12

WALLS, WONDER, AND THE EDGES OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

Travis Zadeh

There is something that does love a wall. Our political horizons brim with them. So do our fantasies. For years, nativist crowds chanted "Build the wall" at rallies and demonstrations, while millions of viewers followed *Game of Thrones*, George R. R. Martin's medieval epic that has as one of its central plot lines a sprawling wall of stone and ice guarded by both men and magical spells, separating the living from the dead.

In a time marked by increasing identitarianism, it is not entirely surprising to encounter walls erected in our politics and entertainment. Not too long ago, politicians and pundits started to debate what the Middle Ages could teach us about the efficacy of walls, in response to a US president who asserted that fortifications along the southern border offered a tested defensive strategy taken from the medieval past (Gabriele 2019; Petri 2019). Where "the political suffuses the ordinary," one may well find a certain pessimism and cruelty beholding the storied proscenium of politics as theater and theater as politics (Berlant 2011, 230; Hsu 2019).

The medievalism of today's white supremacists takes its cues from the social nationalism of European fascists who also found the medieval to be a generative repertoire (Chan 2017; Gluckman 2017; Kim 2017; Schuessler 2019; cf. Utz 2017, 39–52). Like Hydra, the many-headed serpent, such medievalism takes numerous shapes. Neo-Nazis celebrate their militarism in the honor of Vikings and Crusaders, while the press, foreign policy analysts, and politicians regularly characterize jihadi militants, as well as ordinary Muslims, as motivated by a barbaric and medieval ideology—equated, in certain quarters, with monsters beyond the gates

(Pinfari 2019, 101–21). Many US legal authorities and ideologues who justified the use of torture at the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism premised their arguments on the grounds that medieval brutality was sadly necessary as Muslims only understood the language of violence (Holsinger 2007, 2016; Spiegel 2008; Sheehi 2011).

The forward progress implied in the historiography of the Middle Ages is designed to mark off the limits of civilization. It is in this context of boundary making that white supremacists and nativists wave their banners and pound their shields as self-appointed guardians of civilization, protecting the nation and the homeland against an onslaught of religious and racial others. Inversely, as a mechanism for defining the West, this particular temporal progression also lends conceptual ballast to the Muslim world as a coherent spatial category. The epoch-marking terms of enlightenment and modernity serve to affirm the supremacy of Western rationality, which has awoken from a stupor of medieval ignorance and superstition.

The medieval provides a specific teleology that leads through the Renaissance, the Age of Exploration, and the Enlightenment and culminates in modernity. The argument goes that as Muslims did not enjoy these stages of history, they remain, in some basic sense, in the throes of medieval darkness. The normalization of Islamophobia in political discourses across the world is merely one measure of a heightened attention to solidifying external boundaries. In the social imaginary of liberalism as an ideology of the secular and the democratic, Islam has played a shadowy archenemy, veiled in countless images of fanaticism, irrational traditionalism, and tyrannical oppression (Massad 2015; Devji and Kazmi 2019; cf. Al-Azmeh 1993, 11–12, 24–26).

These oppositional structures unfold not so much in geography but in the contours of the imagination. Like all ideological configurations, the boundaries of Western civilization are products of the mind and thus must be cultivated and asserted, generation after generation. This is true not only for the territorial or conceptual coherence of either the West or Europe but also for the very idea of civilization itself (Asad 2003, 172; Mazlish 2004). As with group formation in general, the common vocabulary, heritage, symbols, and ideology said to compose Western civilization must be continually restated and reaffirmed. This boundary work marks Muslims as quintessentially unintegrated and inadmissible (Zadeh 2021).

In the grand historical narratives that condition the possibilities of collective thought, the metonym that sets Islam against the West offers an evident and transparent postulate for self-definition. The juxtaposition generates an endless series of interrogations: Is Islam fundamentally hostile? Can Muslims be assimilated? Will they seek to implement Sharia law? Do they hate freedom? Can

they have fun? Often posed as headlines, these queries animate our news, entertainment, and the language of domestic and foreign policy. It is a logic that resists any manner of synthesis. Here, as elsewhere, this definitional grammar conditions the contours of what can be thought or articulated. Importantly, such rhetoric need not have an actual relation to any particular group, body, practice, or belief to be politically powerful or motivating.

