծնունդ չարի,	O flea! You offspring of evil
ու կենացըս մեր թշնամի,	and enemy of our lives.
ի լուսոյ փախչիս գերի,	From light you flee, prisoner,
ու ընկեր գաս մեզ գիշերի,	and you come to us in the night as a companion.
ըզքունըն հարամ առնես,	You make sleep <i>haram</i> ,
’ւ արթնիւթիւն տաս մեզ ձանձրալի,	and you give us troublesome awakening.
ինչ փոքրերն ըզայն գործեն՝	Small ones do this thing –
դու հանես ըզշունչն ի մարմնի: ³⁵³	you draw the breath from the body.

It is interesting to note the use of the Arabic loanword *հարամ* (*haram*, meaning a ‘sin’ or ‘unlawful’ – typically used, in Arabic, within the context of Islam), indicative of the long contact between cultures that led to many Arabic and Turkish words entering the Armenian language in the medieval period.

Other creatures designated as ‘evil’ include those found in a river, which in the narrative are simply listed: “And there were many *višaps*, and water there, and many types of fish, which were not boiled by fire, but by cold water flowing like a fountain.”³⁵⁴ The same river contains stones that turn whoever touches them black. In the 16th-century *kafa* by Grigoris Alt’amarci, the creatures are evil and dire.

Այ գետ թէ քանի՞ ի քեզ	O river! How many
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³⁵³ MCR3 f.102v; Simonyan 1989: 255. The *kafa* is not present in V424 and Simonyan has it in the Kiurdian 2 mss, which indicates Grigoris Alt’amarci’s authorship.

³⁵⁴ Simonyan 1989: 258. Եւ էին վիշապք բազում, և ջուր անդր, և բազում ազգս ձկանց, որք հուր ոչ լինէին եփեալք, այլ ցուրտ ջուր աղբերացով:

կենդանիք կան չար դժընդակ.	evil, dire animals are in you!
Վիշապ հարկանող հզար՝	<i>Višaps</i> , strong strikers,
սև քարինք ազդող համորակ,	black stones of the same vigorous quality,
ձկունք որ չեփին ջրով ³⁵⁵	Fish, which are not cooked by water

It seems that ջրով ('by water') is a scribal error, where հրով ('by fire') was probably meant – Simonyan's edition records հրով for this *kafa*, and it more accurately describes the strange fish described in the narrative, producing the half-line: "Fish, which are not cooked by fire."

An explicitly Christian element is found in the full-length version of this *kafa*: the creator of this region. Simonyan's edition has the second half of the third line, as well as a fourth set of half-lines, which read:

հաւքրդ հուր ածեն ծափողակ.	birds, which create crackling fire.
Փառք այն ստեղծողին ասեմ,	I say glory to that creator
որ ի մին տեղիսն է բնակ: ³⁵⁶	who inhabits all places.

This creator – glorified – must be the Christian God. Here, in this and several other 16th-century *kafas* for the Letter to Olympias, is introduced the idea that this landscape of marvels fits within God's work. *Višaps* (a serpentine creature of Armenian myth), black stones with unnatural properties, fish that boil in cold water and birds that turn to fire – all exist in a place inhabited by their creator, who inhabits all of Creation. Thus this land begins to be understood in relation to the known world, and through such contemplation are the works of God known and the divinity praised. The use of *višaps*, also included in the translation of the Greek *Alexander Romance* text, additionally makes this remote region more familiar to Armenian audiences, who may not have heard of all the

³⁵⁵ MCR3 f.104v; Simonyan 1989: 258. The *kafa* is not in V424 and Simonyan has it in the Kiurdian 2 mss.

³⁵⁶ Simonyan 1989: 258.

creatures encountered by Alexander but will probably have known about the mythical serpents.

Whether or not audiences actually believed that *višaps* were real creatures, this helps to put all the beings in the same conceptual space.

Other 16th-century *kafas* make explicit their praise for the Creator of the astonishing creatures of the *Alexander Romance*. One, coming before the flea and the much-populated river, elaborates on the planted ones that are twenty-four cubits tall (or twenty-four times Alexander’s height). Alongside Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i’s *kafa* marvelling at their appearance and describing the combat with them, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i added a new *kafa* that addresses their Creator.

Այ իմ հրաշագործ աստուած,	O my wonder-working God,
արարիչդ ազգաց ամենի.	you creator of all peoples!
ու զարմանալի քո գործքդ,	O your marvellous works
զինչ պատմեն երամք տեսողի.	which groups of spectators recount!
ըզբոյսանովի ոչխարս	Natural sheep
լրսեցաք ի Հունդուստանի,	we heard about in India,
բայց ըզտընկածոյ մարդիկս	but these planted men
չենք լրսել յառակս ամենի: ³⁵⁷	we did not hear about in any fables.

God is directly named – praised, again, for the “marvellous works” recounted by those who see them. Though familiar “natural” sheep are among those animals known in India, Alexander and his army were unprepared for the planted men. Not even fables (which include some unusual animals and behaviours) led them to expect this. Simonyan records that this *kafa* was also written with չտեսաք (‘we did not see’) in place of լրսեցաք (‘we heard’) and չենք տեսել (‘we did not see’) in place of չենք լրսել (‘we did not hear’), not only making it about seeing rather than hearing about

³⁵⁷ MCR3 f.100v; Simonyan 1989: 253. The *kafa* is not in V424 and Simonyan has it in the Kiurdian 2 mss.

the creatures, but negating the first of the two verbs, resulting in: “The natural sheep we did not see in India. But these planted men we did not see in any fables.” This too expresses the unexpected experience of being in this place: familiar animals like sheep are not even present, not to mention the giant, plant-like men who *are* present *despite* being unknown from fables. However, despite the surprise of hearing about or seeing these men, the *kafa*’s structure indicates that both types of life – sheep and plant-men – are among God’s works, and God is praised.

As an aside, Alexander does not describe entering India in the Letter to Olympias. This occurs later in the narrative and is partially covered by the Letter to Aristotle. Grigoris Ałt’amarci is, perhaps, referring to later events in India, or is confused between the two different excursions to the edges of the world. This might indicate the composition of the *kafa* separately from the narrative, with India mentioned in the *kafa* because the region is associated with wonders encountered by Alexander³⁵⁸ – alternatively, it shows the ready slippage between the different remote spaces of the *Alexander Romance*. This is not an accurate geography. It tracks, instead, the idea of the world’s edge, in which modern cartographical precision is unnecessary and what Jerry Brotton identifies as “contiguity”, when talking about the famous Hereford Mappa Mundi, is key: “the proximity of one place to one another, each place charged by a specific Christian event.”³⁵⁹ Though the narrative map of the *Alexander Romance* does not share many of its features with the Hereford Mappa Mundi, what is important is contiguity, or how the different parts of the map relate to each other. The point is that Alexander is at the furthest reaches of a map created by God.

Consideration of that creation continues in further *kafas* where Alexander and his army encounter headless men. The narrative reads: “Setting off from there, we came to a place where the men were headless. They had no head at all, but they had the eyes and mouth in their chests, and

³⁵⁸ This is known in Armenian literature beyond the *Alexander Romance* and *kafas* about Alexander. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the 14th-century history *The Flower of Histories of the East* written by Het’um the Historian includes the following on India: “Towarde the north parte by the long and great desert of Inde, where Kynge Alexandre founde so great dyuersite of serpentis and of beestes as his hystorie recounteth...” (Burger 1988: 11).

³⁵⁹ Brotton 2013: 107.

they spoke in their own human language, and were hairy and skin-clothed fish-eaters.”³⁶⁰ Such men are difficult to comprehend as part of the real world, as the *kafas* make clear.

Անունդ արհնեալ արարչական,	You blessed creational name,
թէ քանի ազգ կենդանցան.	how many races of living creatures exist?
առանց գլխո ոք ոչ ծնան,	No one was born without a head,
բայց թէ սովաւ բաղադրեցան,	except for those composed like this.
այս է զարմանք հիացական,	These are admirable miracles,
թէ սոքա որպէս գոյացան. ³⁶¹	how did they come into being?

The version in Simonyan’s edition has two more lines: “Trees, forests and plants, irrational and rational living creatures.”³⁶² The next *kafa* is copied in full in MCR3.

Որչափ որ ստեղծել է զմարդն	To the extent He has created man
ի հողոյ այսպէս չէ տեսած.	from earth, in this way it is not seen,
կամ բնաւ ի միտն անկած,	either conceived in the mind
կամ ի գիր ուրուք նկարած,	or described in writing by anyone:
թէ մարդն անգլուխ լինի	that a man who is headless,
կամ երթայ յուրէք հեռացած,	goes somewhere far away.
զայս որ տեսաւ թագաւորս	This, which the king saw,

³⁶⁰ Simonyan 1989: 260. Եւ անդուստ խաղացեալ եկայք ի տեղի մի, ուր էին անգլուխ մարդիկք: Եւ գլուխ ոչ ունէին բնաւ, այլ ի լանջսն ունէին զաչս և զբերանն, և խաւսէին մարդկեղէն իւրեանց լեզուան, թաւք և մորթազգեստք, ձկնակերք:

³⁶¹ MCR3 f.106r.

³⁶² Simonyan 1989: 260. Ծառք անտառիք և բուսական, / Անբան կենդանք և բանականք:

զարմացաւ խիստ ըզբանչացած:³⁶³ he greatly marvelled at, astonished.

These two *kafas* are found in the Kiurdian 2 mss of Grigoris Att'amarci' (as well as MCR3 of Zak'aria Gnunc'i), but lacunae in V424 leave open the possibility that Xac'atur Keč'ařec'i was also an author. Both *kafas* individually contemplate the headless men – it is possible that they were written by separate authors, or by the same author at different times, responding to these impossible living beings in their own ways.³⁶⁴

In these two *kafas*, the poet or poets go beyond awe at the extent of Creation and question God: how is it possible that headless people exist? Certainly no one has seen or read about or even imagined such a thing. The *kafas* do not exactly say that God could not have created them, but as astonishing and admirable – on the same level as miracles – they demand explanation. These headless people test the limits of the Christian cosmology delineated in the *kafas* – test, but do not undo, as ultimately they are encompassed in the trees, forests, plants, rational and irrational creatures at the end of the full-length version of the first *kafa*, all of which are known to be God's creations. Like the dire, river-dwelling animals and the giant "planted men", the *kafas* fit these headless men within the Christian, created world. By contemplating questions such as these, God is better known.

The next type of creature encountered by Alexander and his army will ultimately be "astonishing and incomparable" too: giant lobsters or crabs. First, however, the *kafas* return to the theme of describing these remote animals as evil, but even more so – comparable to Satan, "a model of the idle-talker". The *kafas* also develop this interpretation in a way that is of specific interest to Armenian audiences, and which deserves special examination: the giant lobsters are, remarkably, a model for the Armenian people.

³⁶³ MCR3 f.106r; Simonyan 1989: 260. ըզբանչացած is a variant spelling of (ը)սքանչացած. Both *kafas* are not in V424 and Simonyan has them in the Kiurdian 2 mss.

³⁶⁴ In the future, it will be desirable to pursue this line of enquiry into identifying the *kafas*' authorship with greater certainty.

After encountering trees that grow and shrink each day and yield a sap like Persian perfume, the river-dwelling animals, five-footed and six-footed beasts, six-eyed beasts, and the headless men, Alexander and his army see “very great lobsters, like boats”.³⁶⁵ No further description of the lobsters is provided in the *Alexander Romance* narrative at this moment, but *kafas* elaborate: three in Simonyan’s edition that describe the lobsters here, two in MCR3. In the narrative, Alexander’s men implore him to return, but he insists on going on “to see the end of the earth”. The lobsters are the last animals they see, as what follows is “a wilderness route ... we did not see anything, no birds and no wild beasts, no reptiles and no fowls, but only heaven and earth. We saw no sun, but went through dark air for ten days.”³⁶⁶ They then reach an island, where they hear but cannot see people speaking Greek. Here, “a lobster came up and plucked fifty-four soldiers and pulled them to the water.”³⁶⁷ Simonyan’s edition has one further *kafa* here, which heightens the emotional impact of the scene by addressing Alexander and describing the lobster as “this creature of evil”. MCR3 has two *kafas*. Lobsters do (re)appear later in the Letter to Aristotle, but without a *kafa*: “Many lobsters leapt up from the lake and immeasurable was their multitude. They destroyed all the tents and soldiers.”³⁶⁸

The lobster *kafas* are first known in the 16th century. Unfortunately, the section of V424 where the lobsters might appear is no longer extant, so it is uncertain whether it contained any lobster *kafas*. Given that MCR3 follows its illumination cycle in many places, it is possible that V424 also included lobsters, but it is only possible to speak of the lobsters’ 16th-century appearances. In MCR3, there are two lobster *kafas*, one each above and below an illumination of a rather meagre-looking, crab-like creature, on f.106v, with another two *kafas* – again, one each above and below –

³⁶⁵ Simonyan 1989: 261. Տեսաք և խեցգետին մեծամեծս իբրև գնաւս:

³⁶⁶ Simonyan 1989: 261-262. Եւ բազում անգամ աղաչէին զիս բարեկամքն իմ դառնալ, և ես նչ կամեցայ, քանզի կամէի տեսանել զկատարած երկրին: Եւ ապա անդուստ խաղացեալ ընդ անապատ ճանապարհ և գնացեալ ի ծովակողմն կոյս և նչ ևս այնուհետև ինչ տեսանէաք. ո՛չ հաւս, և ո՛չ գազան, ո՛չ սողուն, և ո՛չ թռչուն, բայց միայն զերկինս և զերկիրս: Եւ զարեզակն նչ այլ տեսանէաք, այլ ընդ աղաւտ յաւղ յաւուրս տասն:

³⁶⁷ Simonyan 1989: 262. Եւ խեցգետին մի ել կորզեաց և ձգեաց ի ջուրն զինուորս յիսուն և չորս:

³⁶⁸ Simonyan 1989: 290. Եւ վաղէին ի վեր լիկէն խեցգետնեայ բազում, և անչափ էր նոցա բազմութիւն, որ զինակիրս և զվրանս ամենայն կորուսանէին:

accompanying an illumination of a clawed creature upending a boat on f.107r. The first of these four *kafas* reads:

Դառնատեսիլս այս խեցգետին	This shocking lobster,
որ արինակ է հալյկազին.	which is an exemplar for the Armenian people:
զբար բնակչացըն յայտնողին	revealer of the customs of the inhabitants,
բարառնաբար ազգի ի ասին.	it personifies the nation in itself.
բայց այս կարի յոյժ մեծագին	But this is far greater,
ինքս արինակ է բանասարկուն. ³⁶⁹	this itself is a model of the idle-talker.

Simonyan's edition provides a further two lines:

Որով եզիտ ըզմուտ չարին	Through which the evil one found entry
՛ւ արար զԱդամըն տըրտմագին. ³⁷⁰	and made Adam most sorrowful.

It is not stated why the Armenians ought to see their example in this shocking lobster, though the implication of erring would indicate unspecified sins. There is no lobster in the *Physiologus*. Nor do fables offer a clear guide to understanding this *kafa*, as the role of lobsters in Armenian fables is un-fixed.

Fables in Armenian literature are chiefly ascribed to two authors, Vardan Aygekc'i (12th-13th century) and Mxitar Goš (1120-1213), who worked in the mode of Aesop's fables, which were earlier translated into Armenian but subsequently subsumed by the Armenian fables. Vardan Aygekc'i in particular developed the genre in Armenian with a Christian moral, at times explicated after the story of the fable. He is said to have used these fables to embellish his sermons, making his ideas

³⁶⁹ MCR3 f.107a.

³⁷⁰ Simonyan 1989: 261. The *kafa* is not in V424 and Simonyan has it in the Kiurdian 2 mss.

more accessible to his congregation – indicative of a proximity of animal stories and Christian moralising in Armenian religious contexts.³⁷¹ This is seen elsewhere: fables from the sermonary of Bartolomeo di Bologna (died 1333), a missionary sent to Greater Armenia to convert Armenians to Catholicism, were included in the summer and winter volumes of the homiliary of Grigor Tat'ewac'i (1346-1409), despite the opposing ecclesiastical positions of the two holy men.³⁷² Many of the fables attributed to Vardan Aygekc'i were collected in the *Ałvesagirk'* (Book of the Fox), so named for the frequency of the fox's appearance in Armenian fables, but others – attributed to other writers – were copied and printed elsewhere. The ready association of Alexander with the genre of fables in Armenian is apparent by his appearance in some of them. In N. Marr's exhaustive compendium *Sborniki pritch Vardana*, for now the best collection, there are three fables about the lobster, and in each it assumes a different character.³⁷³

In the first, 'The Fox and the Lobster', the fox suggests to the lobster that they race to the threshing floor, with the winner taking the wheat – an obvious ploy for the fox to win – but the lobster pleads to be allowed to hold onto the fox with its pincers, and by this ruse beats the fox to the wheat. The lesson, expressed at the end, is that harm comes to the cunning while the weak will overcome.³⁷⁴ The fox is familiar as trickster, recognisable from the *Physiologus* (and the *kafas*), as well as folklore traditions circulating among numerous cultures, while the lobster – although not the usual candidate for a role in threshing wheat – takes a stereotyped place in this fable as a weaker animal that turns the tables on a stronger, craftier or more predatory animal to succeed. There is no indication of its role in the *kafa*.

In the second tale, 'The Lobster and the Young Animals', the lobster advises the young animals to walk along a certain way, while it takes an erroneous route – but, seeing it, the young animals

³⁷¹ Conybeare 1899: 462-475; Hacikyan et al 2002: 479-480.

³⁷² Manukyan 1997. In her article, Manukyan includes a sample fable in which the overburdening of an aged donkey compared to three pampered younger donkeys is a lesson in failing to practice repentance throughout life, expecting to be able to do it only in the latter years after decades of unholy excess.

³⁷³ A new, critical edition of the *Ałvesagirk'* is currently in preparation by Ani Shahnazaryan.

³⁷⁴ Marr 1895-1899: 2:36-37; Saint-Martin 1825: 14-17. The two versions collected by Marr and Saint-Martin have some word-level differences, but in their details tell the same story.

follow the lobster, earning the chastisement of the mother animal. The moral is directed at those in a position of guidance: those you advise will do as you do, not as you say, and so you must act accordingly. The lobster has certainly erred, but there is no suggestion that its actions were malicious.³⁷⁵ There is no internal evidence for the choice of the lobster in this fable.

In the third tale, ‘The Turtles and Lobsters and the Eagle’ (alternatively ‘The Turtles and the Lobsters’), the non-winged creatures demand that the eagle help them fly. The eagle, perceiving their arrogance, carries them to the highest rock – but then leads the other birds to fly away. Attempting to leap after them, the turtles and lobsters fall to the bottom of a deep valley, where they are shattered on a pile of stones and become food for the birds.³⁷⁶ Perhaps this provides some insight into the meaning of the lobster *kafa*. One variant of the fable is introduced with an explanation: “Arrogantly, the multitude wanted to do some deed, which was beyond its power. They lacked the power to accomplish it to completion, and from the burden of the work they were destroyed. The race of the tortoises and lobsters also acted similarly...”³⁷⁷ The other provides its explanation at the end: anyone who is arrogant and attempts to take on work beyond his or her power “dies like the tortoises”³⁷⁸, falling to hell at the day of judgement, while “the just and the repentant sinners will ascend to encounter the Lord Christ and enter the paternal nuptial couch.”³⁷⁹ Here, then, is an additional example in Armenian tradition of sinful lobsters. While this is not the lobster’s sole role in Armenian fables, nor is the lobster at all unique in possessing a sinful nature among the menagerie of creatures utilised by Vardan Aygekc’i and Mxitar Goš in creating their tales, this fable situates the *kafa* in the animal-world created by the fables and related texts like the

³⁷⁵ Marr 1895-1899: 2:287.

³⁷⁶ Marr 1895-1899: 2:28, 3:75-76. Marr collects two variants of this fable: one found in the *Atvesagirk’*, one copied elsewhere. The basic story is the same, but the *Atvesagirk’* fable (2:28) contains the subsequent paragraph explaining the moral, while the other version (3:75-76) provides only a short introduction to contextualise the animals’ actions within considerations of right behaviour.

³⁷⁷ Marr 1895-1899: 3:75-76. Եւ բազումք կամեցան առնել գործ ինչ, որ ի վեր է քան զկարողութիւն իւր, հպարտութեամբ՝ և ոչ կարացին տանել ի կատարումն, այլ ի ծանրութենէ գործոյն սատակեցան: Որպէս և արարին ազգրն կրայից և խեցգետնեաց. Translation of the fable is my own.

³⁷⁸ Marr 1895-1899: 2:28. սատակի որպէս զկիրիայքն.

³⁷⁹ Marr 1895-1899: 2:28. և արդարքն և ապաշխարեալ մեղաւորքն վերանայն ի հանդիպումն տեառն Քրիստոսի և մտանեն ի յառազաստն հայրական:

Physiologus. The *kafa* is not a complete outlier.

However, the *kafa* goes further than the fable's position on the actions of the lobsters: it directly addresses the Armenian people (հայկազխն). The lobster is a "revealer of the customs of the inhabitants, it personifies the nation (ազգ) in itself." As implicit as the fables' morals are, this *kafa* demands that its audience see themselves in the animal described. Why the lobster?

Explanation for this is to be sought not in fables or the *Physiologus*, but cosmology. One text in particular offers insight. In the cosmos as described in the *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise* ascribed to Zeno, signs of the zodiac are associated with different countries and body parts: "Cancer (is) of the Armenians, which are the lungs."³⁸⁰ The words for 'lobster' and the sign 'Cancer' (խեցգետին) are the same, and in iconography circulating in numerous traditions (not only Armenian) the sign is depicted variously as a crab or lobster, which reflects the crab-like depictions of the խեցգետին in Armenian *Alexander Romance* manuscripts. The *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise*, an epitome of philosophical theories, was composed in Greek in c. 6th century (now lost) and translated into Armenian soon after, most likely in the 7th century. It is not unique in the broader cosmological tradition in linking regions to zodiac signs, though it is the only I have found in the Armenian language that links Armenia and Cancer. Although it was not widely circulated, its use in the "curriculum" of the teaching that flourished at Gladzor and Tat'ev in the late 13th and early 14th centuries ensured its survival in intellectual life.³⁸¹ It is certainly possible that monastic scholars such as Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i would be familiar with this text, through the networks of circulation and transmission among monasteries that resulted in manuscripts containing the *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise* being copied in sites such as Ējmiacin and Deřdzut in the South Caucasus and Tokat (Eudokia) in northern Anatolia close to the Black Sea.³⁸²

This astrological interpretation is supported by the subsequent *kafas*. The next *kafa* in MCR3

³⁸⁰ *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise* 1.4.7 (Stone and Shirinian 2000: 57, 132).

³⁸¹ Stone and Shirinian 2000: 28.

³⁸² Stone and Shirinian 2000: 30.

describes the lobster's way of living and its hideous nature, and mentions a concern for one born in the lobster's time:

Ծնունդ յիրաւի է քո	Deserved is your birth,
խայծգետին ³⁸³ եւ դառնատեսիլ. ³⁸⁴	you are a hideous lobster.
յայն աշհարհն որ ցեղ լինիս	In this land, in which [your] race is
անհեղեղ ³⁸⁵ ու զազրատեսիլ.	ill-shaped and deformed,
կամում տանուտէր լինիս	when you will be lord,
վա գտարին ³⁸⁶ [ցասըմնատեսիլ.	alas, the year [will] know wrath.
Ով որ ծընանի ի քեզ	Someone who is born in you
թըշուառաբախտ ու սախտագիլ ^{387:]} ³⁸⁸	is ill-fated and ill-disposed.

The otherwise obscure final two half-lines become clearer when the idea of being born under a particular astrological sign (“when you will be lord”) is taken into consideration – here, utilised to heighten the horror of this creature. Not only is it shocking, hideous and a “model of the idle-talker”, already a sufficiently serious sin, it is also foul enough to taint an entire astrological month.

Another *kafa*, not present in MCR3 but ascribed by Simonyan to Zak'aria Gnunec'i, makes the astrological connection explicit.

³⁸³ Variation on the spelling խեցգետին used elsewhere.

³⁸⁴ These two lines are slightly different to the version in Simonyan's edition, which reads a little more clearly. See Simonyan 1989: 261: Անունդ յիրաւի է քո / խեցգետին ու դառնատեսիլ. = Deserved is your name, hideous lobster.

³⁸⁵ Variation on the spelling անհեթեթ.

³⁸⁶ MCR3 f.107a. The *kafa* ends here in the manuscript, mid-line, with no sign of damage, suggesting that Zak'aria Gnunec'i forgot to copy the rest of the *kafa*. There is potentially enough space for all the lines in Simonyan's edition. The rest is supplied from Simonyan.

³⁸⁷ սախտագիլ is surely a corruption, especially as Simonyan 1989: 261 fn.3 records սաթխագիլ in one manuscript. For the intended word, ախտագիլ can be assumed (with an emphasis on the ախտ element, meaning 'illness/disease').

³⁸⁸ Simonyan 1989: 261. The *kafa* is not in V424 and Simonyan has it in the Kiurdian 2 mss.

Սարատղանայ ասեն սրմա	They call it – Cancer,
Եւ խեչիփար յորջորջի սա.	And it is named lobster.
Ի ճախրս դաշտաց սա կու կենայ	It lives in the marshes of the fields.
Չեկ տարին տանուտէր կու գայ. ³⁸⁹	It comes as lord at the coming of the year.

The word սարատղանայ is problematic, but սարատան (from Arabic) means the astrological sign of Cancer. That it “comes as lord” again suggests the time of year when Cancer is ascendant.

Whoever first authored poems about the lobsters – whether it was Xaç’atur Keč’ařec’i or not – the work of Grigoris Ałt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunec’i on this subject consolidated a cosmological idea of the hideous lobster to make an admonitory statement.

