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**NOTE ON CONVENTIONS**

Arabic and Persian transliterations follow a modified system based on the standard of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). Syriac transliteration largely parallels Gotthelf Bergsträßer, *Einführung in die semitischen Sprachen* (1928); eastern pronunciation is used, with the spirantization marked, but without notation of the schwa. The transcription of Middle Persian follows the system developed by D. N. Mackenzie. Unpointed or otherwise illegible graphemes, such as an undotted tooth (the base for 'b,' 't,' etc.), or an unvocalized consonantal form, are indicated with a period. Chinese characters are Romanized using simplified *pinyin* transcription. Names and toponyms from non-Latin alphabets are transliterated unless common to English. The genealogical sequence Zayd ibn Zayd, etc., is abbreviated with 'b' for ibn (son); the definite article on the *nisba* and the *laqab* is dropped after its first appearance, i.e., from 'al-Bukhari' to 'Bukhari,' or 'al-Jahiz' to 'Jahiz,' and so forth. However, definite articles are maintained for honorifics and formal titles, i.e., al-Mansūr. Dates preceding the start of the Islamic calendar are given according to the common era; dates pertaining to Islamic history are indicated both in *hijri* and Common Era forms. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
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“La Biblioteca es ilimitada y periódica”
— Jorge Luis Borges

The bulge-eyed literary luminary of Basra, Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥīz was never known to have been much of a traveler, at least according to the geographical authorities, though he clearly enjoyed compiling entertaining anecdotes from far-off lands. In popular legend, he is said to have been crushed to death in old age when his library collapsed upon him. Such has been the fate of bibliophiles. As for their books, in a pattern of seemingly chaotic dispersal, they have traveled along crossroads on camelback, pausing at the remnants of abandoned campsites in the stretching dunes of history; they have been put up for sale in book markets, copied along the way from hand to print to critical editions, translated into, at times, not so willing forms, stacked into archives and libraries, and ultimately lost altogether.

While this is a book for travelers, or at least made up of them, it, too, will undoubtedly share a similar fate of dispersal and loss—though that is another story altogether. For this is a tale not only of the effacement of knowledge, but of its dissemination and re-creation. Much of the groundwork for this tour through the archives was prepared in the service of my doctoral research, which traced the formation of frontiers, as well as their maintenance and dissolution in acts of translation. This current book fits into a larger project on translation and knowledge in medieval Islamic intellectual history. For now, this leads us to the exotic world of geography with its own attachment to imperial archives. The companion to this book follows the problem of mediating alterity, not in the realm of the monstrous and the mundane, but through the sublime word of revelation.

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INTRODUCTION

Modes of Translation
The present study examines the role of translation in its hermeneutical capacity and as a basis of epistemology within medieval Arabic and Persian descriptive geography. While geographical writings continued to evolve throughout Islamic intellectual history, the development of the discipline is intimately related to the administration of the 'Abbāsid empire during the course of the third/ninth century (map 1; fig. 1). The totalizing grandeur of geography, with its imperial illusion of possessing the world, sets out to blanket the horizons of the earth in text and image.

Throughout this field runs a persistent concern with translation and the mediation of difference—in spatial, conceptual, and ethnic terms. This often coalesces around a discourse of the marvelous ('ajab), such that the wonders of the world become a salient feature of Arabic and Persian writings on the nature of existence. This body of literature is infused with the language of the apocalypse, anticipating the annihilation of all human existence in the final hour of judgment, suggesting a paradigmatic intersection of core assumptions and beliefs in the relationship between scripture and geography. The monstrous as a portentous sign is a prominent feature in Islamic apocalyptic literature.

Constructing the 'savage' is arguably a defining characteristic of civilization. The struggles against Humbaba in the Assyrian epic Gilgamesh, the Cyclops of Homer's Odyssey, Grendel from the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf, and Zāhīk from the Persian Shāh-nāma can all be seen as attempts to mediate and sublimate the danger of the foreign and remote. The monstrous is one of the most palpable demarcations of alterity, and, as wedded to the marvelous and the exotic, dwells most often at the margins of the imagination, pushed from the center toward land's end.
The interpretative act of ‘thick description’ offers a theoretical model for this project; namely that the individual elements of the particular, of the anecdotal, when constituted or analyzed through their relationship to the broader structures of the universal, may reveal a good deal about culture and ideology.¹ The illusion of the anecdote lies in its simple reduction of ontology into a bounded and closed narrative form. Such sleight of hand is only possible through the interpretive communities that make a given narrative meaningful. Thus the original articulation of any account depends upon the larger context of its production. Yet such original contexts of production do not predetermine meaning across the polysemous expanse of diachronic dissemination, itself animated through a process of interpretation and translation.

Our point of entry into the field of descriptive geography, a discipline concerned with maintaining the semblance of encyclopedic totality, is a single 'Abbasid embassy sent beyond the frontiers of Islamic civilization. This narrative has been the subject of an ongoing scholarly debate that has focused primarily on the question of authenticity. Appearing throughout medieval Islamic geography, along with a host of other discursive fields, the anecdote details a mission to the end of the world to discover the land of the monstrous tribes of Yājūj and Mājūj. These tribes, mentioned in the Qur'an as races set to destroy all of humankind at the end of time, find their place in Christian and Jewish scriptures as Gog and Magog, and thus represent a shared eschatology of final destruction. Here the scriptural foretelling the ultimate annihilation of the world. In Islamic geographical discourse, as represented in this particular anecdote and numerous others like it, a pattern of engaging with difference develops, affirming that the small and even the abhorrent all reflect a sublime arrangement: [God] leaves nothing without a purpose or without meaning, nothing scattered or unordered, no thread left loose. He makes no errors in His wondrous design (min 'ajib taqdirihi), and He neglects no detail in His elegant order, not in terms of the beauty of construction, nor magnificence of its power as a proof (burhān). All this extends from lice and butterflies to the seven celestial spheres and the seven climes of the earth.²

Of Marvels and Monsters

In early 'Abbasid geographies we not only see the translation, adaptation, and reconfiguration of marvel-writing from Greek antiquity, often through the medium of Syriac translations, but we also encounter repeated stories of translators and problems of communicating across frontiers. Interpreters populate the frontier as a means of surveilling and articulating imperial dominion, controlling liminal spaces through a construction of knowledge about the other. Here translation serves as a domestication of the foreign and remote, where the translators who appear in geographical writings on marvels and monsters help to bring near and subdue the strange and uncanny.

Recurrent in Islamic philosophical writings is the view that the emotional state of wonder (ajāb) manifests through a confusion that arises from a lack of knowledge about the cause (sabab) of a given phenomenon.³ This definition can be traced back to Aristotle's argument, expressed in the Metaphysica (9.82b11–83a23), that in the act of wonder (θαυμάζειν) we find the beginning of philosophy. A writer like Zakariyya al-Qazwini (d. 682/1283) constructs his encyclopedia on the marvels of the world, the Ajāb al-makhliqāt [Wonders of existence], on the basis of this Aristotelian principle that curiosity is the foundation of philosophical speculation (nazār).⁴ Much of the material that Qazwini and other Arabic and Persian authors draw from can be found in the Greek tradition of pseudo-scientific marvel-writing (παραδοξογραφία), a genre populated by dog-headed men (κυνοκέφαλοι) and tribes of wild pygmies (πυγμαίοι).⁵

The homiletic force of the Qur'ān serves as a prime source for the concept of the marvelous as it develops within Islamic intellectual history. Repeated in the Qur'ān is the injunction to contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth. Such homiletic discourse serves to prove God's existence. Accordingly, a teleological argument runs through the entire cosmos, from the stars above to insects below, all reflecting a cosmic order of divine design.⁶

The interconnected relationship between the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels of existence builds upon the notion that every aspect of creation, however minuscule or monstrous, is in concert with this cosmic order. Thus the 'Abbasid intellectual and man of letters, Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–9), comments in the Kitāb al-ḥayawān [Book of the animals] that, in the gnat's wing there is a reflection (ībra) of this larger divine design, just waiting to be uncovered by those who can discern an "abundance of wonders spread therein" (min kathārati 'l-taṣarruf fi 'l-'ajib).⁷ Jāhiz argues that the small and even the abhorrent all reflect a sublime arrangement:
As an ordering principle, such an interconnection between micro- and macrocosms, is, according to Michel Foucault, built upon the logic of "duplicated resemblances," where "nature, like the interplay of signs and resemblances, is closed in upon itself in conformity with the duplicated form of the cosmos." This closure in the context of Islamic theodicy results from a cosmic order that privileges, above all, the principle of divine unity.

In such a configuration, the question of the independent existence of evil apart from God became a theological flash point of debate. For Jāhiz, schooled within Mu'tazili theology, which promoted unity (tawḥīd) and justice (ʿadl) as the primary principles of divine nature, the well-being (maslaḥa) of the world depended upon the balance between good and evil (imtizāj al-khayr bi'l-sharr). Without the harmful (al-dār), the vile (al-makruh), and the lowly (al-da'ū), there could be no way of knowing the good. Such theological articulations were informed by the translation and absorption of material from classical Greek philosophy. With the 'Abbasid translation of Galen's *Compendium of Plato's Timaeus*, we have, for instance, a formulation of divine theodicy which came to serve as a source of major contention within the development of Islamic theology: "It is impossible that the world be in any condition more excellent than that in which it is (lā yumkinu an yakūna alā ʿālīn afdala min ʿālīhi ilāti huwa ʿalayhā)."

The Ash'arī theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) argued along similar lines when he reiterated this formulation as, "It is impossible for the form of this world (ṣūrat ḥādhā l-ʿālam) to be more wondrous (ʿabdā) than it is, of a more beautiful arrangement (aḥsan tartīban), or of a more complete design (akmal sanʿan)." Such theological optimism, in the strict sense of the word, proved to be highly contentious, particularly in regard to its perceived limitation of divine omnipotence (ḥaṣr al-qudra). However, the argument that there is no substantive quality to evil that could exist as an independent power, apart from God, came to be widely accepted as a normative position within the framework of Islamic theology. The ontological status of the monstrous, of the abhorrent, and of evil was thus shaped within the fabric of salvation history, as part of the marvelous and uncanny design of God's creation. As such, the monstrous, however portentous, was not just a sign of demonic machinations, but also of a sublime and mysterious order.

**Epistemes**

Generally speaking, medieval Muslim writers, with the notable exception of some philosophers (falāsīfa), did not question the literalness of the supernatural issues treated in the Qurān; jinn and angels, talking birds and insects, and people waking up after years of slumber are all part of divine orchestration. The revelation of the Qurān is itself viewed as a providential intersection with the course of human history. In such a configuration, the world is full of enchantment, where ruptures with the ordinary (al-khārīj min al-ʿāda), with normative phenomenological experience, are indications of miraculous workings.

Medieval Arabic and Persian geographical writings form part of a broader ordering of the world within an Islamic cosmographical system, where scripture and salvation enwrap the contours of the globe. The paradigm of the wondrous world of diversity, and with it monstrosity, continues to operate in the early modern transmission of geographical knowledge. Well into the nineteenth century, Islamic cartographical projections circulate that include the land of Gog and Magog, ominously mentioned in the Qur'ānic account of Dūh 'l-Qarnayn (Q. 18:85–100), 'the Possessor of Two-Horns,' who is generally identified with Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.). According to the Qurān and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, at the end of time these monstrous tribes, which Dūh 'l-Qarnayn bottled up behind a wall at the edge of the earth, will break free from their enclosure and descend upon the world as a scourge to destroy all humanity.

With the authority of the Qurān, the existence of this wall, along with questions about its location, has been a field of perennial interest throughout Islamic history. For instance, the Syrian intellectual Rashid Ridā (d. 1935) responded in his reformist journal, *al-Manār* (1908), to a letter written by a Muslim from Sudan. The letter inquired whether the barrier mentioned in the Qurān as the wall against Gog and Magog corresponded to the Great Wall of China. This particular theory was championed by many western scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a way of demystifying the account of Alexander's barrier and assigning it a historical origin. Rashid Ridā replied that these two barriers should not be confused. Rather, he concluded that the wall was most probably located in either the North or South Poles, regions that in his day had yet to be fully explored. Even though the penetration of the earth's farthest frontiers has yet to reveal an invincible barrier, Gog and Magog have continued to stir up the apocalyptic imaginations of the three competing monotheistic faiths; they lurk in the geopolitical landscapes of conspiracy theories and end-time scenarios, now largely reduced to a polysemous language of symbols and portentous signs.

At the most basic level, the wall of Gog and Magog represents for medieval thought the frontiers of knowledge, a semiotic 'No more beyond' (non plus ultra), which, like the Pillars of Hercules flanking the Strait of
Gibraltar’s egress into the Atlantic Ocean, demarcates the limitations of human capacity. Such conceptual boundaries slowly gave way to a process of competitive mercantile expansion which led, quite accidentally, to the European conquest of the Americas. Charles V (r. 1516–58), the Holy Roman Emperor and ruler of large swaths of newly-conquered American territories, altered the Herculean phrase to suit his imperial motto ‘more beyond’ (plus ultra), and with it claimed an ever-expanding empire. With the Age of Discovery and the rise of the Enlightenment, the limits of knowledge and the systems of thought that governed them underwent radical reformulations the world over.

The putative backwardness of the ‘Oriental,’ thought to be due, in part, to a childish fixation with superstitions, served as a rationale for European colonialism and its civilizing mission. Just as the enchanted world of European medieval learning and literature was blamed, in large measure, on the disproportionate influence of oriental tales, the category of the medieval itself spoke to a specific Western teleology that led through the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and concluded with the progress of Modernity. As these were stages of history that oriental peoples did not enjoy, they remained, in some basic sense, in a haze of medieval darkness that could only be illuminated through the rational schooling of European dominion. Or so the discourses of colonialism would have it. Thus the problem with the categories of the marvelous or fabulous, the fictive or imaginary, is that they are still burdened with an epistemic order that attempts to strip the world of mysterious causes and effects through disenchaned, rational explanations of empirical positivism.

As for the limits of our own knowledge, we are restricted, in a fundamental sense, by this legacy of suspicion that has attempted to empty the world of mystery. The significance of the marvelous for the cultures that produced such texts and images radically differs from Enlightenment sensibilities, which have sought to sweep away supernatural stories as primitive myths and legends. While we may readily admit that there are no islands populated with dog-headed men, or tribes of women who grow from trees, or nations of savages bottled up behind an ancient barrier at the end of the earth, we need not do so at the expense of understanding the conceptual frameworks that made such stories meaningful.

As a category within medieval Islamic discourse, the marvelous functions in direct relation to its ontological claims about reality. In the context of medieval European epistemology, Caroline Bynum argues that the very function of wonder is predicated on an uncanny reality, for “you can marvel only at something that is, at least in some sense, there.” The significance of the marvelous in such contexts emerges through its veridical ontological status, what Bynum calls “the there-ness of the event.” Such a configuration highlights the primacy of deixis, of pointing, indicating, and beholding this ‘there-ness.’ Imbedded within the marvelous of the Latin mirabilia, which parallels the Greek thaumata (θαυμάσια), is the idea of the spectacle and the ocular perception of something to be seen and to behold (mirabile visu / ήθελμα ἰδέσθαι). For Arabic and Persian descriptive geography this is articulated in the privileged position of empirical observation (‘iyān) and eyewitness testimony.

In Islamic illuminated manuscripts the psychological impact of wonder is often translated visually in the expression of the human face confronted with the strange (gharib) or marvelous (‘ajib). It is not hard to identify the iconicographic gestures meant to evoke astonishment, demonstrating the power of gesture to negotiate the strange and the remote, in deictic acts of communication, guiding our attention toward the marginal, while simultaneously focusing on the psychological state of the observer, who ultimately serves as the visual intermediary for the phenomenon of the marvelous (plate 1). In Persian, the phrase “the finger of astonishment” (angushṭ-i ta’ajjub), in both textual and visual idioms, translates the bizarre, the uncanny, and the savage through the power of gesture. The Arabic lexicographer, Ibn Jinni (d. 392/1002) describes a theory that the origin of language begins through signing (imā) and pointing (ishāra) toward concrete material objects. In this light, gesture is perhaps the most fundamental form of engaging with difference (plate 2).

Much has been said regarding the place of narrative ‘fiction’ and its role in medieval Islamic writerly culture. I would like to first reiterate the hermeneutic difficulty of using the term fiction when discussing the various traditions of Arabic and Persian storytelling, especially when approaching the genre of marvel-writing. As a category, fiction tends to predetermine for us the place and significance of the marvelous or uncanny, at least in regard to intended reception and the question of entertainment value.

An anxiety for authenticity inflects the presentation and management of the marvelous and can be traced throughout Islamic geographies and cosmographies. As it is the ideal of veracity that animates this material, the issue of assaying the authenticity of marvels becomes a standard feature of geographical discourse. This trope of questioning the accuracy of information concerning the world is fully articulated in Greek geographical writings. Both Strabo (d. ca 23 C.E.) and Ptolemy (fl. 141 C.E.), in their respective geographies, raise eyebrows at the hearsay of travelers’ tales.

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The account of how Ptolemy gathered information about the earth through informants whom he dispatched around the world became a well-traveled motif in Islamic geographical discussions of measurement and empiricism. The ‘Abbāsid administrator Qudāma b. Ja’far (d. 337/948), drawing from the introduction of Ptolemy’s Geographia, writes that it is impossible to know the conditions of the earth in terms of its form and size, the locations of countries, and the extent of the inhabited regions by way of direct observation (mu‘ayana), or through eye-witness testimony (mushâhada), because of the shortness of human life and the inability to travel to all the locations that one would need to see in order to grasp such knowledge. Qudāma describes how Ptolemy’s scouts traveled the world and returned with authentic accounts (al-akhbār al-saḥīḥa), which Ptolemy was able to supplement through inference (istidâl), in order to draw further geographical measurements. This stands in marked contrast to Ptolemy’s criticism directed toward previous scholars who based their views on the unreliable opinions of merchants (tuğâr), who were more interested in boasting about the far-flung places they had visited, than in offering an accurate accounting of the world.24

The encyclopedist Abū ʿl-Ḥasan al-Maṣūdī (d. 345/956) picks up the same anecdote describing the danger of relying on information collected from merchants, who are prone to lies, exaggerations, and omissions with respect to distant locations and the extremity of inhabitable lands.25 Tangled in the yarns of merchants is not just the misinformation of geographical distances, but stories of fabulous creatures and wondrous tales of riches and spices waiting to be negotiated on the world’s edge. A prime example lies in the journeys of Sulaymān the Merchant (fl. 237/851), which make their way into the geography of Ibn al-Faqīh (fl. 289/902) and the encyclopedia of Maṣūdī. These accounts of the exotic lands of the east and the strange customs of their inhabitants are supplemented with the even more fantastic merchant tales collected by Abū Zayd al-Baṣrī (fl. 303/915).26

The authenticity of the strange accounts conveyed in such writings was, indeed, an ongoing concern. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. ca 385/995), in his biobibliographical compendium, situates books on the marvels of the world after the Persian stories of Shahrazād in the Ḥazār afṣān [The thousand fables] and accounts of sexual encounters between jinn and humans. This comes in a section on evening tales and fables (al-asmār wa ‘l-khurāfāt), suggesting not only an awareness of the less than factual nature of much of the material, but also an appreciation for the entertainment value undergirding the narrative production of marvel literature.27

As a discrete field within ‘Abbāsid letters, writing on marvels also reflected a broad mercantile network through which traveled the exotica of precious metals, jewels, perfumes, textiles, strange animals, rare foods and spices. The Kitāb al-tabāṣṣur bi-l-tijārā [An inquiry into commerce], ascribed to Jāḥiz, offers an early example of a geographical system ordered around a mercantile economy that privileged specialities (khwāṣṣ) of the various regions of the world, indulging in the sandalwood, coconuts, and elephants of India; the silk, paper, and ink of China; and the brocades, medicaments, and singing-girls of Byzantium.28

This economic geography of luxury was used in the service of imperial projections of power; it was not only indicative of economic networks, but also literary courtly practices. ‘Abd al-Malik al-Thā’alibī (d. 429/1038) relates the deft linguistic showmanship of the courtier and traveler Abū Dulaf (fl. 375/985) in an audience before ‘Abd al-Dawla (r. 338–72/949–83), the Būyid ruler over the ‘Abbāsid caliphate. Abū Dulaf described, in literary jest, the exotic wonders of the various regions of the world: sable marten furs of the Bulghār, mink of the Kāshghar, quinces of Nisābūr, and camphor of Sumatra.29 For the geography of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Muqaddasi (fl. 375/985), this modality of fashioning the world through exotic specialties is consistently matched with an attention to the imperfections of a given region. In this pairing, the exotic is circumscribed by the dangerous and the liminal.

In a discursive economy that privileged such rare commodities, an epistemological structure developed to give authenticity to what was a growing body of marvels, inherited from an international network of travelers, textually and orally crossing frontiers. The foremost illusion of the marvelous is its ability to collapse being—what is out there—into a coded system of writing. This emplotment of ontology into language is one of the great acts of translation upon which geography is predicated.

A variety of remedies were proposed to assay the veracity of any given account. The geographer Ibn Hawqal (fl. 378/988) details how he obtained knowledge from his own journeys, consulted other travelers and merchants, and read earlier geographical literature. In order to test the authenticity of the material collected during his travels, Ibn Hawqal would attempt to corroborate it through multiple sources.30 Needless to say, the most privileged mode of knowledge was direct observation. In the preface to his geography, Muqaddasi outlines a three-staged hierarchy of acquiring knowledge about the world and inquiring into the unseen (al-naṣar fi l-ghayb):
We have divided our book into three sections: the first, concerning that which we saw with our very eyes (mā ʿayannāhu); the second, that which we heard (samīʿnāhu) from trustworthy sources (thiqāt); and the third, that which we have found in books composed on this subject (al-kutub al-muṣannafā fī hādāhʿl-bāb); no royal library has remained unexamined, nor are there any scattered writings I have not leafed through.31

The problem for most geographers was that the truly marvelous and rare, which case some degree of doubt must remain. 32

Finally, there is information passed on from only one of the order of dog-headed creatures and flying monsters, were usually not or two people, who are equally likely to be lying or telling the truth, in

The sacred Kaʾba of Mecca, the pyramids of Giza, and the wall of Gog and Magog are all sites of intelligiblia.

This textual medium of display within the world of manuscripts is also translated visually in maps and miniature paintings that further highlight the power of geographical discourse to collapse the vast distance of space and time before the eyes of readers and viewers who behold the wonders of the world in the highly transportable capital of mimetic reproduction.33

For us the limits of knowledge are very much the product of archives and the historical transmission of information. The site for our knowledge of the unseen, however, is the past, which can only be verified indirectly through a process of textual archeology which, as James Montgomery argues, is in large measure shaped by the serendipity of what survives, itself by no means indicative of what was.34 As a field, Islamic geographical writing reflects a cumulative process of adaptation and transformation, such that what is preserved of the earliest strata of material is often embedded in the reception history of later generations.

The radical transformation of texts in the age of mechanical reproduction has entirely reconstituted our own access to the royal archives that Muqaddasi so studiously leafed through for his research. As with all forms of display and presentation, the texts of today, often expressed through binary bits of information, shape our entrance into the material and greatly determine the kinds of questions we ask of our sources. While the atomistic configuration of word searches has allowed for an incredible collation of information, unseen in ages past, it has also resulted in a further closing off of the polysemous reality of the archive. In large part, this closure was produced through the gains of print technology, which saw the rise of critical editions brought forth by generations of Orientalists. These editions developed out of an epistemic system that attempted to recover an original authorial design and intention, and to cull away spurious accretions that made their way into the porous medium of manuscripts.

Implicit in this process of textual criticism is the judgment, and thus in some part creation, of the authentic and the authorial. The messy reality of multiple recensions that inhabit medieval manuscripts as testaments to the collaborative process of textual production and the formulation of meaning may be, in part, preserved in the form of a critical apparatus within an edition. This apparatus, in turn, collates the meaningful variants of a given text within the space of the margins in a process of redaction that inevitably produces a text that never existed in the course of its medieval reception, but is supposed to reflect a kind of platonic ideal of what the original text would have been. In the process of mechanical reproduction, this multivalent record of dissemination is displaced largely into the space of the margins. However, as with acts of translation, what is gained is the ability to telegraph this information to an even broader audience. In this ever iterated process of loss and recovery, or deficit and surplus, to use a mercantile metaphor, we have today, with most of the digitally searchable forms of Arabic and Persian medieval material, the complete removal of the critical apparatus, if one ever existed, and with it any semblance of this cacophonous reception history. Likewise, what is available either digitally, or in print, is usually based on the narrow selection of what has been edited.

Significant parts of this reception history have been effaced in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century constructions of ʿAbbāsid geography. What has been reconstructed in printed and digital forms, as a mechanical
reproduction, only partially accounts for the codicological record. We have found it necessary to return to the royal archives in an attempt to reconsider the value of this cacophony and what it may tell us about our modern reconstruction of the past. Yet, like all historical knowledge, so many stages removed from the veritable there-ness of the event, it is perhaps enough to leave room not just for the felicity of recovery but also for the uncertainty over what has been lost.

SECTION ONE
GEOGRAPHY, TRANSLATION, AND THE APOCALYPSE
The caliph al-Wāthiq bi'llāh awoke after a night filled with bad dreams. So begins the story that will begin our story. This tale serves as an anecdote of a larger tale, a kind of metaphor for a metaphor. It is one of adventure and peril, a geography of action and conception that questions who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. Our adventure will flirt with the monstrous and the apocalyptic, take us to the world's farthest extreme and back again. There will be loss; some of our companions will die as we skirt the edge of the known world and peer into that crack of oblivion, into a projection of desire that ebbs and flows from generation to generation. Foremost, this is a tale of translation, of the acquisition and transference of knowledge, of communicating the unseen, the unknowable, the demonic and the divine through the porous medium of language.

We begin this journey in the setting of its original production, with the ʿAbbāsid imperial administration of the third/ninth century. Our guide is himself the translator, ever present, yet never seen, veiled in words that are both his and not his own. His name reduces to a word that has entered into our language, transliterated through other tales of transmission: turchemannus, trujamán, truchement, turcimanno, dragoman, and dragomen, a plural formed by specious analogy. He is an interpreter who travels in both political and scholarly domains. The importance of this figure for understanding the world will anchor our telling from the beginning to epistemology, while the dynamism of crossing frontiers will pin our trajectory across maps of seas, deserts, and high mountains. The caliphal interpreter was sent on an embassy to the edge of the world to bring
back an account of the unseen, beyond the territorial limits of state and empire, past the settled cities, and into the landscape of ominous nomads.

We know him merely as Sallâm al-Tarjumân—the interpreter, the dragoman. His identity, for the most part, has escaped us. We know nothing of where he came from, when he was born, when he died, or if he really existed at all. His name, however, is linked to almost every Arabic geography written for over six hundred years, and his tale has entered into Persian, Turkish, Latin, French, Spanish, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Dutch, German, and English, to name but a few. The various international incarnations that our translator adopts, both in the sources and in the scholarship, play in concert as a meta-narrative of uncovering stories hidden by the perfidious hands of history and the treacherous slippage of language.

**Administrative Geography**

The guide for our journey, Sallâm al-Tarjumân, first appears in a work entitled *Kitâb al-masâlik wa ‘l-mamâlik* [The book of routes and realms],¹ composed by Ibn Khurradadhbih (fl. 269/882) sometime during the latter half of the third/ninth century.² This geography received its modern debut with an edition prepared by Charles Barbier de Meynard in 1865. De Meynard, who acknowledged that his publication of the geography represented a significantly redacted form of what the original must have been, based his edition on two manuscripts, one housed in the Bodleian Library (MS Hunt 433, dated 631/1232), and a nineteenth-century copy obtained in Istanbul, with corrections made by a certain Arabic instructor, ‘Abd al-Rahmân Efendi, now held in the Bibliothèque nationale of France (Supplément arabe 895). This manuscript parallels the Bodleian recension.³

With the discovery of another manuscript, now housed in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek of Vienna (MS Mixt. 783), Michael Jan de Goeje was able to present a re-edited version of the *Masâlik*; this appeared in 1889 as the sixth volume in his series of edited Arabic geographical texts, the *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum* (1870–94). While these two editions share the same general contours and are clearly based upon a corpus of common material, there are several significant points of divergence. The problem of the reception history, as reflected in these manuscripts, comes into sharper relief as Sallâm approaches his goal. The extent to which the manuscripts known to survive and the editions based upon them reflect the original form, or forms, of the geography is a question that may never be fully resolved.

In order to understand Sallâm al-Tarjumân more fully, we must first explain the textual world from which he steps forth. As our anecdote is first preserved in the administrative geography of Ibn Khurradadhbih, we choose to start our journey with him. A Persian by origin, Ibn Khurradadhbih descended from an illustrious family. His father was the governor of Tabaristan during the caliphate of al-Ma’mûn (r. 198–218/813–33) and helped to expand the ‘Abbâsid territories throughout Daylam and into the mountainous strongholds of the region.⁴ Ibn Khurradadhbih received historical material on the lives of Sâsânian kings from his father.⁵ His grandfather was a Zoroastrian who is said to have converted to Islam through the influence of the powerful Barmakids, a family of high-ranking ‘Abbâsid officials, whose ancestor was a hereditary priest of a Buddhist temple in the region of Balkh.⁶

Given the frequency with which later writers, across a wide range of fields, rely on Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography, it is clear that this work enjoyed a great deal of popularity from its inception. Though not the first work on world geography produced in Arabic, the *Masâlik* exerted a considerable influence on later writers, to such an extent that Ibn Khurradadhbih has been heralded by some modern scholars as the “father of Arab-Islamic geography.”⁷ From Ibn al-Nadîm’s *al-Fihrist* [The index], we may glean that a body of writings, all entitled *al-Masâlik wa ‘l-mamâlik*, began to coalesce in the second half of the third/ninth century.⁸ While Ibn Khurradadhbih’s work is not the first, it is certainly the earliest Arabic descriptive geography to come to us in a somewhat complete form.⁹

Ibn Khurradadhbih served as the master of post and information (ṣâhib al-barid wa ‘l-khabar) for the district of the Jabal, in modern-day Iran. Given his intimate knowledge of imperial administrative records,¹⁰ several scholars have hypothesized, though without any textual basis, that he may also have served as the primary director of the ministry of communications in either Baghdad or the palatine city of Sâmarra.¹¹ While this is merely conjecture, it is certainly compelling to imagine Ibn Khurradadhbih composing his administrative geography while in the direct service of the state bureaucracy, particularly as much of the information contained in his work draws on a close association with the ruling elite. This association is crystallized in Ibn Khurradadhbih’s formal status as a court companion (nadîm) of the caliph al-Mu’tamid (r. 255–79/870–92), a position that formed part of the routinized composition of the ‘Abbâsid court in this period,¹² and was stylized, in part, to reflect Sâsânian courtly practice.¹³

In Muqaddasi’s estimation, Ibn Khurradadhbih was a minister (wâzîr) responsible for the deposits of scholarly material in the caliphal library.¹⁴
The diverse list of works attributed to Ibn Khurradadhbih—including such topics as the culinary arts, court companionship, musical instruments, and genealogies of Persians—suggest a high-society litterateur, a connoisseur of good taste, associated with the ruling elite, with a wide array of scholarly and bureaucratic resources. All of these characteristics form an image of perfect urbanity, molded around the archetypal figure of the adib, multifaceted, skilled in the etiquette of a variety of subjects and connected to a wider universe of ‘Abbāsid literary culture. As a courtier he frequented caliphal assemblies and attended drinking sessions of notables. The Arab court poet Abū ‘Ubāda al-Butḫūrī (d. 284/897) composed verses honoring his friendship, describing him as a descendent of noble kings, and highlighting his Persian aristocratic lineage.

While his geography became one of the most influential in the field, several medieval authorities questioned his accuracy and reliability. Yaqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229), known both for his geographical dictionary and his biographical account of litterateurs (udabā‘), mentions that Ibn Khurradadhbih’s writings contained so many accounts of questionable authority (gharā‘ib) that several scholars who copied from him would comment that this was merely Ibn Khurradadhbih’s opinion, adding, “if it turns out to be untrue then it is he who is responsible for the lie.” This assessment is articulated by the literary historian Abū ‘l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967), who deemed Ibn Khurradadhbih’s work on poetry and music to be of little merit and of a highly dubious pedigree. Despite its popularity, similar attacks were made against his geography, parts of which were drawn into question by succeeding generations of geographers.

Nonetheless, according to Maš‘ūdī, the geography was one of the most famous and valuable in the field, for specialists and non-specialists alike. The Persian geographer Ibn Hawqal describes how, in his own travels, he made sure that he kept the writings of Ibn Khurradadhbih, along with those of the ‘Abbāsid administrator Qudāma b. Ja‘far and the Sāmānīd wazīr Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Jayhānī (fl. 309/922), always by his side. Needless to say, both Maš‘ūdī and Ibn Hawqal find room to criticize Ibn Khurradadhbih in the course of situating the importance and uniqueness of their respective writings. Yet his close association with the ‘Abbāsid administration and the encyclopedic range of information that he was able to gather gave his work a lasting air of authority.

The administrative elements of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s career are foregrounded in his geography, which includes a detailed account of the economic and agricultural administration of the ‘Abbāsid empire. The work opens with an inventory of the monetary value of the production of lands under the dominion of the caliphate, a calculation of the assets of given tax districts, and a description of the primary stage routes of communication between various regions. These interests, along with such details as the proper titles used for addressing various rulers of the world and a description of the major commercial trade routes, highlight a set of administrative and bureaucratic concerns. The geography thus suggests an audience of caliphal secretaries (kuttab) responsible for overseeing various institutional bureaus (dawā‘in). Ibn Khurradadhbih showcases information bearing directly on the office of taxation (diwān al-kharāj) and the office of communication (diwān al-barād), two governmental agencies that benefited from geographical information applicable to the oversight of their respective institutional functions.

Though the addressee of the opening dedication remains unknown, as redacted in the Vienna manuscript, the proposition that a high official to the caliph, or even the caliph himself, would commission such a work is not entirely far-fetched. The opening highlights Ibn Khurradadhbih’s special status as a client (mawla) to the caliph and thus a protected member of the ruling family’s household. Through his own expertise as a provincial postmaster and through any later administrative positions he might have held at the court, it is reasonable to believe that Ibn Khurradadhbih would feel encouraged, or even compelled, to write such a geographical description of the ‘Abbāsid territories and the surrounding regions of the world.

We can also discern that the political and cultural roles of the secretary (kātib) and the man of letters (adib) appear to be linked in the production of these works. In administrative geography, this fusion is perhaps best illustrated in the figure of Qudāma b. Ja‘far, the author of both a seminal work on Arabic literary poetics and a descriptive geography that appears in a broader study on the fiscal administration of the ‘Abbāsid empire. Qudāma’s Kitāb al-kharāj wa sinā‘at al-kitāb [Book of land-tax and craft of writing] bears the hallmark of a seasoned state secretary instructing up-and-coming bureaucrats in the etiquette of state administration.

According to Qudāma, secretaries in the administration had to possess a thorough knowledge of geography in order to perform the duties of their post. This is most clearly the case in Qudāma’s description of the responsibilities incumbent upon the minister of communication (sāhib diwān al-barād). Qudāma describes how the minister was responsible for overseeing all missives sent from the ministry to any given destination, and for presenting to the caliph the dispatches of other postmasters and agents of information from the outlying regions, or making a summary of such reports.
It is necessary for the chief minister of this ministry to have at his immediate disposal, without the need for further research, [information concerning the roads and routes of all regions] so that, when the caliph calls on him and sends out an army to [deal with] some pressing affair, or some other situation where the knowledge of routes is necessary, thanks to this previous work, the chief minister will find himself already prepared for the caliph, with accurate information at hand.30

According to Qudāma the ministry of communication was to be run by someone of great integrity and honesty, on whom the caliph could place the highest esteem and trust.31 In this light, Ibn Khurradādhbih’s own personal relationship with the caliph al-Mu’tamid, as a learned court companion who served within the administration, speaks to the bureaucratic and cultural contexts that frame his geography.

‘Abbasid Contexts for Translation
One of the most pronounced paradigms in the intellectual history of the ‘Abbasid empire is expressed in the translation movement as it developed in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, flourishing under caliphal and individual patronage. The study of foreign material became a mainstay in the administrative and intellectual horizons of the period. The phenomenon of translation as it existed in the early stages, from the reign of al-Manṣūr (r. 136/754–75) onwards, demonstrates a remarkable interest in and respect for the achievements of other civilizations. While there are accounts of translations from Syriac, Greek, Middle Persian, and even Sanskrit during the Umayyad caliphate,32 the extent to which translation as an epistemological paradigm flourished under ‘Abbasid patronage remains unparalleled in the early development of medieval Islamic intellectual history.

A brief historical sketch of the ‘Abbasid rise to power takes us back to the setting of the initial Arab conquests of Mesopotamia. The Sasanian empire (r. 224–651 C.E.), the great antagonist of the Byzantines, stretched across the Fertile Crescent beyond the Oxus, until it fell dramatically in a series of key battles to invading armies of Arab converts to Islam.33 By 93/711, Arab-led armies had conquered a vast territory that stretched from southern Iberia to western India. In the period immediately following this monumental expansion, the various conquered peoples did not immediately embrace Islam en masse.34

Rather than bring entirely new administrative systems of governance to these territories, the Umayyads adopted and transformed the administrative structures of their predecessors. In the case of the lands captured from Byzantium and the former Sasanian empire, the new ruling class made only slight modifications.35 With the continuation of such diverse, local traditions of administration and taxation, the bureaucratic system that arose was highly heterogeneous and idiosyncratic, often dependent upon the character of various treaties drawn on the submission of a given territory to an Arab army. The garrison cities of Basra, Kufa, and Wāṣit were built, for all intents and purposes, ex nihilo in the heartland of Sasanian Mesopotamia; the new settlements of conquering Arab armies served as emblems of what was, at times, an isolated disjunction between the Arab ruling elite and their non-Arab subjects.36

The ‘Abbāsid revolution, which culminated with the overthrow of the Umayyad caliphate in 132/750, outwardly brought Persian culture and previous Sasanian models back to center stage. The transference of the caliphate from Damascus to the heart of what was, in Sasanian times, referred to as Irānshahr, came to mark a departure from the preferential status enjoyed by Arabs in the Umayyad ruling elite. As the Banū ʿAbbās rose to power, so too did their base of supporters, represented by Persian clients (mawālī).

The ‘Abbāsid administration actively drew on Persian cultural elements, envisioned in large measure through Sasanian imperial ideology, in the formation of their new state. To appeal to Arab Muslim factions, the ‘Abbāsids presented themselves as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. All the while they adopted Persian ideals of good governance and regal customs of state, thus speaking to their Persian supporters, wherein they claimed to be legitimate inheritors of the ancient imperial dynasty of the Sasanians.37 When the second ‘Abbāsid caliph, al-Manṣūr, founded his caliphal city of Baghdad, officially Madinat al-Salam (the City of Peace), near the ruins of what was once Ctesiphon, a capital city of the Sasanians, he consciously united the ‘Abbāsid regime with the long tradition of cosmopolitan empires of Mesopotamia.

This period witnessed the dramatic rise to power of Persian officials. The vizierate and the secretarial administration, to whom the wazir was connected, were occupied, from the very early period of ‘Abbāsid rule, almost entirely by non-Arabs.38 The administrative language took on an outwardly Persian flavor, as many technical terms were adopted from Sasanian governmental practices into Arabic. The imitation of so-called ‘ancient Persian’ traditions was, rather than an unbroken continuum, more a reflection of historical revisionism.39 Persian etymologies for administrative
structures, such as the communication service (barid), circulated, evidently to align the ‘Abbāsids, in a self-conscious refashioning, with a glorified Sāsānian past.\(^{40}\)

The multi-ethnic dimensions of Mesopotamia can be seen in the mixed population of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Persians, Turks, and Syrians, who all came to reside in the region. Baghdad, the city of al-Manṣūr, transformed into a political and intellectual center of gravity. Jāhiz describes the capital as the most noble and grand city he had ever seen.\(^{41}\) Iraq and the caliphal city of Baghdad figure in many ‘Abbāsīd geographical writings as the ‘navel of the world’ (surrat al-arid), a phrase often reserved for the sacred Ka‘ba in Mecca.\(^{42}\) As a cosmopolis, Baghdad naturally attracted scholars, diplomats, and merchants from the surrounding regions and from beyond the administrative frontiers. For successive generations, the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and their entourage drew upon this diverse population to sponsor an ambitious and sustained project of translation that continued for over two hundred years.

This intellectual movement built upon an array of foreign philosophical, political, and scientific material. By the end of the fourth/tenth century an encyclopedic range of mainly Greek writing from classical antiquity was introduced into Arabic.\(^{43}\) However, this movement did not focus solely on Hellenistic learning and the translation of Aristotelian philosophy, Galenic medicine, and Ptolemaic geography, but also included significant studies and translations of Middle Persian and Sanskrit sources. Sponsored by lucrative patronage, non-Arab translators brought forth an astonishing breadth of material that effectively transformed the Arabic language into a highly developed and efficient means of communicating abstract scientific and philosophical thought. The ethos of this age figures as one in which cross-pollination and multicultural interactions were encouraged by synthesizing disparate traditions of learning within a polyphonic cultural matrix, eventually legitimized through an imperial process of appropriation and naturalization.\(^{44}\)

**Shaping and Orienting**

In the opening dedication to his unnamed patron, Ibn Khurradadhbih positions the Masālik in concord with the tradition of translation characteristic of the period. Immediately following the various customary invocations to God, the author announces that he has made a translation from Ptolemy for his patron’s consideration:

I have comprehended what you have requested... [namely that you desire] an outline (rusūm) that would elucidate the routes and realms of the earth, and their description, along with how distant and how near they are, with information concerning the parts of the earth cultivated, versus those that are wasteland, and the distances between such areas, including the way stations that lead to the remote ends of the world, and depictions (rusūm) of the ways (turuq) and forms of cantons (tassūṭ) in these lands, [all] according to how the ancients used to describe such affairs. I have found that Ptolemy had distinguished the regions [of the earth] and given an authoritative account of [the earth’s] description (ṣifā) in a foreign language (bi‘l-lughatin a‘jamiyyatin), so I translated this from his language into an understandable language (bi‘l-lughatin l-sahihatin), so that you might examine it.\(^{45}\)

Ibn Khurradadhbih mentions that this work of Ptolemy was written in a foreign language (lugha a‘jamiyya), but does not specify as to whether it was in Greek, Syriac, or Middle Persian. As we comb the Masālik for traces of Ptolemy’s writing on geography, we find the text to be a secretarial manual on geographic elements of administration spiced with poetic flourishes and highlighted by entire sections dedicated to the wonders (‘ajā‘ib) of the world. Passing over this opening dedication, other references to Ptolemy prove to be not just superficial, but also misguided. At one point, Ibn Khurradadhbih claims that during Ptolemy’s age there were 4,200 cities in the world.\(^{46}\) This estimate, which Ibn Khurradadhbih attributes to a work of Ptolemy, is not to be found in any of Ptolemy’s known writings.\(^{47}\) Ibn Khurradadhbih also makes the common error of confusing Claudius (al-Kalūdhī) Ptolemy, the astronomer and geographer, with one of the Greek Ptolemaic kings of Egypt.\(^{48}\) However, though never stated, there are clear indications in the Masālik that Ibn Khurradadhbih draws upon the cosmographical system outlined in Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*, a work of geographical astrology.\(^{49}\)

Additionally, Ibn Khurradadhbih makes reference to the Ptolemaic system of dividing the inhabited world from south to north into seven latitudinal climes (aqālim), a system developed most fully in Ptolemy’s *Geography*. However, rather than adhering to this climatic model, the Masālik essentially follows an Iranian four-part division, based on the cardinal directions. According to Qudāma, ancient Iranian kings conceptually divided the world into four sections and believed that the region of Mesopotamia corresponded to the navel of the earth (surrat al-arid), a practice which Ibn al-Faqih traces back to the Iranian king Ardashir I (d. 242 C.E.),

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the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. While Ibn Khurradadhbih applies Greek geographical terminology to his four-part division of the world, the central location of Iraq within the structure of his geography appears to be based on an older Sasanian conceptual model, which is deployed here to position the Abbāsid empire at the cosmic center of the world. Ibn Khurradadhbih’s reference to the translation of this unspecified Ptolemaic work is evidently aimed at contemporary values, which found ancient science in general, and Greek learning in particular, to be authoritative.

The geography was composed during the height of the translation movement of Greek into Arabic, and specifically during the Arabic absorption of Ptolemy’s geographic and astronomical writings. Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwārazmī (d. ca 232/847), famous mathematician and court astrologer for the caliph al-Wāthiq (r. 227–32/842–7), is said to have composed a descriptive geography, entitled Sūrat al-ard [Image of the earth], in which he drew on, and, in some cases, revised Ptolemy’s geographical calculations and projections of co-ordinates. The title of this work, “Image of the earth,” itself serves as the general Arabic translation for Ptolemy’s Geography, which is often left in the Arabic sources transliterated from the Greek as jughrāfiyya.

Khwārazmī’s work is believed to be part of a larger project commissioned by the caliph al-Ma’mūn to create a mappa mundi based on the Ptolemaic projection of the earth and the surrounding cosmos. The philosopher and scientist Abū ʿUṯūf Yaʿqūb al-Kindī (d. ca 260/874) is credited with a geographical work entitled Rasm al-ma’mūr min al-ard [Description of the inhabited section of the earth], which he is said to have based on Ptolemy’s Geography. In the third/ninth century, Ptolemy’s work received considerable attention, as manifested in several adaptations and translations into Arabic. In this vein, the polymath Thābit b. Qurra (d. 288/901) made a revision of what were, until his time, unsatisfactory Arabic translations of Ptolemy’s Geography and Almagest.

In the opening dedication, Ibn Khurradadhbih does more than just demonstrate the importance of Greek science to the field of descriptive geography; he also highlights the bureaucratic elements of land management. The administrative culture of the ‘Abbāsid empire evolved out of real, or imagined, Sasanian traditions. This is articulated, for instance, in the Persian terminology repeatedly employed in the discourse of state bureaucracy.

Of note in this regard are the administrative units of land and taxation. Ibn Khurradadhbih describes how his geography outlines the customs and forms of taxation throughout the various regions of the world. He uses here a Persian loanword, tassūj (canton), which he explains as an administrative district or region drawn from a Sasanian model of land management. Persian vocabulary, from the administrative to the architectural, echoes throughout the geography as a testament to the hybrid linguistic and political cultures of third/ninth-century Mesopotamia. Reference to Sasanian bureaucratic land divisions serve as a mainstay of ‘Abbāsid administrative geography, a genre of writing with antecedents in Sasanian administration. Though Ibn Khurradadhbih often relies on pre-Islamic Persian models, he also gives ample voice to Islamic conceptions of space. The opening pages offer an example of how he brings together two projections of geography. Immediately following the proemium, he briefly situates the various regions of the world with respect to their orientation (qibla) to the Ka’ba, the sacred shrine in Mecca. He then transitions into an administrative account, casting Mesopotamia through the lens of Sasanian tradition: “Now I begin with the mention of the Sawād [i.e., Iraq and more generally Mesopotamia], since the Persian kings would call it dil-i Irānshahr, that is the heart of Iraq.” The term dil-i Irānshahr calls to mind the Sasanian view that the Persian empire, “best in every art” (buzurgwār-tar ast bi-har hunari), commanded the center of the world, and all other regions, inferior by nature, revolved around it.

After a detailed account of Mesopotamia and its administration, Ibn Khurradadhbih positions the regions of the world in relation to ‘Abbāsid rule: the east (mashriq) stretches past the lands of Khurāsān to China and the far-flung islands of the Indian Ocean; the west (maghrib) is circumscribed by the lands of Byzantium, the Levant, North Africa and Iberia, along with various Mediterranean islands; the north (jarbī) accounts for Azerbaijan, Armenia, the Khazar, and, according to the Bodleian recension, the lands of Gog and Magog; while the south (tayman) covers the Arabian Peninsula and the various pilgrimage routes to Mecca.

Although the center of gravity lies in Mesopotamia and ‘Abbāsid imperial power, the description of sites attendant to the course of Islamic salvation history also promotes a sacred conception of space that intersects with the life of the Prophet and the centrality of the Qurʾān. References to holy relics and sacred history are scattered throughout the geography. Adam’s expulsion from the celestial garden of Eden, for instance, is mapped onto a mountain in the island of Sri Lanka (Sarandib), where Adam is believed to have landed on earth. His footprint, which is set in stone, is said to measure nearly seventy cubits, a reference to the long-standing belief in the gigantic stature of the first inhabitants of the earth. In the description
of the Sacred Mosque of Mecca (al-masjid al-haram), the narrative relates how Adam took up residence in Mecca, which became a sanctuary for all the nations of the world; it was here that God chose the ground for Ibrāhīm and his son Ismā'īl to build the Ka'ba.69

In the course of outlining various routes and networks, Ibn Khurradadhbih adumbrates such details as the itinerary of the Prophet on his migration (hijra) from Mecca to Medina,70 the tombs of notable figures in Islamic history, and a range of events mentioned in the Qur'ān.71 As part of prophetic history, which represents the miraculous intersection of divine will in the course of human affairs, marvelous phenomena resonate throughout the geography. The marriage between the prophet Sulaymān and Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, is juxtaposed with an account of various palaces built by demons (shayātīn) in the region of Yemen. This architectural grandeur serves as an allusion to Sulaymān’s power over the jinn, who are prominent players in the Qur’ānic and exegetical narratives of his encounter with Bilqis.72 The land of the eastern Caucasus witnesses the stories (qiṣas) of Moses searching for the spring of immortality and his adventures with the enigmatic figure known in exegetical traditions as Khidr. The rock that contains the mysterious spring (Q. 18:65), believed by many to be the fountain of life, is located in the region of Sharwān, and the reference to the meeting place of the two seas (majmā’ al-bahrāyin, Q. 18:60) is situated past Armenia.73 It is in such a world, pregnant with the wondrous signs of God’s creation, that the wall of Gog and Magog is erected. This barrier, which intersects with Qur’ānic eschatology and the development of early Islamic salvation history, marks a conceptual boundary against which the religious and political authority of the Arabian Peninsula and Mesopotamia are projected.

Within this articulation of what is a specifically Islamic geography, Ibn Khurradadhbih presents Persian cultural and linguistic elements as naturally integrated dimensions in this broad progression of salvation. By drawing on pre-Islamic Persian traditions, Ibn Khurradadhbih's work fits into a pattern of Persian scholars who graft Iranian history onto an explicitly Islamic narrative of time.74

One example of this is Ibn Khurradadhbih's use of Persian administrative vocabulary. When treating the bureaucratic division of Mesopotamia, he presents pre-Islamic Persian categories and then glosses them with Arabic words. As for the Sawād, it consists of ten districts (kūra); each kūra is comprised of a municipality (ustān) and sixty cantons (tassūj). He translates the Persian word ustān into Arabic as ihāza, land taken over by the state, and the Persian word tassūj into Arabic as nāhiya, a region or district.75

As Ibn Khurradadhbih squares Arabic with Persian administrative terminology, he approaches his subject matter from a perspective in which Persian may claim a historical precedence over Arabic. The term tassūj from the Middle Persian tasūg, meaning one quarter, is a case in point, as it is linked to the administrative and geographical practices of the Sāsānians during the reign of Qubād I (r. 458–531 c.e.).76 The translation of this Persian administrative lexicon into Arabic foregrounds the historical reality that, long before the Arab conquest of the Sāsānian empire, there existed in Persian a fully developed manner of commanding the world in language.

Ibn Khurradadhbih casts his eye on these bureaucratic antecedents, projecting a configuration of geography that follows the contours of a pre-existing conception of the world. He relates that the districts (kuwar) in the region of Fārs are five: Īṣṭakhr, Shābūr, Ardashir-Khurra, Dārābījird, and Arrajān.77 While this division, and others like it, speak directly to Sāsānian administrative models,78 the degree of overlap with such Sāsānian traditions is in large measure a projection of continuity with ancient Persian precedent.

The terminology Ibn Khurradadhbih employs when making evaluations of the agricultural and monetary assets of regions under ʿAbbāsid control also reflects Sāsānian administrative practices. For instance, he writes that the canton (tassūj) of al-Anbār, a town on the Euphrates, whose name in Persian means 'storehouse' or 'granary,' possesses five village districts (rustūq), 250 threshing-floors (bayaḍ), with a tax revenue in wheat of 2,300 kurr, and in barley of 1,400 kurr, a dry measurement equal to six ass-loads,79 in addition to 150,000 dirhams in currency. Apart from dirham, which derives from the Greek δραχμή, the rest of these terms are of Near Eastern origin, and can be traced back to earlier Sāsānian bureaucratic models.80

Ibn Khurradadhbih draws on Sāsānian history in order to contextualize later land management by subsequent Arab conquerors. Thus he outlines how the second caliph, ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb (r. 13–23/634–44), made a cadastral land survey (misāḥa) of Mesopotamia for taxation purposes and compares it to the taxes that would have been collected from the Sawād for the Sāsānian ruler Qubād.81 Such comparisons fit into a specific historiographical pattern of remembering a pre-Islamic imperial legacy. This is the case with Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jahshiyārī (d. 331/942), who describes in his administrative history, Kitāb al-wuzaraʿ wa ʿl-kuttāb [The book of ministers and secretaries], how Sāsānian kings used the bureaucratic apparatus of the secretariat to conduct land surveys with the aim of leveling taxes, suggesting how geographical measurement could serve as a form of imperial knowledge and possession.82
The *Masālīk* at times reads as an account of geography projected through the lens of pre-Islamic Persian history. For example, Ibn Khurradadhbih uses a Persian creation myth as a vehicle to describe the division of the world into different peoples and kingdoms. He describes how the ancient Persian king of the world, Faridūn (Afdūdu), divided the earth into thirds, between his sons Salm, Ṭūj, and Iran. Ibn Khurradadhbih highlights this foundational moment in Persian history with Arabic verses, which he says were originally sung by one of the poets of the Persian kings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Seemly is the heavens on high,}
\text{the heaven's dome in turquoise blue.}
\text{The sun and moon are there to light our way,}
\text{and we have triumphed with blessings.}
\end{align*}
\]

We divided our kingdom during our age,
like a piece of meat on the butcher's block.
Thus we gave the Levant and Byzantium
up to the setting of the sun to the noble Salm.
And to Ṭūj was given reign over the Turks
and the region of China which his progeny inherits.
For Iran we have reserved by might the Kingdom of Persia
and we have triumphed with blessings.

The story of how the mythic Persian hero Faridūn divided his kingdom between his three sons recurs throughout Persian literature, drawn from an ancient legend that appears throughout Zoroastrian tradition, and is taken up in various Sasanian sources. This mythical division of the world, out of which Iran is born, figures prominently in the opening of the Persian epic, the *Shāh-nāma* [Book of kings], composed by Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Firdawsi (d. 1020) in 1001. Ibn Khurradadhbih showcases these verses, attributed to an unnamed Persian court poet, as part of his project of inscribing Persian history into the geographic order of the world.

As for this broader historiographical projection, Ibn Khurradadhbih is known to have composed a text devoted, in some measure, to the history of pre-Islamic Persian kings, *Kitāb al-kabīr fi 'l-ta’rikh* [Major compendium of history], which Mas‘ūdi extols as one of the most valuable works of its kind. Though Ibn Khurradadhbih's historical writings no longer survive today, we may glean from the fragments that have been preserved through other sources that he took particular interest in Persian history. The history of pre-Islamic Persian kings credited to the anthologist 'Abd al-Malik al-Tha‘alibi draws heavily on Ibn Khurradadhbih's compendium, which is treated as an authoritative source. Through the filter of Tha‘alibi's narrative, Ibn Khurradadhbih speaks on such sundry figures as the religious leader Zoroaster, the military hero Alexander the Great, and the heretic Mazdak.

Ibn Khurradadhbih's material on pre-Islamic Iran proves indispensable for Tha‘alibi, who ranks it alongside such a monumental text as Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) universal history, *Ṭa’rikh al-rusūl wa ‘l-mulūk wa ‘l-khulafa* [History of the prophets, the kings, and the caliphs].

After the conquests, Arabic eclipsed Persian as the privileged medium of communication in all forms of writing, from the literary to the official. Broadly speaking, Middle Persian, known as Pahlavi, was used during the Sasanian period as an official, administrative, and liturgical language, and existed side-by-side with Dari, a language spoken at the Sasanian court.

After three centuries of Arab rule, a dialectical form of Persian developed into a full written language in the Arabic script; this language is today referred to by scholars as early New Persian. Ibn Khurradadhbih gives us a glimpse into the development of Persian literature in the Arabic script when he describes in his geography the northern quarter of the ancient Sasanian empire. He states that the Sasanian king Bahram V (r. 420–38 CE), whose sobriquet was the Onager (Ḡūr), recited the following verse in Persian about the township in Damāwand, named Shalana:

\[
\text{I am the lion of Shalana, I am the tiger ready to attack.}
\]

When treating the life of Bahram Gūr in his history of Persian kings, Tha‘alibi recites a slightly longer variant of this verse. He quotes Ibn Khurradadhbih as saying, "This verse is among that which my companions have related of Bahram Gūr's poetry." Such information suggests the oral transmission of Persian poetry in the Abbāsid court. The life of Bahram Gūr, as an epic hero and model king, continues through various New Persian literary endeavors, as represented in such poetic renditions as the *Shāh-nāma* of Firdawsi, the *Haft paykar* of Niẓāmi Ganjawi (d. ca 1203) and the *Hasht bihisht* of Amir Khusraw (d. 1325).
The *Masālik* unfolds a landscape inflected with Persian literary culture. Such is the case with the quotation of the following Persian verse from the 'Abbāsid poet Abū 'l-Yanbaghi l'-Abbās b. Ṭarkhān (fl. 225/840), who describes the Central Asian city of Samarqand:

*Stinking Samarqand*

Who has thrown you into such a state?

