

## THE STORY OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE POISON-DAMSEL OF INDIA. A TRACE OF IT IN FIRDOUSI'S SHĀH-NĀMEH

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[Read on 4th February 1926.]

### I.

#### INTRODUCTION

Last year, when I was in England, I had the pleasure of reading a Paper before the Folklore Society of London, on 17th June 1925, on the subject of "The Vish-kanyā ( विष-कन्या ) or Poison-damsel of Ancient India, illustrated by the story of Susan Rāmashgar in the Persian Burzo-nāmeḥ."<sup>1</sup> The subject of that paper was suggested to me by an inquiry in January 1924 from Mr. N. M. Penzer through Mr. R. E. Enthoven, asking for some information on Poison-damsel in Indian Literature. Mr. Penzer himself had gathered information from Indian books, but he wanted some further information, if available. Now, since his first inquiry, Mr. Penzer has published the second volume of his "Ocean of Story,"<sup>2</sup> and it is the third Appendix of this volume, for which he had sought further information from the members of my Anthropological Society, that has suggested to me the subject of this paper.

### II.

#### WHAT IS A POISON-DAMSEL.

It is said of an ancient king that, as one of the means of defence against an invading enemy, "he tainted, by means of

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<sup>1</sup> A brief paper on this subject was at first read before my Anthropological Society of Bombay and that paper was subsequently developed and read before the Folklore Society.

<sup>2</sup> The Ocean of Story, being C. H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Kathā Sarit Sāgara (or ocean of streams of story), now edited with Introduction, fresh Explanatory Notes and Terminal Essay by N. M. Penzer, in ten Volumes, Vol. II, Appendix III, p. 275.

poison and other deleterious substances, the trees, flowering creepers, water and grass all along the line of march. And he sent poison-damsels as dancing girls among the enemy's host, and he also despatched nocturnal assassins into their midst." <sup>3</sup> We find, that even in modern warfare, they resort to some such means. For example, the excreting gas, first discovered by the Germans in the late great world war of 1914-18, was a means of that kind.<sup>4</sup> The jets of the gas poisoned the air on the side of the enemy and blinded them.

Now, as to the Vish-kanyā or a Poison-damsel, she was a beautiful young girl employed by a person to bring about the death of an enemy. She enticed him in her trap in some way or another by her fascinating beauty. From all that we read about them, we learn, that these Poison-damsels were of various types. I give below, what I have said of these various types in my above previous paper :—

- (1) "A poison-damsel, in the original sense of the word seems to mean a damsel who does harm deceitfully in some way or other to another person.
- (2) "She is one, born under an inauspicious configuration or conjugation of planets. So, she does harm to one who marries her. It is this view, that seems to have led, and even now seems to lead, many Indian parents to resort to an astrologer to ascertain, whether the planets, under the influence of which their children are born, are of the same conjunction or not. The happiness or otherwise of marriage

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 1, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> It appears from the Shāh-nāmeḥ of Firdousi that there was something of this sort in remote ancient times. For example, King Kāus and a number of his army were blinded by the enemy when they invaded the country of Māzandarān, etc. It was after some time that Rustam relieved them, and, procuring an antedote cured them (Warner Brothers' Shāhnāma, Vol. II, p. 40; Kutar Brothers' Gujarāti Shāh-nāmeḥ, Vol. II, p. 99; Dastur Minocheher's Gujarāti Shāh-nāmeḥ, Vol. I, p. 538; Mohl's small edition, Vol. I, p. 398; Rogers' abridged Shāhnāma, p. 132. For the Persian Text, *vide* Macan's Shāh-nāmeḥ I, p. 240; Vüller's Schāhname I, p. 329.)

depends upon that. The custom is spoken of as *raç jovràvvi*, (राच जेवराववी) *i.e.*, to get the route (of the planets) seen (by an astrologer).

- (3) "A damsel who is, in some way or other, so much poisoned or infected with a disease, that she is likely to convey her poison or infectious disease to the person, who has intercourse with her or who comes into some form of close contact with her, and to bring about his death. A woman infected with a venereal disease is a poison-damsel of this kind.
- (4) "A damsel who has actually saturated her body with gradual doses of poison, and who, therefore, is in a state believed to be likely to convey the poison of her body, so saturated, to another person who comes into contact with her. The *Gesta Romanorum* (11th tale) is said to refer to the story of an Indian queen, sending a poison-damsel to Alexander the Great and of Aristotle frustrating her plan. This poison-damsel seems to be of this kind.
- (5) "A damsel who treacherously captivates the heart of a person, and then actually gives him some poison in food or drink."

