

3 Descriptions and Images – Remarks on Gog and Magog in Nizāmī’s *Iskandar Nāma*, Firdawsī’s *Shāh Nāma* and Amīr Khusraw’s *A’īna-yi Iskandarī*

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Gog and Magog – *Yā’jūj* and *Ma’jūj* in Arabic – are the names of two wild tribes of mythical dimensions, living on the outskirts of the world and representing an eternal threat for civilisation. The nightmarish image of Gog and Magog breaking loose of their bonds and scattering all over the earth out of their remote homeland is often connected with the Apocalypse. They feature in both Biblical and Qur’anic¹ traditions and subsequently seem to have found some degree of ill-fame in many traditions. In British legends, for example, Gog and Magog are two giants who functioned after their capture as the traditional guardians of the City of London; near Cambridge there is the Gogmagog Hill, named after a giant who fell in love with the nymph Granta, who gave her name to the river.²

In Persian literature, Gog and Magog are invariably connected with Iskandar, the historical Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persian empire by defeating the last Achaemenid king Darius in 331 B.C. This connection corresponds to their eschatological role in Islam. It is told in the *Qur’an* that the prophet Dhu’l-Qarnayn, the ‘Two-Horned One’, secured the tribes of Gog and Magog behind a wall, where they will remain until the end of time.³ The prophet Dhu’l-Qarnayn is usually identified with Alexander the Great. Iskandar, in the Persian tradition, is a hero, a sage and one of the ancient Persian kings. The historical Alexander has faded and his role as a conqueror and an enemy of the Achaemenid Empire is in many cases scarcely dwelt upon. The image of Iskandar in Persian literature seems to be derived largely from the Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes’ history of Alexander. Only a limited amount of Pahlavi sources depict Alexander the Great as an evil invader, in contrast to his rather positive image in the Persian literature of the Islamic era.

Firdawsī in the *Shāh Nāma* gives the first extensive treatment of Iskandar in Persian literature, depicting Iskandar as the half-brother of Dārā, or Darius, and accordingly as the legitimate successor to the Persian throne.⁴ Numerous stories in both Persian poetry and prose concerning Iskandar have followed up on this *Shāh Nāma* version. These stories,

brought together in the form of a book, are known under the generic title *Iskandar Nāma* or *Alexander Romance*. The Persian *Iskandar Nāma* has a long history and an intriguing background, described in a variety of reference works.⁵ One of the most famous *Iskandar Nāma*'s is the one composed by Nizāmī around the year 1202, consisting of two parts, or two books, the *Sharaf Nāma* and the *Iqbāl Nāma*.⁶ The former concentrates on Iskandar as a hero and conqueror of the world, while the latter is devoted to Iskandar the philosopher and the prophet, identifiable with Dhu'l-Qarnayn. This prophetic side of Iskandar is not dealt upon at all in Firdawsī's epic. After Nizāmī, the Indo-Persian poet Amīr Khusraw composed another courtly *Iskandar Nāma* in the year 1299-1300, entitled *A'īna-yi Iskandarī*.⁷ He follows Nizāmī and Firdawsī in his choice of the *mutaqārib* metre, as does the poet Jāmī, who composed another courtly *Iskandar Nāma*, the *Khīrad Nāma-yi Iskandarī* in 1484-1485.⁸

The story of Gog and Magog as part of the Iskandar cycle is present in both Firdawsī's and Nizāmī's versions. Amīr Khusraw also includes a lengthy passage on Gog and Magog. Jāmī however does not. I propose to compare in this paper the different versions of the story of Gog and Magog in the courtly *Iskandar Nāmas*, focusing on Nizāmī and Firdawsī, with some brief remarks on Amīr Khusraw.

The Story of Gog and Magog in Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma*

In the *Shāh Nāma*, Iskandar and the sage Khizr are together in the Land of Gloom, in search of the Water of Life. Iskandar and Khizr are separated as Iskandar loses his way and wanders alone through the gloomy lands. He meets talking birds who guide him towards the angel Isrāfīl, whose trumpet will sound on the Day of Judgment. Isrāfīl reproaches Iskandar for his greedy ambitions and warns him of the approaching end of his life. Iskandar replies that he finds fulfilment in his adventurous and ambitious life. After this meeting, Iskandar leaves the Land of Gloom, is reunited with his army and sets off for the West. This is where the story of Gog and Magog intervenes in the *Shāh Nāma*. In many manuscripts this story bears a title, usually variations on "The Building of the Wall against Gog and Magog by Iskandar". This story divides in two major themes: the outer appearance of Gog and Magog and Iskandar's building of the wall against them.

