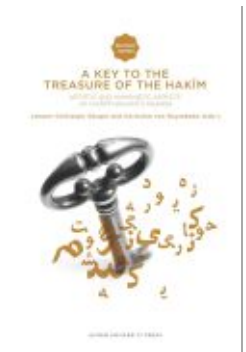




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8 The “Wasteland” and Alexander, the Righteous King, in Nizāmī’s *Iqbāl Nāma*

Carlo Saccone

Many episodes of Nizāmī’s *Iqbāl Nāma*¹ single out the figure of Alexander as the prophet-king and the philosopher-king who brings the message of monotheism to the four corners of the earth. Several of these episodes have been the object of much-deserved attention: for example, the opening scene, where the king talks to the seven philosophers in the audience room;² or the enigmatic one, where Alexander meets a perfect community, during the last northward journey of his expedition to the Orient.³ In this paper, I will take a close look at yet another episode, which seldom attracted scholarly attention but which I deem essential in order to understand the true character of Alexander’s kingship and, in a more general way, Nizāmī’s vision of sovereignty: the episode of the abandoned land or “wasteland”, which Alexander discovers during the journey that takes him and his army southwards, the second of his four journeys (in chronological order: westward, southward, eastward and northward). The geographical identification of this southern region is problematic: is it the African land? Or is it some place in India?⁴ It is this last hypothesis which seems the most likely, if we consider that Iran is the ideal centre of Alexander’s journeys, or, at least, that the place he must always pass through or where he must always return to, is Iran, which, as we know, covered a much larger territory than it does nowadays and was located more eastward.

Let us consider what occurs just before the episode we will analyse, which takes place towards the end of the southward journey. It immediately follows three episodes that we now briefly recall. During this second expedition, Alexander first meets people devoted to strange idolatrous cults, who keep their unfortunate prisoners in jars full of oil for forty days, then behead them and worship their skulls, with which they decorate their houses. Alexander destroys the jars and the skulls, thus converting all these idolaters to monotheism. Next, he crosses a mountain with stones so hard they break his army’s horseshoe bats and, while searching for a solution to this problem, he happens upon a river full of diamonds guarded by snakes. By a clever trick, he takes possession of the diamonds (there is a similar story in the Arabic cycle of Sindbād the Sailor).⁵ These two episodes are dominated by adventure and fantastic elements. The Greek king is above

all an explorer egged on by curiosity, while his religious mission remains in the background. With the third episode, come to the fore the sapiential-religious aspects⁶ which are certainly prominent in this *mathnavī* and in Nizāmī's poetry in general. A detailed description of the episode will prove useful. Reaching a place, comforting to his soldiers' eyes and hearts after the wearing and endless march through mountains and deserts, Alexander meets a young peasant:

در آن زر عگه کشتزاری شگرف
نوازش گرفته زباران و برف
ز سیزی و تری و تابندگی
بر او جان و دل را شتابندگی

(IN25,87-8)

[it was] a land of wonderful cultivated fields, caressed by rain and snow. The brilliance of those fresh, verdant fields caused a great excitement in the heart and soul of the king...

Alexander stops in front of a young toiling peasant. Impressed by the youth's beauty and graceful figure, at odds with his labourer's toil, the king softly invites the boy to approach and asks him:

جوانی و خوبی و بیدار مغز
نه کار تو شد بیل برداشتن
بدین فراخی گوهری تابناک
بیا تا ترا پادشاهی دهم
که خوی تو با خاک چون گشت جفت
ز نغزان نباید بجز کار نغز
به ویرانه ای دانه ای کاشتن
نه فرخ بود هم ترازوی خاک
ز پیگار خاکت رهائی دهم

(IN25,94b-8)

Why did you adapt to working in the fields? You are young, handsome and smart, and those who are outstanding should do but excellent jobs! Your fate should not be that of holding a spade, planting seeds in places forlorn. Such a shiny pearl can not weigh, on the balance, as much as a vile clod of earth. Then come with me, because I want to entrust you with royal tasks and free you, in this way, from your slavery to the soil.