This *kafa* is also noteworthy for specifically identifying its audience members as Armenian. It attests an expectation that the primary audience for the *kafas* is people who not only spoke Armenian but who shared in a common Armenian experience, probably a religious one: Christianity, and probably the Armenian Apostolic Christianity of the *kafas*’ authors. A religious community is also the context in which an admonition directed to the whole ‘nation’ would make the most sense. The erring of the Armenian people indicated by the first *kafa* need not be specified: references to sin function as a shorthand, which the audience of any text can be expected to understand without lengthy exegesis. If anything, its lack of specificity grants it greater power. Any transgression can be imagined or suggested as subject to pejorative – in the case of the *kafa* in the *Alexander Romance*, lobster-based criticism. The unique cosmological association between lobsters and Armenians, which underlies the poem’s association, need not be known, although some clerical or monastic audiences could be expected to share familiarity with the *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise*. For all, the allegorical role of an animal (especially one without any other strong association) as the idle-talking sinner was probably readily perceptible: a strong message, coming in a poem set at a

³⁸⁹ Simonyan 1989: 261.

remotest reach of the world, which in other texts was near Paradise.

The ideas in the *kafas* would translate well across religions and cultures (and perhaps in oral contexts they did), but within the Christian cosmology of the *kafas* is presented a message specifically for Armenian people. The sources of these lobster *kafas* – principally the translated pre-Christian Greek *Alexander Romance* and the translated Christian Greek *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise*³⁹⁰ – are put to use for an Armenian purpose.

The two *kafas* in MCR3 accompanying the second illustration, depicting a six-clawed creature upturning a boat, are not developed along these Christian or astrological lines: they emphasise the peril and horror of the scene to heighten its emotional impact. One of them returns to the unexpected experience of seeing or hearing about these lobsters.

Հրաշ ւ անբաղդատ է բանս ասել,	Astonishing and incomparable it is to relate this,
կամ ի յականջ ուրէք ազդել,	or to pour it into an ear somewhere:
այս կենդանիս մեր անընդել,	these animals, wild to us,
որս[...]ք մարդոյ չէ զինք տեսել,	which were not themselves seen by men.
ըզչորս հարիւրսն յափըշտակել,	Four hundred men snatched off
‘ւ յիսուն և չորս անհետ եղել: ³⁹¹	and fifty-four were lost without trace.

As with the headless people earlier, it is astonishing to inform others about these lobsters – or to be the one being informed. However, the intense questioning of how they might fit within Creation has not continued, presumably because even gargantuan lobsters are real, known animals.

The final event in the Letter to Olympias is the birds with human faces turning Alexander back from the very end of the earth.

³⁹⁰ On the proposed Christian nature of the original lost Greek text, see Stone and Shirinian 2000: 16-18.

³⁹¹ MCR3 f.107r. This *kafa* is not in Simonyan’s edition, making it tentatively ascribable to Zak’aria Gnunec’i.

Հաւքըս խաւսին մարդկան երգօք,	These birds speak with a language of men,
ւ յանդիմանեն զարքայս բանիք,	and reproach the king with words.
անմիտ ի բաց զեր քո զաւրաւք,	“Insane one! Take your army far away!
թէ ոչ պատժիս մեծ տոկոսօք:	If not, you will be punished manyfold.”

[Ա]ղէկսանդրէ ³⁹² էր սարսափել,	Alexander was dismayed
և սիրտն ի վեր յափշտակել,	and his heart was completely ravaged.
շուտով անդրէն ի յետս դարձեր,	Immediately afterwards he turned back anew,
ւ ի մարդաբնակ վայրն ընթացեալ:	and went to the inhabited place. ³⁹³

Հաւքս որ խաւսեցան յայտնի	These birds, which spoke clearly
ու խրատ տըլին ցանկալի.	and gave desirable advice.
յուր երթաս մուր գերի	“To where do you go, errant slave?
յեր անկնիս արիւնդ ամենի.	For what do you spill all of this blood?
շուտով այլ ի յետ դարձիր	Turn back immediately
որ չկորընչիս անակնարկելի,	so that you will not be destroyed unregarded.
գեմ մարդ ես և միտք ունիս`	Given that you are a man and you have intellect,
գագան չես կամ քար 'ւ ի մայրի: ³⁹⁴	you are not a wild creature or a rock in a [dwelling]
	forest.”

By the 16th century, these three *kafas* are all found together. However, the third *kafa*'s retelling of events that transpired in the first two suggests two cycles of *kafas*, either by different

³⁹² The name ends with -է in the manuscript, perhaps erroneously. Simonyan 1989: 263 has the Greek nominative -ոս ending that would be expected.

³⁹³ Simonyan's edition has անմարդաբնակ for this half-line, making it “uninhabited”.

³⁹⁴ MCR3 f.108r; Simonyan 1989: 263. These *kafas* are not in V424 and Simonyan has them in the Kiurdian 2 mss.

authors (perhaps the earliest cycle composed by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, lost to lacunae in V424, and the later by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i, as attested by all three *kafas'* presence in the Kiurdian 2 mss) or even two cycles by the same author, in this case Grigoris Alt'amarc'i.

The worth of Alexander's wide-ranging conquests – including his violent excursion to this remote region – is questioned: for what purpose is he spilling so much blood and travelling to this place? The concern, however, is primarily that he is an intellectual being, not a wild beast, and should act accordingly. The reason for his punishment, should he stay, is not elaborated. Moreover, such errant acts will lead to him being unregarded, indicating that other acts – such as turning his attentions towards India – will have a different outcome. There is a point to *some* conquests. In India, however, he will encounter a more philosophical message: none of his acts in life will matter. The birds with human faces do not perfectly set up the later message, but they presage it by questioning his deeds.

The presence of both մարդաբնակ ('inhabited') and անմարդաբնակ ('uninhabited') in different manuscripts is an interesting variation. On the one hand, the region is presented in the *Alexander Romance* narrative as being uninhabited, and on the other hand it is known to be near Paradise. While the Garden of Eden itself remains uninhabited, its environs are patrolled by the birds with human faces (or angels, or angelic voices, as T'ovma Arcruni, the *Life of Makarios the Roman of Mesopotamia* and the *Life of the six monks* report), and as will shortly be seen, some of the ascetics that Alexander encounters are said to dwell near Paradise (as do Makarios and five of the six monks).

The *kafas* added to the Letter to Olympias by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunc'i in the 16th century develop ideas begun by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i: awe and fear of the creatures encountered at the edges of the world. Marvelling leads to questioning how such beings came to be. The 16th-century *kafas* provide answers to their questions by invoking the Creator of all beings, fitting Alexander's journey into the contiguous cartography of the Christian world, and utilising the strange sights to instigate contemplation of Creation's enormity and the greatness of its Creator. At their

height, the *kafas* can transcend exegesis to address their Armenian audience(s), calling upon cosmology and astrology – and the monstrous nature of abnormally giant, violent animals – to proscribe bad behaviour. Throughout, the *kafas* work to understand this unfamiliar place as part of Christian Creation. The additional layer – that at the world’s edge, where Alexander cannot be permitted to reach, lies Paradise – flits in and out of view. Though not visible in the *kafas*, it is strongly suggested in the *Alexander Romance* narrative and known in other interpretations of Alexander’s journey. The re-mapping of the Letter to Olympias *kafas* will be continued in the Letter to Aristotle, where Alexander again journeys through a remote landscape, but first he must meet the naked philosophers of India.

Naked philosophers

Alexander’s encounter with the naked philosophers (*gymnosophists*) is one of the oldest known episodes of his life, surviving – already in different forms – in Greek on a papyrus from c. 100 BCE (Berol. P. 13044) and a second papyrus from the 1st century CE (Geneva papyrus 271).³⁹⁵ Its roots are in Greek and perhaps also Indian riddle contests.³⁹⁶ It developed multiple moral hefts as it appeared across textual traditions at various removes from the history of Alexander’s campaign. In its earliest known form, that of Berol. P. 13044, it shows a cruel Alexander setting the philosophers a riddle contest where only one of them may survive; by their wisdom, they outwit him and all live, earning a measure of his respect. Geneva papyrus 271 shows the development of the philosophers – here, one of them, called Dandamis – chastising Alexander for his violent life, which he again respects, though he cannot follow this advice: “Dandamis, happy are you, because you speak the truth. God gave you birth in a place where it is possible to live a happy life, wealthy and without fear.

³⁹⁵ Bosman 2010 discusses the roots and initial development of the traditions. For an English translation of Berol. P. 13044 and Geneva papyrus 271, see Stoneman 2012: 77-83.

³⁹⁶ Scalz 2011.

But I live among fears and disturbances...³⁹⁷ To Dandamis, Alexander's life is akin to inversions of the normal usually seen from the Macedonian – and the audience's – perspective: "You go about on your heads instead of your feet, in your madness."³⁹⁸

In the Armenian *Alexander Romance* – with the same structure and moral message as in the Greek α recension, but with more questions³⁹⁹ – the riddle contest occurs as a peaceful question and answer on philosophical concepts, which ends with a brief admonition of Alexander's violent life.⁴⁰⁰ This occurs as he offers the philosophers anything they want. When they demand immortality, he admits he cannot grant this as he is only a mortal man; they retort that, if he is mortal, then why does he pour so much energy into the carnage and spoil of war? Alexander's response is not that he lives among disturbances, but that divine will demands his martial character as part of the complexity of all existence:

Now, I wish to cease giving war, but the lord of my character does not allow it, for if we were all of the same disposition the world would become empty and idle, there would not be sailing in the sea and there would not be the building of houses, marriages would not be consummated, there would not be child-making.⁴⁰¹

The *kafas* written for this episode continue these themes. It is impossible to discern which originate from Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i – hence, this section is not divided into subsections for the late 13th, early 14th century and the 16th century. In V424, f.91r contains an illumination of Alexander speaking to three naked men labelled "Brahman naked philosophers speak again with the king"⁴⁰² but the words of the *kafa(s)* within the red border are too faded to read. Just discernible is զարք, likely the beginning of զարքայն (king), which appears in just one of the four *kafas* about the naked

³⁹⁷ Stoneman 2012: 80.

³⁹⁸ Stoneman 2012: 82.

³⁹⁹ Haight 1955: 101-102 for the Greek α recension version in English translation.

⁴⁰⁰ Simonyan 1989: 276-282.

⁴⁰¹ Simonyan 1989: 281. Եւ արդ, ես դադարել կամիմ ի պատերազմ տալոյ, այլ ոչ տայ թոյլ բարուցս իմոյ տէրն, վասն զի թէ ամենեքին միաբարոյք էաք, դատարկ և անգործ լինէր աշխարհ. ի ծովու ոչ նաւել լինէր և ոչ տուն շինեալ լինէր, ամուսնութիւնք ոչ կատարէին, մանկարարութիւնք ոչ լինէին: This is already present in the α recension of the Greek.

⁴⁰² Բրաքմանք նորէն մերկիմաստասէրք խաւսին ընդ արքային:

philosophers recorded in Simonyan’s edition.⁴⁰³ However, another of the four contains արքայն in the nominative, while another has it in the accusative but as յարքայն, preceded by յ (to). These *kafas* would have to be significantly altered to render զարքայն – however, variants exhibited by other *kafas* make this completely possible. Given the frequency of the word ‘king’ throughout the Alexander material, the probable appearance of զարքայն in the faded V424 *kafa* is by no means sufficient evidence that it is the same as the one recorded by Simonyan: any variation, small or large, has been lost with the red ink. Nor is it clear how many *kafas* fit in that space. The illumination of Alexander, the naked philosophers and some leafy, floral branches surrounding the Brahmins occupies most of the space within the red border, with faded red text taking up the remaining area in the top-left. I estimate that only one *kafa* was included, particularly if it is a variant of the longer one – the one containing զարքայն – from the set in Simonyan’s edition.⁴⁰⁴

That *kafa* reads:

Բրաքմանք մերկիմաստասերք	Brahman naked-philosophers
Զարքայն յաղթեն խաւսաւքն անտերք,	overcome the king with free speech,
Ազդեն նրմա զվաղուեանն ի սերք,	they inspire him to readily love,
Դառնալ առ մայրըն համատերք	to turn to the co-lord earth
Եւ հնագանդել նոցա իղրերք,	and to subdue their desires. ⁴⁰⁵
Իրաւացոյց զիմաստասերք,	He showed the philosophers to be just,
Յանձին կալաւ մըշտանըներք,	in himself he had perpetual devotion,
Ասաց իրար ստուգանըներք,	he said to each strongly-devoted one,

⁴⁰³ These four *kafas* appear Simonyan 1989: 278-279, 280, 281.

⁴⁰⁴ Due to COVID-19 lockdown during the corrections stage of this thesis, I was unable to confirm the measurements of the space taken up by the faded *kafa*. It can be viewed in the facsimile of Traina et al. 2003, f.91r.

⁴⁰⁵ I am grateful to Dr. David Zakarian for the suggestion that իղրերք is a variant upon or scribal error for իղձերք = desires/wishes.

Բայց գիտացիք իրաւասէրք,	“But know, lovers-of-justice,
Որ յիմ կամաց չեմ սրբտատէրք,	that I am not lord of my heart.
Վերին խընամքն յոգնահրաւէրք	The celestial providence’s many commands
Չտայ թոյլ հանգչել առանձնատէրք: ⁴⁰⁶	do not allow one to rest as one’s own master.”

The same ideas contained in the narrative are continued into poetry: Alexander’s ready appreciation of the naked philosophers’ wisdom but his inability to follow it, as “celestial providence” does not allow people to choose their own paths. As part of the wider moral criticism of Alexander’s violent extravagance represented by his legendary experiences at the edges of the world, this is an apogee with a foregone conclusion. Alexander is unchanging, doomed to live – and eventually die – a conqueror. He is fixed: no character in a story, but a lesson. Alexander’s encounter with the naked philosophers at the most remote place he reached in reality reveals his nature.

The other *kafas* in Simonyan’s edition repeat the narrative of Alexander’s conversation with the naked philosophers and their moral message to him.

Մեք մերկ ի մարէ ծընաք	“We were born naked from a mother
ու մերկիկ կանք յաստըւորիս:	and we are naked in this temporary world.
Մերկանդամ ի հող մըտնունք,	We enter into earth naked-limbed,
յաշխարհիս չունինք շատ կարիս.	and in this world we do not have many needs.
Ողորմ ու լալի Սքանդար,	Pitiable and lamentable Sk’andar,
դու հանց էր նեղեալ ցընորիս.	why are you raving in a troubled state?
Յորժամ, որ քեզ մահ տիրէ,	When death rules over you,
նայ ի յայս հողըս հրաւիրիս: ⁴⁰⁷	then you are invited into this earth.”

⁴⁰⁶ Simonyan 1989: 278-279.

⁴⁰⁷ Simonyan 1989: 279. See also MCR3 116v, which has a shorter version with variant final two half-lines.

Արքայն ընդ նոսա ասաց.	The king said to them,
Խընդրեցէք, գոր ինչ և կամիք.	“Ask! Which thing do you also wish?
Ձեզ տուրք և պարգևք շնորհեմ,	Gifts and gifts I will bestow on you,
հանց, որ դուք սրբտով հաւանիք.	precisely what you will love.”
Անդէն միաբան գոչէն.	There unanimously they shout,
Թէ առնես դու մեզ երախտիք,	“Do us a favour!
Տուր մեզ դու անմահութիւն,	Give us immortality
որ բընաւ այլ ոչ մեռանիմք. ⁴⁰⁸	so that we will not die at all!”
Աղէքսանդր յայտնի ասաց,	Alexander said clearly,
թէ. «Ես մարդ եմ մահկանացու.	“I am a mortal man.
Զայդ իշխանութիւնդ չունիմ,	I do not have this principedom.
այդ է գործ մեծին աստուծոյ»:	This is the work of the great god.”
Իմաստունքն յարքայն ասցին.	The wise ones said to the king,
«Երբ դու մարդ ես մահկանացու,	“When you are a mortal man,
Անչափ տաժանիս ընդէ՞ր	why do you toil immeasurably
և հեղես զարիւնն ամենու. ⁴⁰⁹	and spill the blood of all?”

This repetition is broadly true across the multifaceted recurrence of this episode.⁴¹⁰ Its cohesion is probably in part due to its early origins, but also, perhaps, to the fact that the story needs little emendation to suit a Christian setting. Richard Stoneman describes a similar situation for a different

⁴⁰⁸ Simonyan 1989: 280.

⁴⁰⁹ Simonyan 1989: 281.

⁴¹⁰ For an overview of the episode’s development over many centuries and in numerous languages, see Stoneman 2008: 91-106.

text about Alexander's encounter with the naked philosophers that survives in Greek and Latin variants, *The Life of the Brahmins*, which originates in at least the 2nd century CE but was rewritten in the 5th century CE, perhaps by Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis, to whom it is ascribed. Only the most non-Christian concepts are updated by the 5th-century author, with "the Brahman's utopia, and Dadamis' message to Alexander ... left to speak for themselves."⁴¹¹

The Life of the Brahmins in turn influenced the *Story of Zosimus*, a Greek text composed by the 7th century CE at the latest, but probably earlier, that grew from a core text of nude ascetics at the edge of the world, *Abode of the Blessed*, and containing (in some language traditions) a work of possible Jewish origins, *History of the Rechabites*.⁴¹² In the *Story of Zosimus*, the Brahmins appear as the Blessed Ones, without Alexander, and the text seeks to incorporate their noble privations into a Christian geography⁴¹³ – one where their lack of clothing belongs to a wider early Christian exaltation of ascetic nudity.⁴¹⁴ In this land, the landscape itself is Christian: miraculous trees cease to fruit during Lent and resume on Easter, and by this seasonal change the Blessed Ones mark the time of the year. This is a known feature of hagiographical landscapes, where (for instance) herbs grow to sustain the holy men and women on diets of humble simplicity. The story of remote nudes has come quite far from Alexander, though not entirely, as some memories of the connection remain. One Greek manuscript of the *Story of Zosimus* is called "(The) Narrative of Monk Zosimus Concerning the Fathers, Verily the Brahmins Whom Alexander Found *and Philip and he Conversed With Them*, Those Being Naked as a Serpent. Therefore I Wish to Show from Which Tribe They were Separated, (and then) Inhabited the Islands of the Blessed Ones".⁴¹⁵ The Ethiopic version contains Alexander's visit to the Blessed Ones.⁴¹⁶ Clearly the stratum containing Alexander's encounter with the naked

⁴¹¹ Stoneman 2008: 102-103. The shorter Greek recension is translated into English in Stoneman 2012: 34-56.

⁴¹² Charlesworth 1982 for a Greek edition with English translation; Charlesworth 1985 translates the Syriac; Knights 1995; Knights 1997; Knights 1998 on *Abode of the Blessed*; Knights 2014.

⁴¹³ Haelewyck, Somers and Van Elverdinghe 2016: 26.

⁴¹⁴ Knights 2014: 315-318 discusses the nudity commandment within *History of the Rechabites*, although I wonder to what extent the textual or at least conceptual precursor of the Brahman naked philosophers affects the importance of this command in this text.

⁴¹⁵ Haelewyck, Somers and Van Elverdinghe 2016: 23.

⁴¹⁶ Knights 1995: 337, n.30.

philosophers has not been entirely buried beneath later Christian layers.

The Armenian version of the *Story of Zosimus* excludes the *History of the Rechabites* or any mention of the Rechabites and their connection to the story of Jeremiah: they are simply the Blessed Ones (Երանելիք).⁴¹⁷ The text, with titles focusing on the holiness of Zosimus, appears in manuscripts alongside a myriad of texts, from hagiographies to fables to questions-and-answers (which especially suits the invention in Armenian of a new section, *Zosimus' Journey to Athens*, where Zosimus must wisely answer two series of questions about Scripture and the world). The *Story of Zosimus* appears alongside Vardan Arewelc'i's *Geography* in six manuscripts: texts about the world's edges are never far from geography. Emmanuel Van Elverdinghe suggests a definition of the Armenian *Story of Zosimus* as “a popular legend in the guise of hagiography” but stresses that overall it is ambiguous, capable of sitting alongside many genres, and would have been understood by its traditors and audiences in many ways.⁴¹⁸

This caution seems valuable for all of the texts considered here, including the *kafas* and the *Alexander Romance* itself. However, this brief excursion into the later literary lives of the Brahmins has been primarily to show how readily the core philosophical concept of the story transfers across religions, languages and individual texts. For the most part, the authors of the *kafas* saw no need to explain the naked philosophers, with their message of self-denial through ascetic living, to Christian Armenian audiences. However, one *kafa* in MCR3 (not in Simonyan's edition) makes explicit a Christian view of the naked philosophers.

Ոքսիդարկացիք մարդիկս

որ ուս ածեն ի բնութենէ,

The Oxydarkac'i⁴¹⁹ men,

who[se] back[s] bear [their] nature,

⁴¹⁷ Haelewyck, Somers and Van Elverdinghe 2016: 9-15 describes the Armenian tradition of the *Story of Zosimus*.

⁴¹⁸ Haelewyck, Somers and Van Elverdinghe 2016: 14. It is interesting that the Georgian versions are copied alongside “exemplary Christian lives” – with the *gymnosophists*, if the tale's various titles are indicative, considered the central, exemplary characters; see Haelewyck, Somers and Van Elverdinghe 2016: 15-17.

⁴¹⁹ The Armenian renders the Greek name Oxydorkai/Oxydrakai, which is in turn a Greek form of Khshudrakas, an Indus warrior people mentioned in the *Mahabharata* (Stoneman 2008: 93).

մերկ իմաստասէրք բրաքմանգ	naked Brahman philosophers
որ ունին զաւանդն յևայէ,	who have the tradition of Eve.
ասեն մեք որդիք ենք հարն	They said, “We are the sons of the father,
ադամայ որ ելն ի դրախտէ,	of Adam who went out from Paradise,
պատեհ է մեզ սուգ պահել	it befits us to remain in mourning
մինչ որ գայ ստեղծողն յուր որէ: ⁴²⁰	until the Creator comes from where [he is].”

In the narrative and other *kafas*, the naked philosophers are shown to worship their indigenous gods through the Armenian scribal negation of *աւստուած*, but this *kafa* (which can be presumed to be authored by Zak’aria Gnunec’i) links their nudity to the Paradisiacal state – “the tradition of Eve.”⁴²¹ They are sons, either literally or spiritually, of Adam and through him God, maintaining a self-inflicted holy life of sorrow until the Second Coming. Yet again Paradise is placed at the edge of Alexander’s map, represented by the naked philosophers.

In this Christianised landscape, they have a message for the conqueror: his mortal life is transient. His wars and bloodshed mean little. Ultimately, it will require his death for Alexander to learn this lesson, and this theme will reach its fullest embellishment beyond the pages of the *Alexander Romance* (see the discussion in Chapter 6). In life, in *kafas* adorning this narrative, Alexander has further wondrous sights and terrifying inhabitants to encounter in the Letter to Aristotle.

Letter to Aristotle

After Alexander parts ways with the naked philosophers, the narrative incorporates the Letter

⁴²⁰ MCR3 f.116v. This *kafa* is not included in Simonyan 1989.

⁴²¹ One example of the narrative negations is at Simonyan 1989: 279. *իսկ և զշաստուածս բարձեալ բերիցեմք յահեկիին ուսոց վերայ: = and having lifted [them], we shall carry (false) gods upon the left shoulder.*

to Aristotle. This is the second epistolary sequence of Alexander and his army on an adventurous journey through remote landscapes, here an extension of the real India as an unreal land of monsters and mirabilia. Its contours were created in ancient Greek imaginations by writers such as Ctesias of Cnidus, a physician at the Persian court from 405-397 BCE and author of the lost *Indica*, and its map was set for the next two millennia by Alexander's expedition and the legends it inspired.⁴²² The Letter to Aristotle, originally a separate Greek composition that survives in two Latin translations, was added to the Greek *Alexander Romance* early on and included in the *Vorlage* for the Armenian translation.⁴²³ Its many marvels, from a terrifying creature called *brnažani* to bats with human teeth, demand explanation – a function that the *kafas* perform. Those of Xač'atur Keč'arec'i go further than the repetition of wonder in his Letter to Olympias *kafas* to add a scriptural layer of understanding to the sights described by the epistolary Alexander, and *kafas* added in the 16th century perpetuate this interpretative layer. As the poems of both periods perform the same function of fitting this remote India into a Christian cosmology, they are treated in a single section.

Some repetition remains in the *kafas*: the events of the Letter to Aristotle are exciting, and they inspired striking illuminations and lively *kafas* side-by-side in V424, as well as later manuscripts like MCR3. This is true of the fish-eating women who point Alexander and his army towards an island that turns out to be the popular motif of a vast sea-creature that submerges, taking many of Alexander's soldiers to their deaths in the depths. While that event is sadly not described in a *kafa*, the women are.

Այս են մարդիկն ձկնակեր,

These are the fish-eating people,

որ արածին իբրև խոտակեր,

who feed as herbivorous animals,⁴²⁴

⁴²² Stoneman 2008: 67-77.

⁴²³ The first Latin translation, dating to no later than the 7th century, is translated into English in Gunderson 1980, while the second, made into Italian-Latin in the 10th century, is in English in Stoneman 2012: 3-19.

⁴²⁴ In the narrative, these people are described as fish-eaters (and as իգակերպ = that has a female form – as opposed to the ungendered 'people' of the *kafa*; see Simonyan 1989: 282). The comparison here is perhaps in

գոր ըմբռնել ի նաւկներ,	which they have seized in boats.
խաւսին լեզուաքն խուժաբեր,	They speak with wild tongues,
հրաշս պատմեն զարմանաբեր,	They tell marvels and wonders,
յոյովակի ու անքննաբեր,	many and unfathomable,
[զորս] հիամայր յոյժ հրաշաբեր,	which this king, powerful and learned,
արքայս հզար և հմտաբեր: ⁴²⁵	marvelled at.

Here the *kafa* repeats the events of the narrative to emphasise that even a figure like Alexander, a great and knowledgeable king of antiquity, experiences the same awe at these marvels that later audiences would.

The next event is a moment of memory. The army finds a lake of sweet water and, on a nearby headland, a statue raised to the king Sesonchosis on which is written: “I made the foundation of this statue to conquering Sesonk’us, who sailed through the Red Sea.”⁴²⁶ Sesonchosis (or Sesostris) is a legendary Egyptian king in Greek literature – perhaps entering it from an Egyptian tradition of one or more of the real kings by that name⁴²⁷ – used by Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus as an exemplar of far-reaching royal conquest and a comparison to other monarchs, first Darius I and later Alexander.⁴²⁸ Diodorus has him go out into the Red Sea, then enter India and “visit the territory which was afterwards won by Alexander of Macedon, but also certain peoples into whose country Alexander did not cross.”⁴²⁹ There is even a *Sesonchosis Romance*, surviving in small fragments that only hint at the plot but indicate the legendary king’s popularity.⁴³⁰ Like a real king at the Red Sea, he has left a commemorative marker: the *Alexander Romance* from the earliest surviving recension

their way of eating: they graze like herbivores, the fish like grass and the sea their pasture. I am grateful to Prof. Theo Maarten van Lint for this suggestion.

