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THE ALEXANDER LEGEND IN THE QUR'ĀN 18:83-102

Kevin van Bladel

In 1889 E.A. Wallis Budge edited a few Syriac texts about Alexander the Great including the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-Callisthenes. Among these was the first edition of a Syriac work called *Neṣḥānā dīleh d-Aleksandrōs*, roughly "The Glorious Deeds of Alexander," extant in the same five manuscripts as the Syriac *Alexander Romance*.¹ Though often discussed in the context of the *Alexander Romance* tradition, and clearly inspired by traditions about Alexander's conquests like the *Romance*, this *Neṣḥānā* is nevertheless an entirely different work with its own history and a different story to tell (to be dealt with later in detail). Budge named it "A Christian Legend Concerning Alexander" to distinguish it from the *Alexander Romance* itself. Recent scholarship has shortened this name to "the *Alexander Legend*" to distinguish it from the *Alexander Romance*. I follow this convention here.

The next year (1890), Theodor Nöldeke published his study of the *Alexander Romance*, much of which was based on the Syriac version newly available in Budge's edition. In this he also devoted a few pages to the *Alexander Legend*, arguing that it was in fact *the source for an episode in the Qur'ān*, specifically the Qur'ānic story of Dhū l-Qarnayn (Q 18:83-102).² He stated that the *Alexander Legend* must have been transmitted orally to Muḥammad along with the other ancient biblical and traditional stories circulating in the environment of Mecca.³ To prove this relationship Nöldeke indicated a few specific, important elements of the story of Alexander's journeys appearing in both the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and the Qur'ān.

In the century since then, his discovery seems to have become almost forgotten in Qur'ānic studies. For example, the recent *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* article "Alexander" does not even mention the Syriac *Alexander Legend* or Nöldeke's thesis on the matter, though there could be no more appropriate place for it.⁴ Moreover, some recent scholarship has brought considerable confusion into the study of Alexander stories in relation to the Qur'ān.⁵ The subject therefore deserves to be revisited. As I hope to show, it still has much more to offer than even Nöldeke expected.

The present investigation will first show that Nöldeke was basically correct in his view: the Qur'ān 18:83–102 is a retelling of the story found in this particular Syriac text. But that is just the beginning of the matter. Recent publications by scholars of Syriac and Greek apocalyptic texts of the early seventh century, especially several articles by G.J. Reinink, offer a precise understanding of the context in which this Syriac *Alexander Legend* was composed and its political and religious purposes in that context. These studies make it possible to shed new light on the use of the *Alexander Legend*'s story in the Qur'ān and on the concerns of Muḥammad's community. Furthermore, once the affiliation of the Arabic and Syriac texts is established and the character of that affiliation is identified, it is possible to demonstrate (perhaps unexpectedly) the reliability of the traditional lexicography as well as the soundness of the Arabic text of this Qur'ānic passage. All of these matters will be discussed later.

I am deliberately avoiding entering into a discussion of other texts related to the Syriac *Alexander Legend* identified by previous scholars. Traces of the ancient story of Gilgamesh are found in the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and in Q 18:83–102. That these traces appear in both is unsurprising since both tell essentially the same story. But some scholars have argued that the passage immediately preceding the Dhū l-Qarnayn episode in the Qur'ān, a story about Moses (Q 18:60–82), also contains different traces of the Gilgamesh story. This is a matter of decades-long controversy and it deserves further special studies of its own.⁶ Since two *adjacent* episodes in Qur'ān 18 seem to contain material derived from the Gilgamesh story, modern scholars have tended to search for a single source common to both of them. Medieval Qur'ān commentaries associated the two episodes together, too, though it seems for different reasons, with the result that the Qur'ān commentaries are dragged into the modern confusion. I will also avoid discussing other texts in Syriac and in Greek that draw material from the Syriac *Alexander Legend*. One of these is the so-called *Song of Alexander* (also called *Alexander Poem* in modern scholarship), falsely ascribed to Jacob of Serugh (d. 521). It was composed several years after and in reaction to the prose *Alexander Legend*, but the story it relates is considerably different from that in the *Alexander Legend* and does not exactly match those in the Qur'ānic tale of Dhū l-Qarnayn. What is most confusing for modern scholars is that still more traces of the Gilgamesh story, different from those in the *Alexander Legend*, are found in this *Song of Alexander*, but these are similar to the traces of Gilgamesh allegedly found in Q 18:60–82, the Moses story just mentioned. The coincidence has never been adequately explained, particularly since recourse must be had to a poorly documented late, probably oral tradition of the Gilgamesh story. Then there are other later seventh-century Christian apocalypses, such as the *De fine mundi* of Pseudo-Ephraem and the influential *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. These also drew upon the *Alexander Legend*, evidently a widely known text in the seventh century.⁷

The bewildering interrelationships of all these traditions have made it difficult for scholars to arrive at a consensus about them. But the reason that I am avoiding

discussing all these related texts here is that they are irrelevant to the thesis that the Dhū l-Qarnayn episode in the Qur'ān is derived from or retells the story found in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*. The account in Q 18:83–102 does not precisely match a story found anywhere other than in this one text, but previous attempts to deal with the problem have become confused by discussing all of the aforementioned traditions together. For example, one recent account, published twice, posits complicated interrelationships between the two episodes in Qur'ān 18:60–102, the Qur'ān commentaries, the *Alexander Romance* tradition, and the *Song of Alexander*, unfortunately just causing further misunderstanding and omitting almost any account of the crucially relevant *Alexander Legend*.⁸ In the present article, however, only two main problems are to be discussed: the relationship between the *Alexander Legend* and Qur'ān 18:83–102 and the historical context of this relationship.

The Syriac and the Arabic texts compared

To prove convincingly an affiliation between this passage of the Qur'ān and the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, a close comparison is required, closer at least than the brief treatment that Nöldeke gave to it. Since the relevant Arabic text, Qur'ān 18:83–102, amounts to only twenty verses, they can all be given here in translation.

83. And they are asking you about the Two-Horned One (Dhū l-Qarnayn).

Say: I will relate for you a glorious record (*dhikr*) about him.

84. We granted him power in the earth

and gave him a heavenly course (*sabab*)⁹ out of every thing.

85. So he followed a heavenly course

86. until, when he reached the place of the sun's setting,

he found it setting in a fetid spring

and he found by it a people.

We said, "O Two-Horned One, either you will punish (them) or do them a favor."

87. He said, "Whoever does wrong, we will punish him,

and then he will be sent back to his Lord

and He will punish them in an unknown way."

88. "And whoever believes and acts righteously,

he will have the best reward and we will declare ease for him by our command."

89. Then he followed a heavenly course

90. until, when he arrived at the sun's rising place,

he found it rising over a people for whom We did not make a shelter beneath it.

91. Thus We knew everything that he encountered.

92. Then he followed a heavenly course

93. until, when he arrived between two barriers,

he found outside them a people
who could scarcely understand speech.

94. They said, "O Two-Horned One, Yājūj and Mājūj are destroying the land.

Shall we make a payment to you on the condition that you make a barrier between us and them?"

95. He said, "The power my Lord has given me is better, so, help me, with strength, that I may make a barricade between you and them."

96. "Bring me blocks of iron." Eventually, when he had leveled it off with the two clifftops, he said, "Blow." Eventually, when he had made it a fire, he said, "Bring me brass that I can pour upon it."

97. Thus they could not surmount it and they could not break through it.

98. He said, "This is a mercy from my Lord. When His promise comes, my Lord will make it a heap of earth and my Lord's promise is true."

99. And We shall leave them on that day surging like waves¹⁰ against each other

and the horn will be blown and We shall gather them all together

100. and We shall truly show Gehenna that day to the unbelievers

101. whose eyes were covered from recollecting Me, nor could they hear.

102. Do those who disbelieve plan to take My servants under Me as protectors?

We have prepared Gehenna as a guest-house for the unbelievers!

For the purposes of this study, this can be divided into five parts.

- 1 an introduction to Dhū l-Qarnayn, the Two-Horned One (83-4),
- 2 his journey to the sun's setting and his punishment of unjust people there (85-8),
- 3 his journey to the sun's rising place where the people have no shelter from the sun (89-91),
- 4 his journey to a place threatened by Yājūj and Mājūj where he is asked to build a protective wall between two mountains, culminating in his uttering a brief prophecy (92-8), and finally
- 5 God's first-person warning of the events to come (99-102).

The Syriac *Legend of Alexander* is quite a bit longer, twenty-one pages of Syriac text in the edition. A summary of the story, including its relevant details, here follows, showing how each of the five parts of the Qur'ānic story finds a match in the Syriac text. Readers with insufficient knowledge of Syriac may find Budge's English translation to be helpful but should be warned that it strays into error on some important points.

The story of the *Nesḥānā* begins when King Alexander summons his court to ask them about the outer edges of the world, for he wishes to go to see what surrounds it. His advisors warn him that there is a fetid sea, Oceanos (Ōqyānōs),¹¹

like pus, surrounding the earth, and that to touch those waters is death. Alexander is undeterred and wishes to go on this quest. He prays to God, whom he addresses as the one who put horns upon his head, for power over the entire earth, and he promises God to obey the Messiah should he arrive during his lifetime or, if not, to put his own throne in Jerusalem for the Messiah to sit upon when he does come. This in essence matches Q 18:83-4, part one earlier, where God gives the two-horned one power over the entire earth.

On the way, he stops in Egypt where he borrows seven thousand Egyptian workers of brass and iron from the king of Egypt to accompany his huge army. Then they set sail for four months and twelve days until they reach a distant land. Alexander asks the people there if they have any prisoners condemned to death in their prisons, and he asks that those evil-doers (*'ābday-bīṣā*) be brought to him. He takes the prisoners and sends them into the fetid sea in order to test the potency of the poisonous waters. All the evil-doers die, so Alexander, realizing how deadly it is, gives up his attempt to cross the water. Instead he goes to a place of bright water, up to the Window of the Heavens that the sun enters when it sets, where there is a conduit of some kind leading through the heavens toward the place where the sun rises in the east. Though the text is completely vague here in its description of spaces, apparently Alexander follows the sun through its course to the east during the night but "descends" (*nāḥet*) at the mountain called Great Mūsās.¹² His troops go with him. We are also told that when the sun rises in the eastern land, the ground becomes so hot that to touch it is to be burnt alive, so that people living there flee the rising sun to hide in caves and in the water of the sea. Alexander's journeys west and east match Q 18:85-91, parts two and three earlier, exactly in many specific details and in fact make some sense of the cryptic Qur'ānic story (though the Syriac leaves the specifics of his itinerary here fairly murky).