This is a *topos* in Persian poetry: the meeting between the prince and the wise man, who in this version takes the aspect of a young peasant revealing himself endowed with great wisdom. The meeting, in the same *mathnavī*, between Alexander and a wise man who has chosen to live as a hermit and reveals himself to be Socrates is another version of the same *topos*. Alexander tries in vain to convince the philosopher to abandon his miserable state and to accept the comforts of life at court, that is, a standard of living fitting for a man who has earned such fame for his wisdom:

تمنا چه داری تو ای نیکخواه

دگر باره شه گفت کز مال و جاه

(IN17,95)

Tell me – he entreats him – you that seek the good, what offices and honours do you desire.

To this, Socrates's answer is full of contempt:

که با چون منی بر مینبار جور
که تو بیش خواری من اندک خورم
نه ای سیر دل هم ز خوانی چنین
گرانستی ارنیستی گرم و سرد
طلبکاری من کجا کار تست

من از تو به همت توانگرترم
تو با اینکه داری جهانی چنین
مرا این یکی ژنده سالخورد
تو با این گرانی که دربار تست

(IN17,96b-100)

Do not oppress me with the weight of such things. I am stronger than you because of my spiritual ambition (himmat) while you eat more than I do. On the contrary, although you possess the entire world, you can never satiate your heart, not even with feasts! I have but this poor rag clothing me, which is many years old, and even this would bother me, if cold and heat did not exist. But you, loaded with the weight of your kingdom, you come here in search of me: don't you have anything better to do?

Socrates even goes as far as humiliating the king, telling him that the difference between them lies in the fact that, in spite of appearances, it is Socrates who gives orders and Alexander who obeys. He explains all this through a sort of syllogism:

دل من بدان بنده فرمان روا
پرستار ما را پرستنده ای

مرا بنده ای هست نامش هوا
تو آنی که آن بنده را بنده ای

(IN17,105-6)

Well, I have a servant whose name is "lust", and my heart always gives orders to this servant. Instead, [you, the king,] you are the one who is servant to this servant, you obey the one who obeys me, [therefore...]

Note, *en passant*, a very similar episode, whose main characters are a king and a beggar *sufi*, contained in the *Mantiq al-tayr*, by Nizāmī's contemporary, 'Attār. In this episode, the beggar *sufi* compares passion to a donkey and says to the king: "while I ride the donkey of passion, this donkey rides

you, therefore I, who am riding the animal that rides you, am infinitely better than you are.”⁷

Alexander’s meeting with the young peasant is an evident repetition of this episode. The king invites the youth to give up his work in the fields and to accept a royal office or dignity. As was the case with Socrates, the peasant’s refusal is inevitable and firm:

<p>همه توسنان از تو آموزگار که در خلقتش ناید اندیشه ای به من پادشاهی سزاوار نیست چو نرمی ببیند شود کوز پشت هلاک درشتان بود جای نرم</p>	<p>چنین گفت که ای رایض روزگار چنان مان بهر پیشه ور پیشه ای بجز دانه کاری مرا کار نیست کشاورز را جای باشد درشت تنم در درشتی گرفتست چرم</p>
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(IN25,100-5)

Oh shepherd of this time, oh you that tame all yet untamed animals! It is better that everyone devotes himself to his job, without thinking too much about one’s nature. I do but plant seeds, I’m not up to royal charges. The peasant must be happy with a hard life, since he softens in the lap of luxury. My body hardened with the hard life in the fields, a comfortable life is the ruin of those who are used to hardships.

Naturally, the peasant does not even approach that utmost contempt to which Socrates treated the Greek king. The philosopher publicly challenged Alexander’s sovereignty, while the young peasant remains humble and declares himself the king’s subject. However, like Socrates, he claims the dignity of a simple, frugal life and, most of all, the independence of a choice that does not waver, even before the mirage of life at court. Alexander listens to the young peasant’s answer in admiration and questions him once more:

<p>کز اینسان ترا کیست پروردگار پناهت کجا کرد بازار تیز نظر بر کدامین ره افکنده ای؟</p>	<p>که شد پاسدار تو در خفت و خیز کرا می پرستی کرا بنده ای</p>
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(IN25,107b-9)

Who is the one that feeds you? And who is the one that preserves you while you sleep or while you are awake? Who is the one you seek for shelter during famine? And who is the one you adore, who is the one you serve? What is the path you look at?

