

*Of Palimpsests and Acephalous Texts: Tracing the Limits of Early ʿAbbāsīd Geography*

**TRANSLATION OF PASSAGES**

**PASSAGE 1:** Qudāma bin Jaʿfar (d. 337/948), *Kitāb al-kharāj wa šināʿat al-kitāba*, ed. de Goeje (Leiden: 1889), 184–5.

**CHAPTER 11: THE MINISTRY OF POST  
AND THE POSTAL ROUTES AND ROADS TO THE REGIONS OF THE EAST AND WEST**

ABŪ 'L-FARAJ [QUDĀMA] said: The post requires its own ministry. The dispatches which are sent from all the regions are to be addressed to the director [of the ministry], so that he can send each item from these dispatches on to their proper destination. [The director] is responsible for presenting to the caliph the dispatches of all the regional directors of post and intelligence, or producing summaries of them. And he must look over the affairs of the courier-guides, the letter certifiers, and those posted along the station routes and he must ensure their salaries are distributed and appoint mailbag carriers in all the metropolises. As for what is required of the director of this ministry, he should be trustworthy, either in and of himself, or before the caliph who is in power at the time. The work of this ministry does not require someone who is a complete sage, but rather someone who is reliably diligent. As for the practices required of this ministry they similar to what we have outlined for other [ministries], in terms establishing its functions and conditions. So we need not mention [more], apart from the question of roads, the locations of the postal routes and the major highways that lead in each direction. It is necessary for the chief minister of this ministry to have [this information] at his immediate disposal, without the need for further research, so that, if the caliph calls on him at a time when he must depart on a journey or is send out an army in a matter which is important to him, or some other situation where the knowledge of roads is necessary, thanks to [this previous work], the minister will find himself already prepared before [the caliph] with accurate information...

\* \* \*

**PASSAGE 2:** Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Maqdasī (fl. 375/985), *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, ed. de Goeje (Leiden: 1877), 43.

**ACCOUNT OF WHAT I DIRECTLY WITNESSED ON MY TRAVELS**

YOU SHOULD KNOW that a group of scholars and *wazīrs* have written on this subject, though producing imperfect [works]; they have based the majority of [their writings], rather all of them, on hearsay (*samāʿ*). However, for our part there is not a single clime that we have not entered, nor the most insignificant route we have not known, and despite this, we have not given up research, inquiry, or examination into the unknown (*ghayb*) [var. MS C: examination and searching and exploring through archives and books]. We have structured our book into three sections: the first, concerning that which we saw with our very eyes; the second, that which we heard from trustworthy sources; and the third, that which we have found in books composed on this subject. No royal library has remained unexamined, nor are there any scattered writings I have not leafed through, nor any creeds (*madhāhib*) of people which I have not come to know, nor any renunciants

I have not mixed with, nor country preachers that I have not witnessed. In this way, I have attained the soundness [of knowledge] that I sought after in this field. I have been given thirty-six different names, by which I have been called and addressed, such as: Jerusalemite, Philistine, Egyptian, Maghribi, Khurāsānī, Silmī, Qurʾān reciter, jurist, mystic (*ṣūfī*), saint (*walī*), pious worshiper, renunciant, wanderer, bookseller, bookbinder, merchant, prayer leader (*imām*), sermonizer, muezzin, Friday preacher, stranger, Iraqi, Baghdadi, Levantine, Ḥanafī, tutor, learned juristconsult, teacher, scholar of inheritance (*farāʾidī*), master (*ustādh*), sage (*dānishūmand*), *shaykh*, transplant (*nishāsta*), rider...

\* \* \*

**PASSAGE 3:** Ibn Khurradādhbih (fl. 272/885), *Kitāb masālik wa ʿl-mamālik*, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, MS Mixt. 783, fols. 68b–72a.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE BARRIER OF GOG AND MAGOG

SALLĀM THE INTERPRETER informed me that when al-Wāthiq biʿllāh dreamt in his sleep that the barrier which Dhū ʿl-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.

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

[Sallām] said: So al-Wāthiq 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 (*khābar*) of it.”

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 [V 69a] from Sāmarrāʾ with a dispatch from al-Wāthiq biʿllāh to Ishāq bin Ismāʿīl, the ruler of Armenia. He was in Tiflis on our arrival. Ishāq dispatched us to the ruler of al-Sarīr and the ruler of al-Sarīr 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.

A tribe who speak Arabic and Persian populate these fortifications. They are Muslims and they recite the Qurʾān; they have Qurʾānic 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 [69b] [[to a city called ..k.h/..l.h., its perimeter is ten farsakhs and it has iron gates which are lowered from above]]. In the city are cultivated fields and mills. This is the city in which Dhū '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 Dhū '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.

\* \* \*

**PASSAGE 4:** Ibn Khurradādhbih, *al-Masālik wa 'l-mamālik*, Bodleian, MS Hunt 433, fols. 61a–64a.

#### **AFTER SAMANDAR IS THE RAMPART OF GOG AND MAGOG**

ABŪ 'L-QĀSIM related: Sallām the Interpreter informed me that when al-Wāthiq dreamt in his sleep that the barrier which Dhū 'l-Qarnayn had built between us and Gog and Magog was open, he summoned me and said, “Examine [the barrier] and bring me back information concerning its condition.”

He outfitted me with fifty 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 gave me two hundred mules for carrying supplies and water.

So we set out from Sāmarrā' with a dispatch from al-Wāthiq to Ishāq bin Ismā'īl, the ruler [B 61b] of Armenia. He was in Tiflīs on our arrival. Ishāq dispatched us to the ruler of al-Sarīr and the ruler of al-Sarīr 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-nine days.

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 [B 62a] the Qurʾān; they have Qurʾānic schools and mosques. They asked about us and where

we are 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.”

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.

\* \* \*

**PASSAGE 5:** Ibn Khurradādhbih, *al-Masālik*, Vienna, MS Mixt. 783, fol. 75a.

**IN THE NAME OF GOD, FULL OF COMPASSION, EVER COMPASSIONATE**

A TRUSTWORTHY PERSON who [travels in the regions] of commerce reported: “The waterways beyond the Jayḥūn, the river of Balkh, [are] large rivers [... sh.r.] and there is a river called Kankar at the beginning of the kingdom of Shāsh and a river called B.rk and a river called Siyāwāt and a river called Ṭarāzāb and others in which large boats can navigate [from] the [region of] the Turk to the frontier of China and these rivers run from east to west...”

\* \* \*

**PASSAGE 6:** Ibn Khurradādhbih, *al-Masālik*, Vienna, MS Mixt. 783, fol. 77a–b.

HISHĀM BIN MUḤAMMAD said: “A trustworthy person told me that Ḥamīd bin Buhrā the *dihqān* of lower Fallūja [reported]: There once were magnificent wonders located in four cities. In the first there was in ancient times an image (*timthāl*) of the entire earth. So if people within this kingdom withheld the land-tax (*kharāj*), [one could] unleash the rivers over them such that they would be flooded and would be unable to dam up the rivers until they finally brought forth what they owed. So if one were to dam up the rivers for them on the image [of the earth], then the rivers themselves would close up on their lands. In the second city there was a pool, and when the king wished to gather his companions to dine, each one would pour his chosen beverage into the pool and they would mix it all together and then cupbearers would take out vessels, and whoever poured in his vessel something...”