



Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi

Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies

e-ISSN: 2148-5704

Cilt 13, Sayı 36, Temmuz 2026 / Volume 13, Issue 36, July 2026

Makale Türü/Article Types: Araştırma Makalesi/
Research Article
Geliş/Received: 09.12.2025
Kabul/Accepted: 24.03.2026
DOI: 10.17822/omad.133602

Atıf/Citation: Furkan Öztürk "In Pursuit of Curiosity, on the Threshold of Admiration and Following the Footsteps of Wisdom: The Poetics of Marvels and Wonders in Ahmedî's İskendernâme".
Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi 13/36 (2026): 282-298.

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In Pursuit of Curiosity, on the Threshold of Admiration and Following the Footsteps of Wisdom: The Poetics of Marvels and Wonders in Ahmedî's İskendernâme

Merakın Peşinde, Hayranlığın Eşiğinde ve Bilgeliğin İzinde: Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme'sinde Harikalar ve Mucizelerin Poetikası

Abstract: This article examines the fantastic narratives within Ahmedî's İskendernâme by considering some of the fundamental concepts of medieval Islamic thought: namely curiosity, wonder, wisdom, and sagacity. The study positions the figure of Alexander beyond the image of a ruler limited to conquests, treating him as a curious sage-traveler in pursuit of knowledge. The fantastical beings and imaginary spaces in the text are evaluated as being not just fantastic ornamentation, but as symbolic indicators which represent the boundaries of knowledge, human curiosity, and metaphysical exploration. By combining the nature of Qazvî'nî's Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât tradition with Nizâmî's masnavi model, Ahmedî establishes a distinctive narrative aesthetic in Ottoman literature which transports the reader from spectacle to thought, and then to contemplation and admiration. Motifs such as the Indian islands, Waqwaq Island, the Valley of Diamonds, Tagargar, the wall of Gog and Magog, and the mirror in Alexandria, all represent the visual and interpretive dimensions of curiosity; while the Land of Darkness, the quest for the water of life, and the episode of the talking tree, constitute a closure that renders visible the transience of worldly power and human helplessness in the face of death. The article therefore interprets İskendernâme by transcending a reading of it as merely an epic, as a deeply profound and wise text that reveals the nexus of knowledge, wonder, curiosity, and discovery within early Ottoman thought.

Keywords: Ottoman literature, Ahmedî, İskendernâme, marvels and wonders, admiration, curiosity, wisdom

Öz: Bu makale, Ahmedî'nin İskendernâme'sindeki fantastik anlatıları, Orta Çağ İslam düşüncesinin bazı temel kavramları olan merak, hayret, hikmet ve bilgelik bağlamında incelemektedir. Çalışma, İskender figürünü fetihlerle sınırlı bir hükümdar imajının ötesine taşıyarak onu bilgi peşinde koşan meraklı bir bilge-seyyah olarak ele almaktadır. Metindeki fantastik varlıklar ve hayali mekânlar, sadece fantastik bir süsleme olarak değil bilginin sınırlarını, insani merakı ve metafizik keşfi temsil eden sembolik göstergeler olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Kazvî'nî'nin Acâ'ibü'l-Mahlûkât geleneğinin doğasını Nizâmî'nin mesnevi modeliyle birleştiren Ahmedî, Osmanlı edebiyatında okuyucuyu seyirden düşünceye, oradan da tefekkür ve hayrete taşıyan kendine özgü bir anlatı estetiği kurar. Hint adaları, Vâkvâk adası, Elmas Vadisi, Tagargar, Ye'cüc ve Me'cüc seddi ve İskenderiye'deki ayna gibi motifler merakın görsel ve yorumsal boyutlarını temsil ederken Zülümât diyarı, âb-ı hayat arayışı ve konuşan ağaç bölümü, dünyevi gücün geçiciliğini ve ölüm karşısında insanın çaresizliğini görünür kılan bir kapanış oluşturur. Makale bu nedenle İskendernâme'yi bir destan olarak okumayı aşarak erken Osmanlı düşüncesinde bilgi, hayret, merak ve keşif arasındaki bağı ortaya koyan derin ve hikmetli bir metin olarak yorumlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı edebiyatı, Ahmedî, İskendernâme, acâib ü garâib, hayret, merak, bilgelik

Introduction

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, the narratives concerning the exploits of Alexander produce a multilayered discourse that contains not only historical and heroic themes, but also ideas of wisdom, cosmology, and sagacity. This enables Alexander to be transformed from being a conqueror to a curious sage and traveler-type in pursuit of knowledge, thus the representation of political power is replaced with a representation of knowledge, wisdom, and sagacity. Such contemporary narratives mean that Alexander has taken his place in Islamic narratives, *tabaqat*,

and biographical works, not only as a aspirational conqueror of the entire world, but also as a curious sage in pursuit of knowledge. In addition to the *İskendernâme* narratives, another example is Shahrazûrî's *Nuzhat al-Arwâh* which was written as a *tabaqat* book in the twelfth century (a history of philosophy constructed based on Suhrawardî's Illuminationist perspective), in which Alexander appears as one of the one hundred thirty-seven sages that are featured in this book.¹ Similarly, the fifteenth-century Ottoman poet, Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bîcân, in his work *Durr-i Maknûn*, presents an interpretation of creation and Islamic cosmology by drawing on both past scholars and thinkers of his own era in which Alexander is depicted as a sage attempting to discover the wonders of the world.²

There is undoubtedly an admiration and wisdom that permeates the entire narrative of traveling and contemplating these wonders. This admiration is a spiritual process that leads from seeing the "work" (*eser*) to knowing the "Maker" (*Müessir*), and from seeing the "art" (*san'at*) to knowing the "Artist" (*Sâni'*) (*Asmâ' al-Husnâ*). It is a structure deliberately placed and repeated by Ahmedî at the end of each *dâsitân* (narrative) in the *İskendernâme*. Ahmedî's having Alexander tour fantastical beings and places, as well as arousing feelings of curiosity, admiration, and astonishment in a state of contemplation, is functionally almost identical to what Qazvînî achieves in his *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât*. Von Hees, drawing on Qazvînî's definition of *acâ'ib*, has the following to say on this subject:

According to him, this term constitutes the starting point of a quest that ultimately leads to the comprehension of Allah. His main purpose is to revive in his readers the sense of wonder about nature that they possessed as children, but lost as they grew up. Qazvînî devoted his work to *acâ'ib* because, for him, the sense of wonder was the driving force of an open mind and a living faith. This idea is, in principle, similar to the famous Aristotelian view: 'The origin or essence of philosophy is the admiration that man feels in the face of the universe.' According to Qazvînî, quite clearly, all sciences ultimately lead to the knowledge of Allah, which is an idea widespread among nearly all medieval scholars. This belief provided a distinct religious legitimization for the encyclopedic definition of nature that he produced. The title of his book, *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât*, 'The Wonders of Creation,' summarizes his religious understanding of nature, in which every part of the universe is evidence of the existence of Almighty Allah. In the medieval Islamic world, it was a common approach to accept nature as the signs of Allah that humanity must decipher in order to approach Him.³