### III.

#### THE STORY OF ALEXANDER AND THE POISON-DAMSEL.

Mr. Penzer gives the story of Alexander the Great and the Indian Poison-damsel, on the authority of a Latin work called *Secretum Secretorum*, *De Secretis Secretorum* or *De Regimine Principum*. The book had some other titles also: "It purported to be nothing less than a collection of the most important and secret communications sent by Aristotle to Alexander the Great when he was too aged to attend his pupil in person. Such letters had been circulated from the earliest times, but here was a treatise containing not only the essence of political wisdom and state-craft,

but regulations for the correct conduct of body and mind, and an insight into the mysteries of occult lore.”<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Penzer thus speaks of this work : “ The Secretum, however, is not reckoned among Aristotle’s genuine works, but as one of a number of unauthenticated treatises which, reflecting as it does theories and opinions contained in his famous philosophical writings, was readily accepted as a work of the Master himself.”<sup>6</sup>

Now, as to the contents of this book, which he calls “ a certain Pseudo-Aristotelean work,”<sup>7</sup> specially referring to the subject of our paper, Mr. Penzer speaks thus :

“ According to the text, Aristotle is warning Alexander against entrusting the care of his body to women, and to beware of deadly poisons which had killed many kings in the past. He further advises him not to take medicines from a single doctor, but to employ a number, and act only on their unanimous advice. Then, as if to prove the necessity of his warnings, he recalls a great danger which he himself was able to frustrate. ‘ Remember,’ he says, ‘ what happened when the King of India sent thee rich gifts, and among them that beautiful maiden whom they had fed on poison until she was of the nature of a snake, and had I not perceived it because of my fear, for I feared the clever men of those countries and their craft, and had I not found by proof that she

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 287. We find an instance of such “ Most important and secret communications sent by Aristotle to Alexander the Great ” in the letter of Dastur Tansar to the King of Tabaristan. Alexander the Great had not only destroyed the ancient literature and religion of Persia, but had also thought of putting to death the aristocracy of Persia with a view, that thereby, he might have no fear of a powerful rise in revolt by the Persians when he advanced to India. But it was Aristotle who, by a letter, dissuaded him from doing such a base act. (*Vide* the Journal Asiatique, Neuvième Série, Tome III, Mars-Avril 1894, pp. 185-250, and Mai-Juin 1894, pp. 502-555). *Vide*, for a brief account of this letter, my “ Glimpse into the work of the B. B. R. Asiatic Society during the last 100 years, from a Parsee point of view,” pp. 33-35; *vide* for an account of this letter my Iranian Essays (Gujarati) Part III, pp. 127-44.

<sup>6</sup> The Ocean of Story, *op cit*, Vol. II, p. 287.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*. p. 282.

would be killing thee by her embrace and by her perspiration, she would surely have killed thee'.<sup>8</sup>

#### IV.

#### THE SOURCE OR SOURCES OF THE PSEUDO-ARISTOTELEAN WORK, THE SECRETUM SECRETORUM.

According to Mr. Penzer,<sup>9</sup> the Latin work appeared in the twelfth century, and there were two recensions, a longer and a shorter one, both resting upon Greek originals. "A Syrian freedman under the Khalifa al-Ma'mun (*circa* 800)," named "Yahya ibn Baṭṭīq, *i.e.*, John, the Son of Patriciuss," had first discovered the work in "the Temple of the Sun dedicated to Æsculapius (Asklepios). It was written in letters of gold, and he immediately translated it first into Rumi (Syriac) and then from Rumi into Arabic." The Greek text does not exist. There is also a Hebrew version, which is quite as old as any of the complete texts. It is now almost universally recognised as the work of Judah Al-Ḥarīzī, who flourished in the early thirteenth century."<sup>9a</sup> Later on further chapters were added.

Then Mr. Penzer says: "The medical knowledge displayed in the enlarged chapters places the author in the eighth or ninth century, but when restored to their original proportions, we can reduce the date by at least a century. Scholars are agreed that there is no Greek text in existence, and no proof that it ever did exist. Now if we look more closely into the longer Arabic and Hebrew texts, we find that the background of the book is wholly Eastern—Persian and Indian—while, on the other hand, there is hardly a mention of Greece. If any analogy or simile is needed, it is the sayings and doings of Persians or Indians that are quoted. The allusion to chess,<sup>10</sup> the occurrence of Eastern place-names and animals, all tend to point to the influence under which the Secretum really originated. Among similar Eastern works, whose history is now

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 291.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 287-88.

<sup>9a</sup> *Ibid.* p. 289.