Iskandar is first welcomed in a town by a group of complaining people, suffering utter vexation from their wild neighbours Gog and Magog:

دل ما پر از رنج و دردست و خون ز یاجوج و ماجوج مان خواب نیست غم و رنج باشد همه بهر ما	ز چیزی که ما را پی و تاب نیست چن آیند بهری سوی شهر ما
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(Iskandar, b. 1428b-30)

*...Our hearts are full of pain, grief and blood,
From something we cannot endure/ It is because of Gog and
Magog that we have no sleep.
When they come to our town to gather booty, / Nothing but pain
and grief is our share.⁹*

Firdawsī continues with a description of the physical appearance of Gog and Magog. They are treated as a collection of creatures not worthy to be called “people”. Firdawsī composed the following verses on their appearance:

زبانها سیه دیده‌اشان چو خون	همه روی هاشان چو روی هیون
که یارد شدن نزد ایشان فراز	سیه روی و دندانها چون گراز
بر و سینه و گوشه‌اشان چو پیل	همه تن پر از موی و موی همچو نیل
دگر بر تن خویش چادر کنند	بخسبند یکی گوش بستر کنند
کم و بیش ایشان که داند شمار	ز هر ماده ای بچه زاید هزار
تگ آرند برسان گوران شوند	بگرد آمدن چون ستوران شوند

(Iskandar, b. 1432-37)

*Their faces are like the faces of camels/ Their tongues are black
and their eyes like blood;
They have black faces and tusks like boars/ Who would dare to ap-
proach them?
Their bodies are hairy and the hairs are like indigo/ Their breast
and ears are like those of an elephant.
If they go to sleep, one of the ears serves as a bed/ While the other
one is folded over their bodies.
Each female creature gives birth to a 1000 children / Who is able
to count them?
If they come together, they are like cattle / They go running and be-
come onagers.*

Following on this description of Gog and Magog's impressive physique, Firdawsī dwells upon their eating habits. As is related in other sources, their food is *tanīn*, a dragon that falls from the sky in spring. The vexed citizens of the town ask for help, and accordingly Iskandar starts to build the wall:

بیاورد از آن فیلسوفان گروه	سکندر بیامد نگه کرد کوه
مس و روی و پتک گران آورید	بفرمود کاهنگران آورید
بیارید چندان که باید به کار	گج و سنگ و هیزم فزون از شمار
چو شد ساخته کار اندیشه راست	بی اندازه بردند چیزی که خواست
هر آنکس که استاد بود اندر آن	ز دیوارگر هم ز آهنگران
بدان کار بایسته یاور شدند	ز گیتی به پیش سکندر شدند

دو دیوار کرد از دو پهلوی کوه
 چو صد شاه رش کرده پهنای اوی
 پراکنده مس در میان اندکی
 چنین باشد افسون داناکیان
 چو از خاک تا تیغ گشت آرده
 همی بر سر گوهران ریختند
 بفرمود تا آتش اندر زدند
 بفرمان پیروزگر شهریار
 ستاره شد از تف آتش ستوه
 دم آتش و رنج آهنگران
 وزان آتش تیز بگذاختند
 زمین گشت جای نشیم و نشست
 چو نزدیک صد باز پهنای اوی
 جهانی برست از بد داوری
 که بی تو مبادا زمان و زمین

(Iskandar, b. 1455-74)

ز هر کشوری دانشی شد گروه
 ز بن تا سر تیغ بالای اوی
 ازو یک رش انگشت و آهن یکی
 همی ریخت گوگردش اندر میان
 همی ریخت هر گوهری یک رده
 بسی نفت و روغن بر آمیختند
 به خروار انگشت بر سر زدند
 دم آورد آهنگران صد هزار
 خروش دمنده بر آمد ز کوه
 چنین روزگاری بر آمد بر آن
 گهرها یک اندر دگر تاختند
 زیابوچ و ماجوچ گیتی برست
 به رش پانصد بود بالای اوی
 از آن نامور سد اسکندری
 بر او مهتران خواندند آفرین

*Sikandar came and observed the mountain/ With him brought a
 group of wise men.
 He gave orders to bring blacksmiths/ To bring copper and bronze
 and heavy mortars,
 Innumerable quantities of plaster and stone and firewood, / To
 bring as much as was necessary.
 Whatever he wanted, they brought it in endless quantities / When
 everything was prepared and the plans made up.
 The masons and the master blacksmiths/ Everyone who was a mas-
 ter in this,
 They came from all over the world to Iskandar / To help him with
 this necessary work.
 From each country the master craftsmen gathered; / Two walls were
 made on each side of the mountain.
 From the valley up to the crest of the mountain/ They built a wall of
 a hundred shāhrash¹⁰ wide,
 A rash of charcoal and a rash of iron/ Copper was scattered in be-
 tween;
 Over this substance they poured sulphur / As prescribed by the ma-
 gic and wisdom of the great kings.
 Each substance formed one layer / When it was filled from bottom
 to top,
 They mixed a great quantity of naphtha and oil / And they poured it
 over the substances.
 Upon this they threw donkey loads full of charcoal /Iskandar gave
 orders to set this on fire:*

The blacksmiths started to give a hundred thousands blows / As ordered by the victorious king.

The sound of the bellows rose from the mountains / The stars were frightened by the rising flames.

In this manner time went by / The fiercely burning fire and the exertions of the blacksmiths melted the substances.

The world was saved from Gog and Magog / The earth became a place to dwell in.

The wall was five hundred rash high and almost a hundred wide /

The famous wall of Iskandar freed the world from evil and war:

The noblemen praised Iskandar with the words / May time and earth not be without you.

