

From Reality to Fiction: Alexander the Great in Ottoman Literature

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Abstract Ottoman literature developed from a melting pot of a range of elements, including the Qur'an, hadith, hymns of prophets, Sufism, Iranian mythology, Islamic history, Turkish culture and history. Among the sources of Ottoman literature, there are myths from various cultures, especially Persian and Arab cultures, and important historical events. Studies have been carried out using these sources, which have fed Ottoman literature, but in some cases, there is a lack of definitive information about the origin of these sources. There are various reasons for communities to have become disconnected from one another, and as the origins of the sources have been forgotten, a variety of different narratives may develop. In this article, information will be provided about İskender, an extraordinary hero in Ottoman literature, who is said to have influenced Islam and the Qur'an. In prominent debates on the identity of İskender, there are some Islamic writers who view İskender as a prophet who serves God, and there are other writers who argue that he is a historical person. According to those who argue the latter, İskender was either the king of Yemen, or one of the Persian rulers, or some argue that he was Alexander the Great. In this study, these various narrations will be ascertained. Then, data from interdisciplinary research, including archaeological studies, will be evaluated comparatively. Finally, correlations found between this data and the legends in the traditional narratives will be used to ascertain who was İskender in Ottoman literature.

Keywords Ottoman Literature; Alexander the Great; Historical narrative; Legend; Change.

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Introduction

There are various approaches concerning the relationship of myth and legend with literature. According to Ali Canip Yöntem, the origin of literature is *usture*, meaning mythology in the Ottoman language. Personification of inanimate beings was made in the *usture* period. After the *Usture* period, the period of Romanesque novels includes the adventures of previously animated beings. In the following period of realist novels, there was a transition process to modern novels (Tökel 53-54).

Rene Wellek's thoughts on the reasons for artists resorting to myths and legends in literary texts are as follows: "A literary writer requiring a myth indicates that the writer is uniting with the society he/she is living in and is aspiring to have a function in that society" (Wellek and Warren 257-258). Indeed, this statement by Rene Wellek explains why both Ottoman literature and the New Turkish literature era writers' resort to Turkish and Islamic mythology and legendary elements in terms of religion and thought systems, and Greek mythology and legendary elements in terms of Turkey's geographical location.

Ali Nihat Tarlan seems to provide a possible answer to the question raised by Rene Wellek, 'why does a writer resort to myths in literary texts?', in the light of Ottoman literature writers, as follows:

As Ottoman literature is an Islamic literature, some anecdotes about the prophets' lives which were passed on to the Qur'an from the Torah or from knowledge that has been transferred from generation to generation in Arabic tradition have been adapted by literature. Various authors have expanded those anecdotes by ascribing to hadiths and adding old tales and customs; in this way, an Islamic *usture* has developed. They have quoted those anecdotes to strengthen the rules preached by the Qur'an with old hadiths and to reach the moral objective as opposed to the historical. (Tarlan, *Şeyhi* 253)

When the relationship between literature and history is examined, Aristotle considers poetry, an art form that imitates reality within the framework of certain rules, to create a particular effect (Toprak 94). The material used for fictional literary text may be derived from truth and reality. Art is an interpretation of human relationships with nature and mankind. Thus, art results from truth and reality being expressed differently from what is experienced in scientific and daily life. The purpose of changing, transforming, and interpreting is to reach a better understanding and interpretation of the human in its interrelations. Hence, every

work of art is a product of the struggle to embody a human quality in a better and more beautiful manner, in other words, to render it visible, comprehensible, and interpretable (Aktaş 47). A literary work, just like history, is created by sorting out events; however, a literary work is a resolution and rearrangement of actual events (Tural 107).

The process of Islamisation of mythological elements, primarily through Arabisation, and their subsequent adaptation to other cultures such as Persian and Ottoman, is a dynamic transformation shaped by both folk narratives and literary texts. In this context, Pertev Naili Boratav (71) reveals how ancient belief systems were adapted to Islamic frameworks and reproduced within local culture. Fuat Köprülü comprehensively explains how the literary structure that emerged after the acceptance of Islam was synthesised under the influence of ancient Turkish beliefs, and the role of the first Sufis in this transformation (1-7).

The Islamisation of mythological elements and narratives based on historical reality influenced the content of poems. As a result of adapting these narratives to Islamic culture by severing their ties with the originals, newly created heroes and hero-based narratives are seen being reproduced in qasidas, qazels, a type of poetry in Islamic literature, in the context of Islamic figures such as prophets and other religious personalities, rulers, or administrators.

