This volume presents the original text, accompanied by an English translation and commentary, of a hitherto unpublished Syriac composition, entitled *The Marvels Found in the Great Cities and in the Seas and on the Islands*. Produced by an unknown East Syrian Christian author during the late medieval or early modern period, this work offers a loosely organized catalogue of marvellous events, phenomena, and objects, natural as well as human-made, found throughout the world.

*The Marvels* is a unique composition in that it bears witness to the creative adoption by Syriac Christians of the paradoxographical literary genre that was very popular among Arab and Persian Muslim writers. The East Syrian author blends together inherited Christian, borrowed Muslim, and local oral traditions, providing his audience with a fascinating panorama of imaginary geography.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found here: www.openbookpublishers.com

Cover image: An image from the manuscript of Zakarīyā al-Qazwīnī’s *Kitāb ‘Aǧā‘ib al-maḫlūqāt wa-ġarā‘ib al-mauǧūdāt* (1750–1770); Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 463, fol. 78r. Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München.

Cover design: Anna Gaš.
3. COMMENTARY
The primary objective of this section is twofold. First of all, it provides philological observations that aim at elucidating some rare, obscure, or misspelt words, especially various toponyms. In addition to that, it makes an attempt at a source-critical analysis of the extremely diverse material that was used by the compiler of the Marvels.

At this point, a caveat is in order. While I did my best to be as comprehensive as possible in tracing relevant parallels in the corpus of Syriac literature, the scope of Muslim sources used for this commentary is more modest. It is limited, mainly, to the most important geographical and paradoxographical compositions in Arabic (and to a certain extent in Persian) up to the time of al-Qazwīnī. The resulting parallels, thus, are by no means exhaustive, and for some of the discussed traditions or accounts more relevant material from Muslim sources could be adduced. I believe that paradoxographical works of some post-Qazwīnīan writers, such as Ḥarīdat al-ʾaḡāʾīb wa-farīdat al-ḡarāʾīb by Ibn al-Wardī,¹ as well as various later reworkings of ʿAḡāʾīb al-mahlūqāt in Arabic and Persian, many of which are unstudied and unpublished,² may provide additional comparanda for some of the traditions in the Marvels. The same applies to the rich corpus of paradoxographical literature produced in Ottoman Turkish during the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, which for the most part remains unstudied and partially unedited.³

---

¹ See Demidchik (2004, 210–19).

² For an overview and references to some of them, see Demidchik (2004, 49–50).

³ For an overview, see Sariyannis (2015).
Another clarification concerns the use of al-Qazwīnī’s ʿAĝāʾ ib al-maḥlūqāt. As a result of its immense popularity, the composition has a complicated textual history and is attested in at least four different recensions.⁴ While a critical edition of ʿAĝāʾ ib al-maḥlūqāt is still a desideratum, anyone interested in the original text of al-Qazwīnī’s work should start with consulting its text in ms. München, Bayerische StaatsBibliothek, Cod. arab. 464, that was copied in the year 1280, during the lifetime of the author,⁵ as well as make use of the Cairo edition(s) and that of Fārūq Saʿd.⁶ The compiler of the Marvels, however, was active, most likely, several centuries after al-Qazwīnī’s death and, thus, if he had direct access to the text of this work, it was, probably, already in a revised and expanded form. In light of these considerations, I believe that the eclectic text published by Heinrich Ferdinand Wüstenfeld in 1848, which reflects a very late stage in the textual development of ʿAĝāʾ ib al-maḥlūqāt,⁷ would serve purposes of this commentary better than the original version. Accordingly, although I habitually refer to Wüstenfeld’s text as that of al-Qazwīnī, it is only for the sake of convenience, while being fully aware that some of the passages discussed might be later additions to the original composition.

---

⁴ See von Hees (2002, 91–96); Ruska (1913).

⁵ A digital reproduction of the manuscript is available online at https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0004/bsb00045957/images/

⁶ Saʿd 1973. For an Italian translation of the work, based on this edition, see Bellino (2008).

⁷ It reproduces the text of the fourth, most evolved, redaction of the work.
I.1 (= II.1) the city of brass in Andalus

This city should be identified with the legendary ‘city of brass’ (often referred to in Arabic as madīnat al-baht) of Muslim sources. A very popular motif among Arab and Persian writers, its account was included in One Thousand and One Nights. While most of the Muslim sources agree in locating this city in the West, most commonly, in the region of Andalus, there is a difference of opinions as to who was its founder, Solomon or Alexander the Great. Thus, among the authors, who mention the city of brass in connection with Alexander or Dū l-Qarnayn, his Islamic alter ego, are Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamaḏānī (10th c.) and al-Bīrūnī (11th c.).

Closer to the time of the Marvels, we see Zakariyā al-Qazwīnī (13th c.) including this legend into his Āṯār al-bilād: ‘The City of Brass, also called the City of Copper, to which pertains a strange tale, very much out of the ordinary: now, I have seen a number (of writers) write about it in a certain number of writings, some of which I wrote myself, and withal it is indeed a City famous in the mentioning of it, Ibn al-Faqqīh says that the Ancient Sages were of the opinion that as for the City of Brass, it was built by Dhu-l-Qarnayn, who deposited therein his treasures and their talisman which no one is able to withstand. He placed therein the

---

8 For a comprehensive overview of Muslim sources, which includes original texts in Arabic and Persian, see Barry (1984). For non-Muslim medieval writers, see also Russell (1984); Ambartsumian (2013).

9 See Muḥtaṣar kitāb al-buldān; ed. de Goeje (1885, 71).

10 See Kitāb al-ḡamāḥīr; ed. Krenkow (1936, 101–102).
bahta-stone, and this is the Magnet of Man: for should a man stop facing towards it, it draws him like the magnet draws iron, nor can he separate himself from it until he dies. Now (the City) is in the wilds of Andalus…”

I.2 (= II.2) the splendour of Alexandria

Popular among Muslim writers, this tradition appears in many works, usually in connection with the city of Alexandria only. A close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘As for the building of Rome and Alexandria, it is said that the construction (of the latter) lasted three hundred years and that for seventy years its inhabitants would not dare go out during the day without wearing a black veil, to protect their eyes from the dazzling whiteness of its walls’. It is possible that the compiler of the Marvels, or the source he used for this unit, misunderstood Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s account and took the description of Alexandria to apply to Rome as well.

I.3 (= II.3) the lighthouse of Alexandria

The described monument is the famous lighthouse of Pharos in Alexandria. This tradition, which ultimately goes back to Classical sources, was popular among Muslim authors and is found in

---

11 Ed. Wüstenfeld (1948–1949, 2:375); trans. Barry (1984, 307). Cf. also ʿAḡāʾīb al-maḥlūqāt; ed. Wüstenfeld (1948–1949, 1:211–13).

12 For some references, see Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 446, nn. 93–94).

13 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 160).
various works.\textsuperscript{14} For a very similar account, see Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s *Kitāb al-masālik*: ‘Its unusual lighthouse is built in the sea, upon a crab of glass. Besides its own inhabitants, there are there 600 000 Jews, who are like slaves to them’.\textsuperscript{15}

In what concerns Syriac writers before the compiler of the *Marvels*, we find this tradition included by the anonymous West Syrian author of the *Chronicle of the Year 1234* into a small section dealing with ‘the marvels that are in the world’: ‘In the great Alexandria, then, there is a lighthouse, that is a place of observation, built on the seashore, upon the four crabs of glass’.\textsuperscript{16}

It should be added that the noun ܐܝܬ ܗܟܝܠ ܒܐܠܟܣܢܕܪܝܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܡܢܪܬܐ ܐܘܩܝܬ ܕܘܩܐ ܕܒܢܐ ܥܠ ܣܦܪ ܝܡܐ ܛܢܐ ܕܙܓܘܓܝܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ ‘dew’ does not make much sense in the context of the description of the lighthouse, and, probably, is a result of textual corruption. Perhaps, the original reading was the noun ܗܠ ܗܠ ‘hill’. In favour of this suggestion speaks the fact that both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic version feature a similar alternative reading in this place: ܪܒܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ ‘hill’ and ܪܲܥܝܬܐ ܢܡܘܕ ‘mountain, hill’, respectively.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} For references and discussion, see Behrens-Abouseif (2006); Doufikar-Aerts (2010, 186–87); Vorderstrasse (2012); Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 446, n. 95).

\textsuperscript{15} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 160).

\textsuperscript{16} ܐܝܬ ܗܟܝܠ ܒܐܠܟܣܢܕܪܝܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܡܢܪܬܐ ܐܘܩܝܬ ܕܘܩܐ ܕܒܢܐ ܥܠ ܣܦܪ ܝܡܐ ܛܢܐ ܕܙܓܘܓܝܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ; ed. Chabot (1916–1937, 1:112).

\textsuperscript{17} Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 441, unit 3).
I.4 (= II.4) the mirror of the lighthouse of Alexandria

This tradition, which ultimately goes back to Classical sources, was popular among Muslim authors and is found in various works, where it was often transmitted together with the previous unit I.3.\textsuperscript{18} For a similar account, see Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘A mirror that hangs on the lighthouse of Alexandria: a person sitting under it could see another person, who would be at Constantinople, notwithstanding the width of the sea between them’.\textsuperscript{19}

Like the previous unit I.3, this tradition was included in his work by the West Syrian author of the Chronicle of the Year 1234: ‘And on its top — a mirror, in which they see everything that happens in the sea for a hundred miles’.\textsuperscript{20}

I.5 (= II.5) the lighthouse of brass

A very close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘The minaret (or lighthouse) of brass in the land of ‘Ad, with a horseman of brass on it: during the sacred months, water flows from it, and people drink it, water with it (fields) and pour it into their cisterns. After the sacred months, this water ceases’.\textsuperscript{21} For other attestations of this tradition in the works of Muslim writers, see Muḥtaṣar kitāb al-buldān of al-Hamaḍānī.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} For references and discussion, see Behrens-Abouseif (2006).

\textsuperscript{19} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 115).

\textsuperscript{20} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 116).

\textsuperscript{21} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 116).

\textsuperscript{22} Ed. de Goeje (1885, 72). For more references, see Bellino & Mengozzi
There is a certain ambiguity as to how better to translate in this context the Syriac noun *mnārtā*, which could refer both to ‘lighthouse’ and ‘minaret’. While in the previous two units where it also appears (i.e., I.3–4/II.3–4), the meaning ‘lighthouse’ fits well the context, here it is less so. In fact, the Syriac *mnārtā* in this unit preserves ambiguity of the cognate Arabic noun *manāra*, used by Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh and other Arab writers to refer to this monument, which likewise can mean both ‘lighthouse’ and ‘minaret’.

A noteworthy linguistic aspect of this unit is that it features the Neo-Aramaic noun *spāqē* ‘vessels, jars’ alongside its Classical Syriac synonym *gūrnē*. Perhaps, in this way, the compiler of the Marvels (or his source) wanted to refer to two different kinds of reservoirs for keeping water.

