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A Tale of Two Cities: Jābarṣā/Jābalqā and Their Metamorphoses

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Abstract: Although the twin cities at the west and east edges of the world, Jābarṣā (Jābarṣ, Jābalṣā, Jāburṣā) and Jābalqā (Jābalq, Jābarqā), are somehow commonplace in Islamicate cosmographies throughout the medieval period, surprisingly little research exists on them. The main lines of the legend, as formulated by the medieval traditionalists and cosmographers, are as follows: there are two cities at the uttermost east and west parts of the inhabited world, where the sun rises and sets. The inhabitants suffer from the extreme heat and the noise made by the sun in its rising and setting; they have to hide in caves and make their own noise to be protected. In the various versions of the story, some elements lack or differ; the cities are often connected with other legends related to the edge of the world, such as Dhū l-Qarnayn, the Gog and Magog/Yājūj and Mājūj, Muḥammad's night journey, the remnants of the ʿĀd tribe, and so forth. The paper traces the origins of the legend, its formation and various formulations during the Islamic Middle Ages, the significant change it underwent in the late medieval Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy, and finally its survival and fading away to a status of folktale utopia in Ottoman literature and scholarship.

Keywords: Jābarṣā and Jābalqā, cosmography, legends, imaginary geographies, Alexander Romance, Illuminationism

Introduction

Although the twin cities at the west and east edges of the world, Jābarṣā (Jābarṣ, Jābalṣā, Jāburṣā) and Jābalqā (Jābalq, Jābarqā), are somehow commonplace in Islamicate cosmographies throughout the medieval period, surprisingly little research exists on them. A couple of pages in André Miquel's monumental study of Islamic human geography, another so in Faustina C. W. Doufikar-Aerts's equally monumental *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*, a highly informative chapter in Brannon M. Wheeler's treatise on the person of Moses in Islamic lore, and finally a

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very thorough albeit short analysis by Selçuk Aylar:[1] this is practically all one can find. Suffice to say, no relevant entry can be found in all three editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, whereas the comprehensive *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* has a short article, focusing on the Sufi/Illuminationist version.[2]

As we will see in more detail below, the main lines of the legend are as follows: there are two cities at the uttermost eastern and western parts of the inhabited world, where the sun rises and sets; their size is enormous, with tens of thousands of gates and guards. The inhabitants suffer from the extreme heat and from the noise made by the sun in its rising and setting; they have to hide in caves and make their own noise to be protected. In the various versions of the story, some elements lack or differ; the cities are often connected with other legends related to the edge of the world, such as Alexander the Great/Dhū l-Qarnayn, the Gog and Magog/Yājūj and Mājūj, Muḥammad's night journey, the remnants of the ʿĀd tribe, or the lost tribes of Israel.

The present paper will seek to trace systematically the origins of the legend, its formation and various formulations during the Islamic Middle Ages, the significant change it underwent in the late medieval Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy, and finally its survival and fading away to a status of folktale utopia in Ottoman literature and scholarship.

Greco-Roman, Syriac, and Jewish origins

The earliest sources to my knowledge belong to the circle of Alexander the Great. In Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* (28.2–3), we find a reference to the City of the Sun (*πόλις του Ηλίου*), built with gold and emerald:

> the circumference of which is one hundred and twenty stades. It had fourteen towers, built of gold and the green stone and the wall was of Indian stone. In the centre, was an altar built of gold and the green stone, which had sixty steps. On top stood a chariot with horses of gold and green.[3]

The description probably originates from a reference to a sanctuary of the Sun in the island of Nosala by Nearchos, as related by Arrian (*Indica*, XXXI.1): an uninhab-

1 Miquel 1975, ii, 507–508; Doufikar-Aerts 2002, 183–185; Wheeler 2002, 93–110; Aylar 2018. See also Yamanaka 2012, 270–273. On the mystical connotations of the two cities, see Erdoğan 2004.
2 Uludağ, "Câbelkā-Câbelsā."
3 Translation by Elizabeth Hazelton Haight 1955.

ited island, for which "the natives said that it was sacred to the Sun and was called Nosala, and that no human being ever of his own will put in there; but that anyone who ignorantly touched there at once disappeared."[4]

The story has parallels to Lucian's *True History* and thus must have circulated before AD 180,[5] whereas similar stories can be found in Latin authors, such as Pliny the Elder, VI.26 (who talks of "an island known by the names of the 'Island of the Sun' and the 'Bed of the Nymphs,' the earth of which is red, and in which every animal instantly dies"),[6] Pomponius Mela, III.71 (who explains that the "Islands of Sun," opposite the mouths of Indus, are unlivable because of the pressure of the atmosphere and the heat), or Gaius Solinus (who talks of "the city of the Sun," near Panchaea in the Indian Ocean, where the phoenix builds its funeral pyre [33.11], and of "the Island of the Sun," "red, and inaccessible to all kinds of living things" beyond the wastes of Carmania and Persia [54.4]). The City of the Sun, with an altar of gold and emeralds, situated just before a "great darkness," can also be found in the Syriac recension of Alexander Romance;[7] the Syriac text also speaks of another place, again beyond the borders of India, called Obarkia or Obarkĕnâyê, where Alexander is warned by a human-faced bird not to proceed as he was "treading the land of the gods."[8] Analogues of this story can be found in Sanskrit mythology.[9]

The idea that the sun goes near the earth at two symmetrical places can be found in numerous ancient Greek sources.[10] Descriptions of people living near the cradle of the sun and tormented by the intensive heat may have been influenced in some stage by Greco-Roman descriptions of the Northern coasts of Europe;[11] at any rate, such people are described in the *Revelations* of Methodius, bishop of Patara, composed probably in Syria in the late seventh century CE,[12] as well as in the Syriac version of Alexander's romance:

> The place of [the Sun's] rise is over the sea, and the people who dwell there, when he is about to rise, flee away and hide themselves in the sea, that they be not burnt by his rays; and he

4 Arrian 1933; Nawotka 2017, 226.

5 Nawotka 2017, 24.

6 Pliny the Elder 1855, 60–61; Romer 1998; Apps 2011.

7 Budge 1889, 132. The Syriac version was thought to be based on a lost Pahlavi version. However, Claudia A. Ciancaglini (2001) argued that it is a direct translation of a Greek original; but see also van Bladel 2002. The City of the Sun may also have been an inspiration for the "Golden Temple" or "Golden House" of the Syriac and Arabic Alexander narratives: Doufikar-Aerts 2010.

8 Budge 1889, 101.

9 Szalc 2012, 331–336.

10 Aylar 2018, 103–105.

11 Casari 2012, 182.

12 Boyle 1974, 224–225; Idem 1980, 27–28.

> passes through the midst of the heavens to the place where he enters the window of heaven; and wherever he passes there are terrible mountains, and those who dwell there have caves hollowed out in the rocks, and as soon as they see the sun passing [over them], men and birds flee away from before him and hide in the caves, for rocks are rent by his blazing heat and fall down, and whether they be men or beasts, as soon as the stones touch them they are consumed.[13]

Numerous poetic and geographical works of the Roman antiquity (Claudianus, Cleomedes, Valerius Flaccus, Posidonius, and even Tacitus relating a German legend) also refer to the sun making a terrible noise as it submerges into the sea.[14] The noise made by the sun, paired with human tumult, features also in Talmudic literature, where we read that

> Were it not for the sound made by the sun's orb, the sound of Rome's tumult would be heard; and were it not for the sound of Rome's tumult, the sound of the sun's orb would be heard… There are three sounds that go from one end of the world to the other, yet the creatures within the world are not even aware of them: the sound of the sun's orb, the sound of Rome's tumult, and the sound of the soul as it leaves the body.[15]

This legend also passed on to various traditions as far as Central Asia, through Syriac and Nestorian sources and mercenaries.[16] In Giovanni da Pian del Carpine's (d. 1252) account of the Mongols, for instance, the legend of the troglodytes is enriched with the information that they live under the earth because at a certain season the rising sun makes an unbearable noise:

> From there to the east, the Tartars travelled for more than a month through a great wasteland … [These men] could not tolerate the sound of the sun (for at this time when the sun rises they must put one ear to the ground and stop up the other strongly lest they hear the terrible sound which, unless they are careful, would kill many of them) … When they were asked why they lived beneath the earth, they said that once a year, when the sun rose, there was so much noise that men became senseless … In fact the people would play on organs and drums and other instruments at that time so they would not hear the sound.[17]

Thus, at the time Islam appeared some basic elements of the legend were widely circulating in the Middle East, mainly through Syriac texts: the two cities, majestic but tormented by the heat and noise produced by the sun, seem to have been common knowledge in late antique lore of the region.