“In the Islamic tradition, hami (boss) is at the centre of the triangle of poet, artwork, and hami. The most powerful hami of the Ottoman Empire was the ruler. Both the literary work and the poet’s position in the art world were determined by the monarch, and thus, the poet and his work of art were not very influential” (Tarhan, *Poetical Institution* 467). By Islamising these mythological elements and narratives, writers connected their rulers to these figures. For example, when explaining the Prophet Jesus and his immortality, they are seen to have combined them with immortality stories from Islamic culture (Tarhan, *Religious Figures* 238). This article discusses how Alexander the Great’s leadership qualities and exploration of distant lands influenced Islamic culture, leading to the creation of a new hero and new narratives based on these two characteristics of the historical figure. It appears that poets, by reference to legendary figures such as Alexander, praised their rulers, who were patrons of poetry, and included them among the important figures of history, just like Alexander himself.

The samples of Ottoman literature used in this study are very rich with respect to historical, legendary, and mythological elements based on individuals. Taking these elements from another culture, turning them into a new narrative, and forgetting the original version is referred to as acculturation. The original form of

the element addressed in this acculturation process has become a narrative that is forgotten and recreated. Regardless of their source, by means of acculturation, the elements of the literature first entered the process of Islamisation, and then passed from Arabic to Persian literature and then to Ottoman literature. An example of historical, legendary, and mythological elements based on individuals may be found in literature referring to Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great may be found in Islamic literature with two important features, the characteristic of being an ambitious conquering ruler, and his mystical life. The first feature has preserved its historical reality in the name Alexander (in Turkish İskender/Sikender), but the second mystical feature has been adopted and taken the name Dhul-Qarnayn as a result of the Islamic acculturation. Thus, Dhul-Qarnayn has moved away from his historical realism, and his connection with Alexander the Great has been forgotten. This study is important in terms of revealing this forgotten truth. Thus, Ottoman Literature referring to Dhul-Qarnayn may be traced as far back as the Arabs, Persians, Sumerians and Alexander the Great. These elements have not been used in their original contexts found in the sources that they belong to; they have been reproduced and Islamified through the perceptions of Ottoman culture. In general, poets have praised their rulers by way of comparing them with Alexander the Great.

Alexander to İskender

Alexander (Alexander III) is believed to have been born in July 356 BC. His father was Phillip II, the King of Macedonia, and his mother was Olympias. Both Alexander's parents were from noble families. Due to his infidelity, Alexander's father was not on good terms with his mother. Phillip II also disliked Olympias's interest in mystical worldviews and practices. Growing up under his mother's supervision until the period of his principedom led Alexander to take an interest in these mystical worlds also. His fondness for these mystical beliefs is thought to have guided him and, to some extent, pushed Alexander to war. When Alexander was fourteen years old, Phillip II had given Alexander the principedom and had him educated by various philosophers, particularly by Aristotle. Alexander was crowned as the King of Macedonia at the age of twenty. Alexander's first act was to secure his position in the Greek countries. Then he began his expeditions to Iran, which were mired down with his father's death (Lauffer 7-88), expeditions to Eastern Mediterranean countries, and then headed towards Egypt, the country that always aroused his interest. According to historian Siegfried Lauffer, Alexander mounted an expedition to Egypt for two reasons. For the Greeks, Egypt was the land of secrets with magnificent works of art. Ever since Homer, Greek connections with Egypt had

been lost under Persian rule. The other reason for Alexander heading towards Egypt is Ammon's house of divination, which is located in the Oasis of Shiva (Lauffer 89-90). Alexander declared himself Zeus-Ammon in his expedition to Egypt. The figure of Alexander's Zeus-Ammon bust taken from the Museum of Liverpool is seen in figures 1A, 1B and 1C¹. A few samples of coins minted which depict Zeus-Ammon after Alexander's expedition to Egypt are seen in figures 2A, 2B and 3².



Fig. 1A



Fig. 1B

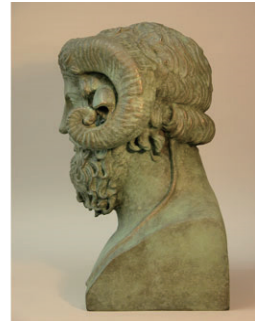


Fig. 1C



Fig. 2A & 2B



Fig. 3

1 Fig. 1A, 1B and 1C: Alexander's Zeus-Ammon Bust

The photos of Alexander's Zeus-Ammon bust taken from the Museum of Liverpool are as follows: His face from the front (Figure A1) and his left and right profile (Figure 1B, Figure 1C) is seen in the display. Available at: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/conservation/technologies/limitededition/zeus> 24.05.2012

2 Fig. 2A & 2B: Alexander's Zeus-Ammon Coins

A few samples of coins minted which depict Zeus-Ammon after Alexander's expedition to Egypt: Kyrenaika, Kyrene, Silver, 17.22gr. In the late archaic style, the right profile of Zeus-Ammon's bearded face with a large ram's horn and a crown and on the reverse side of the coin is an extinct plant that was believed to be sacred. For further information, please see: *The Prosperity Collection Spectacular Ancient Greek Coins*, Park Communications Ltd, London / Great Britain, p. 409, 2012.