I.6 (= II.6) the city surrounded by seven walls

The exact source of this tradition is unclear. Among the distant parallels, one can mention the Median fortress of Ecbatana that was made of seven concentric walls, according to Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.98). Later on, in the Muslim geographical tradition, several cities are reported to have seven walls: some writers, such as

---

23 See Sokoloff (2009, 785).

24 For the Neo-Aramaic *spāqā*, see Maclean (1901, 229). Cf. also the cognate verb *sapaq* ‘to empty’ and adjective *spiqa* ‘empty’ in the Urmī dialect of Neo-Aramaic; Khan (2016, 3:274, 279).
al-Masʿūdī and al-Qazwīnī, relate that about Alexandria,\textsuperscript{25} while others, such as al-Hamaḍānī,\textsuperscript{26} about Jerusalem.

**I.7 (= II.7) the wall between the Caspian and Mediterranean seas**

A close parallel can be found in a brief passage dealing with the Byzantine province of Ṭāfilā, i.e. Thrace, in Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s *Kitāb al-masālik*. Its geographical limits are described in the following way: ‘Borders of this province: from the East — the gulf of the Mediterranean Sea; from the West — the wall (al-sūr), built from the Caspian Sea (*baḥr al-Ḫazar*) to the Mediterranean Sea (*baḥr al-Šām*), and its length is four days’ journey’.\textsuperscript{27}

The exact origins of this tradition are unclear. Bellino and Mengozzi suggest that this tradition may refer to the legendary wall built by Alexander the Great in the Caucasus to defend his realm from the barbaric nations of Gog and Magog.\textsuperscript{28} Another possibility is that it might be a distorted echo of a description of the Great Wall of Gorgan, a Sasanian-era defence system stretching eastwards of the Caspian Sea.\textsuperscript{29} Moreover, it might refer to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} See *Āṯār al-bilād*; ed. Wüstenfeld (1948–1949, 2:97). For additional references, see Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 446, nn. 97–98).
\item \textsuperscript{26} See *Muḥtaşar kitāb al-buldān*; ed. de Goeje (1885, 97).
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 105). For additional references, see Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 439, n. 72).
\item \textsuperscript{28} Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 439).
\item \textsuperscript{29} See Chaichian (2013); Sauer et al. (2013).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the Derbent wall, another major defensive complex from the Sasanian period, located on the other side of the Caspian Sea and stretching westwards.\footnote{On this monument, see Gadjiev (2017).}

Both marine toponyms, i.e., the ‘Sea of the Khazars’ (ܒܝܡܐ ܕܟܙܪ) for the Caspian Sea and the ‘Sea of Syria’ (ܒܝܡܐ ܕܣܘܪܝܐ) for the Mediterranean Sea, are attested in the works of medieval Syriac authors, such as Bar ‘Ebroyo (13th c.).\footnote{See Candelabrum of the Sanctuary; ed. Bakoš (1930–1933, 2:308, 312).} It should be added, however, that there was some confusion among Muslim geographers regarding the exact location of the ‘Sea of Khazars’, as a result of which this name was sometimes applied to the Black Sea.\footnote{See Takahashi (2003, 113).} This confusion can also be found in the works of Syriac Christian authors, as demonstrates the Dictionary of Bar Bahlūl (10th c.), who in the entry on ܦܢܛܘܠ, ‘Pontus’ quotes the following description of this sea by Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (9th c.): بحر يقال له فنطوس وهو بحر الخزر.\footnote{Ed. Duval (1888–1901, 2:1578).}

I.8 the city with seventy gates

The city should be identified as Memphis in Egypt.\footnote{As has been suggested by Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 439).} For a very close parallel, see the following description from Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘Memphis — the city of Pharaoh, who lived here and made seventy gates, and made the city walls from iron and brass. There where there four rivers that flowed...
out from under his throne’.\textsuperscript{35} This account also appears in the works of other Muslim writers.\textsuperscript{36}

Both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic version of this unit feature seven gates instead of seventy,\textsuperscript{37} which is, most likely, the result of a scribal mistake. Bellino and Mengozzi raise a possibility that the opening phrase مدينة ما ‘a certain city’ in the Arabic version of this unit is the result of corruption of the original مدينة منف ‘the city of Memphis’.\textsuperscript{38} In light of the Syriac original text, however, this suggestion does not seem particularly likely, since مدينة ما appears to be nothing else but a faithful rendering of the phrase مدينة منف. Moreover, the authors themselves point out that the postclitic mā is well attested as an indefinite marker throughout the text of the Arabic version,\textsuperscript{39} which prevents us from regarding the case of مدينة ما as exceptional.

\textbf{I.9 the brass columns with chains in Egypt}

A close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s \textit{Kitāb al-masālik}: ‘There are two columns in ‘Ayn

\textsuperscript{35} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 161).

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. al-Hamaḍānī, \textit{Muḥtaşar kitāb al-buldān}; ed. de Goeje (1885, 73).

\textsuperscript{37} Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 442, unit 8).

\textsuperscript{38} Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 449).

\textsuperscript{39} Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 432).
Šams in the land of Egypt. These are remains of (former) columns. On the top of each of the columns was a string of brass. From one of the tops, the water flows from under the string, which reaches only until the half of the column, not going lower. It oozes continuously, night and day. The wet part of the column is green and moist; the water does not fall to the ground. This is a work of Hūshank’.

It is noteworthy that the plural noun qūmrē ‘chains, bonds’ of the Syriac Vorlage is mistranslated as ‘moons’ in both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic version, i.e. جَوْمَاَرٍ and شَمَاَرٍ, respectively.

I.10 the brass horseman in Andalus

The meaning of the inner-textual gloss Qōrnetōs, meant to explain the toponym Andalus in this unit, is unclear. For some reason, it has been omitted in both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic version. Another inner-textual gloss in this unit provides us with information regarding the linguistic background of the compiler or transmitters of the Marvels as it explains the Classical Syriac noun šūšmānē, ‘ants’ with the Neo-Aramaic šekwānē.

A close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘The horseman of brass in the land of Andalus: with his hands in this manner, spreading his arm as if he was saying, “There is no passage beyond me. No one can

40 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 161).
41 The Neo-Aramaic noun sara ‘moon’ is attested in the dialect of Urmi; see Khan (2016, 3:283).
42 See Maclean (1901, 305); Khan (2008, 2:1406; 2016, 3:52).
enter this land because he will be devoured by ants.”

For other attestations of this tradition in the works of Muslim writers, see *Kitāb al-aʿlāq an-nafīsa* of Aḥmad ibn Rustah.

An interesting case of an independent reception of this literary motif among Syriac Christians can be found in the tradition of the oral circulation of the narratives from the *One Thousand and One Nights* among the speakers of Neo-Aramaic. One of the offspins of this work, recorded among the speakers of Barwar dialect, features a story about the overseas adventures of a certain king of Yemen and his son (cf. Night 503). When they arrive at an island inhabited by monkeys who are engaged in an ongoing war against wolves, the leader of the monkeys provides the king and his son with the following information regarding the limits of his domain: ‘He said “The border of the monkeys is the top of the mountain there. There King Solomon has written a monument’. He said ‘From here onwards is the valley of the ants (wādi-t šǝkwànē)’. He said ‘Everything that enters this valley will be eaten by the ants’.”

I.11 the gigantic building in Egypt

This building should be identified as one of the Egyptian pyramids, an unsurprisingly popular item in the descriptions of

---

43 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 116).
44 Ed. de Goeje (1892, 78).
45 Ed. and trans. Khan (2008, 3:1614–15).
46 As has been suggested by Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 440).
Egypt by Muslim writers.\(^\text{47}\) A close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s *Kitāb al-masālik*:

Two pyramids in Egypt: the height of each of them is 400 cubits; they become narrow with their height. They both are laid over with marble and alabaster. Their length, as well as width, is 400 royal cubits. All magic and all marvels of medicine and astronomy are engraved on them in the *musnad* script. They say that only Allah knows that they are buildings of the king Claudius Ptolemy. And it is written upon them: “I built them. The one who lays claim to the might of his kingdom, let him destroy them. And to destroy is easier than to build. (But) even the tax money of the (whole) world would not (suffice to) destroy them.”\(^\text{48}\)

**I.12 the gardens of Qōnyā**

The ‘city of Qōnyā’ is, most likely, Konya of Central Anatolia, known in antiquity as Iconium, which served as the capital of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rūm.\(^\text{49}\) The story, which is explicitly introduced as a part of oral tradition, refers, perhaps, to the famous gardens of Meram, located in the southern suburbs of Konya, whose history can be traced back to the high days of the Seljuk rule over the city.\(^\text{50}\)

---

\(^{47}\) On pyramids in Arabic sources, see Fodor (1970); Pettigrew (2004); Cooperson (2010).

\(^{48}\) Ed. de Goeje (1889, 159).

\(^{49}\) On the city’s history during the Islamic period, see Goodwin (1986).

\(^{50}\) See Redford (2000, 63–65).
The noun yatīrūtā ‘abundance’ in the description of how the gardens’ owner came in possession of his fortune seems to be a result of textual corruption of the original yārtūtā ‘inheritance’. In favour of this suggestion speaks the corresponding reading al-wirt ‘inheritance’ in unit 12 of the Arabic version.51

The ethnic identity of the unnamed owner of the gardens is described with the adjective rhūmāyā, literally ‘Roman’. In the context of the medieval Middle East, however, it could be also translated as ‘Greek’ or even as ‘Byzantine’.52

The identity of Joseph, the transmitter of the story, as well as that of his brother Mār ʿAbdišōʿ of Elam (apparently a bishop), is unclear. In the Neo-Aramaic version (as well as in the Arabic one), the latter is referred to as ‘Mār ʿAbdišōʿ, metropolitan of Elam’ (ܡܪܝ ܥܒܕܝܫܘܥ ܡܛܪܐܢ ܕܥܝܠܐ).53 At the moment, it is impossible to ascertain whether he should be identified with the East Syrian bishop and hymnographer, bearing the same name, who was active during the 13th century.54

I.13 (= II.8) the river Bārtlas

The name of the river is spelt as Baṭlas in II.8, and as Bāltās in the Neo-Aramaic version.55 While I have not been able to find a close

51 Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 443).
52 On the range of meanings conveyed by this ethnonym, see Payne Smith (1879–1901, 2:3831–32, as well as discussion in (Tannous 2018b).
53 Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 443).
54 For the little that is known about this obscure figure, see Burkitt (1928, 269–70). See also discussion in Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 435, n. 56).
55 Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 443).
parallel to this tradition in Arabic and Persian geographical works, it is possible to regard it as a later modification of a somewhat similar account that appears in the Syriac Book of Natural Beings: ‘They say that in the inner Spain there is a river called Batēs, which pours its waters into the sea during the first six hours of the day, while they follow their natural order. And during the other six hours, its waters are stopped in their source, and the whole riverbed appears dry’.\(^{56}\) This account also appears in Bar ‘Ebroyo’s Candelabrum of the Sanctuary, in almost the same form.\(^{57}\)

I.14 (＝ II.9) the Sea of Reeds

For a very similar account, see the section on the Sea of Reeds in the Syriac Book of Natural Beings: ‘And if it happens that some animal or human falls into it, — as long as he is alive, he floats upon the water and does not sink to the depth. But if he dies, or some corpse falls into it, he sinks to the depth at once’.\(^{58}\) Its origins go back to the Greco-Roman geographical tradition of Late Antiquity, as one can judge from the following sentence in the description of the Dead Sea by Julius Africanus (3rd c.): ‘Corpses

---

\(^{56}\) See ed. Ahrens (1892, 46 [Syr.]).

\(^{57}\) See ed. Bakoš (1930–1933, 2:319–20).