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13 Budge 1889, 148.

14 Aylar 2018, 107–108.

15 Bialik and Ravnitzky 1992, 762 (6/24, 25); Aylar 2018, 112.

16 Cf. Boyle 1980, 27–28; Idem 1974; Aylar 2018, 108–109.

17 Carpini 1996, 62–63; cf. the Hakluyt translation in Beazley 1903, 57, 119.

The Formation of the Islamic Version

The Qurʾān mentions Dhū l-Qarnayn's travels to the land of the setting sun and that of the rising sun, and the troubles of their inhabitants, just before building the wall of the Gog and Magog. This is what we read in *al-Kahf*, Q 18: 86–91:

> He reached the setting point of the sun, which appeared to him to be setting in a spring of murky water, where he found some people. We said, "O Dhū l-Qarnayn! Either punish them or treat them kindly." He responded, "Whoever does wrong will be punished by us, then will be returned to their Lord, Who will punish them with a horrible torment. As for those who believe and do good, they will have the finest reward, and we will assign them easy commands." Then he travelled a different course until he reached the rising point of the sun. He found it rising on a people for whom We had provided no shelter from it. So it was. And We truly had full knowledge of him.[18]

This description was soon enriched by commentators of the Qurʾān and the traditions. It seems that the first reference to the name and characteristics of the cities belongs to the commentator Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767), who (commenting not upon *al-Kahf* but upon *al-Muzzammil* and the verse "He is the Lord of the east and the west") cites Ibn ʿAbbās to the effect that Jābilqā, in the place that the sun rises, has a thousand gates guarded by a thousand guards each, and so does Jābirsā, where the sun sets; the noise made by the sun is also already present:

> Said Ibn ʿAbbās: The sun rises near a city called Jābilqā, which has a thousand gates and a thousand guards in each gate, and of which the Highest God has spoken in his Book: "rising on a people for whom We had provided no shelter from it." And the sun sets near a city called Jābirsā, which has a million gates and, at each gate, a thousand guards. They shout and yell at each other, in fear of it [i. e., the sun]. And were it not for their screams, you would hear the noise of its crash (*wajba*), when it [i. e., the sun] falls down.[19]

One may postulate with safety that these names and details originated from the Syriac legend on Alexander and its Arabic versions, although some details may belong to pre-Islamic mythology.[20] Faustina Doufikar-Aerts, who has thoroughly explored the early Arabic versions of the Alexander romance, has studied the first detailed descriptions of the cities: ʿUmāra ibn Zayd (d. ca. 815), perhaps the oldest

18 Q 18: 86–91. Translation from https://quran.com/al-kahf/86–98 See a comparison of various translations here: http://en.noblequran.org/quran/surah-al-kahf/ayat-86/

19 Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr* (2003), 3: 409–410; idem, *Tafsīr* (2002), 4: 476. On Muqātil, see Tohe 2015. It is to be noted that the *tafsīr* attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās has no mention of the cities. See the commentary in Ibn ʿAbbās, *Tafsīr* (2008), 375–376 (al-Kahf), 810 (al-Muzzammil).

20 See the survey by Zuwiyya 2011; Van Bladel 2002, 66–67.

preserved text in Arabic representing parts of Pseudo-Callisthenes, is also the first to give their traditional features. Jābarṣā is an immense city in the extreme West with 15,000 gates and 7,000 guards; at sunset, they make enormous noise to drown the thundering sound of the setting sun. In the East, Jābalqa is inhabited by the Nāshiṭ people.[21] Both cities are inhabited by the descendants of the prophet Hūd, and Dhū l-Qarnayn converts them to the true religion; a virtuous old man ignoring the glory of the army and giving advice to Dhū l-Qarnayn may be recalling Diogenes meeting Alexander.[22] The version titled *Nihāya* (before 850), composed at the same time or slightly later than ʿUmāra's, also has Jābarṣ(ā) in the Western extremity of the world, with only the hot spring where the sun sets (the *ʿayn ḥamīya* of the Qurʾānic quote) situated further west, and Jābalq(a) in the East, just before the mountains from where the sun rises. Alexander meets their inhabitants; because of the proximity of the sun, they have no hair, teeth, or eyebrows and they hide during the day.[23] Finally, in the second half of the 9th century CE, Abū ʿAbd al-Malik's *Qiṣṣat Dhī'l-Qarnayn*, citing various authorities such as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, inverts the position of the cities and has Jābalqa in the West and Jābarṣā in the East. Furthermore, Abū ʿAbd al-Malik adds some new elements: Jābalqa is inhabited by various tribes among whom are the Banū Isrāʾīl, whereas Jābarṣā's hairless inhabitants (as in *Nihāya*) are ruled by king Qāliṣ, who is the recipient of a letter by Dhū l-Qarnayn. The mentioning of the Banū Isrāʾīl is merged with the Brahman story from Alexander's romance, as Dhū l-Qarnayn asks them various questions. What is more, Abū ʿAbd al-Malik also narrates that the twin cities were founded by two ships led by Jābal (ibn) Balqā and Jābar (ibn) Barṣā, respectively.[24] Perhaps the fullest report on the two cities, as it incorporates various elements from previous sources, can be found in a text probably composed in the 9th century CE, *Qiṣṣat Dhī'l-Qarnayn*, drawing mostly from Abū ʿAbd al-Malik's work of the same title. Jābalqā, in the West, is situated on an island, with twelve thousand doors guarded by twelve thousand men every night. The city is in war with Jābarṣā; intimidated by Dhū l-Qarnayn's army, they convert to the true faith. According to another tradition, also attributed to Abū ʿAbd al-Malik, Dhū l-Qarnayn arrives riding on Burāq and enters the city incognito. When the sun sets with a terrible noise, the inhabitants shout the formula "There is no God but Allah" (although they still have to be converted by Dhū l-Qarnayn) and thus save the people of the earth. Other traditions stress the piety or the longevity of the inhabitants, and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān is credited

21 Doufikar-Aerts 2002, 184. On ʿUmāra, cf. Zuwiyya 2001, 24–27.

22 Zuwiyya 2012, 208.

23 Doufikar-Aerts 2002, 183–184.

24 Doufikar-Aerts 2002, 184–185; Zuwiyya 2011, 103–104.

with the origin of both cities' population from the followers of Ḥūd and the boats led by Jābal and Jābar, sons of the two sisters Balqā and Barṣā.[25] Again quoting Abū ʿAbd al-Malik, Jābarṣā is also situated on an island deep into the eastern seas and is even bigger than Jābalqā (ten thousand doors, seventy thousand men in each). Inhabited again by descendants of the followers of Ṣāliḥ, they convert after Dhū l-Qarnayn writes them a letter. Various other details are attributed to ʿAbd al-Malik: their descent from Tāris son of Japheth, their longevity, the fair government by their king named Jalaṣ b. Falaṣ, and their lack of hair due to the heat.[26]

Thus, the twin cities became embedded in the stories of Alexander/Dhū l-Qarnayn, and as such they travelled as far as China.[27] Moreover, the stories also had a life of their own as they became part and parcel of most cosmographical works, at some point enhanced by their association with the Prophet and with the Gog and Magog lore.[28] There may have been various versions until the tradition was crystallized, especially concerning the inhabitants who were gradually accepted to be the faithful among the ʿĀd tribe.[29] Thus, a Central Asian 14th-century compilation of lives of the Prophets cites Muqātil ibn Sulaymān to this effect, but then adds that (again according to Muqātil) they are (now?) unbelievers, that they are from the offspring of Tāris b. Japheth b. Noah, and that most of them belong to the Gog and Magog.[30] The standard narrative, however, seems to be that of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), who refers to a hadith narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās, the main authority on non-Arabic traditions or *Isrāʾīliyāt*:[31]

> Then the Prophet said…: God created two cities, one in the east, and the other in the west. The inhabitants of the city in the east belong to the remnants of the ʿĀd and are descendants of those ʿĀd who were believers, while the inhabitants of the city in the west belong to the remnants of the Thamūd and are descendants of those who believed in [the prophet] Ṣāliḥ. The name of the city in the east is Marqīsīyā in Syriac and Jābalq in Arabic, and the name of the city in the west is Barjīsīyā in Syriac and Jābars in Arabic. Each city has ten thousand gates, each a *farsakh* (6 kilometers) distant from the other. Ten thousand guards equipped with weapons alternate each day as guards for each of these gates; after that (one day, those

25 Zuwiyya 2001, 78–88.

26 Zuwiyya 2001, 124–127.

27 Yamanaka 2012.

28 On the connections of the Gog and Magog with Alexander/Dhū l-Qarnayn, see Doufikar-Aerts 2020.

29 See Buhl, "ʿĀd"; Wheeler 2002, 102–104.

30 al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, trans. Boeschoten and O'Kane, I, 66 (Turkic text), ii, 76 (translation). I was unable to locate the tradition on Tāris in Muqātil's text, e. g. in his commentary upon Hūd (Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr* (2002), 2:287-289); the *Qiṣṣat Dhī'l-Qarnayn* attributes it to Mujāhid (ibn Jabr, d. 722), based on oral transmission: Zuwiyya 2001, 88.

