

Johann Heiss

The Multiple Uses of an Enemy: Gog, Magog and the “Two-Horned One”

In medieval apocalyptic traditions, the apocalyptic peoples of Gog and Magog have a prominent role. This article presents an in-depth case study of aspects of the Gog and Magog story in the different literary traditions in northern as well as in southern Arabia.

One of the most famous historians of medieval Syria, Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233), who as a young man fought in Saladin’s army against the Europeans later called crusaders, mentions the incursion of the Mongols (he refers to them as Tatars) into the domain of the Khwarizm Shah in his annalistic “perfect history” at the year 617/1220. The passage is one of the rare instances where an Arabian historian turns directly to his readers/hearers, when he writes: “For a number of years I continuously avoided the mention of this event, deeming it too horrible, so that I loathed its mention.”¹ He then proceeds to describe the singularity of the gruesome events, comparing them with the story of the Banū Isrā’īl and Bukht Naṣr (the Israelites and Nebuchadnezzar), and the destruction of Jerusalem. He claims: “Indeed, history does not contain anything which comes near to it [the catastrophe of the Mongols] or gets close to it.”² After reflecting on the past, Ibn al-Athīr turned to the future and speculated: “Possibly, there will never be a calamity like that until the world becomes extinct and the earth ceases to exist except [he simply says] Gog and Magog³.” With that, Ibn al-Athīr alluded to a tradition that originated in the Near East, in the Old Testament, and that is common to all monotheistic religions: the stories of Gog and Magog, Alexander the Great, and the End of Times. These legends were so well known and so often repeated that Ibn al-Athīr only needed to mention the name of Gog and Magog to evoke the stories around them in the memory of his readers/hearers.

The names of Gog and Magog occur for the first time in the Old Testament (Gen. 10:2; Ezek. 38–39), where Gog seems to be a king and Magog the region where he reigned. In the New Testament, Gog and Magog appear in the Book of Revelation (20:8), where both are peoples who will invade the earth at the End of Time.

1 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil* 10, ed. Abū l-Fidā’, 399: لقد بقيت عدة سنين معرضاً عن ذكر هذه الحادثة استعظاماً لها كما لها لذكرها

2 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil* 10, ed. Abū l-Fidā’, 399: إن التواريخ لم تتضمن ما يقاربها ولا ما يدانيها

3 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil* 10, ed. Abū l-Fidā’, 399: ولعل الخلت لا يرون مثل هذه الحادثة إلى أن ينترض العالم وتفنى الدنيا إلا بأجوج ومأجوج

Shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, Flavius Josephus⁴ equated Magog with the Scythians. He was also the first to link the biblical Gog and Magog with the popular Hellenistic Alexander tradition, at least as far as we can determine. Because he is a man well known for his attempts to combine Jewish and Hellenistic traditions, Flavius Josephus is understandably a good candidate for such an undertaking.⁵ He is, in any case, the first author known to have used (Gog and) Magog as a foil for actual enemies. With Magog's help, the menace posed by the Scythians could be made clear and, by using the name found in Scripture, this threat and the defence against it were sanctified and transferred to a realm that could – or should – not be reached by human reasoning. The connection with the Alexander tradition added to the potential uses of the story of Gog and Magog: it could be instrumentalised to construct a scenario of menace, but with the involvement of Alexander at the same time allowing a story of the successful handling of the danger or of a (hope for) victory to be construed.

Since the area of the eastern Mediterranean coast was multilingual and multireligious at Flavius Josephus' time and in later centuries, a group of stories like those about Gog and Magog and Alexander the Great was bound to spread over time to many different regions and to be translated into numerous languages. Because the story had to be adapted to the specific contexts and needs of the different temporal and local spaces in which it was used, the outcome was a multitude of versions of mutually interdependent texts, a "*textus*" in the literal sense.

In this article, I wish to describe the development and, above all, the uses of the group of stories around Gog and Magog and Alexander the Great at certain points in the history of Arab/Muslim peoples in northern as well as in southern Arabia. But I will first outline the history of the peoples of the Eurasian steppe to the northeast of Arabia, where Gog and Magog were usually imagined to live. I wish to show that the history of these peoples was intertwined with that of the Arabs from early on.

