

Gog and Magog

For the Gog and Magog statues in London, see [Gogmagog](#) and [Corineus](#). For other uses, see [Gog \(disambiguation\)](#) and [Magog \(disambiguation\)](#).

Gog and Magog (/ɡɒɡ/; /ˈmeɪɡɒɡ/; Hebrew: גֹּגִי וּמָגוּגִי



The Gog and Magog people being walled off by Alexander's forces.

—*Jean Wauquelin's Book of Alexander. Bruges, Belgium, 15th cent.*

Gog u-Magog) in the Hebrew Bible may be individuals, peoples, or lands; a prophesied enemy nation of God's people according to the Book of Ezekiel, and one of the nations according to Genesis descended from Japheth son of Noah.

The Gog prophecy is meant to be fulfilled at the approach of what is called the "end of days", but not necessarily the end of the world. Jewish eschatology viewed Gog and Magog as enemies to be defeated by Messiah ben Joseph, which will usher in the age of the true Messiah. Christianity's interpretation is more starkly apocalyptic: making Gog and Magog allies of Satan against God at the end of the millennium, as can be read in the Book of Revelation.

To Gog and Magog were also attached a legend, certainly current by the Roman period, that they were people contained beyond the Gates of Alexander erected by Alexander the Great. Romanized Jewish historian Josephus knew them as the tribe descended from Magog the Japhethite, as in Genesis, and explained them to be the Scythians. In the hands of Early Christian writers they became apocalyptic hordes, and throughout the Me-

dieval period variously identified as the Huns, Khazars, Mongols, or other nomads, or even the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

The legend of Gog and Magog and the gates were also interpolated into the Alexander Romances. In one version, "Goth and Magoth" are kings of the Unclean Nations, driven beyond a mountain pass by Alexander, and blocked from returning by his new wall. Gog and Magog are said to engage in human cannibalism in the romances and derived literature. They have also been depicted on Medieval cosmological maps, or *Mappa mundi*, sometimes alongside Alexander's wall.

Gog and Magog appear in the Quran as **Yajuj and Majuj** (Arabic: يَاجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ *Ya jāj wa-Ma jāj*), adversaries of Dhul-Qarnayn, widely equated with Cyrus the Great and al-Iskanadar (Alexander the Great) in Islam. Muslim geographers identified them at first with Turkic tribes from Central Asia and later with the Mongols. In modern times they remain associated with apocalyptic thinking, especially in the United States and the Muslim world.

1 The names Gog and Magog

The first mention of the two names occurs in the Book of Ezekiel, where Gog is an individual and Magog is his land; in Genesis 10 Magog is a person, son of Japheth son of Noah, but no Gog is mentioned. In Revelation, Gog and Magog together are the hostile nations of the world.^{[1][2]} Gog or Goug the Reubenite^[lower-alpha 1] occurs in 1 Chronicles 5:4, but he appears to have no connection with the Gog of Ezekiel or Magog of Genesis.^[4]

The form "Gog and Magog" may have emerged as shorthand for "Gog and/of the land of Magog", based on their usage in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.^[5] An example of this combined form in Hebrew (*Gog u-Magog*) has been found, but its context is unclear, being preserved only in a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls.^{[lower-alpha 2][6]}

The meaning of the name Gog remains uncertain, and in any case the author of the Ezekiel prophecy seems to attach no particular importance to it; efforts have been made to identify him with various individuals, notably Gyges, a king of Lydia in the early 7th century, but many scholars do not believe he is related to any historical person.^[7] The name Magog is equally obscure, but may come from the Assyrian *mat-Gugu*, "Land of Gyges", i.e., Lydia.^[8] Alternatively, Gog may be derived from Magog

rather than the other way round, and “Magog” may be code for *Babylon*.^{[lower-alpha 3][9][10]}

The Biblical “Gog and Magog” possibly gave derivation of the name *Gogmagog*, a legendary British giant.^{[lower-alpha 4][11]} A later corrupted folk rendition in print altered the tradition around *Gogmagog* and *Corineus* with two giants *Gog* and *Magog*, with whom the *Guildhall* statues came to be identified.^[12]

2 Judeo-Christian texts



Ezekiel's Vision of the Sign "Tau" from Ezekiel IX:2–7.
—Mosan champlevé panel, mid-12th century.