31 See Colby 2008, 31.

> guards) will have no (more) guard duty until the day the Trumpet will be blown… Were those people not so many and so noisy, all the inhabitants of this world would hear the loud crash made by the sun falling when it rises and when it sets. Behind them are three nations, Mansak, Tāfīl, and Tārīs, and before them are Yājūj and Mājūj.[32]

The *hadith* is considered not sound,[33] and it is significant that no reference to the cities at the edge of the world is to be found in any version of the Prophet's *miʿrāj*;[34] nevertheless, al-Ṭabarī's narrative became classic. Franz Rosenthal notes that "as indicated here, the two cities are located behind Gog and Magog, and the three nations behind the two cities."[35] My competencies do not allow me to assert whether we can detect a Syriac descent: The names given by al-Ṭabarī corroborate this very plausible suggestion; but as Rosenthal notes, they "appear to admit of no plausible Aramaic explanation, except for the final -ā imitating the Aramaic definite article," whereas a historic Jābalq occurs in al-Ṭabarī near Isfahan.[36] Doufikar-Aerts notes the possible link between the "Syriac" name Barjīsiyā and the equally mysterious Obarkia (or Obarkĕnâyê) in the Syriac Romance of Alexander.[37] It is to be noted that al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1036) in his history of prophets, while repeating al-Ṭabarī's description, has a significantly different phrasing according the names of the cities:

> [the] name [of the city in the east] is Barqīshā and in Hebrew Jābaliq. The name of the city in the west is Barjīṣa in Syriac, and in Hebrew it is Jāyir Sāniyūt.[38]

Maria E. Subtelny, who draws our attention to al-Thaʿlabī's reference, comments that "in medieval Islamic literature, whenever the ancient nature of a work or a writing has to be emphasized, it was usually described as having been written in Aramaic/Syriac."[39] On the other hand, Abū ʿAbd al-Malik's fanciful etymology of the Arabic names may indicate an independent Arabic origin of the legend; the details about their mothers being sisters or the particulars of their building a home also pinpoint to some pre-Islamic tale:

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32 al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, trans. Rosenthal, vol. i, 237–238. Cf. Van Donzel/Schmidt 2010, 78.

33 al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, trans. Rosenthal, i, 232, fn 436. On criticism against the *isrāʾīliyāt* in general, see Brown 2022.

34 Colby 2008.

35 al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, trans. Rosenthal, i, 238, fn 459.

36 al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, trans. Rosenthal, i, 237, fn 457. The historical city is also noted by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (1994), ii, 3.

37 Doufikar-Aerts 2002, 185, fn 223.

38 al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, trans. Brinner, 34.

39 Subtelny 2010, 75n77.

> Among the people were two men born of two sisters. The one was Jābal and the other Jābar. Their mothers were Balqā and Barṣā. While at sea they were split up and each party ended up where God willed. … One day Jābar rose up as a leader among them and then built a large house and called it by his name. The people called it the Dār Jābar b. Barṣā. His family grew and multiplied in that house. Eventually, the name Jābar b. Barṣā was shortened to Barṣā. The people joined the son's and the mother's names and called their community 'Jābarṣā', and the consensus was to erect a city on the site of the house …In much the same way, the people of Jābalqā settled into their new city and their population grew at a similar rate.[40]

Wheeler (who also points out that there are Aramaic components in the Syriac names, "mar" as a honorific for saints and "bar" as "son of") argues that the Arabic names may originate from Jabal Qāf, "Mount Qāf," and Jabal Sīnā, "Mount Sina";[41] the suggestion does not seem very plausible to me, but of course cannot be rejected. On the other hand, his theory on the collation of legends concerning the twin cities with the descriptions of an eschatological Jerusalem (according to the Qurʾānic exegesis) seems persuasive.[42] Another hint for the possible origin of these obscure names may perhaps be found in the "Discourse of Jacob of Serugh," an early 6th century CE Syriac work narrating the story of Alexander. In it, the land before the Agog and Magog, close to the fountain of life, is ruled by Tûbarlîkâ, "the great king of the house of the Persians and of the Amorâye," housing "the peoples of the house of Japhet and of the house of Magog, a cunning nation, a flayed nation, an uprooted nation."[43]

At any rate, the twin cities found their way into the most influential cosmographies of the Arabic and later the Persianate world. For instance, Jābulqā in the east and Jābulsā or Jābursā in the west, with their 10,000 gates guarded by 10,000 men each, inhabited by pious people living 7,000 years and descending from the people of ʿAd, are mentioned by prominent geographers or historians such as Ibrāhīm Ibn Wasīf Shāh (10th or early 11th century CE) or Maqdīsī (d. after 966).[44] By the late Middle Ages, they had become a *topos* for Persianate cosmographies. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ṭūsī's *Ajāʾīb al-maḫlūqāt*, composed ca. 1160, draws from the Alexander tradition (the noise upon the movement of the sun, the intense heat) rather than al-Ṭabarī and his hadith:

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40 Zuwiyya 2001, 87–88. David Zuwiyya makes the same suggestion (of an Arabic origin) in ibid., 27.

41 Wheeler 2002, 99–100 and 164, fn 38.

42 Wheeler 2002, 109–110. Cf. the similarities of the "City of the Sun" in Pseudo-Callisthenes' work with the celestial Jerusalem in the *Book of Tobit*: Nawotka 2017, 226.

43 Budge 1889, 176–182; Goodwin Sawyer 1997, 140–141.

44 Miquel 1975, ii, 507–508; quoting Ibrāhīm Ibn Wasīf Shāh, *Muḫtasar al-ʿAjāʾib*, and Maqdīsī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa-al-tārīḫ*.

> Jābalqā: It is a city in the Eastern extremity, beyond which there are no cities. The heat is severe and people dwell in grottos. At the time of the sunrise, the ocean comes to a boil and makes terrifying noises that tear people's hearts. They say that they beat drums fiercely, in order not to hear the sound because it was murderous. Actually, the sun only appeared from that side of the ocean at a long distance, but it is represented as if the sun came from the ocean.
>
> Jābalsā: It is a city in the Western extremity. It has 1012 gates [sic; 12,000 gates?]. Every evening on each gate, 1000 men stand guard. Dhū'l-Qarnayn reached this place and from there went to the land of darkness. He came to a place with light that was not from the sun. Then he saw a mountain with two pillars, on top of which were two birds… Then Dhū'l-Qarnayn went from the place to the extremity where the sun burnt the people, and then returned.[45]

As Yuriko Yamanaka remarks, here some elements are inversed (west/east, sunset/sunrise) in relation with other narrations of the two cities. She also notes a more or less contemporaneous text, Niẓāmī's (d. 1209) *Iskandarnāma*, where Alexander visits an unnamed city beyond China that lies at the place of the rising sun and is white as camphor; the inhabitants suffer from the noise of the sunrise, and it is Alexander who invents the stratagem with the drums.[46] Another *Iskandarnāma*, composed by an anonymous author somewhere between the 12th and the 14th centuries CE, locates Jābalsā beyond the Turkish realm of Shahmalik and contains the legend on the suffering of the inhabitants from the tumult made by the sun.[47]

Following the more "prophetic" tradition, another influential geographer, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229), in his *Muʿjam al-buldān*, actually repeats al-Ṭabarī, however transferring again Jābarṣ to the east,[48] a transfer that it seems had become standard by the time.[49] However, whereas (in the description of Jābalq) he refers to the descent of the inhabitants of Jabalq from ʿĀd and of Jabars from Thamūd, he adds a reference to the Jewish lost tribes that became another major element of the twin cities lore:

> The Jews say: The Children of Moses (*Awlād Mūsā*) fled there [Jābars] during the war of Ṭālūt [the first king of the Israelites] or the war of Bukht-Naṣar [Nebuchadnezzar]. God took them there and deposited them in that place. No one joins them there, and they are the remnants of the Muslims. The earth was folded for them. The night and the day were made equal for

45 Ṭūṣī, *Ajāʾib* (1382), 204; translated by Yamanaka 2012, 271. On Ṭūṣī, cf. Zadeh 2010.