No better than Shāsh

Never will you escape! 96

While the presence of Persian verse within the geography is overshadowed by the dominance of Arabic, its appearance nonetheless reflects a set of courtly practices and linguistic exchanges. According to the literary historian Abū 'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Persian verse and song were already features of court life by the time of Hārūn al-Rashid (r. 140–93/786–809). 97 Al-Wāthiq, for instance, found great pleasure in singers from Khurāsān who could recite in both Arabic and Persian. 98 Such literary contacts between languages gave rise to the use of macaronic poetry, which alternated between Arabic and Persian, often with a range of puns and word plays. 99 More broadly, the countless loanwords and calques, which each language took and transformed from the other, point to what were deep and lasting cultural and linguistic exchanges.

Apart from the *Masālik*, the fragments of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s writings that survive in other sources, along with various references to him, fill out our portrait of this cultured son of Khurāsān, who took great interest in the preservation of Persian history and the cultivation of poetry. Ibn Khurradādhbih appears as an insider in the caliphal court in Maṣʿūdi’s world history, *Murūj al-dhahab* [Fields of gold], and Iṣfahānī’s encyclopedia of Arabic poetry and poets, *Kitāb al-agḥāni* [Book of songs]. 100 The surviving excerpts of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s *Kitāb al-lahw wa 'l-malāḥi* [The book of playing and of musical instruments] further highlight his literary and artistic pursuits. In addition to serving as a source of information for the origins of musical instruments and musical techniques as understood and employed in the ‘Abbāsid period, this treatise also preserves a piece of Persian poetry ascribed to Bārbaḥ, the famous court minstrel of the Sāsānian king Khusraw II Parwīz (r. 591–628 C.E.):

قیصرمآه مانذ و خاقاَن خرَشید
آن من خذَاي ابر مانذ کامگاران
کخاِزاَه ماه بَوشَد کَخْاَزه خرَشید

My lord is powerful like the cloud:

At will he covers the moon and at will the sun. 101

These Persian verses, which hearken back to a pre-Islamic period, are written down in the Arabic script, and supplemented with an interlinear translation in Arabic. Their authenticity and their relationship with Bārbaḥ remains to be seen, a question that need not concern us here. 102 Regardless of whether or not they truly belong to the Sāsānian minstrel, the verses speak to the broader cultural mosaic of Ibn Khurradādhbih’s universe and its role in the preservation of Persian history and literature through the larger vehicle of Arabic belles-lettres.

When compared to the over eighty quotations of Arabic poetry in the geography, it is clear that Persian, as a literary medium, does not possess the same privileged position. Nonetheless, Ibn Khurradādhbih showcases a poetic universe that is very much the product of cultural interactions among cosmopolitan elites. 103 Thus while the poetry sings of the feats of pre-Islamic Arab poets and the legendary battle days (ayyām) of the Arabs, it also praises, in Arabic, the grandeur of Sāsānian history, memorialized, for instance, in the imperial city of Ctesiphon and in Bahram Gūr’s palace of Khwararnaq, near Kufa. 104

The weight given to Arabic poetry in Ibn Khurradādhbih’s projection of space speaks to the manner in which the Persian elite adapted and transformed Arabic literary culture. Ibn Khurradādhbih weaves into his writing a colorful display of quintessential Arabic verse, representing a poetical canon as constructed within ‘Abbāsid court culture at the end of third/ninth century. From the paragon of pre-Islamic (jāhiliyya) poets, Imru’ al-Qays b. Ḥujr (d. ca 550 C.E.), to the so-called poet laureate of the Prophet, Hassān b. Thābit (d. ca 40/659), Ibn Khurradādhbih landscapes his geography with a broad repertoire of Arabic verse.
One of the basic semiotic structures of the geography involves stringing together lines of poetry in order to accentuate the various routes of the world. When describing the route from Mecca to Yemen, for example, Ibn Khurradadhbih cites a verse from Abū Nuwas (d. ca 198/813), who was, perhaps, the best known poet of the ‘Abbasid period, and a chief representative of a new style of poetry ushered in by poets known as ‘the moderns’ (muḥdathūn):

We are the lords over Na‘īt,  
And ours are $ān′āʾ and the musk of its princely chambers.  

Na‘īt, a remote fortress in Yemen, is thus imbricated through the logic of the geography, within a larger discursive network of literary history. Ibn Khurradadhbih uses poetry as a way of glossing specific toponyms, often in an effort to localize obscure literary references. As, for instance, is the case of the renowned opening lament (naṣīb) for the departed beloved in the Muʾallaqa of Imruʿ al-Qays:

Then Tūdih, then al-Miqrāt, the traces [of her campsite] not effaced,  
by what the winds, south and north, wove across them.  

Ibn Khurradadhbih situates Tūdih and al-Miqrāt, two watering holes made famous by these opening verses, in his description of the outskirts of Yamāma in the Arabian Peninsula; by doing so he positions the discipline of geography as a central means of understanding the larger belletristic cultures of the urban elite.

The geography opens a window on the literary tastes cultivated by a court culture that promoted the production and performance of poetry in the articulation of its own identity and power. Thus, when reaching the strongholds of Anqira (Ankara) and ‘Ammūriya (Amorium), in the march-lands (thughūr) with Byzantium, the narrative turns to a verse composed by the ‘Abbasid court poet Ḥusayn b. al-Ḍāḥhāk (d. ca 250/864), in honor of al-Muṭaṣim’s (r. 218–27/833–42) conquests of these two cities in 223/838:

References to conquest, rivalry, pilgrimage, and loss echo throughout Ibn Khurradadhbih’s poetic landscape, which is populated by well-known cities and obscure way stations. These poetical moments of digression privilege the place of literary pleasure in the organization of geographical knowledge. The encyclopedic range of poetic material takes discursive dominion over the world through the core unit of verse, which, like graffiti, both inscribes and appropriates. These poetic citations are predicated on the logic of intertextuality. All of this is enacted through the illusion of the anecdote (the name of a town which triggers the quotation of a verse, which alludes to a certain moment in time) to collapse the heterogeneity of existence into the intelligible, and thus manageable, structure of narrative.

These moments of intertextuality, which are oriented around a hybrid literary culture, are thus acts of transposition that are set to interpret the world as much as to shape it. Interestingly, the continued allusion to poetry, which serves as a projection of an imagined, cosmopolitan community, falls silent precisely as the geography moves further towards land’s end, along the savage frontiers of the world. Such a pattern suggests how the citation of verse in Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography functions as a discursive demarcation of imperial dominion, marking the lands that have been incorporated into the literary fabric of ‘Abbasid power.
MODELS OF TRANSLATION

Considerations on Wonders and Frontiers
Anecdotes of marvels and monsters offer a means of engaging with the foreign and liminal spaces of the frontier. While Ibn Khurradadhbih focuses on the 'Abbasid sphere of influence politically, culturally, and geographically, he also journeys deep into remote lands, removed from the religious and political centers of Islam. A geography with a running interest in the wonders of the world, the Masiilik has many antecedents in classical antiquity. The barbarous nature of the frontier and the space beyond the oecumene has been a continual preoccupation throughout the ages. Both the Greeks and the Persians confronted lands beyond civilization; from the Scythians to the Mazandaran, the margins of the earth were in a constant state of flux.

The relation of the Masiilik with the 'Abbasid court foregrounds its conception of the world. The recurring mention of postal routes of communication between various stages (sīkā) gives it an administrative perspective. The central administration used these networks of communication to spy on outlying territories, an administrative tradition of surveillance with a variety of antecedents shrouded in imperial garb. The master of the communication and information (ṣāhib al-barid wa 'l-khabar) was charged with communicating to the caliph the state of affairs across the empire. Likewise, the office of communication (dīwān al-barid) functioned much like a ministry of intelligence. The world pictured in the Masiilik speaks to adventures of reconnaissance and espionage, of embassies and expeditions with caliphal orders to report about the lands beyond the frontier. To the west, the ongoing conflicts with neighboring Byzantium mark a conceptual border, as do the conquered territories of Sind to the east. The desert stretch through the Arabian Peninsula to the south leads to Yemen and then to the ocean, while north, beyond the Caspian Sea, lie the lands of the Khazar, and then, somewhere beyond them, the civilized world (al-ard al-ma'mūra) ends.

In the vicissitudes of war and peace, the Byzantine empire functions as a mirror image for the 'Abbāsids. The Masiilik gives a description of the Byzantine administration, offering a picture of the bureaucratic system of a neighboring empire. Much of the information on the region is taken from Muslim b. Abi Muslim al-Jarmi, a captive along the Byzantine marchlands (thughūr), who, with some four thousand others, was released in a prisoner exchange negotiated during the reign of al-Wāthiq in 231/845. Mas'ūdī describes how Jarmi's writings (muqannaft) contain details on the main routes through the region, accounts of the neighboring kingdoms, as well information relevant for making military incursions into Byzantium, highlighting the strategic importance of such material.

Just as Jarmi's firsthand experience helps open up the Byzantine empire, so, too, those with a mastery of different languages appear as intermediaries in the facilitation of trade and communication between the regions of the world. The Masiilik famously describes a network of Jewish merchants (rādhāniyya) who traveled and traded around the world, selling an array of goods, from slave girls and boys to furs and spices. Their command of Arabic, Persian, and Greek, as well as the languages spoken by the Franks, Andalusians, and Slavs no doubt helped them on their international itineraries, traveling from China to Iberia and back. The description of the itinerary of the Rūs merchants, also featured in the Masiilik, echoes that of the rādhāniyya. However, their need for interpreters stands in marked contrast to the linguistic prowess of the Jewish merchants. We learn that when these Rūs traders, who are identified with the Slavs (hum jinsun min al-ṣaqālība), and who claimed to be Christians, reached Baghdad by way of the Caspian Sea to sell their beaver pelts and swords, the 'Abbāsid court called in Slav servants to help translate for them.

In geographical writing, the translator often serves as the guide to local knowledge. Such a figure is alluded to in Ibn Khurradadhbih's account concerning the caliphal expedition sent to uncover the 'People of the Cave' (ašḥāb al-kahf) who are described in the opening of the Qur'ānic chapter "The Cave" (Ṣūrat al-Kahf, 18:9–26). The story's center of gravity, and, arguably, that of the whole chapter, lies in the question of the unknown (ghayb) and the limits of human knowledge (cf. Q. 18:22, 26). The episode in the
Qur'an is in dialogue with the Christian hagiographic story of the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.' According to this legend, a group of Christians, variously numbering seven or eight, escaped the persecutions of the Emperor Decius (r. 249–51 C.E.) by fleeing to a cave near Ephesus, where they fell asleep. Miraculously, they remained in a state of sleep for centuries, not waking until the reign of the Christian Emperor Theodosius (d. 395 C.E.).

In the diverse traditions of Qur'anic exegesis, considerable speculation arose concerning the details of this narrative, referred to invariably as an edifying tale (qiṣṣa). Such speculation, also a theme in the Qur'anic account, sparked a desire to locate the Cave of the Sleepers. According to Ibn Khurradadhbih, the caliph al-Wathiq, apparently always curious to learn more of the world's wonders, took up this account and resolved to send the astrologer (munajjim) Muhammad b. Mūsā as an emissary to Byzantium in order to find out more about the state of the cave. In a letter to the emperor of Byzantium (al-rūm), al-Wathiq asks that Muhammad b. Mūsā be provided with a guide who would lead him to the cave. Ibn Khurradadhbih goes on to narrate this story, basing himself on the eyewitness testimony of Muhammad b. Mūsā, who describes the events to him (haddathānī).

The emperor of Byzantium sent a guide with the expedition to take them to the cave. There they found a deep well dug into the base of the mountain, at the bottom of which they were able to discern water. Their group descended into the cave until they arrived at the gate of the burrow; walking along the cavern for about three hundred paces, they reached an overlook where they spotted below a colonnade formed out of the mountain, raised on columns carved from rock. Located on the top of this were a number of chambers, one with an elevated doorstep. In this chamber were dead bodies (mawtā) and a man responsible for standing guard over them. We learn of the remarkably beautiful eunuchs that accompanied the guard. Muhammad b. Mūsā goes on to complete the anecdote:

The guard was not inclined that we see [the bodies]. Wanting to deceive us so that his charge over them would continue, [he said that] he considered it was not safe, for whoever touched them would be plagued by misfortune. I said to him, "Let me see them and you are free from any responsibility." So I climbed with a large torch with my slave until I saw them, in coarse woven fabric. In order to preserve them, their bodies were enwrapped in aloe, myrrh, and camphor. Their skin stuck to their bones. I only had to brush my hand over one of their chests to discover the hair to be coarse and to have been forcibly implanted. The overseer had prepared food for them. He invited us to eat with him. When we tried his food, it disagreed with us and immediately we threw it up. In effect, he wanted to either kill or choke us, with the aim of perpetuating that which he had claimed to the king of Byzantium, [namely,] that these bodies were those of the People of the Cave. So we said to him, "We believed that you would show us bodies that would resemble the living, but these are nothing like that."

Abruptly, the journey to discover the People of the Cave ends; the effect of which is to debunk any Byzantine claim of propriety over the relics and, by extension, over the Qur'anic account. The adventure to the cave condenses complex diplomatic relations with Byzantium into an anecdote of competing teleologies of scriptural authority and geopolitical dominion. After consuming a poisoned meal, the astrologer Muhammad b. Mūsā escaped with his life and with an account (khabar), which circulated widely, to discredit the authenticity of the Byzantine shrine.

For the most part the role of the one who silently guides the astrologer to what turns out to be a mishap in the cave escapes the attention of later sources that transmit this tale. Perhaps it is not surprising that, when other writers turn to this story, the figure of the guide collapses into the background, for he does not seem to play a prominent role in the outward trajectory of the anecdote; he is ancillary to the figures of al-Wāthiq, the astrologer, the emperor of Byzantium, the guard of the cave, his beautiful eunuchs, and the dead bodies themselves. Even Ibn Khurradadhbih's narrative only refers elliptically to the guide as the "one who led him" (man sāra bihi). To the extent that later sources are bound to the textual blueprint of the account, they are unable to fill out further details. That said, the Jāhān-nāma of Muhammad b. Najib Bakrān (fl. 604/1208), a Persian geographical work based primarily on Arabic sources, is freed, through translation, from following verbatim Ibn Khurradadhbih's description of the embassy. Bakrān relates that al-Wāthiq "wrote a letter to the emperor of Byzantium (qaysar-i rūm) asking that [the emperor] supply daily provisions and a road guide (qalawūz) and whatever might be necessary for this expedition."13

Centuries later and in a foreign language, the Turkish word qalawūz offers some insight into the profession of this character—the guide who disappears into the margins, unnoticed and unobtrusive, upset by the other players who enact the performance of discovery. We may contemplate how much the guide knew as he led these foreign visitors through the treacherous turns of the cavern; but the very structure of such anecdotes—the seemingly
innocuous building blocks of history—defies this kind of speculation. We have barely a reference to the guide, let alone information about what motivates him. Nonetheless, as much as history effaces these go-betweens, preferring the illusion of immediacy to the filters of mediation, the role of such informants in shaping the transmission of local knowledge cannot be underestimated. Both the guide and the translator, who are, after all, variations on the same theme, slip by silently, unnoticed, while shaping the course of the trajectory and the outcome of the tale.

In the logic of descriptive geography, translators serve as guides and there is sufficient documentation to sketch such figures. The 'Abbâsid geographer Ibn al-Faqîh records in a case in which the Umayyad caliph Hishâm b. 'Abd al-Malîk (r. 105–25/722–43) sent to the Turks an envoy who communicated with the population by way of an interpreter (tarjumân), with the goal of converting them to Islam. 14 The role of translation in the process of conversion is woven into the memory of the early spread of Islam, reflected in the well-known tradition that the Prophet Muhammad, toward the end of his life, sent messengers to the rulers of the world, translating verses from the Qur'ân into multiple languages, calling them to embrace Islam. 15

One of the most vivid depictions of the tarjumân in this proselytizing capacity is showcased in the epistle of Ibn Fadlân (fl. 310/922), in which he describes his journey as part of the caliphal embassy sent north to the king of the Turkish Bulghârs along the Volga River. Ibn Fadlân is charged with reading a letter from the 'Abbâsid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–32) to the Bulghâr king, in addition to presenting gifts to him and his court. Along with building a fortress to protect the Bulghâr king, who had recently converted to Islam, from attack by the neighboring Jewish Khazar, the caliphal embassy was sent to help construct a mosque and to instruct the newly converted Muslims in the proper ways of Islamic law (shârî'â). 16 During his adventure, Ibn Fadlân describes how he could only communicate with the local people through the aid of his Turkish translators, who are named Takîn and Bàris. 17 He understands the wondrous and often savage world around him through the filter of his translators’ explanations, and with their aid he makes inroads in his broader mission of converting pagans to Islam:

A severe cold spell struck us for some days. Takîn was guiding me and beside him was a man from among the Turks. This man began to speak in Turkish. Takîn started to laugh and he said, “This Turk asks you, ‘What is it that our Lord wants from us, for he is killing us with this cold weather, if we knew what it was that he wanted, we would bring it to him.’” I said to Takîn, “Tell him that the Lord wants from you that you say, ‘There is no deity but God.’” The man laughed and replied, “If we had know that [was all], then we would have done it.” 18

Ibn Fadlân experiences others through the mediation of translation (alâ lîsân al-tarjumân), not directly, but through someone else’s interpretation. 19 From conversing with peasants to addressing the king of the Bulghârs, the translators are always present, opening for Ibn Fadlân a universe on the margins of Islam. As he continues his journey along the Volga, encountering beardless Ghuzz Turks and tattooed Rûs traders, the translators act as ethnographic informants displaying a dazzling spectrum of customs and beliefs that range from mundane curiosities to orgiastic funeral rites of human sacrifice. 20

Following a discursive pattern set in the marvel-writing of classical antiquity, Ibn Khurraḍâdhbih serves as a guide to the foreign and remote, giving a taste of the innumerable wonders found in the distant islands of the Indian Ocean; he describes cannibals who eat people alive, serpents large enough to devour elephants, and boundless jewels and spices ready for the taking. Here are pygmies, who, in their savagery shun people (yastawâshin min al-nâs); they dwell in trees swinging from branch to branch; their speech is incomprehensible because of their small stature. 21 Yet there are other cases, such as the Nicobar Islands, where the inhabitants seem to be rather friendly: they go about naked and eat bananas, fresh fish and coconuts; they have a currency based in iron and are in commerce with merchants. 22 While Ibn Khurraḍâdhbih’s itinerary along the farflung islands of the east is populated with idol worshipers, tribal kings bedecked in gold, and ravenous cannibals, it is also filled with such exotic commodities as sandalwood, cloves, and highly sought-after camphor. 23 This suggests not only well-established mercantile networks leading back to the centers of 'Abbâsid power, but also a literary shaping of the exotic frontiers, balanced between horror and pleasure.

At the edges of the inhabited world, past the cities and the villages into the wastelands and islands, at the furthest extreme of the known earth, mediation through language fails; in those encounters between what could be called the civilized and the savage, where the interpreters themselves will go no further, communication breaks down into signs and gestures. Tâhir al-Marwazi (fl. 483/1090) examines the various customs of indigenous peoples while trading with foreign merchants. In his natural history, Tabâ‘i’ al-hayawân [The natural properties of animals], he describes the Kimâk, a Turkish tribe of Siberia, who trade with foreigners (ghurâbâ) by signs
Tarjuman

40 MAPPING

was on the plank; and (bi-l-isharat), for trade and sets them on a plank of wood, and then leaves. A Kimâk then comes and places an offering in exchange for the goods. If the owner of the goods returns and is pleased, he takes the offering, leaving behind what was on the plank; and if he is not pleased, he leaves the offering alone.25 Marwâzi describes what is known today as ‘silent trade’ or ‘dumb barter; a practice of trading without direct contact or speech.26 Here communication and exchange continue through a sophisticated performance that effaces both speech and presence. Important to this exchange is the fact that the two parties never come in direct contact; this form of barter insures both the exchange of goods and the protection of each side from the other.

Following the same track, Marwâzi relates how the Bulghâr travel to the far north across high packed snows in sleighs drawn by dogs, in order to trade with the Yûra, a Siberian tribe of savages (mutawâwâhishûn) who live in forests (ghiyâd) and are hostile to outsiders, not associating with others for fear of being harmed.27 The Bulghâr merchants take goods such as clothes and salt to barter for sable pelts. The entire exchange of merchandise between the Bulghâr and Yûra, however, is enacted in the absence of the other, without direct communication but through a mediated process of absent trade (mughâyaba).

We get a fuller picture of this activity of absent exchange when Marwâzi moves into warmer territory and describes the economic barter activity of islanders off the coast of India. On one such island, inhabited by cannibals believed to be jinn, merchants barter with the savages (mutawâwâhishûn) without making direct contact and thus insuring the safety of the two sides.28 The maritime trade of clove in the islands of the Indian Ocean is likewise described. There, because of the hostility of the islanders, the clove is bought by absent trading (mughâyabatûn).29

This dance of the merchants with the savages suggests its own form of communication, filtered through an elaborate system of signs. The mutual absence (mughâyaba) is paralleled morphologically, but is opposed conceptually, with the privileged act of direct observation (mu‘âyana), which functions as the dominant epistemological paradigm of descriptive geography. The implied oppositional relationship highlights how subversive and exotic this particular economic practice must have seemed. Such an economy of exchange based on values of absence and presence captures how two sides mediate their own frontiers. In these liminal spaces, on the edge of the forest and on the shore of the island, direct contact is never made but exchange, and with it description, take place nonetheless. For such texts, the category of ‘the savage’ serves as a foil to legitimate the normative position of ‘the civilized’, enacted through the mimetic power of language to control and fashion the other within the reducible and sublimated form of the anecdote, readily transmitted and translated. Within the context of the marvelous, which serves explicitly as the backdrop for this material, the question of relative veracity should not be ignored, as these accounts are not neutral descriptions of reality, but are deployed as a means of defining the self in negative dialectic with an imagined and highly formalized other. Rather than reflecting discrete events, such anecdotes serve as descriptive topoi of the process of exchange across frontiers.

From globe-trotting Jewish merchants who speak multiple languages to guides who serve as translators across foreign lands, and then, finally, to an exchange of goods through the mutual absence of both parties, we can trace various levels of detachment from immediate experience. What emerges from this partially reconstructed mosaic is the fact that the textual world of the wondrous, of crossing the frontier and coming back, has always been the space of translation, separated by degrees from the thing itself. It is the translator, the intermediary between worlds and a supplement for presence, who, hidden in a textual chain of transmission, makes contact to negotiate the space of the frontier.

An Approach to the Story of Sallâm al-Tarjumân

As a discipline, geography promises a description of the earth and its features presented through word and image. Translation, rather than an end—such as geography, which is an entire field within itself—suggests a process; the movement and transference, be it linguistically or physically, from one register to another. The Greek word geography (γεωγραφία) derives from the compound of geo, earth, coupled with graphia, which signifies writing and maintains a representational element, thus pointing to a semantic charge that hearkens back to the act of carving. Ptolemy, in the introduction to his Geography, links the projection of the earth through maps and words with imitation (μιμημα) and pictorial representation, suggesting in the first instance what we today take to be cartography.30

The Arabic translation of this Greek term, ‘image of the earth’ (ṣūrat al-ard), highlights the mimetic quality of the discipline; it is an encyclopedic branch of knowledge whose horizons blanket the entire earth, following coastlines and mountains, harbors and settlements, telescoping out to view the contours of countries and continents, and finally the globe itself. All this is enacted through the magic of mimesis, in the imitative capacity of word and image to capture the impossible: the space outside us and our position in it.
Translation serves as the *modus operandi* of geography, first by gathering knowledge of the world and its inhabitants across frontiers, and second by transmitting that knowledge and projecting it in a meaningful way. The anecdote of Sallām al-Tarjamān’s journey to the edge of the inhabited world serves as an emblem of the relationship between geography and translation. From the third/ninth century, when his story first circulated in the caliphal court, to the thirteenth/nineteenth century, when Orientalists tried to determine the trajectory of his expedition, and today, as we rehearse his tale, Sallām the translator continues his journey through uncharted territory, alive in the minds of admirers and detractors.

Sallām’s narrative is predicated on the Qur’ānic treatment of the nations of Yāyūj and Mājiṭ and the wall built by Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn, as outlined in Sūrat al-Kahf.23 According to the Qur’ān, Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn traveled to the land of the rising sun, where he encountered a people who were plagued by Yāyūj and Mājiṭ; they beseeched him to protect them from the ravaging of these nations. Thereupon, Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn erected a wall between two mountains to protect humankind. Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn figures in the Qur’ān as the heroic model of piety and ultimate instrument of God’s will. The story of Yāyūj and Mājiṭ plays a central role in Islamic eschatology, where, according to the Qur’ān, the Lord will allow these nations to break forth from the barrier to descend across the world and surge against humankind. Their destruction of the earth represents one of the signs of the Hour (‘ayāt al-sā‘a), signifying the advent of the apocalypse and ultimately the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qi‘yama).32

The tale of Yāyūj and Mājiṭ, along with the wall built by Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn, has a pedigree that predates the Islamic configuration, with its roots in Jewish and Christian eschatological traditions tied to the figures of Gog and Magog, who appear, either individually or together, in Genesis 10:2, 1 Chronicles 1:5, 5:4, Ezekiel 38–9, and Revelation 20:7–10. In Christian apocalyptic scenarios, the hordes of Gog and Magog, whose number is as the sand of the sea (ὡς η ἄμιας τῆς θαλάσσης), will come as an army to spread destruction over the earth. In a process of transposition that occurs already with the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (fl. 93 C.E.), the savage Scythians of the Greek imaginary are identified with Magog, who are connected to the apocalyptic races that Alexander the Great bottled up behind a barrier near the Caspian Sea.33 In Syriac writings by Eastern Christians in the early seventh century, this barrier was a well-established motif, expressed, for instance, in the anonymous *Neshānā d’Aleksandrōs* [The triumph of Alexander] and in a homily (*mēnra*) on Alexander attributed to Jacob of Sarug, in which Gog and Magog are fused with the Romance cycle of Alexander and the building of the wall.34 Demonstrating the fluidity of this narrative, with the rapid series of Arab conquests later in the seventh century, Syriac apocalyptic writings, such as the homily by Pseudo-Ephraem and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, incorporate the rise of Islam as part of an eschatological narrative in which Gog and Magog are accorded significant roles.35

Early Muslim exegetes were quick to associate Alexander the Great with the epithet Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn, meaning *bicorntatus*, the possessor of two horns, a name that reflects an iconicographic pattern, established in antiquity, of representing an apotheosized Alexander with horns.36 These horns are a feature of the seventh-century Syriac adventure, the *Neshānā d’Aleksandrōs*, in which Alexander, explicitly configured as an archetypal Christian hero, is endowed by God with horns (qarnātā) upon his head.37 In early Qur’ānic exegetics, the figure of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn takes on a sainthood, often placed on a par with the divinely-inspired prophets who precede Muhammad.38 His Arabic and Persian adventures lead him around the world, where he appears as a heroic champion of monotheism and a protector of humankind.39

The ravaging meted out by Gog and Magog is a story shared among religious traditions, enwrapped variously in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim retellings. As the tale of Gog and Magog disseminated through these three monotheistic faiths, the interpretations concerning who, and where, these monstrous races were multiplied and grew ever more heterogeneous over time. Gog and Magog have been identified variously as Scythians, Huns, Celts, Goths, Alans, Khazars, Arabs, Turks, Magyars, Mongols, and the Ten Tribes of Israel.40 An apocalyptic story for every generation, they are the quintessential illustration of fluid and ever-changing notions of the margin.

When the caliph al-Wāthiq awoke after dreaming that the barrier holding back Gog and Magog had burst open, he did not take his vision lightly. This anecdote stands as a showpiece to Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography of the world and the wonders therein. The journey to Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn’s rampart may be read as a moment of translation set against a culture of translators. Ibn Khurradadhbih is such a translator, standing on the cusp of two arcs of culture, beholding Persian and Arabic traditions, retelling Islamic and pre-Islamic tales. Sallām, the emissary chosen by al-Wāthiq to head his mission to the wall and to bring back eyewitness testimony (*‘ayinhu wa ji‘nī bi-khabarīhi*),41 is also a translator, mediating between the civilized and the savage.
Possessing the Marvelous

In the Vienna redaction of Ibn Khurraḍādhbih’s geography, Sallām’s journey to the wall appears in a section treating the marvelous buildings of the world (‘ajībi al-bunyān). In fact, the opening of the Masālik promises a description of architectural wonders. The first series of structures described under this rubric, the pyramids of Giza, are notable as they position al-Wāthiq’s mission in dialogue with issues of salvation history, royal patronage, and adventurous confrontations with the grotesque.

As with Muhammad b. Mūṣā’s encounter with the preserved corpses disguised as the People of the Cave, the description of the pyramids enters into the subterranean world of crypts and mumified remains. Ibn Khurraḍāadhbih starts with an account, which appears to either share a common source with, or be directly based on, the Kitāb al-ulūf [The book of the thousands] of the famed Persian astrologer Abu Ma’shar (d. 272/886). According to Ma’shūdī, Abu Ma’shar dedicated an entire section of his astrological history to a description of the marvelous temples and buildings of the world. Abū Ma’shar held that the pyramids were part of a Hermetic astrological design, erected, according to his mythological conception of history, by the original Hermes, who was the first to learn the science of the stars and to build temples. This broader cosmographical pattern informs Ibn Khurraḍāadhbih’s description of how the two largest pyramids of Giza, said to tower four hundred cubits above the ground, were engraved with hieroglyphics (musnad) and talismanic symbols (tawwādih), containing every secret (sīr) and marvel (‘ajib) of medicine and astrology. These inscriptions, which, according to Ibn al-Faqih were translated for an unnamed caliph, read, “I have built these two pyramids, so whoever claims to be powerful in his dominion, try to destroy them, for destruction is easier than building.” Ibn Khurraḍāadhbih relates how all the wealth of the world (kharāj al-dunyâ) could not accomplish such a task.

The narrative of the exterior, with its majestic, yet cryptic aura, leads to an underground adventure into the belly of one of the smaller adjoining pyramids. As with the missions of Sallām and Mūṣā, the following account is based on the direct testimony of one of the participants, Ismā‘il b. Yazīd al-Muḥallabī. In all three accounts, the narrators are tied to the ruling elite, as emissaries who interpret the wonders of existence. Muḥallabī, our guide on this adventure, served as a secretary (kātib) to Luṭū’ū (d. 304/916–7), a commander in the service of Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 270/884), the ‘Abbāsid Turkish general and de facto ruler of Egypt and Syria. Luṭū’ū and his entourage broke off with Ibn Ṭūlūn and joined the service of the ‘Abbāsid prince al-Muwaffaq (d. 278/891), the effective administrator of the empire, to fight the Zanj revolt in 269/883. This would be a likely terminus ante quem for the relation of the account to Ibn Khurraḍāadhbih.

Accompanied by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Wāṣiṭī, the secretary (kātib) of Ibn Ṭūlūn, and a group of laborers, Muḥallabī details how they entered the pyramid by pulling away three layers of stone blocks, each separated by fine sand. Beneath the third layer led a passageway to an open courtyard measuring forty cubits squared; this was filled with three hundred and sixty statues (timthāl) in the form of people making offerings. At each side of the courtyard were separate chambers (nimkhānājāt), closed by high stone doors, facing the cardinal directions; Muḥallabī relates these directions with respect to the qibla orientation toward Mecca.

Within the chambers lay onyx urns, the lids of which were shaped in the form of different animals. Cracking open the urns they discovered mummies (mūmiyāt). In the north chamber was a sarcophagus (jūrn) made of a massive black stone, sealed tight with lead. Unable to open the lid by force, they lit a fire so the lead cementing the tomb would melt:

We found in the sarcophagus the corpse of a ruler (shaykh); under his head was a tablet of white onyx that had cracked from the fire we had set, just as the clothing covering the corpse had burned. We took the tablet, and joining it together, found on one side two images (sūratān) of gold. One of the images was of a man, in his hand was a serpent, the other was the image of a man on a donkey, holding a staff, on the other side of the tablet was a third image of a man mounted on a camel bearing a rod. So we took all of this to Ahmad b. Ṭūlūn, who called for an artisan to join together the tablet. We collectively came to the consensus that the three images corresponded to Mūṣā, ‘Īsā, and Muhammad.

This rather destructive treasure-hunting foray is predicated on the power of eyewitness observation (‘iyān), which leads deeper beneath the surface, like one of the many subterranean encounters in the cycle of The Thousand and One Nights, into the symmetrical labyrinth of the crypt, replicating itself within a mirrored pattern of increasingly smaller stages of unveiling. The royal audience, represented in the figure of Ibn Ṭūlūn, not only legitimates this act of ekphrastic recovery, but animates it with a scriptural hermeneutic that unlocks the cosmic design hidden within the monuments of pharaonic Egypt. The Muslim ruling elite reads the hieroglyphs through a teleology of prophetic history, positioning themselves as the rightful inheritors of these mysterious treasures. As with the translatio
of relics, highlighted in the medieval Christian practice of the sacred theft (furta sacra), the transferral of the human remains from the crypt justifies a broader cosmological narrative affirming the salvific power of Islam as prophesied in the monumental wonder of the pyramids.

The opening up of the pyramids serves as an established pattern for the articulation of political power and dominion, manifest in the famed account of how the caliph al-Ma'mūn sought to unlock the hidden treasures contained within the pyramids, in a project that appears to have been inspired by the desire for both monetary and intellectual gain. Muḥallabī's adventure through the pyramids fits into a pattern in Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography of highlighting the divine order of Muslim rule in the course of human history.

The description of marvelous buildings shares part in a mosaic of wonders and curiosities showcased throughout the geography. Shortly before the description of the pyramids, Ibn Khurradadhbih devotes a section to the wonders of the world ('ajā'ib al-arḍ), and includes the portentous discoveries in Toledo preceding the Umayyad conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 93/711. The account of how the last Visigoth king, Roderick (Ludhriq), broke an ancient taboo and with it brought on the Muslim invasion of Iberia, forms part of a historiography shared by medieval Christians and Muslims. After relating that Muslim armies, during the conquest of Toledo, came into possession of Solomon's bejeweled table (mā'īda), Ibn Khurradadhbih describes how the invasion of the peninsula was precipitated by Roderick breaking into an enchanted, sealed temple (bayt) in the city. According to custom, each Visigoth king would place a lock upon the temple to ensure the safety of their reign. Despite the many admonishments from his counselors, who warned of the taboo barring any king from setting foot in the temple, Roderick broke into the inner chamber, only to discover talismanic statues of Arabs on horseback wearing turbans and bearing swords. Ibn Khurradadhbih's account concludes with the year that Roderick forced open (fataha) the temple gate—exactly the year when the Arab armies invaded the Visigoth kingdom. The dangers of such exploration and curiosity are circumscribed by a providential order that legitimates the expansive territory gained in the course of the early Muslim conquests (futūḥāt).

The wonders of the world in Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography are framed by the logic of imperial acts of discovery and possession, in part constructed through a pre-existing Umayyad ideology of expansion. The intimate relationship between the early Arab conquests and geography itself points to a developed discourse of territorial description. Turning from the wonderful enchantment that preordained the collapse of the Visigoth state, Ibn Khurradadhbih relates that the Umayyad general Qutayba b. Muslim (d. 96/715) uncovered during his conquests of the Sogdian city of Paykand in Transoxiana (87-90/706-9) a giant skeleton, the top of which could only be reached with the aid of ladders. This early form of paleontology could position what were evidently the bones of prehistoric creatures, not only as proof of an ancient race of giants, but also as trophies acquired through conquest.

Ibn Khurradadhbih's list of wondrous buildings, mountains, bodies of water, and natural dispositions crescendos in a discursive display of mimetic possession. Symbolically, marvels of relics, bones, strange customs, and bizarre phenomena are controlled and possessed in the capital of textual production. Much of the marvelous material displayed in the geography builds upon earlier paradigms of conquest and dominion that inform the 'Abbāsid interest in curiosities. As Ibn Khurradadhbih draws on examples of marvels from Umayyad conquests, he positions the 'Abbāsid caliphate as not only continuing in a tradition of marvelous possessions, but also surpassing it.

Such is the case with Ibn Khurradadhbih's inclusion of the four wonders of the world enumerated by 'Abd Allāh, the son of 'Amr b. al-?Āṣ (d. 42/663), the conqueror of Egypt. 'Abd Allāh's list situates marvels as trophies of imperial control that accompanied the vast territory conquered by the Umayyads. Topping 'Abd Allāh's list of wonders is the lighthouse (manāra) of Alexandria, from which, it was said, one could see across the stretch of the Mediterranean to Constantinople. His account resonates with the belief that the mirror of Alexandria was capable of burning enemy ships by way of concentrating the sun's rays. Thus, as part of Umayyad dominion, the lighthouse, long thought to have been built by Alexander the Great, served as a symbol of imperial power.

As for the lighthouse, it was a major attraction for medieval travelers and formed an established topos for geographers, who offered detailed descriptions of the ancient structure, which, in turn, further fed the curiosity surrounding the marvel itself. Abū 'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, in his Adab al-ghurabā' [The etiquette of strangers] relates an account of a traveler who visited the lighthouse in 303/915. Inside he found verses dated 270/883-4, written by a certain Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Šamad, who desired to leave a record of the pain, fatigue, and hardship he endured in the course of reaching the marvel. Isfahānī goes on to describe how these poetic inscriptions inspired a series of verses that were later carved onto the monument, continuing the motif of the fragility and temporality of life. This graffiti encoding
the marvel is itself shaped by a discourse of beholding the wonders of the world, and like descriptive geography, represents a means of re-inscribing and appropriating the monument.

Yet even this marvel, which Ibn Khurradadhbih domesticates by likening it to the minaret of Sāmarrā’, seems parochial in the context of the geography, eclipsed by a dazzling orchestration of strange and morbid adventures. As with the logic of storytelling, reiterated throughout the marvels of *The Thousand and One Nights*, in which each story attempts to surpass that which precedes it, Ibn Khurradadhbih’s encyclopedic display of wonders showcases ever-increasing levels of astonishment. The courtly production and reception of these curiosities are part of a caliphal conception of imperial management and control over the diversity of existence.

Illustrative of this caliphal interest in possessing such curiosities is Mas‘ūdi’s claim regarding the purported mission of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-47/847-61), who succeeded al-Wāthiq. He is said to have sent the famed translator and physician Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 260/873) to procure vipers, as well as a specimen from the Nasnās. The Nasnās, monstrous creatures thought to be related to apes, were said to possess only half a head, one arm, and one leg, upon which they hopped. Al-Wāthiq’s earlier adventure to the wall of Gog and Magog, its own form of imperial trophy also requiring the aid of a translator, may have been a model for al-Mutawakkil’s request. In such imperial dispatches, or at least in the anecdotal form of imagining them, the translator is called upon to manage the liminal spaces of the map’s edge.

Generally speaking, the sources paint al-Wāthiq bi’llāh, the ninth ‘Abbāsid caliph, as a profligate, given over to song, dance, and the sensuality of singing-girls (*jawārī*). For all intents and purposes, al-Wāthiq’s own power was dependant on the Turkish military elite whom his father, al-Mu’taṣim, had instated. The Turkish guard came to exercise a considerable control over the caliphate within the palatine city of Sāmarrā’, which was founded by al-Mu’taṣim and continued to be the seat of ‘Abbāsid rule through the reign of al-Mu’tamid.

Al-Wāthiq pursued the monumental development of Sāmarrā’ initiated by his father. The capital city continued to expand into a cosmopolitan center surrounded by cantonments of an international military corps that consisted of Central Asian Turks, Khazars, Sogdians, and Arab tribesmen. Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geographical awareness of the various Turkish tribal confederations of Central Asia, many of which were replicated in the social universe of Sāmarrā’, highlights the strategic importance of the region. Beyond the Khazar kingdom and returning through the heartlands of Transoxiana, Sallam’s own itinerary, which originated in the ‘Abbāsid capital, included travels among non-Muslim populations who inhabited lands beyond the frontiers, but were interconnected with the center of the empire. With this mixed population, Sāmarrā’ was a site for both the cross-pollination and the demarcation of religious and cultural practices.

As for the religious climate of the period, al-Wāthiq is said to have continued the inquisition (*mīḥna*), started by al-Ma’mūn, instituting the
Mu'tazili doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an as official state policy. Though at the end of his life it is reported that al-Wathiq changed his stance on this issue, the sources depict, often with gruesome detail, his bloody implementation of the doctrine, and how at times he oversaw and even participated in the execution of those who affirmed the uncreatedness of the Qur'an.

Taken by the pleasures of food, poetry, and music, his brief and undistinguished reign as caliph came to an abrupt end with his death, at approximately thirty-six, only five years after assuming the caliphate. While there is a significant corpus of historical detail on the life of al-Wathiq, the sources are, inevitably, composite and perspectival. Ibn Khurradadhbih, who was a member of al-Mu'tamid's court a generation later, records the stories of Muhammad b. Musa's journey to the cave of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus and Sallam al-Tarjamun's adventure to the wall of Gog and Magog. Here al-Wathiq appears as a distant, and perhaps even idealized, figure of caliphal authority. In contrast, the image presented by the historian and exegete Tabari has no pretenses of ideal grandeur; in his history, the various events of al-Wathiq's reign fit into the larger geopolitical realities facing the 'Abbasid ruling elite. The political uprisings and frontier skirmishes, however, are removed from the political uprisings and frontier skirmishes, which al-Wathiq presided and where he views with great suspicion, explicitly on Ibn Khurradadhbih. 12 Notably, every subsequent continuation of al-Wathiq's embassy finds its origin in Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography. Other than conjecture, we cannot speak of the translator's identity, his relationship to the author, or to the caliph.

We may, however, turn our attention to other more prominent translators of the period, in order to adumbrate the figure of Sallam al-Tarjamun. The Nestorian Christian Hunayn b. Ishqiq, undoubtedly the most famous 'Abbasiad translator, frequented al-Wathiq's court. In addition to his command of both Syriac and Arabic, Hunayn had reached such a mastery of classical Greek that he is said to have been able to recite Homer from memory. 13 A prolific translator, Hunayn introduced an encyclopedic range of Greek material into Arabic and Syriac, from the oneiromancy of Artemidorus (fl. second century CE) to a translation of the Septuagint. In addition to expanding the holdings of the caliphal library (bayt al-hikma), his work as a translator attracted wealthy individual patrons. Hunayn's interest in such diverse fields as astronomy, belles-lettres, history, magic, mathematics, and philosophy comes to light in his extensive translations and through his own writings. However, Hunayn made his greatest contribution to the advancement of science in the field of medicine, through his translations of Galen and Hippocrates, which served as foundational Arabic texts for generations of physicians. Well before Hunayn reached the position of court physician during the reign of al-Mutawakkil, he had established himself as a leading intellectual of 'Abbasiid society.

Mas'udi describes formal assemblies of doctors and intellectuals over which al-Wathiq presided and where Hunayn figured as a leading authority. The caliph prompted Hunayn and the assembly members to illuminate various matters ranging from natural sciences to theological speculations. As an idealized textual projection of al-Wathiq and Hunayn, Mas'udi's description shares part in a broader articulation of 'Abbasiid imperial authority as rooted in the promotion and cultivation of learning. Far from the extravagance of decadent detachment, Mas'udi pictures al-Wathiq

Sources mention a man referred to as Sallam al-Tarjamun. The Persian geographer Ibn Rusta (fl. 300/912), a keen reader of Ibn Khurradadhbih, does make the comment that Sallam translated Turkish dispatches for al-Wathiq; this might help us to delineate Sallam's relationship to the Turkish general Abu Ja'far Ashinās (d. 230/844) who recommended him for the adventure. It may also situate Sallam within the social world of the Turkish military guard of Sāmarrā'. Yet it is unclear where Ibn Rusta derives this added information, as he bases the rest of Sallam's account of the rampart, which he views with great suspicion, explicitly on Ibn Khurradadhbih. 12 Notably, every subsequent continuation of al-Wathiq's embassy finds its origin in Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography. Other than conjecture, we cannot speak of the translator's identity, his relationship to the author, or to the caliph.

We may, however, turn our attention to other more prominent translators of the period, in order to adumbrate the figure of Sallam al-Tarjamun. The Nestorian Christian Hunayn b. Ishqiq, undoubtedly the most famous 'Abbasiad translator, frequented al-Wathiq's court. In addition to his command of both Syriac and Arabic, Hunayn had reached such a mastery of classical Greek that he is said to have been able to recite Homer from memory. A prolific translator, Hunayn introduced an encyclopedic range of Greek material into Arabic and Syriac, from the oneiromancy of Artemidorus (fl. second century CE) to a translation of the Septuagint. In addition to expanding the holdings of the caliphal library (bayt al-hikma), his work as a translator attracted wealthy individual patrons. Hunayn's interest in such diverse fields as astronomy, belles-lettres, history, magic, mathematics, and philosophy comes to light in his extensive translations and through his own writings. However, Hunayn made his greatest contribution to the advancement of science in the field of medicine, through his translations of Galen and Hippocrates, which served as foundational Arabic texts for generations of physicians. Well before Hunayn reached the position of court physician during the reign of al-Mutawakkil, he had established himself as a leading intellectual of 'Abbasiid society.

Mas'udi describes formal assemblies of doctors and intellectuals over which al-Wathiq presided and where Hunayn figured as a leading authority. The caliph prompted Hunayn and the assembly members to illuminate various matters ranging from natural sciences to theological speculations. As an idealized textual projection of al-Wathiq and Hunayn, Mas'udi's description shares part in a broader articulation of 'Abbasiid imperial authority as rooted in the promotion and cultivation of learning. Far from the extravagance of decadent detachment, Mas'udi pictures al-Wathiq
as actively involved in the promotion of scientific investigation (nazar). Favoring intellectual curiosity, the caliph is said to have detested following tradition blindly (taqlid) and all those who did so.

In addition to Hunayn, such prominent translators and physicians as the Nestorian Christians Bukhtishū (d. 256/870) and Ibn Māsawayh (d. 243/857) attended this assembly,15 which al-Wāthiq commenced by asking how the knowledge of medicine was achieved; what was the source for its principles; was this knowledge obtained by perception, through deduction by analogy (qiyyās), by tradition, through principles of reason; or were the principles of medicine reached through an oral tradition of transmitted knowledge (ṣama‘), as is the case with the religious scholars.16 This line of questioning speaks to the broader intellectual climate of the period, which continued a scholastic tradition of classifying knowledge into principles (usūl) and branches (furu‘) of sciences (‘ulūm). It also suggests the authority of the caliph privileging observation, experimentation, and independent reason in a routinized projection of power.

The anecdote continues with a detailed description of the scientific laws (qanūn) of investigation used for the development of medicine through trial and experimentation (tajriba). The conversation addresses the scientific practices of Hippocrates and Galen, such as deduction by means of analytical analogy as a technique for determining illness or discovering remedies. The didactic format of questions and answers moves freely from the general to the specific, as al-Wāthiq directs the discussion toward an exposition of the elements of the body that aid in digestion. In a seamless digression into the details of dentistry, the narrative displays Hunayn as a master physician, as he describes with precision the anatomy of the mouth and the concomitant field of dentistry, drawn largely from Greek models and vocabulary.17

Inspired by the assembly, Hunayn completed for al-Wāthiq a monograph entitled Kitāb al-maṣā’il al-tabi‘iyya [Issues of natural science], wherein he outlined the differences between food, medicine, laxatives, and the digestive functions of the body.18 The caliphal sponsorship of scientific learning underscores the role of the state in the production of knowledge. From this anecdote of the translator and the caliph we may perceive how Hunayn emulates the ideal of the sage (hakim) as a master of an encyclopedic horizon of knowledge. Likewise, a specific ideal of caliphal authority emerges. The caliph was more than a vice-regent to the Prophet; as the second ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Mansūr is said to have argued, the caliph represented “the power of God over His land” (sultan Allāh fī ardīhi).19 As God’s potentates on earth, the intellectual interest of various caliphs and their role in the transmission of learning took on sacred and ritualized dimensions.20

The Anxiety of Translation

The third/ninth century emerges as the zenith of the translation movement, a time when the authority and influence of professional translators of classical material reached an unprecedented level. Many of the prominent translators were non-Arab Christians who had originally learned Syriac and/or Greek for liturgical purposes. The lucrative sums paid for translations encouraged the development and refinement of the profession, sustaining generations of translators. Despite the value placed on the transmission of Greek, Persian, and Sanskrit works into Arabic, there existed simultaneously an anxiety concerning the act of translation.

The grand littérateur Jāhiz puts this unease into words in a now famous passage from his anthology of animals, the Kitāb al-hayawan.21 Taking zoology as a unifying theme, Jāhiz weaves into his study topics ranging from Qur’ānic exegesis and metaphysical speculations to fables, poetry, and literary criticism. In the beginning of this encyclopedia, he turns to the subject of translation, discussing the difficulties and dangers that surface in the intermediation of languages and cultures. The difference between poetry and prose serves as his entry into this excursus. Jāhiz affirms that poetry cannot be translated, as it is impossible to render verse into another language. Whenever poetry is translated, he argues, its form (nazzm) is cut up, its meter is lost, its aesthetic value disappears, its sublime quality evaporates, and its ability to cause astonishment (tā‘ājub) falls away. Poetry, he maintains, is not like prose, which is more suitable for translation, as it does not contain the same formal and thus untranslatable qualities.22

Keenly aware of the role of translation in the dissemination of knowledge, Jāhiz traces how the science of the Indians, the philosophy of the Greeks, and the literary traditions of the Persians all passed into Arabic; in the process, some works increased in excellence, while some diminished in quality. Thus he describes the way works of learning were translated (nuqliat), crossing nations and languages, until finally reaching Arabic, the latest inheritor of classical knowledge.23 The danger, however, that nuances of meaning could be lost in this process remains quite real for Jāhiz. Such is the case with the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic. The Arabic translator of Aristotle, he argues, does not fully express what the philosopher said in the particularities of meanings and in the precision of technical vocabulary. Jāhiz concludes that a translator
would have to equal the actual writer and composer of the work to fully comprehend the meaning of the original text. In the case of highly specialized writing, this is held as an untenable position. Jāhiz argues that the Arabic translators of Greek philosophy never reached the same level as Aristotle or Plato. In such a configuration, translation portends miscommunication and imperfect understanding; it is a supplement that only approximates the original that it tries to replace.

For Jāhiz a good translator must be the most learned of people in both the source and target languages, so that no damage may suffer either one of them. Complete bilingualism is, however, put into question, as Jāhiz doubts that one could possess equal competence in two languages, without the faculty to communicate in one being stronger and thus influencing the other. He stresses that the more specialized the work being translated, the smaller the number of learned scholars in the field, and thus all the more difficult for the translator, as it becomes more likely that the translation will misrepresent the original text.

The problems of translating scientific and philosophical discourse come as a prelude to a deeper misgiving; Jāhiz warns of the dangers of translating scriptural material, where erring in matters of religion is more grievous than mistranslating Greek philosophy. By touching on the theological implications raised in the act of translation, Jāhiz moves from general doubts to a specific charge against the translation of sacred texts. This uneasiness toward the possibly perfidious turns of linguistic mediation sounds as a counter voice to the authoritative position of translation as promoted by a significant portion of the ‘Abbasid elite.

Jāhiz’s comments on the dangers of translation fit into a larger debate concerning the ontological and linguistic status of the Qurʾān. The doctrine of the inimitability of the Qurʾān (ʿijāz al-Qurʾān) in Islamic dialectical theology (kalām) developed as a proof (ḥujja) that the scriptural revelation to Muhammad was a miracle (muʿjiza) proving his prophethood. The extent to which this inimitability was defined in linguistic terms, through the unique Arabic character of the Qurʾān, was itself a point of contention. On this subject, the jurist, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfīʿī (d. 204/820), in his epistle on jurisprudence, the Risāla, stresses, “the Qurʾān indicates that there is nothing in the book of God which is not in the tongue of the Arabs.” In such a configuration the Qurʾān is defined as an immutable Arabic linguistic expression, a point that is arguably part of the Qurʾān’s own image of itself as scripture. This focus on the vessel of revelation led theologians and legal scholars to raise the question of the translatability of the Qurʾān. The remarks of Jāhiz on translation can be seen, in addition to their references to the translation of Greek science, in the light of broader philosophical and theological debates over the status of revelation and language.

Though the translation movement emerged as a prominent feature in the intellectual climate of the first centuries of ‘Abbasid society, the quality of the translations was not always of the highest standard. This may help to explain, in part, such anxieties concerning the distorting effects of translation. Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, in his account of the works that he translated of Galen, laments the poor state of many Syriac and Arabic translations of original Greek source material. He repeatedly finds himself having to re-translate works that had been poorly translated. In a similar vein, the polymath Ibn Sinā (d. 428/1037) complains of the difficulty he had grasping Aristotle’s Metaphysics (Maʿād al-faṭḥā)—a translation he felt to be utterly incomprehensible (lā sabila ilā fahmihi). He made this judgment after reading the work over forty times, and ultimately memorizing it. Not until Ibn Sinā had read the commentary of Abū Nasr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) was he able to begin to understand Aristotle’s work. The critique leveled by Jāhiz speaks directly to the difficulty of rendering complicated terms and expressions into comprehensible Arabic. The opacity of many translations led Jāhiz to conclude that a text that has circulated through multiple languages, been marked by different pens, and changed into the different scripts of the various creeds and nations, moves further from its original meaning.

In a famous debate recorded by Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (d. ca 414/1023) in his Kitāb al-imtāʿ wa l-muʿānasā [The book of delight and conviviality], the philologist Abū Saʿīd al-Sirāfī (d. 368/979) casts such a charge against the Nestorian translator of Syriac works into Arabic, Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus (d. 338/940). The broad scope of this debate explores the relationship between logic and language. According to Tawhīdī, a certain Qudāma b. Jaʿfar attended the disputation. Assuming this is the same Qudāma as the author of the administrative geography, Kitāb al-kharāji, then we have another example of how the ‘Abbasid administrative class found points of entry into the broader theoretical debates of translation occurring during the period.

As outlined by Tawhīdī, the outcome of this assembly, held by the wazīr Abū ʿl-Fath b. Furāt (d. 327/938), colorfully favors the philologist Strāfī, who adroitly mentions each instance in which he believes his interlocutor errs. Abū Bishr Mattā takes as a starting point the premise that the underlying signification of words is the same for all languages, and that the structures of logic and philosophy exist independent of language. With this position,
he claims that the intentions and aims of a given text can be faithfully reproduced into another language, for, just as the concept that four plus four equals eight is the same in any language, so, too, the structures of meaning are the same across linguistic expressions. Even though, for instance, the ancient Greek of Aristotle is no longer spoken, Abū Bishr Mattā believed that translation can preserve the argumentation, convey the meanings, and be faithful to the conclusions of Aristotle’s work.

The grammarian Sirāfī argues, to the contrary, that the significations (ma‘ānīn) are themselves bound to the signs of a given language (alfāz) and, as such, translation ultimately distorts and corrupts the intentions of any original text. Attacking Abū Bishr Mattā for not even knowing ancient Greek, but relying on Syriac intermediaries, Sirāfī contends that, in the various stages of mediation, from Greek into Syriac and then Syriac into Arabic, the original meanings are transformed through translation.36

The distorting effects of translation pose a particular problem for the interpretation and reception of ancient learning into Arabic. This difficulty is fully highlighted in the notoriously confusing Arabic translation of Aristotle’s Poetics made by Abū Bishr Mattā himself. Based on a Syriac intermediary, not the original Greek, this translation, mediated through the filter of yet another language, must convey concepts and terminology utterly foreign to Arabic. With the continual use of transliterations of Greek words, along with blatant mistranslations, Abū Bishr Mattā often obfuscated the meaning of Aristotle’s highly specialized literary terminology.37 For example, rather than explaining poësis (πόησις), our translator leaves us wondering what is meant by his Arabic transliteration fawāsīs.38 We also lose other important details in Abū Bishr Mattā’s version, where, for instance, the original meanings of tragedy (tragōdía) and comedy (κωμωδία) are collapsed into the Arabic words for praise (madiḥ) and ridicule (hija‘).39

The terms madiḥ and hija‘ are taken from genres of Arabic poetry, and do not adequately account for the original Greek theatrical forms that are largely alien to the Arabic literary culture of the period.

Translations of highly specialized and complex material were often supplemented with commentaries by other writers who sought to elucidate what, at times, could be the perplexing lexicon of a given translation. The philosopher Fārābī wrote commentaries on the translated works of Aristotle not only to add his own voice to various philosophical issues, but also to explain foreign terminology that remained unclear in Arabic. His minor commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics, the Risāla fi qawānīn sinā‘at al-shu‘ārā‘ [Epistle on the canons of the poets’ craft], speaks to the opaque transliterations and poorly presented concepts that Arabic readers were often confronted with when approaching this text.40 Yet, even his glosses of Greek literary terms leave much to be desired and highlight the challenge of comprehending such translations.41

The debate over the ill effects of translation, however, did not arrest the translation movement, which came to an almost organic end when practically all of the available works of Greek antiquity had been translated. The transmission of classical learning in the intellectual development of ‘Abbāsid society cannot be underestimated. The advent of Plato and Aristotle, now shrouded in new forms, had a tremendous influence on the intellectual horizons of the period. A writer such as Jāḥiz did not escape the effects of this movement; his Kitāb al-hayawān, the very work in which he lambastes the poor quality of translations, speaks directly to the Arabic reception of Aristotle’s History of Animals. The work of such philologically trained scholars as Hunayn b. Ishāq demonstrates the prevalent desire for accuracy in translation. Even more, a figure like Hunayn openly acknowledged the challenges of translating foreign terms and concepts into Arabic.42 The effort to incorporate remote traditions of learning into Arabic far outweighed any objections over translation, and however distorted the transmission might have been, in the final analysis, foreign material and modes of thinking became fully integrated into the variegated fields of ‘Abbāsid learning.

