

Is my firewall secure? Gog and Magog on the Internet

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Perhaps it is repeating old news to say that, with a computer, a person can fulfil his very old dream of somehow obtaining the Magic Ball, Carpet and Ring in one! However it is true: the computer and the internet help to make some cherished wishes, and especially the wish to communicate with others at any time or place, achievable. This was my feeling when I began surfing Hebrew and Arabic internet sites, concentrating on the Middle East where the location is identifiable, to find Gog and Magog.¹ I found them among questions such as:

- do angels enter our homes?
- from what age is it forbidden to let children play outside at night?
- what kind of watermelon was the favourite of the Prophet Mohammad?
- is eating chocolate bad for teenagers?

These are questions that evidently concern people in their everyday lives. But during war times there are different questions:

- is it permissible for an orthodox Jew to take shelter in a church?
- is it permissible for a Jew to pray for the safety of a Druze soldier in the Israeli army?

Modern technologies have produced their own questions:

- may an orthodox Jew use a computer?
- do we have to pray when thunder and lightning is shown on the computer?
- are computers, made by IBM, a sign that the Messiah is coming soon? (In Hebrew IBM is MBI, an acronym for Messiah son of Yusuf).²

Amidst all of this voluble religious discussion, we find questions dealing with Paradise and Hell: when will the Day of Judgment come, who will fight the war preceding that day, and who will win it? And within that imminent eschatological context: who are Gog and Magog? Where is the wall that holds them back?

1 Hebrew and Arabic searches were used to narrow the initial search (since a search on 'magog' in Latin script produces an impracticable number of hits), but where sites have parallel English versions these are cited here.

2 <http://news.haaretz.co.il> on 19.12.2005 and 22.07.2006.

ISLAMIC SITES: SIGNS OF THE END

The first striking feature of the Islamic sites is the citation of the many Quranic verses and traditions, describing the *yawm al-qiyaamah*,³ the day of resurrection and the signs of its coming. With some exceptions, there is a strong attempt to justify what is said by reference to the canons of orthodoxy. Although this produces a substantial body of generally accepted 'signs' of the imminence of the Day, and although there is a general agreement that only God knows the hour, there is room enough for disagreement, regarding the number of the signs and the order in which they will occur, and the interpretation of each sign.

'Nana' (writing on a Sunni site) knows that there are 27 signs, eight of which I will share: (1) the siege (*muhaasarah*) of Iraq (2) the collapse of the USA, (12) an Islamic Caliphate in Jerusalem, (14) the coming of al-Mahdi, (19) his opponent, ad-Dajjal, and (20) Jesus, the irruption of (24) Gog and Magog, and finally (25) peace on earth.⁴

'Ajrodi,' (writing on an Egyptian Sunni site),⁵ has been digging in old books. He has found that there are 31 signs, classified as minor and major signs.⁶ The minor signs in turn are in three groups: the eight that have already occurred, such as the revelation of Muḥammad and the capture of Constantinople; the nine that are occurring now, such as the spread of corruption; and the three signs that are still to occur, such as the appearance of al-Mahdi. The major signs are 11 in number, and one of them is the irruption of Gog and Magog, which will be discussed below.

On a mainstream Shiah site, Ayatullah as-Sayyid Mohammad al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥusayni at-Tahiri says that there are ten signs, one of which is the coming of Gog and Magog, the last being the appearance of Jesus.⁷ This is in line with the formal Sunni sources regarding the eschatological signs. The unusual features of a site dedicated to the Iraqi Shiah leader, Ayatollah Sistani, will be discussed in the following section.

Sites dedicated to the thought of the popular but highly unorthodox Sunni Rashad Khalifa, who rejected the hadith and developed his own numerical analysis 'proving' the divine origin of the text of the Qur'an (excepting 9:128-129), take a different tack. Rashad Khalifa claims to be

3 I have adopted the internet convention of representing long vowels with double letters rather than with diacritics.

4 <http://www.montada.com>. This list contains 25, not 27 signs.

