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# Humanistic characteristics Alexander Macedonian in the versified stories of Nezami

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### ABSTRACT

Alexander is one of the most important and permanent characters in history who has affected the world's literature including the European, Turkish and Iranian ones. This character has been defined in many Persian poems, verses and different anecdotes. The versified story of Alexander (Eskandarnameh) is one of the works explaining that Eskandarnameh belongs to Nezami, the poet in 1300. Nezami is known as an Iranian famous story writer in Iran who has perfectly developed this literal type. He is one of the prominent poets raised from Azerbaijan school. Nezami is famous for one of his books called Khamseh or Panj Ganj. This book includes Leili and Majnun, Makhzanolasrar, Khosrow and Shirin, Haft Peykar and Eskandarnameh. Eskandarnameh is one his verses describing Alexander and it presents this historical character as a world conqueror and a sage. The secret of making this work into a permanent and eternal one is set at featuring Alexander as an idealistic character. This book introduces Alexander by characteristics like forgiveness, peace seeker, fairness and, etc. This essay scrutinizes Nezami's concepts towards Alexander and his characteristics.

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### Introduction

Alexander is the son of Philip or Philipus who is the king of Macedonia. He is famous as Alexander, the great. He is one of the Greek historical features and among the world's conquerors who has been called "as the one never defeated in his battles and the most successful commander of all the eras". (Yenne, 2444:2010)

Since Alexander came into existence, story tellers have been narrating his stories and adventures generation to generation either orally or written all around the world. (Dehkhoda's dictionary, 2340:1998). After centuries, these stories got a local nature and changed into a written one. In this way, Alexander became a familiar feature for all nations (Anonymous, 11: 1964)

The story of Eskandarnameh has entered to poem and literature through historical stories and mythological sources. Totally, the poets used that news in their literal interpretations.

Human is a social creature, so it is the counter-action which creates attraction (Payandeh, 2003: 128). Expressions such as Alexander's dam, life water and animal spring are the symbols revealing the effect of this story on Iran's literature from past up to now; in fact, most of the poets or writers have been highly influenced by such expressions. Literature introduces Alexander as a man who is "pure, wise, brave, majestic, messenger and Zolgharnein, religion supporter, theist and forgiver". (Karami, 139:2004). Some believe that Alexander is placed at the highest position of Iran's civilization from the view point of virtues. (Ghavimoddoleh, 1957:2001).

The story of this Greek world conqueror is mixed in Iranian literature and has got various aspects. According to the fact that the term Zolgharnein in Quran Majid, Muslims' holy book, and the adventures and stories related to him has been explained in details in religious interpretations since then, his name has been entered to literal culture. (Fayyaz ,2005: 125). In literature,

Alexander is sometimes a world conquering king and some other time he is remarked as a messenger of wisdom among philosophers discussing with them. Consequently, great Iranian poems and literary men have considered the story of Alexander in their verses from different points of view.

### Alexander in Eskandarnameh

Nezami Ganjavi is one of the story writers illustrated the story of Alexander in verse. Eskandarnameh is made up of two separate verses - Sharfnameh and Eghbalnameh- and it features this idealistic commander. He has used historical books like Akhbarottaval and Tabari history to compose his work. Some other sources of Nezami's Eskandarnameh are Khodaynameh, Karnameh Ardeshir Babakan, and Eskandarnameh in prose, Darabnameh, Afarin nameh of Aboshokr Balkhi, Gashtasbnameh and Shahnameh of Saalbi. (Bahar, 106: 1996). "After Islam, historians and interpreters such as Tabari, Belami and Masudi played a more significant role in depicting and presenting the figure of Alexander."(Karami, 141: 2004)

Eskandarnameh embraces the adventures of Alexander based on fictions and folk culture and the most idealistic descriptions in Persian literature. Nezami tended not to rewrite history but to introduce him Sharfnameh Zolgharnein and as a wise and brave myth by attributing him extraordinary acts and moral specifications to this world conqueror in Eskandarnameh.

