XI. ve XVIII. yüzyıllar
İSLÂM-TÜRK MEDENİYETİ VE AVRUPA
Uluslararası Sempozyum
İSAM Konferans Salonu

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24-26 Kasım, 2006

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Organizasyon:
Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM)
T.C. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı
Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi

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THE ROLE OF GREEK CULTURAL HEROES IN LEGITIMATING THE SULTANS

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Contacts between Eurasian people and the population of western Asia and the Iranian Plateau were established long before the Turks reached to the frontiers of Byzantium and Sasanian Iran. Texts written at that early stage of acquaintance preserve a reaction of contempt sensed by the sedentary empires' population towards who were perceived as barbarians that threat the civilized world.

This attitude towards the Eurasians can also be detected in Islamic sources long after the emergence of the Caliphate. Yet the negative image of the Turks in these writings was accentuated due to the long conflict between Dar al-Islam and the people of the Steppe, as well as because the arrival of considerable numbers of migrants from the edge to the central lands of the Caliphate.

A common literary tool employed by Muslim authors to take out the Eurasian people from the civilization was their identification with the Biblical nations of Gog and Magog. However, these writers were familiar with another myth, that of Alexander (Iskandar) the Macedonian. The Great king was depicted as the guardian of mankind, as the victorious emperor who closed these barbarians behind a barrier.

The status of the Turks changed radically with the eleventh century great migration (volkerwanderung). Led by the Saljuqs waves of tribesmen crossed Mesopotamia and penetrated Minor Asia. Although the image of the Eurasians in the Arabic sources of the age did not change drastically, as one can deduce from the treatment of the Mongols, nevertheless the representation of the Turkish commanders was adjusted to their active role in defending Islam. The literary vehicle used to represent this transformation in image was the virtual picture of Alexander. Turkish sultans adopted the royal title Iskandar al-Zamman.

While the mythological Gog and Magog served as a literary tool to exclude the Eurasian from the civilized world, the name of Alexander the Great served to symbolize the rulers who claimed to be the defenders of the Abode of Islam.

The figure of Alexander of Macedon had attracted the imagination of the people of the Near East many centuries prior to the emergence of the Islamic Caliphate. Does for example, in records written by Jews the Macedonian king is portrayed as a just and wise ruler, the ideal type of the good king whose reign should be recognized by all as a model.1 This picture of Alexander was absorbed by Muslim authors,2 who in early

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1 Talmud Bab hostile pp. 31-32. Talmud, Sanhedrin 91; Talmud Tamid in Biyalik, Sefer haagada 1: 125-26; Megilat Ta’nit 3; Breshit Raba 61.
2 The great Hellenistic king played in Arabic literature the role of the ideal ruler from the Umayyads' days. One topic in his story is his relation with the Iranians. This topic was later adapted by several writers including the well known Persian poet Firdusi. al-Tabari, Jami’ al-bayan al-Qur’an (Beirut,
stages of the caliphate have incorporated the story of Alexander the Great into the emerging Arabic-Islamic culture. This deduction is well supported by the widespread acceptance of Alexander’s roman in Arabic, Persian and Turkish milieus. A key topic in Alexander’s story is his travel to the northern edges of the civilized world and the barrier he built there. Using this defense system the Hellenistic king is said to confine behind it the imaginative Gog and Magog peoples. By achieving this he stopped them from attacking mankind. Some Muslim and non-Muslim authors identified these barbarian peoples with tribes that roamed about the Eurasian Steppes. This identification of the northern barbarians with Gog and Magog is often based on popular interpretation of Ezekiel chapter 38. These Biblical verses served many authors to conceptualize the construction of mankind.

Among Muslim students of Qur’an it became popular to identify the Dhu al-Qarnayn (The Horned King; The king with two beams of glory or salvation) who is described in length in the Holy book with Alexander (Iskandar) of Macedon, the builder of the above mentioned wall (radm). This approach was taken on by several Arab historians, as well as by writers that contribute to other genres. Following pre-Islamic narratives

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4 Emilio Garcia Gomez, Un texto arabe occidental de la leyenda de Alejandro (1929).

