The City of Brass and Alexander’s Narrow Grave: Translation and Commentary of Kafas added to Manuscript M7709 (Part 2)

Alex MacFarlane
University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

Abstract
The 17th-century manuscript M7709 (held in the Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia) includes an Armenian copy of the History of the City of Brass, to which an unknown scribe has added short poems about Alexander the Great. This is the second of three articles that together present the Alexander poems of M7709 in full, with English translation, for the first time (see Part I in Iran and the Caucasus 25.4: 334–351), focusing on sixteen poems: the death of Alexander, and Alexander’s confrontation with emissaries of Darius III. It adds commentary on the poems’ relationship to the corresponding part of the History of the City of Brass on each page, proposing textual reasons why the scribe added the poems where he did. Across the three articles, this commentary delves into textual relationships beyond the pages of M7709, linking the Armenian History of the City of Brass, Alexander Romance and other texts and traditions, to show how this manuscript is situated amid wider networks of circulating literature. As a microhistorical study, it seeks to provide illumination into the macrohistory of medieval and early modern literature in and beyond the Caucasus.

Keywords
Alexander Romance, City of Brass, Armenian Literature, Kafas, Darius III, Solomon, Wheel of Fate, Textual Networks

This article is the continuation of the first one, which introduced the manuscript M7709 and discussed the first six Alexander kafas (short monorhymed poems) added to the History of the City of Brass at the bottom of certain pages MacFarlane 2021.¹ For the place of these kafas with-

¹ The catalogue reference for this particular manuscript is Eganyan/Zeyt’unyan/An-t’abyan 1973: 592. The new catalogue has not yet reached this manuscript. Throughout this article, manuscripts are referred to using the system set out in Coulie 2014.
in the manuscript, see Table 1. The second of three parts, this article focuses on the next fourteen poems.

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Table 1: Location of Alexander kafas in M7709, with subject matter of the kafas and the narrative on each page

**Alexander Kafas of M7709**

The kafas are presented as they appear in M7709 with line breaks added at every half-line. Capitalisation, punctuation and orthography reflect the manuscript, which is rich in medieval Armenian forms, as well as occa-
sional misspellings. The more atypical variants are noted in footnotes. Abbreviations are expanded. Uncertain letters are restored in square brackets, based on versions of the poems that appear in different manuscripts and editions as noted in footnotes. Where applicable, further details about the relationships between these versions are provided as part of the Commentary section after the kafas. Where the letters are unreadable (due, for instance, to a hole in the page) the square brackets are left empty.

In the discussion of the Commentary section, any excerpts of the *History of the City of Brass* are taken from M7709, with uncertain letters restored in square brackets, based on the 1911 Tiflis and 1814 Kolkata printings.²

²These two publications were consulted as digitised records, available through the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme. The 1911 Tiflis printing is EAP80/1/4/48 [accessed 13 September 2022] and the 1814 Kolkata printing is EAP80/1/2/39 [accessed 13 September 2022].

³This *kafa* is in poor condition due to a hole in the bottom of the folio, which severs the text in three major places. It is also incomplete: the rest is found on f.190r. Simonyan (1989: 602 n.393) preserves a full version of this *kafa*, taken from f.74v of manuscript M3387 of the *Alexander Romance* with kafas, on which I base the parts of my translation in square brackets:

In addition to filling in the lacunae, the M3387 *kafa* resolves *մատնասահ* in M7709 as a variant or scribal error for *պտտածահ*. Though it is not relevant to the relationship between this *kafa* and the *History of the City of Brass* text on this folio of M7709, it is worth noting that this particular *kafa* is highly variable. Simonyan (1989: 335) records two major
[than] laugh a lot.
You dream in this world."

"I became pitiable and lamented,
daughter of Dareh, Hroksinē.
The loss of the crown from the head."

"You will abandon [and] forget me,
lord of the world, Alexander.
Invite me to your bosom."

The King made a reply:
"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."

