Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great

Edited by

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CHAPTER 8

Alexander between Rome and Persia: Politics, Ideology, and History*

Jake Nabel

سکندر شد و ماند ایدر سخن!

Alexander passed on, and words are all that's left of him now.
FERDOWSI[1]

By the end of the first century BCE, the lands that Alexander the Great had conquered had fallen under the sway of two vast empires. In the West, Rome dominated the Mediterranean basin and large swathes of northern Europe; in the East, the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia reigned over the Iranian plateau, Mesopotamia, and parts of central Asia. Though the Arsacids would later fall to the Sasanian dynasty and the Romans would lose their empire in the west, the basic division of the ancient world between a Roman Mediterranean and an Iranian Near East proved remarkably long-lived. Not until the Arab conquests of the seventh century CE would this geopolitical status quo shatter and give way to a new world.

As the Parthians and Romans and later the Sasanians and Byzantines sought to make sense of their imperial peers and rivals on the other side of the Euphrates, the memory of Alexander provided historical foundations on which an understanding of the current age could be built. Neither in Iran nor in Rome were these foundations fixed or immutable, and the evaluation of Alexander's

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1 Ferdowsi, *Šāh-nāma* = Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh and M. Omidsalar, eds., *Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi: The Shahnameh* (*The Book of Kings*), vol. 6 (Costa Mesa, CA; New York: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 128, line 1902; cf. Dick Davis, trans., *Abolqasem Ferdowsi: Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, (New York: Penguin, 2007), 528.

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legacy was always a contested business. But the *anabasis* of the Macedonian conqueror remained a crucial reference point for explaining the present by means of the past, a formative event of great antiquity that helped draw the fault lines between Persian and Roman imperial space. To remember Alexander was not just to ruminate on ancient conquests that were variously interpreted as glorious or transgressive; it was a means of thinking through the relationship between the two imperial giants of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East—along with the range of possibilities between antagonism and coexistence that could shape engagement between them.

The Persian and Roman receptions of Alexander are usually discussed separately, and for good reason. As discussed below, the Alexander traditions in these empires differed in their languages, genres, and means of transmission, making direct comparison a difficult enterprise.[2] Nevertheless, this contribution tries to jointly consider the Iranian and Roman Alexanders as products of a shifting and contested status quo between the two worlds. Alexander's reception was shaped by myth and history, but it was also influenced by the demands of political ideology in an interstate environment dominated by two great powers. When the Iranians and Romans told stories about Alexander, they were also, in an important sense, telling stories about their relationship to one another. To consider these two receptions together is to trace an aspect of one of the most significant and enduring geopolitical divisions of the ancient world, and the origins of a gulf between East and West that persists to this day.

The Terms of Comparison

The Iranian and Roman Alexanders are the constructions of very different literary traditions. In the Mediterranean, a range of contemporary literary sources

2 Cf. Daniel Selden's comments on Peter Brunt's attempt to reconstruct the Persian point of view: "In 1962, P.A. Brunt … published a paper entitled 'Persian Accounts of Alexander's Campaigns,' in which he managed to cite *none* of the extant Īrānian narratives of the Makedonian invasion … To give Brunt his due, however, had he consulted the Īrānian literature … he would have encountered reports of Alexander whose discursive organization differs so radically from the works of Diodorus Siculus, Arrian, Quintus Curtius Rufus and Plutarch as to render them largely incomprehensible to those for whom the Hellenic historiographical tradition constitutes the norm." See Daniel Selden, "Iskander and the Idea of Iran", in *The Romance between Greece and the East*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 142–143, emphasis in the original; cf. P.A. Brunt, "Persian Accounts of Alexander's Campaigns", *Classical Quarterly* 12 (1962).

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provides a textured view of the Roman Alexander, with a level of chronological resolution that allows individual authors to be situated in distinct historical contexts. On the Iranian plateau, however, the Parthian and Sasanian Alexander traditions were not committed to writing until long after the Arab conquest, and the texts from this late period bear the indelible marks of the political and religious changes that transformed the region after the advent of Islam. The pre-Islamic Alexander cannot, therefore, be studied in isolation from the turbulent history of post-conquest Iran. Sasanian and, to a much lesser extent, Parthian memories of Alexander are accessible only through the works of poets, priests, and scholars who were themselves reinterpreting and reconstructing the pre-Islamic past in a land transformed by the arrival of a new religion.[3]

The literary evidence for Alexander's reception in pre-Islamic Iran can usefully be divided into two traditions, even if the lines between the two categories are often blurred.[4] The first is what Ehsan Yarshater called "Iranian national history", which comprises authoritative collections of stories of the kings, heroes, and priests who featured so prominently in the legendary cycles of the ancient Iranian plateau.[5] The second is Zoroastrian religious literature, namely didactic and apocalyptic texts written in Middle Persian. These two traditions preserve different interpretations of Alexander's legacy, but as sources for pre-Islamic Iranian views they share important features. Very little Iranian literature was written down before the late Sasanian period, and none of the texts available for study today achieved their current form until well after the Islamic conquest.[6] It is generally agreed that some surviving material reflects oral traditions that had their roots in the distant past, perhaps even as far back as the Hellenis-

3 Cf. Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 35.

4 For this distinction, see Arthur Christensen, *Les Kayanides* (Copenhagen: Andr. Fred. Høst & søn, 1931); Maria Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature", in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch, (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 176–177.

5 E. Yarshater, "Iranian National History", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. 3.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

6 For the emergence of Middle Persian literature during the Sasanian period, see Mary Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, part 1, vol. 4, section 2 (Cologne, 1968), 31–33; Josef Wiesehöfer, "The 'Accursed' and the 'Adventurer': Alexander the Great in Iranian Tradition", in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 115. On the redaction of Middle Persian literature in the centuries following the Islamic conquest, see Yarshater, "Iranian National History", 359–366; Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 33–38.

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tic period or the life of Alexander himself.[7] But there is no clear stratigraphy between the older layers and the accumulations of successive centuries; the historical provenance of particular sections can be guessed at, but not established with certainty.

The most important source for Alexander's reception in the "Iranian national history" is the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi, composed under Samanid and then Ghaznavid rule from 976/7–1010 CE. While the extent of Ferdowsi's indebtedness to oral rather than textual sources has occasioned much debate, his poem likely made use of a prose work which in turn was based on Sasanian texts, including the *Xwadāy-nāmag* ("The Book of Lords"), a comprehensive account of ancient Iranian history assembled during the late Sasanian period.[8] Ferdowsi was also influenced by the Syriac Alexander Romance, which he presumably

7 On orality in pre-Islamic Iran, see Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Philip Huyse, "Late Sasanian Society between Orality and Literacy", in *The Sasanian Era*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008); M. Rahim Shayegan, *Aspects of History and Epic in Ancient Iran: From Gaumāta to Wahnām* (Washington, DC; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 73–108; Philip G. Kreyenbroek, "Storytelling, History and Communal Memory in Pre-Islamic Iran", in *Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies*, ed. Christine Allison and Philip G. Kreyenbroek (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013); Karl Reichl, "Memory and Textuality in the Orality-Literacy Continuum", in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries*, ed. Julia Rubanovich (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015).

8 For studies that emphasize the importance of oral sources to Ferdowsi's poem, see Olga M. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), esp. 54–72; Olga M. Davidson, *Comparative Literature and Classical Persian Poetics: Seven Essays* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 9–28; Olga M. Davidson, "Persian/Iranian Epic", in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 267–268; Dick Davis, "The Problem of Ferdowsî's Sources", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.1 (1996); Yamamoto, *Oral Background*. But note the strong emphasis on written sources in Theodor Nöldeke, *The Iranian National Epic, or, The Shahnamah*, trans. Leonid Bogdanov (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1979 [1930]), 62–67; M. Omidsalar, "Orality, Mouvance and Editorial Theory in Shāhnāma Studies", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002); James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 349. See further the discussions in Richard Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 24–32; Julia Rubanovich, "The Shāh-nāma and Medieval Orality: Critical Remarks on the 'Oral Poetics' Approach and New Perspectives", *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16.2 (2013); Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, "'The Ground Well Trodden But the Shah Not Found …': Orality and Textuality in the 'Book of Kings' and the Zoroastrian Mythoepic Tradition", in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interaction across the Cen-*

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knew through translations.[9] Another key source, both for Ferdowsi and for modern scholars, is the *Annals* of al-Tabari (839–923 CE), a scholar from the Persian province of Tabaristan who wrote in Arabic.[10] Tabari also drew indirectly on the Book of Lords, and his preservation of multiple Alexander narratives gives some indication of the diverse traditions that circulated on the Iranian plateau.[11] A handful of other texts in Middle Persian, New Persian, and Arabic preserve facets of the "national history", though none so extensively as Ferdowsi or Tabari.[12] Of particular interest are the *Letter of Tansar* and the *Book of the Deeds of Ardashir*, both Sasanian texts in origin.[13] Also important is the

turies, ed. Julia Rubanovich (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015). On the *Xwadāy-nāmag* see Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", 57–59; A. Shahpur Shahbazi, "On the Xwadāy-nāmag", in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, "Al-Kisrawī and the Arabic Translations of the Khwadāynāmag", *Studia Orientalia* 114 (2013).

