CHAPTER FOUR

GOG AND MAGOG IN ISLAMIC TRADITION

The second source for any religion-related subject in Islam, after the Koran, is Tradition (hadith) where the theme of Gog and Magog and the barrier of Alexander ‘the two-horned’ is well represented. The hadith shows the early Islamic thinking about the motif before and at the time of Sallam (9th c).

1. The Sunni collections

The best-known Sunni collections are the Six books or Six Sahihs ("The six sound, or reliable ones"), all compiled in the 9th century, i.e. in the days of Ibn Khurradadhbih and Sallam. The compilers were al-Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875), Ibn Madja (d. 887), Abu Dawud (d. 888), al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) and al-Nasa’i (d. 915). Two other important traditionists of the same period are al-Tayalisi (d. 819) and Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855).

2. The Shi‘i collections

The largest and most authoritative of the Shi‘i collections is the Bihar al-anwar ("The seas of the lights"), indeed une mer à boire. The compiler was al-Madjlisi (d. 1698), “a most prolific collector of traditions and unprecedented influential author in the world of the Twelver Shi‘a”. The traditions on Gog and Magog are found under the heading: “The place of return (al-ma‘ad): Signs of the Hour and the story of Gog and Magog”. There is hardly any difference between Sunni and Shi‘i traditions as far as the texts dealing with our subject are concerned. The chains

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1 The work was printed in 110 volumes, Teheran 1956-72. In the present work references are to the Beirut reprint of 1983.
2 EI 2 s.v. al-Madjlisī, Mulla Muhammad Bākīr.
3 al-Madjlisī, Bihar, vi, p. 295-316.
of transmitters, on the other hand, show great differences. The traditions in both Sunni and Shi’i collections have been formative for the ideas in Islam concerning Gog and Magog and ‘the two-horned one’. Over the centuries only nuances have been made, but the data collected by the early compilers have remained unchanged. The relevant traditions will be taken and translated here from both the Sunni and Shi’i collections.

3. Authoritative Koran commentators and lexicographers

An early Islamic authority for the story of Gog and Magog is al-Tabari (d. 923), the great historian and Koran commentator. In his work known as The Commentary he closely follows the traditions on Gog and Magog noted down in the collections during the previous century. This is also the case with the Koran commentators al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209). Arab lexicographers undoubtedly have also contributed to keeping alive the traditions and legends around Gog and Magog. Lane refers to such classics as the Sahih of al-Jawhari (d. 1006-7), the Lisan al-arab of Ibn Manzur (d. 1311-12), the Mishah of al-Fayyumi (finished in 1333), and the Qamus of al-Firuzabadi (d. 1415). The traditions of the 9th century, those collected by al-Bukhari in particular, were extensively drawn upon by Ibn Hadjar al-Asqalani (d. 1449), an Egyptian hadith scholar, judge and historian whose life work, the Fath al-bari a commentary of al-Bukhari’s Sahih, “constitutes the final summation of the science of hadith”. Among the many other Sunni Koran commentators we may mention al-Hauwari (2nd half 9th century).