<sup>10</sup> For this subject of the Origin of Chess in the East, *vide* my paper before this Society entitled "Firdousi on the Indian Origin of the Game of Chess" (*Jour. B.B.R.A.S.* XIX, pp. 224-36. *Vide* my Asiatic Papers, Part I, pp. 85-98).

fairly completely known, may be mentioned Syntipas, Kalilah and Barlaam and Josephat.<sup>10a</sup> All these slowly migrated westwards, changing their character with their environment, and readily adapting themselves to any new purpose for which they might be wanted."

Now, I agree with Mr. Penzer that the origin of the Pseudo-Aristotelian work, *Secretum Secretorum* is Eastern—Persian and Indian. As far as we know, no Indian version of the story of Alexander and the Poison-damsel of India is known to exist. So, we have no materials to compare the Western version of the story with any Indian version. But I beg to show in this paper that we have a Persian version of the story giving us pretty sufficient materials for comparison. Again, that Persian version seems to have come, like the three stories above referred to, from the Pahlavi.

#### THE PAHLAVI ORIGIN OF SOME INDIAN STORIES MIGRATING TO THE WEST.

We know that all the above three stories which originated in India, passed to the West through Iran or Persia and through the Pahlavi books of Iran.

(a) For the first story of Syntipas (Sindibad), I beg to refer my readers to my Paper before this Society, entitled "The so-called Pahlavi Origin of Sindibād-nāmeḥ or the Story of the Seven Wise Masters."<sup>11</sup> In that paper, I have shown that, though we cannot directly trace the story to any extant Pahlavi book, we can trace it to the story of Kaus, Soudabeh and Siavakhsh in the *Shāh-nāmeḥ* of Firdousi, who had taken most of his materials from Pahlavi.

(b) As to the second story of Barlaam and Josephat, I will quote here in full what I have said on this subject in my Paper before my Anthropological Society, entitled "The German Kaiser William in the Incantations of the Oraons of Chota Nagpur and the Iranian King Faridun in the Incantations of the ancient Persians."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10a</sup> For this story *vide* Barlaam and Josephat, by Joseph Jacobs (1816).

<sup>11</sup> Jour. B.B.R.A.S. XVIII, pp. 206-12. *Vide* my Asiatic Papers, Part II, pp. 45-52.

<sup>12</sup> Jour. Anthropol. Sty. of Bombay Vol. X pp. 615-35. *Vide* my Anthropological Papers, Part II (pp. 234-54) pp. 241-42.

“The Christian story of Barlaam and Josephat, is believed by many Christian scholars to be the Christianised version of the legendary history of Buddha Sakya Muni, one of whose titles is Bodhisatva. Prof. MacDonnel says: ‘That the founder of an atheistic oriental religion should have developed into a Christian saint is one of the most astounding facts in religious history.’<sup>13</sup> We have an interesting account of this transference in Jacob’s Barlaam and Josaphat.<sup>14</sup> The author of this book, in his learned Introduction, presents interesting evidence to show that, in about the 5th or 6th century, Buddhistic legends and doctrines<sup>15</sup> went to Syria and got mixed up with the Christian dogmas and legends prevalent there. The Indian Zarmanochegas<sup>16</sup> by name, a native of Barygasa<sup>17</sup> referred to by Strabo as having gone to the court of Augustus Cæsar from Barygaza from the Indian king Porus,<sup>18</sup> the ‘sovereign of 600 kings,’<sup>19</sup> and who is said to have immortalized himself

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<sup>13</sup> Prof. MacDonnel’s History of Sanskrit Literature, p. 420.

<sup>14</sup> Barlaam and Josaphat, English Lives of Buddha, edited and introduced by Joseph Jacobs.

<sup>15</sup> “The pith of what this author says is this: Both Buddha and Christ represent the ideals of a whole continent. Buddha represents Asia’s ideal “To be,” while Christ represents that of Europe “To Do.” Buddha is a *contemplative Sage*, Christ a *beneficent Saint*. But, though their aims are different, their methods are similar. They both fight against the world. The similarity of the schemes of both consists of the following: The legends of both present parallels of (a) the Annunciation, (b) the Massacre of the Innocents, (c) the Temptation in the Wilderness, (d) the Marriage at Cana, (e) the Walking on the Water, (f) the Transfiguration. (g) Again, both taught by parables, some of which are well-nigh the same, e.g., those of the Sower, the Prodigal son, Seed and Soil. (g) Both lay stress upon the Spirit against the Letter and upon the opposition between Riches and Spirituality and upon inward Purity. (h) Both recommend a Brotherhood or Church. (i) Even the formalities of some of their rituals is the same.”

<sup>16</sup> “Supposed to be another form of Zarmanus, or Garmanus, another form of Sarmanas, a sect of Indian philosophers.”

<sup>17</sup> “Another form of Barygaza which is Baroatsch, Barutsch or Broach.”