9 Stoneman, *A Life in Legend*, 30–31; see also the discussion of sources in Haila Manteghi, "Alexander the Great in the *Shāhnāmeh* of Ferdowsī", in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman et al. (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2012), 161–174. See also below, n. 29.

10 But note that Tabari also discussed Alexander in his *Tafsīr*, a work on the Quran: see Z. David Zuwiyya, "The Alexander Romance in the Arabic Tradition", in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 73.

11 For Tabari's use of the Book of Lords, see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 314. For his accounts of Alexander, see El-Sayed M. Gad, "Al-Tabari's Tales of Alexander: History and Romance", in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman et al. (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2012). For his relationship to pre-Islamic Iranian historical traditions more generally, see Savant, *New Muslims*, 41–47.

12 See Yarshater, "Iranian National History", 361–366; Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature", 55–61.

13 On the *Letter of Tansar*, see Mary Boyce, *The Letter of Tansar* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1968); Yarshater, "Iranian National History", 63; Pierre Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 364–365. The document survives only in a New Persian translation by one Ibn Isfandiyār, who in turn only knew it through an Arabic translation of the original Middle Persian. For the *Kār-nāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*, see the edition of Frantz Grenet, *Le geste d'Ardashir fils de Pâbag = Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* (Die: Éditions A Die, 2003); see further Carlo G. Cereti, *La letteratura pahlavi: introduzione ai testi con riferimenti alla storia degli studi e alla tradizione manoscritta* (Milan: Mimesis, 2001), 192–200; Richard Stoneman, "Persian Aspects of the Romance Tradition", in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman et al. (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2012), 12–14.

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Book of Darab, a 12th century CE Persian romance that supplies some additional details about Alexander's putative Persian father.[14]

Zoroastrian religious literature too reflects a long process of oral transmission, commission to writing during the (late) Sasanian period, and later redaction after the Muslim conquest.[15] For students of Alexander's legacy there is little of interest in the Avesta and the Zand, the central text of the Zoroastrian faith and its exegesis. But several Middle Persian Zoroastrian texts comment on the conqueror's reign, a period of history that they couch in distinctly negative terms.[16] The texts as we have them are productions of the early Islamic period, though they contain material that originated in Sasanian or even Parthian times.[17] The oral traditions that they drew on may even preserve a dim memory of Alexander's invasion, though this is a contentious point.[18]

As far as the Roman material is concerned, it must first be emphasized that the study of the historical Alexander is inextricable from the study of his Roman reception. Arrian was a Roman office holder writing under Trajan, whose eastern campaigns in the early second century CE occasioned a renewed interest in the Macedonian conqueror.[19] The other Alexander historians too looked back on the past from a Roman present. These authors had access to earlier accounts, of course, some of which were composed by Alexander's companions and contemporaries.[20] But their readings of the Hellenistic sources

14 Marina Gaillard, *Alexandre le Grand en Iran: Le Dârâb Nâmeh d'Abu Tâher Tarsusi* (Paris: De Boccard, 2005).

15 On Zoroastrian texts in Middle Persian, see J.P. de Menasce, "Zoroastrian Pahlavī Writings", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater, vol. 3.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature."

16 The passages pertaining to Alexander are collected in Touraj Daryaee, "*Imitatio Alexandri* and Its Impact on Late Arsacid, Early Sasanian and Middle Persian Literature", *Electrum* 12 (2007): 93–95; cf. M. Rahim Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians: Political Ideology in Post-Hellenistic and Late Antique Persia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 295–297.

17 Touraj Daryaee, "Zoroastrianism under Islamic Rule", in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 109–110.

18 See below, p. 206.

19 On Arrian's career in the Roman east see A.B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 16–25; on interest in Alexander's eastern conquests during the reign of Trajan see Richard Stoneman, *Alexander the Great* 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 5–6; Angela Kühnen, *Die imitatio Alexandri in der römischen Politik (1. Jh. v. Chr.–3. Jh. n. Chr.)* (Münster: Rhema Verlag, 2008), 167–168.

20 On the sources and methods of the Alexander historians, see N.G.L. Hammond, *Three His-*

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were shaped by the conditions of the late Republic and early Principate, and their notions of conquest and empire were influenced by their status as Roman subjects.[21]

Alexander historiography aside, a wealth of material from oratory, philosophy, biography, and poetry captures Roman attitudes towards Alexander with much greater chronological precision than the Iranian sources.[22] Material evidence plays a role as well, since some scholars have detected conscious evocation of Alexander in the busts of late Republican strongmen and the coinage of particular emperors.[23] The Romans were interested not only in the magnitude of Alexander's conquests, but also in the moral qualities of a ruler who had achieved such great yet perilous heights.[24] Like the Persians, they took a range of positions on the king's virtues and vices. Moreover, the relative certainty with which the pertinent texts can be dated means that the views of Roman authors can be situated in their historical and political contexts to an extent that Iranian views cannot.

Another important feature of the Roman literature is that it occasionally speaks for the Iranians, attributing statements to Parthian or Sasanian rulers

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torians of Alexander the Great: The So-Called Vulgate Authors, Diodorus, Justin and Curtius (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); N.G.L. Hammond, *Sources for Alexander the Great: An Analysis of Plutarch's Life and Arrian's Anabasis Alexandrou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander* on Arrian; and Elizabeth Baynham, *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) on Curtius Rufus.

21 On the production of Alexander histories in a Roman context, see John Atkinson, "Originality and Its Limits in the Alexander Sources of the Early Empire", in *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, ed. A.B. Bosworth and E.J. Baynham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Diana Spencer, *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 9–38; Diana Spencer, "Roman Alexanders: Epistemology and Identity", in *Alexander the Great: A New History*, ed. Waldemar Heckel and Lawrence Tritle (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 202–214; Thomas Hahn, "East and West, Cosmopolitan and Imperial in the Roman Alexander", in *Alexander the Great in the Middle Ages: Transcultural Perspectives*, ed. Markus Stock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 13.

22 Many of the most important passages are reproduced as readings in Spencer, *The Roman Alexander*.

23 See e.g. Dorothea Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild für Pompeius, Caesar und Marcus Antonius: Archäologische Untersuchungen* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1967); Kühnen, *Die imitatio Alexandri*.

24 Richard Stoneman, "The Legacy of Alexander in Ancient Philosophy", in *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. Joseph Roisman (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 325–326; Sabine Müller, *Alexander, Makedonien und Persien* (Berlin: Trafo, 2014), 115.

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that specify their relationship to Alexander and/or the Achaemenid Empire that he conquered.[25] Such passages present their own methodological difficulties, and the authenticity of the Persian views that they purport to represent has occasioned much debate.[26] The nature of the Iranian evidence rarely allows for direct confirmation or rejection. It is possible, of course, to consider the implications of the supposedly Iranian sentiments found in the Greco-Roman literary texts. But it was common practice in ancient historiography to put Roman ideas into the mouths of barbarians, and the value of such passages as evidence for Iranian attitudes may be minimal.[27] What appear to be Parthian or Sasanian interpretations of Alexander and the Achaemenids may be no more than Romans indulging in a Persianizing fantasy.

Finally, the sprawling traditions of the Alexander Romance wound their way through both Rome and Persia, promulgating a diverse collection of stories that mixed history with saga and myth. From a recension in Greek at some point between the second and fourth centuries CE, versions of the Romance proliferated in a number of languages—including Latin—that gave the tradition a broad geographical impact in Roman and Persian territories and beyond.[28] The possible existence of a Middle Persian Alexander Romance remains a contentious subject, and this body of literature might have enjoyed considerable popularity among Sasanian ruling elites.[29] But no Middle Persian text survives

25 See Tac. *Ann.* 6.31.1; Cass. Dio 80.3.4; Herodian 6.2.1–2, 6.2.6–7, 6.4.5; Julian *Or.* 2.63a–b; Amm. Marc. 17.5.5.

26 See below, pp. 210–211.

27 For the Roman use of barbarian mouthpieces, see Eric Adler, *Valorizing the Barbarians: Enemy Speeches in Roman Historiography* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011). As Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg ("Yauna by the Sea and across the Sea", in *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, ed. I. Malkin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 340) argued for Greek historiography on the Achaemenids, "Persians on Greeks are really Greeks on Persians and therefore Greeks on Greeks." The same problem applies to Roman historiography on the Parthians and Sasanians.

