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HĀRŪT AND MĀRŪT: THE ARMENIAN ZOROASTRIAN DEMONIC TWINS IN THE *QUR'ĀN*
WHO INVENTED FICTION.

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Haurvatāt and Amərətāt, “Wholeness” and “Immortality” are the rhyming pair amongst the seven Aməša Spəntas, the “Holy Immortals” of the Avesta who preside over the seven good creations of Ahura Mazdā: in the forms Xordād and Āmurdād they survive in modern Persian as names of months. In a Manichaean Middle Persian to Sogdian glossary, MP *'(mwr)d'd hrwd'd* is glossed as Sgd. *hrwwt mrwwt*, i.e., *Amurdād Harwadād* as *Harwōt Marwōt*. The names do not occur in a known Manichaean text so one does not know what the translator understood by them; and since the *h-* is not Sogdian, Henning suggested that the forms in the latter language “were probably borrowed from the same source from which Armenian *Haurot Maurot* are derived.”¹ Armenian sources know the Aməša Spəntas as the “seven helper/adjutant (*hamharz*) gods (*astuac-k'*)” but unlike a number of prominent *yazatas* they are not remembered as objects of cult and the names of only three are attested. Spəntā Ārmaitī, Phl. Spandārmad, “Holy Devotion”, the female guardian of earth and mother of mankind, in the NWMIr. form *spandaramet-akan* with a Pth. adjectival suffix translates the Biblical Gk. Dionysian revels detested by the Maccabees. The probably older form from SWIr., *sandaramet-k'* with *pluralis tantum* is the generic underworld; and by the Middle Ages the radically shortened *sandark'*, cf. the analogous form *Sondara* in Cappadocian, are a class of chthonian demons.² As for *hawrot mawrot*, it is the name of a flower.

On Ascension Eve (Arm. *Hambarjum*), unmarried girls sprinkle its petals into a bowl of water in which they also place identifiable personal items and then stand vigil overnight under the stars. The heavens open then (so does the cave of the apocalyptic

¹ Henning 1940, pp. 16, 19 (=1977, pp. 17, 20).

² Russell 1987, Ch. 10 on Spandaramet and Ch. 12 on Hawrot Mawrot.

hero of the Sasun epic, P'ok'r Mher, "Little Mithra") and their secrets stream down to earth. On the morn as each girl's object is removed a quatrain about her future fortune in love and marriage is recited. Such a vernal *vičaka-xat*, "game of lots" in ancient Iranian culture may have been a source of Heb. Pūrīm and Esther.³ The water and flower reflect the original associations of the twin divinities. In Arm. dialects there is attested a form *xorot morot* with diminutive *xorotik morotik*: in central Armenian Van and Muš the words mean "lovely, beautiful"; and in the northeast— Javaxk' and Širak— they refer also to a blossom with a rosy hue and sweet scent. The word *xorotik* (or *xorot*, without the diminutive suffix *-ik*) alone also can mean "beautiful".⁴ This suggests that the semantic development of the word(s) as "comeliness" was assisted by association with the unrelated but homonymous *xortik*, "delicious, choice morsel" from Mlr. *xwartik* (Malxasyanc', *s.v.*); cf. Tk. *parça*, Mod. Heb. *ḥatīx(ā)* "piece", said of a desirable girl or boy.⁵ Such association would foster a *volksetymologische* understanding of the paired form as analogous to others in X + privative prefix *m-X*, even though the second element in such compounds is often actual, e.g., Arm. (*v*)olor-molor "wandering around lost" or Č'inumač'in, the latter literally China-and-*Mahā*-China, but it has the same force as Yiddish *Ek Velt*. And at the proverbial world's edge skulk the giants of Biblical apocalyptic myth Gog and Magog, whom we shall encounter again presently, known to Armenians also by their Arabicized forms *Yajuj* and *Majuj*, from which Arm. *joj*, "giant", may derive.⁶ The *xorotik-morotik* compound when it means "beautiful" always refers to a loved and desired person, not a thing. So in the Arm. folk song *Tehkonda: Xorotik*,

³ Russell 1990, pp. 33-40.

⁴ Dialect dictionary 2002, p. 363.

⁵ And here in the Ebonic parlance of the USA of my youth, the happy exclamation when a lovely girl walked by uptown, "Mmm, mmm, MMM! Sho' like a piece o' dat!" For the other amorous uses of English "piece" one need only consult the constantly-growing Urban Dictionary on the Internet.