We next find Alexander traveling at the headwaters of the Euphrates and the Tigris, where he and his armies stop at locales given very specific place-names. This specificity has rightly been taken as due to the Syriac author's personal familiarity with the upper Tigris region, probably his homeland.¹³ Yet Alexander continues northwards into mountains, evidently the Caucasus, until he comes to a place under Persian rule where there is a narrow pass. The locals complain about the savage Huns who live on the opposite side of the pass. The names of their kings are listed to him, the first two of which are Gog and Magog. Alexander is treated to a vivid description of the barbarism of the Huns. Among the gruesome details it is reported that their cries are more terrible than those of a lion. The Huns have no qualms in killing babies and pregnant women. In short, they do not know civilization but only brutality. The people complain to Alexander that these savages raid with impunity and they hope his dominion will be established. After he satisfies his anthropological and geographical curiosity about the far northern peoples, Alexander asks the locals if they want a favor, and they answer that they would follow his command. So he suggests building a wall of brass and iron to hold out the Huns. Together they accomplish the task with the help of the

Egyptian metalworkers. This account matches Q 18:92-8, part four earlier, in precise detail.

The next part of the story is crucial to dating the text. Alexander puts an inscription on the gate containing a prophecy for events to follow his lifetime. These events are given precise dates. First he says that after 826 years, the Huns will break through the gate and go by the pass above the Haloras River¹⁴ to plunder the lands. Then after 940 years, there will come a time of sin and unprecedented worldwide war. "The Lord will gather together the kings and their hosts," he will give a signal to break down the wall, and the armies of the Huns, Persians, and Arabs will "fall upon each other."¹⁵ So many troops will pass through the breach in the wall that the passage will actually be worn wider by the spear-points going through. "The earth shall melt through the blood and dung of men."¹⁶ Then the kingdom of the Romans will enter this terrible war and they will conquer all, up to the edges of the heavens. In closing, Alexander cites the prophet Jeremiah, 1:14, "And evil shall be opened from the north upon all the inhabitants of the earth." Clearly this corresponds closely with Q 18:99-102, the fifth and last part of the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn.

There are still some details and a conclusion to the story in the Syriac text that have no corresponding part in the Qur'ān. When Alexander comes into conflict with the King of Persia, called Tūbarlaq, then, with the help of the Lord, who appears on the chariot of the Seraphim along with the angelic host, Alexander's armies are inspired to conquer the king of Persia. When he is captured, the Persian king Tūbarlaq promises to give Alexander tribute for fifteen years in return for a restoration of the borders. But Tūbarlaq's diviners predict that at the end of the world, the Romans will kill the king of Persia and will lay waste to Babylon and Assyria. Tūbarlaq himself puts the prophecy in writing for Alexander, saying that the Romans will conquer the entire world and rule it all before handing power over to the returning Messiah. The *Alexander Legend* finally comes to an end with the remark that at the end of Alexander's life, he establishes his silver throne in Jerusalem just as he had promised. This last episode is not reflected in the Qur'ānic story, but it has proven important in recent scholarship in assigning a date to the Syriac text (to be discussed later).

Precise correspondences between the two texts

Many of the correspondences between the Syriac and the Arabic stories are so obvious that they do not need special attention. Simply relating both stories together establishes their extraordinary similarity. However, some correspondences require emphasis and further comment.

Alexander is twice said in the Syriac to have been granted horns on his head by God. Once it is in a prayer that he himself utters, referring to his horns, and the second time we are told that they were horns of iron.¹⁷ Though Alexander had been portrayed with horns as early as his own time, here one finds the epithet Dhū l-Qarnayn, the Horned One, as one element matching the present Syriac text.¹⁸

When Alexander came to the people in the west, he tested the efficacy of the deadly, fetid waters with the lives of convicts. This passage helps to explain the option given, for no apparent reason, by God to Dhū l-Qarnayn in the Qur'ān: either to punish the people or to do them a kindness. Dhū l-Qarnayn says he will punish only wrongdoers (*man zalama*), who are like the prisoners sentenced to death in the Syriac text, described there as evil-doers ('*ābday-bīšē*).

The Syriac text has Alexander travel from that point, near to where the sun sets, in the direction of the place where the sun rises, just as does Dhū l-Qarnayn in the Qur'ān. The sun does not exactly set in the fetid water, but more vaguely nearby. And it is only this Syriac text that explains the meaning of Q 18:90, where the otherwise unknown eastern people who have no cover from the sun are mentioned.

On his third journey, the people who can hardly understand speech are explained by the Syriac text as "Huns," here a generic term for Central Asian pastoralists, who appeared to the residents of the Middle East as savages. Their allegedly bestial barbarism is explained at length in the Syriac. The Qur'ānic text saying that they "could scarcely understand speech" together with reference by name to Gog and Magog makes sense only in the context of this Syriac tale.

Dhū l-Qarnayn's ability to build a wall of iron and brass is explained in the Syriac story by his being accompanied by seven thousand Egyptian "workers in brass and iron," precisely the same metals. In both texts our hero builds the wall at a place between two mountains in order to fend off savages. Though the tradition of Alexander's wall holding off the Huns is an ancient one going back at least to Josephus (d. ca 100), who specifies that the gates were of iron, nevertheless the details of the Arabic account are all matched only by this Syriac *Alexander Legend*.¹⁹ Most importantly, in both texts the hero issues a prophecy upon completing the fortification foretelling the end of the world in a time of great battles among nations.

Thus, quite strikingly, almost every element of this short Qur'ānic tale finds a more explicit and detailed counterpart in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*. In both texts the related events are given in precisely the same order. Already earlier several cases of specific words that are exact matches between the Syriac and the Arabic were indicated. The water at the place where the sun sets is "fetid" in both texts, a perfect coincidence of two uncommon synonyms (Syriac *saryā*, Arabic *ḥami'a*). Also, the wall that Alexander builds is made specifically of iron and brass in both texts. We are told in the Syriac that God will "gather together the kings and their hosts," which finds a nearly perfect match in Q 18:99: "the horn will be blown and we shall gather them together."²⁰ The proper names of Yājūj and Mājūj are not uniquely matched by this Syriac text (where they appear as Agōg²¹ and Māgōg), for their tradition is derived from the books of *Ezekiel* and the *Apocalypse of John*, but they do still count as specific word correspondences between the Syriac and Arabic texts in question here. In the Qur'ān God is characterized as saying, "We shall leave them on that day surging like waves against each other," *wa-taraknā ba'dahum yawma'idhīn yamūju fī ba'dīn*, while the Syriac says similarly "and kingdoms will fall upon each other," *w-nāplān malkwātā ḥdā'al ḥdā*.

The title of the Syriac work is "*Neṣḥānā* of Alexander." The word *neṣḥānā* means "glory" or "victory" but was often used to refer to a narrative account of a person's heroic acts.²² In Q 18:83 God is portrayed as commanding Muḥammad to say that he will recite a *dhikr* about the Dhū l-Qarnayn. *Dhikr* in Arabic has most of the same connotations as Syriac *neṣḥānā*: it refers to glory or good repute but it also can refer to an account remembered about someone. Could the word *dhikr* in Q 18:83 be a translation of the very title of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*? It is a tempting consideration, but there are a few other instances in the Qur'ān where a *dhikr* of a person is related without any apparent reference to a written work.²³

The translation of *sabab* (pl. *asbāb*), occurring in Q 18:84, 85, 89, and 92 as "heavenly course" requires some explanation. These are conventionally translated merely as the "ways" that Dhū l-Qarnayn is made to follow, since among the many meanings of *sabab* in Arabic are prominently "means" and "ways of access." However, Arabic lexicographers and much other evidence attest to the early use of the word to mean in particular heavenly courses, specifically cords leading to heaven along which a human might travel: *asbāb al-samā'*, "ways to heaven" or "sky-cords."²⁴ In fact this is probably the *only* meaning of the word occurring in the Qur'ān, appearing in four other places.²⁵ Nor are these isolated cases of such a usage in Arabic. For example, it is also attested in the poetry of al-A'shā (d. 625), an exact contemporary of Muḥammad, where the phrase *wa-ruqīṭa asbāba l-samā' i bi-sullam*, "and were you to be brought up the gateways of heaven by a flight of steps," is found with the synonymous, variant reading *abwāb al-samā'* "gates of heaven."²⁶ Thus, the translation given earlier, though unconventional, is not only suitable but likely. In the case of Dhū l-Qarnayn's tale, it matches the window of heaven (*kawwteh da-šmayyā*)²⁷ through which the sun passes on its course, and which Alexander follows, in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*. The remaining problem is then to account for the third "way" mentioned in Q 18:92, the northward path that is not connected with any course of a heavenly body in the *Alexander Legend*. Here one may excuse the Arabic as following the pattern of the earlier journeys. The matter is bound up with the problem of how these heavenly courses were imagined, something I treat in detail elsewhere.²⁸

If there were a closer correspondence of the Syriac and Arabic, it would be possible to argue that one was just a much modified translation of the other. As it is, however, the correspondences shown earlier are still so exact that it is obvious in comparison that the two texts are at least connected very closely. They relate the same story in precisely the same order of events using many of the same particular details. Every part of the Qur'ānic passage has its counterpart in the Syriac, except that in the Qur'ān the story is told through the first-person account of God. Also, as explained earlier, the Qur'ān does not include the last part of the *Alexander Legend*, in which Alexander defeats the Persian emperor Tūbarīaq, who writes his own prophecy down for Alexander and gives it to him, to the effect that the Romans would one day decisively defeat the Persians, establishing a worldwide Christian rule that would remain until the return of the Messiah.

