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Kafka's Antizionism through a Comparative Analysis of 'Jackals and Arabs' with Judeo-Christian Texts, the Alexander Romance, and the Qur'an

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Abstract: Kafka explores many elements in 'Jackals and Arabs' that are found in the Judeo-Christian tradition of Gog and Magog, the Alexander Romance, and the Qur'anic story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. A comparative analysis of these works reveals Kafka's criticism of the Zionist movement. Kafka rejects Zionist exceptionalism and separatism through the narrator's rejection of the jackals' cause. Kafka's jackals are compared to Gog and Magog, who are portrayed as corruptors of the land in the aforementioned texts. The categorisation of corruptors of the land is significant because this reverses Zionist claims of a profound connection to the land, which Kafka, likewise, reverses when the jackals claim that the desert is their home from which the Arabs should be removed. Zionist avowals of Arab backwardness are countered by Kafka as he makes the Arabs superior, which is also how the indigenous population are depicted in the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions since they are contrasted with the barbarity of Gog and Magog. Finally, the Zionist trope of the European Jewish hero who flees persecution is inverted by Kafka who confers on the narrator a quasi-prophetic/royal status similar to that of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and Alexander the Great.

Keywords: Kafka; antizionism; Qur'an; Alexander the Great; Dhu'l-Qarnayn; the Alexander Romance



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1. Introduction

Published in 1917, Franz Kafka's 'Jackals and Arabs' featured as the first of a pair of 'two animal stories' (*zwei Tiergeschichten*) in *Der Jude*, a monthly magazine founded by Martin Buber and Salman Schocken (Kafka 1917, pp. 488–90). It tells of a man from the north traveling through the desert with a caravan of Arabs. As they rest for the night in an oasis and the Arabs sleep, the man suddenly realises that jackals have surrounded him. The oldest of them addresses the man and tells him that his coming was foretold long ago. He elaborates that they are exiled among the Arabs and he bids him to cleanse the land of impure Arabs who do not eat dead meat, and only eat animals they have sacrificed. At this point, a pair of rusty scissors are brought that are supposed to achieve the task of slitting the throats of the Arabs. The leader of the caravan then appears and whips the jackals, forcing them to retreat. To the surprise of the narrator, the Arab leader is familiar with the jackals' plot and ridicules the jackals' plea, which is apparently made to every European traveller. He then exposes the hypocrisy of the jackals by having a rotting camel carcass placed in front of them. The jackals cannot resist the meat and begin to devour it, even as the leader whips them. The narrator holds back the Arab chief from whipping the jackals further as they eat, and he departs with them.

This story has been interpreted in many ways. Some see it as a commentary on the incommensurability between the exoteric and esoteric (Tauber 1948), or the essential dichotomy between the inexorableness of the external world order and the vain internal yearnings of the disenfranchised (Bruce 2003, p. 156), while others regard it as an indictment of messianic hope that is cherished by the downtrodden (Rubinstein 1967). This study argues that 'Jackals and Arabs' is Kafka's critical assessment of the nascent Zionist

movement. Kafka's criticism becomes apparent when the narrative is read through the lens of the history of Alexander the Great, with whom Kafka was very familiar from an early age (Stach 2017, p. 168), and for whom he had a deep admiration, as attested by his declaration, 'there is no one like Alexander the Great . . . no one' (Stach 2015, pp. 155, 227). Through a comparative analysis of Kafka's work with the Alexander Romance by Pseudo-Callisthenes—a largely fictional and corrupted, but very popular, retelling of Alexander the Great's exploits (Berg 1973)—and the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in the Qur'an, who was believed to be Alexander the Great (see below) and his interaction with Gog and Magog, as well as the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is argued that Kafka commentates on what he deemed to be the fundamental shortcomings of Zionism.

Before interrogating the interplay between the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Alexander Romance, and the Qur'an, it is important to know the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and Ya'jūj Ma'jūj (Gog and Magog) in the Qur'an. The story is from chapter 18, and it is worth citing it in full:

They ask you about Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Say, 'I will give you an account of him'. Surely, We established him on earth and gave him everything he needed. So he followed a road. Until he reached where the sun sets, and he found it setting in a muddy spring (*'ayn ḥamī'a*) with people around it. We commanded, 'O Dhu'l-Qarnayn! Either punish them, or show them kindness'. He replied, 'As for those who do wrong, we will punish them, then they will be returned to their Lord who will punish them yet more severely. And as for those who believe and do good, they will have the best reward, and we shall give them easy commands [to follow]'. Then he followed a road. Until he reached where the sun rises, and he found it rising over a people whom We had given no shelter from it. So it was, and We knew all about him.

Then he followed a road. Until he reached between the two mountains where he found a people who could barely understand anything that was said [to them]. They pleaded, 'O Dhu'l-Qarnayn! Surely, Gog and Magog (Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj) are corrupting the land, so why don't we give you a tax on the condition that you place a barrier between us and them?' He retorted, 'What my Lord has established for me is better [than what you offer], so just help me with some manpower and I will build a rampart between you and them. Give me sheets of iron!' [They continued] until he levelled [the gap] between the two cliffs. He then commanded, 'Blow!' until it was [like] fire. He then instructed, 'Bring me molten copper to pour over this'. So they [Gog and Magog] could not climb over it, nor could they pierce through it. He then remarked, 'This is a mercy from my Lord, but when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will level it to the ground, and the promise of my Lord is true'. And on that day, We will let some of them surge against others, and the horn will be blown, then We will gather them together (Quran 18:83–99).¹

It is the third group of people whom Dhu'l-Qarnayn encounters, after he travels all the way to the west and then all the way to the east, that bears similarities with Kafka's 'Jackals and Arabs'.

That Kafka would have been aware of Dhu'l-Qarnayn is possible from the presence of Abraham Geiger's work in his library, which mentions the Qur'anic character (Geiger 1833, p. 172). But whether he was aware of the Qur'anic version or not, the thematic similarities between the Qur'anic story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and Gog and Magog—especially in the Qur'anic commentary tradition and Judeo-Christian traditions, alongside the Alexander Romance by Pseudo-Callisthenes—with 'Jackals and Arabs' allows a clearer picture to emerge of the true extent of Kafka's criticism of the Zionist movement. This is because comparison of these hitherto neglected sources exposes central themes that Kafka explores in his work. Introducing these texts in an analysis of Kafka's story displays an added dimension that not only reveals Kafka's knowledge of religious texts, which, in the case of

the Judeo-Christian tradition is beyond doubt (Stach 2017, p. 151), but also sharpens his critique of Zionism.