Firdawsī's story on Gog and Magog concludes with this detailed description of the building of the wall. All in all, the episode counts 71 verses in Khaleghi Motlagh/Omidshar's edition.

How then does Nizāmī describe the people of Gog and Magog? In how far is he following the descriptions found in Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma* and in the numerous historical sources¹¹ where Gog and Magog are described?

The Story of Gog and Magog in Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma*

Compared to Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma*, the episodes in Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma* are more organised, always opening with an address to a singer, the *mughannīnāma*. In the editions of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, the Gog and Magog episode has the following title: رسیدن اسکندر به حد شمال و بستن سد یاجوج, "The Arrival of Iskandar at the Northern Frontier and the Closing (Building) of the Wall against Yā'jūj". In Nizāmī's version of the story of Gog and Magog, only Yā'jūj, or Gog, is mentioned while Ma'jūj, Magog, has been left out entirely. Nizāmī reaches the episode at the end of the second part of the *Iqbāl Nāma*. He relates how Iskandar meets a people described as 'muslims without a prophet'. They are pious and good, but in constant agony because of the wild people of Gog. Iskandar builds a wall against these savages. Though within the episode, the actual passage specifically on the subject of the wall is remarkably short, the whole episode counts 176 and 175 verses in the editions of Dastgirdi and Babayev respectively.¹²

The briefness of the story of Gog in Nizāmī is all the more surprising, because as far as the Persian Alexander romances are concerned, it is Nizāmī who has fully developed the prophetic and philosophical dimension of Iskandar in the *Iqbāl Nāma*.¹³ The prophetic dimension of Iskandar is directly related to the identification of the Qur'anic Dhu'l-Qarnayn with Iskandar. *Qur'an* 18, 93-8 described how Dhu'l-Qarnayn builds a wall or

rampart (سد *sadd*) against Gog and Magog. Apparently Nizāmī saw no reason to dwell on the Dhu'l-Qarnayn connection.

He starts off by describing how Iskandar and his men are wandering to the north, suffering many hardships. They reach a town with pious people who regard Iskandar as a prophet. Iskandar helps them with a variety of matters, and when they see how apt he is, they venture to ask for his help in dealing with Gog and Magog:

به چاره گری برگشادند راز برین زبردستان فرمان پذیر یکی دشت بینی چو دریا فراخ چو ما آدمی زاده و دیو فام	چو دیدند شاهی چنان چاره ساز که شفقت کن ای داور دستگیر پس این گریوه در این سنگلاخ گروهی در آن دشت یاجوج نام
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(IN27,48-52)

*When they saw a king so skilful in providing remedies / They revealed their secret in order to find a cure, saying: /
 Have pity oh helping ruler with us submissive servants.
 Behind this mountain pass in this stony place / You see a plain wide like the sea.
 On that plain lives a group named Yā'jūj / Like us human-born, but looking like demons.*

The expression “human-born” (آدمی زاده), if taken literally, “born from Adam”, agrees with the description given in some Islamic sources of Gog and Magog, that they were children of Adam, but not of Eve, since they were born from Adam’s nocturnal emission of semen mixed with earth.¹⁴

After this introduction follows a further, brief description of their appearance:

چو گرگان بدگوهر آشفته رنگ ز بینی نشانی نه بر رویشان کسی را نه اندیشه از گرم و سرد به خون ریختن چنگ و دندان زده	چو شیران آهنل الماس چنگ رسیده ز سر تا قدم مویشان بدستی ببالا جهانی بخورد بچنگال و دندان همه چون دده
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*Like lions with a heart of iron and diamond claws / Like evil wolfs looking wretched.
 Their hair reaches from head to toe / There is no sign of a nose on their face.
 A span high, they eat like giants/ None of them bothers about heat or cold.
 With claws and tusks all are like wild animals/ their claws and tusks made to shed blood.¹⁵*

The description of their appearance ends here, and after having mentioned that Gog and Magog are *یزدشناس* *īzādshenās* “God-knowing”, Nizāmī continues with an account of their eating habits, mentioning like Firdawsī *tanīn*, the dragon falling from the sky in spring, giving Gog and Magog both lust and strength. He further describes how each of them has no less than a thousand children. (This well-known, and apparently rather appealing characteristic is found in every description of Gog and Magog.) Then, Nizāmī reports the fact that they eat the corpses of their dead kinsmen. This is their only virtue: by eating every corpse, they keep their country free of carcasses and pollution. Firdawsī does not report this fact, although it is mentioned in Arabic and Persian historical sources. However, it is not deemed a virtue in those sources, but rather a proof that they cannot be seen as a *ملت* *millat*, as a civilised people, but rather as animals, for they live in the same way as animals.¹⁶ Nizāmī’s description of the habits of Gog and Magog ends here. Upon hearing the complaint of the virtuous people, Iskandar builds a rampart made of steel:

بدانگونه سدی ز پولاد بست	که تا رستخیزش نباشد شکست
چو طالع نمود آن بلند اخترى	که شد ساخته سد اسکندرى
از آن مرحله سوى شهرى شتافت	

(IN27,81-83a)