Alexander, remembering his mission, uses these questions in order to ascertain the young man’s faith. The peasant answers:

به پیغمبری خلق را رهنمای ...
نگارنده کوه و صحرا و رود
نهم چند ره روی خود برزمین
کزینسان به من داد ناخواسته
که از هر یکم هست صد گونه سود
بر آنکس که او باشد ایزدشناس
پذیرفتم از راه دین پروری

(IN25,110 and 112-7)

جوانمرد گفت ای ز گیتی خدای
بر آورنده آسمان کبود
شب و روز پیش جهان آفرین
بدین چشم و ابروی آراسته
بدیگر کرمها که با من نمود
سپاسش برم واجب آید سپاس
ترا کامدستی به پیغمبری

Oh lord of the world, oh guide and prophet of people ...to Him who raised for us this blue sky, to Him who has painted mountains, rivers and deserts, to Him who created the world, night and day I bow my head to the ground several times. Gifted with eyes and eyebrows I didn't ask for, which He however wanted to offer me, and gratified by the other gifts he wanted to give me, taking advantage of each of them a hundred times, what should I do but thank Him? Thanking is a duty for those who have learnt to know God. And you that came here with a prophetic mission, I accept you with all my heart, devotedly.

He subtly and indirectly compares God's gifts to those Alexander would like to offer him, implicitly declaring that he is happier with the former. Alexander is obviously convinced of the perfect monotheistic orthodoxy of the young man's faith and does not question him any longer. He kisses him on his forehead, gives him a formal dress and

که هم سرخ گل بود و هم سبز شاخ
سبکتر شد از خستگیهای راه

(IN25,125-6)

در آن مرز و آن مرزار فراخ
شبانروزی آسود شه با سپاه

At that point, in those happy lands where purple roses and green boughs were growing, the king rested for a whole day and night along with his soldiers, in order to relieve themselves of the journey's weariness.

Alexander has found real wisdom in the young peasant, who has taught him a lesson: the glitter and comforts of the court, which the king flashes before his eyes, are meaningless to the servants of God and His decree. The peasant shows himself to be a perfect *ante-litteram* Muslim, totally devoted to the will of God. Facing this sincere monotheist, Alexander finds nothing to do, to teach, nor to preach. Furthermore – and this is remarkable – he has not even anything to offer which may be attractive to the young man, neither can he convince him of abandoning his life in the fields.

Before this peasant, who has chosen God as his only king, Alexander is powerless. The peasant, though not with the contempt and sarcasm used by Socrates, has equally called into question the Greek king's sovereignty: to him there is only one king worth this title and this is the King of Heavens. This episode, in the light thrown by the others that we are going to analyse, acquires an overriding ideological value, not only with regard to the royal figure of Alexander but in a more general way, also with regard to the Islamic theory of sovereignty.

Let us examine now the episode of the "wasteland", that is, the land abandoned by men and animals, which we will focus on in the analysis of Alexander's second, southward, expedition. The Greek king reaches

زمینهای وی جمله بی گاو و کشت عمارتهگی درخور خسروان	فروزنده مرزی چو روشن بهشت درخت و گل و سبزه آب روان
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(IN25,130-1)

A land that shines like a new paradise, but where the fields have neither animals nor plants; instead, there were plenty of trees and flowers and streams, which made it a place for princes.

Alexander is perplexed, amazed, he wonders whether a sudden and unpredictable natural disaster, maybe a fire or a flood has made men and animals flee that place, as it lacks nothing, it is fertile and rich in water:

سر و سرور این بروم کیست کجا در چنین ده کند گاو هو	ببرسید کاین مرز را نام چیست کشاورز و گاوآهن و گاو کو
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(IN25,133-4)

How is this land called – he asks around – and who is the lord of such a place? And where are the animals, the peasants and the ploughs? And where is it, around here, that you can hear the bel-lowing of a cow?

A local notable appears at this point, who, after having paid appropriate tribute to the king, answers his anxious questions:

حوالی بسی دارد از بهر ورز یکی زو هزار آورد بلکه بیش نگردد کس از دخل او بهره مند ده آباد بودی و در ده کسی	که اقصای این دلگشاینده مرز دراو هر چه کاری بهنگام خویش ولیکن ز بیداد یابد گزند اگر داد بودی و داور بسی
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(IN25, 136-9)

Oh king, this land that conquers the heart has many prosperous and tillable provinces, where anything you plant in the appropriate

time grows more than one thousand times as much. But these provinces suffer from the oppression of injustice, therefore nobody can profit of them. If there was justice here, and if there were judges enough, this village would be prosperous and inhabited.