Kafka's works have been read from a Judeo-Christian perspective from the very beginning. Max Brod (d. 1968), 'his closest friend, first editor and biographer, described Kafka as a quasi-religious "sage"' (Weidner 2017, p. 200). William Rubinstein believes that it is specifically the Jewish traditions that were the immediate inspiration for 'Jackals and Arabs'. He writes,

The principal elements in the Jewish Messianic tradition are the pact between Abraham and God, sealed by Abraham's circumcision, by virtue of which the Jews are to inherit the land of Canaan; the scattering of the Jews in the Diaspora; and the coming of the Messiah to destroy the enemies who keep the Jews from the promised land and to restore them to it. The elements of this tradition are found in Kafka's story. All have their roots in the Old Testament but came down to Kafka modified by various rabbinic and popular tradition (Rubinstein 1967, p. 14).

Rubinstein only provides sparse and vague allusions to similarities between the Jewish messianic traditions such as the connection of the knife used to carry out Abraham's circumcision with the pair of scissors in Kafka's story (Rubinstein 1967, p. 16). Kafka, Rubinstein believes, 'could be expected to be quite familiar with this tradition' of messianism (Rubinstein 1967, p. 15). This is a safe assumption as Reiner Stach's seminal work on Kafka's life convincingly shows (Stach 2017, p. 151). Generic complementarities between the two narratives are provided by Rubinstein. For instance, the jackals' dropping their muzzles is said to be a demonstration of prayer, their howls are equated with religious chants, and their reference to cleanliness is likened to 'kosherness' (Rubinstein 1967, pp. 15–16).

A more sustained thematic comparison between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Alexander Romance that Kafka most likely knew about (Stach 2013, pp. 155, 227; 2015, p. 151), with the Qur'anic commentary tradition pertaining to Alexander the Great and his encounter with Gog and Magog uncovers an interpretative dimension that has significant contextual ramifications. This is because the Qur'anic commentary tradition underscores many of the same points of emphases found in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Alexander Romance. However, there are some themes that are highlighted more in this tradition which means the issues Kafka wishes to address become more conspicuous. More generally, introduction of the Qur'an into the mix accentuates the close association between religious texts and literature. Navid Kermani writes eloquently about the shared characteristic of foreignness and unbelonging between Kafka's oeuvre and the Qur'an due to the former's socio-cultural alienness and the latter's exaltation of difference (Kermani 2016). Indeed, the message that resonates so loudly through the Qur'anic corpus is that of the lone prophetic voice speaking against the cacophony of the collective. This affirmation of alterity, as Kermani argues, is also the distinguishing feature of Kafka's works (Kermani 2016).

There are many key elements that 'Jackals and Arabs', the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Alexander Romance, and the Qur'anic story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and Gog and Magog share: (1) the depiction of populations encountered by the protagonist as unclean and irrational, and their numerousness, (2) the nature of their crime that is to be punished, (3) the messiah from Europe, (4) the action of the messiah, and the provision of the instrument for action. Each of these elements are investigated separately.

2. The Depiction of Gog and Magog as Unclean and Irrational, and Their Numerousness

The names 'Gog' and 'Magog' have undetermined etymologies, as elucidated by Emeri van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt in their exhaustive study on the topic (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, pp. 3–4); whether one is derived from the other, or they refer to mythical or historical peoples is unclear (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, p. 3). What is clear is that 'both names became intimately connected in Judaic tradition as symbols of evil powers' and 'eschatological symbols of divine wrath' (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, pp. 3–4). It is significant that the two names are not mentioned together in Genesis 10:2, which

apprises the reader that the sons of Japheth (one of Noah's sons) were 'Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek and Tiras'. More detail is then provided in Ezekiel 38:2 which states, 'Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshek and Tubal; prophesy against him'.² Here there is a pairing of Gog and Magog, but the latter is seen as a geographical location and the former is the ruler of that place. This prophecy has spawned 'a bewildering number of different interpretations' in the Christian tradition (Moskala 2007, p. 243), which means that no decisive conclusion can be reached (Alexander 1974). Even though consensus on the interpretation of the vision of Ezekiel is elusive, it still serves as the foundation of the eschatological significance of Gog and Magog in Judaism and Christianity, as van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt observe (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, p. 5). However, they claim that the Islamic version is also based on this when that is far from certain because the two times Ezekiel (or Dhu'l-Kifl) is mentioned in the Qur'an, there is no connection to Gog and Magog (Qur'an 21:85–86).

Some versions of the Alexander Romance mention that Gog and Magog were fierce warriors, some of whom had blue eyes, with women who were single-breasted and fought more than the men (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, pp. 150–51). Details are provided about how the women carried multiple knives, so that 'if one of them should get into a fight, wherever she stretches out her hand she can lay hold of a knife' (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, p. 151). In contradistinction to the story of Kafka, we are told that 'they eat the raw flesh of everything which dies of theirs; and they drink the blood of men and of animals' (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, p. 151).

There is also mention of the location and size of Gog and Magog, which is crucial to Kafka's story. In Ezekiel 38:15, God addresses Gog, 'You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army'. Also important in 'Jackals and Arabs' is the concept of cleanliness, which is mentioned in Ezekiel 39:24, when God declares 'I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their offenses, and I hid my face from them'. Indeed, there are multiple references to 'cleansing the land' in Ezekiel 39.

The Qur'anic commentary tradition elaborates on the quasi-humanness and impurity of Gog and Magog. Exegetes explain that, although they are the progeny of Adam, Gog and Magog were not given birth by Eve. Instead, the semen of Adam amalgamated with dirt following a nocturnal emission. This means that they are only half-human and impure. This tradition is cited on the authority of Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. 32/652?), a companion of Prophet Muḥammad who was famously a convert from Judaism and continued to consult Jewish texts after his conversion (Anwar et al. 2021). Nevertheless, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), whose exegesis has been vaunted by Norman Calder as the pinnacle of the polyvalent commentary tradition (Calder 1993, p. 110), casts doubt on this tradition because he argues that prophets do not have nocturnal emissions (Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 11, p. 56).