*Thus he built a wall from steel / That would not break until
Resurrection Day.
When that high star had appeared / And the Wall of Iskandar was
built,
He hurried from that area to another town...*

All in all, the story of Gog and Magog does not exceed forty lines in Nizāmī’s version. In sharp contrast with the rather lengthy description by Firdawsī, Nizāmī leaves out the process of the building of the wall, on which no more than one verse is spent. On the whole, the information provided by Nizāmī is limited. Remarkably, in the description of their outward appearance, Nizāmī omits one of the most striking features of Gog and Magog: their huge ears. In many sources, Gog and Magog are referred to as “elephant-ears”. As seen in the Firdawsī description, their ears are so big that they use one as a mattress and the other as a blanket. The *Haft Iqlīm*, in line with Tabarī’s *Tafsīr*, even mentions three kinds of Gog and Magogians, one of which is the *گليمگوش* *gilīmgūsh*, the ‘carpet-ears’.¹⁷ The miniature painters of many *Shāh Nāma* manuscripts have gratefully used this feature.

Why Nizāmī treated Gog and Magog in such a succinct manner remains enigmatic. Could it be that, living in Ganja, in the midst of the Caucasus, he thought himself too close to the lands which were often identified as

the realm of Gog and Magog? Did he perhaps not like to dwell too extensively on a story so clearly connected to the identification of Iskandar with Dhu'l-Qarnayn, an identification that was not undisputed? Or did he deem the story too well-known? But then, why did he include the story at all? According to Bürgel, the last part of the *Iqbāl Nāma* seems to have been composed in a hurry, and is thus perhaps incomplete. Maybe Nizāmī had intended to complete it later, but forgot or did not find the time.¹⁸

The Story of Gog and Magog in Amīr Khusraw's *A'īna-yi Iskandarī*: a Comparative Note

Whatever scruples Nizāmī may have had on the subject of Gog and Magog, his immediate successor Amīr Khusraw did not share. His version of the story is markedly different from Nizāmī's version, and much longer than Firdawsī's report (b. 1623-1888).¹⁹ Amīr Khusraw dwells extensively on the appearance of Gog and Magog as well as on the building of the wall, and his story is very elaborate. The descriptions he presents of the appearance of Gog and Magog and the building of the wall are in some respects reminiscent of Firdawsī's. He starts by describing a people who have taken refuge in caves, because they despair of the 'Wild Yā'jūj' (b.1706). As did Nizāmī, Amīr Khusraw never mentions the Ma'jūj. The whole episode in the *A'īna-yi Iskandarī* takes up at least 180 verses, without counting the introduction where the 'Mountain of Yā'jūj' is already mentioned a few times. The building of the wall in Amīr Khusraw covers more than thirty verses (b. 1831-66). The description of Gog and Magog runs as follows:

که دیوانه گردد سپهر کهن
گروه برده در تک ز غولان دشت
چو ریگ بیابان و خاشاک کوه
به یکدم ز دریا بر آرند گرد
نه گل ماند اندر زمین نی گیاه
بگوش دراز از خران برده گوی
در آن چشم کوتاه و گوش دراز
نه زان دامنی کو بود عیب پوش
یکی گوش بالا و دیگر بزیز
حریر بر و حله تن همان
کشان ریش تا زیر زانوشان
مژه زرد و رو سرخ و دیده کبود
شکم پهن و پا خرد و ناخن دراز
ز فرزند و مادر ندارند شرم
بخواهر زنی کشته مادر عروس
نمیرد یکی تا نزاید هزار

(b. 1726-41)

از آن دیوخیان چه رانم سخن
گروهی به هر سو چو دیوان بگشت
فزون از شمردن گروهها گروه
مثل گر به دریا کنند آب خورد
بهر سو که در پیش گیرند راه
بکوتاه چشمی سگ جیفه جوی
نه شرمی و نی بینشی دلنواز
ته پا چو دامن فروشته گوش
بهنگام خفتن بخسپند سیر
قبائشان همانست و جوشن همان
شکن بر شکن چین ابرویشان
گلیمی ز موی گشن بر وجود
برون آمده نیششان چون گراز
برهنه به همدیگر آیند گرم
ز بی دانشی همچو خرس و خروس
بشهوت شب و روز باهم به کار

What to say about those with temperaments like demons? / The ancient spheres are driven mad by them.
A troop like demons went in every direction / Outstripping the ghouls of desert.
Countless troops and more/ Like the sand of the deserts and the leaves on the mountain slopes.
If they would drink the water of the sea / They would in no time reach the bottom of the sea.
Wherever the road takes them / No flower remains, nor plant.
Short-sighted like the dog looking for carrion / Long-eared, in length exceeding donkey's ears.
They have no shame and provide no pleasant sight / With their small eyes and long ears.
Their ears hang upon their feet like a dress / But not the kind of dress which covers the body in a proper way.
When they go to sleep / they put one ear on top and the other below.
The ears form their coats and their coats of mail / This is the silk and brocade upon their bodies.
Their brows are full of wrinkles / Their beards hang upon their knees.
They are covered with a carpet of abundant hair / With yellow eyelashes and red faces and blue eyes.
Their tusks come out like the tusks of boars / Their belly is wide and their feet are small and their nails are long.
Naked they huddle together to get warm / They have no shame in front of mother or child.
Out of ignorance, like bear and cock, / The mother would kill the bride for being a sister in law.
In lust they act day and night together / No one dies before giving birth to a thousand ones...