Fig. 3: Alexander's commanders' coin

A coin minted in the satrapy of Lysimachus, one of Alexander's commanders, in the name of Alexander the Great, who was known as Zeus Ammon. 297-281 bc. A similar coin may be found in the British Museum. Available at:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/959/Alexander-the-Great-as-Zeus-Ammon-on-a-silver-tetradrachm> 24.05.2012

Alexander the Great may have become known as İskender in Islamic narratives. In other words, İskender, also referred to by the nickname Dhul-Qarnayn, may be Alexander the Great, the King of Macedonia. "Dictionaries give the meaning of the word qarn as 'horn, century, a community that lived in a certain time, head of a person, sides of the head, forelocks of a man, side locks of a woman, edge of the sun's circle, chief of a tribe, etc.'. There is a suffix at the end of the word ayn that indicates duality. So Dhul-Qarnayn means the two-horned one" (Pala, *Akademik* 243). Ahteri's (761) Arabic-Turkish dictionary titled Ahteri-yi Kebir states that the word qarn, which he explains as "the horn of animals similar to sheep, goats and cattle", was used in references to "Dhul-Qarnayn, the nickname of İskender-i Rumi" (Macedonian or Greek Alexander).

İskender is included in Taberî's History. There is a one-hundred-page chapter on Alexander in the second volume. There is a further reference in an anecdote in the chapter about Khidr in the first volume. According to this anecdote, "Dhul-Qarnayn is not the person God Almighty speaks of in the Noble Qur'an (Surat Al-Kahf, ayat 83), that person's name was Alexander. He had built a wall against Gog and Magog. This was after Moses. This person's name is Dhul-Qarnayn-i Askar; they call him Little Alexander" (Taberî, *I*, 450). In the second volume of Taberî's History, under the title "Why was Alexander given the name Dhul-Qarnayn (the two-horned)?" Taberî states that:

The nickname of Alexander was Dhul-Qarnayn – The Two-Horned. The two horns at the ends of a bow used for shooting arrows are also called Qarns. The reason Alexander is called Dhul-Qarnayn is that he has seen the East, which is one corner of the world, and he has seen the West, which is the other corner of the world. Therefore, he was called Dhul-Qarnayn. (Taberî, 2 289)

In the Qur'an, Dhul-Qarnayn is mentioned as the person who built a wall against Gog and Magog (see later). "There are views that claim the King of Macedonia was called by the nickname of Dhul-Qarnayn, though there are also views asserting that Dhul-Qarnayn was the nickname of the Achaemenian ruler Kurush, or that this nickname was given to a Yemeni king" (Tekin 132). The Yemeni King Tuba is one of those kings who are mentioned using this name in Arabic Literature. The Yemen King Tuba reigns over Saba" (Ritter 123). İskender Pala, quoting Ebu Reyhan, says that: "The ones with 'Dhu' in their names are from Yemen. Like Dhu'n-Nûn, Dhu'l-Menâr. The word Dhu is Arabic. Dhul-Qarnayn is an Arabic nickname" (Pala 343). Ritter explains the reason for the Yemeni King Tuba being called Dhul-Qarnayn

as follows: “Yemen Kings’ names would also begin with ‘dhu’. For this reason, it is possible that when they saw Dhul-Qarnayn’s name beginning with ‘dhu’, they embraced him as their own, appropriated him” (Ritter 123).

Another tale about İskender may be found in the following sentences: “Two strange objects had appeared on İskender’s head, shaped like horns. İskender, who wanted to hide them, would cover his head with a veil. But one day, when he went to a bathhouse, his clerk learned his secret” (Tökel 190-191).

