In Sallam’s travel account the reason for his journey is the dream of the Caliph al-Wathiq¹ (regn. 842-47): it was as if the barrier which exists between us [i.e. the Muslim world] and Gog and Magog had cracked [cf. Koran xviii:93]. As is occasionally the case in religious tradition, Islam sees a dream as a divine revelation, linked to prophecy and completing it. al-Wathiq’s dream may be seen as an expression of current eschatological ideas, activated by fear of the Turks, in whom the collectors of the hadith in the first half of the 9th century saw personifications of Gog and Magog. Similar ideas were alive among Syrian Christians in the Arab world. The fear of Christians and Muslims is clearly expressed in the Apocalypse of Bahira,² dated between 817-24 i.e. during the reign of Caliph al-Ma’mun. Quite correctly al-Ma’mun is indicated in this text as the seventh Imam (caliph), i.e. of the ‘Abbasids, and the twenty-fourth of all caliphs taken together. According to the Apocalypse the end of time will come during al-Ma’mun’s reign. The aim of the text is “to strip the Prophet’s biography of all the lustre with which the compilers of hadith were already beginning to done it”.³ At the same time the Christian author of the text wants to bring the Koran from the supposed divine level down to the human level. If this is indeed the case, the aim of the Apocalypse of Bahira might be seen as a Syrian reflex of al-Wathiq’s endeavour to rationalize the stories on the Seven Sleepers

---

³ A. Abel, Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman, in: Studia Islamica 2 (1954), p. 29; cf. id., L’apocalypse de Bahīra, p. 11.
(the “People of the Cave”), and Gog and Magog and the barrier of Alexander ‘the two-horned as found in the Koran. The investigations into these quite popular themes may indeed have been inspired by the Caliph al-Wathiq’s wish to put an end to misuses of the Koran, by his Mu’tazilism, and by the question whether or not the Koran is created. The *Apocalypse of Bahira* undoubtedly has a Syrian background: the predictions about the Antichrist, Gog and Magog, the four kingdoms (the Turks as the last kingdom), and the Final Judgement are based on the 8th century *Apocalypses of Daniel and Ezra*. *Pseudo-Methodius* is explicitly mentioned. Muslim circles in Baghdad and Samarra, among them Ibn Khurradadhbih and/or Sallam, may well have been acquainted with these apocalyptical ideas alive among the Syrian Christians. This in its turn may explain the similarity between the Syriac tradition of Alexander’s barrier and that given by Sallam and Ibn Khurradadhbih.

The Arab geographers, Ibn Khurradadhbih, al-Muqaddasi, al-Mas‘udi and Yaqut all relate that the caliph sent the astronomer al-Khwārazmī (ca. 800-47) to Byzantium to investigate the story of the *Sleepers of Ephesus*. Ibn Khurradadhbih even writes that the astronomer himself told him that the Greek emperor had sent someone to accompany him to Qorra, and that they had travelled to the place of the alleged Cave of the Sleepers. al-Muqaddasi suggests that the purpose of al-Khwārazmī’s mission was to collect information about Gog and Magog. If that was the case, at least two missions were planned at the beginning of al-Wathiq’s reign to gather information about the barrier. The astronomer’s journey had preceded

---

4 Cf. al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murādī*, viii, p. 222ff., where it is said that al-Wāthīq began to question the doctrine according to which the Koran was created.
6 Cf. Chapter 8, p. [162], and Chapter 9, p. [168].
7 M.J. de Goeje, *De legende der Zevenslapers*, in: *Mededeelingen der Kon. Acad. van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam*, 4e reeks, 4e deel, Amsterdam 1901, p. 27, 29. Yākūt, *Mu‘ījam*, ii, p. 805f. (where he is called Muhammad b. Mūsā al-Munājjīd ‘the astronomer’); al-Mukaddasī, *Ahsan al-takātīm*, p. 362-365. The story was also told in al-Mas‘ūdī’s lost “Middle Book”, *Kitāb aswābat* (id., *Murādī*, § 730-732); al-Mas‘ūdī writes that al-Wāthīq sent al-Khwārazmī to Germa (not identified). He adds that he dealt there also with the barrier which ‘the two-horned one’ had built to prevent the passage of Gog and Magog.