In addition to specific locations and ways of knowing, the conceptual borderlands drawn around the West are rooted in discrete visions of history. Our present is shaped not only by the material conditions of our past but also by the particular ways of invoking, imagining, and locating it. Theories to account for a great divergence, where Western powers emerged as hegemons of the world in political, economic, and technological terms, often proceed with triumphalist postures of exceptionalism mixed with thin stories of Oriental decline, stagnation, and superstition. Rather than interrogating the material and historically contingent factors that made the global conquest of capital possible, much time has been spent pondering the essential primitivism of the conquered and the unique genius of the triumphant (e.g., Huff 1993; Ferguson 2011).

In performative terms, it is here helpful to think of the notion of disqualification as a means of interrogating the "political forces, social cues, and moral virtues" that produce qualified knowledge, while also marginalizing other ways of knowing (Foucault 1980, 82–86; Gandhi 1998, 43; Stoler 2002a, 159–60; 2002b, 95). To recognize that knowledge systems are also evaluative invites a fuller engagement with the ethical implications and material conditions that govern the production and consumption of scholarly labor. In this current political landscape drenched in nativism, speaking out against Islamophobia is certainly a noble and necessary task.

Inversely, we would be naive not to acknowledge that a good measure of modern scholarship produced on Islam within the Western academy is motivated by a desire to combat Salafi radicalism and its own appropriations of Islamic history. Observing such motivations, stated or unstated, may help to historicize the values governing the language of academic and scientific objectivity (Daston and Galison 2007). Scholarship is always invested in specific evaluative systems. These values are not only historically conditioned; they are also constantly unfolding.

The often pithy narratives that condition how we come to view history as a "collective, singular subject" are intertwined with specific ethical and epistemic frameworks for understanding being, agency, and the possibilities of human flourishing. The secular frame of a disenchanted physical universe serves as one of the primary postulates for modern historical reasoning. The professional discipline of history has dispensed with any effort to read divine will in the annals

of human strife. Such logic predicates both history and literature as consummately secular modes of viewing and fathoming the world (Asad 2003, 41–43). But the posture of disenchantment for both historical endeavors and social critique produces its own forms of estrangement that can make fathoming all the varieties of wonder and rarity that we encounter in the past and the present rather vexing.

The Containment of Wonder

One response to this dilemma can be seen in efforts to "re-enchant, if not the world, at least the historical profession." This is precisely the terrain covered by Caroline Walker Bynum, who turns for inspiration to the medieval Latin history of wonder, not as a form of assimilation, conquest, or possession but rather as a "cognitive, perspectival, non-appropriative, and deeply respectful" mode for appreciating "the specificity of the world." In a compellingly crafted argument, Bynum concludes that this particular configuration of wonder, from its Latin roots in *admiratio*, should be the special concern of the historian. And yet, she is quick to recognize that history writing is always situated and perspectival and that such awareness may shatter "the possibility of writing any coherent account of the world" (Bynum 1997, 2, 24–25).

To be sure, the posture of detachment, of wondering at a distance, can easily turn attention away from the material means, social mechanisms, and contextual specificity by which knowledge is produced in the present. The illusion of scholarly neutrality and disinterest is designed to obtain authority through objective distance. These paratexts are no less strange and awe-inspiring, as they animate not only what we study and why, but how we go about doing so.

Early in the written record, wonder, as a form of perplexity and curiosity, came to represent a prime means for fathoming the world and our place in it. This theme is frequently traced back to Plato and his famed student Aristotle, who famously opens the *Metaphysica* with the argument that wonder arises out of a curiosity to uncover the puzzles of existence, leading from curiosity to contemplation and ultimately concluding with knowledge of truth. This idea, as Bynum and others have demonstrated, has a lasting influence in Latinate discourses on wonder as an affective disposition (Llewelyn 2001).

Yet similar statements can also be made about the epistemic and aesthetic influence of Aristotelian *thaumazein* in the formative development of Arabic philosophy. Amazement, perplexity, and wonder as the basis for obtaining wisdom animate a good deal of early Arabic writings on knowledge, nature, and being. Such wonder talk not only shapes classical Arabic and Persian letters but also

runs throughout Islamic theodicy, philosophical optimism, natural history, and occult learning. There is a case to be made that as a means for conceptualizing the world, the language of wonders and rarities (*ʿajāʾib-o-gharāʾib*) functions as one of the primary aesthetic and cognitive methods for ordering the broad historical contours of Islamic thought, from the full array of sciences and arts to the very constitution of the cosmos.

