“My City Which Is of Bronze”

The City of Bronze Encroaching on the Alexander Romance

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1 Introduction

In legend, Alexander III of Macedon surpasses his history: he reaches the edges of the world, encounters impossible creatures, and sees wondrous sights. One of these is the palace of Kandakē (also Kandaki, Kʼandakinē), fictional queen of Meroë. It is constructed of fine metals, precious stones, and rare woods. In a separate tale, Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣāyr journeys across the Maghreb and finds the City of Bronze, a splendid city of bronze, gemstones, and statues capable of movement, in which a dead queen still sits on her throne. Tablets inside and outside the city are inscribed with the message that even wealthy rulers become dried bones. At the end of his life, Alexander learns the same lesson: he will go into the ground empty-handed.

These two tales took different routes into Armenian literature, and they continued travelling after their translations: Kandakē’s city becomes the City of Bronze, while the lessons learnt by Alexander and Amir Mūsā share the pages of a single manuscript. 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 the moral heft already present in the legend. In turn, Alexander’s dying lesson about mortality heightens Amir Mūsā’s story.

This article follows the connections between Alexander and the City of Bronze in Armenian literature. It is concerned with two tales. The first, the legendary history of Alexander—known in Armenian as The History of Alexander of Macedon and more widely in scholarship as the Alexander Romance (to which it will be referred throughout)—was translated into Armenian from a Greek Vorlage in or soon after the 5th century. Starting in the late 13th, early 14th century with the work of Xačʽatur Kečʽaṙecʽi and continuing in the 16th century primarily with Katʽołikos Grigoris Altʽamarcʽi and his pupil Zakʽaria Gnunecʽi,
the Armenian text was accompanied by short monorhymed poems called kafas that repeated or added new details to the tale.¹ Later the Alexander Romance is abbreviated, altering details of the story in some ways and integrating its kafas into the narrative sequence.²

The second tale, the History of the City of Bronze, has antecedents in Arabic literature that go back to at least the 9th century, with roots in multiple narratives that cohered into mediaeval versions.³ It is most famous now for its appearance in the 1001 Nights sequence. The first translation from Arabic to Armenian was made in the late 10th century for David III of Tayk and included kafas to translate the rhyming poetic inscriptions found by the tale’s protagonist, as well as his lamentations upon reading them (whence the word kafa, from the Arabic for rhyme, qafiya). In the early 13th century, a vardapet Arak’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’amarc’i, who—as with the Alexander Romance—composed additional kafas for it.⁴

The earliest Armenian version has the City of Bronze in the north (rather than its more famous location in the Maghreb), perhaps reflecting the early Arabic tale, long before its inclusion in the 1001 Nights.⁵ Deeper traditions in Iranian and Central Asian literature place a potential bronze city in the north.⁶ 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.

Starting with Alexander’s visit to Kandakē, this article tracks how her city becomes the City of Bronze between Alexander Romance manuscripts and a 17th-century talaran (anthology of poetry and hymns) that includes some Alex-

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¹ A good introduction to this well-travelled text is Stoneman 2008, though it is sparse on the Armenian tradition. On the role of the kafas, see Simonyan 1975, Maranci 2003–2004, and MacFarlane 2019. The Armenian edition of the Alexander Romance is Simonyan 1989, with a new edition in preparation by Aram Topchyan. There is an English translation in Wolohojian 1969 (text, without kafas), while an Italian translation of the late 13th-century, early 14th-century manuscript V 424 accompanies its facsimile in Traina et al. 2003 (text and kafas, with lacunae where the manuscript is damaged). V 424 is held in the monastery of the Mxit’arists on San Lazzaro degli Armeni, in the Venetian lagoon, Italy.

² The third text in Simonyan 1989 is an abbreviated Alexander Romance.


⁴ Russell 1983, 255.


ander kafas copied separately, without the prose narrative. It then considers a different kind of interaction, in another 17th-century talaran that contains the tale of the City of Bronze with Alexander kafas—many about Alexander's death—added to the bottom of some pages.