5 <http://www.elosboa.com>

6 See Remke Kruk's contribution in this volume for the origin of this classification.

7 <http://www.maarefislam.org>

a divine messenger,⁸ and thus exempted from the general ban on revealing future events (see below).

The Internet is said to be one of minor signs of the Judgment Day because there is a tradition that “the hour will not come, until there is disorder and lies multiply and markets and times are close to one another.”⁹ As in the question about the permissibility of computers for orthodox Jews, the negative evaluation of the internet in general does not prevent the author expecting answers from those who use it.

ISLAMIC SITES: GOG AND MAGOG

Although a search for pages on this subject in Arabic produces some 50,000 ‘hits,’ the majority have much the same content, while differing in form. We have not searched Farsi, Turkish or Urdu sites, and the Shiah are certainly under-represented in our sample. The articles we found focus on the role of Gog and Magog in the Last Day and on the location of the wall which shuts them off from the rest of the world.

The Lahore Ahmadiyya think that Gog and Magog are equivalent to ad-Dajjal (interpreted as ‘a group of liars’).¹⁰ By collapsing these two signs, they broaden their possible applications. Gog and Magog are “a faithful picture of the irresistible inroads of materialistic Europe and the Christianity,” acting “at the bidding of the Jews,” drawn in prophetic language. But they are also historical fact represented in prophetic language: the figure of Dhu’l-Qarneyn in Surah 18 is understood as Darius I of Persia (rather than Alexander the Great), and this enables the place between two mountains to be identified as Armenia and Azerbaijan. The wall is at Derbent (or Darband) on the Caspian sea, and the two dangerous hordes are the Slavs and Teutons – Russian and Europe – as in the eschatological interpretation of the story.

A site inaugurated by Ayatollah Sistani and hosted by the *markaz al-mustafa* (Centre of the Chosen One), hosts a large library of Shiah texts. One of these¹¹ cites postmillennial traditions in which the Mahdi, or twelve mahdis, come first and inaugurate a long period of justice, followed by disorder. According to one of these, there will be twelve just

8 <http://www.submission.org/AP02.htm>

9 www.dar-alqassem.com

10 <http://www.aaail.org/text/books/mali/gog/sgmnt1.shtml>;

<http://www.aaail.org/text/books/mali/gog/sgmnt4.shtml>.

Al-Mu’tazela (the Mutazalites) also equate Gog and Magog with ad-Dajjal. See

<http://www.geocities.com/mutazela/abhath/qawm.html>

11 <http://www.aqaed.com/1.html>, ‘ayaat al-ghadeer limarkaz al-mustafaa lildaraasaat el-islamiiyyah, see especially page 61.

Caliphs in the whole history of Islam leading up to the resurrection, two of them from the house of the Prophet,¹² one of whom lives for forty years and the other thirty years. Only after that can the time of disorder arrive, the hour of resurrection and the coming of Gog and Magog. The interesting points about this account are that the imamate and caliphate are clearly distinguished (in line with Ayatollah Sistani's understanding of the distinction between religious and political authorities), and that the end times are set in some indefinite far future.

As we move from the more formal web publications to Arabic web discussions, the focus of interest moves from gathering and interpreting specific religious texts to searching for contemporary applications of the figures of Gog and Magog. At least in the Sunni discussions, the identification is based on the writers' political preferences, with little reference to what could be inferred from Quranic and Old Testament material. The most popular candidates are USA and Israel, with Europe, Russia and China also being mentioned.

There are some critical voices, focusing on the impossibility of literal interpretations of the signs rather than on the xenophobia shown in interpretations of the signs. The Association of Non-Religious Arabs sum up points from Islamic sources about Gog and Magog, asking logical questions which they hope will make the more literal-minded believers think:

If the number of Gog and Magog is 10 times the number of the Moslems in the world, then they are around ten billion! Where are they hiding? Where can they obtain their food? If they are behind an iron-copper wall, how is it that satellites cannot discover them? And if their arrows can reach heaven, returning with blood, whose blood is this?¹³

Others have solved these problems: Gog and Magog will be huge clone armies, because the Quran uses *yansiloon* in Surah 21:96 (swiftly swarming), whereas if they were naturally born the word *yatanaasaloon* (propagate) would have been used.¹⁴ We can see that the speculation here is entirely future-oriented, without any thought of the meaning of the Quran itself, which asserts that Gog and Magog lived in pre-Islamic,

¹² Thus these are not the twelve Shiaah Imams, who must naturally be from the House of the Prophet.