2.1 Ezekiel and the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, Gog only appears in chapters of the *Book of Ezekiel*.^{[lower-alpha 5][14]}

The *Book* records a series of visions received by the 6th-century BC prophet *Ezekiel*, a priest of *Solomon's Temple*, who was among the captive during the *Babylonian exile*. The exile, he tells his fellow captives, is God's punishment on *Israel* for turning away, but God will restore his people to *Jerusalem* when they return to him.^[15] After this message of reassurance, chapters 38–39, the *Gog* oracle, tell how *Gog of Magog* and his hordes will threaten the restored *Israel* but will be destroyed, after which God will establish a new *Temple* and dwell with his people for a period of lasting peace (chapters 40–48).^[16] The *Gog*

oracle, as internal evidence indicates, was composed substantially later than the chapters around it.^{[lower-alpha 6][17]}

“Son of man, direct your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince, leader of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy concerning him. Say: Thus said the Lord: Behold, I am against you, Gog, the prince, leader of Meshech and Tubal ... Persia, Cush and Put will be with you ... also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you.”^[18]

“*Gog of Magog*” here can be tied to *Magog* the *Japhethite* in *Genesis 10*, even though *Gog's* paternal lineage is not explicitly given, due to the string of other names present: *Meshech*, *Tubal*, *Gomer* are all sons of *Japheth* thus “brothers” of *Magog*; *Togarmah* of “*Beth Togarmah*” is *Magog's* “nephew”.^[19]

Of *Gog's* allies, *Meshech* and *Tubal* were 7th-century kingdoms in central *Anatolia* north of *Israel*, *Persia* towards east, *Cush* (*Ethiopia*) and *Put* (*Libya*) to the south; *Gomer* is the *Cimmerians*, a nomadic people north of the *Black Sea*, and *Beth Togarmah* was on the border of *Tubal*.^[20] The confederation thus represents a multinational alliance surrounding *Israel*.^[21] “Why the prophet's gaze should have focused on these particular nations is unclear,” comments Biblical scholar *Daniel I. Block*, but their remoteness and reputation for violence and mystery possibly “made *Gog* and his confederates perfect symbols of the archetypal enemy, rising against God and his people”.^[22] One explanation is that the *Gog* alliance, a blend of the “*Table of Nations*” in *Genesis 10* and *Tyre's* trading partners in *Ezekiel 27*, with *Persia* added, was cast in the role of end-time enemies of *Israel* by means of *Isaiah 66:19*, which is another text of eschatological foretelling.^[23]

Although the prophecy refers to *Gog* as an enemy in some future, it is not clear if the confrontation is meant to occur in a final “end of days” since the Hebrew term *aharit hayamim* (Hebrew: אחרית הימים) may merely mean “latter days”, and is open to interpretation. Twentieth-century scholars have used the term to denote the eschaton in a malleable sense, not necessarily meaning final days, or tied to the *Apocalypse*.^{[lower-alpha 7][24]} Still, the *Utopia* of chapters 40–48 can be spoken of in the parlance of “true eschatological character, given that it is a product of “cosmic conflict” described in the immediately preceding *Gog* chapters.”^[25]

2.2 Gog and Magog from Ezekiel to Revelation

Over the next few centuries Jewish tradition changed *Ezekiel's Gog from Magog* into *Gog and Magog*.^[27] The process, and the shifting geography of *Gog* and *Magog*,



Gog and Magog besiege the City of Saints. Their depiction with the hooked noses noted by Paul Meyer.^[26]

—Old French Apocalypse in verse, Toulouse MS. 815, fol. 49v

can be traced through the literature of the period. The 3rd book of the *Sibylline Oracles*, for example, which originated in Egyptian Judaism in the middle of the 2nd century BC,^[28] changes Ezekiel’s “Gog from Magog” to “Gog and Magog,” links their fate with up to eleven other nations, and places them “in the midst of *Aethiopian rivers*”; this seems a strange location, but ancient geography did sometimes place Ethiopia next to Persia or even India.^[29] The passage has a highly uncertain text, with manuscripts varying in their groupings of the letters of the Greek text into words, leading to different readings; one group of manuscripts (“group Y”) links them with the “*Marsians and Dacians*”, in eastern Europe, amongst others.^[30]