2 Initial Encroachments

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 accompanying 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: a brilliant gold roof, thrones of onyx and beryl, tables of ivory, Numidian columns, human figures built of bronze, sculptures of elephants and chariot-drivers, a river like another Pactolus and ripely fruiting trees. A subsequent passage adds further details:

On the following day, Kandakē took Antigonus 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.

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7 Nawotka 2017, 226.
8 A river now called Sart Çayı, in western Turkey.
9 Simonyan 1989, 308.
10 Alexander is pretending to be Antigonus, acting as his own messenger.
11 Simonyan 1989, 309.
A *kafa* by Xač’atur Keč’arec’i in the late 13th, early 14th century makes the elephants into the foundation of the marvellous structure in its first six half-lines:

>This was the palace of Kandakē, which was not set on a foundation, but was impossibly constructed on twenty elephants in motion. Alexander marvelled at it, he said, “This is truly, greatly sublime.”

In *kafas* surviving from the 16th century, the description of the palatial buildings is repeated, though some details are mixed up.

> The great Antigonus saw the palace of Kandakē, like the tabernacle of Moses or the temple of Solomon. On that altar was prepared for him by the saintly, holy Beriel, for the sacrifice of the innocent lamb and the ineffable Word of the Father.

> 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 think him able to go to the
races.

The great pavilion with arches,
that arc like spring, from a cloud,
in which icons of savage gods
are the colour of blood,
with trees and flowers, fruits,
rose, lily of a verdant bush.

On the following day
the queen took the hand of Antigonos,
showed him the resplendent rooms
of ethereal diamond stone,
the sun and the moon
in the fifteen panels,
the wandering lords
leaping for joy from the powerful star.

And the gold-hued rivers flowed forth
[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. Its beauty is such that men hurl themselves from the ramparts to be within it. Those who

15 Simonyan 1989, 310.
16 Simonyan 1989, 310.
18 Simonyan 1989, 311.
19 The following excerpts from the History of the City of Bronze are taken from the manuscript M 7709, discussed later in this article, and checked against a version of the story printed in Tiflis in 1911 (P.P.K’. 1911), which is very close to the manuscript. The 1911 Tiflis printing is digitised as eap180/1/4/48 https:/ /eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP180‑1‑4‑48 [accessed 16 February 2022]. For a recent English translation of the Arabic tale in the 1001 Nights, see Lyons—Lyons 2010, 518–546.
enter safely find astonishing architecture: an arch of “red precious stones, that were like nothing we could engrave” and, beyond its threshold, “four columns within the palace—one blue, one purple, one red, one green—and over those columns a dome plastered with gold. In that cupola they saw no stony edifice, no wooden, but all was gold and silver.” Within the cupola they find the dead body of the city’s queen, seemingly nameless, though in the Arabic tale she is known by names including Tadmura and Tarmazayan. Surrounding her are numerous treasures, including “a gold lion like a living creature, and luminous stones put in the lion, so that at night, the stones gave more light than the sun.” 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 region—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 Kandakē’s 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 ʿAbd 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 Iafrate 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 took it (according to some reports). 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 ساحن is similarly broad in its metallic meaning, so that the city’s name could be translated from both languages as the City of Bronze, the City of Brass or the City of Copper.

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”—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 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.”

Much is gilded, from the altar to the walls and floor: “All the house he anointed with gold ...” 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.” These too are overlaid with gold. Some of these details recall Kandakē’s palatial complex—the cedar wood in 16th-century Alexander Romance kafas, 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 passage. For ‘cedar’, the 16th-century Alexander Romance kafa has սարդ, while the edited text of 3 Kings 6 uses եղեւնափայտ and մայր. Otherwise, the trees mentioned are different: the Alexander Romance mentions plane trees and trees without

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27 Zohrapian 1805, 2:142.
28 Zohrapian 1805, 2:143. եւ զաﬔնայն որմս տանն շուրջանակի քանդակեալ գրեաց գրչաւքերոբսեւրմաւենիս, եւդրօշուածսհայելիս՚իներքսագոյննեւյարտաքինն։
29 Zohrapian 1805, 2:143. Եւ զաﬔնայն որմս տանն շուրջանակի քանդակեալ գրեաց գրչաւքերոբսեւրմաւենիս, եւդրօշուածսհայելիս՚իներքսագոյննեւյարտաքինն։
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.