Whereas in Firdawsī and also in Amīr Khusraw, the outward appearance of Gog and Magog and the building of the wall by Iskandar receive an extensive description, this is not the case in Nizāmī's version of the story. He focuses on their eating habits and food, to which he has devoted thirteen verses. In comparison to Firdawsī and Amīr Khusraw, Nizāmī tells the story of Gog and Magog in a very cursory manner.

Text and Image, Gog and Magog

How do the descriptions of Gog and Magog and the building of the protective wall against them by Iskandar relate to the images of Gog and Magog in illustrated manuscripts?

For Firdawsī's *Shāh Nāma*, the visual and the textual fields of enquiry have been brought together through the efforts of the Cambridge and Edinburgh Shahnama Project. The Project's Pictorial Corpus Database²⁰ has proven very convenient in providing access to visual sources. The Shahnama Project Pictorial Corpus Database so far counts 368 illustrations from 735 manuscripts for the episode of Iskandar. These illustrations have been classified into 48 scenes. In the iconographical tradition of the *Shāh Nāma*, the first appearance of Iskandar is usually at the end of the reign of Dārā, whom he consoles and supports in his hour of death. The actual chapter on Iskandar follows immediately, and some of the adventures of Iskandar during his numerous travels have become favourite subjects for miniature painters.²¹ The story of Gog and Magog is one of those adventures, of which 25 illustrations so far have been included in the Shahnama Pictorial Corpus Database.

On the basis of the material collected in the Shahnama Pictorial Corpus Database,²² Gog and Magog are not always part of the illustration scheme, while one would expect such eminently suitable subjects to be used by the painters. Where they are represented, they have diverse forms in the iconographical tradition of the *Shāh Nāma*, and do not really correspond with the description given by Firdawsī. Sometimes they resemble demons, sometimes, primitive human beings. In Firdawsī, the description of the wall built by Iskandar is an important feature, and the wall is usually part of the painting, if not its central theme. Another recurrent theme is the illustration of the fires, the blacksmiths and the bellows. Close to Firdawsī's description is for example a painting from a *Shāh Nāma* manuscript kept in Berlin, dating from the seventeenth century, which contains an enchanting image of Gog and Magog.²³ On this almost full-page illustration, Gog and Magog have a boar's head, as described by Firdawsī. Their skin is not only black, as Firdawsī stated, but on this painting they figure in different colours. Their ears are incredibly large, almost like insects' wings. They look more menacing than many other Gog and Magog found in other illustrated *Shāh Nāma* manuscripts.

The illustrations to Amīr Khusraw's *Khamsa* have been analysed recently by Brend in *Perspectives on Persian Painting – Illustrations to Amir Khusraw's Khamsah*.²⁴ Brend divides the illustrations to Amīr Khusraw's story of Gog and Magog in three subjects:²⁵ Iskandar attacks the Yā'jūj (seven paintings), Iskandar studies the Yā'jūj prisoners (one painting) and Iskandar builds a wall against the Yā'jūj (four paintings).²⁶ She includes two reproductions of Gog and Magog illustrations. Brend discusses the relation between the depiction of Gog and Magog and their description by Amīr Khusraw for two manuscripts of the Topkapı Saray Library in particular, namely H801, a *Khamsa* manuscript dating from 902/1497 and H 798, a *Khamsa* manuscript dated 906/1500. In connection to

the Turkman-style illustrated manuscript H801 Brend draws attention to the faithful rendering of the Yā'jūj figures:

The latter [i.e. the Yā'jūj] suggest a careful reading of the text, being flap-eared, hairy, tusked and clawed, and having a vigorous muscularity which may connote their lechery, while demonstrating the painter's understanding of anatomy.²⁷

The depiction of Gog and Magog in H 798 (described in chapter 5 on Ottoman manuscripts under Bayezid II) is, according to Brend, rather problematic. They have long ears, as described in the text by Amīr Khusraw, but otherwise they

are of varying size, have long heads, fleshy noses, white fangs, and are represented in several tones of slate-grey. Though more demonic than humanoid, they are not very close to the standard type of Persian div (...).²⁸

Brend sees a resemblance with the traditional drawing of a Turk, deriving from Central Asia, and adopted by the Ottomans as the shadow-puppet figure Qaragöz. For two other *Khamsa* manuscripts, Or. 11327 (British Library, copied between 903/1498-090/1504) and Or.fol. 187 (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 1495), Brend merely mentions the wing-like ears of the Yā'jūj.

