

Alexander at the base of the City of Brass

Starting in the late 13th/early 14th centuries, the Armenian *Alexander Romance* was enriched by numerous *kafas* (monorhymed poems) at the pen of Xaç'atur Keč'arec'i; in the 16th century, Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i, Zakaria Gnunec'i and others added yet more. These *kafas* are preserved in *Alexander Romance* manuscripts, alongside the main text, and in *tataran* and *žoťovacu* collections separate from the narrative. Often, these separate *kafas* are different to those accompanying the *Romance*. What this attests to is a rich tradition of poetic composition and transmission between manuscripts, places, performances and individuals.

This interest in the legendary story of Alexander belongs to a wider network of stories across multiple language traditions in the Caucasus, Anatolia and the Near East – Armenian, Arabic, Greek, Turkish, Georgian and many more – that bring mirabilia and religion together, eg: the *City of Brass* (or Bronze, or Copper), *Barlaam and Josaphat*, animal stories like those in the *Physiologus* and *Kalila wa-Dimna*, and legends of Solomon. Clearly the Armenian *Alexander Romance* occupies a special place in this context, as many manuscripts survive and some are lavishly illustrated, but this paper argues that it – and its *kafas* – cannot be understood without looking at that wider view. For instance, a 17th century manuscript from Kaffa includes *kafas* of Alexander at the bottom of folios that narrate the *City of Brass* (which also has its own *kafas* by poets including Grigoris Ałt'amarc'i) [M7709, ff.183w-211w]. Situating the Armenian *Alexander Romance* through examples like this allows a deeper understanding of the marvellous and Christian tradition of the ancient Macedonian king that developed in medieval Armenian literature.