

# Dogfaces, Snake-tongues, and the Wall against Gog and Magog

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In unsettled times and eras of cultural, religious, and political tremors, contemporaries have often read events as signs of the imminent end of time. Gog and Magog often play a role in eschatological visions, as report has it that they will break through their wall on the threshold of Doomsday. Even today, recent views and calculations of the exact moment of their escape are proclaimed in large numbers on the internet and in ominous writings. Some deem it will take place in the year 2019 or 2020 – depending on the diverse methods of calculation – which sounds, as compared to the world’s age, as if we were on the brink of disaster.

Be that as it may, it is not my purpose to judge these claims, but to place an example of this phenomenon in a broader, literary-historical framework. In 1855, an article was published in the Dutch periodical *De Gids* written by Luitenant C.M. de Jong van Rodenburgh, entitled 'The Khrouân, something about Islamism in North Africa'.<sup>1</sup> The author presents his observations concerning the religious practices in Kabylia and other parts of North Africa. He dwells, in particular, on the role of prophecies by *marabouts* in popular belief.

One of these visions concerns the coming of ‘Mouleï Skâ, the master of the hour,’ as understood by the author.<sup>2</sup> He states that the Arabs await this messianic figure with fear and trembling, because he will uproot society. Though he will expel the Christians from their lands, he will also sit in judgment upon the Muslims. After much bloodshed he will establish a temporary golden age of happiness and merriment. Subsequently, the gate will be opened and a coarse nation, which is held locked up by this gate behind two huge mountains in inner Africa, will assault the living. The total destruction of the world by these wild people, after which they will be annihilated themselves, preludes the end of time.<sup>3</sup> De Jong van Rodenburgh further remarks

<sup>1</sup> “De Khrouân, Iets over het Islamisme in Noord-Afrika,” in *De Gids*, 19, n.s. 8/2, (1855) 447-467. The term ‘Islamism’ has to be understood in its nineteenth-century context as an equivalent term for Islam, and not as it is sometimes used in modern times to indicate new forms of radical or political Islam.

2 What he probably meant is *moulay s̄ā'a*, the master of the hour, i.e. the end of time.

3 *Op.cit.*, p. 457.

that the unquestioning belief of the Arabs in the irrefutable truth of these ominous prophecies causes them to live in a permanent state of insecurity and restlessness. According to the author's analysis the French [colonial] government can never succeed in transforming the population into a nation of quietly living peasants and winning the hearts of their noblemen and *marabouts*, because they consider the French presence as a transitory state, awaiting the moment of their expulsion from above at the appearance of 'Mouleï Skâ.'

These nineteenth-century socio-cultural observations by lieutenant De Jong traveling in outlying districts have a completely outdated spirit, making it hard for the modern reader to take the information seriously. Yet, the document is of interest for the subject matter, the evolution of the Gog and Magog motif. It is easy to recognize this motif in the above prophecy, the coarse nation – representing Gog and Magog – and their confinement behind two huge mountains, which is the core of several seventh-century apocalyptic texts. The question is, why did nineteenth-century French rule in North Africa elicit from the local *marabouts*, predictions which remind the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel's Apocalypse? The answer lies in the scope of the Gog and Magog motif, which will be considered here from a historical-religious, and legendary-literary point of view.

The terms Gog and Magog can be traced back to names occurring in the Old Testament in *Genesis* and *Ezekiel*, and in John's *Revelation* in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> In *Genesis* these names denote the descendents of Japheth, in *Ezekiel* and *Revelation* the terms refer to nations acting at the end of time. In later eschatological representations of Gog and Magog we find several re-occurring elements:

1. Gog and Magog are two of a series of names of wild tribes or their kings.
2. Gog and Magog burst out, from the North, at the end of time.
3. Gog and Magog will harass the nations on earth and assault their lands, possessions and cultures.

In the history of the Gog and Magog tradition, two turning points can be distinguished. The first was when Gog and Magog were connected – in Christian apocalyptic literature – to Alexander the Great. Alexander came to be portrayed here as a monotheist who protected

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 10:2-4, the sons of Japheth: Gomer (Gog?) and Magog etc.; Ezekiel 18:6, 37:28, 38:1-4, 38:15-23, 39:1; Revelation 20:6-10.

the world from these coarse nations, Gog and Magog, by shutting them in behind a gate.