\(^{58}\) See ed. Ahrens (1892, 48 [Syr.]).
are carried beneath its depths, but the living would not easily even dip under it'.

It should be pointed out that the toponym ‘Sea of Reeds’ (ܢ�습니다ܐ ܚܡܐ), derived in its turn from the biblical יַם סוּף, could refer to two different locations in Syriac sources. Thus, some writers, like the author of the Book of Natural Beings, quoted above, identify it with the ‘Dead Sea’ (ܢ 같습니다ܐ ܚܡܐ). On the other hand, Bar Bahlūl in his Dictionary explains it as the sea that the Israelites crossed during their exodus from Egypt, while giving the ‘Red Sea’ (ܢ 같습니다ܐ ܚܡܐ) as its alternative name. It is noteworthy that the authors of both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic versions of the Marvels follow the latter understanding of this toponym, as they translate it as حمر للبحر الأحمر and ܩܬܵܐ ܐܡܣܘ, respectively.

I.15 (= II.10) the place ʾEwrīqōs

The roots of this tradition in Syriac literature could be traced back to the following passage in the Syriac version of Pseudo-Nonnos’ scholia on the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus: ‘Now the Euripos (ܐܘܪܝܦܘܤ) is a region of the sea between the island of Boiotia and Attica which changes (direction) seven times in a

---

59 Ed. Wallraff et al. (2007, 61).
60 Cf. the Peshitta version of Exod. 10.19, 13.18 et passim.
61 Ed. Ahrens (1892, 48 [Syr.]).
62 See the entry ܢ 같습니다ܐ; ed. Duval (1888–1901, 1:846). Cf. Bar ʿEbroyo’s Candelabrum of the Sanctuary; ed. Bakoš (1930–1933, 2:309–10). See also discussion by Takahashi (2003, 107–108).
63 Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 443, unit 14).
day. Now it changes in that the water in this part escapes and as it were is sucked up and again vomited forth, and the water again fills up as it was (before). This happens, as they say, seven times a day’. 64 Later, Bar Bahlūl includes a brief reference to this toponym into his Dictionary. 65 In the process of its reception and transmission by Syriac writers, this tradition was further modified, as one can see from the following description in the Syriac Book of Natural Beings: ‘About the sea of ʾĀrōpōs. There is a rock in the sea called ʾĀrōpōs that goes up and down ten times during a day. It, then, goes down for five hundred cubits at one time, until the sea bottom shows up, and goes up in the (same) manner’. 66 Our passage, apparently, reflects one of such later reworkings of the original tradition, during which, among other things, the toponym ‘Euripos’ was changed into ‘Euriqos’ as a result of confusion between the letters Pē and Qotp.

I.16 (= II.11) the river in Syria

The river described in this unit is very similar to that of unit I.19, with the only significant difference being that I.16 does not specify on which day of the week it flows. For a very similar account, see the Syriac Book of Natural Beings: ‘On the border of Syria, between ʾIqā and Deʾōpāsās, there is a river that on one day out of seven flows well with plentiful and mighty waters. And during

64 Scholia to ‘Invective I’ 34; ed. Brock (1971, 229–230 [Syr.], 98 [trans.]).
65 See the entry ܐܘܪܝܦܘܤ; ed. Duval (1888–1901, 1:92).
66 ܝܢ ̈ܥܠ ܐܵܪܘܿܦܘܿܒ ܝܡܐ. ܐܝܬ ܫܢܐ ܚܕܐ ܒܝܡܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܐ ܐܪܘܿܦܘܿܒ ܕܥܣܪ ܙܒܢ ܝܢ ܒܚܕ ܥܕܢܐ܇̈ ܥܕܡܐ ܒܝܘܡܐ ܣܠܩܐ ܘܢܚܬܐ. ܢܚܬܐ ܕ_IRQ ܚܡܫ ܡܐܐ ܐܡ ܕܡܬܓܠܝܐ ܐܫܬܗ ܕܝܡܐ ܘܣܠܩܐ ܒܗ ܒܙܢܐ; ed. Ahrens (1892, 49 [Syr.]).
those six days, its flow stops and ceases completely. And it always observes this law: it flows on the day of Sabbath’.67 The ultimate source of this tradition is, most likely, the following description of a river that the Roman emperor Titus saw in Syria, provided by Josephus (Bell. 7.5.1): ‘It runs between Arcea (Ἀρχέας) ... and Raphanea (Ῥαφαναίας), and has an astonishing peculiarity. For, when it flows, it is a copious stream with a current far from sluggish; then all at once its sources fail, and for the space of six days it presents the spectacle of a dry bed; again, as though no change had occurred, it pours forth on the seventh day just as before. And it has always been observed to keep strictly to this order; whence they have called it the Sabbatical river, so naming it after the sacred seventh day of the Jews’.68 In the Muslim tradition of paradoxography, a similar river is described in ‘Aǧāʾib al-mahlaqāt of al-Qazwīnī, who, however, locates it in the ‘land of Slavs’.69

I.17 (= II.12) the well flowing with water, salt and naphtha

Establishing the original form of the toponym poses a certain difficulty, as it is spelt differently across the manuscripts: Knīgar in

---

67 Ed. Thackeray et al. (1926–1965, 3:534–35). On the transmission of Josephus’ works in Syriac, see Minov (2019, 112–14).
68 Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:182).
V and L,\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Kānīlāz} in B1. Both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic versions omit it, featuring the generic ‘a country’ instead. Since none of these variants is attested as a recognizable toponym in Syriac or other sources that were available to me, perhaps, it should be emended to \textit{Kašgar},\textsuperscript{71} a city in Central Asia.

Another noteworthy aspect of this unit is that it features several non-standard spellings. Thus, the Classical Syriac noun for ‘pool’ \textit{ܩܒܝܬܐ}, \textit{qebyā} is spelt as \textit{ܩܘܝܬܐ}, \textit{qawyā} in V. Another spelling variant of this noun, found in this unit in V and B1 of II.12, is \textit{ܩܘܬܐ}, \textit{qewtā}, which, however, might be the result of a scribal mistake. In addition to that, we come across the spelling \textit{ܢܘܬܐ}, \textit{nūṭā} for ‘naphtha’ in B1 of II.12, which is a phonetic spelling of the East Syrian pronunciation of \textit{ܢܦܛܬܐ}.\textsuperscript{72} In fact, both these cases of phonetic spelling could be due to the influence of Neo-Aramaic orthography. Thus, Maclean’s \textit{Dictionary} gives the forms \textit{ܩܘܝܬܐ}, \textit{qewyā} for the former, and \textit{ܢܘܬܐ}, \textit{nūṭā} for the latter.\textsuperscript{73}

I.18 (= II.13) the red spring in Pūštīdar

The toponym \textit{Pūštīdar} (spelt as \textit{Pūštīdārā} in L, \textit{Pūšti} in II.13, and \textit{Pūštīdār} in the Neo-Aramaic version\textsuperscript{74}) is, most likely, of an Iranian origin. Bellino and Mengozzi explain it by referring to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} In L the reading \textit{ܟܫܝܓܪ} is also possible.
\item \textsuperscript{71} For attestation in Syriac sources, see Payne Smith (1879–1901, 1:1842).
\item \textsuperscript{72} See Nöldeke (2001, 15, n. 3).
\item \textsuperscript{73} Maclean (1901, 272 and 210, respectively).
\item \textsuperscript{74} Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 444, unit 18).
\end{itemize}
Persian compound *pušt dār* ‘prop, thick clothing, propped’. Perhaps, it should be identified with the toponym *Pušt-i Dār*, mentioned by the Qajar official Mirza Mohib ‘Ali Khan Nizam al-Mulk in his treatise on the disputed borderlands between the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran.  

This tradition, which does not seem to be attested in the major Arabic and Persian paradoxographical and geographical works, could be a part of the local folklore of Kurdistan that might have reached the compiler of the *Marvels* by way of oral transmission. Remarkably, it features an explicitly Christian element: the last sentence of the unit mentions *ḥnānā* (lit. ‘grace, mercy’), a kind of contact relic typical for the Syriac Christian tradition. It consists of a mixture of blessed oil, water, and dust from the tombs of saints, and was used mostly for the purposes of healing. In both the Arabic and Neo-Aramaic versions, this understanding of *ḥnānā* in our passage is made unambiguous through the addition of a gloss that explains it to be ‘the dust of blessing’ (تَرَاب البِرَكَة / تراب اليركة). Perhaps, the addressee of this gloss was Eduard Sachau, the Western scholar, on whose behalf these two versions were produced, and who was not expected to know what *ḥnānā* is.

---

75 Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 448, n. 101).

76 See Zoroufi (1968, 89).

77 See Jullien & Jullien (2010).

78 Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 444, unit 18).
The mention of ḥnānā in this context, however, poses some questions, since as far as we know, it was not a necessary condition for this substance to have red colour, not to speak of the fact that it was supposed to be produced in an ecclesiastical setting. A possible explanation of this oddity might be that the original form of this tradition, before its integration into the Marvels, featured not ḥnānā, but another similar-sounding word, that is henna (Arab. ḥinnāʾ, Pers. ḥīnā, Neo-Aramaic xənna), a plant-based reddish dye popular through the Middle East, where it was and is still used for temporary tattoos and hair colouring. The East Syrian Christians of Northern Mesopotamia were no strangers to this practice and used henna for dyeing the hair and hands, especially at weddings. Given the reddish colour of henna, this substance would make better sense in the context of this unit. Taking into consideration a possibility of the oral transmission of this tradition, it is conceivable that the compiler of the Marvels or subsequent copyists of the work might have changed the original henna to ḥnānā, whether intentionally or by accident.

I.19 (= II.14) the river flowing on Sabbath

The river described in this unit is very similar to that of unit I.16, with the only significant difference being that I.19 says explicitly on which day of the week it flows. For a very similar account, see the Syriac Book of Natural Beings: ‘And moreover, in Spain, there

---

79 For Neo-Aramaic, see Maclean (1901, 102); Khan (2016, 3:328).

80 See Colin (1986).

81 For examples, see Khan (2016, 3:328, 4:311).
is another river, whose flow is withheld during six days, and on Sabbath, it flows’.\textsuperscript{82} This river should not be confused with the river Sambation of Jewish sources, on which see the next unit.