The Qur'ānic account puts more emphasis on the coming end of things and God's judgment and, not surprisingly, does not mention any expectation of universal Christian empire for the Romans.

Dating and contextualizing the Syriac *Alexander Legend*

At this point I think there can be no doubt whatsoever of the affiliation between the Qur'ānic passage and the Syriac *Alexander Legend*. The question now becomes how to specify that affiliation. Here we will be assisted by finding a date and historical context for the Syriac text. Fortunately G.J. Reinink has devoted many articles to the problems posed by this *Alexander Legend* and related texts which have succeeded in determining definitively where, why, and when the *Alexander Legend* was written. I employ his detailed studies extensively in what follows, and the reader is urged to pursue them for further information that can be used to assign a date to this Syriac work.²⁹ This section may seem to be a bit of an excursus, but it is crucially important to contextualize the Syriac text in order to relate it to the Qur'ān.

The *Alexander Legend* is an apocalyptic text in which the ancient Alexander is portrayed as presenting a prophecy written long ago for events to come, which were intended to be understood by the audience at the real time of authorship as referring to events leading up to and including their own time. This is how many texts of the apocalyptic genre work. Thus the date of composition for such apocalypses can often be found by locating the latest point at which events allegedly predicted match actual historical events. Where the events "predicted" diverge from history, there one usually can find the date of the composition. The message of the apocalypse for its own time is not just in the events it describes, but rather in the way it describes these events and the future that it expects to unfold given what has occurred.

In the Syriac *Legend*, Alexander's prophecy, written on the wall he himself erected, gives two dates marking the invasion of Central Asian nomads, called Huns, whose penetration of the great wall and arrival at the headwaters of the Tigris are portentous events to be taken as signs of the final battles preceding Christ's return and the end of time. Alexander specifies how many years must elapse before these events take place. Already Nöldeke in 1890 calculated the dates according to the Seleucid Era (beginning 1 October 312 BCE) normally followed in Syriac tradition, also called the Era of the Greeks and, importantly, the Era of the Alexander.³⁰ The first of the two dates is thus converted from 826 years later to 514–15 CE, precisely the time of the invasion of the nomadic Sabirs who entered Syria and Anatolia.³¹ Evidently this invasion, which holds no importance in the narrative, serves just as a key for the contemporary audience of the text that they can use to verify the accuracy of the second, more elaborate prophecy, associated with a later date. In any case, no scholar after Nöldeke has disputed the calculation of this first dating, as far as I have seen.³²

The second of the two dates, 940 years after Alexander, which marks the time of the final war preceding the Messiah's return according to the prophecy, is converted likewise to 628–9 CE. The message of the prophecy actually concerns events around *this* date, which coincides with the end of a long and extremely difficult war between the Persians and the Romans (603–30) during which Jerusalem was devastated, the relic of the True Cross stolen from that city, and the Persians conquered Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, occupying Anatolia, too, and they even besieged Constantinople itself in 626 CE in concert with the Avars, who invaded from the north. The Byzantine remainder of the Roman Empire was only barely saved from the Persian onslaught by the emperor Heraclius' daring campaign through Armenia, ending in the winter of 627–8 with a surprise invasion into Mesopotamia and damaging raids on the rich estates around Ctesiphon. In these invasions the Turks joined the Byzantines in raids south of the Caucasus at Heraclius' invitation and afterwards continued to make war on Persian territory in Transcaucasia, plundering until 630. The Byzantine invasion of Mesopotamia led the Persian nobles to remove their King of Kings, Khosrō II, from power in February of 628 and to negotiate for peace.³³ Persian forces occupying former Byzantine territory withdrew to Persia in 629, and early in 630 Heraclius personally returned the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem in a formal celebration. (Just a few months before Heraclius' arrival in Jerusalem, tradition tells us, the inhabitants of Mecca surrendered peacefully to Muhammad and submitted to his government.) Given the date that Alexander's prophecy signals, 628–9 CE, it must be referring to the devastating wars of that time and their successful end for the Romans.

Reinink has shown that the *Alexander Legend* demonstrates, through its prophecy and its use of Alexander to prefigure the emperor Heraclius, detailed knowledge of the events of that war and its resolution with the restoration of the earlier borders, a peace treaty, and a final reference to Jerusalem. Using this information, too much to repeat entirely here, he has persuasively argued that the *Alexander Legend* was composed just after 628, perhaps in 630, the year in which Heraclius restored the cross to Jerusalem.³⁴ In the course of the war, while the Byzantines were very hard pressed by the Persians, Heraclius resorted to highly religious propaganda in order to rally his allies and to improve Roman morale. This propaganda has received recent scholarly attention.³⁵ Likewise Heraclius' attempts to eradicate the schisms in the Church after the war are well known. Reinink considers *Alexander Legend* to be a piece of pro-Heraclian postwar propaganda designed to promote the emperor's political cause not long after the war's end, re-establishing Roman rule over provinces that had been under Persian power for well over a decade and trying to overcome the schismatic Christological differences dividing his Chalcedonian court from the monophysites of the provinces recently recovered from the Persians. His thesis is that the *Syriac Legend of Alexander* was composed "shortly after 628" (i.e. in 629 or 630) by an inhabitant of Amida or Edessa, or some other place near to those, in support of

Heraclius.³⁶ He argues that the monophysite Syrians were the primary audience (although it is possible that the story was intended also to win over monophysites of other nations such as Arabs).³⁷ Heraclius' visit to Edessa in late 629 might have been an occasion for its composition. It is also possible that the text was written a few months later when Heraclius restored the cross to Jerusalem.³⁸

The specific details in the *Alexander Legend* that reflect this historical context are numerous. But unlike the Qur'ānic story of Dhū l-Qarnayn, the Syriac text ends with the Persian king's own prophecy containing what Reinink has characterized rightly as a message of Byzantine Imperial eschatology: the prediction that one Byzantine emperor will soon establish a worldwide Christian rule which will be followed by the return of the Messiah.³⁹ This was intended to counter the belief, widely held at the time as many sources show, that the total destruction of the Roman/Byzantine Empire and even the end of the world were imminent. As Reinink sums it up, the author of the *Alexander Legend*

wants to demonstrate the special place of the Greek-Roman empire, the fourth empire of the Daniel Apocalypse, in God's history of salvation, from the very beginning of the empire until the end of times, when the empire will acquire world dominion. He created an Alexander-Heraclius typology, in which the image of Alexander is highly determined by Byzantine imperial ideology, so that his contemporaries would recognize in Heraclius a new Alexander, who, just like the founder of the empire, departed to the east at the head of his army and combated and defeated the Persians.

(G.J. Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander.
Apocalyptic Prophecies during the
Reign of Heraclius," 26)

By now it should be amply clear that the *Alexander Legend* is the product of a very specific, identifiable historical and cultural environment, the end of a devastating war widely believed to carry eschatological implications, ending with Heraclius' campaign in 628 and in 629 with the final withdrawal of the Persian armies. This needs to be held in mind when the relationship between this text and the Qur'ān is considered.

If this is the message of the *Alexander Legend*, what is the point in having Alexander make his journeys west, then east, then north, then return south? The answer is clearer when one imagines a map of his itinerary. In effect Alexander's travels make a sign of the cross over the whole world. This symbol seems to have been overlooked by other commentators, but I believe it was intended by the author of the *Alexander Legend*. The sign of the cross was the emblem of victory for the Christian empire, and the prophecies in the *Legend* indicate the imminent universal rule of the Christian empire. One may even speculate that this cross-shaped itinerary was intended symbolically to refer to Heraclius' return of the

relic of the True Cross early in 630 to Jerusalem, the city where Alexander places his throne at the end of the *Alexander Legend*. Alexander's journeys describe the symbol of Christian Roman power across the entire world, which it will come to rule in its entirety according to the prophecy.

But what is the point of having Alexander build the Wall of Gog and Magog? According to Greek and Latin traditions from the first century CE onward, Alexander was indeed credited with building gates in the Caucasus to keep out invaders. These gates, described by many ancient Greek and Latin authors, were usually identified as located at the pass of Darial in the middle of the Caucasus (Arabic *Bāb al-Lān*).⁴⁰ However, in the seventh century, just around the time of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, confusion arose concerning the location of Alexander's fortified pass. It now came to be identified with a gated wall situated on the Caspian coast that had been built more recently (Arabic *Bāb al-Abwāb*). By the mid-sixth century, the waters of the Caspian had receded considerably on their western shore, exposing a wide pass of land around the eastern end of the Caucasus.⁴¹ The Sasanian shahs constructed a very large wall (or series of walls) with a great gate in order to block this coastal gap as a defense against northerners who might otherwise easily raid Iran, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. The scholarly literature documenting the existence and history of these walls through archaeology and written sources is enormous.⁴² The town Darband eventually came to be at these walls at the Caspian, presumably at first just a garrison town, eventually a very important site. Its Persian name, meaning "Door-Bolt," indicates its original purpose. Seventh century sources mention these fortifications a number of times. For example, the Armenian historian called Sebeos, writing in the 680s, called it "the Gate of the Huns."⁴³ But the displacement of Alexander's gate from Darial to the wall at Darband does not appear unambiguously in the sources until the Frankish Latin chronicler known as Fredegarius (wr. ca 660), in his report on the year 627, described Alexander's gates as having been built over the Caspian Sea (*super mare Cespium* [sic]), saying that these are the gates that Heraclius opened to admit the savage nations living beyond them.⁴⁴ From this time onward, Alexander's Caspian gates were widely thought to be those at Darband. What caused this confusion to be held generally between Latin and Arabic tradition? It seems that the Syriac *Alexander Legend* may have prompted it. While it may have intended the pass at Darial (though the geographical expertise of the author is subject to doubt), the invasions of the Turks through the wall at Darband in 626–30 must have forced the association of Alexander's walls with that route.