"You spent my days as if in shade
or shadow, as if in a dream.
It is like a spring flower,
like a violet or rose."

variants (see n.3 for the second), but the second is itself quite varied, to the extent that the version quoted in this footnote is recorded separately in the endnotes of Simonyan’s edition (and is, itself, not wholly the same as the M7709 kafa, notably in the final line as it appears on f.190r). Another variation of the kafa is found in M7726, f.38r-v.

5 For տացիկ, read ծաղիկ. Simonyan (1989: 340) preserves a variant of the kafa’s second half, which elaborates on the meaning of the flower:

You are like a spring flower,
which arrived at the days of summer.

The meaning here, presumably, is that the spring flower does not survive into summer. It is based on this variant that I translate the third half-line in M7709 as “It is like a spring flower”, rather than “A flower is like spring”, as well as the fourth half-line flowing more naturally from a comparison to a flower, rather than to a season. Flowers as representations of the fragility of human life appear regularly in Armenian poetry (see Cowe 1988-1989: 145 for discussion in relation to a poem by Mkrtič’ Nałaš).
"I was consumed like flesh, and extinguished like a lamp.
You set like the sun and you go into the earth, to a prison."

He who tricks his lord, [will be] the cursed serpent of the world.
He who did evil to the good, [will be] cursed like Cain.

He who seizes the others will be rent like a leper.
He who betrays his lord to death, will be torn to pieces like Judas.

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.

Hungering, he sees bread, he wakes up [to what] the needy long for.
So Alexander

You were consumed like your wax and extinguished like a lamp.
You set like the sun and you go into the earth, to a prison.

It has a consistent point of view, rather than M779's switching from the voice of Alexander to the direct address of a narrator. The image of the wax lamp burning out also flows through the first two half-lines. However, in the flow of kafas through M779, it makes more sense for this kafa to be in Alexander's first-person voice, following on from the kafa added to f.191v, relating his death through metaphor. That said, it is not an especially artful transition in voice from Alexander to second-person to, in the next kafas, a third-person narrator. The question of how the kafas added to M779 were meant to be read is taken up in the conclusion to this article, in the third published part.

For չանա, read ջանայ.

քամտար, is a variant on քամպատնար.
entered a narrow grave.

Philip sat on the throne, the ambassadors of Dareh before him: exactors who came for the tribute, to demand the royal money.

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.”

”Go and take this news to Dareh, king of the Persians, that the son of Philip, Alexander, tells [you] this.”

”Formerly, when I was not a son, my father gave Dareh the tribute. Now that I have become the heir, I demand my paternal tribute.”

The riders looked attentively upon the face of Alexander. Listening to the words, they were astonished by his reply.

Having come to their senses, they understood the intention of the lion. They said that [his] days are coming, he will bring the black year to Dareh.

COMMENTARY

Alexander’s death (f.189v-f.194r.)

Kafas about Alexander resume after the rebound manuscript returns to the first city. The relationship between the History of the City of Brass and the added kafas is straightforward: the death of kings. Throughout this extended sequence about death (f189v-f.194r), the Alexander kafas represent

9 M7709 f.194v.
10 քարտէ is a variant on քարտէ.
11 For սահռ, read սահռ.
a small selection of the entire corpus of *kafas* about Alexander’s death. However, it is not possible at present to propose a Vorlage for this set—to say whether the scribe had access to a full-length *Alexander Romance* manuscript or one (or several) shorter collections of *kafas* in a talaran or other anthologising manuscript. The *kafas* added to M7709 are sufficiently eclectic as a whole—from Alexander’s conception to death via the planted men—that it is sensible to propose access to at least one longer source, containing more *kafas* from which the scribe made his selections.