28 On the date of the Greek recension, see Ken Dowden, "The Alexander Romance", in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B.P. Reardon (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 650.

29 Theodor Nöldeke ("Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans", *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften Classe, phil-hist. Klasse* 38.5 (1890)) argued that the Syriac version of the Romance was produced in the early 7th century CE from a Middle Persian version of Pseudo-Callisthenes, and the view still has adherents (Daryaee, *Imitatio Alexandri*, 89; Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature", 175; Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, "Alexander the Great in the Syriac Literary Tradition", in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 42) and opponents (Richard

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for study. An assessment of the Romance's significance in Persia must therefore include the traditions in Syriac as well as Arabic, which were widely disseminated throughout Iran with the arrival of Islam.

Politics, History, and Analogy

An essential feature of Alexander's reception in both Iran and Rome was the use of his memory to support a historical analogy. For commentators on both sides of the Euphrates, there was a strong continuity between Alexander's invasion of the powerful empire on his eastern frontier and the deep-seated Roman instinct to seek new imperial acquisitions at the expense of the Parthians and the Sasanians. The difference was the direction in which the continuity ran.

In the Iranian sources, Alexander's eastern imperialism was an early manifestation of Roman imperialism, because Alexander was a Roman. His description as such in the Iranian evidence is clear and consistent. In the Zoroastrian texts he is variously called "Alexander the Caesar from Rome"[30] or "Alexander the Roman".[31] In some passages, the men who served in his armies are called Romans as well.[32] The same holds true for other texts in Middle Persian or descended from Middle Persian sources, like the *Book of the Deeds of Ardashir*, the *Letter of Tansar*, and the *Book of Darab*.[33] According to Ferdowsi in the *Šāh-nāma*, "the king in Rome was Philip", who along with Alexander was also called by the appellation of Caesar.[34] Nor is there any apparent incompatibil-

N. Frye, "Two Iranian Notes", in *Papers in Honour of Prof. M. Boyce*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 185–187; C.A. Ciancaglini, "The Syriac Version of the Alexander Romance", *Le Muséon* 114 (2001): 121–140). If a Middle Persian Romance did indeed make an impact in late antique Iran, its popularity would presumably have been among the nobility, not the Zoroastrian clergy: see Wiesehöfer, "Accursed and Adventurer", 128.

30 *Bundahišn* 33.19 = Fazlollah Pakzad, *Bundahišn: Zoroastrische Kosmogonie und Kosmologie* (Tehran: Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia, 2005), 366: "*aleksandar ī kēsar az hrōm*".

31 *Abdīh ud sahīgīh ī zamīg ī Sīstān* 13: "*alaksandar ī hrōmīg*"; *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 7.32 = Carlo G. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995), 144: "*aleksandar ī hrōmāyīg*"; *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag* 1.3: "*aleksandar ī hrōmāyīg*".

32 *Dēnkard* 3B; 4C = Helmut Humbach, Josef Elfenbein, and Prods O. Skjærvø, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1991), 52–53.

33 *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān* 1.1 = Grenet, *La geste d'Ardashir*, 52–53; *Letter of Tansar* = Boyce, *Letter of Tansar*, 26 and n. 2; *Dārāb-nāmeh* = Gaillard, *Dârâb Nâmeh*, 128–129.

34 Ferdowsi, *Šāh-nāma* = Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi: The Shahnameh*

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ity between Alexander's identity as a Roman on the one hand and his supposed birth in the land of Greece or Egypt on the other.[35] The texts associate the king with Roman power even where they make him the ruler of non-Roman political entities.

"Rome" was hardly a fixed point of reference in late antique and post-conquest Iran, of course, and the clergy, poets, and scholars who contributed to the Iranian Alexander traditions would have understood the geographical designation in various ways both before and after the arrival of the Arabs. In the world of early Islam, the word *Rūm* most often meant the curtailed Byzantine state of Asia Minor, though it could still refer to the erstwhile Mediterranean empire and, eventually, to the lands of the Christian north more generally.[36] But while the meaning and location of Rome shifted, Alexander's identification as a leader of this realm remained. As Rome moved, the memory of the conqueror moved with it.

The same Zoroastrian texts that call Alexander a Roman preserve a harsh judgment of his character and kingship. The "accursed" Alexander is accused of various crimes against the Good Religion: the assassination of rulers, the murder of priests, the destruction of archives, the burning of holy texts, and even the translation of the Avesta into Greek.[37] Many of these charges are likely to have been no more accurate than the labelling of the Macedonian conqueror as a Roman; most scholars agree, for instance, that the Avesta would not have existed in written form during the fourth century BCE, and thus would have been unavailable for Alexander to desecrate.[38] Nevertheless, the memory

(*The Book of Kings*), vol. 5 (Costa Mesa, CA; New York: Mazda Publishers, 1997), 519, line 44: به روم اندرون شاه بد فیلقوس; cf. 524, lines 110–111.

35 In the *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag* 1.3, for instance, Alexander is "*aleksandar ī hrōmāyīg ī muzrāyīg mānišn*", or "Alexander the Roman who lived in Egypt". Cf. Ps. Callisth. 1.1–14.

36 Koray Durak, "Who Are the Romans? The Definition of *Bilād Al-Rūm* (Land of the Romans) in Medieval Islamic Geographies", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31.3 (2010): 287. See also Cemal Kafadar, "A Rome of One's Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum", *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 9–10, with further discussion of the term's referents during the Seljuk period.

37 See the passages collected in Daryaee, "Imitatio Alexandri", 93–95 with the discussion in Wiesehöfer, "Accursed and Adventurer", 124–125. Tabari preserves similar accusations: see 701 = Moshe Perlmann, *The History of Al-Tabarī*, vol. 4 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 94.

38 On the commission of the Avesta to writing, see Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 16–17; Wiesehöfer, "Accursed and Adventurer", 145; Prods O. Skjærvø, "Avestan Society", in *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, ed. Touraj Daryaee (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58.

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became deeply embedded in Zoroastrian tradition. The king's Roman identity went hand in hand with his reputation as an enemy of pre-Islamic Iran's most important religion.

Since our Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts are overwhelmingly productions of the eighth through tenth centuries CE, their pronouncements on Alexander should be situated in their early Islamic contexts. The Arab conquest took a political, financial, and demographic toll on the Zoroastrians of the Iranian plateau, and while relations with Muslims were not always adversarial, the collection and preservation of the Good Religion's teachings seem to have been spurred by the pressures of foreign invasion and the erosion of the faith's historically close relationship with the wielders of political power.[39] In this respect, Alexander's campaigns may have offered ancient parallels to the depredations of the Arabs; Zoroastrianism's misfortunes at the hands of Iran's recent conquerors shaped its interpretations of the Macedonian invasion.[40]

But post-conquest Zoroastrians also worked with material that bore the weight of long tradition. As many scholars have argued, Alexander's designation as a Roman is likely to have emerged from the long history of conflict between the Parthians and Romans and, later, the Sasanians and Byzantines. Since the empires of Iran and Rome clashed repeatedly from the first century BCE through the seventh CE, the Iranians projected a Roman identity onto an enemy from the remote past.[41] This is not to say that their traditions had lost all original memories from the time of Alexander. It may well be the case that the Zoroastrian depiction of the king as a sacrilegious despoiler was, in origin, the result of the chaos unleashed by his armies during his invasion of the Iranian plateau.[42] But the later rivalry between Persia and Rome seems to have

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39 See Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), esp. 114–119; Savant, *New Muslims*, 113–115; Daryaee, "Zoroastrianism under Islamic Rule", 109–110.

40 On the parallels between Alexander's invasion and the Arab conquests, see also Albert de Jong, "Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran", in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 94.

41 Theodor Nöldeke, "Geschichte des Artachšîr i Pâpakân, aus dem Pehlewi übersetzt, mit Erläuterungen und einer Einleitung versehen", *Bezzenberger's Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen* 4 (1878), 36 n. 1; Gaillard, *Dârâb Nâmeh*, 18–19; Daryaee, "Imitatio Alexandri."