In the early twentieth century Russian scholars discovered a number of Pahlavi inscriptions on the old wall at Darband, dated variously at first but with a final, general consensus to the sixth century.⁴⁵ Thus the author of the Syriac *Legend of Alexander* was using common lore that would be readily understood by its audience: Alexander was thought to have built a real wall with a gate that was known to the inhabitants of the Caucasus region and indeed was famous far and wide, a wall that bore inscriptions. It is easy to see how one of these inscriptions might have been thought to have been carved there by Alexander.

The *Alexander Legend's* account identifies the people beyond the wall, the "Huns," as Gog and Magog. These names originally come from Hebrew scripture. They are associated by *Ezekiel* 38–9 with northern, invading nations, serving as God's punishment, and then later by the *Revelation of John* 20 with final turmoil just before the ultimate redemption. Gog and Magog are, in short, an eschatological motif: they are northern nations whose invasion heralds the end of time.⁴⁶ In the sixth century Andreas of Caesarea had made this association clear in his commentary on the *Revelation of John*, identifying Gog and Magog with the Huns, and in doing so he was following the sources going back at least to Josephus (d. ca 100).⁴⁷

Thus the *Alexander Legend* combines two traditions (1) Alexander's building of a wall in the Caucasus to hold out Huns and (2) the identification of Huns, a generic term for all Central Asian peoples, with Gog and Magog, thereby associating Alexander with the end of time and giving him an occasion to make eschatological prophecies. Alexander's wall also explains why the Huns (Gog and Magog) cannot invade at just any time; they have to surmount the wall first. But when that wall is breached, that will be a sign of the approaching end. Once these traditions were combined, it was now easy to link Heraclius both with the world conquering Alexander, who similarly defeated the Persian emperor, and with the end of time.

As already stated, in his final campaigns against the Persians, Alexander's former enemies, Heraclius actually did enlist the help of Inner Asian peoples, the Kök Türks, in his war against the Persians (626–7) – they are called variously in the sources Türks and Khazars, being perhaps Khazars under Kök Türk rule, though the specific tribal or ethnic identity of these invaders is a subject of very long debate – and afterward these Türks fiercely raided Caucasian Albania, Georgia, and Armenia until 630.⁴⁸ One wonders whether Heraclius or his supporters promoted the idea that his Türk allies, summoned from the north, were the people of Gog and Magog come to punish the Persians. The Türk invasions are known from the Greek chronicle of Theophanes⁴⁹ and in some detail from a compilatory seventh-century source used by the Armenian *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (*Patmut' iwn Aluanic'*) by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i. As it says, "During this period (Heraclius)... summoned the army to help him breach the great Mount Caucasus which shut off the lands of the north-east, and to open up the gates of Č'olay [i.e. the gates at Darband] so as to let through many barbarian tribes and by their means to conquer the king of Persia, the proud Xosrov."⁵⁰ Fredegarus, as mentioned, also states that Heraclius opened these gates. Thus the devastating raids of the terrifying "Huns" – "predicted" in the *Alexander Legend* – also match the Türk campaigns in the years 626–7 (alongside Heraclius) and 628–30 (independently), and inhabitants of Caucasian Albania and Iberia, Armenia, and the neighboring lands such as Mesopotamia and Syria were surely well aware of them.

Moreover, Greek and Armenian sources show that these real invasions of Türk warriors in the early seventh century were actually interpreted then in

apocalyptic terms and associated with the eschatological motif of Gog and Magog. J. Howard-Johnston has dubbed the source of historical information on these Caucasian campaigns used by the Armenian Movsēs Daxuranc'i as the *682 History* (because its reports end with the year 682 and we do not know its original name).⁵¹ This source describes the nomadic invaders in horrific terms in connection with the joint Byzantine-Türk siege of the Caucasian Albanian capital, Partaw (Arabic: Bardha'a). They are depicted as ugly savages, like merciless wolves, who kill regardless of the victim's age or sex.⁵² The Syriac *Alexander Legend* describes the Huns in quite similar terms, also stressing their readiness to kill women and children and their bestial nature.⁵³

The way in which the Armenian source describes these wars between the Byzantines, the Türks, and the Persians gives yet another example for how people really did expect the end of time during or soon after these wars. The *682 History* focuses its attention on the events around the Caucasian Albanian capital of Partaw, but first it begins with a special prologue to the description of these invasions, which are characterized as part of not just local but the universal calamities (*i tiezerakan haruacoc's*) prophesied by Jesus in the *Gospels* about the times of tribulations (*i žamanaki č'arč'aranac'n*).⁵⁴ This understanding is based in the *682 History* explicitly on quotations of Jesus' prophecies selected from *Matthew* 24 and *Luke* 21:5–28. The full prophecy of Jesus in *Matthew*, not cited in its entirety by the Armenian historian, indicated particularly that a siege of Jerusalem would be one of the signs of the end (*Luke* 21:20). This would be accompanied by signs in the heavens and confusion among nations before the final redemption. All of this helps to contextualize the role of the Huns in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, who are to be identified with the Türks and their invasions into the Caucasus region from 626 to 630.

To sum up, the *Alexander Legend* is seen to reflect many specific events and cultural tendencies of the period around 628–9, the year it indicates as a time of wars between many nations beginning with the breaking of Alexander's wall by the Huns. Out of these wars the Roman Empire would emerge victorious, some time after which the Roman Empire would permanently overthrow the Persians and establish a universal Christian empire. It is best understood, following Reinink, as a piece of propaganda composed by someone sympathetic to the need of Heraclius around 630, immediately after almost thirty years of demoralizing war and unprecedented military loss, to help in reconsolidating quickly the loyalties of the regained territories of the empire and their monophysite inhabitants. The success or popularity of the *Alexander Legend* is indicated in that it was used by at least three more apocalypses, the so-called *Song of Alexander* attributed falsely to Jacob of Serugh (composed just a few years later but before the Arab conquest, between 630 and 636),⁵⁵ the Syriac apocalypse *De fine mundi* attributed falsely to Ephraem (composed sometime between 640–83),⁵⁶ and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (composed around 692, quite possibly in reaction to the building of the Dome of the Rock).⁵⁷ The *Alexander Legend* was evidently well known in the early seventh century.

The relationship between the *Alexander Legend* and Qur'ān 18:83-102

To return to the main question, the extremely close correspondences between the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and Qur'ān 18:83-102, reviewed earlier, must mean that the two texts are related. On the one hand, there is a Syriac text the date of which is almost certain, about 629-30 CE, and the historical context and political meaning of which is known fairly precisely (as just explained); on the other, we have a passage from the Qur'ān, an Arabic compilation the precise dates and historical circumstances of which are debated by historians, but which tradition has understood to be collected into its current form during the caliphate of 'Uthmān (644-56) or at least after Muḥammad's death (632). It is possible to approach the problem of affiliation between the two systematically. The two texts must be related. That is the only explanation for their point-for-point correspondence. In that case there are three reasonable possibilities: (1) the Syriac takes its account from the Qur'ān, or (2) the two texts share a common source, or (3) the Qur'ān uses the account found in the Syriac.

Could the Syriac text have its source in the Qur'ān? If this were the case, then the Syriac text would have to be seen as a highly expanded version of the Qur'ānic account, which would then need to be understood as an attempt to explain the cryptic Qur'ānic story with rationalizations drawn from stories about Alexander. However, the Syriac text contains no references to the Arabic language the type of which one might expect to find if its purpose was to explain an Arabic text, and it is impossible to see why a Syriac apocalypse written around 630 would be drawing on an Arabic tradition some years before the Arab conquests, when the community at Mecca was far from well known outside Arabia. Moreover, the very specific political message of the *Alexander Legend* would not make any sense in this scenario. This possibility must therefore be discounted.

Could the two texts share a common source? This also becomes practically impossible for some of the same reasons. The Syriac *Alexander Legend* was written to support Heraclius by indicating the author's belief in the significance of events leading up to 629 AD, events supposed to be foreshadowing the establishment of a Christian world empire and the coming of the Messiah. Yet relating Dhū l-Qarnayn's first prophecy of the end times is also the very purpose of the story in the Qur'ān: the prediction of God's actions at the time of judgment using an ancient voice of great authority. As already explained, the war between Byzantium and Ctesiphon went very badly for the Byzantines until the very end, prompting an intense bout of political and religious propaganda to boost the desperate war effort and to consolidate allegiances after the victory. Reinink has shown that this Syriac text, given its contents, must be understood as pro-Heraclian propaganda belonging to this milieu, dated to 629-30. *If Alexander's prophecy was composed just for this purpose at this time, then the correspondence between the Syriac and the Arabic, which contains the same prophecy reworded, cannot be*

due to an earlier, shared source.⁵⁸ Put differently, the only way to posit a common source is to assume that everything held in common between the Qur'ānic account and the Syriac *Alexander Legend* could have been written for and would have made sense in an earlier context. In light of the detailed contextualization given earlier, and in light of G.J. Reinink's work referred to earlier as well, this becomes impossible.

Stephen Gero implied in one article that since the text comes from this date (629 CE or later), it *cannot* be regarded as a source of the Qur'ān. He does not explain in detail but I take the implication to be that such a date of composition is too late for it to have reached the human agents who related the Qur'ān.⁵⁹ But to me this seems to be the only real possibility because the others are invalid, as just explained. The Qur'ānic account must draw from the Syriac account, if not directly then by oral report.

Since the Qur'ān is using the material found in this Syriac text, a text composed for a very specific context in contemporary politics and loaded with particular religious meaning, this gives historians an important opportunity to understand the religion of Muḥammad and his early followers without relying entirely on later tradition. Before considering the significance of this further, it is important to ask how the text could have been known in Arabic and under what circumstances.