The choices made by traditors¹² in and across different types of text—full-length *Alexander Romance*, abbreviated tale, žolovacu and talaran manuscripts—are many and complex. This can be seen in a comparison of this section of M7709 *kafas* about Alexander’s death to two other sources of *kafas* discussed in the first published part of this article, i.e., the abbreviated version of the *Alexander Romance* and the short set of *kafas* collected in the 17th-century talaran manuscript M7726, which provide a patchy correspondence, as set out in Table 2.¹³

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Table 2: location (if present) of each *kafa* in M7709, the abbreviated Alexander Romance and M7726

¹²‘Traditor’ is being used here in its folkloristic sense: a person who holds and passes on an oral or literary tradition.

¹³It is notable that the *kafas* correspond unevenly to each other between these two sources, which is relevant to the discussion of M7726’s closeness to the abbreviated *Alexander Romance* in the first published part of this article. Ultimately, the work to consult more manuscripts in order to build up the biggest possible picture of all these connections remains ongoing. The catalogue reference for M7726 is Eganyan/Zeyt'ünyan/Ant'abyan 1970: 597.
In all other sources, other kafas besides the ones added to M7709 are present in the death sequence. The abbreviated Alexander Romance has two (nos.75 and 76) between the ones that overlap with M7709 (and four more that come later, including two later in M7709, on f.201v and f.202r), while M7726 has many more, as the numbering indicates. Further, the order is different in M7726, showing the versatility of these poems about death—the way different traditores could arrange them to tell subtly different stories. The full-length Alexander Romance, too, has many more.

This suggests that the scribe who added Alexander kafas to M7709 took them from a longer corpus. It is questionable whether the entire corpus of Alexander kafas ever existed in one place, but working from a longer set—whatever it was—allowed this scribe to select ones that resonated well with the text of the History of the City of Brass, rather than simply copying an existing set. These carefully chosen correspondences make each page of M7709 pleasing to read.

**f.189v-f.190r**: This kafa is written mainly at the bottom of f.189v, but its final lines are at the bottom of f.190r, before the other kafa that has been added to that page. That kafa will be treated separately below.

On f.189v of M7709, the History of the City of Brass relates part of the lengthy inscription in poetry and prose left by the dead king of the first city, in which he describes the circumstances of his death and laments about his wasted life: “I neglected my soul, and I counted profitable riches. I abandoned all to others, I got one shroud, and I went”.14 This ends a poetic inscription that begins on the previous folio about the treasures and long life enjoyed by the dead king. Much like his soul and his riches, it all ends under the same shroud as any other corpse. In the added kafa, Alexander's soul already weeps, knowing its approaching death. The two souls resonate: both great yet doomed to die.

Another correspondence between the kafa and the History of the City of Brass requires knowledge of this kafa’s context in the Alexander Romance narrative. It appears at the point in the story where Alexander joins a celebrative party of his men, during which Ullos (Iolaus) offers him the poisoned drink that kills him. Many of the revellers are co-

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14 ὄχθησιν ἔνα ψυχήν ἄραν ὑπηρετεῖ. ὁ δὲ τιμίαν ἐγέρθη θάνατος. ὁ πολλὰς ἐγέρθην ἐνέργειας. ὑπερήφανος ἀνήρ ἐγέρθην ἐνέργειας.
conspirators, who draw out the proceedings in order to ensure the poison’s efficacy. The *kafa* builds on this: Alexander has a premonitory dream of the hail falling on his head, the blood pouring from his eyes, but the men—the “they” of the poem—tell him not to be afraid. In the *History of the City of Brass*, the inscription relates that as the king suffers and approaches death, he calls “all” to him and asks for their aid. They, however, are unable to assist him, as his death is God’s will. On f.189v of M7709, both Alexander and the dead king are surrounded by many people, who—for different reasons—cannot aid their king as he approaches death. The scribe who added the Alexander *kafa* has set up a very pleasing parallel between the two stories.

f.190r-f.191r: The next three *kafas* are part of an exchange between Alexander and his wife Hrôksine (Roxana, who is the daughter of Darius in the Alexander Romance). All three appear in the full-length Alexander Romance, and the poems on f.190r, f.190v and the first half of the poem on f.191r appear in the abbreviated Alexander Romance. The first two also appear in M7726. In f.190r of M7709, Alexander is speaking, then Hrôksinê in f.190v, and again Alexander in f.191r.