46 Yamanaka 2012, 271–273.

47 Southgate 1978, 57, 116–117, 158.

48 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (1994), ii, 2–3. Yāqūt also mentions a hadith with the expression "between Jābars and Jābalq," meaning "the whole world," allegedly in Muʿāwiya's time.

49 For instance, in a Turkic 14th-century compilation based on different Persian versions of the lives of the prophets: al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, trans. Boeschoten and O'Kane, I, 484 (Turkic text), ii, 556 (translation).

> them until they ended up at Jābars where they settled. No one but God knows their number. When one of the Jews went to them, they killed him. They would say: "You may not join us for you have corrupted your customs [sunnah]." Therefore, they considered it lawful to shed his blood for this.[50]

References to the Lost Tribes were not unknown, although more often than not they were not associated directly with the twin cities. The earliest reference belongs perhaps to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, who relates that God prepared an underground passage for the faithful Israelites and led them to China;[51] al-Ṭabarī repeats the same story,[52] and in the same vein, al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272) in his *tafsir* describes this journey, explaining that a sea or a river of sand (the well-known Sabbation of the Jewish tradition) separated them from the rest of humanity.[53] Among such narratives, many located this place in the western end of the world, beyond al-Andalus, although not mentioning Jābilqā (or Jābirsā).[54] It was perhaps the role they would play in the eschatological narrative, which (associating them with the battles against the Gog and Magog,[55] but perhaps also the meeting with Muḥammad, already mentioned by Muqātil)[56] led to their location in the easternmost city. Thus, al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283) describes the inhabitants of Jābarsā, visited by Muḥammad, as living in paradisiac conditions, in faith and full happiness. Citing Ibn Abbas, he locates Jābarsā in the east, inhabited by the remnants of the Thamūd, whereas Jābalq in the west is inhabited by the remnants of the ʿĀd. Gabriel explains to Muḥammad that

> "Between you and between them is a journey of six years going and six years returning. Between you and them is a river of sand which flows like arrows, and it stops only on the Sabbath."

A series of questions and answers between the Prophet and the inhabitants, who are "followers of Moses" (*qawm Musa*), elaborate this utopian vision of equality, justice, humility, and abundance:[57]

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50 Translated in Wheeler 2002, 93. Wheeler (ibid., 94) shows that this story (minus Jābars) comes also from al-Ṭabarī.

51 Rubin 1999, 27–28; Muqātil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsīr* (2002), 2:553–554.

52 Rubin 1999, 46.

53 Wheeler 2002, 101; Rubin 1999, 28. On the righteous Jews, see also Subtelny 2010; the tradition was also inserted in a 13th-century *miʿrāj* narrative of Central Asian origin (Colby 2008, 162).

54 Rubin 1999, 28.

55 Rubin 1999, 29–30.

56 Rubin 1999, 47; Muqātil ibn Sulayman, *Tafsīr* (2002), 2:554.

57 al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād* (1994), 17–18. Cf. Wheeler 2002, 107–108; Subtelny 2010, 59–62. On Qazwīnī, see now Zadeh 2023.

> The Prophet said: "Why are all your buildings equal?" They said: "so that we would not honor some over others, so that some of us would not block the air of others."
>
> The Prophet said: "Why do I not see among you any authority or judges?" They said: "Should we divide some of us over others of us? We give the truth ourselves, so there is no need for one of us to enforce justice among us."
>
> The Prophet said: "Why are your shops empty?" They said: "We grow everything and harvest everything. Each man takes what is sufficient and gives what remains to his brother." (...)
>
> The Prophet said: "Do you practice usury?" They said: "The one who practices usury is the one who does not trust in the sustenance of God."[58]

This description originates from the *tafsīr* of Abu l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983), who identifies these Israelites with a "people from beyond China (*qawm min warāʾ al-ṣīn*), from the *umma* of Moses, from beyond the sandy hills of Arabia (*raml ʿālij*)"; al-Samarqandī places the meeting during Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*.[59]

The Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) Version

All medieval geographers consider the two cities real and existing in this world, located in one of the seven Ptolemaic climes (the first, according to al-Qazwīnī). A radical change in the perception of the two cities comes with Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), the founder of Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy, a Neo-Platonic theory, based on the idea that reality is a series of emanations of light. In this worldview, a major role is played by the "world of images" (*ʿālam mithāl*), a sphere of existence containing archetypes of all things and from which both miracles and mystic visions come. In his own writings, the idea was not completely elaborated (this would be the task of his follower, Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī, one century later): al-Suhrawardī wrote about "suspended images" (*muthul muʿallaqa*), a kind of Platonic archetypes whence dreams, imagination, but also jinn, demons, and miracles originate, and located them in "the eighth clime in which are Jabalq, Jabars, and Hurqalya."[60] While elaborating on the idea of these images as constitut-

58 Translated in Wheeler 2002, 107–108.

59 al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm* (1993), 1, 575–576; Rubin 1999, 48.

60 van Lit 2018, 58; on the "eighth clime," cf. Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, 73–84. Hūrqalyā could be the subject of another paper, and indeed it has been the main topic of the rather imaginative study by Corbin 1977. Cf. Aylar 2018, 113; Uludağ, "Câbelkā-Câbelsā"; Erdoğan 2004, 202–203 (who quotes

ing a separate world or sphere of existence, al-Shahrazūrī (d. after 1288) continued to use the twin cities in this context and in more than one of his treatises:

> If you hear of the discussion of the ancients that there is a magnitudinous world in existence, which is not the sensory world nor the intelligible. Its cities are countless without end. Among them are Jabalqa and Jabarsa, which are two of the cities of the world of image, both having a thousand gates and uncountable creatures are in it, who are unaware that God created Adam and his offspring…

Or, in another instance, using the notion of the eighth clime:

> In [this world] are wonders and marvels such as places, people, rivers, oceans, trees, and pleasant and repulsive forms without end. These worlds occur in the eighth clime wherein are Jabalqa, Jabarsa and Hurqalya, containing wonders, being in the middle of the order of the world… Some [people of] soothsaying and sorcery, and the people of spiritual knowledge can witness these worlds.[61]

Actually, al-Shahrazūrī went beyond his teacher in describing the topography of this world of images. He states that

> As the Earth is divided into seven climes, so there is an eighth, the world of suspended image, which holds the bodies ascended to heaven… Wonders and marvels that become visible to prophets and saints are mostly due to reaching that world… Jabalq, Jabars, and Hurqalya are names of cities of the world of image which the Lawgiver has mentioned. Now, Jabalqa and Jabarsa are cities of the Earthly world of suspended images, whereas Hurqalya is part of the celestial world of image.[62]

In Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī's (d. 1310) commentary, it is explained that the eighth clime is the world of images (*ʿālam mithāl*): of the eight climes, seven are the geographical ones "with dimensions and extent which are perceptible to the senses," whereas the eighth "is the one whose dimensions and extent can only be grasped by the imaginative perception"; whereas the twin cities are "cities of the world of the Elements in the universe of the archetypal form," Hūrqalyā belongs to "the world of the celestial Spheres of the universe of archetypal forms."[63] Such descriptions passed on through commentators such as al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390) and others, especially in the Indo-Iranian world.[64] Sometimes, the cities were subject to further

M. Zeki Pakalın on the vocalization Hereqliyā, which would lead to a Greek origin, possibly from Ηράκλεια).

61 van Lit 2018, 92–97.

62 van Lit 2018, 103.