42 Frye, "Two Iranian Notes", 187–188; Philippe Gignoux, "La démonisation d'Alexandre le Grand d'après la littérature pehlevie", in *Iranian Languages and Texts from Iran and Turan*, ed. Maria Macuch et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007); Josef Wiesehöfer, "Zum Nachleben von Achaimeniden und Alexander", in *Achaemenid History VIII: Continuity*

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imparted a Roman identity to Alexander that became fused with earlier traditions. Modern researchers may attempt to disentangle the older and newer threads, but there is no indication that late antique and post-conquest Iranians would have done so.

The Roman tradition operated in a different way. The Romans never described Alexander as anything but a Macedonian king; they never claimed him so literally as one of their own. They did, however, believe that the process of conquest and expansion afforded their most powerful commanders the opportunity to follow in Alexander's footsteps—to carve a greater empire out of the same eastern lands that Alexander had once invaded, whether for good ends or bad. The idea that the Macedonian king's political and military career served as a model has received much scholarly discussion under the label of *imitatio Alexandri*, or the imitation of Alexander.[43] The concept has been fruitfully applied to Hellenistic history and particularly to Seleucid kingship, but most studies in this vein have focused on Romans of the late Republic or the Principate.[44]

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and Change. Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop, April 6–8, 1990—Ann Arbor, Michigan, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg et al. (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 395; Wiesehöfer, "Accursed and Adventurer", 125–126; de Jong, "Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran", 94; but cf. Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 370; Touraj Daryaee, "Refashioning the Zoroastrian Past: From Alexander to Islam", in *The Zoroastrian Flame: Exploring Religion, History and Tradition*, ed. A. Williams et al. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 137.

43 An ancient use of this phrase may be Seneca's *furiosi et externi et infeliciter superbi regis imitatio* (*De Brev*. 18.5), though it is not clear that the words refer to Alexander; see S.J.V. Malloch, "Gaius' Bridge at Baiae and Alexander-Imitatio", *Classical Quarterly* 51.1 (2001): 208–209.

44 On the *imitatio Alexandri* during the Hellenistic period, see Claudia Bohm, *Imitatio Alexandri im Hellenismus: Untersuchungen zum politischen Nachwirken Alexanders des Großen in Hoch- und Späthellenistischen Monarchien* (Munich: tuduv, 1989); Andrew F. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For the concept in Egyptian literature, see Kim Ryholt, "*Imitatio Alexandri* in Egyptian Literary Tradition", in *The Romance between Greece and the East*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh and Stuart Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For key studies on the Roman *imitatio Alexandri*, see Alfred Heuss, "Alexander der Große und die politische Ideologie des Altertums", *Antike und Abendland* 4 (1954): 65–104; Michel, *Alexander als Vorbild*; Otto Weippert, "Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit", (PhD diss., Bayerische Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 1972); Erich S. Gruen, "Rome and the Myth of Alexander", in *Ancient History in a Modern University*, vol. 1, ed. T.W. Hillard et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 178–191; Spencer, *The Roman Alexander*; Kühnen, *Die imitatio Alexandri*.

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Debate persists as to how the Roman *imitatio Alexandri* should be understood. For would-be Roman conquerors of the East, was the desire to match or exceed Alexander's achievements a genuine commitment, or were Alexandrian echoes merely useful propaganda tools to justify foreign campaigns to a domestic audience?[45] Then again, Alexander's example may have been less a consideration for Roman commanders than it was for the authors who chronicled their lives; perhaps the drawing of parallels was a literary device, not a political strategy.[46] The debate need not be resolved here, and at any rate the possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Whether the *imitatio* belonged more to the realm of history or rhetoric, the figure of Alexander occupied a prominent place in how the Romans thought and wrote about eastern conquest—a prospect that never ceased to entice Roman leaders.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate the prominence and longevity of Alexander's example. In the first century BCE, Gnaeus Pompey Magnus "believed himself to be similar to king Alexander and vied with him in his achievements and plans", according to his contemporary Sallust.[47] Nearly two centuries later, Trajan would couch his Parthian campaign in terms of both reverence for and rivalry with the Macedonian; he offered sacrifices to the king's memory at Babylon, but also wrote to the Senate to proclaim that his own campaign had advanced farther east than Alexander's.[48] And in the fourth century CE,

45 *Imitatio Alexandri* as a sincere motive: Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC–AD 337* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 142–143; D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 142–143. For the propaganda value of Alexandrian parallels, see Andreas Luther, "Zum Orientfeldzug des Gaius Caesar", *Gymnasium* 117 (2010) on Gaius Caesar; Malloch, "Gaius' Bridge" on Caligula; and Kühnen, *Die imitatio Alexandri*, 150–151 on Nero.

46 For this view, see F.E. Adcock, "Caesar's Dictatorship", in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. S.A. Cook et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 739; Peter Green, "Caesar and Alexander: Aemulatio, Imitatio, and Comparatio", in *Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 194; Gruen, "Rome and the Myth of Alexander", 182–188; cf. Erich S. Gruen, "Review of *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth* by Diana Spencer", *The International History Review* 25.3 (2003): 639–641.

47 Sall. *Hist.* 3.88 M: *similem fore se credens Alexandro regi, facta consultaque eius quidem aemulatus erat*. Gruen ("Rome and the Myth of Alexander", 184–185) stresses that the sentence is a fragment devoid of context. But it is good evidence from a contemporary that Alexander was a yardstick against which Pompey measured his own career; cf. Kühnen, *Die imitatio Alexandri*, 74–75; Kathryn Welch and Hannah Mitchell, "Revisiting the Roman Alexander", *Antichthon* 47 (2013): 88.

48 Cass. Dio 68.29.1, 30.1; cf. G. Wirth, "Alexander und Rom", in *Alexandre le Grand: image*

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as Julian marched east to fight the Sasanian king Shapur II, the orator Libanius described his native Antioch to the emperor as "a city of Alexander, who moved along the same course that you do."[49]

On one level, then, Alexander's invasion of Persia in the fourth century BCE furnished a historical precedent for Roman-Parthian and later Roman-Sasanian armed conflict. As Alexander had won power, glory, and territory in the East at the expense of the Persians, so generations of Roman leaders would clash with their Parthian and Sasanian counterparts in the name of conquest and empire. For some observers in Rome and on the Iranian plateau, these clashes could be interpreted as re-runs of Alexander's original *anabasis*, now seen as a formative struggle between East and West that had set the stage for what was to come. The Macedonian king's place had been taken by Romans who sought to replicate or even surpass what he had achieved—again with an Iranian empire arrayed against them.

But while both sides might view Rome's eastern campaigns as analogous with Alexander's original invasion, the evidence suggests a crucial difference in the way that they conceived of their histories. The Romans imagined their commanders as new (and in some cases improved) versions of the Macedonian conqueror; they described the present in terms of the past. The Iranians, however, assigned to their ancient enemy an identity—"Roman"—that belonged to their contemporary imperial rivals; they described the past in terms of the present. The end result was much the same: both approaches to history fostered the impression that the East and the West had long been at war with one another, and that Alexander's age had sown the seeds of a deep antagonism.[50] But the contours of the traditions were different. In Iran, the present was a way to frame the past; in Rome, it was the other way around.

The Greco-Roman sources do not stop at drawing parallels between Alexander the Great and Rome's generals; they go one step further, and complete the analogy. If the Romans were the heirs to the great Macedonian's eastern campaign of conquest, then their Parthian and Sasanian enemies had to be

et réalité: 7 exposés suivis de discussions, ed. E. Badian (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1976), 198.

49 Lib. *Or*. 15.79: πόλις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ τὰ αὐτά σοι δραμόντος. For other comparisons of Julian to Alexander (including some comments by Julian himself), see Rowland Smith, "The Casting of Julian the Apostate 'in the Likeness' of Alexander the Great: A Topos in Antique Historiography and Its Modern Echoes", *Histos* 5 (2011) and R.J. Lane Fox, "The Itinerary of Alexander: Constantius to Julian", *Classical Quarterly* 47.1 (1997): 250–251, who downplays Julian's conscious imitation of Alexander.

50 Cf. Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, 154; Gaillard, *Dârâb Nâmeh*, 18–19.

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reborn versions of the Achaemenids who had opposed him. In a practice that would continue for centuries, Roman authors of the Augustan period increasingly began to model their descriptions of the Parthians on earlier portrayals of the Achaemenids in Greek literature. Just as the distinction between "Mede" and "Persian" was often elided in the Classical period, now the Parthians could be called Medes, Persians, and Achaemenids—all terms that had referred to the descendants of Cyrus the Great and the inhabitants of his empire.[51] The practice continued apace well into the Sasanian period.[52] As long as ambitious Roman generals with eastern commands were ready to follow in Alexander's footsteps, the Parthians and Sasanians provided rough and ready equivalents of the Achaemenids who had ruled the Near East during the king's lifetime.