It is not quite clear whether the introduction of Alexander in these apocalypses originated in the accounts of Flavius Josephus in *Historia de Bello Judaico*, which claimed that the king of Hyrcania allowed the Alans to attack the Medes through a passage in the Caucasus that had been closed by King Alexander centuries earlier.<sup>5</sup> It seems plausible, however, that Flavius Josephus' account of Alexander in *Antiquitates Judaicorum*, in which he dwells on the king's visit to Jerusalem and his reverence for the God of the Jews, paved the way for Alexander's monotheistic repute in Christian apocalypses.<sup>6</sup>

The connection of the eschatological nations Gog and Magog to Alexander the Great first occurs in the anonymous *Christian Syriac Alexander Legend (AL)*, an apocalyptic text which is dated, currently, around 630 A.D.. The *AL* probably took root as a reaction to the glorious victory of the Byzantine King Heraclius over the Persian Shah Khosrau II in 628. The euphoria emanating from this victory fostered the conviction that the triumph heralded a divine plan in which the Christian Byzantine Empire would gain supremacy over the world in the period preceding the end of time. The *AL* explicitly pays attention to Gog and Magog, their wickedness and repulsive behavior, and has Alexander build a gate to exclude these nations from entering the civilized world until they will be released on divine command to destroy the world and to be destroyed themselves.

The author of *AL* seems to have deliberately chosen Alexander, the antique cosmocrator, as the protagonist of his apocalyptic manifesto, connecting him with the eschatological nations known from biblical sources. It served his purpose to emphasize the universal importance of Heraclius' exploits and to interpret the events of his time as the fulfillment of the predestined course of history in the divine Plan of Salvation of the world. Alexander was depicted as the founder of the Greek-Roman-Byzantine 'Christian' empire and predecessor of Heraclius, whose victory meant the restoration of the realm and marked the beginning of the fourth and final empire as predicted in the Book of Daniel (2.44).<sup>7</sup> To make the Alexander-

5 Flavius Josephus (37 A.D.-circa 100 A.D.) *The Wars of the Jews* vii, 7.4.

6 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicorum*, xi, 8.4-6.

7 G.J. Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies During the Reign of Heraclius," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation* in: Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 2, eds. G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte, Louvain, 2002, pp 81-94.

Heraclius typology created in *AL*<sup>8</sup> work, Alexander was presented with the features of a monotheist, missionary king and associated with biblical prophecies.

It is hard to tell whether this was a reshape of Alexander made on the basis of his profane character in the famed Alexander Romance by Pseudo-Callisthenes.<sup>9</sup> This originally Greek legendary biography of Alexander the Great is held to have been translated into Syriac around 600 A.D., which makes it chronologically possible that Syrians were acquainted with it, and especially with the cosmocratic aspects of its protagonist. This may have provided a basis, but it is obvious that Alexander's eschatological profile was inspired by biblical sources.<sup>10</sup>

Once the connection between Gog and Magog and Alexander in an eschatological context had been established in the *AL*, several other apocalypses embroidered on this theme in the following decades.

A few years after *AL*, a homily known as the *Alexander Poem* saw the light of day.<sup>11</sup> This *mēmra* or homily had a different – doctrinal and edifying – character, but it was mainly, although not exclusively, based on *AL*. In the *Alexander Poem*, the building of the gate and the revelation of its eschatological role are the leading motifs. The *Poem* is void, however, of the politico-religious pretensions of *AL*, as described above.<sup>12</sup> The text is full of references to biblical prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah and Daniel, and Alexander himself is made a prophet when he is ordered by an angel to write down and teach to the world the prophecies revealed to him by the angel.

In both the *AL* and the *AP*, the release of Gog and Magog on divine command is a prelude to the end of time. *AL* tends to add distinct data, such as a precise year for the escape “at the conclusion of eight hundred and twenty-six years,”<sup>13</sup> and defines Gog and Magog as two of the kings of the Huns. *AP* describes the moment vaguely as

8 See G.J. Reinink, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts,” in *Byzantinorossica*, 2 (2003), pp 150-178, 164.