I.20 (= II.15) the river of sand

For a very similar account, see the Syriac Book of Natural Beings: ‘On the river of sand: It is told about this river that it flows not with water, but with dry sand. And it makes a loud sound and flows with great vehemence and frightening force. And it cannot be crossed on a ship or on foot. And its flow stops on the day of Sabbath and until the sunset. The sand, which is in it, appears solid as the dry land’.\textsuperscript{83} An almost identical account is found in Bar ʿEbroyo’s Candelabrum of the Sanctuary.\textsuperscript{84} In Syriac sources, this river is also mentioned in the prayer of Cyriacus in the Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta.\textsuperscript{85}

This river should be identified with the famous river Sambation of late antique and medieval Jewish sources, which was

\textsuperscript{82}ܡܝܢ ܟܠܝܐ ܡܪܕܝܬܗareth ܢܗܪܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܕܫܬܐ ܝܘܒܗ ܘܒܫܒܬܐ ܪܕܐ;
\textsuperscript{83}ܐܢܘܢ ܡܪܕܝܬܗ. ܐܠܐ ܫܒܫܐ ܪܕܐ .ܘܼܒܝܫܐ .ܘܒܚܐܦܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܘܒܥܘܫܢܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܪܕܐ .ܘܠܐ ܒܐܠܦܐ ܡܬܥܒܪ ܒܗ ܘܠܐ ܒܪܓܠ. ܘܒܝܘܡܐ ܕܫܒܬܐ ܟܠܝܐ ܡܪܕܝܬܗ ܘܥܕܡܐ ܕܥܫܡܐ ܡܬܚܙܐ ܚܠܐ ܕܒܓܘܗ ܟܕ ܡܓܫܡ ܐܝܟ ܐܪܥܐ ܝܒܝܫܬܐ.
\textsuperscript{84}ܗܝ ܡܪܕܝܬܗ. ܐܠܐ ܚܠܐ ܝܒܝܫܐ ܕܒܚܐܦܐ ܫܒܫܐ ܪܕܐ ܘܠܐ ܒܐܠܦܐ ܡܬܥܒܪ ܐܦܠܐ ܒܪܓܠ. ܘܒܝܘܡܐ ܕܫܒܬܐ ܟܠܝܐ ܡܪܕܝܬܗ.
\textsuperscript{85}See ed. Bedjan (1890–1897, 3:276).
thought to flow during six days of the week, but stand still on Sabbath. The ‘river of sand’ (Arab. *wādī al-raml*) that stops on Sabbath was also a popular motif among Arab geographers. Some of them, like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġarnāṭī (12th c.), situated this river in the West. It is this element, absent from the Syriac parallels quoted above, that brings the compiler of the *Marvels* close to the Muslim geographical tradition in this particular case.

I.21 (= II.16) the raining place Maṭlāyā

A very close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s *Kitāb al-masālik*: ‘In the land of Romans, on the sea of Khazars, there is a city called al-Mustāṭila. It rains there continuously during winter as well as during summer so that its inhabitants can neither beat nor winnow their grain. They pile it in sheaves in their houses. Then, they take a certain quantity of ears, according to their need, rub them in their hands, after which they grind it and bake it’.

I.22 (= II.17) the rain in Hejaz

A close parallel is provided by the following account from Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s *Kitāb al-masālik*: ‘The people of the Hejaz and Yemen (*al-Yaman*) are under the rain during the whole summer,

---

86 See Pennacchietti (1998, 30–33); Rothkoff (2007).
87 See Doufikar-Aerts (2010, 181–83).
88 See his *Tuḥfat al-albāb*; ed. Ferrand (1925, 48).
89 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 156). See also comments in Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 441).
and they gather harvest during the winter. In Sanaa and neighbouring countries, it rains during the whole of June, July, August, and a part of September, from midday until sunset’.\footnote{Ed. de Goeje (1889, 156).}

It is noteworthy that the toponym \textit{Taymnā}, ‘the South’ of the Syriac \textit{Vorlage} is rendered as \textit{التيمىٔ} ‘Tayma’ (i.e. the large oasis of Tayma in north-west Arabia) in the Arabic version, whereas in the Neo-Aramaic version it is changed into the generic \textit{درة} ‘the plain’.

I.23 the river in Azerbaijan

For a very similar account, compare the entry on the ‘river of Azerbaijan’ (نهر اذربيجان) in al-Qazwīnī’s \textit{‘Ağāʾīb al-mahluqāt}: ‘Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyāʾ al-Rāzī, who got the report from Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḡayhānī, the author of \textit{al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik al-šarqiyya}, related that in Azerbaijan there is a river whose waters flow, turn into stones and become slabs of rock used for building’.\footnote{Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:176). Al-Qazwīnī reports a very similar tradition in connection with the ‘fount of Azerbaijan’ (عين اذربيجان); ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:189).}

I.24 (= II.18) the fount near the city of ‘Amas

This and three following units (i.e., I.25–27) comprise a distinctive group of traditions since all of them are connected with the region of \textit{Bēt Dliğ / Bēt Dliš}. This toponym refers, most certainly,
to Bitlis (Kurd. *Bidlis*; Arm. *Baghaghes* / *Baghes*), a city in eastern Turkey and the capital of Bitlis Province.\(^{92}\) Located in the valley of the Bitlis River, 15 km south-west of Lake Van, this city stood on an important road that connected the Armenian plateau with the Mesopotamian plain. The capital of a Kurdish Muslim principality from the 13th to the 19th century, Bitlis was also home to a large Armenian community.\(^{93}\)

The exact location of the town ‘Amas,\(^{94}\) mentioned in this unit is unclear. From the location of the fount on the ‘sea-shore’, it could be deduced that the town was situated somewhere not far from the south-western shores of Lake Van. Perhaps, it should be identified with Himis (Arm. *Khums*, modern *Emek Köy*), a village in the Kardshkan district, located ca. 10 km south of the southern shore of the lake.\(^ {95}\) The description of the fount fits well the geological profile of the area around Lake Van, characterized by hydrothermal activity.

There seem to be no close parallels to this tradition in the major Arabic and Persian paradoxographical and geographical works. It might well have reached the compiler of the *Marvels* by way of oral transmission.

---

\(^{92}\) See Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:297–311); Hewsen (2001).

\(^{93}\) See Sinclair (2001); Thomson (2001).

\(^{94}\) Spelled as ‘Ams in II.18. In the Neo-Aramaic and Arabic versions, it is spelled as ‘Amās and ‘Ammās, respectively; Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 445).

\(^{95}\) See Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:226, 229).
I.25 the mountain fount of Pānōr

The toponym Ḥizān in this unit refers, most likely, to Hizan (Kurd. Xīzan), a town and a district in Bitlis Province of Turkey, located about 40 km south-east of the city of Bitlis. The toponym Pānōr should be identified with the Panor mountain pass, located about halfway between Bitlis and Hizan. As for the toponym Ṭāṭīq, it should be identified, most probably, with the small plain to the left of the river Kocaçay, in the vicinity of the modern villages Yolcular and Dereağzi. According to Sinclair, this area was called Tatik or Dadig during the Medieval period.

Similarly to I.24, this tradition does not seem to be attested in the major Arabic and Persian paradoxographical and geographical works. It might well have reached the compiler of the Marvels by way of oral transmission.

I.26 the sweet-water fount in Lake Van

The toponym Ṭāṭōn in this unit refers, most certainly, to the modern Tatvan (Kurd. Tetwan; Arm. Datvan), a coastal town on the western shore of Lake Van. In the early modern Muslim sources, it appears as Tātwān, as in Sharafnama of Sharaf al-Din Bidlisi

---

96 See Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:230–34).
97 See Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:230–31), as well as the map following p. 326.
98 Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:230). Cf. Sharafnama of Sharaf al-Din Bidlisi, where it is mentioned several times as Tātīk; ed. Véliaminof-Zernof (1860–1862, 1:213, 432).
99 See Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:274).
(16th c.),\textsuperscript{100} or as \textit{Taht-i Van}, as in the \textit{Seyahatname} of Evliya Çelebi (17th c.).\textsuperscript{101}

Similarly to I.24 and I.25, this tradition does not seem to be attested in the major Arabic and Persian paradoxographical and geographical works. It might well have reached the compiler of the \textit{Marvels} by way of oral transmission.

\textbf{I.27 the river island in Ṭārōn}

The toponym Ṭārōn is of Armenian origin and refers to the region of Taron, located to the north-west of Bitlis, that forms a part of the Muş province of modern Turkey.\textsuperscript{102} It is not clear whether the river, described in this unit, should be identified with the modern Murat river (Arm. \textit{Aratsani}), the major watercourse of the region.

It might be noted that while the majority of the Christian population of Taron was constituted by Armenians, there was also a recognizable East Syrian presence in the region. To that bears witness the existence of a bishopric that included this region, as one can conclude from the mention of ‘Mār Ḥnānīšōʿ bishop of Rustāqā, Ṭārōn, and Ürmī’ in the colophon of an East Syrian manuscript, produced in the year 1577.\textsuperscript{103}

Similarly to I.24–26, this tradition does not seem to be attested in the major Arabic and Persian paradoxographical and geographical works and might have reached the compiler of the

\textsuperscript{100} Ed. Véliaminof-Zernof (1860–1862, 1:349).
\textsuperscript{101} Ed. Dankoff (1990, 60, 198).
\textsuperscript{102} See Sinclair (1987–1990, 1:291–96); Hewsen (2001).
\textsuperscript{103} See Wilmshurst (2000, 417).
Marvels by way of oral transmission. Given the prominence of Friday as a beneficial day in this account, it is possible that it originated in a Muslim milieu.

I.28 (= II.19) the long-eared people

The motif of people with ears large enough to cover themselves is attested across many ancient cultures, including the Greco-Roman world.\(^{104}\) Thus, the Greek historian Ctesias in his description of India, mentions the nation of Otoliknoi, who ‘have huge ears which they use to cover themselves like an umbrella’.\(^{105}\) This monstrous race appears in the works of Muslim writers as well, where they are often identified with one of the mythic nations associated with Gog and Magog and called Mansak or Manšak. For an example, cf. the following description from al-Qazwīnī’s ‘Aǧāʾib al-maḥlūqāt:

To these [living creatures] also belong peoples called Mansak. They live in an eastern direction near Gog and Magog, look like human beings but have ears like those of an elephant. Each ear is like a garment. When they go to sleep, they lie down on one ear and cover themselves with the other.\(^{106}\)

---

\(^{104}\) For an overview, see Kirtley (1963).

\(^{105}\) Trans. Nichols (2011, 80).

\(^{106}\) Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:448); trans. van Donzel & Schmidt (2009, 66).
A remarkable aspect of this unit is that it features the only explicit inner-textual gloss in Persian in our work. In the concluding sentence, the ‘Persian’ name for the long-eared people is provided, transliterated into Syriac as gālim gōš (ǧālim ǧūš in L). This loan-word reflects a singular form of the New Persian collective compound noun گليم گوشان, gilīm-gošān, literally ‘carpet-eared ones’ or ‘blanket-eared ones’, used to refer to the mythological long-eared people in Classical Persian sources. For instance, gilīm gošān are mentioned in one of the poems of Manuchehri Damghani (11th c.).

It is unclear whether the inclusion of this gloss should be ascribed to the compiler of the Marvels or, perhaps, to the literary (or oral) Muslim source that he might have used for this tradition. In what concerns the latter scenario, it should be pointed out that a very similar gloss with the Persian name is added to al-Qazwīnī’s description of the long-eared people, quoted above, in some copies of ‘Aḡāʾib al-mahḷūqāt, such as the one found in ms. London, British Library, Or. 14140 (early 14th c.), fol. 131v: ویقال لهم كليم كوشان.

---

107 See Steingass (1892, 1096).
108 Ed. de Biberstein-Kazimirski (1886, 181 [Pers.]).
109 For the image of this folio, see Carboni (2015, 90, fig. 3.34). The whole manuscript is also available online: https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023586788.0x000001.
I.29 (= II.20) the dog-people of Karnāš

Some late antique Syriac works, such as the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* (6th c.), contain brief references to the legendary ‘dog-men’ (ܒܪܢܫܟܠܒ),\(^{110}\) which go back to Greco-Roman tradition. Moreover, the dog-men play a central role in a metrical homily on Apostle Andrew, ascribed to Ephrem, where God sends the apostle to evangelise ‘the country of dogs’ (ܕܟܠܒܝܢܐܬܪܐ).\(^{111}\) Yet, none of these or other ancient and medieval Syriac compositions seem to contain an account comparable to that of this unit.