Persis Berlekamp, who examines the miniatures (catalog of wonders) in *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât* manuscripts, also takes as her starting point the sense of wonder expressed over these miniatures, and whether the aforementioned images have an aesthetic dimension. Berlekamp holds the view that these depictions were produced to evoke wonder in the face of Allah's creation. According to the author, the reader is awed before the most extraordinary phenomena of the universe (the cosmos) and in the face of the majesty and power of Allah. Berlekamp re-reads Qazvînî's *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât* tradition through this wondering lens, thus highlighting Qazvînî's purpose to arouse astonishment (*ajab*) in the reader in the face of creation. It is noted that in early manuscripts, the images were primarily constructed to show the divine order of the cosmos, whereas in late medieval examples, greater emphasis was placed on the possibilities of human activity within the boundaries of this order. Berlekamp states that the aim of this literature is to evoke wonder in the face of the act of creation (*Sâni'*); that wonder is a concept that changes over time and with the worldviews of different social groups; that modern education and positivist

¹ Şemsüddîn Eş-Şehrezûrî, *Nüzhâtü'l-Ervâh, Bilgelerin Tarihi ve Özdeyişleri, Eleştirmeli Metin-Çeviri*, trans. Eşref Altaş (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Yayınları, 2015), 440-521.

² Yazıcıoğlu Ahmed Bîcân, *Durr-i Mekkûn, Saklı İnciler*, ed. Necdet Sakaoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999).

³ Syrinx Von Hees, "Şaşırtıcı: Acâib Edebiyatının Bir Eleştirisi ve Yeniden Okuması," trans. Yeliz Özay, *Millî Folklor* 103 (2014): 147.

historiography approaches have difficulty understanding these views; and that therefore different methodological frameworks are needed.

The images' evocation of wonder expressed as divine signs for the viewer helps the student grasp the relationships between the whole and the parts of the cosmic order, and appreciate them in terms of religion. The fact that Qazvîni's text was taught in madrasas is testament to the didactic aim of the work. A transition is therefore made from concrete form to abstract truths, and this tradition, which begins with Qazvîni's *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât*, offers important clues regarding ways of thinking, learning, and comprehending truth.⁴ It can be said that in Eastern cultures, the determining influence of the *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât* literature, which reflects thousands of years of collective memory and mythological accumulation, represents the root of this interest. This is demonstrated by *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât* circulating as a common heritage among Islamic literatures and being translated repeatedly into different languages over the centuries. Qazvîni's *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât wa-Gharâ'ib al-Mawjûdât*, in particular, has become more widely known and prominent than others, impacting a broad circle of readers and writers through translations into Persian and Turkish.⁵

In her important article examining the semantic field of the concept of *acâ'ib* in medieval Arabic and Persian literature, revealing the significant inconsistencies in the use of this concept, and comprehensively evaluating its relationship with fantastic literature, Syrinx Von Hees discusses fundamental prejudices regarding this genre, also called "wonder literature." In the aforementioned study, Von Hees draws attention to the defining contributions of three fundamental texts in Arabic and Persian literatures to the formation and development of *acâ'ib wa-gharâ'ib* literature. In this framework, *Acâ'ib al-Hind* (a number of seafaring adventures relating the stories of Sinbad the Sailor), *Tuhfat al-Albâb wa-Nukhbat al-A'jâb* (jinn and humans, countries and structures, oceans and aquatic animals, excavations and tombs), and *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât wa-Gharâ'ib al-Mawjûdât* (according to all researchers, the archetype of the *acâ'ib* genre, an encyclopedia of nature) stand out as the fundamental masterpieces of *acâ'ib* literature. These three fundamental works determine both the thematic content and the epistemic legitimacy of *acâ'ib* literature.

Emphasizing that the scientific and epistemological norms of medieval natural history differ radically from the norms of modern science, Von Hees is at pains to point out that a medieval work must be read within its own historical-cultural contexts to prevent the door being opened to anachronistic judgments and evaluations. From this perspective, *acâ'ib* in the Middle Ages should be understood, not as a substitute for science, but as a concept of curiosity and wonder that triggers the desire to know, thus encouraging observation, evaluation, and meaning-making. Indeed, Qazvîni's work constitutes a concrete example of this by organizing and classifying marvelous phenomena within a cosmographic totality. Von Hees, in this context, believes that the term *acâ'ib* should be evaluated as a multi-functional concept:

In short, the one-sided association of *acâ'ib* with the supernatural and the fantastic causes serious distortions in our comprehension and evaluation of medieval texts. Even when evaluated in the terms of "reality" as accepted today, the term *acâ'ib*, in both geographical and religious contexts, refers to real entities, the great majority of which belong to the plane of reality. Today, only a very small number of themes can be reduced to being products of imagination. Therefore, I argue that the term *acâ'ib* in Arabic and Persian literature should be interpreted as "wonder-inducing themes."⁶

⁴ Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image & Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁵ For more information, see Günay Kut, "Türk Edebiyatında Acâibü'l-Mahlûkât Çevirileri Üzerine," in *Acâibü'l-Mahlûkât, Eski Türk Edebiyatı Araştırmaları II*, ed. Fatma Büyükkarcı Yılmaz (İstanbul: Simurg Yayınları 2010), 1-9.

⁶ Hees, "Şaşırtıcı: Acâib Edebiyatının Bir Eleştirisi ve Yeniden Okuması," 142-162.

Similarly, Roy Parviz Mottahedeh evaluates the vocabulary in Arabic as containing the meanings of being astonishing and strange (*'ajab*, *'ajâ'ib*, *'ajîb*, *gharîb*, *ta'ajjub*, etc.) and emphasizes the function of the concept of *acâ'ib* in the Arabian Nights, the driving force of the narrative, as “wonder-inducing.”⁷ For this reason, the term *acâ'ib* cannot be reduced to one-dimensional, i.e. purely “fantastic” or “superstition” categories. On the contrary, as a functional concept, it assumes the function of a tool that enables the circulation of knowledge, intercultural transmission, and encyclopedic knowledge production in the pre-modern Islamic field of science and literature. In other words, *acâ'ib* is a dynamic concept positioned on both discursive and epistemic levels at the intersection of curiosity, observation, wonder, wisdom, and sagacity.

1. Representations of Marvels and Wonders in Ottoman Narratives

The use of marvels and wonders to inspire amazement does not only appear in masterpieces such as *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât* or the Arabian Nights; the effect can be traced back to narrative genres in Turkish literature such as *seyâhatnâme*, *esâretnâme*, and *sergüzeşt-nâme*. There has been an increasing number of studies published on the subject in recent years. In one such comprehensive study, Sadık Yazar identifies the traces of *acâ'ib* in texts such as *Târîkh-i Hind-i Gharbî*, *Khitây-nâme*, *Kitâb-ı Bahriyye*, *Mir'ât al-Mamâlik*, *Vâqı'ât-ı Sultân-ı Cem*, *Hediyye*, and *Sergüzeşt-i Esîrî-i Malta*, with particular focus on Abû Hâmid Muhammad al-Gharnâtî's work, *Tercüme-i Tuhfat al-Albâb wa-Nukhbat al-A'jâb*.⁸ Similarly, in her detailed examination the *acâ'ib* and *gharâ'ib* narratives in Evliya Çelebi's *Seyâhatnâme*, Yeliz Özay Diniz considers Evliya Çelebi's strange and wondrous stories, dreams and prophecies, “others,” animals, nature, talismans, and magic within the context of the epistemic framework of seventeenth-century Ottoman society, and particularly through concepts such as “truth and falsehood,” “reality and fiction,” “context,” “experience,” and “knowledge.”⁹ Diniz also stresses that it is imperative to read Evliya and his *Seyâhatnâme* with the perspective of a seventeenth-century reader if one is not to fall into cynical anachronisms over narratives which feature witches, *karakoncolos*, and ogres:

In this case, it should be taken into account that one is confronted with the story and heroes of another episteme; that in seventeenth-century Ottoman society, belief, fantasy, reality, and wisdom were intertwined, and most importantly, that the relationship or function of this coexistence with daily life was different from today. Deciphering Evliya and categories such as fear, credibility, and wonder-inducing in his stories seems possible only through the eyes of the seventeenth-century reader. The belief in such “*acâyib ü gharâyib*” beings—which today are called superstition or fabrication, or in a more academic approach can be called myth—in Evliya's language, has undoubtedly produced folklore and, even if its function has changed, has preserved and transmitted it as long as it has been needed.¹⁰

Fazile Eren Kaya has therefore conducted an *acâ'ib* city that exists somewhere between Senteriyye and Alexandria, but is hidden from view by a talisman. In this direction, Fazile Eren Kaya has conducted a space-centered *acâ'ib* reading of a city between Senteriyye and Alexandria that was said to have once existed but was later claimed to have been hidden from people's eyes by a talisman.¹¹ İsmail Hakkı Aksoyak, on the other hand, has approached Üsküdarlı Sırrî's *Hikâye-i Gharîbü'l-Âsâr* from a different perspective than the medieval perception of *acâ'ib*,

⁷ Roy Parviz Motahedeh, “*Ajâ'ib* in *The Thousand and One Nights*,” in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, eds. Richard G. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 29-39.

⁸ Sadık Yazar, *Ebû Hâmid Muhammed el-Gharnâtî, Tercüme-i Tuhfetü'l-Elbâb ve Nuhbetü'l-A'cab, Gharnâtî Seyahatnâmesi* (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2015). See also Sadık Yazar, “XVI. Yüzyıl Türkçe Seyahatnamelerinde *Acâib*,” *Millî Folklor* 103 (2014): 98-110.

⁹ Yeliz Özay, “Evliyâ Çelebi *Seyahatnâmesi*'nin *Acâib* Edebiyatı Açısından Değerlendirilmesi,” *Millî Folklor* 103 (2014): 123-133.

¹⁰ Yeliz Özay Diniz, *Evliyâ Çelebi'nin Acayip ve Garip Dünyası* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017), 29-30.

¹¹ Fazile Eren Kaya, “Senteriyye ile İskenderiye Ortasında *Acâib* Bir Şehir,” *Millî Folklor* 103 (2014): 134-141.

arguing that the concept of *acâ'ib wa-gharâ'ib* underwent a change from the seventeenth century onward, so that it also encompassed different subjects.¹² The common starting point of these studies is Syrinx Von Hees's article on *acâ'ib* literature. Another fundamental source that researchers refer to in *acâ'ib* literature, particularly in the context of travel narratives, is Houari Touati's work entitled *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages (A History and Anthropology of a Scholarly Pursuit)*. Under the heading "Travel and Its Writing" and within the subheading "The Extraordinary Aspects of Travel," Touati states that *acâ'ib* narratives do not merely aim to entertain or satisfy the need for fantasy but, as Von Hees also emphasizes, also have the function of arousing admiration and being convincing. Touati reinforces this approach by stating that it is impossible for a travel narrative to achieve its objectives without the use of *acâ'ib*:

As for the ancient Greeks, F. Hartog—through the example of Herodotus—has shown how they made *thoma* (marvel-*acâ'ib*) a defining custom. In their eyes, a travel narrative could not claim to be a faithful account if it did not have a *thoma* subheading. The same can be said to be true for medieval Muslims, who thought that a travel narrative that failed to compile *acâ'ib* could certainly not achieve its objective; for every medieval travel narrative is programmed to open onto an extraordinary realm. This extraordinariness of travel is both a cultural and narrative necessity. This is sometimes like the sole justification for reading or listening to a travel narrative. An Eastern scholar asks a Western—Andalusian—and much "traveled" colleague—the epithet *jawwâl* came from here; we can translate this word as "tourist" in the sense it was used in the Age of Enlightenment—to tell him the "most '*ajîb*' thing he saw during his travels. The great *jawwâl*, who carries more than one extraordinary story in his bag, tells a story very different from the others in its unconventional nature. The story told both transforms its author and surprises the person to whom it is told. The traveler has changed status and become a narrator. The other, while a listener, turns into a publisher.¹³

2. The Representation of Curiosity, Admiration, and Wisdom in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*

A genre of Ottoman literature where fantastic narratives are frequently found is undoubtedly *masnavi*, yet limited studies have been conducted on this subject. Excellent narrative examples, in terms of fantastical beings and places, can be found in works such as *Salsalnâme*, *Kıssa-i Kahkaha*, *Süheyl ü Nevbahâr*, *Camasbnâme*, *İskendernâme*, *Süleymânnâme*, *Battâlnâme*, *Saltuknâme*, *Dânişmendnâme*, *Ebû-Müslimnâme*, *Hamzanâme*, and *Kahramânnâme*. Of these seminal works, *İskendernâme* by Ahmedî, an author considered the pioneers of *adab* in Ottoman literature due to his production of works in numerous genres, is distinguished by its colorful and striking narratives of marvels and wonders.¹⁴ This *masnavi*, which was written by Ahmedî in the early fifteenth century, represents a version of the Alexander romance in Ottoman literature.¹⁵

The poet's main influences are Firdawsî's *Shâhnâme*, completed in 1010 (the first versified form of the story contained approximately 2,500 couplets), and Nizâmî's Persian *İskendernâme* from 1194 (*Sharafnâme* and *Iqbâlnâme*). Ahmedî added the *Gülşah* narrative, an element of global history, and *Mawlid* sections to the work he created based on these models, thus producing

¹² İsmail Hakkı Aksoyak, "Acâ'ib Edebiyatı'ndan Bir Örnek: Üsküdarlı Sırrî'nin *Hikâye-i Garîbü'l-Âsâr*," *Millî Folklor* 103 (2014): 111-122.

¹³ Houari Touati, *Ortaçağ'da İslam ve Seyahat, Bir Âlim Uğraşının Tarihi ve Antropolojisi*, trans. Ali Berkay (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 203.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the definition and functions of the term "*acâib ü garâib*" in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, see. Furkan Öztürk, "Ahmedî'nin *İskendernâme*'sinde *Acâib ü Garâib*," In *Semih Tezcan Kitabı*, eds. Emine Yılmaz, Nuran Tezcan, Nurettin Demir (Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2020), 243-258.