⁴²⁵ V424 f. 92v; Simonyan 1989: 282-283.

⁴²⁶ Simonyan 1989: 286. Մեանքուսայ աշխարհակալ, հաստատութիւն արձանի արարի, որ ընդ Կարմիր ծով նաւեն:

⁴²⁷ Rutherford 2013: 35.

⁴²⁸ Ryholt 2013: 60-62.

⁴²⁹ *Library* 1.55.2-3.

⁴³⁰ Stephens and Winkler 1995: 246-266.

includes this monument, in turn surpassed by Alexander and his army.⁴³¹ In V424, the monument is illuminated with a king’s face upon it, and in the opposite margin is a faded *kafa*. Reconstruction of this one is more tentative than usual, with one line that cannot be read or matched, with its few surviving letters, to a line from the later *kafa* in Simonyan’s edition.

Մեանքուս[իս] աշխարհա[կալ]	The conqueror Sesonk’usis –
որ կան[զնեցի] արձան մն[ալ]	I raised a statue to last,
ինձ յիշա[տակ] ⁴³² յար[...] ⁴³³ մնալ	To always remain a monument to me,
մինչ յաւիտեան և [անշա]րժ կալ	To be immovable in perpetuity.
[.....]	
աղէքսանդրէ յաղա[ւթս] կալ: ⁴³⁴	Pray for Alexander!

While Alexander’s own commemorative marker at the exit from the lands beyond Darius’ death is not remarked upon, the monument of Sesonchosis inspires this *kafa* emphasising the statue’s role in projecting the king’s name into perpetuity. The transition from describing the statue to imploring that Alexander be received in prayer is unclear. In the later *kafa*, the missing line reads “There he said to prepare a meal for him”⁴³⁵ – echoing the narrative where, after seeing the statue, Alexander orders the army to strike camp and cook dinner. The suggestion is that Alexander or a narratorial voice impels the army and/or the *kafa*’s audience to pray for Alexander. To remember him like

⁴³¹ In the Greek α recension: “...and assembling there we found water so sweet that it tasted like honey. So while we were in a very happy mood, we saw on the hill a stele with an inscription. These were the words carved on it: ‘Sesonchosis, ruler of the world, made this watering-place for those who sail the Red Sea’. Then I gave orders to make a camp...” (Haight 1955: 105). For stelae at the Red Sea, see Lloyd 2007. The layers of meaning in these stelae are too many for a full discussion here: they are Persian, set up in the name of Darius I and positioning him – invader of Egypt – as an Egyptian ruler through textual and iconographic choices in a Mesopotamian practice of inscriptions at the periphery. The heritage of these methodologies of legitimisation is vast – and facets of it are at play here, in this fictional monument of Sesonchosis.

⁴³² This is a tentative reconstruction: the letters following յիշա are very faded, and while the proposed word here looks like it would fit within the limited shapes that remain, I caution that it is not certain.

⁴³³ It is clear that at least one letter follows յար, perhaps u or ւ.

⁴³⁴ V424 f. 94r; Simonyan 1989: 286, n.1.

⁴³⁵ Անդէն ասաց ճաշ նըմա տալ. Simonyan 1989: 286.

Sesonchosis? To impel him to remain a great king, not lost in his vanities? A great many interpretations are open, but not one of them is further elaborated here.

Alexander and his army then progress once more through an episodic landscape of violent encounters with alarming animals. In one of these events, at night, a panoply of creatures comes from the reed forest (perhaps banyans)⁴³⁶ to drink at a lake, leading to another conflict.

Այս են գազանք որ յանդառին,	These are the creatures that are in the forest,
ըռ[նկ]եղջիւր չորքոտանին:	a four-footed rhinoceros,
առիւծք չափով են գուարակին	lions [that] are the size of a bull,
դէմք այլադէմք չար գազրա[լ]ին	[with] an appearance distorted, evil, ugly,
վարազ վարեալք յաղմուկ կռուին,	boars driven to the tumult [where] they fight,
ինձք և ուսամբ վնասակարին,	leopards with the back of an injurious one,
կարճահագի վագերք վառզին, ⁴³⁷	scorpid tigers [are trampled],
փեղք եզնախոյք զ[ու]ա[րա]կանին:	elephants, ox-rams, ⁴³⁸ bulls,
Արք վեցոտնայք և փոկոտին	six-footed and web-footed ones
և շնակաքաւք կերպարանին	and ones with the appearance of dog-partridges.
սոքա ամէնքս ի լիկն էկին,	They all came to the lake,
կազ և կռուոյ սկիզբն արարին	they began the strife and battle,
գոր ցասուցեալ աղէքսանդրին	which rendered Alexander indignant,
և բոց[ակէ]զ իսարշ [սն]եցին: ⁴³⁹	and he set them ablaze.

⁴³⁶ Stoneman 2008: 69.

⁴³⁷ A word based on վառզ- resists discovery in dictionaries. Corruption is likely, perhaps of կռիւին ('are trampled/crushed') or կոտորին ('are destroyed/routed').

⁴³⁸ The եզնախոյ(ք) are known only from the *Alexander Romance*, an animal derived from the words for ox (եզն) and ram (խոյ). Wolohojian 1969: 126 calls them "wild oxen", but I have preferred a chimerical translation more in keeping with the dog-partridges.

⁴³⁹ V424 f.94v; Simonyan 1989: 288. It is in an unnumbered footnote in Simonyan's edition, as the 16th century variant – much the same content, but rearranged – is in the main body.

The fight rages for many hours of the night. Then “a creature greater than all elephants appeared, which was named բռնաժանի, which desired to come to us”⁴⁴⁰ – inspiring a pair of *kafas* that turn from awe (or indignation) to Christian understanding.

Այս բռնաժանի գազանս,	This <i>brnažani</i> creature,
աւրինակ էր սատանայի,	it was a model of Satan.
որ յանկարծակի հասեալ	Arriving suddenly,
շատ արար արեան ճապ[աղի]	it scattered much blood.
ամբոխն դողորդ [առեալ]	Shudders overcame the multitude.
մ[իջ]եցի բոլոր բա[նակի]	The entire army was cut.
ու [ն]ետիւ հարեալ սրով	Striking with arrows, with swords,
խողխողել բարձին ի միջի: ⁴⁴¹	slaughtering, they destroyed it in their midst.

Բանական մարդ չէ տեսել զայս կենդանի,	Rational man has not seen this creature,
ոչ ի ցով ⁴⁴² կամ ի ցամաք սիրտ աշխիս ⁴⁴³ .	not in the sea or in the land at the centre of the world.

այն ո[ր] վիթ մի եղջերու է յայլ տեղիս,	That, which is [like] a gazelle or stag in another place,
ասայ բնաւ չէ նման [ն]մա յառաւրէիս.	nothing like it exists in this temporal [world].

իւր անունս է վիրաւոր բռնաժանիս	Its name is the wounder <i>brnažani</i> ,
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⁴⁴⁰ V424 f. 95v; Simonyan 1989: 288. գազան մի, որ մեծ էր, քան զամենայն փիղս, որոյ անուն էր բռնաժանի, որ ցանկալք յարձակիլ ի վերայ մեր:

⁴⁴¹ V424 f. 95r; Simonyan 1989: 288. See also MCR3 f.123r.

⁴⁴² This atypical spelling of ծով (‘sea’) is found in V424.

⁴⁴³ This abbreviated form of աշխարհիս (‘of the world’) is found in V424.

աւրինակ սատանայի յառակ բանիս.	a model of Satan, explained in a fable. ⁴⁴⁴
շատ [ար]ար անհնարին արեան չարիս,	It caused great, terrible, bloody misfortunes,
մինչ հարել սատակեցին զայս կենդանիս: ⁴⁴⁵	until striking they destroyed this creature.

The *břnažani* is the *odontotyrannos* (tooth-tyrant) of the Greek *Alexander Romance*, calqued into Armenian from բռնակալ (tyrant) and ժանի(ք) (tusks) – Wolohojian translates it as “unicorn”.⁴⁴⁶ Other candidates for its real-life identity or inspiration include the rhinoceros and the crocodile.⁴⁴⁷ In the narrative it is described as “one-horned” (միեղջուր). Christina Maranci sees a discrepancy between the *kafas* that suggest deer-like qualities and the image of a one-horned creature with a feline face, body and feet in V424 (which is echoed in the MCR3 depiction of the *břnažani*), suggesting that the image originally accompanying Xač’atur Keč’arec’i’s *kafas* in a lost autograph manuscript was different to the one in V424.⁴⁴⁸ I prefer to leave the term *břnažani* untranslated, reflecting this uncertainty about its appearance. Whatever animal it might have been – if indeed the writer intended it to refer to a particular real or mythical species – its aspect is clearly meant to be the most terrifying yet, unfamiliar and immense and violent. In the narrative it attacks the army, slaying twenty-six, but with Alexander’s encouragement the soldiers manage to kill it. The *kafas* develop the idea that by this point in Alexander’s journey, the creatures encountered have become distressing to “rational man” – to those endowed with reason – as these are the first of the

⁴⁴⁴ The translation of բանիս is complicated by its position at the end of the line, which I suspect has forced the ending -իս to fit the monorhyme. I take it as բանի, the third-person singular form of բանիմ/բանամ (‘to explain’), meaning ‘[which is] explained’, rather than ‘[which] you explain’, as there is no indication that the *kafa* is addressed to an individual person. An alternative is a rhyme-forced version of the noun բան (‘word’) in plural (perhaps բանից, ‘from the words’, or բանս, ‘in the words’), which would give the translation ‘A model of Satan, from/in the words of a fable’ for the full half-line. As the meaning of the two options is essentially the same – that meaning can be found in a fable – it is not necessary to pursue the uncertainty further.

⁴⁴⁵ V424 f. 95r; Simonyan 1989: 289. See also MCR3 f.122v. This *kafa* is in an unnumbered footnote in Simonyan’s edition, as a 16th-century variant – a shorter *kafa* that repeats the notion of the *břnažani* as a previously unseen animal and model of Satan, but not its placement in temporal geography – is in the main body.

⁴⁴⁶ Simonyan 1989: 588, n.333; Wolohojian 1969: 126.

⁴⁴⁷ Stoneman 2008: 74-76.

⁴⁴⁸ Maranci 2003-2004: 24.

(surviving) *kafas* by the poet to invoke Satan. In both, the *břnažani* is “a model of Satan”. The evil aspects of Satan are an immediately accessible point of reference to Christian Armenian audiences of the *kafas*. This terrifying and destructive creature encountered by Alexander and his army is readily understandable as belonging to the evil within Creation. The first *kafa* leads with this comparison and then repeats the violent encounter. The second situates the *břnažani* within a particular geography of the world.

By saying that “Rational man has not seen this creature, not in the sea or in the land at the centre of the world” the second *kafa* makes use of the narrative map of the *Alexander Romance*, in which the ‘central’ world of familiar human civilisations – and, by extension, flora and fauna – tapers into remote regions of unpredictability. A creature as frightening as the *břnažani* certainly does not belong in the central world. The *kafa*, repeating that the *břnažani* is a model of Satan, indicates where it can be found: “explained in a fable”. There is no known Armenian fable about the *břnažani*; what the *kafa* may be referring to is moralistic animal-tales more generally, which incorporates another influence, not Aesop (or Vardan Aygekc’i and Mxitar Goř) but the *Physiologus*. This text was translated into Armenian in the 5th century and enjoyed great popularity: Gohar Muradyan’s study of the Armenian *Physiologus* is based on 42 manuscripts and identifies five recensions or sub-recensions.⁴⁴⁹ The contents comprise a variable number of short expositions about the natures of various real and mythical animals, presenting their good or bad qualities as Christian allegories. There is no entry for the *břnažani*, but the entry for the unicorn hints at the slippage identified above between different animals the creature could be: though the unicorn of the *Physiologus* is small, “the beast is exceedingly fierce; and it has one horn on the head.”⁴⁵⁰ Its ferocity appears to be an Armenian innovation in this text, with the Greek version describing it as “alert” rather than “fierce”.⁴⁵¹ The rest of the entry follows folklore of the unicorn that would be familiar to a Western European audience – a virgin woman is required to catch it – so it may have no connection to any

⁴⁴⁹ Muradyan 2005.

⁴⁵⁰ *Physiologus* 25 (Muradyan 2005: 128-129, 157).

⁴⁵¹ Muradyan 2005: 157, n.135.

uncertain medieval notions of what a *brnažani* is, but it is an interesting possibility: a glimpse into what Xač'atur Keč'arec'i meant when he wrote that the *brnažani* is "explained in a fable".

Another glimpse is in the tale of *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, a frame narrative of a prince's (Ioasaph) spiritual development aided by the tales told by his ascetic teacher (Barlaam), that originated in Indian tales of the Buddha's enlightenment. Through some intermediaries, it travelled from Sanskrit to the 9th-century Arabic compilation *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Būdāsf* in Abbasid Baghdad. A 10th-century Georgian composition, the *Balavariani*, produced in Jerusalem, led to the Greek edition of *Barlaam and Ioasaph* made at the Iviron monastery, subsequent translations of which included Armenian as well as the Latin *Barlaam and Josaphat* that provided the basis for many European vernacular versions.⁴⁵² As part of its passage through Christian languages, it gained more explicitly Christian features. In it, a parable about the perils of worldly pleasures begins with a man being chased by a terrifying creature – originally an elephant, but in the Greek it has become a unicorn. This goes against the allegorical role of the unicorn established in the Greek *Physiologus*.⁴⁵³ Cecily Hilsdale proposes: "Even as the unicorn's new association with death went against established allegorical interpretation, it lent vibrancy to the tale of worldly renunciation, giving the scene a compelling dynamism that an elephant simply could not."⁴⁵⁴ The Armenian translation, which F. C. Conybeare estimated as being made by the 11th century, has the unicorn in the fourth parable: "The life of the world is to be likened to (that of) the man who, fleeing from the presence of an unicorn, in the hurry of his flight fell into a ditch wide and deep."⁴⁵⁵ Did this unicorn influence Xač'atur Keč'arec'i as he wrote about the mysterious and terrifying *brnažani*? It is impossible to say with any certainty. What is more reasonable to suggest is that he drew upon the broader genre of stories tinged with the fantastic that explained animals and their actions as part of the Christian world – the *Physiologus*, fables, *Barlaam and Ioasaph* and more – to explain the marvels experienced by Alexander at the

⁴⁵² Hilsdale 2017: 59-62.

⁴⁵³ Hilsdale 2017: 62-72.

⁴⁵⁴ Hilsdale 2017: 72.

⁴⁵⁵ Conybeare 1896: 121. Conybeare views the Armenian text as dependent on a Syriac intermediary, rather than coming directly from the Greek edition.

edges of the world, and that this may have contributed to the terrifying features of the enigmatic one-horned *brnažani* and its Satanic exegesis by the time Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i composed *kafas* about it in the late 13th, early 14th century.

The *brnažani* is followed by an encounter that might also refer to the *Physiologus*: giant foxes, five or eight cubits long, that run out from the sand and attack the army. Its *kafas* in V424 are highly faded. The first is recognisable as a variant recorded by Simonyan, and also appears in MCR3.

Ութ կանգնեա հն[կ]ից չափով	Measuring eight cubits or five,
[Յաւազկուտին վեր վազե]լով	leaping over heaps of sand,
[Ջով]ք աղ[ուես]ուց հե[թեթալ]ով	[in] leafy branches, the foxes finding a way
[Յաղմուկ նենգով դ]աւ [զ]ործելով	into the fray by deceit, working a plot,
[Լեզուն] ե[րիս ճեղս ունելով]	having a three-branch tongue,
[Յանկ]արծ[ա]հ[աս խայ]ծանելով	unexpectedly coming to prick,
[Շնաբար ազօ]քն [քնծնելով]	with dog-like tails trying to woo,
[Ժանեաւքն անյազ պատառե]լով ⁴⁵⁶	with teeth insatiably tearing.

The second one is not in Simonyan's edition and cannot be clearly read in V424, but it appears to rhyme in -կերպ, and a *kafa* with the same rhyme is preserved in MCR3. This *kafa*, presumed to be authored by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i and copied by Zak'aria Gnunec'i, reaffirms details from the first (which it appears beneath in V424 and MCR3) – the leaping foxes, the duplicitous wagging of their tails, the tearing/rending of their teeth. Its only innovation (aside from its atypical meter, neither the typical *kafa* nor *hayren* meter) is the comparison to Pegasus.

Աղուեսք հեթեթող խաբոսակի կերպ, The foxes, [with] the aspect of deceitful contriver[s],

⁴⁵⁶ V424 f.95v; Simonyan 1989: 289, n.4. A 16th-century variant on this *kafa* – much the same content, but rearranged – is in the main body of the edition. The version at MCR3 f.123r-v closely follows the V424 version.

ի վեր վազելով պագիսուսի կերպ, leaping over like Pegasus,
ազովքըն քրծնին ընդանի շան կերպ, with [their] tails they wooed like tamed dog[s],
և մեծ պատառեն չար գազանի կերպ:⁴⁵⁷ and they greatly rend like evil creature[s].

Of the fox, the *Physiologus* says that “this animal is in all respects insidious and perfidious”: it tricks birds into thinking it is dead so that they will come close and attempt to eat it, in order that it can eat the birds in turn. This recalls the *kafa* lines “With dog-like tails trying to woo” and “with [their] tails they wooed like tamed dog[s]”: a different trick of the foxes, wagging their tails like domesticated animals, but similarly deceiving. The *Physiologus* goes on to say that “Likewise the devil is small in all respects, and his intrigues are great and the tricks are deceptive.”⁴⁵⁸ A 16th-century *kafa* for these giant foxes, ascribed by Simonyan to Zak’aria Gnunec’i (though not found in MCR3), directly echoes the *Physiologus*.

Տէրն աղուէսուց որջք ասէ	The lord says of the foxes: dens,
և թըռչնոց երկնիցըն՝ ըզբոյն.	and of the birds of the heavens: nests.
Աղուէսն սատանի նըման,	The fox, similar to Satan,
որ շըրջի նա գիշերն ի բուն,	goes around all through the night –
Որ կան յայրեցած գաւտին	At the burnt belt
և արգել տան մարդու հոգոյն,	they hold back the soul of man –
Զոր տեսեալս նորան ասէր,	Having seen it, Alexander said:
աղաւթիմք զերծիլ յանասոյն: ⁴⁵⁹	“Let us pray to get rid of the animal.”

The line “The lord says of the foxes: dens” references Matthew 8:20 – “Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have

⁴⁵⁷ MCR3 f.123v. See V424 f.95v, though it is highly faded.

⁴⁵⁸ *Physiologus* 18 (Muradyan 2005: 116-117, 152).

⁴⁵⁹ Simonyan 1989: 290.

dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” – and is in turn quoted in the *Physiologus* as one of four references to foxes in the scriptures. This *kafa* also compares the foxes to Satan. However, the *kafa* is not found in V424 and is considered by Simonyan to be authored by Zak’aria Gnunec’i. To him, working two centuries later, the *Physiologus* interpretation of the foxes is clearly relevant here, and perhaps he even has it in mind with his citation of a shared Biblical passage. That said, the ubiquity of foxes in ambiguous trickster or fully evil roles in folklore across cultures, not to mention the many foxes of the *Alvesagirk’*, makes identifying one specific text as an inspiration not particularly possible or even useful. It is more fruitful to see the fox *kafas* – like the ones about the *brnažani* – as belonging to a wider idea of foxes among many Armenian traditors and their texts, shared by the *Alexander Romance*, the *Physiologus*, the *Alvesagirk’* and others.

The breadth of foxes is seen in two earlier historical texts. The same passage from Matthew is referenced in T’ovma Arcruni’s 10th-century *History*, in which the king of the Ałuank is said to respond to the 9th-century encroachments of Bugha al-Kabir with a derogatory letter that includes the following: “you are like the stag without horns, and we the eagles [swooping down] on you, blinding your eyes, to throw you as carrion to my young and the foxes who live in dens.”⁴⁶⁰ Most of this passage draws on Proverbs 30:17 – “The eye that mocks a father, that scorns an aged mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.” – but the den-dwelling foxes are an addition from Matthew 8:20. The second example of a fox having a negative connotation is earlier, and quite separate, with no reference to Matthew: it is found in the 5th-century *Buzandaran Patmut’iwnk’* [Epic Histories]. The Persian king Šapuh has his captured enemy the Armenian *sparapet* Vasak Mamikonean brought before him and calls him a fox – to which Vasak retorts that Šapuh thought him a lion, threatening the Persians, until he saw that Vasak is small in stature. Manolis Papoutsakis, tracing the development of this motif comparing the paltry fox to the lion in Syriac literature, suggests that it was taken up by the anonymous author of the *Buzandaran*

⁴⁶⁰ T’ovma Arcruni, *History* 3.10 (Patkanov 1991: 179; English translation taken from Thomson 1985: 244).

Ideas crossed between texts. No one source underlies the interpretations of the *Alexander Romance* expressed in the *kafas* – a learned *vardapet* of the late 13th, early 14th century would be familiar with many of the tales circulating in Armenian at this time. Xač'atur Keč'arec'i relied on fluid, multi-textual ideas of the fox to situate the giant foxes encountered by Alexander and his army in Creation in a way that its audience would understand. Generations later, in the 16th century, Zak'aria Gnunec'i continued this.

The interpretation of these animals within a Christian understanding of the world is continued with the next encounter to be described in *kafas*: bats larger than pigeons, with human teeth. V424 contains two *kafas*, the first of which repeats the events of the narrative: these bats appear, but are easily caught and eaten by Alexander and his army. The second *kafa* elaborates a little on their evil nature.

Հաւքս որ տեսանիս իբրև աղաւնոյ չափ,	These winged creatures, which you see as the size of pigeons,
մուկն են վնասակար դունչն աղու[ետու] չափ,	they are hurtful rats, with chins like a fox's.
թև մաշկէ ունին ջղժիկանիաց չափ,	The wings have hide like a bat's,
վնա[սակար] սատանայի չափ,	and they are hurtful in the measure of Satan.
ի տիւ չերևին այլ կենդանե[աց] չափ,	By day they do not appear like other animals,
գիշեր[ըն] կրուին չա[ր] թշնամոյ չափ. ⁴⁶²	by night they fight as evil enemies.

Their appearance is further described – with a comparison to foxes that recalls the nature of those animals as discussed earlier – and they are called “hurtful in the measure of Satan”. The danger

⁴⁶¹ Papoutsakis 2007.

⁴⁶² V424 f. 96r; Simonyan 1989: 291. See also MCR3 f.124r.

posed by a creature as disquieting as a bat with human teeth is also fit into Creation. It remains alarming, but in a way that can be understood (and eaten).

These are the last of the wild creatures encountered in *kafas*. An understanding of this litany of beasts has been built up by this point. As the *kafas* say, these are not experiences that a rational man would possess. Yet by placing Alexander's experiences within a multi-textual idea of the world that (a) contains such creatures, (b) can sometimes utilise them for instructional purposes, and (c) is divinely created, the veracity of these wondrous sights is subordinated to an encompassing view of the Creator's powers, so entering mankind's comprehension. The order of the Christian world is thus maintained.

The trees of the Sun and the Moon

Alexander's journey ends with the foretelling of his death: the talking trees of the Sun and the Moon, whose Indian priests take him to their clearing, inform him that soon he will die at the hands of one of his companions. Later omens associated with his death in the histories and the *Alexander Romance*, such as a monstrous birth, a concerned Chaldaean (Babylonian) seer, belong to the real world of 4th-century BCE predictive science.⁴⁶³ Talking trees belong to the edges of the world. They continue the motif, brought to the fore by the naked philosophers, of Alexander's mortality and his inability to alter his mortal fate. He asks repeatedly if he will return to Macedon, to his mother and wife, and is told each time that he will not.

The *kafas* of *Xač'atur Keč'arec'i* do not develop this theme. The first simply repeats the scene, while the second increases its emotional impact by emphasising Alexander's emotional distress, particularly his grief at knowing he will never see his mother again.

Խաւսուն եւ ասուն ծառոցս

To the speaking and rational trees,

⁴⁶³ Stoneman 2008: 186-191.

ի բազինս զարմանակերտ	in the admirably-constructed sacred place,
այսրէն ալթնան կալաւ	in which they are dwelling,
արքայի[ց] մեծ[ն] հրաշակերտ:	[came] the great king, marvellously constructed.
զոհիւ ի յաղաւթս եկաց,	With offerings he stood in prayer,
և հայցէր պատուէր լուսակերտ,	he requested luminous instruction.
ասաց կարճեցան աուրբոյ	It said: “Your days are shortened,
կենաց քոց ճարտակերտ:	and your ingeniously constructed life.”
յորժամ զբաւք մահու լսեց	When he heard the sad news of death,
արքայն հզար և զարհուրեց	the mighty king was dismayed.
յոզոց հանել դառն արտասուեց	Groaning, he wept grievously,
և սրտառուչ զմայրն յիշեց: ⁴⁶⁴	and he recalled his tender mother.

In the 16th century, this *kafa* will function as the second half of an emotional frame that begins with the final *kafa* before Alexander leaves the central world after the death of Darius, where his mother speaks of her fear that he will come to harm.⁴⁶⁵ However, that *kafa* is not in V424, so here this *kafa* simply marks a moment of heightened emotion, before Alexander turns back from the edges of the world. A *kafa* added between the above two in MCR3 continues this repetition of the narrative, with the trees predicting Alexander’s death by poison and telling him to flee this place.⁴⁶⁶

Another 16th-century *kafa* recorded by Simonyan is concerned not with Alexander’s fate, but with the nature of the trees and, by contrast, the divine.

Նախախնամութիւն վերին,	Celestial providence
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⁴⁶⁴ V424 f98r; Simonyan 1989: 296.

⁴⁶⁵ Simonyan 1989: 251.

⁴⁶⁶ MCR3 f.127r.