Were such descriptions faithful to an Iranian understanding of history? Or were they no more than an *interpretatio Romana*, a genealogy invented by the Romans and projected onto the Persian empires of the first centuries CE?[53] Answers have varied.[54] As noted above, several passages in Roman historiog-

51 Michael Wissemann, *Die Parther in der augusteischen Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1982), 122–123; Holger Sonnabend, *Fremdenbild und Politik: Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1986), 280–288; Antony Spawforth, "Symbol of Unity? The Persian-Wars Tradition in the Roman Empire", in *Greek Historiography*, ed. Simon Hornblower (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1994), 237–243; Rolf Michael Schneider, "Die Faszination des Feindes: Bilder der Parther und des Orients in Rom", in *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse = The Arsacid Empire—Sources and Documentation: Beiträge des internationalen Colloquiums, Eutin (27.–30. Juni 1996)*, ed. Josef Wiesehöfer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 111; Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 375–376; Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 204–206. On the classical elision between "Mede" and "Persian", see Christopher Tuplin, "Persians as Medes", in *Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop, April 6–8, 1990, Ann Arbor, Michigan*, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg et al. (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 238–251. The Roman view of the Achaemenid heritage of the Parthians coexisted with other theories of their Scythian origin: see Stefan Hauser, "Die ewigen Nomaden: Bemerkungen zu Herkunft, Militär, Staatsaufbau und nomadischen Traditionen der Arsakiden", in *Krieg–Gesellschaft–Institutionen: Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Kriegsgeschichte*, ed. Burkhard Meißner et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 170–185; Charlotte Lerouge, *L'image des Parthes dans le monde gréco-romain* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 174–185.

52 See the passages discussed in Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, 30–41.

53 For the term, see Erich Kettenhofen, "Die Einforderung des Achämeniderbes durch Ardasir: Eine Interpretatio Romana", *Orientalia Lovaniensa Periodica* 15 (1984).

54 For those who deny that the Parthians and Sasanians made direct appeals to Achaemenid heritage, see E. Yarshater, "Were the Sasanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?" in *Atti del*

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raphy contain proclamations from Iranian rulers that mount claims to former Achaemenid territories on the basis of putative descent.[55] If some of these passages raise suspicions, others come from reputable authors like Tacitus and Ammianus who are generally thought not to have taken undue liberties with the reporting of documents.[56] Still, the addition of claims to Achaemenid heritage would not be surprising given the conventions of ancient historiography.[57] In the absence of corroborating evidence from Parthian or Sasanian territory, the Greco-Roman literary sources cannot be trusted to speak for the Iranian view of the past.

The late date of the eastern literary evidence leaves much on the Iranian side unclear, but it does give a sense of the relevant traditions. Where the classical Mediterranean sources relied on early Greek historiography for their information about the Achaemenids, the Iranian memory of the dynasty was likely to have been rooted in the oral compositions, both legendary and religious, that dominated the Parthian and Sasanian view of the past.[58] Some early Islamic sources remember Alexander's opponent not as Darius III the Achaemenid but as Dārā the Kayanian, the last scion of a dynasty whose origins were in

Convegno internazionale sul tema: La Persia nel Medioevo. (*Roma, 31 Marzo–5 Aprile 1970*) (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1971), 519; Kettenhofen, "Die Einforderung des Achämeniderbes"; Philip Huyse, "La revendication de territoires achéménides par les Sassanides: une réalité historique?" in *Iran: Questions et connaissances*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Huyse (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2002), 297–311; Huyse, "Late Sasanian Society", 152–153. For less unequivocal discussions, see Josef Wiesehöfer, "Iranische Ansprüche an Rom auf ehemals achaimenidische Territorien", *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran N.F.* 19 (1986): 177–185; Josef Wiesehöfer, "Gebete für die 'Urahnen' oder: Wann und wie verschwanden Kyros und Dareios aus der historischen Tradition Irans?" in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient World*, ed. Edward Dąbrowa (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2002), 111–117; Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*. Touraj Daryaee has argued that the Sasanians knew of the Achaemenids, but wrote them out of their history in favor of the Kayanians, who were more closely aligned with Zoroastrian religious authority; see Touraj Daryaee, "National History or Keyanid History?: The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography", *Iranian Studies* 28.3/4 (1995); Touraj Daryaee, "The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia", *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 55.4 (2006).

55 Tac. *Ann.* 6.31.1; Cass. Dio 80.3.4; Herodian 6.2.1–2, 6.2.6–7, 6.4.5; Amm. Marc. 17.5.5.

56 D.S. Potter rejects the testimony of Herodian for the reign of Ardashir, for instance, but accepts that of Ammianus for Shapur II (*Roman Empire at Bay*, 223, 460–461).

57 See the literature cited above, n. 27.

58 Matthew P. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 47–48.

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the realm of myth.[59] In the *Šāh-nāma*, for instance, Dārā "exalted the Kayanian crown to the sun" after ascending the throne.[60] Dārā's origins are unclear, but some scholars locate them in late antiquity, when the Alexander Romance tradition began to work its way into a Sasanian version of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*.[61] Although names like Artaxerxes and Darius seem to preserve correspondences between the Achaemenids and Kayanians, in the final analysis the two dynasties come from different, and irreconcilable, historical traditions.[62]

So while the Parthians and Sasanians did not follow the Romans in describing themselves as "Achaemenids", they may nevertheless have seen connections between their own families and the Kayanian dynasty that had died out in the wake of Alexander's campaigns. The *Šāh-nāma* traces the lineage of the Sasanian founder Ardashir back to Dārā, whose son Sāsān escaped the depredations of Alexander by fleeing to India.[63] The *Book of the Deeds of Ardashir* preserves the same genealogy.[64] Tabari knew of traditions that held Dārā to be the father not only of Ardashir but also of Ashak—the founder of the Parthian kingdom, known to the Greek world as Arsaces.[65] In a word, the Parthians and Sasanians did not need to know who the Achaemenids were in order to trace their ancestry back to Alexander's Persian opponent.

59 Selden, "Iskander and the Idea of Iran", 152; Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 360. On the Kayanians in the Avesta, see Daryaee, "National History or Keyanid History", 136–137; on the Kayanian heroic cycle, see Mary Boyce, "Some Remarks on the Transmission of the Kayanian Heroic Cycle", in *Serta Cantabrigiensia* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1954); Yarshater, "Iranian National History", 461–473.

60 Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shahnameh*, vol. 5, 529, line 1: به خورشید تاج کیی برفراشت.

61 Mario Grignaschi, "La *Nihāyatu-l-ʾArab fī Ahbāri-l-Furs Wa-l-ʾArab et les Siyaru Mulūki-l-ʾAǧam* du Ps. Ibn-al-Muqaffaʿ", *Bulletin d'études orientales* 26 (1973): 98–99; cf. Julia Rubanovich, "Why So Many Stories? Untangling the Versions of Iskandar's Birth and Upbringing", in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interaction across the Centuries*, ed. Julia Rubanovich (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), 203–205.

62 Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 362.

63 For the narrative, see Davis, *Shahnameh*, 530–531.

64 *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān* 1.5–6 = Grenet, *La geste d'Ardashir*, 54–55; cf. Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 385–386; Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 364.

65 Or, alternately, Dārā's father, also named Dārā or sometimes Dārāb. See Tabari 700, 704, 709 = Perlmann, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 4, 93–100; cf. Tabari 814 = C.E. Bosworth, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 3. Other Islamic authors report the same genealogy; see Yarshater, "Iranian National History", 475 and n. 1.

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The imagined descent of Arsaces and Ardashir from Dārā may have further contributed to a negative view of Alexander's kingship over the Iranian plateau. In the *Letter of Tansar*, the king's councillor Aristotle advocates a policy of divide and rule to keep the newly-conquered land of Iran quiescent: Alexander should foment rivalry among the Persian nobility so that, fighting with one another, they "would not be free to think upon the past."[66] By turning the land over to squabbling petty kings, Alexander robbed Iran of its traditional cohesiveness and erased the memory of its greatness under the Kayanians—a greatness that, according to the *Letter*, would not be re-achieved until the conquests of Ardashir. Ferdowsi too speaks of Iranian disarray after Alexander's death, and Tabari intones that "Persian rule continued to break down until the rise of Ardashir."[67] To be sure, this view stems in part from Sasanian propaganda designed to belittle the Arsacid dynasty which they overthrew.[68] But it is nonetheless telling that Alexander, not Arsaces, was held to be the cause of the deluge from the Kayanian period.