¹³ <http://www.ladeeni.net>, my translation from the Arabic.

¹⁴ <http://members.lycos.co.uk/alhs79/xmb/>

and pre-clone, times. There is also a strong defensive desire to find whatever is new and western prefigured in the Quran.

Hamid al-Awlaqiyy has used folk etymologies, saying that Gog (*jo-jo*) refers to the Turks (*to-ko*) and they live in mountains, while Magog refers to the Mongols, who live on the plains.¹⁵ This is in line with the interpretation of the Quran verse in traditional *tafsir* literature, but seeking a proof based not on the authority of the past but on a form of reason. The technique is called *tawfeeq* or ‘matching’ interpretation and is used by many of the writers studied. The identification with these past invasions of Islamic lands leaves this author with no eschatological role for Gog and Magog: the events occurred a thousand years ago, and the majority of the Muslims are simply mistaken to place them in the future.

An Egyptian scientist called Layla Abd al-Mon'im claims that she has discovered the equation of the reinforced concrete which Alexander the Great used in building the wall!¹⁶

It is funny for us in the Netherlands to read that Manazir Ahsan al-Kilani (died 1956), a scholar from India who was critical of the eschatological scenarios which he says were adopted by Muslims from Jewish and Christian sources, was nevertheless concerned that Gog and Magog might in fact exist. Gog and Magog were said to be very short, and he had heard that Prince Nawwab Zahir Yarjenk had visited a village in Holand [*sic*], where he saw that all the inhabitants were dwarves!¹⁷

Numerical cookery is a common feature. The first example is from a Sunni Egyptian site.¹⁸ This takes as a starting point that Gog and Magog exist behind a wall built by Alexander the Great, which still stands, and that they are trying to break through. Untroubled by the question of where the wall and the people are, it asks “when”? The relevant texts are in Quran verses 18:99 and 21:96 and $18+99=21+96=117$, making the two verses equivalent. 18:98 foretells the collapse of the wall “to dust,” and is followed by 18:99, which contains the time indication *yawma-idhin* “that day” which is the 1,547th word in the Surah, contains 5

15 <http://www.alsaha.com/sahat/Forum2/html/006054.html> on 5/11/2005; in November 2006 this site was open to members only.

16 <http://www.yahoooh.com> (*sic*) 19.05.2004. In the early development of the internet in Egypt there was some comment that the name Yahoo resembled Ya huwa, words that a Sufi might use in calling on God. The name of this provider (hosting pious material) is presumably a reference to this discussion. The content has since been moved to <http://hwarat.osrty.com/showthread.php?s=&threadid75777> 20.11.2006.

17 <http://darululoom-deoband.com>

18 <http://www.alargam.com/numbers/future/11.htm>; the author's book is available at <http://www.geocities.com/mando2u2003>

letters, and is in the 99th verse. Since $1547 - (99 - 5) = 1453$, the collapse of the wall is dated at 1453 AH. If we turn to verse 21:99, the time indication is *idha* “when,” which is 1097th word in the Surah, and appears in the 17th juz’ (reading section) of the Quran, in the 21st Surah. Since $1087 + (17 \times 21) = 1454$, the date 1454 AH is indicated. Thus Gog and Magog can be expected in 1453/1454 AH = 2031/2032 AD.