It seems more likely that this tradition reached the compiler of the *Marvels* through Muslim sources.\(^ {112}\) While I have not been able so far to identify the toponym Karnāš and find a close parallel to this account, I believe that its origins should be sought among stories similar to the following account from the anonymous Persian composition ‘ʿAǧāʾib al-dunyā (13th c.):

> There is a people in the islands of Kūhra ( קוهره) and Bārīk (باريک), whose men wear garments (made) of tree bark, whereas their women go around naked. They use swords as weapons and eat human flesh. When they catch a man, they hand him over to the women, before eating him, so that they (i.e., the women) would become pregnant from him and give birth to beautiful children, because they

---

\(^{110}\) Ed. Brooks (1919–1924, 2:214); see also translation and comments in Greatrex et al. (2011, 451).

\(^{111}\) Edited by van Esbroeck (1998, 93–105).

\(^{112}\) For some references, see Bellino & Mengozzi (2016, 434, n. 54).
themselves are ugly. They have prolonged faces, like dogs.113

I.30 (= II.21) the sheep-tailed people of Arabia

These creatures should be identified, most likely, with nasnās/nisnās (pl. nasānis), the legendary wild human-like creatures of Arabic and Persian Muslim sources.114 Thought to be the descendants of the ancient Arab tribe of ʿAd, cursed by God, or the product of crossbreeding between humans and animals, they were often located in the region of Yemen and said to be hunted by local Arabs for food. For examples, see accounts found in the anonymous Kitāb ġarāʾib al-funūn wa-mulah al-ʿuyūn (11th c.)115 and Ṭabāʾiʿ al-ḥayawān of al-Marwazī (12th c.).116

I.31 (= II.22) the scorpion-legged people

It seems likely that this unit is derived from the description of the men with scorpion legs in the following passage from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7):

and we saw too wolves and leopards and panthers and beasts with scorpions’ tails, and elephants, and wild bulls, and ox-elephants, and men with six hands apiece; and we

____________________________________
113 Ed. Smirnova (1993, 410, fol. 135b).
114 See Viré (1986, 133–34); Kruk (1995, 33–34); El-Zein (2009, 142–43).
115 Ed. Rapoport & Savage-Smith (2014, 512–13).
116 Ed. Minorsky (1942, 59–60).
saw men with scorpions’ legs and teeth like dogs and faces like women.\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{I.32 (= II.23) the island of cannibals}

The cannibal inhabitants of distant lands were one of the most common topoi of Muslim paradoxographical and geographical works.\textsuperscript{118} References to various islands inhabited by cannibals are found in the earliest specimen of Arabic travel writing, such as \textit{Aḥbār al-šīn wa-l-hind} by Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī (9th c.),\textsuperscript{119} and \textit{ʿAḡāʾib al-hind} by Buzurg Ibn Šahriyār (10th c.).\textsuperscript{120} For parallels to the notion of eating humans alive, cf. the anonymous \textit{Kitāb ġarāʾib al-funūn wa-mulāḥ al-ʿuyūn} (11th c.): ‘The island of al-Dāsbī. Its inhabitants are of the Zanj race, with pepper-like hair. When a foreigner falls in their hands, they eat him alive. They devour human flesh like dogs’.\textsuperscript{121}

The name of the island in this unit varies somewhat across the manuscripts: \textit{Klāmīs} in V and \textit{Balūs} in L and B1 of II.23. It is the latter variant, however, that should be recognized as the orig-

\textsuperscript{117} For general discussion, see Szombathy (2015).
\textsuperscript{118} Ed. Mackintosh-Smith & Montgomery (2014, 27).
\textsuperscript{119} Trans. Freeman-Grenville (1981, 73–74).
\textsuperscript{120} Ed. Rapoport & Savage-Smith (2014, 482).
inal form, since it reflects the well-attested in Arabic sources toponym, Bālūs, one of the most famous islands of cannibals in Muslim literature. For example, see the following account from Ibn Ḍordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘To the left, at the distance of two days journey from it, there is the island of Bālūs, whose inhabitants are cannibals’.\textsuperscript{122} Cf. also al-Marwazi’s notice: ‘The inhabitants of Bālūs are cannibals’.\textsuperscript{123} According to Minorsky, this island should be identified with the port on the south-western coast of Sumatra.\textsuperscript{124}

I.33 the tree climbers of Serendib

The toponym Serendib (spelt in V as Sarndib), referring to the modern island of Sri Lanka, is attested in the works of some medieval Syriac authors, such as Bar ‘Ebroyo (13th c.).\textsuperscript{125} The island is also mentioned in unit I.51.

A close parallel is provided by the following description of the inhabitants of the island of al-Rāmī, located not far from Serendib, from Ibn Ḍordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘And they climb trees with their hands (only), without putting their feet on them’.\textsuperscript{126} According to Minorsky, this island should be identified with Sumatra.\textsuperscript{127} The identification of it as Serendib in the Mar-

\textsuperscript{122} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 66).

\textsuperscript{123} Ṭabāʾiʾ al-ḥayawān; ed. Minorsky (1942, 49* [Arab.], 59 [trans.]).

\textsuperscript{124} Minorsky (1970, 187).

\textsuperscript{125} See Candelabrum of the Sanctuary; ed. Bakoš (1930–1933, 2:310, 314).

\textsuperscript{126} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 65).

\textsuperscript{127} Minorsky 1970, p. 187, n. 5.
vels could be a result of the reliance of its compiler on some geographical work that placed the island of al-Rāmī not far from Serendib. For example, the author of the Persian geographical treatise Ḫudūd al-ʿālam (10th c.) describes this island as located ‘in the region of Sarandib’.

I.34 (= II.24) the people with dog teeth

Although some Muslim writers also refer to people having dog teeth, given the mention of Alexander in this unit, it seems more likely that this tradition derives from the following account in the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7), describing various monstrous races that the king and his men met during their march from the Caspian gates to India: ‘and we saw men with scorpions’ legs and teeth like dogs and faces like women’.

I.35 (= II.25) the headless people

While descriptions of the race of men without heads are found in works of several Muslim writers, it seems more likely that this report is derived from the following account from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7):

---

128 Trans. Minorsky (1970, 57).

129 Cf. the description of Gog and Magog in al-Qazwīnī’s ʿAḡāʾib al-mahlūqāt; ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:448).

130 Cf. the description of the inhabitants of the island of Ǧāba in al-Qazwīnī’s ʿAḡāʾib al-mahlūqāt; ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:112).
Then we departed thence through fear, and came to a certain place. And the people who were in that place had no head at all, but they had eyes and a mouth in their breasts, and they spoke like men, and used to gather mushrooms from the ground and eat them. Now each mushroom weighed twenty pounds. And those men were like children in their minds, and in their way of life they were very simple.\(^{132}\)

I.36 (= II.26) the strap-feet people

These mythological anthropoid creatures appear already in Greco-Roman sources, where they are often referred to as Ἱμαντόποδες / Himantopodes and located in Africa or India.\(^{133}\) Later on, one finds them mentioned in the works of various Muslim authors.\(^{134}\) To Syriac Christians these creatures were known from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7), where they are said to attack Alexander’s troops: ‘And we departed thence and arrived at the country of the people whose feet are twisted; and when they saw us, they began to throw stones, and they threw accurately and aimed at us’\(^{135}\).

---

\(^{132}\) Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.8.46; Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.1.9; Pomponius Mela, *Chor.* 3.103; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alexander Romance* 3.28.

\(^{133}\) For Persian and some Arabic sources, see A’lam (1996).

\(^{135}\) Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.8.46; Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.1.9; Pomponius Mela, *Chor.* 3.103; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alexander Romance* 3.28.
While in this case it is difficult to establish exact source used by the compiler of the *Marvels*, one can point out a passage from al-Qazwini’s *ʿAǧāʾib al-maḥlūqāt*, which has many common elements with our unit. In this passage, al-Qazwini quotes at length an account of a seafarer named Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq al-Sarrāğ about his adventures on the island of Saksar. After he manages to escape the cannibalistic dog-headed people, after whom the island is named, Yaʿqūb wanders into a grove of fruit trees. There he is ambushed and enslaved by one of the people living in this part of the island, who mounts on Yaʿqūb’s shoulders. Twisting his feet around his victim’s neck, the soft-legged man forces Yaʿqūb to carry him around the fruit trees, so that he might pick fruits from them. It is only with great difficulty that Yaʿqūb manages to get rid of his captor.

I.37 (= II.27) the raven-like people

This account is most likely derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7), which describes an attack of the raven-like people against Alexander’s troops:

and within the wood there were wild men, whose faces resembled ravens, and they held missiles in their hands, and their clothing was of skins. When they saw us, they cast missiles at my troops and slew some of them; and I commanded my troops to shout and to charge them at full

---

136 See Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:121–22).
speed; and when we had done this, we slew six hundred and thirty-three of them, and they slew of my horsemen one hundred and sixty-seven.137

I.38 (= II.28) the ass-legged people

This report is most likely derived from a brief description from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7), which concludes the passage describing the attack by the strap-feet people, quoted above in I.36, with the following statement: ‘and there were some among them with asses’ legs’.138

I.39 (= II.30) the hairless people

The exact origin of this account is unclear.

I.40 (= II.31) the conjoined twins from the island of Kīš

The exact origin of this account is unclear. The story finds distant parallels among expressions of the general interest in the cases of conjoined twins, exhibited by not a few Muslim men of letters. For examples, see al-Bīrūnī, Kitāb al-āṯār al-bāqiyyah;139 al-Qazwīnī,

---

137 Sachau (1879, 93).
138 ed. Budge (1889, 176 [Syr.], 99 [trans.]).
139 ed. Budge (1889, 178 [Syr.], 99 [trans.]).
ʿ Ağāʾ ib al-maḥlūqāt; 140 the anonymous Persian ʿ Ağāʾ ib al-dunyā, 141 Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī (14th c.), Nuzhat al-qulūb. 142

The toponym Kīš (also mentioned in unit II.57) is well-known and refers to the island located in the lower Persian Gulf. 143 Situated half-way between Siraf and Hormuz, its port was one of the major emporiums of the Gulf in medieval times. 144 The location of this story, as well as the fact that the narrator reports hearing it from a certain Anās, probably a Muslim, makes it plausible to suggest that it originated and/or circulated as a part of the folklore of Muslim traders and seamen of the Persian Gulf.

I.41 the old man in the sea

The exact origin of this account is unclear. Likewise, the toponym Myaṭāl (Miṭālaṭ in L) is not immediately recognizable. Since the narrator reports that he heard this story from a certain Christian clergyman Qūryaqqūs, a citizen of Mosul and merchant, it is possible that it originated and/or circulated as a part of the folklore of Muslim traders and seamen of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Perhaps, the mysterious ‘old man’ could be related to the figure of the ‘old man of the sea’ (Arab. راءف al-bahr), a malevolent protagonist who plays a major role in the fifth voyage of Sindbad the Sailor, included in the One Thousand and One

140 Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:12, 451).
141 Smirnova (1993, 477).
142 Le Strange (1919, 274–75).
143 See Potts (2004).
144 See Kauz (2006).
Moreover, Muslim paradoxographical and geographical works contain a number of accounts about seafarers meeting people in the middle of the ocean.