դու շարժաւոյ երկնից կամարին,	you mover of the vault of heaven,
Մի և անկարաւտ, անմահ,	One and unwanting, undying,
անորակ, անձև, անմարմին.	without accident, without form, incorporeal,
Եւ քո հրամանացոյ ահեղ	and your formidable commands
ամենայն եղեալք հնազանդին.	all beings obey.
Անշունչ՝ և անոգի ծառերս	Inanimated and spiritless trees
բանական ձայնիւ կու խաւսին: ⁴⁶⁷	spoke with a rational voice.

Much of the *kafa* describes the nature of God, but by ending with two half-lines about the speaking trees it emphasises their place in Creation: to God is allotted omnipresence and obedience, while the trees have only a rational voice, not even the spirit or soul ([h]ոգի) that humanity possesses. Knowledge of the future and a man's fate would usually fall to God, not to trees, so this *kafa* rights the strange situation encountered by Alexander. It joins the other *kafas* in fitting Alexander's experiences within a Christian cosmology. It also gives a more pointed reminder to its audiences that the one Christian God has dominion over all the marvels in this tale.

Conclusion

The edges of the world are unfamiliar, strange. Beyond Armenia: immense plant-men, fish that boil in cold water, naked philosophers, the terrifying *brnažani*, giant foxes, bats with human teeth. To Xač'atur Keč'arec'i, Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i, the place of Armenia at the boundary between the central world conquered by Alexander and the remote space he subsequently enters does not appear to be a concern. In terms of experience, the marvels of the *Alexander Romance* appear as far from their late 13th, early 14th-century and 16th-century

⁴⁶⁷ Simonyan 1989: 296. This *kafa* is not in V424 or MCR3, and on the basis of Simonyan's edition must be assumed to have been authored by Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i.

Armenian traditors as they are from the literary Alexander: they are unknowable to rational man – a group Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarci and Zak'aria Gnuneci would have considered themselves part of – and demand explanation. As the *kafas* progress through the narrative, astonishment leads to a measure of comprehension as the poets draw on an array of culture-crossing sources to fit the fearsome animals into a cosmology in which all things are part of Creation – and thence to contemplation of the divine Creator of these marvels.

What has become apparent throughout this chapter is that the *kafas* do not alter the *Alexander Romance*. Rather, the re-mapping done by Xaç'atur Keč'ařec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarci and Zak'aria Gnuneci is the process of turning the edges of the world into an accessible Christian space. The result of this is to make the remote regions of the *Alexander Romance* available for Christian Armenian edification. It remains a fun tale, and was surely enjoyed as such, but like the *Physiologus* and *Kalila wa-Dimna* (among many other texts) it was positioned particularly by its *kafas* to be utilised as an instigator of religious contemplation.

The *kafas* also start to construct the idea of the edges of the world as a moral space: the region where Alexander learns of his inevitable death and, particularly from the naked philosophers of India, the futility of his mortal acts. Though some 16th-century *kafas* (presumed to be authored by Zak'aria Gnuneci in the case of the naked philosophers, and by Grigoris Alt'amarci in the case of the trees of the Sun and Moon) do strive to fit these experiences within Creation, positioning the philosophers as descendants of Adam and reminding audiences that the speaking trees are not to be compared with God, the *kafas* mainly repeat the narrative's focus on Alexander's mortality: "Pitiable and lamentable Sk'andar, why are you raving in a troubled state? When death rules over you..." The pitiable and lamentable nature of Alexander will be developed from the 16th century onwards when the *kafas* are copied beyond the pages of the *Alexander Romance*, in separate *tataran* and *řolovacu* collections, which create their own sequences of *kafas* with their own hefts. Many of these have clear moral lessons for their audiences. The next chapter will explore how the remote space of the *Alexander Romance* becomes associated with other remote spaces, how further literary influences

crossed between texts in the Armenian language and other languages in the multilingual environments of the 16th century and later, and how Alexander's life and death becomes a vehicle for contemplating the nature of kingship and life as a whole in a moral and religious frame.

CHAPTER SIX: KAFAS SEPARATED FROM THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE

Such pleasure in selection!
The anthologist more than any other knows
the universe is multiple.
– Sofia Samatar, “Snowbound in Hamadan”⁴⁶⁸

From the 16th century there survives the earliest example of *kafas* about Alexander being copied separately from the *Alexander Romance*, a phenomenon that continued into the 17th and 18th centuries. The *kafas* are found in *tataran* (anthology of poetry and hymns) and *žoťovacu* (miscellany) collections amid varied contents including other poems, lay and religious songs, and prose tales. Some selections of *kafas* in these manuscripts appear to be comprehensive collections of a full ‘cycle’ of Alexander *kafas* taken from the *Alexander Romance*, following the narrative of Alexander’s life and military campaigns, while others are shorter sets grouped around particular events or themes relating to Alexander. Some of the *kafas* in these shorter sets are not known to exist in any *Alexander Romance* manuscript, some connect Alexander to other tales of marvels and morals, and some are even reworkings of entirely different poems such as the works of Frik.

What is there to make of this panoply? It is immediately clear that in and after the 16th century there was a considerable interest in the story of Alexander. Of course, the closer this study comes to the present day, the more manuscripts survive, but there are no names known to be associated with the *Alexander Romance* between Xač’atur Keč’arec’i in the late 13th, early 14th century and Grigoris Alt’amarc’i and Zak’aria Gnunc’i in the 16th century. It appears that the revitalisation of creative engagement with Alexander by Grigoris Alt’amarc’i in the 16th century led to the *kafas* flourishing beyond the bounds of the *Alexander Romance*, including in direct engagement with other tales.

Grigoris Alt’amarc’i is an interesting figure for his role in composing *kafas* not only for the *Alexander Romance* but for another wonder tale that also features marvels at the edge of the known world: the *City of Bronze* (*Patmut’iwn Płndzē K’atāk’i*). As discussed in Chapter 4 (pp.85-87), the

⁴⁶⁸ Samatar 2012.

Arabic prose tale brought short, rhyming poems with it in its 10th-century translation to Armenian. Grigoris Alt'amarc'i edited the second, 13th-century translation and composed about 50 new *kafas* for it.⁴⁶⁹ His interest in the two tales is reflected in how they were subsequently transmitted in Armenian: one of the abovementioned collections – M7709 (held in the Matenadaran), a 17th-century *tataran* manuscript – includes the *City of Bronze* with *Alexander kafas* copied at the base of the page. In other manuscripts – such as LOB4580 (British Library Or. 4580) – both tales are copied in complete versions alongside similar stories such as *Barlaam and Josephat* and the *History of P'ahlul the King*.⁴⁷⁰ Eventually, in print, the *City of Bronze* would appear alongside the *History of P'ahlul the King*, the *Wisdom of Ahiqar*, the *Life of Saint Alexianos* and several others – all concerning marvels and all with a moral tone – though not the *Alexander Romance*.⁴⁷¹

The *tataran* and *žołovacu* manuscripts containing *Alexander kafas* provide insights into the wider ways that both the figure and the tale of Alexander were used by Armenian traditors. As discussed in Chapter 5, the 16th-century poets Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i, in copying *Alexander Romance* manuscripts, transmitted the existing *kafas* and composed their own additions, and in doing so developed Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i's positioning of the tale's geographic extremes within a divinely created cosmos. The traditors who anthologised or copied the contents of the *tataran* and *žołovacu* manuscripts containing short selections of *kafas* utilised Alexander's experiences in remote spaces and against foreign monarchs – Darius, Poros and the fictional queen Kandakē – to contemplate a moral lesson that complements what Alexander learned from the naked philosophers and the trees of the Sun and Moon in the *Alexander Romance* narrative: his many achievements matter little, for in the end he is only mortal.

Hasmik Simonyan identified eight *tataran* and *žołovacu* manuscripts containing *Alexander kafas* in the Matenadaran, and they demonstrate the variety of *kafas* anthologised separately from the

⁴⁶⁹ Russell 1983: 255-256.

⁴⁷⁰ Conybeare 1913: 277-281.

⁴⁷¹ Russell 2009: 77-78 outlines the typical contents of this print anthology. It was printed 16 times from 1708 to 1911, primarily in Constantinople (13 printings) as well as Tbilisi (2 printings) and Kolkata (1 printing).

Alexander Romance narrative.⁴⁷² Four contain short sets of *kafas*: M3668 (16th century), M5623 (1653), M7709 (17th century) and M7726 (17th century). The other four have longer collections, which based on a preliminary survey of the manuscripts are most likely full cycles of the *Alexander* narrative *kafas*: M519 (17th century), M723 (1734), M8482 (1664) and M8689 (17th century). Whether these share in a single ‘canon’ full cycle, or are significantly different to each other, remains to be determined. In the future, it will be desirable to identify similar manuscripts in the holdings of other institutions and find out if the 50-50 split between short sets and full cycles is at all representative. For the present study, the manuscripts identified by Simonyan provide an insight into what uses the *kafas* were put to beyond the *Alexander Romance*.

This chapter examines one 16th-century and two 17th-century *talaran* and *žořovacu* manuscripts (M3668, M7726 and M7709) that contain short sets of *Alexander kafas*, as case studies of this phenomenon. M3668 includes a complete mini-cycle of *kafas* about the entwined fates of *Alexander* and *Darius*. Several *kafas* in M7726 are used as an example of how the works of other Armenian poets were utilised to talk about fate in the encounter between *Alexander* and *Darius*. Finally, the connection between *Alexander* and the tale of the *City of Bronze* is followed through multiple manuscripts, from the *Alexander Romance* to *kafas* about *Alexander* meeting *Kandaki* in M7726 and the *Alexander kafas* added to the bottom margins of the *City of Bronze* tale in M7709. Together, they show how the lives of the *kafas* once they left the *Alexander Romance* were multiple.

“This world is like a wheel”: *Alexander* and *Darius* in the mirror

M3668 is a 16th-century *žořovacu* manuscript of unknown origin, now held in the *Matenadaran*. It is not quite as small as some of the other anthologies: 13.5 x 8 cm. It contains 30 *kafas* about *Alexander* on ff.154v-159r, each four half-lines long and using the *hayren* meter. They

⁴⁷² Simonyan 1975 provides a fold-out table of the *Matenadaran*’s holdings of Armenian manuscripts that contain *Alexander* material, between pages 52-53.

are at the end of the manuscript: f.159v contains faded colophonic material and there are no further folios. The *kafas* are ascribed in the manuscript by a red-inked header to Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i: "From the writings of Alexander by Xaç'atur vardapet of Keč'aris, saying..."⁴⁷³ It is certain that Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i authored 14 of them, as they are found in the late 13th-, early 14th-century manuscript V424 discussed in Chapter 5 (particularly at pp.119-126). Ten other *kafas* cannot be verified because the relevant folios of V424 are too damaged to identify their contents. That leaves six *kafas* in M3668 that are definitely not in V424, but survive in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts from the 16th century, though this does not rule out the possibility of their earlier composition. It is also likely that the *kafas* as a whole are attributed to Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i because of his recognition as the original author of *kafas* about Alexander, including at least 14 of these ones.

The *kafas* collected in M3668 represent what appears to be an individual's compilation: it is a short sequence that plucks select *kafas* from alongside the *Alexander Romance* narrative and perhaps elsewhere, creating its own coherent story-in-verse. Its heft is the turning wheel of fate: Darius' defeat at the hands of Alexander and the scratching out of his good fortune, as Alexander ascends the wheel (though is also cautioned of his eventual death).

They are arranged as follows:

M3668 folios	Number of <i>kafas</i>	Subject of the <i>kafas</i>	Proposed authorship
ff.154v-155v	6 (no. 1-6)	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	<i>unknown</i>
ff.155v-157r	10 (no. 7-16)	Alexander is addressed about kingship	4 x Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i

⁴⁷³ M3668: f154v. Յաղէքսանդրի գր[ո]ցն խաչատուր վարդապետի կէչառեցոյ ասացեալ:

			6 x c.16th-century
ff.157r- 159r	14 (no. 17-30)	Alexander and Darius at war	10 x Xač'atur Keč'arec'i 4 x <i>unknown</i>

The *kafas* are reproduced in their entirety below. They are based on my examination of M3668 in the Matenadaran, with reference to M.T'. Avdalbegyan's edition of the *kafas* taken from the same manuscript and, where applicable, Hasmik Simonyan's *Alexander Romance* edition.⁴⁷⁴ The discrepancies between my reading and Avdalbegyan's are so slight (one or two letters that do not alter the meaning of the words in question) that I have not deemed it necessary to include a philological apparatus in this thesis.⁴⁷⁵

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | Փիլիպպոս նըստեալ յաթոռ
Դարեհի դեսպանքն առաջի
որք հանողք եկին հարկին
պահանջել ըզորամն արքունի: | Philip sat on the throne,
the ambassadors of Dareh before him:
exactors who came for the tribute,
to demand the royal money. |
| 2. | Աղէքսանդրոյ առաջ եկեալ
Խաւսեցաւ քան զարմանալի
Ասաց թէ այլ ոչ տամ հարկ
Ու ըզտուեալն առնում Դարեհի: | Alexander, having come forward,
spoke astonishing word[s].
He said: I will not give tribute anymore
and I will take what is given from Dareh. |

⁴⁷⁴ Avdalbegyan 1958: 184-188; Simonyan 1989: 117-118 (no. 1-6), 130-131 (no. 7-10), 134 (no. 11-12), 137 (no.13-14), 139 (no. 15-16), 147 (no. 17-18), 151 (no. 19-20), 153 (no. 21-24), 161 (no. 29-30).

⁴⁷⁵ In the future, I intend to revisit this manuscript and the others that I consider in this chapter in order to confirm my readings, at which point I would confirm any discrepancies between my reading and Avdalbegyan's to include them in the apparatus of the ensuing publication(s).

3. Գնացէք եւ զըրոյց տարէք
Դարեհի Պարսից արքային
Թե Փիլիպոսի որդին
Աղէքսանդրը զայս կու խաւսի:
- Go and take this news
to Dareh, king of the Persians,
that the son of Philip,
Alexander, tells [you] this.
4. Վաղ որ ես տըղայ չեի
Հայրն իմ հարկ տայր քեզ հանդիսի
Այժմ որ ես որդի եղայ
Պահանջեմ զհարկըն հայրենի:
- Formerly, I was not [yet] a young man,
my father gave you the tribute with pomp.
Now, [as] I have become the fully grown son,
I demand the paternal tribute.
5. Կըծկել պըշուցեալ հային
Ընդ յերեսըն Աղէքդանդրին
Մըտիկ խաւսերոյն դըրել
Զարմանայր ընդ խաւսըս նորին:
- Having been cowed, they looked attentively
upon the face of Alexander.
Listening to the words,
They were astonished by his reply.
6. Ի եկեալ առ ի միտս իւրեանց
Իմացան ըզշիքլ առիւծին
Ասցին թե հասնի սըմա ար
Սեւ տարի բերէ Դարեհի:
- Having come to their senses,
they understood the intention of the lion.
They said that his day will come,
he will bring the black year to Dareh.
7. Խըրատ տամ հըզաւր արքայ
Դու ականջ կալ լ ինձ հաւատայ
Զինչ շինի քակի [ա]մէն
Սողոմոն տեսաւն է վըկայ:
- I give counsel, powerful king:
give you[r] ear and believe me.
What is built, is all demolished,
Solomon the seer is witness.

8. Եւ զինչ մարդ ծընեալ յաշխարհս
 Էն մեռել ճարակ մի չըկայ
 Հայնցեղ իմացիր ըզքեզ
 Ու զքաղաք սքանդարիայ:
- Every man born in this world
 is mortal, there is no remedy.
 Similarly, know yourself
 and the city of Sk'andari (Alexandria).
9. Արքայն պատասխան կու տայ
 Թե այդ որ ես խիստ եմ վըկայ
 Որ զինչ յադամայ ի մեզ
 Են ծընել թագաւոր ու ծառայ:
- The king gave a reply:
 This, [of] which I am a sure witness,
 [came] from Adam to us,
 [that] they were born king and servant.
10. Ամենն են ի հող դարձել
 Ամենն այլ մարդ մի չկայ:
 Շինուածքն են փուլ եկել
 Ու իւրենց հետն իսկի չկայ:
- They have all returned to the earth,
 all of them, no man is left!
 The buildings came crumbling down,
 and not a trace is left of them.
11. Վայ տամ քեզ հազար բերան
 Ով իւելաք խիկարդ աննըման
 Թե է՞ր մոլորիս յայդ բանդ
 Ու պաշտես պատկեր դիւական:
- Ah! I say to you a thousand times,
 Oh! Skilful, incomparable Xikar (Ahiqar).
 For what reason did you wander to this prison,
 and worship a diabolic image?
12. Ծանիր զարարիչն աստուած
 Որ երեստ քեզ միտք բանական
 Թե չէ ի յաւուր դատման
- Know the creator God
 who gave you a rational mind,
 for otherwise, at the day of judgement,

- Ընկրնիս ի հուրն անշիջան: you fall into the unquenchable fire.
13. Մարմինն է ի խոտ նրման The body is similar to grass
 Ու ծաղկի դաւիթ վրկայեց and flower[s], Dawit' attested,
 Եւ փուր է քամու նրման and breath is similar to wind,
 Յոր ասաց 'ւ ելիփազ գրրեց: Job spoke and Elip'az (Eliphaz) wrote it down.
14. Սողոմոն ըստուեր ասաց Solomon spoke of a sign,
 Եսայի նոյնպէս գուշակեց Esayi (Isaiah) similarly prophesised.
 Սքանդար դու քեզ պէտ արա Sk'andar, you take care
 Զի արիւնն ոչ ով չըմարսեց: for no one will stomach blood.
15. Քան զամպն արեւին պայծառ More the shining sun than the cloud,
 ւ ի լուսոյ աստեղ նրման[ի]ս and the light of a star, you are like.
 Քան ըզծովային ծընունդ More than [one] born of the sea,
 Յադամայ յորդիս աստար ես: you are extraordinary among the sons of Adam.
16. Բայց [մեծ] մին դալատ կայ քեզ But there is a great mistake concerning you,
 Որ միայն մեծ ըզքեզ ուզես which [is that] you only wish to be great.
 Վայ թե հենց ցաւոց դիպնուս Oh, as soon as you meet pains,
 Շատ եղուկ [ու] վայ տաս դու քեզ: Oh! You will make yourself very wretched.
17. Ի բերանս պատուէրս արար He gave instructions aloud:
 Թ' [ի]մ բանիւ ասցէք Դարեհի Using my words, you will say to Dareh,

- Թե դու զքեզ աստուած գրեցեր
 հաւասար արեւ ծագաւղի
 that you considered yourself a God
 equal to the rising sun.
18. Եւ ինձ աւագակ ասցեր
 ու զըլուխ ամէն գողերի:
 Ամ այս գողըս գալ կամի
 գողանալ զկէանքըդ արեւի:
 And you called me a brigand
 and the head of all thieves.
 Now this thief wishes to come
 to steal your sun-like life.
19. Դարեհ դիր ականջ բանիս
 Հաւատայ ու դու ինձ լըսէ
 Աշխարհս ի դաւլապ նըման
 Որ ի վեր 'ւ ի վայր թաւալէ:
 Dareh, lend an ear to my words,
 believe and listen to me.
 This world is like a wheel,
 which is rolling over in [its] place.
20. Ջընջել է քո բախտի գիր
 Ու մահու աւրըն մաւտել է
 Առնու զթագն ու ըզթախտըն քո
 Աղեքսանդր որդին Պիլիպպէ:
 The writing of your fortune is scratched out
 and the day of death draws near.
 Your crown and throne will be taken
 by Alexander son of Philip.
21. Եկայք որ առնեն թըտփիր
 Որ չլինինք երկիրս մեր առակ
 Բանս իրաւ եւ չէ կատակ
 Նա կու գայ հանդէս ուժընդակ:
 Come, those who give advice,
 [so] that we are not a spectacle to our land:
 this matter is serious and not a sport
 he comes [in an] allied assault.
22. Թե ըզդէմս յԱղեքսանդր առնեմք
 If we act against Alexander

- Դարեհի ահն է դժբընդակ – the awe for Dareh is daunting –
Ապա թե հանդէս մտնուք then, if we enter into battle,
Վախենք թե լինինք խայտառակ: we fear that we will become covered with disgrace.
23. Բեկլարքս գըլուխ գորաց Satraps, leaders of the army,
Սարտուցեալք ի յԱղէքսանդրէ rebuffed by Alexander,
Գիտեն որ յաղթել կամի they know that the power of Dareh
Դարեհի հըզաւրն ի քաջէ: shall be vanquished by the brave one.
24. Խորհուրդ 'ւ ի գանգաշ մըտել Having entered into advice,
Թըղթաբերն ազդմամբ կու ասէ the letter-bearer says insistently:
Անճարիցըն ճար տեսէք Find a solution for the witless,
Որ կապանքըն մեզ չըտիրէ: so that the bonds do not govern us.
25. Ասէ Մակեդոնեան հըզաւրն He spoke, the strong Macedonian,
Աղէքսանդր հեծեալ յերիվար Alexander, mounted on a horse,
Փողիցըն հրաման երեստ he gave an order to the trumpets
Հարկանել զերգն աղմըկարար: to play the clamorous song.
26. Մունեղիկն ի մէջ անցաւ The herald stood in the midst,
Ազդ առնէր զաւրացն անմոլար making an announcement to the unerring soldiers.
Ըզտուրն է հանել արքայն The king has drawn the sword,
Դուք ընդէր կայք հայնց կամըկար: why are all of you so quiet?

27. Չարխին չըհ[աւա]տամ իսկի I do not trust to fate at all
 Թե առնէ զով ոք թագաւոր that it makes someone king.
 Ֆալակըն փախուստ բերէ Fortune brings flight
 Յորժամ տայ աշից իւր խոլոր: when it gives its evil eye.
28. Յանկարծ յաթոռոյ ձըգէ Suddenly he strikes [Dareh] from the throne
 Ու առնէ առակ հեռաւոր and makes him a remote spectacle.
 Հայնցե[ղ] Դարեհի եղև So it happened to Dareh,
 Որ փախաւ գաղտիկ 'ւ ի մոլոր: who secretly fled and [became] lost.
29. Մայրըն Դարեհի կու լայ The mother of Dareh weeps,
 Որ անունն է Հըռոդոնէ whose name is Hrodonē (Sisygambis),
 Եւ կինն արտասուք ածե and the wife sheds tears,
 Որ ասեն իւրն ըստատիէ: they say her [name is] Statiē (Stateira).
30. Քոյրըն քաշեց զիւր ծամերն The sister tore her hair,
 Որ կոչի նա գագիփարտէ she who is called Gagip'artē (Drypetis).
 Դուստրըն վայ 'ւ եղուկ կու տայ The daughter calls herself unfortunate and ill-
 starred,
 իւր անձինըն հռքսիանէ:⁴⁷⁶ H'rok'sianē (Roxana).

Fate is the axis around which this sequence of *kafas* turns. *Kafa* 19 offers a central image: “This world is like a wheel, which is rolling over in [its] place.” The idea of the turning wheel is old, arising

⁴⁷⁶ M3668 f.154v-f.159r.

in ancient Greek and Latin literature, and developing in Christian contexts to its full fruition in the *Rota Fortunae* of Western European iconography: a physical depiction of a wheel, on which multiple people or manifestations of the same person are bound, turned by Fortune, with the person at the apex enthroned or otherwise enjoying the finest fruits of life, but with a simple turn of the wheel sent into misfortune while the impoverished at the wheel's base is raised up to power.⁴⁷⁷ Its principles are clearly expressed in Armenian poetry by writers such as Frik (c.1230-1310)⁴⁷⁸, as well as in the above description of the wheel rolling over in its place – the Christian topos of the rise and fall of power that it belongs to is the structural underpinning of the M3668 *kafas*. Alexander rises up the wheel from child to the true son and heir of Philip when he tells the representatives of the Achaemenid Empire that Macedon will not pay its expected tribute: “Formerly, I was not [yet] a young man, my father gave you the tribute with pomp. Now, [as] I have become the fully grown son, I demand the paternal tribute.” Eventually he will reach its apex as “he strikes [Dareh] from the throne”. Darius falls. This is foretold: “The writing of your fortune is scratched out and the day of death draws near.” At the end, Darius flees and is lost, and his female relatives lament their fates. Exactly how this sequence of *kafas* achieves this turning of the wheel is set out below.

Kafas 1-6 present a straightforward conflict. The Achaemenid emissary has come to Macedon to exact the tribute expected of Persian subjects, but Alexander – now, as the heir, acting with authority he lacked in the past – refuses, stating that instead he will have the “paternal tribute”, ie: the tribute his father formerly paid. The Persian party look upon Alexander and understand that he is serious, and moreover that this is a sign of their king's eventual defeat: “they understood the intention of the lion. They said that his day will come, he will bring the black year to Dareh.” Though Darius remains at the top of the wheel, its turning – and his “black year” – is sure to occur.

⁴⁷⁷ Stoneman 2016 discusses ancient Greek and Latin ideas of fortune, including the wheel, in the context of a discussion about fortune – both the idea and the goddess Tyche/Fortuna – in the life of Alexander, as depicted in various texts from Quintus Curtius Rufus (his article's main focus) up through medieval Western European depictions of both Alexander's and Darius' turning fates. For the development of the Western European *Rota Fortunae* more generally, see Radding 1992.

⁴⁷⁸ See Hacikyan 2002: 524-533 for a summary of Frik's life and work.

A conversation about kingship follows. In *kafas* 7-8, a speaker gives counsel that all built can be demolished, that “Every man born in this world is mortal”, and he exhorts his addressee, the “powerful king”, to “know yourself and the city of Sk’andari”. Solomon is invoked as a witness to this truth. Alexander is certainly being addressed, as the builder of Sk’andari (Alexandria) and indeed a powerful king, and reminded that like all mortals he must die and his city eventually crumble. The identity of the person (or deity) addressing him is not clear in the *kafas*. In *kafas* 9-10, a king – safe to assume it is the previously addressed Alexander – replies, asserting that he is a “sure witness” of the fact that since the time of Adam some are born king, others servant, and all have “returned to the earth”, while buildings have crumbled without a trace.