Merely drawing attention to these areas of conceptual confluence is not to paper over the many points of divergence. Consider, for instance, the famed philosopher-physician Ibn Sīnā, who notably places a psychological emphasis on the mind's sensation of astonishment (*taʿajjub*) as aroused by the imitative quality of image-evoking statements. Further, Ibn Sīnā views imitation (*muḥākāt*) as a source of aesthetic pleasure. Such a line of argumentation locates wonder as a psychological response related to the faculty of representation (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*), the cognitive faculty that is the site of *phantasia* in the Aristotelian tradition of the psyche or soul. For Ibn Sīnā, imitation possesses an element of amazement (*taʿjīb*) that truth or authenticity lacks—a sentiment drawn from his own reading of Aristotelian poetics and psychology (Zadeh 2010, 42–43; Harb 2020, 93–97). By contrast, Bynum suggests that medieval Christian theologians sought to separate *admiratio* from *imitatio*, often out of broader concerns regarding Christological devotion (Bynum 2001, 52–53). In comparative terms, the extent to which this tension between absorbing and admiring at a distance actually bears true for the history of wonder as a cognitive state, as an emotive response, and even as a prelude to pleasure or possession certainly deserves further attention.

On close inspection, it would appear, contrary to what Bynum suggests, that there is a good deal in medieval Latin discourses on wonderment and the mysteries of nature that is indeed concerned not only with cataloguing and explaining—and thereby exerting epistemic control over—but also with possessing and manipulating the full array of phenomena diffused throughout the cosmos (Eamon 1994, 38–90; Truitt 2015, 12–39). The storied adventures of Alexander the Great, who is known in Arabic Hermetic literature as a master of perfect nature (*al-ṭibāʿ al-tāmm*), provide a concise inventory for this variety of wonder as an articulation of imperial desire, if also an emotive impetus with therapeutic and practical ends. Cast as a natural philosopher, the world conqueror Alexander is a frequent guide in classical Arabic and Persian to ingenious devices and the wonders of creation, as he is in Greek and Latin. His famed teacher Aristotle dutifully records the special properties (*khawāṣṣ*) of sundry substances that Alexander uncovered on his conquests. The wonderous and strange properties hidden throughout existence were generally known in Latin as *qualitates occultae*; they were frequently catalogued, mined, extracted, tested, and consumed in compendiums

of natural history and the secrets of creation that promote wonder very much as a prelude to possession. Wonders were not just far from home at the margins of existence; they could be encountered through all manner of quotidian fare, stretching through the cosmos from the gnat's wings to the daily motions of the planets.

It was Galen, after all, who turned to the wonders (*thaumata* in Greek, translated as *ʿajāʾib* in Arabic) of human anatomy in a paean to the perfect wisdom (*sophia/ḥikma*) of a divine creator, in true teleological fashion. It is this sensibility that leads the Persian natural philosopher al-Qazwīnī, following the theologian al-Ghazālī before him, to argue that wonder does not end by merely uncovering the cause behind a given phenomenon, as Aristotle would appear to have had it. Rather, beholding the innumerable wonders of creation is a basis for ethical discipline and spiritual pursuit. Such a contemplative practice leads to a greater appreciation of divine wisdom by seeking to continually see the world anew (Zadeh 2023).

Needless to say, writings on natural wonders circulated widely in countless languages—translated, repurposed, expanded, absorbed, and consumed. There is much in these elite, pre-industrial formations of philosophy, natural hierarchy, and imperial history that made them intelligible and interchangeable. Yet there is also a good deal of difference. Certainly, distinct theological and ideological commitments framed the various means of engaging this broader universe of ideas.

While strange creatures, often referred to as *gharāʾib*, populate Arabic and Persian collections of natural wonders, they generally abide in a world where evil has no ontological foundation in metaphysics, coded within a larger cosmology of Islamic theodicy of divine perfection and order. Yes, there are savages and all manner of beasts and barbarians. But this spectrum of difference represents a notable contrast to the various ideas of monstrosity that develop in Latin Christendom and then are transposed onto Africa, Asia, and the New World (Davies 2016, 13–17, 30–39). Thus, when confronting hybrid forms of animals and humans found throughout history, from Herodotus and Pliny to al-Qazwīnī and Mandeville and beyond, we should ask not only are they races, as they are frequently called today (Mittman 2015), but also are they truly monstrous, in the sense of uniformly representing baleful and unnatural deformity. It turns out that as categories, monsters and monstrosity are not nearly as universal or static as the modern scholarly usage that follows after them would suggest (Wengrow 2014, 108–12). Similarly, while there is much to be said about shared languages of bigotry, xenophobia, and climatic determinism, classical Islamic discourses, in all their variety, do not follow the same historical patterns or evaluative frameworks that give birth to the modern category of race (Gandhi 2022; cf. Anidjar 2015).