It is no easy task to find resources and information on the depiction of Gog and Magog in the *Khamsa* of Nizāmī. Many works have been devoted to *Khamsa* manuscripts and illustrations, not surprisingly, since, together with the *Shāh Nāma* of Firdawsī, it is one of the most frequently illustrated Persian literary works. However valuable, these studies are not the best tools to find information on the depiction of a specific scene and a pictorial database such as has been developed for the *Shāh Nāma* would be very welcome. The only resource of *Khamsa*-illustrations available thus far is a very useful survey of illustrated *Khamsa*-manuscripts by Larissa Dodkhudoeva, in which she has compiled an index of 3360 miniatures to Nizāmī's poems out of 245 manuscripts.²⁹ Dodkhudoeva has classified the illustrations into 338 different themes or scenes. According to Dodkhudoeva, the number of illustrations of the *Iskandar Nāma* is by no means disappointing. In the conclusion of her book, she remarks:

It was earlier assumed that the philosophical message of Nizami's poem the IskandarNama was an obstacle to creating a variety of miniatures to it. However, the Index testifies to the opposite. Among the Khamseh poems the IskandarNama is most widely illustrated. More than 100 themes of this two-part poem are registered in the

*Index, the most popular being stories with a philosophical message about the deeds of the legendary king.*³⁰

Dodkhudoeva provides the following list showing the distribution of illustrations in the *Khamsa*-manuscripts she has examined:³¹

- Makhzan al-Asrār – 23 themes
- Khusraw u Shīrīn – 75 themes
- Laylī u Majnūn – 48 themes
- Haft Paykar – 47 themes
- Iskandar Nāma – 127 themes: Sharaf Nāma – 88 themes, Iqbāl Nāma – 39 themes
- Decorative miniature – 18 themes.

According to her list, the most frequently illustrated themes of the *Iskandar Nāma* are the following:

Sharaf Nāma:

- Iskandar fighting the Zanjī's (no. 218 – 80 illustrations),
- Iskandar with the dying Dārā (no. 230 – 86 illustrations),
- Queen Nūshāba shows Iskandar his portrait (no. 248 – 45 illustrations),
- Iskandar receives the Khāqān of China (no. 274 – 42 illustrations),
- Battle with the Russians (no. 285 – 42 illustrations)

Iqbāl Nāma:

- Iskandar's conversation with seven wise men (no. 313 – 50 illustrations),
- Iskandar and the sirens (no. 327 – 30 illustrations)

Of the Gog and Magog passage, Dodkhudoeva has listed nine illustrations. Eight of these show the actual building of the wall (scene no. 331) and one illustration shows how the people ask for Iskandar's help against Gog and Magog (scene no. 330). This is the list of these nine illustrations and three additional illustrations of Gog and Magog in Nizāmī manuscripts:

1. *Khamsa*, Shiraz, 945/1538. Topkapi Saray, H 765, folio 389v: three of the people harassed by Gog and Magog address themselves to Iskandar.³²
2. *Iskandar Nāma*, Shiraz, around 1400. British Library, Or. 13529, folio 32.³³ This illustration of Gog and Magog features in a pocket-size manuscript of the *Sharaf Nāma*. Gog and Magog are referred to in the meeting between Iskandar and the Khāqān of Chīn, when Iskandar is cursing the Khāqān for having broken their agreement. The painting accompanying this scene is described as "Iskandar and the people of Gog and Magog", but only small figures are visible, some of whom might

represent Gog and Magog, perhaps the ones to the left, above the diagonal writing on the upper part of the page.

3. Anthology, no title, with the *Khamṣa* of Nizāmī and other works, 838-40/1435-36, Chester Beatty Library, Per. 124, folio 294v.³⁴ Described as 'Iskandar, on horseback, inspecting the building of the barrier against Gog and Magog. One of his archers is shooting at the demons that are appearing behind the wall.'
4. *Khamṣa*, 850/1446-7. Topkapi Saray, H. 786, folio 309v.³⁵ Iskandar is seated on a horse in a mountainous landscape, where a wall is being constructed: a fire is ablaze. From behind the high mountain pass, the people of Gog and Magog are watching. Only their heads are visible, they have no specific characteristics.
5. *Khamṣa*, 854/1450, Shiraz, Metropolitan Museum, New York, 13.228.3, folio 384a, the last of 31 miniatures in this manuscript, described as: 'Alexander's return from the East to the North and his shutting out Gog and Magog by a wall'.³⁶
6. *Khamṣa*, Shiraz, ca. 1450, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Suppl. Pers. 1112, folio 320. It is described as: 'Construction du mur de Gog et Magog. Iskender à cheval regarde les travaux; singes dans les rochers; arbres'.³⁷
7. *Khamṣa*, Shiraz, around 1505, India Office Library, London, Ms. 387, folio 442b³⁸, described as: 'Iskandar and his followers survey the peoples of Gog and Magog from the battlements of the iron wall he has built. The treatment is unusual in that the artist has placed himself on the 'wrong' side of the wall and we see Iskandar from the point of view of the tribesmen of Gog and Magog. A few of the latter hide among a mass of rock on the left, represented as naked savages. Water, with fish, at the base of the wall.'
8. *Khamṣa*, 936/1529, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Per. 196, folio 313v.³⁹ 'Sikandar with his army in a rocky district. Sikandar, after capturing a fortress, sets up a barrier in a mountain pass to protect the people from invasion. An unusual miniature, both for its subject and its treatment. The small figures of young men and girls, nude above the waist, in the background, presumably represent the people of the country, whom Sikandar is aiding.' (p. 60) This painting holds an odd position in the manuscript, coming immediately after the death of Dārā.⁴⁰
9. *Khamṣa*, 968/1561, Shiraz, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Suppl. Pers. 1955, double-page painting⁴¹. On the left half of this double-page, painting craftsmen are busy building the wall with square bricks. Iskandar, on his horse, under a parasol, watches them. One verse ('When that high star had appeared, and the Wall of Iskandar was built', verse 80 ed. Babayev) is singled out to occupy a space in the painting itself, covering a few figures and the feet of Iskandar's horse. Gog and Magog feature on the left of the painting, besides the text