Some exegetes go even further and assert that Gog and Magog are not human at all. The Ottoman-era polymath Abu'l-Thanā' al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), in his encyclopaedic commentary that traverses several genres (Nafi 2002), cites opinions of scholars who maintain that Gog and Magog are from the jinns (Ashqar 1998), although he ultimately rejects this opinion (Ālūsī 1994, vol. 8, p. 359). Kafka seemingly inverts the Qur'anic paradigm by making the supplicants non-human. But as Naama Harel notes, the dichotomy he creates is not between humanity and non-humanity, but between rationality and irrationality (Harel 2020, p. 84). This is the same bifurcation that the Qur'an creates when it focuses on the uncivilised action of Gog and Magog, not even mentioning whether they are human or not. Dhu'l-Qarnayn's immediate cooperation with the supplicants aligns him—and by extension the reader—with rationality and righteousness.

Gog and Magog's crime, described in the Qur'an as 'corrupting the land' (*yufsidūn fi'l-ard*) (Q18:94), evokes a certain animalistic barbarity. In 'Jackals and Arabs' Kafka emphasises that the jackals, despite asserting their superiority, have only their teeth thereby supporting the Heideggerian notion of 'hands' denoting an instrument of intellection. He writes,

We are trying to learn thinking. Perhaps thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet. At any rate, it is a craft, a “handicraft.” “Craft” literally means the strength and skill in our hands (Heidegger 1968, p. 16).

Thinking, just like building a cabinet, requires the instrument of the hands which are a vehicle through which the conceptualisation of thoughts is afforded a physical outlet in the sensible world. Since ‘thinking itself is man’s simplest, and for that reason hardest, handiwork’ (Heidegger 1968, pp. 16–17), it requires hands which become emblematic of rationality. The jackals have only teeth, even though they are able to think. Gog and Magog in the Qur’an, through ‘corrupting the land’, oppose the building that hands carry out. Instead, they destroy and corrupt, which bespeaks their irrationality and savagery. It is this same barbarity that the jackals bid the narrator to carry out, not because they cannot, but because they will not.

Kafka exposes the dichotomy of the jackals’ situation. On the one hand they believe the narrator to be clean, which is why they bid him to kill the Arabs because they are impure. On the other, they believe that all the water in the Nile would not cleanse them if they did, so they ask him to do what they will not. In other words, their hope rests on the fact that the narrator would never kill and eat animals because that would be irrational and impure. Eating carrion is pure because it does not squander the life of the animals. This is conspicuously in contradistinction to the Abrahamic faiths that forbid eating carrion. In Kafka’s story, then, what separates the jackals from the Arabs (according to the jackals), or the rational from the irrational, or the pure from the impure, is not the eating of animals, but the killing. It is this very killing that the jackals implore the narrator to carry out because he is pure. Should he carry out their demand, his rationality and purity, by the jackals’ own definition, would be forfeited. Further, the declaration of the jackal that all the water of the Nile would not be enough to cleanse them if they did such a thing indicates that the impurity this act would confer would be irremovable. Kafka then complicates the matter even more when he gets the Arabs to throw a camel carcass to the jackals. The jackals feast on it, forgetting their hatred of the Arabs. They are fed, Kafka intimates, not by the Arabs, but by the Arabs’ ‘impurity’ of not consuming carrion. Had they consumed carrion, they would not have gifted it to the jackals. It is the ‘impurity’ of the Arabs, therefore, that sustains the jackals.

The Alexander Romance and the Qur’anic exegetical tradition also emphasise the numerosity of Gog and Magog. Pseudo-Callisthenes attributes this to their magic, which makes ‘it appears as if there were a hundred thousand horsemen with him; and by the side of every hundred men there seem to stand one hundred thousand bands of demons’ (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, p. 151). The commentary tradition, on the other hand, attributes their large number to prolific procreation. Qur’anic exegetes do not rely on Judeo-Christian traditions for evidence of the abundance of Gog and Magog as they have prophetic traditions that make the same point. Muḥammad Thanā’ Allāh Pānīpatī (d. 1225/1810), a Sufi master whose commentary became one of the standard texts on the Indian subcontinent (Qadri 1988), adduces a tradition that states,

Gog is a nation, and Magog is a [separate] nation. Each nation has four hundred thousand [members]. A man from among them does not die until he has seen a thousand members of his progeny, each of them carrying weapons (Pānīpatī 1991, vol. 6, p. 66).

Qurṭubī cites three separate prophetic traditions that give different numbers, but they all agree that each male will have a thousand children (Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 11, pp. 56–57). The savagery and immorality of Gog and Magog intimates that they are a force for evil, but what was the specific nature of their crime that made Dhu’l-Qarnayn or Alexander the Great get involved? This is not elucidated in the Qur’an; however, Judeo-Christian sources, the Alexander Romance, and the Qur’anic commentary tradition furnish details on the topic.

3. The Nature of Gog and Magog's Crime

Pseudo-Callisthenes observes that Gog and Magog used to 'eat raw flesh of everything which dies of theirs' and 'drink the blood of men and animals' (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, p. 151). Qur'anic exegetes make similar observations. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), widely regarded as the most influential classical Qur'anic exegete (Saleh 2016), mentions how Gog and Magog ate humans (Ṭabarī 2000, vol. 18, p. 104), a point that is reproduced in many commentaries (Bayḍāwī 1997, vol. 3, p. 293). In a passage that is reminiscent of Pseudo-Callisthenes' work, Ṭabarī writes,

They resemble animals: they eat grass and prey on riding animals and beasts just as predators do; they devour all vermin (*khishāsh*), like snakes and scorpions, and all living things that God has created on earth (Ṭabarī 2000, vol. 18, p. 107).

Pānīpatī writes along the same lines that 'they [Gog and Magog] do not pass by a horse, a wild beast, or a pig, without devouring it, and they devour whoever dies from among them' (Pānīpatī 1991, vol. 6, p. 66). Qurṭubī even cites a similar opinion from Prophet Muḥammad himself which states that 'they do not pass by an elephant, a wild beast, or a pig, without devouring it, and they devour whoever dies from among them' (Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 11, p. 57).

Some versions of the Alexander Romance mention that the wall built by Alexander the Great around Gog and Magog was to contain a disease that was spread by them (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1989, p. 731). In other versions, their crime is said to be the practice of dark magic. They are portrayed as great sorcerers who employ the dark arts to gain victory in battle. A particularly gruesome ritual is delineated that bewitches their enemies:

When they go forth to war, they fetch a pregnant woman, and pile up a fire, and bind her in front of the fire, and cook her child within her, and her belly bursts open and the child comes forth roasted. Then they lay it in a trough and throw water upon its body, and its body melts away in this water; and they take their swords and bows and arrows and spears, and dip them in this water. And to everyone whom this water touches, it appears as if there were a hundred thousand horsemen with him; and by the side of every hundred men there seem to stand one hundred thousand bands of demons, for their sorceries are greater than those of all kingdoms (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, p. 151).