The *Book of Jubilees*, from about the same time, makes three references to either Gog or Magog: in the first, Magog is a descendant of Noah, as in *Genesis 10*; in the second, Gog is a region next to Japheth’s borders; and in the third, a portion of Japheth’s land is assigned to Magog.^[31] The 1st-century *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, which retells Biblical history from Adam to Saul, is notable for listing and naming seven of Magog’s sons, and mentions his “thousands” of descendants.^[32] The Samaritan Torah and the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made during the last few centuries of the pre-Christian era) occasionally introduce the name of Gog where the Hebrew original has something else, or use Magog where the Hebrew has Gog, indicating that the names were interchangeable.^[33]

Chapters 19:11–21:8 of the *Book of Revelation*, dating from the end of the 1st century AD,^[34] tells how Satan is to be imprisoned for a thousand years, and how, on his release, he will rally “the nations in the four corners of the Earth, Gog and Magog,” to a final battle with Christ and his saints.^[2]

“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the Earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them

for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.”^[35]

2.3 Midrashic writings

After the failure of the anti-Roman *Bar Kokhba* revolt in the 2nd century AD which looked to a human leader as the promised messiah, Jews began to conceive of the messianic age in supernatural terms: first would come a forerunner, the *Messiah ben Joseph*, who would defeat Israel’s enemies, identified as Gog and Magog, to prepare the way for the *Messiah ben David*;^[lower-alpha 8] then the dead would rise, divine judgement would be handed out, and the righteous would be rewarded.^{[37][38]}

The aggadah, homiletic and non-legalistic exegetical texts in the classical rabbinic literature of Judaism, treat Gog and Magog as two names for the same nation who will come against Israel in the final war.^[39] The rabbis associated no specific nation or territory with them beyond a location to the north of Israel,^[40] but the great Jewish scholar Rashi identified the Christians as their allies and said God would thwart their plan to kill all Israel.^[41]

3 Alexander the Great



Land of “Gog i Magog”, its king mounted on a horse, followed by a procession (lower half); Alexander’s Gate, showing Alexander, Antichrist, and mechanical trumpeters (upper left).^{[42][43][44]}

—Catalan Atlas (1375), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale.

(d. 420) with the Scythians and Jordanes (died c. 555) said that Goths, Scythians and Amazons were all the same; he also cited Alexander's gates in the Caucasus.^{[71][lower-alpha 22]} The Byzantine writer Procopius said it was the Huns Alexander had locked out, and a Western monk named Fredegar seems to have Gog and Magog in mind in his description of savage hordes from beyond Alexander's gates who had assisted the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (610–641) against the Saracens.^[73]

4.1 Nomadic identification

As one nomadic people followed another on the Eurasian steppes, so the identification of Gog and Magog shifted. In the 9th and 10th centuries these kingdoms were identified by some with the lands of the Khazars, a Turkic people who had converted to Judaism and whose empire dominated Central Asia—the 9th-century monk Christian of Stavelot referred to Gazari, said of the Khazars that they were “living in the lands of Gog and Magog” and noted that they were “circumcised and observing all [the laws of] Judaism”.^{[74][75]} Arab traveler ibn Fadlan also reported of this belief, writing around 921 he recorded that “Some hold the opinion that Gog and Magog are the Khazars”.^[76] According to the famous Khazar Correspondence (c. 960), King Joseph of Khazaria claimed that his people were the descendants of “Kozar”, the seventh son of Togarmah the Japhethite, though he makes no mention of Gog and Magog.^[77]

After the Khazars came the Mongols, seen as a mysterious and invincible horde from the east who destroyed Muslim empires and kingdoms in the early 13th century; kings and popes took them for the legendary Prester John, marching to save Christians from the Saracens, but when they entered Poland and Hungary and annihilated Christian armies a terrified Europe concluded that they were “Magogoli”, the offspring of Gog and Magog, released from the prison Alexander had constructed for them and heralding Armageddon.^[78]

Europeans in Medieval China reported findings from their travels to the Mongol Empire. Some accounts and maps began to place the “Caspian Mountains”, and Gog and Magog, just outside the Great Wall of China. The *Tartar Relation*, an obscure account of Friar Carpini's 1240s journey to Mongolia, is unique in alleging that these Caspian Mountains in Mongolia, “where the Jews called Gog and Magog by their fellow countrymen are said to have been shut in by Alexander”, were moreover purported by the Tartars to be magnetic, causing all iron equipment and weapons to fly off toward the mountains on approach.^[79] In 1251, the French friar André de Longjumeau informed his king that the Mongols originated from a desert further east, and an apocalyptic Gog and Magog (“Got and Margoth”) people dwelled further beyond, confined by the mountains.^[80]