block and behind the unfinished wall. They are depicted as seven small figures, some darker than others, sitting or standing in a mountainous landscape with a tree nearby. They do not seem to heed the building of the wall. The figures themselves have no specific characteristics, except for their nakedness.

- 10 *Khamasa*, 848-849/1444-1445, Shiraz / Timurid style, John Rylands Library, Manchester, Ryl Pers 36 (ex Bland), fol. 305b.⁴² Three Gog and Magog figures can be seen on the right side of the painting, one of whom seems to be grabbing the ruler by the hands. They have long ears, reaching to their waist, and boars' tusks. The painting is entitled 'Iskandar and the people of Gog and Magog', and described as follows: 'He is interviewing them by a building behind a line of rocks. In the foreground is the sea, with three curious monsters. They are observed by a party of Iskandar's mounted followers, also behind the rocks.'⁴³
- 11 *Khamasa*, 1439, University Library Uppsala, O. Vet. 82, fol. 388r.⁴⁴ Three men are kneeling down in front of Iskandar on his horse. On the right, a large tree is depicted, on the left, a high brick wall and in the middle, three high mountains. Four figures peer above the wall, watching the scene below. They are presumably Gog and Magog, but they have no specific characteristics to mark them as such. Unlike Iskandar and the three men kneeling, they have no beards or turbans. The description of Ādahl is as follows: 'On his travels to the north Iskandar reaches the country of the Ya'juj who are being constantly harassed by the savage Ma'juj. Iskandar advises the people of Ya'juj to build a high wall to protect themselves. On horseback on the right in the picture Iskandar is bidding farewell to the leader Ya'juj, who are kneeling before him. Behind this central group there are three steep hilltops and, on the left, a brick wall. Above the pinnacles of the wall four savage-looking men can be seen. There is a blue sky with white bars of clouds. The picture extends into the right-hand margin where a tall tree is growing on the bank of a little stream.' Ādahl's description is misleading as far as Nizāmī's text is concerned: she calls the people asking for help Yā'jūj, who are being harassed by the savage Ma'jūj, whilst Gog and Magog in Nizāmī only figure as Yā'jūj – no mention is made of Ma'jūj, and certainly the term Yā'jūj is not used for the victimised people.
- 12 *Khamasa*, Shiraz, around 1560, Topkapi Saray, A. 3559/K. 432, fol. 446v,⁴⁵ 'La Construction d'un mur contre Gog et Magog. Large bordure enluminée sur trois côtés. L'image a été ajoutée plus tard au manuscrit, et n'occupe pas la place qu'elle devrait prendre dans le texte.' The painting appears after the death of Iskandar.

On the basis of these paintings, nothing definitive can be said about the appearance of Gog and Magog in Nizāmī. In fact, they very often look

human-like, thus according with Nizāmī's description. One exception is the painting from the *Khamsa* in the John Rylands Library (Ryl Pers 36, listed under no. 10), where Gog and Magog have the proverbial elephant-ears and boars' tusks. The wall is quite central in most of the paintings. Although the brevity of the story in Nizāmī would perhaps suggest that there would not be enough material for the illustrators to draw on, this is not supported by evidence from illustrated manuscripts, such as available. There appear to be no marked differences with the wall found in *Shāh Nāma* illustrations, even though there the figures of Gog and Magog sport more often (but by no means always!) the typical characteristics attributed to them by Firdawsī. This is also true for illustrations in Amīr Khusrāw manuscripts. The question remains whether it is a coincidence that in the available illustrations to Nizāmī's Gog and Magog story, they usually lack the long ears and savage tusks, or is it proof that the illustrator conformed to Nizāmī's terse text? The various depictions of Gog and Magog in *Shāh Nāma* manuscripts through the centuries indicate that the painters do not need to rely on the description provided by the poet in case of this well-known story. Gog and Magog and the wall built by Iskandar were familiar subjects, known from the *Qur'an* and the *hadīth*, also described and painted in illustrated versions of works as the *Qisas al-Anbiya'* and the *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*. Also in popular Alexander romances, such as the prose *Iskandar Nāma* dating between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, Iskandar is fighting Gog and Magog, sometimes designated as "the Elephant-ears."⁴⁶

Thus, the central theme in the Gog and Magog iconographical tradition is the wall in combination with Iskandar on horseback, rather than Gog and Magog themselves. This is not at all surprising: after all, the wall forms the physical and symbolical boundary between an organised, Muslim civilisation and what lies beyond. What is beyond should be kept out of view until the End of Times. The wall is the key symbol of the story and spotting the wall means immediate recognition of the scene. The story of Iskandar, Gog and Magog is easily and immediately identified through this specific feature, while monstrous figures, such as Gog and Magog, although undoubtedly suitable objects for painting, may be met with in a wide range of other stories. That Nizāmī is not focusing on this wall is perhaps of small consequence, bearing in mind Clinton's remark in his article 'Firdawsī and the Illustration of the ShāhNāma': "Poet and painter use very different means to identify the leading characters of the narrative."⁴⁷ Even though Nizāmī only mentions it, this wall remains the identifying mark of the visual representation of the story of Gog and Magog.