Ritter points to this meaning of the word with reference to a conversation Alexander had with God, which may be found in a book written in the second century. In this conversation, Alexander says, “Oh God Almighty, give me horns so I can gore the world with them like a ram” (Ritter 123). The second explanation is that Alexander is the son of Jupiter-Ammon. Gönül Tekin explains Ritter’s view of Jupiter-Ammon in her research on *Çengname* (an Ottoman poem) as follows: “We need to participate in Ritter’s view. Because in Egypt, the emblem of the God Ammon, which is in parallel with Zeus, is a ram, and this God bears two ram horns. Thus, Alexander of Macedonia is this Zeus-Ammon’s son, revived as the King of Egypt” (Tekin 132).

Siegfried Lauffer’s statements are supplementary to Gönül Tekin’s views. According to Lauffer, when Alexander enters Egypt, the conditions are as follows:

Alexander expressed his stance about Egyptians by respecting their specific rituals and religions. Seeing himself as the old Pharaohs’ successor and not the Achaemenians because of the Persian conqueror Cambyses’ act of killing the Apis bull¹. In his time, Alexander had depicted himself in the style and clothing of Pharaohs after being crowned as a Pharaoh in Memphis” (Lauffer 90)

Gönül Tekin (132) may be referring to this point. Alexander may have worn the two horns that were worn by the God Ammon. Coins have been minted, and statues have been made in Alexander’s name throughout the centuries, depicting him with these horns.

Lauffer continues to cite Alexander’s important acts during his expedition to Egypt as follows:

Alexander set out on an expedition, which he considered to be very important,

1 This bull is mentioned in Taberî’s History. According to Taberî, the Pharaoh worshipped that bull: Ebû Ca’fer Muhammed bin Cerîr’üt-Taberî, *Tarih-i Taberî*, Cilt: 1, translate: Faruk Gürtunca, Sağlam Yayınevi, İstanbul, p. 415.

to the Oasis of Shiva, where God Ammon's sacred house of divination is located, following the coast of the Nile's delta with a small group of servitors... When Alexander reached the sacred ground with his companions, he was greeted by the oldest oracle as the son of Ammon because he was the new Pharaoh. Nobody learned the answers to the questions he asked the oracles alone in the temple. Presumably, they were about the future, especially his plans for the days to come. All Alexander ever said was that he was very happy about what he came to know. It has been said that he also wrote to his mother, Olympias, saying that he had obtained secret information that he would tell her in private when he returned. It is believed that the information he obtained was about his divine origins. (Lauffer 91-92)

The source of the Islamic narrative of İskender's Immortal Water (*âb-ı hayat*) may be a story created by the people as a result of Alexander's meeting with a priest of the Oasis of Shiva's house of divination. "It is accepted that Alexander believed he was from the lineage of Zeus-Ammon after he visited the house of divination, but he did not want to express it very much. This thought of his is inferred from his prayers to Ammon in critical situations and from his wanting to be buried in the Oasis of Shiva when he dies" (Lauffer 92). Alexander mounted an expedition to Iran after this meeting and extended his borders up to Central Asia.

İskender is referred to by poets in Ottoman literature for his leadership and his conquests that extended as far as India. Poets often commemorate their ruler as a conqueror equal to those who succeeded İskender. In the *qasidas* and *qazels* (lyric poems) discussed in this study, Ottoman poets have praised leaders by reference to Alexander. In his *Fetihnâme* (a *qasida* about conquests), written for Sultan Beyazıt, fifteenth century poet Necâtî sees his Sultan as İskender-i sâni, which means the second Alexander. Necâtî's *Fetihnâme* employs a sophisticated comparative strategy. By invoking "Kayser" (Byzantine Emperor) and "Fağfûr" (Chinese Emperor) alongside Alexander, Necâtî positions Beyazıt within a global imperial framework. The term "İskender-i sâni" (Second Alexander) operates on multiple levels:

Martial prowess: Aligning Beyazıt with history's greatest conqueror

Legitimacy: Claiming inheritance of world-empire tradition

Prophetic echo: Invoking Qur'anic Dhul-Qarnayn's divine mission

Surpassing the model: The phrase "seni sonra" (after you) implies succession, while "Kıyurma" (do not think less) suggests equality or superiority

This rhetorical move exemplifies the Ottoman panegyric tradition of teşbih (comparison) and tezat (contrast), where the praised figure both resembles and exceeds the comparative exemplar. Necâî's choice of Alexander specifically invokes both historical achievement and Islamic legitimacy, since Dhul-Qarnayn represents God-sanctioned universal rule in Islamic tradition.

Kayurma Kayser ü Fağfûrdan seni şöñra

Getürdiyse felek iy Sikender-i sâni (52/37)

(O Alexander the Second, even though destiny made you a successor
to the Greek Emperor and the Chinese Emperor
do not think of yourself any less than them,
because you are so much superior to them!)