The imagery evoked here is consistent with the savagery of Gog and Magog mentioned in the previous section. However, the Qur'anic commentary tradition and the Alexander Romance generally identify the corruption wrought by Gog and Magog with consuming what should not to be consumed. This is deemed to be a corruption of God's law, whereas the jackals identify these very acts as the corruption that the Arabs have brought about in Kafka's story. Harel points out that the alliance the jackals seek is based on purity, which they equate with eating carrion and raw flesh, as opposed to what the Arabs do, which is kill animals for food (Harel 2020, p. 84). The jackals thus assume that in the north—where the narrator is from—killing animals for food is also regarded as impure. This is the same assumption made by the opposing party who address Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Even though we are not told what the nature of Gog and Magog's corruption is, it is taken for granted that Dhu'l-Qarnayn (and the reader by extension) agrees with the definition of the indigenous people. In addition, Kafka 'exposes the speciesist politics of language' when he employs the term '*fressen*' for what the Arabs do, and '*essen*' for what the jackals do (Harel 2020, p. 86). Although both are used to refer to eating, the former is ordinarily reserved for animals and for eating in an uncivilised manner, whereas the latter is employed for civilised eating by humans (Harel 2020, p. 86). Kafka's inversion here is not detected in the English language where 'eating' is employed for both, neither is it detected in the Arabic where the verb '*akala*' serves both purposes (Lane 2003, vol. 1, p. 71). Nevertheless, Pseudo-Callisthenes and Qur'anic exegetes go to great lengths to denote that the actions of Gog and Magog are uncivilised and the actions of humans are civilised, as opposed to Kafka's jackals who take a contrasting view. Pseudo-Callisthenes mentions that they drink blood, whereas Qur'anic exegetes mention consumption of grass, vermin, wild beasts, and pigs, which are ritually

impure for Muslims (Qur'an, 5:3). It is to put an end to this corruption that the help of the messiah from Europe is sought.

4. The Messiah from Europe

Van Donzel and Schmidt argue that the integral role Gog and Magog play in Jewish messianism was developed in the Targumim (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, p. 8), which were the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible with interpretive glosses (Flesher and Chilton 2011). However, the Targumim mention many versions of Gog and Magog, with different frameworks of how they fit into the overall religious eschatological picture, and different dates for when their war will occur (Strack and Billerbeck 1922). They are generally identified as enemies of God, but a coherent picture of the role they play, or even who will defeat them—the two candidates are Messiah ben David and Messiah ben Joseph—is not provided (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, p. 8). Some scholars, nevertheless, believe that it is the latter who will defeat Gog and Magog because there was a duality of spiritual and political messianism that developed in Judaism, and while Messiah ben David fulfilled the spiritual function, Messiah ben Joseph fulfilled the political one. Joseph Klausner thus writes 'Messiah ben Joseph, [is] an earthly Messiah, who fights against Gog and Magog and falls in battle; and Messiah ben David, [is] a spiritual Messiah, who prepares the world for the Kingdom of God' (Klausner 1955, p. 11). But the various interpretations lead van Donzel and Schmidt to conclude that a 'uniform tradition about Gog and Magog ... does not exist in post-biblical Jewish literature' (Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009, p. 8).

Although the Talmud and Midrash mention Alexander the Great's generous treatment of the Jews when he conquered Jerusalem, it is the Alexander Romance that most Jewish works predicate their story of Alexander's gate on (Bonfils 2013). Even though the superficial commonalities between the Alexander Romance and the narrative of Dhu'l-Qarnayn have led some scholars to conclude that the Qur'an absorbed and retrofitted the story of Alexander's gate to suit its needs (Sukdaven 2019; Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009), the evidence for this seems to be conjectural. This is because there are important differences between the story in the Alexander Romance and the one in the Qur'an.

The Qur'anic narrative of Dhu'l-Qarnayn seems to have very little in common with the Alexander Romance notwithstanding the construction of the gate. The backdrop to the revelation of the narrative is significant in this regard as it involves the Jewish population from Medina. 'Imād al-Dīn ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), one of the most influential late Medieval Qur'anic exegetes (Saleh 2010), who takes a monovalent approach to Qur'anic commentary (Calder 1993), extricating what he believes to be influences of Jewish traditions (*isrā'iliyyāt*) (Tottoli 1999), explains that these verses were revealed because 'the unbelievers of Mecca sent a delegation to the People of the Book (*Ahl al-kitāb*) of Medina asking them about what they could use to test the Prophet, peace be on him, so they said, "Ask him about a man who had travelled much in the world (*rajul ṭawwāf fi'l-arḍ*)"' (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 5, p. 189). The term 'People of the Book' refers to the Jewish and Christian communities (Izutsu 1998), but when specified further with the geographical location of Medina, it means only the Jewish community as there was a sizeable Jewish community there (Strassler 2004, pp. 3–19).

In other words, it was the Jewish community who had knowledge of the person who had travelled extensively and they were the ones who posed the question to Prophet Muḥammad in response to which the verses were revealed. This goes some way to explaining why exegetes were willing to accept Jewish sources to furnish details about the story (Sukdaven 2019; Van Donzel and Schmidt 2009). Yet there is confusion about the identity of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, explains Ibn Kathīr. Many commentators identified him as Alexander the Great when, argues Ibn Kathīr, Dhu'l-Qarnayn was not European and lived before him (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 5, p. 189). It is for this reason that some scholars believe Dhu'l-Qarnayn was actually Cyrus the Great (d. 530 BC) since he was intimately connected with the history of the Jews and liberated them from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon. Indeed, the influential Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (d. 100?) writes in

book eleven of *The Antiquities of the Jews* that Cyrus was called to this mission by God Himself (Josephus 2023). This is not like Alexander who had a more tenuous connection with Jewish history (Wheeler 1998). Cyrus' connection with the Jews and lionisation by Jewish historians, as well as brief mention in the Book of Isaiah (44:28–45:13), means that he was well-known in the Judeo-Christian tradition and Qur'anic exegetes were likewise aware of him.