Al-Tarjumān, al-Turjumān, al-Tarjamān

There are a variety of ways in Arabic to express the idea of translation, although the verb tarjama stands out, taking as its primary signification to interpret, to explain speech or language in another language, to translate from one language into another. While there exists a certain amount of debate in the classical Arabic lexicons over the origin of the word, the connection between the verb tarjama and the expression rajama bi‘l-ghayb, to conjecture or speak about something of which one knows nothing, is attested in classical dictionaries.43 The semantic link between translation and speaking about the unknown has interesting epistemological implications as to the role of the translator or interpreter in any given act of communication. It follows that from tarjama is born the tarjumān, a word whose correct vocalization has been the subject of dispute, read variously as turjumān and tarjamān. Ibn Manzūr (d. 711/1311–12), in his encyclopedic lexicon, Lisān al-‘Arab, glosses tarjumān as an interpreter (mufassār), who translates speech (yutarjimatu ‘l-kalām), moving it (yanganalu) from one language to another. Modern philologists have long viewed the Arabic tarjumān to be a loanword from the Aramaic targônā, ‘an interpreter,’ thus linked with the word for the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, the
Targum, though the link with the Akkadian verb to speak, ragāmu, has been largely discredited. The term tarjumān has entered Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and Spanish, taking on a variety of forms and significations, fully crystallized in dragoman, the English word for a native informant or guide.

From the gnostic to the mundane, a spectrum of figurative significations are reflected in the profession of the tarjumān. The word stands out in such common expressions as 'the tongue is the interpreter of the heart' (al-lisanu tarjumānu 'l-qalb), one moment honest and the next mendacious. Such a sentiment views translation with a certain level of ambivalence. The tarjumān signifies the negotiation of presence, forever filtering the degrees of separation amplify in the mediation of increasing levels of interpretation, so does the potential for distortion. This metaphonic reflection on the figure of the tarjumān gains further authority through a saying (hadith) attributed to the Prophet, which states that on the Day of Resurrection no veil (hijab) will conceal those to be judged before God, just as no interpreter (tarjumān) will come to intercede on their behalf. Here the acts of intercession, interpretation, and translation all turn together in this image of veiled communication, seen as both derivative and suspect.

Just as the figurative picture casts the tarjumān negatively into the intricate notions of intercession (shafāa) recurrent in Islamic eschatological discourse, there also exists a positive theological configuration concerning the acts of mediation and translation. The mystic and scholar, Muhayī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), in his al-Futūḥat al-Makkīyya [The Meccan revelations], uses the expression 'interpreter of divine truth' (tarjumān al-haqq) as a descriptive designation for the manner in which the Prophet communicated revelation. The prophetic dissemination of the divine message offers a hermeneutic intermediary between God and humankind. Perhaps only when elevated to such a unique prophetic position can interpretation and translation be seen as unadulterated forms of communication. The variegated hues of these figurative uses all silhouette the hermeneutic role of the tarjumān in communication, imagining both the dangerous and simultaneously divine potential that lies residually in the various substrata of significations buttressing this term.

The sources join together the professional roles of the translator and interpreter in this one word. We can imagine a difference between the translator of scientific texts and the interpreter, standing at a caliphal court, who translates diplomatic messages in foreign languages. Though tarjumān can refer to both figures, Arabic sources are just as inclined to describe a translator of scientific works as a nāqīl, one who transposes from one language into another, or as a mutarjīm, the active participle of the verb tarjama, meaning one who makes a translation.

The highly developed culture of translation surrounding Ḥunayn's circle appears to have cultivated a technical vocabulary to refer to the various personages and stages of the profession. In an anecdote concerning the translation of Dioscorides' Materia medica, made into Arabic during the third/ninth century, the physician and biographer Ibn Abī Usaybi'a (d. 668/1270) sheds light on the evolutionary process of the translation and redaction of a given text. Ibn Abī Usaybi'a bases his information on the authority of an earlier account made by the physician and biographer Ibn Jbil of Córdoba (d. ca 384/994), which prefaces the introduction to Ibn Jbil's own Tafsīr anwā' al-adwīya l-mufrada min Kitāb Dīyyusqurīdūs [Explanation of the names of simples according to the treatise of Dioscorides], a work that survives today only in fragments. Ibn Jbil states that Dioscorides' text was originally translated in Baghdad during the reign of al-Mutawakkil. Here Ibn Jbil describes a two-tiered process of translation: Iṣṭifān b. Basil is referred to as the translator (tarjumān) from Greek into Arabic, while Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq is addressed as the mutarjīm, signifying 'head translator,' for he is said to have examined (tāṣaffāha) Iṣṭifān b. Basil's translation of Dioscorides, corrected the parts he saw fit, and then, finally, approved it (ajażahū). The difference in nomenclature in this account is clear enough, as the tarjumān refers to a kind of apprentice translator, in contrast to the title mutarjīm, which is reserved for the master of the craft.

This distinction seems convincing, as the fully developed translation movement in Ḥunayn's day could easily support such differentiation. Yet, matters are confused by the fact that many sources also refer to Ḥunayn as a tarjumān. On this issue, Ḥunayn himself remains silent, though in one instance he refers to translators as mutarjīmūn. In an autobiographical account of questionable origin, Ḥunayn describes himself as a nāqīl, a term that was frequently used to designate the translators of scientific material. The etymology of this word is connected to the verb naqala, signifying to move; this speaks directly to a spatial dimension imagined in the act of translation. Furthermore, the semantic resonance of this word evokes a degree of estrangement, as with the adjective, naqīl, which signifies a stranger (gharib) who comes to reside among a tribe or a people. In this fashion, the nāqīl evokes an importation and grafting of the foreign, moved across both physical and conceptual space.

In his Risāla, a bibliographical index of his translations of Galen's work, Ḥunayn illuminates the translation movement and its surrounding cultural milieu. Many details, however, remain only lightly sketched.
we know that translations often went through several stages of correction in the process of a final recension. Such is the case with Hunayn's translation of Galen's *De motu musculorum*, in which he relates, "I translated this work into Syriac, and no one had preceded me in translating it. Then Iṣṭīfā [b. Basil] translated it into Arabic. Muhammad b. Mūsā asked me I review the translation against the original Greek and correct any errors, which I then did." This, along with many other similar instances recorded in the *Risāla*, reveals a highly developed, professional process of translation at work. Through the various stages of emendation and correction, we may conjecture a space in the translation movement for a semantic differentiation between the roles of the *tarjumān*, who would make a first draft, and the *mutarjim* who would oversee the final corrected version.

The semantic valence of the *tarjumān* could fit the diverse activities of scholarly, professional translators as well court interpreters chosen by a caliphal court to journey to the edge of the known world. In the most basic sense, the *tarjumān* communicates across frontiers, whether conceptual or physical. Although the outward form of their translations diverges, both Hunayn and Sallām are pioneers of uncharted territory, transmitting remote knowledge across linguistic boundaries. With the entire translation movement brought together through the official sponsorship of the 'Abbāsid state, both Hunayn and Sallām are in dialogue with caliphal audiences.

As Sallām sets off on his way through the world of signs, we may pause to contemplate how he himself is but a sign, inflected with all the positive and negative charges of translation. Just as the *tarjumān* may both veil and reveal, Sallām's story conceals as much as it discovers. What separates Sallām from his contemporary Hunayn is that the original text of Sallām's translation no longer survives. Nor, for that matter, could it ever survive. Sallām's quest for knowledge represents a phenomenological, first-person engagement with existence. Unlike Hunayn, Sallām claims to translate signs through experience and not through texts. Yet the tautology plays out, as we perceive that Sallām's ocular testament of the world out there is very much a product of a textual universe, linked intertextually with the inner world of books. However, in contrast to Hunayn, there is no single text against which we can cast Sallām's story to analyze the quality of his translation.

**The Interpretation of Dreams**

The narrative logic that moves the story of Sallām's journey to the edge of the world starts with a dream. Al-Wāthiq's apocalyptic vision fits into a pronounced strain of messianic discourse undergirding 'Abbāsid political legitimacy. Stories of caliphal dreams and their interpretations form a recurring theme in the writing of the period. The interpretation of dreams developed into an all-encompassing hermeneutic strategy of reading the past movement of history and the future trajectory of time.

The practice of interpreting dreams to reveal unperceived designs in the world took shape on a canvas much older than the stage of 'Abbāsid politics. Throughout antiquity, the divination of dreams served as a vehicle to understand the relationship between humankind and the divine. Those learned in the art of divination often emerged as prominent figures in the social networks of pre-Islamic Arab tribes. The figure of the soothsayer or the diviner (*kahin*, pl. *kuhhan* and *kahana*) formed a central part of the religious landscape of pre-Islamic Arabic society. The interpretation of dreams was a prominent feature of the *kuhhan* in their prophetic leadership capacity, as they drew on esoteric knowledge to reveal the mysteries of nature (asrār al-ṭabi'a).

The tradition of discovering prophetic messages in dreams and events (*ta'wil al-ahadith*) finds authority in the Qur'an and in the biographical construction of the life of the Prophet. The reverence accorded to dreams gave rise to the sustained development of dream interpretation (*ta'bir al-ru'yā*), considered to be a legitimate field of learning in the sciences of religious law (*al-īlām al-shar'iyya*). Among the early community of religious scholars and *ḥadith* transmitters, the art of oneromancy was an established discipline, as evidenced in the corpus of interpretations associated with Muhammad b. Sirīn (d. 110/728), referred to by the 'Abbāsid polymath Ibn Qutayba (b. 276/889) as the leading authority in the field.

Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb ta'bir al-ru'yā* [Book of interpreting the dream vision] approaches dreams within the framework of a pre-existing hermeneutical praxis, constituted as a field of religious learning and authenticated by the model of the Prophet and the early Companions. A driving concern in this work is not only the afterlife, but also apocalyptic signs of the Day of Judgment. The Prophet is consistently positioned as the supreme reader of dreams, offering interpretations that are often inflected with eschatological significance.

From the early stages of 'Abbāsid rule, the caliphate promoted the activity of oneromancy, in concord with a greater repertoire of techniques for divining the future. In this broader context of divination, the figure of the astrologer (*munajjim*) and the practice of judicial astrology through the study of the decrees of the stars (*ahkām al-nujūm*) in the determination of human destiny were prominent features in the 'Abbāsid court. Within Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography the astrologer parallels the translator in
The cultural value placed on divination suggests the political potential of dreams, which could be positioned as a readily discernible means of comprehending and often justifying the course of human events. The signification of dreams as divine portents of the destiny of the state forms a marked theme in the historiographical documentation of the vicissitudes of the ‘Abbāsid elite. Anecdotes of interpreting dreams often serve as a method of perceiving a divine architecture, buttressing the various causes and effects of history.

In the course of the third/ninth century, what could be called autochthonous Arabic practices of dream interpretation, as advanced, for instance, in Ibn Qutayba’s formulation, are shaped ever more by foreign influences. From Brahmans to Zoroastrians, Muslims turned to an international milieu of practitioners, skilled in variegated forms of interpreting dreams. One of the sources to have had a lasting influence on Islamic dream interpretation is the Oneirocritica of Artemidorus. Ibn al-Nadim attributes the translation of this work, entitled Kitāb ta’bir al-ru’yā, to Ḥunayn b. Ishāq.

Al-Wāthiq’s vision that the wall of Gog and Magog had broken open and, by implication, the Day of Resurrection was drawing near, took place within a cultural matrix in which the divination of dreams held a significant value. The Prophet himself is said to have dreamt of these monstrous creatures, indicating that the final hour was at hand. Dreams about the wall and the Prophet’s confirmation of their validity also form an established trope in the hadith corpus and the exegetical tradition on Gog and Magog.

The hermeneutic dimension of oneiromancy is central to the Arabic expression for dream interpretation, known as ta’bir al-ru’yā. The word ta’bir is the verbal noun of the causative second form verb, ‘abbara, and expresses the specific practice of interpreting dream-visions. Just as the Arabic verb, naqala, to move, comes to signify the practice of translation, so, too, does the notion of movement resonate with the act of dream interpretation; for crossing from one space to another is an essential element in the etymology of this word, which finds root in the first form verb, ‘abara, ‘to cross, ford, pass over.’

The interpreter of dreams, known as the mu’abbir, reads signs of dreams or psychic visions (al-takhayyulat al-nafsāniyya), so as to draw out (li-yantaqila) the hidden affairs of the world (al-umūr al-ghaybīyya). Early Arabic oneiropic writing frames dream interpretation as an activity of translation, in which, for example, a vision of coarse bread could signify wealth, or a dream of writing could suggest artifice. The interpreter renders the signs of dreams comprehensible to the human mind, translated into a coherent narrative. Al-Wāthiq’s dream frames the anecdote of the journey to the wall of Gog and Magog, foregrounding the entire narrative movement as encoded inside a broader landscape of interpretation and translation.

The destruction of the barrier that holds back the monstrous races of Gog and Magog stands, in Islamic eschatological discourse, as one of the signs of the end of time, signifying the annihilation of all living things, the advent of the Day of Resurrection, and, ultimately, the enactment of the Final Accounting. When God flattens the wall, Gog and Magog will spread through the earth, destroying everything in their path.

These monstrous tribes are thought to be so numerous that they will stretch from their front line in Damascus to their rearguard in Balkh; when they reach the ocean they will drink all of the water and devour everything in it. As suggested in Ibn Qutayba’s study, the interpretation of dreams concerning the apocalypse figures as a recurrent theme in Islamic oneiropic writing, so much so that a section treating the Day of Resurrection was seamlessly inserted into the Arabic translation of Artemidorus’ dream-book. Such recontextualization within an explicitly Islamic teleology of salvation is indicative of a broader pattern of absorption into Arabic classical learning.

Visions of the apocalypse, or of the signs relating to the end of the world, such as Gog and Magog, are interpreted uniformly as a blessing for faithful believers and a warning for sinners. Where al-Wāthiq’s soul stands is altogether a separate matter. His proclivity, however, for dreaming about the world beyond, particularly heaven, is a theme that finds resonance in the sources. Such other-worldly dreams serve as an established motif in the literature of the ʿAbbāsid court and, as such, should be viewed, when set against Sallām’s anecdote, in light of the broader social and political context, suggesting a well-trodden path of discursive conventions and literary topoi.
SECTION TWO

MARVELOUS ALTERITY
Historical Landscapes

Sallām’s anecdote begins with the ethereal realm of dreams, only to move quickly into the terrestrial world of economics and geopolitics. Ibn Khurraḍādhbih relates that al-Wāthiq, intent on sending a mission to discover the state of the wall, asked his Turkish general, Abū Ja‘far Ashīnās, to recommend someone capable of undertaking such an adventure.¹ This piece of information is of particular importance, for it suggests a political backdrop shaped by the power dynamics of the Turkish military guard of Sāmarra’ and their growing influence over the caliphate. Ashīnās figures prominently during the reign of al-Mu‘taṣim, who granted him a palace in Sāmarra’, along with administrative rule over the Arabian Peninsula, Greater Syria, and Egypt.² As a military commander, Ashīnās led battles on the outer frontiers (ṣūr) between Byzantium and the ‘Abbāsid empire.³ One of the first administrative appointments al-Wāthiq made on assuming the caliphate, in Ramaḍān of 229/843, was to bestow a crown upon Ashīnās and adorn him with ornamental belts. This inaugural ceremony is said to have signified the beginning of Ashīnās’ rule over the western portion of the ‘Abbāsid territories, which stretched from Iraq to North Africa.⁴

Sallām, who is said to speak thirty languages, is called upon to venture to the world outside, to bring back information of the unknown, and to communicate this information to the caliph. As we set Ashīnās next to Sallām, we move from the register of historiographic specificity into the extraordinary space of legends. For though it is not impossible for someone to speak thirty languages, it is surely exceptional. The number itself is
inconsequential and serves as a projection of Sallām’s skill as a translator. Indeed, exactitude in the number of languages spoken is not what is at hand, for the discourse of the marvelous always flirts with specificity, in a dialectic that keeps the marvelous continually present, yet somehow just beyond reach.

After the short introductory frame that sets the journey in motion, Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ transfers diegetic control of the narrative to Sallām, who relates the account through the authority of his own direct experience. Admittedly, this immediacy of the first person is interrupted on several occasions, wherein the authorial voice of Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ, as the direct transmitter (rāwī) of the narrative, repeats the phrase ‘Sallām reported.’ These interruptions, though meant to confirm the authenticity of the transmission, also suggest a process of redaction. The two voices point to distinct authorial planes, creating a space wherein Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ, as the transmitter, serves also as the redactor of an original report. As a narrative technique, the diegetic form of a directly related report strengthens the appearance of factuality.

Sallām relates how the caliph equipped him with fifty strong, young men for the expedition. Provisions were prepared for the cold weather that the entourage would face and included felt coats, lined with leather and fur-covered saddlecloths (*kushubānāt bi’l-firār*), from the Persian *gustuvān*, horse-armor). Here, as in other parts of the journey, Sallām’s language is imbued with Persian vocabulary. In addition to the two hundred mules packed with supplies, the embassy is outfitted with enough hard currency to last an entire year. Describing the various preparations, Sallām’s narrative speaks to a course of concrete pragmatism.

Caliphal embassies sent across the expansive territory of the ‘Abbāsid lands, which stretched from North Africa to India, helped maintain the stability of the empire. The broader foreground of Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ’s descriptive geography addresses the concerns of empire, tracing postal routes and stages, the itineraries of merchants, and the networks of communication set in place to sustain political rule over vast and disparate territories. As Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ follows the course of Sallām’s trajectory to the farthest end of the known world, we see theory put into practice. The various routes and stages minutely described in the beginning of the geography come to life under Sallām’s feet, as the lists of towns, cities, and districts transform into the backdrop of a larger narrative progression.

Leaving the caliphal capital of Sāmarra’ behind, Sallām heads north into the heart of the tightly-knit territories of the Caucasus (map 2). Through the mountainous regions that form the isthmus between the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east, Sallām crosses a well-trodden literary landscape. The Caucasus mountain range is associated with the mythical mountain of Qāf, which figures prominently in Islamic cosmographical configurations of the universe. When describing the Caucasus earlier in his geography, Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ mentions several fortified mountain passes (*abwāb*) that block access to the various kingdoms of the region. Here he makes reference to the mysterious fountain of life as being located next to the Caspian Sea. This tradition is carried on by the geographer Ibn al-Faqīḥ, who also sees in the Caucasus a site for the Qur’ānic passage in Sūrat al-Kahf that narrates the story of Moses and Khidr and alludes to their quest for immortality.

This chapter of the Qur’ān, which Ibn Khurrādadhbiḥ quotes in regard to the miraculous fountain, culminates with a description of
how Dhū 'l-Qarnayn built his wall to protect humankind. Many early exegetes believed this rampart to be located between two mountain ridges (saddayn) in the fortified passes of the Caucasus. There were also accounts linking the fortification of Darband (Persian, literally, 'barred gate'), known in Arabic as al-Bab wa 'l-Abwāb (the 'Gate and the Gates') and as Bāb al-Abwāb (the 'Gate of Gates'), positioned next to the eastern stretch of the Caspian Sea, with Alexander's wall holding back Gog and Magog. At the edge of the 'Abbāsid state, this region represented, for Arabic and Persian writers, a liminal space, on the frontiers of the marvelous and apocalyptic.

Sallām’s itinerary in the Caucasus weaves through a complicated political landscape that was critical to the ‘Abbāsid regime. With a written dispatch from the caliph, Sallām travels to the city of Tiflis, in modern-day Georgia, to meet the Muslim governor of Armenia, Išāq b. Ismā’īl (d. 238/852). His journey through the Caucasus takes place at a moment of considerable tension between the frontier provinces in the region and the central ‘Abbāsid administration. Sallām makes no reference to these internal conflicts related to ‘Abbāsid control over the frontier; rather, he gives only a skeletal outline of his journey to the ruler of Tiflis.

Išāq b. Ismā’īl emerges as a prominent figure in the history of the region largely as a result of his rebellion against ‘Abbāsid control, in which he attempted to form his own independent state free from caliphal suzerainty. Said to have descended from the Arab tribe of the Quraysh, Išāq is described as an Umayyad partisan who challenged ‘Abbāsid rule. The encyclopedist Mas’ūdī, narrating in the fourth/tenth century, relates that the history of Išāq became famous throughout the region of the Caucasus and beyond. The ‘Abbāsid administrator Ya’qūbī (fl. 278/891), who had personal experience on the Armenian frontier, writes in his universal history that during the reign of al-Wāthiq, state control over the region weakened. This is an issue that had plagued earlier caliphs. According to Ya’qūbī, Armenian patricians, along with the local Arab elite, revolted against the yoke of ‘Abbāsid control. In response, al-Wāthiq sent a military expedition to the region to put down the uprising. This military force was able to bring about the submission of some of the rebelling factions; however, despite the mounting pressure, Išāq b. Ismā’īl remained defiant. He refused to capitulate to the caliph’s demands and successfully repelled the ‘Abbāsid military force.

An anonymous Arabic work known as the Taʾrīkh Bāb al-Abwāb [History of Darband], which is thought to have been written around 500/1106, documents in detail the historical developments of the region under Muslim rule. This history exposes a problem of chronology when it mentions a discrepancy in the sources over the date of the military expedition sent by al-Wāthiq against Išāq, offering one account that positions the campaign in 230/844, as Ya’qūbī suggests, and another claim that the campaign had occurred two years earlier, in 228/842–3. The Taʾrīkh Bāb al-Abwāb mentions that, after the failure of the first military campaign against Išāq and the sudden death of the ‘Abbāsid general overseeing the expedition, al-Wāthiq sent another force in 230/844 to wage war against the rebel leader. This second attempt, nonetheless, also ended in failure. Effectively, Išāq remained free from caliphal rule, until the reign of al-Mutawakkil, who sent the Turkish general Bughā al-Kabīr al-Sharābī (d. 248/862) to Armenia in 238/852 in order to bring a final end to the rebellion. After numerous battles, Bughā succeeded in setting the city of Tiflis on flames. Išāq was captured and decapitated, and his revolt, which lasted thirty-five years, came to an end.

This outline of events is a curious backdrop for Sallām’s journey to Tiflis. Al-Wāthiq must have dispatched Sallām sometime during his reign, which lasted from 227/842 to 232/847. From Ya’qūbī, we know that Ashinās, the Turkish general who recommended Sallām, died in 230/844. In the same year, al-Wāthiq ordered a military campaign against the rebel Išāq in Tiflis. Moreover, there is the indication, as the Taʾrīkh Bāb al-Abwāb suggests, that al-Wāthiq’s first campaign against Išāq was sent two years earlier. Assuming that Sallām would not travel to Tiflis at the very moment that caliphal forces were trying to besiege it, we would have to date the expedition to the wall of Gog and Magog sometime in the first year of al-Wāthiq’s reign. Yet, if we are to take seriously the statement in the Taʾrīkh Bāb al-Abwāb that Išāq’s rebellion lasted for over thirty-five years, it would seem odd that Sallām, a caliphal envoy, would have met with such a mutinous figure. Unfortunately, the historiographical sources cannot fully illuminate Sallām’s narrative, for none of them speak independently of his expedition. We could contemplate Sallām’s stay in Tiflis as a secret caliphal reconnaissance mission to discover the strength of Išāq’s rebel forces; the anecdote both resists and encourages such speculation.

Tabari relates that Išāq, a stocky man covered with tattoos, was married to the daughter of the ruler of the neighboring province of the Qoy-su river valley in southern Dāghistān, a region in the western Caucasus that borders the Caspian Sea. After his stay in Tiflis, Sallām headed with a dispatch from Išāq to this neighboring ruler, referred to as the 'Lord of the Throne' (ṣāhib al-sarrī). For details and information concerning the region and this sobriquet, we must look outside Sallām’s narrative. Early
in the *Masālik*, Ibn Khurruṣadhibbīh mentions the Lord of the Throne when describing the fortified mountain passes of the Caucasus.²⁰

This region gives Ibn Khurruṣadhibbīh cause to return to the recurrent theme of the splendid days of Sāsānian rule. He outlines how King Qubād, followed by his son Khusrāw I Anūshirwān (r. 531–78 C.E.), built fortresses along the mountain passes of the Caucasus in order to stave off the hordes of invading northern tribes.²¹ The historian Abī ḫabīb Ḥājiyaʿ al-Baladhurī (d. ca 279/892), a contemporary of Ibn Khurruṣadhibbīh, describes in his *Futūḥ al-buldān* [Conquests of the regions] a systematic program undertaken by the Sāsānian kings of settling and fortifying the region. Continuing the tradition established by his father, Anūṣhirwān conferred governorship on the rulers of the Caucasus, making them pledge loyalty and pay tribute to the Sāsānian state. Among these rulers was the ‘Chief of the Mountain’ (khāqān al-jabal), named the king of Wahrārzān, who bore the title the Lord of the Throne.²²

A mantel of Persian history shrouds the region. The geographer Abī ḫabīb al-Īṣṭakhri (fl. 324/936) writes that the ‘People of the Throne’ were Christians and that the name of the territory finds its provenance in a throne made of gold, which originally belonged to the Sāsānian kings.²³ In addition to mentioning that there existed a peace treatise between the People of the Throne and the ‘Abbāsid state, Ḫāṭkhārī explains that their ruler descended from the heroic Persian ruler Bahram Gūr.²⁴ According to Masʿūdī, the last Sāsānian king, Yazdagird III (d. 31/651), while retreating from invading Muslim forces, sent his golden throne and his royal effects to one of Bahram Gūr’s descendents who was in the region, and then ordered that this man await his arrival. Before Yazdagird could return for his royal belongings, he was caught and killed by the invading Muslims. This descendant of Bahram Gūr settled in the region and took authority from the symbol of the throne, establishing himself as king over the people.²⁵

The sources describe the incredible power that the Lord of the Throne possessed, with fortified positions across the mountains, from which he made forays into the territory of his northern neighbors, the Khazars. Referencing the Persian heritage of the kingdom, the geographer Ibn Rusta mentions that this ruler received his royal treasury from the Sāsānian king Anūṣhirwān. Ibn Rusta takes particular interest in the peculiar customs practiced in the region. The inhabitants of the palace were said to be Christians, while the rest of the subjects were pagans (*kuffār*) who performed strange funerary rights and worshipped dried heads.²⁶ Beyond the realm of Abbāsid control and outside the reach of Islam, the Lord of the Throne and his kingdom invoke a landscape of the foreign and remote.

With a dispatch from the Lord of the Throne, Sallām continued his travels to the kingdom of the Alāns (al-Lān).²⁷ Though he gives no further details concerning this part of his itinerary, we can suppose that between the two kingdoms there existed cordial relations during the period. This idea is supported by Masʿūdī, who, writing nearly a hundred years after Sallām’s journey, mentions that between the Lord of the Throne and the king of the Alāns were bonds of marriage.²⁸ As with the Lord of the Throne, the king of the Alāns is said to have converted to Christianity, though Ibn Rusta describes the people of this kingdom as pagans (*kuffār*) who worship idols (* asnām*).²⁹ The Alāns, descendents of Iranian tribes, were a powerful force in the central part of the northern Caucasus; this was due in part to their control over the Darial pass (Bāb al-Lān). The Alāns also appear in the pre-Islamic Persian history of fortifying the region. Legend holds that the castle of the Alāns (*qal’at al-Lān*) was originally built by one of the ancient mythical Iranian kings, Isfandiyār, the son of Bishtāsib.³⁰ This fortress, perched at an inaccessible point in the Darial pass, was designed to stave off attacks from the very Alāns who later came to possess it. Masʿūdī mentions that the exploits of Isfandiyār, along with the story of his castle, not only formed a recurrent theme in Persian literature, but also featured prominently in the Persian *Paykār-nāma* [Book of battles] that was translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffā’ (d. ca 142/759).³¹

The ruler of the Alāns directs Sallām to the king of Filān (Filān Shāh), whose title also invokes pre-Islamic Persian history. Baladhurī includes Filān Shāh in a list of honorary titles bestowed by the Sāsānian king Anūṣhirwān on the rulers of the Caucasus.³² In the sources, reference is made to the Filān Shāh as a ruler near the fortified city of Darband.

The philologist and historian Ḥamza al-Īsfahānī (d. ca 350/961), in his history of the pre-Islamic Persian kings, gives an etiology of this title that harkens back to the Sāsānian period and describes how Anūṣhirwān, after building the barrier of Darband, dispatched captains to defend the frontier, investing each of them with a brocade robe of honor. These brocade robes were decorated with images of animals. Each captain was then named after the brocade designs on his robe, thus the names of *Bughrān Shāh*, from *baghrār*, the boar; *Sharwān Shāh*, from *shir*, the lion; and *Filān Shāh*, from *pīl*, the elephant.³³ For this account, Ḥamza al-Īsfahānī draws his work from Arabic translations of pre-Islamic Persian sources. This story offers a conceptual link between the defensive wall of Darband and the placement of governors, such as the Filān Shāh, along the Sāsānian frontier in the Caucasus.³⁴
The Filân Shâh sends Sallâm to the king of the Khazars, where he stays for only one day and one night, which, given the distance covered and the political importance of the Khazars, is quite remarkable.\(^{35}\) As a narrative device, such a short stay serves to highlight the apocalyptic barrier as the primary object of the mission. While we may wish to see in al-Wâthiqq’s delegation to the wall a historical core of actual diplomatic engagements along the frontier, the account suggests international relations and imperial diplomatic activities, but only superficially and in a rather confused way. In the opening to his recension of Sallâm’s adventure, Muqaddasi relates that al-Wâthiqq also sent the court astrologer Muhammad b. Mustâ ‘l-Khwârazmî to the ruler (târkhân) of the Khazar.\(^{36}\) However, the relationship between this mission and that of Sallâm’s is not elucidated. The idea that these adventures were part of the same calihal dispatch is likewise not developed. It could well be that Muqaddasi has confused Khwârazmî’s mission to the People of the Cave with Sallâm’s adventure, as this is the only reference to Khwârazmî’s journey to the Khazar in the early sources. Yet in Muqaddasi’s account is the suggestion of ongoing calihal relations with the Khazar through the figure of the astrologer, geographer, and calihal go-between.

Unlike the Filân Shâh, there is a considerable body of information detailing the history of the Khazar state, which, centered along the Volga River, flourished for over three hundred years, from the seventh to tenth century C.E. By the time Sallâm visits the region, the ruling elite of the Khazar had already converted to Judaism.\(^{37}\) The peculiar political structure of the double kingship of the khaqanate,\(^{38}\) along with the strange religious practices and rites of the Khazar, make this a site of continual interest for Arabic and Persian writers.\(^{39}\) Outlining an exotic syncretism of tribal, autochthonous rituals, and Judaic traditions, the sources describe how the Khazar state consisted of a minority of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and a majority population of heathens who followed ancient traditions (rusûm qadîma) of worshipping graven images (‘awthân).\(^{40}\)

Sallâm’s journey to the Volga Basin speaks to a well-established network of trade during the period. According to Mas‘ûdî there was a sizable population of Muslim mercenaries, merchants, and artisans living in Âtil, the Khazar capital on the Volga.\(^{41}\) The numismatic record of hoards of ’Abbâsid coins that survived in northeastern Europe demonstrates that, in the course of the third/ninth century, the Caucasus was one of the major arteries of trade between Mesopotamia and the Central Asian steppe.\(^{42}\) Yet Sallâm’s trajectory, crisscrossing the Caucasus mountains into the Khazar territory on the Volga, represents an erratic and embroiled itinerary.\(^{43}\) The geographical place names he references consistently correspond to historical kingdoms and peoples. However, his course from Tiflîs to Sarîr, Sarîr to the Alâns, the Alâns to Filân Shâh, and finally, from Filân Shâh to the Khazar, has him backtracking at various points. We could produce any number of extra-textual hypotheses to speculate why Sallâm followed this particular route: the political situation of the region could have demanded it; the caliph could have given him specific orders to spy on these kingdoms; or bad weather could have blocked certain passes.

Though the narrative gives the most general sketch of Sallâm’s itinerary, the journey itself takes place in a textual landscape fully foregrounded in Arabic and Persian sources. After two wars against the Khazar in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries, the Arab conquests of the region were brought in check. As with the Pyrenees in the west, the mountains of the Caucasus came to serve as a frontier and border zone, halting the initial Arab military expansion. The ’Abbâsids inherited from the Umayyads the challenge of fortifying themselves against incursions from the region. The Arabic and Persian geographic accounts draw parallels between the ancient Sásânîan program of establishing fortifications and settlements and the more recent confrontations between Muslims and the heathen tribes of the Caucasus.

In the description of this region, two themes consistently resurface in the Arabic and Persian sources: first, the vast number of languages spoken by the different nations; and second, the defensive wall built by the Sásânîans at Darband to keep these very nations at bay. The linguistic diversity of the Caucasus was proverbial; a tangled expanse of inaccessible mountains, hidden valleys, steep ravines, dense forests, and raging rivers, all of which served as a refuge to various isolated tribes.\(^{44}\) Described as a virtual “mountain of languages” (jabal al-alsûn),\(^{45}\) the linguistic situation in the Caucasus suggests a confused and incomprehensible babble of heathens, with each village isolated and unable to understand the next.

The number of languages spoken in the Caucasus is usually placed between seventy and seventy-two; however, the seemingly exaggerated figure of three hundred also appears.\(^{46}\) Ibn Hawqal states that originally he could not imagine that three hundred languages were spoken in such a small area, until he traveled through the region and saw that each small village he visited had its own distinct language.\(^{47}\) A similar sentiment is expressed by the ’Abbâsid geographer Ibn al-Faqîh, who explains that the people of the Caucasus can only understand the language of their rulers (lughat šâhibîhî) through the aid of an interpreter (tarjumân).\(^{48}\)

Though this may seem to verge on hyperbole, the linguistic and ethnic diversity plays an important role in shaping the cultural and political
landscape. The mutual incomprehensibility of the languages says nothing of the difficulties that foreign travelers would have had traversing the region. Against such linguistic variance it seems clear why Sallām, an interpreter said to be proficient in thirty languages, was chosen to head al-Wāthiq’s expedition. This region, pitched in the unintelligible speech of heathens who cannot even understand each other, represented a noisome threat, poised just beyond the frontiers of the ’Abbāsid empire.

The danger that the Caucasus posed for pre-Islamic Persian kings was a motivating force in their establishment of fortifications and settlements along their northwestern frontier. Yaqūt views the vast number of these uncontrollable tribes as a cause for the anxiety of Sasanian emperors toward this frontier; the threat meant that the Sasanians could never divert their attention from the constant maintenance of their defenses.\(^{49}\) Erecting the wall at Darband symbolically condensed this anxiety into a single act. Tradition held that the wall built by Anūshirwān was one of the amazing architectural feats of the Sasanian dynasty.\(^{50}\)

Concomitant with the accounts of Darband is the tale of Anūshirwān’s fabled stratagem of deceiving the king of the Khazar in order to build the various defenses of the barrier. Mas’ūdī senses a divine hand in the architecture, remarking, that had God not aided his servants, the kings of Persia (mulāk al-furs), as they built the defensive walls around Darband, then surely the kings of the Khazar, the Alāns, the Avars, the Turks, and all the other nations of the region would have overrun them.\(^{51}\) Detailed descriptions outlining the dimensions of Anūshirwān’s rampart (sadd) recur in the geographical and historiographical writings. Ibn al-Faqīh describes various statues and images that were located on the wall; these represented human, animal, and vegetal forms, all considered to be talismans used to protect the defenses of Darband.\(^{52}\)

One widely circulated tale related by Qazwīnī, in his encyclopedia of natural wonders, details how Anūshirwān, after building the bulwark along Darband against the Turks and the Khazars, sat on the top of it wondering if indeed his wall would stand the test of time. He then fell asleep, whereupon he had a vision of a creature (sākin min sukkān) from the Caspian Sea. The creature recounted that God had informed him that while all other such fortifications would not withstand the vicissitudes of time, Anūshirwān’s wall would last forever (plate 3).\(^{53}\) Various elements from this anecdote clearly relate to Dhū ’l-Qarnayn’s rampart, and are perhaps indicative of an older Sasanian parallel to the wall of Gog and Magog, suggesting a broader historical motif of bottling up nomadic tribes against incursions at the edge of civilization.\(^{54}\)

The heroism of Anūshirwān, one of the most glorified Sasanian emperors, known by the sobriquet the ‘Just’ (ādil), is central to the lionized history of the fortifications. It is Anūshirwān who, in the words of the historian Tha‘alibī, “civilized the world, subdued its petty kings and established noble customs.”\(^{55}\) Following the architectural monuments of Persian kings, Ibn Khurraḍādhībī lists the great audience hall (iwān kisrā) built in the Sasanian capital Ctesiphon, and often associated with Anūshirwān, as one of the marvels of the world. On this subject, he quotes from the famous ekphrastic ode by his associate, Buhtūrī, composed in 270/883–4. Buhtūrī’s nostalgic qaṣida marvels at the supernatural design of the ruined edifice:

\[
\text{لا يتَّرَى أَصْحَابَ أَنَّسَيَّ نَجِيَّ}
\text{سَكْنُوا هَمُّ صَّعُبُ جَيْبَ لِأَنْسَي}
\]

No one knows whether it is a creation of man for the jinn to inhabit, or a creation of the jinn for man.\(^{56}\)

In addition to monumental works of architecture, and the demarcating of civilization, Anūshirwān represents the cultivation and promotion of intellectual and cultural pursuits. His entourage included the famed advisor Buzurgmihr, who is said to have had a command of all languages and alphabets.\(^{57}\) From flirtations with Greek philosophy to sponsoring the translation of the Indian ‘mirror of princes’ known as the Pañcatantra, or Kalīla wa Dimna, Anūshirwān embodies imperial majesty and sophistication, a symbol of Persian high culture and past glory. This splendor serves as a contrast to the disordered and chaotic tribes that threaten the existence of the state.

Throughout late antiquity, Greek and Latin writers associated the bulwark at Darband with Alexander’s wall against Gog and Magog.\(^{58}\) The identification was known to Arabic and Persian writers. Yet practical experience showed that Darband could not be the site of Alexander’s wall. Although the Sarir, the Alāns, and the Khazars dwelled beyond Darband, and lurked as foreign threats, they were also known entities, and, as such, were generally not seen to correspond to the peoples of Gog and Magog mentioned in the Qur’ān. The anonymous author of the Persian world history Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa ’l-qiṣaṣ [Compendium of histories and narratives], written in 519/1126, outlines this issue when he argues that there is no justification to the claim that the fortifications at Darband built by Anūshirwān represent the wall of Alexander the Great.\(^{59}\) Though Darband might evoke the rampart of Alexander, with its ancient, imperial
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described in the Qurʾān. Thus with this equivalence—placed in the context of the early Muslim expansions—the entire account is situated within the broad arc of Islamic eschatology. 60

Shahrbarāz’s conversion and his submission of Darband to the Muslim armies serves as an opening frame onto the narrative of the mission to the wall. Moreover, the matter of conversion is further highlighted when the Arabs transform the envoy’s story into an account that corresponds to the Qurʾānic description of the barrier that holds back Gog and Magog. This story, positioned on the frontier, pushes the rampart built by Alexander past Darband to some distant land beyond the Caucasus. 61 The tale of Shahrbarāz’s envoy speaks to a continuity between Sasanian power in the region and the advent of Islam. The Sasanian governor not only hands over power to the Arab general, but he also offers this story and the idea that out there, somewhere beyond the horizon, exists this marvelous and strange world, waiting to be uncovered.

The anecdote of the Sasanian emissary has many obvious parallels with Sallām’s journey. Both are official missions to discover the wall, and both move from kingdom to kingdom, returning after successfully reaching the wall in the space of roughly two years. There are, however, elements of the anecdote laid forth by Shahrbarāz’s envoy that do not correspond to Sallām’s narrative. The falconer’s story of kings making offerings to God at the abyss before the wall, along with the eagle, and the precious gem it retrieves, relates to the widespread belief in the wondrous qualities of the aetites (ἅρμονῖς), or the eagle-stone, which was thought to have magical powers and could only be found in the nests of eagles. The story of precious stones retrieved from the bottom of a deep ravine by eagles forms part of an international web of tales on powerful gems.

St. Epiphanius (d. 403 C.E.), bishop of Constantia in Cyprus, in a treatise on gemstones, transmits an account similar to the story related by Shahrbarāz’s envoy. He describes a series of mountains in the deserts of Scythia that stretch up like walls over a seemingly bottomless ravine. Here kings would search for precious stones by throwing the meat of sheep down into the chasm; gemstones located at the bottom would then adhere to the meat, which was, in turn, retrieved by eagles that inhabited the high peaks and would dive after the carcasses and return with the gems to their mountain nests. According to St. Epiphanius, these stones had a range of mysterious powers, including the ability to aid women during parturition. 62 This account, which appears also in early Chinese sources, 63 makes its way into Arabic and Persian versions of the exploits of Alexander the Great,
where it is transformed into a ruse for recovering diamonds in a valley of giant snakes, itself the basis for an adventure of Sindbad the Sailor.64

Shahrbarāz's mission transposes the wall of Gog and Magog with that of a gem-filled chasm, as this is apparently a coordinate already fixed to the adventures of Alexander. In contrast to the tale of the Sasanian envoy, Sallām does not veer into the romances of gems uncovered in remote lands with ancient rituals. Yet despite the obvious divergences, the overwhelming similarities between the separate missions of Shahrbarāz and al-Wāthiq suggest an established topos of following Alexander to the end of the world.

Ostensibly, the tale of the Sasanian envoy precedes Sallām's journey by nearly two hundred years. The chain of transmitters, which Tabarī lists as relating this account, date back to the original event of Shahrbarāz's audience with ‘Abd al-Rahmān in 22/643. The authenticity of this chain of transmission, however, may be called into question. Tabarī narrates the anecdote on the authority of ‘Amr b. Ma‘dī Karīb, who in turn bases it on Mātār b. Thalj al-Tamīmī, who was present when the envoy of Shahrbarāz arrived, and thus listened firsthand to the story as it unfolded before him. Little is known of Mātār b. Thalj, whose name means 'Rain the son of Snow,' the original narrator of this story.65

However, we have much more information on the second transmitter, ‘Amr b. Ma‘dī Karīb. A famous Arab warrior and pre-Islamic poet who converted to Islam, he participated in many key battles during the initial days of the Arab conquests. As for the date of his death, the sources disagree. There are accounts of his exceptional longevity, with some claiming that he died during the reign of the caliphate of Mū‘awiyah b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41–60/661–80). However, it is quite possible that ‘Amr b. Ma‘dī Karīb died during the battle of al-Qādisiyya (ca. 16/637), which would, in turn, make him an unlikely transmitter of a tale that is said to have taken place several years later.66

It is noteworthy that Tabarī, infamous for including long chains of transmitters in his history, relies here on only one intermediary who lived nearly two hundred and fifty years before him. That this anecdote is ascribed to Amr b. Ma‘dī Karīb evokes, to some degree, the yarns of the idealized warrior poet of the early days of the Arab conquests. Yet the parallels with the Alexander Romance also suggest further degrees of elaboration in the formation and dissemination of the account.

The uncertain line of transmission, along with the central anecdote surrounding the wondrous eagle-stone, raises the question of the historicity of the mission. There is, however, no good reason to suspect or suggest, given Tabarī's eye for authenticity, that he either invented this narrative or that he considered it to be anything other than genuine. Without other earlier sources to substantiate the account, it is difficult to determine whether or not the story of Shahrbarāz's envoy to the wall predates Sallām's journey, given that Tabarī is a younger contemporary of Ibn Khūradadhūhī. However, all outward appearances suggest that it does. If, indeed, the tale of the Persian expedition from Darband to Alexander's wall circulated before al-Wāthiq's expedition, then we have a clear tradition that anticipates and foregrounds Sallām's narrative.

After Tabarī, the Sasanian mission from Darband to the wall of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn continues to circulate and develop in Persian and Arabic sources. Abū ‘Ali Ba‘fami (d. 365/974), the Persian historian and translator of Tabarī's history, focuses his attention on the marvelous tale of the precious stone in which Shahrbarāz set his ring.67 Other writers do not fail to find similarities between the mission sent by Shahrbarāz and the story of Sallām al-Tarjuman. For example, the exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), the historian Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and the geographer Ibn ‘Abd al-Mun‘īm al-Hīmyarī (d. 900/1494) all relate these two narratives side-by-side as historical accounts of the wall against Gog and Magog, and consider the expedition sent by Shahrbarāz as a genuine Sasanian undertaking that preceded al-Wāthiq's mission.68

The Andalusian geographer Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) relates a similar royal quest for the wall of Gog and Magog, based on the account of the distinguished Egyptian historian, genealogist, and jurist, Sa‘īd b. ‘Ufāyir (d. 226/840), who appears as an authority in both Andalusian historiography and Arabic descriptive geography.69 In this anecdote, as with Shahrbarāz's quest, the wall is imagined to lie beyond the Caucasus. According to Ibn ‘Ufāyir, Mū‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, sent twenty-five men to uncover the location of Alexander's rampart. Mū‘āwiya dispatched his embassy with a letter and gifts to the king of the Khazar, seeking permission to travel beyond the Khazar kingdom.

On their northern journey, the party reached two mountain ridges ( jabalayn ), where they saw the iron wall shining lustroously. Beyond, they could hear the uproar ( jalaba ) of Gog and Magog. On the wall was a staircase ascending to the top of the barrier, which a man from among the group attempted to climb. However, as he reached the middle of the wall he suddenly panicked ( tahayyara ), whereupon he fell and died. Before returning, the delegation took as evidence of their journey a piece ( qītā ) of an iron shovel, apparently because it had been used by Alexander when he first built the wall. The account ends with Mū‘āwiya's astonishment ( fa-tā‘ajjabā ) over the entire affair.70
Whether Ibn 'Ufayr’s narrative reflects a historical embassy sent by Mu'awiya remains to be seen. However, taken broadly, the anecdote offers a glimpse, even if imagined, into Umayyad-Khazar relations, themselves in large measure defined by a struggle for hegemony in the Caucasus. As part of the larger discursive imaginaire, this account connects the salvation history of the Qur'an, represented through the enclosed nations of Gog and Magog, with the geopolitical landscape of Umayyad legitimacy and power. Against this highly developed literary landscape, the missions of Shahrbārāz and Mu’awiya push the frontier beyond the Caucasus. For our purposes, the authenticity of these two quest narratives is not as significant as the memory of them, both of which, according to the sources, significantly predate al-Wāthiq’s expedition to discover the fabled barrier. It is thus possible to argue that when Ibn Khurradadhbih composed his geography, adventures to the wall of Gog and Magog already formed a discrete trope in the articulation of imperial dominion. Such narratives endured because they circumscribed what were complex historical encounters beyond imperial frontiers within a discernible teleological pattern of sacred geography.

These three expeditions to the wall depend upon the ability of rulers to send exploratory delegations across the far reaches of the earth. Such quests are not only semiotic adventures in the pursuit of knowledge, but also projections of authority in the expansive demarcation of political and geographical boundaries. Each of these accounts uses an idiom of apocalyptic thought to shape the significance of historical interactions between Muslims and their northern neighbors.

In a similar vein, the figure of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn offers a standard archetype of the devout and pious king who enacts God’s will on earth. Drawing similarities between Muslim rulers and the world-conquering hero was a common motif in panegyric poetry. Ibn al-Faqih, for instance, relates how the many conquests (futūhāt) of al-Mu'tasim, the father of al-Wāthiq, were celebrated in verse, as in the following line, which likens the 'Abbāsid caliph to Dhū 'l-Qarnayn in search of the mysterious Khidr, who had attained immortality from the fountain of life:

With power you acquired regions of the world, as though you were following Khidr’s trail.

In Ibn al-Faqih’s geographical compendium, the 'Abbāsid conquests are mapped out onto a poetic landscape:

Dhū 'l-Qarnayn did not reach his goal, nor did Khusrav invade the hairless Huns.

These verses were sung in honor of Hārūn ar-Rashīd’s victories in Khurāsān. In the poetic expanse, the caliph surpasses the models of Greek and Sasanian kingship; where Dhū 'l-Qarnayn fails to reach the waters of life and Khusrav makes no incursions against the Huns, the caliph is imagined, in contrast, at the height of imperial power.

When Ibn Khurradadhbih relates the account of al-Wāthiq’s mission to the wall, he does so within a discursive universe in which the might of caliphs is measured against the legendary prowess of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. Al-Wāthiq’s reign, unlike those of his forefathers, was not distinguished by territorial expanse. By encoding an embassy to the Caucasus within an established paradigm of following the traces of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography amplifies the dominion of 'Abbāsid power and circumscribes al-Wāthiq and his legacy within pre-existing models of caliphal authority.

On Frontiers and Dispositions

The Bodleian manuscript of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography, which has a different ordering than the Vienna recension, situates al-Wāthiq’s embassy directly after a description of the fortifications of Darband and the Khazar city of Sāmandar. In the stage-route logic of the work, this would locate the wall north beyond the lands of the Khazar. As Sallām travels past the Caucasus on his way to discover this remote land, he does so against an imagined landscape of both Sasanian and Umayyad forays into the region. Sallām conspicuously bypasses any mention of the defensive walls at Darband—long identified with Alexander’s rampart against Gog and Magog and considered the standard locus in quo for passage through the Caucasus. That the trajectory of Sallām’s narrative avoids such an important site suggests an almost conscious distancing from the tradition itself.

The association of the Caucasus with the peoples of Gog and Magog draws on the historical reality that, since antiquity, this region formed a central artery through which tribes from the Eurasian steppes descended.
into the fertile crescent of Anatolia and Mesopotamia. As Sallām makes his way through a landscape marked by ancient fortifications, he moves across a geography of differentiation, where kingdoms are defined against their neighbors, tribes against tribes.

After describing the various regions of the world, along with the outer frontiers and the fortifications (ribāṭāt) that separate nations from each other, the encyclopedist al-Muṭahhar b. Ṭahir al-Maqdīsī (fl. 355/966), in his universal history Kitāb al-bad’ wa ’l-ta’rikh [The book of creation and history], explains that every nation (qawm) faces enemies that threaten its existence. Thus Byzantium and Armenia make war against Greater Syria, Azerbaijan, and Mesopotamia; Byzantium threatens western regions (maghārib); India stands against the people of Balkh; and the Turks are enemies of Khurasān. This world of hostility informs the social logic behind tales of bottling up hostile nations behind defensive barriers.

The Shāfi‘ī jurist Ibn al-Qāss (d. 335/946), who served as a judge in Tarsus along the frontier with Byzantium, writes, in a geographical treatise marking the coordinates for the qibla, that the ancient Persians divided the world into seven climes, with Iran situated in the center. He adds that they further divided these seven parts into four sections that paired the Arabs with Indians, the Chinese with Turks, the Byzantines with Africans, and the Persians in the center by themselves. Such a system suggests a way of linking two major geographical models both associated with ancient Persian traditions.

In his geographical–mathematical study treating the determination of latitudes and longitudinal differentiation, Tahdīd nihayāt al-amākin li-taṣḥīḥ masāfāt al-masākin [The determination of the coordinates of positions for the correction of distances between inhabited areas], Abū ‘l-Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (d. ca 442/1050) outlines a similar tension inherent in geographical divisions of space and territory. He explains how the ancient Persian kings, for the sake of governance (ṣiyāsā) and to demarcate land, divided the inhabited world into seven circular sections, in the form of six circles rotating around a seventh circle with each circle being equal in size.

According to Bīrūnī, ancient Persian kings devised the seven-part kishwar division to better determine the distances of other kingdoms from their own territory. The word kishwar is derived from the Avestan stem form karshuuar-, the noun from the Iranian root karsh, which has the basic meaning ‘to make furrows’. The term itself evokes demarcations that highlight one region as distinguishable from the next, just as something that is delineated by lines is readily perceived (fig. 2).

Concluding his explanation of this ancient Persian geographical system, Bīrūnī comments that there exists no connection between these seven divisions and the natural order of things, nor does this geographical system have any link with the phenomena of astronomy. Rather, he adds, these divisions are made arbitrarily, according to the diverse kingdoms, the difference in features of their peoples, along with their different morals, customs, languages, and religions.

Here Bīrūnī differentiates the natural divisions of the world from political and cultural ones. There existed, however, a widespread notion, which Bīrūnī himself held, that the external, natural cosmos influenced the formation of ethnic, cultural, and geographical identities. Drawing
specifically from the Galenic division of the four humors and their effects on a person's character, Arabic and Persian geographers continued a long tradition of viewing the balance of temperature and moisture as a cause for the temperamental differences between peoples. These Galenic concepts entered directly into geography and cosmography through the writing of Ptolemy, who strongly influenced Arabic and Persian writers with his climatic division of the world. The extremities of heat and cold were viewed as natural factors that defined where civilization could take root. Accordingly, the severe temperatures in the farthest extremes of the north and south made these regions of the earth uninhabitable.

It was taken for granted that climate and geography influenced the innate disposition of people; those who lived either too close to, or too far from, the sun were thought to suffer a deficiency of the intellect and were often considered to border on the savage. Following this principle, the Andalusian scholar Ibn Sādī (d. 462/1070), in his Tabqaṭ al-umān [The classes of nations], outlines how nations living too far north or south of the equator, because of the severity of temperature, have been unable to achieve much intellectually; of these people he lists, to the north, the Chinese, the Turks, Gog and Magog, the Khazar, the Sarir, the Alans, the Slavs, the Bulghār, and the Rūs; and to the south, the Ethiopians, the Ghanaians, and the Zanj.

Similarly, the anonymous author of the Persian descriptive geography, the Ḥudūd al-ʾālam, posits that each country differs from another in four respects (ruy): first, by the difference of water, air, soil, and temperature; second, by the difference of religions (din-hā), laws (sharīʿat-hā), and beliefs (kish-hā); third, by the difference of words (lugḥāt) and languages (zabān-hā); and fourth, by the difference of kingdoms (padhshāhī-hā).

This description of the world echoes a notion that the external natural universe influences temperament and character, determined by the climatic balance of the four humors.

The link between climate and disposition also forms part of a cosmographical conception of the earth in relation to the universe. The field of astrology engages with the diversity of temperament, moving from the climatic influence on innate dispositions to address the role of the stars in determining the characteristics of people. In his geography the scholar and geographer al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. 334/945) explains how both the variations of climate and the astrological movements of the zodiac influence the different regions and peoples of the world. He adheres to a division of the world into quadrants that are each subdivided into three smaller sections, with a total of twelve divisions that correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac, such that, over each subdivision move a combination of heavenly bodies, all of which operate in concord over the world below.

Such geographical and cosmographical demarcations attempt to account for and manage the incredible diversity of creation. By the middle of the second/eighth century, as territorial expansion slowed, the new Islamic state went through a process of consolidating power and defining boundaries. A technical vocabulary evolved to account for the intricate configuration of the frontiers. Against the Byzantines, a two-tiered system of frontiers developed in Syria and in Mesopotamia: an outer series of breaches, or strongholds (thughūr) was defended by an inner level of fortifications (ʿawāsim), where the people of the frontier could retreat in times of war. These two levels served as a buffer zone against enemy incursions into the heart of the state. As the political landscape of the Islamic community fragmented during the ʿAbbāsid period into autonomous or semi-autonomous kingdoms, such as the Umayyads of al-Andalus, the Idrisids of the Maghrib, and the Sāmānids of Transoxiana, a variegated nomenclature (ākhir, tukhmūn, ḥāshiya) to describe an internal system of borders between Islamic states also emerged.

Yet, in the face of this fragmentation there existed a fully expressed notion of the Muslim lands as distinct from the territories beyond the reach of Islam. As a category, Islam is often imagined by medieval Muslim geographers as a nominal, reified site of political dominion. The terminology used to describe the division between the realm of Islam (dār al-islām) and the realm of strife (dār al-ḥarb) was evidently a feature of Umayyad legal discourse. These categories of identity find further expression in the third/ninth century, with imperial law codes composed for the early ʿAbbāsid caliphate by state-sponsored jurists. Juridical writings, such as the Kitāb al-siyār (Book on military campaigns) by the Hanafi jurist Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), addressed the legal complexity of interactions with lands beyond the territory of Islam. As deictic demarcation, the categories of dār al-islām and dār al-ḥarb underscore an important connection between religious and geographical identities. These two realms, divided between the lands of peace and the lands of war, stand as mirror images of each other; binary opposites, separated, nonetheless, by ever-changing, porous boundaries, where the outer frontiers (thughūr) are never drawn as firm lines, but represent rough points of contact between two sides that are unstable, and always transforming. Both the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids enacted a variety of peace treaties (hudna/ṣulḥ) with Byzantium; these guaranteed safe conduct (aman), facilitating trade and travel. Prolonged periods of peace often served as moments of great cultural
and intellectual exchange, as, for example, was demonstrated with the various caliphal missions undertaken to procure ancient Greek works to be translated into Syriac and Arabic.\textsuperscript{92}

Arabic and Persian geographical writings, indebted to ancient Greek models, generally reflect a perspective on the frontier that is not pre-determined by juridical considerations of religious law. Not once in the surviving sections of the \textit{Masālik} does Ibn Khurradādhbih make reference to either the \textit{dār al-islām} or the \textit{dār al-harb}, two terms which come to be fully determined within juridical discourse. His work rather showcases diverse tales of travelers interacting with various people from around the world. In his geography, \textit{Kitāb al-buldān}, the historian and geographer Ya’qūbī, a contemporary of Ibn Khurradādhbih, refers to the land of Islam (\textit{ard al-islām}) with Baghdad as the center of the universe and the navel of the earth (\textit{surrat al-ard}), thus orienting the world around a political and religious power of Islam.\textsuperscript{93} Nonetheless, Ya’qūbī does not make reference to either the \textit{dār al-islām} or the \textit{dār al-harb}, nor, for that matter, does Baladhuri, whose history is very much focused on relations with non-Muslims, deploy these particular binary oppositions.