Nezami retold the story of Alexander Macedonian from his birth till the time of his kingdom and dominating more countries in Sharfnameh. In this Masnavi (couplet-poem), he illustrates Alexander in the role of a world conquering ruler. Moreover, he elucidates Alexander as a wise character, philosopher and a divine messenger and he discriminates his knowledge, wisdom and messenger as well as his meetings with the greatest sages of his time in Eghbalnameh.( Nezami,2001:128) In Sharfnameh, Nezami narrates Alexander with specific character traits to pave the way to develop him as a messenger. This current essay

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specifies the humanistic characteristics of Alexander in Eskandarnameh.

#### **Humanistic Characteristics in Eskandarnameh**

“The character is defined as a personage in a narrative or dramatic work and a kind of prose sketch briefly describing some recognizable type of person (Baldick, 2001: 37). Character is the fictional representation of a person, which is likely to change, both as a presence in literature and as an object of critical attention, much as it changes in society”. (Jalali, 2008:62)

#### **Forgiveness**

After being appointed as king in place of his father in his own country, Alexander developed his country and was very generous. He built many constructions and he granted lots of money and treasure to the others. He replaced beauties instead of ugliness. He was a real warrior at battle fields. He gave back the thrones to the kings and made them rulers once more. He exempted people from paying taxes and was very generous to the ones in need and commanded not to get any money from merchants and farmers (Nezami, 2001: 93). After winning Dara, Alexander occupied Iran and Dara's throne, crown and kingdom. Considerably, he shared all those extreme wealth among the riches and the poor and gave them the positions they deserved.

#### **Peace Seeking and Avoiding Fighting**

Like other thinkers in the world, Nezami supported peace and friendship. The poet has confessed his anger and hatred towards war, bloodshed and homicide for times. Thus, he counted war among the reasons preventing human perfection and felicity.

The poet never accepts to practice his authority and power to evade and conquer places; he deeply believes that it is the responsibility of the country's military and government to defend and provide security, peace and independence. The precious philosopher chooses Alexander as the main and leading hero of the story in order to stabilize a comprehensive peace, social justice and peacefully living together.” Nezami ponders Alexander as a wise ruler whose destiny tending to a messenger position. Furthermore, he remarks his military expeditions and triumphs in wars against the evasions of oppressors. In fact, he is sure enough that Alexander is not man-of-war in nature. In addition, he regards his wars as a pedagogical type and improving the spirits. That is why he feels regretful of fighting and winning against Zangian because Zangian have made many of their people lose their lives”. (Zarrinkub, 289-288:2000)

When Alexander observes the ones killed in battle fields, he feels so sorry of witnessing such scenes and wonders why lots of people must be dead.” He remarked them as a lesson, apparently, he laughed but he was deep in grief and sorrows. Why this crowd must be killed.” (Nezami, 2001: 132)

He was uncertain to fight against Dara. Then, he consulted with the sages and wise men and declared his hesitation in this way that if Dara accepts the peace, he won't remember him as a brave one. And in case he pulled out his sword he has been cruel towards other Kianian kings. (Nezami, 2001: 165). In a letter writing to Dara, Alexander asks him to stop war and bloodshed and advises him to peace and warns him the consequences. He recommends Dara not to do something useless and avoids him from his terrible fate and revenge and Alexander prohibits him from doing anything illogical and tempts him to follow peace instead of war; because courageous and brave men never hurt others by war and put them into horrible troubles. (Nezami, 2001 :194-195)

#### **Consulting with Wise Men**

Like other philosophers, Nezami would like to contemplate and consult with the wise ones. He doesn't believe in personal decisions and prefers to do important tasks through searching and consulting with sages. History reveals that wherever a person takes all the controls by himself and doesn't consult with any one and selfishly moves forward, he will not be successful and will become defeated. It is commonly seen in Nezami's works that whenever the heroes of his stories are dealt with such events or difficulties, they consult with thinkers and experts. From Nezami's point of view, a successful government is the one depending on consulting with thinkers and wise men. “Recalling the attributions to his ideal hero, the poet points out that Alexander always consulted with the experienced and wise ones in his works and all these directed him to approach his targets”. (Nezami, 2004 :41)

In Eghbalnameh, Alexander has been defined as a scientist placing among philosophers and sages. He paid close attention to what they said and what they did.