Fantastical elements of the First 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 irreal. Consider the shamir, used in the First Temple’s construction: 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 the shamir’s acquisition is filled with wonders typical of Solomon.

The point here is not—yet—to draw a direct line between Kandakē’s palace and the City of Bronze, but to allude. 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—Iafrate’s “network of references”.

The Armenian narrative introduces the City of Bronze separately in a later, short letter Alexander writes to his mother Olympias about the edges of the world, associating it with a city there: “Sailing to that place, we found the city Areg [the City of the Sun]. 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.”

It is not clear when the italicised line was added to the text. 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 marvelous City of Bronze in its own tale, but the palatial complex of Kandakē in the

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30 Simonyan 1989, 326. ԵւնավելառսովաւգտաքզԱրեգքաղաք:
Ինձայսպէսթուի
թէ
սաէ,
որասենՊղնձէքաղաք,
որէշրջաչափուﬓասպարիսացհարիւրեւքսան,
եւ
աշտարակքէինինմաչորեքասան՝ոսկովեւզըմրխտովշինեալ
:Մի
-ﬕինոցանէ
ունէրաստիճանսվաթսունեւիվերայանցեալկայրկառքձիովքյոսկոյեւիզմրխտէ
:
Եւ տեսանել զնոսա ոչ էր դիւրեաւ վասն շամանդաղին
:
Եւ քուրﬓ արեգական
եթովպացիէր. For the City of the Sun in the Greek tradition, see Nawotka 2017, 226.

31 Wolohojian 1969, 185; Traina 2003, 159; Russell 1983, 251.
Alexander Romance with gold and precious stones and a spectacular sculpted horse-drawn chariot, though they are separate places.

For now, Kandakē’s palace and the City of Bronze remain distinct, though both fit well into the remote regions of the Alexander Romance’s narrative map. Two manuscripts from the 17th century reveal that direct links between Alexander and the City of Bronze were made.

3 Kandaki in the City of Bronze (M 7726)

The first manuscript is M 7726, a talaran of unknown origin, held in the Mesrop Maştoc’ Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (the Matenadaran) in Yerevan, Armenia. It is small: 10.6 × 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 old catalogue of the Matenadaran appears to ascribe authorship to Grigoris Alt’amarc’i, based on the sequence of names in the catalogue’s brief 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). The anthologist of M 7726’s kafas is mainly concerned with the meetings between Alexander and other rulers. The kafas deal with three such encounters: first, 24 kafas about Alexander and the Achaemenid king Darius, then 15 kafas about Alexander and the Indian king Poros, and thirdly, 10 kafas about Alexander and the fictional queen Kandakē. The remaining kafas describe Alexander’s death.

Several kafas in M 7726 unite Kandakē 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 in the city of bronze.” Her next appearance is when Alexander goes to meet her. In these short poems, her home is given no detailed elaboration, no lustrous details as in the narrative and kafas discussed earlier. Instead, these kafas give a straightforward rendition of Kandakē and Alexander’s encounter, but they explicitly place Kandakē within the City of Bronze. The relevant kafas are as follows.

ԱռԿանդակիէﬔծտիկին
He sent her to Kandaki the great queen.
Alexander changed his likeness to a messenger’s so that no man would recognise him.

He went to the City of Bronze to the great queen Kandaki.

Enraged, Kandakē demands to know why he has dared to use trickery to come to her city.

She became bitterly angry.

"Oh bastard and evil one, you are insane!

Why were you so bold to come to my city which is [made] of bronze?"

Later, after Kandakē has counselled him not to trust in his fate, Alexander tells his troops that there is no way to conquer her city.