Yet a great many Muslim exegetes believed that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was Alexander the Great, as Ibn Kathīr concedes. For instance, Ṭabarī writes that 'he was a young man from Europe who came and established the city of Alexandria' (Ṭabarī 2000, vol. 18, p. 92). He does, nevertheless, also cite an opinion in passing that he could have been from Persia (Ṭabarī 2000, vol. 18, p. 93). Ṭabarī's preference, though, clearly is the former. While Ṭabarī at least countenances the possibility that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was not European, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 719/1319), whose commentary became the standard Medieval commentary in Sunni Islam (Saleh 2021), asseverates that he was indeed European. He nevertheless indicates that Dhu'l-Qarnayn's connection to Persia was because he ruled over Europe and Persia (Bayḍāwī 1997, vol. 3, p. 291). It therefore appears that in the Qur'anic commentary tradition a significant coterie of exegetes believed Dhu'l-Qarnayn was Alexander the Great who was, of course, European. Kafka makes the Europeaness of the narrator a key feature of his story (see below).

There is also a difference of opinion as to whether Dhu'l-Qarnayn was a prophet. The origins of this debate are rooted in the Qur'anic text itself, since the verses state that God spoke to him, which would indicate that he was a prophet. Parallels to this are to be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Book of Isaiah mentions how Cyrus was called by God to liberate the Jews. Yet the commentary tradition largely bypasses allusions to the Judeo-Christian tradition because the Qur'an itself mentions God speaking to Dhu'l-Qarnayn and commanding him directly. Bayḍāwī succinctly sums up the debate thus: 'They differ about his being a prophet, despite agreeing that he was a believer and righteous' (Bayḍāwī 1997, vol. 3, p. 291). An important exegete, who is still best known for his elaboration of political theory in Islam, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) (Vogel 2014), explains that there is even a debate about whether he was a king. He writes,

They differ about him: was he a prophet? So some people inclined towards saying that he was a prophet sent [by God], and God gave him dominion over the world. 'Alī ibn 'Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, 'He was neither a prophet, nor a king, but he was a righteous slave [of God]' (Māwardī n.d., vol. 3, p. 337).

Māwardī draws on the authority of the fourth caliph, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), to underscore that not only is Dhu'l-Qarnayn's prophethood in question, but so is his kingship. Again, the majority of exegetes affirm that he was a king due to the Qur'an's declaration that he conquered a large portion of the world, even if they express agnosticism about his prophethood. In fact, the first thing we learn in the Qur'anic story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn is that God 'established him on earth and gave him everything he needed' (Q18:84). This is taken to mean that he was a king according to most exegetes. Qurṭubī even cites a tradition of Prophet Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*) in which he confirms that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was a king (Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 11, p. 46). The Messiah-King motif is also prevalent in the Jewish tradition (Rubinstein 1967). Intimation of royalty plays a fundamental role in Kafka's story when the jackals hold the train of the narrator (see below).

We are told in the Qur'an that Dhu'l-Qarnayn first travels to the most westerly point of the known world where the sun sets (Q18:85–86), and then to the most easterly point where it rises (Q18:89–90). Only after this does he follow a different path that leads him between the mountain ranges (Q18:92–93). This means that the Qur'anic narrative makes it clear that Dhu'l-Qarnayn could only have come to them from the south or the north, although it does not specify which. Ezekiel 38:15 explicitly states that Gog and Magog are in the north. Most Qur'anic exegetes, too, agree that the allusion to the mountains means that Dhu'l-Qarnayn travelled due north to get to them (Bayḍāwī 1997, vol. 3, p. 292). The significance of directionality is operationalised by Kafka in 'Jackals and Arabs' who

places great emphasis on the narrator being from the north. This is an inversion of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Rubinstein 1967), possibly imparting that the narrator is not the Messiah-warrior-king of the Old Testament.

The Qur'an then mentions that the people Dhu'l-Qarnayn met at this place had a language that was so radically different to his that they could barely comprehend what he was saying (Q18:93). What is significant here is that the Qur'anic story already mentioned that Dhu'l-Qarnayn travelled to all westerly parts and easterly parts of the known world, yet it does not say that he had problems communicating with any of the peoples he met in those places. It was only the people he met at this place who could barely comprehend him. Comprehensibility also plays a crucial role in Kafka's story. Harel notes that the narrator 'does not marvel at the talking jackal. It is not the jackal's speaking ability that surprises the narrator, but solely the content of his words' (Harel 2020, p. 95). Clayton Koelb observes that it is precisely because the jackals can speak that their cause becomes so urgent since the audience can now identify with them (Koelb 1989, p. 27). In the Qur'anic narrative, the same sentiment is evoked for the opposing party through opposite means: it is only because the people Dhu'l-Qarnayn meets can barely even communicate that their helplessness seems to be amplified. The reader empathises with them even though they have not displayed any disability because not being able to communicate with a foreigner in one's own land is not emblematic of any cognitive impairment. The reaction of Dhu'l-Qarnayn is to help the people against Gog and Magog by constructing a wall.

5. The Action of the Messiah, and the Provision of the Instrument for Action

Alexander constructs an iron and brass gate to trap Gog and Magog, and prophesies that they will escape towards the end of time in the Alexander Romance (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1889, pp. 155–16). While this does not have a direct parallel in Kafka's work in which it is the jackals who bring forward a rusty pair of scissors for the narrator to kill the Arabs, it does in the Qur'anic narrative of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in which the iron and copper used to imprison Gog and Magog explicitly comes from the supplicants.³ But there are other significant differences. For one thing, the pair of scissors are outrageously and exaggeratedly incapable of serving the purpose for which they are brought, underscoring the fact that the jackals are no threat to the Arabs; their hope of cleansing the land of Arabs is a vain one (Harel 2020). This point is driven home by Kafka when he reveals that the Arab chief is well-aware of the jackals' plot, but instead of being threatened by it, he scoffs. In the Qur'anic story and the Alexander Romance, it is Gog and Magog against whom the instrument (iron/brass/copper) is used. We are not told of Gog and Magog's reaction to the plot of Dhu'l-Qarnayn; it is assumed that they are unaware of it. Also, the iron and copper that imprison them is not like the pair of scissors because they are eminently suitable for the task. The reason they are suitable is that it is Dhu'l-Qarnayn himself who clearly asks for the iron and copper, not the supplicants who offer them unbidden. This then begs the question: if the supplicants had the device of Gog and Magog's imprisonment, why did they ask Dhu'l-Qarnayn for help? It could be that they did not have the manpower to execute the plan themselves, even though they help in the construction, as the Qur'an makes clear; or that they lacked the ingenuity for constructing the barrier. Again, we are not given details.