Scientists and sages accompanied Alexander everywhere he traveled. He usually asked for their help whenever he wanted to take a decision. Nezami has recalled one hundred and thirteen scientists in Sharfnameh who were always accompanied him in travels.” Those scientists were knowledgeable and familiar with astrology. And every one of them was farsighted in decision making. One of them was the sage Bolinas. Bolinas devised a solution for any problem he was consulted with. Since he knew incantation and magic, he could break the spell of Azar Hodayun, one of the servants in Isfahan fire-temple.” (Nezami, 2001: 312)

Aristotle was one of the scientists in Alexander's court who Alexander always consulted with. (Nezami, 2001: 56)

Another case indicating the prudence and the far sightedness of Alexander and his consulting with other scientists is when Dara's representative went to him to get the annual tax and expenses, and then Alexander held a meeting with the high ranking authorities of his court and asked their opinions. First, he worshiped and appreciated God for his victories and then asked them to give their attitudes toward paying tax to Dara.

“In this meeting, Alexander talked about his braveries and battlefields and he claimed that it is very humiliating for him to pay tax to Dara. Eventually, he wanted the philosophers and the scientists present in his meeting to declare their outlooks” (Nezami, 2001: 144-145)

As Dara was getting equipped to fight against Alexander, Alexander arranged a committee to consult with Roman experts. All the ones attended in that meeting voted that Alexander must not be the pioneer in this war and bloodshed and he should respect the kings prior to him.

#### **Justice and Judiciary**

Nezami has always sought for a fair kingdom. He attributed such characteristics like justice to Alexander Macedonian. Thus, he tries to introduce him as a fair and ideal king. Nezami reflexes his evolving and promoting aims in this character. Holistically, he positioned Alexander as a righteous and ideal leader who wished to conduct the society into fairness and goodness.

Nezami describes Alexander's justice in his dominated countries in this way that he founded his Kingdom on honesty and optimism. During his kingdom, he never hurt people by cruelty. He fairly managed the world. He also directed security and peace in his country that every one trusted him. (Nezami, 2004: 39)

In fact, Alexander, the world conquering philosopher, is one of the great men and symbols of justice that the poet intends to.

“The fame of Alexander’s justice expanded the whole country soon after he got the throne. He had never been cruel with his people and conducted a righteous government and every one remembers him as a good one. He was always exemplified as a king who fought against oppression and called him as the just and the righteous one.”(Nezami,2001: 91-93)

Alexander traveled a lot to all around the world to set free people from oppression. He also wanted to realize the conditions of people and talk to them and to punish the ones who had been mean to them. He led people to the right direction. He wanted to eliminate oppression and prohibit them from killing and bloodshed. (Nezami,2001: 312)

Alexander was ready to help any nation required him and defend them against their invasive neighbors like the war between Alexander and Zangian required by Egyptians. Alexander supported them and defeated Zangian. Consequently, they were set free from sufferance and pain. (Nezami,2001: 130 and 132)

He encouraged his consultants and successions to justice and asked them to be an experienced fair seeker.

#### **Companionship with Ascetics**

One of the great specifications of Alexander is following the ascetics. According to Nezami, wherever he found a perfect ascetic he talked to him in private and made advantages of his power of mind in crucial works.

“He always paid special attention to great men and ascetics and avoided ill-tempered ones. Whenever he wanted to set off for a battle, he asked them to pray and assist him.”(Nezami, 2001: 315)

Once on his way in Alborz Mountain, Alexander was hauled by a fortress set up between Sherwan and Darband. The fortress guard neglected Alexander and didn’t obey him. As the path was too hard and the fortress guards resisted, Alexander couldn’t occupy there. In consequence, he asked the wise men help him. One of the attendants told him of an ascetic living in a cave and he just prayed. Just then, Alexander set off to meet him and begged his help. Ultimately, that ascetic prayed and the fortress destroyed. (Nezami,2001: 321:322)

#### **Encouraging to Learn**

Nezami believes that knowledge can excel the innate talent of human in all his works and he regards Alexander as the one who loves knowledge and has learned all sciences and gives special consideration to artists and wise men. In fact, people are titled and promoted according to their knowledge and capabilities.