5 Jamal al-Din Nizami (1141-1209), Iskandar Nameh.


11 Quran, 18: 83-101

12 B. M. Wheeler, Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis (London, 2002).

13 Alexander as a hero of popular myth: The Romance (qissa) of Iskandar.
these Muslim authors agree with the theory that had depicted the Macedonian king as a protector of the civilized world, which in their *mapa mundi* was identical with the Islamic lands. 14

The thesis that this paper aims to advance is that participants in the Islamic ethnical and political (pre-modern) discourses used these imaginative world construction and demography. It served them as an instrument to bring in or to take out people and territories. While Alexander was the vehicle to bring Central Asian chiefs into leadership position within the Abode of Islam, Gog and Magog served as the medium to exclude people from constituting an acknowledged ingredient of the Islamic Umma.

The world of the early 'Abbasids was populated by numerous nations. 15 Muslim writers employed several instruments to delineate these people. 16 As was previously argued they used Biblical verses and the story of Alexander as sources in explaining the diversity of mankind. In addition they utilized other ancient mythological writings. Yet in these writings the realm of the people that Alexander had enclosed and the site of the massive barrier that he had built are disputed.

Some medieval (pre-1055) Muslim scholars located the Alexander’s wall (*radm*) on the northern edges of the Caliphate. They disputed if the barrier was constructed at the northern edges of the inhabited world, 17 or on the borders of Khazars’ lands (namely in the Trans-Caucasian steppes). 18 Sketching the table of humanity these writers commonly used imaginative mysterious people to embody Turanian peoples. 19 They often identified the Gog and Magog with the Turk, According to this line of interpretation the Turks have been named so because they are “those who were left (turikatu) behind the barrier”. 20

Several Arabic geographical writings from the middle ‘Abbasid Age have transmitted a story concerning the caliph al-Wathiq (227-232/842-847) who had sent his chief translator Sallam al-Turjuman (*dragoman*) 21 to inspect a barrier, which was

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17 According to al-Idrisi, *Opus*, p. 934 the ninth part of the sixth Clime embraces a portion of the Qipchaq lands, the land of the Torgesh and the barrier of Gog and Magog. The land of the Torgesh borders the barrier. It is a very cold country.
21 Among his duties at the court was the translation of letters send by the King of the Turks to the caliph al-Wathiq. Ibn Rusteh, *al-A’laq al-Nafisa* ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1861), p. 149 (ll. 1-2).
presumably can be located in the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{22} Returning to the Caliph's headquarters in Samarra, Sallam wrote an account of his mission to the Trans-Caucasian steppes that was copied and partly preserved.\textsuperscript{23} The narrative reflects the place that the Turks occupied in the imaginative \textit{mapa mundi} that Muslim scholars drew.\textsuperscript{24}

Following the mass migration of Eurasian people from the Steppes to the Central Islamic Lands (post-1055) the image of Turks in various records had changed. One of the literary tools adopted by writers in the service of the new Turkish rulers (sultan) was the invention of a link between these rulers and Alexander. This strategy enabled them to distantly the Eurasian people from barbarian Gog and Magog and connect them with the forces that fulfilled the historical role of protectors of civilization.

Muhammad Ibn Hassul was among the earliest contributors to the Saljuq historiography,\textsuperscript{25} and the only author from that stage in Turkic history whose work reached us. A salient feature of his epistle is its focusing on ethnic images. He strives to demolish the old negative representation of the Turks, as well as presenting the Saljuks as the revivers of Sunni tradition. In his work Ibn Hassul shows great conformity. Constructing upon ancient Persian mythology he places the competition between Turkic and Iranian chiefs in the framework of the historic confrontation between Iran and Turan. Another narrative that is visible in Ibn Hassul after the encounter between the advancing armies of Islam and Turks in Darband see Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 1: pp. 2668-69.

\textsuperscript{22} On the encounter between the advancing armies of Islam and Turks in Darband see Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 1: pp. 2668-69.