I.42 (= II.32) the tree of Waqwaq

The legendary island or archipelago of Waqwaq, located sometimes in the sea of China and sometimes in the Indian Ocean, was one of the most popular topoi of the Muslim paradoxographical imagination. A number of accounts, dealing with this island, feature descriptions of a miraculous tree bearing fruits that resemble human or animal shapes, or are actual living beings (often women). While the exact origin of the account in our unit is difficult to establish, one can cite as a relatively early parallel the following report from ʿAǧāʾib al-hind of Buzurg Ibn Šahriyār:

---

145 On the complicated textual tradition of the cycle of Sindbad and influence of ʿaḡāʾib literature on this work, see Bellino (2015).

146 Cf. Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh, Kitāb al-masālik; ed. de Goeje (1889, 65); the anonymous Kitāb ǧarāʾib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-ʿuyūn; ed. Rapoport & Savage-Smith (2014, 512); the anonymous Persian ʿAḡāʾib al-dunyā; ed. Smirnova (1993, 441–42).

147 For references and discussion, see Ferrand et al. (2002); Toorawa (2000).

148 See articles in Bacqué-Grammont et al. (2007). To the sources discussed in this volume one might also add accounts from the anonymous Kitāb ǧarāʾib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-ʿuyūn; ed. Rapoport & Savage-Smith (2014, 519), and the anonymous Persian ʿAḡāʾib al-dunyā; ed. Smirnova (1993, 342).
Muhammad b. Babishad told me that, according to what he had learnt from men who had been to the Waqwaq country, there is a large tree there, with round leaves, or sometimes oblong, which bears a fruit like a marrow, only larger, and looking somewhat like a human being. When the wind blows, a voice comes out of it. The inside is full of air, like the fruit of the *ushar*. If one picks it, the air escapes at once, and it is nothing but skin. When he saw this fruit, a sailor was pleased by it, and cut one off to take it away. It burst immediately, and all that remained in the man's hands was like a dead crow.\(^{149}\)

**I.43 the woman pregnant for two years**

While the exact origin of this tradition is difficult to establish, mention of the cities of Baghdad and Tus points to a Muslim milieu. Moreover, its content is in line with discussions of the extraordinary cases of long periods of gestation found in the works of some Muslim physicians.\(^{150}\) For a close parallel, cf. ‘Ārīb ibn Saʿīd al-Qurṭubī (10th c.), *Kitāb ḥalq al-ġanin*: ‘a tradition reports that al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim stayed sixteen months in the womb and that at birth he had teeth’.\(^{151}\) As for the length of the pregnancy in our account, it evokes the views held by some Muslim writers who claimed that gestation could last as long as two years.\(^{152}\)

---

\(^{149}\) Trans. Freeman-Grenville (1981, 39).

\(^{150}\) For references and discussion, see Kueny (2013, 189–90).

\(^{151}\) Ed. Jahier & Noureddine (1956, 33).

\(^{152}\) For references and discussion, see Verskin (2020, 72–73).
I.44 (= II.33) the woman who gave birth to sixty children

The story finds parallels among expressions of the general interest in extraordinary cases of multiple pregnancies exhibited by some Muslim physicians.¹⁵³ For a very close parallel, see the following account by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī (9th c.), Firdaws al-ḥikma:

More than one woman told me that in our times a certain black woman gave birth to sixty children. And they used to say that she gave birth to a kor of children because one kor is equal to sixty qafız. And this was in thirty-five pregnancies or more, and she produced more twins than that. And she would miscarry once or twice in a year.¹⁵⁴

Of the two measures of capacity that are mentioned in this account, i.e., kōr and qpīzā,¹⁵⁵ the latter (spelt, in its plural form, as qpīsē in V and L, and as qpīzē in B1) is a unit of weight equivalent to about 64 lbs., and has an Iranian etymology.¹⁵⁶ It is well attested both in Classical Arabic and New Persian as qafız (or kafız).

I.45 (= II.34) the woman who gave birth to twenty children

This tradition probably belongs to the same source as the previous unit. For close parallels in Muslim sources, see the recurring mentions of the case of a woman giving birth to twenty children, as in the following passage from Firdaws al-ḥikma of ʿAlī al-

¹⁵³ For references and discussion, see Kueny (2013, 187).
¹⁵⁴ Ed. Siddiqi (1928, 37).
¹⁵⁵ See Sokoloff (2009, 612, 1391).
¹⁵⁶ See Ciancaglini (2008, 250).
Ṭabarī: ‘another woman gave birth to twenty children in four pregnancies, five children in every pregnancy, and they (all) lived’.

For similar accounts, see also ‘Arīb ibn Saʿīd al-Qurṭūbī, *Kitāb ḥalq al-ḡanīn*; Ibn Qayyim al-Ḡawziyyah (14th c.), *Ṭibyān fī aqsām al-Qurʾān*. This tradition ultimately goes back to Aristotle, who, in one of his works, mentions ‘a certain woman who had twenty children at four births; each time she had five, and most of them grew up’.

**I.46 (= II.35) the woman pregnant with seven children**

While the immediate source of this account is unclear, the compiler of the *Marvels* likely derived it from the same source as the three previous units. The mention of the ‘Frankish man’ (*Prangāyā*) as a protagonist points at its origins during the Crusades or post-Crusader period.

**I.47 the child suckled by the dead woman**

The primary aim of this grotesque account is to promote the notion of Syriac as the primeval language, an important expression of Syriac Christian identity, roots of which can be traced back to the pre-Islamic period. While it seems to be implied already in

---

157 Ed. Siddiqi (1928, 37).

158 Ed. Jahier & Noureddine (1956, 27).

159 Ed. al-Ḥarastānī & al-Zaqli (1994, 305).

160 *Hist. anim.* 7.4; trans. Thompson (1910, sect. 584b).

161 On development of this notion in Late Antiquity, see Rubin (1998); Moss (2010).
the discussion of biblical names based on Syriac etymologies by Theodoret of Cyrus (5th c.), this idea finds fully articulated expression only in Pseudo-Ephrem’s *Cave of Treasures* (ca. 6th c.), whose author claims that before the destruction of the tower of Babel all people spoke Syriac and that all languages in the world are derived from Syriac.162 These and some additional expressions of Syriac primacy continued to circulate among Syriac Christians during the medieval period.

With this story, the compiler of the *Marvels* introduces what seems to be a unique and novel argument in favour of the primacy of Syriac. Its line of argumentation is akin to the one found in an account from Herodotus’ *Histories* that describes a linguistic experiment, supposedly conducted in ancient Egypt during the reign of Psammetichus.163 Driven by the desire to establish what nation is oldest in the world, this king ordered that a couple of new-born children should be brought up without a person speaking with them. When the children grew up, the first sound they had uttered was ‘bekos’ (βεκός), which was interpreted by the king’s counsellors as the Phrygian word for ‘bread’. According to Herodotus, it is as a result of this experiment that the Egyptians conceded the honour of being the oldest nation to the Phrygians.

As for its possible antecedents, I have as yet been unable to discover any close analogues of this story in Muslim or other sources from the medieval Islamicate world. There are, however, several literary works that share with our account the motif of

162 *Cave* 24.9–11; see also Minov (2013, 165–75).

163 *Hist.* 2.2; ed. Godley (1926–1930, 1:274–77. For an analysis of this story, see Gera (2003, 68–111).
breastfeeding corpse, which, apparently, originated in the Muslim literary *imaginaire* before the time of the composition of the *Marvels*. One such example of miraculous nursing is found in the Judeo-Arabic version of the popular medieval Arabic frontier epic *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*. There, the recently-born hero Junduba is found in the desert by his adoptive father prince Dārim, suckling the breast of his murdered mother: ‘He (i.e., Dārim) saw the princess Arbāb, left behind and slain, and this newborn was suckling from her. The milk was pouring out in excess, by the power of the Possessor of Power […], and his mother was nursing him, though she was dead at his side’.  

Another narrative that bears witness to this motif is the story of Meyyitzâde from the *Seyahatname* of the famous Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi (17th c.). It appears as an etiological account in the context of the description of the tomb, located in the Kasımpaşa neighbourhood of Istambul, which was named after this person, i.e., *Kabr-i Meyyitzâde*. According to Çelebi, the father of Meyyitzâde left his pregnant wife at home when he set out on a military campaign with Sultan Mehmed Khan III in the year 1595–96. When upon his return, he learned that his wife had died, he ordered her grave to be opened, at which point they found inside the child alive, suckling the right breast of his dead mother, whose body had not rotten (*vâlidesinin sağ memesin emer,*

---

164 Trans. from Schine (2019, 182).

165 Ed. Dankoff et al. (1996, 198). I thank Aslı Niyazioğlu for drawing my attention to this parallel.

166 On this monument, see Crane (2000, 367).
aslâ çürümemiş). In the aftermath of this miraculous event, the boy was given the name Meyyitzâde ‘the son of the corpse’.

I.48 the martyrdom of the ape’s son

This unit provides us with the only instance when the compiler of the Marvels explicitly mentions his written source. The reference to ‘the book of Mār Basil’ most likely points to the erotapocritic composition known as the Questions of Basil and Gregory, which is attested both in Syriac and Arabic.\(^{167}\) And indeed, an account almost identical to that of our unit is found in some textual witnesses of the Arabic version of the Questions. Since the only existing edition of this work by Ğirğis Bey Yaʿqūb is a rare book in Western libraries, I offer below the complete Arabic text and English translation of the story, based on one of the earliest textual witnesses of the Questions, i.e., ms. Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Ar. 481 (1091), fols. 307v–308r.\(^{168}\)

\(^{167}\) On the Syriac version, which is still unpublished, see Baumstark (1922, 79–80), who gives a list of its manuscripts in n. 1. The full text of the Arabic version was published from an unspecified manuscript by Bey Yaʿqūb (1920, 94–155). I thank Barbara Roggema for providing me with a copy of this rare edition. For a recent discussion of the Arabic version that includes an inventory of its manuscripts, see Roggema (2019).

\(^{168}\) I am most grateful to Alice Croq, who is currently preparing an edition of the Arabic version of the Questions, for letting me publish here the Arabic text and English translation of this passage prepared by her. Except for a few minor variants, this text is identical with that of Question 70 in Bey Yaʿqūb (1920, 126–27).
ما تقول في مولود ولد له وجهان وأربع ارجل وفيه شبه من الحيوان يجب أن يعمد أم لا؟

أجاب بابا بيلايوس ما ينبغي أن يعمد ولكن يستبقا منجل تسبيح الله وعلم أنه كان في قلوبه المدينة قرد ضائع امراه نصرانيًا كان بولص الرسول قد اعمدها فولدت من ذلك القرد ذكرها كان صورته قرد وانسان من صدره الي رجليه قردا وعنقه ووجهه انسان وكان يتكلم مثل انسان وكان يدخل الي الكنيسة ويسعم الكتب المقدسّه ويعملن فلما صار ابن عشرين سنه كان يطلب ويحرص أن يعمد فاجتمع من أجله سنودس اي مجمع وكان الرئيس عليه تيموثاؤس تلميذ بولص فجري بينهم خلفا في ذلك فنهم من كان يقول نعم ومنهم من يقول لا فوثب ذيونيسيوس استخف اثنا فقال انا أنا فلا

ادخل الأعضاء النجس الحيوان في ما المعمودى المقدسّه واجتمع رأي الجماعة ورسموا تلك السنودس ان لا يعمد انسان مختلف الخلقه فلما دخل طربيوس الملك الكافر الي قلوبه المدينة والهموم بالذبايح للاصناج جا هذا مسرعا وقف قدّام الملك وقال له انا أنا فاني نصراني وان ذلك الملك اجاز عليه اصناف من العقوبات فلم ينقل عن امانه بل كان وهو يعذب 170 يصبح ويقبل انا نصراني فامر الملك ان يطرح في اناه مملو زفت

169 طربيوس in Bey Yaʿqūb’s edition.