In his Bahariye, which is a type of qasida that is presented in the spring, or the part of a qasida about the spring in the Nesib section, written for Sultan Suleiman, sixteenth century poet Şem'î tells Sultan Suleiman that it is as though he is from the time of the Prophet Solomon, and he is the Second Alexander. In this poem, the poet compares his patron ruler to the Prophet Solomon, a famous leader of sacred religions. The reasons for referring to the ruler as the second Alexander are also present here:

Martial prowess: To emphasise that Sultan Suleiman, like Alexander the Great, conquered many places in the east and west.

Legitimacy: According to Islamic narratives, the Prophet Solomon could speak with every living creature and ruled not only over humans but over all living beings. Thus, the poet emphasises that his ruler was both the emperor of the world and the ruler of all living creatures.

Prophetic echo: The poet attributes sanctity to his ruler by likening him to the prophet Solomon, the ideal leader in monotheistic religions.

The phrase “Süleymân-ı zemânsın” (the time of the Prophet Solomon) and the expressions “nice tîgûñ Şalarsañ gün gibi şarka vü ğarba irüşür” (if you were to let out your swords like the sun, they would reach the east and the west) suggest that the poet put Sultan Suleiman on an equal footing with Prophet Solomon and Alexander the Great in terms of prosperity and power.

The poet's choice of Alexander and the Prophet Solomon to embody both the ruler's power and his will to conquer evokes both historical achievement and Islamic

legitimacy; for the Prophet Solomon, in Islamic tradition, represents universal rule sanctioned by God.

Şalarsañ gün gibi tîgüñ irüşür şarka vü ğarba
Süleymân-ı zemânsın sen nice İskender-i sâni (56/22)
(You are the Second Alexander!
Just like the time of the Prophet Solomon,
if you were to let out your swords like the sun,
they would reach the east and the west.)

The nickname Dhul-Qarnayn for Alexander is mentioned in the poem of Edirneli Nazmi, who was a sixteenth century poet. The poem is in the 5758th “Qazel (lyric poem)”. In this poem, the poet compares himself to Alexander the Great, known as the Dhul-Qarnayn, in the context of the power of his poetry, while also likening his literary work to immortality. Here, the poet alludes to a story about Alexander, as told in the Islamic world (see the Alexander and Khidr section). Through the use of semantic connections between words, a literary device known as *leff ü neşir*¹ in Ottoman literature, the poet praises both himself and the power of his poetry. Using the simile (comparison) element common in Ottoman *qasidas*, the poet directly states that he is Alexander, known as Dhul-Qarnayn. The poet compares his words to the water of immortality found in the Land of Darkness, covered with black precious stones. The poet’s aims can be seen here:

Martial prowess: The poet emphasises that his poetry, much like Alexander the Great conquering lands, conquers the hearts of people.

Legitimacy: Claiming to be an artist whose words are like gems.

Prophetic echo: The poet seeks to sanctify his own words by associating himself with Dhul-Qarnayn, a figure revered in Islam. Therefore, the poet attempted to concretise the power, impact and sanctity of his own poetry through the art of simile, an example of Ottoman panegyric poetry.

Sen de Zū'l-Karneyn olan İskender'e
Her gören teşbîh Nazmî cevhere
(You mention Dhul-Qarnayn, who is Alexander

1 This is the act of taking two or more elements (nouns, adjectives, etc.) from one line and arranging them in a second line, either in an orderly or mixed manner, without explicitly stating their similar or contrasting characteristics; in other words, it is called "verbal symmetry"; the first part is "gathering/folding" (*leff*), and the second part is "spreading/explaining" (*neşir*).

Everyone who sees Nazmi refers to his gem)

İskender with Gog and Magog

In an anecdote about İskender in the Qur'an's Al-Kahf verse, Gog and Magog are the names of a tribe whose members are only as tall as a hand. Their teeth are like a pig's teeth, and their ears are as big as their bodies. Their bodies are hairy. People who are troubled by this tribe that eats snakes in summer and grass in winter go to İskender-i Dhul-Qarnayn (two-horned Alexander) for help. Alexander builds a wall against this tribe. This wall is called Sedd-i İskender (The Wall of Alexander) (Levend 177). According to Taberî, this incident took place after the time of Moses. It is written that this Alexander is also called Dhul-Qarnayn -ı Askar, which means Little Alexander. It is also written that this king is a fair ruler and a wise person who acknowledges God (Taberî I, 450). Ritter states that the story of Gog and Magog comes from pre-Islamic times and can also be found in Hebrew eschatology. According to Ritter (124), the original story of Gog and Magog is as follows: "There, two nations are mentioned that are located at the north of the realm. Their names are Gog and Magog. They will rise when the apocalypse comes, they will destroy the earth, walking towards the west, but eventually they will be destroyed as well." Furthermore, Ritter quotes De Goe and states that the Wall of Alexander mentioned in the Qur'an is considered to be the Great Wall of China. De Goe says that "Gog and Magog would dig through that wall every day, but the wall would close up in the evening. When the apocalypse comes, they will dig through the wall and scatter around the world. This wall ought to be the Great Wall of China. A legendary story of this Wall must have come to the West, and the primitive tribes must have interpreted the story in this manner" (Ritter 124).