Notes

- 1 Al-Qur'an (2001) 18:90-99 and 21:96.
- 2 Cobham Brewer (1988). My thanks to S. and B. Martin for this reference.
- 3 van Donzel (2002).
- 4 Firdawsi-Khaleghi-Motlagh (1384), 'Iskandar', 96-102, verses 1421-92.
- 5 Hanaway (1998).
- 6 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) vol. 2, 912-1536; Nizami-Babayev (1947). It is not certain that Nizāmī used the names *Iqbāl Nāma* vs. *Sharaf Nāma*, see de Blois (1998).
- 7 Amir Khusraw-Mirsaidov (1977).
- 8 Jami-Gilani (1366), *Khīrad Nāma-yi Iskandarī*, 911-1012.
- 9 All *Shāh Nāma* citations are taken from the edition Firdawsi-Khaleghi-Motlagh (1384).
- 10 Steingass (1892): a *shahrash* (p. 727) or a *rash* (p. 577) is equivalent to a fathom, i.e. 1,82 metres.
- 11 The historical sources have been discussed by van Donzel and Ott: van Donzel (2002) and by Hanaway (1998).
- 12 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) IN27,1-176; Nizami-Babayev (1947) 175-186.
- 13 Bürgel (1995).
- 14 van Donzel (2002) p. 231b.
- 15 Nizami-Babayev (1947) b. 51-54. The somewhat enigmatic verse 53 (*bedasti...*) has been left out in Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372) IN27,52-53, with several minor differences.
- 16 See for example Amin Razi (1961) 516; on other Persian sources, notably Muhammad ibn Mahmud Hamadani's *Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, see Seyed-Gohrab (2007).
- 17 van Donzel (2002) 231b.
- 18 Bürgel, personal communication.
- 19 All citations are taken from Amir-Khusraw-Mirsaidov (1977).
- 20 Available online under <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk>.
- 21 For a discussion on the number of Iskandar illustrations in the *Shāh Nāma* manuscript tradition, Hillenbrand (1996), specifically on Gog and Magog illustrations: 209.
- 22 See <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/browseArchive.php?Pt=sc&Ch=-1432396385&SS=-1181211365&N=16&P=1248&>.
- 23 Ms. Or.fol.172, folio 456v; see Shahnama Pictorial Corpus under <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/browseArchive.php?Pt=il&IS=689981116&>.
- 24 Brend (2003).
- 25 Indicated as AI 13, AI 14 and AI 15.
- 26 Brend (2003) 273.
- 27 Brend (2003) 121.
- 28 Brend (2003) 155.
- 29 Dodkhudoeva (1985).
- 30 Dodkhudoeva (1985) 306.
- 31 Dodkhudoeva (1985) 306-7.
- 32 Reproduced in Stchoukine (1977) LXVIIa, description on 122-3. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 285, 330-1.
- 33 Described in Titley (1977) 136; reproduced on 101 (fig. 21, fol. 71) in Robinson (1957). Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-2.
- 34 Described in Arberry (1959) 51. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985), 286, 331-2.
- 35 Described in Stchoukine (1977) 51. Reproduced in Stchoukine (1967), 401-8. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-3.
- 36 Manuscript described in Williams Jackson (1965) 49-53; description of miniature on 53. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-4.
- 37 Blochet (1899), 46. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-5.

- 38 Reproduced in Robinson (1976) 41, description, 40. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-6.
- 39 Described in Arberry (1959), 59-60. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-7.
- 40 According to Bürgel, this miniature does not depict the Gog and Magog story, but the conquest of the robber's castle at Darband from the *Sharaf Nāma* (ed. Dastgirdi, 214 f.) (personal communication).
- 41 Reproduced in Vejmar (1974) illustrations 167-168. Listed in Dodkhudoeva (1985) 286, 331-8.
- 42 Described in Robinson (1980) 70-88. Reproduction on p. 87 (no. 423). Dodkhudoeva (1985) has not listed this painting.
- 43 Robinson (1980) 88.
- 44 Described by Ådahl (1981) 37. Dodkhudoeva (1985) has not listed this painting.
- 45 Described by Stchoukine (1977) 130-1, no. 73. Dodkhudoeva (1985) has not listed this painting.
- 46 *Iskandar Nāma*-Afshar (1964) 507; 535; *Iskandar Nāma*-Southgate (1978) 116; 150-3.
- 47 Clinton (2001) 69.