On f.190r the poetic inscription in the *History of the City of Brass* laments the king’s death: “Alas, my dead name, which no one remembers: son of the king Galat, son of the king Šatat (Shaddad).” His life and his lofty royal pedigree—Shaddad is a king of Arabic legend—are forgotten, much as Alexander loses the crown from his head.

On f.190v, the poetic inscriptions continue. The dead king exhorts readers to “know this life, and know it is not permanent. You forgot death, which is dwelling to all”.

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15 The specific reason he should not be afraid operates on another, more moralising level: the men tell him that it is better to weep than to laugh, and that he simply dreams about the world. It is no premonition, but a reflection of the present day, as perceived through—presumably—the Christian concept of sin. Yet as they urge him to reflect on the sinful world, they hasten his passage from it.


17 Ավաղը զավակնուց անունը է, որ իմ կողմից չե զգուշացնել իր էրթևի շատ: և փիրի կողմից է կոն[ի]րյայքի փաստի միակ: իսկ աման զավակնուց փաստի ինչպիսի:
that Alexander “will abandon [and] forget” her as he goes away to die. The dead king in the History of the City of Brass is also leaving life, in an inscription above the fourth door that Amir Musē and his party pass: “Now I am returned to the earth, I became nourishment for worms.”

Distress and death continue on f.191r, with inscriptions above the fourth and fifth doors. There is an echo in the burning. Alexander's heart “is aflame with fire” knowing that he will die, “burning” with longing for the mother he will never see again, while the dead king’s inscription reminds readers of what happens in death: “Now, separated from all, eternal fire burns us.”

f.191v-f.192r: On f.191v, Amir Musē reads the poetic inscriptions above the sixth, seventh and eighth doors. They continue to dwell on death: the sons of Adam forget the day of their death and the terrible torment that lies ahead. The sixth and eighth poems especially focus on this theme. The seventh lingers on the pointlessness of owning possessions, with an allusion similar to the one used in the Alexander kafa, opening: “The goods of this world are like a dream, its innumerable misfortune—I say that hardship loves this life.” The days of Alexander's life and the dead king's worldly goods are like a dream: a fine correspondence between these two texts.

In the kafa at the bottom of f.192r, Alexander is consumed and extinguished: metaphors for not only the snuffing out of his life, but the ending of his name, his memory, the achievements and wealth he accrued. The continuation of the inscription above the eighth door in the History of the City of Brass shares these concerns. It says: “I was lord of all these edifices and treasure, I resided in and possessed these cupolas, and from this sweet scent I became immortalised. See all this kingdom, which is the home of wild creatures and birds.” His grand palace and all his goods are merely a home for wild animals now. Both kings go into the ground. Alex-

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19 ձիլու հետ են երուտայրություն ձիների համար եմ ինքի. հիմքում ամուսնություն դրանց են եմ. հիմքում ամուսնություն դրանց եմ եմ. 
20 մի աստղական դրություն կարող ե՛մ դարձնել եմ և ինչպես եմ եմ եմ. 
21 իմ աստղական դրություն կարող ե՛մ դարձնել եմ և ինչպես եմ եմ եմ. 
22 Տեսն այս աստղական դրություն կարող ե՛մ դարձնել եմ և ինչպես եմ եմ եմ. Տեսն այս աստղական դրություն կարող ե՛մ դարձնել եմ և ինչպես եմ եմ.
Alexander will “go into the earth” while the dead king has inscribed: “Stand at this place and see me in the earth”.²³

The language of these two kafas, as well as the later paired kafas on f.193v and f.194r, and f.201v and f.202r, is familiar from much medieval Armenian poetry, such as that of Yovhannēs T‘lkuranc‘i (14th century) and Mkrtič‘ Naš (c.1393-1470). Mortal life as a dream, the regret at a wasted life, the descent into the earth and a prison: all are recurrent motifs. The lessons are clear—and echo both the Alexander kafas and the History of the City of Brass upon which they were written. Mkrtič‘ Naš wrote in one poem:

All man’s glory is empty and vain:
Solomon says this with lordly grace.
If you are the lord and prince of all,
Still you will descend to earth and prison later on (Russell 1987: 125).