63 Corbin 1977, 126–127, 134.

64 van Lit 2018, 150 and index, s. v. Jabalqa and Jabarsa; Erdoğan 2004, 206–209.

differentiations. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhījī (d. 1465) identifies Jābalqā with the "world of images" in the East, "turned toward the spiritual entities":

> [i]t is the interworld (*barzakh*) between the suprasensory world and the world visible to the senses. It contains all the archetypes of the universe, and thus of necessity is an immense city. Jābarṣā, to the West, is the world of the Image, the interworld in which the Spirits dwell when they have left the world of earthly existence. That is the very place where the Forms of all completed works exist, the Forms of all moral behaviour and good and bad actions… Thus, Jābarṣā is the interworld situated in the West, and turned toward the material bodies; of necessity, it is also an immense city and faces Jābalqā. The structure of Jābalqā is more subtle and more pure, since that of Jābarṣā, being in terms of created works and moral behaviour acquired in the world of earthly existence, is to a great extent made up of forms and figures enveloped in darkness.[65]

One may note that in this description, Jābalqā returns to the east, as in the earlier tradition by Ṭabarī or Ṭūṣī, rather than Yāqūt's or Qazwīnī's narratives. Lāhījī's description became a standard for the Indo-Iranian Sufism, as for instance we see in the mid-17th-century Indian *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*:

> The lord Shaikh Muhammed Láhejí stated, in his commentary upon Gulshen-raz, that in the histories and accounts before-said is to be found, that Jábilká is a town of immense magnitude in the East, and Jábilsá a town of the utmost extent in the West, opposite to the former. Commentators have said a great deal upon both. According to the impressions which I, an humble person, have received upon my mind relative to this subject, without copying others, and conformably with the indications, there are two places; the one, Jábilká is *âalemi-misal*, the "world of images," because on the east side the spirits emerge into existence. Barzakh (another name for it) is between the invisible and the visible, and contains every image of the world; certainly there may be a town of immense greatness, and *Jábilsá* is "the world of similitude."[66]

It is to be noted that this imagery seems to have remained in the confines of Illuminationist philosophy, rather than permeating Sufi thought at large. For instance, the cosmographical diagrams, often found as visual aids to texts of mystical or cosmographical content and heavily influenced by Ibn Arabi's insights, do not contain any reference to the mystic twin cities.[67]

65 Corbin 1977, 160.

66 Shea and Troyer 1843, 3:279–280.

67 Karamustafa 1994. These diagrams are mostly developing those drawn by Ibn Arabi: see Karjoo-Ravary 2022.

The Ottoman Afterlife of the Twin Cities

Ottoman literature inherited genres and themes from this tradition, and the twin cities were part and parcel of it. However, with the exception of cosmographies, Cābilḳā (Jābilqā) and Cābilsā/Cābirsā (Jābilsā) passed on as a feature of the Ottoman imaginary rather than the compact and concrete legend that they had been.[68] For instance, the episode of Alexander visiting these cities is missing from most Ottoman versions of the story.[69] The most famous version (due to its being a source for early Ottoman history), Aḥmedī's (d. 1412) *İskendernāme*, has Alexander travel to the end of the world and explore on a boat the Ocean (only to find out the crew of another boat, sent by another Alexander, realizing thus the futility of his quest).[70] In this context, there is no reference to his reaching any city resembling the twin cities. However, both are mentioned in the chronicle of world history Aḥmedī incorporates: king Keykavus builds a tower similar to that of Babel in order to reach the sky; an angel tears it down, and one of its pieces falls in Cābilḳā, another in Cābilsā.[71] The legend of the two cities is preserved more intact in another *İskendernāme*, composed by Behiştî Ahmed Sinan in 1505: here, an angel gives instructions to Alexander and describes the populations at the edges of the world. A tribe called Mensik lives in Cābulsā in the upper west,[72] Cābulḳā is situated in the east, whereas the tribes of Hābil and Ḳābil populate the north and south. It is Alexander's task to convert all these tribes to the true faith. The descriptions of the cities indicate the outstanding number of their populations; Cābulḳā features the intense heat of the sun that makes people hide in caverns during the day, as well as the 20,000 guards that serve only once.[73]

Similar appearances can be found in other popular narratives of the early Ottoman period. A peculiar text of the late 15th century, known as *Ḫıżırnāme* and composed by Şeyh Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1493/4), describes the travels of a dervish through the terrestrial and celestial worlds;[74] although his wanderings to Mount Qāf and the Wall of the Gog and Magog (as well as the sources of the Nile, a

68 On stories and leitmotivs passing on from the literary tradition of the Alexander romance to Ottoman vernacular culture, see Eldem 2022, 39–47.

69 On Ottoman representations of Alexander, see Kastritsis 2016; Goodwin Sawyer 1997. On the way, for example, Aḥmedī does not hesitate to depart from his Persian models (or rather to mix freely his sources), see Eldem 2022, 11–32.

70 Goodwin Sawyer 1997, 32–33; Toutant 2016, 16.

71 Akdoğan/Kutsal 2019, 707.

72 Usually, this tribe is associated with the Mongols and located at the east: Sariyannis 2015, 458 and fn 61.

73 Ayçiçeği 2014, 637–638 (v. 4197–4208), 708–709 (v. 5131–5149), 724–726 (v. 5357–5384).

74 Kocaer 2015; Bulut 2003; Erturan 2009.

marvelous island in the western sea where Ilyas/Elias lives,[75] and so forth) are described repeatedly, there is no mention of the twin cities. However, there are several descriptions of mystic cities that remind us of the Jābilḳā/Jābilsā lore: thus, Mount Qāf houses a city built of gold and silver, with a gate of red ruby, served by a hundred thousands of angels.[76] Another city is Mirāt, at the sources of the Nile and Euphrates at Mount Qāf. Inhabited by angels, it is located in an island in a sea named Ümmü'l-buhur; it is built of gold and silver and has twelve thousand doors, at a distance of forty days from one another; thousands of angels guard each door.[77] Finally, the dervish also visits the sunrise (*maṭlā'uş-şems*), at a great mountain in the East called Sündüz, where the sun rises and sets through a huge door.[78] In a similar vein, the voluminous Sarı Saltuḳ's epic (*Saltuḳnāme*), composed by Ebū'l-Hayr-i Rūmī ca. 1480 (but incorporating legends dated from the late 13th century), has the two cities in a role of setting for fairytale like stories; yet, their location and other features (such as the size and number of gates) are still to be seen. A king in Hungary, Hırakûn, wants to beat Server (Sarı Saltuḳ), so he seeks help from an itinerant monk, who says:

> "There was a competent witch (*bir ulu cādū*), in the East. He was in the city of Cābulḳā, and with his witchcraft he enchanted the king of Cābulḳā … With seven hundred witches they mounted jars and arrived to the castle of Cābülsā, in the West, at the place the sun sets."

The king and inhabitants of Cābülsā are Muslims, as were those of Cābulḳā before the witch, Rağduş Cādū, enchanted them. Cābülsā has 10,001 towers and gates, and Server travels to Cābulḳā on a cloud to hunt the witch and save the king, Ferdus Şāh, and its people. Elements of the legend are evident in his account:

> "[I was travelling so high] that the stars could be seen above the waters like high mountains… near the heavens. And the sound of the firmament of the world (*felek-i dünyânun sadâsı*) came to my ears like the sound of a wheel. The heat and the cold of the sun and the moon impressed me. In the sunrise of the tenth day after we left Cābülsā, we arrived at Cābulḳā … Beyond it there was no inhabitable land, everything was [waste because of] dryness from the heat of the day (*andan öte ma'mûrluk yoğıdı, gün ısısından kuruluk idi*).[79]

75 On this island and its relation to a tradition mentioned by al-Rabghuzi, see Kocaer 2015, 107–108.

76 Kocaer 2015, 48, 247; Bulut 2003, 48–49; Erturan 2009, 101–102.

77 Kocaer 2015, 253–254; Bulut 2003, 72–74; Erturan 2009, 124–126.

78 Kocaer 2015, 53, 131–132, 259; Bulut 2003, 93–95; Erturan 2009, 146–147.

79 Ebü'l Hayr-i Rûmî, *Saltuk-nâme* (1990), 3: 211–218. I wish to thank Zeynep Aydoğan for these references. Cf. Aydoğan 2020.