Yet, there remain numerous areas of conceptual overlap that put Arabic and Persian writings in conversation with a much broader array of ideas—wonderment

FIGURE 12.1. Voyages of Sir John Mandeville, in a collection composed circa 1410, known as *Livre des merveilles du monde*, Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, MS Français 2810, fol. 210a, featured in Bynum (1997, 25) as "Men carrying a western Marvel, the barnacle goose born from trees, meet wise men from the East bearing their comparable marvel, the vegetable lamb."

is merely one among many (Karnes 2015, 2022). Today to discuss the history of wonder as a prerequisite of philosophy without gesturing to developments beyond the confines of Latin Christendom is to risk a certain provincialism. To be sure, Bynum does evoke the wonders of the East, long part of a wider imagined geography. But as in the texts that contain them, Easterners, even when wise, are addressed largely as foils to the strange practices "back home" or as uncanny vehicles for wonders and themselves as objects of curiosity (figure 12.1). Even though they may well share an equivalent economy of marvels, the vocabulary of their wonderment and their intellectual capacity to deploy it, even when used for similar ends, are left ignored. Rather, Latin Christendom is used as the grounds for generalization, offered as the conceptual inspiration for the historian to reenchant the profession through a wonderment that is both a mode and a method of historical inquiry. In less generous hands, such a narrow focus on Western Christians as agents of thought and emotion worthy of our exclusive attention and theoretical elaboration can lead to rather parsimonious treatments of intellectual and social history that occult from view contiguous and overlapping fields of concern. Such genealogies easily reinforce the false notion that ancient Greek

learning was the unique prerogative of Europe or that Jews, Christians, and Muslims have occupied radically distinct ethical and intellectual worlds.

Fantastic Entertainments

Even for those not so sanguine about the potential of wonder to apprehend without absorbing, there are numerous reasons to contemplate the power of wonderment as a cognitive sensibility and emotive disposition, in addition to its significance as an organizing area of inquiry (Hughes-Warrington 2019). The present-minded among us cannot miss how the strange, horrific, and grotesque shape popular culture and mass media. Yet, while etymologically related to the Greek *phantasia*, it would be a categorical solecism to view the conceptual labor of the fantastic today as neatly analogous to the classical conceptions of the imagination. Historically, the words *phantasma*, *takhyīl*, and *dimyon*, in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew, respectively, are connected not only to a particular psychology of the soul, but also to a shared cosmology populated by demons, spirits, and angels, where microcosm and macrocosm are interconnected in the emanating power of a divine intellect spread throughout all existence, from the rays of the stars to the minerals spread throughout the earth.

Here the vocabulary of high-level Islamic metaphysics has a good deal to offer in the appeal to *al-umūr al-gharība*, strange, uncanny, weird, paranormal, extraordinary phenomena. It is a key category in Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy, used as a basis to explain in scientific terms both magic and miracle; it also forms the theoretical backing to the category of the extraordinary sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-gharība*) frequently equated today, not unproblematically, with the "occult sciences" (Zadeh 2020, 614–24). In this repertoire of wonder and rarity, the value of the marvel to behold lies in its veridical ontological status, or the "there-ness" of any given phenomenon, as Bynum evocatively refers to it.

Contrast these discourses of the marvelous with the vertiginous subgenres of modern fantasy and science fiction filled with dragons, nymphs, and witches, along with aliens, mummies, mutants, and zombies. Supernatural wonders populate the fictive universes of our screens and printed pages. In the course of global industrialization and the vast circulation of memetic capital, these new forms of alternative worldmaking have found expression in countless languages and societies (e.g., Campbell 2018; Knickerbocker 2018). In many ways these wonderous worlds enchant for reasons that are quite distinct from earlier historical modes of fathoming existence. As an organizing principle, the modern variety of the fantastic is indelibly shaped by the values of fiction and the romantic notions of genius and the imagination that accompany its rise. The word

"genius" notably provides a concise metric for measuring these historical changes, transforming from the Latin *genii*, or guardian spirits—themselves parallel to the *daimones* of Greek cosmology—into a secularized, even if re-enchanted, vision of individual ingenuity, creativity, and originality (Asad 2003, 50–52).