The transmission of the story from the Syriac text into Arabic

How could a Syriac text composed in northern Mesopotamia in 629–30 CE or just about that time have been transmitted to an Arab audience in Medina or Mecca so that it could become relevant enough to the followers of Muḥammad to warrant a Qur'ānic pronouncement upon it? Such a transmission would have been quite possible in the circumstances around 628–30 CE and soon after. Contemporary records in Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic (poetry) repeatedly note the involvement of Arabs as troops and scouts on both Roman and Persian sides during and at the end of the great war of 603–30, and the Syriac *Alexander Legend* itself mentions Arabs as one of the nations involved in the last wars.⁶⁰ Indeed, the *Alexander Legend* is likely to have been circulated widely if it was part of the Byzantine rallying cry after the war in the face of great losses and as a tool of Heraclius for rebuilding his subjects' loyalty to the idea of a universal Christian empire undivided by schism. If it was aimed particularly at monophysites, as Reinink also proposed, then one would expect it to have been deliberately spread among the monophysite Arabs of the Ghassānid phylarchate, some of Heraclius' close allies.⁶¹ It is even possible that Muḥammad's own followers heard the story of the *Alexander Legend*, for example during their raid on Mu'ta, around the southeast end of the Dead Sea (probably September 629) just a few months after the Persian withdrawal from Roman territory and a few months before Heraclius' triumphant return of the cross to Jerusalem.⁶²

Yet one is left wondering exactly how apocalyptic works were disseminated during these decades. Since they are full of political significance for a particular period of time, one expects that they would have been published and promoted actively by their authors. In any case, one can hardly doubt that this text was widely known. An indication of that was aforementioned: the *Alexander Legend* provoked a monophysite response in Syria within a few years, one more cynical about the durability of Heraclius' kingdom, and information connected with the *Alexander Legend* was known as far away as Gaul a few decades later (on which, see the discussion about Fredegarius, later).⁶³

Nor is it difficult to suggest motives for Muḥammad or his followers to have paid attention to this apocalypse. Even with the extraordinary skepticism over the early records of Islam prevailing today, no one disputes that Muḥammad's movement was based on the belief in prophets. The Qur'ān contains many references to the prophets of the past. The Syriac *Alexander Legend* presents Alexander the Two-Horned as just such a prophet. Moreover, Alexander's prophecy clearly indicates that final wars heralding the end of the world were taking place. Many in the community that followed Muḥammad seem to have shared this apocalyptic sentiment with others in the contemporary Middle East.⁶⁴ However, the Qur'ānic account leaves out all mention of the Roman Empire's inevitable, universal, Christian victory before the return of the Messiah, an important aspect of the last section of the *Legend*. Instead it focuses on and culminates in Dhū l-Qarnayn's prophetic warning that God's judgment will come in a time of wars between great armies. Evidently that was the message of the story that was most meaningful to the adaptor of the Arabic account, and the elements that make the story sensible as Byzantine propaganda are omitted completely in the Arabic.

One may even suppose the words of Q 18:83, "And they are asking you about the Two-Horned One (Dhū l-Qarnayn). Say: I will relate for you a glorious record (*dhikr*) about him," to be a true reflection of the environment in which the Syriac *Alexander Legend* was circulating. Here was an apocalypse widely known and certainly currently relevant. Perhaps Muḥammad's followers or others in the vicinity wanted an explanation of this apocalypse from him, and so they were given an account of it, adapted to make it appropriate to their movement. It may also be possible to see reflections of the prophecy of the *Alexander Legend* in *sūrat al-Rūm* (Q 30:1-6), where the war between the Persians and Romans is referred to, but the Romans are said to be destined to conquer, at least according to the preferred reading of early Qur'ānic exegetes.⁶⁵

In short, there are many indicators that the *Alexander Legend* could easily have reached the community at Medina or Mecca and that, when it did, it would have been meaningful to them. There is no reason to doubt this possibility, and the relationship between the Syriac and Arabic texts determined earlier requires one to suppose that the *Alexander Legend* was in fact transmitted somehow. However, the precise time at which the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn entered the Qur'ān – in Muḥammad's last years, or later – is still undecided.

Floods of nations and the prophecy of Jesus

There is one more point related to the Qur'ānic retelling of this Syriac text that deserves attention. While it is widely known that Jesus was and is regarded as a prophet by Muslims, since he is so designated in the Qur'ān (19:30), there is little discussion of just what Jesus was supposed to be a prophet of. It is often overlooked that Jesus was thought even by Christians to be prophesying nothing less than the end of the world (as in *Matthew* 24 and *Luke* 21:5–28), and that this would be preceded by a siege of Jerusalem (*Luke* 21:20). The sack of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614 therefore shocked Christian contemporaries especially because it seemed to indicate that the end the world and the return of the Messiah were near according to the very words of Jesus. Other signs predicted by Jesus preceding the end would be seen in the heavens, and there would be "distress of nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves" (*Luke* 21:25).⁶⁶ Contemporary sources show that witnesses to the great war of 603–30 saw the fulfillment of Jesus' words in it.

Most important here is the account of the Türk invasion of Caucasian Albania used by the Armenian author Movsēs Daxsurants'i, the *682 History*. Before describing how the Türks broke through the Wall at Darband, this source adapts the prophecies appearing in *Matthew* 24:6–7, 29 and *Luke* 21:25 in its prologue, paraphrasing them, saying that there would be "confusion of nations like the confusion of the waves of the sea" *xrovut'iwnk' žolovardoc' orpēs aleac' covu xroveloy*.⁶⁷ Then it goes on to describe the events of the wars, using allusions to these paraphrased words of Jesus' prophecy in order to prove that the prophecies were fulfilled. For this purpose, the Türks are likened explicitly to overwhelming waves, the waves of confusion among nations in Jesus' predictions: "Then gradually the waves moved on against us," *apa takaw šaržēin alik'n ənddēm mer*.⁶⁸ After raiding Caucasian Albania the Türks turned west: "the floods (*utxn*) rose and rushed over the land of Georgia."⁶⁹ Even Khosrō II "rose up like a raging torrent" when he set out to war against them⁷⁰ and we are reminded of the image again with the phrase, "waves of invaders."⁷¹ Thus the author of the *682 History* takes every opportunity to show that Jesus' prophecy was being fulfilled in the invasions of the Türks and the wars of this period in general.

This image of nations as waves was also used specifically to describe the Türks' overwhelming of the walls at Darband. The *682 History* does not connect Alexander with these walls, but it does say that near Č'ol (a town near the gate at Darband) were

magnificent walls which the kings of Persia had built at great expense, bleeding their country and recruiting architects and procuring many different materials for the construction of the wonderful works with which they blocked [the passes] between Mount Caucasus and the eastern sea [the Caspian]. When the universal wrath confronting us

all came, however, the waves of the sea flooded over and struck it down and destroyed it to its foundations at the very outset.

(Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, trans. Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 83)

These waves are not real waves of the Caspian but rather attackers from the north. The text immediately next describes the physical appearance of the Türk invaders, portrayed as monstrous, whom Heraclius had invited to war as his allies. It is striking that this author, a resident of Caucasian Albania, the territory immediately south of these walls, reports that the Türks actually destroyed the wall (*i himanc' tapaleal*, "demolished it to the foundations"),⁷² just as Alexander's Syriac prophecy in the *Legend* said that they would be destroyed. The Byzantine chronicler Theophanes also states that, at the beginning of their invasions, "the Khazars broke through the Gates of the Caspian" (*diarrhēxantes tās Kaspīas pūlas*).⁷³ Just so, in the Qur'ān (18:98), Dhū l-Qarnayn prophesies that God will make the barrier a heap of earth at the time of his promise, the final judgment (*fa-idhā jā'a wa'du rabbī ja'alahū dakkū'a*). But the difference in the Armenian source is that in it the breaking of the wall by the Türks was identified as part of the fulfillment of Jesus' words.

There are not many other surviving reports about these Türk invaders and their passage through the wall. That is why it is especially striking that one of the few other authors to mention it, the contemporary Frankish chronicler known as Fredegarius (wr. ca 660) describes the gates as having been built out of bronze (*aereas*) by Alexander *propter inundacione gentium sevissemorum* (sic), "on account of the surging wave of most savage nations." Here again the invaders are described as a surging wave, an *inundacio* of nations, held back by the gates that, Fredegarius goes on immediately to say, Heraclius himself ordered to be opened: *easdem portas Aetraglius aperire precipit* (sic).⁷⁴ In light of the description of the Armenian 682 *History*, which was explicitly connected with the prophecies of Jesus, it seems likely that Fredegarius was drawing from a source that made a similar allusion to the waves of nations, paraphrasing Jesus' prophecy in *Luke* 21:25. Moreover, this Latin chronicle's association of Heraclius with the opening of the gates of Alexander that held back savages brings together most of the parts of the *Alexander Legend*. It is in fact the earliest known association of Alexander specifically with the wall at Darband (and not the wall at the Darial pass or another, unspecified place, as in the *Alexander Legend*).⁷⁵ What is missing in Fredegarius is reference to Gog and Magog. But in his confusion that chronicle's author bizarrely thinks that the Hagarene Saracens were admitted by this gate, not the Türks. This implies that he identified the Arabs as the people of Gog and Magog, though it is not explicitly stated.

Now, the description of the Hun invaders as waves is not found in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*. However, as shown earlier, God is portrayed as saying in the Qur'ān 18:99, "And We shall leave them on that day surging like waves (*yamūju*) against each other" when the wall holding back Gog and Magog is demolished.

It is tempting therefore to think that the Syriac *Alexander Legend* was associated consciously at some stage of the transmission into Arabic with an explanation or oral commentary including reference to Jesus' prophecies of the end of the world, since the near-contemporary source of Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, the 682 *History*, shows that the reference to waves in Jesus' prophecy was taken to refer to the invasions of the Türks, identified elsewhere by contemporaries as the eschatological peoples of Gog and Magog, and their involvement in a war of many nations. Fredegarius' chronicle also describes them as waves. If this hypothesis is correct, the word *yamūju*, "surging like waves," in the Qur'ān, is essentially a verbal echo of Luke 21:25 (*sunokhē ethnōn en aporiai ēkhous thalássēs kai sálon*), the "distress of nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves,"⁷⁶ Jesus' prophecy of what would happen before the final redemption. It suggests that Movsēs Dasxuranc'i's source (the 682 *History*) and Fredegarius' source were not the only ones to consider Jesus' prophecies to be fulfilled in these wars. Muḥammad's earliest followers may have understood the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn not just as the prophecy of the imminent end made by Alexander, regarded as a pious, ancient world-conqueror, but also as an allusion to the prophet Jesus' similar warning of the end times, now very near, which they expected as seriously as other inhabitants of the region, when nations did indeed crash together, as it might have appeared on a field of battle, like waves of the sea.