In Eskandarnameh, it is recorded that as Philipus, Alexander’s father, realized the competency and intelligence of his son. He made the wise Neghomahbes, Aristotle’s father, trained him and educated Alexander. He taught him all the skills and sciences that a prince must know of.(Nezami,2001: 86)

When Alexander became king, he announces that the ones who are artists and sages are superior to others in his court. And the highest position is for the scientists.

Returning to Rome, he made the Roman philosophers to translate any knowledge from Greek, Pahlavi, Dai and other languages to learn about the experiences and knowledge of other nations. In conclusion, he wanted to enrich the culture and the knowledge of his country by the cultures and religions of the countries he dominated. (Nezami,2004:37)

#### **Faithful to Contracts**

One of the very high character traits of a human is his faithfulness to contracts and promises. In all his works, Nezami emphasizes this principle. Moreover, he adds that Alexander counts that a realistic leader is the one who never breaks his promises and contracts.

“Alexander relied on his belief that wisdom guides him in all his responsibilities and the leadership policy is founded on contracts.”(Nezami,2001: 258 and 377)

#### **Theism**

In Eghbalnameh, Alexander is symbolized as a mono-theist man who invites his people to the religion of the prophet Abraham before he became a prophet. After he became prophet, he invited the world to his religion. He never stepped beyond the limit of the piety and abstemiousness circle. He always worshiped God and he bowed down to God and mourned

Alexander intended to expand theism through dominating lands. In case those nations accepted the religion, he wouldn’t destroy those cities and countries. He is theist and believes that God has helped him in all his triumphs.

“He is certain that all humans should pray and worship just one God. He owes God all his victories who ascended him from the very low position into the highest one.”(Nezami,2001: 258)

Considerably, not only Nezami but also other Iranian writers have noted the faith and theism of Alexander. Belami says: ‘there was a king in the world that was fair and improved the lands and other kings and nations obeyed him.’(Belami, 465: 1954)

From the text above, it is inferred that Alexander is the man of God who pays special attention to theism and justice.

Alexander is very fanatic to expand theism and the religion of the prophet Abraham but terribly pessimistic about Zoroastrian religion. Notably, before he conquered Iran, he had sworn to eliminate Zoroastrian religion right after dominating this nation. (Nezami,2001: 192)

After conquering the kingdom throne and defeating Dara in Iran, Alexander invited people to theism and Abraham’s religion. He stops people from worshiping fire. He also made fire-worshippers get out of the fire-temples and put them in difficult situations. (Nezami,2001: 239)

He commanded to ruin all fire-temples. Then, he set off to Azerbaijan; he killed Zoroastrian priests and fire-worshippers on his way.

In Sharfnameh, Nezami points out that Alexander extinguished fire anywhere he found it and destroyed their books.” He damaged many fire-temples and made Zoroastrian leaders obey him.”(Nezami,2001: 241-242)

He destroyed a large idol-temple in Ghandehar, too. Furthermore, he warned them to avoid from idolatry and turn to theism.

#### **Conclusions**

Nezami, the Iranian famous poet, is known as the one who has always tended to perfectionism. In his unique masterpiece, he has illustrated human accomplishments in forms of amazing stories and marvelous and expressive literature.

In Eskandarnameh, Nezami dedicates the figure of his ideal ruler. He presents Alexander as the hero of Eskandarnameh story, wise hero, world-conqueror, philanthropic, righteous and supporter of science and knowledge.

Nezami has featured all the specifications of an ideal hero in Alexander. In this versified story, Alexander is indicated as the symbol of a perfect human. He is not only a perfect human with perfect human characteristics but also invites people to theism. He stops people from Zoroastrian religion and destroyed fire-

temples. Furthermore, he made them obey him. Whenever possible, he prayed and worshiped God and asked him for help. Alexander owes his kingdom and victories to God. Holistically, he always appreciates God.

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