9 See below, note 30.

10 Especially the Book of Daniel. For the influence of Flavius Josephus, see above, note 7.

11 Formerly ascribed to Jacob of Serugh († 521), but currently dated after 630 A.D.. Its *terminus ante quem* is the Arab invasion of Syria (636) or Mesopotamia (640).

12 The reasons for this and the role of Chalcedonian and Monophysite aspirations have been given in detail by G.J. Reinink, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts,” *opus cit.* pp. 163-168.

13 E.A. Wallis Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great being the Syriac version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, Cambridge 1889, (1) repr. Amsterdam 1976, p. 154. As concerns the second date, ‘nine hundred and forty years,’ it is not sure that it points to the year of the end of time, because the text seems to be corrupt here. See G.J. Reinink, “Die Entstehung der Syrische Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios’ Kirchenpolitik,” in *Orientalia Lovensiana Analecta* 18. ‘After Chalcedon,’ eds. F.C. Laga, J.A. Munitiz, L. van Rompay, Louvain 1985, pp. 261-281, pp. 268-269, note 27.

“in the seven thousandth year”<sup>14</sup> and while Gog and Magog are defined as the descendants of the mighty house of Japheth, they are described as coarse nations of an indeterminate sort.

In the course of time, all kinds of hordes on the move, such as the Scythians, the Huns, the Mongols, the Tatars and many others have been identified as the escaped hordes of Gog and Magog. Speculation with regard to their ‘real’ identity continues to the present day.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after the appearance of the *Alexander Poem*, circumstances in the Near East were to undergo unanticipated radical changes. Heraclius’ restoration of the Byzantine territories, which in *AL*’s propagandistic interpretation stood for the reinstallation of the ‘last empire,’ actually lasted for barely seven years. From 635 onward, Jerusalem, and gradually the whole of Heraclius’ dominion, came under the control of the Arabs, the new political power in the region, which brought a new long-term religion: Islam. These developments did not stop the emergence of apocalypses, but definitely influenced their purport, since the events urged the re-interpretation of the *status quo* within the concept of history.

The poem *Sermo de Fine Extremo*, ascribed to Ephrem Syrus (4th c.), but presently dated between 640 and 683 A.D., is the first known apocalyptic text responding to the Islamic invasion.<sup>16</sup> Pseudo-Ephrem considers this conquest as a temporary chastisement of the Byzantines for their persecution of the Monophysite Christians. The *Sermo* is quite elaborate about the passing invasion of the Arabs, the offspring of Hagar with Abraham, from the desert, and even more about the final assault by Agog and Magog, the Huns, from behind the gate: on which point the *Sermo* has a lot in common with *AL*.<sup>17</sup> There is no prominent role in Pseudo-Ephrem’s apocalypse for Alexander, but in line with the reputation by then established, he figures as the builder of the gate. The author gives no details about its construction, nor

14 A.E. Wallis Budge, “A Discourse Composed by Mār Jacob upon Alexander, the Believed King, and upon the Gate Which He Made Against Āgōg and Māgōg,” in *The History of Alexander the Great being the Syriac version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, Cambridge 1889, (3) repr. Amsterdam, 163-200, pp. 187 and 189.

15 Mañšūr ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm, prolific writer of works on Islamic eschatology, expounds the theory that a part of the descendants of Gog and Magog currently live in the People’s Republic of Mongolia, mixed with the population of that state. The greater part, however, lives in enclosure, under the surface of the earth, underneath all regions of the world. See *Yajūj wa Majūj min al-Wujūd ḥattā al-Fanā’* (“Gog and Magog, from Existence to Annihilation”), Damascus/Cairo 2004, pp. 239-244.