¹⁵ For detailed information on this topic, see *The Greek Alexander Romance*, trans. Richard Stoneman (London: Penguin Press, 1991); Mino S. Southgate, *Iskandarnamah, A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

a coherent, integrated, and original text.¹⁶ In light of available information, it is accepted that the first *İskendernâme* of Ottoman literature was written by Ahmedî. Nuran Tezcan defines Ahmedî as being “the first holistic representative of the *adab* understanding based on the ancient Iranian tradition” in Ottoman literature, and suggests that Ahmedî is among the founding poets of Ottoman literature in that he produced works in genres representing the fundamental elements of this understanding—divan (*qasîda* and *ghazal*), history (Ottoman and global), and encyclopedic *masnavi* (*İskendernâme*).¹⁷ In addition to Ahmedî, poets such as Alî Shîr Navâî, Ahmed-i Rıdvân, Hamzavî, and Behîştî Sinân also produced works of Turkish literature within the *İskendernâme* genre.¹⁸

In the *İskendernâme* of the fourteenth-century Ottoman poet Ahmedî, the hero Alexander, who appears as either a sage, a conqueror, or as an explorer in pursuit of knowledge, is curious about all things. In the narrative, Alexander encounters fantastic *acâyib wa-gharâyib* elements such as people with wolf heads or with elephant-like trunks on their faces, the one-legged and one-winged Nasnas, the land of naked people, the island of women, the land of darkness, the valley of diamonds, Waqwaq Island, the mysterious islands in the China Sea, the Indian islands and their wonders, the people of Gog and Magog who are half a human’s height with bodies hairy like pigs and sharp, long claws, a fish with a snake’s body and an elephant’s head, a creature that swims in the sea by day and flies by night, giant monkeys, one-horned rabbits, a mirror that shows everything happening in the whole world, the water of life, *dîvs*, the White *Dîv*, and a talking tree.¹⁹ Metin And examines and interprets, while also enriches his descriptions with miniatures, many of the fantastical beings mentioned in *İskendernâme*: nasnas, angels, giants, jinn, Buraq, Gog and Magog, the Waqwaq Tree, and a dragon) under the heading “mythological creatures” in his book on Ottoman-Islamic mythology,²⁰ as well as explaining why he focuses so much on Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme*:

The reason we dwell so long and in such detail on Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme* is that many elements and persons in this cluster of legends are addressed in various parts of this book. We will address the mythological creatures found especially in books of the Qazvînî’s *Acâ’ib al-Makhlûqât* type in a separate section. Meanwhile, we find in the work elements such as the Waq Waq tree—also found in the Arabian Nights—the mirror that shows everything happening in the whole world, and great serpents. But the two most important subjects—Alexander’s building of a barrier against Gog and Magog and his going to the Land of Darkness with Khidr to find the water of immortality—are addressed in several places in this book.²¹

It is inconceivable that Ahmedî would be unfamiliar with *Acâ’ib al-Makhlûqât* literature, as it was used as a textbook in madrasas and thus assumed didactic and encyclopedic functions,

¹⁶ For comprehensive information, see Caroline Goodwin Sawyer, “Revising Alexander: Structure and Evolution of Ahmedî’s Ottoman *İskendernâme* (c. 1400),” *Edebiyât* 13, no. 2 (2003): 228-230.

¹⁷ Nuran Tezcan, “Anadolu’da *Adab*’ın Kurucusu Olarak Ahmedî ve Gülşah Mesnevisi,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* (Çekirge Budu, *Festschrift in Honor of Robert Dankoff*) 44 (2015): 437-453. Also see for Ahmedî’s life and works Fuat Köprülü, “Ahmedî,” *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1, 1950, 216-211; Günay Kut, “Ahmedî,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, 1989, 165-167.

¹⁸ For extensive information on verse and prose *İskendernâme* narratives in Turkish literature, see İsmail Ünver, *Türk Edebiyatında Manzum İskender-nâmeler* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi, 1975), 121-127; İsmail Avcı, *Türk Edebiyatında İskendernâmeler ve Ahmed-i Rıdvân’ın İskendernâmesi* (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı Yayınları, 2014), 45-71; Vasfi Babacan, *Hamzavî’nin İskendernâme’si, Giriş-İnceleme-Metin* (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınları, 2025), 17-39.

¹⁹ As in Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme*, supernatural phenomena, different races, strange creatures, and various imaginary beings occupy an important place in early Alexander historiographical traditions, the Alexander Romance and its Byzantine, Syriac, Armenian, and Latin versions, as well as in medieval European Alexander narrative traditions. For extensive information, see Richard Stoneman, “Primary Sources from the Classical and Early Medieval Periods,” in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), 1-20.

²⁰ Metin And, *Minyatürlerle Osmanlı-İslâm Mitologyası* (İstanbul: Akbank Yayınları, 1998), 254-305.

²¹ And, *Minyatürlerle Osmanlı-İslâm Mitologyası*, 62.

and almost all biographies of Ahmedî agree that the writer received a good madrasa education. Furthermore, the fact that sources specifically state that Ahmedî first received his madrasa education in Anatolia, and later continued his studies in Egypt where his teacher was Sheikh Ekmeleddin, and that he specialized in classical Islamic sciences, suggests that the orientation of his narrative vein towards *acâyib wa-gharâyib* in *İskendernâme* is not a coincidental ornamental element, but an actual quest for knowledge. It is clearly apparent in the text that the figures, images, and metaphors related to fantastical beings are particularly prominent during Alexander's conquest of India and his killing—like Odysseus, using his intelligence and cunning—of the dragon that was plaguing the locals people there. It can also be seen that curiosity and admiration are concentrated in the sections on fantastical beings (*acâyib wa-gharâyib*) (3228-3926) and Wars (3927-4246) (See Appendix 1).

While Ahmedî constructs the structure of his narrative with *dâsitân*s and the advice (*pand*) that immediately follows, in this *masnavi* construction modeled after Nizâmî, Ahmedî begins each *dâsitân* with a parrot, a singer (*mughannî*), a musician (*mutrib*), and most often a nightingale (*murgh-i shaydâ*), thus both placing the reader inside a scene that invites admiration, and prepares the ground for contemplation that invites one to make sense of what one sees.

2.1. Narratives of Marvels and Wonders on the Indian Islands for the Achieving of Wisdom

The *dâsitân* of Alexander's journey to the Indian islands, and his encounter there with marvelous and miraculous (*acâyib*) beings (*Dâsitân-ı raftan-i Iskandar ba-jazâyir-i Hindûstân va dîdan-i acâyib-râ*), is again presented by the nightingale. In Ahmedî's colorful and lively style, expressed in the words of this bird, which conjures all of the most important characteristics of the planets in the mind's eye of the reader within a scene in which curiosity, admiration, and wisdom are simultaneously set in motion, the sunrise becomes poetry. In this section, after Alexander has slain the evil dragon and saved the land of Sind, he desires to travel to every corner of all the lands and seas. He orders many ships to be built and, during his voyages, remarks on how many marvelous and miraculous places there are, thus expressing his desire to see and make sense of the extraordinary places and beings of the world, rather than merely conquer them.

In the narrative concerning the Indian islands (3228-3534), the first stop is Râyic Island. Alexander orders the capture of everything on the island, and his men bring him, not only one who sees, but a wise scholar who considers, and thus understands, the nature of what he sees. This scholar appreciates the beautiful arts of the Şâni' (*Asmâ' al-Husnâ*) in his contemplation of strange creations. The effect of this literary device upon the narrative is to temper with wisdom the curiosity felt toward the astonishing.