<sup>18</sup> “A general name of Indian kings.”

<sup>19</sup> “Strabo, Bk. XV, Chap. I. 73. Hamilton and Falconer’s Translation, Vol. III, p. 119.”

by burning himself to death at Athens, seems to have been a Buddhist. His fame, as an Indian, who, though in a prosperous state of life, burnt himself to escape a possible or probable calamity in future, may also have drawn the attention of the people at Judea.

“Now Mr. Joseph Jacobs traces the origin of the Christian story of Barlaam and Josephat through different successive sources. He gives a table giving the pedigree of the works giving the story from earlier times to the present times, and shows, that it may have come down from an Indian original through its Pahlavi version, now lost. From Pahlavi it must have gone to Arabic, in the same way as the story of Kalila and Damna has passed into that language. From Arabic, it went through various ways to the various sects of the Christians. It is supposed that the name Joseph or Josaph is a variant of Bodhisattva, a word used for ‘the man who is destined to become a Buddha’<sup>20</sup>. It began to take that shape while passing through Persia. Bodhisattva became Budhaspa. Mr. Jacob thinks, that the “*aspa*” form at the end is a favourite form with the Persians at the end of many names. For example take the names of the members of Zoroaster’s family : Pourushaspa, Paitaraspa, Hachaedaspa. So Bodhisattva became at first Budhaspa. It may be so ; but I think, it is more probable that the change is due to the fact, that the same letter in Pahlavi can be read as ‘v’ and ‘p.’ I am inclined to trace the equations as follows : The Indian Bodhisattva or Buddhisattva, when written in Pahlavi, could also be read Budhisatpa, which, by dropping the ‘t’ became Budhisapa, and then, possibly, through the fondness of the Persians for the word “*aspa*” became Budhaspa. Then, on coming into Arabic, the letter, ‘b’ owing to a change in the *nukteh*s, became ‘y’ and the word became Yudaspa. Y often becomes j and p becomes f. So Yudaspa became Joseph. In Josaphat, perhaps the ‘t’ that had disappeared, re-appeared changing places. I would place the equation in Pahlavi and Arabic characters as follows : बूधीसत्त्व = Pahl. بدریس = Pahl.

اڊرڻ = Pahl. اڊرڻ = Arab. بودسپ = یودسپ = جوسف

<sup>20</sup> “Barlaam and Josaphat, by Joseph Jacobs, Introduction, p. XXXV.”

Whatever be the way, in which the story of Buddha went to the West, the fact is, that Buddha, as a great and pious ethical teacher, was somehow sanctified in the Christian Church. In the Greek Church, also known as the Orthodox Eastern Church, his feast day is 26th August. In the Martyrologium of the Roman Church, it is 27th November. It is said that even a Church (Divo Josaphat) is dedicated to him at Palermo."

(c) As to the origin of the story of Kalileh and Damneh, known in the West as the story of Bid-pāi, it is so well known, that I need not dilate upon it. The story passed from India to the West *via* Iran and through Pahlavi, and we know well, that the Persian Anvār-i-Sohili is a later form of it.

Like the above three stories, the origin of our story in question is Indo-Persian. Its migration is in the following order: Indian—Pahlavi—Greek—Syrian—Arabic—Latin. Or, it may be in the following order: Indian—Pahlavi—Arabic—Latin. The story, on going to the West, had been given in the following various languages: Arabic, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, Provençal, Dutch, French and English.

#### A FEW POINTS COLLECTED FROM VARIOUS VERSIONS.

We collect the following points from the above versions of Alexander's story as given in an old Hebrew version of Aristotle's story:

1. An Indian king sent rich gifts to Alexander.
2. One of the rich gifts was a "beautiful maiden" whom they had fed on poison until she was of the nature of a snake. According to some Arabic texts, it was the mother of the king who sent the damsel, and, according to others, it was the queen who sent her.
3. Aristotle saved Alexander from the grasp of the maiden.
5. According to an Arabic text, Aristotle knew the practices of Indian kings and physicians in such matters.
6. The maiden was one "who thought to rouse his (Alexander's) passion" (Spanish version, Perzer op. cit. p. 292).