Book after book, film after film conjure up marvelous worlds as entertainment to be consumed in delight and diversion—in a series of alternative possibilities to the normal, quotidian, and predictable. In contrast to other models of wonder, the question of veridical status is generally not as important as the awe-inspiring spectacle of difference itself. Worldmaking has long been the coin of capital, for both imaginative endeavors and the extractive industries that condition modern consumption. Worlds of fantasy are served as salves to tedium, boredom, and isolation. Far from the seemingly intractable problems offered by the theater of everyday politics—environmental degradation, global pandemics, economic and racial inequalities, ongoing wars, gun violence, the rise of ethnonationalism—there is always a chance to escape it all through exotic travels across remote lands of time and space. Sublimated expressions of communal fears and desires, these otherworldly fascinations appear to speak back, as it were, to the disenchanting forces of a mechanized universe governed by the transparency of measured reason that has all but failed us.

We are now reminded with some frequency that the secular disenchantment of society is as much a myth as is the claim to modern rationality (Latour 1993; Partridge 2004–2005; Josephson-Storm 2017). Interest in the paranormal forms part of an increasing and renewed cultural value placed on such esoteric arts as astrology, New Age spirituality, and paganism (Kripal 2010, 2011). Although rejected in the dustbin of Enlightenment rationality, esotericism has important predecessors well before its rise in nineteenth-century transcendental thought (Hanegraaff 1996, 2012; Schmidt 2000; Saif 2019). A good deal of esoteric thinking in Latin Christendom came to derive its authority from a body of occult writing that circulated in the East, prominently in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian.

The Orient has long been mined as a textual and ethnographic source of ancient wisdom and hidden knowledge. The stories of the *Arabian Nights*, in their gothic mazes and lairs, are important parties to the ongoing fascination with the imaginative powers to conjure and transform. The price of admission promises incantations, magical seal rings, flying carpets, and genies who can deliver harems of delight and horrific scenes of dismemberment in the wink of an eye. It is this sensibility of the Orient that pervades Wojciech Has's *Saragossa Manuscript* (1965), with its macabre scenes of enchantresses and erotic deceptions. The enticements and horrors of the East proceed along the push and pull of attraction and repulsion, as in the arabesque conceit that guides film noir—a viewer

who is seduced into the action, only to be consumed and annihilated, both ethically and corporally.

As a mode of entertainment, these modern enchantments respond to continuing social demands for the spectacle of different worlds and ways of being. The uncanny landscapes summoned up are tantalizing, horrifying, racialized, and gendered all at once (Lavender 2014, 2017). They project reflections of self and other across imaginary geographies of difference, with all our present concerns of identity and politics thinly transformed into myth and metaphor. In a mesmerizing logic befitting Scheherazade, the markets of the imagination are moved by a collective desire for greater wonder and diversion. Today, the conceptual boundaries that guide these fascinations with the fantastic and paranormal are still usually set off at an oblique angle from the abiding authority of science, religion, history, and the general parameters of reality itself. Well before our era of post-truth politics, the tension between the real and the unreal has offered a basis for both critique and consumption.

Territory's End

Containment is an old strategy. Traces of the past remain in mammoth stone ramparts and impressive fortifications, as well as more modest boundary markers and trenches that line the globe. Walls are not only built but also commemorated. The memorialization of city ramparts and temple blocks stretches back to the earliest written records. Akkadian and Sumerian cuneiform tablets praise in epic form King Gilgamesh tending the city walls of Uruk (Damrosch 2007). Within the gates of the city, the walls of the temple mark the cosmic lines that generate sacred space. As with Hadrian's wall and the wall of China, these archaeological remains reflect the very durable power of the wall as a symbol of territorial demarcation and epistemic control.

Yet beyond such generational, physical labor, walls also line the imagination as an ideological basis for fathoming human history. This can be seen in the dividing lines that we impose neatly onto epochs and ages from antiquity through modernity to fathom history as discrete metonymic units of progress. Walls hold together so many of the myths we tell. The Freemasons were not the first to develop a Hermetic fascination with temples or ancient architects. Indeed, the story of Hermes, as the master mason and prophet of wisdom who teaches humanity the arts and sciences, travels widely beyond the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. The same holds true for Alexander the Great, the world conqueror whose feats have been celebrated in countless ages and tongues and whose name has long been associated with a particularly well-known barrier.