Excitement rises as Alexander and his soldiers' encounter a strange winged creature who is in human form, but whose speech is incomprehensible. Alexander and his retinue reach a mountain covered with serpents from which it is impossible to exit as the road consists of rocks and stones which seem to be constantly burning like fire: an example of the writer making the extraordinary concrete, while also increasing the curiosity and excitement. The serpents eating each other because they cannot find other food opens a space for thinking, as well as a shudder when one contemplates the merciless order of nature.

Other extraordinary encounters include a parrot who is taught to speak by a multilingual person, and a gigantic tree whose resin is of camphor quality, and under whose shade a thousand people can fit. Details such as a list of those who wish to obtain camphor from this tree, the trunk being covered with depictions of dragons, names being written on arrows and those arrows being shot at the tree in summer, and those who find the arrows after the serpents have withdrawn in winter after taking the tree's camphor, are implicit lessons that knowledge is gained through patience and reasoning, rather than encyclopedic transmission.

Alexander and his retinue then arrive at an island called Ramini where everyone, women and men, walks around naked. The reader is astonished by the inhabitants who consume only fruit, whose speech is incomprehensible, and who display an almost fairy-like timidity. Admiration is also maintained, and even increased, by the fact that the aforementioned island is covered with vegetation, described as golden grass, and hosts numerous jeweled flower beds. Their next stop, Waqwaq Island, is described by Ahmedî as follows:

3291 Vardı ʾıradan şāh bağlayup nitāk Ol yere ki ʾanuḡ adıdur Vākṽāk	3291 The Shah prepared and from there Arrived at a place called Waqwaq
3292 Yēri anuḡ cümle rīgistān olur Yolı nā-pīzā varan ḥayrān olur	3292 Its land is entirely sandy Its path is crooked, and all who visit are amazed
3293 Gēce yıldızla yörirler ol yolı Gündüz anda bulmazlar menzili	3293 At night they travel the road by the stars By day, they find no lodging
3294 Biḡ cezīre vardı ol yörede hem Daḥı yēdi yüz yakīn ne biḡ ü kem	3294 In that region, neither less nor more There were one thousand seven hundred islands
3295 Şehr idi ser-tā-ser ü mülk ü diyār Kamuya bir ʾavret idi şehriyār	3295 The country and land from end to end was one city The ruler of the people was a woman
3296 Altı biḡ ebkār-ı gül-ruḥ ḡonce-leb Ḥidmet ēderlerdi aḡa rüz u şeb	3296 Six thousand rose-cheeked, rosebud-lipped virgins Served her night and day
3297 Çün Sikenderʾden işitdi ol ḥaber Vērbidi bī-ḥad aḡa zerr ü güher	3297 When she heard news of Alexander She sent countless gold and jewels
3298 Ol kadar tūḥfe vēribidi ki şāh Āferīn kıldı aḡa vü hem sipāh	3298 She sent so many gifts that Both the shah and the soldiers praised her
3299 Buldı şeh bir aḡaç anda bes yüce Tāze vü ser-sebz ü ḥüb ucdan uca	3299 The Shah found a very lofty tree there Which was from end to end fresh, verdant green, and beautiful
3300 Dökmez idi yapraḡın bād-ı vezān Ērmez idi ʾanuḡ bahārına ḥazān	3300 The autumn wind would not shed its leaves Autumn would not reach its spring
3301 Ol aḡaçda bir ʾaceb yemiş biter Çün temām olup yemişi ʾanuḡ yeter	3301 On that tree grows a strange fruit Once it appears, its fruit is sufficient for all
3302 Ol yemişden vākṽāk üni gelür Bu ne ḡudretdür bu ne ḥikmet olur	3302 From that fruit comes the sound “waqwaq” What power is this? What wisdom is this?
3303 Gelicek ol ün düşer ēle vebā Daḥı ḡaḥt u fetret ü dürlü belā	3303 When that sound comes, plague befalls the land Drought, malaria, and various other calamities descend
3304 Vākṽā gelür ol ün ne mäh u sāl Ol ün olur gelicek nā-ḥüb fāl ²²	3304 For months, for years, from time to time that sound is heard And when it sound is, inauspicious events occur ²³

After leaving Waqwaq Island, the Alexander is driven on by his curiosity to arrive at a place called Benan. Right from the beginning of the journey, interest is aroused by the people, who are extraordinarily graceful and beautiful, living on steep mountain ranges which are inaccessible to humans. Alexander tricks someone into being captured and, despite the captured person's immediate death, even the corpse is admired by Alexander and his companions for its beauty, thus enabling a lesson about the juxtaposition of the transience of bodily beauty and the fascination created by it. The people who live on the next stop, Etvariye Island, have human bodies but dog-like heads. However, as soon as Alexander's soldiers arrive, these mysterious people suddenly disappear. It is suggested in the text that they possess an enchanted, mysterious, and metaphysical nature, symbolizing how knowledge is not always attainable.

²² Yaşar Akdoğan and Nalan Kutsal, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin* (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019), 510; Robert Dankoff, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin I* (Ankara: Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi Yayınları, 2020), 593-595.

²³ Furkan Öztürk, *İskendernâme* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları. Hasan Âli Yücel Klasikleri, 2018), 248-249.

Such passages are testament to the epistemic and mythic roles of the *acâ'ib* elements which exist in *İskendernâme*. In a further adventure, Alexander encounters a wise and sage *pir* who is said to be a thousand years old. When Alexander asks the depth of the Indian Ocean, the *pir* informs him that *Khidr ibn 'Âmil* had the same question, and that the answer was conveyed to him through an angel. The revelation that the body of a person who fell into the sea during David's time has been descending for approximately three hundred years and has still not yet reached the bottom, represents the ocean's boundaries as being an unobtainable enigma, rather than something measurable; thus serving to further deepen the sense of helplessness regarding the limits of human knowledge.

The *pir* goes on to describe the various strange creatures which live in the sea, further increasing the wonder of the reader by demonstrating his encyclopedic wisdom. The *pir* describes the gigantic fish (whale) said to be about two hundred cubits in length that tried to swallow a ship he encountered, but was turned back by the sailors beating drums and shouting; the crab, which after it turns to stone when it emerges from the water, and is broken into pieces and given to physicians, can then be used like kohl to treat eye diseases; the deer, whose blood smells like musk in the sea; the light (*nûr*), which appears like a bird; the elephant-headed fish; the human-faced fish; and other similar examples that swim in water during the day and fly in the air like a bird.

Alexander subsequently arrives at Java Island and encounters a headless people whose faces are located in their necks, as well as a white bird that dies when it emerges from fire. It is mentioned that Alexander founded the city of Serendib here because he loved the island very much, which suggests that curiosity is directed not only toward seeing, but also toward building. The encounter with a naked people on another island called *Lankâvûs*, as well as his struggle with a dragon he subdued with his cunning and intelligence on *Tinnîn Island*, maintains the dimension of power and might, as well as admiration. Details such as the edges of a large fountain, and the deep well beside it on *Salamit Island* turning to stone as a result of water droplets striking and splashing the well, combine the miraculous face of nature with the narrative of wisdom.