Rashad Khalifa, as the Messenger of the Covenant, is authorized to say that “Gog and Magog, the final sign before the end of the world, will reappear in 2270 AD (1700 AH), just 10 years before the end. Note that Gog and Magog occur in Suras 18 and 21, precisely 17 verses before the end of each sura, representing 17 lunar centuries.”¹⁹ In addition to the combination of inspired authority and arithmetic substantiation, this is interesting because it supposes that Gog and Magog are not now present (ruling out identifications with America, where he lived) and because it is far distant. Khalifa’s interpretation disarms imminent eschatologies, in favour of a world that will continue its mundane course for almost three centuries: a reassuring thought for traditionalists. An unbeliever might wonder why the arithmetic does not show that Gog and Magog will appear 17 centuries before the end of history, but that would miss the point. It is the inspiration and not the arithmetic which is decisive.

JEWISH SITES: GOG AND MAGOG

It is another sign of the times that Gog and Magog now have their own web sites: Gog.web-site in Hebrew, and the English version of the same site, magog.web-site.²⁰ Both are devoted to the proposition that the end times are here, and that the Gog-magog war foretold in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 is to be the last war, followed by a time of peace. These two sites are circumspect about identifying Gog and Magog. The text in Ezekiel 38:2-3 refers to “Gog of the Magog land, president-head (=Rosh) of Meshech and Tuval...” which is unclear. Is Gog a personal name, or a title like ‘King’? The location of the land of Magog is also uncertain: authorities are cited for Germany and Central Europe, but the 10th century Rav Saadya Gaon identifies Magog with Iran, Iraq, and Asia Minor. The site also reports a contemporary interpretation: Gog was pronounced as Gogh by the Babylonian Jews, which sounds in English like Gorr, but in the Quran (not named as such) it is Joj, and if we

¹⁹ <http://www.submission.org/quran/magog.html>

²⁰ <http://gog.web-site.co.il>; <http://magog.web-site.co.il>; accessed 21.11.2006. The number of sites in Hebrew referring to Gog and Magog is only a tiny fraction of the number in Arabic.

combine these we get George [Bush]. On another site, Yacov M. Tabak notes that the Yemenite pronunciation of Gog is GeOGe, with soft 'g's, and that George is pronounced in Texas as Geo'ge, which makes the identification easy.²¹ To return to Gog and Magog's own site, Magog is in any case allied with the land of Put (Ezekiel 38:5-6) which the Midrash Raba says is the 'treaty land,' *Aretz ha-brith*, while the United States in Hebrew is *Aretzot ha-brith*.

Rav Amnon Yitzchak Shlita expects an American withdrawal from Iraq, a power vacuum and the "end script of Gog uMagog" in which all nations, America included, will fight Israel.²²

Yeranan Yaakov knows that "the War of Gog Umagog ... will be between Christianity and Islam, with the Christians winning. The Christians, becoming overconfident, then attack Israel. President Bush is Gog (for no apparent reason), and the first part of the war will be against Afghanistan, followed by Iraq, and then Iran and/or Syria. The Messiah will come following the defeat of Iran by Christians."²³

It is striking in the last two sites mentioned, that 'Gog and Magog' has become a catch-all title for all apocalyptic events, whose general scenario is taken as well-known. The scriptural sources for the figures of Gog and Magog are almost lost from sight under a welter of contemporary applications. This is not typical of Jewish sites, where the identification of Gog and Magog, from scripture, Torah, Talmud and Midrash, is often the foundation for eschatological scenarios.

Where some sites had taken source references to Scythians and Germania as Eastern Europeans and Germans, the Hashem site²⁴ links the Scythians to Iranian nomads, Germania to the Iranian province of Kerman, along with the province of Hormuz to its South, and Kandia or Gytia is linked to present-day Baluchistan, straddling the Iranian, Pakistani and Afghani borders. The ancient port city of Gogana was near the present site of the Bushihr nuclear reactor (which is in fact hundreds of kilometers from Hormuz, but this does not prevent the author finding Bushihr relevant). In addition to Ezekiel, and the Midrash and Talmud sources used by other Jewish sites, this site draws on a 19th century Jewish author who traces the locations of Noah's descendents. If the area of Magog embraces Afghanistan, he concludes that the present war in

21 <http://www.chayas.com/Yerush.htm>

22 <http://dreamingofmoshiach.blogspot.com/2006/11/end-script-of-gog-umagog.html>

23 Translated at <http://www.jewishblogging.com/blog.php?bid69063>

24 <http://hashem1.net/?p=361>, the author bases his contemporary application on the source research in the Gog and Magog sites already mentioned, and provides links.