Another key difference between the Qur'anic narrative and Kafka's story is that the jackals ask the narrator to kill all the Arabs, whereas the opposing party in the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn ask him to merely imprison Gog and Magog. The reader is, again, firmly on the side of the supplicants in the Qur'anic story because not only are they behind the cause—they agree, along with Dhu'l-Qarnayn, that there should be no corruption in the land—but they agree also with the punishment for that, which is limited to creating a means of stopping the corruption only. The jackals fail to conscript the narrator and the reader to their cause, not just because of their purported superiority and denigration of the Arabs, but also because their punishment for that is so excessive. This does not mean that the narrator completely abandons the jackals. When he raises his hand to stop the Arab chief whipping

the jackals while they feast on the camel carcass, he insinuates that both the self-regard of the jackals and their disproportionate solution have led him to disregard their plea, yet their cause is not completely without merit. Dhu'l-Qarnayn's whole-hearted commitment to helping the people he meets is on account of the legitimacy of their grievance, which is conferred through ambiguity (since the Qur'an does not expatiate on what 'corrupting the land' specifically means, thereby aligning the reader with Dhu'l-Qarnayn's assessment through ambiguity), and the proportionality of their proposed response.

Kafka's entire story is ostensibly a commentary on the Zionist movement with which he was preoccupied around the time he wrote 'Jackals and Arabs' and for many years after (Stach 2015). Analysis of this work, therefore, cannot ignore the context in which it was written.

6. Kafka's Antizionism in 'Jackals and Arabs'

So central is the theme of Zionism in the story of 'Jackals and Arabs' that Jens Hanssen writes, 'The reluctance of most Kafka scholars to acknowledge that "Jackals and Arabs" is about the question of Palestine is bewildering' (Hanssen 2012, p. 180). Kafka had a complex relationship with Zionism, which is reflected in this story. Early declarations by close associates of Kafka, like Max Brod, Hugo Bergmann, and Felix Weltsch, that Kafka was a committed Zionist have now been superseded by views that he had a more nuanced and fraught relationship with the cause (Bokhove 2004, p. 24; Spector 2004, p. 18). Indeed, Stach's indispensable biography of Kafka's life makes it abundantly clear that not only was Kafka not a Zionist, but attempts by his friends—most notably Brod—to bring him into the fold of Zionism continually fell on deaf ears and was a source of friction between the two (Stach 2015, p. 117), to the extent that Brod became uncomfortable about even broaching the subject in front of Kafka (Stach 2015, p. 119), and he was forced into 'a balancing act: in order to remain on speaking terms with Kafka, he had to drop the role of the propagandist' (Stach 2015, p. 123). Others, like his schoolfriend Bergmann, had to endure Kafka's ridicule on their early zealous Zionism. Indeed, so sustained was Kafka's criticism and scorn that Bergmann was moved to write a letter to his friend about the 'bitterness that had built up in him over the years, a bitterness that could not be brushed off in a simple conversation' (Stach 2017, p. 189). Brod and Weltsch, therefore, resorted to indirect overtures like asking him to take up the editorship of *Der Jude* that published Zionist propaganda (Lappin 1997). Not only did Kafka decline, but he thought the idea ludicrous (Stach 2015, p. 481).

It is evident from Kafka's library that he was very interested in the Palestine question (Born 1990, pp. 163–65; Hanssen 2012, pp. 192–93). In fact, Stach mentions how it remained a central concern of his for many years (Stach 2015). It is also significant that 'Kafka wrote "Jackals and Arabs" during the war-induced hiatus in Jewish immigration to Palestine, only half a year before the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 committed the British government to support a Jewish national home in Palestine' (Hanssen 2012, pp. 167–68). It is therefore axiomatic, given Kafka's immense interest in the issue and the time he wrote the story, that Zionism would be one of the many themes he explores in it. In fact, '[t]o this day, "Jackals and Arabs" represents a rare European account—fictional or nonfictional—in which the violent nature of Zionism's designs on Palestine is countered by an Arab protagonist whose narrative of resistance ... Kafka renders empathetically' (Hanssen 2012, p. 169).

A close reading of 'Jackals and Arabs' reveals that it is critical of Zionist ambitions. Niels Bokhove convincingly argues that Kafka's desire to move to Palestine was just connected to his deep interest in horticulture. Thus, his Zionism was a personal quest to carve out an agricultural life 'suitable for himself' (Bokhove 2004, p. 58). Stach elaborates that Kafka's interest in a rural life was certainly not shared by his friends, like Brod and Weltsch, for whom the move to Palestine was predicated on political motivations (Stach 2015, p. 203). Above all, however, Kafka considered emigrating to Palestine because it would allow him to maintain the relationships that he had so long cherished, and certainly not because he believed in the movement. As Stach writes, Kafka's 'plans [to go to Palestine]

... were not an outgrowth of Zionist belief but rather—just as ten years earlier, when he first met Felice Bauer—they arose from personal relationships and remained dependent on them’ (Stach 2015, p. 492). This was in stark contrast to political Zionism that drew on the concept of *Volk*, or the Jewish collective, as opposed to the individual (Vogt 2015). Kafka was critical of this idea, and he

deliberately avoided invoking the word *Volk* and related language, and there is no known instance of his ever having used the word affirmatively—not to mention normatively—prior to 1920. Instead, he championed compassion, freedom from prejudice, and basic sincerity. Rhetoric had no place here; only devotion to people mattered (Stach 2015, p. 117).

If there was a progression and evolution of his views on the Zionist project, it ‘alternated between irony and scepticism to antagonism’ (Bokhove 2004, p. 54). Stach makes it clear that Kafka’s first impression of Buber’s famous three lectures on Zionism in 1909 and 1910 was indifference; he thought the emphasis on the collective through terms like the ‘Jewish soul’ and ‘Jewish blood’ was at its core hollow (Stach 2017, pp. 424–25). The lectures Buber delivered bored Kafka, and his writings Kafka regarded as ‘tepid things’ (Stach 2013, p. 62). Not only were the grandiose ambitions and ramifications of Zionism against the humility that Kafka so fervently preached, which is why he found it ‘repulsive at times’ (Stach 2013, p. 63), but ‘[h]e even experienced Zionism as an obstacle to his literary activity’ (Bokhove 2004, p. 52), which was so dear to his heart and for which he sacrificed almost every other endeavour (Shaked 2004, p. 243). It is this very theme of self-grandiosity that he so scathingly critiques in ‘Jackals and Arabs’ (see below).