This should not suggest, however, that early geographers did not engage with such terminology in their construction of space. Istakhri, followed by Ibn Hawqāl, refers a handful of times to both terms when describing the political formations of the world.\textsuperscript{95} Likewise, Mašūdī on occasion mentions Muslim territories as the \textit{dār al-islām}.\textsuperscript{96} Muqaddasī focuses his work primarily on the ‘kingdom of Islam’ (\textit{mamlakat al-islām}) and chooses to ignore altogether the ‘kingdoms of the infidels’ (\textit{mamlākīk al-kufīr}), for, as he explains, he has neither traveled to those regions, nor does he believe that there is much benefit to be gained by discussing them.\textsuperscript{97} The ‘Abbāsid secretary Qudāmā b. Ja‘far, who, in his administrative geography, does not limit himself to the lands of Islam, employs the term ‘kingdom of Islam’ (\textit{mamlakat al-islām}), and refers to the territorial limit of Islam (\textit{hadd al-islām}).\textsuperscript{98} When surveying the traditions of geographical writing, we find that though there is a clear projection of the category of Islam spatially, the terminology used to describe the regions inhabited by Muslims and their place in the world is neither monolithic nor anchored solely to the concerns of jurists.

With regard to the geographical tradition, the division of the world into the realms of war and peace has been overstated, for though the early geographers often treat in detail the societies and customs of the nations outside the territory of Islam, they use the polarizing oppositions of \textit{dār al-islām} and \textit{dār al-harb} / \textit{kufr} to describe their relations to foreign regions much less than might be expected, given the subject matter.\textsuperscript{99} Generally Muslim geographers do not address commerce and travel across the diverse kingdoms of the earth by dividing the world into a single legal partition between two monolithic realms. In the discourse of geographical writing—from descriptions of the magnificent capital of Byzantium to the mysterious inhabitants of the Wāqwāq islands—the foreign comes into view not only in its capacity to threaten, but also as a wondrous sign of how the strange and exotic is spread throughout creation. Though the narratives travel across kingdoms of unbelievers and islands of savage cannibals, the writing itself serves to mediate such dangerous elements. In the form of narration, through the power of discourse, the monstrous and illicit can be managed and controlled by description itself.

The geographical techniques for grasping and projecting natural and political formations offer highly idiosyncratic visions, employing a variety of often contradictory models to fathom the shape of the world and the political formations therein. In general, geographers draw, in some fashion, on what they viewed to be the Ptolemaic division of the world into climes (\textit{aqālim}), divisions that follow various parallel latitudes running from the equator to the North Pole. However, in the literature, there is no consensus on how many climes existed; numbers range from seven to twenty.\textsuperscript{100} The Arabic and Persian geographers also make use of the Sāsānian model of dividing the world into seven territories.\textsuperscript{101} This model held that the Sāsānian territory of Irānshahr was the center of the universe, a tradition that was emulated by ‘Abbāsid geographers.\textsuperscript{102} There are striking resemblances between the \textit{kishwar} model of concentric satellites orbiting around one centered territory and the Islamic tradition of \textit{qibla} maps that orient the world around Mecca. The \textit{qibla} marks the correct position to which Muslims, relative to their given location in the world, turn during prayer so that their faces and prayers align with the sacred Ka‘ba in Mecca (plate 4). As a result, \textit{qibla} maps order the cosmos as rotating around a sacred geography. Yaqūt details all three of these systems, along with a variety of cosmographical accounts concerning the position of the earth relative to the universe, in the introduction to his geographical dictionary \textit{Mu‘jam al-buldān}. He concludes that, with all the divergence of opinions concerning the shape, position, and composition of the earth, it is God alone who knows the truth of the entire matter.\textsuperscript{103}

Despite these varying viewpoints, a widespread belief existed that the earth was divided into a section of inhabitable regions, existing only in the northern hemisphere, and that these regions were surrounded by an encircling ocean (\textit{al-bahr al-muhīt/Ωκεανός}).\textsuperscript{104} A range of opinions...
developed concerning what shape these land masses took, many of which appear to be informed by ancient Persian traditions, such as the belief that the inhabited lands look like a hooded garment. Another theory was that the land masses of the world took the shape of a bird, with disparate remarks made of those who inhabited the west, i.e., the part that represented the bird’s tail.

In large measure, Arabic and Persian geographers drew their idea of the inhabitable territories of the earth from the ancient Greek concept of the oecumene (oikouménē), often translated into Arabic as al-ard al-mā’mūra and into Persian as ābādhāni. As for Ibn Khurradadhbih, he divides the inhabited world into four land masses or continents (aqsām), consisting of Europe (aruṭā), Libya (lūbiya), Ethiopia (iṭyūfiya), and Scythia (isqūtiya). Ibn al-Faqqih follows this same tradition, as does Hamdānī, who assigns this particular quadrupartite division an astrological significance by describing how each of these regions are subsequently subdivided into thirds, with a total of twelve sections, each corresponding to a sign of the zodiac. The transliterated form of the place names used to describe these four continents—Europe (Eύρωπη), Libya (Λύβα), Ethiopia (适合自己ia), and Scythia (Σκύθα)—does little to disguise the Greek origin of this tradition, which entered into Arabic through the various translations of Greek scientific material.

Of the aforementioned authors, only Hamdānī consciously acknowledges Ptolemy as the source of this astrological conception of the earth. Yet the division of the oecumene into quarters is not to be found in either Ptolemy’s Geographia or his star-catalog, the Almagest. In his geography, Ptolemy follows a tradition of dividing the earth into not four, but three continents. The anonymous author of the Persian geographical work, the Hūdūd al-‘ālam, draws on this tripartite Greek tradition when partitioning the earth into the three sections, and refers to them accordingly, as Libya (lūbiya), Europe (aruṭā), and Asia (asyā). Outlining this ancient Greek tradition, Birūnī, followed by Yaqtū, explains how Greek writers further subdivided Asia into two smaller sections, known as Asia Major (asyā ʿl-kubrā) and Asia Minor (asyā ʿl-sughrā).

This subdivision of Asia into two categories harmoniously echoes the four continents set forth by Ibn Khurradadhbih, where the last two sections of Ethiopia and Scythia correspond respectively to these two divisions of Asia. However, all indications suggest that Ibn Khurradadhbih, along with Ibn al-Faqqih, who copies him verbatim, do not draw their information from the three-continent division of the inhabited world as set forth in Ptolemy’s Geography. Rather, we may surmise from Hamdānī’s exposition on the astrological influences upon the characteristics of the inhabitants of the world, that Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos, a short treatise on astrological geography, served as the source for this particular classification of the inhabited earth into four continents. In this work, which was translated several times into Arabic under the title Kitāb al-arbaʿā, Ptolemy explains the effects of the astral bodies on the characteristics of the various regions of the oecumene. He quarters up the world into the divisions of Europe, Libya, Ethiopia, and Scythia, which appear centuries later as transliterations in Ibn Khurradadhbih’s Masālik. Moreover, in this exposition, Ptolemy mentions that Ethiopia and Scythia are sections of Greater Asia, a term that encompasses both Asia Minor and Asia Major; for Ptolemy this rationale dovetails seamlessly with the more common tripartite division of the inhabited earth, as outlined clearly in his Geography.

The path of transmission and translation of such Greek geographical categories highlights the unique and heterogeneous manner in which the traditions of Arabic and Persian geography developed. When Ibn Khurradadhbih describes the inhabitable lands of the earth as partitioned into these four sections, he does so in dialogue with Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos, the source for this division, and a pillar in the pantheon of Greek astrological works translated into Arabic. Ibn Khurradadhbih demonstrates how this division of the earth into quadrants corresponds to the four natural elements, the humors of the body, and the twelve signs of the zodiac. In the Bodleian manuscript a diagram is given of the earth shaped as a circle with four mixtures of humors grafted onto the cardinal directions. Ibn Khurradadhbih states that the sages (ḥukamāʾ) have mapped out these humors on the earth so that the subtlety of God’s divine design (lutf tadbīrīhi) could be ocularly observed (li‘l-i‘yān). Similarly, as Ibn Rusta explains, the diversity found in the various communities (milal) of the world is based upon humoral composition, which varies with respect to the four geographical regions of the earth and their relationship to the influence of the stars. According to Ibn Rusta, this natural variation is something that can be verified through direct observation (i‘yān), just as its interconnection with the broad system of astral influence is readily supported by reason (ʿaql).

One obvious effect of this theory of astral influences and humoral dispositions is the promotion of rather chauvinistic ideologies of naturally ordained superiority. Marwāzī, whose natural history follows this theory of humoral geography, situates Iranshahr in the middle of the seven climes and claims that because this region is governed by the sign of the Sun it is associated with more special qualities (fadāʿi) than other parts of the
world. Accordingly, the inhabitants of Iran possess the perfect expression of ethics, beauty, natural temperament, and overall greatness, just as the kings of this land are the ornament of dominion and power, because of their maintenance of order and justice. As for those who live at the far extremes of civilization, their natures and dispositions are shaped in relation to their lack of humoral balance. According to Marwazi this can be observed notably in the Turks, who suffer from an excess of cold the farther north they dwell, especially in the country of Gog, where their "stature shortens, their eyes become small, their nostrils and mouths narrow, their souls compress, and their joy diminishes." 121

Such natural and geographical demarcations were emplaced into 'Abbāsid ideology. The very constitution of the palatine city of Sāmarrā was founded, according to legend, on the site where Sām the son of Noah was born. Considered the ancestor of the Arabs and the Persians, Sām (Shem) is thought to have inherited the middle of the earth; this is in contrast with Noah's other two sons; Hām is the progenitor of the Africans, while the Turks and Gog and Magog are descended from Yāfīth (Japheth). 123

The elaborate ethnographical discourse that frames Ptolemy's astrological geography translates directly into later Arabic and Persian geographical traditions. The Tetrabiblos points to a quarry of ancient Greek anxieties about the world. Drawing on long-established xenophobic and ethnocentric stereotypes, Ptolemy details how the influence of the zodiac predetermines the natural disposition of the various nations that inhabit the four regions of the world. What are at times grotesque caricatures find their way into Arabic practically unaltered. 124

The division of the earth evoked by Ibn Khurradadhbih speaks explicitly to an epistemology in which natural dispositions are assigned to the various peoples of the world. This brings us to the final region of the oecumene, known to Ibn Khurradadhbih as isqūṭya. Greek authors invariably located Scythia in the Caucasus and around the Caspian Sea. Ibn Khurradadhbih identifies the same region with toponyms familiar to Arabic readers; accordingly, Scythia consists of Armenia, Khurāsān, the Turks, and the Khazars. For ancient Greek writers, Scythia stood as a symbol of the barbaric and monstrous on the edges of civilization. Herodotus describes how the Scythian warriors, after drinking the blood of their victims, would fashion clothing out of their skins and carve goblets out of their skulls. Such descriptions of their gruesome customs and the horrific burial rites of their kings serve as common motifs in the geographical literature on the region. 125

For classical Greek literature, Scythia is synonymous with exotic barbarism. In the Tetrabiblos, Ptolemy situates in this region the mythical, martial tribes of Amazon women, who cut off their right breasts in order to better wield swords and bows during combat. On this section, Hamdān adds to Ptolemy's description, stating that the peoples of Gog and Magog reside in this quarter of the world. The invasion of the Huns across Central Asia and through the Caucasus in 396 C.E. encouraged Christians, writing in Greek and Syriac, to identify Gog and Magog with the Scythians. This pre-Islamic tradition continued not only with Hamdān, but with other Muslim writers who saw in the Greek toponym of Scythia the apocalyptic tribes of Gog and Magog.

It is logical that, just as the figure of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn in the Qurʾān corresponds to Alexander the Great of Macedonia, so too should the peoples Alexander bottles up at the end of the earth appear in ancient Greek writings. The Andalusian religious scholar and adīb, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), writing in his doxography on the various religions and philosophies of the world, Fašl fi 'l-nilal wa 'l-ahwāʾ wa 'l-nīhal [The division on the religious communities, sects, and creeds] argues for the existence of Gog and Magog. He states that Aristotle made reference to Gog and Magog in his Kitāb al-ḥayawān (Historia animalium), in a section on the natural characteristics of cranes (gharānīq). As for Aristotle, this anachronism could not be further from the truth, for nowhere does he make mention of these scriptural monsters. The section in question is Aristotle's treatment of the migratory patterns of cranes (yē̃pavoi), which, according to him, take these birds to Scythia. In this region, Aristotle says that pygmies dwell in caves with their equally small horses. Aristotle is quick to affirm that this account is not a myth (μύθος). Just as Aristotle's work on the classifications of animals inspired Greek traditions of marvel-writing, so, too, his influence was felt in the later 'ajāʿīb discourse in Arabic and Persian. Though the Arabic translation of the Kitāb al-ḥayawān made by Yūḥannā b. al-Batrīq (d. ca 200/815) does not explicitly identify the pygmies with Gog and Magog, it is perfectly reasonable for Ibn Ḥazm to see in the description of the people from Scythia (iskūthiyā), who are the height of one cubit (dhīrā'), the apocalyptic figures mentioned in the Qurʾān, often characterized by their small stature. The transposition of Gog and Magog onto the race of pygmies from classical Greek sources, who are attacked by cranes, finds full expression in Arabic and Persian letters.

Between the Arabic translation of Aristotle's Historia animalium and Ibn Ḥazm's notion that Aristotle references Gog and Magog, we observe in Hamdān a tradition of identifying the Scythia of ancient Greece with
the region of Gog and Magog. Ibn Hazm further states that Ptolemy, in his Geography, mentions the wall of Gog and Magog and gives the length and width of the region they inhabit. Such a statement offers insight into how Muslim writers viewed Greek geographical and scientific authorities as corresponding to pre-existing scriptural notions of the universe. In the case of Ibn Hazm, he uses ancient Greek sources as proof of the existence of Alexander's wall against Gog and Magog. The association in early Christian writings, first in Greek, then in Syriac, of Scythia with Gog and Magog, aided Muslim writers in their identification of these apocalyptic peoples.

The influence of Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos on Ibn Khurradadhbih's conception of geography speaks to the central place of astrology in the development of geographical thought and highlights how the notion that astrological influences predetermine human temperaments, forming ready-made types and characteristics, is implicit to this division of the inhabited world. The narratives surrounding Gog and Magog also play a part in this astrological ethnography, for these two tribes, trapped at the farthest edge of the world, represent the most brutal savages on the earth. As a result of the severity of the climate, the lands beyond them are believed uninhabitable. Although Ibn Khurradadhbih does not explicitly identify Scythia with Gog and Magog, the nations through which Sallam al-Tarjumān journeys readily recall the delineations of Scythia's boundaries.

By the time Sallam undertakes his adventure, early Arabic geographical tradition had already established that the lands of Gog and Magog lie beyond the Khazar, situated between the sixth and seventh climes, stretching across the farthest edge of the inhabited world. As Sallam crosses the Caucasus, he meets the Khazar king, who dispatches five guides to take him to the wall.

At this point in his narrative Sallam leaves all traces of the known world behind and enters terra incognita. As the expedition veers off the map, he keeps a steady account of the days traveled. The demarcation of time now serves as the primary means of charting the terrain covered. After having traveled away from the Khazar in an unspecified direction for a period of twenty-six days, the party enters a putrid black smelling land (ard südā muntinat al-rā'īha). Abū ʻAbd Allāh al-Idrīsī (d. 560/1165), in his world geography, Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtirāq al-afaq [Pleasant journeys into faraway lands], refers to Sallam's description of traveling through the black stinking land for ten days when he describes the region as a completely savage land, where no plant grows or living thing dwells. He further adds that navigating through it is torturous (sālikuḥā karbun), as it gives off a wretched stench, there is no water to survive, and there is no path to enable anyone heading out across the land to find his way. Sallam describes how his delegation prepared themselves for this odoriferous onslaught by taking along vinegar; this they applied to rags to cover their noses, in an effort to protect themselves from the rancid odors. After traveling through this land for a period of ten days, they finally reached the ruins of cities upon cities, laid to waste long ago by Gog and Magog, before Alexander the Great finally shut them behind the wall. The image of ruined cities reflects a Qur'ānic theme of traveling across the earth to witness the destruction of past civilizations; a proof of the wrath of God and confirmation of the final judgment to come:

Have they not traveled across the land to see what was the end of those before them? They were more numerous than them, superior in strength, and in their monuments [left] on the land; yet all they accomplished was of no profit to them. (Q. 40:82)

In its eschatological treatment of the end of time, the Qur'ān makes a cryptic allusion to a town (qariya) that was laid to waste, the inhabitants of which will only be able to return when Gog and Magog break out from the barrier (Q. 21:95–6). In these ruins, Sallam offers ocular confirmation of the broader course of Qur'ānic history, as he witnesses a vast apocalyptic landscape inscribed within a scriptural projection of the destruction of past civilizations.

The expedition travels through these destroyed cities for twenty days, then finally reaches a series of fortified outposts. Throughout the narrative Sallam balances the specific with the vague, revealing enough information to maintain an almost scientific engagement with the material world. Unlike the territories of Armenia, the Alān, the Filān Shāh, and the Khazar, these lands that Sallam now crosses do not correspond to any known location that could be assigned to specific peoples and places.

For nearly a month Sallam treks through this black putrid region, crossing a no-man's land hostile to life and civilization. Though he keeps
a steady account of the time that transpires, rationally ordering the world into segments of distance, the initial pattern of identifying in language the locations through which he travels ends. The exactitude of his account, so intimately linked to the belief that the world can be described in language, begins to loosen and finally dissolves across this sinister landscape. As the specificity of the cartographer’s coordinates breaks down we lose track of Sallām’s exact location in this apocalyptic land.

**Ut Pictura Poesis**

As Sallām draws near the wall, he follows the trail of Alexander the Great, laid out in the body of writing surrounding the Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition. Originally believed by early western scholars to be the work of Callisthenes, the Greek historian and contemporary to Alexander, the Romance cycle developed well after Alexander’s historical exploits. It transformed over the years as it spread through various translations and adaptations, including Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Latin, and all the major European vernaculars.¹

In the early history of Islam there was a lively debate over the true identity of Dhū ’l-Qarnayn.² One prominent identification was with an ancient South Arabian Himyari king, generally referred to in the sources as al-Ṣa‘b b. Dhī Marāthid. Ibn Hishām (d. ca 218/833) in his *Kitāb al-tijān fī mulḵ Himyar wa ’l-Yaman* [The book of crowns on the kings of Himyar and Yemen] traces the controversy back to the earliest scenes of Qur’ānic exegesis, in which Wahb b. Munabbih (d. ca 102/720) asks the Companion of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687–8), about the identity of Dhū ’l-Qarnayn. Ibn ‘Abbās responds that the hero mentioned in the Qur’ān corresponds to al-Ṣa‘b b. Dhī Marāthid, to whom God gave dominion over the earth, as a means for all of his conquests. This Himyari king traveled to the lands where the sun rises and sets, and built the wall against Gog and Magog. Wahb inquires about Iskandar the Greek (al-Rūmī), to which Ibn ‘Abbās replies that he was merely a pious wise man who built two lighthouses on the Mediterranean.³ Ibn Hishām, who also relates the adventures of searching for the
fountain of life, traveling around the world with Khidr, and the building of the barrier in the north, is of the opinion that Dhu 'l-Qarnayn was indeed a Himyar king. Ironically, the life of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn, as represented in Ibn Hisham's Kitab al-tijan, is substantially shaped through the adventures of Alexander the Great, as developed within the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle.

Pointing to the evidently archaic contours of this debate, Ibn Hisham draws support for his claim by turning to a range of citations from poetry and speeches that the Arab Bedouins had marshaled forth as proof of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn's Yemeni origins. Quoted as an authority is the paragon of pre-Islamic Arabic poets, Imr al-Qays b. Hujr, who is said to have sung of the exploits of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn al-Ša'd b. Dhi Marathid, the Himyar king:

\[
\text{And he built a barrier where the sun rises against Gog and Magog among the mountains.}^4
\]

Indeed the association of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn with the South Arabian ruler can be traced in many early Arabic sources. Ḥassān b. Thabit, famed poet of the Prophet, is said to have composed a poem that turns to the victories of the South Arabian Dhu 'l-Qarnayn as an inspiration for the ensuing Arab conquests.\(^5\) Here the Himyar king climbs the heavens through divine cords (awtār / asābāb),\(^6\) stares down the sun, and forces Gog and Magog into submission behind a barrier. This qasida, like much of the poetry ascribed to Ḥassān b. Thabit, was most likely composed in a later Umayyad context.\(^7\) It is of note that, in the course of the early Arab conquests, the figure of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn was positioned, at least metaphorically, as a source of emulation for military expansion.\(^8\)

For the Arab philologist and expert on South Arabian genealogies, Nashwān b. Sa'id al-Himyarī (d. 573/1178), the question over the true identity of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn continued to be an issue worth debating. Himyarī argued that non-Arabs (ajam) were responsible for promoting the belief that Dhu 'l-Qarnayn, who was truly a South Arabian king, was, rather, Alexander the Great, the Macedonian conqueror.\(^9\) At play within these debates is the question of ownership. Early Muslims undoubtedly wondered why a pagan Greek ruler, who was lionized in Byzantine propaganda as a Christian hero,\(^10\) would appear in the Qur'ān.

Rejecting Greek origins was one means of avoiding this problem. Absorbing and appropriating them was another. This is the framework that informs a prophetic hadith preserved in the Futūḥ Misr wa 'l-Maghrib [The conquests of Egypt and the West] by the Egyptian scholar Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871). He traces this particular account back through several transmitters to the Egyptian traditionist 'Uqba b. 'Amir (fl. first/seventh century), who later transmitted the hadith from his home in Alexandria. 'Uqba b. 'Amir relates that he was with the Prophet when a group from the People of the Book came bearing their scriptures (maṣāḥif / kutub) to test Muhammad, which they did by asking him about Dhu 'l-Qarnayn. This is in keeping with the Qur'ānic passage in which the very name of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn is posed as a kind of riddle to the Prophet (Q. 18:83).

Muḥammad, proving his status as the messenger of God, gives the group an account fully in accord with the Alexander Romance. This hadith describes how Dhu 'l-Qarnayn, who was a Greek, was given a kingdom and traveled to the edge of the ocean in the land of Egypt, where he established a city called Iskandariyya (Alexandria). The Prophet then relates how Dhu 'l-Qarnayn built a barrier against Gog and Magog: here Dhu 'l-Qarnayn encountered a nation (umma) whose faces were like those of dogs (wujūh al-kiliib, i.e., κυνοκέφαλοι), and who fought against Gog and Magog. Beyond them were a race of pygmies (ummat qisār, i.e., νυμφαίοι), who battled with the dog-headed monsters, and were, in turn, at war with a nation of cranes (gharan'iq, i.e., ψάραι), much akin to Aristotle's account of pygmies in his zoology. Dhu 'l-Qarnayn continued traveling until he reached a valley of serpents, finally arriving at the encircling ocean (al-bahr al-mudir).\(^11\) In Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's history, the Prophet's speech to the People of the Book is placed as an authoritative response to the exegetical claim that Dhu 'l-Qarnayn was from Yemen.\(^12\) The account, a version of which is preserved in Ṭabarī's exegesis,\(^13\) draws from the marvels long associated with the adventures of Alexander in the monstrous lands of the east. Recounted in the shadow of the lighthouse of Alexandria, this hadith not only identifies Dhu 'l-Qarnayn with the Alexander of Greek antiquity, but also situates the newly conquered territory of Alexandria, and by extension Egypt, within the framework of Islamic eschatology.

While Ibn Hisham's Kitāb al-tijān and Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's Futūḥ Misr diverge radically over their identification of Dhu 'l-Qarnayn, each suggesting regional appropriations of the Qur'ānic hero, they share an engagement with the general outlines of the Alexander Romance. This speaks to the fact that the adventures of Alexander were well known in some form in Arabic, most likely transmitted orally by early preachers (qassās) through the vehicle of prophetic tales (qisas), which built upon material available regionally. As attested by the Qur'ānic adventure of
of these people, conversant in both Arabic and Persian, yet isolated from the rest of Islamic civilization, comes to Sallām and his retinue both as a surprise and as a testament to how Islam has spread around the world, to the farthest edges of the inhabitable earth.

Though Sallām does not give us any more information concerning this group of Muslims, his account readily suggests the presence of Muslim merchants and missionaries among Turkic tribes along the Volga and in parts of the Central Asian steppe.20 Another variant of Sallām's narrative, not present in the redaction of Ibn Khurraḍādhībī's geography, but recorded by Idrīṣī,21 gives a short narrative of how these people, explicitly identified as the Adhkish Turks, converted to Islam years before, when a man on a camel appeared to them bearing a copy of the Qur'ān. This man taught them religious precepts (sharā'i') and communicated to them the meanings of the Qur'ān in a language they could understand; they converted, and memorized the Qur'ān. Such accounts of conversion, while stylized, nonetheless echo historical missions beyond the frontiers. Early in the Masālik, Ibn Khurraḍādhībī alludes to the report by the intrepid adventurer Tamīm b. Bahr, who appears to have traveled around 206/821 to the Uyghur (Tughuzghuz) capital on the Orkhon River, in modern-day Mongolia.22 Tamīm b. Bahr's sobriquet, al-mutta'awwī'ī, identifies him with a class of volunteer fighters who occupied forward posts against the borders of the Turks and other infidels. This further suggests how inroads were made into the territories beyond the frontiers of Islam, both in the north and to the east. Ibn Khurraḍādhībī refers to communities of Muslims settled at the farthest reaches of China; other early sources describe isolated populations of Muslims not only living in China, but also in Tibet, and among the Uyghur.23 In contrast to such examples of far-flung Muslim populations, Sallām's depiction of this community, situated beyond the Khazar before the wall of Gog and Magog, who are so cut off from the religious and political centers of Islamic civilization that they had never heard of a caliph in Iraq, speaks to a remote landscape, imbued with an uncanny sense of the familiar.

Moreover, the description itself evokes a widely circulating hadith, contained, for instance, in the Muṣannaf of ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) and the canonical collection of Muhammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870); it describes, as one of the signs of the end of time, the emergence from the east (min qibālī ʿl-mashrīq) of a people, unknown to the rest of Muslims, who recite the Qur'ān.24 Sallām's account of this Qur'ān-reciting community at the edge of the known world is deployed not only to resonate with Islamic apocalyptic imagery, but to concretize, both historically and
geographically, the reality of these scriptural teachings, in concert with a broader projection of salvation.

According to the Vienna recension of Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography, the expedition moves from this isolated community of Muslims to a series of closely situated fortifications, each one to two farsakhhs from the other. Here is located a large fortified city that lies a distance of three days journey from the wall. Sallām names this city, which has gates with iron doors, mills, and cultivated fields, though the vocalization of this name, as represented in the manuscript, remains unclear. The parameter, at ten farsakhhs, or roughly sixty kilometers, makes the city enormous; the description suggests colossal dimensions. Sallām explains that here Dhū 'l-Qarnayn set up camp when he came to build the wall. The precision of the description and measurement do not belie the wondrous world surrounding the fortifications.

The Vienna manuscript situates the barrier as the last and most spectacular in a list of marvelous buildings around the world. The genre of writing about man-made marvels has a long pedigree; the idea of a canon of seven man-made wonders of the world was itself a popular conceit in classical antiquity. The rampart crowns Ibn Khurradadhbih's list of amazing architectural achievements, which include the pyramids of Giza, the ruins of Palmyra, and the pavilion at Ctesiphon. The story of Sallām's expedition, however, takes up the largest portion of this section, such that all of these great structures collapse under the weight of the rampart.

While maintaining the greater significance of the edifice, Sallām delves into an architectural description of the wall that draws upon an established discourse of measuring buildings. Through his description, Sallām builds with pictorial vividness (evidentia / ἐνάρεσις) an image to be imprinted on the mind's eye—ut pictura poesis, 'as is painting so is poetry'—inflected through an ekphrastic register to capture in language a mimetic representation. This act of observation and description is presented as a form of empirical and evidentiary knowledge, such that readers are able to imagine themselves beholding the wall (mirabile visu / θαύμα ἰδέως). Sallām renders the dimensions of the rampart into linguistic form with the same scientific rigor that characterizes the entire narrative, itself predicated on the value of individual ocular proof (i'yān) as an epistemic modality for fathoming the frontiers of the world. Idrisi's recension of the adventure explicitly mentions that Sallām took descriptive notes (ṣifāt) while standing before the wall, and these were used in the redaction of the adventure submitted to the caliph. Al-Wāthiq's command to survey, inspect, and observe (muʿāyana) the wall is part of a process of controlling and regulating, under the watchful authority of the caliphal eye, the anxieties about the apocalypse associated with frontiers and the limits of knowledge.

Sallām describes how Dhū 'l-Qarnayn dug the foundation thirty cubits into the ground, which he filled with iron (hadīd) and copper (nuḥās) until it reached the surface of the earth. Then Dhū 'l-Qarnayn set up two doorposts framing the mountain sides that stretched above the pass. This description echoes the Qur'ānic account:

Then [Dhū 'l-Qarnayn] followed a path until he reached two mountains, and found at their base a people who could hardly understand a word. They said, "O! Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, behold Gog and Magog are destroying the land! Could we pay tribute to you on the condition that you erect between us, and between them a barrier?" He said, "That which my Lord has granted me is better [than your tribute]. But do help me by [your] strength, I will erect between you and between them a rampart. Bring me pieces of iron." Then, when he made level the pass with the two cliffs, he said, "Blow!" Then, when he had made it a fire, he said, "Bring me molten copper that I will pour on this." So then [Gog and Magog] were unable to surmount it, nor could they pierce it. (Q. 18:92-7)

Sallām situates his testimony in dialogue with this scriptural tradition, affirming that the rampart that he presents corresponds to the description immortalized in the Qur'ān.
Sallām’s account catalogs the dimensions of the gate: an iron lintel (darwānd) one hundred and twenty cubits long, and doorposts (iḍādān)五十 cubits high and twenty-five cubits wide, framing a locked paneled gate, through which no wind can pass. Both the doorposts and the lintel stretch out from the wall for a distance of ten cubits, like a barbican at the entrance to a fortress. Above the lintel extends the wall, flanking the skirt of the mountain pass, rising higher than sixty cubits, farther than the eye can see.

Lining the rampart stretches a crenelated parapet of thirty-seven iron battlements or merlons (shurfa, pl. shuraf), five cubits high and four cubits long. The top of each merlon is armed with two angled points (qurnatān) that face each other, a detail that appears to echo the two horns in Dhū ’l-Qarnayn’s name.33 Each of the two door panels (miṣrāṣān) is fifty cubits wide, sixty cubits high, and five cubits thick. The two panels hang on thick vertical pivot bars set into the sides of the lintel.

Sallām turns from the expansive reach of the rampart to the fine details that compose each element of the structure. Narrowing down to the infinitesimal, he focuses his attention on a description of the key to the gate:

On the lock is attached a key, which is a cubit and a half long; it has twelve teeth (dandānka), each tooth is in the form of a pestle used in mortars (dastaj al-hawāwīn). The key’s circumference is four hand spans; it is connected to a chain welded to the gate, which is eight cubits long and four fingers thick in circumference. Each ring on the chain is like the ring of a ballista (manjaniq).34

The description moves from the looming structure down to the bolt of the lock and the key for the bolt, and the teeth on the key. With the description of the twelve teeth on the key, the passage suggests that each element in the variegated material world of existence can be rendered into language.

The display of such empirical measurements forms part of a broader discourse in descriptive geography, in which descriptions of wondrous buildings take on a generic quality, defined by certain tacit conventions. Accounts of architectural formations fit within a cosmographic framework as articulations of civilization and demarcations of territory. The astrologer Abū Ma’shar includes in his astrological history, the Kitāb al-ulūf [The book of the thousands], a section on temples and monumental structures (al-hayākil wa ’l-bunyān al-‘azīm) erected over the ages.35 Though only fragments of this study survive, we may gather from the many quotations made by later authors that it enjoyed a fair amount of popularity. Demonstrating the importance of this genre, Masūdī dedicates an entire chapter of his encyclopedia to the great buildings and temples of various nations. He mentions that many authors over the course of history have written on the subject of the marvelous buildings and the wonders of the world, for which he says the wall built by Dhū ’l-Qarnayn stands as an emblem.36

This ekphrastic attention to producing, through language, an image in the mind’s eye was an object of literary inquiry. In the discourse of Arabic poetics and rhetoric a technical vocabulary developed to discuss literary techniques and tropes, theorizing the descriptive power of language. The literary critic Abū Hilāl al-‘Askari (fl. 395/1005), in his study on poetry and prose, Kitāb al-sinā’atayn [Book of the two arts], posits that the best description (wASF) “is that which consists of the most signifying elements (mā’dānī) of the object described, to such a point that it is as though the description represents before you an image of the object, so that you see it as if it were before your very eyes.”37

This notion of the visual quality of descriptive language has a long genealogy: The philosopher Fārābī, in his general commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics, draws an explicit parallel between the art of poetry and the art of painting, for though the two may differ in the media used, both arts produce a likeness (tashbih) with the aim of “impressing imitations (muḥākayāt) on peoples’ imaginations and senses.”38 Fārābī presents the notion that mimetic qualities of language parallel other representational arts; a view expressed in Abū Bishr Mattā’s Arabic translation of the Poetics.39 Despite the various peccadilloes in Abū Bishr Mattā’s redaction, such a line of argumentation comes across clearly as he follows Aristotle, paralleling imitations produced by sound and speech with those of color and form.

In addition to the concept of vivid description (wASF), the category of bayān—clarity, exposition, elucidation, manifestation—is another site for the configuration of visuality in language. The variegated notions of bayān are interconnected to the self-image of the Qurʿān as a linguistic articulation; bayān is deployed as a synonym for the Qurʿān, as is the word mubīn, from the same root, signifying that which makes manifest. A motif repeated numerous times in the Qurʿān is the revelatory power of signs:

\[
\text{كَذَٰلِكَ يُبِينُ اللهُ لُغَتَهُمْ عَلَى زُورٍ تَمْتَعُونَ}
\]

Thus God makes manifest His signs so that you may understand. (Q. 2:242)
The notion that God created man and then taught him *bayān* (Q. 55:2–3), a term that may be rendered as utterance, speech, or even reason, in the sense of logos, adds a further dimension to the visual and linguistic elements implicit to this concept, echoing the scene in Q. 2:31, in which God creates Adam and then teaches him all the names (*'allāma Ādama 'l-asmā‘a kullāhā*).

The revelatory power of communication is woven into the development of philosophical exploration on the nature of language. Jahiz writes that meanings residing in the hearts of humans, imagined in their minds, are veiled and hidden, and only come to life when they are mentioned and spoken to others. For him, this act of communication is *bayān*, the signification that makes a hidden meaning manifest, clearly, and unequivocally. Jahiz equates clear expression with sight, and inarticulateness with blindness, just as knowledge (‘ilm) is sight and ignorance is blindness, a notion that underscores the visual element tied to knowledge and the concepts of *bayān* and *fasāha* (eloquence); for to be eloquent is to be intelligible and clear in speech (*fasīh*). 40

Jahiz describes how signs (dalālāt), producing meanings, are expressed either through words or through non-linguistic elements, as the act of signification can be effected through gesture and sound, in addition to the written word and visual representation. These acts all possess the potential to communicate meaning. Jahiz punctuates this point with a quote by the Persian administrator of the caliphal library, Sahil b. Harūn (d. 215/830), who states that *bayān*, here communication, or elucidation, is the interpreter of knowledge (al-*bayān*ūn *tarjumān*ūn ‘l-‘ilm). 42

Sallām’s description not only presents an image of the wall, translating material existence through the illusory quality of sight into language, but it also engages in a long tradition of imagining the physical dimensions of this particular marvelous edifice. The expedition to the rampart, from its very outset, is in dialogue with a set of expectations and conventions. As Sallām opens before our eyes an image of the barrier, he translates into Arabic the very patterns used over centuries to describe the physical reality of the wall, producing what appears to be an architecturally coherent structure. 43

**Even More Walls**

The striking parallels between Sallām’s adventure and the Syriac tradition of casting the wall against Gog and Magog—drawn in part from, and elaborated significantly on, the Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle—suggest that Sallām forms his narrative around certain generic expectations. Of particular interest is an apocalyptic homily (*mēmrā*) on the adventures of Alexander, ascribed to the bishop Jacob of Sarug (d. 521 C.E.), but likely composed around 650 C.E. This sermon in verse, which details Alexander’s quest for the eternal waters of life and the barrier he constructs against Gog and Magog, fits into a corpus of apocalyptic Syriac literature from the seventh century that focuses on the heroic life of Alexander. The description of the barrier follows an ekphrastic paradigm of imagining the wall:

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Alexander [made a lintel (eskuppā) over the gate (tar‘ā) for the entire pass (shūgā),
He made it skillfully six [cubits] wide and also six [cubits] high of copper (nhāshā) and iron (parzliā),
a marvelous construction (‘hādā tmīhā) beyond compare.

He drove bolts (mukliē) into the lintel and into the gate,
and fortified them such that no one knew where their junctions were.
For the entire lintel, over the gate against the wind,
The king made formidable posts (qāymē) of copper and iron.
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The lintel, the iron and copper, the wind blocked out, the exacting precision of the measurements, all speak to the established *topoi* against which Sallām positions his own narrative. Other elements beyond the wall suggest parallels between Sallām’s tale and the details of the Syriac homily. The distant land and the mountainous surroundings are echoed in both narratives, as is the region of noxious odor adjacent to the lands of Gog and Magog. In the Syriac poem this is a great fetid sea (yammā saryā) producing the deadliest smells, which is itself a reference to the surrounding ocean (ūqiyanōs/Ωκεανός). 46 How a putrid sea and the land of darkness, scenes central to this *mēmrā* ascribed to Jacob of Sarug, are transformed in Sallām’s account into a black putrid land, is likely the
product of textual residue, which is both lost and gained through the various stages of transmission and adaptation.

While the physical dimensions change with each telling, the convention of projecting in language such precise details remains a fixed trope. This is certainly the case with what is considered to be a slightly earlier propaganda under the reign of Heraclius (r. 610–41 C.E.). This text emplots the ancient hero within an explicitly Christian framework. The Nešhanā depicts Alexander traveling through the north to build a wall against the Huns, whose leaders are named Gog and Magog. The association with the frontiers of the north, and the Biblical prophecy of Jeremiah that predicts how disaster will issue forth across the land from the north (Jer. 1:14),

The Nešhanā treats the dimensions of this northern wall with precision, picturing with detailed measurements the physical space of the edifice. Of particular interest is the treatment of the way Alexander built the gate:

\[
\text{He fixed the gate and the bolts, and he placed nails of iron and beat them down one by one, so that if the Huns came and dug out the rock which was under the lintel (eskuppā) of iron, even if footmen were able to pass through, a horse with its rider would be unable to, so long as the gate stood hammered down with bolts (muklē). And...}
\]

Alexander is depicted as the master builder, as he erects the barrier against barbarous tribes linked to the Huns. The strong parallels between this description of the wall and the Qur’ānic account of the adventure of Dhū l-Qarnayn have, since the nineteenth century, drawn considerable scholarly attention. In the Nešhanā, as with the homily attributed to Jacob of Sarug, the wall built to stave off the hordes of savages from the north has an explicit eschatological message framed through a Christian vision of the apocalypse. Already with the Qur’ānic episode, the overtly Christian theological significance of Alexander’s wall is entirely missing, suggesting multivality in the staging of the account throughout the sectarian milieu of the seventh century.

In addition to the vivid description of the wall with its foundation, the threshold, and the hinges for the gate, there exists another striking parallel between the Nešhanā and Sallām’s account, namely the detail of the key (qlíūdā). In this Syriac projection of the apocalypse, the figure of the twelve grooves (shnānātā) to the key that unlocks the door resonates as part of a broader numerical Christian symbolism. While this stratum of signification is absent, the detail of the twelve teeth remains firmly tied to Sallām’s version of the wall.

As is the nature of such tales, the wide dissemination of the Alexander cycle, reconfigured in a dizzying range of linguistic and cultural avatars, impedes a clear delineation of transmission. It would be tempting to argue that Sallām’s account is drawn directly from the Christian Syriac tradition; that, for instance, he came in contact with a Syriac-speaking Christian who could have informed him of the shape of the wall. Several notable Christians and Christian converts were active participants in ʿAbbāsid administration and cultural life. Likewise, the ʿAbbāsid court was enriched by translators, such as the Christian scholar Ḥunayn, suggesting the broader fecundity of transmission and dissemination across religious and cultural boundaries. Yet these lines of argumentation that seek to establish origins often only obfuscate a historical record that was neither linear nor reductive, but polyvalent and multidimensional. Rather than a direct line of influence,
it seems more probable that the account of the wall and its key of twelve teeth was already part of the broader absorption of the legend, shaped both orally and textually.

That said, the Syriac expansion of the Alexander cycle had a tremendous influence on framing the reception of Alexander throughout late antiquity. For instance, a North African Arabic account of the life of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn also prominently features twelve teeth, and follows quite closely the description of the wall in the *Nesbān*. Likewise the *Sirat al-Iskandar* [The life of Alexander] cluster of Arabic manuscripts, which dates from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but appears to draw upon more archaic Arabic material, describes the same key with twelve teeth. Based on the vocabulary and imagery used, these later Arabic tellings of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn appear not to be directly under Sallām’s sphere of influence. This later cluster and Sallām’s account engage with the Alexander cycle at very distinct points of entry, shaped by distinct cultural and linguistic fields.

Sallām’s choice of language to describe the wall speaks to a circuitous path through various layers of translation. His repeated use of Persian words to outline the architectural dimensions suggests another venue for the transmission of such details as the lintel (darwand) of the gate and the teeth (dandānka) of the key, which he likens to pestles of mortars (dastaj al-hawāwīn). The Arabic tradition of the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle as it survives for us today, unlike Sallām’s narrative, is devoid of such Persianate flourishes.

In contrast to the Syriac and Arabic tellings, Sallām, as an eyewitness, places the focus of his narrative onto his own perspective. All around him lie signs that speak to the past age of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn. Sallām describes the traces that remain of the epic project, indicating an area dug out of the mountain in which the gates were cast, along with the location where cauldrons were used to mix the copper, and where the lead and copper were poured out. On each cauldron were handles on which hung chains with prongs. Referencing the traces left behind, Sallām brings to light a textual universe rich in detail, fully conversant with what it would mean to actually build such a monumental structure:

Near the gate are two fortifications, each one with a perimeter of two hundred cubits by one hundred cubits. By the gate of these two fortifications are two trees. Between the fortifications is a fountain with drinking water. Located in one of these fortifications are the construction tools with which the barrier was built, including iron cauldrons and iron mixing rods. On each trivet (*dīgdān*, Persian) are four cauldrons, similar to cauldrons for making soap. Here the remaining iron bricks have all clumped together with rust.

The artistry of erecting the edifice, so central to the Syriac tradition, figures as a sign of the miraculous feat.

The residue of Persian lexical items recurrent in Sallām’s account suggests several issues. Foremost, we have seen the role of Persian bureaucrats and men of letters in shaping the contours of Ḥabbāsīd literary society. This is the case with Ibn Khurradadhbih’s *Masālīk*, which frames Sallām’s tale through a geographical narrative intercalated with stories of ancient Persian kings. The extent to which Ibn Khurradadhbih himself had a hand in the redaction of Sallām’s account, when weaving this narrative into the larger fabric of his geography, remains unseen. We could, however, imagine a Middle Persian intermediary to the Syriac tradition, from which Sallām might have drawn so many of his striking parallels. Though we may find a certain amount of satisfaction positing that Sallām’s unique choice of vocabulary originates from some earlier Persian tradition, the extent to which the exploits of Alexander were developed in Middle Persian remains a matter of some debate.

Possible support for such a formulation is offered in Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 597/1200) universal history, in which he draws his description of the adventure from Muhammad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. al-Munādī (d. 335/944), a religious scholar from Baghdad who specialized in the study of the Qurān and had an interest in apocalyptic writings and the history of Persian kings. According to Ibn al-Munādī, the Persians (al-Furs) were in possession of writings that they had inherited (kutub mawāritha) concerning the wall built by Alexander. These writings described the process of constructing the barrier and gave an account of its physical appearance, detailing how groups of four cauldrons (*qudūr*) of iron were hung on trivets (*digdān*); these were used by Alexander to forge the bricks for the wall. The entire edifice, including the door panels, the lock and the key, was measured in greater cubits (al-dhirā al-a’zam). Ibn al-Munādī concludes his description of the Persian account with the full narrative of Sallām’s adventure, which he had received via Ibn Khurradadhbih.

The similarities between the purportedly ancient Persian record of the wall related by Ibn al-Munādī and Sallām’s description are striking. According to Ibn al-Munādī this ancient account included such elements as the stinking black land, the door panels, the key, the Persian word for trivet (*digdān*), and even the number of cauldrons on each trivet. These details, ascribed to ancient Persians, are deployed as a confirmation of Sallām’s narrative, just
as Sallām’s eyewitness testimony offers ocular proof of this earlier Persian tradition. Such tautology makes it difficult to affirm whether or not there existed a Middle Persian or early Arabic version of the Alexander cycle containing such details that would have served as an established intertext for Sallām’s adventure. This is very much the suggestion made by Ibn al-Munādī’s arrangement; a point that is no less important, as it underscores how Sallām’s narrative, from its earliest reception within ‘Abbāsid society, was set to confirm what were seen as ancient Persian accounts of the wall. Such a line of analysis is further supported through the early association of Sallām’s adventure with Shahbārāz’s mission to the barrier.

The Syriac versions of the Alexander cycle contain many similar details, lending credence to the notion that Sallām’s text was in dialogue with pre-existing material in Arabic and Persian that was evidently shaped by early Syriac sources on Alexander’s barrier. In such a formulation it is also possible that the Nešhānā, most likely produced in Mesopotamia, could have drawn out these details of the wall from a body of oral and textual traditions that also circulated in Middle Persian. While Alexander’s conquests of Darius and his destruction of Persepolis represent traumatic events in the arc of Persian history, the Greek hero had long been absorbed into the imagined pantheon of Persian kings. The ‘Abbāsid scholar Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dinawārī relates that the Persians believed that Alexander was actually the son of the Kayanid king Dārāb, thus giving Alexander a full royal Persian genealogy—an association that continues throughout Persian letters. 64

Another point of similarity with Ibn al-Munādī’s Persian description is the question of the greater cubit, which appears to echo the ‘Alexandrian’ cubit alluded to in Sallām’s account. 65 When giving the dimensions of the wall, Sallām states that he based his calculations on the ‘black’ cubit (ṣūdā’, a standard measurement used during the ‘Abbāsid period; it corresponds to slightly more than half a meter. 66 This added piece of information enables us to reconstruct with precision Sallām’s account of the wall’s dimensions, thus offering an architectural blueprint in which every detail is accounted for, bringing the magnificence of the design into full relief. The description outlines a massive structure whose dimensions appear to present a coherent picture. It stretches over eighty meters (266 feet) between the mountain pass, rising more than sixty-five meters (213 feet) into the air, with each doorpost extending twenty-seven meters high (87 feet). The key itself is a formidable object at eighty-one centimeters (32 inches).

Inquiring as to whether the locals had ever seen Gog and Magog, Sallām hears that on occasion they had reached the top of the wall only to be helplessly blown back down by a providential black wind. Sallām learns that Gog and Magog do not measure more than a cubit and a half, underscoring a subhuman alterity. Their minuscule stature stands in stark juxtaposition to the colossal size of the barrier. Eager to uncover the condition of the edifice itself, Sallām asks if the gate has suffered any harm:

They said, “Nothing has ever occurred except for this crack (ṣhaqq).”

The crack was the width of a thin thread.

I then replied, “Are you nervous at all about [this crack]?”

They responded, “No. For this gate is five cubits wide using the Alexandrian cubit.” This cubit measures a cubit and a half according to the black cubit. Each cubit was the length of Alexander’s forearm. Sallām stated: I drew close and I took out from my leggings a knife and I scraped the spot of the crack, and there broke off a piece the size of half a dirham. So I packed it securely into a cloth in order to show it to al-Wāṭhīq bīllāh. 65

As Sallām peers into this thin fissure, he edges nearer the great frontier of existence, between the ordered world of daily events and the eschatological expanse of the final destruction. As with Shahbārāz’s envoy and Mū‘āwiya’s mission to the wall, Sallām also takes back with him a testament of his journey, in the form of this small chip of iron, a token from the seemingly impregnable rampart, which, one day, too must fall.

With the passing mention of the conversion of the ‘Alexandrian’ cubit to the ‘black’ cubit, the narrative explicitly draws attention to Alexander the Great, the epic hero identified in early Qur’ānic exegetical traditions with the figure of Dhū l-Qarnayn. The cubit, fixed to the length of a forearm (dhīrā’), suggests the relativity of measuring, dependent upon the body as the frame of reference. Alexander’s arm stands as the rubric for every detail of the structure, which in each corner and turn corresponds to the physical size of the hero, a point also suggested in Ibn al-Munādī’s account.

Moving beyond the traditions that fix the building of the wall in some remote moment of history, Sallām stands before a living community of caretakers who man the fortifications. According to the Bodleian recension, a guardian (ra‘īs) rides in every Friday with a group of knights each bearing an iron mallet (mirzamba, Persian) in order to inspect the wall. 67 The choice of Friday, the day of the congregational prayer, further sets this ritualized praxis within a larger religious symbolism. During the day, the guardian strikes the bolt of the gate, once in the morning, once at noon, and again at the start of the afternoon. Each time he strikes the wall, he...
puts his ear to the gate, listening to Gog and Magog clamor on the other side like a nest of hornets. At sunset, the guardian raps the bolt one last time, in order that Gog and Magog may hear and understand that on the other side there are guards watching over the gate. From this elaborate ritual set to protect humankind, we learn that no damage has befallen the gate, and that though Gog and Magog clamor to escape, they have never been able to damage the wall.

While the Vienna recension relates a similar account, it places the ritual of inspecting the wall on every Monday and Thursday. This falls on the days of the supererogatory fast (ṣawm al-taṭawwūr), which, according to a hadith of the Prophet, are when human actions are presented to God.68 Furthermore, the choice of these two days parallels ‘Abbasid ceremonial in Sāmarrā’, where the caliph held open sessions on Mondays and Thursdays in the great public audience chamber (dār al-‘āmma). Here the caliph would address visitors and supplicants, make rulings and dispense justice, often in a spectacle of public punishment through a performance meant to echo divine judgment and arbitration.69 The similarities between the ceremonial practices before the wall and those of the caliphal palace are further highlighted in the Vienna recension, which explicitly likens the inheritance of the guardianship over the barrier evokes the inheritance of the post of overseer from generation to generation to the way in which the caliphs inherit the caliphathe from each other.

The description of the caretakers who guard over the barrier in ritualized processes suggests not only a military order, but also a religious obligation poised on the precipice of the apocalypse. By commanding the fortifications with key in hand, the guardians manage the inviolate gates. In the Vienna manuscript, the inheritance of the guardianship over the barrier evokes the succession of the caliphe. The ‘Abbasid caliphs, through their descent from ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Mutta‘il (d. ca 32/653), the uncle of the Prophet, had special ancestral rights to the guardianship of the sanctuary in Mecca. After the conquest of the city, the Prophet is to have bestowed upon ‘Abbās custodianship of the siqāya, a hereditary right of giving drink to pilgrims.70

This right itself is connected to the providential dream that led ‘Abbās’ father, ‘Abd al-Mutta‘il, in the previous generation, to discover the long hidden Zamzam spring; a discovery which further strengthened ‘Abbasid hereditary claims over the sanctuary and the ritual performance of the pilgrimage rite (hajj).71

As the Masālik itself highlights, control of the shrines at Mecca and Medina was directly tied to caliphal legitimacy.72 The importance of Mecca for the early ‘Abbasid caliphs is further expressed in the architectural refashioning of the sanctuary complex undertaken by al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85).73 Al-Wāthiq, too, joined in this symbolic articulation of religious authority with renovations of the sacred mosque (al-masjid al-hāram) and by rebuilding the siqāya enclosure next to the Zamzam well, an edifice connected to ritual libations and symbolically associated with ‘Abbāsid rule.74 As ex officio guardians of the sanctuary, the caliphs appointed the leader of the pilgrimage and the governor of Mecca; many caliphs performed pilgrimages to the sanctuary. The practice of leaving offerings at the Ka‘ba, often associated with military conquest and the spread of Islam, is a further feature of ‘Abbāsid ceremonial.75 Al-Ma‘mūn sent rare jewels to adorn the Ka‘ba on an annual basis, just as al-Mu’tasim gifted a precious lock, highlighting his role as legitimate guardian of the sanctuary.76 The keys of the Ka‘ba themselves became a feature of caliphal investiture.77

The connection between the Ka‘ba and the wall of Gog and Magog is further expressed in the ekphrastic traditions of measuring the Meccan sanctuary. The mathematical specificity of the barrier’s dimensions echoes the descriptions of sacred sites characteristic of Near Eastern temple registers, such as the description of the Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel 40:5–42:20.78 As with the measurement of the wall, mathematical descriptions of the holy sites of Mecca are a fully developed feature in ‘Abbāsid letters.79 The sanctuary and the wall represent the arc of Islamic civilization, both are under the guardianship of ‘Abbāsid control and both are connected to the eschatological unfolding of the end of time.80 Just as Gog and Magog will ultimately destroy Dhī ‘l-Qarnayn’s barrier, according to several prophetic hadith, so, too, will the Ka‘ba be leveled by a foreign army, in a kind of apocalyptic symmetry of portentous destruction.81 The link between these two structures is accentuated in accounts that circulated in the early ‘Abbāsid period; these describe how Dhī ‘l-Qarnayn, the architect of the ominous barrier, undertook a pilgrimage to the Ka‘ba on his course to conquer the world.82

Linguistic Cacophony

Sallām’s last spectacular act of translation turns to one particular feature of the wall: the inscription in iron, written high above the right doorpost, in what Sallām calls the first language (bi‘l-lisān ‘l-awwal). He translates this ancient inscription into Arabic, which corresponds, word for word, to the Qur‘ānic verse that concludes the account of the barrier:
When the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will flatten [the rampart], the promise of my Lord is true (18:98).

As with the Qur’ānic episode, prophecy figures centrally in the Syriac traditions of imagining the wall, where Alexander is pictured having left an inscription, predicting the end of the world. A consistent feature in the Arabic treatment of the Alexander cycle is the convention of describing Alexander’s prophecy and dating the advent of the world’s demise. In the Arabic Romance cycle, Dhū‘l-Qarnayn begins a prophetic speech quoting this very Qur’ānic verse, which concludes the account of the barrier. In turn, Dhū‘l-Qarnayn’s words serve as a gloss to the Qur’ānic passage, as the prophecy signifies the final act of the wall’s construction, while simultaneously gesturing toward its destruction. This is a widely accepted reading in exegetical circles, where the verse is understood to correspond to what Dhū‘l-Qarnayn proclaimed upon completing the wall. What makes Sallām’s account unique is his discovery of Dhū‘l-Qarnayn’s words written in the first language, engraved on the wall.

By evoking this original language, the narrative engages with a long tradition of imagining an idyllic time of unity when all humankind spoke in one tongue with perfect, mutual understanding, before the advent of linguistic fragmentation and cacophonous discord. The destruction of the tower of Babel signifies the instance when the one tongue divides into many. The Qur’ānic motif in Rabbinic midrashim signifies for Muslim writers the birth of the city was called Babel because of this etiological link to the verb tabalbalat alsunu ‘l-nis). Tabari claims that Sallām means suryāniyya when he describes this inscription written on the wall. What remains clear is that by mentioning the first language of humankind, Sallām evokes an ancient and remote script placed in some primeval landscape, before the unity of language was divided. This foundational articulation of scripture thus attests to the great antiquity of the barrier. As Sallām translates Dhū‘l-Qarnayn’s inscription into Arabic, he confirms the Qur’ānic prophecy while affirming the efficacy of translation. For these words, written in this ancient script, represent the very verse that centuries later would be revealed to Muhammad in Arabic.

The exact nature of the speech (kalām) of God was a pressing issue during the time in which Sallām made his journey to the wall. Al-Wāthiq is said to have brutally continued the inquisition (mihna) instating the Mu’tazila doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān. The theory of the created Qur’ān held that speech presupposes both articulation and movement, and thus would contradict the divine immutable nature attributed to God. The Mu’tazila argued that the speech of God was, rather, created in the articulations of prophets, and through the pages on which revelation was inscribed. This theory served as the official doctrine of the ‘Abbasid court during the reigns of al-Ma’mūn, al-Mu’tasim, and al-Wāthiq, and was used as a justification to strengthen the power of the caliphate as a source of religious authority. Tabari records a letter ascribed to the caliph al-Ma’mūn, in which he bolstered his case for the establishment of the doctrine. Quoting the Qur’ānic verse, “We have made it an Arabic recitation” (Q. 43:3), al-Ma’mūn argued that everything God has made (ja’ala), He has created (khalqa). This argument held the Arabic nature of the Qur’ān to be an indication of its createdness, as it was revealed through the temporal and contingent vehicle of language. Similarly, one could imagine that the prophetic inscription of Dhū‘l-Qarnayn is recorded through the temporal medium of an ancient language. Perhaps, for the theologically minded and for the purposes of state propaganda, Sallām’s translation of words written in the first language, which correspond directly to the Qur’ān itself, might have suggested that the revelation was created through a temporal linguistic vehicle. However, the idea that the ‘Abbasid regime could put to use this dimension of Sallām’s story for political or theological ends is questionable, considering how far removed the adventure is from the explicit theological debates concerning the createdness of the Qur’ān. While the eternality of revelation may well not be implicated here, the Qur’ān itself serves as the gravitational center for the entire adventure. Both the Qur’ānic inscription on the barrier and the community of Qur’ān-reciting
Muslim converts before the wall highlight the centrality of scripture in the definition of territory and community.