The City of Bronze is only a place, but its presence in Alexander’s itinerary signifies a textual proximity of great interest. Though the palace of M 7726’s Kandakē is not detailed, it is wondrous by appellation: made of bronze. The two cities

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34 M 7726 f.37r. The ‘her’ in the first line is Kandakē’s daughter-in-law, who Alexander has freed from captivity.
35 M 7726 f.37v.
36 M 7726 f.37v.
37 M 7726 f.37v.
in the Armenian *Alexander Romance*—Kandakē’s palace and the City of the Sun (identified with the City of Bronze)—are one. The collection of *kafas* in M 7726 provides no context for this narrative closeness, but all bar one of these *kafas* about Kandakē are also found in the abbreviated *Alexander Romance*, where Alexander visits K’andakinē in the City of Bronze.\(^{38}\) As in the *kafas* in M 7726, the city is not lavishly described: the episode focuses on the upheavals of how Alexander and K’andakinē meet and then part. The altered story of the abbreviated *Alexander Romance* and its *kafas*—its updated cartography—is presumably a source for M 7726’s collection of *kafas*, in which this pivotal meeting between king and queen takes place in a city made of bronze.

**4 Alexander at the Base of the City of Bronze (M 7709)**

M 7709, the second manuscript linking Alexander and the City of Bronze, presents a different proximity. It too is a *tałaran*, dating to 1608–1658 and created in Kaffa (Feodosia, Crimea) by a Xač’gṙuł (Xač’atur k’ahanay), and it measures 14 × 9.5 cm.\(^{39}\) It includes the tale of the City of Bronze interspersed with its own *kafas*—then, in the lower margin of this tale, some *kafas* about Alexander have been written. The difference in handwriting styles suggests that these Alexander *kafas* are additions to the manuscript by a separate scribe, 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 later hand.

The Alexander *kafas* added to M 7709 are a non-chronological selection, with subjects such as the last Egyptian Pharaoh Nectanebo II’s seduction of Olympias, Alexander and his army’s encounter with plant-men in a remote region of the world, the young Alexander refusing to give Macedon’s tribute to the envoys of Darius, and the deaths of Alexander and Darius. Many are found in other manuscripts. The choice of *kafas* appears random, but it is not so. Part of the association is found in the narrative of the City of Bronze—not unique to this one manuscript—which says, of the first city visited by Amir Mūsā, that “Alexander built it”.\(^{40}\) *Kafas* about him fit at the base


\(^{39}\) Eganyan—Zeyt’ünyan—Ant’abyan 1970, 592. The manuscript contains many *tal* and several tales, including the *History of the Youth Farman*, the *History of the City of Bronze* and the *History of the Girl and the Boy*.

\(^{40}\) M 7709 f.182r. զայսաղէկսանդրշինեաց արձակա"
of the narrative’s pages. Of even greater interest is the subject accounting for many of the *kafas*: Alexander’s death.41

The culmination of the *Alexander Romance* and *kafas* dwelling on Alexander’s mortality is that despite his impressive deeds and accumulation 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 narrative, which begins with ill omens, progresses to the poisoning of Alexander, and then follows his final days as he declines in health and eventually dies. M 7709 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 nameless ruler, who had amassed so much in her life.

Many of the *kafas* added to M 7709 about Alexander’s death show him finally learning this lesson in his last days.

> գիշերսերազիտեսա
> նայիմլացսառերզհոգիս
> աչ
> դիժարդիդիւրինդառնայ

Alexander fears his dreamt death, and though his men (the ‘They’ of the poem) tell him not to be afraid, many of them are co-conspirators in the scheme to poison him. In a later *kafa*, Alexander addresses his wife Hṙoksinē (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 Hṙoksinē 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.

41 For a thorough study of the relationship between the Alexander *kafas* and the City of Bronze narrative in M 7709, with a translation of all *kafas*, see MacFarlane 2021 and forthcoming.

42 M 7709 f.189v–190r. Translation of this badly damaged *kafa* makes use of the version at Simonyan 1989, 602 n. 393.
“I became pitiable and lamented, daughter of Dareh, Hröksinē. I fell from heaven into the abyss. The loss of the crown from the head.”