1 A Texture of History: The Road to the Dam

In 642, Arab troops destroyed the last Sasanid army at the Battle of Nihāvand, sealing the fate of the Sasanid Empire. Nine years later, in 651, they took the important trading town Marw, the capital of Khurāsān that had been refounded by Alexander the Great as Alexandria Margiana (now in Turkmenistan). In the following year, the Muslim troops conquered the towns of northern Tocharistan, including Balkh, and in 661 the Umayyad dynasty began with the caliph Mu'āwiya. He proceeded to send

4 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.6.123: τοὺς γὰρ νῦν ὑφ' Ἑλλήνων Γαλάτας καλουμένους Γομαρεῖς δὲ λεγομένους Γόμαρος ἔκτισε. Μαγώγης δὲ τοὺς ἀπ' αὐτοῦ Μαγώγας ὀνομασθέντας ᾤκισεν, Σκύθας δὲ ὑπ' αὐτῶν προσαγορευομένους.

5 Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources*, 10.

a legation to inspect the dam that, according to the Qur'an, had been erected against Gog and Magog, following in the footsteps of a delegation sent during the Sasanid period. Arab garrisons were set up in the major towns, including Marw, which "became the Arab's major base for military operations in Central Asia".⁶ Caliph Mu'āwiya made Khurāsān a separate province in 673, and his governor there, 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, then crossed the Oxus River into the Bukhāran kingdom, where tribute was raised. Arabs settled in the subdued towns and added Arabic to the many (e.g. Persian, Turkish) languages spoken and written there. After a period of revolt and internal strife following the death of Mu'āwiya, some of the provinces and towns like Bukhāra had to be subdued again under al-Walid (r. 705–715). Khwārizm was seized in 712 by al-Walid's governor, Qutayba, who invaded Transoxania as far as Ferghana two years later. In 715, he again invaded the Jaxartes regions, now operating in alliance with the Tibetans. The allies were successful in defeating the Turkish Türgiř rulers in the region, and they appointed a ruler in Ferghana sympathetic to their interests. However, the Turkish Türgiř people restored their power and "became the supporters of the local peoples against the Arabs and Islam and [the Türgiř became] also the close allies of the Tibetans".⁷ Because this alliance threatened to close them off from the west, the Chinese made a secret pact with the Arabs to counter the Türgiř and the Tibetans. Between 737 and 740, the Kaghanate of the Türgiř, encompassing the Central Asian trading towns along the Silk Road, was destroyed by the Chinese and the Arabs. The Türk empire in the eastern steppe region was in turn overthrown in 742 by a coalition of Uyghurs (Tughuzghuz in Arabic) and Qarluqs, who then took the place of the Türgiř.

When the Abbasid rebellion broke out in 747 (one of the many rebellions in the mid-eighth century), it did so in Merw, which belonged to the most important commercial towns of its time, with a Sogdian market and a Bucharan quarter. The leaders of the revolt were merchants of Arab and Central Asian origin, while the defeat of the Umayyad army was brought about by a largely Central Asian army, the Khurāsāniyya. The first Abbasid caliph, Abū l-'Abbās al-Saffāh, was proclaimed in or around 750, the year in which Ko Sōnji, a Chinese general of Koguryo (Korean) origin, defeated the Tibetans in the Pamirs and intervened in a conflict between the kings of Ferghana and Shāsh/Taschkent. When Shāsh was taken, the crown prince fled to the Arabs in Samarqand, who dispatched an army against Ko's troops. In the following battle at Atlakh, near Talas, in July 751, that part of Ko's army composed of Qarluqs joined the Central Asians and the Arabs, and this side was victorious⁸. It was from people taken captive at this battle and brought to Samarqand that the Arabs (and later the Europeans) learned how to produce paper.

⁶ Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 123.

⁷ Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 134.

⁸ Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 145.

With this very shortened series of events,⁹ I wish to indicate that the regions through which one had to pass in order to reach the homelands of Gog and Magog (commonly thought to be in the northeast) were not in the least unknown in the centres of the Arabic empire, be it Damascus, Merw, Baghdad or Samarra.