Not only does this local notable inform the Greek king of the reasons why that land has been abandoned, but he also reveals himself as a sort of wise man who draws a universally valid moral from the present situation. A moral in which one can easily perceive the author's strong and most Islamic personality, particularly sensitive to the theme of justice. This wise notable continues:

تباہی پذیرد ز بیدادگر
بسوزد ز گرمی بیوسد ز نم

به انصاف و داد آرد این خاک بر
چو از دخل او گردد انصاف کم

(IN25,140-1)

Oh king, only through justice and equity will this land be fruitful, but there will be nothing but ruin and abandonment here as long as the unjust dominate! Since there is no justice in sharing out the harvest, may the fields burn under the sun or rot in the dampness of the night.

These great and simple words – if you allow me to return to the present time for a moment – could still be the subject matter of profitable meditation for the world's leaders of today! These are the precise words of a great sage of our time, Pope John Paul II, who repeated: "*There can be no peace without justice.*"

The wise notable finishes his speech according to the Islamic faith in God's final justice:

جو و گندمش را برد باد و سیل
که گردد به یک جو ترازوی او

به یک جو که در مالش آرد میل
سبک منجیقست بازوی او

(IN25,142-3)

Thus, while everybody is fighting even for a grain of wheat, wind and floods sweep the whole harvest away. But the arm of God is a quick catapult, and His scale will weigh everything up to the last grain!

This contains a subtle allusion to the Qur'anic passage (XCIX, 7-8) which says, with regard to the day of the final statement (*yawm al-hasāb*), that is the Judgement day: "*those who have done even just a grain of evil, they will see it and those who have done even just a little grain of good, they will see it.*"⁸ These verses must have impressed Muhammad's

public who, according to a well-known *hadīth*, had significantly commented: “*These are the most terrible verses of the Koran!*” However, the wise notable also implicitly invites Alexander to find a remedy for the disaster provoked by injustice, something which is part, *naturaliter*, of the spirit of the famous Qur’anic passage (III, 110) where Allah addresses Muhammad and his followers with these words: “*You are the best nation that ever sprang: promote justice, forbid injustice and believe in God!*”

Having listened to the wise notable’s speech, Alexander doesn’t lose an hour: “Informed that tyrants’ injustice had caused the ruin of those lands, he decided to build there a barrier of justice (سدی از عدل بنیاد کرد) *saddī az ‘adl bunyād kard*) and to call that place “Iskandarabad” (Alexander’s City). To make it more prosperous, he ordered that all must give their due to those who worked for them and pay alms for the poor and also that nobody could be given a warrant for pillaging and that such abuses would not be tolerated, so that so righteous a king was praised a thousand times.”

ز بیداد بیدادگر شد خراب همان نامش اسکندر آباد کرد که هر کس دهد حق مزد ور خویش بتاراجشان کس نیارد برات هزار آفرین بر چنان داوری	چو خسرو خبر یافت کان خاک و آب در او سدی از عدل بنیاد کرد بآبادیش داد منشور خویش دهد هر کس مال خود را زکات در او ره نیارد برات آوری
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(IN25,144-8)

This, then, is the essence of Nizāmī’s work. Let us consider, now, the placing of these episodes in relation to the structure of the poem which, as we know, is built as a sort of great *mandala*.⁹ The core are Alexander’s four expeditions (westward, southward, eastward and northward), preceded by the aforementioned long episode of the discussions between the king and the seven philosophers and followed by the episode of the king’s death and the same philosophers’ lamentations upon his grave. This refined structural symmetry is found at various levels: in the general structure of the work, in that of its single parts, and also, more subtly, at the level of the message structure. The two episodes we have briefly described provide an excellent example of this structure.

If we analyse the poem considering its symmetry, it is easy to find two episodes which, placed according to a mirror symmetry in the fourth and last journey (the northward one), are the equivalent of the stories of the peasant and of the “wasteland”. These are two famous episodes: the first is that of Alexander’s arrival in the lands threatened by Gog and Magog,¹⁰ where he builds the famous barrier to protect the endangered peoples; the second is the episode immediately following upon it (already mentioned above and equally well-known) where Alexander meets a community of Perfect Men, which has been seen as echoing political doctrines and utopias outlined by various authors, from Plato to al-Fārābī.¹¹