7. Aristotle was "versed in astronomy." By "astronomy" what seems to have been meant is "astrology," whereby he foresaw the fraudulent stratagem of the Indian king.
8. The damsel was brought up on poison from infancy. She gave.....'poisoned words'—that is to say, the breath from her mouth when speaking was poisonous—and her look also brought on sudden death. . . A master saw through this and gave the king a herb to put in his mouth, which freed him from all danger. (German version by Frauenlob, a German poet of the 13th Century, Penzer op. cit. p. 292). Mr. Penzer says: "The idea of the miraculous herb is entirely new and seems to have been an invention of the poet" (p. 293).
9. "A certain king was once informed by a sooth-sayer that a child, named Alexander, had just been born who was destined to be his downfall. On hearing this discouraging news, the king thought of an ingenious way in which to get rid of the menace, and gave strict orders for several infant girls of good family to be nourished on deadly poison.....Once the king was besieged by a powerful army and he sent this maiden by night into the enemy's camp..... As soon as he (the besieging king) kissed her he fell dead to the ground.....Delighted with the success of his experiment, the king ordered the damsel to be even better cared for, and nourished with even purer poison than hitherto. Meanwhile Alexander, grown to manhood, had started his campaigns, besieged and conquered Darius, and made his name feared throughout the world. Then the king.....had five maidens beautifully attired, the fifth being the poisoned damsel;.... these he sent to Alexander, ostensibly as a mark of his love and obedience ..... Alexander..... rushed to embrace her. But Aristotle, a wise and learned man of the court, and Socrates, the king's tutor, recognised

the poisonous nature of the maiden and would not let Alexander touch her.....Then Alexander had her beheaded and her body burnt." (A French prose version of the early fourteenth century, *Ibid.* pp. 292-293.)

10. "A wise queen in the land of Sizare.....discovered by her magical art that a son of Olympus, Alexander by name, would one day deprive her of her kingdom..... She first procured Alexander's portrait,<sup>21</sup> and seeing that his features betrayed a sensual nature, made her plans accordingly.....The queen put "a baby-girl, just born," into one of the big eggs of a snake which "are as big as bushel baskets.....and the snake-mother hatched it out with her other eggs." The baby-girl was fed by the mother snake. "She could not speak, and only hissed like a snake, and any one coming near her too often either died or fell into disease.....The queen gradually taught her to speak.....She grew into one of the most beautiful creatures in the world with a face like an angel." Then, when Alexander arrived in her country, the queen "offered him the girl, with whom he at once fell in love, saying to Aristotle, 'I will lie with her.'" But Aristotle dissuaded him from doing so, saying and proving that the girl was poisonous.

Aristotle's method of proving that the girl was poisonous is interesting from an Indian point of view, as we hear here various stories of snake charmers and snake cures. He first got a poisonous snake shut up in a jar, and there and then, with the juice of fresh dittany "drew a circle round the jar about an ell away from it." Then on the jar being opened, the snake tried to run out, but

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<sup>21</sup> Here, there is an indirect instance of an evil influence being exerted upon the person by his enemy through his portrait. The belief is still held in India by many, and so, we hear of instances of some people being altogether averse to being photographed. *Vide* my paper, entitled "The Indian custom of a Husband or Wife not naming his Wife or her Husband" before the Bombay Anthropological Society, read on 31st August 1921 (*Jour. of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, Vol. XII, No. 3 (pp. 301-11) p. 316. *Vide* my *Anthropological Papers*, Part III, p. 129.)

could not go out of the enchanted circle drawn by Aristotle with the juice of dittany<sup>22</sup> and soon died. Then Aristotle made the above girl, with two others that were not poisoned, stand in a place and similarly drew round them a circle with the juice of the dittany. Then, when he called them to come out of the enchanted or magic circle, the two unpoisoned damsels ran out, but the poisoned one could not, and, shortly after, feeling choked, died like the above mentioned snake<sup>23</sup>.

In the above particulars of the story, one particular is a direct reference to intercourse with the damsel. Alexander wanted to have it and Aristotle prevented him from having it. This has led Mr. Penzer to refer to the intercourse being dangerous on account of some kind of venereal disease.

## V.

### FIRDOUSI'S VERSION OF THE STORY.

Now, as said above, Mr. Penzer speaks of the back-ground of the Western story as Eastern—as Persian and Indian. As far as we know, we have no Indian book or writing to show positively that the back-ground is Indian. It may be Indian or it may not be so. But we have enough literary materials to show, that it is Persian. We find what may be called a trace of the story in Firdousi's *Shāh-Nāme*. Firdousi describes the story, not the

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<sup>22</sup> Dittany is "a plant growing in abundance and perfection on Mounts Dicté and Ida in Crete." It is "the *Dictamnus ruber* or *albus*. Its leaves in smell resemble lemon-thyme and yield an essential oil" (Webster). On inquiry from the Professor of Botany in the Elphinstone College, I learn that the plant has no known Marathi name and that the plant occurs in the temperate Western Himalayas.