The depiction of the Valley of Diamonds, one of the fantastical locations, as described as being unreachable due to the serpents surrounding it. Alexander's obtaining the diamonds that stick to pieces of meat thrown into the valley through eagles, thanks to his cunning, confirms that *acâ'ib* motifs function not merely as exotic décor, but as an order that makes visible the hero's trials and the mythological dimensions of the figure of power. In the couplets where *Ahmedî* praises these events and Alexander's skills opens this adventure, the reader follows the poem with curiosity and admiration.

By thinking about the axis of lesson and wisdom, he makes implicit criticisms regarding the deficiencies of his own age:

3503	İşbu rây ile şeh-i pîrüzger Buldı ol elmâsı almağa zafer	3503	The wise shah, with this very thought Succeeded in obtaining that diamond
3504	Rây ile her 'uqde kim var hâl olur Şâhib-i rây chl-i 'ağd u hâl olur	3504	Every existing knot is untied with thought Those who possess thought are masters of agreement and resolution
3505	Şehler ilerü olurdu rây-zen Şimdi nêçün oldılar hem-rây-zen	3505	Shahs used to be superior to their advisors So why are they now on the same level as them?
3506	Ol zemân başlara tâc imiş hüner Şimdi hâk-i pây oldı ol güher ²⁴	3506	At that time, skill was a crown on heads Now that jewel has been trampled underfoot ²⁵

²⁴ Akdoğan and Kutsal, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin*, 531; Dankoff, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin I*, 627.

²⁵ Öztürk, *İskendernâme*, 265.

2.2. The Wonders of the East and the Narrative of the Unreachable Talismanic Stone

This is far from being the end of Alexander's quest for the discovery of extraordinary beings and places. On the contrary, his conquest of China and India, before bestowing those lands with the benefit of his justice, represents both his expansion of power and the curiosity that drove him towards toward new horizons. As Alexander wins universal acclaim, both amongst the rich and the poor, the reader is taught that this expansion is legitimized not only by power, but also by order, wisdom, and sagacity.

The astonishment and excitement created by the text only increases still further as Alexander, continuing to discover the wonders of the East, arrives after a journey of several days at an apparent paradise whose trees are sandalwood and brazilwood, and whose plants are hyacinth and white bryony. During the days of feasting and fun that follow, there is fascinating talk at night of the talismanic stone, *ḥaylakûs*, which shines like a mirror of constantly swirling colors. The narrative of curiosity, astonishment, and excitement continues as we learn that the stone can be found in China and Russia, and that, according to Aristotle, all jinn will submit to the owner of *ḥaylakûs*. We also learn that insects or wild animals cannot dwell where the stone is located, that jinn constantly hide the location of the mine from humans, and that the stone cannot be obtained by just anyone. The latter condition leads to instructive conclusions regarding the distance between man's endless ambitions and the world's secrets. After contemplating the beauties of the East, Alexander's arrival in Kashmir (3840–3903) begins a new phase in which curiosity is combined with the move to conquer and organize. He travels to many Turkish lands in the region and conquers cities where the people are religiously converted by Alexander. This belief in the unity of God foregrounds the conception of power in wisdom. Following the feasting after the battles of conquest, Alexander orders the extraordinary beings he has discovered to be brought into his presence by his soldiers, after which he continues his quest, thus demonstrating that *acâ'ib* is not merely a décor that arouses wonder, but a hunger for knowledge that is never fully sated.

3894 Bir zemāndan sonra fermān kıldı şāh Kim ol eṭrāfa yörüdiben sipāh	3894 After a while the shah gave an order And the army was sent around
3895 Ne 'acāyib ki ʿol memālikde ola Görmek için şey getüreler ele	3895 So that the wondrous beings in those lands Would be brought for the shah to see
3896 Kūh u deṣti yörtüyüp şayd ētdiler Çok 'acāyib cānever kayd ētdiler	3896 They walked and hunted in mountains and plains They captured many strange beings
3897 Buldılar nesnāsi ol avda yakīn Şekli insān el ayağı bir hemīn	3897 In that hunt, with hands and feet in human form They found a real monkey
3898 Bir ayağıyle eyle ʿēderdi seyr Kim anı gören gişi şanurdu ṭayr	3898 It would run with its feet in such a way that A person who saw it would think it was a bird
3899 Bir cemā'at daḥi kim şayd ētdiler Tağda bir boynuzlu tavşan ṭtdılar	3899 A hunting party also Caught a horned rabbit in the mountain
3900 Her sebu' ūrkerdi andan görse reng Ger dirende-şīr olaydı ger peleng	3900 Whether it be a wild lion or a tiger Every predatory animal that saw it would be frightened
3901 Bu 'acāyib fıtrata kılğıl nigāh Kim göresin nēce durur bārigāh	3901 To understand what the exalted station is like Look at these strange beings!
3902 Bī-nihāyetdür bu dergeh bil 'ayān Ne yakīn eřişür aña ne gümān	3902 That gate of mercy is infinite, know well Neither knowledge reaches it nor doubt
3903 Bir zemāndan sonra rāy eyle ʿētdi şāh Kim Tağargār'dan yaña ilte sipāh ²⁶	3903 After a while the shah decided To take the army toward Tagargār ²⁷

²⁶ Akdoğan and Kutsal, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin*, 566-567; Dankoff, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin I*, 683-685.

²⁷ Öztürk, *İskendernâme*, 294.

2.3. Tagargar and the Wall of Gog and Magog: Politics of Development, Order, and Protection

Of Alexander's journeys, Tagargar (3904–3926) is one remarkable stop on the *acâ'ib* route in which curiosity constantly seeks new forms and new boundaries. Alexander encounters a populous people in Tagargar who, while having human form, also possess internal animalistic characteristics. For example, there are groups of people who have human bodies but the heads of wolves and elephant trunks on their faces, thus inspiring feelings of admiration and astonishment in the reader that such strange creatures could be created by God (Şâni'). In the same region, a frail people living between two high mountains, where both women and men live naked, ask Alexander for protection from the threats of Gog and Magog, thus associating Alexander with the themes of intervention and the establishment of order. The depiction in the text of Gog and Magog as communities with hairy pigs-like bodies and sharp claws, half a human's height, that plunder buildings and crops, visually demonstrates the extent of the great threat, and Alexander's response to this threat is shaped on the basis of skill and wisdom. Countless workers are mobilized to construct a high barrier which extends between the two mountains and blocks out the lands of Gog and Magog. All of the gaps of this barrier are completely filled, and it is strengthened with iron and copper melted in furnaces. The provision of security makes visible that Alexander's curiosity-based expedition also includes the responsible policies of development and protection.

Upon reaching Egypt after the war with the army of dîvs and jinn in Khorasan (4016–4143) is won, curiosity remains alive, not only in the discovery of supernatural beings, but also due to extraordinary structures built by human hands. Sights such as that of an embroidered and painted dome on which the names of Arab and Persian rulers are written, as well as magnificent pyramids (*ahrâm*), create feelings of admiration more than astonishment in Alexander. Magnificent architecture foregrounds not only the view of the magnificent in the narrative, but also the idea of order being created through reason and labor. The sense of the combination of Alexander's admiration and wisdom can be seen by his founding of the city of Alexandria due to his great love of Egypt, having a lighthouse built, the like of which had never been seen before, and his placing of a mirror (*âyîna-i jahân-numâ*) which showed distant places at the top of the lighthouse (4247–4443). The perpetuation of the desire to gaze upon the horizon in contemplation through these very inventions suggests that curiosity is the result of momentary consideration toward the achieving of functional knowledge.