Some perfectly symmetrical elements are immediately detectable. In the northward journey, the episode of the protective barrier against Gog and Magog corresponds to the episode of the construction of "a barrier of justice" (سدی از عدل) *saddī az 'adl* in the southward journey, which must protect the land abandoned by men and animals because of injustice. In the North, Alexander built a physical barrier against Gog and Magog (which, as we know, closely follows a precise Qur'anic starting point: XVIII, 83-98). In the South, against unjust tyrants, he builds a symbolical "barrier of justice", made of laws and new and fairer rules to divide the harvest. In one case, injustice comes from outside society, an external enemy, i.e. from the terrible tribes of Gog and Magog; in the other case, injustice is due to an internal enemy, i.e. perverse social inner tendencies, in an unfair society dominated by tyrants. In both cases, Alexander's sovereignty concretely and actively reveals itself, through the construction of "barriers", be it physical or ideal. Construction, whether real or symbolic, is here a synonym of civilization, of the raising of a divine *nomos* as barrier against injustice and human barbarity.

Let us now consider the other symmetrically located couple of episodes. In the northward journey, after having met the community of Perfect Men and having verified that they live and act in total accordance with the will of God, Alexander declares:

جهان هست ازین نیکمردان بجای	همانا که پیش جهان آزمای
که اوتاد عالم شدند این گروه ...	بدیشان گرفتست عالم شکوه
بدان بود تا باید اینجا گذشت	فرستادن ما به دریا و دشت
در آموزم آیین این بخردان	مگر سیر کردم ز خوی ددان
به گرد جهان برنگردیدی	گر این قوم را پیش از این دیدمی
به ایزد پرستی میان بستی	به کنجی در از کوه بنشستی
جز این دین نبودی دگر دین من	ازین رسم نگزشتی آیین من

(IN27,163-4 and 166-70)

Before him, who explored the whole world, there is the world of these virtuous men; thanks to them, the universe shines, because they are the spiritual pillars of the universe (...) Our mission through mountains and deserts was conceived because, tired of men's brutal behaviour, we could come here to learn these wise men's law. If I had known these people before, maybe I would not have wandered through the world. I would have retired to a secluded corner on a mountain in order to devote myself only to God's adoration, my customs would not have been different from their laws, nor would my faith have been different from their faith!

Alexander recognises that he doesn't need to impose his law because of the superiority of that particular community's law. These wise men had

taught him a lesson. We cannot but notice a strain of self-criticism in this Alexander. He is a tired prophet-warrior at the end of his journeys, confronted with the peace that reigns in this perfect community. Had he met them earlier on, he admits, *my customs would not have been different from their laws*.

One acknowledges the perfect parallelism between this episode and that of the meeting with the young peasant, described above. In this episode too, Alexander first wants to test the young man's faith and, having verified his thorough orthodoxy, he admits he has nothing to teach him; on the contrary, the young man gives him a lesson of most pious subjection to the divine decrees by firmly refusing the offices and honours the king offers him. He evidently perceives Alexander's invitation to accept an assignment at court as a violation of the divine plan, which destined him to humbly work in the fields: by refusing, he shows that before being subject to the earthly king's laws he is first subject to the laws of God. Here too, we can detect an implicit underlying critique: the king's generosity is the other side of a typically earthly greed, which the pious peasant rejects.

There is also another, more subtle aspect, which Nizāmī implicitly underlines in the comparison between the two episodes. There is nothing the Greek king needs to do, either for the pious peasant or for the perfect community: he does not need to build barriers, either real or symbolical, he has neither to give laws nor protection against anything. Alexander's sovereignty is, so to say, "suspended", maybe even humbled: the peasant turns his back on his offer, the community of the Perfect Men is clearly a "world apart" where the Greek king has no power at all, either good or bad.

This situation of "suspension" of sovereignty is the exact opposite of that which occurs in the other couple of episodes, those of Gog and Magog and the "Wasteland". Here, Alexander's sovereignty is exercised to its utmost, he must act as legislator and protector, as *defensor fidei* and *defensor civitatis*, he builds, as we have seen, both real and ideal "barriers."

These four episodes, symmetrically organized in equivalent couples, show how, in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, Nizāmī deliberately wanted to focus on the question of sovereignty, or better, on the issue of the *limits* of sovereignty.¹² A complex issue, which, as we know, was considered very delicate in the medieval Islamic debate on Power and Sovereignty, and which, for certain aspects, is also relevant nowadays. It is a delicate issue because it is concerned with theological and generally religious aspects, and not only with historical and political issues.