170 يعمد in the manuscript is a corruption; the reading of Bey Yaʿqūb’s edition should be preferred.
Question seventy-one. Gregory said: ‘What do you say about someone who was born with two faces or four legs and has something similar to an animal, — should he be baptized or not?’ Basil answered: ‘It is not right to baptize him, but he should be allowed to live for the glorification of God. Know that in the city of Callinicum, there was an ape who had slept with a Christian woman. The apostle Paul had baptized her, and from this ape, she gave birth to a male child whose appearance was like that of a human and an ape: from his chest to his feet he was an ape, and his neck and face were human. He spoke like a human being, and he went to the church and listened to the Holy Scriptures and learned. When he reached the age of twenty, he asked and strove to be baptized. A synod, that is to say, a council, was gathered on his account, and it was presided over by Timothy, the disciple of Paul. They disagreed on this matter: some of them were saying “yes” and others “no”. And Dionysius, the bishop of Athens, got up and said, “As for me, I am not going to let impure animal limbs enter the waters of holy baptism!” And the assembly agreed with his opinion, and this synod laid down a rule that no human being of a different appearance should be baptized. And when the infidel king Ṭarabiyūs came to the city of Callinicum, he requested
from them to sacrifice to pagan idols. This one (i.e., the boy) came quickly and stood in front of the king and said to him, “As for me, I am a Christian”. And this king had him suffer several kinds of punishments, but he did not deny his faith, and moreover, as he was tortured, he shouted and said, “I am Christian!” The king, then, ordered that he should be thrown into a reservoir filled with pitch and brimstone. When they threw him into it, he shouted and said, “May this reservoir be my baptism, O Christ God!” After his death, Titus the bishop said, “Truly, his body will rise up at the resurrection”.

As one can see, except for minor differences, the two versions of this story, that of the Marvels and that of the Questions, present basically the same narrative. The absence in the text of the former of such details as the mention of Paul baptising the woman, of Paul’s disciple Timothy presiding over the council, and of the bishop Titus in the concluding sentence, brings us to the conclusion that the narrative of the Marvels is a slightly abbreviated version of the more extensive original version of the Questions. Unfortunately, given the absence of a critical edition of either version of the Questions, i.e., Syriac and Arabic, it is difficult to say anything certain as to when precisely and in which milieu this story originated, nor whether the compiler of the Marvels relied on Syriac or Arabic text in this specific case.

---

171 سفل in the manuscript, but it is better to adopt the reading of Bey Yaʿqūb’s edition, i.e., اناء.
In what concerns the message of the story, it resorts to grotesque imagery in order to tackle important issues related to the problem of communal identity by stressing the paramount significance of baptism as the primary marker of belonging to the Christian community. The notion of baptism of blood is crucial for unpacking the meaning of this narrative. Rooted in the deep symbolic connection between the sacrament of baptism and martyrdom, the understanding of martyrdom as the second baptism, or even as a last-resort substitute for proper baptism, had developed among Christians already during Late Antiquity. In the Syriac milieu, this notion is attested in some hagiographic works, such as the Martyrdom of Āzād, whose author describes the martyrs as ‘baptized in a second baptism’ (ܐܝܕܝ ܒܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ), as well as in canonical compositions, such as the Canons of Hippolytus and the Testament of Our Lord, claiming that if a catechumen is martyred before having been baptized, he or she should nevertheless be regarded as having successfully accomplished this sacrament with his/her blood.

I.49 the child raised by a dog

The story presented in this unit is, most likely, one of the later variants of a very similar account of the curious event, also said to have taken place in the city of Basra in the aftermath of a

---

172 See Jeanes (1993).

173 Ed. Bedjan (1890–1897, 2:251).

174 See Bradshaw et al. (2002, 103).
plague, which was included by al-Jāḥiẓ (9th c.) into his *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*:

The learned men of Basra claimed, and Abū ʿUbayda al-Naḥwī, Abū l-Yaqẓān Suḥaym b. Ḥafṣ, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Madāʾīnī mentioned, (who knew it) from Muḥammad b. Ḥafṣ, (who knew it from) from Maslama b. Muḥārib: a certain house having been ravaged by the plague, the neighbours were convinced that there was no one left alive in it. Now there was a baby in that house, not yet weaned nor able to stand upright: it crawled on all fours. One of the neighbours who had survived went and shut the door of the house. Some months later, one of the family’s heirs came to the house; he opened the door and went inside into the courtyard, and was amazed to find a baby playing with the puppies of a bitch that had belonged to the owners of the house. He was dumbfounded. A few moments later the bitch appeared: when the baby saw her, it crawled over to her and began to suck her dugs, which the animal offered to it. The baby, left alone and forgotten in the house, must have felt hungry, and seeing the puppies being suckled by their mother, have crawled over to the bitch, which obligingly placed herself so as to allow it to suck. Having once given it suck, she continued in the same way, and the baby likewise.175

Al-Jāḥiẓ brings this story as confirmation of the ‘divine direction’ that guides all created beings by instilling in them ‘innate knowledge’ for the best course of action.

175 Ed. Hārūn (1965–1969, 2:155–56); trans. (augmented) Pellat (1969, 143).
I.50 the plague in Basra

While the exact origin of this tradition is difficult to establish, the mention of the city of Basra points to a Muslim milieu. Tracing its origins is made difficult by the fact that there were quite a few outbreaks of epidemics that afflicted the city during the medieval period. Thus, in addition to the obvious case of the Black Death (1346–1353), one comes across references to plagues that devastated Basra during the years 688–689, 955, and 1436.\footnote{See Ashtor (1976, 87, 170, 278).}

I.51 the buffalos of Serendib

The toponym Serendib (spelled in V as Sarnādīb), referring to the modern island of Sri Lanka, is attested in the works of some medieval Syriac authors, such as Bar ʿEbroyo (13th c.).\footnote{See Candelabrum of the Sanctuary; ed. Bakoš (1930–1933, 2:310, 314).} The island is also mentioned in unit I.33. The plural noun ܝܫܥܐܓܡܬܐ, ‘buffalo bulls’, vocalized in V as gamešē, should probably be understood not as a misspelt form of the Classical Syriac gāmūšē,\footnote{See Payne Smith (1879–1901, 1:741–42); Ciancaglini (2008, 137).} but rather as a variant spelling of its Neo-Aramaic cognate gāmišē.\footnote{See Maclean (1901, 52), who lists the alternative spelling ܓܵܡܸܫ on p. 53.}

For a very close parallel, cf. the following passage from the description of the island of Rāmī in Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘After Serendib, there is the island of Rāmī. … And on it,
there are buffaloes without tails (جواميس لا اذناب). This tradition is also attested in al-Qazwīnī’s ʿAḡāʾīb al-mahlūqāt, although without mention of Serendib.

I.52 the mountain of snakes

It is possible that this report is derived from the following description from one of the offshoots of the Syriac Alexander Romance known as the Exploits of Alexander:

and beyond the nation of the Mnīnē there are no human beings but only terrible mountains and hills and valleys and plains and horrible caves, in which are serpents and adders and vipers, so that men cannot go thither without being immediately devoured by the serpents, for the lands are waste, and there is nothing there save desolation.

I.53 the wolf and leopard

This report is almost certainly derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7): ‘and we

---

180 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 61). For a discussion of various locations of this island, sometimes identified with Sumatra, in the works of Arab geographers, see Carboni (2015, 354, n. 52).

181 Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:108).

182 Ed. Budge (1889, 265–66 [Syr.], 152 [trans.]).
saw too wolves and leopards and panthers and beasts with scorpions’ tails’.

I.54 (= II.54) the sea turtles

Similarly to unit I.10, this narrative features an inner-textual gloss that explains the Classical Syriac noun gālē ‘turtles’ with the Neo-Aramaic qrāyē.184

A close parallel is provided by the following account from the description of the inhabitants of the part of the ‘Great Eastern Sea’ close to the port of Aden in Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘And there are in it (i.e., the sea) turtles (salāḥif). One such turtle is twenty cubits in circumference, and it has about a thousand eggs in its belly. And their shell makes a good shield’.185 This passage also appears in al-Qazwini’s Āḏaʾib al-maḥlūqāt186 in a form closer to that of our unit, that is, without the last sentence.

I.55 (= II.55) the camel-fish

This unit most likely comes from the same source as the previous one. For a very close parallel, cf. the following passage from the description of the inhabitants of the ‘Great Eastern Sea’ in Ibn

---

183 Bēnū ʿĀqib ʿAlāʾūd Dāwūd ʿAbū Rūḥān; ed. Budge (1889, 174 [Syr.], 98 [trans.]).
184 See Maclean (1901, 284), under ܩܪܝ; Khan (2016, 3:54).
185 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 61).
186 Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:109).
Ḫordāḏbeh’s *Kitāb al-masālik*: ‘There is also a fish that looks like a camel (سمك على خلقة الجمل).’

I.56 the islands of life and death
The exact origin of this account is unclear.

I.57 (= II.56) the island of prayers for rain
The exact origin of this account is unclear.

I.58 (= II.49) the giant fish and sailors
The hydronym ‘the sea of Qūlzam’ (also mentioned in unit II.53) is a calque from the Arabic *baḥr al-Qulzum* of Muslim sources, which was applied sometimes to the Red Sea as a whole and sometimes only to the Gulf of Suez because the port known as Qulzum (from Greek Κλύσμα) was located on its western banks. An alternative Syriac name for the Red Sea, i.e. ماء ماء, is found in works of medieval authors, such as Bar ʿEbroyo.

Two main elements of this description are found in an account by Buzurg Ibn Šahriyār (10th c.), who relates how Ahmad b. Hilal, a ruler of Oman, came across a whale ‘more than 200 cubits long’ that was stranded ashore, while supplementing it with the following information: ‘Ismailawayh the shipmaster told me that this fish abounds in the Sea of Zanj and in the Great Sea

---

187 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 61).
188 See Becker & Beckingham (1986).
189 See *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary*; ed. Bakoš (1930–1933, 2:309–10).
of Samarqand. It is called a *Wal*. It likes wrecking ships. If it attacks a ship, [the sailors] strike pieces of wood against one another, and shout and beat drums'.

I.59 (= II.50) the big fish with smaller fish inside

Compare a very similar description of a whale from Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī’s *Aḥbār al-ṣīn wa-l-hind*:

In this sea there is also a kind of fish that reaches twenty cubits in length. We caught one of these and split open its belly. Inside it was another fish of the same genus. We took this second fish out then split its belly open too—and there inside it was yet another fish of the same type! All of them were alive and flapping about, and they all resembled each other in form.