3. Final Journeys: From the External World to the Internal World—Metaphysical Threshold

There follows a movement from curiosity in the external world to a desire to explore the internal. This is seen in the extreme focus in section entitled 'Final Journeys' (7871–8541) upon *acâ'ib* narratives characteristic of Ahmedî's epic understanding, namely Alexander's journey to the Land of Darkness, his debates with the Brahmans, the Monastery of the First Dhû al-Qarnayn, the Land of Women, the Land of Darkness, and the Talking Tree (8315–8541) (see Appendix 1). While these sections correspond to the final phase of Alexander's life cycle on the content and symbolic levels, they reconstruct the hero's pre-death spiritual quest into a mythic context.

Ahmedî's lively and dynamic language, which contains descriptions of nature such as spring, autumn, winter, and sunrise, especially in the opening sections, assume a more solemn atmosphere of contemplation with the prominence of autumn and winter images in the final periods. The construction of the phases of Alexander's childhood, youth, maturity, and old age within a seasonal continuity, as well as their structuring in parallel with nature's cycle, strengthens the layer of wisdom contained the narrative. This cyclical structure operates in a way reminiscent of the "seasonal cycle" concept that Northrop Frye set forth in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, in that there is suggestion that there is a deep web of meaning behind the adventure.

In this final phase, in which there is increasing imagery of autumn and winter, Alexander has entered the final days of his life. After performing the required pilgrimage to Hejaz, he returns to Egypt; whereupon a physician who notices the pallor on his face and the constriction in his heart, speaks to him of the water of life (*âb-i hayât*), which is believed to grant immortality to the person who drinks it, but also warns that reaching this spring is extremely difficult and very few people can complete this journey. Alexander subsequently decides to turn eastward and go to the Land of Darkness, which becomes a final act that goes beyond the mere curiosity of conquest as it is fed by the desire for wisdom. He leaves Aristotle, his companion, as his deputy, takes Khidr as his companion, and sets out with countless soldiers. In Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, this journey is portrayed as a symbol of both a material and spiritual quest. The communities of supernatural beings and symbolic places encountered represent profound references to man's desire for knowledge, power, and immortality.

In the first stage of the journey, Alexander arrives at the city of the Brahmans and listens to advice from a Brahman regarding the virtues of simple living and abstinence. This is one of the moments when the axis of wisdom begins to speak directly within the text. Alexander then visits the tomb of Alexander Dhû al-Qarnayn, who lived before him, which has the symbolic meaning of showing that curiosity can relate not only to the future, but also to the past, that is, to memory and continuity.

In the following stage, Alexander and his army arrive after a month-long dangerous journey at the city called Shazkam, where only women live. The great tree in the center of the city with a fountain beneath it represent mythic symbols of fertility and the life cycle, thus maintaining the feeling of admiration in the face of the extraordinary. Women who want children drink water from the fountain and touch the tree. Those who do become pregnant only give birth to girls, thus making one feel that *acâ'ib* is placed in the narrative as a possibility.

After leaving Shazkam, we reach a region where darkness reigns. According to tradition, the water of life (*âb-i hayât*) is found here, but the road is extremely difficult, thus representing curiosity being carried to an increasingly dangerous and more testing ground. As Alexander and his army advance into the darkness, they encounter natural forces such as storms, floods, and lightning. The scene thus intertwines admiration with feelings of fear and sublimity, while also making visible the limits of human power in terms of wisdom. The costs of the quests begin to mount with Khidr and Alexander losing each other during the pitch-black storm, and most of the army being destroyed. Alexander senses the impossibility of reaching the water of life, and then wants to turn back, thus representing the point where curiosity moves from a desire to obtain everything to knowing one's own limits.

However, when Alexander cannot find the way he came, he takes another route. This enables the remains of his army to collect jewels from encrusted stones they discover, before finally succeeding in emerging from the darkness, thus showing once again the wonder-producing face of *acâ'ib*. Alexander's lamentations at this point over losing half his army, as well as never hearing from Khidr again, deepens the narrative in terms of feelings of loss and patience. In the final stage, Alexander's arrival at a plain full of birds, and then lodging under a shady tree, as well as the tree calling out to Alexander in the silence of midnight to announce that his life is approaching its end, represents a closure where curiosity is now directed not at external wonders, but at the ultimate boundary of existence. The talking tree scene articulates this judgment of wisdom in a mythic language that arouses admiration in Ahmedî's epic as a metaphorical representation of the confrontation of death. Thus the work, by ceasing to be merely a narrative of conquest and adventure, attains a narrative horizon that makes one consider the limits of man's desire for knowledge and power, and the metaphysical impossibility of the passion for immortality in which curiosity begins with admiration, but ends with the attaining of wisdom.

8532 Ol ağaç nâle ʿdiben zâr zâr Dedi ki ʿey mihnet çekici şehriyâr	8532 That tree, moaning sorrowfully, said O sovereign who suffers hardship
8533 Nêçe yörîdür seni bu hırş u âz Mâl çoğı ne ʿaşı çün ʿömr ola az	8533 How will this greed and avarice keep you alive? What use is great wealth when life is short?
8534 ʿÖmrün âhir oldı pes nedür sebeb Kim kılursın dünyeyi böyle taleb	8534 Now you have come to the end of your life What is the point in desiring the world thus?
8535 Pâzişhlik sürdün ondört yıl temâm Bir gün olmadun cihânda şâd-kâm	8535 You reigned as sovereign for exactly fourteen years There was not a single day when you were happy in the world
8536 Bunca cem ʿ ʿetdün velîkin yemedün Ölem ü ayruğa kıla demedün	8536 You accumulated so much, yet did not consume it You did not say, “I will die; it will be left to another”
8537 Uş gèdersin kıalur ayruğa bu genc Sen çekersin arada bîhûde renc	8537 Behold, you are going, this treasure remains to another You toil here was in vain
8538 ʿEy dirîğ ü derd sênün rencün Kim elün uş érmez oldı gencün ²⁸	8538 Alas, pity for the torment you have suffered Behold, your hand can now never attain your treasure ²⁹

The death scene following the “Final Journeys” section in Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme* is a complementary element that connects the epic’s cyclical structure to a contemplation-centered closure. The hero’s confrontation with death after the unsuccessful quest for the water of immortality (*âb-i hayât*) in the Land of Darkness, clarifies the narrative’s horizon of wisdom. In the transience of worldly splendor, death as a boundary that power cannot reach, and the fact that there are human limits which man cannot transcend become the final knowledge gained in this scene. Alexander’s falling into deep sorrow upon hearing the words indicating his death from the talking tree also shows that wisdom is not merely an intellectual comprehension, but a realization that shakes existence. After listening to these words, it is as if Alexander’s soul bids farewell to his body, and when morning comes, he departs with a sick heart, chapped lips, and tearful eyes.