⁶ The rhyming *šogmog(-em)*, "delation, flattery, lie" perhaps inspired another form of the name of the pair in which initial *j-* is altered to *sh-*: Zaruhi Pōlosean of Šāhbāyī, Van, told her son Grigor, *Eōt'ə glxani hrēšə piti gay Hayastani vray ew mec paterazm piti əllay, isk al Šugug Mugug piti gay anor dēm*, "The seven-headed monster will come against Armenia and there will be a great war; and Šugug Mugug as well will come against it" (oral comm. by Krikor Boghosian). The seven-headed dragon and Gog and Magog are standard fare from the Book of Revelation.

xorotik, xorotik-morotik im yarn ē “Pretty, pretty, lovely is my beloved!” — or *Ay! Xorotik-morotik, Ay! Sirunik kak‘avik* “Oh lovely, oh lovely little partridge!” The strutting partridge gives its name to the generically lewd dance in Arm. celebrations of physical love and early medieval polemics against it.

Though it might appear that the divine names underwent degeneration to become common nouns the reality could be more complex. One recalls for instance that the Parsi Gujarati form, *Ordibehešt*, of the name of another *Aməša Spənta*, *Aša Vahišta*, who presides over fire, can be used simply for “fire” — so closely is the visible creation suffused for the Zoroastrian with the presence of its tutelary divinity.⁷ So plants and waters might have been called *hawrot* and *mawrot* by pre-Christian Armenians who still knew what the names meant. The Armenian “game of lots” is now a sanitized and innocuous rite of young girls sanctioned by church and society. But it might once have been a nocturnal (and therefore perhaps goetic)⁸ ritual of lecanomancy and love magic — or, indeed, something more malevolent — on the fringe of a Mazdaismicate⁹ society employing sacred names imbued with poetic rhyming potency and manipulating herbs and possessions of the subject or target person of the rite. Such a magical rite, employing several of the central features of the Armenian *vičakaxat*, is indeed attested in a source whose roots are in late antiquity. In the *Sēfer ha-Rāzīm*, “Book of Secrets”, a compendium of spells that advertises itself as having come to king Solomon from the personal library of Noah, there is a list of eighty angels of the “second encampment” who serve one TYGRH. In order to cause various kinds of dire harm to an enemy, or to do other damage, one may call on these four score malevolent beings by taking water from seven springs on the seventh day of the months in the seventh hour of the day in seven different unfired pottery vessels. These are to be exposed beneath the stars for seven nights, after which one is to pour their contents into a glass vial over which one has

⁷ Russell 1988.

⁸ Compare the “black *yasna*” described by Plutarch in *Peri Isidos kai Osiridos*, where Persian witchcraft inverts the canonical rite even as witchcraft in Christendom perverts the Mass.

⁹ Pardon the neologism; but it is a useful construction and why should Islamicate societies have all the fun?

pronounced one's foe's name. One then smashes the seven vessels and scatters the shards to the four directions, reciting appropriate incantations.¹⁰ So the innocent quatrains of latter days may but palely reflect what were defixions of yore. Much magic in antiquity was specifically love magic, which was employed not only to arouse desire but also, more sinisterly perhaps, to destroy the bonds of wedlock: one need only peruse that *locus classicus*, the historiola of St. Cyprian of Antioch, to see how the black art worked. So *hawrot* and *mawrot* may have to do with a lioness of a magical rite that in later centuries becomes an Armenian folkloric pussy cat.

So now we consider the two Aməša Spəntas in the 102nd verse of the second *sūrā*, *al-Baqara*, of the *Qur'ān*. This is a scripture that still awaits its Kittel, but this longest and doubtless latest, summarizing chapter adds an immense quantity of regional oral lore to the basic teachings of the new religion, probably as it approached century mark. The passage is taken to be an admonition directed specifically to Jewish believers at Medina. "Solomon did not disbelieve; but the demons (*aš-šayātīnu*) disbelieved. They taught mankind magic (*siḥra*) and that which was revealed to the angels twain ('*ala 'l-malakayni*) in Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt, but they did not teach it to anybody till they said, 'We are naught but a temptation (*fitnatun*), so do not disbelieve (*fa lā takfur*).' And from these two, people learn that by which they can cause division between husband and wife: but they injure no one save by God's leave." Islamic tradition confines the two angels to a well in Babylon¹¹ and mentions the incident with the girl who became the star Zuhra, i.e., Venus. Muslim legend elaborates the myth considerably; and the reliance upon Jewish sources, as will be seen, is palpable. So in the Persian-language Lahore *Tafsīr*, for

¹⁰ Morgan 1983, pp. 25-28.