Another popular epic, *Abu Muslimname*, which was widely circulating in various versions up to the 16th century, has also Feramürz, the evil king of Cābilḳā, fighting with his army of giants (*div*) against Abu Muslim with his warriors and amazons.[80] Even Evliya Çelebi, a fairly educated gentleman writing in the late 17th century, lists the tribe (*ḳavm*) of Cābūlsā, as well as that of the Gog and Magog, as belonging to the various sorts of the jinn:

> [Among the tribes of jinn there is] the tribe of Cābülḳā; God knows their number. They were brought to the faith in the night of the Ascension of the Prophet. They were also created before the prophet Adam. Then the tribe of Cābülsā, God knows their number, they are ancient creatures.[81]

A glimpse of the legend may also be discerned in a passage from a late-16th-century oracular text foretelling the future of the Ottoman dynasty, the so-called *Papasnâme* ("The priest's book") or alternatively *Bahrü'l-mükâşefe* ("Sea of discovery"; this is a reworked version dated in the late 17th century), written by Derviş Mehmed, a Christian priest turned Muslim.[82] Among the feats of the future sultans, the forty-eighth sultan, Edhem Han, is prophesied to discover an unknown city between China and Hungary by the name of Cüzteziye, which "in its language" means "Bewilderment" (*şehr-i Taʿaccüb*). Its inhabitants prove to be Muslims, illuminated by the Prophet Muḥammad who gave them a special book:

> Sultan Edhem Han… will prepare a big fleet and sail with 5,500 ships to China (*Çin ve Māçin*). After conquering many lands, he will campaign to Hungary, and he will proceed so far in the hinterland (*şol ḳadar içerüye varalar*) that he will find a new city, in the same sense as the new world.[83] This will be called city of Cüzteziye in their language, and in our language city of Bewilderment. The Sultan will imagine that the inhabitants of the city would be infidels, so he will advance against them with a great army; but they all will raise their fingers and say "There is no God but God and Muḥammad is his Prophet." So the Sultan will enter the city and meet a white-bearded old man, who will hand him a book, saying that "the Prophet – peace be upon him – left this book here and taught us the religion of Islam, and from then on we all are Muslims and fight the infidels…" Then the ulema of the city will come to the Sultan and he will ask them, "how do you pray, and where do you turn for the Kaaba?"; and they will answer, "God sent us the Prophet, and he taught us the holy Quran, the prayers and the Book, and all

80 Mélikoff 1962, 140. I owe this reference as well to Zeynep Aydoğan.

81 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname* (2001), 343 (f. 397a). Cf. Kafadar 2022, 145n33. On Evliya, see Dankoff 2004.

82 See Krstić 2011, 116–118; Aksoy Sheridan 2016; Avcı 2017; Sariyannis (in press). The text is to be published by Günhan Börekçi and Tijana Krstić; I wish to thank them both for their permission and help.

83 The author explains this term elsewhere, when referring to the "new World," i. e. the Americas; he insists that this is not a world created anew, but just one "concealed from us" until its discovery.

> knowledge; once a year the Power creates in the direction of Qibla a tent upon a high marble platform; we go and perform the *tavaf* and see the Prophet inside, and every year a word of God comes to us from the Hereafter (*bir kelām-ı Allāh bize ġāibden gelür*)…"[84]

Meanwhile, the two cities had become a setting for fairytale-like stories, totally unrelated either to reality or tradition, already by the late 16th century.[85] Dervīş Ḥasan Medḥī's late-16th-century *Şîr-i Dilîr bâ-Mihr-i Münîr* actually takes place in the two kingdoms of Cābelisā and Cābeliḳā; but nothing brings to mind the legendary descriptions save that the two cities are situated in a great distance from one another, Cābelisā being in the far west side of the world: "some say that one is on the right of the mount Qāf and another on the left, because the mountain encircles the whole earth."[86] In Giritli ʿAzīz Efendi's famous *Muḥayyelāt*, a series of novels composed in 1796, Cābilḳā is only mentioned as a city of the jinn, at a distance of three years from Serendib/Sri Lanka,[87] and Cābilsā as a city of the fairies (*peri*).[88]

The fact that the story of the two cities gradually faded away into a fictional legend in Ottoman literature does not mean that we do not encounter the complete story, as formulated either by traditionalists or cosmographers in the Middle Ages. Still, it is worth remarking that it did not make its way into quite a lot of Ottoman geographical literature, and it seems that the description of the two cities remained an exception rather than a rule. Ottoman cosmographies in general followed the medieval model, as formulated by Ṭūṣī or Qazwīnī, and most of the earlier examples are but adaptations of these models.[89] Yet, not all texts convey the legend as we have seen it above. From among the earlier specimens, a late 14th-century cosmography by ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān identifies Cabilḳa (as Cāblaḳā) with the city of Nāḫvān in the Fergana valley, saying that "some people call this city Cāblaḳā" while "others" (*bir rivāyetde*) say that Cāblaḳā is the Chinese city of Yesil; no supernatural

84 Derviş Mehmet, "Papasnâme," Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS Mixt 689 (dated 1651), fols. 31v–32r; Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi MS Saliha Hatun 112/2 (dated 1685/6), fol. 22r; in the *Bahrü'l-mükâşefe* version: Nânî, "Bahrü'l-mükâşefe," Bibliothèque nationale MS suppl. Turc 879, fols. 25v-26v (the French translator reads the name of the city as *Khour-Cherié*; p. 93 of the translation in the same MS, dated 1734).

85 The famous 15th-century collection of stories, *Ferec ba'de'ş-şidde*, describes a great island called Lādān, where "the sun rises from the land and sets on the land" (*güneş anda yėrden doġar, yėre batar*); the names of the two cities are used in the sense of the extremities of the world ("from Cābilḳā to Cābilsā"): *Ferec ba'de'ş-şidde*, ed. Hazai/Tietze, 435, 444.

86 Çakır/Koncu 2010, 55–56.

87 Aziz Efendi, *Muhayyelât*, ed. Alacatlı, 28; ed. Duymaz, 176.

88 Aziz Efendi, *Muhayyelât*, ed. Alacatlı, 208; ed. Duymaz, 296. On Aziz Efendi, see Tietze 1948; Uysal 2006.

89 See Sariyannis 2015; Coşkun 2019, 2020.

element appears at all.[90] In the same period, no reference is to be found in Aḥmed-i Bīcān's *Terceme-i ʿAcāʾibü'l-Maḫlūḳāt*.[91] Passing on to the 16th century, let us see for instance a compilation of several Arabic sources under the title *Tuḥfetü'z-Zamān* ("Gift of Time"), composed ca. 1526 by Muṣṭafā b. ʿAlī (d. 1571), the timekeeper of Sultan Selim Mosque in Istanbul.[92] The compilation draws a lot from the Dhū l-Qarnayn/Alexander circle: there is Aḥmedī's story on Alexander's exploring ship, which meets another ship by yet another king;[93] a description of the sun rising and setting not from the cities but from Mount Qāf;[94] an account of the Gog and Magog.[95] Some vague resemblance may be seen in the description of a city named Kengdere (?):

> This is a prosperous city in the region of China, it is the remotest cultivated land. There is no other city beyond it to the east, [whoever goes past it] reaches the Ocean. Upon the Equator, if the sun rises at this city it sets in the outmost west [in the same line]. Its rise becomes its set (?). The disparity (*tefavüt*) is minimal … Now the distance between the utmost west (*aksâ-ı mağrib*) and Kengdere is 11,400 miles, between Istanbul (*Konstantin*) and Kengdere 7,470 miles, and between Mecca and Kengdere 6,877 miles.[96]

Similarly, a translation or rather adoption of the early 15th-century Arabic *ʿAjāʾib, Kharīdat al-ʿAjāʾib wa-farīdat al-gharāʾib* (Pearls of Wonders and the Uniqueness of Strange Things), compiled by Maḥmūd al-Khatīb in 1563,[97] has no reference to the two cities although there are detailed descriptions of the territory of the Gog and Magog and the lands before Alexander's wall (namely, el-Ḫarliḫiyye, el-Bessīd, el-Ḫarḫıriyye, el-Teġarġariyye, el-Kimyākiyye, el-Cāḥānimiyye, el-Edkeş, et-Türkeş, el-Ḫānşāh, el-Celīḫ, el-Ġarne, and el-Bulġār).[98] However, when describing the land of Sin, Maḥmūd speaks of the peoples living beyond: those walking around naked, those with no hair in their bodies, and

90 İnan 2010, 63–64 (fols. 101r, 102r). On the author, cf. İhsanoğlu *et al.* 2000.1, 3.