As a point of departure, we observe that the couple of episodes Gog and Magog – "Wasteland" typify the case of the imperfect city, or even the utmost grade of unfair city or City of Injustice, which is the exact opposite of the case typified by the other couple of episodes. The community of the Perfect Men represents an ideal perfect city or City of Justice, which has its foundation in that spiritual "city of justice" every citizen has realised in

himself, an issue foreshadowed by the young peasant's figure who, thoroughly pious and satisfied in his own condition, accepts the divine justice and decrees.

From the point of view of the Nizamian *Weltanschauung*, these four episodes are constructed on a pregnant double opposition: *city of justice* vs. *city of injustice* and *suspended sovereignty* vs. *effective sovereignty*. Alexander's sovereignty is exercised to its utmost degree of justice where the perfection of the earthly city plummets to bottom level. On the contrary, it tends to lessen, or even to extinguish, where the earthly city has reached perfection in its total submission to God.

Nizāmī, then, did not simply offer us four stories among the many we can ascribe to Alexander's Islamic Vulgate.¹³ Skilfully playing with subtle structural symmetries, he suggested, through these four episodes, a precise vision of power and sovereignty, which may also be defined as a complete political philosophy. In order to briefly re-construct the outline of this political ideology, we should say that, according to Nizāmī, prior to Alexander's power and always in dialectical opposition to it, there is the other power, the power which is above all others, the power of God. As far as human sovereignty is concerned, Alexander's power is justified and *effective* only as far as the other sovereignty, God's sovereignty and Law, is not acknowledged or respected. Before those who acknowledge and thoroughly respect the divine decrees, Alexander has nothing to do, he is aimless, almost powerless. Actually, this Alexander seems a prefiguration of the future Islamic caliph, the ideal caliph, whose task it is to universally enforce the triumph of Allah's Law, i.e. the will of the only real sovereign, the only king worthy of this name. Alexander's power, as well as that of the future caliph, is justified in the form of a "vicarious power."¹⁴ not in the form of an absolute power: it is *suspended* in those places where only God's Law reigns. This is confirmed by the fact that when Alexander reaches the city of the Perfect Men, he does not find any city authority, any established human power and – and this is a decisive detail – he does not think of claiming this role as sovereign.

In the city of the Perfect Men an anarchic-religious utopia is realised, whose presuppositions are all already present in the *Qur'an* (V, 43-50), in the famous verses on sovereignty (*hakīmiyya*) which we here recall. In a long speech, God is said once more to have given every human community a Law to judge human questions, the *Pentateuch* to the Jews, the *Gospel* to the Christians and the *Qur'an* to the Muslim' *umma*. Then, the speech continues with verse (V, 50), which polemically refers to those among the Meccans, who persist in refusing the revelation. In Arberry's translation:

Is it the judgment (حکم hukm) of pagandom then/ that they are seeking? Yet who is fairer/ in judgment than God, for a people/ having sure faith? (V, 50).

Ahmed Ali's translation, which takes into account other aspects, goes:

*Do they seek a judgement of the days of pagan ignorance? And who could be a better judge than God, for those who are firm in their faith?*¹⁵

It is useful here to recall that the Arabic term *hukm*, usually translated as “judgement”, has a very large semantic spectrum, which certainly draws on the kings' ancient privilege to exercise both political and judicial power. The term, therefore, conveys an idea of “judgement” which spreads from the political area to the judicial one, and which makes it a synonym of “power” in a very broad sense. Another traditional expression, often quoted, both rightly and wrongly, is the *lā hukm illā-lillāh* (لا حكم إلا لله) that is “There is no power/judgement except God's one”.¹⁶ This idea that *the sovereign power is only God's power* is so rooted in the Islamic sensitivity that, as we know, Muhammad and the caliphs who succeeded him as guides of the community, always refused the title “king”. As we may recall, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, for example, simply wanted to be called *khalīfa rasūl Allāh* (“deputy of God's messenger”). With the Umayyad dynasty, caliphs define themselves as *khalīfat Allāh*, that is “God's deputy” (a title used for the Qur'anic Adam too), also implying that only Allah is the king or sovereign worthy of this name. A further evidence of this situation where sovereignty, as an earthly human institution, is fundamentally de-legitimized, is the way the *Qur'an* deals with the figure of Pharaoh, in the episode where he opposes to Moses as God's prophet. The key-episode (X, 90) is at the end of the chase of the Jews, escaping through the Red Sea:

*We brought the people of Israel across the sea but the Pharaoh and his army pursued them wickedly and maliciously till he was on the point of drowning, and he said: “I believe that there is no God but He in whom the people of Israel believe, and I submit to Him.”*¹⁷

The Qur'anic Pharaoh's impiety – who only when dying repents and thoroughly acknowledges God's sovereignty – becomes a sort of anathema on all human claims to *al-hukm* the power/judgement, which is perceived as the Heavenly King's prerogative.