This could easily be inscribed on the walls of the City of Brass or the first city. The “earth and prison” recalls “into the earth, to a prison” in the Alexander kafa on f.192r. Though Solomon’s role in this verse, echoing his role in Scripture—as author, by tradition, of several books in the Old Testament, including the wisdom on life and death of Ecclesiastes—is different to his role as imprisoner of mythical beings in the History of the City of Brass, his presence pervades the textual landscape. Poems by Yovhannēs T‘lkuranc‘i detail the humility of the grave. One speaks of a warlike figure, unnamed:

He who rode with his neck up high,
Wielding his sword in every clime–
I saw him most regretful,
Lying between boards of wood (Russell 1987: 119).

So too does Alexander, in the kafa on f.194r, enter “a narrow grave”, and the king in the kafa on f.201v will also lie down and have “a narrow passage”—a grave—despite his “great patrimony”.

The idea of the dream is also present in these other medieval poems. In the same poem as above, Mkrtič‘ Naš wrote: “You will be as a dream of the passing night. You will awaken later on, but attain naught” (Russell 1987: 125). Alexander spent his days “as if in shade or shadow, as if in a

²³ Արիք դուք յայս տեղս եկեք և տեսէք զի [ս] ի մէջ հո [ղ] ին.
dream” in the kafa on f.191v and realises in the kafa on f.193v that “existence is like a dream”. Awakening in that kafa, he realises he is “a foolish beggar”.

Life and death were common concerns for many medieval poets, and their shared language speaks not only to Scriptural influences such as Ecclesiastes but to the circulation of ideas and literature among many medieval texts. Poems directly engaging with Scripture as well as kafas for tales like the Alexander Romance and the History of the City of Brass were written by some of the same authors, notably Grigoris Alt’amarci in the 16th century. Their subject matters varied, yet the similarities between works by authors like Mkrtič’ Nalaš, Yovhannēs T’lkuranc’i and the various poets of the kafas show how common these ideas were. Consider these lines in another poem by Yovhannēs T’lkuranc’i, which would make a fine four-line summary of nearly the entire History of the City of Brass narrative:

Whoever held fortress or city
Or palaces adorned with gold
Later left all without their master
And lies beneath the earth (Russell 1987: 119).

f.192v-f.193r: These two kafas take a different tone to the others in M7709. They turn to the one who kills Alexander, declaring that he will be “cursed like Cain” and “torn to pieces like Judas”. They are the most sympathetic to Alexander, describing his death as a human betrayal rather than the will of God, with no moral lesson for Alexander about the pointless exertions of his life. In the History of the City of Brass on these two folios, the dead king’s inscriptions continue that lesson about life and death. Amir Musē and his party come to a golden cupola and, within it, an emerald table set with gold, pearl and precious gems, inscribed with more poetry. The message is made clear in one part of the inscription: “Where are the ones who rejoiced around this table?” Dead or otherwise gone, of course.

f.193v-f.194r: The final two kafas about Alexander’s death in this sequence return to a familiar theme: the illusory nature of life. It is, again, like a dream. These kafas also introduce Alexander’s regret. When he awakens from the dream of life, he sees himself as “a foolish beggar” and realises

24 ուրենիսկ որ զուարճանային շուրջ զսեղանովս
what “the needy long for”, i.e., the main priorities in life, sustenance and survival, not the vanities of a prince. The culmination of these two kafas is that Alexander enters his grave.