The episode of Alexander's wall to contain Gog and Magog crosses the East and the West in Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Greek, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish, Syriac, and Urdu, not to mention the full array of languages written in Latin Christendom. Variously told, Alexander the conqueror, student of Aristotle, master of perfect nature, curious collector of wonders and rarities, journeys north to the edge of the inhabitable world on a godly mission. Sealing off the tribes of Gog and Magog behind a giant mountain barrier, Alexander succeeds in saving the world from savages set to devour humanity. Alexander's wall marks an outer boundary beyond which habitation and knowledge end.

The belief in an ancient, impenetrable barrier features in various forms of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim eschatology. Making their appearance in both the Bible and the Qur'an, Gog and Magog also surface in a sizable body of exegetical literature, parenetic prose, and geographical discourse. Protected by both guardians and talismans, the line against the others represents a shared idiom for conceptualizing space and territory, contained in cartographic terms quite literally at the edges of the world. As an ominous symbol, the scene, as with many others taken from prophetic and imperial history, came to feature as part of a standard repertoire in Islamic divinatory texts and images (Farhad and Bağci 2009, 25, 34, 152–53; see figure 12.2). Come the end of time, these savage tribes will break through the barrier, to spread across the world as hoards bent on destroying everything in sight. Like the language of wonder, or Ibn Sīnā's regimes of medicine and philosophy, the myth of the Alexandrian rampart spreads across diverse regions of the globe. Transported, adapted, assimilated, and retold, Alexander's adventures represent a shared horizon for conceiving the world and our place in it in cosmic terms (Zadeh 2011; Silverstein 2014; Akasoy 2016a, 2016b).

Conceptually, the barrier of Gog and Magog also exhibits many obvious parallels with the wall of Westeros in *Game of Thrones*, which protects the land of the Seven Kingdoms against the wildlings, armies of ravenous skeleton-zombies, and white walker overlords. Both walls guard humanity from apocalyptic destruction. Yet, for much of its history, Alexander's rampart was generally not valued as fantasy or fiction. The power of the wall and the numerous tales about it lies in its veridical "there-ness," as a physical edifice bottling up actual savages.

In the gap that separates Gog and Magog from the undead wights at the gates of Westeros is the space where fantasy, in its modern form, abides. The ancient myth of savages behind a wall can be torn down, ridiculed, and rejected as a primitive emblem of the ignorance and superstition that clouded the world before the totality of the globe and its two hemispheres became fully realized. And in the ceaseless configurations of "myth as ideology in narrative form" (Lincoln 1999), the story can also be recast along the enchanted landscapes of modern fantasy. The barriers against Gog and Magog and the creatures beyond the