The approach of death is foreshadowed in the narrative through a series of signs and ruptures. While traveling toward Iran, Alexander suddenly has a nosebleed when he arrives in Qumis, loses his balance on his horse, and falls to the ground unconscious. His companions lay him on chain mail for a bed and spread a golden shield over him to let him rest, but the weakness of his body indicates that death is approaching. Understanding that his condition is worsening, Alexander writes a letter to his mother, Rukiye Hatun, to convey his will and entrust his son, Iskandarûs, to her. Upon reaching Shahrazûr, Alexander’s pains intensify, and although Plato comes to prepare medicine, it is understood that the illness has advanced and it becomes clear that treatment will not work. Thus wisdom, where measures are exhausted, turns into submission and testament.

The detailed will that Alexander leaves to those around him is an effort to construct wisdom in the face of death. Alexander requests that his body to be carried by sultans, that the funeral ceremony be of some length, that a golden coffin is made for him and that it is adorned with jewels. His wishes that his body be washed with camphor and that, when placed in the coffin, one of his hands is left outside, are symbolic gestures that intensifies the wisdom of the scene. It is his intention that everyone sees that a sovereign who conquered the seven climes goes empty-handed just as he came into the world; thus death ceases to be merely an end, and becomes a lesson in wisdom that proclaims the ultimate judgment of power. Further requests are that he is carried during his funeral by Egyptian sovereigns, which is where the mourning is to be held there; that

²⁸ Akdoğan and Kutsal, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin*, 943; Dankoff, *Ahmedî, İskendernâme, İnceleme-Tenkitli Metin II*, 527.

²⁹ Öztürk, *İskendernâme*, 640.

abundant wealth is given to those whose rights he has violated; and that the location of his buried remains unknown, and for this reason he should not be buried in the ground.

When the will is fulfilled, the bird of life departs from his body and Alexander's worldly journey comes to an end. In Ahmedî's style, this death is not so much a historical closure as a metaphysical contemplation scene that reveals the tension between mythic sublimity and human mortality, thus making one consider on the plane of wisdom and sagacity the tragic limit of man's desire for power and immortality.

Conclusion

The narratives concerning fantastical beings and places in Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*, as demonstrated in this study, function not merely as fantastic elements and exotic décor but rather as a poetic system that reveals the epistemic horizon that medieval Islamic thought has constructed in terms of curiosity, admiration, and wisdom. The text combines the distinctive language of the encyclopedic knowledge tradition (especially Qazvînî's *Acâ'ib al-Makhlûqât*) with the vein of allegorical and mystical narrative inherited from Nizâmî, thus positioning wonder as the beginning of knowledge and the door opening to wisdom.

Alexander's path, woven, as it is, with motifs such as the Indian islands, Waqwaq Island, the Valley of Diamonds, Tagargar, the wall of Gog and Magog, and the mirror and lighthouse in Alexandria, transforms the desire to see into a test of both power (conquest/development) and thinking (contemplation/taking a lesson), while the advice structure repeated at the end of the *dâsitâns* consciously connects this experience to contemplation. In the 'Final Journeys' the failure of the quest for the Land of Darkness and the *âb-i hayât*, combined with the talking tree and the death scene, proclaims the ultimate limit of curiosity (mortality); thus the *acâ'ib* aesthetic concludes after evolving from admiration to wisdom, and from claims for power to the realization of one's own limits. In this respect, *İskendernâme*, by showing how the relationship between knowledge, wonder, and discovery was literarily constructed in early Ottoman thought, repositions the *masnavi* as both a teaching of wisdom, and a quest for metaphysical text, thus offering a distinctive form of poetry on the axis of curiosity, admiration, and wisdom.

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Appendix 1: Outline of Ahmedî's *İskendernâme*

1. Beginning (1-306)	
The beginning of the book	1-21
The debate between a moth and a candle	22-64
Discourse on God's unity, names, and attributes	65-191
Discourse on humanity	192-239
Praise of the Prophet	240-283
Purpose of the book	284-306
2. Alexander's birth, education, and accession to the throne (307-917)	
The story of Alexander Dhû al-Qarnayn (307 nightingales)	307-465
Alexander's birth (466 nightingales)	466-574
Alexander's accession to the throne (575 mughannî)	575-585
Greek sages and their debates with Khidr	586-917
3. Iran (918-1330)	
The conquest of Iran (918 nightingales)	918-1098
The war with the Dârâb (1099 nightingales)	1099-1330
4. Sistan (1331-1933)	
The love story of Alexander and Gülşah (1331 murgh-i shaydâ)	1331-1933
5. India (1934-3227)	
The conquest of India (1934, 1940 nightingales; 1947 mutrib)	1934-2163
Discussions: theology, cosmology, astronomy, astrology, physiology, psychology, medicine	2164-2785
The banquet and music	2786-2854
The Hunt (2855 parrots)	2855-2948
The war with the Fur of India (2949 nightingales)	2949-3067
Alexander's killing of a dragon in Sint (3068 murgh-i khush-gû)	3068-3164
Discourse on virtue and morality	3165-3227
6. Fantastic beings ('ajâ'ib and gharâ'ib) (3228-3926)	
Indian islands and their beauties (3228 nightingales)	3228-3534
China	3535-3704
The East and its beauties (3705 parrots)	3705-3839
Kashmir	3840-3903
Tagharghar	3904-3926
7. Wars (3927-4246)	
Gog and Magog	3927-4015
Dîvs I (4023 mutrib)	4016-4113
Russia and Khazar	4114-4143
Dîvs II 4144-4246	
8. Egypt and beyond (4247-5010)	
Egypt and its beauties	4247-4443
Qaydâfa, Queen of the Maghrib	4444-4802
Ahmedî and his beloved; discussion on planets	4444-4519
Qaydâfa 4520-4802	
Search for lands beyond the seven climes (4803 nightingales)	4803-5010
9. World History (5011-7870)	
Rulers before Alexander (5011 parrots)	5011-5785
Rulers after Alexander (5786 nightingales)	5786-5964
The Prophet Muhammad	5965-6042

The rulers of Iran and Yemen	6043-6193
Miracles of the Prophet; the conquest of Khaybar and Mecca	6194-6370
Mi'râjnâme	6371-6617
The last Iranian rulers, Caliphs, Umayyads, Abbasids	6618-7122
Mongols, Ilkhanids, Jalayirids	7123-7536
Ottomans (Tevârîkh-i Âl-i Osmân)	7537-7870
10. Final Journeys (7871-8541)	
Debate with Khidr on the hereafter	7871-8008
Alexander and the Pilgrimage (8009 dawn birds)	8009-8198
The tale of the fox that fell into the indigo vat	8025-8056
Alexander in Jerusalem	8199-8287
The return to Egypt	8288-8314
Journey to the Land of Darkness (8315 nightingales)	8315-8376
Debates with the Brahmans	8377-8432
Monastery of the First Dhû al-Qarnayn	8433-8484
The Land of Women	8485-8501
The Land of Darkness	8502-8528
The speaking tree	8529-8541
11. End (8542-8754)	
Alexander's illness, testament, death, and funeral	8542-8678
Alexander's son's preference for a tranquil life over an adventurous one	8679-8708
The end of the book	8709-8754