This aspect of superiority and consequent separatism is one of the main traits of Zionist literature according to Ghassan Kanafani (Kanafani 2022, pp. 91–94; Hawa 2023, p. 84). Kanafani argues that even before Kafka’s birth, Zionist literature had already evolved into a literature of separatism and Jewish exceptionalism that presaged political Zionism. He cites Benjamin Disraeli’s *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* as a case-in-point (Kanafani 2022, p. 60). Kanafani explains that in this work, ‘Disraeli showcases a Jewish Zionist hero around half a century before the birth of the Zionist movement in Basel, where he rejects any chance of social integration’ (Kanafani 2022, p. 60). It is noteworthy, adds Kanafani, that Disraeli introduces ‘a Zionist hero for the first time instead of a solely Jewish one’ (Kanafani 2022, p. 61). The separatism and exceptionalism that Disraeli’s Zionist hero promulgates is what Kafka so stridently critiques when the Jackals speak of their purity and superiority, and the narrator eventually rejects their pleas. Seen against the backdrop of the story of Gog and Magog—who were unequivocal corruptors and enemies of God—this condemnation of purported superiority when one is actually the corruptor becomes even more vehement. Indeed, as Stach notes, Kafka was extremely nervous about the publication of ‘Jackals and Arabs’ in *Der Jude* because of the depiction of Jews as jackals who were ‘pushy and servile’, whilst ‘insisting on their own “purity”, yet they greedily devour the carrion thrown before them’ (Stach 2015, p. 178). Kafka exposes the moral vacuity and unconcealed racism of the Disraelian declaration that ‘Jews are ordained on historical and religious grounds to assume the moral and intellectual leadership of the universe’ (Kanafani 2022, p. 61).

Another trope of Zionist literature, says Kanafani, is the ‘mercenary and backward Arab enemy’ (Hawa 2023, p. 84). Kanafani explains that the ‘mental and civilisational backwardness’ of the Arabs is portrayed ‘as an incurable disease’ (Kanafani 2022, p. 92). Instead, Kafka depicts Arabs as superior to the jackals. Stach writes,

The highly educated readers of *Der Jude* were far more likely to be shocked by the extremely positive depiction of the Arabs, whom the Zionists promised participation in the economy, education, and hygiene “according to European standards” (while they were often regarded merely as a reservoir of cheap labor by the Jewish immigrants in Palestine) (Stach 2015, p. 178).

It is the jackals who are backward in Kafka’s work. Again, seen through the lens of the narrative of Gog and Magog, the contrast between the jackals, or Gog and Magog—who

are consummate corruptors of the land—and the obedient indigenous population that is aided by God, is even more stark.

The connection to the land is also a feature of Zionist literature, as Kanafani informs the reader. The “barbarism of the Arabs” is manifested through ‘their sheer lack of connection to the land, which they are said to have ruined over generations’ (Kanafani 2022, p. 92). This is contrasted with the Zionist who has a profound and religious connection to the land. Kafka rejects the historical and religious claim to the land in ‘Jackals and Arabs’ when the jackals allege that the desert is their home, and they wish to rid it of the Arabs. It is important to note that in the story of Gog and Magog, even though their corruption of the land is not up for debate, the opposing side only ask for their imprisonment and not banishment from the land or murder; in other words, the connection to the land is not severed (see above).

Finally, the Europeaness of the hero is another feature of Zionist literature according to Kanafani (Kanafani 2022, p. 92): ‘The hero comes from Europe, in most cases, as a result of apocalyptic persecution’. The story of Gog and Magog and the Alexander Romance highlight this trait of the hero but, just as in Kafka’s work, the hero is not fleeing from persecution; rather, he is a royal/prophetic figure. Kafka derides the Zionist motif of the persecuted European Jewish hero by assigning to the narrator a quasi-prophetic/royal status that is found in the story of Dhu’l-Qarnayn and Alexander the Great. Significantly, the Zionist hero fights gallantly, despite not wanting war (Kanafani 2022, pp. 96–97), whereas Kafka’s hero—although he holds back the Arab chief’s hand when he whips the jackals—ultimately, walks away.

Not even the horrific and vicious displays of anti-Semitism in November 1920 in Prague could dampen Kafka’s condemnation of Zionism. Kafka was well-aware of anti-Semitism and had experienced it from his childhood (Stach 2017, p. 156), yet he did not see Zionism as a solution to Jew-hatred (Bokhove 2004, p. 54; Kafka 1986, p. 417). In fact, in ‘Jackals and Arabs’ Kafka seems to share Yosef Haim Brenner’s view that Zionism, far from being the solution to Jew-hatred, was a means of its metastasis (Fleck 1983). His explicit proclamation to his fiancée Felice Bauer that he was not a Zionist bears out this interpretation (Kafka 1973, p. 501). It was for personal and ‘social reasons only, Kafka “feigned” being a Zionist, but in reality, deep inside himself, he was not’ (Bokhove 2004, p. 58).

Kafka’s literary output is saturated with scars of the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire that brought an end to ‘solidarity among nations’ (Shaked 2004, p. 254). It is for this reason that he could not support the usurpation that Zionism called for. Many scholars thus argue that Kafka’s pronounced anti-Zionism is given free rein in ‘Jackals and Arabs’ where he ‘exposed the rotten roots of Zionism’ (Hanssen 2012, p. 177). Others argue that Kafka’s depiction of Arabs is redolent of the father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl’s (d. 1904) (Herzl 1917), who uses the term ‘*schmutzige Araber*’ (dirty Arabs) in *Altneuland* (Herzl 2023, p. 20). The old jackal addressing the narrator says in remarkably similar language, ‘*Schmutz ist ihr Weiß; Schmutz ist ihr Schwarz*’ (Dirt is their white; dirt is their black)’ (Kafka 2023). However, the two statements, despite their ostensible similarity, are very different because in Kafka’s case, the jackal is giving his perception of the Arabs, which is ultimately rejected by the narrator. Indeed, as Iris Bruce observes, ‘Kafka is caricaturing the concept of the Chosen People who appear . . . intolerant of Arab culture’ (Bruce 2003, p. 154). She, however, argues that Kafka was a Zionist and that in ‘Jackals and Arabs’ he literalises anti-Semitic tropes, specifically, the militant Arab slogan: ‘Palestine is our land, and the Jews our dogs’, when the Arab chief declares that the jackals are ‘our dogs; finer dogs than any of yours’ (Bruce 2007).