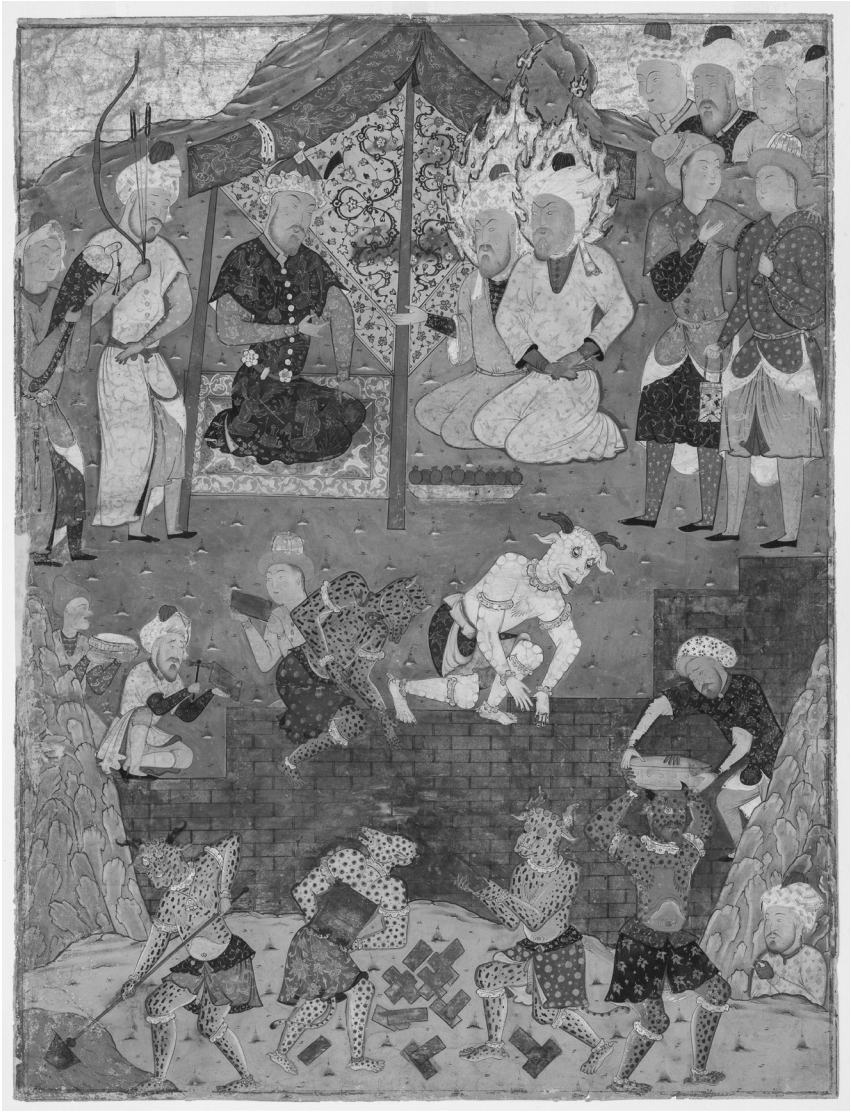

FIGURE 12.2. Alexander (Iskandar) in conversation with the prophets Khiḍr and Elijah (Ilyās), while demons and men build a wall against Gog and Magog from a dispersed *Fāl-nāma* (Book of divination) for Shāh ḍahmāsp (d. 1576). © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. Reprinted courtesy of Chester Beatty, CBL Per 395.2.

Seven Kingdoms of Westeros prove quite useful—if only as metonyms for measuring the conceptual distance between the disciplines that govern modern reason and the geographies and metaphysics that fashioned the world before the global spread of capital.

Such spatial thinking, it turns out, also reveals a good deal about how Islam as a discursive tradition functions territorially in the social imagination. Like the West, the modern conceit of the Muslim world offers a coherent and self-evident way of viewing the geopolitical present. The concept of a Muslim world that is neatly cordoned off has been remarkably productive. It is an immanently pliable idea employed by both detractors and advocates. Its territorial transparency has appealed to numerous reformists who have promoted Muslim unity as the basis for various pan-regional identities (Grewal 2013; Cemil 2017). For Islamophobes, by contrast, the coherence of its boundaries provides a conceptual framework to direct fear and hatred.

At a very basic level, the dilemma posed by such spatial binaries is amplified by the dialectic quality of language and the numerous forms of deixis—of I and you and here and there—that structure collective thought and action (Hanks 2011). Definitional logic of the in-crowd / out-crowd variety tends to govern both small and large-scale group formations (Sapolsky 2019). In order to critique the map, we must first confront the ideational quality of spatial thinking, its immateriality, and its often fictitious, if factitive, nature. To do so is to witness the complexities of being located in space and of being named in language. It is to recognize that while the meaning of the barrier at the edge of the map may shift over time, its power to captivate, contain, and condition is no less real.

REFERENCES

Akasoy, Anna. 2016a. "Geography, History and Prophecy: Mechanisms of Integration in the Islamic Alexander Legend." In *Locating Religions: Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, edited by Nikolas Jaspert and Reinhold Glei, 16–36. Leiden: Brill.

——. 2016b. "Iskandar the Prophet: Religious Themes in Islamic Versions of the Alexander Legend." In *Globalization of Knowledge in the Mediterranean World of Post-Antiquity, 700–1500*, edited by Sonja Brentjes and Jürgen Renn, 167–204. New York: Routledge.

Al-Azmeh, Aziz. 1993. *Islams and Modernities*. London: Verso.

Anidjar, Gil. 2015. "The History of Race, the Race of History." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105 (4): 515–21.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 1997. "Wonder." *American Historical Review* 102 (1): 1–26.

——. 2001. *Metamorphosis and Identity*. New York: Zone Books.

Campbell, Ian. 2018. *Arabic Science Fiction*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.