The language of Q 18:83–102

Now that the continuity of tradition between the Syriac *Alexander Legend* of Alexander and the Qur'ānic passage in question (Q 18:83–102) is established, it is possible to draw some new conclusions about the language of the Qur'ān here. Though controversy has been aroused by the recent attempt to find Syriac or Aramaic words in the Qur'ān where they had not been part of the traditional reading, now one can see that where the Qur'ān is definitely reinterpreting a Syriac text, not a single Syriac word is found, but rather there are true Arabic equivalents of Syriac words.⁷⁷ Q 18:83–102 is a distinctively Arabic text and in no way is it Syriac. Thus it is clear that Qur'ānic tradition and, in particular, the traditional Islamic lexicography of the Arabic words in this passage prove to be quite reliable. A high number of exact parallels of meaning between the Syriac and the Arabic (though the Arabic passage is short) come to light while reading the Qur'ānic text in a way that accords very closely with the traditional Muslim interpretation – interpretation of the words themselves, that is, the lexicography, and not the explanatory commentary or *tafsīr*. Whatever problems one finds in the grammar and script of the Qur'ān, it is quite clear that the words and basic meanings of this passage of the Qur'ān have been understood by Islamic tradition correctly. In a sense this Syriac *Alexander Legend* vindicates the reliability of some basic, traditional claims about this Qur'ānic passage, providing means to verify Arabic tradition.

Conclusions

The main conclusion reached here is that a Syriac text quite current and important in the last years of Muḥammad's life was adapted for twenty verses of the Qur'ān. This is not entirely new, since Nöldeke made a similar argument in 1890. Nor is it surprising, since the Qur'ān relates many other well known ancient stories in its own way to deliver its own message, as Muslims generally accept. However, it is now shown beyond any reasonable doubt that this is the case for a text contemporary with Muḥammad. Moreover, what is most important for our understanding of the adaptation of the *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān is not the fact of the borrowing but rather the way in which the particular religious and political message associated with the *Alexander Legend* was used, truncated, and altered for new purposes.

This is not a sweeping theory about the formation of the Qur'ān, for it only concerns one small portion of a text agreed upon by almost all to have been compiled from different oral and written materials collected together after the death of the prophet. This theory makes no claims about the text of the Qur'ān as a whole, but it nevertheless requires that the Syriac *Alexander Legend* be taken into account by any theory attempting to account for the whole Qur'ān. It is only in studying the Qur'ān as a text in its own historical context, which historians of the Qur'ān have neglected to a surprising extent in their overdependence on later Arabic sources for the history of the seventh century, that it will become comprehensible to the historian and to those truly concerned with understanding its inimitable history.

The findings of this article may be summarized as follows. The Syriac *Alexander Legend*, written in 629–30 as religious and political propaganda in favor of Heraclius after a devastating war, puts forth two prophecies: one about the impending end of the world in a war of all nations, the other predicting that Roman, Christian rule would come over the entire earth before the Messiah's return. This text was evidently well known soon after its publication since several other texts written in the seventh century react to or include material derived from it. The Arabic, Qur'ānic account of Dhū l-Qarnayn also repeats this story, but includes only the first of its two prophecies, along with the narrative of Alexander's journeys. If Muḥammad himself did speak Q 18:83–102, then it may well have been his response to questions concerning the publication of these prophecies ("They ask you about the Two-Horned One. Say..."). Whatever the precise circumstances of the Arabic composition were, its primary message is that God's judgment is very much imminent. The reference to contemporary wars reflects the notion, widely held around this time, that the violence and strife of this period were indeed an indicator of the rapidly approaching end of the world. It is not surprising that a community of Arabs whose religion was based on a belief in prophecy would find the contents of this story meaningful, since it put a prophecy supporting the apocalyptic sentiments that they shared, designed for their troubled times, into the mouth of an ancient and respected world-conqueror.

What is striking is that the strongly pro-Roman element, appearing especially in the second prophecy of the *Alexander Legend*, is completely omitted, though many details of the other parts of the story are included. Surely this omission also reflects some attitude in the community of Muḥammad. Finally, though it depends (probably through oral report) on a Syriac work for its content, Q 18:83–102 shows no hint of Syriac vocabulary. It is an entirely Arabic text likely to have been first uttered in the early seventh century. The extraordinary correspondences between the Syriac and the Arabic vindicate the early Muslim understanding of the meaning of the words in this text, but not their exegesis of it.⁷⁸

Approaching the Qur'ān by contextualizing it in the milieu of the early seventh century clearly has much to offer, but it is surprising to find how disconnected the field of Qur'ānic research is from other historical studies on the same period and region, with some notable recent exceptions. It seems now that the future of Qur'ānic studies lies not within the discipline construed as Islamic studies alone but rather that many major historical problems of the Qur'ān will be solved by historians of Late Antiquity, whose approaches to the first century of Islam are proving more successful than the various apologetic and polemical approaches that predominate in the modern study of early Islam. That is perhaps to be expected, since scholars in the field of Islamic studies are largely concerned with later tradition and has generally (though not in every case) failed to find adequate tools for approaching the Qur'ān in its original context, the early seventh century. Yet almost every primary source used in the present study was published more than fifty years ago, many of them more than a century ago. Scholars of Islamic studies have brought historical–epistemological problems – which are problems particularly when they confine themselves to late sources – so prominently to the foreground that it is nearly impossible to read the texts themselves, while the general abandonment of the basic preliminary tools of historical scholarship – the philological methods used to establish text that can then serve as objects of historical research – are sorely neglected. But Qur'ānic studies now require scholars trained in Greek and Syriac, not to mention other forms of Aramaic, and even Armenian, Ethiopic and other languages, as much as in Arabic.⁷⁹ With the great surge in research and publication on Late Antiquity, the very context into which Islam came, answers to the pressing theoretical questions as well as to some of the historical ones also may at last appear.⁸⁰

Notes

- 1 E.A. Wallis Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great, being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889.
- 2 Th. Nöldeke, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans," *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, philosophisch-historische Klasse*, 38, 1890, 5, 27–33.
- 3 Nöldeke, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans," 32, "Wie andre Geschichten so hat Muhammed natürlich auch diese auf mündlichen Wege erhalten."

- 4 J. Renard, "Alexander," in *EQ*, vol. 1, 61–2. The article "Gog and Magog" in the same encyclopaedia (Keith Lewinstein, vol. 2, 331–3) at least mentions the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and cites Nöldeke's work, but it does not refer to Nöldeke's thesis that this text was a source of the Qur'ān, rather citing the *Alexander Legend* with extraordinary understatement inconclusively as one of a few "suggestive parallels."
- 5 See note 8.
- 6 Like Gilgamesh, the Alexander of this *Legend* travels to the edges of the world where he found a sea of deadly waters, the touch of which meant death. Also like Gilgamesh, this Alexander journeys through the passage through which the sun passes every night, entering it at sunset and emerging at the eastern end at sunrise. Both Gilgamesh and Alexander follow the sun's nightly course just after it sets, apparently having to pass through before the sun comes around again and catches them. In both stories, the sun's passage is associated with a mountain, Māšu in the Akkadian and Mūsās in the Syriac, evidently related names. Thus there seems to have been an oral tradition of the Gilgamesh story that became associated at an unknown time with Alexander. Moreover, the Syriac *Song of Alexander*, written in reaction to the *Alexander Legend*, and a Talmudic account of Alexander contain more material derived from the Gilgamesh tradition (such as the search for the water of life). This points to the existence of a late antique Aramaic oral tradition of Gilgamesh in which the name Alexander replaced the more ancient hero's name. References to literature on connections between Alexander, Gilgamesh, and the Qur'ān are collected in Brannon Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, 10–37 (plus endnotes), though the conclusions reached there are sometimes doubtful (see note 8).
- 7 G.J. Reinink, "Heraclius, the new Alexander: Apocalyptic prophecies during the reign of Heraclius," in G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte (eds), *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 2, Leuven: Peeters, 2002, 81–94; idem, "Alexander the Great in the Seventh-Century Syriac 'Apocalyptic' Texts," *Byzantinorossika* 2, 2003, 150–78 (this journal is available online at <http://byzantinorossika.org.ru/byzantinorossika.html> where it can be viewed with DjVu software, which is, at the time of this writing, available elsewhere online as a free download); now out of date but full of useful information is F. Pfister, "Alexander der Große in Offenbarungen der Griechen, Juden, Mohammedaner und Christen," in F. Pfister, *Kleine Schriften zum Alexanderroman, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie* 61, 1976, 301–37.
- 8 B. Wheeler, "Moses or Alexander? Q 18:60–5 in early Islamic exegesis," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 57.3, 1998, 191–215 and idem, *Moses*, 10–36. Wheeler does not address directly Nöldeke's hypothesis of the relationship of the *Alexander Legend* to Q 18:83–102, which is the subject of the present paper, though he does refer in his notes to Nöldeke's work ("Moses or Alexander?" 201, n. 52; *Moses*, 138, n. 55 to chapter 1). This strikes me as an unfortunate oversight. While this is not the place to redraw Wheeler's charts showing the supposed interrelationships of these texts, a few critical remarks are in order to guide the reader. In discussing the Qur'ān, its commentaries, three different texts about Alexander (the *Legend*, the *Song*, and different recensions of the *Romance*), and then also the Talmudic story of Alexander, Wheeler has overlooked a good deal of relevant published research (e.g. see later in this note) but has almost completely avoided getting into the details of the texts that could be used to establish their real interrelationships. To take just one of the problematic conclusions as an example, his charts of affiliations (Wheeler, "Moses or Alexander?" 202–3; *Moses*, 17, 19) argue that the Babylonian Talmud is a source of the Christian *Song of Alexander*, which is extremely unlikely. He argues, without foundation, that when Qur'ān commentators refer to extra-Qur'ānic traditions, it becomes