16 G.J. Reinink, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts”, *opus cit.* pp 168-171.

17 Pseudo-Ephrem gives a very extensive list of 30 names of nations, composed from different sources. See G.J. Reinink, “Pseudo-Ephrems ‘Rede über das Ende’ und die Syrische eschatologische Literatur des Siebenten Jahrhunderts,” in *Aram*, 5 (1993), pp. 448-451, pp. 437-463.

about predictions written on it by Alexander. He refers particularly to the prophecies of Ezekiel and inserts allusions to the gospel of Matthew.<sup>18</sup> While the *Sermo* is less explicit as to the founder of the Roman/Byzantine empire, its author sticks to the concept of final world-dominion of the Byzantines as predicted by Alexander in the *AL*.<sup>19</sup>

A second and most influential Syriac apocalypse from the second half of the seventh century is the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. It was soon translated into Greek and Latin, through which it became well known in western and eastern European (apocalyptic) literature.<sup>20</sup> This *Apocalypse* differs greatly in tenor and structure from the previous one. Pseudo-Methodius assigns a major role to Alexander the Great as the founder and master of the fourth realm of Daniel and in eschatology. The main issue in the text concerns Alexander's involvement with Gog and Magog. With divine assistance he shuts them in behind a gate in the mountains of the north in order that the prophecy of Ezekiel (38:14-16) may be fulfilled. In short, Alexander is given the role of founder of the last Byzantine Empire and indirectly as the ancestor of its imperial dynasty, and he is granted a key position in the outcome of the biblical prediction relating the arrival of Gog from the lands of the north to invade Israel at the end of time.<sup>21</sup> Pseudo-Methodius became the apogee of the apocalypses concerned with Alexander and Gog and Magog. Once parts of the *Apocalypse* had been incorporated in several recensions of the legendary Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes, Alexander's eschatological role and association with Gog and Magog became a recurrent theme.<sup>22</sup>

18 See "Des Heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Sermones III, übersetzt von Edmund Beck," in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 321 Scriptorum Syri tom. 139, Louvain, 1972, pp. 79-94.

19 *Sermo* 349-354, *opus cit.* p. 89.

20 See the editions of W.J. Aerts and G.A.A. Kortekaas, "Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius. De älteste griechische und lateinische Übersetzung," in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* I and II, vols. 569, tom. 97 and 570, tom. 98, Louvain, 1998. For the German translation from Syriac see G.J. Reinink "Die Syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius," in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 541, tom. 221, Louvain, 1993.

21 The interpretation of the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius has been treated previously, and will not be reviewed here. See G.J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I. Problems in the Literary Source Material. Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 1*, eds. A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad, Princeton, 1992, 149-187. Also G.J. Reinink, "Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic texts," *opus cit.* pp.171-177. See also P.J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, London 1985, especially "The Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius," pp. 13-38.

22 The Gog and Magog episode from the Greek translation of Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse* has been interpolated in the Greek  $\epsilon$  and  $\gamma$  recensions of Pseudo-Callisthenes, which are dated at present in the 8th/9th and 9th/10th century respectively. In the 5th-century  $\beta$  recension it has been incorporated afterwards. The Latin translation of Pseudo-Methodius found its way into the *Historia de Preliis* I<sup>2</sup>.

From the above it is clear that the Syriac apocalyptic tradition was crucial for the development of the connection between Gog and Magog and Alexander. Unlike the earlier *AL* and the *AP*, the late 7<sup>th</sup>-century apocalypses of Pseudo-Ephrem and Pseudo-Methodius expressed a reaction to the Arab conquest and the spread of Islamic rule in the region, which were the new historical events of their time. They unambiguously placed these ‘incidents’ in the projected concept of history; the Arab supremacy as a temporary punishment for the sins of the Christians. Ironically, the origin of these same historical events brought about the second major turning point in the Gog and Magog tradition.

Approximately at the same time as the appearance of the *Alexander Legend* and the *Alexander Poem*, the Arabs – or more precisely, the first generation of Muslims – learned about Gog and Magog in the Quran, in verses 18:92-98. These referred to the story of Dhū ’l-Qarnayn, ‘the man with two horns’, who built a wall to confine Yājūj and Mājūj until the end of time. The Muslims’ acquaintance with Gog and Magog was to modify the Gog and Magog tradition in the entire Islamic world, and beyond.