<sup>23</sup> In the above story, we find a child fed by snakes. Cases of human children being fed by animals, at times by ferocious animals, are said to have occurred in India. I know the case of a wolf-boy who was so fed by a she-wolf. I myself had seen the boy in Agra. (*Vide* my Paper before the Bombay Natural History Society, on 7th May 1889, entitled "Recorded instances of children nourished by wolves, and birds of prey." *Vide* my Asiatic papers, Part II, pp. 197-200.)

whole story as found in later books, but a trace of the story, on the authority of Pahlavi writers.<sup>24</sup> Firdousi says:

There was a wise Indian king named Kaid ( کید ). He saw continually for 10 nights certain dreams. Nobody in his court could explain the dreams and he was referred to a learned man named Mehrān ( مهراڻ ), who lived in a wilderness in the midst of wild animals. The king went to the place where Mehrān lived in the wilderness and narrated his ten dreams to him and asked for an explanation. The wise man explained and said, that all the dreams predicted the coming of Sikander (Alexander) from Roum and Iran, with a large army, under selected officers. The king would have no cause to be afraid of him if he presented to him the four rare things (*chār chīz*)<sup>25</sup> which he possessed. These were: (1) A beautiful girl.<sup>26</sup> (2) A philosopher who revealed all the mysteries of the world. (3) A clever physician. (4) A cup in which water never got heated, when placed on fire, and was never finished, how much-so-ever people drank out of it. What was predicted by Mehrān turned out to be true, and Alexander invaded Kaid's dominions and sent him a letter, asking him to surrender. The Indian king<sup>27</sup> wrote in reply, offering his homage and his above four rare things. Alexander was pleased to learn this and he sent his messengers to the court of the Indian king to have a description of the four rare things. The Indian king then described before the messengers his four rare things. He first described the beauty of the girl. From what the king

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چنين گفتم گویند پهلوي  
شگفته آیدت کاین سخن بشنوي

Macan's Calcutta Edition 1829, III, p. 1290. Kutar Brothers' Text in Gujarati, Vol. VII, p. 57. Translation by Dastur Minocher J. Jamaspasa, Vol. III, p. 291. Translation of Warner Brothers, Vol. VI, p. 91. These brothers take the word Pahlavi to be a common name and translate it as "Days of Old". Mohl's small edition, Vol. V, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1292, 1.20.

<sup>26</sup> The Pers. word, 'dukhtar' means a daughter, as well as a girl, a maiden.

<sup>27</sup> Capt. Wilberforce Clarke thinks that this Indian king may be the king Taxalus of the Greeks. The Sikandar Nama e Bara, translated by Capt. W. Clarke.

said, it appears that the girl was not the king's own daughter, as we may at first be led to believe by the use of the word 'dukhtar' (daughter, Sans. *dohitri*). The Indian king, while describing her beauty, speaks of her descent as that from a Sepehbūd<sup>28</sup> i.e., the commander of an army.

Thereafter, Alexander sent, with a letter,<sup>29</sup> ten of his ministers to see the girl and the other three rare things. The Indian king welcomed them. They first saw the girl and were struck with wonder at her extraordinary beauty. They then wrote, each separately in his own words, to Alexander and described the extraordinary beauty of the girl. Alexander was pleased with what he read, and sent a message to them to return with the four rare things offered by the Indian king. They did so. The beautiful girl (*fughistan*)<sup>30</sup> shed tears when she left the court of the Indian king. Alexander was much pleased to see her and exclaimed that she was "the lamp of the world."<sup>31</sup> He then married her with religious rites.

Firdousi then proceeds to describe Alexander's inspection of the other rare things, the philosopher, the physician and the cup. It is in the account of his interview with the physician that we

<sup>28</sup> *Sepehbud nezād ast va yazdān parast i. e.*, She is descended from a commander of an army and is a worshipper of God. M. Mohl. translated this line as: "C'est une fille de rois, elle adore Dieu." (Mohl's small ed. Vol. V, p. 100). He does not represent the king as speaking of the girl, as "my daughter" but speaks of her as one of "royal descent". The word *sepāh* means a soldier.

<sup>29</sup> Macan's Calcutta Ed. (III, p. 1297) gives the number as ten. So do the Kutar Brothers in their Gujarati Transliteration and Translation, Vol. III, p. 17. Dastur Minocheher also gives the number as ten. But Mohl gives the number as nine (small ed., V, p. 101).

<sup>30</sup> *فغستان* The word may be read as "fughistan" and means "a handsome person" or as "fugsutān" and may mean "the favourite wife" or mistress of the king (Steingass).