¹¹ Why Babel? Presumably because of the babble of tongues (and, in early Islam, of creeds) there since God's hand smote the proud tower of the rebellious, the din reminiscent of the whisperings (*waswasa*) of the *jinn* and the mutterings (*zamzama*) of the *majusis* (Magians; magicians!) with their *niranjīyyat* (spells, lit. Zoroastrian *nirangs*, sacred formulae of power). Dr. Geoffrey Herman has called my attention to Goldziher 1884-8, p. 124: in A.H. 102 Mujahid at Babylon requested that the Jewish exilarch show him Harut and Marut, who hung upside down, great as two mountains, in their well. So it would seem that in the early Islamic period the connection was still strong of the Koranic myth to Jewish tradition in the lands that had only recently been the center of Sasanian power.

instance, we read: “Khwāja Imām, may God be pleased with him, said: We heard it said in some commentaries, There came to ‘Ā’īša, may God be pleased with her, a certain woman and said, My husband took another woman to wife and I am tormented by jealousy. A woman told me, I’ll take you to a place where they will teach you something. You pronounce it over your husband and he will not even touch that other woman. At night she arrived, leading two of what could have been either cats or dogs, God knows. She mounted one and seated me on the other and off we went. We traveled till we reached a place where we saw two people suspended upside-down. She led me to them and left me there. They said: Do not learn what we say, or else you will become an unbeliever. But I said, I must learn it. If you have to, they said, then go to that furnace. And I saw a place like a furnace. When I went there I was frightened, turned around, and said, I went to the furnace. They replied, What, then, did you see? I said, I didn’t see anything. They retorted, That means you didn’t go there. So, go back! Don’t learn or you’ll become an unbeliever. I did not obey. So they said, Go on then, go right up to the furnace, to see. I didn’t go all the way that second time either. I went up to the furnace only the third time, looked, and saw something like a horseman clothed in white. White cloth covered his head. He rose out of the furnace and flew up to the sky. I returned and related what I had seen. They said, That was your faith, and it flew up and away. Now learn. And they pronounced those words. I committed them to memory and returned home. As they taught me, I cast a kernel into the earth and pronounced those words. In the same instant a stalk grew, became green, rose, and started to sprout leaves. As soon as that plant appeared, I immediately repented.” Idris intervenes on behalf of the woman to God.¹²

The names are familiar; but the narrative alludes to a longer story concerning another pair of angels known from the corpus of texts on Enoch concerning the giants or *nephilim*; in the cycle of legends about king Solomon; and in later Jewish mythological

¹² Abdullaeva 2001, p. 84, who cites also the comment of Ḥasan Baṣri on a tradition that the two teachers of magic were Zoroastrians that one should therefore read not *malakayn*, “twain (fallen) angels” but *malikayn*, “two kings” (p. 82). This suggests that some remembered the Iranian origin of the names of the two.

literature. Originally the two are Šemihaza or Šemhazai,¹³ and ‘Azael; and the former has two sons, Hiya and Hiwa. The rhyming names of the latter were chanted, the Talmud notes, by boatmen as they strained at their ropes. The Manichaean version of the Book of the Giants knows Šahmizād and his sons Ohyā and Ahyā. A Sogdian text equates the former with Sām; and the twin angels are in Persian named as Sām and Narīman. The Avestan epic hero of the cycle of the *kavis*, Kərəsāspa, belongs to the Sāma clan and is called *naire.manah-*, “manly-minded”; so the Iranizing version of the narrative has equated the fallen angels, it would seem, with him. In Pth. the giants themselves are *kaw-ān*, “kavis”. Later Jewish lore stresses the rhymed character of the twins’ names by calling them ‘Aza and ‘Azael. The giants in the earth practice telling lies (Aram. šqrh, kdbyn); and in the apocryphal Book of Jubilees (8.1-4) the Watchers (Gk. *egrēgoroi*, Aram. *‘irin*), who unlike the vigilant angels of the heavenly host are fallen beings, are said to have initiated divination using astrology.¹⁴ So the apocryphal literature of Jews, Christians, and Manichaeans that existed at the dawn of Islam had a pair of fallen angels whose names sometimes rhymed and who lied and invented magic.