impossible for the Qur'ān to refer to the same extra-Qur'ānic traditions; the Qur'ān itself is cleared of relying on the same ancient traditions (*Moses*, 28–9). This and other problematic schemata aside, Wheeler has not included the *Legend of Alexander* in his chart of affiliations, but only the *Song of Alexander*, which has been shown not actually to be by Jacob of Serugh, as Wheeler seems to think: “Moses or Alexander?” 201; *Moses*, 17; following Nöldeke, actually, but missing much of the subsequent scholarship: for example, A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, Bonn: A. Markus und E. Weber, 1922, 191; K. Czegléd, “Monographs on Syriac and Muhammadan sources in the literary remains of M. Kmoskó,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 4, 1955, (19–90) 35–6; G.J. Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A concept of history in response to Islam,” in A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad (eds) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 1, Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1992, (149–87) 167 n. 73; S. Gero, “The legend of Alexander the Great in the Christian orient,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 75, 1993, 3–9, 7; and above all the introduction accompanying the standard edition of the *Song of Alexander* itself: *Das syrische Alexanderlied. Die Drei Rezensionen*, CSCO 454 (edition)–455 (translation), *Scriptores Syri* 195–6, Trans. G.J. Reinink (ed.), Louvain: Peeters, 1983. Compare Wheeler’s reference to “the brief so-called Legend of Alexander, which is often said to be a prose version of Jacob of Serugh’s (*Song*)...” (Wheeler, *Moses*, 17, no references given) with Reinink’s statement: “No scholar has seriously considered the possibility that the legend is dependent on the (*Song*)” (Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 153). Not even Budge, who first edited the *Legend*, thought that it was a prose version of the *Song*; rather he supposed that they shared a common source (Budge, *History of Alexander*, lxxvii). As Reinink has shown, the *Song of Alexander* is to some degree a reaction to the *Alexander Legend* composed not many years after the latter, probably between 630 and 640 CE (Reinink, “Alexander the Great,” 152–5 and 165–8).

- 9 On the translation of *sabab* as “heavenly course,” see my discussion later in the article.
10 The verb *yamūju* here means to move as waves move. The reference to the armies moving like waves becomes important in what follows.

- 11 Budge, *The History of Alexander*, text 256, line 12, trans. 145.

- 12 Here Budge has misunderstood the passage leading to a nonsensical translation (*The History of Alexander*, text 260–1, trans. 148): “And when the sun enters the window of heaven, he straightway bows down and makes obeisance before God his Creator; and he travels and descends the whole night through the heavens, until at length he finds himself where he rises. And Alexander looked toward the west, and he found a mountain that descends, and its name was ‘the great Mūsās;’ and [the troops] descended it and came out upon Mount K̄lāudiā.”

The passage should rather be understood as follows: “And when the sun entered the window of heaven, he (Alexander) immediately bowed down and made obeisance before God his Creator, and he traveled and descended the whole night in the heavens, until at length he came and found himself where it (the sun) rises. He saw the land of the setting sun and found a mountain where he descended, named Great Mūsās, and they (the troops) descended and arrived with him. And they went forth to Mount Q̄lāwdiyā (Claudia).” The role of Mount Ararat, called Great (Mec) Masis in Armenian, in this story goes back to the very ancient times. At some unknown point it was identified as the mount Māšu (*ma-a-šu*) of Tablet IX of the Gilgamesh epic, where Gilgamesh finds a way into the passage through which the sun enters at nightfall. The later Arabic rendering of the story found in an Adalusian manuscript (on which more later) renders the name of the mountain as *al-Jūdī*, an Arabic name for another, smaller mountain at the northern end of Mesopotamia called Ararat. On the confusion about these mountains see M. Streck, “Djūdī,” *El*², vol. 2, 573b–4a. On the various mountains

- known in Armenian as *Masis*, see J.R. Russell, "Armeno Iranica," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Marcy Boyce, Acta Iranica* 25, *Homages et opera minora* vol. XI, Leiden: Brill, 1985 (447–58) 456. For the occurrence of al-Jūdī in a later Arabic translation of the *Alexander Legend* (discussed in the present article), see E. García Gómez, *Un texto árabe occidental de la Leyenda de Alejandro*, Madrid: Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, 1929, Arabic edition 50, l. 24. --
- 13 K. Czeglédý, "The Syriac Legend Concerning Alexander the Great," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 7, 1957, (231–49) 245, who seeks to localize the author by reference to the rivers Haloras and Kallath. Reinink, "Entstehung," 280, and idem, "Alexander the Great," 161, suggested that the author's home was Edessa or Amida.
 - 14 The Haloras (Arabic *Halūras*, Armenian *Olor*) is a high tributary of the Eastern Tigris, upstream north of Amida. Just beyond its head is a pass leading down from the Arsanias river, so that by this way one could cross between the Armenian valleys and northern Mesopotamia.
 - 15 Budge, *The History of Alexander*, text 269–270, trans. 154–5.
 - 16 Idem, *The History of Alexander*, text 270, trans. 155.
 - 17 Idem, *The History of Alexander*, trans. 146 and 156; text 257 l. 14 and 272 l. 11.
 - 18 It is well known that already in his own time Alexander was portrayed with horns according to the iconography of the Egyptian god Ammon. (A.R. Anderson, "Alexander's horns," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 58, 1927, [100–22] 101.) But the problem here is not to illustrate the entire history of this image, something already investigated in detail by others, but rather to show the proximate source of the information used in the Qur'ān.
 - 19 Josephus, *De Bello Iudaico*, 7.7.4. The ancient traditions on Alexander's wall, its iron gates, and its location are treated amply by A.R. Anderson, "Alexander's Horns," 109–10 and especially in "Alexander at the Caspian gates," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 59, 1928, 130–63. The wall is discussed further elsewhere in the present article.
 - 20 In the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and in the Qur'ān God gathers the peoples who will fight (Syriac *nkannēš*, Arabic *fa-jama'nāhum jam'an*). In the earlier tradition of *Revelation of John* 20:7–9 it is Satan who "gathers" (*sunagagein*) Gog and Magog to fight.
 - 21 It is likely that one should emend the text of the Qur'ān from *Yājūj* (*y'jwǰ*) to *Ājūj* (*j'wǰ*) on the basis of the Syriac source combined with the attestation of the form *Ājūj* in Arabic recorded by al-Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn Hajar (E. van Donzel and C. Ott, "Yādūdī wa-Mādūdī," *EL*², vol. 11, 231a–3b). An unintended [*y*] may be easily read in that position (before initial *alif*) by mistake in either Syriac or Arabic script.
 - 22 Many examples of this usage are found in W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870–1872, vol. 3 (e.g. on 1090b, 1113a, 1127b).
 - 23 For example, *sūrat Maryam* (Q 19:2) is headed, "a *dhikr* of the mercy of your lord on his servant Zakariyyā." Here, *dhikr* clearly means "record" or "account." Cf. *sūrat Tāhā* (Q 20:99), where the word apparently refers to accounts of former (Biblical) times.
 - 24 E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book 1, part 4, 1285c, entry "*sabab*."
 - 25 My study of Qur'ānic *sabab* will appear elsewhere. The meaning "heavenly courses" is explicit in Q 40:37, *asbāb al-samawāt*, where Pharaoh wants to vie with Moses in reaching the *asbāb*, the courses, of the heavens to behold Moses' God. It also appears in Q 38:10, *fa-l-yartaqū fī l-asbāb*, where God challenges those who vie with his all-mastery to reach heaven by ascending by *asbāb*; in Q 22:15, *fa-l-yamdud bi-sababin ilā l-samā'i thumma l-yaqta'*, which has been taken by many to refer to stringing a

- noose from the roof of a house; it appears rather to be a challenge to ascend to the heavens by the extraordinary means of a heavenly course, but it is doomed to failure, as in the previous example; and in Q 2:166, where God says that the *asbāb* (the heavenly cords) will collapse on judgment day. For this list of occurrences I used Arne A. Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004, 126–7.
- 26 K. van Bladel, "Heavenly cords and prophetic authority in the Qur'ān and its Late Antique context," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, 2007, 223–247; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, article "thamānān," Book 1, part 1, 355c–356a. *Asbāb* in this verse is preferred as the *lectio difficilior*.
- 27 Budge, *History of Alexander*, text 260, trans. 148.
- 28 The cosmology of the *Alexander Legend* is very similar to that found in the *Book of Enoch* (*I Enoch*) and a few of the elements of Alexander's experiences of the far edges of the world are just like those encountered by Enoch. Like Alexander, Enoch visits the four corners of the earth. *I Enoch* 17–36 tells this story, in which Enoch sees the prison (*I Enoch* 18:14, 21:10: Greek *desmōtērion*, Ethiopic *bēta moqəḥ*) for fallen angels and a place of punishment of the souls of sinners (*I Enoch* 22:13, Greek *hamartōloi*, Ethiopic *xāṭə'ān*) in a far western place. This is quite like the prison that Alexander draws those whom he sends into the deadly waters to test them. In his vision, it is the winds that serve as the pillars of heaven over the earth (*I Enoch* 18:3: Ethiopic *a'amāda samāy*; Greek "foundation of heaven" *sterēdna tou ouranou*), pillars calling to mind perhaps the Arabic *asbāb al-samawāt* under discussion. Enoch also finds "gates of heaven" in the north (*I Enoch* 34–6: Ethiopic *xawāxawa samāy*). In the portion of the work known as "The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries," *I Enoch* 75–82, Enoch sees the gates of heaven (*I Enoch* 72:2ff.: again Ethiopic *xawāxawa samāy*, sing. *xoxət*) and the windows (*I Enoch* 72:3ff. Ethiopic *maskot*, pl. *masākaw*) to their right and left. The sun, moon, stars, and winds pass through these gates. (Words cited here are taken from the Ethiopic and the surviving Greek portions of *I Enoch*: *Das Buch Henoch. Äthiopischer Text*, J. Flemming (ed.), Leipzig: J.C. Heinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902 and *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece*, M. Black (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1970). It is likely that the author of the *Alexander Legend* knew the story of Enoch or shared its cosmology. Gates of Heaven, *abwāb al-samā'*, are also mentioned in Q 7:40 and 54:11, where in the former case they seem to be portals leading to the Garden (*al-Janna*) and in the latter case they are the hatches through which rains come to earth in Noah's story, reflecting the "windows of heaven" in Genesis 7:11 (Hebrew *arubbōt haššamayim*).
- 29 G.J. Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios' Kirchenpolitik," in C. Laga, J.A. Munitiz, and L. Van Rompay (eds), *After Chalcedon. Studies in Theology and Church History offered to Professor Albert van Roey for his Seventieth Birthday*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 18, Leuven: Peeters 1985, 263–81; "Ps.-Methodius," 1992, 149–87; "Pseudo-Ephraems 'Rede über das Ende' und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts," *Aram* 5, 1993, 437–63; "Alexandre et le dernier empereur du monde: les développements du concept de la royauté chrétienne dans les sources syriaques du septième siècle," in L. Harf-Lancner, C. Kappler et F. Suard (eds), *Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures occidentales et proche-orientales. Actes du colloque de Paris, 27–29 novembre 1997*, Nanterre: Centre des sciences de la littérature de l'Université Paris X, 1999, 149–59; "Heraclius, the New Alexander," "Alexander the Great," 2003, 150–78.
- 30 The Era of the Greeks began in 1 October 312 BC according to the Julian Era. The dates can be converted by subtracting 312–311 from the Common Era year. On the use of this era in Syriac see P. Ludger Bernhard, *Die Chronologie der syrischen Handschriften, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Supplementband 14*, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1969, 110–2. One will notice that the Era of