In fact, Gog and Magog were held by the Mongol to be

their ancestors, at least by some segment of the population. As traveler and Friar Riccoldo da Monte di Croce put it in c. 1291, “*They say themselves that they are descended from Gog and Magog: and on this account they are called Mogoli, as if from a corruption of Magogoli*”.^{[81][82][83]} Marco Polo, traveling when the initial terror had subsided, places Gog and Magog among the Tartars in Tenduc, but then claims that the names Gog and Magog are translations of the place-names Ung and Mungul, inhabited by the Ung and Mongols respectively.^{[84][85]}

An explanation offered by Orientalist Henry Yule was that Marco Polo was only referring to the “Rampart of Gog and Magog”, a name for the Great Wall of China.^[86] Friar André's placement of Gog and Magog far east of Mongolia has been similarly explained.^[80]

4.2 The confined Jews

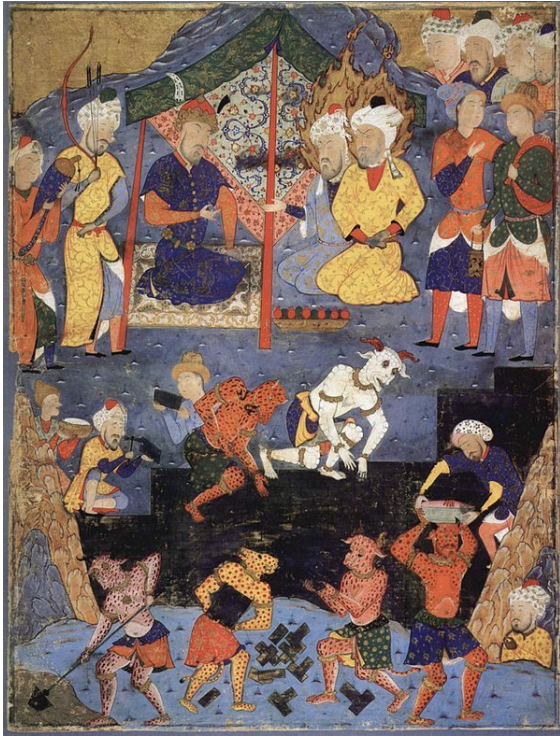
Some time around the 12th century, the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel came to be identified with Gog and Magog;^[87] possibly the first to do so was Petrus Comestor in *Historica Scholastica* (c. 1169–1173),^{[88][89]} and he was indeed a far greater influence than others before him, although the idea had been anticipated by the aforementioned Christian of Stavelot, who noted that the Khazars, to be identified with Gog and Magog, was one of seven tribes of the Hungarians and had converted to Judaism.^{[74][75]}

While the confounding Gog and Magog as confined Jews was becoming commonplace, some, like Riccoldo or Vincent de Beauvais remained skeptics, and distinguished the Lost Tribes from Gog and Magog.^{[81][90][91]} As noted, Riccoldo had reported a Mongol folk-tradition that they were descended Gog and Magog. He also addressed many minds (Westerners or otherwise^[92]) being credulous of the notion that Mongols might be Captive Jews, but after weighing the pros and cons, he concluded this was an open question.^{[lower-alpha 23][83][93]}

The Flemish Franciscan monk William of Rubruck, who was first-hand witness to Alexander's wall in Derbent on the shores of the Caspian Sea in 1254,^[lower-alpha 24] identified the people the walls were meant to fend off only vaguely as “wild tribes” or “desert nomads”,^{[lower-alpha 25][96]} but one researcher made the inference Rubruck must have meant Jews,^[lower-alpha 26] and that he was speaking in the context of “Gog and Magog”.^{[lower-alpha 27][92]} Confined Jews were later to be referred to as “Red Jews” (*die roten juden*) in German-speaking areas; a term first used in a Holy Grail epic dating to the 1270s, in which Gog and Magog were two mountains enclosing these people.^{[lower-alpha 28][97]}

The author of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a 14th-century best-seller, said he had found these Jews in Central Asia where as Gog and Magog they had been imprisoned by Alexander, plotting to escape and join with the Jews of Europe to destroy Christians.^[98]

5 Gog and Magog in Muslim tradition



Iskandar (Alexander) builds a wall to seal Yajuj and Majuj; here aided by dīvs (demons).