As to Solomon, he is said to have traveled on the pinions of an eagle to Tadmor in the Mountains of Darkness to visit ‘Aza and ‘Azael. He forced them by his ring with the holy Name to teach him mysteries. This is but one episode of Solomon’s many-faceted career as a magician; and again there seems to be considerable cross-fertilization between Jewish and Iranian myth, especially in the Islamic period. For Muslim tradition attributes the origin of the Persian vernal New Year, Nō Rūz, which became a popular and carnivalesque feast as far afield as Egypt, variously to the primordial king Jamšīd and to Solomon— the latter having established it to commemorate the day when that same potent seal ring (*khatam*), which had been stolen by a demon (*jinn*), was recovered.¹⁵ In the texts of the *Testament of Solomon* that demon was none other than Ašmedai, i.e., the Avestan Aēšma Daēva. Jamšīd’s fatal hubris in Persian epic culminates in the demand

¹³ The name sounds, as Shaked has suggested, as though it might be simply Heb. *ha-šēm ha-zeh*, lit. “this name”, maybe a cautious circumlocution. Pious Jews refer to God discreetly as Hashem, “The Name”.

¹⁴ Reeves 1992, pp. 44-45 n. 100, 76, 77-78; and Milik 1976, pp. 330-331.

¹⁵ Shoshan 1993, pp. 40-41, citing Shaked 1991, p. 90, n. 5.

that men worship him rather than God since he can cure every disease. This finds a parallel in the legend that Hezekiah concealed (Heb. *gānāz*) Solomon’s *Sēfer Raḥū’ōt*, the book of cures that included every disease and its remedy and therefore might tempt the sick to pray to the king rather than the Creator. Zoroastrians consider Ahreman the author of disease and do not see the demonstration of human excellence in medicine as overweening pride, but as an aspect of the lifelong “martial striving against the demons” recommended by the Phl. credo;¹⁶ so perhaps here the vector of influence ran from the monism of Israel, where God is author of good and evil, life and death— eastwards.¹⁷

The story of the two angels, called most often ‘Aza and ‘Azael in the later Jewish sources, may be summarized as follows. At the time of creation the angels who begged of God that they be let loose upon mankind to prove our iniquity— and unworthiness to receive their worship— were allowed to become the precious stones, gold, and purple dye that entice people. ‘Aza and ‘Azael in particular protested that, whatever the conditions of the world, they would acquit themselves better in it than men. But they tried instead to rape the girl who escaped to become Istahar/Venus/Nāhīd. Opting for punishment in this world rather than hell, they were sent to the Mountains of Darkness beyond the river Sambatyon. This is where Gog and Magog are, as well as the Ten Lost Tribes, all behind the security barrier erected by Alexander the Great. They are imprisoned in a deep mountain cavern: one of them repented and, though chained upside down, can see; the other sulks below in the dark. But their social life is rather busy. Afrira and Kastimon, two even nastier demons from a world below, sometimes come to bother and scare them. Naamah— Ašmedai’s mother— tempts them. Genun the Canaanite, son of Lamech, invented musical instruments there: ‘Azael entered them, and that is how music became seductive and led men into promiscuity. After they had discovered rock and roll, the Canaanite went on to invent beer, pubs, and iron weapons.¹⁸ So God created the Sabbath and the *sitra aḥra* took care of Saturday night.

¹⁶ Phl. *razmīg ayōzišn padērag dēwān*, in the *Čīdag andarz ī pōryōtkēšān* “Select counsels of the primordial faithful”, attributed to Ādurbād ī Amahraspandān.

¹⁷ See Russell (in publication), and Halperin 1982, pp. 269-292.

¹⁸ Graves and Patai, 1963, pp. 100-106, with refs. to Dillmann 1853, pp. 92-93.