Irrespective of the implications for language and revelation that this ancient inscription might evoke, Sallâm's adventure is consistently framed by a course of concrete pragmatism. The envoy acquires warm clothes, supplies, ready hard cash, diplomatic letters that allow free movement from kingdom to kingdom, guides who serve as go-betweens, and uses standard measurements that account for it all. In his detail of the prophetic inscription, he mentions how this was written in the first language of man, as it would be hard to suggest that Dhū 'l-Qarnayn would have written these words in Arabic, considering the antiquity of the barrier. All these details are in dialogue with the universe of actualization and causality, in which signs are enveloped in an *ordo rerum*, in the semiotics of existence.

Despite this ordered chain of signs and significations, the mention of the first language—evoking the ancient linguistic unity before fragmentation—distances Sallâm's narrative from earlier traditions of imagining the wall and from the concomitant anxieties which bespeak its construction. The variance of languages around the world serves as an established convention in the many reenactments. The *Nesḥànâ* foregrounds this anxiety when Alexander inquires about the people of Gog and Magog, "what do they look like (*demwâthòn*), what are their tongues (*leshshûnayhôn*) and what are their clothes (*lbûshayhôn*)?"

The Qur'anic treatment of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's mission to confine Gog and Magog highlights the issue of communication and linguistic diversity; before reaching the land of these savage tribes, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn faces difficulties in communicating with the people who beseech his help against Gog and Magog:

"أَنْبِئُ هُمْ بِلِكَ بَيْنَ الْسَّلِيمِينَ وَحْدَ مِنْ تَوْبَةٍ قَوْمًا لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ

Until he reached two mountains, and found at their base a people who could hardly understand a word. (Q. 18:93)"

Several exegetes locate a translator (*mutarjim*) at the scene who aids this community in their dialogue with Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, highlighting how central the problem of communication is to the narrative logic of the Qur'anic passage. The question of comprehending the nations of the world stands as a central motif to the prophetic tales on the life of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. As outlined in Ibn Hishâm's *Kitâb al-tijân*, Wahb b. Munabbih describes how God sent Dhū 'l-Qarnayn around the world to call the various nations to the true faith. To enable this, God gave Dhū 'l-Qarnayn the power to speak in every language of the world. This added dimension is further highlighted in Tâbarî's transmission of Wahb b. Munabbih's account, which strongly echoes the trope of the reluctant prophet, established in the paradigm of Moses' hesitation when called to undertake his prophetic mission (Exodus 3:11–21; 4:11–14). Addressed directly by God, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn is commanded to convert the unbelieving nations of the world, all of whom speak different languages. When he hears this, he asks how he could possibly complete such a task:

"You have described to me, O Lord!, a great thing. There is no one capable of such an affair but You. So tell me about these nations to whom You have sent me. With what strength am I to overpower them? With what group am I to outnumber them? With what ruse will I plan a stratagem against them? With what endurance will I stand strong against them? With what language will I speak to them, and how will I understand their words, with what ear will I be able to hear their speech?"

God replies that He will expand Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's mind to deepen his understanding, "I will stretch out your tongue so that you may utter everything. I will open up your ear so you can hear everything." Granted super-human abilities, with the power of tongues and with light and darkness under his command, Dhū 'l-Qarnayn conquers nations of varying customs and languages with darkness, and then, with light, he calls them to the one true faith. Only Gog and Magog remain beyond his reach.

After the episode of the wall, in Wahb's account, the narrative turns toward a remote, utopian society that knows no crime. This community, we are told, is not in need of judges, upholds the laws of God, and has neither rich nor poor. Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, amazed by these people, asks them a series of questions. The version of Wahb's tale as recorded by Ibn Hishâm places this mysterious group of people in India and refers to them as the *tarjumâniyyûn*, the translators. The etiological justification given for their name is that they had translated the revealed scrolls (*suḥûf*) of Abraham into their own language, and they agreed to follow the precepts contained in these works.
There is a striking similarity between this story of the translators of India and the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle. Both the Greek and Syriac traditions outline a series of philosophical questions and answers between Alexander and the sagacious Brahmans of India (brāhmaṇa, βραχμάων, brahmāṇe). Starting with the Greek redaction, the Brahmans are cast in an idealized light, representing the apogee of wisdom. They walk around naked and are totally disengaged from the material trappings of this world. Wahb’s treatment of the Indians and Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn directly parallels the Pseudo-Callisthenes episode of Alexander and the Brahmans. Through a process of mistranslation and transposition, the word for Brahman (ब्रह्म or brahman) was transformed into the word Tarjumān (ترجمان), suggesting primarily a textual line of transmission.

The anxieties over linguistic diversity inflected in the accounts of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn play out metatextually in their own dissemination. As Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn crosses the mutually incomprehensible speech of the world, Brahmans transform into translators, and the chain of transmission takes the adventure in often unexpected directions. These continuations transform across time and space, so that centuries later the tarjumāniyyīn appear in a version of the life of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn translated into aljamiado, i.e., Spanish written in the Arabic script.

Sallām’s mention of the primal language sidesteps altogether the linguistic anxieties so palpable in the various narrative approaches to Alexander. Sallām does not need to engage in a past world of linguistic cacophony, for he inhabits one. Just as the narratives that cycle through the adventures of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn accentuate the interrelation between geography and language, so, too, does Sallām move through various linguistic fields to make his way to the promise of the Lord, of the day when the pitched cacophony will stop. The wall signifies the destruction that awaits the nations of the earth and stands as a reminder of the greater promise of everlasting paradise, where such linguistic veils of difference will be dissolved.

Re-entries

From the wall—at the crossroads of scripture and geography—Sallām makes his way back into the world of fixed coordinates. Leaving behind the well-imagined fields of terra incognita, he is led by his guides into the region of Khurāsān, having disappeared off the map somewhere beyond the Caspian Sea. As with the journey through the Caucasus, Sallām gives an outline of his itinerary through Transoxiana (mā warā al-nahr). It is of note that many details of his return journey are not included in the Bodleian manuscript, or the later reception history as preserved in the successive Arabic and Persian recensions of the adventure, which give a streamlined account of Sallām’s re-entry into the orbit of ‘Abbāsid dominion. According to the Bodleian version, guides lead the expedition back to the region of Khurāsān until reaching Samarqand. They stay with the famous ‘Abbāsid governor of Khurāsān, ʿAbd Allāh b. Tāhir (d. 230/844), before returning to the caliphal capital of Sāmarra.

While the Vienna recension gives much more detail, it also raises several problems. Foremost, parts of the sections in question are illegible in the manuscript, which has been emended in the process of its medieval restoration. Based on this account, the party first make their way to a ruler (malik), who appears to be named al-Lub, al-Labb, or some variant thereof. Then they set off toward another ruler, whose name is partly illegible and left without vowel or consonant markers. De Goeje, in his edition, offers Tabānīyan as a reading, however, this is conjecture, as the name is unknown to other sources. The expedition remained several days with this ruler, who is said to have served as the head tax collector of the region (sāhib al-kharāj). Eight months after leaving the wall, they finally reach Samarqand, whereupon they head to the city of Isbijāb and then cross the Oxus River at Balkh, then onto Ushrūsana, followed by Bukhārā, Tirmidh, and then finally Nisābūr (map 3).

Though the names of these two rulers remain obscure, the toponyms mentioned correspond perfectly with the region described; all are well-known place names appearing in Arabic and Persian geographies. Yet, the itinerary appears to be quite erratic, as it requires the expedition to crisscross back and forth several times: from Samarqand they return to Isbijāb, from Balkh they backtrack to Ushrūsana at the western borders of Samarqand, only to cross back past Samarqand, to Bukhārā. From Bukhārā they return, back in the direction of Balkh, in order to reach Tirmidh.

As in Sallām’s itinerary through the Caucasus, the trajectory through Transoxiana is confused and suggests, rather than an actual journey, a list of famous toponyms mixed together. Sallām identifies this region as part of the administrative rule of Khurāsān, the northeastern province of the ‘Abbāsid empire. No reason is given for the erratic trajectory, nor is any suggestion made, such as we had in the Caucasus, that Sallām was directed from one ruler to the next, which could perhaps explain the several backward steps on the way home.

Even a textual error in the transmission of the narrative would not readily explain the movement of the expedition across the region. As with his journey through the Caucasus, we could speculate as to what led Sallām down this particular path. Or we could assign the inconsistencies in the
order of the toponyms to a broader issue, namely that both Transoxiana and the Caucasus were remote regions at the edge of ‘Abbasid territory, and it was enough for Sallām to mention a list of well-known place names for his tale to engage with established geographical discourse. It is also of note that there circulated within ‘Abbasid letters an account of how Alexander traveled through Transoxiana and Khurāsān after having built the wall against Gog and Magog.\textsuperscript{108} Sallām’s itinerary upon returning from the barrier thus could, itself, be meant to evoke Alexander’s travels through Central Asia.

The question of Sallām’s re-entry into the domain of the ‘Abbasid empire is complicated by a further recension of his itinerary as preserved by Idrīsī, which he explicitly states is based upon the account as preserved by Ibn Khurrahādhbih and the no longer extant redaction of the adventure by the Sāmānīd wāzīr Jayhānī.\textsuperscript{109} According to this itinerary, after leaving the wall, Sallām traveled through Barskhan and Tarāz,\textsuperscript{110} territory of the Qarluq Turks, a confederation of western Turkish groups who lived across the Central Asian steppe, between Lake Balkhash and Lake Issyk-Kol, in the Seven Rivers region of modern-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.\textsuperscript{111} Based on this recension, Sallām traveled on from Tarāz to Samarqand. According to Idrīsī, the region located north beyond the Qarluq Turks was laid to waste by Gog and Magog before Alexander had erected the wall. Idrīsī admits, however, drawing from the direct experience of a Turkish informant, that during his own day these lands, once destroyed, had been re-inhabited.\textsuperscript{112}

Idrīsī’s recension would thus situate the wall beyond the Qarluq, bordering the Adhkish Turks, who appear to have been located in the region of the Altai Mountains of Mongolia.\textsuperscript{113} Yet, even this itinerary, which Idrīsī plots through the toponyms of his world map, leaves much ambiguity in terms of exactly where Sallām entered into the Qarluq territory.\textsuperscript{114}

It is noteworthy that Idrīsī’s trajectory most explicitly engages with the heartland of what was the Uyghur Khanate (744–840 C.E.) in the Orkhon Valley of Mongolia, which had been the seat of an imperial power until it was overrun in 840 C.E. by Qirghiz Turks.\textsuperscript{115} The Uyghurs, known to Arabic and Persian sources of the period as the Tughuzghuz, represented a powerful imperial force beyond the ‘Abbasid frontiers.\textsuperscript{116} The collapse of the Uyghur Khanate precipitated a significant shift in the geopolitics of the day. It could well be the case that al-Wāthiq’s dream in 227/842 of Gog and Magog, long identified with Turks, offers an eschatological projection of the political disturbances in the Central Asian steppe.

While the three major variants, expressed in the Bodleian and Vienna manuscripts and Idrīsī’s account of the adventure, detail radically different
trajectories for Sallām's re-entry into the 'Abbāsid empire, they all follow him through the region of Transoxiana and Khurāsān. Sallām journeys past the Caspian on his outward journey to return on the eastern side of the Aral Sea. Traveling through Transoxiana, the adventure skirts along the northeastern frontier of 'Abbāsid dominion, through regions that were very much present in the 'Abbāsid political imagination. It is in Samarqand that al-Wāthiq's father, al-Mu'tāsim, had begun acquiring the Turkish slaves who later came to serve an important function in the military composition of the caliphal capital of Sāmarra'.

During this period, the caliphate in Sāmarra was politically intertwined with the region in the form of the Sogdian and Turkish guard, who played a central role in governing and protecting the empire. The established trade routes of goods and slaves from the Central Asian steppe into the 'Abbāsid heartland was facilitated by economic networks of Sogdian merchants whose itineraries, centuries old, stretched across Central Asia and the western frontiers of China. However obliquely, all three of the major recensions suggest historical interconnections between the 'Abbāsids and the lands beyond Transoxiana, suggesting, but never fully delineating, a broader political and economic backdrop to the adventure.

Even more pressing to the historical reality is Sallām's mention of the casualties suffered over the course of the journey. While traveling to the rampart, twenty-two men perished, all of whom were buried along the way. On the return from the wall, another fourteen died, leaving Sallām, from the original group of fifty who began the expedition, with only fourteen. We learn also that of the two hundred mules that started the journey, three-quarters had died over the long distances over challenging terrain comes to the fore in this passing mention that the majority of the expedition perished. The journey is framed as a religious mission across a sacred geography, a point suggested with the mention that all the men who died were buried in their clothes. This is a direct reference to the practice of burying martyrs in the garments they wore when they died, to serve as proof on the Day of Judgment of their martyrdom.

Bringing the narrative ever closer to the historical contingencies of the period, Sallām details how they reached 'Abd Allāh b. Tāhir, governor of Khurāsān. Just as the historical figure of Ashīnas, the Turkish general in al-Wāthiq's retinue, frames the opening of the tale, so, too, does 'Abd Allāh b. Tāhir signify a full return to the established world of 'Abbāsid politics. Poet, statesman, and forefather of the Tāhirid dynasty of Khurāsān, 'Abd Allāh b. Tāhir is a famous figure in the political history of the 'Abbāsid state. We are told that he granted everyone in the expedition a lofty sum, for which Sallām gives an exacting account.

This reference helps situate the narrative in historical space, for Sallām must have met 'Abd Allāh b. Tāhir before he died on 11 Rabi' al-Awwal 230/26 November 844. Sallām explains that, from the time he left Sāmarra to the day he returned, over twenty-eight months had passed—sixteen months to reach the wall, twelve months and some days to return. This permits us a terminus post quem for the start of the expedition as having occurred during the first nine months of al-Wāthiq's reign, between Rabi' al-Awwal and Dhū 'l-Qa'da of 227 January and August of 842.

The details that frame the narrative, the dates recorded, the historical figures met, the places crossed, the sums of money given, the provisions made, the numerous deaths along the way, are all in dialogue with an external world that is used to support the veracity of the expedition. Just as Sallām's description of the rampart engages with this enveloping discourse, so, too, the framing elements that lead toward and away from the wall, the cities crossed and the people met, suggest a world fully actualized.

The inconsistencies of the irregular routes traveled through the Caucasus and Transoxiana would be hard to detect without a firm understanding of these two regions on the edge of the 'Abbāsid empire. The variants in the different recensions suggest a real confusion and even disagreement as to where exactly Sallām traveled. However, the details maintained throughout Sallām's adventure appear to bring together a narrative consistent with the pragmatic necessities required by such an undertaking. This is the ultimate aim of the tale, for its value lies in the claim that this expedition not only took place, but that it succeeded in reaching the wall, thereby serving as the ultimate gloss on the Qur'ānic passage. For those who survived its perils, the expedition paid off. At the caliphal reception in Sāmarra, when al-Wāthiq saw the chip of iron that Sallām had taken from the wall and heard the tale (qiṣṣa) of the expedition, he praised God, ordered that alms (ṣadaqa) be distributed, and granted all those who returned generous sums of money.

Here the anecdote to the wall ends, as Ibn Khurradadhbih relates that Sallām the Interpreter narrated the account in its entirety directly to him. Sallām confirmed his transmission of the adventure with the formal report (kitāb), which he had written outlining the events for al-Wāthiq. The narrative thus has the authority of both oral and textual transmission. This suggests, through the immediacy of presence, that Sallām, in direct contact with Ibn Khurradadhbih, would have had the opportunity to correct any errors or mistakes in the transmission of the report. It is from this account,
preserved first in Ibn Khurraḍàdhbih’s geography, that later generations of writers have come to imagine al-Wáṭīq’s mission. Despite these textual guarantees, the question of the truth claims made consistently throughout the narrative surfaces as a major issue for successive generations who seek out the location of the wall.

SECTION THREE
BEYOND THE WALL
Storytelling

At the opening of the mission, al-Wathiq seeks a report (khabar) on the condition of the wall. While the word khabar has the sense of a factual testimony, it also carries the meaning of a story or anecdote. As a crafted, generic form within the broader sphere of bellettristic discourse, there are several common techniques which khabar-narratives deploy to convey the impression of factuality, such as direct speech, dialogue, and ekphrastic attention to detail.¹ Idrisi, for instance, describes Sallām’s report as consisting of factual descriptions (akhbār) of the journey and the sights seen, as well as an account of the conversations (khitāb) with people he met along the way.² The dramatic character of the report, with its focus on both description and dialogue, speaks to a discrete set of discursive expectations. The framework of the khabar-narrative, with its diegetic attention to detail and emphasis on eyewitness authority, offers a window onto the past; it is designed to maintain an intrinsic truth value.³ However, as a discursive form bound to an established body of literary strategies and conventions, the khabar-narrative affirms its own authenticity, while continually flirting with the tension it produces between the factual and the fictional.⁴

According to the Vienna recension, Sallām concludes his adventure by referring to the entire account as a qiṣṣa. The respective semantic layers of both khabar and qiṣṣa shape the reception history of the adventure. As for qiṣṣa, it immediately suggests an “edifying account,” in the sense that the writings on the lives of the prophets came to be known as qiṣṣā al-anbiyā’ (stories of the prophets).
Likewise, preachers who narrated sermons based on edifying tales would be called, from the same etymological root, *qiṣṣās*. Though the noun *qiṣṣa* never appears in the Qurʾān, the word *qaṣaṣ* does, signifying something close to narrative, explanation, or story, as in Q. 12:3, where God informs Muḥammad, from the same etymological root, *alaykum*.

The inclusion of the narrative within the succeeding generation of ʿAbbāsid geographies suggests not only the popularity of the anecdote, but also the way in which geographical discourse developed through the adaptation and incorporation of previous authorities. This wide transmission speaks to the authoritative position that the anecdote enjoyed in the discursive fashioning of geographic space, marking out the extent to which later geographical writing drew upon previous generations, reconfiguring older sources into new discursive molds. Tracing the frontiers of Islam, this body of geographical writing returned to Sallām’s mission to map out the earth’s end. From climatic models to alphabetized dictionaries, the wall against Gog and Magog and the journey to it is recontextualized with new meaning in each telling.

Notably absent from this early reception is Ibn Ḥawqāl’s Sāmānid geography, which directly incorporated the writings of Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934) and Iṣṭakhrī. Ibn Ḥawqāl, who traveled extensively in the course of compiling his geography, drew widely from his own direct empirical observation. For his treatment of Gog and Magog, he incorporates an anecdote that he received from a Sāmānid chamberlain. Like Ibn Khurradadhbih’s description, Ibn Ḥawqāl’s account of Gog and Magog highlights the role of the state in the knowledge and maintenance of frontiers.

This desire for empirical evidence based upon eyewitness accounts shapes the way Muqaddasi introduces his geography. Yet even Muqaddasi, who prided himself on firsthand experience, relates Sallām’s tale as copied from authoritative sources. His justification for incorporating such material is quite revealing:

Whenever it was necessary that I myself should go to a place and make inquiries there, I did so; whatever I found unsatisfactory, that my reasoning would not accept, I have ascribed to the person who related it, or I have simply written, “it has been asserted.” I have supplemented my work, too, with materials I came across in the royal archives... The scope of [geography] is, in our opinion, so wide that we need not repeat, copy from a book, or purloin the work of another, except where the nature of the matter compels, or some...
difficulty makes such action imperative. This is what we have done
in the account... of [Dhū 'l-Qarnayn’s] wall.22

Beyond his own reach, Muqaddasī mentions how he read (qara tu) from
the work of Ibn Khurradadhbih and others the account of the barrier
(qissat al-sadd). He relates that the geographical authorities on this issue
agree (alā nasaqin wāhidin), and that the subsequent transmission (isnād)
of this anecdote is based solely on Ibn Khurradadhbih, who, according to
Muqaddasī, had access to the caliphal library.23 In his
of this anecdote is based solely on Ibn Khurradadhbih, who, accordmg
stresses the authority of state archives and
estimating, Ibn Khurradadhbih’s proximity to the caliphal
The early transmission of the account across a
‘Abbasid
writings is reflected by the
treatise for determining the direction of prayer, popular among
Muslim travelers.24 Mixing mathematical geography with
Byzantines, and Arabs, Ibn
narratives and studies on the calendric systems of Iranians, Indians,
Mog, and the
range of
section
of religious learning
which he locates as seventy-two days past the Khazars. For his descriptiOn
of the Ka’ba, that Ibn
he draws on the account of
of the treatise this account serves as a means of demarcating the
of scripture within the expanse of geography. Ibn
who, according to ‘Abd al-Karîm al-Sam’ānî (d. 562/1166), was so named because of his
penchant for relating prophetic tales (qisas),28 offers a direct transmission
for the account, ‘Ibrāhîm b. ‘Ali related to me (hadathani) that he read
Khurradadh bih, who said, ‘Sallām al-Tarjumān related to me...’29 The
oral and written lines of transmission (isnād) serve as formal conventions in
hadith scholarship, exegetical and juridical discourses, and a host of other
belletristic writings of the period. The isnād represents an idealized process
through which knowledge was transmitted in early Islamic intellectual
history. Ibn al-Qâṣṣ’s description imagines a written form of the geography
in the course of the transmission, adumbrating the process of learning,
by which students studied directly under an author or transmitter in a
routinized and idealized communicative performance.30 This pattern of
dissemination points to a broad social and intellectual network, reflected
in the other transmitters of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s work, such as Abū ‘Ali ‘l-Kawkabi ‘l-Kâtib (d. 327/939) and Abū ‘Abd Allâh al-Kâtib al-Ḥakîmî (d. 336/948), both of whom were connected to the secretariat in Baghdad.31

Such a structure of transmission, in which teachers would read to
students, often from informal lecture notes and personal copies, akin to
the hypomnemata of classical antiquity,32 underscores the opportunity
for a multiplicity of redactions that often evolved over time. As for Ibn
Khurradadhbih’s geography, it is evident, based upon the codicological
evidence, that a good deal of the material was reworked and updated
during a process of what was most likely multiple stages of composition,
redaction, and publication (appendix 1; fig. 3). The case of Sallām’s story
bears witness to this, as the manuscript copies of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s
geography preserve significantly different accounts, and the reception of the
adventure suggests noticeable variations in the amount of distance covered,
the exact itinerary of the journey, and the size of the barrier itself. Thus, for
instance, the Vienna recension records dimensions for the barrier which
appear to be mathematically impossible. Here the door panels, measured
at seventy-five cubits, rise above the door frame, which is measured at only
fifty cubits, such that the total length of the gate, at one hundred and fifty
cubits, fails to block the width of the entire pass, at two hundred cubits.35

Even structurally, the two major recensions of the Masâlik place the
wall in very different locations of the text. In Bodleian MS Hunt 433, the
adventure appears directly after an account of the Khazars (appendix 3),
while in Vienna MS Mixt. 783, the wall is subsumed under a broader rubric
on the wondrous buildings of the world (appendix 2).34 Thus, within the
manuscript tradition itself, the location of the wall travels, highlighting a
shifting pattern of identification and localization fully present within the
geographical projections of Gog and Magog.

While these variations may reflect distinct authorial redactions, they also
suggest a process of transformation that many geographies went through in
the course of their codicological reception. For instance, Muqaddasī, who
had access to Sâmânid royal libraries, complains that Ibn Khurradadhbih’s
geography only reached him in the form of an abridgment (*mukhtasar*).\(^{35}\) He further adds that if one were to closely examine the geography of the Samanid wazir Jayhani, it would be apparent that a large portion of it was based entirely upon Ibn Khurradadhbih.\(^{36}\) The notable abridgment of Ibn Khurradadhbih may very well speak to a cannibalization of the geography by Jayhani, whose text, according to Muqaddasi, was quite long.\(^{37}\) Muqaddasi mentions that he saw in the royal library of the Buyid ruler 'Adud al-Dawla a geography in seven volumes bearing no title but ascribed to Jayhani; it was thought, however, to have been the work of Ibn Khurradadhbih.\(^{38}\) While in Nisabur, Muqaddasi also came across two separate abridgments ascribed to Ibn Khurradadhbih and Jayhani respectively, which agreed in substance, though Jayhani’s was slightly longer.\(^{39}\)

Of the known surviving manuscripts of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography, the earliest dated copy is from 631/1232. The two major manuscripts appear to be abridged in some fashion and rearranged in distinct orders, indicating a process by which later redactors came to shape and even construct the work, perhaps based upon the readings of later geographies. For instance, Idrisi, when relating Sallam’s adventure to the wall, states that he draws on both Jayhani and Ibn Khurradadhbih for his description, which diverges in notable ways from the surviving manuscripts of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography, indicating how accretions to the text evolved through the process of dissemination (appendix 4). While it may be that Jayhani is the source for this divergence, it is also possible that Idrisi drew on the writing (*kitab*) of one of his Turkish informants who might have shaped the account of the story, so as to explicitly position Gog and Magog beyond the Adh-kish Turks.\(^{40}\)

The polysemous manuscript transmission, with all its variants, speaks to the problems of the factual and the authentic. Yaqut, in his geography, plays with this tension as he frames Sallam’s narrative in dialogue with a host of accounts, which all authoritatively promote their own truth-claims as to where the land of Gog and Magog truly lies. Yaqut simply concludes that, because of the divergences of the authorities, he is not convinced of the veracity of all that he has laid forth. It is God alone who knows the entire truth of the matter. However, as the wall is affirmed in the Qur’ān, Yaqut has no doubt concerning the actual existence of these monstrous races bottled up behind a barrier.\(^{41}\)

Descriptive geographies were often supplemented with a broader body of cartographical material. Like many geographers before him, Muqaddasi integrates a series of detailed maps into his work. In the opening to his geography, he describes how he color-coded his maps so that the geographical descriptions would be more readily perceptible, “In the maps, we have colored the well-known roads red, the golden sands yellow, the salt seas green, the well-known rivers blue, and the principal mountains in dust color.”\(^{42}\) Sallam’s journey is grafted into this cartographic system of representation. Against these spatial projections, where maps themselves function as mimetic acts of possession, Sallam’s course is translated from word into image, placed in physical space through an ocular vision that occurs as much in the mind’s eye as in the cartographical illusion.

Mas‘ūdi states that he consulted a map of the earth (*sūrat al-ard*), on which were representations of large buildings and lofty palaces, including depictions of the length of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn’s wall, an image reiterated in Islamic maps of the world.\(^{43}\) In the *mappa mundi* integral to Idrisi’s world geography, we can trace the trajectory of the journey across the margins of the east (plates 6a and 6b). Highlighting the very toponyms described in Sallam’s adventure, Idrisi leads us to the farthest northeastern corner of his map, where the land of Gog and Magog is located. Sallam’s presence is most noticeable in the case of the putrid land (*al-muntina*), which becomes a standard topographical feature in a range of cartographical projections, placed before a visual representation of the towering gate (plate 7).\(^{44}\) Sallam’s ekphrastic description translates into a cartographic world of representations, where maps project the variegated forms of being. Positioned on the frontier of the inhabited world, the land of Gog and Magog and the wall that bottles them up serve as sites of repeated interest in the visual representations of world maps (plate 8).

The broad range of historiographic discourse that draws on this story speaks to a larger phenomenon of incorporating an encyclopedic array of anecdotal material in an effort to record all of written history. Al-Wāthiq’s embassy to discover the wall became part of the historiographic record, localized as a concrete event in time. Ibn Taghribirdi (d. 874/1470), for instance, turns to the expedition as a historical detail in the life of al-Wāthiq; Dhahabi sees Sallam’s adventure as an occasion to complete information concerning the wall; for Ibn al-Jawzi the anecdote plays a part in the larger hagiographic narrative of Alexander the Great.

Most of these authors turn to al-Wāthiq’s mission as a real event and as an accurate description of the rampart. However, the debate concerning the authenticity of this story continues, despite the fact that many historians and geographers take Sallam’s account to be authoritative. This anxiety over veracity resounds in a range of material. Suspicions coalesce around two interrelated problems: 1) did Sallam al-Tarjamān truly journey...
to the wall; and 2) was what he saw indeed the barrier mentioned in the Qur'an. Questions plague the account from its first reception in 'Abbāsid geography. Ibn Rusta, in his geography Kitāb al-dā'āq al-naftsa [Book of rare ornaments], is one of the earliest voices to call into question the truth of the tale. He explains that he recorded this account exactly as it appeared in the original so that we may see the confusion (takhliṭ) and exaggeration (tazyid) contained therein, the authenticity of which cannot be accepted.55

Likewise, while Tha'alibi relies heavily on Ibn Khurradadhbih as a source for pre-Islamic material on the Persian kings, he, too, disputes Sallām's claims concerning the wall, arguing that the barrier can only be as God the Almighty has mentioned in the Qur'an:

That which Sallām al-Tarjamān relates when speaking of the wall, in regard to the gate and the door post, and in the description of the lock and the key and the teeth (dandānjāt) in the shape of pillars (ustuwanāt) is not to be relied upon, for it does not agree with what the Qur'an mentions as the description of the rampart.56

A similar critique is echoed in a marginal note in Hunt 433, the Bodleian manuscript of the Masālik, which lambastes Ibn Khurradadhbih's account of the wall as contradicting the Qur'an.57

This criticism builds upon an earlier inquiry into the actual dimensions of the wall. In addition to curiosity concerning the wall's location, early Muslim scholars took an interest in the physical appearance of Alexander's barrier. A debate evidently contemporary to Ibn Khurradadhbih took place concerning the physical size of the rampart. According to Mas'ūdi, the well-known caliphal astronomer Muhammad b. Kathīr al-Farghānī (fl. 247/861) is said to have rejected claims that the wall stretched one hundred and fifty farsaks.58 While Farghānī may have sought to prove the absurdity of such tales, in his astronomical treatise, Jawāmi' 'ilm al-nujūm [Compendium on astronomy], he does not question the actual existence of Gog and Magog, whom he locates geographically in the sixth and seventh climes.59 It is easy to imagine how such early disputes concerning the physical dimensions and location of the wall might serve as an impetus for Sallām's mission, which could then put such debates to an end.

Disagreement nonetheless continued. With serious misgivings, the polymath Birūnī questioned the various descriptions of the wall, singling out the anecdotes of Shahhrarāz and Sallām al-Tarjamān. He found both accounts unreliable. Focusing his attention on the story of al-Wāthiq's embassy, he argued that the veracity of the account is drawn into question when Sallām describes a Muslim community located at the edge of the earth and isolated from all other Muslims:

The reliability [diminishes] in the description of the residents of those regions that have begun to profess Islam and speak in Arabic despite their separation from the civilized world, and [their] location right in the middle of a putrid, black land that stretches a distance of many days [in either direction] between it and them. [A people who] do not know anything about the caliph or about the caliphate, nor who he is, nor his state. We do not know of a single Muslim community cut off from the lands of Islam, save the Bulghārs and the Sawār, and they are close to the outlying regions of the civilized world, in the extreme of the seventh clime. Furthermore, they have not mentioned anything to do with this wall, and they are not ignorant of the caliphate and the caliphs, rather they are in communication with them; nor do they speak Arabic, rather a language that is a mixture of Turkish and the language of the Khazar. Since the description of this account takes on such a shape, it is not expected that this information would lead to the disclosure of the truth. This is what I wanted to relate concerning the issue of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. God knows best about this.60

Birūnī's response underscores the fact that despite the many details woven into Sallām's narrative, the precise location of the wall he visited remained for his readers shrouded in mystery. For much of the historiographical discourse, interested merely in the fact of the journey and not the exact location of the wall, such a lacuna could be overlooked.

Needless to say, this early criticism never doubted the existence of the wall itself, but rather drew into question the authenticity of Sallām's description. For instance, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), like Tha'alibi before him, when describing the caliphal adventure, which he refers to as a long tale (hikāya tawīla), states that the true affair concerning the description of the wall is to be found in the Qur'an.61 Despite the tension over whether or not Sallām's account genuinely depicts the wall, the belief in the wall's physical existence plays a significant role in the popularization of the narrative.

The doubts concerning the story's veracity continue simultaneously with a broad acceptance of Sallām al-Tarjamān's role as a chief authority on the barrier. The overwhelming majority of writers present the 'Abbāsid adventure as a historical expedition that succeeded in reaching its goal. The authority of the account forms part of a larger discursive structuring of the world, anchored in scriptural and empirical knowledge. Ibn Ḥazm,
for example, in his doxography, uses Sallām's eyewitness testimony and the power of scriptural citations as proof of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's barrier, in a rebuttal to Jews, who, he claims, doubted its existence. 62

Sallām enters directly into the formal exegetical commentaries of the Qur'ān, aided in part by the immensely popular body of narratives dedicated to recounting the lives of the prophets (qiṣaṣ al-anbiyyāʾ). Ibn Khurradādhibbī's geographical engagements with Surat al-Kahf share in a larger practice of narrating and imagining the accounts of the People of the Cave and the wall of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. The visual traditions representing the lives of prophets draw on these two Qur'ānic scenes as standard subjects in the broad repertoire of miniature painting. 63 Writing from Nīsābūrī, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Thalābī (d. 427/1036), in his 'Arā'īs al-majālis fl ĕ qiṣaṣ al-anbiyyāʾ [Ornaments of assemblies on the tales of the prophets], showcases Sallām in order to give a description of the wall and further develop the life of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. 64 Sallām's account appears in Abū 'l-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī's Salwat al-aḥzān [Comfort in times of sorrow], 65 a homiletic work that details notable pious figures in history. Likewise, in the general history ascribed to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), which begins with biographical entries on the prophets, Sallām serves as the primary source for the story of the wall, described under the rubric of curious or strange tales (al-hikāyāt al-gharība). 66 Similarly, the Delhi Sultanate historian Minhāj al-Dīn Jāzzānī (fl. 658/1260) includes Sallām's adventure in his universal history, which he drew upon from a collection of stories (qiṣaṣ) on the adventures of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn. 67 The anecdote became such a fixture in hagiographic writings that the tale made its way into Khwārazmī Turkish, translated into the Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyyāʾ of Nāṣīr al-Dīn al-Rāghūzī (d. after 710/1310), as an authoritative testament to the barrier against the monstrous races. 68

In the field of Qur'ānic hermeneutics, the Ash'ārī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in his major commentary of the Qur'ān, situates the wall in the farthest region of the north (aqṣā ʿl-shamāl), at the end of the inhabited earth, as established in books of history (kutub al-tawāriikh). Referencing the account of Shahrbārāz's envoy to the wall beyond the Khazar, related by Ṭabarī, Rāzī describes al-Wāthiq's mission, and quotes Ibn Khurradādhibbī's geography as further evidence for the northern location of the barrier. This is juxtaposed with the opinion of Būrūnī, who, according to Rāzī, situated the wall in the northwestern quarter of the earth. 69 Nīẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 730/1330) in his commentary, quotes Rāzī's account of the mission and Būrūnī's opinion, 70 in a broader demonstration of how the life of Alexander was itself a paradigm for exploration and learning. For Nīsābūrī, Alexander's relationship with Aristotle offers a divine confirmation of the legitimacy of philosophical inquiry. 71

The Damascene scholar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who details al-Wāthiq's mission in his world history, also draws upon it in his Qur'ānic commentary. 72 As a genre, Qur'ānic exegesis has tended toward conservatism in terms of privileging accounts based upon the sayings of the Prophet, early Companions, and established juridical and philological authorities. However, by the time the scholar Burhān al-Dīn al-Bīqāʾī (d. 885/1480), renowned for his use of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels to interpret the Qur'ān, referred to the authority of al-Wāthiq's mission, the account itself had long been marshaled forth into the formalized body of exegetical writing as a historical testament to the existence of the wall. 73

Given Sallām's ability to travel through such diverse fields of scholarship, it comes as little surprise that he also makes his way into scientific cosmographical writings on the wonders of creation (ajāʾīb al-makhliqāt). As a genre, this encyclopedic body of literature focuses on natural history, in its broadest sense, as unified under the rubric of wonder and curiosity. The practice of tying exotic narratives together with the authority of scientific investigation has a long history. 74

Arabic and Persian writings on the marvels of the world emerge as part of a broader cosmological field of inquiry that perceives, in all of creation, from the beehive to the orbit of the planets, the greater design of God's grandeur. Muhammad b. Mahmūd al-Tūsī (fl. 555/1160), author of one of the first Persian cosmographies of marvels, writes that the aim of human life is to contemplate the marvels of creation and thus come to know God; a motif that had already been fully articulated in the early formulations of Islamic theodicy on divine design and order. 75 The wonder of the tale itself is enhanced by the ocular proof that is the basis of Sallām's description. The anonymous Persian collection of historical anecdotes, the Mujmal al-tawāriikh wa ʿl-qiṣas, includes Sallām's account as part of the wonders of the world, and concludes that there is no other description of the rampart as detailed as this one, for Sallām actually sees the wall. 76

Since writings on the wonders of creation, like descriptive geography, often recycle a set corpus of material, the question of organization and arrangement was often one of the primary means of setting a work apart from its predecessors. Thus within this field we find the adventure to the wall continually re-situated and re-contextualized. Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī (d. 565/1169–70) draws on the anecdote for his description of marvelous buildings in his Tuḥfat al-albāb [Gift to the intellects]. 77 Tūsī, in his ʿAjāʾīb-nāma, incorporates Sallām's journey to the wall of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn and
orders it into an alphabetized list of wonders that span the regions of the earth.\textsuperscript{78} Also prominent is the tradition of quoting Sallām’s anecdote as part of topographical lists of wonders lurking in the various geographical climes of the world, as is the case with Ibn al-Wardī (d. 861/1457) in his \textit{Kharidat al-aqā’īb} [The pearl of marvels].\textsuperscript{79} Through each telling, the story is transformed, often abridged, reduced to its bare elements; indeed Sallām may be given a different name or disappear entirely.\textsuperscript{80}

Yet beyond such truncations, there are also traditions that develop and expand Sallām’s journey. Through the material that survives we are able to catch a glimpse of how, somewhere in the dissemination of the tale, other wondrous accounts were appended to the name of Sallām, the ‘Abbāsīd interpreter. It is in Qazwīni’s book of wonders that Sallām’s evolution as the standard-bearer of the marvelous is most prominent.

In a section treating the strange islands and marvelous creatures of the oceans, Qazwīni tells how al-Wāthiq’s ambassador visited the Caspian Sea.\textsuperscript{81} Here Sallām describes an island inhabited with only herds of sheep. Their number was so great that there was no place on the island to escape from them. When ships arrived, the crews would catch as many fat ewes and rams as they wished. Sallām goes on to relate, “Except for these sheep, I did not see any other animals on this island. The island has springs and grass and numerous trees. Praise be to Him whose blessings are innumerable!”\textsuperscript{82} The account of the Island of Sheep can be found in earlier Arabic geographies, with antecedents in classical antiquity.\textsuperscript{83} This tale, nowhere to be found in the account of al-Wāthiq’s mission as known in Ibn Khurradadhbih, was presumably associated with Sallām because of his status as a well-known traveler in the region.

In the same section, Qazwīni mentions another account ascribed to our intrepid adventurer. After referencing the standard introduction to Sallām’s adventure to the wall, Qazwīni immediately digresses to a further account of marvelous phenomena. In contrast to Ibn Khurradadhbih’s description, in which Sallām remained with the king of Khazar for only a day and a night,\textsuperscript{84} Qazwīni relates that Sallām stayed for a period of five days:

While with [the king] I saw an amazing thing (\textit{amr ‘ajīb}): [the Khazar] had caught a fish of great size, they pierced its ear and wove cords through it and then they pulled the cords tight such that the ear of the fish split open. From inside the fish emerged a maidservant of reddish-white complexion, long hair, and a beautiful form. They took her and brought her to the land. She would hit her face, pull out her hair, and scream. God had created over her midriff a white film, like thick clothing that ran from her navel to her knees, as though it were a tightly woven loincloth. They held on to her until she died among them.\textsuperscript{85}

In the illuminated manuscript tradition this account of the maidservant emerging from the body of a fish appears as a site of recurrent interest (plate 9).

Fusing the beautiful and the bestial, the image of an attractive woman taken from the belly of a giant fish borders on the grotesque. The description of how she bears her hair and screams, along with her death in the hands of her captors, adds a distinctly graphic element to the story, as does the initial splitting open of the fish to pull forth the maidservant. This account bears the hallmark of a first-person testimony, and is presented as an authoritative description of a strange occurrence that takes place at the margins of the world, in the remote land of the Khazar.

Although by the time Qazwīni recorded this anecdote the Khazar dynasty had long disappeared, they surface in the later sources, frozen in time. Qazwīni relates that he read this tale (\textit{hikāya}) in a number of books, and mentions, in particular, the \textit{Kitāb al-‘ajā’īb} [Book of wonders] of the Andalusian traveler, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnātī. This anecdote, which has a long pedigree, does appear in Gharnātī’s \textit{Tuhfāt al-albāb}, though, perhaps due to a variant manuscript recension, the ascription to Sallām is entirely missing; rather Gharnātī merely describes how some merchants related this tale to him.\textsuperscript{86} Somewhere in the transmission from Gharnātī to Qazwīni, the story became attached to Sallām.

The ascription of this wondrous account to al-Wāthiq’s interpreter points to broader discursive strategies of the marvelous. Above all, the identification of Sallām strengthens the tale’s veracity, moving it from an unspecified group of merchants to a localized, historical first-person eyewitness description, based on the authority of a known, and, presumably, respected narrator. This gesture moves us away from Gharnātī’s account, which is set in an unspecified place, some time in the distant past (\textit{sana min al-sinin}), to the specific setting of Sallām’s journey to the king of the Khazar.\textsuperscript{87}

Due in large measure to the popularity of Qazwīni’s work, the anecdote of the fish and the handmaid ascribed to Sallām enjoyed a wide reception and was repeated in works such as Ibn al-Wardī’s book of wonders, \textit{Kharidat al-aqā’īb},\textsuperscript{88} Ibn Ḥājī’s (d. ca 930/1524) geographical compendium, \textit{Nashq al-azhār fī ‘ajā’īb al-aqṭār} [Smelling flowers through the wonders of the regions],\textsuperscript{89} and Ahmad b. Yūsuf al-Qaramānī’s (d. 1019/1611) history, \textit{Akhbār...
to live to tell

Just as the adventure is threaded into nineteenth-century Morocco, so, too, does it inflect the intellectual history of South Asia, and, in this way, is emblematic of the routinization of learning and the charismatic power of transmitting knowledge across various centuries and societies. The encyclopedic compendium by Amin Ahmad al-Razi (fl. 1002/1594), the *Haft iqlim* [Seven climes], represents an intersection of geography, history, and belletristic writing, all tied together with an interest in marvelous tales. Writing in the Persian context of the Indian subcontinent, Razi relates the history of various Islamic dynasties and recounts biographies of important people from each region, all structured around the Ptolemaic division of the world into climes. At the very end of his compendium lies the wall of Gog and Magog, which he describes by drawing on Sallam’s adventure. In a similarly structured work, Hakim Maharat Khan al-Isfahani, physician of the Mughal emperor Shah ‘Alam Bahadur Shâh I (d. 1124/1712), relates the journey in his Persian geographical compendium, *Bahjat al-‘alam* [Splendor of the world], which explicitly draws from earlier authorities, such as Ibn al-Wardi’s *Kharidat al-ajâib*, and is based on the Ptolemaic division of the world into seven climes.

Likewise, Murtaḍa Husayn Bilgrâmi (d. 1210/1795), who served in the Mughal administration, draws on the same anecdote at the end of his geographical and historical compendium, the *Hadîqat al-aqâlim* [The garden of the climes]. He uses this account in order to detail Alexander’s wall and the monstrous peoples of Gog and Magog, after which he describes both Europe and America. The figure of Bilgrâmi is particularly interesting, as he represents the intersection between two epistemological systems. On the one hand, he is fully immersed in Arabic–Persian fields of learning, while on the other, he is in direct contact with the colonial production of knowledge through his interaction with European scholarship. This is most clear in Bilgrâmi’s association with Captain Jonathan Scott (d. 1829), who commissioned Bilgrâmi to compose the aforementioned historical geography. Scott himself was a founding member of the Bengal Asiatic Society and Persian secretary to Warren Hastings (d. 1818), the first governor-general of British–ruled India.

The widespread belief that the rampart of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn described in the Qur’ān corresponds to some geographical site, and that Gog and Magog are bottled up behind this barrier, predetermines the continued interest in Sallam’s journey. Almost every major geographical treatise written in Arabic and Persian discusses the lands of Gog and Magog as located in physical space, as part of the wider conception of the world...
For instance, the Ilkhānid geographer and historian Ḥamd Allāh al-Mustawfī, in his Persian *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, prefaced the account of Sallām’s journey by situating the wall at a latitude of 73°0’ and a longitude of 109°30’, deep in the seventh clime, which would be in the heart of Siberia, at the northern edge of the earth.\(^{100}\) Though the various projections differ, there is an overwhelming agreement that Gog and Magog correspond to real nations located somewhere on the earth’s margins.

Based on the authority of Prophetic sayings, Gog and Magog were, from an early period, associated with the Turkic tribes of Central Asia.\(^{101}\) The field of descriptive geography often identified these monstrous races as directly related to the Turks.\(^{102}\) The scholar and lexicographer Mahmūd al-Kāshghari (fl. 476/1083), in his Turkish grammar and dictionary, *Divān lughāt al-Turk* [Compendium of the Turkic dialects], the widely held belief that the Turks all trace their ancestry back to Turk, son of Yafīth, son of Noah—the same genealogy delineated for Gog and Magog.\(^{103}\)

The exegetical tradition often locates the wall of Gog and Magog in the land of the setting sun, where the Turks dwell.\(^{104}\) Kāshghari, supported by his personal experience living among the Turkic tribes of Central Asia, lists the language spoken by Gog and Magog as one of the Turkish dialects (alsun al-turk), though he admits that nothing is known of it because of the barrier and the interposition of the mountains that separate Gog and Magog from the rest of the world.\(^{105}\) The Ilkhānid historian and statesman Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 718/1318), in his historical compendium, *Jāmi’ al-tawārīkh*, details a Mongolian origin myth that describes how their primogenitors had emerged from an iron mountain enclosure. The account appears to echo the barrier built against Gog and Magog and points to the appropriation and reinscription of the story among Central Asian Turks.\(^{106}\)

Despite the geographical isolation suggested by the enclosure, there are reports of travelers and merchants who were able to make contact and even trade with these monstrous races. On his caliphal mission to the Bulghār, Ibn Faḍlān claims to have seen, with his own eyes, a giant carcass from the people of Gog and Magog, suggesting that contact beyond the barrier was believed to be possible. According to reports he received from the Bulghār, these monsters were said to live beyond the land of the Finnish Veps (Wisū).\(^{107}\) A similar suggestion is made by Ibn Ḥawqal, who maps Gog and Magog in the northernmost regions of the earth.\(^{108}\) After describing the Khazar, the Kimāk, the Bulghār, and the Saqāliba, Ibn Ḥawqal turns to the lands of Gog and Magog, the true extent of which, he admits, only God knows. Yet he is able to provide further detail through a report that he received directly from the Sāmānid chamberlain (ḥājib), Abū ʿĪsā b. Alptākīn (d. 356/967).\(^{109}\)

According to Ibn Alptākīn, merchants from Khwārazm were able to reach these remote tribes and trade with them by climbing a series of lofty mountains that lead to the region. However, the merchants, who would acquire silk and furs, had to carry their goods on their backs, as pack animals were unable to ascend the towering peaks.\(^{110}\) Ibn Ḥawqal relates that the people of Gog and Magog were hairless, and that they would only trade with merchants after plucking out all the hair from the merchants’ beards.\(^{111}\) Such a detail resonates with Ibn Faḍlān’s astonishment at the bearded Turks he encountered on his journey who plucked all the hair off their faces, and suggests that the merchant tales of Gog and Magog that reached Ibn Ḥawqal were based on the identification of these savages with Turkish nomads. Such a process of transposition seems to be the basis of the account by the Persian scholar Shāhmardān b. ʿAbī l-Khayr (fl. 476/1083), who describes how merchants (bāzargānān) were able to make contact with the monstrous races. Though unlike Ibn Ḥawqal or Ibn Faḍlān, Shāhmardān situates these tribes near China.\(^{113}\)

All these descriptions point to a process by which the ominous sign of the monstrous was grafted onto actual peoples and places. This multivalent act of transposing monstrosity with the foreign is reflected in the rather fluid boundaries enclosing the apocalyptic races. Thus, for instance, Muqaddasī comments that many people believed Gog and Magog dwell beyond the lands of Iberia, while he himself was of the view that they lived a two-month journey past the Khazar.\(^{114}\) This northern location is one of the prevailing opinions, drawn, in large part, on the details of Sallām’s journey beyond Khazaria. However, as with Shāhmardān’s assessment, the association with the northeast is also well documented. For instance, Qudāmā, basing himself in part on material from the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle, relates how the ruler of China beseeched Alexander the Great to build a wall against the savage tribes, who are explicitly identified as Turks.\(^{115}\) Thus the rampart was at times situated between the Tughuzghuz Turks and the Chinese.\(^{116}\) The Ghaznavid historian Abū Saʿīd Gardizi (fl. 440/1049) identifies Gog and Magog as a Turkish tribe near the northern border with China, drawing apparently from the lost geography of Balkh.\(^{117}\) Gardizi goes on to describe how Alexander erected the barrier at the bequest of the people of Turkistān, who were plagued by these savage tribes.\(^{118}\)

The fluidity of shifting borders forms part of the logic of circumscribing the mark of the savage, which, as a category, was transposed and made
relevant for ever-changing geopolitical realities. Writing in 625/1228, the Persian collector of anecdotes, Sadid al-Din al-‘Awfi, describes in his Jawāmi’ al-ḥikāyāt [Collections of tales], the destruction of Transoxiana, Khurasan, Iraq, and Azerbaijan by the Mongol hordes, whom he identifies, evidently not in a metaphorical sense, as the front guard of Gog and Magog, an association that was quite long lasting. As each age confronted a new set of enemies and aggressors, the marginal figures of Gog and Magog linger in the background, ready to be associated with any new menace. Thus the historian, Ibn Iyas, writes in his history of Mamluk Egypt, Badā‘i’ al-zuhūr fi waqā‘i’ al-duḥūr [The wonders of blossoms and the vicissitudes of the ages], that during the year 912/1506 the Europeans (Franj) made their way into the Persian Gulf (Bahār al-Ḥiǧāz) and started to upset the Ottoman trade monopoly in the region. We are told that after years in the attempt, they finally succeeded, through their cunning, to tunnel their way under the wall built by Alexander the Great, which Ibn Iyas locates on a mountain range separating the Mediterranean (Bahār al-Rūm) from the Indian Ocean (Bahār al-Ṣin).

By way of the Indian Ocean, Gog and Magog, in the guise of Europeans, are able to enter the Persian Gulf. Though evidently not aware of the full details, Ibn Iyas describes the entry of Portuguese traders into the Indian Ocean by way of the navigation route that Vasco da Gama opened during his three circumnavigations of Africa around the Cape of Good Hope (1497–9, 1502–3, 1524). For Ibn Iyas the bursting of Alexander’s wall explains how European merchant boats could make their way from the Mediterranean into the Indian Ocean.

It is through these European forays into uncharted territory in the heyday of discovery that Sallām journeys from manuscript to printed page, appearing suddenly in Rome in 1592, with the first printed Arabic geography, Idrisi’s Nuzhat al-mushtāq. The way in which Idrisi’s work traveled from the court of the Norman monarch of Sicily, Roger II (d. 1154), where it was first commissioned, across the Arabic-speaking world, to end, over four centuries later, in the Medici printing house, bespeaks the entangled lines of transmission that such material enjoyed. This Arabic printed edition of Idrisi’s geography gained an even wider circulation with the publication, in Paris, in 1619, of a Latin translation undertaken by two Arab Christian language instructors, Gabriel Sionita and Joannes Hesronita. Because of a textual error in a passage that appeared to identify the author of the geography as a native of Sudan, this work became known in Latin as the Geographia Nubiensis [The geography of the Nubian]. Though Idrisi’s identity was obfuscated for some time to come and the maps that originally accompanied his work remained largely unknown, the significance of his descriptive geography did not go unnoticed; indeed, its influence was felt in the fields of European geography and cartography. For our purposes, it is through this printed translation that the story of Salam Altargiaman (interprete) and the adventure to the rampart (agger) of Dhū ’l-Qarnayn (Bicornis) first became widely available to an early modern European readership, who would find in the mission another kind of wonder altogether.
Of Encyclopedias and Fiction

Following the traces of Sallam’s tale takes us to the birth of modern Orientalism. Here, the dialectic between fact and fancy plays out even more fervently on the stage of an entirely new array of cultural assumptions and epistemic paradigms. Sallam’s adventure appears in the Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel (Paris, 1697) of Barthélemy d’Herbelot (d. 1695), an encyclopedia whose title page promises to contain, “everything regarding the knowledge of the peoples of the Orient, their histories and traditions, true or fabulous. . .” D’Herbelot’s work was posthumously edited and published by the French Orientalist Antoine Galland (d. 1715), translator/author of Les mille et une nuits (Paris, 1704–17), the sprawling expansion of the popular Arabic collection of stories, Alflayla wa layla (The Thousand and One Nights), whose European incarnation played a central role in constituting the image of the exotic Orient in the colonial discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.7 In Voltaire’s (d. 1778) estimation, d’Herbelot’s Bibliothèque orientale too was a collection of “Arabic and Tartar stories,”4 and, as such, it also formed part of an epistemological framework that attempted to possess and orientalize the Orient.5 As a mine of information of oriental mores and customs, d’Herbelot’s encyclopedia inspired the Gothic romance by William Beckford (d. 1844), originally entitled An Arabian Tale from an Unpublished Manuscript (London, 1786), and subsequently known simply as Vathek,6 a fictional novel that detailed the fantastic adventures of the ‘Abbásid caliph al-Wáthiq as a libidinous tyrant on a magical quest filled with debauchery and murder, all to gain supernatural powers.

In the entry on Gog and Magog (Iagiouge et Magiouge), d’Herbelot outlines al-Wáthiq’s embassy to the rampart, drawing from the Persian account of Mustawfi’s Nuzhat al-qulüb, which he knows to be based upon a certain Ketab al messalek val memalek.7 D’Herbelot goes on to relate the anecdote of Sallam and the maidservant in the belly of a fish, quoting from Qazwini’s ‘Ajá’ib al-makhliqát, which he believes is drawn from accounts of Sirens.8 The allure of such fabulous stories forms part of a broader view concerning the essential oriental inclination toward the fanciful and superstitious.

The English literary critic, Thomas Warton (d. 1790), in the introduction to his influential study, The History of English Poetry (1774–81), entitled “Of the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe,” advances the view that the impetus of the medieval romance, as a mode of relating marvelous adventures, can be traced back to the fables of the Oriental imagination. For Warton, the story of Sallam’s encounter with the wall of Gog and Magog, as culled from d’Herbelot’s Bibliothèque orientale, is merely a footnote to his larger argument, exemplified in the case of the giant Goëmagot (i.e., Gogmagog), inhabiting Cornwall in the Historia regum Britanniae by the bishop Geoffrey of Monmouth (d. ca 1155). Beliefs in giants and other such superstitions, as suggested by Warton’s formulation, were not natural to Europeans, but were entirely “Arabian inventions,” a theory, which, while debated,9 was repeated throughout the nineteenth century.10 Sallam’s journey, as with other fanciful oriental accounts, such as Sindbad the Sailor, were grouped together by the common wisdom that saw the ultimate Eastern origin behind wonder tales and childish superstitions, “half fiction, half fact, which are so universally diffused among the legendary literature of every country as to appear indigenous to each of them.”11

While Sallam’s story was repeated in the popular reception of the exotic and benighted Oriental, the first detailed study of the account was produced by the German Orientalist Theophilus (Gottlieb) Siegfried Bayer (d. 1738), in an article on the history of the fortifications of the Caucasus, according to Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish sources, entitled, “De Muro Caucaseo.” Best known for his work on Chinese, Bayer had an encyclopedic devotion to oriental languages, as evidenced by his work with Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Manchu.12 Bayer wrote this particular article in 1726, during the first year of his tenure in St. Petersburg, as the chair of Greek and Roman antiquities at the Academia Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitanae.13 The fledgling academy,
found by the Russian czar, Peter the Great (d. 1725), had all the outward appearance of an imperial center of learning. This setting foregrounds Bayer's treatment of the material; as Bayer himself mentions, his article on the military defenses of the Caucasus was inspired by the recent Russian conquests of the western and southern shores of the Caspian, in 1723, from the Safavids of Iran. It is in this context of the Caucasus, revisited under the tutelage of Russian imperial forces, that we are reintroduced to "Alsalemus altargjeman (seu Interprete)."