— *Persian miniature from a Falnama, 16th cent.*^{[99][100]}



The Monster of Gog and Magog, by al-Qazwini (1203–1283).

The conflation of Gog and Magog with the legend of Alexander and the Iron Gates was disseminated throughout the Near East in the early centuries of the Christian

era.^[101] In the Qu'ran Surah 18, Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog) are suppressed by Dhul-Qarnayn “the two-horned one”, commonly interpreted to mean Iskandar (Alexander the Great).^[102] Dhul-Qarnayn, having journeyed to the ends of the world, meets “a people who scarcely understood a word” who seek his help in building a barrier that will separate them from the people of Yajuj and Majuj who “do great mischief on earth”. He agrees to build it for them, but warns that when the time comes (Last Age), Allah will remove the barrier and Yajuj and Majuj will swarm through.^[103]

The early Muslim traditions were summarised by Zakariya al-Qazwini (d. 1283) in two popular works called the *Cosmography* and the *Geography*. Gog and Magog, he says, live near to the sea that encircles the Earth and can be counted only by God; they are only half the height of a normal man, with claws instead of nails and a hairy tail and huge hairy ears which they use as mattress and cover for sleeping.^[104] They scratch at their wall each day until they almost break through, and each night God restores it, but when they do break through they will be so numerous that “their vanguard is in Syria and their rear in Khorasan”.^[105]

When Yajuj and Majuj were identified with real peoples it was the Turks, who threatened Baghdad and northern Iran;^[106] later, when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad in 1258, it was they who were Gog and Magog.^[107] The wall dividing them from civilised peoples was normally placed towards Armenia and Azerbaijan, but in the year 842 the Caliph Al-Wathiq had a dream in which he saw that it had been breached, and sent an official named Sallam to investigate.^[108] Sallam returned a little over two years later and reported that he had seen the wall and also the tower where Dhul Qarnayn had left his building equipment, and all was still intact.^[109] It is not entirely clear what Sallam saw, but he may have reached the Jade Gate, the westernmost customs point on the border of China.^[110] Somewhat later the 14th-century traveller Ibn Battuta reported that the wall was sixty days’ travel from the city of Zeitun, which is on the coast of China; the translator notes that Ibn Battuta has confused the Great Wall of China with that built by Dhul-Qarnayn.^[111]

6 Modern apocalypticism

In the early 19th century, some Chasidic rabbis identified Napoleon’s invasion of Russia as “The War of Gog and Magog”.^[112] But as the century progressed, apocalyptic expectations receded as the populace in Europe began to adopt an increasingly secular worldview.^[113] This has not been the case in the United States, where a 2002 poll indicated that 59% of Americans believed the events predicted in the Book of Revelation would come to pass.^[114] During the Cold War the idea that Russia had the role of Gog gained popularity, since Ezekiel’s words describing him as “prince of Meshek”—*rosh meshek* in Hebrew—

sounded suspiciously like Russia and Moscow.^[115] Even some Russians took up the idea, apparently unconcerned by the implications (“Ancestors were found in the Bible, and that was enough”), as did Ronald Reagan.^{[115][116]}

Post Cold War-millennarians still identify Gog with Russia, but they now tend to stress its allies among Islamic nations, especially Iran.^[117] For the most fervent, the countdown to Armageddon began with the return of the Jews to Israel, followed quickly by further signs pointing to the nearness of the final battle—nuclear weapons, European integration, Israel’s seizure of Jerusalem, and America’s wars in Afghanistan and the Gulf.^[118] In the prelude to the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, President George W. Bush told Jacques Chirac, “Gog and Magog are at work in the Middle East”. “This confrontation”, he urged the French leader, “is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase His people’s enemies before a new age begins”.^[119] Chirac consulted a professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Lausanne to explain Bush’s reference.^[120]