Along with the identification of Alexander as a Roman, the putative descent of the Sasanians from Dārā seems to have affected how the dynasty justified its campaigns of plunder and conquest against the Romans. The *Letter of Tansar* explains Ardashir's western foreign policy as follows:

> He [Ardashir] has devoted all his thoughts to attacking the Romans and pursuing his quarrel against that people; and he will not rest until he has avenged Darius [Dārā] against the successors of Alexander.[69]

Persistent doubts about the dating of the *Letter* mean that it is impossible to know whether such a statement actually figured in the royal proclamations of Ardashir himself.[70] But if the document does indeed have a Sasanian provenance, it shows that, by the sixth century CE at the latest, Sasanian wars with Rome could be explained as campaigns of vengeance against the empire from which Alexander had launched his invasion of Iran.[71] An echo of this idea in Parthian propaganda may survive in the Muslim author Abū Mansūr al-Taʿālibī (961–1038 CE). His history mentions a leader named Afqūr Šāh, probably to be

66 Translation from Boyce, *Letter of Tansar*, 28.

67 Davis, *Shahnameh*, 530; quotation from Perlmann, *The History of Al-Tabarī*, vol. 4, 98.

68 Wiesehöfer, "Iranische Ansprüche", 177.

69 Translation from Boyce, *Letter of Tansar*, 65, adapted.

70 On the dating of the document, see the literature cited above, n. 13.

71 Cf. Richard Payne, "Cosmology and the Expansion of the Iranian Empire, 502–628 CE", *Past and Present* 220.1 (2013): 23, on Ardashir's "procurement of reparations from Rome."

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identified with the Arsacid Pacorus, whose successful campaigns against the Romans are supposed to have obtained vengeance for Alexander's fallen foe Dārā.[72] Even if the Achaemenids had lapsed into historical obscurity, then, the memory of Darius persisted and mattered. It linked the Parthians and Sasanians to the glorious Iranian past, and it animated a new struggle with Alexander's "successors" in the west.

A final consideration for the question of analogy is how and whether the Iranian and Roman traditions were in dialogue with one another. Were the Parthians and Sasanians aware of the *imitatio Alexandri* in Rome, and if so, how did the Roman espousal of Alexander's example influence their own views of the conqueror? Conversely, when the Sasanians claimed to be restoring the glory that Persia had known under Darius III and his predecessors, what sort of reaction might this propaganda have spurred in Rome? Direct evidence for the exchange of historical traditions is scarce, but some scholars have persuasively suggested that the Iranian and Roman Alexanders may have fed into one another, deepening the idea that the Romans stood in Alexander's shoes while the Persians stood in Darius'.[73] Recent scholarship has discussed how developments in Iranian and Roman political ideology were put in dialogue with one another as diplomats, merchants, and missionaries circulated between the Mediterranean and the Near East.[74] The transmission of Alexander narratives

72 See Yarshater, "Iranian National History", 475. On this Pacorus in Greco-Roman literature, see Margarete Karras-Klapproth, *Prosopographische Studien zur Geschichte des Partherreiches auf der Grundlage antiker literarischer Überlieferung* (Bonn: In Kommission bei R. Habelt, 1988), 119–123. Cf. Josef Wiesehöfer, "Rūm as Enemy of Iran", in *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity*, ed. Erich S. Gruen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005), 115: "Such a story can hardly be of Sasanian origin; it must have been a survival of the Parthian view of the conflict between East and West."

73 Touraj Daryaee, "The Changing 'Image of the World': Geography and Imperial Propaganda in Ancient Persia", in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient World*, ed. Edward Dąbrowa (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2002), 102; Daryaee, "Imitatio Alexandri"; Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, esp. 340–349.

74 For political ideology, see Josef Wiesehöfer, *Iraniens, Grecs et Romains* (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2005), 111–149; Canepa, *Two Eyes*; Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*. For the diffusion of ideas, see John F. Matthews, "Hostages, Philosophers, Pilgrims, and the Diffusion of Ideas in the Late Roman Mediterranean and Near East", in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, ed. F.M. Clover and R.S. Humphreys (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 29–50. Rika Gyselen, "Romans and Sasanians in the Third Century: Propaganda Warfare and Ambiguous Imagery", in *Commutatio et Contentio: Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. Josef Wiesehöfer and Henning Börm (Düsseldorf: Wellem Verlag, 2010) uses

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could have been part of these exchanges, and it may even have deepened the identification of both empires with the figures they saw as their imperial predecessors.

In sum, the reception of Alexander in both Iran and Rome supported an interpretation of their relationship that rested on a historical analogy. For ambitious Roman commanders and the authors who wrote about them, eastern campaigns against the Parthians or Sasanians were opportunities to recreate or even surpass Alexander's campaigns against the Achaemenids, now reincarnated as the Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties. In Iran, the early Islamic texts suggest that the Sasanians—and perhaps the Parthians too, though it is unclear whether the evidence goes back that far—saw the Romans in the west as both the successors of Alexander and answerable for the havoc he had wreaked upon their land. The memory of the king became a way to interpret interstate politics: as Alexander was to the ancient Persians, so now the Romans were to the Parthians and the Sasanians. When Persia and Rome clashed, they carried on a contest of great antiquity with roots that ran far deeper than their own eras.

The Limits of Analogy

Political ideology demands a coherent vision of how the world is supposed to look; grey areas and subtlety can dilute the force of clear narratives. In the politico-religious worldview that emerged in Iran under the Parthians and Sasanians, Alexander was an accursed foreign interloper whose invasion upset the cosmic order; in the conquest-centred realm of Roman imperial ideology, he was a leader who had blazed an eastern trail for future generations of military commanders. Rome took his place, while Parthia and the Sasanian kingdom took the place of his Persian enemies.

But the analogy only went so far. In both Rome and Iran, the legacy of Alexander was too multifaceted and too diverse to fit into any one historical narrative. In the literature of the late Republic and early Principate, some Roman observers were distinctly critical of the king's legacy and, by extension, of the project of eastern imperialism that it underpinned. And in the literature of Iran, one strand of the Alexander legend tried to create a place for the Macedonian in the roster of the great Persian kings. Where the Alexander

numismatic evidence to argue that the Sasanians responded to Roman propaganda. For the mobility of the stories contained in the various traditions of the Alexander Romance, see Daniel L. Selden, "Mapping the Alexander Romance", in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman et al. (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2012).

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historians of Rome expressed concern that the king had flirted with eastern despotism in his efforts to accommodate his Persian subjects, the Persians themselves embraced a story that made him one of them. These traditions coexisted with the Alexander analogy that the dynamics of Roman-Parthian and Roman-Sasanian relations had foregrounded—sometimes uneasily, and sometimes even within the confines of a single text.

In Rome, Alexander's example could sometimes be deployed to highlight the treacherous pitfalls of eastern imperialism rather than the glory that successful conquerors could earn. After the death of Publius Crassus (son of the triumvir Marcus Crassus) in battle against the Parthians at Carrhae in 53 BCE, Cicero lamented that the young man had been killed "while he was trying to be like Cyrus and Alexander."[75] The author blames Crassus' death on his desire to follow the wrong kind of *exempla*; the brash adventurism of the Persian and Macedonian conquerors is contrasted with the austere honour and sober wisdom of Crassus' ancestors, and his service in the Carrhae campaign is said to have resulted from "a fire of ambition unsuited to young men."[76] Moreover, Alexander is paired with Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire and, in this passage, Alexander's moral equivalent. For Cicero, the Macedonian provided no better an example than the Persian.

Such wariness of Alexander's military adventurism was shared by Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who wrote under the later Julio-Claudian emperors. In a letter to his correspondent Lucilius detailing the nature of Stoic virtue, Seneca inveighs against the greed and lack of self-restraint that great commanders tend to exhibit. Alexander illustrates his point perfectly:

> Not sated with the ruin of the states so numerous which Philip had conquered or bought, he overthrows various others in various other places and bears arms around the whole world; nor yet does his cruelty, though tired, subside, like that of wild beasts who eat more than hunger demands. Now he joins many kingdoms into one kingdom, now the Greeks and the Persians fear the same man, now even the nations left free by Darius submit to the yoke.[77]

75 Cic. *Brut.* 282: *dum Cyri et Alexandri similis esse voluit*. Cicero considered Publius a disciple: see Cic. *Q Fr.* 2.8.2.