\textsuperscript{24} The chief source of this account is Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Khurra(ah)dibbih (lived c. 204/8207-303/916?) started his writing in 2291844). His transmission was utilized by other 'Abbasi period writers, as well as by latter sources. al-Muqaddasi states: I had read the story of the barrier in Ibn Khurra(ah)dibbih's book as well as in other works that narrated the same story. I cite here Ibn Khurra(ah)dibbih's account and chain of transmitters because he was a secretary of the caliph al-Wathiq and he had far more better knowledge of the works in the library of the Commander of the Faithful Ahsan al-taqasimfı ma rifat al-aqalim, p. 362 (11. 6-8). Ibn Rusteh, al-A’laq al-Nafisa, pp. 98 (11. 9, 13), 149 (11.4-7). Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Hamdhani. Ibn Faqih, Kitab al-Buldan ed. Y. al-Hadi (Beirut: 1996), pp. 108, 593-600. al-Idrisi, Opus, pp. 930, 933, 934-38; Zakariya al-Qazwini, Kitab Athar al-bilad wa-akhbar al-‘ibad (Beirut, 1960), pp. 596-99, 618-620. idem. Kitab ‘ajib al-makhluqat wa-ghura’ib al-mawjudat (ed.), F. Wustenfeld, Wiesbaden, 1967), p.128, al-Mas'udi, Tanbih, p. 26; al-Idrisi, Opus, pp. 930-938.

\textsuperscript{25} Claude Cahen, "Le Malik-Nameh et l'histoire des origines Seljukides", Oriens vol. 2 (1949), pp. 31-65.

The image of the famous philosopher as the wise political adviser of the great king was a common subject in Arabic literature. al-Mas'udi, Kitab al-tanbih wal-ishraf, p. 87, 116-22.

\textsuperscript{26} Robert Dankoff
The peak of this course of action, that is to say the self-promotion of barbarian rulers who claimed to pursue Alexander’s footsteps was their adoption of the royal title “Iskandar al-Zaman”. Several Mamluk sultans used it, both in monumental inscriptions as well as in letters which were issued by the royal chancellery. Thus for example al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars included this title among others in several locations: in the large shrine that he built in Nabi Moussa. Another example can be seen at the Syrian village of Qara (north to Damascus); In Aleppo’s citadel praise al-Malik al-Mansur Qalavun the repressor of the infidels “Iskandar of our Times”; His son Muhammad bear the same title in his marriage contract. In the letter that Barquq had sent to the Maghreb asking to permit Ibn Khaldun’s family to join him in Egypt the Mamluk ruler is represented as the enormous sultan, the Shah-hin-shah and “Iskandar al-Zaman”.

The defeat of the Mamluks and the occupation of their sultanate by the victorious Ottomans did not end Muslim rulers use of Alexander name’s as an instrument for self boasting and fame. Several record prop the thesis that the figure of Alexander was not unknown among the Ottomans. Thus for example al-Fanari who lived in the territory ruled by Ba-Yazid wrote an *tarikh iskandar*. The sultan Salim boasted that the *al-’alam* Bir Basha Muhammad played in his court a role similar to that played by Aristotle in Alexander’s. Another example to a ruler that carried the title “iskandar al-zaman” is from the Indian sub-continent.

The line taken by me in the present paper aimed in tracing the role of Alexander the Great in Arabic sources, starting with writings from the early Abbasid period and closing with the early Ottomans. This method of research aimed to reconstruct the ethnic discourse and Alexander’s image in various writings authors. The chronological securitization was employed in order uphold the thesis that ethnical images have changed throughout the ages. The comparison between Turkic sultans and Alexander of Macedon was used by medieval Arab writers as a tool in bringing the people from the edges into core of Islamic society.

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28 *al-Shaga’i’q al-mu’amaniyya*, 1: 21. For additional authors that contributed to this genre see Hajji Khalifa.
29 *shaga’i’q mu’amaniyya*, 1: 189