The tone is explicitly Christian. The addressee is exhorted to “Know the creator God who gave you a rational mind” in *kafa* 12, or else face “the unquenchable fire” of hell. (The comparison of Alexander to Xikar [Ahiqar] will be discussed later.) *Kafas* 13-14 reference the Old Testament. The first two half-lines of *kafa* 13 – “The body is similar to grass and flower[s], Dawit’ attested” – refer to Psalm 103:15, which reads “The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field” and is attributed, like many of the Psalms, to King David. Psalm 130:16 goes on to compare mortal life to wind, unremembered after it has ended: “the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” – continuing the images of *kafa* 13, in which “breath is similar to wind”. When the breath of life has finishing blowing, like wind it is not remembered. This is echoed by Job, laid low by God’s will. Job 14:1-2 uses the imagery of flowers to describe human life: “Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble. They spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure.” In Job 7:7, he pleads with God: “Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath” – in both verses, this is imagery shared by the *kafa* that attributes such ideas to him. Eliphaz, speaking to Job, is concerned primarily with how God delivers justice to mankind, and does not depend on the imagery of grass, flowers and wind (other than to compare descendants to grass in Job 5:25), but the common topos of crumbling buildings seen earlier in the sequence of *kafas* is found in Job 15:28-29 where Eliphaz says of the unrighteous man that “he will inhabit ruined

towns and houses where no one lives, houses crumbling to rubble. He will no longer be rich and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the land.” Eliphaz is perhaps invoked by the unknown author of the *kafa* for his part in a Biblical episode about God’s ability to change a man’s fortune. Using the metaphor of the wheel, Job is spun around it from apex to nadir and finally back to apex.

Solomon and Isaiah are then called upon: two great prophets, coming before a direct address to Alexander at the end of *kafa 14*, in which he is told “Sk’andar, you take care, for no one will stomach blood.” – a direct admonition that recalls the naked philosophers of the *kafas* associated with the *Alexander Romance* asking Alexander for what purpose he spills so much blood. The prophets lend weight to this warning. Solomon’s prophecies are famed especially in Islamic tradition, but his renown in Christianity is also great. If there are also meant to be echoes of *kafa 13*, one can be found in Isaiah 40:6-8: “A voice says, ‘Cry out.’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.’”

Kafas 15-16 concern the nature of Alexander, which is “extraordinary among the sons of Adam” but also flawed: “you only wish to be great.” The final two half-lines of *kafa 16* exclaim about the pain he will experience if he pursues the path of greatness.

The cautions of these *kafas* are familiar: Alexander must be aware of his mortality and not exert himself on futile or immoral acts of pursuing greatness or blood-spilling. He must also know God. This sequence of *kafas* is fully Christian, and particularly so in this section that instructs Alexander on kingship. The instruction provided by these *kafas* is not only internal, for Alexander, but external, for the audience(s) who read or heard them and were invited to consider the ways in which the turning wheel governs their own fortunes, the inevitability of mortality, and the futility of exerting themselves on immoderate deeds. The person addressing Alexander, however, is not identified.

Kafas 7-16 are all found in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts and collected in Simonyan’s

edition. The first four, *kafas* 7-10, are added to Alexander's construction of Alexandria, with no indication in the narrative of who is addressing Alexander.⁴⁷⁹ Another *kafa* found in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts at this point simply repeats events in the narrative concerning the approach of a snake and the construction of a shrine.⁴⁸⁰ A short while later, *kafas* 11-12 belong to an episode in which Alexander, still in Alexandria, speaks to the god Sarapis in a dream and asks about his death.⁴⁸¹ The *kafas* are also found in V424 at f.24r. The speaker here can be taken to be Sarapis. *Kafas* 13-16 come when Alexander arrives at Memphis and sees the statue of Nectanebo. In the narrative of the *Alexander Romance*, prophets (ἰερεῖς) come out from the Egyptian cities to greet Alexander, name him a new Sesonchosis and elevate him to the throne of Hephaestos, and tell him about the prophecy of the last Egyptian king Nectanebo whose statue Alexander sees. The full set of *kafas* at this point of the *Alexander Romance* present a conversation between Alexander and the Egyptian prophets.⁴⁸²

Though the events of the *Alexander Romance* make it clearer who speaks to Alexander in these *kafas*, the sequence found in M3668 does not. Perhaps its compiler cared not for clarity of narrative, only for the important wisdom found in these *kafas* plucked free from their contexts like fruit in a bowl. The most likely identification of the speaker is divine, whether a god of Alexander's history such as Sarapis or the Christian God.

From *kafa* 17, the conflict between Alexander and Darius resumes, beginning with the exchange of letters between the two kings. Alexander addresses Darius, chiding him for considering "yourself a God equal to the rising sun" in *kafa* 17 and calling him a brigand – now the tables are turned and the thief Alexander will steal Darius' "sun-like life" – and it is here too that the image of the wheel is introduced, in *kafa* 19: "Dareh, lend an ear to my words, believe and listen to me. The world is like a wheel, which is rolling over in [its] place." In *kafa* 20, Alexander continues to address

⁴⁷⁹ Simonyan 1989: 130-131.

⁴⁸⁰ Simonyan 1989: 131.

⁴⁸¹ Simonyan 1989: 134.

⁴⁸² Simonyan 1989: 137-139.

the subject of fortune: “The writing of your fortune is scratched out and the day of death draws near. Your crown and throne will be taken by Alexander son of Philip.” Here Alexander possesses the Christian wisdom that, presumably, he has learnt from divine speaker of the earlier *kafas*, though not without his usual arrogance – a bragging tone can certainly be read into Alexander telling Darius that he will be the one to defeat him.

For the next four *kafas*, Darius expresses his fear of defeat to his own people. In *kafa* 21 he says that “this matter is serious and not a sport, he comes [in an] allied assault.” His leaders, however, know in advance that Darius’ end approaches, as *kafa* 23 makes apparent: “Satraps, leaders of the army ... they know that the power of Dareh shall be vanquished by the brave one.”

Kafas 25-28, the only ones not found in Simonyan’s edition, describe the decisive battle between Alexander and Darius. The first two *kafas* simply depict Alexander giving an order to the trumpets to play a battle signal, and a herald compelling the soldiers to follow their king’s lead. The third *kafa*, though, returns to a first-person perspective and can be assumed to be Alexander speaking about fate, first: “I do not trust to fate at all that it makes someone king” – defying fate and its wheel. From the perspective of the person on the wheel, who naturally wants only to rise and not fall, fate is not trustworthy, as it will cause both outcomes in the end. The second two half-lines of *kafa* 27 show that other side to fate: “Fortune brings flight when it gives its evil eye.” That flight takes place in *kafa* 28, after Alexander has struck Dareh from his throne: “So it happened to Dareh, who secretly fled and [became] lost.” The narrative of Dareh’s betrayal and murder by his own people is elided, with his end described only as his flight (from battle and from Alexander) and his becoming lost.

The *kafas* end with a list of Darius’ female relatives – mother, wife, sister and daughter – who weep for their fates, including Alexander’s eventual bride, Hřok’sianē. Though in the narrative of the *Alexander Romance* the Persian royal women will be honourably treated by Alexander (and, according to the Greek and Roman historians, so too in the real historical events – if the historians can be trusted to give a perspective that the real women would have agreed with), the *kafas* of

M3668 present their grief as the finale of this sequence: a symbol of how Darius has fallen to the bottom of the wheel.

Alexander's eventual fate – his death and the lessons he finally learns then – is not shown in these *kafas*, but it is foretold in *kafas* 7-10 when he is reminded of the mortality of all men and told to be cognisant of the fact that both he and his cities can be demolished by the will of God. This gives the *kafas* of M3668 a more complicated structure than a single through-narrative, though it certainly has that: Darius falling from the wheel and Alexander ascending. At the same time, it also cautions the ascender of what will inevitably happen outside the bounds of the *kafas*: here he ascends, but later he too will fall like Darius. It does this in the heart of the sequence, so that it ends on Alexander's highest note and Darius' lowest, but remaining at the turning axel of the *kafas* is the lesson that on this same wheel Alexander will eventually fall. This is a lesson shared by the *Alexander Romance*, its *kafas* and the *kafas* in other *tataran* and *žoťovacu* manuscripts.

The heavy inheritance of Persia's long history in medieval Persia, the wider Islamicate spheres and the many interconnected regions that belonged to these wide, unbounded worlds makes an interest in the conflict between Alexander and Darius unsurprising. Though the Achaemenids were poorly remembered, Darius endured.⁴⁸³ The two kings' last encounters at Gaugamela and the post-battle pursuit into the mountains where Alexander (in legend) finds the dying Darius in time for a final conversation are pivotal moments. Darius' death is the door that, opening, takes Alexander to remote spaces at the edge of the world. It was also the final step in Alexander's ascent to the Persian throne, as he fitted himself into Persian royal tradition by avenging his now-predecessor Darius' death and taking up his crown. In the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, as in others, Alexander also takes Hřok'sianē – rewritten as Darius' daughter – as his wife. In some Persian and Arabic traditions, Alexander is the half-brother of Darius, bringing him even closer to the Persian royal family.⁴⁸⁴ The *Romance* and other legendary traditions thus legitimise Alexander as Persian king further than even

⁴⁸³ Manteghi 2018: 25-28.

⁴⁸⁴ Manteghi 2018: 41-43.

the historical invader did. This close, cross-cultural connection between Alexander and Darius was readily available for the compiler of the M3668 *kafas* to structure his selection around the two kings' fateful encounters – and it is a fertile setting for the *kafas*' Christian lessons.

Narratives about Alexander have been fitted fruitfully within the 'mirrors for princes' genre: texts that through various rhetorical means guided princes or kings to consider the ideal traits of kingship, such as erudition, justice and the overall ability to keep the peace within the realm. These were popular in Islamic circles. Kings such as Alexander were used as the 'mirror' for patron kings to look in, learning about kingship and themselves through historical and exalted models. A sovereign – both in text and in reality – could be seen as a microcosm for the state of his people, with al-Ghazzālī writing that "Sages have said that the character of subjects springs from the character of kings; for the common people and the royal officials and troops become good or bad through the instrumentality of their kings inasmuch as they acquire their habits from them."⁴⁸⁵ Good instruction is therefore essential. Alexander features in many mirrors, including ones that are not primarily about him. In Niẓāmī Ganjavī's *Haft Paykar*, a romance about the Sassanian king Bahrām V, the poet positions himself as an advisor to his patron 'Alā' al-Dīn Kōrp-Arslān by means of comparison to four other advisors to four great kings, including: "Much wisdom Alexander bore from Aristotle's precious store."⁴⁸⁶ Haila Manteghi positions Niẓāmī Ganjavī's *Iskandarnāma* as a 'mirrors for princes' text, with much of its content dedicated to Alexander's temporal and spiritual kingship, his martial accomplishments, his accrual of philosophical wisdom and his ultimate elevation to the position of a prophet. To the image of Alexander, it is possible to turn:

Helpless in that place where I was dazed and dazzled,
I cast my lot and found Alexander's name among the great and grand.
Every mirror that I burnished bright in thought of him,
Alexander's imaginal form I found reflected therein.
Do not regard that ruler with a perfunctory, thoughtless gaze,
for he was both a swordsman and one who wore the crown.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ al-Ghazzālī, *Book of Counsel*, quoted in Meisami 1987: 181.

⁴⁸⁶ Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Haft Paykar*, quoted in Meisami 1987: 199.

⁴⁸⁷ Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Iskandarnāma*, quoted in Manteghi 2018: 76-77.

Islamic ‘mirrors for princes’ were not unknown to Armenian writers, and influenced some of their works. In c.1289/1290 CE, Yovhannēs Erznkac’i wrote *Letter to the princes of the region of Ekeleac’* to address the Armenian royals of Cilicia with criticism about the lack of Christian Armenian leadership in the region around Erznka (Erzincan), which was within Islamic and later Mongol cultural and political spheres. Despite its Christian heft, Rachel Goshgarian places “its admonition against wine drinking and exhortation to just rule and hard work” within the context of Islamic ‘mirrors for princes’, which were popular in Anatolia in the 13th and 14th centuries.⁴⁸⁸ Of course, such endorsements of sobriety, justice and hard work are widespread throughout Christian thought too, not least in the Bible, but the inter-cultural connections were present. Two treatises by the same author – ‘Constitution and Rules of the Association of Brothers’ and ‘Again Rules and Advice for Worldly Pubescent Youths’ – share features with the *futuwwa* constitutions written for Islamic brotherhoods, and around 1260 CE Yovhannēs Erznkac’i translated the Arabic ‘Epistles of the Brethren of Purity’ (*Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā*), a Neoplatonic text describing hierarchical brotherhood, into Armenian.⁴⁸⁹ Though not ‘mirrors for princes’ and with different audiences in mind, these various texts share a concern with guidance for good behaviour. They also point to the ready transference of ideas through literature. The ability of texts with didactic contents to cross cultures is also highlighted by the popularity of texts such as the *Book of Syntipas the Philosopher* in Greek.⁴⁹⁰ Like Armenian counterparts such as the tale of Xikar (Ahiqar), it enjoyed a life in early modern print as well as in manuscripts.⁴⁹¹

The Alexander *kafas* of M3668 are not exactly a ‘mirror for princes’, but I propose that they share in advice literature’s concerns with good kingship. The simplest, most narrative *kafas* are about the encounters between the two kings (starting with Darius’ envoys), while the more philosophical and spiritual ones consider the character of Alexander – exhorting him to remember

⁴⁸⁸ Goshgarian 2012: 242.

⁴⁸⁹ Goshgarian 2012: 234-239.

⁴⁹⁰ Toth 2016: 392.

⁴⁹¹ Toth 2016: 396-397.

his limits and know God – and the ill fate of Darius. Contrasted, the two kings exemplify the turning wheel of fortune. Their much-inked encounter provides the poetry’s compiler with the opportunity to deliver a lesson on the fragility of power.

Though they concern kings, the Alexander *kafas* of M3668 surely did not have the royal audience of texts such as Niẓāmī Ganjavī’s *Haft Paykar* or Yovhannēs Erznkac’i’s *Letter to the princes of the region of Ekeleac’*. Like the ‘mirrors for princes’, though, they take the idea that the actions of kings are applicable to a wider audience, not as the wellspring of character described by al-Ghazzālī, but as exemplars that all people can learn from: the treatment of Alexander and Darius on the wheel of fortune is a reminder to all who read or hear these *kafas* that they too are subject to the same turning. Looking at what is in the rest of the manuscript offers some insight into the *kafas’* use. M3668 also contains calendrical content and *taʿ* ascribed to Grigoris At’amarc’i, Arak’el Baḡišec’i and these 30 *kafas* by Xač’atur Keč’arec’i.⁴⁹² The one folio of possibly colophonic material at the end of the manuscript was too faded for me to study in the short period of consultation with non-digitised manuscripts at the Matenadaran in 2016, so I cannot state for certain whether the manuscript’s creator or owner are known. The calendrical content suggests either use in the religious environment of a monastery, or within an individual’s personal religious life in a secular environment. The *kafas* about Alexander, Darius and the fates of all kings and mortals present a subject of contemplation for the manuscript’s Christian owner.

The comparison of Alexander to Xikar (Ahiqar) in *kafa* 11 has been set aside for now, but it is worth discussion for the way it enriches the lesson to Alexander about living well. The story of Ahiqar is one with a long history. Aramaic papyri from Elephantine dating to the 5th century BCE contain the first fragments of a story that includes a king Ahiqar sharing wise sayings with his nephew. A long period of time then passes before the tale is documented again, but continuities in contents between the ancient Aramaic tale and the late antique and medieval versions that

⁴⁹² Eganyan, Zeyt’unyan and Ant’abyan 1965: 1,061. The modern, in-depth catalogue of the Matenadaran has not yet reached this manuscript.

appeared in numerous languages demonstrate its continued transmission.⁴⁹³ The Armenian translation may have been made from Syriac as early as the 5th century CE.⁴⁹⁴ Its closeness to wisdom texts led to its apocryphal inclusion in Armenian Biblical manuscripts.⁴⁹⁵ It also enjoyed a productive life as a tale of marvels and morals, including alongside the *Alexander Romance* in manuscripts and as one of the tales in the PPK print anthology referred to on p.94.⁴⁹⁶

Of its prominent themes, one is “exhibiting caution in all aspects of life, and being content in moderate living”⁴⁹⁷ – immediately relevant to the moral lessons imparted to Alexander and the *kafas*’ audience(s) in M3668. Alexander is called out for exceeding himself when there is no purpose for doing so. *Kafa* 11 compares Alexander to Xikar to reprove him for straying from God’s light: “Ah! I say to you a thousand times, Oh! Skilful, incomparable Xikar. For what reason did you wander to this prison, and worship a diabolic image?” The tale of Ahiqar, closely related to wisdom literature including the Jewish wisdom text *Sirach* by Ben Sira (composed in the 2nd century BCE), was easily given a Christian glaze by its later translators – making wise Xikar readily available to Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i or the later traditor who compiled M3668 as a model for Alexander. The comparison to Xikar helps to reinforce the lesson in the M3668 collection, for those who know of his wisdom and particularly his recommendation of a moderate life. Alexander will only be freed from his prison if he learns the lessons of the *kafas*, but ultimately the only release from the wheel is his foretold death.

By the medieval period, the Armenian name Xikar was also used adjectivally to mean ‘wise’, as James R. Russell notes in poetry by Yovhannēs T’lkuranc’i and Frik: “Give me counsel; you are very wise” (YT), “A good boy, son of a great father, an exile, a friend, and very wise” (F).⁴⁹⁸ He also notes the use of the figure Xikar in a poem ascribed to Nahapet K’uč’ak: “Where wise Xikar is, make a

⁴⁹³ Bledsoe 2014 identifies parallels between the Aramaic tale and the Syriac and Armenian versions.

⁴⁹⁴ Russell 2009: 77, following the dating proposed in Conybeare, Harris and Smith 1913, which provides an English translation of the tale from Armenian (among many other languages). The Armenian edition of the tale is Martirosyan 1969-1972.

⁴⁹⁵ Stone 2006: 113-114.

⁴⁹⁶ Russell 2009: 77.

⁴⁹⁷ Bledsoe 2014: 251.

⁴⁹⁸ Russell 1987: 62, 64.

remedy, a cure for my wound.”⁴⁹⁹ It would be possible to read the second-half line of *kafa* 11 in this way – “Oh! You skilful, incomparable wise one” – but I follow Avdalbegyan and Simonyan in seeing it as the name Xikar.⁵⁰⁰ In a set of *kafas* replete with references to God and wise living, the legendary sage Xikar – who could appear alongside Scripture – belongs. Its original context, alongside the *Alexander Romance* where the god Sarapis addresses Alexander in a dream, is no poor place for Xikar either. The possibility of the word ‘xikar’ being fluid in the hands of the different traditors who copied – or spoke, or sang – this *kafa* is particularly interesting: that some meant ‘wise’, but by the referent-rich collection in M3668 meant Xikar the sage. It is certainly worth considering the meaning of Xikar the sage amid these *kafas*.

The comparison to Xikar also speaks to the connections between tales of marvels and morals that is integral to understanding the dispersal of the *Alexander Romance* and the *Alexander kafas* in the Armenian language. As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, the tales of Alexander and Xikar appeared alongside one another in Armenian manuscripts such as LOB4580, which contains the *Alexander Romance*, the *City of Bronze*, the *History of P’ahlul the King*, *Barlaam and Josephat*, the *History of Xikar*, a song about Saint Alik’sanos, and other tales and songs.⁵⁰¹ Tales were often transmitted together. The Byzantine Greek tradition circulated such tales in a single manuscript as the *Book of Syntipas the Philosopher* (which has much in common with the Ahiqar tradition), *Stephanites and Ichneutes* (the Greek translation of the Arabic *Kalīla wa-Dimna*), fables, the *Physiologus*, and the *Lives of Aesop and Alexander* (ie: the *Alexander Romance*).⁵⁰² Such manuscripts (and, later, printed books) reveal how traditors perceived these tales as similar in type or lesson, resulting in direct connections such as the comparison of Alexander to Xikar. Tales such as the *Alexander Romance* were embedded among others, ranging from well-developed narratives such as

⁴⁹⁹ Russell 1987: 9.

⁵⁰⁰ Avdalbegyan 1958: 185 and Simonyan 1989: 134 both capitalise the Իւ, making it Իւիկար. No such distinction is made in the manuscripts M3668, V424 and MCR3, but this is typical of manuscripts, which rarely use erkat’agir letters aside from the first letter of each *kafa*.

⁵⁰¹ Conybeare 1913: 277-281.

⁵⁰² Toth 2016: 390, with reference to the manuscript Mosquensis Synodalis 436. Toth additionally mentions other manuscripts that share some of the same core texts.

the Ahiqar tradition or the *City of Bronze* to short pieces on a unified theme like the *Physiologus*. The readiness of traditors to create the connections between these texts – whether in direct transmission or shared literary spaces – has already been demonstrated in Chapter 5 (in particular pp.132-140, 154-163) with the commonalities between the Alexander *kafas* and texts including the *Physiologus* and the *Anonymous Philosophical Treatise* attributed to Zeno. Further links are revealed here.

The *kafas* of M3668 demonstrate how the Alexander *kafas* became malleable in the hands of individuals. Beyond the narrative of the *Alexander Romance*, they could be assembled in new configurations to tell their own stories: here, the clash between Alexander and Darius, the two kings' natures and the turning wheel of fate. Ideas were taken from across cultures – 'mirrors of princes', didactic, advice literature like the Ahiqar tradition – and utilised in a Christian Armenian context. The compiler of M3668 picked *kafas* from multiple points in the narrative, at times (such as *kafas* 15-16) selecting the most philosophical *kafas* from amid poems that repeated the narrative, truly curating this collection to create a mini-story and an object of contemplation, whether privately or in the audience of an oral performer. Its themes are shared with the *Alexander Romance* and other *kafas*, as well as wider tales and religious teachings, but it is also its own item: a single outcropping of the Alexander tradition in Armenian. Its cycle of 30 *kafas* is not currently known to me to appear elsewhere. Its existence is a testament both to the intra- and inter-textual connections in medieval and early modern Armenian literature, and to the ways that these texts were always in the hands of individual people.

“no mounted soldiers come to aid”: textual transmission in Armenian

Material moved between texts in multiple ways. It is relatively rare to find evidence of direct transmission from one text to another: the lines can be sketched, but rarely the words seen to

traverse them. Much transmission (aside from direct translation) is in ideas – narrative sequence, character, theme – rather than line-by-line lifting. In special cases, however, the movement of lines of literature from one text to another can be traced. This is so in some of the Alexander *kafas*, in which the poet re-uses lines of poetry written by Frik. This section will examine some of the *kafas* in M7726, another *taġaran* collection, to illuminate this specific inter-textual aspect of the Alexander *kafa* tradition in Armenian. As has already been shown, the authors of the *kafas* appear to have drawn on and referred to many texts when positioning Alexander’s experiences within their Christian cosmologies. The textual transmission discussed in this section is slightly different, as direct lifting from poems not about marvels but concerned with fate. Examination of it contributes to an understanding of how embedded the Alexander *kafas* are within other literature in the Armenian language.

M7726 is a 17th-century *taġaran* collection of unknown origin. It is small: 10.6 x 7.5 cm, a size that would fit in the hand. It contains 70 *kafas* about Alexander, with no header to indicate authorship, only the opening line of the twenty-fifth *kafa* in red ink. The catalogue of the Matenadaran appears to ascribe authorship to Grigoris Alt’amarc’i, based on the sequence of names in the catalogue’s summary (Grigoris Alt’amarc’i follows a Yovhannēs, who is named in a red-ink header in the section of poems before the *kafas* about Alexander).⁵⁰³ The *kafas* it contains are all in the *hayren* meter, with some faulty rhymes and meters. Some of these may indicate defective copying or transcription or transmission from an earlier version with correct rhyme or meter. M7726’s *kafas* are mainly concerned with the meetings between Alexander and other kings. They deal with three such encounters: first, 24 *kafas* about Alexander and Darius, then 15 *kafas* about Alexander and the Indian king Poros, and thirdly, 10 *kafas* about Alexander and the fictional queen Kandaki (as her name is typically spelled in this manuscript). Three of the *kafas* in the sequence about Alexander and Darius borrow from three of Frik’s poems in his sequence *Ban Pitani* (Useful Words).

⁵⁰³ Eganyan, Zeyt’unyan and Ant’abyan 1970: 597.

The Armenian poet Frik (c.1230-1310), though elusive in biography and even name, composed many poems that survive to this day. These were on subjects such as the tumultuous era of Mongol incursions and rule in which he lived, the divine, and the fate of the human soul.⁵⁰⁴ The applicability of verses on fate to *kafas* about Alexander is, at this point, apparent: the *kafas*' concerns are frequently with the fate of Alexander.

Immediately preceding the three *kafas* in M7726 that draw on Frik's poems is a *kafa* about Darius fleeing from Alexander, who has taken the crown and the throne.⁵⁰⁵ After that are the three *kafas* that borrow from Frik. Their order does not follow Frik: the first of the three Alexander *kafas*, beginning Յորժամ չարին ի յետ թակի, comes third in Frik's sequence. The order below is that of M7726.

M7726

Frik, *Ban Pitani*

Յորժամ չարին ի յետ թակի

Ոչ մուքն, ոչ ապրանքն օգտէ,

Նա ձրգէ իւր աչքըն խոլոռ

Ոչ հարիւր հազար ձիաւոր.

Ոչ Զօրք [ու] հեծեալ օգնէ

Յորժամ չարին ի յետ քակուի

Ոչ հարիւր հազար ձիաւոր:⁵⁰⁶

Եւ ձրգէ ի յաչքըն խոլոր:⁵⁰⁷

As the wheel of fortune destroys,

No possessions, no property comes to aid,

it casts the threatening eye:

no 100,000 horsemen,

⁵⁰⁴ Hacikyan 2002: 524-533.

⁵⁰⁵ M7726 f.34v.

Դարեհ ել փախուստ առաւ

Տէր Պարսից արքայն հանդիսէն

Առեալ զթաճն ու զթախտն ամեն

Աղեկսանդր որդին Փիլիպպէ:

= Darius the lord, the Persian king, was taken to flight from the combat, Alexander the son of Philip having taken all the crown and the throne.

⁵⁰⁶ M7726 ff.34v-35r. These three Alexander *kafas* are not found in any of the other manuscripts I have studied or in Simonyan's *Alexander Romance* edition.

⁵⁰⁷ Mkryan and T'orosyan 1941: 219.

no mounted soldiers come to aid,
no 100,000 horsemen.

as the wheel of fortune destroys
and casts the threatening eye.