Among the qasidas that constitute the sample of this study, in one couplet of the "Cülûsiye", which is a qasida about the Sultan's accession to the throne, written by sixteenth century poet Revânî for Sultan Selim, the poet has compared the Sultan's sword to a Wall against Gog's provocation and mischief. The Sultan is Alexander the Second, who built the wall. Here, the poet praises his patron, the ruler Alexander, through the story of Dhul-Qarnayn, a figure with religious significance and a Quranic origin. The poet's aims in creating this narrative with this couplet are as follows:

Martial prowess: The poet wants to emphasise Sultan Selim's military superiority. To defend the existence of a ruler who, according to the Quran,

possessed the power of Dhul-Qarnayn, who destroyed Gog and Magog, he states that the ruler's sword was made of iron and was unbreakable.

Legitimacy: In line with the general style of praise found in Ottoman literature, the poet claims that his sovereign is the ruler not only of the world but also of the universe.

Prophetic echo: The poet attributes sanctity to his ruler by likening him to Dhul-Qarnayn, a figure of Islamic jurisprudence. He also emphasises that the ruler did a good deed by destroying a force harmful to humanity, like Gog and Magog.

*Fesâd u fitne Ye'cücine sedd-i âhenîn tîgi
Anuñ zât-ı şerîfidür meger İskender-i sâni (55/7)
(His glorious self's sword is a wall of iron
against the Gog's provocation and mischief
Apparently, he was Alexander the Second)*

The position of Alexander the Great, under the name İskender, in the tradition of poetry and literature may be explained by the Ancient Greek and Roman influence that left deep traces on Islamic and Persian culture (Şentürk 288). Whereas there has been very little debate generally in the Islamic world about who İskender and or Dhul-Qarnayn were, some Ottoman poets had accepted that İskender was Alexander the Great. For example, in the following couplet, the author mentions the Gog and Magog tribes' elements of oppression and discord, and that Alexander the Great stopped these evils with the barrier he put up. In a qasida by fifteenth century poet Ahmed Pasha, tutor of Mehmed the Conqueror, Alexander the Great is mentioned. The striking element here can be seen in describing Alexander the Great as a Greek. The poet wrote this qasida to wish his ruler good health. The poem is titled *Der- 'İyâdet-i Şâh-ı Devrân*, meaning "For the Health of the Ruler of the Time." In each couplet of this poem, the poet explains why his ruler should be healthy and why he should recover. In the following couplet, the poet's reference to his ruler as Alexander the Greek has two explanations. The first reason is based on the common Turkish tendency to generalise about people living in places like Macedonia as Greeks. However, since the poet in question was considered one of the most important professors of the fifteenth century, another explanation for his referring to Alexander as Greek is also conceivable. The poet seeks to point out that Sultan Mehmed, as the conqueror of Istanbul, became the ruler of both the Byzantine and Islamic worlds. The verse following the couplet below reads, "Tedbîr ile leşker şıyup mektûb ile iklim alan, Ol iftihâr-ı milket-i 'Oşmâna şihhat yaraşur,"

meaning that the ruler who overcomes the enemy's plans with prudence, conquers countries with a letter, and wins battles with the marching band of the Ottoman Empire deserves to recover. The poet is explaining here that Mehmed the Conqueror was the ruler of both Istanbul and Constantinople. The poet aims to convey these meanings through this narrative structure.

Martial prowess: The poet emphasises that the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmed, with reference to Alexander the Great and other Greek figures, made him the leader of both the Byzantine and Islamic worlds.

Legitimacy: The poet claims that his ruler is the heir to both Byzantium and Islam. He also emphasises that the ruler did a good deed by destroying a force harmful to humanity, like Gog and Magog.

Prophetic echo: By associating the story of Gog and Magog with the word Alexander, the poet enhances the sanctity of his ruler, recalling the hero Dhul-Qarnayn in Islamic fiction.