Islam developed its own remarkable tradition with regard to Gog and Magog. First occurring in the Commentaries on the Quran (*tafsīr*) and in the Traditions (*ḥadīth*), the Gog and Magog motif spread through the collections of Tales of the Prophets, the *qīṣaṣ al-’anbiyā’*, and popular narratives, the *siyar*. Quite often the reports are ascribed to the notorious transmitters of *isrā’īlīyāt*, Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ka’b al-Aḥbār. The Muslim Gog and Magog tradition mainly focused on the descriptions of Gog and Magog and the building of the wall by Dhū ’l-Qarnayn. Because this denomination, ‘the Two-horned,’ looked like an epithet rather than a person’s name, it became subject to all kinds of interpretations. Authoritative exegetes of the Quran, including Ṭabarī († 923), show their awareness of the fact that Alexander (the Great) had been associated with the exclusion of Gog and Magog. Although the identification of Dhū ’l-Qarnayn as Alexander remained unresolved among exegetes, this did not prevent Arabic literature, of Christian and Muslim provenance alike, presenting King Al-Iskandar as the Two-horned builder of the wall against Gog and Magog.<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, this representation became

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23 This development has been described in detail in my exposé on the Dhū ’l-Qarnayn tradition in *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, diss. Leiden 2003, 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4. An English translation of this book is forthcoming (Louvain 2007).

current in the Middle East, parts of Africa, Central Asia and South East Asia.

From the above we can observe that two Gog and Magog traditions developed, more or less independently, in their Christian and Muslim contexts. But the results were quite similar, in part because their points of departure had much in common. It may also be assumed that interchange of motifs has contributed. To throw some light on the relation between the two traditions and to place the *marabouts'* eschatological vision in its proper perspective, I will briefly consider the central motifs in the two traditions: descriptions of Gog and Magog; the construction of the rampart; and eschatological predictions.

The descriptions of the physical features of Yājūj and Mājūj show some resemblances to Gog and Magog in the Syriac apocalypses. The latter dwell on their repulsive behaviour, which is characterised, in particular, by the fact that they are cannibals, drinking blood and devouring snakes and scorpions. These characteristics also occur frequently in Arab reports.<sup>24</sup> One notable case will serve as an example:<sup>25</sup>

He [Dhū 'l-Qarnayn] sealed the letter and gave it to his envoy to have it delivered to the people of Tārīs,<sup>26</sup> a nation whose multitude is only known to God, the most High. They are of various shapes; they have human bodies (*adamī*) but the faces of dogs (*wujūh al-kilāb*). Their stature is like that of a tall cedar tree. ... The height of a man is eighty cubits. They have claws instead of fingernails. Their canines are like the fangs of the lion. They have palates like those of camels which produce a loud noise when they chew, like the chewing of a strong horse, and their faces are like dog faces, while their bodies are like those of humans.

24 See for example Ṭabarī (Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr aṭ-) († 923), *Kitāb Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* ('Commentarius in Coranum') 31 vols, 16, Cairo 1323-29 H., p.14 and Ibn al-Wardī (Sirāj ad-Dīn Abū Haṣṣ 'Umar) († 1456), *Kharīda al-'Ajā'ib wa Farīda al-Gharā'ib* ('The Virgin of Marvels and the Pearl of Wonders'), ed. Maḥmūd Fakhūrī, Beirut 1991, p. 304.

25 The passage has not been referred to elsewhere; it is part of an unknown, as yet unpublished manuscript. For other characteristics, please refer to the general survey 'Yādījūj wa Mādījūj' by E. van Donzel and C. Ott in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edition, vol. xi, fasc. 183-184, Leiden, 2001, pp. 231-234.

26 Identified in the text as Yājūj and Mājūj. Tārīs is linked to Tiras, mentioned as one of the sons of Japheth in Genesis X.2.