Cemil, Aydin. 2017. *The Idea of the Muslim World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chan, J. Clara. 2017. "Medievalists, Recoiling from White Supremacy, Try to Diversify the Field." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 63 (42): A3.
Damrosch, David. 2007. *The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Henry Holt.
Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. 2007. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books.
Davies, Surekha. 2016. *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps, and Monsters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Devji, Faisal, and Zaheer Kazmi, eds. 2019. *Islam after Liberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Eamon, William. 1994. *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Farhad, Massumeh, and Serpil Bağci. 2009. *Falnama: The Book of Omens*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.
Ferguson, Niall. 2011. *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. New York: Penguin Press.
Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. Hertfordshire: Harvester Press.
Gabriele, Matthew. 2019. "Trump Says Medieval Walls Worked. They Didn't." *Washington Post*, January 10, 2019.
Gandhi, Leela. 1998. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Gandhi, Supriya. 2022. "Locating Race in Mughal India." *Renaissance Quarterly* 75 (4): 1180–220.
Gluckman, Nell. 2017. "A Debate about White Supremacy and Medieval Studies Exposes Deep Rifts in the Field." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 64 (4): 43.
Grewal, Zareena. 2013. *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. New York: New York University Press.
Hanegraaff, Wouter. 1996. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
——. 2012. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hanks, William. 2011. "Deixis and Indexicality." In *Foundations of Pragmatics*, edited by Wolfram Bublitz and Neal R. Norrick, 315–46. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Harb, Lara. 2020. *Arabic Poetics Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Holsinger, Bruce. 2007. *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm.
——. 2016. "Neomedievalism and International Relations." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, edited by Louise D'Arcens, 165–79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hsu, Hua. 2019. "Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety." *New Yorker*, March 25, 2019, 61–65.
Huff, Toby. 1993. *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hughes-Warrington, Marnie. 2019. *History as Wonder: Beginning with Historiography*. New York: Routledge.
Josephson-Storm, Jason. 2017. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Karnes, Michelle. 2015. "Marvels in the Medieval Imagination." *Speculum* 90 (2): 327–65.
——. 2022. *Medieval Marvels and Fictions in the Latin West and Islamic World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kim, Dorothy. 2017. "Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy." In the Middle, August 28, 2017. https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/teaching-medieval-studies-in-time-of.html.

Knickerbocker, Dale, ed. 2018. *Lingua Cosmica: Science Fiction from around the World*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Kripal, Jeffrey. 2010. *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

——. 2011. *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lavender, Isiah, III, ed. 2014. *Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

——, ed. 2017. *Dis-orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Lincoln, Bruce. 1999. *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Llewelyn, John. 2001. "On the Saying That Philosophy Begins in Thaumazein." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 4:48–57.

Massad, Joseph. 2015. *Islam in Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mazlish, Bruce. 2004. *Civilization and Its Contents*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Mittman, Asa Simon. 2015. "Are the 'Monstrous Races' Races?" *postmedieval* 6 (1): 36–51.

Partridge, Christopher. 2004–2005. *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*. 2 vols. London: T and T Clark International.

Petri, Alexandra. 2019. "Medieval Things Still Work Fine!" *Washington Post*, January 12, 2019.

Pinfari, Marco. 2019. *Terrorists as Monsters: The Unmanageable Other from the French Revolution to the Islamic State*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Saif, Liana. 2019. "What Is Islamic Esotericism?" *Correspondences* 7 (1): 1–59.

Sapolsky, Robert. 2019. "This Is Your Brain on Nationalism: The Biology of Us and Them." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March/April): 42–47.

Schmidt, Leigh Eric. 2000. *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schuessler, Jennifer. 2019. "Symbols of Past Used by Right Upset Scholars." *New York Times*, May 5, 2019, A1.

Sheehi, Stephen. 2011. *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims*. Atlanta: Clarity Press.

Silverstein, Adam. 2014. "Enclosed beyond Alexander's Barrier: On the Comparative Study of ʿAbbāsid Culture." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2): 287–306.

Spiegel, Gabrielle. 2008. "Getting Medieval: History and the Torture Memos." *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, September 1, 2008, 3–6.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2002a. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

——. 2002b. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance." *Archival Science* 2:87–109.

Truitt, Elly. 2015. *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Utz, Richard. 2017. *Medievalism: A Manifesto*. Kalamazoo, MI: ARC Humanities Press.
Wengrow, David. 2014. *The Origins of Monsters: Image and Cognition in the First Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Zadeh, Travis. 2010. "The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the *ʿAjāʾib* Tradition." *Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 13 (1): 21–48.
——. 2011. *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation, and the ʿAbbāsid Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris.
——. 2020. "Cutting Ariadne's Thread, or How to Think Otherwise in the Maze." In *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, edited by Liana Saif et al., 607–50. Leiden: Brill.
——. 2021. "Unruly Subjects." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 7 (1): 98–111.
——. 2023. *Wonders and Rarities: The Marvelous Book That Traveled the World and Mapped the Cosmos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.