*Yec'uc-ı zulm ü fitnenün Sedd-i Seddin Çekmege
Ol mefhar-ı İskender-i Yunan'a sıhhat yaraşur (32/6)
(It is fitting for the Sultan,
of whom Alexander the Greek took pride,
to build a strong barrier against
Gog of oppression and strife)*

İskender and Khidr

In Ottoman literature, İskender is mentioned in the stories of Khidr and immortality. Likewise, Khidr is similarly mentioned regarding İskender in Taberî's History. In the story of Khidr and Elijah, İskender becoming a ruler and searching for the water of immortality resembles the story of the Sumerian King Gilgamesh looking for the plant of life (see below). In this story, İskender does not succeed. The story goes that Khidr is İskender's cook and goes with İskender and Elijah to the city of Bolkar along with 4000 soldiers. The Land of Darkness is there. When they get to this land, İskender goes one way, and Khidr and Elijah go another way, looking for the water of life. Khidr put a cooked fish, which he had prepared earlier, beside him and washed his hands in a water source he found. Water drips from his hand onto the cooked fish. Suddenly, the fish comes back to life and jumps into the water. At that moment, Khidr realises that it is the water of life and calls for Elijah. They both bathe in the water. Thus, they both obtain immortality (Taberî, 2, 280-283).

Meanwhile, İskender leaves the Land of Darkness without accomplishing what he came for, just like the Sumerian King Gilgamesh.

There are many tales of immortality in history, and the source for stories in Ottoman literature about İskender's immortality may go back to the Sumerians. According to the writings on Sumerian tablets (Kramer 154), Inanna is the Sumerian goddess of light, love, and life, and the Queen of the Skies. When Inanna dies in the underworld trying to save her deceased husband, Dumuzid the Shepherd, her corpse is sprinkled sixty times with the food and water of life (Kramer 159). When this act is performed, Inanna comes back to life (Kramer 157-159). According to Tekin (217-218), Inanna's husband is also immortal. In her study of Çengnâme, Gönül Tekin states that Dumuzid the Shepherd, who is born again every year, is Jesus in Christianity and Circis or Khidr in Islam. The annual rebirth here represents the revival of the world in the spring each year.

Khidr is a god of nature in pagan cultures who brings about the arrival of spring by turning green the places he steps on every year. This pagan cult, which can also be found in the Christian World as Saint George, who was believed to turn green the places he walked on, found its way into Quranic commentaries in the Islamic World (Şentürk 289).

In Taberî's History, there are debates over Khidr's name; some call him 'Ermiya', some call him 'Elyasa', and some call him 'Belyâ'. Taberî says that, while according to one account he had come to the Israelites as a prophet, according to another account, he was a descendant of Noah and had seen the era of Noah. It has even been said that he was on Noah's Ark and his bloodline is said to be as follows: "Beliyâ son of Melkân son of Eber (Âmir) son of Salah (Sâleh) son of Arpachshad (Erfahşüd) son of Sam son of Noah" (Taberî, *I*, 448).

Hellmut Ritter (120) made a comparative study of narratives about Khidr in his book *The Effect of Eastern Mythology on Literature*. According to this study, the cult of Khidr draws from the Greek story about the sea devil Glaukos. This story goes as follows: There is a fisherman named Glaukos, a name meaning green. "One day, he sees one of the dead fish revive when it touches the grass. He eats some of that grass and becomes a demon. Immortality is a curse for him. He roams mountains and cliffs groaning, he wants to be free of this immortality" (Ritter 120).

According to Ritter (122), the cult of Khidr has become Islamic because this tale was translated from Greek in the novel of Alexander to Pahlavi and then to Arabic. The immortality grass that the Greek sea devil Glaukos found is likely to have its origins in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. In this epic, the child of the forest Enkidu, the Sumerian king Gilgamesh's beloved friend, is killed by the

Goddess Inanna. Gilgamesh has lost his dear friend, and he has also felt the fear of death. Gilgamesh, who does not want to die, hears a story about immortality: “He had heard that, in the olden times, someone named Utnapishtim (Zivsudru in Sumerian) had obtained immortality after the great flood that the Gods created to destroy civilisation. He had to go and find him; he had to know how he became immortal. But, according to the lore, he lived far away, in the garden of the Gods” (Çiğ 55). After hearing his story, Gilgamesh looks for Utnapishtim in every land and when he finally finds him, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh: “There was a thorned grass, it wounded hands that tried to pick it up and made them bleed. Only those who ate this plant were rejuvenated and regained their strength. But this thorn is at the bottom of a deep water which is on your way. If you can take it out, you will rejuvenate” (Çiğ 75). So, Gilgamesh sets off again and finds the plant at the bottom of the water. When he gets out of the water and lies down to rest, a snake comes and eats the plant that he found. Eventually, Gilgamesh is not successful in his quest (Çiğ 75). Utnapishtim in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh may be compared to Khidr and İskender regarding their immortality.