This is the portrayal of Gog and Magog in the *Qiṣṣat Dhī 'l-Qarnayn* ('Story of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn') by one Abū 'Abd al-Malik.<sup>27</sup> The most notable part is the comment that Gog and Magog are considered to have 'dog faces,' which almost certainly is an allusion to the Cynocephali. The occurrence of dog-headed or dog-faced creatures is not uncommon in Arabic geographical literature and travel accounts,<sup>28</sup> but as a feature of Gog and Magog it is notable, because it points to the Syriac *AL* and *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. In the *AL* Alexander asks if there are any living creatures beyond Gog and Magog. The answer is: "Those of Bêth-Āmardāth and the Dog-men; and beyond the Dog-men is the nation of the Mēnîneh."<sup>29</sup> In Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse*, the Dog-men are integrated in the list of tribes of the race of Gog and Magog who were shut in together by Alexander. They are characterized as "Anthropophagoi (men-eaters), who are called Kynokephaloi (dogheads)." In the Arabic version of this part of the *AL* we find a paraphrase which states that beyond Gog and Magog live 'the Nafāyis, that is to say the Najāyis, dogheads.'<sup>30</sup> It is quite unintelligible why the composer/translator cares to 'gloss' the term *nafāyis* ('precious') as *najāyis* ('unclean'). A possible explanation is that the translator was aware that Nafāyis represented the Anthropophagoi – in other elaborations also named Anafagius/Anouphagoi.<sup>31</sup> In the Ethiopic version we find here: "There

27 Ms. Rabat, Bibliothèque Générale D 1427, ff. 75-118, pp. 91a-91b. My analysis of this text, which contains an Arabic version of the Aljamiado *Rrekontamiento del Rrey Alisandere*, can be found in *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, *opus cit.* 1.6.3-1.6.3b.

28 Qazwīnī (c.1203-1283) reports of the inhabitants of an island in the Sea of the Zanj: 'their heads are like dogheads and they have human bodies.' It is noteworthy that this description is next to his description of Yājūj and Mājūj and their neighbors. Ibn al-Wardī makes mention of similar island-dwellers and he even states that Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's men fought with them. See Zakariya Ben Muhammed Ben Mahmud el-Cazwīnī's *Kosmographie* ('*Ājā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*'), ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1849, 2 vols, 1, p. 449 and Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīda al-'Ājā'ib wa Farīda al-Gharā'ib* ('The Virgin of Marvels and the Pearl of Wonders'), ed. Maḥmūd Fakhūrī, Beirut 1991, p. 126.

29 E.A. Wallis Budge, "A Christian Legend Concerning Alexander," in *The History of Alexander the Great being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, Cambridge, 1889 (2), pp. 144-158, p. 152.

30 Ms. BN 3687, p. 74vo. This episode of the *AL* has been incorporated in *Sirat al-Malik Iskandar*, the Arabic adapted translation of the Syriac Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes. See *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, *opus cit.* 3.6.1. P.M. Fraser, *The Cities of Alexander the Great*, Oxford 1996, gives an elaborate and useful survey and stemma of the Alexander Romance, although it now has to be revised on the point of the Arabic derivatives. For more than a century, the Arabic translation, presumably made in the ninth century, was considered lost. During my investigation of the Arabic Alexander tradition I discovered a hand-written text, entitled *Sirat Al-Malik Iskandar*, which appeared to represent the sought-after Arabic Alexander Romance. I am currently preparing an edition of this text, which I have provisionally named after its copyist, Quzmān. This Arabic recension is intermediary to the Syriac and Ethiopic recensions of Pseudo-Callisthenes' Alexander Romance and incorporates parts of *AL*, in particular the building of the gate against Gog and Magog.

31 In the Latin translation and in the γ recension of Pseudo-Callisthenes (iii 26), respectively. See C.S.F. Burnett, "An Apocryphal Letter from the Arabic Philosopher al-Kindi to Theodore, Frederick II's Astrologer, Concerning Gog and Magog, the Enclosed Nations, and the Scourge of the Mongols," in *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 15 (1984), 151-167, p.167.

are nations living beyond them, namely the Taftās, that is to say the Nagāshāwīyān, [who have] faces like dogs.”<sup>32</sup> Despite the corruption of the names – the last ones apparently through an Arabic intermediary text – it is clear that all the descriptions probably depend on the Dog-men, the neighbouring tribes of Gog and Magog, in the *AL*.<sup>33</sup> This illustrates the connection between the ‘occidental’ and ‘oriental’ Gog and Magog traditions, which seems to have continued through the ages, and a cross-cultural connection, because the *Qiṣṣat Dhī ’l-Qarnayn* of Abū ’Abd al-Malik is of Islamic provenance, whereas the Arabic translation of the *AL* has a Christian background.<sup>34</sup>