Since Gog and Magog are mentioned in the Qur'an (sura 18, *al-kaḥf*, "The Cave"), there could be no doubt about their existence for a believing Muslim. The passage in the Qur'an also mentions a two-horned one, who built the dam (*sadd* or *radm*) against the evildoers Gog and Magog, after people harmed by them complained to him.¹⁰ The identity of this enigmatic two-horned one (arab. *dhū l-qarnayn*) was a matter of debate within Islam from early on. Within the tradition of the Christians and Jews living among the Muslims, the identification with Alexander the Great, whose legend does seem to have informed the Qur'anic text, prevailed. This identification was not acceptable or at least dubious for many Muslims, however, because Alexander was clearly not a believer. Consequently, other people were also identified with *dhū l-qarnayn*, one of whom I will discuss later.

Gog and Magog are also mentioned in some of the *ḥadīths* or sayings of the prophet Muḥammad, some of which identified them with Turkish peoples. We shall encounter the Turks again in the following examples.

2 The Mission to the Dam against Gog and Magog

Ibn Khurradādhbih or Ibn Khurdādhbih was born circa 820, possibly in Khurāsān (the capital of which was Merw), into a family with a Zoroastrian background. He was of Persian origin, travelled widely and in later life lived in the capitals Baghdad and Samarra. He died around 912.

Ibn Khurradādhbih was the head of post and intelligence in the province of Jibāl (now in Iran) under Caliph al-Mu'tamid (ruled 870–892) and later wazīr or minister for post and information (intelligence service) in the capital Baghdad. He wrote on music, among other topics, but also a famous and frequently copied story about the mission to the dam against Gog and Magog under the caliph al-Wāṭiq (r. 842–847). This account is contained in his *kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* ("Book of Roads and Kingdoms"), which he seems to have finished in 885/886. The book is a kind of administrative geography of the Islamic regions and their borderlands, interspersed with narrations on different issues, among them a chapter on remarkable edifices.

⁹ Following Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*.

¹⁰ sura 18, *al-kaḥf*, verse 94 brings together the two-horned one, who usually is identified with Alexander the Great, and Gog and Magog: "They (the inhabitants of the region) said: You two-horned one. Gog and Magog are spoiling the land. May we pay you a tribute, that you will erect a dam between us and them?" (transl. Asadm with alterations).

There, the dam against Gog and Magog is mentioned as the last and most prominent example,¹¹ and the mission to the dam is described.

Caliph al-Wāṭiq, we are told, saw in a dream that the dam against Gog and Magog was open. He decided to send a legation to examine the condition of the dam.¹² Ashinās, a Turkish general of the caliph, proposed to send as an envoy Sallām the interpreter, who spoke thirty languages.

Then follows Sallām's report in the first person. After being equipped with everything needed (including winter clothes, money, fifty men and pack animals), he started from Samarra, which had been the capital of the Abbasid Empire since around 835. al-Wāṭiq's father al-Mu'tasim, had transferred the capital from Baghdad to Samarra: "The most important reason for the move had been the serious conflicts which had arisen between the inhabitants of Baghdad and the caliph's Turkish slave soldiers from Central Asia."¹³ But the situation did not change substantially, as the different groups of Turkish soldiers were also stationed at locations around Samarra, with the militia of the abovementioned Turkish general Ashinās at Karkh Fayruz, around 10km north of the capital.¹⁴ It seems that the Turks were perceived as a menace, something which may have had a bearing on the decision to instigate Sallām's mission to the dam.

Sallām and his group travelled roughly northeastwards (but with detours) along a route that took in the courts of the different rulers, governors and kings. First they reached the governor of Armenia in Tiflis, then they travelled on to the ruler in al-Sarīr, from there to the king of Allān (the Alans), then to Filān Šāh, and from there to the king of the Khazars. They then had to traverse a stinking land full of destroyed towns, and next encountered a people who spoke Persian and Arabic and were Muslims but knew nothing about a caliph. After passing the town of Ika,¹⁵ from where it was three days to the dam, Sallām found the place where the "two-horned one" and his troops had stayed. They learn that Gog and Magog are two different people and very small, Magog being even smaller than Gog (one rather than one and a half cubits¹⁶). Then Sallām describes the dam and especially its door very exactly, giving measurements in cubits for nearly everything, even stating how deep the foundations are (which he certainly could not see). It seems that conjuring up an exact picture in the mind of the hearer or reader through the detailed description

11 See Ibn Khurradādhbih, *kitāb al-Masālik*, ed. Goeje, 162–170 about the expedition of Sallām, the interpreter, to the dam of Gog and Magog.