Զաշխարհս⁵⁰⁸ ես քեզ հանց ատամ
Երբ չունիս ոչ ով մօտեւոր
Ոչ հավլ ոչ երդում ունիս
ւ ամ քո սիրտդ է խիստ նենգաւոր:⁵⁰⁹

Է՛յ չարիս, ամ քեզ ոնց ատատամ,
Երբ չունիս զոչ ով մօտեւոր.
Ոչ դաւլ, ոչ երդումն ունիս,
Զի քո սիրտդ է խիստ նենգաւոր:⁵¹⁰

In this world, I believe you are thus
when you do not have someone near you
and you have no oath and if you do not
give an oath,
now your heart is very deceitful.

Oh fortune, now I believe you are thus
when you do not have someone near you
and you have no oath and if you do not
give an oath,
because your heart is very deceitful.

Զով որ կամենաս այսօր
Կու դրնես [դու տով] թագաւոր
Դառնաս ու ձրգես աչացդ
Հաւասար մոխրոյն միաւոր:⁵¹¹

Զով որ կու սիրիս այսօր,
Կու դրնես ի յոսկի աթոռ.
Յեզուց կու ձրգես յաչից,
Հաւասարես հողոյն մոխրաւոր:⁵¹²

Who you desire today,
you can make a king with [],
you turn around and you banish him from

Who you desire today,
you put on the throne of gold.
Tomorrow your banish him from the eyes,

⁵⁰⁸ This is an interesting variant, which could plausibly be a miscopying of Է՛յ չարիս. I am grateful to Prof. Theo M. van Lint for this suggestion.

⁵⁰⁹ M7726 f35r.

⁵¹⁰ Mkryan and T'orosyan 1941: 218.

⁵¹¹ M7726 f.35r.

⁵¹² Mkryan and T'orosyan 1941: 218.

the eyes

like a piece of ash.

you render [him] equal to the ash-covered earth.

The first of these Alexander *kafas* best exemplifies the way that the poet reused Frik’s work. This poem varies across manuscripts of Frik, with the edition of M. Mkryan and E. T’orosyan giving multiple variations of the third half-line of the Alexander *kafa*. (In some versions, the Frik versions of the poem are also in the same order as in M7726, opening with Յորժամ...) The Frik poem given above has the half-line as “No possessions, no property comes to aid”. Other Frik variants include:

Ոչ թուխթն, ոչ դալամ օգնէ

No paper, no reed pen comes to aid,

Ոչ հարիւր հազար ձիաւոր:

No 100,000 horsemen.

Ոչ թանղ լ’ ոչ յալամն⁵¹³ օգնէ

No [] and no reed pen come to aid,

Ի ոչ հարիւր հազար ձիաւոր:⁵¹⁴

No 100,000 horsemen.

The poem is flexible: any aspect of life can be inserted without making it incoherent. The half-line “No possessions, no property comes to aid” would suit Alexander in another context, as a familiar sentiment that owning wealth in life means little on the wheel of fortune. However, in M7726 the *kafa* is about Darius, specifically his military defeat, so the martial theme of the second half-line – “No 100,000 horsemen” – is begun in the first, with “no mounted soldiers” coming to aid the Persian king as he flees from Alexander and the Macedonian army. The poet has borrowed from Frik to create a *kafa* that suits the narrative of Darius’ demise.

The other two Alexander *kafas* are much closer to the Frik originals. Though some words are

⁵¹³ Many of the Frik variants have words that appear to be variations in spelling of the perhaps-unfamiliar Arabic/Persian loanword ալամ, such as յալամ and դալամ.

⁵¹⁴ Mkryan and T’orosyan 1941: 218-219, n.41.

changed, the overall meaning remains intact: the troublesome nature of oaths, the readiness with which fortune will raise someone up and then swiftly cast them down. The latter’s applicability to Darius’ fate is especially clear. Next in M7726 is a *kafa* about Alexander arriving at Darius’ palace to find him betrayed to death by two of his servants.⁵¹⁵

The poet has incorporated these Frik poems easily into the sequence of *kafas* about Alexander’s defeat of Darius, showing well the mutability of medieval Armenian poetry. Such borrowing was not unknown. Hasmik Simonyan noted 10 *kafas* in M3387 (a manuscript of the *Alexander Romance* copied in Isfahan in 1635 with accompanying *kafas* and illuminations, held in the Matenadaran) that use wording and ideas from the same poem *Ban Pitani* by Frik – including the three found in M7726.⁵¹⁶

Small borrowings between poets must have been commonplace. Writing about an ode of Mkrtič’ Nalaš, which owes a great debt to a poem by Konstandin Erznac’i, S. Peter Cowe says that it demonstrates “that often creativity in medieval poetry resides not so much in the invention of new themes as in the novel restatement of those already traditional”.⁵¹⁷ Innovative repositioning of existing poetry underpins the Alexander poet or poets at work here. Frik’s words about fate and failure are creatively fit into the downfall of Darius. This is evidently the work of someone familiar with Frik’s work, whether a *vardapet* recasting familiar poems or an equally inventive oral storyteller. The deft revision of the first *kafa* to “no mounted soldiers come to aid, no 100,000 horsemen” to better suit its new context is a poetic skill found across the centuries. Changeability in the mouth of performers is known into the modern era, such as the example given by Theo Maarten van Lint of the poet-singer Ruben Haxverdyan who altered a line in one of his famous songs,

⁵¹⁵ M7726 f.35r

Մինչեւ Ադէկսանդր եմուտ
Առ թէպաս Պասից արքային
Երկու ճարտն չար նենգեն
Առ սպանման մեծին Դարեհի:

= As Alexander reached the palace of the king of the Persians, two evil servants deceitfully contrived to carry out the murder of the great Dareh.

⁵¹⁶ Simonyan 1975: 84-91.

⁵¹⁷ Cowe 1988-1989: 153.

replacing “child” with “grandchild”, to reflect the new generation in his family.⁵¹⁸ A poet working primarily in the written form of manuscripts would, of course, be equally capable of creatively rewriting Frik’s already flexible poem.

It is a desideratum of future study to look closer at the Frik borrowings in M7726 and M3387 (and any other manuscripts in which they appear) to identify whether they represent the work of an identifiable individual: a personal way of telling the Alexander story. The journey between a set of 10 Frik-based *kafas* in an *Alexander Romance* manuscript (M3387) and only three appearing within a smaller collection (M7726), and any as-yet-unknown intermediaries, would also be interesting to trace.

Other poets beside Frik found their way into the Alexander *kafas*. A *kafa* that appears in the late 13th, early 14th-century manuscript V424, as well as the 16th-century MCR3, about Alexander’s disguised journey to Kandakē, features two half-lines modelled on a full line of poetry from an otherwise unrelated piece by Yovhannēs Erznkac’i (c.1230-1293) about doing right or wrong in life.

Xač’atur Keč’arec’i

Yovhannēs Erznkac’i

ջանա որ հանց բան առնես,

Ջան արա՛ գործէ բարի,

որ չլինիս յետև փոշիման:⁵¹⁹

որ յետոյ չլինիս փոշիման

Take care that you do such a thing

Strive, do good,

that afterwards you do not become

so that afterwards you are not sorry.⁵²⁰

regretful.

There are differences in these half-lines, but the second especially makes the borrowing clear.

⁵¹⁸ van Lint 2014: 379-380.

⁵¹⁹ V424 f.102r. See also MCR3 f.132r and Simonyan 1989: 305 for the same lines.

⁵²⁰ Armenian text and English translation both taken from Stone 2013: 499.

Xač'atur Keč'arec'i, presumably familiar with this work of Yovhannēs Erznkac'i's, reshaped its words to give a different admonishment: that no harm be done to Alexander, disguised as his own servant, while in the city of Kandakē. No doubt many more such borrowings existed.

The use of Frik's poems provides a fine example of transmission within Armenian-language texts, but also serves as a reminder not to see such connections as simply intra-cultural. Poets existed in wider contexts. Frik frequently composed in the long, monorhyming poetic style (at the end of every full line, seen above in -որ/ն [-or/ř]) inaugurated in Armenian by Grigor Magistros but with roots in Arabic poetry, and van Lint suggests that Frik's poem about Arghun Khan and Bugha could be interpreted as possessing a *mathnawī*-type organisation best known in Arabic and Persian poetry.⁵²¹ That Frik knew poetry beyond the Armenian language is demonstrated in his use of four lines of a poem by Khāqānī of Shirvān, which he first transcribes and then translates into Armenian.⁵²² The lines, about the Sufic mystic experience, are set in Armenian by Frik as the opening of a longer poem about the final judgement: he “recast the Sufi imagery of sacrifice in a Christian setting of the greatest possible dramatic power: the offering of the Paschal Lamb.”⁵²³ Khāqānī, as will be discussed in the next section, also wrote poems about Kandakē. Their world, across languages, was small – and poets crossed languages. Frik drew on influences within and beyond the ‘boundary’ of Armenian, creating poetry that other poets drew on in turn: the *kafas* of M7726 (and M3387) about Alexander and Darius, a much-considered encounter.

“pitiable and lamentable”: the City of Bronze and Alexander’s pointless life

The connection explored in this section spans manuscripts and texts, and is a journey worth following at length, from Alexander to Kandakē and the City of Bronze. The words “ողորմն ու լալի”,

⁵²¹ van Lint 2013: 256.

⁵²² Discussed in Russell 1994.

⁵²³ Russell 1994: 237-238.

spoken by the naked philosophers to Alexander in the *Alexander Romance* (as discussed in Chapter 5, p.146), recur in other *kafas*, put in his own mouth to describe himself, as well as by the poetic narrator about Alexander's deplorable poisoner as the Macedonian conqueror's death approaches. These words can be imagined to circle the dying Alexander and recall the naked philosophers' admonition. They called him pitiable and lamentable for his present state: his great and murderous exertion to conquer the world, when in death he will simply lie in the earth, no different to the ascetic nudes. As Alexander told them in that encounter, it was not in his nature to turn back from his conquest – a lesson unlearned. Inevitably, the mortal king must die. Only then does he perceive how pointless his life's endeavours were. This lesson about life as an illusory state is not unique to Alexander. As a spiritual concept common to religions including Christianity and Islam, it appears across genres and numerous narratives. It will be seen to occur in the works of poets such as Nizāmī. A particular place in which this lesson is central is the City of Bronze – a tale that becomes interestingly entangled with Alexander's life and death in Armenian literature. This can be traced through a complex set of connections between Alexander and the City of Bronze.

The section starts with Alexander's visit to Kandakē (Candace), fictional queen of Meroë, whose city becomes the City of Bronze between *Alexander Romance* manuscripts and the *taḥaran* collection M7726 that includes some Alexander *kafas* without the prose narrative. The section then considers a different kind of interaction, in a *taḥaran* collection that contains the tale of the *City of Bronze* with Alexander *kafas* added to the bottom of certain folios, including a number of *kafas* about Alexander's death. The proximity of these two tales attests to their shared geography. Both contain a narrative cartography in which the remote edges of the world are the setting for the marvellous and the instructional: monstrous creatures and motile statues and the important lesson that amassing power in life means little after death. The way that the City of Bronze enters and interacts with the story of Alexander enriches its world, and even helps to draw out that moral lesson already present in the *Alexander Romance* and *kafas*.

First, it is useful to summarise the development of the City of Bronze tale in Armenian and its

content. Its antecedents in Arabic literature go back to at least the 9th century CE, with roots in multiple narratives that cohered into medieval versions and eventually, in the 19th century CE, an extended tale added to the *1001 Nights* sequence.⁵²⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 5 (p.86), the first translation from Arabic to Armenian was made in the late 10th century for David of Tayk' and included *kafas* to translate the Arabic *qafiya*-style poetic inscriptions found by the tale's protagonist, Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, governor of the Maghreb, as well as his lamentations upon reading them. In the early 13th century, a *vardapet* Aṙak'el made a second translation, which is perhaps the version that in turn was edited and expanded upon in the 16th century by Grigoris Alt'amarci, who – as with the *Alexander Romance* – composed additional *kafas* for it.⁵²⁵

The earliest Armenian version has the City of Bronze in the north (rather than its more famous location in the Maghreb of the west), perhaps reflecting the early Arabic tale, long before its inclusion in the *1001 Nights*.⁵²⁶ Deeper traditions in Iranian and Central Asian literature place a potential bronze or copper city in the north.⁵²⁷ In terms of narrative function, however, its cardinal direction is not relevant: it is remote. The same is true of Kandakē's city Meroë, to be found in modern Sudan but placed in the *Alexander Romance's* uncertain geography along his route from India back to Babylon. Anywhere in the far west, north or along the map's less defined far-off regions is sufficient.

The tale follows Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr (d. 716/7 CE), who is tasked by the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685-705 CE) to fetch him brass-sealed bottles containing marids (a type of jinn) imprisoned by Solomon.⁵²⁸ On his journey into the desert, he finds a grand castle set with precious metals and stones but empty of inhabitants, for its inhabitants long ago died and left only inscriptions warning the reader that death strips even the mighty of all wealth, as per God's will.

⁵²⁴ Fudge 2006: 91-96.

⁵²⁵ Russell 1983: 255.

⁵²⁶ Russell 1983: 257-258.

⁵²⁷ Russell 1983: 251.

⁵²⁸ A recent English translation of the Arabic City of Bronze tale within the *1001 Nights* sequence is Lyons 2010: 518-546, which I have made use of for the purposes of this thesis. Greater research into the different variants of the tale in both Arabic and Armenian will be pursued in postdoctoral projects.

After weeping himself unconscious, Mūsā recovers and continues his journey, passing a statue of a horse and rider made of brass that, if rubbed, will point to the City of Bronze. There is also an ifrit (a type of jinn) imprisoned in a pillar by Solomon for its misdeeds. It too points Mūsā towards his destination. When he reaches the city, he finds it resplendent yet impenetrable, for it lacks gates or doors. Eventually a route in is found, whereupon Mūsā and his companions find a city filled with treasures and the dead bodies of its inhabitants, including the queen, Tarmazayan. Tablets inside and outside the city are inscribed with the same message as in the empty castle: even wealthy kings become dried bones. Mūsā weeps himself unconscious several more times. At the end of the tale, Mūsā leaves the city and continues on to the ocean, where he meets the people who live there – giant, black-skinned men who speak an incomprehensible language, in these ways typical dwellers of the world’s edges, but who also speak Arabic and follow Islam – and they fish up some of the brass bottles containing marids imprisoned by Solomon, as well as giving Mūsā some mermaid-like creatures. On his return to the Caliph’s court, Mūsā retires from his position and retreats to Jerusalem to worship God, so affected is he by the lesson he has learnt in the desert and the City of Bronze.

The City of Bronze comes closer to the world of the *Alexander Romance* with every layer of reinscription. In the Greek *Alexander Romance*, it is not present. In the Armenian *Alexander Romance* narrative and *kafas* associated with it, two separate locations need to be considered: the lengthily described city of Kandakē – which is also described in the Greek versions – and a brief mention of the City of Bronze.

Kandakē’s city is described in the narrative as having a marvellous appearance.

Again she welcomes Antigonos and guides him through the royal residence. He saw the palace with its roof of brilliant gold, with walls built of stone. The beds were Chinese weaving-work, fashioned with gold, and the thrones, which were standing on onyx and beryl, had seats reinforced with tightly-bound leather straps. The tables were made of ivory, and set before them was a dedication of lapis lazuli work. The columns were Numidian, the capitals of which were shining black-hued Indian wood, and there were offerings of human figures built from eminent bronze, which because of their multitude could not be counted. Chariots armed with scythes, and with well-fashioned purple stone, with horses and chariot-drivers you [would] imagine making themselves rush to the races. Elephants sculpted from

the same stone were trampling enemies underfoot on the ground, and their trunks encircled their adversaries. Other temples had columns made from a single stone, with diamond seals, and icons of savage gods displaying blood-hued faces, and beams joined very high up, as if many plane trees grew up. Clear, golden-hued water flowed like a river, and it appeared to be another Pactolus.⁵²⁹ Each tree in a row had ripe, desirable fruit hanging from its branches.⁵³⁰

A subsequent passage adds further details: “On the following day, Kandakē took Antigonos’ hand and showed him the bright and resplendent rooms of cerulean stone, and it seemed as if the sun and the moon [were] in the walls because of the golden marble boards. There was a great temple of unrotting wood, incombustible in fire. And a house was built, the foundation of which was not constructed on the ground, but on great pieces of four-cornered wood built with wheels, pulled by twenty elephants. If the king went somewhere to make war on a city, this was [his] home.”⁵³¹

A *kafa* by Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i repeats this information:

Այս էր տաճարն կանդակէ,	This is the palace of Kandakē,
որ չէր հաստել ի [հի]մանէ,	which was not set on a foundation,
այլ անհնարէն կառուցեալ է,	but is impossibly constructed,

⁵²⁹ A river near the Aegean coast of western Anatolia, now called Sart Çayı in the modern republic of Turkey.

⁵³⁰ Simonyan 1989: 308. Դարձեալ առնու և մուծանէ յարքունիսն զԱնտիգոնէ: Իսկ զապարանսն տեսանէր փայլակուն ոսկիազարդ յարկ ձեղամբ, վիմակերտ որմալք: Եւ անկողինքն էին ճենականք ոստայնանկաց արուեստք ոսկով գործեալ, և գահոյքն, որ ունիվնաց և բիւրդայց ի վերայ կային և բազմոցն փոկակապ մածմամբ պնդեալք, և սեղանք ի փղոսկրանիւթոց առաջի եղեալ և ի գոճազմոյ արարածոյ նիւրումն: Եւ սինք՝ նումիտականք, որոյ խոյակքն հնդիկ փայտ սևեթոյրք փաղփին և մարդապատկերց էին նուէրք կանգնեալք ի քաջ պղնձոյ, որք վսան բազմութեան ոչ կարէին զթիւ առնուլ: Եւ կառք գերընդագէնք՝ ճախարակալք ծիրանի քարէ, հանդերձ ձիալքն և կառավարալքն կարծիս տային զինքեանս ի յարձակումն ընթացից դիմել: Եւ փիղք՝ ի նմին քարէ քանդակեալք, ոտիւքն ընդ գետին կոխէին զթշնամիս, և պատճիս պատեալ զհակառակորդալքն: Եւ այլ տաճարք, դարձեալ հանդերձ սեամբք՝ ի միոջէ քարէ դրոշմեալք անդամանդ, և խուժադուժ աստուածոց պատկերք՝ տեսողացն ցուցանելով զերեսն արիւնագոյն, և գերանք բարձրաբերձք ի բարձու յարկեալք՝ որքան, թէ սաւոյրք ի բուսոյ վեր ամբարձեալք: Իբր և գետ հոսէր, ոսկեզոյն ջուր ականակիտ՝ երևելով այլազգ Պագտուդոս: Եւ մի ընդ միոջէ ծառոց կարգաւ տնկելոց հասուն ցանկալի և յոստս ունէին զմիրգս:

⁵³¹ Simonyan 1989: 309. Իսկ միւս աւուրն, առեալ Կանդակէ զձեռն Անտիգոնէ՝ ցուցանէր նմա սենեակս պայծառս և լուսաճաճանչս յաղագոյն քարէ, մինչ զի զարեգակն ի տախտակի և զլուսինն անգամ ի ձեռն կճեայ ոսկեղէն տախտակացն յորմս կարծեալ ի ներքս: Եւ ի նա էր տաճար մի մեծ յանփուտ փայտից և անայրելի ի հրոյ: Եւ տուն շինեալ էր, որոյ ոչ էր կառուցեալ հիմն ի վերայ երկրի, այլ ի վերայ մեծամեծ չորեքանկիւնի փայտից կոփելոց կառուցեալ անուաւոր, քարշեալ ի քսան փղոցն: Եւ թէ ուրեք երթեալ թագաւորն ի քաղաք տալ պատերազմ, այն լինէր յարկ:

ի քսան փղաց շարժմանէ,	by the movement of twenty elephants.
յոր հիացեալ աղէքսանդրէ	Alexander marvelled at it,
ասաց վեհիցն այս գեւ շա[տ]է	he said, “This is truly, greatly sublime.”
և բ[արկ]ացեալ դշխ[ոյ]ն յարն[է]	The queen is roused to anger
և ծա[ն]ուցման նշանս յայտնէ: ⁵³²	and reveals the notifying sign.

The use of տաճար causes some uncertainty about whether the structure is a palace or a temple, as the word can mean either. Where it is described as containing icons of gods, it seems sensible to translate it as ‘temple’. However, where it is used in the *kafa* above for the structure that, in the narrative, Kandakē or another ruler would dwell in while at war, ‘palace’ is a better fit. What is significant for the eventual merging of Kandakē’s palatial complex and the City of Bronze is that both types of buildings belong to that complex and, more broadly, to her city as a whole.

In *kafas* surviving from the 16th century – though not in MCR3 – the description of the palatial buildings is repeated, though some details are mixed up.

Զարքունիսըն Կանդակէ	The great Antigonos saw
տեսնաւր մեծն Անտիգոնէ,	the palace of Kandakē,
Որպէս զխորան Մովսէսի	like the tabernacle of Moses
կամ զտաճարն ի Սողոմովնէ.	or the temple of Solomon.
Յոր սեղան կազմեր ի նա	On which altar was prepared for him
սուրբ հոգովըն Բերիելէ,	by the saintly, holy Berial,
Զենման անարատ գառին	for the sacrifice of the innocent lamb
և անճառ բանին ի հաւրէ: ⁵³³	and the ineffable Word of the Father.

⁵³² V424 f.103v; Simonyan 1989: 309 n.8.

⁵³³ Simonyan 1989: 309-310.

Վերոյ չորս անփուտ փայտից
հաստատեալ զհիմն ի քարէ.
Ձեղունքն էր մարգարտաշար
և որմաւք փայլմամբ ի սարդէ,
Գահոյքն ի շափիւղայից,
կարկեհան բիւրեղ ի շիկնէ,
Բազմոցն պալարակապ
և հիւսեալ յոսկի տաղանդէ:⁵³⁴

Սեղանքն ի փրդոսկրէից
և կազմեալ նա ի գոճազմէ,
Խարիսխ և սիւնքըն խոյակք,
սև աթորք ի հընդկականէ,
Պատկեր նըկարեալ մարդոյ
էր անթիւ ի բազմութենէ
Եւ կառք զերազէն ճախարք,
ծիրանապաճոյճ ի կայծէ:⁵³⁵

Հանդերձ ձիաւար կառաւք
կարծիս ունել յընթացէ,
Խորանաշատ կամարաւք,
զերդ զարնան աղեղն ի յամպէ.

Above, four unrotting pieces of wood
strengthened the foundation of stone.
The ceiling was strung with pearls
and with resplendent walls of cedar,
the thrones [were] of sapphires
[and] ruby crystal of a red hue,
the seat embossed
and woven with a talent of gold.

The altars [were] made of ivory
and it was adorned with lapis lazuli,
the columns – base and capital –
the black seats of Indian [origin],
the images painted of men
were innumerable in their multitude
and the chariot, suitably magnificent,
purple-adorned with carbuncles.

The rider with a chariot
you [would] suppose him able to go to the races.
The great pavilion with arches,
that arc like spring, from a cloud,

⁵³⁴ Simonyan 1989: 310.

⁵³⁵ Simonyan 1989: 310.

Որով աստուածոց պատկերք	in which icons of savage gods
խուժադուժ ի յարեան գունէ,	are the colour of blood,
Ծառաւք և ծաղկով, պըտղաւք,	with trees and flowers, fruits,
վարդ, շուշան ի կանաչ թըփէ: ⁵³⁶	rose, lily of a verdant bush.
Իսկ ի միւս արն առեալ	On the following day
դըշխոյին զձեռն Անտիգոնէ,	the queen took the hand of Antigonos,
Ցուցեալ լուսաճանճ սենեակս	showed him the resplendent rooms
յաւդային անդամանդ քարէ,	of ethereal diamond stone,
Զարեգակն ի տախտակի	the sun and the moon
և զլուսինն ի տասն ու հընգէ,	in the fifteen panels,
Տանուտէրք մոլորականք	the wandering lords
հըրճուէին ի բարկ աստեղէ: ⁵³⁷	were leaping for joy from the powerful star.
Եւ գետք ոսկեգոյն բըխմամբ	And the gold-hued rivers flowed forth
ծիծաղածաւալ ոռոգէ: ⁵³⁸	[and] water [all] with laughter.

Such space has been given to these lengthy and at times repetitive descriptions because the City of Bronze is, like Kandakē’s palace, exquisite in its beauty. Its illusions are such that men hurl themselves from the ramparts to be within it. Those who enter safely find astonishing architecture and splendid furnishings, from the eponymous “brazen towers” to “ivory benches overlaid with glistening gold and silks”, “a large marble fountain covered with a canopy of brocade” and “a great dome built of stones coated with red gold, more beautiful than anything any of them had ever seen.

⁵³⁶ Simonyan 1989: 310.

⁵³⁷ Simonyan 1989: 310-311.

⁵³⁸ Simoyan 1989: 311.

In the middle of this was a large marble shrine around whose sides were ornamented windows with a grating of emeralds, more precious than any king could afford. Within was a canopy of brocade set over pillars of red gold, and inside this were birds whose feet were green emeralds and under each of them was a net of brilliant pearls spread above a fountain. Placed at the side of this fountain was a couch adorned with pearls, gems and sapphires” – on this lay the dead queen of the city.⁵³⁹ The moral of the tale requires the queen and her city’s inhabitants to all lie dead within its walls, while Kandakē, her family and (presumably) her subjects flourish. The details of Kandakē’s palatial buildings originate in the Greek *Alexander Romance* – with roots, perhaps, in real sights of India encountered by Alexander and subsequent Greeks who visited the region⁵⁴⁰ – but it is not difficult to see how the similarly stunning, jewel-set structures could, later, be taken to be one and the same.