<sup>31</sup> Kin (*ke in*) *ast cheragh-i-Jehan*." Macan and Kutar Brothers give the words as "Kinat cheragh-i Jehan" and take them to be addressed to God, as "O God! this is your lamp." But I think, that the text followed by Mohl (Small ed. V, p. 105) is correct and the words are "kin ast" and not "kinat."

find a reference again to Alexander's relation with a woman, though the above particular girl is not mentioned. Firdousi says of the physician that he knew what poison was and what the antidote of poison was. Immediately after his mention of the physician's knowledge of poison and its antidote, he refers to the sexual life of Alexander. I give my translation of what Firdousi says on this subject, following the text of Macan's Calcutta edition.<sup>32</sup>

“ He (the physician) possessed much of knowledge (or wisdom, *dānâi*). He knew poison (*i.e.*, what poison was) and the antidote of poison (*paī-zehr*<sup>33</sup>). He cut several mountain-herbs and rejected those which were useless, selected those that were pure remedies and mixed (with them) medicines (*dārū*) as required. He washed his (Alexander's) body with mountain-medicines and kept him always healthy. He (Alexander) did not sleep much at night but mixed himself well in all pleasures. His head was full of work with women and sought of having a soft thing on his breast.<sup>34</sup> So, the king began to be reduced. He did not care well for his body. One day, the physician came before Alexander and found the signs of reduction from the moisture of his eyes<sup>35</sup> and said: From too much intercourse<sup>36</sup> with women, even a young

<sup>32</sup> Vol. III, p. 1302 1.12. The *Sekander-nameh* of Nizami gives the four rare things in the following order (1) The King's daughter. (2) The Cup. (3) The Philosopher and (4) The Physician. (The *Sikandar namah e Barā*, or Book of Alexander the Great, written A.D. 1200 by Abu Mūhammad bin Yusuf bin Abu Ayyid-i-Nizāmu-d-din, translated by Capt. H. Wilberforce Clarke (1881), p. 573. For Nizami, *vide* my Asiatic Papers, Part II, pp. 9-16).

<sup>33</sup> Another form or word for this *paī-zehr* is *Bād-zehr* from which is derived by Webster our English word “bezoar.” Webster says of bezoar: “Fr. bezoard, Pers. *bād-zahr*, the bezoar-stone from *bad* wind and *zahr* poison; literally, wind of poison *i.e.*, that, which, like the wind, disperses and drives away the poison.” I think the proper derivation is not from Pers. *bād* wind, but from Pers. *bād*, power, guardian, which is another form of *pāi* which means power, resistance. So *paī-zehr* is that which offers resistance to, or cures, poison.

<sup>34</sup> This line seems to mean that he sought to have the soft embraces of women.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps, what is meant to be said is, that the king wept on account of his unbearable illness.

<sup>36</sup> Lit. sleeping and rising.

man undoubtedly becomes an old man. I am of opinion, that for three nights you have been without sleep (on account of too much intercourse). Tell me your secret and open your lips for that. Alexander said: 'I am all right. I have no disease (azār)<sup>37</sup> in my body.' That eminent<sup>38</sup> wise man (*i.e.*, physician) of Hindustan did not agree in that affair (*i.e.*, with what Alexander said). When night fell, he looked into the writings *i.e.*, books and purchased medicine for remedying the diminution (or consumption of his body). Then, on that night, Alexander slept alone and had no intercourse with the moon-faced girl. When the physician (pazashk)<sup>39</sup> came the next morning, he found, seeing from his eyes, that he was (*i.e.*, he slept that night) without her mistress (bi-yār). He threw off the medicine (which he had prepared for the king) and sat cheerful and took a cup (of drink) cheerfully in his hand and ordered table to be spread and asked for musicians and wine<sup>40</sup>. The king (Alexander) asked him: 'Why have you thrown away this thing which you had with some trouble prepared with medicine.' He (the physician) replied: 'Last night, the king of the world (*i.e.*, Your Majesty) did not wish for intercourse with the mistress and slept alone. So, Your Majesty, when you sleep alone, there is no need for medicine (*i.e.*, medicine is not necessary) for thee.' Alexander laughed and was pleased with him."

One must read this account of Firdousi, as it were, beneath the lines. The mention of poison and counter-poison, the gradual diminution of the healthy appearance of the king when he slept with the Indian girl, his recovery of good looks when he kept away from her,—all these point to the Indian girl being the poison-

37 The word "azār" ordinarily means a disease, but in a colloquial sense, it is taken to mean "the disease" *i.e.*, the venereal disease.