12 In later versions of the story the caliph is said to have been in fear because of that dream.

13 Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources*, 173.

14 Cf. Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources*, 173.

15 This name is a dubious conjecture; it is not legible in the Vienna ms.

16 A cubit (of Alexander) measures little more than 50 cm.

was designed to document the authenticity of his report. The author also uses a number of Persian terms in the description.¹⁷

As an example for the kind of exact *waṣf* (“description”) Sallām/Ibn Khurradādhbih transmits, the key hanging on the door will suffice:

[...] And on the lock a key [Arab. *miftāḥ*] is hanging, which is one and a half cubits in length and has twelve teeth [Pers. *dandānka*]; every tooth has the form of a pestle [Pers. *dastaj*] for a mortar [Pers. *hawāwīn* in an Arab. plural form], and the circumference of the key is four spans. It is hanging on a chain that is welded to the door. Its length is eight cubits, in circumference four spans. The ring through which the chain goes is like the ring of a catapult [*manjanīq*, from Greek μηχανή or μηχανική].

There are many traits in Sallām’s report that seem to be taken from the stories of Gog and Magog and Alexander in the Syriac tradition. One passage of a Syriac text of this kind presented by Zadeh¹⁸ also mentions the key of the door:

And he [i.e. Alexander] made a bar of iron teeth with grooves, and hammered out an iron key [syr. *qlīdā*, which is Greek κλειδίον, new Greek κλειδί] which had twelve grooves, and he attached onto the gate locks made of copper.¹⁹

Taken together, the two texts illustrate by their use of loanwords the complex fate of the story of Gog and Magog: they reflect the mix of languages in the regions where the story was told and written down as well as revealing shared components of the basic narrative. In the Arabic tradition, the text of sura 18 of the Qur’an had to be taken into account, and its elements were accordingly incorporated into Sallām’s report. Since there was no certainty regarding the identity of the “two-horned one” within the Arabic chain of transmission, Sallām/Ibn Khurradādhbih avoids the mention of Alexander (or any other potential candidate). The Macedonian king appears only when Sallām/Ibn Khurradādhbih talks about the unit of measurement, which is denoted as the cubit of Alexander. As suggested by Zadeh, “It would be tempting to argue that Sallām’s account is drawn directly from the Christian Syriac tradition”.²⁰ Indeed, Christians and Christian converts lived at the court of the caliph, many of whom were presumably Syriac-speaking. Additionally, translators lived at the centre of the caliphal state, among them Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (808–873), who was one of the most famous and prolific translators and a Nestorian Christian. Thus, the caliphal court and the capital Baghdad were ideal places for the merging

¹⁷ *Darwand* for “lintel”; *dastaj al-hawāwīn* “pestle used in mortars”; *dandānka* “tooth” (here of a key); *degdan* “tripod, fireplace”, with *deg* “pot”.

¹⁸ Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 108–109.

¹⁹ Zadeh cites the Syriac *Neṣḥānā*, and points out that the word translated here with “grooves” can mean “grooves, rocks, and mountains”, which is connected etymologically to the word for “teeth”. Obviously one could also translate here with “teeth” or “points” (cf. Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 240–241, n. 51)

²⁰ Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 109.

of different strands of traditions as well as for the dissemination of the versions of a story generated there.

On the door of the gate which hinders Gog and Magog from encroaching upon the rest of the earth, Sallām found an inscription “in the first language”, of which he gives a translation. It corresponds word for word to verse 98 of sura 18, exactly the sura where Gog and Magog and the “two-horned one” are mentioned: “Yet when the time appointed by my sustainer shall come, he will make this level with the ground: and my sustainer’s promise always comes true.”²¹

This inscription connects the beginning and the End of Time via the Qur’an: in the first, oldest language a verse of the holy book is already written long before Islam exists (but is, of course, known to God), and it announces that the dam (radm) will be razed at the appointed End of Time, when Gog and Magog will come forth. And, one could continue: “Satanas will come out and deceive the peoples (τὰ ἔθνη) that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, and he will gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea [...]” (Rev. 20:7–8)

Apart from the (presumably, bad) dream of the caliph, we are given no details concerning the motivations for the expedition, but we can suspect that a perhaps vague fear and feeling of threat concerning the Turks around the capital and the Turks far away may have played a part.