Another motif which reveals the acquaintance of Arab authors with the Syriac tradition is the building of the rampart. In general, there are two stereotype descriptions of the construction of the *sadd* (barrier), which sometimes occur side by side in the same text. The common feature is that the space between two mountains is filled with alternate layers of copper and iron. In one version, the layers are melted together using firewood, in the other, the structure is built of metal bricks, and molten copper is poured over them.<sup>35</sup> A third type is found in the above-mentioned Arabic Alexander Romance, *Sīrat al-Malik Iskandar*. It is mainly based on the equivalent part in the *AL*, but also on Pseudo-Methodius, and inspired by details in the Quran commentaries and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*. The important aspect here is the fact that Gog and Magog are shut behind a *bāb* (gate), an element which is actually alien to the Islamic tradition. Several geographers, however, also mention a gate instead of a wall. Primarily, they transmit the story of Sallām at-Turjumānī’s who is reported to have been sent to inspect the wall of Gog and Magog by order of Caliph

32 E.A.Wallis Budge, *Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great. Ethiopic Histories of Alexander by Pseudo-Callisthenes and other Writers*, London, 1896, p. 234.

33 In the Spanish-Arabic Alexander Romance *Hadīth Dhī ’l-Qarnayn* one phrase can be identified – by its context – as also referring to the same passage. ‘Beyond this nation are people who are called the Na’āshiyūn, beyond whom is nothing but air and wind.’ Unfortunately the detail of the dogheads is missing. See *Un texto occidental de la Leyenda de Alejandro*, ed. E. Garcia Gomez, Madrid, 1929, p. 31. Ibn ’Abd al-Ḥakam († 870) and Ṭabarī († 923) also refer to a people living beyond Gog and Magog as the ‘dog-faces.’ See *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain Known as Futuh Misr of Ibn Abdal Ḥakam*, ed. Charles C. Torrey, Yale Oriental Series III, New Haven 1922, 39 and Ṭabarī, *opus cit.*, p. 6.

34 See F. Doufikaar-Aerts, “Alexander the Flexible Friend. Some Reflections on the Representation of Alexander the Great in the Arabic Alexander Romance,” in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 55 (2003) 3/4, pp. 195-210.

35 The classification was made on the basis of reports by Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, Ibn al-Athīr, Tha’labī, Abū ’Abd al-Malik, Bayḍāwī and Pseudo-Aṣma’ī. See F. Doufikaar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, diss. Leiden 2003, 3.6.1.

Wāthiq bi-'llāh († 847).<sup>36</sup> The description of the gate shows considerable resemblances to the gate depicted in the Arabic version of the *AL*. The clearest example is the intriguing fact that the gate is said to have a key with twelve wards: this detail is known uniquely from the *Arabic* version of the *AL* in *Sīrat al-Malik Iskandar*.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of the reference in Sallām's story to this twelve-warded key, which is supposedly made to open the gate (*bāb*) at the appointed time, there is generally no reference to a key. In most accounts, Gog and Magog are to escape from behind the closed barrier (*sadd/ radm*) in a less civilized way. They are said to apply all means and ruses to demolish the wall, by undermining it, or scratching the wall with their claws. A variant of this method is given by 'Umāra ibn Zayd:

When he [Dhū 'l-Qarnayn] had finished the wall and had constructed it strongly and solidly, he placed above it a stone talisman in the shape of an eagle's statue. On its breast he inscribed one of the names of God the Exalted; it is known here that this is placed in the middle of the wall. If Gog and Magog come near to *lick* the wall until it becomes so thin that they are very near to what lies behind it, the eagle shrieks so loudly that everyone near the wall will know.<sup>38</sup>

Gog and Magog try to break out by licking the wall, as their mouths and tongues are like 'rasps' and 'saws.' This representation coincides with the one in the above mentioned *Sīrat al-Malik Iskandar*:

At all times, in every period, in every year, the people [Gog and Magog] will try to open the gate. They will leave nothing untried and will even *lick* it with their tongues, which are as sharp as a *snake's tongue*, but they will not succeed in opening it until the moment that God orders it.'<sup>39</sup>

The example proves the mutual derivation of motifs, since the 'Islamic' features of Gog and Magog appear here in a 'Christian'

36 Ibn Khurdādhbeh, *al-Maqdisī*, Idriṣī, Abū Ḥamīd al-Gharnāṭī, Ibn al-Wardī. The story has also been transmitted by Tha'labī.