76 Cic. *Brut.* 282: *hunc quoque absorbuit aestus quidam insolitae adulescentibus gloriae*; cf. Henriette van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models: The Political Strategy of a Newcomer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 313–314.

77 Sen. *Epist.* 94.62–63: *Non contentus tot civitatium strage, quas aut vicerat Philippus aut emerat, alias alio loco proicit et toto orbe arma circumfert; nec subsistit usquam lassa*

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Embedded in this moral discourse is a point of great consequence for Roman policy in the East.[78] Alexander is castigated for forging one kingdom from constituent parts that do not belong together; it is improper, in the author's view, for a single man to rule over both Greeks and Persians. This was no academic comment on an arid historical matter: for Seneca's contemporaries, the Parthians to the east ruled a resurrected version of the Persian Empire that Alexander had subjugated.[79] The implication for Roman leaders was plain: if Alexander had gone astray in adding Persian territory to his empire, then would-be conquerors of the East like Crassus, Caesar, and Antony had made the same mistake. Parthian territory constituted a part of the world that was better kept separate from Roman power; Rome's emperors followed in the Macedonian's footsteps at their own peril.

The idea reoccurs, in a still more vehement formulation, in the *Bellum Civile* of Seneca's nephew Lucan. As Caesar heads to Egypt, the land where Alexander was buried, the poet takes the opportunity to draw an implicit comparison between the Roman and Macedonian conquerors.[80] The deceased king is reviled as "the mad offspring of Pellaean Philip", a "lucky plunderer", and "an evil fatal to the world."[81] Lucan considers Alexander's limitless ambition to be a wicked transgression. "If liberty were ever to restore the world to itself", the poet laments, "Alexander would have been preserved for mockery—born to be a bad example to the world that so many lands could be under the sway of one man."[82] As in Seneca's evaluation, the king is faulted for joining together disparate kingdoms into a single polity, a decision that stemmed from madness, impudence, and an unchecked lust for power and that rendered him "an archetype of tyranny and megalomania."[83]

crudelitas inmanium ferarum modo quae plus quam exigit fames mordent. Iam in unum regnum multa regna coniecit, iam Graeci Persaeque eundem timent, iam etiam a Dareo liberae nationes iugum accipiunt.

78 Spencer (*The Roman Alexander*, 72–73) discusses the passage's commentary on the moral and philosophical education of a ruler.

79 See above, n. 51.

80 See Frederick Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 222–230; but cf. Nadja Kimmerle, *Lucan und der Prinzipat: Inkonsistenz und unzuverlässiges Erzählen in* Bellum Civile (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), esp. 35–37, who has criticized the idea of a negative comparison between Alexander and Caesar.

81 Luc. 10.20: *Pellaei proles vaesana Philippi*; 10.21: *Felix praedo*; 10.34: *Terrarum fatale malum.*

82 Luc. 10.25–28: *nam sibi libertas umquam si redderet orbem | ludibrio servatus erat, non utile mundo | editus exemplum, terras tot posse sub uno | esse viro*. Cf. Juv. 10.168.

83 Jonathan Tracy, *Lucan's Egyptian Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 29.

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How did such negative appraisals resonate during the late Republic and Principate? In contrast to treatments that tried to use Alexander to legitimize and promote eastern imperialism, traditions hostile to the Macedonian king implied that Romans who ventured east of the Euphrates were overstepping their bounds, projecting the empire's power into a region where it did not belong. Such a view could be difficult to reconcile with the political ideology of *imperium sine fine* (empire without limit), an attitude to conquest that was woven deep into the fabric of the empire.[84] All the same, one way of remembering Alexander emphasized that the king had gone, both geographically and morally, into places where the Romans were not supposed to follow.

In addition to more pedestrian despotic excesses—drunkenness, rapacity, megalomania—the negative Alexander tradition attributed a vice to the king that clashed dramatically with traditional Roman virtue: he was accused of going native, of succumbing to the Oriental degeneracy against which he had fought.[85] The charge had its basis in his adoption of Achaemenid aulic customs, including Persian dress, culinary habits, and especially ritual prostration (*proskynesis*).[86] Plutarch defended these measures as canny political leadership and Diodorus stressed their limited implementation, but the rest of the Alexander historians saw a degeneration into "the evil ways of foreign and conquered peoples."[87] Other Roman commentators tended to follow the latter view, with the result that "the theme of Alexander's moral decadence under the corrupting influence of the Orient became a veritable *topos* of Roman literature."[88] In his meditation on the hypothetical outcome of a war between Alexander and the Romans, Livy opines that the Macedonian "would have come to Italy more like Darius than Alexander" because of his adoption of eastern customs.[89] There was a sense that, in conquering the Persians, Alexander had become one of them.

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84 The phrase is from Verg. *Aen*. 1.279. On Roman attitudes toward imperial expansion, see William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327–70 BC* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1979) for the Republican period and C.R. Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40–46 for the Principate.

85 For Roman views of Alexander's drunkenness, see Spencer, *The Roman Alexander*, 86–97.

86 See A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 284–287.

87 Curt. 6.2.3: *peregrina et devictarum gentium mala*; cf. Arr. 4.7.4–5; Just. 12.3.8–11. On Curtius Rufus' account, see further Baynham, *Unique History*, 169–171. Plutarch's defense: *Mor*. 330b–c; cf. *Alex*. 45, 47. Diodorus' disclaimer: 17.77.4–7.

88 Briant, *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, 203, with the discussion on 202–229.

89 Liv. 9.18.3: *Dareo magis similis quam Alexandro in Italiam venisset*.

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On the Iranian side, one surviving tradition held that Alexander had not *become* a Persian; he had been *born* a Persian. According to this version of the legend, Alexander and his opponent Darius / Dārā were half-brothers, sons of the great Kayanian hero Dārāb. Alexander's mother was Nāhīd, the daughter of Philip—who, as mentioned above, was regarded in Iranian tradition as a Roman king. Philip gave Nāhīd to Dārāb as a wife. Dārāb, displeased with her malodorous breath, repudiated her and sent her back to Philip, though she was already pregnant with Alexander.[90] To cover the shame of her rejection by the Persian king, Philip claimed that he was the father, and in time named Alexander the crown prince of Rome. In the meantime, Dārāb took another wife, from whom Dārā was born a year or so after Alexander.[91]

This genealogy meant that Alexander could be, at one and the same time, a legitimate Kayanian king and a foreign Roman interloper. His figure in the *Šāh-nāma* is rife with tension between these two identities. Overall, Ferdowsi's portrait is positive: the king's beauty, wisdom, and temperance are emphasized throughout the narrative. In one scene, when Alexander visits Dārā in disguise, his half-brother observes that he is radiant with *farr*, the royal splendour that was the hallmark of Iranian kingship.[92] When Dārā is attacked by two of his councillors, he dies in Alexander's arms after asking his rival to marry his daughter, to preserve Zoroastrianism, and to maintain Iranian festivals.[93] After Dārā's death, Alexander reassures his new Persian subjects that "Iran is the same now as it always was", and shortly afterwards he puts on the Kayanian crown.[94]

In Ferdowsi's poem, these markers of Iranian kingship coexist with other assessments of Alexander as an interloper and an outsider. In a passage that shares many features with the *Letter of Tansar*, Alexander's final plans are said to have aimed at protecting Rome from foreign invasion. Aristotle advises him to leave Persia's nobility alive but disunited; "make the Kayanians into a

90 On Nāhīd's breath, see Manteghi, "Alexander the Great in the *Shāhnāmeh*", 166; Rubanovich, "Why So Many Stories", 207–212.

91 This is the narrative in Ferdowsī (cf. Davis, *Shahnameh*, 452–455) and, with minor variations, Tarsusi (Gaillard, *Dârâb Nâmeh*, 97–128). Tabari too knew this tradition (though he calls Alexander's mother Hali, not Nāhīd). But he also cites other genealogies, including one that held Alexander to be the son of Philip: see Tabari 696–697, 700–701 = Perlmann, *The History of Al-Tabarī*, vol. 4, 90–93.

92 Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shahnameh*, vol. 5, 537, line 95 = Davis 2007, 459.

93 Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shahnameh*, vol. 5, 557, lines 370–382 = Davis 2007, 466–470.

94 Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Shahnameh*, vol. 5, 561, line 414: همانست ایران که بود از نخست. Alexander crowned with the Kayanian crown: 565, line 458.