The stories around Gog and Magog, Alexander the Great, and the End of Times also appear quite early in South Arabia and the narratives are used in a similar fashion. This is shown by Faustina Doufikar-Aerts in her contribution to this volume. She quotes Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan’ānī (744–827), who in his voluminous *al-muṣannaf* (“The Categorized”) – namely traditions or ḥadīṡ of the prophet – dedicates a number of pages to the events at the End of Time and to Gog and Magog.²² But the complex of stories surrounding Gog and Magog was also interpreted and utilised in other ways in South Arabia.

3 The “Two-Horned One” in South Arabia

The Yemeni traditionalist Wahb b. Munabbih (died in Ṣan’ā’ in or shortly after 110/728), who originated from a South Arabian family of Persian descent, asked a companion of the prophet, ‘Abdallāh b. (al-)‘Abbās (d. 68/687/88), to explain who “the two-horned one”²³ was:

²¹ Transl. Asad.

²² ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, ed. al-A’ẓamī, 381–402.

²³ See the “*kitāb al-tījān*” (“Book of the Crown”) of Ibn Hishām (who died ca. 218/833): 119–120; and also Nashwān, *Khulāṣa*, ed. ‘Alī b. Ismā’il and Ismā’il b. Aḥmad, 135.

[...] he (‘Abdallāh b. (al-)‘Abbās) was asked about *dhū l-qarnayn*, who he was. He said: ‘He was from Ḥimyar, and he was al-Ṣa‘b b. dhī Marāthid, and he was the one whom God made strong on earth, and he gave him means for everything.²⁴ He reached the two extremities [verb. horns, Arab. *qarn*, used to explain one part of the name *dhū l-qarnayn*] of the sun and he trod the earth and built the dam against Gog and Magog.’ He (Wahb b. Munabbih) asked: ‘And Alexander the Rūmī²⁵?’ He (‘Abdallāh b. (al-)‘Abbās) answered: ‘Alexander the Rūmī was a virtuous and wise man. He built on the sea of Ifrīqīs²⁶ two lighthouses, one in the land of Babylon, the other in the Land of Rome.’

After a short digression on the name *Ifrīqīs*, Nashwān continues²⁷:

Ka‘b al-Aḥbār²⁸ was asked about *dhū l-qarnayn*, and he said: ‘We hold it to be correct from the knowledge of our [Jewish] religious authorities (*aḥbār*) and our ancestors that he was from Ḥimyar and that he was al-Ṣa‘b b. dhī Marāthid²⁹. Alexander was from the Banū Yūnān [the Greeks] b. ‘Iṣ b. Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm [Abraham], the friend of God, and his men saw ‘Isā b. Maryam [Jesus, son of Mary], among them Galenos, Aristoteles and Daniel. Galenos and Aristoteles were from the Rūm [Byzantines] of the Banū Yūnān [Greeks], and Daniel was from the Banū Isrā‘īl, one of the prophets of God.’

Notwithstanding these assertions, the source underlying al-Ṣa‘b b. dhī Marāthid’s deeds is obviously the same cycle of sagas that surround Alexander the Great in the Pseudo-Kallisthenic tradition. As proof of the claim that the “two-horned one” was a South Arabian, Ibn Hishām turns to quotations from poetry that allude to “the two-horned one’s” origins in South Arabia, such as a line from the pre-Islamic poet Imru’ al-Qays: “And he built a dam where the sun rises against Gog and Magog among the mountains.”³⁰

24 Cf. Qur’an 18:84: God tells the prophet what to answer if he is asked about the “two-horned one”; God says: “We made him strong on earth, and gave him means for everything.”

25 Rūmī is usually the Arabic term for Byzantine people; it originally denoted someone “from Rome”, and then transferred to their Byzantine “successors”. Usually, Alexander is denoted as Yūnānī, “Greek” (originally “Jonian”).