The most frequent visitors to the angels in the Mountains of Darkness are humans like Solomon seeking to learn magic. ‘Azza the recalcitrant sulks in his pit; but ‘Azrael sees people approaching. Then they both cry out and burning serpents surround them. They dispatch their animal familiar, a *Mischwesen* called *unimata* with the head of a snake, the body of a cat, small paws, and two tails. The postulant must then cover his face and make an offering of the ashes of a white cock. The *unimata* then conducts him to the fallen angels’ binding chain, which he must strike thrice. The two then teach him magic over the course of fifty days.¹⁹ The details are intriguing, and recall the epic myths of Zoroastrian Armenia: Movsēs Xorenac‘i, whose *History of the Armenians* is often dated to the fifth century and at all events reached its present form no later than the eighth, provides the details of a much older oral epic still recited by the *gusans* (“bards”) in his day. The epic of the Artaxiad dynasty contains many archaic elements and telescopes the events of the second and first centuries B.C. In one episode the Armenian king Artawazd, cursed by his father Artasēs, falls into the chasm of greater Ararat (Arm. Azat Masik‘). He is chained there, held by giants called *k‘ajk‘*. Since dogs are gnawing at the chains to free him, mediaeval Armenian writers report that blacksmiths begin their working week by striking their anvils thrice to strengthen the chains of Artawazd. Artawazd’s mother, Sat‘enik, was something of a witch; but there is no record of Artawazd receiving and teaching visitors. Nor are there any snakes in the myth, which is so reminiscent of the tale of Aži Dahāka, Zohhak, chained or crucified in Mt. Damāvand and tortured by the two snakes that spring from either shoulder. But Armenian lore abounds in *višaps*, serpent-dragons, in the region of Ararat.²⁰ Perhaps the Jewish tale has shifted the serpents of an older version of the story to the *unimata*’s ophidian head and double tail. The offering is sinister: the harbinger of dawn and bird of the yazata Sraoša is holy to Zoroastrians; and Manuk Abelean notes in his work on Armenian folk belief that a heavenly rooster wakes the angels. Gabriel, whose name is popularly connected with “rooster”, is in Jewish belief

¹⁹ Bamberger 1952, pp. 178-181, with refs. Louis Ginzburg in vol. 4 of his *Legends of the Jews* and Angelo Rappoport in vol. 1 of his *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel* report substantially the same details of the myth.

²⁰ On Artawazd, see Russell 1987 Ch. 13 “Captive Powers”; Russell 1994; Russell 1986-87; and Russell 2006.

the first to rise.²¹ A 14th-cent. MS from Herāt of the *Mir‘āj nāme* depicts the Prophet Mohammed in the first heaven meeting a giant white cock whose feet touch the earth and whose comb brushes the foot of the divine throne.²² In the context of Iranian religion killing a white cock would be a perversion, a reversal of the sacred analogous to a blasphemous parody of the Eucharist.

It seems possible that an Iranian Zoroastrian myth, or, more precisely, the pre-Christian Armenian reflex of one about an evil titan chained in a mountain chasm, was involved in the shaping of a Jewish tale first elaborated in the books of Enoch about two fallen angels who tell lies generally and more specifically teach magic. From their other associations with seductive fashions, lewd music, and strong drink, love magic would seem to be their particular specialty. The tale evolved in a milieu where Iranian and Jewish traditions were strongly interpermeable; and this is apparent also in the Solomonic cycle where it is reflected. It entered Manichaean lore, where a secondary re-Iranization seems to have occurred: the angels are renamed Sām and Narīman and the tradition knows their Aramaic equivalents. It is not known whether a version of the myth known to Manichaeans in Sogdiana called them Harwōt and Marwōt; but if there was, it must have come from the west of the Iranian world, most likely from Armenia, where the legendry surrounding Hawrot and Mawrot was so deeply entrenched. The details of the legend also argue for an Armenian locus; and the names in the *Qur‘ān*, Hārūt and Mārūt, are closer to the Armenian forms than to any others. De Menasce has explained the motif of twin beings with reference to the Indian legend of the two Aśvins who took a fancy to princess Sūkanya (*Mahābhārata* 3.123-125); and Dumézil saw in them an expression of the “fonction terrestre”.²³ The two Aməša Spəntas at least personified water and plants employed in a magical rite. Many traditions like twins with rhyming names in any case: the Dioscuri do not rhyme but Remus and Romulus do; and closer to home the first generation of the heroes of the Armenian epic of Sasun consists of such a pair, the strong, heroic Sanasar and his smaller, weaker, more moody twin brother Bałdasar. By the

²¹ Cited by Scholem 1965, p. 147 n. 4.

²² Séguy 1977, Pl. 9 (fol. 11).