Coming back to Nizāmī, it seems clear that these ideas form the background to his construction of Alexander's sovereignty. The pattern of human society, though governed by a pious and ardent monotheist king like Alexander, is infinitely inferior to the ideal city, the community of the Perfect Men, which is exclusively subject to God's decrees and which therefore does not need Alexander or any other earthly king. Where Allah's sovereignty (*hakīmiyya*) is thoroughly acknowledged, the presence of an earthly king is intolerable or, better, has become superfluous.

Alexander's task is well-summarized in the salutation the young peasant addresses him with: "*Oh shepherd of this time, oh you that tame all still untamed animals!*" He is "shepherd" and guide, the one who received from God the charge to bring His Law throughout the world; he is a "tamer" whose task it is to lessen every human appetite, the appetite of a human race that forgot God's sovereignty. Rather than establishing a universal kingdom, his mission, which clearly prefigures that of Muhammad and of the Islamic caliphs, is that of taking the divine *nomos* to those peoples who ignore it. He doesn't bring *his* law, he brings the law of a Heavenly King. In the performance of his task, he will resort to all the earthly and non-earthly wisdom at his disposal, and thanks to God's assistance he will be *infallible*.¹⁸ For this reason, his sovereignty has only a relative power, "vicarious", not absolute. And for this reason, he doesn't claim any sovereignty at all before those who already know God's law. Those who live in the City of the Perfect Men, the City of Justice – says Alexander – appear to him as "the spiritual pillars of the world" and, furthermore, "thanks to them, the world shines in its light."

Paradoxically, God's sovereignty is most perfectly realized in the form of an accomplished *holy anarchy*: the City of the Perfect Men has no earthly authority and will never need it.¹⁹ In fact, Nizāmī's Alexander contemplates a utopian city, the City of Justice, an ideal – if I may say – still valid nowadays.

Alexander's justice is then clearly realized not only in his building "barriers of justice", but most of all, in his renouncing to exercise his sovereignty on those who are already completely subject to the Heavenly King. The "righteous king" exercises, as is his duty, his sovereignty in the City of Injustice, in the "Wasteland". Before those who acknowledge God's kingship and put into practice God's laws however, he thoroughly gives up his royal prerogatives, he *suspends* his sovereignty.

Notes

- 1 European translations: Nizami-Bürgel (1991) and Nizami-Saccone (1997).
- 2 Bausani (1977).
- 3 Bertotti (1989).
- 4 My introduction "La leggenda islamica di Alessandro" Nizami-Saccone (1997) 5-61.
- 5 Saccone (1999c).
- 6 Nizami-Bürgel (1991), *Nachwort*, 585-630; Bausani (1977).
- 7 'Attar-Maskur (1353) Maqala xxi, 129-30; also Saccone (2005) 279-311.
- 8 Also al-Qur'an (2001) VII,8-9.
- 9 Saccone (1999c) 215ss. On this interesting structure of many Persian *mathnavīs*, Saccone (2006) 27-58.
- 10 See also the article by van den Berg in this volume.
- 11 Nizami-Bürgel (1991) *Nachwort*; Bürgel (1995) 65-78.
- 12 Saccone (2002) 33-64; Bridges/Bürgel (1996); Nizami-Bürgel (1991).
- 13 Saccone (1999c); Casari (1999).

- 14 Saccone (2002).
- 15 The Koran (1998) and Al-Qur'an (2001).
- 16 This is an ancient motto of the kharijites, also popular today among some Islamic fundamentalists. On the concept of *hakimiyya*, also in connection with Islamic fundamentalism, cf. Nasr (2002) 143-67; Bürgel (1991b) 21-95.
- 17 Al-Qur'an (2001).
- 18 Saccone (1999b).
- 19 Compare this 'holy anarchy' with classical anarchical theories discussed in Nozick (1974).