26 Ifrīqīs is the Arabic rendering of the name of the Roman province Africa. The name is used as a personal name in the South-Arabian genealogies (al-Hamdāni, *Iklil*, 2, 65–79, 108, 117). The sea of Ifrīqīs is clearly the Mediterranean Sea, so Babylon (Bābilyūn) must be the old fort of the town that was to later become Cairo.

27 Nashwān, *Khulāṣa*, ed. ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl and Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad, 135.

28 An early source for Muslim authors, the name of which means “the glory of the [Jewish] learned men” in translation. Not much is known of his life. He is said to have come from a south-Arabian Jewish family of Ḥimyar/dhū Ru‘ayn origin. He allegedly converted to Islam, and in 638 accompanied the caliph ‘Umar during the conquest of Jerusalem. He introduced Jewish legends (later pejoratively called Isrā‘īliyyāt) into Islamic contexts. According to tradition, he died in Ḥimṣ between 652 and 656.

29 ṣa‘b can be translated as “headstrong, obstinate”, and marāthid can be understood as a plural of marthad, “a generous man” (Lane 1031b); in part two of al-Hamdāni’s *al-Iklil*, one finds another al-Marāthid, the son of Marthad the Younger, on 52.

30 The translation follows Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 98; for the Arabic, see Ibn Hishām n.d.: 124; Nashwān, *Khulāṣa*, ed. ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl and Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad, 139.

Ibn Hishām also quotes from a poem by Ḥassān b. Thābit³¹, a contemporary of the prophet, who wanted his reminder of the victories of the South-Arabian ruler al-Ṣaʿb to spur the Arabs on to conquest. The early Arab conquests involved many South Arabians, who often stayed in the conquered lands, be it Egypt, Iraq or Syria. Like many of the poems attributed to Ḥassān, this one was presumably composed later, in Umayyad times. It is clear that “in the course of the early Arab conquests, the figure of Dhū ʿl-Qarnayn was positioned, at least metaphorically, as a source of emulation for military expansion”.³²

The “two-horned one” had now become an Arab, or, to be more precise, a southern Arab, and not a Greek who had already been pocketed by the Christians. al-Ṣaʿb was a Ḥimyarī, and often thought of as having been a member of the pre-Islamic South Arabian ruling elite. This is shown by the particle *dhū/dhī* before his name, which was originally a pronoun. In the ninth/tenth century, it was understood as a kind of title indicating an elite status.

In the same period, a time when people from the northern Arabian regions, among them members of the family of the prophet Muḥammad, came south and claimed a special position in society, a part of the Yemeni population disapproved of them. It was difficult to oppose them openly, because that would have meant coming dangerously close to the borders between religiosity and unbelief. The disapproval of people from the north was therefore expressed in non-religious ways and language: The South-Arabian glorious past was emphasised, thereby presupposing that the people from the north lacked a comparable past, without explicitly stating this fact. The South-Arabian sector of the genealogies was reworked, adapted and equipped with many shining, South-Arabian sounding names like al-Ṣaʿb b. dhī Marāthid. Additionally, already existing narratives like the one about Gog and Magog were adapted to South Arabian needs. It is little wonder that one of the staunchest advocates of the South-Arabian side in his time, the abovementioned Nashwān b. Saʿīd al-Ḥimyarī (d. 1178), relied on the material collected by Ibn Hishām when he wrote an explication of his *qaṣīda al-Ḥimyarīya* under the title of *Khulāṣat al-sīra al-jāmiʿa li-ʿajāʾib akhbār al-mulūk al-tabābiʿa* (“Quintessence of the comprehensive history concerning the wondrous reports of the Tubbaʿ kings”³³). Nashwān’s works did not only play “a part in the struggle of the tribes of South Arabian origin against the northern Arabs for predominance in the Muslim world”.³⁴ As a Yemeni Zaydī scholar, he opposed the claim that only members of the family of the prophet could be imams or leaders of the community. For him, every Zaydī learned man was eligible to become imam. With this claim, Nashwān directly opposed the descendants of the prophet.

³¹ Lived c. 563–674; he was a companion of the prophet (one of the *ṣaḥāba*) and a member of the Khazraj tribe, which allegedly had a South-Arabian genealogy.

³² Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 98.

³³ *tubbaʿ* was understood as a title of pre-Islamic south Arabian kings.

³⁴ Lichtenstädter, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, 976.

4 Integrating the People

Scenarios of menace and of successfully overcoming former foes can be used as foils against an actual enemy, and can thereby help figures of authority to create or maintain communities in a manner that suits their own interests. It makes little difference whether the former enemy was a real one or, as in the case of Gog and Magog, one existing only in (holy) books and narratives. The boundaries to these enemies, to actual ones as well as to past ones, have to be made visible and clear, and – if necessary – the distance between oneself and the enemy has to be lengthened. Time and again, Gog and Magog were used as foils against actual enemies like the Scythians, Huns and Turks, who threatened the group to which the relevant politicians and other agents believed they belonged. In the light of that menace, people had to be induced to common action to overcome the threat and to be victorious, just like Alexander the Great was when he built the dam against Gog and Magog. If the people imagined as a community were to close ranks, they could be just as successful as Alexander or the “two-horned one”. Gog and Magog were imagined to live near the margins of the earth, as far away as possible geographically. But their distance from humanity could be still further emphasised by different means; their depiction with dogs’ faces in some of the Arabic literature of the 9th century is one such example.

In projecting the remembrance of Gog and Magog onto an actual foe, what was originally a community of remembrance becomes a community united by the expectation of victory over that enemy. This is true of the use of the story of Sallām the interpreter, a function not expressly addressed by Ibn Khurradādhbih himself but by some of those who retold the story.

The events around Gog and Magog and the “two-horned one” were instrumentalised differently in South Arabia: there, the narratives are used for the purpose of legitimisation, i.e. to enhance the status of those responsible, while at the same time opening up the possibility that the position of others would be devalued.

Additionally, during the early Arab conquests the figure of *dhū l-qamayn* was used, at least metaphorically, as “a source of emulation and stimulus for military expansion”.³⁵

Having all that in mind, it comes as no particular surprise that before the first Turkish (Ottoman) siege of Vienna in the year 1529 pamphlets were distributed among the troops of the Austrian side, where the Ottoman troops (here, too, commonly called the Turks) were presented as Gog and Magog; after several centuries, Gog and Magog could still be instrumentalised for the same goals as in South Arabia between the tenth and twelfth century.

³⁵ cf. Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam*, 98.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām aṣ-Ṣan’ānī. *al-Muṣannaḡ*. Edited by Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A’zamī. 12 vols., Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī li-l-ṭibā’a wa-l-niṣhr, 1970/1390–1983/1403.
- Ibn al-Athīr, Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī⁴. *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*. Edited by Abū l-Fidā’ ‘Abdallāh al-Qāḏī, Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Daḡāqa et al. 11 vols. Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1424/2003 (1407/1987).
- Ibn Khurrādādhbih or Ibn Khurdādhbih Abū l-Qāsim ‘Ubayd Allāh. *Kītab al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*. Edited by M. J. de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1889.
- Nashwān b. Sa’īd al-Ḥimyarī. *Khulāṣat al-sīra al-jāmi’a li-‘ajā’ib akhbār al-mulūk al-tabābi’a*, published as: *Mulūk Ḥimyar wa-aqyāl al-Yaman. qaṣīdat Nashwān b. Sa’īd al-Ḥimyarī ... wa-sharḥuhā* Edited by ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Mu’ayyid and Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad al-Jirāfī. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Madīna, 1985/1406.

Secondary Literature

- Beckwith, Christopher I. *Empires of the Silk Road. A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011 (2009).
- Donzel, Emeri van, and Andrea Schmidt. *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam’s Quest for Alexander’s Wall*. Vol. 22, Brill’s Inner Asian Library. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010.
- Seyed-Gohrab, Ali-Asghar, Faustina C.W. Doufekar-Aerts, and Sen McGlinn, eds. *Gog and Magog. The Clans of Chaos in World Literature*. Amsterdam, West Lafayette/Indiana: Rozenberg Publishers, Purdue University Press, 2007.
- Zadeh, Travis. *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam. Geography, Translation and the ‘Abbasid Empire*. London: Tauris, 2011.