Bayer's own frame of reference was inflected in great measure by his background as a German Protestant, and by the larger discourse of scientific discovery with which his philological examinations were in concert. His ironic disdain for the fabula, which is Sallâm's story, can, in part, be explained by a trend in European epistemology, which sought to demystify the marvelous through science and reason; the discursive power of the Enlightenment attacked superstition on all fronts as 'vulgar credulity.'

As shown by this one essay, the philological study of language, out of which modern Orientalism developed, for Bayer serves as a tool for parsing history from legend. One of the central thrusts of Bayer's article is an exposé of childish Muslim myths, which crescendos in an attack on the Prophet Muhammad, who is caricatured as a coarse and foolish storyteller (fabulatorem inficietum et ridiculum). For Bayer, the story of the wall against Gog and Magog told (sic) by 'Mahomete' in the Qurân is the perfect representation of such condemnable superstition. Pepper his prose with allusions to classical Greek and Latin sources, Bayer quotes Horace when he cautions us to assay the true value of these fables from the oriental nations (orientalium populorum), so that we may distinguish the real from the false coins embedded in such dubious material, "quid distent aera lupinis."

Not surprisingly, Bayer views Sallâm's adventure as no different than one of the many ridiculous (multa ridicula) tales told by Orientalists. Baising himself on what he acknowledges as the truncated Latin edition of Idrisi, many details of Sallâm's journey escape him, such as the name of the caliph who dispatches Sallâm; as Bayer states, this piece of information is not present in the version of the account before him. However, out of the material that is available to him, Bayer shows great zeal in relating all the particular elements that punctuate this tale, from Isaacium Eben Ismael, ruler of Armenia, to the key that locks the gate of the ominous wall. Here the pleasure of relating Sallâm's account arises from taking delight in mocking the incredulous Orientalists. To underscore this point, Bayer again turns to Horace—spectatum admissi, risum teneatis, amici?—in a passing reference to the opening of the Ars Poetica (1–5):

Humano capiti ceruicem pictor equinam
iungere si uelit et varias inducere plumas
undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne,
spectatum admissi, risum teneatis, amici?

Were a painter to unite a horse's neck to a human head,
and spread a variety of plumage over limbs taken from every part,
so that what is the torso of a beautiful woman
terminates unsightly in an ugly fish below;
could you, my friends, refrain from laughter?

Bayer merely has to quote the last line of this opening passage of the Ars Poetica to set in motion a chain of associations that evoke artifice and dissimilitude. The uncanny resemblance of Horace's image of the mermaid with the account of the maidservant emerging from the body of a fish ascribed to Sallâm was evidently lost on Bayer, who makes no reference to the story, though it is already detailed in d'Herbelot's Bibliothèque orientale. Even without the maidservant and the fish, Bayer's disdain for Sallâm's marvelous tale resounds through his entire presentation. It is an account that Bayer deigns to narrate with the sole aim of revealing its absurdity (ut fabula desinat in risum); a fable that begins with the dream of a caliph and ends with the dream of Sallâm (Ita ex somniis chaliphe exorsa fabula, in somniis Alsalemi desinat).

This negative reception in St. Petersburg, however, did little to impede Sallâm's travels across the imagined geographies of Orientalists. While Bayer sets forth his own position candidly, later writers would learn to veil and obscure such contempt. With Bayer it is clear that the multa ridicula of oriental nations serve to disprove the validity of their faith. The fabula of Dhū Ḥ-l-Qarnayn's wall as represented in the Qurân bears testimony to this, as does the ridiculous tale of Alsalemus, which, according to the epistemology of Orientalism, goes part and parcel with the misguided beliefs of Orientalists.

A Romantic Turn
The Swedish diplomat and Orientalist of Armenian descent, Constantin Mouradgea d'Ohsson (d. 1851), approached Sallâm's adventure from a completely different perspective. As the son of Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson (d.
1807), who was himself a scholar, former dragoman, and charge d'affaires for
the Swedish mission in Istanbul, Constantin came to his field of study unlike
most of his fellow Orientalists. Best known for his Histoire des Mongols, in
1828 Constantin d’Ohsson published a curious book entitled Des peuples du
Caucase et des pays au nord de la mer Noire et de la mer Caspienne, dans le
dixième siècle. The subtitle, ou Voyage d’Abou-el-Cassim, begins to explain
the unique nature of this study. Basing himself on over twenty Arabic,
Persian, and Turkish manuscripts scattered across Paris, Leiden, Upsala,
and Stockholm, d’Ohsson weaves together his very own travel narrative
based on a fictitious adventurer, whom he invents and names Abou-el­
Cassim. As d’Ohsson explains in his preface, he imagines Abou-el-Cassim
as a caliphal envoy sent to the king of the Bulghārs on the Volga in the
year 336/948. He uses such primary sources as Maṣ’ūdī’s Murūj al-dhahab,
Yaqtū’s Mu’jam al-buldān, and Taḥārī’s Taʿrikh to fill in the details of Abou­
el-Cassim’s imaginary journey through the region. D’Ohsson, along the
way, glosses this work, a virtual storehouse of information, with detailed
explanatory footnotes. He then concludes Abou-el-Cassim’s adventure with
an appendix, as long as the body of the text, wherein he supplements the
information of the narrative with full explanations.

With nearly each statement accounted for by some primary source,
d’Ohsson’s encyclopedic display results in a recondite blend of fact and
fancy. Against this backdrop we see Sallām’s journey cast as a well-known
authority on the wall. D’Ohsson’s work is devoid of any editorial display
of disdain. Rather, he lets the sources speak for themselves. Through the
figure of Abou-el-Cassim, he imagines being a Muslim traveler in the tenth
century. Abou-el-Cassim relates that the wall of Gog and Magog is
mentioned in the Qur’ān, where God says to the Prophet, “They (that is to
say the infidels) will ask you about Dhū ’l-Qarnayn” (Q. 18:83). D’Ohsson
showcases Abou-el-Cassim’s beliefs throughout the travelog, as when he
informs us, “It is certain that at the end of the world Gog and Magog
will spread across the earth, according to our sacred book.” This serves as
an occasion for a digression concerning al-Wāthiq’s expedition.

With characteristic attention to detail, d’Ohsson offers an editorial
footnote at the end of Sallām’s account citing various Arabic, Turkish, and
Persian sources that all include the adventure. Here d’Ohsson makes no
comment on the question of authenticity, rather he quotes from the history,
Rawdat al-safā’ [Garden of purity], of the Timūrid historian Muhammad
b. Khwandschān Mir Khwānd (d. 903/1498), who, upon describing the
barrier, mentions:

Although the astronomer Muḥammad Farghānī and other recent
scholars have tried to demonstrate that all these details [concerning
the wall] are false, nonetheless, as it has been transmitted to us by the
ancient historical works, I am not permitted to reject them, rather I
have recorded all they have said faithfully. 25

This is the only commentary accompanying the anecdote. D’Ohsson
content to let the texts speak for themselves, which, after all, is central
to the larger aim of this project, namely, to present a coherent narrative of
a fictional journey from the perspective of a Muslim traveler in the tenth
century.

Only in a passing reference made in the prologue does D’Ohsson
draw direct attention to the question of the veracity of the many fabulous
accounts contained in these sources. He mentions that the same reproach
made by the Greek geographer Strabo could also be applied to the authors
of these manuscripts:

Observing that those who were professedly writers of myths
(μεθογράφοι) were esteemed and honored, they supposed that
they also should make their writings pleasing, if they told, in the
appearance of history (ἐν ἰστορίας σχηματι) what they had never
seen, nor even: heard, at least not from eye-witnesses, with no other
object in view than to tell what afforded their audience pleasure and
amazement (θαυμαστήν). 26

This is a fitting quote for an author of an imaginary account envisioned
through the eyes of a fictional medieval Muslim traveler. We, as readers,
nonetheless still feel a sweet wonder and curiosity when reading d’Ohsson’s
translation of such material as the legendary exploits of Anūshirwān or
Sallām’s marvel of the maidservant emerging from the body of a fish. 27
By projecting these diverse anecdotes through the lens of the imaginary
Abou-el-Cassim, d’Ohsson masterfully escapes any responsibility for the
authenticity of the material, a narrative technique fully exploited in the
various traditions of marvel-writing, where the frequent citation of sources
adds a veneer of authority, distancing both the author and the reader from
the charge of assessing the problem of veracity. 28

D’Ohsson demonstrates a certain romantic passion for these sources,
imagining himself in the role of a caliphal envoy to the king of the Bulghārs,
traveling across the hostile and savage lands of the wondrously foreign.
Though he addresses the latent question of veracity obliquely, the effect of
Abou-el-Cassim’s narrative leaves us with the impression that one would
not have to actually travel anywhere to write such a travelog. All of this material is drawn together with Mandevillean flare from the accounts of other writers and composed into the cohesive semblance of a journey. This flirtation with the fictional, though supplemented by the marginal notes and the erudite appendix, offers us the pleasure of enjoying the adventure, imagining ourselves, in exotic transference, traveling through a strange land in the distant past.

In a series of passing observations made in the nineteenth century, we can capture further glimpses of Sallâm's reception by European scholars. The reaction is overwhelmingly negative, and Sallâm's story is generally dismissed as a fabrication. The French Orientalist Joseph Toussaint Reinaud (d. 1867), in the introduction to his edition and translation of the *Taqwîm al-buldân* [Survey of countries] by Abû 'l-Fidâ’ (1848), briefly references Sallâm's account.²⁹ By this time Sallâm had become well known in the scholarship on Arabic and Persian geography, aided in large measure by the wide circulation of the French translation of Idrîsi's geography and the immense popularity of d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale.*³⁰ Reinaud outlines the story of al-Wâthiq's mission to the wall; he plots Sallâm's course through Armenia and Georgia, across the Caucasus, his visit to the Khazar, and his travels around the Caspian and up into the Urals and the Altai mountains. He mentions that the account of Sallâm was preserved by Idrîsi and others, and concludes that "unfortunately, it is overloaded with fabulous stories and from the very beginning it aroused the suspicions of Muslims themselves."³¹ Even more dismissive is the remark of the Austrian Orientalist, Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893), in his monograph *Die Post- und Reiserouten des Orients* (1864), in which he claims that the journey is an intentional deception, "eine unverschämte Mystifikation des Sallâm."³²

The pendulum swings back as the French scholar Charles Barbier de Meynard (d. 1908) rejects Sprenger's claim outright. Barbier de Meynard, the first to publish an Arabic edition and translation of Ibn Khurâradâhibîbîn's *Masâlik* (1865), sets forth his own hypothesis concerning "la trop fameuse relation du Sallâm l'interprète."³³ He sees al-Wâthiq's mission to the People of the Cave, along with the journey to the wall of Gog and Magog, as part of a concerted theological effort on the part of the caliph to combat the ridiculous tales circulated by *hadîth* scholars concerning the location and identification of such *Qur'ânîc* references. In his view, Sallâm's journey had, at least, a real beginning, and he sees "les fantaisies" that conclude the adventure as a concession to the taste for the marvelous, which the scientific conquests of al-Ma‘mûn were unable to weaken.³⁴ For this reason de Meynard refused to hold Sallâm's account as merely an impudent...


Plate 6a: Mappa mundi, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Idrīsī, Nuzhat al-mushtāq, dated 960/1553. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, MS Pococke 375, fols. 3a–4b.

Plate 6b: Detail of mappa mundi with the putrid land (muntina), the barrier against Gog and Magog, and the Adhkhish Turks, Idrīsī, Nuzhat al-mushtāq, dated 960/1553. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, MS Pococke 375, fols. 3a–4b.
Plate 7: Magnified view of the gate to Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's wall, located before the Khāqān of the Adhkish Turks, Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq*, eighth/fourteenth-century MS. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Supplément arabe 892 (MS arabe 2221), clime 6.9, fols. 33b–34a.

Plate 8: Detail of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn's gate in a *mappa mundi*, near the legendary City of Brass (*madīnat al-nuḥās*), from an anonymous Egyptian manuscript, entitled *Kitāb gharāʾib al-funūn wa mulāḥ al-ʿuyūn*, eighth/fourteenth-century MS. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, MS Arab c. 90, fols. 23b–24a.
Plate 9: Sallām al-Tarjumān observing a maiden pulled from the belly of a fish by Khazar sailors in the Caspian Sea, Zakariyyāʾ al-Qazwīnī, Ḥaqq al-makhluqāt, ca. 710/1310. © British Library Board, MS Or. 14140, fol. 46b.

Plate 10: Sallām al-Tarjumān shown the wall of Gog and Magog in a compilation entitled Ḥaqq al-buldān, from selected passages of the Rawdat al-saḥā of Mīr Khwānd on the marvels of the world, compiled for the wazīr of Bistām in 1240/1824. © British Library Board, MS Or. 12995, fol. 75a.
Plate 12: *Mappa mundi* attributed to Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī and Ahmad b. al-Ṭayyīb al-Sarakhsī, and said to have been derived from Ptolemy, with a prominent focus on the *terra incognita* of Gog and Magog; also including a detail of Alexander's gate located in the upper left-hand portion, near the Adhkhish Turks and the Mountain of Qāf, dated 977/1570. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

Plate 13: Detail of emended section of Ibn Khurradadhbih, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*. Courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek of Vienna, MS Mixt. 783, fol. 69b.
mystification. Such a formulation is informed by a desire to see ‘Abbāsīd rationalism—embodied in Mu'āzzi thought—as something which it was not, namely a precursor of Enlightenment ideals. Yet, regardless of the strength or weakness of his hypothesis, de Meynard’s intention was clear; he argues that to understand this account we must historicize it. He finds in the narrative a historical journey, which, though colored by fantastical elements, bears upon the social reality of the period.

Michael Jan de Goeje

The movement to historicize Sallām’s adventure continued to develop throughout the century. The Dutch Orientalist Michael Jan de Goeje (d. 1909) had a tremendous impact on the modern reception and study of Arabic descriptive geography, by editing and publishing a corpus of major Arabic geographies in his Bibliotheca geographorum Araborum (1870–94). Preceding his own edition and French translation of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s Masālik (1889), de Goeje published, in Dutch, a short study dedicated to the question of the wall, entitled, “De Muur van Gog en Magog” (1888). 35

Here de Goeje traces the figure of Alexander’s wall in some of its various incarnations, leading us through the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle to Shahrbāz’s envoy, and finally ending with the account of Sallām’s adventure. He takes up al-Wāthiq’s embassy as an occasion to plot the actual location of the wall against Gog and Magog. Situating this narrative in a physical topography of place names, de Goeje seeks to prove that not only did Sallām’s journey occur, but that we can trace exactly where he traveled and uncover the very rampart described in such detail. He does this by mixing together the distinct accounts of Sallām’s entry into Transoxiana as preserved in the Vienna manuscript and in Idrisi’s redaction. 36 De Goeje argues that this composite text engages with a concrete series of references, fully corresponding to a geographical and historical reality that can be traced, described, and substantiated. Filling in the lacunae of Sallām’s narrative with conjecture and glossing over the many inconsistencies, de Goeje concludes that not only did Sallām al-Tarjuman reach the Jade Gate to the Great Wall of China, but that the legend of Alexander’s wall in the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle, itself the inspiration for the Qur’ānic account, finds its origin with the fortifications of the Great Wall. 37

Ultimately, de Goeje erects the edifice of his argument on the reading of one toponym in the adventure, which he vocalizes as Igu and believes to correspond to a city which was known as 伊吾 (Yiwu) and 伊吾盧 (Yiwulu) during the during the Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) and Tang (618–907 C.E.) dynasties. 38 Yizhou (伊州), as it came to be known, represented for the
Tang one in a series of forward occupied positions on its western frontier, which were continually challenged by Tibetan and Uyghur competition in the region. After 840, when a massive force of Qirghiz Turks destroyed the Uyghur Khanate on the Orkhon Valley of Mongolia, the political situation of the Turfan region, in general, and of Yizhou, in particular, went through a period of violent upheaval. Over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries there had been a continued Uyghur presence in the Tarim Basin, and the Yizhou prefecture was no exception.

Toward the end of the eighth century, the Tibetan empire succeeded in gaining control over the prefecture of Yizhou. Between 842 and 851, the region witnessed a bloody civil war over a question of succession among the ruling factions of the then fragmenting Tibetan Empire. While by the spring of 851 the Tang dynasty had captured Yizhou from the Tibetans, in the years that follow, fragments of the Uyghur Khanate from the Orkhon, who had fled to the region, succeeded in gaining control over both Yizhou and Gaochang (高昌). The Uyghurs referred to Gaochang as Qocho, which became their capital in 856. Yizhou, they called Qomul, which through Mongolian became Khamil, whence the modern Chinese name for the city, 哈密 (Hami), in the Xinjiang province.

De Goeje admits that his reading of this toponym as Igu to correspond with Hami / Yizhou is conjectural, for the surviving manuscript on which he bases this reading leaves this word unvocalized. Looking to support his thesis, de Goeje argues that Sallām traveled to Yizhou by way of Lake Balkhash, located in southeastern Kazakhstan. Here the putrid smell of the black land through which Sallām’s expedition traveled can be explained by an allaceous odor produced by asafoetida, an umbelliferous plant common in the region.

From Yizhou, de Goeje argues that Sallām was led to the Jade Gate, known as the Yumenguan Pass (玉門關) of the Silk Road in the northwest of China. This fortified pass formed part of a lengthy series of defensive walls built during the Han dynasty. Looking for further support for this argument, de Goeje turns to the two rulers Sallām says he met during the return journey from the wall. This passage only occurs in the Vienna manuscript and is not picked up by the later Arabic and Persian reception of the account. The manuscript states that the expedition traveled to a place whose king was called al-Lub, which de Goeje vocalizes as al-Lub. It then describes, in a section that is partly illegible, that the group traveled to a place whose king appears to be طاپَنُیوَن, which de Goeje reads as طاپَنُیوَن, and vocalizes as Tabānūyan. Turning north above the Tarim Basin, de Goeje claims that the king, al-Lub, ruled over Lake Lop-nor, while he holds that Tabānūyan ruled over a region identified by Ibn Khurradādhbih as the Upper Nūshājān, on the western border of China (الحدود الشرقیة), which de Goeje believes corresponds to the city of Khotan. These conjectures are all made in order to substantiate the central claim that Sallām traveled around and through the region of the Tarim Basin and that he proceeded to the Wall of China via the city of Yizhou.

The force of de Goeje’s argument lies in his identification of this one toponym—whose vocalization and consonantal form is not substantiated by any other Arabic or Persian source—with the ancient Chinese city, Yizhou. As this is located some 220 miles (350 kilometers) from the Jade Gate, de Goeje must also overlook the way the Vienna manuscript details a three-day journey from Igu, or Ilka, to the wall of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn. Only a relay system of post horses could cover this distance in such a short time.

De Goeje is also forced to explain a fortiori why Sallām would travel through this region during the height of instability, in the midst of a Tibetan civil war of succession (842-51). Additionally, he must account for how Sallām could travel from the Khazar capital to the Jade Gate in a period of what appears to be roughly two months, an extraordinary pace for the period considering the distance separating the two regions. Likewise, he must demonstrate why a city, populated by a mix of Uyghurs and Tibetans, would be known to Sallām by a Chinese toponym. Furthermore, de Goeje must argue for the existence of an Arabic- and Persian-speaking population of Muslims living in Yizhou who have memorized the Qur’ān, built mosques and Qur’ānic schools, have never heard of the caliph, and—by the look of Sallām’s account—are the rulers of the city.

The linguistic evidence for this line of argumentation is anything but conclusive. During the Tang dynasty, the term 周 (州) served as an administrative designation for a frontier prefecture. There is documentary evidence, in both Tibetan and Khotanese, that the Tibetan empire adopted this Chinese administrative term for the names of cities that they had wrested from China, such as seems to be the case with 伊州 (Yizhou). However, at a very early date this city was also known by some variant of the local Uyghur toponym Qomul, which, as noted above, transformed into the modern name Hami. It has been claimed that a variant of Qomul appears in a Sogdian document of the early fourth century C.E. Though the reading of this Sogdian toponym has been disputed, there is, in an Uyghur document from the Tang period, what appears to be the early use of Qomul by the local Uyghur population. Furthermore, it is by the name Qomul, and not Yizhou, that Arabic and Persian geographical sources came to know this city. Lastly, in early Persian geographical texts, the Chinese
Thus, even if Sallam were to have traveled to this city in the Xinjiang region during this period of violent upheaval, it is not clear that it would have been referred to as Yizhou or that he would have written the word as Ḥukū.

The Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Sogdians of Yizhou/Qomul were not, at that moment, Muslims but rather Buddhists and Manicheans. However, it is not beyond the pale of reason to envision a Muslim population living in the prefecture during Sallam’s visit. With regard to the black prutid lands, asafoetida, often identified in Greek as *silphion* (σιλφίων), in Arabic as *ḥiltīt*, and in Persian as *angūdān* and *hīng*, is a common plant found throughout Central Asia, Iran, and India, and has been used for medicinal purposes for centuries, referenced, for instance, in Ḥunayn ibn Ḥishāq’s translation of Dioscorides’ *Materia medica*. It is plausible to suppose that Sallam came across fields of this plant when he traveled nearly a month through a black, prutid region. Furthermore, we could easily imagine that these fields of rancid asafoetida, a plant used as a spice for cooking even in Sallam’s day, could have been encountered in Lake Balkhash on the way to Yizhou.

There are a variety of potential vocalizations for the names of the rulers mentioned by Sallam. These two names appear only in the Vienna manuscript and are left unvocalized and partly illegible. Since they are not substantiated in any other source, why should they not bend under the weight of de Goeje’s reading? Furthermore, this thesis does not address the fact that the concept of the “Great Wall” of China, as a continuous series of fortified constructions, did not yet exist during Sallam’s day.

It is this last point, namely the anachronistic configuration of the Great Wall of China as an ancient barrier stretching for thousands of miles, which is, perhaps, most problematic. The Great Wall of China, as it is known today, did not exist before the middle of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Prior to the Ming fortifications, a series of walls and ramparts were erected under different dynasties for ever-changing purposes, but these fortifications did not represent a continuous line of demarcation, with a unified history or purpose. The Jade Gate, which lies at the western stretch of China, was abandoned after the fall of the Han dynasty and was never connected to the much later Ming fortifications of the north that served as a buffer against Mongolian nomads. Furthermore, it appears that the Tang of Sallam’s day actually looked down upon the practice of wall building. Various Chinese dynasties built walls and barriers, often from packed earth strengthened with wood; but these frequently disintegrated with the fall of a given dynasty.

The myth of the Great Wall of China as an ancient continuous barrier is, in large part, the product of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European constructions of the Orient, where the Wall stood as an emblem of Chinese isolationism and oriental despotism.

As European geographical knowledge transformed during the course of the Enlightenment, the exact location of Alexander’s fabled barrier came under scrutiny. De Goeje’s thesis that the rampart against Gog and Magog was really the Great Wall, is, itself, in dialogue with a running debate that stretches back to the seventeenth century. This debate is shaped, in large part, by pre-existing notions concerning the nature and history of the Great Wall. For instance, the editorial notes to the English (1730) translation of Abu ‘1-Ghazi Bahādur Khān’s (d. 1074/1663) Chaghatay history, *Sha‘jarat al-atrāk* [The genealogy of the Turks], itself based on an earlier French translation (1726), promoted the idea that the wall of Gog and Magog found throughout the oriental sources corresponded to the Great Wall of China and that, furthermore, al-Wāthiq’s mission to Alexander’s rampart most likely reached this Chinese barrier. A similar conclusion is drawn by Edward Gibbon (d. 1794), in his influential history on the Roman empire; he reads Bayer’s description of Sallām’s adventure and concludes that the “imaginary rampart of Gog and Magog” is derived from “the gates of Mount Caucasus, and a vague report of the wall of China.” However, Bayer himself had rejected the notion that Alexander’s barrier was to be found in the Wall of China, a theory that had been promoted earlier by the English Orientalist Thomas Hyde (d. 1703).

By the time the English geographer, historian, and surveyor for the East India Company, James Rennell (d. 1830), objected to the identification of Alexander’s wall against Gog and Magog with the Great Wall of China, the theory had taken on the power of common wisdom, a link substantiated in the mimetic power of early modern European cartography. Rennell’s claim that the two walls were indeed different was met with skepticism, as reflected in an anonymous review, published in the * Asiatic Annual Register* (1801), of his study, *The Geographical System of Herodotus, Examined, and Explained* (1800):

... the land of Gog and Magog is placed by Oriental geographers north-east of China and we think it rather probable that the Wall of China is the one designed by them, though the inaccuracy of their accounts and particularly those of the envoy of the caliph Wathec, have rendered its situation obscure and perplexing...
existence of any other rampart than the Wall of China [this] rests upon very doubtful authority.

So powerful was the Great Wall in the European imagination that it stood as a means of assessing the quality and authenticity of accounts of medieval travelers to China. Marco Polo was famously excoriated by nineteenth-century scholars for not describing the Great Wall. After all, how was it possible for him to travel to China and not mention the single most important symbol of Chinese civilization? Such cognitive dissonance was itself the product of an epistemological system that reduced the Orient into an ahistorical caricature, essentialized and reified. Marco Polo does not mention the Wall of China because the Wall of China as a single unified entity did not yet exist. What he did look for was the people of Gog and Magog, whom he identified as the Tatar tribes of Ong and Mongol. As for Ong, who correspond to the Turkic Önggül tribe, many of whom had converted to a form of Nestorian Christianity, Polo connected them to the descendants of Prester John, the legendary Christian patriarch of the far east who animated the imagination of medieval European Christians for centuries. Despite this effort to mold the Orient into a confirmation of the pre-existing paradigms of what the Orient was, Polo did not find the wall of Gog and Magog in any massive Chinese barrier.

Just as Marco Polo's narrative was shaped by preconceived notions of what the world should be, so, too, later European constructions of the Orient were often predicated on grossly unexamined preconceptions. The observations of Sir Henry Yule (d. 1889) on Ibn Baṭṭūta’s (d. ca 779/1377) account of the wall of Gog and Magog are particularly illustrative. According to the Arabic redaction of Ibn Baṭṭūta’s travels, while in the Chinese city of Canton (Kalān), Ibn Baṭṭūta asked the Muslim population settled there about the location of the wall of Gog and Magog. He learned that the barrier was a sixty-day journey beyond the city, and that along the way were nomadic cannibals who devoured whomever they captured. For this reason, Ibn Baṭṭūta comments that he never encountered anyone who had seen the wall or what was beyond it. Nowhere does Ibn Baṭṭūta claim that this barrier was the Great Wall of China. However, Yule sees the matter in an entirely different fashion:

This is an instance of Ibn Baṭṭūta’s loose notions of geography. He inquires for the Wall of China from his coreligionists at the wrong extremity of the empire... Had he inquired at Khanbalik (if he really was there) he might have received more information. The Rampart of Gog and Magog was believed to have been erected by Alexander the Great to shut up the fierce nations of the north and bar their irruptions into civilized southern lands. It is generally referred to Darband on the Caspian, but naturally came to be confounded with the Wall of China. Edris gives an account of the mission sent by the Khalif Wathek Billah to explore the Rampart of Gog and Magog.

Contrary to Yule’s reading, Ibn Baṭṭūta does not ask for the Wall of China, but for an apocalyptic barrier built by Alexander the Great against savage nations at the end of the earth. None of the medieval geographers confuse a Chinese barrier for Alexander’s rampart, as the concept of a singular, unified Great Wall of China, an anachronism for the period, would have been entirely foreign to them.

Not only did the Great Wall of China give Europeans a mechanism to historicize and demystify medieval accounts of the barrier against Gog and Magog, but it also served as a means of stripping away the legendary material surrounding the figure of Alexander the Great. As James Dunbar (d. 1798) argued in Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages (1780), as far as the wall of Gog and Magog was concerned, “the lofty spirit of Alexander would hardly have stooped to such dastardly policy,” suggesting that it is rather a characteristic of oriental despotism to pen people behind walls.

In a similar vein, Richard Burton (d. 1890) comments in his annotation of the account of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn included in his sprawling translation of The Thousand and One Nights (1885–6), that the Great Wall of China “dates from B.C. 320 and as the Arabs knew [the Chinese city of] Canton well before Mohammed’s day, they may have built their romance upon it.” He claims that the myth of the barrier against Gog and Magog not only had its origins in the Great Wall, but that the Arabs themselves invented the entire account. De Goeje’s thesis is thus neither meant to be original nor provocative, but is rather set to marshal the authority of philology as a means of proving what was already a widespread belief, namely that the legend of Alexander’s rampart found its origins in the Great Wall of China. Such a pairing not only helped to separate the Alexander of myth from the Alexander of history, but it also served to highlight the oriental character of this entire mythology and thereby assign the fiction to an oriental imagination, which, in turn, unduly shaped medieval European accounts of marvels and monsters.

The notion that the mythical origins of the wall of Gog and Magog were rooted in the Great Wall of China has been so enduring that the Sinologist
Joseph Needham, when treating the Chinese practices of wall building in his encyclopedic study Science and Civilisation in China (1971), argues "both Franks and Saracens knew of a Great wall, vague though their knowledge might be, and throughout the middle ages they ascribed its origins to the Macedonian world-conqueror." Following de Goeje, Needham claims Sallām's adventure represents a perfect example of this very confusion. Ironically, the confusion is not with medieval travelers who mistake Chinese fortifications for Alexander's rampart, but with modern scholars who were quick to read into the sources a timeless and mythical Chinese barrier that simply was not there.

To imagine Sallām at the Jade Gate we must overlook the most obvious fact that by no means does Sallām's description match the physical form of the gate itself. Nor, for that matter, does the account evoke any section of the Great Wall of China as it came to be later constructed. We know that this wall is not made out of brass and copper, nor does it dam up a single mountain pass, nor is it carved with a Qur’ānic inscription. Sallām's account certainly does not lack detail when it comes to the description of the rampart. The image he casts before us draws on the long and polysemous traditions surrounding Alexander's barrier.

To accept de Goeje's theory in the hope of physically locating the 'real' wall of Sallām's journey, we must dissect the entire account into pieces of fact and fiction, if we are to think that what Sallām believed to be the wall of Gog and Magog was all along simply the Wall of China. As far as the Jade Gate of the Han dynasty is concerned, this would have represented a series of largely abandoned mud fortifications. In his desire to locate the origins of Alexander's barrier against Gog and Magog in the Great Wall of China, de Goeje is forced to overlook many factors which draw his readers into doubt. The question of why Sallām must have visited these particular ruins and not any of the other countless fortifications scattered across Central Asia is never addressed.

Yet, to do justice to de Goeje's theory we should appreciate that he is the first major Orientalist to fully explore the narrative claims and implications of the adventure in terms of the physical world, in an attempt to give philological credence to what was already a well established trope in European letters. Restoring faith in Sallām's account, moving out of the field of marvelous fiction into the domain of historical fact, de Goeje demands that the anecdote be taken as a serious example of geographical exploration and travel.

Whither the Wall of China?

De Goeje's quest for a geographical location for Sallām's adventure parallels his argument that the Wāqwāq islands—a recurrent toponym in Arabic and Persian descriptive geography, where women grow off trees—really correspond to Japan. Both arguments are built on a desire to demystify the enchanted world represented in Islamic cosmography. And both of these theories were met with controversy.

The Wall of China thesis caused a stir, as scholars set off to counter, modify, or support de Goeje's argument. Immediately following its publication, Wilhelm Tomaschek, in the Vienna Oriental Journal (1889), wrote a short review summarizing de Goeje's main points. Despite minor differences of opinion concerning Sallām's return journey, mainly with regard to Idrisi's recension, Tomaschek follows the outline of de Goeje's argument, elevating Sallām's narrative out of the 'realm of fable' into the world of historical reality, where, in the Wall of China the account gains factual authenticity, an opinion concerning the Wall of China.

In his study on the Alexander cycle, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans" (1890), Theodore Nöldeke (d. 1930) upholds the view that Sallām reached the Wall of China, "wie de Goeje gezeigt hat." Nonetheless, Nöldeke also claims that Sallām's description of the wall was heavily influenced by the anonymous Neshānā d'Aleksandrov, which he postulates that Sallām did not actually read, but heard via some Christian acquaintance. Such a move suggests again that while some of the material contained in the anecdote may well be fictitious, the underlying itinerary reflects a historical journey.

Tracing the footsteps of Abū Dulaf, another controversial medieval traveler, Josef Marquart (d. 1930), in his study of geographical journeys through Asia, Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge (1903), continues the tradition of attempting to fix geographical specificity to elusive texts. Marquart situates Sallām's journey to the Wall of China as a precursor to Abū Dulaf's "criss-crossing rambles" through Tibet and the Chinese frontier. The explicit assumption underpinning these investigations holds that in such marvelous journeys there are kernels of truth waiting to be uncovered; this is built on the belief that the material contains authentic information, albeit in an arrangement that is not entirely genuine.

As the thesis on the Wall of China came from one of the most eminent Orientalists of the day, it challenged other scholars to view Sallām's account as a historical event that occurred in time and space. Richard Henning picks up this sentiment in his multi-volume compilation of travel narratives of discovery, Terrae incognitae (1936), when he turns to de Goeje's reading in
order to affirm that Sallām made his way to Hami in the Xinjiang province and then ultimately to the Wall of China. Admittedly, Henning finds a discrepancy between the three days it takes Sallām to reach de Goeje's Jade Gate after leaving the city of Hami and the hundreds of miles that actually separate these two locations. However, this minor inconsistency does not challenge the larger frame of the narrative, which marks it as authentic; for Henning, the stinking country, the devastated localities, the city of Hami, and the Muslim municipalities in proximity to the wall all affirm the historical truth of the actual journey.

Even before such scholars drew on the Wall of China thesis as historical fact, there had already been serious doubts concerning de Goeje's argument. The first significant challenge came from Étienne Zichy, in his article "Le voyage de Sallām, l'interprète, à la muraille de Gog et de Magog" (1922). Zichy takes up the question of the wall, attacking de Goeje's thesis in order to re-plot what he believes to be the actual course of Sallām's adventure. To do this, he bases his argument primarily on the version of the journey to the wall as recorded in Idrisi's geography. For the transmission of this anecdote, Zichy draws on both Ibn Khurradadhbih and the lost work of the statesman and geographer Jayhānī. Idrisi leaves Igū, or Ikka, out of his account altogether. Instead of mentioning Sallām's departure from the Khazars, he describes the itinerary as setting out from the Bashjirt, a Turkish tribe of the southern Ural mountains. In Idrisi's account, the Adhkhish live a short distance from the wall. Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography lists the Adhkhish as a Turkic tribe. However, he makes no mention of them during Sallām's journey. From here Sallām journeys to a city whose king is the ruler of the Adhkhish Turks. Zichy argues that the Adhkhish must be located in the Urals, near the Bulghārs along the Volga. Positing new readings for each of de Goeje's conjectures, Zichy claims that Sallām actually traveled not to the Wall of China, but merely north of the Caucasus, and that it was here that the contemporaries of Sallām searched for the wall.

This article was followed the next year (1923) with another rebuttal to de Goeje's hypothesis; this was made by C. E. Wilson in an essay entitled "The Wall of Alexander against Gog and Magog; and the Expedition sent out to find it by the Khalif Wāthiq." Wilson also rejects de Goeje's hypothesis. He chooses instead to base himself, like Zichy before him, primarily on Idrisi's account of Sallām's journey. However, Wilson follows the itinerary of Sallām's journey up past the northern Mongolian steppe into the region of Lake Baikal, which stretches across southeastern Siberia, where he believes "Idrīsī imagined the rampart to be." For Wilson, this would position the wall at the extreme north of the Yablonoi mountain range of northern Mongolia. Wilson traces the expedition from the Bashjirt, through what he terms the fetid land of the Qirghiz steppe of Mongolia, where he claims Sallām's expedition concluded. After painstakingly mapping out a new itinerary for Sallām's journey, he argues that Alexander's wall is nothing but a "legend which could not bear close investigation." This, however, does not lead Wilson to doubt the broader truth claims of al-Wāthiq's intention to find the wall, and of Sallām's expedition across uncharted territory. Wilson's hypothesis ultimately points not to intentional mystification but incredulous misunderstanding, wherein Sallām, guided by a popular legend, was led to some fortification thousands of miles away in the far northeast, and when told that this was Alexander's rampart, accepted it as fact.

The cartographer Konrad Miller (d. 1933) soon after published a study (1928) on Idrisi's world map, in which he also turned to the question of Sallām's journey to the wall. Miller superimposes a fallacy of psychological intention onto the account, claiming that when Sallām was unable to find the wall in the traditional location of the Caucasus, he chose instead to invent the entire affair, daring not to return to the caliph empty-handed. Here Miller claims that Sallām's fanciful imagination was mistaken by Idrīsī as truth. Turning from the anecdote to Idrisi, Miller argues that we should by no means think that the rampart described represents the Wall of China, "of which Idrīsī knows nothing at all." Rather Miller argues that Alexander's wall was always supposed to be located somewhere in the north or northeast, and that as geographical knowledge of the world increased, so, too, did geographers push the wall farther to the margins of the world. Basing himself both on Idrisi's account of the expedition and the projection of the accompanying world map, Miller concludes that Idrīsī must have thought that the wall was located in the Altai mountain range at the headwaters of the Irtysh River.

The argument over Sallām's journey continued with Andrew Anderson's monograph, Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Enclosed Nations (1932). Anderson prefaces his remarks by stating that the anecdote of Sallām al-Tarjumān has had "an altogether undeserved influence." In turn, Anderson goes on to reject de Goeje's Great Wall thesis, and like Zichy, Wilson, and Miller, he follows Idrīsī's account to map Sallām's itinerary. Yet Anderson concludes that the mountain chain containing Alexander's rampart, as represented by Idrīsī, does not correspond to the Altai range as Miller argues, but suggests that the name given by Idrīsī as Qiīfaya is a corruption Qaf, Qabk, or Qabkh, i.e., the various Arabic forms for the Caucasus, an argument which is nonetheless not entirely convincing.
After these articles, mention of the adventure often takes on the form of passing references rather than fully developed arguments. Minorsky, in his commentary on the anonymous fourth/tenth-century Persian geography, the *Hudūd al-ʿalam* (1938), dismisses the entire affair with a brief aside, calling Sallām’s account to the wall of Gog and Magog, “a wonder tale interspersed with three or four geographical names.” Yet despite this flat-handed rejection, Minorsky finds in Sallām’s account sufficient geographical information to refute Zichy’s thesis that Sallām traveled north past the Caucasus into the Urals.

On the other hand, the desire to glimpse the truth in this account echoes tangentially in A. A. Vasiliev’s study, *Byzance et les Arabes* (1935), in which he is not so quick to discredit the entire affair. Rather, like al-Wāthiq’s mission to the People of the Cave, Vasiliev is ready to accept the historicity of Sallām’s expedition. In a brief footnote, he challenges Sprenger’s claim that the entire account was purely a mystification, suggesting instead that the description of the wall probably reflects a mixture of popular legends held by the people encountered, and Sallām’s own preconceived notions.

Zeki Validi Togan, in his edition, translation, and commentary of Ibn Faḍlān’s journey to the king of the Bulghars (1939), also chooses to take the journey to the wall seriously. In a note, Togan argues against de Goeje’s hypothesis and offers instead a series of possible readings for the unidentified toponyms in Sallām’s itinerary. Foremost, Togan sees in Igu, or Ikka, not the Chinese city Yizhou, but a reference to a toponym named by the Turkish lexicographer Kāshgharī as Iki-Öğüz (إيكي أوز), which he identifies with a frontier town (bīl-thaghr), on the Ili River, a tributary of Lake Balkhash in Kazakhstan.

Togan argues that since Gog and Magog were commonly held to be Turks, we should then look among the eastern Turks in order to plot Sallām’s itinerary. For Togan, the adventure ends before the Iron Gate, that is the Tiemenguan (鐵門關) to the Taklamakan Desert, at the eastern stretch of the Tian Shan mountain range.

Each of these scholars approaches the story from a distinct angle, adding their own voices to the fray, emphasizing certain elements and ignoring others, often to suit their own tastes and dispositions. For instance, D. M. Dunlop, in his monograph, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (1954), speculates more about Sallām’s ethnicity than the itinerary of his journey. After mentioning that Sallām stayed with the king of the Khazar, Dunlop concludes, without any textual evidence, that Sallām was probably a Khazar Jew. Salo Wittmayer Baron, in his *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1952), hypothesizes, also without evidence, that Sallām was most likely a Jew from al-Andalus.

Building upon the itinerary as mapped out by de Goeje, the historian and engineer László Bendefy published an entire monograph in Hungarian (1941) on the topic. Bendefy’s initial interest in the adventure appears to be based on Idrisi’s account of how Sallām visited the Bashjirt—proto-Hungarian tribes who were neighbors of the Khazar. From here Bendefy follows de Goeje, tracing the caliphal mission to the Great Wall of China. Yet the location of the Jade Gate in a desert plain and the archeological description of the edifice published by the Hungarian explorer and archeologist Sir Aurel Stein (d. 1943) hardly corresponds to Sallām’s description of a mountain barrier. Bendefy reasons that, had Sallām traveled to the Wall of China, he would have soon realized that this barrier was not built by Alexander the Great. This leads Bendefy to look to other fortifications associated with the Greek hero in order to identify the itinerary of the caliphal delegation.

Bendefy plots Sallām’s adventure through Central Asia over the Hindu Kush mountain range into the Swat Valley, in the northwest of modern-day Pakistan. Here, Bendefy reasons, Sallām must have discovered the mountain fortification of Bir-köt, which, based on the survey of Sir Aurel Stein, corresponds to Bazira (بژیرا). According to the Greek historian, Arrian of Nicomedia (d. ca 160 C.E.), Bazira was the location of a military campaign carried out by Alexander the Great in the Swat Valley during the spring of 327 B.C.E. In Bendefy’s estimation, it was in this region that Sallām saw what he took to be Alexander’s barrier against Gog and Magog. Bendefy identifies this with Aornos (Αορνος), described by Arrian as a natural rock (nētra) stronghold, which Alexander the Great had captured and which Aurel Stein sought to locate on the precipitous massif of Uņa-sor rising above the Indus River. To support this entire hypothesis, Bendefy suggests that Idrisi’s reference to the Adhkish is a textual corruption which should be read as Badakhshān, a region in northeastern Afghanistan. This leads him to argue that the toponym interpreted by de Goeje as Igu is a distortion of the fortification of Girā, or rather Rāja Girā, the local Pathāni name for Udegrām, the location of another of Alexander’s battles in the Swat Valley, identified by Aurel Stein as Arrian’s Ora (‘Ορα). This entire theory, needless to say, is philologically, geographically, and historically dubious.

Bendefy argues that the details of Sallām’s narrative that run counter to this thesis, such as the actual description of the barrier, are themselves errors introduced into the account by Ibn Khurraḍadhibih, who had a penchant for fabulous tales. While Sallām’s account of the wall and its mountainous regions certainly does not match that of the Jade Gate, it
also lacks any concrete mention of travel through the Swat Valley and fails to match Aural Stein's descriptions in any significant way. How these mountainous ruins, which have come to be associated with Alexander’s Indian campaign largely through Aurel Stein’s identifications, could have been known to Sallām, is also not addressed. Following de Goeje’s effort to concretely locate the wall, Bendefy adds the use of archeological material to the analysis of the adventure in an attempt to wed Sallām’s itinerary to the historical campaigns of Alexander the Great.

Most recently three articles in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, all written by E. J. van Donzel, followed by a monograph (2010), co-written with Andrea Schmidt and Claudia Ott, have sought to revitalize the theory developed by de Goeje more than a hundred years ago. The first two encyclopedia articles appear side by side, under the headings, “Qoço” and “Qomul.” Van Donzel uses this pair of articles to defend the argument that Sallām traveled by way of Yizhou, known by the Uyghurs as Qomul, to the Great Wall of China. Treating the journey as historical fact, van Donzel glosses the historical campaigns of Alexander the Great.

In these two articles, van Donzel bypasses the question of authenticity altogether, using Sallām’s description of Igu, or Ikka, as a way to describe what the city of Qomul once really looked like, telling us that Sallām’s description of city walls stretching for a parameter of sixty kilometers corresponds to the Chinese kuan (guan), which he argues was equivalent to a fortified city. Van Donzel’s claim that Sallām’s description of Igu, or Ikka, with its sixty-kilometer parameter, corresponds to a Chinese guan seems specious, as a guan (關), historically, was a mountain pass, barrier, or customs house. The idea that there were Chinese urban centers of such a size on the frontiers is also questionable. As for Yizhou, according to ‘Tang administrative records from the ninth century, it was a relatively modest outpost with fewer than two thousand households. Yet from de Goeje’s thesis, van Donzel builds a historical narrative of conclusions, based on what he takes to be the first narrative of a Muslim traveler to the region. He claims Sallām’s reference to the Muslims inhabiting the city Igu, or Ikka, is proof for the early presence of Islam in the Xinjiang region.

Van Donzel’s last encyclopedia article takes a slightly different approach to the adventure. The subject for this article is reserved entirely for Sallām al-Tarjuman. Though van Donzel still calls Sallām an early traveler to China and supports de Goeje, he offers a more nuanced position, drawing into question the veracity of the narrative and calling the journey an alleged expedition, “Sallām may have traveled the Ili River upstream. The ruined towns which he then reached are perhaps the ruins of Peiting. . . the city of the ancient capital of the region. He may then have passed modern Urumchi, Guchen and Barku.” Van Donzel argues that though the details of Sallām’s journey after having left the Caucasus might be vague, there is no good reason to doubt that Sallām made his way to the Jade Gate. He bases this conclusion on one single observation that he takes as historical fact, “Sallām did reach Hami, since his Ikku is identical with this Chinese town.” Here van Donzel directs us to his own entry on Qomul in the Encyclopaedia of Islam as proof for this claim. In this article on the Uyghur city, his identification of this unvocalized toponym with Yizhou is based on de Goeje’s hypothesis, which here is presented as a historical reality. This is despite the fact that de Goeje’s largely speculative argument has been a flash point for heated debate. Van Donzel does reference some of those who challenged de Goeje’s claim, yet, in the final analysis, he concludes that Sallām “did indeed travel to the eastern part of the Tarim basin [where] he saw the western extension of the Great Wall of China.”

As we have noted, the textual evidence for the claim that Sallām made his way to China is tenuous at best. Though the Vienna manuscript that de Goeje uses for his edition of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s descriptive geography is far more complete than the Bodleian copy used by de Meynard, it is, as de Goeje himself acknowledges, a later abridgment. The manuscript in question, Vienna Mixt. 783 (Loewenstein 2403), purchased by the Swedish Orientalist Count Carlo de Landberg (d. 1924) in Alexandria and gifted to the Imperial Library of Vienna in 1886, is undated, though one of the ownership notes goes back to 756/1355. The condition of the manuscript is poor and worm-eaten, with large portions having been taped over and recopied by a later hand. This is the case with the section containing the unvocalized toponym that de Goeje reads for Yizhou (plate 13).

The scribe who recopied this passage does not make our job any easier, as not only is the toponym in question left without diacritical marks, but its consonantal form is ambiguous and can be read in multiple ways:

إلى مدينة يقال لها حلب (اسمك) تربعه عشرة فراسخ وها) أبواب حدید

ilā madinatin yaqālī laḥā .lhl/.k.h tarbi’ihū ‘ashāratu farāṣkha
wa laḥā abwābū ḥadīdīn

It is of note that the passage copied over does not agree grammatically with the rest of the text, suggesting that what lies beneath the medieval restoration could very well contain something else altogether. The codicological record is all the more problematic. De Meynard recognized
that his edition, based on the Oxford manuscript (MS Hunt 433), and the much later manuscript housed in Paris (Supplément arabe 895), represented a significant abridgment of the text, and, as such, was an imperfect reflection of the original geography. With the discovery of a new and considerably expanded manuscript (Vienna Mixt. 783), de Goeje was able to significantly improve de Meynard's text, basing his edition on three manuscripts, namely Vienna Mixt. 783, Bodleian Hunt 433, and a third manuscript in Oxford, which he did not identify, but only mentioned as containing a fragment of the geography.\(^\text{139}\)

On close inspection, it is evident that this third manuscript is Bodleian MS Hunt 538, which contains an excerpt embedded within the larger geography of Ibn Hawqal, mainly treating marvelous phenomena, including the wall of Gog and Magog. This particular manuscript served as a basis for both de Goeje's edition of Ibn Hawqal and Johannes Kramers' subsequent re-edited improvement. Neither of these editors included this section in their editions, or found it particularly noteworthy that Ibn Khurdadbeh was quoted at length in a manuscript of Ibn Hawqal's geography. Indeed de Goeje seems to intentionally obfuscate the matter by not mentioning the provenance of this material.\(^\text{140}\)

A comparison with the other manuscripts of Ibn Hawqal makes it readily apparent that this section is a later addition to Ibn Hawqal's text. Nonetheless, it is included within MS Hunt 538 as original to the manuscript, as it is written out in the same scribal hand. This speaks to how fluid and multi-valent the textual reception of medieval manuscripts could be, particularly when the original form and intention of the author was often eclipsed by the tastes and desires of those responsible for a text's transmission. Ibn Hawqal, along with Ištahârī, and evidently Balkhi, two authors on whom he bases his own geography, are exceptional among early geographers in not mentioning al-\=Wâthiq's mission to the wall; the insertion of this account remedies what might have appeared to his readers as a glaring lacuna.

Illustrative of this process of adaptation and transformation is a geographical compendium made in 725/1325 in the famous crusader castle of Syria, the Krak des Chevaliers. This particular manuscript consists of a partial abridgment from Ibn al-Faqih, and selections from Idrisi, including Sallam's adventure to the wall, which is highlighted on the title page by the proclamation, "contained herein is the account (\textit{hadith}) of Gog and Magog."\(^\text{141}\) As with the insertion in the Ibn Hawqal manuscript of MS Hunt 538, this tag underscores how the account to the wall came to be viewed as the \textit{sine qua non} of Islamic descriptive geography. Perhaps even more important is how common such acts of mixing and matching geographical material were in medieval codicological practices.

Medieval manuscripts were transmitted in an evolutionary process, which often ignored authorial design or intention, wherein the practices of dissemination could give birth to multiple recensions, even within the lifetime of an author. To make sense of the significant differences between the Bodleian (B) and the Vienna (V) manuscripts, de Goeje posited a two-stage process of recension, one (B) which began during or slightly after the reign of al-\=Wâthiq, around 232/847, and another (V) which Ibn Khurdadbeh did not finish until after 272/885. De Goeje based this theory upon internal references to historical events dated after the reign of al-\=Wâthiq, which appear only in the Vienna manuscript. Such is the case with the description of the adventure in the pyramids of Giza undertaken in the service of Ibn Tülün; this is recorded only in the Vienna manuscript and historically must postdate al-\=Wâthiq's reign. While the Bodleian manuscript does not contain this section, it is also missing several other segments that appear to be integral to the geography.

It should be noted that much of the material datable to the latter half of the third/ninth century appears in the form of poetic citations that are almost entirely absent from the Bodleian recension. The use of verse, however, functions as an essential component to the geography, in terms of form and structure, as several of the toponyms mentioned are relatively rare, as far as geographical discourse is concerned, and are explicitly framed as catchwords to explain and geographically situate particular lines of verse that highlight or reference geographical locations. This helps to confirm that the Bodleian copy is an abridgment of a text, which like the Vienna manuscript, once contained a full range of poetic citations.\(^\text{142}\)

It is thus not impossible to imagine that the historical references lacking from the Bodleian copy, which is missing an undetermined number of folios,\(^\text{143}\) are not a reflection of an earlier recension, but represent a later abridgment. The radically different proemiums opening the two recensions, which have recently been studied by James Montgomery,\(^\text{144}\) could easily be understood not as different authorial redactions, but as reflections of an even later process of abridgment. In terms of the Bodleian proemium, it was copied by a different hand from the main body of the text.\(^\text{145}\) As for the Vienna copy, its proemium, which is wedded to the political context of the period, is also, evidently, by a later hand.\(^\text{146}\) However, based upon the reception history, the introductory dedication in the Vienna manuscript is most likely original to the geography.\(^\text{147}\)

This messy work of codicological analysis is not mere pedantry, for broader claims about the nature and purpose of the geography are based
upon what appears to be a deceptively clean text when edited. While de Goeje's modern edition neatly smooths out the rough edges of manuscript variation through, what is, at times, an obscure critical apparatus, just like upon what appears to be a deceptively clean text when edited. While de defining the text according to a set of particular interests. The epistemic able expanding, cutting, and rearranging where they saw fit. For instance, the end of Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography, as presented in the Vienna manuscript, is interrupted with what appears to be a later addendum to the by an anonymous narrator shepherds from the region of Samarqand, who was lured into a verdant spring and disappeared, seduced by beautiful water nymphs. While this could very well correspond to an authorial version, as de Goeje himself admits, there is no way of knowing, as this section does not appear in the other manuscripts. What we have of Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography is not a camera copy of an original redaction, or even two distinct authorial recensions, but a codicological record that reflects the text's medieval reception history. While what survives appears, for all intents and purposes, to correspond to material produced at some point in the third/ninth century, it is also evident that this material has been redacted, edited, and shaped in the process of transmission.

With regard to the historical record, Ibn Khurradadhbih is known to have been a companion of al-Mu'tamid, for whom he apparently wrote his work on musical history. From the bibliographical accounts about Ibn Khurradadhbih, it is not at all apparent that he was affiliated with the court of al-Wâthiq, a generation earlier. Furthermore, there are many references in the geography that predate al-Wâthiq, such as the account of al-Ma'mûn receiving from 'Abd Allâh b. Tâhir two thousand Ghuzz Turks as captives from Kabul in 211-2/826-7, and the narrative based on Tamim b. Bahir's journey to the Uyghur Turks on the Orkhon, which, according to Minorsky, appears to have occurred around 206/821. It is reasonable to assume that a good portion of the historical and geographical information that Ibn Khurradadhbih gathered is based on previous existing data collected by and for the secretariat, in circulation well before he actually began to compile his work. The modern notion of authorship and authorial design is entirely anachronistic to the period and to this particular text. This is highlighted in the Bodleian manuscript in which Ibn Khurradadhbih is explicitly mentioned as an authority within the narrative (wa qâla Abû 'l-Qâsim...), suggesting a form of authorship that is as much a process of emendation, arrangement, and authorial certification as actual composition.

While it is clear that there were at least two recensions of Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography, the assumption that the manuscript divergence that we have today reflects two different stages of authorial design is based, more than anything, on a desire to see the manuscripts for something which they are clearly not, i.e., authorial redactions. However, by recognizing the surviving codicological record for what it is, namely stages in the reception history of third/ninth century geography, we risk losing authorial, and thus epistemological control over the text. While the Bodleian manuscript, which at points reads very much like an abridgment when compared to the Vienna recension, is missing apparent references to later historical events and contains several notable variants in order and content, these differences appear, above all, to reflect a historical process of reception and abridgment. De Goeje's claim that there were two original redactions gives both levels of variants, which are quite significant as far as al-Wâthiq's mission goes, a veneer of authorial intention. This, after all, forms the basis of textual source criticism, which seeks to reconstitute an ideal 'original' text out of the morass of manuscript recensions. Yet such a framework, which privileges an original authorial design, overlooks how, in the course of publication, either in manuscript or print form, texts and their meanings become collaborative events which are, necessarily, part of a process of veiling the author, however construed, within an ever collapsing horizon of intention.

As for the reception history of Sallâm's adventure, the surviving record is quite telling. The 'Abbâsid geographer Ibn Rusta was one of the first to copy out the adventure, which he does as a means of demonstrating Ibn Khurradadhbih's own exaggeration (tazyid), very much in keeping with Isfahânî's assessment of Ibn Khurradadhbih as seldom discriminate in what he relates and in the books he writes. Raising doubt about the veracity of the journey, Ibn Rusta's version does not mention a city near the mountain pass. This is also the case with Ibn al-Faqîh, who composed his geography during the reign of al-Mu'tadid (r. 279-89/892-902). While Ibn al-Faqîh transmits the account as authentic, he makes no reference to the enormous city located on the road to the barrier. Ibn Rusta and Ibn al-Faqîh, who testify to the earliest surviving reception of Ibn Khurradadhbih, both plot Sallâm's journey through the lands beyond the Khazar, without mentioning specific toponyms that could concretely locate the wall. In his edition of these two geographies, de Goeje chooses not to copy out these
transmissions of Sallām’s journey, evidently because he saw no need to replicate an account already contained in Ibn Khurradadhbih’s work.158

The result of passing over this reception history as redundant is to efface the early record of the adventure. The succeeding generation of geographical writing, as represented by Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, Ibn al-Munādī, Muqaddasī, and Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī, is also unanimous on this issue. None of these authors makes reference to a named toponym before the wall. Even Idrīsī’s apparent redaction of Jayhānī, which de Goeje believes is closer to the Vienna recension, offers us no insight into the name of this city.159

This reception history is further supported by the codicological evidence from the surviving manuscripts of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography, for only Vienna Mixt. 783 identifies a toponym before the wall. Even here there is doubt, for what appears to be the name of this city survives only after the restoration of damage to the manuscript, by means of a later scribal hand, which has pasted a sheet of paper over the effaced section in question. Whether what is written on this restoration corresponds to the original manuscript remains to be seen, as we are effectively left only with a palimpsest. Perhaps more importantly, neither the Bodleian nor Paris manuscripts, nor the excerpt in Ibn Hawqāl, make reference to a city before the wall. This is completely in line with the early reception of the account, which maps the adventure in the ambiguous space of *terra incognita*, beyond the lands of the Khazar.