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shield for your whole realm", he urges, "if you don't want an army to come against Rome."[95] In contrast to earlier passages, Alexander seems not to be a Kayanian himself here, and he is more concerned with the defence of Rome than the defence of Iran. Later in the poem, as Ferdowsi narrates the rise of the Sasanians, the dynasty's founder Ardeshir will inveigh against the wickedness of Alexander, who he claims "killed our ancestors one by one and unjustly took the world into his fist."[96] There is at this point no acknowledgement that, according to earlier passages, Alexander *was* one of Ardeshir's ancestors. Different traditions surrounding the Macedonian collided in the same text, and Ferdowsi evidently saw no need to reconcile them.[97]

It is not easy to explain these discrepancies, for they strike at the heart of controversial questions about Ferdowsi's method and craft as a poet of the Iranian past. It may be that the text means to highlight Ardeshir's duplicitous rhetoric: the reader should notice that the Sasanian founder is reworking the past in order to justify his rebellion against the established political order, and that he is misrepresenting Alexander's lineage.[98] But some scholars take the view that inconsistencies in Ferdowsi stem from contradictions in his various sources, whether oral or written.[99] Faced with two or more different accounts of Alexander's heritage, perhaps the poet chose to transmit both versions, and to imbue his text with the uncertainty that he himself faced.

If Ferdowsi indeed encountered the positive Alexander in one of his sources, what accounts for the king's integration into the dynasties of ancient Iran? Scholars have offered several explanations.[100] One possibility is that the popularity of the Alexander Romance in the late Sasanian period forced a reconsideration of the king's legacy, softening attitudes to Alexander among the Iranian

95 Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omidsalar, *Shahnameh*, vol. 6, 118, line 1740: سپر کن کیان را همه پیش بوم چو خواهی که لشکر نیاید به روم; cf. Davis, *Shahnameh*, 523.

96 Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omidsalar, *Shahnameh*, vol. 6, 157, line 352: نیا گان ما را یکایک بکشت به بیدادی آورد گیتی به مشت.

97 Cf. the discussion in Wiesehöfer, "Accursed and Adventurer."

98 See Dick Davis, *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeh* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 17–18, who suggests that the arc of Ferdowsi's poem reveals a constant breakdown in Iranian loyalty towards the king, with Ardeshir's rebellion against Artabanus/Ardavan as one particularly egregious example.

99 See A. Shapur Shahbazi, *Ferdowsī: A Critical Biography* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1991), 132; Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 104: "the *Shāhnāmeh* is a complex work reflecting multiple sources, rather than the expression of the personal convictions of a Ferdowsi, the zeitgeist of early Islamic Iran, or the timeless aspirations of all Iranians."

100 For a survey, see the discussion in Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, 303–307.

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nobility and reconciling his reign with the national tradition.[101] Another is that the pre-Islamic Alexander was fundamentally reworked in the centuries following the conquest of Iran by the Muslims, who considered him a leader of religious and moral virtue as well as worldly success.[102]

But it is also possible that the "good" Alexander had deeper roots in pre-Islamic Iran. A recent suggestion by M. Rahim Shayegan traces the possible origins of this tradition back to the Arsacid period.[103] In Tacitus' description of a letter written by Artabanus II, Shayegan notes, the Arsacid king justifies his territorial claims by way of reference to a double heritage: firstly, the Achamenid empire founded by Cyrus the Great and, secondly, the Macedonian empire of Alexander.[104] If the Arsacids claimed both Persian *and* Hellenistic ancestry—as, for instance, their contemporaries in Commagene and Pontus seem to have done—then there may be some basis for a positive Iranian assessment of Alexander's legacy long before the Sasanian or Islamic periods.[105] To be sure, this argument rests on uncertain foundations: as seen above in Cicero's reproach of Publius Crassus, the pairing of Cyrus and Alexander was also a *topos* of Latin literature, and it is impossible to tell where Artabanus' words end and Tacitus' embroidery begins.[106] But recent work has shown that the Arsacids' engagement with the culture and ruling strategies of the Hellenistic kingdoms, though

101 On the fraught question of a Middle Persian version of the Alexander Romance, see above, n. 29.

102 See Zuwiyya, "The Alexander Romance in the Arabic Tradition"; Rubanovich, "Why So Many Stories", 212–232. For interpretations of the positive Iranian Alexander as a production of the Islamic period, see Boyce and Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 60 n. 40; A. Abel, "La figure d'Alexandre en Iran", in *Atti del Convegno sul tema: La Persia e il mondo Greco-Romano: Roma, 11–14 aprile 1965* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1966), 119–134.

103 Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, 293–311.

104 Tac. *Ann*. 6.31.1; see above, n. 25, 55.

105 On the double inheritance of the Commagenian dynasty, see the inscription of Antiochus I at Nemrud Daği (*OGIS* 383) with the discussions in Margherita Facella, "Φιλορώμαιος καὶ Φιλέλλην: Roman Perceptions of Commagenian Royalty", in *Imaginary Kings: Royal Images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome*, ed. Richard Fowler and Olivier Hekster (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005), 87–103; and Richard Fowler, "'Most Fortunate Roots': Tradition and Legitimacy in Parthian Royal Ideology", in *Imaginary Kings: Royal Images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome*, ed. Richard Fowler and Olivier Hekster (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005), 127–128. For the ancestry of the Pontic king Mithradates VI Eupator, see Facella, "Roman Perceptions", 88 and n. 13; Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians*, 307–311.

106 Cic. *Brut*. 282; see above, p. 216.

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sometimes overstated, was far from superficial.[107] The possibility exists, therefore, that positive evaluations of Alexander's legacy had a long and complicated history on the Iranian plateau, competing with and in some contexts superseding the negative image of the ruler that Zoroastrian texts preserved.

Conclusion

As the empires of Iran and Rome settled into a long and complex period of imperial contestation and coexistence, the memory of Alexander the Great supplied an ancient precedent for contemporary political developments. In some respects, the Macedonian's invasion of the Achaemenid Empire set the stage for the Roman-Persian relationship, which took the form of an east-west rivalry between the imitators of Alexander and the descendants of his opponent Dārā. For Roman commanders and the authors who recorded their exploits, Alexander's example provided a reference point with which Roman accomplishments in the East could be measured, compared, and contrasted; for the Sasanians (and perhaps the Arsacids too, though the evidence for their period is far more tenuous), the campaigns against Rome in the west might be justified as a fight to avenge the Kayanian dynasty that the "Roman" Alexander had destroyed.

To be sure, Alexander's legacy operated differently in Iranian and Roman traditions, because the two sides had different conceptions of history. The Parthians and Sasanians seem to have assigned Alexander the Roman identity of their contemporary rivals, mapping the circumstances of the present back onto the past. The Romans, on the other hand, called their eastern foes Medes, Persians, and Achaemenids—borrowing terms from older Greek literature on the Achaemenids to describe their enemies in the present. In this sense, Iranians used the present to describe the past, and the Romans the past to describe the present. In both cases, though, the international arena was interpreted by means of an historical analogy: the Romans took Alexander's place, and the Parthians and Sasanians assumed the mantle of his enemies.

107 See Josef Wiesehöfer, "'Denn Orodes war der griechischen Sprache und Literatur nicht unkundig'. Parther, Griechen und griechische Kultur", in *Variatio delectat. Iran und der Westen. Gedenkschrift für Peter Calmeyer*, ed. Reinhard Dittmann (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2000), 703–721; Marek Olbrycht, "Parthians, Greek Culture, and Beyond", in *Within the Circle of Ancient Ideas and Virtues: Studies in Honour of Professor Maria Dzielska*, ed. Kamilla Twardowska et al. (Krakow: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonica", 2014), 129–142.

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But even as this analogy helped commentators in both Rome and Iran to explain the historical foundations of the relationship between the two empires, it coexisted and clashed with alternate visions of what Alexander's career had meant. One version of the Alexander legend in Iran turned him into a legitimate Kayanian and a devout Zoroastrian—the same dynasty and religion that other texts insist he tried to destroy. And in Rome, the negative evaluation of Alexander by historians, philosophers, rhetoricians, and poets could cast doubt on the project of bringing Persia and its subject peoples into Roman imperial space, mounting a challenge to the ideology of expansion that was otherwise deeply entrenched among ruling elites.

In a word, then, the reception of Alexander in Persia and in Rome demonstrated to both sides that their conflicts and antagonisms had deep roots in the ancient past. In their own ways, residents of both empires used their histories of Alexander to explain why the ancient world had been divided between them, and to articulate how that division reflected tensions that were bigger, and ran deeper, than their own era. But the memory of the Macedonian was never static or uncontested, and his kingship would always be variously assessed. Alexander was one way that the Iranians and Romans thought through and interpreted their relationship to one another, but there was always more than one way to read his story.

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