In the History of the City of Brass on these two folios, Amir Musê and his party leave the first city and journey on through the remote landscape in search of the City of Brass. On the way, they find a high hill and atop it a pillar imprisoning a dev, specifically a k’aj.25 This begins a new section of the story, in which Amir Musê hears how the k’aj made war with Solomon and lost. There is little in common between this section of the History of the City of Brass and the Alexander kafas—rather, the kafas continue their arc towards Alexander’s death, remembering the resonances with earlier pages. The final words inscribed on the table in the first city linger onto the following folio. At the beginning of f.193v, the text reads: “A thousand kings dined at it [the table], and the names of all the kings are written, and every one of them passed beneath the earth.”26 On f.194r, the final kafa in this sequence has Alexander seeing food and then, like the kings, going into the ground.27 It is in the next sequence of Alexander kafas, starting on the next page, that a new resonance is created between narrative and added poetry.

ALEXANDER DEFIES DARIUS’ AMBASSADORS (F.194V-F.197R)
The Alexander kafas now change subject: starting on f.194v, six kafas relate an encounter between Darius’ ambassadors and the youth Alexander, not yet king, as Philip still sits on the throne. The first kafa establishes the scene. The next five depict a confrontation as Alexander refuses to pay

25 In the Arabic version of the tale, the being imprisoned in the pillar is an ifrit, a type of djinn. For the k’aj in Armenian tradition, see Petrosyan 2020. Belief in the existence of such beings persisted in the Caucasus through to at least the late 19th century, as Manning (2012: 219-250) discusses in the context of Georgian literature about the kaji and other creatures that belonged to what the new intelligentsia, by that time, framed as folk superstition.

26 ռ. ռապաբուլը կիրակուիչ է. հ գեղեցեր նարդու. և անձանիք ռապաբուլը անձանիք գրած էր. և անձանիք նարդու գրած էր հ Շարիճի հայկ.</ref>

27 Other versions of this kafa make it clear that he sees a feast—using the word սեղան, which can mean ‘table’ or ‘meal’—such as the one in M7726, f.39r:

De կարծիք ինձեամ փառում. He sees many tables,
երբ զարթի կարօտուան պիտան. he wakes up [to what] the needy long for.
the tribute owed to Achaemenid Persia by Macedon, and the ambassadors perceive that he will one day bring doom to Darius. These six kafās accompany most of the k’aj’s story about its king’s—and its own—arrogant defiance against Solomon, who eventually imprisoned the k’aj in the stone column. After the six ambassador kafās, the added kafās return to the subject of death—the k’aj’s story ends a folio later, after only one death poem.

Placing these six ambassador kafās at the bottom of pages that contain the k’aj’s story creates a new resonance: both are about confrontations in which a powerful figure is (or will eventually be) overturned. The k’aj and the king face up against Solomon and lose. The ambassadors of the Great King face Alexander, and they recognise that he will eventually defeat Darius. This makes sense of the intrusion of these kafās into a sequence about death, which accompanies the cities filled with treasures and the dead. These are different kinds of stories.

The page-by-page correspondences between the History of the City of Brass and the Alexander kafās vary in closeness. The first is narratively quite neat: Solomon sends messengers to the king Abdul-aziz, demanding, “Give your daughter to me in marriage, and smash your idols and believe in my God, who created the heavens and earth. If you do this, you will be a brother to me.” If not, the king must prepare for battle. Then, in the added kafā, the ambassadors of Darius stand before Philip, “exactors who came for the tribute”. Two embassies—but two very different outcomes. Ultimately, Solomon will succeed in defeating the king and taking his incomparably beautiful daughter by force, while Darius will first be denied his tribute, then his throne.