Hröksinē responds.

“You will abandon [and] forget me, lord of the world, Alexander. But I will die with you. Invite me to your bosom.”

The king replied:

“My soul is perturbed, be silent! My heart is aflame with fire, do not oppress [me], God is [my] witness, for I have learned that my mortal day is upon me [and] I will soon return to my mother, 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 M 7709 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 M 7709. Alexander’s 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 added to M 7709 across two folios.

“I spent my days as if in shade or shadow, as if in a dream.”

43 M 7709 f.190r.
44 M 7709 f.190v.
45 M 7709 f.191r.
It is like a spring flower, like a violet or rose.

I was consumed like flesh, and extinguished like a lamp.

You set like the sun and you go into the earth, to a prison.

This existence is like a dream, from which he awakens [and] becomes regretful.

In sleep, he knew himself a prince; when he awoke, a foolish beggar.

So Alexander entered a narrow grave.

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, willing that he meet the same sinners' death. After that, the *kafas* return to reflecting on the illusory nature of life.

In the illusory dream of life, he is a prince—only in dying does he awake to realisation. Then, in the second half of the next *kafa*, is life's ultimate end: the earth, a grave.

The *kafas* continue. The dead king is not always named: these *kafas* come after six about Alexander confronting the emissaries of Darius, who foresee the Achaemenid king's downfall. On intervening pages there are *kafas* that directly name Darius and mourn his death. The two *kafas* here, however, are associated...
with Alexander in the *Alexander Romance* narrative, and in M 7709 it is possible to read this assemblage of death *kafas* as intentionally bringing both kings together: here, at the base of the City of Bronze, both Alexander and Darius die.

I came to the tomb of this king, he who had a great patrimony. I requested from him, “This place, how did it become sufficient for you?” A reply came, “It is enough and even more than enough.”

At last, Alexander has learnt his lesson: death—and its narrow grave—must suffice, even for this great king.

The *kafas* about Alexander’s death added to M 7709 do not all focus on the emotional and moral path of Alexander towards the grave, though the majority do. 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. The physical proximity of these moral conclusions to Amir Mūsā’s own journey on the pages of M 7709 speaks to their perceived similarity: proof that at least the person adding the Alexander *kafas* to this copy of 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-adorned walls. Here are two stories that use the remote regions of the world, well-populated with marvels, as a space for instruction. The glories are great, but death comes for us all.

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53 M 7709 f.201v.
54 M 7709 f.202v.
5 Conclusion

Over time, the City of Bronze encroached on the Alexander Romance in Armenian literature. Starting as a suggested city in the Armenian Alexander Romance, it became the city of Kandaki in M 7726: a minor detail amid the anthologist’s interest in Alexander’s royal encounters but placed decisively on the map. In the lower margins of M 7709, 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.

This path through the Armenian Alexander Romance and its kafas towards the City of Bronze points to the fluidity of a shared narrative landscape, in which the edges of the world are populated with marvels and morals: a grand city, a dead ruler’s empty hands. This landscape stretches far beyond the Armenian versions of the Alexander Romance and the City of Bronze tale discussed here. In the Syriac version of an ‘ajāʾib (marvel literature) text called The Marvels Found in the Great Cities and in the Seas and on the Islands, dated to the period between the 15th–early 17th centuries CE, the first marvel is a familiar city: “Alexander built a city of brass on some island in the country of Andalus, the width of which is four months. And he placed many treasures in it. And it is a great and sealed city, and there are no gates in it.”55 Other examples of Alexander’s textual proximity to the City of Bronze abound. This literary landscape in the interconnected mediaeval and early modern worlds of the South Caucasus, Middle East, Anatolia, and Black Sea littoral (and beyond) is bigger than the regions traversed by Alexander and Amir Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr. Their separate journeys—and the encroachment of the City of Bronze on the Alexander Romance in the Armenian narrative and kafas—are only small parts of Armenian literature’s place in its complex cartography. Much mapping awaits.

Bibliography


55 Minov 2021, 33.


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