²³ De Menasce 1947.

seventh century of the Christian era and the end of the Sasanian age, the Jewish, Christian, Manichaean, and Mandaean mythology and demonology the early Muslims encountered in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Israel was rich in Iranian names and terms: in a world where the king of the demons is named in the inscription on a Jewish magical bowl as Bagadāna, it comes as no particular surprise that there should have existed a version of the myth of ‘Aza and ‘Azael in which the two fallen angels bore the alternative Iranian names Harut and Marut and had a specific association to the water and plants used in a ritual by Armenians. One might have encountered the latter at every turn. In Mesopotamia, Mani’s mother Maryam had been of the Armeno-Parthian noble house Kamsarakan, and Armenians were ubiquitous at court; Armenians thronged the schools and streets of Antioch and Nisibis; an Armenian papyrus is known from Egypt (the poor historical Artawazd had also languished in captivity at Alexandria, a prisoner of Marc Antony); and Armenian monks and pilgrims in the Land of Israel were exceedingly numerous.

Unless the “two youths” (*šānēy ha-bākhūrīm*) invoked in the name of Samael in a Geniza fragment to afflict N the son of N with noise and discharges from the back are our demonic twins, they do not seem to appear in Jewish magical texts themselves. ‘Azael (‘z’l) is one of the angels who stand before the divine throne, on a Jewish Aramaic amulet from Aḡabeyli, near Maraş— clearly a pious sort and not one of our boys.²⁴ But one of the Iranian twins may perhaps survive in an Armenian spell that, appropriately, deals with love. The late Dr. Levon Boyajian of New Jersey owned a magico-medical manuscript that had been copied by his grandfather, whose family had migrated from Č‘mškacag (Chemishgezek, the ancient town that was home to the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiscēs) in the province of Dersim (now Tunceli), Western Armenia, to Aleppo. He probably compiled the manuscript there in the 1920’s, copying both recent cures and old spells, and brought it to New York. Dr. Boyajian’s son donated the book to the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research at Belmont, MA, where I have studied it. On p. 62 is a magical operation and spell to release the binding (Arm. *kap*) of a

²⁴ On the two youths, see Naveh and Shaked 1993, p. 235 f. For ‘Azael in the amulet, see Naveh and Shaked 1985, p. 68 f.

bridegroom. One is to clap one's hands, recite the prayer beginning "Heavenly God" and the Psalm beginning with the words "Ascribe might" and write the name of the afflicted man on two slips of paper. The bride and groom are to wash in water in which the first piece of paper has been placed; and the groom is to bind the second to his right arm. With God's help he will be released. On the paper is to be written the nonsense words of the spell: *Hasawił, mat'um, marum, mat'ēumn, mariwn, mahk'on, awasi, azawmi, marut'*. The final word may be a rendering of Arabic Mārūt as an Armenian heard it, with a trilled *r*: the rhymes of late medieval and early modern Armenian spells consist often of *voces mysticae* and actual lexical items drawn from the prayers and spells of Muslim—and, more rarely, Greek—neighbors. So the name of at least one of the two fallen angels may still be attested in an actual magical rite as well as in a women's ritual that may once have been such a rite as well: one notes in both the use of water in which objects have been immersed.²⁵

I have suggested that the imaginary place at the edge of the world of the confinement of the two fallen angels—the Mountains of Darkness, beyond the river Sambatyon and the wall built to contain Gog and Magog and their hordes (Ezekiel 38, Revelation 20)—was thought to be in the environs of Armenia, or at least a mythologized image of it. What evidence do we have for this? The ten lost tribes of Israel were also thought to dwell in these parts: God punished them for their sins and they were exiled by the Assyrians to the northeast, to Media somewhere beyond the river Gozan (cf. I Kings 14-15, II Kings 17.6). Talmudic tradition locates them around Adiabene and Hamadan and mentions a river Sanbatyon—in the third century Commodianus has them *Persida flumine clausi*. Their new abode, which came to be called Arzareth after *erets aheret* ("another land", in Deut. 29.28) seems to be a place of snowy mountains (if a word SLWG may suggest Heb. *šeleg*, "snow"). One candidate is the Elburz chain south of the Caspian. The latter is mentioned as a place where they were; and if one notes the testimony of Josephus (Wars 7.7.4) to the effect that Alexander built his wall to keep out