In the Islamic apocalyptic tradition the end of the world would be preceded by the release of Gog and Magog, whose destruction by God in a single night would usher in the Day of Resurrection.^[121] Reinterpretation did not generally continue after Classical times, but the needs of the modern world have produced a new body of apocalyptic literature in which Gog and Magog are identified as the Jews and Israel, or the Ten Lost Tribes, or sometimes as Communist Russia and China.^[122] One problem these writers have had to confront is the barrier holding Gog and Magog back, which is not to be found in the modern world: the answer varies, some writers saying that Gog and Magog were the Mongols and that the wall is now gone, others that both the wall and Gog and Magog are invisible.^[123]

7 See also

- Armageddon
- Eschatology
- Magog

8 Explanatory notes

- [1] All Reubenites are held to be descendants of Reuben in the view of the Torah. But it is unclear what family relationship Gog’s father Joel has with the sons of Reuben in verse 3.^[3]
- [2] 4Q523 scroll
- [3] The encryption technique is called *atbash*. BBL (“Babylon”) when read backwards and displaced by one letter becomes MGG (Magog).

- [4] The giant mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth in *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136 AD).
- [5] A Gog is mentioned in I Chronicles 5:4, but he is Gog of the tribe of Reuben, an Israelite, and can hardly be the same as the Gog of Ezekiel.^[13]
- [6] Composed between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC
- [7] Tooman’s view is that the “latter days” means “the end of history-as we-know-it and the initiation of a new historical age”.
- [8] The coming of the Messiah ben David “is contemporary with or just after that of Messiah ben Joseph” (van der Woude (1974), p. 527).^[36]
- [9] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.123 and 18.97; *The Jewish War* 7.244–51
- [10] The Ethiopic version derives from the lost Arabic version (Boyle 1979, p. 133). While Budge 1889 does not appear to comment, cf. Budge (1896), *The Life and Exploits of Alexander*, p. 216, fn 1.
- [11] Also called *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*, ed. tr. by E. A. Wallis Budge. It has a long full-title, which in shorthand reads “An exploit of Alexander.. how.. he made a gate of iron, and shut it [against] the Huns”.
- [12] The first invasion, prophesied to occur 826 years after Alexander predicted, has been worked out to fall on 1 October 514; the second invasion on A.D. 629 (Boyle 1979, p. 124).
- [13] The oldest manuscript is recension α . The material is not found in the oldest Greek, Latin, Armenian, and Syriac versions.^[56]
- [14] Recension ϵ
- [15] Recension γ
- [16] Alexander’s prayer caused the mountains to move nearer, making the pass narrower, facilitating his building his gate. This is the aforementioned element first seen in pseudo-Methodius.
- [17] Gog and Magog being absent in the *Alexandreis* (1080) of Walter of Châtillon.
- [18] Note the change in loyalties. According to the Greek version, Gog and Magog served the Belysrians, whom Alexander fought them *after* completing his campaign against Porus.
- [19] “Tus” in Iran, near the Caspian south shore, known as Susia to the Greeks, is a city in the itinerary of the historical Alexander. Meyer does not make this identification, and suspects a corruption of *mons Caspius* etc.
- [20] Branch III, *laisses* 124–128.
- [21] Toulouse manuscript 815, folio 49v.
- [22] The idea that Gog and Magog were connected with the Goths was longstanding; in the mid-16th century, Archbishop of Uppsala Johannes Magnus traced the royal family of Sweden back to Magog son of Japheth, via Suenno, progenitor of the Swedes, and Gog, ancestor of the Goths.^[72]

- [23] Riccoldo observed that the Mongol script resembled Chaldean (Syriac,^[93] a form of Aramaic), and in fact it does derive from Aramaic.^[94] However he saw that Mongols bore no physical resemblance to Jews and were ignorant of Jewish laws.
- [24] Rubruck refers Derbent as the “Iron Gate”, this also being the meaning of the Turkish name (Demir kapi) for the town.^[95] Rubruck may have been the only Medieval Westerner to claim to have seen it.^[92]
- [25] Also “barbarous nations”, “savage tribes”.
- [26] Based on Rubruck stating elsewhere “There are other enclosures in which there are Jews”
- [27] Since Roger Bacon, having been informed by Rubruck, urged the study of geography to discover where the Antichrist and Gog and Magog might be found.
- [28] Albrecht von Scharfenberg, *Der jüngere Titurel*. It belongs in the Arthurian cycle.

9 References

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