the Greeks, frequently called in Syriac tradition the Era of Alexander, does not actually correspond with the death of Alexander. The assumption of the author of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, that the Era of Alexander began with Alexander's death, is a mistake easy to make. He wanted only to signal the dates of his prophecies with an era in common use.

- 31 The little that is known of the general early history and ethnic affiliation of the Sabirs is summarized by Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992, 104–6.
- 32 It is approved by, for example, Czeglédy, "The Syriac Legend," 245.
- 33 Earlier scholarship has used the signal of the year 628–9 CE in Alexander's prophecy to date the text in different ways. Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 2003, shows that the text was composed in 630 or just before that time.
- 34 Reinink, "Alexander the Great."
- 35 For example, J. Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian campaigns and the revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630," *War in History* 6, 1999, (1–44) 26–40. W.E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- 36 Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 160–2.
- 37 Idem, 163–4.
- 38 Idem, "Die Entstehung" and "Alexander the Great."
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 A.R. Anderson, "Alexander's Horns," 109–10. Idem, "Alexander at the Caspian Gates" gives an exhaustive account of the ancient and modern confusion over precisely where these gates and the pass that they blocked were located. They were at least since the first century CE mistakenly thought by many classical authors to have been located at the pass of Darial in the middle of the Caucasus. Later, around the seventh century, this site was confused with the pass at Darband along the Caspian Sea.
- 41 Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 89; cf. maps 56 and 57 on 66–7.
- 42 Extensive bibliographies are found in E. Kettenhofen, "Darband," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 7, 13–19; G.G. Gamzatov, "Dāgēstān i: Cultural relations with Persia," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 6, 568–75; D.M. Dunlop, "Bāb al-Abwāb," *El*², 1, 835. Hewsen, *Armenia*, 85, 90–1, contains maps of these walls and in particular a detailed close-up map of the wall at Darband. For a list of frontier walls built by the Sasanians: H. Mahamedi, "Wall [sic] as a system of frontier defense during the Sasanid period," in T. Daryaee and M. Omidshafar (eds), *The Spirit of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of Ahmed Tafazzoli*, Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2004, 145–59; this study makes almost no use of relevant Greek, Armenian, and other sources.
- 43 *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, trans. and comment. R.W. Thomson and J. Howard-Johnston, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999, I, trans. 148.
- 44 *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV. Cum Continuationibus, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum tomus II*, Bruno Krusch (ed.), Hannover: Hahn, 1888, (1–214) esp. 153.
- 45 Erich Kettenhofen, "Darband," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 7, 13–19, 16.
- 46 In so characterizing these names I paraphrase Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander," 2002, 85. On the tradition of these names in Arabic, see E. van Donzel and C. Ott, "Yādūdī wa-Mādūdī," *El*², 11, 231a–33b, and K. Lewinstein, "Gog and Magog," *EQ*, 2, 331–3.
- 47 Andreas, *Commentary on Revelation*, J. Schmid (ed.) in *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Texte I. Der Apokalypse-kommentar des Andreas von Kaisareia*, Munich: Zink, 1955, 223 (kephalaion 63): *einai dē taútā tines mēn Skuthikā ēthnē nomizousin huperbōreia, hāper kaloūmen Ounnikā, pásēs epigeiōu basileias, liōs horōmen, poluanthrōpōterā te kai polemikōtera*. "Some people think that these

- (scil. Gog and Magog) are the Scythian, Hyperborean nations, which we call Hunnic, both most populous and most warlike, as we see, of the entire earthly kingdom." Cf. Josephus, *Judean Antiquities*, 1.6.1.
- 48 For the complicated debate about the identity of the leader of the Türks (or their Khazar subordinates) in these invasions see A. Bombaci, "Qui était Jebu Xak'an?" *Turcica* 2, 1970, 7-24. See also P. Golden, *Khazar Studies*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980, 49-51.
 - 49 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, C. de Boor (ed.), Hildesheim: Olms, 1963. *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*, trans. and comment. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, Oxford: Clarendon, 1997, 446-8. See also the modern synthesis of W. Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 142-6.
 - 50 *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, trans. C.J.F. Dowsett, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 87.
 - 51 J. Howard-Johnston, "Armenian Historians of Heraclius: An Examination of the Aims, Sources, and Working-Methods of Sebeos and Movses Daskhurantsi," in G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte (eds), *The Reign of Heraclius*, 41-62. The earliest known citation of the work is by Anania Mokac'i, writing some time after 958, by which time the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* had a reputation of its own (Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, xv-xvi). Now that two palimpsest texts written in the Caucasian Albanian (Aluan) language have been discovered in the Sinai and deciphered, proving that there was at least an ecclesiastical literary tradition in this language, it is possible to wonder whether the description of these invasions of Caucasian Albania was originally composed in the local literary language before being translated into Armenian. It is noteworthy that the anonymous author of these passages states that he came from the village of Kalankatuk' (Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 84; this is the reason the compiler Movses Daskhurantsi is sometimes mistakenly called Kalankuac'i), located very near Partaw, the capital of Caucasian Albania (see the map of Hewsen, *Armenia*, 41). For more on the discovery and decipherment of the new Caucasian Albanian texts by Zaza Aleksidze, see the internet site armazi.uni-frankfurt.de, following the link "Albanica."
 - 52 Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 83-4 (Book 2, chapter 11).
 - 53 Budge, *History of Alexander*, text 263-5, trans. 150-1.
 - 54 Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 75 (Book 2, chapter 9). Edition: Movses "Kalankatuac'i", *Patmut' iwn Aluanic' Ašxarhi*, M. Emin (ed.), Tbilisi, n.p., 1912 (reprint of M. Emin's 1860 Moscow edition), ed. 144.
 - 55 Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 165.
 - 56 Idem, "Pseudo-Ephraems 'Rede über das Ende,'" 455-63.
 - 57 Idem, "Pseudo-Methodius," and "Alexander the Great," 171-7.
 - 58 G. Reinink's ("Alexander the Great," 2003, 152) more general remarks on the inter-relationships of early eighth century apocalypses are worth repeating: "The postulating of some older 'common source,' which is supposedly lost today, does not always form a satisfactory explanation of the differences between these texts and especially not, if we should completely ignore the specific literary and historical conditions under which each of these works came into being, conditions which may have led to certain reinterpretations, adaptations and modifications of the existing tradition."
 - 59 Stephen Gero, "The legend of Alexander the Great," 7.
 - 60 Budge, *History of Alexander*, text 155, trans. 270 l. 1.
 - 61 On Ghassanid monophysitism and their connections with Heraclius, see I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995, vol. 2.
 - 62 On the raid at Mu'ta see W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 171-4.
 - 63 Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 165-8.

- 64 F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin, 1998, 228–9, includes a basic bibliography for early Islamic apocalypticism. On apocalyptic feeling in other sources from this period, see Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander," 81–3.
- 65 N.M. El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 24–33.
- 66 New Oxford Annotated Bible, 2nd edn. rev.
- 67 Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 75; Tbilisi edn, 144. Cf. the Gospel text of Luke 21:25 edited by Beda O. Künzle, *Das altarmenische Evangelium*, New York: Lang, 1984, I, 205: *i yahel barbaṛoy ibrew covu ew xrovut'ean*.
- 68 Tbilisi edn 154, text, Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 84.
- 69 Tbilisi edn 156, Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 85.
- 70 Dowsett, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 88.
- 71 Idem, 89.
- 72 Idem, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, 83, Tbilisi edn, 153, I. 26.
- 73 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 315–16.
- 74 *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredagarii*, 153.
- 75 Anderson, "Alexander at the Caspian Gates," 135.
- 76 New Oxford Annotated Bible, 2nd edn. rev.
- 77 The controversial thesis was published under the name Christoph Luxenberg, *Die Syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 2000. Detailed review of this work can be found in other articles in the present volume.
- 78 For evidence that there was once a more substantial knowledge of the *Alexander Legend* in Arabic, at least as early as the mid-ninth century, including some investigation of the Qur'ân commentaries on Q 18:83–102, see K. van Bladel, "The Syriac sources of the early Arabic narratives of Alexander," in H.P. Ray (ed.), *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in South Asia*, New Delhi: Aryan International, 2007, (54–75) 64–67. See also the important study of the *Alexander Romance* in Arabic by F.C.W. Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: Zeven eeuwen Arabische Alexandertraditie: van Pseudo-Callisthenes tot Šūṭī*, Dissertation, University of Leiden, 2003.
- 79 This was made amply clear by Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1997.
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