Through the positivism necessary to construct the illusion of a definitive and stable *urtext*, de Goeje, in the process of his edition and translation, pushes the messy history of textual reception into the margins of a critical apparatus. The hypothesis of two authorial redactions neatly explains the discrepancies in the two major manuscript groupings. That these stemmata represent the only recensions, authorial or otherwise, however, remains to be seen. The transmission of learning within Islamic intellectual history followed both oral and written lines of dissemination, often extending from the lifetime of the author and beyond. This is evidently the case for Ibn al-Munādī and Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, whose respective receptions of the adventure are based upon the formalized structure of *iṣnād* transmission, which suggests that Ibn Khurradadhbih himself could have circulated the account at various points in time. Whatever might have constituted the published text(s), it is clear from its early reception that the section treating a named city before the wall is missing.

While the sources converge in the absence of any concrete toponym next to the barrier, the reception history itself points to multiplicity and heterogeneity in the process of transmission. Thus, when tracking the distance covered between the Khazar and the fortifications before the wall, through the putrid land and destroyed cities to the series of fortifications, the two recensions of the geography offer distinctly different calculations: the Vienna manuscript gives a total of fifty-six days, while the Bodleian manuscript claims it took sixty-six. Ibn Rusta, Muqaddasī, and Yāqūt state that it took sixty-three days to reach the fortifications. Ibn al-Faqīḥ skips over this section entirely, claiming earlier in his geography that a journey of two months separates the Khazar and the wall of Gog and Magog.160 Ibn al-Qāṣṣ states authoritatively that the wall of Gog and Magog is located seventy-two days north of the Khazar, while his actual description of the adventure adds up to a total of seventy-four. Idrīsī’s account describes the journey as seventy-three days, through from the borders of the Bashjīrt. While this polysemous divergence reflects the multiple lines of transmission and transformation in the history of reception, all of the writers are clear about one thing, namely that the wall of Gog and Magog is located somewhere beyond the land of the Khazar. Not one of them directly references China or a Chinese fortification.

The Bodleian recension presents a shorter account of the anecdote, which does not contain many of the same details found in the Vienna manuscript. These include the description of an enormous named city before the barrier, the small crack discovered in the wall, the Qur’ānic inscription written in the first language, and certain details of the return journey, such as the frontier regions visited and the numerous casualties suffered. Yet, these added elements are missing in the later accounts of al-Wāṭhiq’s mission, starting immediately with the likes of Ibn al-Faqīḥ, Ibn Rusta, Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, and Ibn al-Munādī, and continuing after Idrīsī. While this could indicate an early abridgment of the account within the body of Aḥbāṣīd descriptive geography, it could also point to a later expansion and improvement of the adventure as preserved within the Vienna recension. It is the Bodleian version, or more likely an earlier redaction quite similar to it and not the extended account in the Vienna recension, which serves as the general basis for the reception history of Sallām’s adventure.

As we have noted, the recension that passes through Jayhānī and is picked up by Idrīsī and those who follow him, such as Ibn al-Athīr,161 only mentions a city ruled by the Khāqān of the Adhkīsh Turks. This continues the long tradition that associates Gog and Magog with Turkic tribes. In the process of reception, several significant details, which do not appear in the manuscripts of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography, creep into the account of the mission. For example, in Ibn al-Qāṣṣ’s account, Sallām learns that the horrible smell in the black putrid land was caused by the
rotting carcasses of the people destroyed by Gog and Magog. Likewise in Idrisi, the anecdote of a camel-riding missionary who converted the Turks before the wall and taught them the Qur'an does not have an analog in the surviving manuscripts of the Masālik. While these variations could, indeed, find their genesis in the original authorial composition of Sallām al-Tarjumān, it is just as likely that such additions are themselves later exegetical expansions of the account.

So what of the mysterious toponym in the Vienna manuscript? As the name of the city is left unvocalized there are numerous possible readings, and thus the original intent must remain open to speculation. Barring evidence from any future manuscript discovery, there is nothing to ground the text to one authoritative interpretation. While this toponym could be original to the authorial design of the text, given that it is entirely absent from the account, it is as reasonable to assume that it represents a scribal addition, as it is to posit an authorial origin behind the word. It could very well be the case that this mysterious toponym was introduced after the Mongol invasions of Central Asia, as the word may be a corruption of ōngū (ْنْغُ), and would thus be based upon a known folk etymology for the word wall.

Not only is this vocalization more philologically plausible than that offered by Yizhou, but it also has the added benefit of semantically echoing the location that it purports to represent. Furthermore, Rashid al-Din explicitly identifies ōngū as a Mongolian word for a walled fortification which he likens to Alexander's rampart (sadd), suggesting a reasonable means for reckoning how this word could have been grafted onto a description of the wall against Gog and Magog. While it is unlikely that Sallām al-Tarjumān would have come across such a word, the idea that he encountered the Ōnggūt, who guarded fortifications for the Chin dynasty (1115-1234) along the borders of Mongolia, would be entirely anachronistic. The word itself appears to belong to a different historical sphere of linguistic exchange; one that developed well after the third/ninth-century 'Abbasid encounters along the march-lands of Central Asia. Such a hypothesis would thus be predicated on the multivalent reception that Ibn Khurramādhbiḥ's geography enjoyed, or suffered, depending on one's perspective.

Yet this, too, is unsatisfying, if not also unconvincing, as such a reduction limits and closes off the conceptual fluidity of the frontier. Focusing on the problem solely from the question of where Sallām actually ended up, or whether his journey was a historical fact, risks overlooking the complex narrative structures that have animated this anecdote for centuries. For though de Goeje's Wall of China thesis does a great service by taking the material seriously, the positivism of trying to give historical and geographical specificity to Sallām's journey forces us to ignore all the deliberate ambiguity and indeterminacy that weds this narrative to the fluid space of the marvelous.
The Limits of Knowledge

The anecdote as a vehicle for historical knowledge is limited by its own narrative form and generic expectations. The ‘Abbasid adventure to discover the land of Gog and Magog does not lead us to a physical wall, but to epistemic multiplicity. The narrative resists bringing us closer to ‘Abbasid relations with Khazaria, the reconfiguration of the Uyghur Khanate, or Sogdian trade routes through Central Asia—though all these are parts of frontier history which loom large during the period. Such historical configurations, rather, form the imagined and largely unspoken landscape of the adventure, whose underlying concern is not in the world of ontology. While outwardly a physical barrier appears to be the focus of Sallām’s mission, like descriptive geography, such semiotic employment serves to fashion existence within a discrete, manageable narrative, which, in this particular case, means grafting ‘Abbasid dominion within the arc of salvation.

The dissemination, translation, and reception of such anecdotes reflects the broader transmission and circulation of knowledge and its expansion through the accretions of new iterations. Following the intricate turns of the thread, as the adventure weaves back and forth through the fabric of its interpreters, we may behold a discernible pattern of storytelling recurrent in both the sources and the scholarship that traces them. From the beginning, the tension between the authentic and spurious forms a well-defined motif.

Sallām’s narrative anticipates the generations of readers who will try to fathom and transmit the real with exacting certainty. All the names assigned to it—ḥabar, qiṣṣa, ḥikāya, fabula, mystifikation, legende, récit, relation, report, narrative, story, tale, text—attempt to account for the words and their effect, and yet none of the categories, with their own valences and predispositions, bring us any closer to apprehending the historical
There is an inherent challenge in using such categories as the legendary, fabulous, or marvelous to interpret and explain the impressive dissemination of Sallām’s journey. Even those, such as Ibn Rusta, Tha‘alibi, and Birūnī, who objected to the evident contradictions and ambiguities in the account, held the belief that the wall of Gog and Magog exists; this premise foregrounds the medieval reception of the adventure. As Ibn al-Wardi states in his cosmographical book of wonders, Gog and Magog must be located on the map, for there is Qur’ānic proof (nasṣ al-kitāb) of their physical existence. For us, the problem of the category of the marvelous is that it is inflected with an implicit sense of the fictitious; and though some medieval Muslims voice suspicion concerning the authenticity of Sallām’s journey, their broader worldview embraces a universe populated with marvels and monsters. This is a world affirmed in the Qurān itself, where the talking hudhud (hoopoe), the jinn and angels, Moses and the fish, the People of the Cave, the wall holding back Gog and Magog are all generally taken as literal accounts of reality.

To begin to appreciate the narrative of al-Wāthiq’s embassy, we have had to explore the cultural assumptions and social logic surrounding its production and reception. By mapping out the various contingencies that inflect Ibn Khurrawādhibhi’s descriptive geography, we have seen why this particular anecdote is emblematic of how other such tales are in commerce with discourses of the marvelous. This structure is enacted through a mimetic illusion that manages the vertiginous world of diversity through the power of text and image. All of this is predicated on the belief that the marvelous is part of a reality that can be verified through empirical observation. Needless to say, this particular framework of ocular authority runs counter to Enlightenment epistemologies.

Confronted with a world stripped of such medieval enchantment, modern analysis has centered on three basic propositions: 1) the expedition itself never occurred; 2) the expedition occurred, yet Sallām, not finding the wall, made up the entire affair so as not to anger the caliph; 3) the expedition occurred, yet Sallām reached a fortification which he incorrectly thought to be the rampart of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn. All three of these responses ultimately doubt the central claim of the account, that Sallām reached Alexander’s wall, built to protect humankind against a race of monsters destined to overrun the world at the end of time. While these conclusions may be bolstered by the fact that we lack the material evidence for the existence of a wall built by Alexander against Gog and Magog, they also run the risk of ignoring the broader significance of the tale itself.

Those who sought to give more credence to Sallām’s itinerary as a historical event, have invariably turned to Idrisi’s version of the account to supplement their analysis. More often than not, this supplementation has occurred without consideration of how the variations in Idrisi’s text do not necessarily reflect a more accurate or truly original version of events and may well be indicative of how later readers altered or changed Sallām’s account in the course of its reception. This is a process that is also likely at play in the codicological recensions as preserved in the two major manuscript groupings of Ibn Khurrawādhibhi’s geography.

**Models of Imperial Dominion**

In dialogue with Syriac, Persian, and Arabic narratives of the rampart, Sallām sets his course in line with a tradition of following the tracks of Alexander the Great. The implicit logic operating within the text affirms the truth of Sallām’s experience and the unquestionable existence of the wall itself. As with the gem offered to Shahrbārē and the shavel presented to Mu‘āwiya, the chip of iron that Sallām scratches off with his knife serves as a testament to the physical existence of the ominous boundary.

Despite the many divergences, ultimately, the various recensions position Sallām’s wall in a remote and largely untraceable land at the margins of existence. The topographical specificity that frames the entire affair, tantalizingly fans out precisely at the moment the wall is unveiled, revealing and simultaneously concealing, to keep ever present and ever distant the object desired. The putrid-smelling land, the ruined cities, and the unvocalized toponym all take us out of the discourse of exactitude and into the world of indeterminacy.

From its initial reception, the adventure has been framed by a discourse of the marvelous. Within Islamic configurations, marvel-writing has developed a concern with the apocalypse and the destruction of the earth. The wall itself is a visual testament to the broad design of salvation history, which will level the threatening diversity of existence in apocalyptic fury. A discourse of wonder permeates the Qurān, which refers to itself (Q. 72:1) as a marvel (‘ajab). Muslim exegetes took the primary meaning of the word for a Qurānīc verse (āya) to be equivalent to a marvel (‘ajab), demonstrating a deeper symbolic relationship between the Qurān as a linguistic phenomenon and the human reaction of astonishment at the reception of divine revelation. The marvelous is part of the very Qurānīc narrative that foregrounds the People of the Cave and Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn’s...
campaign against Gog and Magog, as the word marvel frames the entire sura (Q. 18:9; cf. 18:63).

Ibn Khurradadhbih's account of the missions sent by al-Wathiq to discover the locations of these two stories suggests not only the incorporation of Qur'anic material within the field of descriptive geography, but also a vision of caliphal power as interconnected with religious knowledge and imperial surveillance. As such, these missions form part of an articulation of Abbâsid dominion, where the relics of Byzantium are disproved, while the wall of Gog and Magog is not only located but controlled, under the rule of Muslims, in what appears to be a divinely orchestrated progression of history.

As for this imperial projection of power, given the state of the codicological evidence, we can only speculate as to the original contexts for the reception of Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography. In the cases of Sallâm's journey to the wall and Muhammad b. Mûsâ's encounter with the false Byzantine relics, Ibn Khurradadhbih claims to have heard both accounts directly from the adventurers themselves, perhaps at some point not too long after the events occurred. How much time might have separated Ibn Khurradadhbih's reception of this material and the composition of his geography, nonetheless, remains to be seen. The adventures were most likely disseminated within a courtly context during Ibn Khurradadhbih's own lifetime, as Sarakhsi, the ill-fated tutor and ku'dâm of al-Mu'tamid, appears to have related both stories in his no longer extant geography.

We know from the biographic record that Ibn Khurradadhbih, the companion of al-Mu'tamid, was a denizen of the court. Among his works, considered lost, are the Kitâb al-ṭabikh [Book on the culinary arts], the Kitâb al-sharâb [Book on drinking], and the Kitâb al-nudâmâ wa l-julâsâ [Book on boon companions and table companions], all of which speak to a belleslettres interaction with court culture. This proximity to centers of power suggests not only a caliphal audience, but also larger networks connecting the ruling elite, the bureaucratic interests of the secretariat, and the social circles of litterateurs. Ibn Khurradadhbih's audiences with al-Mu'tamid, as well as his association with the Christian aristocrat 'Abdûn b. Makhlad (d. 310/922–3), brother of Šâ'id b. Makhlad (d. 276/889), the wâzîr to both al-Mu'tamid and the prince regent al-Mu'waffaq, highlight points of interconnectivity along which the marvelous stories and the poetical citations of his geography could well have circulated. His friendship with the court poets Ibn al-Rûmî (d. 283/896) and Buhturi further adumbrate a backdrop of literary salons (majâlis) that were the occasion for poetry and wondrous tales.

In a description of Transcaucasia and the kingdom of the Khazar, Ibn Khurradadhbih cites a verse from Buhturi's elegiac poem dedicated to Šâ'id b. Kundajîq, a military commander and governor of Mawsil and jazîra, of Khazar descent:

\[\text{He has gained honor in Iraq in addition to that which he has been pledged in Khamlij or Balanjar.}\]

Like most of the poetic citations in the Vienna recension, this line of verse is missing from the Bodleian manuscript. As for its placement within the Masâlik, this verse with its reference to Khazar cities situates the land beyond the frontiers within the orbit of Abbâsid influence. Buhturi composed this particular elegy in 269/883 for the ceremonial investiture in which Ishâq b. Kundajîq was crowned and given two swords, and conferred the title Dhû 'l-Sayfâyn ('Possessor of the two swords'). A similar honorific is found in Dhû 'l-Wâzîratayn ('Possessor of the two vizierates'), the title granted in the same year to Šâ'id b. Makhlad, in a sardonic reference to his service to both al-Mu'waffaq, de facto ruler of the empire, and his imprisoned brother, the caliph al-Mu'tamid. Tabâri relates that during this same year Ishâq b. Kundajîq was instructed by Šâ'id, acting on the orders of al-Mu'waffaq, to capture the caliph al-Mu'tamid, who sought refuge from his brother with the general Ibn Tûlûn. Ishâq b. Kundajîq, after having detained al-Mu'tamid, returned him disgraced in chains back to Sâmarrâ', in Sha'bân 269/February 883. The citation of this verse within the Masâlik has led James Montgomery to argue that the unnamed patron mentioned in the opening dedication of the Vienna recension could not have been the caliph al-Mu'tamid, as it would be unlikely for Ibn Khurradadhbih to reference an elegy in honor of a figure who participated so prominently in the caliph's humiliation. This line of analysis would point rather to al-Mu'tamid's rival, the prince regent al-Mu'waffaq, as the addressee elliptically referenced in the Vienna exordium, or to someone within al-Mu'waffaq's entourage, such as his son, the future caliph al-Mu'âlîd.

Ibn Khurradadhbih's acquaintance with Šâ'id's brother perhaps suggests an affiliation with the partisans of al-Mu'waffaq, a point which strengthens the claim that the geography, at least as preserved in the Vienna manuscript, would not have been dedicated to al-Mu'tamid. Similarly, the reference in the adventure through the Giza pyramids to the general Lu'lu', who
abandoned his former master Ibn Ṭūlūn to join forces with al-Muwaffaq, may also offer a further indication of an alignment in the Vienna recension with the partisans of al-Muwaffaq. This is admittedly more problematic, as the discoveries in the pyramids appear to lionize Ibn Ṭūlūn, ally of the imprisoned al-Muʿtamīd, for his ability to have the pharaonic treasures unearthed. It may suggest that the anecdote of the pyramid, as well as the allusion to Ishāq b. Kundaḏiq, were deployed within a political context in which such material had already been neutralized and was therefore no longer politically charged or relevant.

The appendix at the end of the Vienna manuscript, with its account of seductive water nymphs, the adventure in the pyramids, many details of the mission to the wall, and the majority of the verse citations, are entirely missing from the Bodleian recension. Significant portions of the poetry, however, are preserved within the reception history of the Masālik. Nonetheless, the appendix, the Giza foray, and the various particularities of Sallām's adventure found only in the Vienna manuscript are also absent in the geographers that follow Ibn Khurradadhbih, pointing to the limited circulation of this particular manuscript. While the Vienna copy preserves details that suggest a greater proximity to the court, it also contains evident accretions that have been introduced into the text at some point in the course of its transmission. The limited dissemination of the prototype for the Vienna manuscript points to multivalency in the production of the geography, both in the recensions and in the diachronic reception. There may well have been multiple copies produced within the lifetime of the author and disseminated in a host of individual occasions, in piecemeal, or as a set body of anecdotes, or in a formalized redaction deposited within the treasury. The present codicological evidence nonetheless limits a full clarification of the original courtly contexts of production and reception.

As for the broader audience, Ibn Khurradadhbih's social universe suggests a cosmopolitan urban literary culture. Among Ibn Khurradadhbih's associates was Ibn al-Marzūbān (d. 309/920), a philologist, historian, and Qur'ānic exegete of Persian descent, who, according to Yaqūt, translated over fifty works from Persian into Arabic. Ibn al-Marzūbān was a student of the Baghdadi historian and man of letters Ibn Abī Tāhir (d. 280/893), who, likewise, was of Persian stock, and, according to Ibn al-Nadīm, had a penchant for collecting fables (khurāfāṭ) and evening tales (asmār). In his treatment of literati and the denizens of the court, Ibn al-Nadīm situates Ibn Khurradadhbih between these men, underscoring an associative proximity in the literary universe of 'Abbāsid writerly culture during the latter half of the third/ninth century. As for the intersection between storytelling and imperial administration, there is also the case of Ibn Khurradadhbih's contemporary, the Persian courtier, Abū ʿI-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymārī (d. 275/888), nadim to both al-Mutawakkil and al-Muʿtamīd. Like Ibn Khurradadhbih, Ṣaymārī appears in Ibn al-Nadīm's chapter on boon companions, table companions, men of letters, singers, buffoons, clowns, and comedians. Ṣaymārī, who was a judge and jurist, wrote on a wide array of subjects, including astrology and oneiromancy.

He is, however, also remembered for his obscene humor and his role as a court humorist. His treatise, Fadh al-surm ālā ʿi-fam [Superiority of the anus to the mouth], gives a taste of this largely court-sanctioned vulgarity. Ṣaymārī had his own run-in with Būḥtūrī, and like Ibn Khurradadhbih, had an interest in marvelous tales, as is evident in his no longer extant collection Ajā'ib al-bahr [Wonders of the sea] which, based on Ibn al-Nadīm's classification, would be in the realm of fables of dubious authenticity. Ibn al-Nadīm also points out that the 'Abbāsid caliphs were particularly fond of listening to evening tales and fables. It is through this larger social network of belletristic writing, with its attendant interest in poetry and storytelling, that Ibn Khurradadhbih's geography, and with it Sallām's adventure, is shaped and disseminated.

And it is in this light that we should re-evaluate Ḩṣfahānī's strong condemnation that Ibn Khurradadhbih was unreliable. One of the explicit reasons given by Ḩṣfahānī is Ibn Khurradadhbih's claim that the caliphs, beginning with ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and continuing through the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids, were all skilled singers. According to him, Ibn Khurradadhbih's examples of the material sung and composed by these caliphs are all pitiful and not worth mentioning.

It is of note, however, that Ḩṣfahānī's Kitāb al-aghānī depicts al-ʿAbbāṣī as a connoisseur of music and poetry who played the lute and sung his own compositions. Al-ʿAbbāṣī studied closely with the renowned musician Ḩṣfahāq al-Mawṣūlī (d. 235/850); the latter helped al-ʿAbbāṣī improve his skills. The caliph famously sought to establish a canon of the best musical compositions under Ḩṣfahāq's supervision. According to Ḩṣfahāq, of all the caliphs, al-ʿAbbāṣī was the most skilled singer. While the Kitāb al-aghānī indicates that later ʿAbbāsīd caliphs did not attain the same skill in music or poetry, the tradition of caliphal compositions and performances continued after al-ʿAbbāṣī, until al-Muʿtaḍīd, who, according to Ḩṣfahānī, was the last accomplished musician among the caliphs. Thus it stands to reason that when Ibn Khurradadhbih traced the practice of singing and
composing poetry to the earliest caliphs, he was appealing to a particular conception of the caliphate and court culture. The surviving sections of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s Kitāb al-ḥawāt wa l-邙alāḥi, which was evidently composed for al-Mu’tamīd,24 himself an ardent aficionado of music, offer a full-throated defense of singing and musical performance as grounded in the tradition of the Prophet, the theories of ancient philosophers, and the patronage of emperors.25 The discipline of music (mūsāqiya), according to Ibn Khurradadhbih, represents a philosophical system that leads to all other sciences (sā‘ir al-ši‘ālūm), combining perfectly rational principles (‘uqūl) with physical perceptions (ḥawāss).26 To this end, Alexander the Great paid great respect to musicians, as did Khusraw Parvīz, who would sing with his beloved Shirīn.27 Such a configuration serves not only to legitimate musical performance, but also positions it as part of the cosmopolitan character of the caliphate.

As with his book on music, Ibn Khurradadhbih’s administrative geography promotes a very specific image of the caliph and caliphal dominion. While his geography deals with the reality of competing powers, both within and beyond the political territories of Islam, represented, for instance, by the Rustamids, the Idrisids, the Umayyads of al-Andalus, and the Byzantines, it locates the focus of attention on the centers of ʿAbbāsid rule. To evoke, as Ibn Khurradadhbih does, the Sāsānian usage, it is the ‘heart of Iran’ (dil-i Irānshahr) that serves as the central node through which the routes of the world pass. From the sacred landscape of Mecca and Medina, to the wastelands before the wall of Gog and Magog, Ibn Khurradadhbih positions the caliphate as the axis mundi around which revolves an expansive, divine cosmography. This process of imperial self-fashioning frames the geography and its placement of ever-marvelous anecdotes along the frontiers. The Masālik opens up the itineraries of Rūṣ traders, the expansive network of polyglot Jewish merchants, and Sallām’s adventure beyond the Khazars. The extent to which these descriptions reflect historical reality, has, nonetheless, received a considerable amount of debate. The geography’s relationship to the larger constellation of ʿAbbāsid writerly culture and its adherence to the expectations of belles-lettres point to a process of not only describing the world, but also shaping it through a set of literary conventions.

The Task of the Translator
There are many parallels between Sallām’s adventure to the wall and Ibn Faḍlān’s narrative concerning his travels to the king of the Bulghars nearly a century later. Both are caliphal envoys sent to the far reaches of the world. Both encounter wondrous phenomena at the margins of existence. Yet Ibn Faḍlān’s narrative is a much longer account, more developed and substantial, and offers a fuller array of historical and geographical contingencies.

Ibn Faḍlān also describes his own encounter with Gog and Magog. He relates that the Bulghār king found a giant man from these monstrous races.28 Eventually, the king had the man killed and hung from a tree. Curious, Ibn Faḍlān requested to be taken to see the carcass, still hanging from the tree. He describes for us the immensity of this giant from the people of Gog and Magog, who, he is told, live a three-month journey beyond the Finnish Veps (Wisū), a group themselves three months away from the Bulghārs (plate 14).

A giant from a far-off land, a wall at the end of the earth; both of these intrepid adventurers cast their eyes onto the wondrous material reality of being. Led by guides, who point the way and help interpret and translate the margins of the world, our adventurers, in turn, guide us to behold the marvelous. The interpretative lenses that frame their comprehension of existence lead them to see a world that largely corresponds to their preconceptions. Ibn Faḍlān, when confronted with this giant figure, draws upon a particular vocabulary to fathom the phenomenon. As with Ibn Faḍlān’s act of beholding, the ocular proof of the witness confronted with alterity stands at the heart of Sallām’s translation project. Central to both adventures is the allure of storytelling through the exotic tales of travelers to remote lands. There is ample evidence to suggest that the very centrality of the marvelous in Islamic intellectual history, so much a part of scientific constructions of the natural world, reflects a desire to indulge in the narrative pleasures of the strange and uncanny.29

The backdrop of the ʿAbbāsid translation movement, the transmission of knowledge through various linguistic fields, the rise of administrative geography matched with imperial anxieties over the frontier, the value of verse, the role of dream interpretation, the development of marvel-writing, the eschatological projections of time all play in concert with the social contingencies that frame the production of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s geography and the ʿAbbāsid reception of Sallām’s adventure. Without this broader social matrix we have only a narrative utterly inconsistent with our own assumptions of the world. As the debate that follows Sallām demonstrates, the open field of the anecdote allows, and even encourages, such slippage in comprehension. The geographical rendering of the margins through the power of anecdotes hides the complex work inherent in the task of the translator, concealing the incongruous moments with diegetic continuity, emplotting narrative unity across the heterogeneity of existence.
Well before becoming one of the most powerful rulers of the Islamic East, and before acquiring a vast library which would include a copy of the Ibn Khurradadhbih’s *Masalik*, the Buyid prince ‘Aḍūd al-Dawla, at the fresh age of nineteen, visited the ruins of Persepolis, once the center of the Sassanian empire. He took an interest in the ancient inscriptions lining the walls of the ruined city, which centuries before had been sacked by Alexander the Great en route to the wonders of the east. We know this because ‘Aḍūd al-Dawla had his own inscription made on the doorway between the portico and the main hall of Darius’ palace in commemoration of his visit:

خضرة الامير أبو شجاع URL5 AVG URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 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URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 URL5 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and with a pocketknife, he inscribed (kataba) on the wall a set of verses, which concluded:

مُحَلِّس حَفَّ بِالْشَّرْوُرِ وَالْشَّرْيِ وَالْعُلُوِّ وَالْعُلُوِّ وَالْمَدَرِ

A gathering overtaken by cheer, narcissus, myrtle, singing, and fragrance.
It suffers no fault, save that it will be effaced by the reverses of fate.  

The poetry is not only a gloss on the ephemeral evening, but also on the transience of the mimetic illusion that the paintings of the palace represent. Not surprisingly, nostalgia serves as a prominent trope in the reconstituted textual memory of such poetic graffiti. Unlike the inscriptions of 'Adud al-Dawla, what survives of this caliphal encounter with the fragility of existence is the narrative performance of the graffiti, which simultaneously fulfills and contradicts the prediction of its own effacement.

As critical observers, our entry into the past occurs through these fragments, through the textual and semiotic, etched in the monuments erected, the words inscribed, the bones entombed. All of these are traces of the past that we try to recuperate into a meaningful order. To uncover such meaning we must seek out additional pieces to set together, so as to reconstruct a conceptual mosaic, which, in the realm of being, can only be a pale simulacrum of the past, achieved by a swift léger de main. Our own endeavors of recuperation are likewise historical acts to be contextualized and decoded, circumscribed by our own assumptions and values.

The motif of melancholy before the ruins—the atlâl and athâr—resounds in the very origin of Arabic poetry, in the generic form of the opening verses (nasib) of the classical ode (qasida). This modality of longing (hanin) in dislocation marks an established conceit in 'Abbâsid descriptive geography, and suggests already, in the beginning, a loss, a nostalgic estrangement.

Our strategy for understanding the paradigmatic patterns enveloping the intersection of salvation history and geography has been to draw on the power of the anecdote as a point of entry into the larger discursive assumptions and values surrounding the anxieties of translation. The 'Abbâsid expedition sent to discover Dhû l-Qarnayn's wall that holds back the tribes of Gog and Magog serves as an emblem for the coalescence of eschatology and geography, drawn together in the metaphor of translation. To understand the larger workings of such anecdotes, we must diagram the core individual elements against which historical material is cast and disseminated. Yet, as we have acknowledged, from such encyclopedic grandeur the sum of the parts can never truly make the whole.

The case of Sallâm al-Tarjûman's journey to the wall at the edge of the world first appears along the frontiers of the 'Abbâsid empire, as part of a body of geographical writing that details the administrative concerns of the state with belteristic attention to poetry and marvelous anecdotes. When seen within the larger pattern of looking for geographical confirmation of Qur'ânic materials, Sallâm's adventure evokes a tradition of mapping scripture across the contours of the globe. The strong parallels between the caliphal mission and earlier Syriac, Sâsânian, and Umayyad accounts further suggests the lasting effect of translation in the formation of Arabic and Persian descriptive geography. Furthermore, the prominent role of translators and acts of translation in geography, and the concomitant tradition on the wonders of creation, indicates the important conceptual role that translation has played in conceiving and imagining frontier spaces. Standing between the savage and the civilized is the figure of the interpreter, who domesticates alterity into the sublimated form of the anecdote. The fact that many readers, over time, have come to question such anecdotes highlights the lasting tensions surrounding the widely disseminated accounts of 'ajâ'ib literature. This is further accentuated by the fact that a similar anxiety envelopes the potentially distorting effects of translation, a semantic resonance that inflects the very category of the tarjûman.

While the marvels of existence become a fixture in a wide range of fields, the concern for fidelity is matched with an aesthetic that flirts with what modern readers might anachronistically wish to call fiction. In the apprehension of marvelous phenomenon mediated between layers of translators and acts of translation, the translator’s integrity is continually under scrutiny. While a deep strain of positivism inflects much of the material, in the reconstruction of events through the stable transmission over time, there is a counter voice of doubt and speculation, autochthonous in the primary sources, which questions the reliability of such transmission.

An entire range of metaphors and anecdotes accounting for translation evolve as central tropes in the imaginaire, concerned in the most basic sense with understanding the diversity of existence. The conceptual borders mapped out in a geography of salvation serve as imagined conceits, and thus are not to be found in being, but in language. These discourses enveloping the construction and dissolution of such borders are circumscribed by an
imperial logic of dominion; yet they also point to the subversive power of translation in the slippage of communication, as a veil (hijāb) that conceals as much as it reveals. Ultimately, such frontiers are epistemic in nature. They are used in the production of meaning, in distinguishing alterity through deictic acts of communication, through gesture (ʿimā) and pointing (ishāra) with the finger of astonishment (angusht-i taʿajjub). This leads us both here and there, from apprehending the unfettered marvel, to moving off the page, attempting to internalize the sublime design of difference itself.

APPENDIX 1

THE DISSEMINATION
OF THE ADVENTURE

Manuscripts of Ibn Khurradadhbih, al-Masālik wa ʿl-mamālik

Bodleian Library, Oxford University
H = MS Hunt 538, excerpt of Ibn Khurradadhbih in Ibn Ḥawqal, al-Masālik wa ʿl-mamālik [Uri, Bibliothecae Bodleianae, §963], fols. 139b–145b.

Bibliothèque national de France, Paris

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna
V = MS Mixt. 783, Kitāb masālik wa ʿl-mamālik ʿan Ibn Khurradadhbih [Loebenstein, Katalog, §2403], 77 fols. Undated, provenance note dated 756/1355. Worm-eaten, damaged by moisture, several portions have been taped over and recopied, three different hands, last section appears to be a later addition, fols. 75a–77a.
APPENDIX 2

THE VIENNA RECENSION

The following is a translation of Sallām’s adventure as it appears in the copy of al-Maṣālik wa ʿl-mamālik, housed in Vienna MS Mixt. 783 [MS V, fols. 68b–72a]. Double brackets mark sections that have been copied or glued over in the manuscript and recopied; bracketed parentheses indicate marginal notes, while single brackets indicate my own clarifications. The paragraph numbers are collated with appendices 3 and 4; the asterisks mark notable divergences, and paragraph numbers marked with asterisks indicate sections not present in the Bodleian and Paris recensions.

Description of the Barrier of Gog and Magog

[§1] Sallām the Interpreter informed me that when al-ʿWāthiq biʾllāh dreamt in his sleep that the barrier which Dhūʾl-Qarnayn had built between us and Gog and Magog had opened, he asked for a man to set out to its location and seek information about its condition.

[§2*] So Ashinās said, “There is no one more appropriate than Sallām the Interpreter.” [For] he could speak thirty languages.

[§3] [Sallām] said: So al-ʿWāthiq summoned me and said, “I want you to set out for the wall in order to inspect it and return to me with an account (khabar) of it.”

[§4*] He outfitted me with fifty strong young men and gave me five thousand dinars and a personal indemnity of ten thousand dirhams and he ordered that each man be given a thousand dirhams and daily sustenance to last a year.
He ordered that there be prepared for the men felt coats wrapped in leather, and that there be made ready for them fur saddlecloths and wooden stirrups. He gave me two hundred mules for carrying supplies and water.

So we set out with a dispatch from al-Wathiq b‘il-lah to Isḥaq b. Ismā‘il, the ruler of Armenia. He was in Tiflis on our arrival. Isḥaq dispatched us to the ruler of al-Sarir and the ruler of al-Sarir dispatched us to the king of the Alāns and the king of the Alāns dispatched us to the Filān Shāh and the Filān Shāh dispatched us to the Ṭarkhān, king of the Khazar. We remained with the king of the Khazar for a day and a night, until he sent us off with five guides. We traveled away from [the king of the Khazar] for twenty-six days.

Then we came upon a putrid black land. Before entering this land, we had prepared for ourselves vinegar to smell in lieu of the vile odor. For ten days we traveled in this land. Then we reached ruined cities and we traveled through them for twenty days. We inquired about these cities and were informed that Gog and Magog had breached them and then destroyed them. Then we traveled through fortifications near the mountain range on a branch [of which] is located the barrier [cf. Masālik, 163, note i].

A tribe who speak Arabic and Persian populate these fortifications. They are Muslims and they recite the Qur’ān; they have Qur’ānic schools and mosques. They asked about us and where we were from. We informed them that we were messengers of the Commander of the Faithful.

They grew astonished and exclaimed, “The Commander of the Faithful?”

We replied, “Yes.”
They asked, “Is he old or young?”
We replied, “He is young.”
They were equally astonished and inquired, “Where is he?”
We responded, “In Iraq. in a city called Sāmarrā’.”
They replied, “We have never heard of this before.”

The distance between one fortification to the next ranges from one to two farasakhs.

Then we traveled [to a city called Unkuh [?]. Its perimeter is ten farasakhs and it has iron gates which are lowered from above]. In the city are cultivated fields and mills. This is the city in which Dhu ‘l-Qarnayn resided with his army. A distance of three days’ journey separates the city from the rampart. Fortifications and towns line the way until the rampart is reached on the third day. The barrier is [located in] a mountain enclosure.

They say that Gog and Magog live in [this enclosure] and that they are of two kinds. They mention that [those of] Gog are taller than [those of] Magog and that one of them is an arm’s length or an arm’s length and a half tall [[more or less]].

Then [[we reached a high mountain on which is a fortification and the barrier] that Dhu ‘l-Qarnayn had built. This is the pass, [(which is a valley)], between the two mountain sides, the width of which is two hundred cubits. This is the path from which [Gog and Magog] will set off to scatter across the earth.

So Dhu ‘l-Qarnayn dug the foundation of the rampart thirty cubits into the ground and he built it up with iron and copper until the foundation reached the surface of the earth. Then he erected two doorposts, which are next to the mountain on both sides of the pass.

The width of each doorpost is twenty-five cubits, and they are fifty cubits high. [(At their base each of these posts protrudes ten cubits from the gate.)] All of this is constructed with bricks of iron set into copper.

Each brick measures a cubit and a half squared by four fingers thick.

A lintel (darwand) of iron, five cubits thick, stretches across the two doorposts, the length of which is one hundred and twenty-five cubits, mounted over the doorposts extending on each side for a distance of ten cubits.

Over the lintel [V 70a] is a wall of iron bricks set in copper that extends to the top of the mountain. It rises as far as the eye can see, stretching above the lintel for about sixty cubits.*

Above this are iron merlons; on top of each merlon are two angled points (qurnatān) that face each other.

Each merlon is five cubits tall by four cubits wide, and there are a total of thirty-seven merlons [lining the wall].

As for the iron gate, it has two door panels which are sealed shut, each panel is fifty cubits long. seventy-five cubits high, and five cubits thick.* The two panels hinge on thick vertical pivot bars set into the lintel.
[§22*] No wind enters either through the gate or the mountain pass, as though it were made of one single mass.

[§23] On the gate is a bolt, which is seven cubits long and the thickness of an arm-span in circumference.

[§24*] Two men alone would be unable to fasten the bolt.

[§25] The bolt is twenty-five cubits above the ground. Five cubits above the bolt is the lock, which is longer than the bolt. It is secured by two hasps, which are each two cubits long. On the lock is attached a key, which is a cubit and a half long; it has twelve teeth, each tooth is in the form of a pestle used in mortars. The key's circumference is four handspans; it is connected to a chain welded to the gate,* which is eight cubits long and four fingers thick in circumference. Each ring on the chain is like the ring of a ballista.

[§26] The lower threshold (atatba) of the gate is ten cubits wide and one hundred cubits long, not including what is under the base of the two doorposts, and rises up five cubits. [V 70b] All of this is measured [in the black cubit.

[§27] Along the gate are two fortifications], a fresh spring is located [at the gates of each of these two fortifications] and before [each one are two trees. Located in one of the fortifications] are the construction tools with which the barrier was built, including iron cauldrons and iron mixing rods. On each trivet are four cauldrons, similar to cauldrons for making soap. Here the remaining iron bricks have all clumped together with rust.

[§28] The guardian of these fortifications rides in every Monday and Thursday.* They inherit [watch over] the gate just as the caliphs inherit the caliphate.* He rides in with three men who bear around their necks an iron mallet.

[§29*] At the gate are stairs which he climbs to the highest step, whereupon he strikes the bolt, once in the early morning, in order to listen to [Gog and Magog], who clamor up like a nest of hornets, and only after a while do they quiet down. In the afternoon he will strike it once more, and he will lean in with his ear against the gate. They clamor the second time more fiercely than the first, and after a bit they quiet down. Come evening he will strike it a third time and again they will make tremendous noise. He will then wait until sunset.

[§31] Then once again he will strike the bolt so that those behind [the gate] can hear and understand that there are guards there. And the guards inspect to see that those on the other side have not damaged the gate in any way.

[§32] Near this spot is a large fortification ten farsakhs by ten farsakhs, with an area of one hundred farsakhs.

[§33*] Sallam said: I asked those who were present from the people of the fortifications [V 71a], "Has there ever been any kind of damage to the gate?"

They said, "Nothing has ever occurred except for this crack." The crack was the width of a thin thread.

I then replied, "Are you nervous at all about [this crack]?

They responded, "No. For this gate is five cubits wide using the Alexandrian cubit." This cubit measures a cubit and a half according to the black cubit. Each cubit was the length of Alexander's forearm.

Sallam stated: I drew close and I took out from my leggings a knife and I scraped the spot of the crack, and there broke off a piece the size of half a dirham. So I packed it securely into a cloth in order to show it to al-Wāthiq bi'llāh.

High above the right doorpost there was an inscription in iron, written in the first language: When the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will flatten [the rampart], the promise of my Lord is true [Q. 18:98].

[§34*] We examined the structure and the majority of it is lined with rows of yellow bricks made from copper and rows of black bricks made from iron.

[§35*] There was a place dug out on the mountain in which the gates were cast, along with the location where the cauldrons were used to mix the copper, and where the lead and copper were poured out. The cauldrons looked to be of brass. On each one were handles on which hung chains with prongs which were used to carry the copper to the top of the wall.

[§36] We asked those present, "Have any one of you seen Gog and Magog?" They mentioned that they had seen them several times atop the wall, whereupon a dark wind would descend and push them back onto their side. Measuring by eyesight, the male stands one and a half handspans tall.

[§37] The mountain on the outer side has no slope nor craggy base, no plants grow, nor grass, nor trees, nor anything else. It is a flat mountain (musattah), rising up with a sheer white face.* [V 72b]
When we set off we took with us guides to the region of Khurāsān. And the king was called al-L.b. We traveled from that spot and reached an area whose king is called Ṭ.ā.ū.n, and he was a director of taxation. We stayed with them for several days.

We traveled from that place until we arrived at Samarqand, this took eight months. We reached Isbishāb and we crossed the river at Balkh. Then we traveled to Sharūsana and then on to Bukhārā and then to Tirmidh. Then we reached Nisābūr.

Of the men that were with us twenty-two died of illness on our way to the wall. Those that died we buried in their clothes. And those that got sick we had to leave in villages along the way.] On the return fourteen men died. So when we arrived at Nisābūr we were only fourteen men.

The people of the fortifications had outfitted us with everything we needed.

Then we reached 'Abd Allāh b. Tahir. He granted me eight thousand dirhams and gave each of my companions five hundred dirhams, and granted to each horseman five dirhams and to the footmen three dirhams for each day of travel until reaching Rayy.

Of the mules only twenty-three survived.

We arrived at Sāmarrā. I went to al-Wāthiq and informed him of the account and I showed him the iron which I had scratched off from the gate. He praised God. He ordered that alms be given out and he gave each man one thousand dinars.

It took us sixteen months to reach the rampart and twelve months [f. 72b] to return. * 

Sallām the Interpreter related to me this report in its entirety, then he dictated it to me from his own draft which he had drawn up for al-Wāthiq b'il-lāh.
Then we reached a putrid black land. Before entering this land, we had prepared for ourselves vinegar to smell in lieu of the loathsome odor. For ten days we traveled in this land. Then we reached ruined cities and we traveled through them for twenty-seven days. We inquired about these cities and were informed that Gog and Magog had breached them. Then we traveled through fortifications near the mountain range on a branch of which is located the barrier.

A tribe who speak Arabic and Persian populate these fortifications. They are Muslims and they recite the Qur'an; they have Qur'anic schools and mosques. They asked about us and where we were from. We informed them that we were messengers of the Commander of the Faithful. They grew astonished and exclaimed, “The Commander of the Faithful!”

We replied, “Yes.”
They asked, “Is he old or young?”
We replied, “He is young.”
They were equally astonished and inquired, “Where is he?”
We responded, “In Iraq, in a city called Samarrā.”
They replied, “We have never heard of this before.”

Then we traveled to a sheer mountain face with no vegetation.

A valley, the width of which is one hundred and fifty cubits, cuts through the mountain.

There are two doorposts constructed on each side of the mountain through which the valley runs. The width of each doorpost is twenty-five cubits, and they extend ten cubits from the gate. All of this is constructed with bricks of iron set into copper. [The doorposts] rise up fifty cubits.

There is a lintel of iron which stretches across the two doorposts, the length of which is one hundred and twenty cubits. The lintel, mounted over the two doorposts, extending for a width of ten cubits along each doorpost, is five cubits thick.

Over the lintel rises a wall of iron bricks set in copper that extends to the top of the mountain. It rises as far as the eye can see.

Above this are iron merlons; on each merlon are two angled tips of equal size.

As for the iron gate, it has two door panels which are sealed shut, each panel is fifty cubits long and five cubits thick. The two panels hinge on thick vertical pivot bars set into the lintel.

On the gate is a bolt, which is seven cubits wide and the thickness of an arm-span in circumference.

The bolt is twenty-five cubits above the ground. Five cubits above the bolt is the lock, which is longer than the bolt. It is secured by two hasps which are each two cubits long. On the lock is attached a key, which is a cubit and a half long and has twelve teeth, and it is as if each one is larger than the pestle used in mortars. Connected to the key is a chain eight cubits long and four fingers thick. Each ring on the chain is like the ring of a ballista.

The lower threshold of the gate is ten cubits wide and is a hundred cubits long, not including what is under the base of the two doorposts, and rises up five cubits. All of this is measured in the black cubit.

The guardian of these fortifications rides in every Friday with ten knights, each knight bears an iron mallet, each one weighing fifty manns.

The guardian pounds the bolt with these mallets three times so that those behind the gate can hear and understand that there are guards there. And the guards inspect to see if those on the other side have not damaged the gate in any way. When our companions struck the gate they placed their ears on it and heard from within a roar.

Near this spot is a large fortification ten farsakhs by ten farsakhs.

Along the gate are two fortifications, each two hundred cubits squared. At each of the gates of these two fortifications are two trees, and between these two fortifications is a fresh water spring. Located in one of the fortifications are the tools with which the barrier was built, including iron cauldrons and iron mixing rods. On each trivet are four cauldrons similar, but larger, than soap cauldrons. Here the remaining iron bricks have all clumped together with rust.

The bricks measure a cubit and a half squared by four fingers thick.

We asked those present, “Have any one of you seen Gog and Magog?” They mentioned that they had seen them several times atop the wall, whereupon a dark wind would descend and push them back onto their side. By the looks of it, the male measures only one and a half handspans.
When we set off we took with us guides [who led us] to the region of Khurasan. We traveled through it until reaching the back side of Samarqand.

The guardian [B 64a] of the fortifications had outfitted us with everything we needed.

Then we reached Abū ʿIʿ-ʿAbbās ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāhir. Sallām the Interpreter said: He granted me one hundred thousand dirhams* and gave each of my companions five hundred dirhams, and granted to [P 42b] each horsemans five dirhams and to the footmen three dirhams for each day of travel until reaching Rayy.

I returned to Sāmarrāʾ twenty-eight months after having departed.*

Sallām informed me the entirety of this account and he dictated it to me from his own draft which he had drawn up for al-Wāthiq.

The following are excerpts of Sallām’s adventure related by Idrīsī, Nuzhat al-mushtaq [2:934–8]. Asterisks mark notable variations, asterisks followed by roman numerals mark significant divergences with the Vienna, Bodleian, and Paris recensions.

As for the rampart of Gog and Magog, books reference it and accounts circulate about it, among them is what Sallām the Interpreter related. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Khurradadhbih reported from [Sallām] in his book; likewise Abū Naṣr al-Jayhāni reported this account. They both relate that:

When al-Wāthiq saw while sleeping that the barrier which Dhū ʿl-Qarnayn had built between us and Gog and Magog was open, he summoned Sallām the Interpreter and said to him, “Go and inspect this barrier and bring me back information about it and its condition and what is going on with it.”

He then ordered a group of fifty men to accompany [Sallām] and he gave to [Sallām] five thousand dinars and an indemnity of ten thousand dirhams and he commanded that each man be given five thousand dirhams and daily sustenance to last a year. He ordered that they be supplied with two hundred mules for carrying supplies and water.

Sallām the Interpreter related: So we set out from Sāmarrāʾ with a dispatch from al-Wāthiq biʿllāh to Isḥāq b. [p. 935] Ismāʿīl, the ruler of Armenia, with the aim that he send on our delegation from there.” So we set out to Tiflis and when we met with him he drew up a dispatch for us
to the ruler of al-Sarîr and we set out toward him and when we reached
him he directed us to the king of the Alâns.

[*II*] And he sent along with us an exchange of letters. When we reached
the king of the Alâns he dispatched us to the ruler of Fîlân Shâh and when
we reached him we stayed with him for some days and he chose for
us five guides who would lead us along our journey.

[*IV*] So we traveled away from him for twenty-seven days on the
borders of the Bashjirt until we reached a long, expansive black land with
a horrible smell.

§8 We traversed this land for ten days, having prepared ourselves with
items which we would smell in order to block out [the stench], fearful of
being harmed by the loathsome odor.* We finally passed through it and
traveled for a period of a month through a destroyed land, whose build­
ing had been decimated and only ruins remained which indicated what
was once there.* We asked those traveling with us about these cities and
they informed us that they were cities that Gog and Magog had raided and
destroyed. Then we reached fortifications near the mountain range on a
branch of which is located the barrier. And that was in six days.*

§9 A tribe who speak Arabic and Persian populate these fortifications.

[*VI*] Here is a city whose king is called the Khâqân of the Adhkish.

§9 The people are Muslims who have mosques and Qur'anic schools . . .

[*VII*] We asked them about their conversion to Islam, when did it come
about and who taught them the Qur'an. They replied [p. 936], "Many
years back a man reached us riding a four-legged beast with a long neck with
a hump on its back." We realized that they were describing a camel. They
went on, "He stayed with us and communicated with us in a language we
could understand and he taught us the precepts (sharâ'i') of Islam and how
to follow them, so we accepted them and also he taught us the Qur'an and
its meanings and we learned and memorized it from him." Sallâm reported:
Then we went from there to the barrier to inspect it.

§10 We traveled from the city for a distance of two farsakhs and then
we reached the barrier.

§13 There is a mountain. A valley, the width of which is one hundred
and fifty cubits, cuts through it. In the middle of this location is a gate of
iron, fifty cubits long, flanked on each side by two doorposts.

§15 The width of each doorpost is twenty-five cubits . . .

§17 The darwand is the upper lintel (al-âtaba al-ûlya) which had
been mounted over each doorpost,* extending for a width of ten cubits.

§18 Above the lintel is a solid structure of iron bricks set into copper,
reaching up to the top of the mountain. It rises up as high as can be seen.

§19 Above this are iron merlons; on the edges of each [merlon] are
two horns (qarnân) of equal size.*

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THE IDRISI RECENSION

208 / p. 937 The guardian of these fortifications rides in every Friday
with ten knights bearing iron mallets,* each weighing fifty manns.

§31 He pounds the bolt with these mallets each day three times so that
those behind [the gate] can hear and understand that there are guards there.
And the guards inspect to see that Gog and Magog have not damaged the
gate in any way. When those bearing the mallets strike the gate they place
their ears on it, listening to what is on the other side; they could hear a roar
from within the gate pointing to creatures on the other side.*

§38 Then we set off with guides from the people of the fortifications.
And they led us up to the region of Khurâsân.

[*IX*] We traveled from these fortifications to the city of Lakmân, to the
city of Gharyân, then to the city of Barsâkhân, then to Ţarâz and finally
to Samarqand.

§43 Then we reached 'Abd Allâh b. Tâhir and stayed with him for
several days. He granted me one hundred thousand dirhams and gave each
of my companions five thousand dirhams, and granted to each horseman
five dirhams and to the footmen three dirhams for each day of travel until
reaching Rayy.

§47 Then we reached Sâmarrâ after having set out and traveled for
twenty-eight months.

[*X*] This is all that Sallâm the Interpreter reported concerning the
descriptions of the barrier and the regions through which he traveled and
the nations which he met along the way and the dialogue which he had
with those he met.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Journals and Reference Works

AEMA  Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi
AOASH Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BSOS Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies
Elr The Encyclopaedia Iranica. London: Routledge, 1982-.
IJMES International Journal of Middle East Studies
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland
JWCI Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
MEL Middle Eastern Literatures
ZGAIW Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften

Primary Sources


ABBREVIATIONS

CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientaliarm
Kharaj

Lahw

Masālik
Ibn Khurrawādhih. al-Masālik wa 'l-mamālik. BGA, vol. 6, 1889.

Meynard

MHudud

Mi'tār

Mu'jam

Murūj

Naftsa

Nuzhat

RIF

Sūrat

Tanbih
al-Maṣūdī. al-Tanbih wa 'l-ishrāf. BGA, vol. 8, 1894.

Tagṣīm

Ṭiğān

TRM

Udabā'

Yaṣūbī

YBN

NOTES

Introduction
2 On the broader epistemological implications of translation, see George Steiner, After Babel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 47.
10 Hayawan, 1:204.
12 Ghazālī, al-Imlā‘an ishkālāt al-Ihyā‘, appendix to the Ihyā‘, 5:35; for this formulation and its broader impact, see Ormsby, Theodicy, 32–91.
14 See chapter 7, 155ff.
17 See chapter 7, 149.
19 See Raymond Prier, Thauma idesthai (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1989).
24 Khurājī, 132; cf. ʿIṣḥāq b. al-Ḥasan al-Zayyāt (fl. fifth/eleventh century), Dhikr al-ʿaḡālīm (Barcelona: CSIC, 1989), 85; see the opening anecdote to ‘Idrisi’s (d. 560/1165) geography, Nuzhat, 6–7.
25 Tanbih, 30.
27 Fihrist, 2:131–2, 332; cf. 1:305, 468, 471.
30 Sūrat, 329.
31 Taqāsīm, 43.

Notes to Chapter 1: Routes and Realms

1 According to the title page of Bodleian MS Hunt 433 (= MS B), the full title is Kitāb al-ma‘ālīk wa l-mamālik fi sīf al-arḍ.
2 See Kashef, 1:278; M. Hadi-Sadok, “Ibn Khurraiadābhī,” EI8; C. Bosworth, “Ebn Kordābēh,” EI11; also Ignatii Krachkovskii, Istoriia arabskoi geograficheskoi literature (Moscow: n.p., 1957), trans. ʿAlā‘ al-Dīn ʿUthmān Hāshim as Ta‘rīkh al-adab al-jughhrāfī l-arabī (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta‘līf wa l-Tarjuma wa l-Nashr, 1963–5), 147–51; GAL, 1:225–6; see also Tadeusz Lewicki, Zródła arabskie do dziejów słowiańszczyzny (Warsaw: Zakład imienia Ossolińskich, 1956–88), 1:43–50. Kh. r. dā. dh. b.h., it can be read as Khurādābhī, after the Zoroastrian deity Khurādā, meaning ‘Khurād is best’ (Middle Persian, Xordād-Weh). Khurraiadābhī is admittedly the lectio difficilior; see Philippe Gignoux, Noms propres sassanides (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 2, fasc. ii, 187; §1035; cf. Krachkovskii, 147. There is some confusion over the dates of his birth and death, which are variously given as 205/820 and 211/826, for the former, and 300/912, for the latter. Regarding the date of composition of the Masālīk, de Goeje argues for a two-stage process: the first, during the reign of al-Wāthiq, in the year 222/834, and the second, which was not completed until after 272/885, Masālīk, xx. See chapters 6 and 7 for the manuscript recensions of Ibn Khurraiadābhī’s geography, p. 133–4, 169–71.
3 See Meynard, 8.
4 TRM, ser. 3, 21014–5.
8 According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū l-‘Abbās Ja‘far Ahmad al-Marwāzī was the first to compose a work entitled al-Masālīk wa l-mamālik, though he did not finish it. Ibn al-Nadīm relates that, after his death, the books of Marwāzī were taken from al-Awāz to Baghdad and sold there, in the year 274/887–8, Fihrist, 1:463, Dodge, 329; Udābā‘, 2:776–7. As for other contemporaries of
Ibn Khurradadhbih who wrote on the subject of “Routes and Realms,” Ibn al-Nadim mentions the Baghdad historian Ahmad b. al-Hārith al-Kharrāż (d. ca 258/872), along with Ahmad b. al-Tayyib al-Sarakhṣi (d. 285/899), Dodge, 227–8; Uddābā', 1:23, 292; Sarakhṣi was a pupil of the philosopher Kindī (d. ca 260/874), and an intimate of the caliph al-Mu'tadid (r. 279–8/892–902), who ultimately executed him, Dodge, 326, 626–8; see Franz Rosenthal, Ahmad b. al-Tayyib as-Sarakhṣi (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1943), 13–39, 58–80.

9 See de Goeje's introduction, Masālik, xvii.; also see Barthold and Krachkovskii concerning the issue of the original size of this work.

10 See, in particular, the audit (taqād) of revenue and agricultural capacity for the Sawād, Masālik, 8–15.

11 De Goeje puts forth the hypothesis that, after working as the postmaster for the Jabal during his youth, Ibn Khurradadhbih was promoted to the position of minister responsible for overseeing the central bureau of communication at either Sāmarrā' or Baghdad, and that it was there that he gathered the material for his descriptive geography, Masālik, ix; cf. GAL, 1:225. De Goeje’s statement is later turned from supposition to fact, with M. Hadj-Sadok, who claims that Ibn Khurradadhbih was “promoted to the office of director-general of the same department in Baghdad and later in Sāmarrā’.” The sources only mention Ibn Khurradadhbih’s position as sāḥib al-barid wa l-khābar for the Jabal, see Dodge, 326. More broadly, Muqaddasi attests that Ibn Khurradadhbih held a bureaucratic position at the court as a wāzir, which itself might be an error; he does not specify that he was the postmaster general of either Sāmarrā' or Baghdad.


13 See Murūj, §578.


15 See Ibn Najjar, Dhayl Ṭa‘rīkh Baghdād, 2:11, §269.


18 Buhturi, “ibnun mulākin sādatin nujub,” Diwān, 1:253–4, §84, line 11; we may speculate as to the political implications of the faraj ba‘d al-shidda motif in the poem itself, which was composed, according to Šayrafī, in 269/882–3, i.e., during the beginning of the imprisonment in Sāmarrā’ of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s patron, al-Mu’tamid, by his brother al-Muwaffaq.


20 Tanbih, 75; Musā’ab, §9.


22 Murūj, §§503; Sūrat, 3, 5.


24 James Montgomery has treated the issue of the two distinct proemiums in the surviving manuscript tradition, “Serendipity,” 202–9.


26 See references to the genre in Fihrist, 1:324, 428, 458–9, 463.


28 Khārij, 102.

29 Adam Silverstein, Postal Systems in the pre-Modern Islamic World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90–140.

30 Khārij, 78.

31 Ibid., 77.

32 Gutas, Greek Thought, 20-7; Mohsen Zakeri, “Translation from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) into Arabic to the Early Abbasid Period,” in Übersetzung (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 21199–1205.