91 See Toprak 2019; Erdem 2018.

92 See İhsanoğlu *et al.* 2000.1, 49–52; İstanbullu 2019. On Mustafa b. Ali's sources, see his own account: ibid., 50–51.

93 İstanbullu 2019, 90.

94 İstanbullu 2019, 148.

95 İstanbullu 2019, 226–230.

96 İstanbullu 2019, 172.

97 Çoşkun 2007 and 2011; İhsanoğlu *et al.* 2000.1, 38–42.

98 Yanıç 2004, 227–231. Most of these regions had been previously described as situated in Central Asia and China (ibid., 105, 222–226).

> another tribe that after the sunrise flee, and until the sunset take shelter and hide in caves. Their food consists mainly of fish and a plant that resembles mushrooms.[99]

One of the few texts making a complete reference to the twin cities story is the famous *Dürr-i meknūn*, the late-15th-century cosmography long but probably wrongly attributed to Ahmed Bīcān. There we read that beyond Turkestan

> near the place the sun rises, there is a city by the name of Cabilḳa. It has a thousand gates. Because of the heat of the sun, its people enter some caves until afternoon; for the sea boils due to the heat of the sun. Besides, at the moment the sun rises they lose their heads because of the noise the sun makes, and many pregnant women lose their babies. For this reason, they have watchmen, and when the sun rises they play tympani, drums and kettledrums; all this noise suppresses the noise of the sun, when it rises. Every day they do this. The wall of the Gog and Magog is beyond them.
>
> Similarly, there is a city at the sunset, called Cabilsa. When the sun sets, they also play drums and kettledrums, because of the fervor of the noise of the sun [sic, *güneşüñ gürüldüsi ḫarāretinden*; in other copies, "because of the awe of the noise of the sun," *heybetinden*]. Iskender Dhū'l-Qarnayn reached and saw them, and then passed to the dark places (*ẓulümāt*).[100]

The description may stem from Muḥammad Ṭūṣī's *Ajā'ib al-maḫlūqāt*, as it corresponds with its main elements, whereas it also continues with the story of the two birds talking with Alexander. Another anonymous early-15th-century compiler, who mainly translates Ṭūṣī's work, adds some more information from *tefsir* literature as he says explicitly (*bu sözleri tefsīrlerden naḳl ėtdük ki ol nüsḫada yoġ-idi*): Cābilsā is inhabited by the followers of the prophets Ṣālīḥ and Hud, and the inhabitants of both cities are more numerous than the Gog and Magog. Both cities have a thousand gates, one *farsang* or twelve thousand steps from one another, and every gate is guarded by 70,000 people. The rest of the information copies Ṭūṣī, as most of the book does.[101]

Two later cosmographies of a much more literate and scholarly nature stick in general to this pattern and seem to have shaped a canon. Thus, in his universal history (*Künhü'l-aḫbār*), which included an introductory description of the world, Mustafa ʿĀlī (d. 1600) copies the *hadith* related by al-Ṭabarī with some minor changes. The Prophet explains that, in order for the noise from the rising and setting of the sun not to be heard all along the earth, God has created two cities, Berḳiyā (in another ms. Berḳisā) or Cābilḳā in the East and Berciyā (in another ms.

99 Yanıç 2004, 104.
100 *Dürr-i meknun*, ed. Kaptein, 167–445 (7.10, 7.12); ed. Demirtaş, 147; ed. Sakaoğlu, 67.
101 *Tercüme-i Acâ'ibü'l-mahlûkât*, ed. Sarıkaya and Kut, 228–229.

Bercisā) or Cābirsā in the West, each one with eleven (!) gates and ten thousand watchmen; no watchman guards twice, so populous are the cities. Beyond these cities live the tribes of Nāsik, Mensik, Hāvīl, and Nāvīl, and beyond them the Gog and Magog. When the Prophet visited them during his *miʿrāj*, he invited the inhabitants to Islam, but only the two cities accepted it.[102] "Eleven" (*on bir*) gates may be a corruption of "ten thousand" (*on biñ*), and the readings Berḳisā and Bercisā correspond directly to al-Thaʿlabī's version, whereas there seems to be no known precedent for Berḳiyā (save for the Syriac Obarkia) or Berciyā (reminding al-Ṭabarī's Barjīsīyā). Interestingly, this narrative takes place in the description of the course of the sun and the orbits of the planets; the two cities appear nowhere in the description of the seven climes and the lists of the cities thereof.

Perhaps the most complete rendering of the myth, as it was formulated in the late medieval period, is to be found in ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed's (d. after 1598) cosmographical *Menāzırü'l-avālim*, completed in 1598: in his list of cities of the first clime, ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed relates the hadith attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, according to which Cābirsā, situated in the Far East, is inhabited by the remnants of the tribe of Thamūd, whereas Cābilḳā in the West by the tribe of ʿĀd. Still, both of the tribes are Jews, sent there after Nebuchadnezzar; such inconsistencies are typical of ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed's compiling style. Muḥammad visited them in his *miʿrāj*; normally, six years are needed to reach them and twelve to come back, whereas one has to pass a river of sand that stops only on Saturdays. ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed includes the conversation between the Prophet and these tribes; all this material comes from al-Qazwīnī, as we saw above.[103] Other translations or adaptations of al-Qazwīnī's work, such as an anonymous *ʿAcāʾib-i buldān*, copied before 1645–1646,[104] feature the same information.

As both ʿĀlī's and ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed's treatises became instant classics,[105] it seems they influenced deeply other cosmographical works composed in the first half of the 17th century. For instance, a manuscript penned down by Hüsamüddin Burusavî (d. 1632) for prince Osman II describes Cābirsā and Cābilḳā as being in the west and east, respectively; Cābirsā is the city reached by Alexander in a "muddy place" (*bir balçıklık yer*; a reference to the "spring of murky water" of the Qurʾān). The size of the cities is 12,000 *farsah*, with 12,000 towers of 10,000 gates each, guarded by 10,000 men each who serve only once until the End of Times. People live up to 6,000 years. The description of the noise of the sun follows al-Ṭabarī's tradition, where the noise

102 Âlî, *Künhü'l-ahbâr. 1. Rükün*, ed. Donuk and Örs, 1:169. On ʿĀlī, his work and methods, see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*; Schmidt, *Pure Water*.

103 Âşık Mehmed, *Menâzırü'l-avâlim*, ed. Ak, 2:458–460. On ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed and his work, see Hagen 2004, 224–226.

104 Berlin, Staatsbibliothek MS or. oct. 1604, fol. 6v; cf. Sohrweide 1974, 166–167 (no. 195).

105 For the influence of ʿĀṣıḳ Meḥmed upon Evliya Çelebi, see MacKay 2012.

would kill all humanity (rather than Ṭūṣī's or Niẓāmī's, and more generally the Alexander tradition, where it would only be harmful to the city's inhabitants):

> While the sun is rising or setting, the voice of their drums and reeds playing holds the world (*tabl ve zurnalarının âvâzesi dünyayı tutub*); if they did not make these noises in the sunrise and sunset, no creature alive could suffer the groaning of the sun (*güneşin iñildüsine asla zî-ruh kimi tahammul edemeyüb*) and everybody on the face of the earth would die.[106]

A turning point seems to have been Kâtib Çelebi's (d. 1657) influence from the mid-17th century on. This outstanding scholar, who tried to effectuate an ambitious encyclopedic project of translating European sources into Ottoman Turkish, in order to expand geographical and historical knowledge into hitherto unknown fields, was especially keen on geography and translated Mercator's *Atlas Minor* before embarking on his own huge compendium, *Cihānnümā*.[107] In this endeavor, Kâtib Çelebi was especially critical against *ajā'ib*-style cosmographies, as for example when he bluntly denies the very existence of Mount Qāf in an anthology of edifying texts on various topics (*Tuḥfetü l-aḫyar fi'l-ḥikem ve l-emṣāl ve'l-aş'ār*):

> [Mount Qāf] does not exist in reality. Even if commentators of the Quran have stated that it is a mountain that surrounds the whole world, this is just an opinion [of theirs] and has been said in compliance to legends … Because the state of the earth has been known to geographers; there is no room left for them to tell such things [as the existence of Qāf], and this is known to everybody.[108]

Thus, it should cause no surprise that the two cities are nowhere to be mentioned in Kâtib Çelebi's *œuvre*. It may be partly attributed to his influence that later cosmographies seem to ignore the legend as well; for instance, no reference is to be found in *Takmila-i tarjama-i ʿacā'ib al-mahlūqāt* by Rodosī-zāde (d. 1701), which anyway contains very little geographical information.[109] İbrāhīm Ḥaḳḳı Erzurūmī (d. 1780) in his *Mārifetnāme*, a treatise on cosmology, mathematics, and ethics composed in 1757 (one of the first Ottoman works to mention Copernican astronomy side-by-side with the traditional geocentric model), has also no reference of the twin cities, neither in his description of the movement of the sun and its sinking

106 Hüsamüddin Burusavî, "ʿAcā'ib al-uʿccāb al-maḥlūḳāt," MS Resid Efendi 671, fol. 42v. I wish to thank Feray Coşkun who brought this manuscript to my attention and provided me with a copy. On the author, see İhsanoğlu *et al.* 2000.1, 84–85.