²⁵ Though it is difficult to argue from silence, perhaps *Harut' (for Hārūt) was heard as too close to Harut', a common diminutive of the proper name Yarut'iwn, "Resurrection", to be suitable for a negative spell; while Marut' carries the suitably frightening phonetic signature of Arm. *mah* "death", *ma(r)šel* "wear out, decay", *mērnīl*, "die", and so on.

the Scythians, whom he identifies with Magog, then that barrier would have been at the Caspian Gates near the western shore of that sea.²⁶ The *Qur'ān*, Ch. 18, knows both the wall and its builder, Zeus Ammon's son the *dhū 'l-qarnain*, "two-horned"; and has the barrier between two mountains. This is a persistent detail: the 14th-cent. Swedish *Konung Alexander* adds that the twin peaks *waro hogh ok mykith lang* "were high and very **long**"; and ancient Armenian sources call P'ok'r and Azat Masik' — Little and Greater Ararat — *erkar*, "long".²⁷ And the turbulent river Araxes, that Tacitus writes will not bear bridges, (Virgil follows him, making the Araxes the edge of earth and Empire on the shield of Aeneas), flows past it. The historian and the poet meant by the political metaphor that Parthia would never submit to Roman domination; but it can make of the river a Sambatyon as well, a limit of the known world. For is not the incursion of Parthians into the Land of Israel an apocalyptic harbinger of redemption in the Talmudic literature?

So the country where another troublesome couple, Adam and Eve, were expelled from a garden of delights and the Ark of Noah rested, might be a fair candidate near the Caspian Gates for the Otherworld of Arzareth. And as the tale developed, Gog, Magog, and the "hidden" tribes were blended together even as the two words of Deuteronomy had been: John Mandeville speaks of "they of Caspye... Iewes of x. lynages, that men

²⁶ Josephus, a native of the Galil, lived, rather ironically, not very far from the only town that is known to have borne the name of the ostensibly remote and fabulous Scythians, Scythopolis (Heb. Bēt Še'an). Presumably he even met a few serving in the Roman cavalry.

²⁷ In Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians*, I.26, the Mede Aždahak has a dream that foretells his doom: he finds himself "in an unknown land (*yerkri*) near a mountain long from the earth (*erkar yerkrē*) in height, whose summit seemed encased in the severity (*sastkut'eamb*) of ice; and they said, you would think, this is in the land of the progeny of the Armenians (*haykazanc'*). And as I looked longer (*erkaragoyns*) at the mountain, a woman clothed in purple (*ciranazgest*), having a veil of heavenly color (*erknagoyn*) about her, appeared seated on the edge (*i cayri*) of such a height, lovely, tall in stature, and red-cheeked (*karmrayt*), gripped by the pains of giving birth (*erkanc'*). And I looked longer still (*yerkaragoyns*) at this apparition and was in wonder, suddenly the woman gave birth (*cnaw*) to three fully-grown men (*eris katareals*) of the stature and nature of the progeny of the gods (*diwc'azanc'*). The first, gripping the flanks of a lion upon which he was mounted, sped west; the second, on a leopard, headed north; but the third, reining a monstrous dragon (*zvišap anari*), advancing upon our realm, attacked." On the antiquity of this passage, its relationship to other Iranian epic material, and its poetics and encoding of material from the song of the birth of Vahagn, see Russell 2009.

clepen Goth & Magoth.” That is all very well; but the *topos* of confinement implies another of escape. Orosius in the fifth century warns that the Jews teeming around the Caspian will break out (*erupturus*). *Pesikta Rabbati* 31.10 has the exiles migrating homewards in *meḥīlīm*, “tunnels”— like the *gilgul* of the bones of the men to be resurrected at Doomsday in the vale of Jehosophat, perhaps. In the uneasy folklore of the Middle Ages the belief was widespread in Germanic lands that the hordes of Gog and Magog waiting to burst from their confines and ravage Christendom were indeed the ten lost tribes— not the weak and despised Jews they knew, though, but Jews called either *rote* “red” (and oversexed) or *groß* “big” (like the giants, ‘*anaqīm* and *nefīlīm*). And what the persecutors feared, their victims hoped for: David Reuveni came to Rome in 1624 boasting that he could harness the might of these muscular Jews to retake Jerusalem. Eldad the Danite, who appeared in Qayrawan with tales of the ten lost tribes, went one better, for he spoke in a strangely-flavored (as it seems to recent researchers, a Najrani-tinged) Hebrew. Mandeville claimed Jews learnt the old tongue in order to be able to communicate with the ten tribes, presumably when the latter might come as a conquering, liberating army.²⁸ The Zionist project, with its sunny aim of *skazku sdelat’ byl’iu*, “making reality of a fable” (as a Soviet song promises; *Im tirtsū ēn zū agādā* was how Herzl put it), was determined to bring back the exiles. Yitzhak Ben Zvi in *The Exiled and the Redeemed* muses on those deported by Assyria long ago. And Eliezer Ben Yehuda, whose contribution was the revival of spoken Hebrew, muses in his memoir, “At that time [1881, the year of his *aliya*], Palestine was more like a fairy tale to most Jews, hardly more real than the kingdom of the sons of Moses across the River Sambatyon.”²⁹