It is the myriad interpretative possibilities that Kafka creates that have led to his work being received in completely different ways in the Arab world. Atef Botros expatiates on the triphasic reception of Kafka in the Arab world from 1939 to the present time. He explains that initially Kafka’s secularisation of religious texts was highly influential among the Egyptian literati, especially Taha Hussein (Botros 2009, pp. 1–98). The second phase saw Kafkaesque motifs and themes interrogated by the Arab intelligentsia following translation

of his works into Arabic (Botros 2009, pp. 99–123). Finally, from 1971 onwards there began intense debate as to Kafka's relationship to Zionism in increasingly politicised and polarised readings of his works (Botros 2009, pp. 124–71), especially 'Jackals and Arabs' (Botros 2009, pp. 172–226). Botros elaborates that this work elicited radically different interpretations among the German Jewish and Arab audiences because while the former read the work in the context of Arab-Jewish relations against the tragic backdrop of the Holocaust (Botros 2009, pp. 183–90), the Arabs necessarily read it in light of the Six-Day War of 1967 (Botros 2009, p. 191).

By introducing the interpretation of the jackals as Gog and Magog, this study reveals that Kafka was commenting on the 'corruption' of Zionism. The self-aggrandisement that Buber preached in his lectures on Zionism and which Kafka found so anathema (Stach 2013, p. 62; Stach 2017, pp. 424–25), is replicated in the narrator's rejection of the jackal's cause (Hanssen 2012, p. 184). Those who argue that Kafka was a Zionist (Bruce 2007), and that the Arabs are instigators of violence against the jackals misrepresent Kafka's intentions. The Arabs may be the ones exerting violence against the jackals, but it is 'in self-defence' and in the face of the imminent threat of 'ethnic cleansing' of their race by the jackals (Hanssen 2012, p. 184). This is the same as the population terrorised by Gog and Magog who seek their imprisonment; they do so out of self-defence (see above). Kafka's Arabs in the story are not innocent, of course, but 'their right to exist is not questioned', and even in their situation, they are portrayed with a generosity of spirit that gainsays the reductionistic reading of many Arab and Zionist scholars alike (Hanssen 2012, p. 184). Kafka's various allusions to the jackals' numerousness and savagery—emblematised by their swarming around the narrator and biting down on his jacket and shirt, to which the narrator pointedly objects—demonstrates the parallels with Gog and Magog who are savage and abundant in number (see above).

Comparison of 'Jackals and Arabs' with the story of Gog and Magog also displays Kafka's exposition of the tension between the Arabs and the Zionists, which were no secret to anyone who read the newspapers (Stach 2015, p. 494). The indigenous population retaliate to Gog and Magog's aggression in the same way as the Arabs. Viewing the jackals as literary incarnations of Gog and Magog—who are portrayed as enemies of God that corrupt the land in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions—throws Kafka's anti-Zionist intentions into sharp relief. But above all, Kafka's multifaceted work conjures a nuanced picture of a tragic and ineluctable circle of violence created and perpetuated by religion and culture on both sides (Bruce 2003, p. 154).

7. Conclusions

The foregoing has demonstrated that Kafka explores many elements in 'Jackals and Arabs' that are found in the Judeo-Christian tradition of Gog and Magog, the Alexander Romance, and the Qur'anic story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. A comparative analysis of these works reveals the severity of Kafka's criticism of the Zionist movement. Kafka rejects Zionist exceptionalism and separatism through the rejection of the narrator when the jackals proclaim their purity and superiority, and try to enlist him to their cause. If the jackals are Gog and Magog, then their declaration of superiority rings even more hollow since they are portrayed as unequivocal corruptors of the land. The categorisation of corruptors of the land is important because it reverses Zionist claims of a profound connection to the land, which Kafka, likewise, reverses when the jackals claim that the desert is their home, which needs to be cleansed of the Arabs. Zionist avowals of Arab backwardness are countered by Kafka as he makes the Arabs superior, which is also how the indigenous population are depicted in the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions since they are contrasted with the barbarity of Gog and Magog. Finally, the Zionist trope of the European Jewish hero who flees persecution is inverted by Kafka who confers on the narrator a quasi-prophetic/royal status similar to that of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and Alexander the Great.

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Notes

¹ All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

² The citations of the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version.

³ There are two important issues (pointed out by one of the astute reviewers) that arise with the explicit mention of iron in the Alexander Romance and the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. The first is whether the militant Zionist, Vladimir Jabotinsky (d. 1940), was aware of these stories and thus influenced by them in his revisionist manifesto 'The Iron Wall'. This manifesto states that there could never be voluntary agreement with the Arabs and a figurative iron wall should be established between the Arabs and the Jews, that is, a complete separation of economy, military, and culture, which would eliminate all hope of the Arabs ever ridding themselves of the Jews (Jabotinsky 1923). Unfortunately, despite the obvious similarities between the metaphor of 'The Iron Wall' and the construction of an iron wall by Alexander and Dhu'l-Qarnayn, there is no explicit evidence to suggest that Jabotinsky knew about these stories. The central importance he gives to iron in his novel, *Samson* (Jabotinsky 1986), in which he creates 'a literary portrait of the "Iron Wall" idea' (Conforti 2011, p. 581), would intimate that he perhaps amalgamated the Biblical story of Samson with the centrality of iron in the Alexander Romance and the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Jabotinsky, as is evident from his story, does not refer very often to the Biblical narrative (Natkovich 2020), instead choosing to carve out a different narrative based on the key notion of iron, as stated, in addition to the idea of kingship (Jabotinsky 1986). These two concepts are also fundamental to the Alexander Romance and the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, as this work demonstrates. The second issue is whether Kafka was aware of the Jabotinsky's 'The Iron Wall', and thus 'Jackals and Arabs' is an indictment of the revisionism Jabotinsky propagates in this work. It is a matter of record that Jabotinsky was known to Kafka because he watched the Zionist propaganda film *Shivat Zion* in Prague in October 1921 (Hanssen 2012, p. 193). In this film, Jabotinsky appears alongside Winston Churchill and Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner. Yet Kafka is thoroughly unmoved by the film and hardly mentions it in his diary (Hanssen 2012, p. 194). It is possible that Kafka was aware of 'The Iron Wall', and he subverts the notion of Arab backwardness that Jabotinsky promulgates in that work when he declares that 'Culturally they [the Arabs] are five hundred years behind us' (Jabotinsky 1923). Nevertheless, this was a familiar trope that Kafka knew about and he did not need to read 'The Iron Wall' in order to be exposed to it. Therefore, in the absence of clear evidence, it would be more judicious to accept that although Kafka knew about Jabotinsky, it is uncertain whether he critiques 'The Iron Wall' through 'Jackals and Arabs'.

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