107 Kātib Çelebi, *Cihānnümā* (2022). On Kâtib Çelebi and his method, see also Hagen 2003; Sariyannis 2015, 452–456.

108 Gökyay 1968, 264.

109 Çelik 2019.

into the sea surrounding the world nor in his account on the seven climes and their countries.[110] The reader may remember that Evliya Çelebi has only a vague idea of Cābülsā/Cābülḳā, as places inhabited by jinn, and so does Aziz Efendi use this material at the end of the 18th century. Thus, by the late 17th century, it seems, only fiction might make use of the twin cities legend. Serious Ottoman scholarship considered them a strictly symbolic tradition.

On the other hand, the Illuminationist view of the cities as belonging to another, spiritual world may have contributed to their banishment from the real topographical space. We see this theory already in the monumental work of the great moralist Ḳınalızāde Ali Çelebi (d. 1572), *Aḫlāḳ-i ʿAlāʾī* ("Sublime Ethics"; composed in 1563–1565); Ḳınalızāde explains in detail the existence of the "world of images," containing dreams and inspirations, but also, according to "some chosen saints" (*baʿż-i aṣfiyāʾ*) who, through asceticism and strife, "have entered the lands and climes of this world and experienced its wonders," the two cities of Cābülsā and Cābülḳā, whose population and marvels are beyond comprehension (*bu şehrlerin ḫalāyıḳının şümārından aʿdād u erḳām maʿzūl ve ʿacāyīb ü ġarāyībi ḫāric-i aṭvār u efhām ve bīrūn-ı idrāk-i evhām u ʿuḳūldür*).[111] This view is expressed as late as the early 19th century by İbrāhīm Ḳasabbaşızāde (d. 1820), one of the most prominent exponents of late Ottoman *ishrāqī* thought.[112]

Conclusions

Being not an Arabist, I would not dare to reach any conclusions regarding the genealogy of the Jābarṣā/Jābalqa legend throughout the *tafsīr* and *sīra* literature. It is, however, clear that the basic story incorporated elements from the Hellenistic traditions built around Alexander the Great, as well as from various Graeco-Roman Indica, as distilled through the Syriac versions of Alexander Romance. In the Islamic period, these legends (most probably blended with elements from Arabic mythology) found their way in Qurʾānic exegesis, universal histories, and geographical literature; the two cities took their names, in three or four versions (not to count the Syriac or Hebrew names given), and their features, including a possible connection with the lost Tribes of Israel, had been crystallized by the 10th century CE. One

110 University of Michigan, Special Collections Research Center Isl. MS 826, fols. 8r-9r, 75r–76r; Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, *Mârifetnâme*, ed. Meyan, 30–32 and 242–244.

111 Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi, *Ahlâk-ı Alâ'î*, ed. Koç, 85.

112 *Sefinetü'l-mesail*, MS Süleymaniye Ktp. Halet Efendi 792, fols. 53r-v; quoted in Erdoğan 2004, 206. On Kasabbaşızâde, see Erdoğan, "Kasabbaşızâde İbrâhim."

might speak of two traditions, although not very distinct: one kept the connection with Alexander's travels, following the Qurʾānic lead of Dhū l-Qarnayn meeting the inhabitants of these extreme places; so the early accounts of Dhū l-Qarnayn's story, but also the 11th-century Persian cosmographer Ṭūṣī. Another tradition, starting with al-Ṭabarī and other exegetes but also adopted by geographers (Yāqūt or al-Qazwīnī), preferred to focus on a visit of the Prophet during his *miʿrāj*. The strong utopian element inherent in many of these traditions was enhanced by the addition of a section where the Prophet asked the inhabitants a series of questions, which revealed that the cities lived in a sort of pious life without Islam (which they duly and willingly accepted afterward).

With al-Suhrawardī, the two cities gained a new dimension as the Illuminationist philosopher considered them a sort of repository for archetypal visions and images, situated not in this world but in an "eighth clime," i. e. in the "world of images" (*ʿālam mithāl*). This mystic view became very popular in the eastern Islamic world, as indeed Illuminationist ideas as a whole, including the Ottoman, Timurid, Mughal, and Safavid empires. I lack the competence to trace the fates of the legend in Safavid or Mughal sources, although one suspects that the Illuminationist, metaphysical version may have taken the upper hand. As for the Ottoman Empire, although *ishrāqī* thought became quite established in large segments of the bureaucratic elite and in a number of Sufi brotherhoods,[113] the two cities remained a strong element of popular imaginary as places of utopia and perhaps demonic presence. Whereas 15th- and 16th-century geographical texts included Jābarṣā/Jābalqā with all their lore, mainly drawing from al-Qazwīnī, they had disappeared by the second half of the 17th century and survived only as fictional or symbolic places.[114]

Is there any meaning in tracing these metamorphoses of a legend in the long run, apart from satisfying one's curiosity for enchanted tales, or perhaps studying the mechanisms of creating and transforming parageographical knowledge?[115] It has been remarked that Islamicate culture is devoid of utopias, be them rural (similar to "the land of Cockaigne/Cuccagna" or the *Schlaraffenland* of medieval and early modern European peasants) or scholarly (the like of Plato's Atlantis or Thomas More's and other Renaissance authors' creations).[116] Indeed, insofar that Islam accepts the existence of an incontestable ideal society that has been realized on earth (under Muḥammad, and perhaps under the first four caliphs) and which

113 Kurz 2011, 203–243; Arici 2018; Sariyannis 2022, 49–55.

114 Hans von Mžik explores a similar transformation from real to symbolic geography in the case of the "meeting of the seas": Mžik 1938, 97–108.

115 I borrow this term from the analysis of Mžik 1929, 476–477, fn. 1 and Idem 1938.

116 Cf. Al-Azmeh 1990.

subsequent generations strive to approximate, utopianist thought mainly took the form of radical fundamentalism, while the philosophical approaches to the "perfect state" or *madīna fāḍila* lacked the quality of heterotopia, indispensable in utopian thought. In the same vein, the detailed and quite concrete imaginary of the Islamic paradise may have substituted medieval rural utopias of the Cockaigne sort.[117]

In this context, some of the descriptions of Jābarṣā/Jābalqā may fill part of this void. Not only are they inhabited by pious descendants of ancient tribes (be them Jewish or of the mythical ʿĀd or Thamūd); not only the majestic magnitude of the cities and the size of their populations (supplemented, in some sources, by extraordinary longevity) appear from the very start; what is more, from the 10th-century CE onward, with al-Samarqandī's additions adapted by al-Qazwīnī and the geographers who followed, the tradition of the Lost Tribes of Israel (merged perhaps with the Brahman episode of Alexander Romance) gave the episode of Muḥammad questioning the inhabitants about their customs, which reflect an egalitarian, just society. This is perhaps why a (limited) series of utopian descriptions of the Ottoman period borrow several features from the two cities of the sun; in contrast, the cities themselves often feature as demonic places, especially in popular lore. On the other hand, the *ishrāqī* concept of the "eighth clime" elevated this utopian strand to a metaphysical level, at the same time stripping it from any social context.

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117 I delve into this topic, offering some examples of Ottoman utopianism, in Sariyannis (in press).

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