Afghanistan must be part of the Gog and Magog war, which is to last for seven years.

On the Sunni alargam site²⁵ the Saudi Khaalid ‘Abd al-Waahid has a commentary on eschatological Islamic and Christian texts, which he relates to the destruction of the United States and Israel. The Revelation of John, chapter 20, from verse 7 reads (with the author’s explanatory insertions):

And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison, and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for fighting; and their number is as the sand of the sea. They went up over the plains of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints (Jesus and the Muslims who are with him), and the beloved city (Jerusalem). But fire falls from heaven, and devours them. Iblis who deceived them will be thrown into a lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast (America) and the dajjal (Israel) are also. They will be tormented day and night, forever and ever.

He explains that Satan or Dajjal (*sic*) originally came before Jesus. Gog and Magog surround Jesus and the saints in Jerusalem, where they have fled, but ‘by the command of God’ they will be destroyed and their bodies disposed of.²⁶

Other sources on the same Hashem site²⁷ say that the war began with the attack on the twin towers of the World trade center (while paradoxically saying that President Bush is Gog) and continues in Iraq.²⁸ The coming ‘Christian’ war against Iran and/or Syria will be the third stage. The idea that the Gog-Magog war will have three phases is not uncommon. Some sites identify World War II as the beginning and the 1967 war the second, or the two world wars as the first and second phases.²⁹ But Rabbi Ishmael’s commentary on Isaiah 21:15 is cited as pointing to three “wars of panic” (i.e., terrorism) conducted by the Ishmaelites (Arabs and Islam) in the later days,”³⁰ which would exclude World War II from the scenario.

25 <http://www.alargam.com/numbers/end/48.htm>

26 A similar explanation by Rabbi Ben Zion Motzafi can be found at <http://hashem1.net>

27 Translated at <http://yeranenyakov.blogspot.com/2006/06/end-of-days-where-are-we-part-1-of-3.html>

28 The towers are identified with the towers that fall in the ‘day of the great slaughter’ in Isaiah 30:25. See for example <http://hashem1.net/?p=185>

29 <http://tinyurl.com/y9atad>; <http://gog-site.co.il>. 22.12.2005

30 http://magog.web-site.co.il/gog/e_war.shtml

Many sites also divide the war, or the third stage of the war, into two parts: a war of Christians against Muslims and/or Iran, in which Israel takes no part, and a subsequent war of Christians, or a coalition of survivors, against Israel. Rabbi Ben Zion Motzafi says that the war of Gog and Magog will be a war of 70 nations, Christians fighting Moslems, and that it has already started in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. The Moslems will be defeated, and the Christians will then come to Jerusalem (everything according to God's plan), where God will teach them a lesson by fighting with the Jews against them.³¹

The relation between the Gog and Magog war and the coming of the Messiah is much discussed. The orthodox Haemet site cites differing authorities, one that places the war before the arrival of the Messiah, since the Messiah either wins the war or is killed in it,³² another placing the coming of the Messiah first, and the resolution, that the war comes before the Messiah and continues after him.³³

Several sites refer to the interpretation of the 18th century Rabbi Hirsch, who "interprets the prophet's vision not as a military battle but as an ideological war between the philosophy of 'gog' – which means roof in Hebrew – and the philosophy of *sukkah* (a booth or tent-like temporary dwelling): those convinced that their fate lies in the power of their own hands and their own resources will attack the values of those who recognize the limits of human endeavor to influence the world."³⁴

One site, citing Maimonides, claims that the biblical 'peoples' no longer exist as ethnic identities, and should be understood rather as 'types' of particular attitudes towards Israel. The purpose is not to banish xenophobia, but to bring it closer to home: "If the Ishmaelites [Arabs, Palestinians] are not yet Magog, they may well be on the way to being so."³⁵

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The computer and the internet have opened up a new world, and it is not open only to the sensible, the civilized and the humane. Those whose

31 (<http://hashem1.net> 31.08.2006).