Indeed, that proximity is potentially present in the *kafa*’s comparison of the palace to Solomon’s temple – not the temple itself, but its architect. Solomon did not construct the City of Bronze, but he is integral to the frame of the narrative about the quest that takes Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr – the tale’s protagonist – to the city. The impetus for the quest is the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān hearing about a remote region where the people dwelling there sometimes fish up brass bottles containing jinn imprisoned and sealed within them by Solomon. At the very end of the tale, after leaving the City of Bronze – and learning its moral lesson – Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr at last reaches that remote region and has the people there bring him twelve of Solomon’s brass bottles, which he takes back to the Caliph. Though Solomon is not directly connected to the City of Bronze, he is instrumental to its presence in the tale. Additionally, Allegra lafrate points to further Solomonic links in the Spanish location that likely underlies the City’s location: the real Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr conquered both North Africa and Spain, including Toledo, while an early Arabic version of the tale has it set around Toledo, a city that claimed possession of Solomon’s table until Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr

⁵³⁹ Lyons 2010: 518-546.

⁵⁴⁰ Szalc 2014.

took it (according to some reports).⁵⁴¹ The choice of metal is also notable: as with the Armenian word պղինձ, which can mean copper or its alloys bronze and brass, the Arabic ‘nuḥās’ is similarly broad in its metallic meaning.⁵⁴² The bottles and the city are made of the same substance. Iafrate describes the story’s varied elements as “some quite evidently, others in a more allusive way, certainly meant to create a network of references that would resonate with the audience, evoking and strengthening a distinctive Solomonic setting”⁵⁴³ – I suggest that this same technique of allusion is at play in the poet’s comparison of Kandakē’s palace to Solomon’s temple, laying the foundation stones of an eventual equation in *kafas* between Kandakē’s dwelling place and the City of Bronze.

Solomon’s temple is a distinct structure, but it too may belong to the “network of references” that construct the above association. Also known as the First Temple of Jerusalem, his temple replaced the tabernacle of Moses – mentioned in the same *kafa* – as the dwelling-place of God. Its construction is recorded in the Book of Kings (3 Kings in the Armenian Bible, 1 Kings in Bibles used in the Western church, due to the use of different translations), and while ostensibly a real temple, it is described in opulent terms: “He ornamented the inside of the house with cedar vaults and beams, and engravings all of cedar, and no stone was visible.”⁵⁴⁴ (3 Kings 6:18) Much is gilded, from the altar to the walls and floor: “All the house he anointed with gold...”⁵⁴⁵ (3 Kings 6:22). Decorative features run throughout: “All the walls of the house he engraved with cherubs and palm trees, and images visible on the interior and the exterior.”⁵⁴⁶ (3 Kings 6:29) These too are overlaid with gold. Some of these details recall Kandakē’s palatial complex – the cedar wood in 16th-century *Alexander Romance kafas* (see page 203), the foliate details and the abundance of gold – though these are by no means unique details. Some of the words used vary, suggesting no direct inspiration from the Biblical

⁵⁴¹ Iafrate 2016: 262-264.

⁵⁴² Iafrate 2016: 264.

⁵⁴³ Iafrate 2016: 263-264.

⁵⁴⁴ Zohrapian 1805: 2:142. Եւ դրուագեաց գտունն ի ներքոյ եղնափայտիք զկամարսն և զկողակս, և զդրօշուածս զամենայն յեղնափայտից. և ո՛չ երևէր քարն. Translations from 3 Kings of the Armenian Bible are my own.

⁵⁴⁵ Zohrapian 1805: 2:143. Եւ զամենայն տունն օծ ոսկւով...

⁵⁴⁶ Zohrapian 1805: 2:143. Եւ զամենայն որմս տանն շուրջանակի քանդակեալ գրեաց գրչաւ քերոքս և րմաւենիս, և դրօշուածս հայելիս ի ներքսագոյնն և յարտաքինն:

passage. For ‘cedar’, the 16th-century *Alexander Romance kafa* has սարդ (sard), while the edited text of 3 Kings 6 uses եղևնափայտ (eḡewnap’ayt) and մայր (mayr). Otherwise, the trees mentioned are different: the *Alexander Romance* mentions plane trees (see page 201) and trees without specifying their species, while 3 Kings 6 references palm trees, cypress-wood and juniper-wood. While the comparison of Kandakē’s palatial complex to Solomon’s temple does not evince any textual borrowing, it can be interpreted as not only an attempt to elevate the palace’s appearance in Christian terms, but to evoke and draw comparison to the impressive architecture associated with Solomon.⁵⁴⁷

A direct line is not – yet – drawn between Kandakē’s palace and the City of Bronze, but both existed in the same narrative register of the ancient, the splendid, the (sometimes) holy. The poet of the *kafas* utilised this register when writing about a particular structure and drew inspiration from its many constituent tales – lafrate’s “network of references”.

The Armenian *Alexander Romance* narrative introduces the City of Bronze separately from Kandakē’s palace, in a later, shorter letter that Alexander writes to Olympias upon his return to Babylon, about sights and experiences in remote regions on that final leg of his journey: “Sailing to that place, we found the city Areg. *It seemed to me that it is the one they call the City of Bronze,* which has a circumference of 120 stadia, and within it fourteen towers built of gold and emerald. Each of them had sixty stairs, and overhead was a chariot with horses of gold and of emerald. It was not easy to see them because of the mist. The pagan priest of the sun was Ethiopian.”⁵⁴⁸ The

⁵⁴⁷ Fantastical elements of the temple’s story are not connected to Kandakē or the wider *Alexander Romance* in Armenian (or Greek), but it is notable that this temple – like most features of Solomon’s life – attracted the unreal. Consider the shamir, either a living worm or a stone capable of working metal by affect, rather than the conventional use of a tool. The shamir is known in the Talmud and Midrash, and is also alluded to in Quran 34:14. The story of how Solomon acquired the shamir is filled with the sort of wonders typical of Solomon.

⁵⁴⁸ Simonyan 1989: 326. Եւ նաւել առ սովաւ գտաք զԱրեգ քաղաք: Ինձ այսպէս թուի, թէ սա է, որ ասեն Պղնձէ քաղաք, որ է շրջաչափումն ասպարիսաց հարիւր և քսան, և աշտարակք էին ի նմա չորքսասան՝ ոսկով և զըմրոյստով շինեալ: Մի-մի ի նոցանէ ունէր աստիճանս վաթսուն և ի վերայ անցեալ կայր կառք ձիովք յոսկոյ և ի գրիստէ: Եւ տեսանել զնոսա ոչ էր դիրեաւ վասն շամանդաղին: Եւ քուրմն արեգականն էթովպացի էր.

italicised line is potentially a later interpolation.⁵⁴⁹ This is after Alexander’s visit to Kandakē’s city, after meeting the Amazons, when he is again – for a short time – traversing lands inhabited by impossible species: dog-headed and headless men. The details of this City of Bronze recall not only the marvellous City of Bronze in its own tale, but the palatial complex of Kandakē in the *Alexander Romance* with gold and precious stones and a spectacular sculpted horse-drawn chariot. For now, though, they remain distinct, though both fit well into the remote regions of the *Alexander Romance’s* narrative map.

A century later, two manuscripts preserve the direct link between the City of Bronze and Alexander in two different ways: M7726 and M7709, both held in the Matenadaran. Both contain *kafas* about Alexander separate from the *Alexander Romance* narrative. Several *kafas* in M7726 unite Kandaki and the City of Bronze. Both she and the city are first mentioned in one of the Poros *kafas*, in a line that reads: “Kandakē of the city of bronze.”⁵⁵⁰ Her next appearance is when Alexander goes to the City of Bronze to meet her. In these short poems, her home is given no detailed elaboration, no lustrous details as in the *kafas* discussed above. Instead, these *kafas* give a straightforward rendition of Kandaki and Alexander’s encounter, but they explicitly place Kandaki within the City of Bronze. The relevant *kafas* are as follows.

Ըղըրկեց պըղընձէ քաղաքն	He sent an expedition to the City of Bronze,
Առ Կանդակիէ մեծ տիկին	to Kandaki the great queen.
Պարգեւք զանազան երես	He gave various gifts,
Խալիաթ հագոյց տանողին. ⁵⁵¹	he made the bearer wear the precious gift of clothing.

⁵⁴⁹ Russell 1983: 251.

⁵⁵⁰ M7726 f.36r. Կանդակէ պըղընձէ քաղաքին:

⁵⁵¹ M7726 f.37r.

Աղեկսանդր զպատկերն փոխեաց	Alexander changed [his] likeness
Զերդ դեսպան որ մարդ չճանաչէ	to that of a messenger so that no man would
	recognise [him].
Գրնաց ի պըղընձէ քաղաք ն	He went to the City of Bronze
Առ Կանդակին մեծ տիկին: ⁵⁵²	to the great queen Kandaki.

Enraged, Kandaki demands to know why he has dared to use trickery to come to her city.

Աղեկսանդրու պատկերն	Alexander's likeness
նրկարեաց ունէր ի թըղթին	she had a painting of from a letter.
Հայեաց ընդ երես նորին	She looked upon the same face,
Բարկացաւ սըրտիւ դառնագին:	she became very bitterly provoked in the heart.

Այ բիճ եւ չարեաց ծընունդ	Oh bastard and evil one,
Անըզգամ դու ի բնութիւնէդ	insane you [are] of nature.
Էր վըստահացար եկիր	Why did you have the boldness [to] come
Իմ քաղաքն որէ պըղընձէ: ⁵⁵³	to my city which is [made] of bronze?

Later, after Kandaki has counselled him to not trust in his fate, he tells his troops that there is no way to conquer her city.

Ելաւ իւր հեծելն եկաւ	He went and came up to his cavalry,
Եւ զպատճառն ասաց Կանդակիէ	so that he could say about Kandaki:

⁵⁵² M7726 f.37v.

⁵⁵³ M7726 f.37v.

Չըկար առնել(յ) ճարակ

There is no way of taking

Այն քաղաքն որէ պըղընձէ:⁵⁵⁴

this city which is [made] of bronze.

It is only a place, un-described, in these *kafas* – but its place in Alexander’s itinerary signifies a textual proximity of great interest.

M7709, the second manuscript linking the City of Bronze and Alexander, is quite different. It too is a *tataran* collection dating to the 17th century, created in Kaffa, and it measures 14 x 9.5 cm. In addition to poetry, it contains the tale of the *City of Bronze* interspersed with its own *kafas* – in the lower margin of this tale, some *kafas* of Alexander have been written. The difference in handwriting styles suggests that these *kafas* are later additions to the manuscript, especially as on one page a faded red *kafa* belonging to the City of Bronze tale is rewritten in what appears to be the same hand as these Alexander *kafas*.

The Alexander *kafas* added to M7709 are a non-chronological selection, with subjects such as Nectanebo’s seduction of Olympias, Alexander and his army’s encounter with the planted men discussed in the previous chapter, the young Alexander refusing to give Macedon’s tribute to the envoys of Darius, and the death of Alexander. Several are found in other manuscripts. These include the six *kafas* about Alexander and Darius’ envoy (seen above in M3668, as well as appearing in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts) and the *kafas* about Alexander’s death (most of these appear in at least one other manuscript, whether it is V424, MCR3 or M7726). See *Table 1* for the full listing of the M7709 Alexander *kafas*, arranged in the order in which they appear in the manuscript, with all correspondences identified thus far. Those in square brackets were noted but not copied during the one visit I made to the Matenadaran during the course of this thesis. An upcoming research trip will fill in these crucial gaps and provide further insight into the these *kafas*, but for now there is sufficient to discuss.

⁵⁵⁴ M7726 f.37v.

M7709 folio	Subject of the <i>kafa</i>	Other manuscripts
f.183v	Nectanebo tricks Olympias	
f.183r	Nectanebo tricks Olympias	
f.184v	Nectanebo tricks Olympias	V424 f.6r, MCR3 f.8v
f.185r	Nectanebo tricks Olympias	V424 f.6r, MCR3 f.8v
f.185(c)	The natural sheep and planted men	MCR3 f.100v, M7726 f.39v
f.189r	Alexander's death sequence	
f.189v	Alexander's death sequence	V424 f.116v, M7726 ff.38r-v
f.190r	Alexander's death sequence	V424 f.118r, MCR3 f.154r, M7726 f.39r
f.190v	Alexander's death sequence	V424 f.118r, MCR3 f.154r, M7726 f.39r
f.191r	Alexander's death sequence	V424 f.118r, MCR3 f.154r
f.191v	Alexander's death sequence	V424 f.118v, MCR3 f.155r
f.192r	Alexander's death sequence	V424 f.118v, MCR3 f.155r
f.192v	Alexander's death sequence	MCR3 f.159r, M7726 f.38v

f.193r	Alexander's death sequence	MCR3 f.159r
f.193v	Alexander's death sequence	MCR3 f.161v, M7726 f.39r
f.194r	Alexander's death sequence	MCR3 f.161v, M7726 f.39r
f.194v	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	M3668 f.154v
f.195r	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	M3668 ff.154v-155r
f.195v	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	M3668 f.155r
f.196r	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	M3668 f.155r
f.196v	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	M3668 ff.155r-155v
f.197r	Alexander defies Darius' ambassadors	M3668 f.155v
f.197v	Alexander's death sequence	
f.198r	Alexander's death sequence	
f.199v	[extended Darius <i>kafa</i>]	
f.201v	Alexander's death sequence	MCR3 f.162r
f.202r	Alexander's death sequence	MCR3 f.162r
f.209r	[<i>kafa</i> that mentions Alexander, Darius and a višap]	
f.209v	[unknown]	
f.210r	[unknown]	
f.211r	[unknown]	

The choice of *kafas* appears random, but the person who added them surely had a reason. Part of the explanation is found in the narrative of the City of Bronze – not unique to this one manuscript – which says, of the city, that “Alexander built it”⁵⁵⁵. *Kafas* about him fit at its base. A desideratum would be a close analysis of the City of Bronze tale in this specific manuscript to determine whether there are narrative-specific reasons for the folios where each *kafa* appears, but that has been beyond the scope of this study.⁵⁵⁶ At present, it is possible to make one important point about the Alexander *kafas* in M7709: the subject that receives the greatest amount of attention is Alexander’s death. The culmination of narrative and *kafas* dwelling on Alexander’s mortality is that despite his impressive deeds and accumulated of wealth in life, he meets his mortal end and goes empty-handed into the grave. Many *kafas* were written for the drawn-out death sequence at the end of the *Alexander Romance*, which begins with ill omens, progresses to the poisoning of Alexander – in the Armenian version, by a man named Ułtos (rendering the Greek Iollas/Iolaus) – and then follows his final days as he declines in health and eventually dies. M7709 reproduces a number of these *kafas* at the base of the City of Bronze tale: an appropriate location for Alexander’s death, as Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr will eventually arrive at the dead body of the city’s ruler, who had amassed so much in her life.

In the Arabic City of Bronze tale, the lesson that amassing wealth in life means little upon death is made abundantly clear. Even before finding the dead queen Tarmazayan in the city, Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr sees the dead citizens and the splendid palace, adorned with green lapis lazuli and written around with the words of a *qafiya* that includes the following lines:

Look at those who once adorned their homes,
 But then went to their graves to account for what they did.
 They built, but to no avail; they stored up wealth,
 But this wealth did not save them when their time had come.
 How many hopes they placed on what could not be theirs;
 But hopes were not to help them in the grave.
 From highest rank they were brought down

⁵⁵⁵ M7709 f.182v. զայս աղէկսանդր շինեաց

⁵⁵⁶ I intend to revisit M7709 in the Matenadaran and prepare an article on this subject upon completion of the DPhil.

To the lowliness of a narrow grave – a wretched fall!
 When they were buried, a voice was heard to cry:
 ‘Where are your thrones, your crowns and all your robes?
 Where are the faces that were veiled away,
 Protected by the curtains and the drapes?’
 The grave has a clear answer for the questioners:
 ‘The roses are no longer on their cheeks.
 For many days they ate and drank their wine,
 But after their fine foods, they too were eaten.’⁵⁵⁷

This lesson is repeated on an inscribed golden tablet beside the city’s dead queen, which included the following lines: “Where are the kings, the Chosroes and the Caesars? Where are the lords of India and Iraq? Where are those who ruled all the regions of the world? ... Their palaces stand empty and they have left their families and their lands. Where are the kings of the Persians and the Arabs? They all died and are now dried bones, and all the lords of rank are gone.”⁵⁵⁸ The tablet then relates Queen Tarmazayan’s story of an illustrious and just reign that met with years of famine and, inevitably, death. “This is our story, and of the reality of our power only the traces remain.”⁵⁵⁹

Many of the *kafas* added to M7709 about Alexander’s death show him finally learning this lesson in his last days: becoming pitiable and lamenting as he recognises how little point there was to his life.

Ասաց թագաւոր ի ժամ	The king said at [that] moment,
Ես մեծ թագաւոր էի.	I was a great king,
զարաւոր հըզաւր և արի.	powerful, strong and valiant
[.....	[.....
] և խումաշ ունէի.] I had silk,
որ չունէր մարդ ի վերայ երկրի. ⁵⁶⁰	which no man in the world had.

⁵⁵⁷ Lyons 2010: 538.

⁵⁵⁸ Lyons 2010: 541.

⁵⁵⁹ Lyons 2010: 541.

⁵⁶⁰ M7709 f.189r. This Alexander *kafa* is not found in any of the manuscripts I have studied or in Simonyan’s *Alexander Romance* edition.

The itemisation of the king’s achievements in life, from physical strength and valour to owning rare luxuries, recalls the dead monarchs in the City of Bronze tale who detail the greatness of their rulerships and possessions. What follows is death.

The next *kafa* in M7709 is in poor condition due to a hole in the folio, which makes it hard to gain a full understanding of its contents, but it is clearly a variant of a *kafa* found in other manuscripts – one for which already two variants are known, and the M7709 version is either a third variant or a much-altered version of one of the others.⁵⁶¹ All variants have Alexander dream of hail falling on his head, at which they diverge: the first variant has Alexander weep and his soldiers comfort him, while the second has Alexander fill with dread as he perceives an omen of his death. If M7709’s *kafa* is one of these variants, it is the first.

Alexander’s then addresses his wife Hřoksinē (Roxana), who in the *Alexander Romance* is the daughter of Darius. In the *Alexander Romance* narrative, he tries to sneak away to end his life in private, but Hřoksinē follows him and convinces him to return to his rooms. The *kafas* give no indication of this story, showing only Alexander’s distress at the loss of his life – the loss of his crown, symbol of his achievements.

ողորմ ու լալի դարձայ	I became pitiable and lamented,
դարեհի դուստր հռքսիներ.	daughter of Dareh, Hřoksinē.
յերկնից ի անդունդս անկայ.	I fell from heaven into the abyss,
կորուստ ի գթագս ի գրլիսէ: ⁵⁶²	the loss of the crown from the head.

Hřoksinē responds.

⁵⁶¹ M7709 f.189v. Simonyan 1989: 335, n.4, V424 f.116v and M7726 ff.38r-v have the first variant, and Simonyan 1989: 335 and MCR3 f.152r have the second variant.

⁵⁶² M7709 f.190r. This *kafa* is widely copied. See also V424 f.118r, MCR3 f.154r, M7726 f.39r and Simonyan 1989: 338-339. Variations between the different manuscript versions are small, with only the occasional use of different words that do not change the overall meaning.

Թողուլ մոռան կամիս	You will abandon [and] forget me,
աշխարհի կայսր աղէկսանդրէ	lord of the world, Alexander.
Ես ա[յ]լ մեռանիմ հե[տ] քեզ.	But I will die with you.
զիս ի քո գիրըդ հաւաքէ: ⁵⁶³	Invite me to your bosom.
Արքայն պատասխան արար	The king made a reply:
թէ ելաւ հոգիս դու լռե	My soul is perturbed, be silent!
սիրտս վառեցաւ հրով	My heart is aflame with fire,
մի նեղեր աստուած վկայ է	do not oppress [me], God is [my] witness
Թէ ես գի[տ]ացել էի	For I have learned
որ մահուս արն մօտել է	that my mortal day is upon me
շու[տո]վ դառնայի առ մայրս	[and] I will soon return to my mother,
որ այրած սիրտ [ըզ]ն[ա] կու[զ]է: ⁵⁶⁴	for whom my burning heart is longing.

Alexander's emotional state is dwelled on here, including his love for his mother (a theme elaborated upon in the *Romance*) and his anguish that he will return to her dead. The person who added the Alexander *kafas* to M7709 was less concerned with the straightforward narrative of Alexander's decline and death. For instance, one *kafa* in the sequence as it appears in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts – about Alexander allowing his concerned army to see that he remained alive – is not included in M7709.

⁵⁶³ M7709 f.190v. This *kafa* is widely copied, in many cases as the second half of the above *kafa*. See also V424 f.118r, MCR3 f.154r, M7726 f.39r and Simonyan 1989: 338-339. Variations between the different manuscript versions are again small.

⁵⁶⁴ M7709 f.191r. See also V424 f.118r, MCR3 f.154r and Simonyan 1989: 339. Variations are again small.

Մակեդոնացոցն եկել	The Macedonians came
ի տեսիլ մեծի արքային,	to see the great king.
ու կարծիս առին նենգման,	They suspected a deception,
թէ ի մահ ըզնա մատնեցին	that [the guards] had delivered him to death.
աղէքսանդր յուշովն եկել	Alexander attentively came
հրամայեց որ զնա տեսին	and commanded that they see him,
զի մի դաւ գործեն բախամար	in order to prevent them conspiring violently
ընդ իրեարս յաղմուկ նախանծին. ⁵⁶⁵	against each other in zealous tumult.

His emotional response to these events is clearly a greater priority to the copyist. The next *kafa* in the *Alexander Romance* manuscript sequence, which is a more contemplative piece presented from Alexander's perspective, is copied into M7709 across two folios.

Աւուրքս էի ի շուք նման	I spent my days as if in shade
կամ ըստուեր երազի նըման	or shadow, as if in a dream.
ծակիկ[=ծաղիկ?] է գարնան նման	It is a little spring-like flower
մանուշկի կամ վարդի նման ⁵⁶⁶	like a violet or rose.
Հալեցայ մսի նման	I was consumed like flesh,

⁵⁶⁵ V424 f.118v. See also MCR3 f.155r, which has the same version as in V424, and Simonyan 1989: 340, which preserves a slight variation in the third half-line: Եւ կարծիս առին նըմա = They had a suspicion concerning him.

⁵⁶⁶ M7709 f.191v. The *kafa* appears in the margin of V424 f.118v but is very fragmentary. See also MCR3 f.155r, which is very close to the M7709 version. Simonyan 1989: 340 preserves several variations in the second two half-lines:

ծաղիկ տէր գարնան նըման,
մանուշակի վարդի նման

= The lord is a little spring-like flower, which arrived at the days of summer. (The meaning here, presumably, is that the spring flower does not survive into summer.)

ու շիջա ճրրագի նման	and extinguished like a lamp,
վրտնուս արելի նման	You set like the sun
ու գրնասս ի հող [ւ ի] գրնտան: ⁵⁶⁷	and you go into the earth, to a prison.

The tone is mournful: Alexander expresses regret at spending his life in a dream-like state, only to be (inevitably) extinguished like a lamp and set like the sun. This message is continued soon thereafter, though a *kafa* in-between first curses the man who poisoned Alexander, comparing him to Cain and Judas via willing that he meet the same sinners' death.

Ով պարոնին նենգ չանա.	He who tricks his lord,
անիծած զինչ ասն աշխարհի	[will be] the cursed serpent of the world.
Ով որ բարուն չար առնէ.	He who did evil to the good,
կայեն ի նման նգովի: ⁵⁶⁸	[will be] cursed like Cain.
Ով ապր[շտ]ակէ գայլոց	He who seizes the others

⁵⁶⁷ M7709 f.192r. This *kafa* is elsewhere copied as the second half of the previous one. In V424 it is very fragmentary, while MCR3 f.155r and Simonyan 1989: 340 preserve variations. The latter is:

Հալեցար մոմի նրման
 և շիջար ճրրագի ի նրման
 Մրտնուս արևուն նրման
 ու գրնասս ի հողն, ի գրնդան:

= Be consumed like your wax and extinguish like a lamp. You set like the sun and you go into the earth, to a prison. (This version is more coherent than the one in M7709, in having a consistent point of view rather than switching from the voice of Alexander to an exhortative narrator. The image of the wax lamp burning out is also continued through the first two half-lines. However, the consumption of flesh, alongside the floral imagery in the first *kafa* of this pair, may echo the City of Bronze poem quoted earlier; future research will need to investigate the existence of these parallels in the Armenian-language City of Bronze and its *kafas*.)

⁵⁶⁸ M7709 f.192 v. See also MCR3 f.159r, which has very slight variations that do not alter the meaning. M7726 f.38v has a *kafa* with more signification variations, particularly in the first and third half-lines, but again the meaning is preserved:

Ով իւր մեծին չար կամի
 Անիծածզին օձն աշխարհի
 Կամ աղէկին վատառնէ
 Նրգովի նրման կայենի:

= He who wills evil to his great one, [will be] the cursed serpent of the world. He who oppresses the good, [will be] cursed like Cain.

Գէլեզի նման բորոտի	will be rent like a leper.
Ով զիր տ[եառ]ն ի մահ մատնէ	He who betrays his lord to death,
յուդայի նման պատառի: ⁵⁶⁹	will be torn to pieces like Judas.

Then the *kafas* return to reflecting on the illusory nature of life.

Այս կեանսէ յերագ նման.	This existence is like a dream,
զինչ զարթնու լինի փոշիմ[ա]ն	from which he awakens [and] becomes regretful.
Ի քուն զինչ իշխան գի[տ]է.	In sleep, he knew himself a prince;
երբ զարդնու աղք[ա][տ]ուանբան: ⁵⁷⁰	when he awoke, a foolish beggar.

Then, in the final two half-lines of the next *kafa*, its ultimate end: the earth, a grave.

այսպէս աղէկսանտր եղել	So Alexander
որ մ[տ]աւ ի նեղ գերեզման: ⁵⁷¹	entered a narrow grave.

The *kafas* about Alexander’s death added to M7709 do not hew only to one moral heft. It is possible to protest the crime of murdering Alexander and curse his killer – but the main lesson to be taken from these events is the inevitability of a death and the implications of that mortality on the conduct of one’s life. Some of the lines on this theme echo the City of Bronze *qafiya* quoted above: life like roses, the consumption of flesh, death in a narrow grave. In the future it will be very

⁵⁶⁹ M7709 f.193r. See also MCR3 f.159r, which has only very slight variations in spelling.

⁵⁷⁰ M7709 f.193v. See also MCR3 f.161v and M7726 f.39r, which have only slight variations, mostly in spelling and none that change the meaning.