33 See Parvaneh Pourshariati, Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008).


35 For the heterogeneous form that state administration initially took on under the Umayyads, see E. Ashtor, A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages (London: Collins, 1976), passim, and specifically, 39.


37 See Gutas, Greek Thought, 29.


For the position that Iraq is the center of the world, see YBN, 233; Kharāj, 139; Murūjī, §978. This is an idea continued with Baghdāḍī, Ta’rīkh Baghdādī, 1:519–20. By the time Muqaddasi writes, however, the splendor of Baghdad had diminished, 36. The view that the title ‘nāvel of the world’ is reserved for Mecca appears throughout the sources, see Muṣ’jam, 4:463.

For a survey of the translation movement in its entirety, see Gutas, Greek Thought.


Masālīk, 5; Masūdī gives a number of both 4,200 and 4,500 cities, which he claims is based on Ptolemy, Murūjī, §191, note 4, cf. §1327.

MHudūd, 14.

De Goeje catches Ibn Khurrdadbeh’s mistake in a footnote to his French translation, Masālīk, 121, Arabic, 159; cf. Tanbih, 129. Masūdī rejects the identification of Ptolemy the scientist with one of the Hellenistic kings of Egypt as fallacious.

See chapter 4, 90–4.


Masālīk, 55.


See C. A. Nallino, "al-Khwārizmī e il suo rifacimento della Geografia di Tolomeo," Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti 5 (1944): 458–532. Sezgin, however, raises doubts as to whether the work edited by Mžik is indeed to be ascribed to Khwārazmī. Yet, Sezgin does believe that this work represents geographical coordinates recorded for the no longer extant world map commissioned by al-Ma’mūn, see GAS, 124, and Sezgin, The Contribution of the Arabic-Islamic Geographers to the Formation of the World Map (Frankfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 1987), 14–5.

See Maqbul Ahmad, "Khariṭa," E1. Masūdī relates that he saw a series of maps dated to the period of al-Ma’mūn that represented "the universe with spheres, the stars, land and the seas, inhabited and barren regions of the world, settlements of peoples, cities, and these were more exquisite than the maps that Ptolemy laid out in his Geography, or those in the Geography of Marinus, or those of others," Tanbih, 33. Based on the surviving coordinates, this geography would have featured the lands of Gog and Magog in the far northeast, see GAS, 122–4, §§1a–b.

Tanbih, 25, 51.


Masālīk, 5–6.

Morony, Iraq after the Muslim Conquest, 128–9.

See Kharāj, 159–62.


Masālīk, 5.

Ibid.

Ma’mārī, Muqaddima, 168; English, Minorsky, "The Older Preface to the Shāh-nāma," 172.
Islam recall such boastful poetry in pride of their ancestry, which ostensibly links these lines of verse with the broader shu'ābiyya movement, Tanbih, 37.

Marūj, 59, cf. §503.


Ghurar, 130.


Cf. Taqāṣīm, 335.


During the ’Abbāsīd period the figure of Bahram Gūr was closely linked to the heroic feats of the pre-Islamic Persian kings in a discourse that often highlighted the grandeur of the Persians in comparison to that of the Arabs, cf. Fadl al-ʿArab wa l-tanbih al-ʿulāmīh (Abu Dhai: al-Muẓaffar al-Thaqāfī, 1998), ascribed to Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), 86–7.


100 Murūj, §§2123–27; Aghānī, 8:276; 10:319; 15:24; 16:133; on Isfahānī’s negative assessment of Ibn Khurraḍādhbih as an unreliable source, see conclusion, 85–6.


102 As Shaﬄi’i Kadkani notes, the transmission of these verses, both the Arabic and the Persian, seems to be garbled, ibid.

103 When considering the quantity of Arabic poetic material showcased, it seems perhaps incongruous to classify his work as part of the shu‘ubiyah movement of Persian writers, mainly of verse, who lambasted the putative primacy of the Arabs, as scholars such as Krachkovskyi have suspected, 167–71.


106 Masāliḵ, 152.


108 In the over the eighty verse citations, there are several references to battle days (ayyām) and to lands obtained through conquest (fuṭuḥāt). See, for example, Masāliḵ, 7, 18–9, 22, 25, 100–1, 119, 146, 152. However, of all the citations, there are only a handful of references to lands beyond Muslim territory, which are themselves connected to military expansion or the projection of ‘Abbāsid power, e.g., 124; cf. Buṭturi, Diwan, 2:974–9, 5386, line 36.

Chapter 2: Models of Translation


3 See Tāmbīṭ, 190–1; Masāliḵ, 105–6; an account in both MS B, fol. 53a–b, and in MS V, fol. 444–b. While Jarmī’s writings may have circulated among the secretariat during the reign of al-Wāḥiq, or shortly thereafter, there is nothing to indicate, from the line of transmission recorded in the Masāliḵ, that Ibn Khurraḍādhbih’s geography is contemporary to Jarmī’s account, contra Lewicki, Zröda arabskīe, 1:59–60.

4 On the speculation concerning the identity and nature of this network of itinerant Jewish merchants, and whether or not such an international network even existed, see Ch. Pellat “Rādhānīyā,” EIr.


7 Masāliḵ, 154; cf. Buldān, 540–1; Murūj, §§458–61.

8 This was an interpretation offered by James Montgomery in a roundtable discussion at the tenth conference of the School of ‘Abbāsid Studies, Leuven (2010).


10 Muhammad b. Mūṣā b. ‘Shākir appears to have been from the Banū Mūṣā, who had close ties to the ‘Abbāsid court, cf. GAS, 13:243–4; on the Banū Mūṣā, see GAS, 5:245–52; 6:147–8; D. R. Hill, “Mūṣā, Banū,” EIr. In the sources and in the secondary scholarship there is some debate concerning whether the famous polymath Muhammad b. Mūṣā ʿl-Khwārizmī and Muḥammad b. ‘Shākir are the same person. See D. M. Dunlop, “Muḥammad b. Mūṣā al-Khwārizmī,” JRAS (1943): 248–50. Dunlop’s thesis is not entirely conclusive, as the surviving material on the life of Muḥammad b. Mūṣā ʿl-Khwārizmī is such that it is difficult to conclude with certainty whether or not these two figures are indeed one and the same. Following Dunlop, Sezgin lists them separately, GAS, 13:238, 244. Cf. Taqāṣim, 562.

11 Masāliḵ, 106–7.


For Takin, or *tegūn*, signifying a prince, but in this context applied to a *ghulām* (servant, slave), and for various interpretations concerning the significance of the name Bārīs, see Togan's commentary in *RIF*, 4; Lewicki, *Zródła arabskie*, 3:123, §§27–8; and James McKeithen, *The Risalah of Ibn Fadlan* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1979), 28.

For the body tattoos, see *RIF*, §81. For a description of one of the more graphic scenes in *RIF*, §§89–92, see Albert S. Cook, "Ibn Fadlan's Account of Scandinavian Merchants on the Volga in 922," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 22 (1923): 54–63.


Masālik, 66.


Ṭabaʾrī al-hayawān, ed. and trans. Vladimir Minorsky as *Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir Marwazi on China, the Turks, and India* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1942), Arabic, ch. 9, §§8, 45, trans. 34 (hereafter Ṭabaʾrī al-hayawān). Minorsky draws from only a selection of Marwazi’s *Ṭabaʾrī al-hayawān*, while the complete work remains in manuscript form. Minorsky doubts that this tribe described by Marwazi truly refers to the Kīmāk, 107–8; cf. MHudūd, 304ff., along with C. E. Bosworth, “Kīmāk,” *EI*. Cf. Masālik, 28.


Ibid., 44–5. The Yūra depicted appear to be identical with the Siberian Yugra, see Minorsky’s commentary, 113; cf. Peter Golden, "The Peoples of the Russian Forest Belt," in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1:229–55. In regard to mughayaba, Marwazi thrice uses this specific word to describe silent trade, Arabic, ch. 15, §§3, 12, 16, cf. ch. 9, §8. The Arabic term denotes mutual absence; the trilateral root ghāy/yā/bā etymologically signifies absence. MS Delhi Arabic 1494 of the British Library presents no ambiguity concerning the word in question, cf. fols. 14a, 42b, 44b, which is consistently given as mughayaba. Minorsky, in his critical apparatus, offers mu’āyana as a possible reading, Arabic, 45. However, mughayaba is justified, as it agrees with the codicological record, as well as other sources; cf. Abū l-Fida’ (d. 732/1331), *Taqvim al-hulūd* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1840), 201–2; Ahmad b. ‘Alī l-Qalqashandi (d. 821/1418), *Subh al-āshā* (Cairo: al-Mu‘assasa al-Miṣriyya, n.d.), 4:466; 5:422.


Marwazi, *Ṭabaʾrī al-hayawān*, Arabic, ch. 15, §§12, 48; English, 58.


Ibid., ch. 15, §§12, 48; English, 58.


Regarding the Arabic vocalization for Gog and Magog, there are two accepted Qur‘ānic readings, Yā’ūjī and Mājūfū without the hamza, which was preferred in the Ḥiḍaj and Iraq, versus Yā’ūjī and Majūfū with the hamza. See Tabārī, who considers the former to be the correct reading (al-qirā’t al-saḥīha), *Ibāri*, 16:16.


On the question of the prophethood of Dhū 'l-Qarnayn, see Ibn Hishām, al-Sira al-nabawiyya (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifā, 2006), 289; he is often considered merely a pious servant of God (abd ǧāliḥ), see 'Abd al-Razzāq, Tafsīr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Imiyya, 1999), 3:234–5; Jāmi', 169. There are various interpretations as to whether or not this figure corresponded to Alexander the Great, in addition to the speculations concerning the origin and significiation of the epithet ‘Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn,’ see Murūjī, §§124, 671; Buldān, 125–6; Jāmi', 169; Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981–3), 21:164–6.


Abū Ma’shar’s description, as quoted in Tha’alibī, contains more detail than Ibn Khurradadhbih’s passage, which suggests that Ibn Khurradadhbih is not the source for Abū Ma’shar, Tha’alibī, Latā‘if, 164–5; see Murūjī, §1419; Dodge, 656–8; David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma’shar* (London: Warburg Institute, 1968), 15n6.


Similair accounts concerning Ibn Ṭūlūn and the pyramids are detailed in several later sources, all of which appear not to be aware of the episode as recorded in MS V, a possible indication of the limited circulation of the Vienna recension; the adventure is also absent from the later geographies, see Abū Muhammad al-Balawi (fl. 330/941), *Sirat Ibn Ṭūlūn* (Damascus: al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya, 1939), 194–6; Abū Ja’far al-Idrīsī (d. 649/1251), Kitāb anwār ‘idwāry al-ajrām fi ‘l-kashf ‘an asrār al-ahrām (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1991), 35–6, 132; Maqrīzī, al-Muwaffaq for nearly ten years, *TRM*, ser. 3, 4:2028–9, 2080–2.

In 273/887 Ṭa‘lī‘u’ was imprisoned by Abū Ahmad al-Muwaffaq for nearly ten years, *TRM*, ser. 3, 4:2112, 2146. Only MS V contains the adventure related by Muhallabi; on the question of the dating of these two recensions, see chapter 7, 171.

Abū Ma’shar’s description, as quoted in Tha’alibī, contains more detail than Ibn Khurradadhbih’s passage, which suggests that Ibn Khurradadhbih is not the source for Abū Ma’shar, Tha’alibī, Latā‘if, 164–5; see Murūjī, §1419; Dodge, 656–8; David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma’shar* (London: Warburg Institute, 1968), 15n6.


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For general sources on al-Wathiq's life, see Ya'qūbī, 2:479–84; YBN, 264–5; TRM, ser. 3, 2:1330–64; Aghānī, 9:267–92; Baghārdī, Tarīkh Baghārdī, 16:22–8; Ṣafādī, al-Wāfi, 27:201–4; Ṣuyūṭī, Tarīkh al-khulafa’ (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, 1969), 315–20. As for al-Wathiq’s death of “insufferable thirst,” Max Meyerhof has speculated that this was caused by diabetes, see his article, “All al-Tabarî’s ‘Paradise of Wisdom,’ One of the Oldest Arabic Compendia of Medicine,” Isis 16 (1931), 9.


On al-Wathiq’s fondness for eggplant, see Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih (d. 328/939), al-Qalam al-’Arabi, 1996).

On the reign al-Mutawakkil, see Ibn Ḥaqqīn al-Ashtar, Ta’rikh al-rashid, ed. Badawi, 2:251, excerpt A.


On Kitāb al-Tabarî’s discussion of Bishār Mattā’s translation, see Muḥammad b. Idris al-Shāfishī, al-Risāla (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), 32, 913.

See Q. 14:46; 16:105; 39:29; 41:44; 43:1–2; 92:5.


Ḥunayn b. Ishaq, Risālat Ḥunayn b. Ishaq (Teheran: Mu’assasa-i Muṭāla’at-i Islāmī, 2001), passim.


Ibid.


Tawḥīdī, al-imtā‘, 1108.


Tawḥīdī, al-imtā‘, 1111.


Ibid.


See ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawi’s treatment of tragedy and comedy, for instance, ibid., 153.

In a surviving fragment of his *Kitāb al-muqāt*, ‘Ḥunayn b. Ishaq discusses the limitations of Arabic for the expression of foreign terms. The fragment, which may well be spurious, is quoted in the *Kitāb al-majālīs*, written in 417/1026–7
by the Nestorian bishop of Nisibis (Naṣibīn), ʿIyāb b. ʿSīnā (d. 439/1047–8), ed. L. Cheikho, al-Mashriq 20 (1922), 373.


46 Ghazālī, “al-lisānā tamārjamān yāsduqu marratan yaktūbahu ukhṭār,” Iḥyāʾ, 1:34.

47 One version of this hadith states that “There is not one among you who the Lord will not speak to [directly], there is neither an interpreter between [the Lord] and him, nor a veil that will veil him” (mā minkum min ʾahadīn illā sayyikallimühumu rabbuhu, laya baynahu wa baynahu tamārjamān wa lā hijābun yahjubahu). See Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-zakāt,” 1:266–7, §1434; idem, “Kitāb al-manāqib,” 3:709, §657; cf. Muslim b. ʿAl-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875), Ṣaḥīḥ, “Kitāb al-zakāt,” 1:400–1, §2399; Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887), Sunan, “al-Muqaddima,” 31, §910; idem, “Kitāb al-zakāt,” 268, §916; Abū ʿIsā ʿl-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), Sunan, “Kitāb šifāt al-qiyāmā,” 2:617, §2592; all hadith citations from the canonical six books are listed by the individual volumes of each respective collection in Mawsūʿat al-ḥadith al-sharīʿ (Vaduz: Jamʿiyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmi, 2000–1).

48 Ibn al-ʿArabī develops the gnostic role of the interpreter in the communication of revelation in al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (Cairo: al-Ḥayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿĀmmā lil-Kitāb, 1972–92), see particularly, 8:188–9; 9:461–2; 10:176. Following the same figurative line, he uses the metaphor of translation and interpretation as a title for a collection of his mystical and erotic verse, Tarjumān al-ʾashwāq [The interpreter of desires].


50 Ibn Abī Usayyibaʾs biography of Ibn ʿUṣayiba from ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ, 493–5, cf. R. Arnauld, “Iṣṭīʿān b. ʿBasīl,” EI². Though here Ḥunayn is referred to as a mutarjim, in other instances the title tarjumān is used, Ibn al-Qiftī, Tāʾrikh al-ḥukmāʾ, 25. Cf. Ibn Abī Usayyibaʾ, ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ, 257, who also records the term nāqil to describe Ḥunayn, though the context suggests that this appellation is used as a slight by his slanderers, 265. In other contexts, Ḥunayn is described as a nāqil, 259, 279. Tarjumān is clearly used as a professional title, as is the case of Mūsā b. Ḥūlī al-Ṭarjumān, 262, who nonetheless does not reach the same rank as Ḥunayn, 281; the same is true for Fathūnī al-Ṭarjumān, whose translations are said to be filled with errors, 280. Muqaddasī calls Saʿlām a mutarjim, reflecting a certain interchangeability of the terms, 362–5.

51 Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, Risāla, 2.


54 Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, Risāla, 29; see also Fihrist, 2278; Dodge, 684.

55 See Hayrettin Yücesoy, Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 24–8, 40–58.


57 See Gutas, Greek Thought, 96–104.


59 See Q. 12:4–6, and the story of Yūsūf and his vision and his divinely instructed ability to interpret dreams and portents (Q. 12:6, 12, 16, 96–104).

60 Ibn Khudān, Kitāb al-ʿibār, 1:882.


62 Ibn Qutayba, Kitāb taʾbir al-ʿrāʾyā, 103.

63 Ibid., 100, 134, 166.

64 See Gutas, Greek Thought, 45–52, 108–10.


67 See Lamoreaux, Early Muslim Tradition, 76–7; see also Maria Mavroudi, A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 168–336.


69 Fihrist, 2:181, Dodge, 614. On the question of the authenticity of the attribution to Ḥunayn, see Mavroudi, A Byzantine Book, 135–42. Whether or not the translation at hand is that of Ḥunayn himself or one of his disciples, all internal indications of the text point to a translation of the third/ninth century or possibly the fourth/tenth century. The only translation that we know from the period is the one ascribed to Ḥunayn.

70 See, for example, Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, “Kitāb al- ṭanṭān,” 2:1428, §7146; Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, “Kitāb al- ṭanṭān,” 2:1212, §7416.

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1 Ya'qūbī, 2:481; cf. YBN, 256.
3 See Murūj, §2817.
5 This section appears only in the Vienna recension, MS V, fol. 68b; on this reading of kūstubān, see de Goeje's glossary, Masālik, 6.
6 See C. E. Bosworth, "Kabū," EI².
8 Buldān, 584.
9 On the authority of 'Atā' al-Khurāsānī, Tabārī quotes Ibn 'Abbās as having interpreted Q. 18:93, "bayna 'l-saddayn" as two mountains, across which is the rampart (radm) of Dhīl 'l-Qarnayn, holding back the peoples of Gog and Magog, thought to correspond to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Jāmī', 16:16. Cf. Tījān, 103; Anderson, Alexander's Gate, vii-viii.
11 'Ardānī was used as a blanket term to include a variety of regions including what is today Georgia. Following a Sasanian tradition, Ibn Khurraḍādhibh divides Armenia into four sections, of which Tiflis is located in the first, Masālik, 122; cf. Futūḥ, 194; C. E. Bosworth, "al-Kurj" EI².
12 Murūj, §498; TRM, ser. 3, 2:1414-6.
13 Murūj, §498.
14 Ya'qūbī, 2:481-2.
15 Fragments of the anonymous Ta'rikh Bāb al-Ahwāb survive through quotations recorded by the seventeenth-century Turkish historian Ahmad b. Lutf Allāh in his history Šāhīd al-duwāl. Vladimir Minorsky prepared the Arabic text, with a translation and commentary, A History of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th-11th Centuries (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1958).
16 Minorsky, History of Sharvān, §4.
17 Ibid., §5.
20 Masālik, 124.
21 Ibid., 123-4.
22 Futūḥ, 193-7; Hitti, 305-9; see Murūj, 444; also Kharāj, 193-4. For the title of Wahrāzān and the possible variants, see Minorsky, History of Sharvān, 97-9; cf. MHUDūd, 447-50.
23 Gaston Wiet identifies the People of the Throne with the Avars in Daghstān, see Ibn Rusta, Les atours précieux: par Ibn Rusteh (Cairo: Publications de la Société de géographie d'Egypte, 1955), 165; Minorsky, History of Sharvān, 97-9.
24 Iṣṭakhri, 130.
25 Murūj, §478.
26 Naftsa, 147-8.
27 See Agusti Alemany, Sources on the Alans (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 244-75, with attention to 246-7.
28 Murūj, §479.
29 Naftsa, 148.
33 Hamza al-Isfahānī, Ta'rikh sīnī, 45.
34 On the fortification of Filān Shāh, see Mu'jam, 1304. Cf. Minorsky, History of Sharvān, 100-1.
35 The Arabic reads, "tarkhan malik al-khazar." De Goeje understands tarkhān as a sobriquet for the king of the Khazar, Masālik, French, 125. Ibn Khurraḍādhibh uses this term to refer to the prince of Samarqand and as a title for lesser Turkish rulers, Masālik, 40-1. See Minorsky, History of Sharvān, 101. The tarkhān, signifying a lesser official, may allude to the phenomenon of the double kingship of the Khazar state, in which there existed a figurehead potentate who ruled merely in name, referred to as the Khāqān, while the real power resided in the hands of another king. See HUDūd, §50:1: "The Khazar king (padshah) is called the Tarkhān of the Khāqān (ū-rā tarkhān-i khāqān..."
khwândan),” Minorsky suggests that the anonymous author of the Hudūd drew here from Sallām’s account. On the issue of the double kingship, see Murūj, §452; Naqṣa, 139; Ištakhrī, 131; RIF, 169–70. J. G. Frazer, using these sources as his guide, presents an interesting reading of double kingship and regicide among the Khazars, “The Killing of the Khazar Kings” Folklore 28 (1917): 382–407.

36 Taqāsīm, 362. This is picked up by Ḥājjī Khalīfa in his Kitāb-i jahān-numā, who situates Khwārazmī in al-Wāḥiq’s expedition to find the wall. This appears to be based on a confused reading of Muqaddasī’s transmission of the adventure, Kitāb-i jahān-numā (Istanbul: İbrāhīm Mutafaariqa, 1732), 379. Cf. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, François de Polignac, and Georges Bohas, “Monstres et murailles,” Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée, 89–90 (2000), 118, 121.


40 Murūj, §447; Ištakhrī, 129.


43 Minorsky, History of Sharvān, 101.

44 Murūj, §446.


47 Ibid.

48 Buldān, 591; Muʿjam, 4:306; 5:11.

49 Muʿjam, 1:303.

50 Murūj, §905.

51 Ibid., §504.

52 Buldān, 588.

53 ʿAjāʾīb, 249. The same account appears in Buldān, 584–5.

54 The dream of the creature from the water echoes an account in the romance cycle of Alexander’s dream of founding the city of Alexandria on the Nile Delta. Mas’ūdī records Alexander’s dream and then his subsequent submarine adventure in the diving bell, Murūj, §§831–2; see Callisthenes [pseud.], trans. Minoo Southgate, Iskandarnamah (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 194–5.

55 Ghurar, 636.

56 This verse only appears in MS V, fol. 68a; see Masālik, 162; Buḥṭuri, Diwān, 2:1152–62, §470, line 43; on the date of composition, see Ṣayrānī’s note, 1152; cf. J. S. Meisami, “Buḥṭuri” EAI; see also Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi, Description in Classical Arabic Poetry (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 92–121.


59 Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa l-qaṣī (Tehran: Mu’assasa-i Khwār, 1939), 76.


61 Tābarī relates that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān had wanted to push his conquest to the wall (sadd), TRM, ser. 1, 5:2667–8; Bāl’āmī explicitly reads this rampart as that of Gog and Magog, Bāl’āmī, Tārīkh-nāma-i Ṭabarī (Tehran: Surūsh, 1995–9), 3:352–4.


63 Laufer, Diamond, 6–20.

64 See Ruska, Steinbuch des Aristoteles, 59, 105–6.


66 See Ch. Pellat, “Amr b. Ma’dikarib,” EFD.


68 Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-kabīr, 21:171; Dḥahabi, Tārīkh al-Islām, 2:244–8; Miʿṭār, 310–1.


70 Bakrī, 1:455; Miʿṭār, 310.

71 See W. Barthold, “Khazar,” EFD.

72 Compare this with the case of Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 122/740), the Umayyad governor of Mesopotamia and Azerbaijan, who, according to Muqaddasī, sought the cave of darkness (kahf al-zulamāt) that Dhu l-Qarnayn had entered, near a fortification (ribaṭ) built by the legendary hero, Taqāsīm, 146; cf. Nabilia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957–72), 1:55. Maslama’s rebuilding of the defensive walls at Ḍār al-Abwāb is also positioned as paralleling Alexander’s barrier against Gog and Magog, a topic explored by Antoine Borrut, who kindly shared with
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given the title of the genre, fits into a larger conception of the world divided into the temporal rule of kingdoms. Ḥikārī, §6. Thus are referenced the lands (bilād), kingdoms (mamlākī), the end (ilā ḥkhīr), the frontiers (ḥudūd), and the abode (dār) of Islam, Ḥikārī, §5-7. This variety in naming is clearly connected to its opposite, namely kufr, cf. Ḥikārī, §3, §5. Though there is a fluidity in the categorical terms, the division between kufr and islām is certainly present in the early geographical projection of space, and speaks to the formation of collectives in negative dialectic. The same follows with Ibn Ḥawqal, who draws directly on Ḥikārī's model, Sūrat, 1, §8-10, §13.

96 See Murād, §2302; here evidently the context is not geographical but political, set against Byzantium.

97 Taqāṣīm, 9. As for Islam as a geographical category, Muqaddasi relates, “I have traveled across Islam, far and wide,” and uses “farthest reaches of Islam (aṣṣiṣ `l-islām),” Taqāṣīm, §116, 241.

98 Kharāj, mamlakat al-islām, §150, §151; hadd al-islām, §172; thughir al-islām, §130-1, §185; buldān al-islām, §186; bilād al-islām, §156; bilād `al-adwuw, §186.

99 It is important to note that even the demarcations of dār al-islām and dār al-kufr are also constructed around projected notions of Islamic orthodoxy; see Abū Maṣūr al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn (Istanbul: Muḥād at al-Dawla, 1928), 270.


102 YBN, §233; Muṣālib, 5. Ibn al-Qāṣs gives also the appellation dīl-i zamin / qalb al-ard, British Library, MS Or. 13315, fol. 26a; as part of a larger articulation of ‘Abbāsid ideology, Qudāmā refers to dīl-i Irānshahr as the capital of the empire of Islam (qaṣarat mamlakat al-islām), Kharāj, §159; a similar categorization is given in Ḥikārī, §15; Sūrat, 9; Kramers, “L'influence de la tradition iranienne,” §151-2.


104 On the notion of the encircling ocean as linked to ancient Greek geographical writing, see Int. Atlanticum Marc, Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography, William Smith (London: Walton and Maberly, 1854).

105 The Sūrat al-ard ascribed to Muhammad b. Muṣāla `l-Khwārazmī describes the encircling ocean as forming the shape of a taylāsān around the lands of the earth, Kitāb Sūrat al-ard (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1926), §22; cf. Taqāṣīm, §10-14; Muṣādī describes a similar map ascribed to Ptolomy, §193; see, however, Kramers, “L'influence de la tradition iranienne,” §148-9.

106 Buldān, 59; Taqāṣīm, 10.

107 Muṣālib, 155.

108 Buldān, 62.

109 Jazīrat, 31-44.


73 Buldān, 110-1.

74 Ibid., 110; Muṣājam, §8; according to Ḥiyāfānī, this verse, however, was composed originally by Ibn Jāmī in honor of a victory of Hārūn al-Rashīd in Byzantium, Aḥadīrī, §18-74.

75 Buldān, 109.

76 MS B, fols. 69b-61a.

77 Maqdisī, Kitāb al-bad', 4:91-2.

78 Ibn al-Qāṣs, British Library, MS Or. 13315, fols. 25b-26a; GAS, 1:306-7; GALS, 1:496-7; Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘īyya al-kubra (Istanbul: `Isā `l-Bābī ‘l-Halabī, 1964-76), §3-96.

110-1.


81 Buldān, 109.


83 The kishwar system is outlined in the Pahlavi Zand-Akāsīh, Iranian or Greater Bundahish (Bombay: Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, 1956), ch. 8. See Abū Maṣūr Ma`mārī, “Muqaddima-i qadim-i Shāh-nāma,” §166-8; English, §171-2.

84 Buldān, 109.


86 See, for example, Ḥikārī, §15-9.

87 Buldān, 107-8, and English, §102-3.

88 See, for example, Ḥikārī, §15-9.

89 Ḥudūd, §8.1.

90 Jazīrat, 26ff.


92 Such is the case, for instance, when Ḥikārī uses the phrase “in Islam (ft l-islām) as a geographical demarcation in opposition to the dār al-kufr, Ḥikārī, §153.


95 See Gutas, Greek Thought, 178.

96 YBN, 233.

97 For example, Ḥikārī makes a clear geographical projection of Islam as a kingdom (mamlakat al-islām) like the kingdoms of China and India, which,
Note to Chapter 5: A Wondrous Barrier


4 Tijān, 115; Himyarī, Mulūk Ḫimyar, 111–2.


6 Ḥassān b. Ḥabīb, Diwān, 1:472, lines 19, 21; for further references to the ropes of heaven motif, see Kevin van Bladel, “Heavenly Cords and Prophetic Authority in the Qur’ān and its Late Antique Context,” BSOAS 70 (2007): 223–46.

7 Ḥassān b. Ḥabīb, Diwān, 1:473, line 37; see W. ‘Arafāt, “Ḥassān b. Ḥabīb,” EI.


9 Himyarī, Mulūk Ḫimyar, 98–113, 104; on the question of the authorship of the Sharḥ, see vii; cf. Ise Lichtenstiidter, “Kitāb al-sunna;” cf. Ilse Lichtenstiidter, “Kitāb al-tawḥīd,” 3:532, 7567; Abū Dāwūd al-Siṣṭānī (d. 275/889), Sunna, “Kitāb al-sunna,” 2:803–4, 3:4770, in Mawsī‘at al-hadith al-sharīf, Abī Ya‘lā ‘l-Mawsī‘l (d. 307/910–20), Musnad (Damascus: Dār al-Ma‘mūn li‘l-Turāth, 1984), 1:2408–9, 3:921. Similarly, Ibn al-Faqīh describes how he read from the Gospel (al-Injīl) that one of the signs of the end of time was the advent of a nation (qawm) from the east; this is a reference to the apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelation (12:12–6), which describes how demonic eastern kings emerge in preparation for the battle of Armageddon, Buldān, 609.

10 See Peter Clayton and Martin Price, eds., The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (London: Routledge, 1989).


12 Ibn, 38.

13 Jāmī, 16:8; see ‘Umāra b. Zayd, British Library, MS Add. 5928, fol. 5a.


19 Tajarī, Jāmī, 16:19.


21 See Nuzhat, 935–6.


24 Abū al-Razzāq, Muṣāma‘n, “Kitāb al-jāmī,” 11:376–8, §30890; Bukhārī, Sahih, “Kitāb al-tawḥīd,” 3:532, 7567; Abū Dāwūd al-Siṣṭānī (d. 275/889), Sunna, “Kitāb al-sunna,” 2:803–4, 3:4770, in Mawsī‘at al-hadith al-sharīf, Abī Ya‘lā ‘l-Mawsī‘l (d. 307/910–20), Musnad (Damascus: Dār al-Ma‘mūn li‘l-Turāth, 1984), 1:2408–9, 3:921. Similarly, Ibn al-Faqīh describes how he read from the Gospel (al-Injīl) that one of the signs of the end of time was the advent of a nation (qawm) from the east; this is a reference to the apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelation (12:12–6), which describes how demonic eastern kings emerge in preparation for the battle of Armageddon, Buldān, 609.


27 Compare this, for instance, with the circumference of the city of Isfahān, which, according to Ibn Rusta, was one faraskh with walls defended by one hundred towers and four gates, Nafsa, 160–1.


36 Mas'ūdi relates that people dispute the actual dimensions and location of the wall, Murūj, 5149.

37 Abu Hilāl al-'Askari, Kitāb al-šinā'atayn (Cairo: ʿĪsā ʿl-Bābi ʿl-Ḥalabī, 1971), 134. See also Sumi, Description in Classical Arabic Poetry, 1–17.


39 Aristotle, Kitāb Arīstātātīs, ed. ʿAyyād, 87.

40 Bayān, 1:76

41 Ibid.

43 For visual reconstructions of Sallām’s account, see Miquel, La Géographie humaine, 2:505, fig. 33; and László Benedey, Szallam tolmács küldetése Nagy Sándor faláhosz (Budapest: Szentföldi Ferencrendi Zárdai, 1941), 74–5, 77. For the various discrepancies in the arithmetic of Sallām’s barrier, see chapter 6, 133.


46 Jacob of Sarug [pseud.], Das syrische Alexanderlied, 454:30, rez. 2, line 73; Hunnius, 178, line 73, trans. Budge, The History of Alexander, 167; compare with the Neshānā d’Aleksandrōs, edited and translated by Budge, in The History of Alexander, Syriac 256ff. Budge designates this work as, ‘The Christian Legend,’ to distinguish it from the Tashīṭa d’Aleksandrōs, the Syriac translation of the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle. I refer to the work by its Syriac title, Neshānā d’Aleksandrōs, 256, signifying a victory, triumph, or trophy, such as with the heroic acts of martyrs or Christian heroes.


48 Neshānā, Syriac, 265; English, 150.

49 Methodius [pseud.], Die syrische Apokalypse, 520:15, 86.

50 Neshānā, Syriac, 271; English, 155.

51 Neshānā, Syriac, 268; English, 153. In the description of the key, Budge’s translation disregards the Syriac šinānāṭā, which can mean both grooves, rocks, and mountains, etymologically connected to the word for teeth, shemē. Instead, Budge offers cubits (ammin), 268n5, cf. 267n9, and xviii. However, the various MSS (ABCDE) attest to this word. For the meaning of this word as teeth or points, see Carl Brockelmann, Lexicon Syriacum (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1895), 380–4; Smith, Dictionary, 587; also see Nöldeke, “Beiträge,” 2993. Justin Perkins, in a translation of MS B of Budge’s edition, published as “Notice of the Life of Alexander the Great,” JOAS 4 (1854): 359–440, reads “he fastened iron spikes in the cliff, and nailed the iron key which had twelve notches. And he encompassed it with brazen chains.” The interpretation of the twelve notches agrees with the Arabic Alexander cycle as it is expressed in Berlin MS Or. 2195, fol. 39a, and in Callisthenes [pseud.], Ḥadith Dhi ʿl-Qarnayn, 53; likewise in the Ethiopic translation of the Arabic prepared by Budge himself, The Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great (London: C. J. Clay, 1896), 238.

52 See Nöldeke, who believes this Syriac work to be the inspiration of the Qur’ānic account of Dhi ʿl-Qarnayn’s wall against Gog and Magog, “Beiträge,” 26ff. Though this thesis has had a lasting effect on modern readings of the sources for the Qur’ān, it has not gone entirely without criticism, see Wheeler, Moses or Alexander?” 191–215.

53 There are striking parallels between the Qur’ānic passage and both the Syriac mēmrā and the Neshānā, viz. the eschatological significance of the wall, the prophetic role of Alexander in foreseeing its destruction, along with the details of the wall itself being constructed of iron and copper. However, assuming that these two Syriac accounts are genuinely from the beginning of the seventh century, they do not speak a fortiori to a direct line of causality for the formation of the Qur’ānic tradition. Take, for instance, the use of the words for copper and iron to describe the wall in the Neshānā and in the accounts ascribed to Jacob of Sarug and Methodius; both of these terms are incorporated into the Qur’ānic account. Yet, the Arabic word used for iron, ḥadid (18:96), is not etymologically linked to the Syriac parzāl, found in the Syriac accounts, while the Arabic cognate firzil is, though this is not used in the Qur’ānic description. As for the term for copper, the Syriac nhāshā is etymologically linked to the Arabic muḥās. Rather than this shared cognate, the Qur’ān uses qītra (Q. 18:96); cf. the use of muḥās (Q. 5:33). Many structural elements of the Qur’ānic tale, in a very general sense, parallel the Syriac tradition, which appears to predate the Qur’ān, see Nöldeke, “Beiträge,” and Kevin van Bladel, “The Alexander Legend in the Qur’ān 18:83–102,” in The Qurʾān in its Historical Context (London: Routledge, 2008), 175–203. At a linguistic level, however, the significant instances of divergence point to an oblique course of transmission and appropriation, both orally and textually, that emerges in dialogue with the eschatological discourse on the life of Alexander, widely diffused throughout the seventh century. The epithet of Dhi ʿl-Qarnayn is itself an indication of this, for while the Syriac cycle references the horns of Alexander, it consistently refers to the hero by his Greek name, and not by a variant epithet, cf. Neshānā, Syriac, 257, English, 146.

54 See Sourdel, Le vizirat ‘Abbāside, 1:295, 312–3, 316, 328, 378; on Ibn Khurradadhbih’s relationship with the Christian aristocrat, ‘Adīn b. Makhlad, see ‘Umari,
Masālīk al-abṣār, 1:311.

55 Cf. Callisthenes [pseud.], Hadith Dhī ‘l-Qarnayn, 53; the date of this work is based on what appears to be a seventh/thirteenth-century Maghribi manuscript; to what degree this manuscript draws on an earlier tradition of Arabic translations of the Syriac versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes cycle remains to be seen, see Zuwiyya, Islamic Legends, 41–2.

56 See Berlin MS Or. 2195, fol. 39a; Callisthenes [pseud.], Hadith Dhī ‘l-Qarnayn, 53; Sharḥ sīrat Iskandar Dhī ‘l-Qarnayn, dated 1104/1693, BNF MS Arabe, ancien fonds, 1494a, fol. 76b; cf. Doufi–Aerts, Alexander Magnus Arabicus, 141–2, 144.

57 Masālīk, 168. The two trees here may be an oblique reference to the speaking trees of the Sun and the Moon found in the Alexander cycle, while the spring may echo Alexander’s quest for the fountain of life.

58 See M. L. Chaumont, “Callisthenes” Elr; Noëdeke argued, rather speculatively, that the Syriac Tashšīta d’Aleksandrōs was based on a lost Middle Persian text, “Beiträge,” 14ff. Ciancaglini has sought to discredit this theory; though her argumentation, particularly regarding the stages of translation from Pahlavi into Syriac, awaits further evaluation, “The Syriac Version.” Nonetheless, even her theory does not exclude the circulation of the Alexander Romance within a pre-Islamic Persian milieu, 135–7.


62 See the account of Abū Sahl al-Fadl b. Nawbakht (d. ca 193/809), Fihrist, 2:133; Dodge, 574–5; Ghorūr, 485; Ḥamza al-Isfahānī, Tārīkh sīni, 37; cf. Gutas, Greek Thought, 39–40.


64 Masālīk, 168.

65 Ibid., 166; see W. Hinz, who calculates this at 0.5405 meters, Islamische Masse und Gewichte, 54–64; however, Alastair Northedge, based upon the archeological measurements of bricks in Sāmarrā’, puts the black cubit at 0.526 meters, “The Racecourses at Sāmarrā’,” BSOAS 53 (1990), 54.

66 Masālīk, 168.

67 MS B, fol. 63a; cf. MS V, fol. 70b.


69 See YBN, 261; cf. Dominique Sourdel, “Questions de cérémonial ‘abbaside,”


Jāmī’, 1618.

Ibid.

Ṭijān, 103.


MS B, fols. 65b–64a; Meynard, 102.


MS V, fol. 71b.


De Goes suggests that the original reading was the river of Ilakh, i.e., the Jaxartes, which he believes was corrupted into the river of Balkh, i.e., the Oxus, *Masālik*, 169, note d. In his French translation he changes the order of the itinerary to make it more plausible, to “Samarkand, Isbyshchob, Osrouschan, Bokhara, Tirmidh, the lleue de Balkh (l’Oxus), *Masālik*, 131. This reading still does not explain why Sallām would leave Samarqand for Isbijab and then head back to Bukhara.


*Nuzhat*, 935.

Ibid., 938; *Masālik*, 169, note b.


*Nuzhat*, 932–3. Khūrūn Barskhn Mand al-Turkī, the name is evidently garbled in the manuscript recensions, note line 4; this might be a distorted form of the name of the Kimak informant mentioned at the beginning of the geography, *Nuzhat*, 5.


On the H1story of *Hudud*, 932–3, 935.


The description of the report as a qiqsā and the distribution of alms appears only in MS V, fol. 71b.

Chapter 6: To Live to Tell

1 See Stefan Leder, “Prose, non-Fiction, Medieval,” *EAL*.

2 *Nuzhat*, 938.


5 See Lane’s entry for qassah; Ch. Pellat “Kissas,” *EI*.


7 Ibn al-Nadim mentions that Sarakhsi wrote a geography, *al-Masālik wa l-mamālik*, *Fihrist*, 1:459, Dodge, 628; GAS, 11:244–5. Ibn Ḥazm states that Sarakhsi, presumably in this geography, recorded the story of Sallām al-Tarjamān; Ibn Ḥazm also lists Qudāma b. Ǧafar as relating the adventure, while the surviving geographical material from the ‘Abbāsid administrator does not include the account, Ibn Ḥazm, *al- Ḥaṣīf fi l-milal*, 1:144.


9 British Library, MS Add. 23378, fols. 169b–173a; British Library, MS Or. 4895, fols. 97a–98b; de Goes also omitted this account in his edition of *Nafṣa*, 149, note c.


11 British Library, MS Or. 13315, fols. 48a–b.


14 *Nuzhat*, 934–8.

16 Bilād, 597–9.
17 Mitār, 310–1.
21 Siyārat, 14.
22 Taqāsīm, 3, 6.
23 Ibid., 362.
24 Ibid. According to this statement, Muqaddasī probably read the geographies of Ibn Khurraḍādbeh and Ḥayḥānī in the royal library of Nīsābūr, a testament to their reception histories, Taqāsīm, 4.
26 Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, British Library, MS Or. 13315, fols. 30a, 57a.
27 Ibid., fol. 48a.
30 Cf. Ibn al-Jawzī’s isnād transmission of the account, which he takes from Ibn al-Munāḏī, who reports to have received Ṣallām’s adventure from Ibn Khurraḍādbeh, al-Muntāzam, 1:294.
33 MS V, fol. 69b; see de Goeye’s translation, Masālik, 127n1, 128n1.
34 MS V, fol. 66a.

Notes to Chapter 6: To Live to Tell

35 Taqāsīm, 3–4
36 Ibid., 241.
37 Ibid., 4.
38 Ibid., 4, note l.
39 Ibid.
40 In addition to the Turkish informant who discusses the area adjacent to the wall, Idrīsī lists as one of his sources the writing of a certain Khānākh (var. Jānākh), the son of the Khānāk ruler (khāqān), of whom nothing is known, Nuzhat, 5, 933; cf. Muḥammad, 297.
41 Muṣaf, 3:200.
42 Taqāsīm, 9; cf. Muṣaf, §191.
43 Muṣaf, §731.
45 Ghurar, 440–2.
56 Ghurar, 440–2.
57 MS B, fol. 64a; this note appears to be in the same hand as the note on the frontispiece by the jurist ʿAbd al-Latif b. al-Ghaffār who read through the work in the year 1040/1630–1.
58 Muṣaf, §731; cf. Mir Khwānd, Taʾrīkh-i rawdat al-ṣafā, (Tehran: Markaz-i Khayyām Pīrūz, 1960), 1:93; though contra Mir Khwānd, given the dimensions of the wall debated, as described by Masʿūdi, it does not appear that Farghānī is responding directly to Sallām’s account.
60 Birūnī, al-Āthār al-bāqiya, 48–9.
61 Ibn Khaldūn, Kitāb al-ībar, 1:137.

Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, Stories of the Prophets (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1999), 7–15, 32–8, 328–30.

Tha'labī, 'Arā'is al-majāliṣ, 243–4; while this account is not present in Brinner’s translation, The Lives of the Prophets (Leiden: Brill, 2002), it is part of the early manuscript tradition, see British Library, MS Or. 1494, dated 513/1119, fols. 193b–196b.

See the partial manuscript of Ibn al-Jawzi’s work, in CSIC, Madrid, Almonacid MS Junta 38, fols. 4a–5b; cf. L. P. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 153–4.

Hāji Khalīfā credits Suyūtī with the title Baddārī al-zuhūr, which he differentiates from the work with the same title by Ibn Iyās, Mamlūk historian, and occasional student of Suyūtī, Kashf, 1:229. Modern popular editions of this collection of prophetic tales, however, ascribe the authorship of this work to Ibn Iyās, Baddārī al-zuhūr (İstanbul: Matba‘at al-Dawla, 1931), 162–3.


Rabhghūzī ascribes this adventure not to Sallām but to Abū Ya‘qūb Tarjumānī, on the authority of Majd al-Dīn Andijānī, who includes the account in his own Qur'ānic commentary; in this account the key has eighteen teeth, Qiṣṣas al-anbiyā‘, An Eastern Turkish Version, trans. H. E. Boeschenstein, J. O’Kane, and M. Van Damme (Leiden: Brill, 1995), fols. 175v–1769r.


See Romm, Edges of the Earth, 92ff.


See the Persian cosmographical work, Majma‘ al-gharā‘ib, Bodleian MS Ouseley 47, fol. 47b. This work, compiled by Muhammad b. Darwish al-Balkhi for the Afghān ruler Pir Muḥammad Khān (r. 963–75/1556–67), relates that al-Wāthiq sent an unidentified group to the wall. See also Māhmūd Efendi ‘l-Khatīb, who mistakenly copies ‘Sallām as ‘Su‘aymān; Bodleian MS Turc 39, fols. 66a–67b.

81 Ajā‘īb, 128.

Ibid.

Nuzhat, 220; Ferrand appends this account to Gharnātī, Tuḥfat al-albāb, 233–4.

Masālik, 163.

85 Ajā‘īb, 128–9.

Gharnātī, Tuḥfat al-albāb, 1192. Gharnātī’s Tuḥfat contains no reference to Sallām in this anecdote. A manuscript of the Tuḥfat copy gives certifications of oral transmission (sama‘ā‘ī) that date to a copy made during Gharnātī’s lifetime in Muṣāfil, 557/1162 (British Library, Add. 18535, fol. 122b). This manuscript is also missing the ascription to Sallām. Abū ‘l-Fāṭārī al-Iṣbā‘ī (d. ca 850/1446) relates the same story; however, on the authority of neither Sallām nor Abū Ḥāmid, but rather a certain Shaykh Abū ‘l-ʿAbbās al-Ḥiḍāzī, suggesting a different genealogy altogether, al-Mustatraf (İstanbul, Lebanon: al-Maktaba al-ʿAsriyya, 1996), 2:215. Also see César E. Dubler, Abū Ḥāmid el Granadino (Madrid: Editorial Maestre, 1953), 309–14; cf. René Basset, Mille et un contes (Paris: Maisonneuve Frères, 1924), 192.

Gharnātī, Tuḥfat al-albāb, 199.

Ibn al-Wardī, Khudrīyat al-ajā‘īb, 152; see also the anonymous Ajā‘īb al-makhḍūqmāt, drawn from Qazwīnī and others, British Library, MS Or. 1528/1, fol. 15a.


The jazīrat al-saksār mentioned by Qazwīnī is based on the Persian, sag (dog) and sar (head), suggesting the ancient origin of such material. For the Greek tradition, see J. W. McCrindle’s translation and notes, Ancient India as Described by Kēsias the Knidian (London: Trübner and Co., 1882), 22. The loanword μαρτρυόμασ (manticore), also belies the Persian mard (man) and khvār (eater), McCrindle, 11–2; cf. Wittkower, “Marvels of the East,” 162; and, in general, for the Qazwīnī context, Julie Badiee, “An Islamic Cosmography” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1978), 128–41.


Ibid., 248–9, where this entire tale is related on the authority of Gharnātī, however, see above, 249n86.

In addition to referencing the story twice in al-Tarjumānā al-kubrā, Zayyānī recalls his description of Sallām in his unpublished work, al-Tarjumānā al-mu‘arrīb (The Arabic interpreter), 248.

Chapter 7: Beyond the Walls of the Orient


7. D'Herbelot, Bibliothèque orientale, 470.

8. Ibid., 471.


15. Bayer, "De Muro Caucasiano," 446.

16. Ibid., 438.

17. Ibid., 446, this quotation is from Epistula VII of Horace. Lundbæk describes how Bayer was known for his "immoderate use of quotations" from Greek and Latin, T. S. Bayer, 6.


104 Idrisi, Geographia Nubiensis, 267-70.

Notes to Chapter 7: Beyond the Walls of the Orient
mention al-Wathiq, while the Latin translation printed in Paris obfuscates al-Wathiq b'ilalah by translating his name as "Fidelis Deo," *Geographia Nubiensis*, 267.


20 Bayer, "De Muro Caucaseo," 442.


22 D'Ohsson, "Ills (c'est-à-dire les infideles) t'interrogeront sur Zoul-Carnéin," *Des peuples*, 131.

23 "Il est certain qu'à la fin du monde les Yadjoudjes et Madjoudjes se répandront sur la terre, selon notre livre sacré." Ibid., 333.

24 Ibid., 139.


27 D'Ohsson, *Des peuples*, 8–12; d'Ohsson sets the account of the jeune fille emerging from the body of a fish with the Yura and not the Khazar, 83.

28 See Zadeh, "The Wiles of Creation."


33 "The all too notorious account of Sallam the interpreter," Meynard, 23.

34 Ibid., E. J. van Donzel makes a similar point, basing himself on the Christian apocalypse of Bahirā, which he argues provides a rationalized reading of the Qur'ānic stories of the People of the Cave and Dhū ʿl-Qarnayn's barrier, *Gog and Magog* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 176–7. However, such a critique is not to be found in the Syriac or Arabic versions of the legend edited by Barbara Rogge, *The Legend of Sergius Bahirā* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 394–6, 368, 414, 506.


37 Ibid., 5:116.
an upper limit, this would mean traveling approximately 50 km per day to reach the Jade Gate. Both of these estimates would be significantly more than the comfortable per diem average of 12 km to 17.5 km for the entire itinerary suggested by van Donzel, *Gog and Magog*, 218, 242.

54 For the designation of this city as a prefecture during the Tang dynasty in 630, see Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, "Camul", 1:153–6.


57 As for the Uyghur toponym, see Törö Haneda, "A propos d’un text fragmentaire de prière manichéenne en ouigour provenant de Turfan," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 6 (1932), 3, fol. a, line 1. Haneda argues for an ancient use of some variation of Qomul, as distinct from Yizhou in the early Tang period, 9–10, 17–21.

58 In Arabic and Persian geographical sources, Yizhou is known through the Uyghur as Qumul or Qomul and not by the Tang administrative term. Even the *Hudūd*, which renders all these prefectures as *qi* (chī) or *jiq* (jiq), accounts for Yizhou by the Uyghur name Qomul, albeit in a muddled form (*zamir*), see §§12.9 and *MHudūd*, 275; Gardizi knows Hani as Qumil, *Zayn al-akhbār*, 268.

59 Had Sallām indeed traveled to Yizhou he probably would have transcribed it as *fiy* (fiy) or *i*c* (i*c* and not *i*c* (*i*c) or *iguh* (*iguh). See, for example, the transliterations of the Chinese prefectures *Suzhou* (Ganzhour) = *x≠m*. See Rashid al-Din, *Jāmi‘ al-tawārikh*, 1:321–2, 325, 325–30. With regard to the above cited toponyms in *Hudūd*, see Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, 1:150, 2:238, 822; James Hamilton, "Autour du Manuscrit Staël-Holstein," *Tōung Pao* 46 (1958), 138.

Anderson, Alexander's Gate, 96; cf. Miller, Charta Rogeriana, 31. Anderson, who did not have access to Idrisi in the original Arabic, is mistaken. The text reads Qūqāyā, with a manuscript variant as Qūqāyā, and it explicitly states that this mythical mountain range is located in the far east (aqāsā 'l-mashriq). Nuzhat, 910.

MHudūd, 225.

Ibid.

A. A. Vasilev, Byzance et les Arabes (Brussels: Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales, 1935), 1:8–9.

RIF, 196–8.


Bendefy, Szallam, 5–8, 83; see Z. V. Togan, “Bashdjirt,” EI².

Bendefy, Szallam, 20; Stein, Serindia, 2:683–97.

Bendefy, Szallam, 91.


Bendefy, Szallam, 58–64, 92–3; Stein, On Alexander's Track, 152.

Bendefy, Szallam, 46–7, 89.

Ibid., 67–8, 86n150, 92; Stein, On Alexander's Track, 60.

As for the Adhkish Turks, see Masālik, 31; Nuzhat, 843–4. Bendefy offers no explanation as to how de Goeye's Igu could be mistakenly transcribed as Girā, that is Rayā Girā, which appears to have been an onomastic corruption that occurred after Mahāmd of Ghaznān (d. 421/1030) invasions of the Swat Valley; see Abdur Rehman, “Ethnicity of the Hindu Shahis,” Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society 51, no. 3 (2003). 9. Bendefy claims that, because the toponym is unpointed, we are free to imagine what the proper transcription would have been, Szallam, 67.

Bendefy, Szallam, 74–7, 93.


Ibid., 115.

Van Donzel, “Komul,” Supplement, EI²; cf. idem, Gog and Magog, 208. In the work cited, Luo Zhewen and Zhao Luo, The Great Wall of China in History and Legend (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1986), there is no description here that readily parallels Sallām's layout of this enormous city, 39–41.
been re-appended to replace a lost opening sheet, additionally the number of lines on the folio is thirteen, which deviates from the consistent eleven lines per folio throughout MS B.

127 Masālīk, xviii; MS V, fol. 1a; cf. Loebenstein, Katalog, 1197.
128 Hājī Khalīfa outlines a very similar incipit as MS V, Kafshī, 2:1665n3. While this does not mean it is original to the text, Montgomery’s reading of the Vienna encomium suggests that it is deeply embedded within ‘Abbāsīd politics, “Serendipity,” 202–9; the same, however, cannot be said for the Bodleian encomium, which may well be a perfunctory addition by a later scribe.

132 Ibid; on the centrality of the identification of this toponym with the modern Chinese Hami for de Goeje’s thesis, see van Donzel, Gog and Magog, 207.
133 Van Donzel, “Sallām al-Tardjumān,” Supplement, Eī; he does not, however, engage directly with the scholarly criticism of de Goeje’s thesis in his monograph, Gog and Magog.
134 Ibid.
135 See Masālīk, xvii.
138 The pronominal masculine suffix added to tarbī does not agree with its grammatically feminine antecedent (madīna). De Goeje corrects this in his edition, Masālīk, 164, note h. However, not noted by de Goeje is how the pronominal feminine ending at the end of the taped over passage (lāhā) appears not to agree with the partly legible masculine pronoun which starts the original text (... hu ’l-abwāb).
139 Masālīk, xiv.
141 British Library, MS I.O. Islamic 617, fol. 1a.
142 MS B contains less than ten verse citations, fols. 10a, 15a–b, 43b, 65b, 78a, 79a; cf. Masālīk, 15–6, 82, 128–9, 162, 181. The thesis that the prototype for MS B contained more poetic material is substantiated by the excerpt in Bodleian MS Hunt 538 (= MS H), which, based on its parallels with Sallām’s anecdote and its placement of the account beyond the Khazar, derives from the same archetype, see MS H, fol. 142a–b; MS B, fols. 61a–64a; cf. MS V, fol. 72a. MS H includes a verse found only in the Vienna redaction, further suggesting that the Bodleian manuscript is descended from a copy that originally had more poetry in it, see MS B, fol. 65b, MS H, 142b.
143 MS B, fols. 81b–82a, a Latin note draws attention to the lacuna in the margin, highlighting the catch word at the bottom of fol. 81b that does not match the first word at the top of fol. 82a; the same lacuna is transmitted in MS F, fol. 94a.
145 The opening folio is written out in a heavier ink, the paper appears to have
See de Goeje's transcription of the lām in al-Lb, which, though not marked with as strong a cant, is similarly missing the angled marker of the kāf; using the same reasoning as Ikka, this could be transcribed as al-kāf, etc.

This appears to be a folk etymology with no clear analogue in Mongolian.

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This appears to be a folk etymology with no clear analogue in Mongolian, see Gerhard Doerfer, "Some Thoughts on the Origin of the Term 'Mauer'" in al-Lb, which, though not marked with the angled marker of the kāf, this could be transcribed as al-Kāf, etc., MS 1:84–5. See also Henry Serruys, "Mongol Altan 'gold' = 'imperial', Monumenta Serica 21 (1962): 357–78.

Masālik, xviii.


Conclusion

1 Miquel, La géographie humaine, 2:503.
2 Ibn al-Wardi, Kharidat al-'ajā'ib, 11.
4 See between the discourses of wonder and eschatology in Ibn al-Wardi, Kharidat al-'ajā'ib, 289–324.
5 Muḥammad b. Bahādur al-Zarkashi, al-Burhān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān (Cairo: Dār il-hayā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyya, 1957), 1:266; see Ṭabari, who lists both 'sign' (alāmāt) and 'account' (qisās) as primary meanings, Jami', 1:47.
6 See above, 221112, 24517.
8 Masālik, 124; cf. Buhṭuri, Diwān, 974–9, §386, lines 35–6.
9 TRM, ser. 3, 4:2037–9.
12 See the verses cited in Masālik, 7, 16, 32–3, 162; Buldan, 383, 616, 420; Tanbih, 37.
17 Fihrist, 1:467–9; Dodge, 332–3.
18 Fihrist, 2:332; Dodge, 724.
19 Fihrist, 2:331; Dodge, 723–4.
21 Aghānī, 9:277.
23 Ibid., 9:338; Kilpatrick, Making the Great Book of Songs, 21–2, 263.
24 See Murūji, §§3213–27.
26 Ibid., 14–5.
27 Ibid., 18.
28 RIF, §72.

Postscript

1 For this inscription of 'Adud al-Dawla, see Sheila Blair, The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana (Leiden: Brill, 1992), S6, 32–3.
2 Ibid., §7, 34–5.
3 Islahānī, Kitāb adab al-ghurabā', §9, 24–5; var. "bi-nāzīlī 'l-aqdār," Mu'jam, 570–1; Northedge, Historical Topography, 208, 331.
4 See Buldan, 105–14.
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