37 It has been maintained in Ethiopic translation, based on it. See A.E. Wallis Budge, *Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great. Ethiopic Histories of Alexander by Pseudo-Callisthenes and other Writers*, London, 1896, p. 238. In the *AL*, *opus cit.* p. 153 the key was described as twelve cubits long.

38 'Umāra ibn Zayd, ms. London, B.M. Add. 5928, 23a. See *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, *opus cit.* 3.6.1.

39 *Sīrat al-Malik Iskandar*, ms. Paris B.N. Arabe, 3687, 76ro.

That day will coincide with Doomsday, according to the *marabout* in Djenné from whom the anthropologist recorded the story.<sup>40</sup> In this current variant of the popular escape of Gog and Magog, which is frequently ascribed to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, their method seems to have gained in efficiency, for they are eating their way through.

This has brought us back to Africa and the *marabouts*. So let us turn now to the salient observations by De Jong van Rodenburgh about the ‘Mouleï Skâ.’

‘The master of the hour’ is most probably to be identified as the Mahdī, concerning whom many traditions have been passed down. A small detail in the lieutenant’s report gives a clue. According to his source, ‘Sidi-el-Boukrari’<sup>41</sup> wrote that the ‘master of the hour’ has the prophet’s name, and his parents have the same names as the prophet’s parents. He will resemble the prophet in nature, but not in physical features, and he will fill the earth with justice.

In the *Sunan* ('Traditions') of Abū Dāwūd, and in similar traditions, we find precisely these predictions about the Mahdī: he is said to be of the house of the Prophet Muḥammad, he will bear the prophet's name, and his father the name of the prophet's father, and he will spread justice all over the world, replacing the injustice which has entirely filled it. There will be rain in plenty and an abundance of

41 The 'writer' who is probably meant here is the famous traditionist al-Bukhārī.

plants will grow. He will rule for seven years. In addition it is stated that the Mahdī resembles the prophet in his nature (*khuluq*), not in his appearance (*khalq*).<sup>42</sup>

As to the marabouts' forecast of the expulsion of the Christians from North Africa, this vision may be prompted by certain traditions about the Rūm or Banū Aṣfār, in particular ones similar to those transmitted by al-Qurṭubī in his *Tadhkira* ('Reminder').<sup>43</sup> He reports that a king of Rūm called Ḍamāra, the fifth of the Heraclides, will be sent by divine command. He will ask the Mahdī for peace, since the Muslims have appeared before the idolaters. He will grant them peace for seven years. But after a while they will violate the truce and gather against the Muslims under the sign of the Cross. The Mahdī will encounter them with the armies of the Muslims and a terrible fight will take place, in which the Muslims will triumph. Then, they will conquer the territory of the Rūm and destroy their cities and fortresses, and abuse the women and children. The Mahdī will rule for forty years until death comes upon him unexpectedly.

With reference to these predictions about the Mahdī in the Islamic eschatological tradition it is clear that what De Jong van Rodenburgh described as '*zonderlinge voorspellingen*,' bizarre predictions, were in fact allusions to an age-old motif, developing over time and still very much alive. It is not surprising, in this case, that Gog and Magog's wall and its mountain-range from Asia could move to the heart of Africa: what was vital was that their abode, their dog faces and snake tongues should remain carefully hidden in *terra incognita*.

42 Abū Dāwud Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath as-Sijistānī († 888), *Sunan*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī 'd-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1935, originally appeared in 4 vols, but is reprinted in 2 vols, 3, pp. 106-108.

43 Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī († 1272), *At-Tadhkira fī Aḥwāl al-Mawtā wa Umūr al-Ākhira* ('The Reminder, about the Affairs of the Dead and Matters of the Hereafter'), ed. 'Iṣām ad-Dīn Sayyid aṣ-Ṣababī, Cairo, 1999, pp. 493-494.

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