A reference is made to this story by the Ottoman palace poet Nedim, who wrote a *qasida* for Sultan Ahmet in the eighteenth century. Nedim concludes his poem of praise to the ruler by praying for him with references to Khidr and İskender. Here, the poet's aim can be explained, through the narrative structure in the poem, to convey his good wishes as follows:

Prowess of Wealth: The poet makes his wishes to his ruler within the context of the changing structure of the Ottoman Empire. In the new Ottoman structure, there is no room for warfare; what matters is protecting existing territories. Therefore, the poet wishes for his ruler to be an emperor of great wealth.

Legitimacy: By the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire had lost its former power and had been losing territory since the Treaty of Passarowitz¹. The poet expresses a wish for the ruler to achieve success on a global scale. Therefore, there is no longer a ruler in the Ottoman Empire who is a second Alexander, or even superior to Alexander, as was the case in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The poet, with hope, wishes for his ruler to achieve a level of

1 The Treaty of Passarowitz, signed on July 21, 1718, ended the 1715-1718 Ottoman-Austrian-Venetian War and included provisions such as the cession of Upper Serbia, Belgrade, and the Banat Plateau to Austria; the Dalmatian, Bosnian, and Albanian coasts to Venice; and the retention of the Peloponnese Peninsula by the Ottomans.

governance similar to that of Alexander.

Prophetic echo: The poet, by mentioning Khidr, who is associated with Alexander the Great in the Islamic world, wishes the ruler a long life.

*Sana temlik eylesin Hak bir yere cem ‘ eyleyüp
Mülk-i dehri ömr-i Hızrı devlet-i İskenderi
(God will set you somewhere and give you
the wealth of the world, the immortal life of Khidr,
the reign of Alexander)*

Conclusion

Alexander the Great of Macedonia has influenced many cultures and works of literature. His life has been the subject of narratives; sometimes, even in those where the name of Alexander is forgotten and turned into another extraordinary hero story. A factor behind the formation of these stories may be that Alexander and his mother believed in mystical views and practices, and they thus lived in pursuit of these beliefs. This factor, combined with Alexander’s progress to Central Asia to conquer the world, formed the basis of the many stories about him. Alexander, who declared himself as Zeus-Ammon in Egypt and had his picture and statue made by wearing two horns on his head like Ammon, and then printing money with this image, led to him being named Dhul-Qarnayn-i İskender, which means two-horned Alexander, in the Islamic literary tradition. Over time, this has been forgotten in Islamic literature and has caused debate in the academic world as to why İskender was referred to as double-horned.

While some interpret the nickname Dhul-Qarnayn as a reference to a mythological figure or God who goes both to the east and to the west, an alternative interpretation may be that it is a reference to the travels of Alexander the Great from one end of the world to the other. Some researchers deny that there is any connection to Alexander, arguing that Dhul-Qarnayn is a holy figure. Some ancient Islamic commentators have suggested that the name İskender and/or Dhul-Qarnayn may refer to Alexander, in that he wanted to dominate the world by hitting it with horns. Some more recent scholars argue that Alexander was the son of Ammon. This view may be derived from the accounts of events during his life in Egypt and the statue that Alexander had made after declaring himself as Zeus-Ammon, the heir of the Pharaoh in Egypt, with two horns as a crown. This interpretation facilitates an understanding that the stories of İskender and Dhul-Qarnayn in the Ottoman literary traditions may have developed from stories of Alexander the Great.

It is therefore possible that Alexander the Great had a significant influence on Ottoman literature. Poets wrote praises of their rulers, sometimes even praising themselves, for their poetic power in the literature, saying that they were superior, both as warriors and as rulers, to Alexander the Great. We also encounter the name Alexander (translated as İskender) as a character in short stories in Ottoman literature. In this story, İskender searches for the water of immortality but cannot find it. It is someone else, Khidr, who finds the water. Whereas many researchers claim there is no connection between İskender and Alexander the Great, Ottoman poets described İskender as Greek and acclaimed their rulers by reference to İskender's reign and Khidr's water of immortality. All of these references may indicate that İskender in Ottoman poetry is Alexander the Great.

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