⁵⁷¹ M7709 f.194r. See also MCR3 f.161v and M7726 f.39r, which have some variations that introduce a table/banquet to the first half-line (M7726: Թէ բազում սեղան տեսնու = He saw a great spread) and alter the second half-line without offering greater insight into its somewhat opaque meaning. The final half-line also gains some elaboration (M7726: կու գընամ ի հող ի զընտան: = go into the earth, into a prison).

interesting to investigate whether these echoes exist in the manuscript between the Alexander *kafas* and the wording of the Armenian City of Bronze text and *kafas*.

The *kafas* in M7709 continue past Alexander's death.

Ի յերեք անկեան աշխարհ.	In the three corners of the world
[է] եկէք մահուս տեսական	you came to your apparent death.
զայս [տ]իեզերաց արքայս	This king of the universe,
կու տանին դրնել ի [տ]ապ[ան] ⁵⁷²	they take to place in the tomb.

Արքայիս տապան[ն] եկի	I came to the tomb of this king,
որ ունէր շատ մի հայրենիք.	he who had a great patrimony.
Այ[] [...] որ զաշխարհս ունէր.	This man who had subdued the world,
սա պառկել ու փող մ[...] ունի: ⁵⁷³	he was laid down [in a narrow place].

Յիրմէն ես հարցունք եղայ.	I requested from him:
[այդ] տեղ [այ]նց եղաւ [քե]զ հերիք.	This place, how did it become sufficient for you?
դարձաւ պատասխան []	A reply came:
թէ հերիք ու շատ մ աւելիք: ⁵⁷⁴	It is enough and even more than enough.

At last, Alexander has learnt his lesson: death – and its narrow grave – must be enough, even for the king of universe.

⁵⁷² M7709 f.197v. This Alexander *kafa* is not found in any of the manuscripts I have studied or in Simonyan's *Alexander Romance* edition.

⁵⁷³ M7709 f.201v. See also MCR3 f.162r and Simonyan 1989: 354-355, which preserve a variant final half-line: նա պառկել ի թիզ մի տեղիք = he laid down in a narrow place.

⁵⁷⁴ M7709 f.202r. See also MCR3 f.162r and Simonyan 1989: 354-355, which differ slightly in wording but without changing the meaning. Where the M7709 has a missing word, MCR3 has երես and Simonyan has ետուր.

There are many more *kafas* that the scribe who added these ones to M7709 could have chosen from – more on the same suitable theme of mortality, as well as others about the events surrounding Alexander’s death – and the eclectic selection raises questions. How many *kafas* about Alexander did the scribe have access to, either via other manuscripts or an oral repertoire? Do the *kafas* in M7709 represent a careful choice or a limited availability of material to this particular individual in 17th-century Kaffa? It is unlikely that a scribe had access to every Alexander *kafa* at this point in time and place, given the *kafas*’ variety and dispersal across not only *Alexander Romance* manuscripts but the smaller collections such as M7726, M3668 and M7709. This all suggests the possibility of multiple cycles of *kafas*, some appearing in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts and some surviving in *talaran* collections – as, perhaps, the written reflection of oral cycles. Ultimately, the selection process is likely to remain a mystery. (My examination of the manuscript in 2016 did not include the colophonic material.) What is significant, however, is the decision to situate them at the base of the City of Bronze tale, particularly given the inclusion of *kafas* about death.

This physical proximity of these moral conclusions speaks to their perceived similarity: proof that at least the person adding the Alexander *kafas* to the City of Bronze tale saw these stories as relevant to each other, placing Alexander’s death at the tale’s base like another architectural feature on these well-cupola’d walls. Here are two stories that use the remote regions of the world, well-populated with marvels, as a space for moral lessons. The glories are great but death is inevitable.

The association between remote space and instruction appears beyond the confluence of these Armenian manuscripts. Other Alexander traditions in the Caucasus make use of these ideas, in comparable yet individual ways. The *Iskandarnāma* of Niẓāmī Ganjavī (1149-1209 CE) is a notable example.⁵⁷⁵ This Persian poem, with its feet in the *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-Callisthenes and influenced especially by other Persian texts composed and written in the interim, is divided into two parts: the *Sharafnāma* and the *lq̄bālnāma*. The first part focuses more on his conquest of Asia, while

⁵⁷⁵ I make use of Haila Manteghi’s study of the Persian Alexander tradition for this discussion (Manteghi 2018: 71-157).

the second part represents him as a sage and ultimately a prophet, though it continues to depict Alexander journeying through the world's far reaches "to amplify his moral and spiritual understanding".⁵⁷⁶ With all of the episodes in the *Iskandarnāma*, Haila Manteghi identifies many connections to texts in Persian, Arabic, Greek and Hebrew, making it clear how readily these motifs travelled.⁵⁷⁷

Some episodes are especially relevant to this discussion. Alexander ventures close to Paradise in the *Iqbālnāma*, seeking the source of the Nile and then departing the river to arrive at the Garden of Iram where he finds a ruby-carved inscription on the tomb of Shaddād (king of the lost city of Iram) cautioning its reader about human mortality.⁵⁷⁸ The reverberations between this episode and the City of Bronze are apparent. Elsewhere in the world's remote edges, Alexander is the source of instruction: teaching customs and wisdom to desert men who live in caves and eat crocodile meat (and reward him by guiding him out of their poisonous desert), and providing religious teaching to kingless people whose habit is to kill visitors and put their bodies in vats of sesame oil, later beheading the corpses and listening to the prophetic voices of the skulls.⁵⁷⁹

The ultimate instructional space of the *Iqbālnāma* is a city in the far north where there is no gate, no doors or locks, no theft or deceit or any other un-right actions: "We have no care for anything except that it please God."⁵⁸⁰ Alexander recognises that he has reached the apogee of his journey: "The mission I set out upon – to cross desert and plain / Had but this one end: that I should meet such men."⁵⁸¹ This Hyperborean space embodies the wisdom that few – if not no – humans attain, and Alexander knows that he can travel no further in place or knowledge.

In Niẓāmī's work, Alexander gains wisdom sooner than in the Armenian material under

⁵⁷⁶ Manteghi 2018: 155.

⁵⁷⁷ Stoneman 2012 also examines some of the exchanges between particularly Persian and Greek written and oral literature, spanning the period from before Alexander's life to the 12th century CE. Evidence for the strand of Persian tradition in which Alexander is the evil destroyer of Zoroastrian heritage (detailed in Wiesehöfer 2011) is not apparent in the Armenian *kafas*.

⁵⁷⁸ Manteghi 2018: 144.

⁵⁷⁹ Manteghi 2018: 144-145.

⁵⁸⁰ Manteghi 2018: 151.

⁵⁸¹ Manteghi 2018: 151.

consideration here: in the *Iqbāl-nāma* he has seven philosophers in his court and converses with others he meets in the world, including an Indian sage who asks Alexander questions about creation, death, the soul, the evil eye and other subjects. Unlike the usual exchange between Alexander and the naked philosophers of India (as already seen in the Armenian *Alexander Romance*, discussed in Chapter 5, pp.143-150), this episode has the sage asking Alexander the questions and being humbled by the king's great wisdom.⁵⁸² It is unsurprising that this Alexander goes into death with a little more grace than the Armenian Alexander. Still, he is the same Greek figure compelled to see (and conquer) the world: "Not thirty-six years, not thirty thousand years suffice / My greed for lands and spaces, my thirst for sights."⁵⁸³ He manages, though, to expound wisely on his approaching death and makes suitable arrangements for his coffin, as summarised by Manteghi:

When Alexander is dead, his men put him in a golden coffin, deliberately leaving one arm hanging over its side. This is because in his last testament, Niḏāmī relates, Alexander decreed that one of his hands should be displayed empty and open outside his tomb in order to show that although he was the king of seven climes and possessed so many treasures, he left the world empty-handed.⁵⁸⁴

The *Dārābnāma* of Ṭarsūsī (11th to 12th century) also has Alexander placed in his coffin with one hand extending out of it, for the same reason.⁵⁸⁵ So too the *Qābusnāma* of Kaykā'us (born c.1021 CE) and the *Khiradnāma-ye Iskandarī* of Jāmī (1414-1492).⁵⁸⁶ This tradition is known elsewhere in the Caucasus, up to the modern day: two Armenians have told me variants on an oral tale in which Alexander's hands are visible palms-up through the sides of his coffin to signify that even a world-conqueror goes into death empty-handed.⁵⁸⁷

Other elements of the association between Alexander and Kandakē and the City of Bronze are also known across language traditions. The City of Copper is also the home of Khandut' Khat'un, a

⁵⁸² Manteghi 2018: 135-137.

⁵⁸³ Manteghi 2018: 153.

⁵⁸⁴ Manteghi 2018: 154.

⁵⁸⁵ Stoneman 2012: 15.

⁵⁸⁶ Stoneman 2008: 192.

⁵⁸⁷ One is Nouné, an Airbnb host and scholar of Armenian music in Yerevan, and the other is the historian David Zakarian.

character in the Armenian *Daredevils of Sasun* epic cycle, in some variants of that cycle: yet more bleed between the landscapes of stories.⁵⁸⁸ The 12th-century poet Khāqānī of Shirvān wrote many verses in his Persian *Dīvān* about Kandakē (Qaidāfa), indicating that the queen’s story was a popular subject at that time.⁵⁸⁹ Niẓāmī, who calls her Nūshāba, locates her in Barda’ (Partaw in Caucasian Albania, Bərdə in modern-day Azerbaijan) and has her impart essential moral guidance for Alexander’s quest for wisdom.⁵⁹⁰

The Syriac version of an *‘ajā’ib* (marvel literature) text called *The Marvels Found in the Great Cities, and in the Seas, and in the Islands* and dated to the 15th or 16th century has, as its first marvel, a city built by Alexander:

Alexander built a city from brass on some island in the region of Andalus, the breadth of which is four months. And he placed in it many treasures. And it is a great city, and (it is) sealed and there are no gates in it.⁵⁹¹

Aside from the city’s material, other features identify it as the same City of Bronze: its location in Andalus, its treasures and its lack of gates. Interestingly, the Modern Aramaic and Arabic versions of this text don’t identify the city with such precision: “Alexander built a city on an island that is a four-month walk away and he put many treasures in it. This city is [extraordinarily] big and smooth. It has no gates.”⁵⁹² This is despite the obviously rich Arabic tradition of the city. However, certain key features are present – the treasures and the lack of gates – that recall the city.

This journey through the *Alexander Romance* and its *kafas* towards the City of Bronze, and then beyond it to look at nodes of a wider network of connections between the brazen city and the Macedonian conqueror, reveals further ways in which Alexander belonged to cross-cultural stories and ideas about the world. At its edges, marvels gave way to morals: an empty city, a dead king’s empty hands. The poets, compilers and annotators of the *kafas* continued to refer to the other tales

⁵⁸⁸ Yeghiazaryan 2008: 37-38.

⁵⁸⁹ Manteghi 2018: 111.

⁵⁹⁰ Manteghi 2018: 111-113.

⁵⁹¹ Minov 2018.

⁵⁹² Bellino and Mengozzi 2016: 445. The authors were unaware of the Syriac version.

known to them, putting them to their own purpose. In the Kandaki *kafas* of M7726, the City of Bronze is a minor detail in the poetic interest in Alexander's royal encounters. In the lower margins of M7709, the lesson of the City of Bronze tale is heightened by the addition of *kafas* about Alexander, particularly his drawn-out death sequence in which he finally learns the same lesson as Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr: amassing wealth and glories in life has little meaning in the face of all mankind's inevitable mortality. The multiple settings of the *kafas* discussed in this chapter – within the *Alexander Romance* and separately in *taṭaran* collections – show again the plurality of Alexander. Each is an outcropping in a far greater sea of Alexanders, connected to the currents of other stories.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with Sofia Samatar's poem "Snowbound in Hamadan" remarking on the anthologist's knowledge that "the universe is multiple" – so too the *kafas* about Alexander, which had many lives beyond the *Alexander Romance*. The compiler of each of the three manuscripts discussed in this chapter took pleasure (I presume) in their selection of *kafas*. They drew upon the moral themes of advice literature like 'mirrors for princes', the rich resources of their own fellow poets such as Frik, the features of similar tales that combined marvels and morals to both entertain and edify, and of course the *kafas* that already existed.

The *kafas* were evidently deeply intra-connected, and not just between the *Alexander Romance* sequence of *kafas* and the ones anthologised. The overlap of the *kafas* in M7709 with at least two other *taṭaran* and *žoṭovacu* manuscripts containing *kafas* of Alexander (as well as those full *Alexander Romance* manuscripts that contain at least the six about Alexander refusing to pay the tribute) is clear evidence of a complex network of *kafas*. This may suggest the existence of a shared repertoire in the mixed oral and written tradition, which was widespread by the end of the medieval period and into the early modern era. Each collection is unique – likely of an individual's choosing from that repertoire, whatever its exact nature, whether the individual was an *ašut* planning to

perform, a scribe amending a wonder tale for personal enjoyment, or for sharing out loud, by personal choice or by a patron's request, or any number of other scenarios. Many *kafas* were available to each individual, transmitted in writing or oral performance. Attempting to map the transmission of *kafas* to identify which ones were available in which periods and places is not yet possible, but the study carried out in this chapter indicates the multiplicity of the *kafas*' circulation: the different types of collections, their varied yet overlapping contents.

These connections extended across texts, languages and cultures. Whether sharing moral concerns with 'mirrors for princes' and similar texts in Armenian and other languages across the medieval and early modern South Caucasus, Anatolia and the Middle East, utilising lines composed by Frik or Yovhannēs Erznkac'i, or associating Alexander with another wise wonder tale to add weight to its lesson about the pointlessness of an excessive life, the *kafas* of the three *tataran* and *žoťovacu* manuscripts discussed in this chapter are embedded within the wider literary landscape in which their Armenian traditors lived. Those traditors perpetuated the same re-mapping of the Armenian *Alexander Romance* done by Xač'atur Keč'ařec'i, Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i, in which the edges of the world are positioned as spaces of both marvels and moral instruction. Those remote regions are more peopled with familiar figures – from Frik to Amir Mūsā ibn Nušayr – than Alexander ever knew.

CONCLUSION

“To listen to and tell a rush of stories is a method.”

– Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*⁵⁹³

This thesis has come a long way from its starting point. It began by asking whether Armenian traditors reacted to the *Alexander Romance* positioning Armenia at the border between the central ‘civilised’ world and the remote, monstrous regions beyond it. This question was troubled at the start: Armenian traditors did not typically see themselves at the border and did not, therefore, need to engage with this dangerous positioning. Nor did Armenian traditors deconstruct classical ideas about the monstrous animals and impossible peoples that inhabited remote regions in legend. The *Alexander Romance* did not negate Armenians, but neither did they disrupt its negation of other peoples. Pursuing this research path led instead to a different version of this map: one in which *kafas* about Alexander at the edges of the world situated him in a Christian cosmos as an instigator of awe at God’s works and as a lesson about mortality. The troubling aspects of the map remain.

On its path, this thesis sought first to situate the *kafas* in earlier Armenian literature of genres relevant to the *Alexander Romance*: geography, history and apocalypse. It found some shared concerns in these texts. The edges of the world are frequently unknown and so marked by unfamiliar peoples in the mode of classical geography. Alexander is, at times, evoked in descriptions of these spaces: to describe the “great dyuersite of serpentes and of beestes” of India in *The Flower of Histories of the East* by Het’um or the allegory of the Amazons in the *Geography of Anania Širakac’i* (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2). The debt to the *Alexander Romance* is explicit in some instances, such as these, with reference to his ‘book’ or ‘history’. Overall, however, the roots of the *kafas* in the genres of geography, history and apocalypse are few. Notable is the absence of his Wall or Gate against Gog and Magog in the *kafa* tradition as studied thus far – though it was not as highly developed in Armenian literature as in other language traditions, it was certainly known and

⁵⁹³ Tsing 2015: 37.

attested in apocalypses and histories, including as-yet-unedited manuscripts, and at a very late stage entered some manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance* (as discussed in Chapter 3).

One historian, however, utilised Alexander in a way that presaged the *kafas*: T'ovma Arcruni in his 10th-century *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* describes the approach to Paradise by quoting directly from the *Alexander Romance* and asserting that where Alexander saw birds with human faces, he in fact met angels (as discussed in Chapter 2). The placement of Alexander in a Christian map proved highly productive. The hagiographical *Life of Makarios the Roman of Mesopotamia* (translated into Armenian by Grigor II Vkasasēr in the 11th century) placed a commemorative marker of Alexander near Paradise, while the naked philosophers of Alexander's legends explicitly state in one *kafa* that they must mourn their expulsion from Paradise until the Second Coming (a composition to be read against the broader tradition of the Blessed Ones) – a framing of the world that positions all within the Christian Creation. The *kafas*, too, re-mapped the landscape of the *Alexander Romance* to fit this view of the world.

In the second section of this thesis, attention was shifted to the *kafas* and their connections to an array of texts from across the medieval world. Starting in the late 13th, early 14th century at the pen of Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i and continuing in the 16th century primarily by Grigoris Alt'amarc'i and Zak'aria Gnunec'i, the composition of *kafas* at first to accompany the *Alexander Romance* saw a critical engagement with the text and the world it described. This thesis first focused (in Chapter 5) on the *kafas* composed about Alexander at the edges of the world by these three poets and written down in manuscripts of the *Alexander Romance*, alongside text and illumination. It found that they interpreted the animals and peoples that Alexander encountered with reference to Scripture and in the mode of texts such as the *Physiologus* and fables, which similarly see all flora, fauna and peoples as created by God. Specifically, they drew lessons from some of these experiences: faced with birds that turn into fire, one *kafa* says “glory to that creator, who inhabits all places”; another confronts the impossibility of men without heads by asking “how did they come into being?” and encompassing them among all the “Trees, forests and plants, irrational and rational living creatures”

of Creation. Through such contemplation could God's works be known. So too did Vardan Aygekc'i embellish his sermons with fables to make their lessons more accessible. The most remarkable of the *kafas*' lessons is the hideous lobster that "is an exemplar for the Armenian people": an allegorical invective against errant ways. The *kafas* speak directly to their audience in pursuit of understanding.

Surviving from the 16th century onwards, *tataran* and *žotovacu* manuscripts anthologised *kafas* about Alexander separately from the *Alexander Romance* narrative. This thesis focused (in Chapter 6) on three manuscripts that collect three short cycles of *kafas*, each distinct, as case studies of this phenomenon. The Alexander *kafas* of M3668 comprise a complete mini-cycle about Alexander and Darius on the wheel of fate, teaching lessons about life that are shared by the 'mirrors for princes' genre, among others. *Kafas* in M7726 highlight the interconnections within Armenian poetry and the repurposing of existing lines by poets such as Frik. Such connections extended further. M7709 includes the *City of Bronze* tale with *kafas* about Alexander later added to its lower margins, many out of sequence but chiefly concerning Alexander's death: his realisation that his wars have been in vain and that he enters the same narrow grave as any person, a lesson shared with the *City of Bronze* and its protagonist. Such juxtaposition is surely intentional. These anthologies develop ideas in the *kafas* accompanying the *Alexander Romance*: Alexander's futile life is condemned by the naked philosophers of India in text and *kafas*, while remote regions as instructional spaces are seen throughout the *kafas* about the animals at the edges of the world. The *tataran* and *žotovacu* collections also further reveal how the *kafas* exist within a network of texts spanning genres, languages and cultures.

The audiences of these *kafas* were varied and not always visible, but several possibilities are raised. The model of monastic interpretation, in which the *kafas* take on the role of the 'reader' of the text – whether in a group setting or in private contemplation – is considered (in Chapter 4). Given the three major authors of the *kafas* and their Christian content, their initial composition in the monastery is likely. However, they slipped through those walls like breath. Several of the later

tataran and *žořovacu* manuscripts preserve musical notations for the *kafas*, and some of the manuscripts are of a size that suggests the *davt'ar* of an *ařuř*. Their orality cannot be doubted, even though their speakers or singers can no longer be heard. Within the monastery and travelling through the medieval and early modern world, the *kafas* circulated on the page and aloud.

As this thesis stated in its Introduction, the *Alexander Romance* has never represented the entirety of the network of literature about Alexander that circulated through the centuries. This thesis has amply demonstrated the truth of this statement in the Armenian tradition. The *kafas* in and beyond the *Alexander Romance* demonstrate the breadth of the Alexander legendary tradition in the Armenian language. It is a complex tradition that overlaps and branches out. In its many irruptions, its traditors took material from their own networked lives to create compositions and collections that re-mapped the ancient *Alexander Romance* as a modern, entertaining, edifying and accessible Christian text.

At the end of this thesis, the door is opened to connections. Any study of Alexander and the *Alexander Romance* could be used as a starting point for many further projects, because of the text's deep embedment in medieval and early modern literatures across language traditions. The following desiderata are therefore select and personal, and grew out of the research conducted to write the second part of this thesis.

My intention to write a focused piece on the shared geography of the *Alexander Romance*, the *History of the House of the Arcrunik'* and the hagiographical *Life of Makarios the Roman of Mesopotamia* has been stated from the outset. The place of Paradise and Alexander's proximity to it in all three texts is interesting for its particular delineation of a Christian map of the world.

The connections highlighted in this thesis and previously identified by scholars such as Hasmik Simonyan and James R. Russell between the *Alexander Romance* with its *kafas* and other tales of wonder and Christian wisdom such as the *City of Bronze*, *History of P'ahlul the King*, the *Wisdom of Ahigar*, and the *Life of Saint Alexianos*, some of which were also accompanied by *kafas*, warrant

further research. There are many potential directions for this. The development of a full study of the Alexander *kafas* in M7709 and their relation to the *City of Bronze* tale and *kafas* at the bottom of which they are copied has already been proposed. Further investigation of the so-called PPK anthology and its predecessors in manuscripts would be fruitful, including with regard to the *Alexander Romance*'s non-inclusion in the printed anthology despite its earlier appearances alongside many of the other tales – especially in the abbreviated, popular form that this thesis did not manage to encompass.

Another direction is the pursuit of these tales into Armeno-Turkish: the Ottoman Turkish language written in the Armenian alphabet, produced in both manuscripts and printed books. Armeno-Turkish was read by bilingual Armenians who also read the Armenian language, as well as Turks, Greeks, Bulgarians and others, and Murat Cankara encourages consideration of it as “a site where the hybrid identities of Ottoman Armenians and Turks could be negotiated and articulated in different ways”.⁵⁹⁴ The connections between texts and peoples are essential. Many PPK tales did not appear in Armeno-Turkish, but the hagiographical *Life of Saint Alexianos* did – investigating the similarities and differences between these versions, as well as their societal contexts, would provide insights into the processes that went into selection. Much more work besides this remains to be done with Armeno-Turkish literature, and more possibilities are sure to come to light with further inquiry.

A separate ambition is to produce a critical edition with English translation of the *kafas* about Alexander. The *kafas* have never been collected in their entirety: Hasmik Simonyan's edition of the *Alexander Romance* includes a strong but incomplete collection of the *kafas* that appear alongside the narrative, but not those only in separate *tataran* and *žofovacu* manuscripts. M. T'. Avdalbegyan includes the *kafas* of M3668 in his edition of poetry by Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i, but other cycles remain unpublished. Moreover, only the *kafas* of V424 have been translated into a modern language

⁵⁹⁴ Cankara 2018: 191. This article with references provides a good introduction to the scholarship on Armeno-Turkish, of which there is a new flourishing.

(Italian).⁵⁹⁵ The full translation of the *kafas* into English would benefit the many scholars of the *Alexander Romance* and the wider legendary tradition who are unable to read Classical and Middle Armenian, giving them a key insight into the unique way that the *Alexander Romance* was received and re-mapped in Armenian. This will be a significant undertaking, but this thesis has made the first steps towards it.

It is a disjuncting experience to write a thesis about medieval poetry at a time that the calamitous consequences of climate catastrophe are, it seems, finally entering mainstream acceptance (after many decades of scientific publication and cross-society activism on the matter), yet there are perhaps lines to be drawn between small pieces of poetic composition hundreds of years ago and our uncertain future. This lies in the connections between people that this thesis has tried to point to. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes: “Neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collaborative survival. It is time to pay attention to mushroom picking.”⁵⁹⁶ Her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* examines the salvage economics and capitalist encounters that define the trade in matsutake, the most expensive mushroom in the world. It emphasises the necessity and success of collaborative networks between people, in the daily work of harvest, sale, shipment, sale and consumption. This is not the work of states, nor is it the facile ‘we should all get along’ of breakfast Brexit soundbites. There will be no attempt here to propose a singular solution. Tsing’s concern is with the verges – both the literal verges where mushrooms might grow and the societal verges where many of their harvesters and sellers operate – while this thesis, and my own personal concern, is with the use of history. She writes: “It’s not easy to know how to make a life, much less avert planetary destruction. Luckily there is still company, human and not human. We can still explore the overgrown verges of our

⁵⁹⁵ Traina et al. 2003.

⁵⁹⁶ Tsing 2015: 19.

blasted landscape—⁵⁹⁷ Our global landscape is blasted not only by extraction capitalism but by ethnonationalism and its borders. The rise of ethnically divided states in the Caucasus and beyond attests to this. Laurent Mignon proposes that “the study of this [Armeno-Turkish] literature could potentially represent, in the Turkish context, an important opportunity to discover what Hrant Dink called ‘the common memory’ of the Turkish and Armenian people ... and thus perhaps modestly, contribute to the healing of the open wounds.”⁵⁹⁸ I make no claims to brokering peace with a doctoral thesis. However, it is certainly the case that writing and telling history actively interprets the present as much as the past. Exploring textual connections facilitates a more nuanced approach to identity-construction and co-existence, which is essential to carrying out rigorous historical study as well as to producing history that does not contribute to conflicts and divisions. Xaç’atur Keč’arec’i, Grigoris Alt’amarc’i, Zak’aria Gnunec’i and others, including many a no-longer-known *ašut*, likewise interpreted each of their own worlds – writing and telling its lessons, its creator, its connected cultures, its flaws – as much as they sought to understand what Alexander did in antiquity. I end this conclusion with reference to the Tsing quotation with which I opened it: this work – pursuing connections in the past and writing about them in the present – feels like a method, small like a mushroom.

⁵⁹⁷ Tsing 2015: 282.

⁵⁹⁸ Mignon 2011: 123.

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