32 http://www.aish.com/literacy/concepts/The_Pre-Messianic_Era.asp;
<http://tinyurl.com/y8culw>

33 <http://www.haemet.net/amtut/End/A2.htm>

34 <http://tinyurl.com/vj6a6>, 26.11.2006. A writer at the less traditional e-mago site says that the battle is spiritual not physical

<http://www.e-mago.co.il/Editor/article.php?index=133>
 35 <http://tinyurl.com/y9atad>, 26.11.2006

message is hatred of the other and fear of the future also find themselves able to communicate with everyone, everywhere. The clans of chaos are a firewall away.

In the Islamic sites, we can distinguish between writers who are primarily interested in locating or rationalizing the Quranic story set in the far past, and those who are interested in eschatology. Very few sites correlate the historical with the eschatological pictures of Gog and Magog in the Quran, but they do correlate the eschatological picture with everything else. It is primarily the Sunni, and primarily the discussion logs rather than web publications, whose focus is strongly eschatological and political.

As compared to the pamphlet literature which is available on book stalls in the Middle East, heterodox and politically suppressed groups have a greater presence on the internet.

Jewish and Shiah sites, and the more formal publications, deal in more detail with the various source materials, and are more likely to make broad use of sources without insisting on one conclusion. A few writers on Muslim sites reject the eschatological elaborations of the role of Gog and Magog, in traditions, as Christian and Jewish corruptions (*israliyyah*).

The Arabic sites tend to a simpler eschatological scenario, in which there is a battle between Jews and Muslims, in Jerusalem or Megiddo, but in any case in Israel, and in the near future. This does not necessarily usher in the end times. Bassam Jarrar, another of the arithmetic interpreters whose works are also distributed as books and audio cassettes and appear to be influential,³⁶ expects the decline of Israel and the establishment of a caliphate based in Jerusalem in the year 2022 AD. He specifically says that this does not indicate that the Day of Judgement will follow soon after. Gog and Magog appear on the sidelines of his scenario, which we could class as future-oriented but not eschatological.

Some Jewish sites have a simple scenario, a coalition of all nations, or seventy nations, who attack Israel and are miraculously defeated. The majority, however, have more complex scenarios which may extend back over the 20th century, and may involve one enemy (often America) destroying another.

³⁶ Bassam Jarrar, *The Decline of Israel 2022AD, A prophecy or numerical coincidence*, Lebanon 1996, available as e-text (2006) from <http://www.islamnoon.com>. Regarding the audio tapes, see http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng_n/incitement_e1205.htm

The Jewish sites can be divided into those that identify the Gog-Magog war with Israel's near neighbors and those that cast the net wider, including World War II in some cases, America and Iran in others. One suspects that there are deeper issues behind the inclusion or exclusion of the holocaust from the portion of history that is rendered meaningful by the Gog-Magog scenario.

A common feature of contemporary Hebrew sites, missing in the Arabic sites, is that the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 is taken as the starting shot in the war of Gog and Magog, which is to last seven years.

While there is some effort to justify speculations about eschatological themes on Jewish and Islamic scriptural grounds, there is a free embroidery upon these themes. Few writers seem to have used the scriptural sources directly: rather they cut and paste from other internet sources, producing small inconsistencies such as Nana's list of 27 signs, which has only 25 items. It could well be that the freedom that writers take, to expand and interpret the material, is greater because it comes to them in the form of internet rather than from the printed book. Compared to the pamphlet material that Professor Kruk has examined in this volume, and the studies by Cook and Tottoli which she cites, there is more authorial input in the internet discussion, and fewer compilations of traditions without commentary. It is clear that the ongoing process of internet discussion will produce an increasing distance between the folk religion versions of Gog and Magog and the versions in formal literatures, even the versions in religious pamphlets.

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