Ben Yehuda was partly inspired to resurrect Hebrew, and to use it as his everyday tongue in Israel, by the Russian translation of George Eliot’s novel *Daniel Deronda*; and it has been argued that she invented a character who undertakes the project of personal and national liberation and renewal as a Jew because she could not face writing as candidly about the similar needs of women. Fiction thus writes reality; and by imagining as Arzareth the very land of which my nation now sings, *Ēn lī erets aḥeret*, “I do **not**

²⁸ On the ten tribes and *rote Juden*, see Benite 2009; and Gow 1995.

²⁹ Muraoka 1993, p. 62.

have an Other Country”, a mythologized land of exile is transposed and imposed upon an actual place of return. But irony seems as essential to writing as gravity is to physicality: the two angels fell and are confined in this Otherworld because they could not control their own libido, so now their profession is to teach others how to arouse and manipulate it, reminding their clients that everything they are about to say is a temptation or even rebellion (for *fitna* has both these senses).

The angels Hārūt and Mārūt, says the scripture, taught *sihr*, “magic”. This much accords with the rest of the evidence; and their warning, that what they are about to say is all nothing but *fitna*, again agrees with the tradition already noted that the giants and their ilk specialized in lying and deceit. But two decades ago Cyril Glasse, the scholar of Islam, offered to me this haunting paraphrase of the angels’ caveat: “Everything we are about to say to you is a lie; now then, listen carefully!” And everyone *does*. There is no implication that the warning effectively repels anybody. If it did, the Prophet would not be telling the tale. One might aver that any man who has just traveled to the terrifying limits of the world to learn witchcraft is not going to be deterred by the health warning on the package. But in a more general way, what is it that we know is not true, yet we listen to it despite that, or even precisely because it is untrue? It is literary art, fiction. Pindar (Nemean ode 7.22-23) writes of Homer, *epei pseudesi hoi potanāi te makhanāi/ semnon epesti te* “for on his **lies** and his winged skill something sacred is present.” It is not very far from the *semnon*, the holy, to *sihr*, the magical; and indeed with reference to certain kinds of poetry and rhetoric, there is a famous *ḥadīth*: *Inna mina ’l-bayāni la-siḥran* “There is a kind of eloquence like magic.”³⁰ Our little life is rounded by a sleep: aware of its confines and of the pain of the sentence and the sorrow of its end, literary imagination a lie we welcome, knowing it is a lie. It is magical indeed, providing wonder and relief and a sense of freedom. Suspending disbelief, we break down Alexander’s wall and cross the river Sambatyon at will. Brian Boyd has argued of late that fiction is an evolutionary adaptation, a way of gaming out possible roles and situations in order to cope with them better, rather in the manner that a motorcycle rider scans the road ahead and anticipates (imagines) potential situations he will have to deal with at very short notice. But fiction is

³⁰ Cit. by T. Fahd, “Siḥr,” *EI* 2.

more than a limbering up of the mind to deal with future challenges. It is also demonic, *fitna* in the sense of revolution, since it is man's protest against the way things are, an attempt to create in another fashion than the Creator, and to speak of matters such as the vagaries of human passion in which we, and not God, are at the center. Hārūt and Mārūt, not the unfolding genome, invented it, all right. Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy perceived this in his old age, repented, turned from fiction to Christ, and, Solomon-like, repudiated the great books of his earlier life. One evening his wife was reading such a book to him, though. It dealt with illicit passion and the problems of family life. "It's rather good," he admitted. "What is it?" It was, she told him, a novel entitled *Anna Karenina*.

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