This correspondence continues for the next two folios. On f.195r, the king Abdul-aziz becomes angry and seeks counsel from his soldiers and the k’aj. Hearing—unwisely—that he need not be afraid of Solomon, at the end of the folio he “beat Solomon’s messenger”. In the kafā, Alexander speaks defiantly to the messengers of Darius, refusing to pay the tribute and pledging to take back what has been given. Again, the actions are...
similar, but the outcomes will be different. On f.195v, Abdul-aziz sends the messenger back to Solomon, where the messenger tells him everything. Solomon prepares for battle, and sends a second messenger to reiterate his demands and his threat of war. In the kafa, Alexander speaks to the messengers, telling them to “take this news to Dareh, king of the Persians”. Messengers go back and forth across the folio, setting the stage for war.

Over the next three pages, the battle between Abdul-aziz and Solomon is conducted, while Alexander remains a foreboding force for Darius in the eventual war. On f.196r, the two sides arrange their armies, with Solomon giving commands to his varied force of soldiers, many k’aj, wild creatures, birds, snakes and višaps. In the kafa, Alexander is still talking to the messengers, outlining how the tables have turned: before his birth, his father acted one way, but now he is the son and heir, in a position to make demands. Threats rise up on the page. On f.196v, Abdul-aziz’s k’aj boasts that “I will bring Amirat’, the vazir of Solomon, to my lord”.30 Amirat’, who appears to be another k’aj or a similarly powerful being, “also shouted in a terrible roaring voice”.31 In the kafa, Darius’ representatives “looked attentively upon the face of Alexander” and “were astonished by his reply.” On the final folio in this sequence of six, f.197r, the terrible battle is described, and at the end of it, the k’aj is seized by Amirat’ and brought before Solomon. In the kafa, the outcome of the eventual battle is foreseen: the men see that Alexander “will bring the black year to Dareh”. Darius, like the k’aj (and Abdul-aziz), will be brought low.

These six kafas look intentionally placed at this point in the narrative, providing a parallel to the k’aj’s story of a fateful battle. The dispatching of messengers, the rising tension, the ultimate defeat—immediate and foreseen—flows across the six folios.

Let us return to the first pages of this set, where the outcomes of the embassies will vary: the arrogant Abdul-aziz will fail, while Alexander will triumph. The difference invites comparison. Is there a distinction to contemplate between the arrogant k’aj and Abdul-aziz on the one hand, and the assured young Alexander on the other? Is there, too, a similarity? On the pages of this same manuscript, before these kafas, Alexander dies,
learning in his last moments that the vanities of a prince’s life are as real as a dream. Later, on f.201v and f.202r, the king of that kafa will reflect that the grave is sufficient for a man who had subdued the world.

If these kafas are to be read sequentially, the jump from Alexander’s death and vanities to his brash youth seems to not only invite but demand a critical appraisal of his entire life. The kafas laud Alexander—he is the “desirable flower” that honours Olympias’ dubious deed of sleeping with a snake—and lead him empty-handed into the earth. The logic of this progression is clear if viewed as a manifestation of the ‘wheel of fate’. On this wheel, a person is turned: at the apex they are enthroned or otherwise enjoy the finest fruits of life, but with a simple turn of the wheel they are sent into misfortune while the impoverished person at the wheel’s base is raised up to power.32 The proximity of the young Alexander’s brash confidence to his death is a wheel-like reminder that he, like Abdul-aziz—like all people—will meet the same eventual end. Indeed, the wheel will be invoked in a kafa added to f.209r, to be discussed in the final article, which exhorts Darius to know that “This world is like wind, which is flowing up and down”. In M7709, Alexander is born, brought low as he dies, defies Darius—and in the coming folios, the kafas will again turn to death.

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32 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. The principles of the wheel are clearly expressed in medieval Armenian poetry by writers such as Frik (c.1230-1310); see Haciyan 2002: 524-533 for a summary of Frik’s life and work, Melik’ Muşkambarean 1952 for the standard edition of Frik’s poetry, and Pifer 2021: 162-169 for an essential reading of fate in Frik’s famous poet ‘Against Fate’.
Without the fine counsel of Professor Theo M. van Lint, the translations of kafas presented here would be far poorer. Needless to say, any lingering errors are my own.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**