38 Pasandīd *i.e.*, the elected, the best.

39 The word 'physician' comes from Pers. pazashk which comes from Avesta Baeshaza.

40 What is meant is this: The physician found that Alexander, having kept away in the previous night from the company of the mistress (whom I take as a poison-damsel), looked well. So, he saw no necessity of giving him any medicine as an antidote for the poison and was delighted and made himself merry.

damsel, with whom the story, as known in the West in its various versions, associates Alexander. It seems that, as said by Firdousi himself in the beginning, the poet had the story in Pahlavi before him. The subject of intercourse with women, not being a decorous or descent subject to be written upon openly, the Pahlavi writer must have written under some restraint. Firdousi also seems to have done the same. It is probable, that Firdousi may not have completely grasped the drift of the whole story. He is therefore not clear in his interpretation of the story.

There is one point in Mr. Penzer's account to which I like to draw attention here. He says (p. 308): "The most simple explanation of the true meaning of poisoning by intercourse which at once suggests itself is that it was merely venereal disease unrecognised as such." Mr. Penzer then says that "Syphilis was introduced into Europe by way of Spain in 1493 by Columbus' men."<sup>41</sup> Further on, he says: "Syphilis appears to have been unknown in India till the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, when it was introduced by the Portuguese."<sup>42</sup> But if we take the word "azā:" in the above description of Firdousi, in the sense of venereal disease, in which sense the word is ordinarily understood even now, at least in the Bombay Presidency, one may say, that Mr. Penzer's above explanation about the poison-damsel, being a girl infested with syphilis seems to be correct and his statement that syphilis was not known in India before the advent of the Portuguese to be incorrect.

#### POINTS OF SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE WESTERN STORY AND FIRDOSI'S STORY.

From the above account, we find, that there are a number of points of similarity between the *different* versions of the Western story and Firdousi's version of the Eastern story.

1. Both the stories refer to, what may be called, an extraordinary thing. The Western story refers in the beginning to a sooth-sayer and Firdousi's to a learned man, Mehran by name, who was an ascetic dream-reader.

2. In both the versions, there is a kind of prophecy,—in one case by the sooth-sayer and in the other by the dream-reader, saying that Alexander will invade India.
3. Both the stories refer to the presentation of rich gifts to Alexander by the Indian king, and to a young damsel as being one of these rich things.
4. Both the stories represent Alexander as falling in love with the damsel at first sight.
5. Both the stories represent a learned wise man as saving Alexander from mischief. In the Western story it is Aristotle who does so. In Firdousi's story, it is a physician—the very physician who was sent as a gift to Alexander by the Indian king.
6. In both versions, we find a reference to a herb as an antidote to the poison of the damsel. In the Eastern story, it was “a master” who saw through this and gave the king a herb. In Firdousi's story, the physician “cut several mountain-herbs” for the purpose.
7. In one of the versions of the Eastern story, the transference of the poison was through sexual intercourse. In Firdousi's story also it is the same.

## VI.

### MAÇOUDI'S REFERENCE TO FOUR RARE THINGS, AND, AMONG THEM, TO A MAIDEN.

We find a reference to these four rare possessions of the Indian king in the work of Maçoudi also. Abou'l-Haçan Ali Maçoudi, who was born at Bagdad in the end of the third century, had come to India. He was in Multan in Hijri 300 *i.e.*, A. C. 912. He was in Cambay in about 916.<sup>43</sup> In his *Maruj Al Zahab* (Chap. XXVI),<sup>44</sup> he gives, what he speaks of as “an abridged History of the

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<sup>43</sup> Maçoudi, *Les Prairies d'or*. Texte et Traduction par Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille. Vol. I, Avant Propos, p. III.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 260.

Expedition of Alexander in India.” Therein, he says, that Alexander, after defeating king Porus, king of Mankir<sup>45</sup> (مانکیر), heard, that in further India there was a king named Kend<sup>46</sup> (کند), who was somewhat of a philosopher and an ascetic. He sent him a letter asking him to offer submission. Kend rendered submission offering his four rare possessions and a miraculous cup as tokens of submission. Of these four rare possessions, one was a young girl “the like of whose beauty the sun had never seen.”<sup>47</sup> Alexander accepted the terms of submission and sent his ambassadors to bring these four things. The ambassadors went to the court of the Indian king, who welcoming them, produced before them the four rare things. The first that was produced before them was the young girl. “When she appeared before them, their eyes rested upon her. Alexander himself, when he saw her, was struck with her beauty.”

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<sup>45</sup> This seems to be modern Maghar in the district of Basti in the North-Western Provinces (*Vide* Constable’s Hand Atlas of India, 1893), p. 47.

<sup>46</sup> This is another form of Firdousi’s Kaid (کاید). Both these words can be written with the same forms of letters, with a change in the *nukteh*s of the second letter.

<sup>47</sup> I follow Barbier de Meynard’s translation (Vo. II, p. 261). “Une jeune fille dont la soleil n’avait jamais vu l’égale pour la beauté.”