Cf. also the description of different kinds of fish by Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh.

---

190 ʿ*Aḡāʾib al-hind* 9; trans. Freeman-Grenville (1981, 9–10). This description might, in its turn, be based on a similar account of Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, *Aḥbār al-ṣīn wa-l-hind* I.1.1; ed. Mackintosh-Smith & Montgomery (2014, 34–35), beginning of which is lost. This tradition is found in many later geographical and zoological works. Cf. also Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh, *Kitāb al-masālik*; ed. de Goeje (1889, 61); Ḥamdāllah al-Mustawfī al-Qazwīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*; trans. Stephenson (1928, 58).

191 Ed. Mackintosh-Smith & Montgomery (2014, 22–23). Cf. also Buzurg Ibn Šahriyār, ʿ*Aḡāʾib al-hind* 11; trans. Freeman-Grenville (1981, 11); Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh, *Kitāb al-masālik*; ed. de Goeje (1889, 61).

192 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 61).
I.60 (= II.51) the bull-fish

This unit most likely comes from the same source as units I.54 and I.55. For a very close parallel, cf. the following passage from the description of the inhabitants of the ‘Great Eastern Sea’ in Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘There is (also) a fish that looks like cattle (al-baqar), which gives birth and suckles. And they make shields from its skin’. 193

I.61 (= II.39) Alexander and the two talking birds

This account is most likely derived from the following episode from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7), which takes place when Alexander and his troops arrive at a place called Obarkia:

And on the seventh day we saw two birds, the bodies of which were very large, and their faces were like the face of a man; and suddenly one of them said in the Greek language, “O Alexander, thou art treading the land of the gods;” and again it said to me in the same language, “Alexander, the victory over Darius and the subjection of king Porus are enough for thee.” 194

193 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 61).

194 ܒܠܫܢܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܗܘܬ. ܐܝܟ ܦܪܨܘܦ ܒܪܢܫܐ. ܘܡܢ ܫܠܝܐ ܚܕܐ ܕܐܫ ܐܢܬ. ܘܬܘܒ ܒܗ ܒܠܫܢܐ ܐܡܪܬ ܠܝ. ܐܠܟܣܢܕܪܘܤ ܚܡܠܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܪܝܘܫ ܘܫܘܥܒܕܗ ܕܦܘܪ ܡܠܟܐ.
I.62 (= II.40) Alexander and the two growing trees

See commentary on unit II.40 below.

I.63 (= II.42) Alexander and the two talking trees

It is most likely that this unit presents in a very abbreviated and somewhat reworked form the extended account from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7), in which the king during his journey through India comes across the sacred garden with the two trees, the male tree of the sun and the female tree of the moon, which can talk; when Alexander asks them about his future, both trees inform him (one of them in the Greek language) that he will die at Babylon.\(^\text{195}\)

It should be noted that the version of unit II.42 adds in the concluding sentence that Alexander died ‘in Babylon’, which, perhaps, reflects better the original version of the *Marvels*. Babylon as the place of Alexander’s death is mentioned in some other Syriac sources.\(^\text{196}\)

I.64 (= II.58) the island of the Antichrist

This account reflects the belief, widespread among Muslims, that al-Dağğāl, the False Messiah of Islamic apocalypticism, is restrained by being chained to a mountain on an island, from which he eventually shall emerge at the time of eschatological consummation.\(^\text{197}\) A close parallel is provided by the following

\(^{195}\) Ed. Budge (1889, 185–89 [Syr.], 104–106 [trans.]).

\(^{196}\) Cf. the short *Life of Alexander*; ed. de Lagarde (1858, 207).

\(^{197}\) See Cook (2002, 117–20).
account from Ibn Ḫordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik: ‘And the king of Zābaḡ is called Maharāǧ. And in his kingdom, there is an island called Barṭāīl (بِرطایل), from where the sound (of musical instruments) and drum beating are heard every night. And mariners say that the Deceiver (الدجال) is there’.\textsuperscript{198} A very similar description of the island of al-Daḡḡāl appears in al-Qazwīnī’s ‘Aḡāʾib al-maḥlūqāt,\textsuperscript{199} as well as in the works of several other Muslim writers.\textsuperscript{200} It has been suggested by Minorsky that this island might be identified with Bali.\textsuperscript{201}

I.65 ( = II.40) Alexander and the two growing trees
See commentary on II.40.

II.29 the people with lions’ heads and scaly tails
This account is most likely derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7): ‘We set out again from thence and came to another place where there were men with lion’s heads and scaly tails.’\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{198} Ed. de Goeje (1889, 68).
\textsuperscript{199} Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:111).
\textsuperscript{200} Cf. Kitāb ġarāʾib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-ʿuyūn; ed. Rapoport & Savage-Smith (2014, 480); Šaraf al-Zamān Ṭāhir al-Marwāzī, Ṭabāʾiʿ al-ḥaya- wān; ed. Minorsky (1942, 38* [Arab.], 50 [trans.]).
\textsuperscript{201} Minorsky (1942, 152).
\textsuperscript{202} ܐܪܝܐ ܘܕܘ; ed. Budge (1889, 178 [Syr.], 100 [trans.]).
II.36 the woman giving birth to the lizard-like child

The toponym *Bēt Sasē* does not seem to be attested in any other Syriac sources. While the immediate origin of this story is unclear, it finds parallels among the expressions of general interest in extraordinary cases of congenital disorders exhibited by some Syriac Christian writers, as well as by Muslim paradoxographers. Thus, a somewhat similar account is found in the excerpt from a West Syrian chronicle, preserved in ms. Berlin, Sachau 315 (Berlin Syr. 167), fol. 65r, which opens with the following report: ‘In the year 1344 of the Greeks, which is the year 423 of the Arabs, a certain woman in the city of Bagdad gave birth to a likeness of a snake of short stature that had a head, mouth, and neck like those of a human being, but no arms and legs’. 203

As for Muslim writers, in the part of the introduction to al-Qazwīnī’s *ʿAǧāʾib al-maʿḫūqāt* that elucidates the category of ‘strange’, the author notes among other examples such a group of natural phenomena as ‘the birth of animals of strange appearance (تولد حيوان غريب الشكل)’, within which he lists several cases of birth defects among humans, including that of a woman from the region of Balkh who gave birth to a child that looked like a *nasnās*. 204

---

203 Ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:12). On *nasnās*, see the commentary to unit I.30 above. For a discussion of Muslim views regarding the causes of birth defects, see Kueny (2013, 181–82).
II.37 the horned serpents

This unit is most likely derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7): ‘And in the midst of the phalanx there sprang up snakes with horns on their heads, some red and some white, and they bit and killed a number of the men’.  

II.38 the animal bigger than an elephant

It is most likely that this report is an abbreviated form of the following account from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7):

After the moon had set and it was dark, an animal which was bigger in its body than an elephant and which they call *Mašqlat* in the language of the country, came into the ditch and wished to spring upon us, but I straightway called out to my troops to take courage and stand ready. Now the longing and desire of the animal was to enter the ditch and to kill men, and suddenly it rushed into the ditch and killed twenty-six men, and amid loud noises and struggles it too perished by the hands of my troops; and after it was dead, we with three hundred men dragged it with great toil from the ditch and lifted it out.

\[^{205}\text{�行 ܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܕܣܗܪܐ ܥܪܒ ܘܥܡܛܢܐ ܗܘܐ. ܚܝܘܬܐ ܚܕܐ ܕܒܦܓܪܗ. ܠܓܘ ܚܐܪܝܬܐ ܐܬܬ ܘܨܒܬ ̇ ܘ ܩܪܝܢ ܠܗ ̇ ܥܫܝܢܐ ܗܘܬ. ܡܫܩܠܬ ܒܠܫܢܗ ܕܐܬܪܐ ܗ }̣ \]^{206}\text{�行 ܡܢ ܫܠܝܐ ܠܓܘ ܪܓܬܗ}

\[^{205}\text{�行 ܣܘ ܡܢ ܡܢ}^{206}\text{�行 ܡܢ ܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܕܣܗܪܐ ܥܪܒ ܡܨܥܬ ܦܠܓܐ ܣܠܩܘ ܗܘܘ. ܘܠܣܘغضܐܐ ܕܒܢ}\]^{ed. Budge (1889, 174 [Syr.], 97 [trans.]).}
II.40 (= I.62 and I.65) Alexander and the growing trees

It is most likely that this story is a somewhat modified form of the following account from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7):

> And upon the bank of the river there was a tree, which grew and increased from dawn until the sixth hour, and from the sixth hour until evening it diminished in height until there was nothing to be seen of it. Its smell was very pleasant, and I gave orders to gather some of its leaves and fruit, when suddenly an evil wind burst forth upon my troops and distressed them pitilessly; and we heard the sound of violent blows, and swellings and weals appeared upon the back of my troops; and after this we heard a voice from heaven like the sound of thunder which spake thus:
> "Let no man cut ought from this tree, neither let him approach it, for if ye approach it, all your troops will die."

It should be noted that this unit also appears in Recension I, although in a very reduced form, in two almost identical units, I.62

---

207 ed. Budge (1889, 175 [Syr.], 98 [trans.]).
Commentary

and I.65. One should perhaps take it as an indication that Recension II better preserves the part of the original version of the Marvels that was derived from the Alexander Romance.

II.41 the partridge-looking bird

This unit is most likely derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7), which follows the preceding account of the trees: ‘And there were birds too which were like partridges’. 208

II.43 the half-human animal attacking Alexander’s troops

It is most likely that this report is an abbreviated form of the following account from the Syriac version of the Alexander Romance (III.7):

At the ninth hour of the day, behold a creature half beast half man, which in its body was (like) a wild boar reared upright; and it was not at all afraid of us. I commanded my troops to catch it, and when they drew near to it, it was not at all afraid and did not run away from them. Then I ordered a naked woman to go towards it, that we might easily seize it; but when the woman went up to it, the beast took hold of the woman and rent her, and began to devour her. When we saw this, we went against it at full speed, and smote it and killed it. 209

208. ܠܐ ܗܘܝ ܠܚܓ ܕܕܡ ܘܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܬܘܒ ܦܖ; ed. Budge (1889, 178–79 [Syr.], 100 [trans]).

209. ܲܝܟ ܚܙܝܪ ܒܪܐ ܝܢ ܕܐܝܡܡܐ. ܗܐ ܚܝܘܬ ܒܪܢܫ ܚܕܐ. ܕܒܦܓܪܗ ܘܒܥܕܢ ܬܫܥ ܫܥ ܬܝ ܕܢܐܚܕܘܢܗ ܙܩܝܦ ܗܘܐ. ܘܡܢܢ ܒܡܕܡ ܠܐ ܐܬܬܙܝܥܬ. ܘܦܩܕܬ ܠܚܝܠܘ.
II.44 the great animals attacking Alexander’s troops

This unit is most likely derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7):

> Then we set out from thence and came to a place amid groves of trees which were large, and in these woods there were wild beasts like the wild asses of our own country. Each of them was fifteen cubits in length, and as they were not dangerous, my troops killed a number of them and ate them.²¹⁰

II.45 the threatening bats

This report is almost certainly derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7): ‘and we saw bats which were as big as vultures, and their teeth were like those of men’.²¹¹
II.46 the bird on a tree-top

This unit is most likely derived from the following passage from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (III.7):

> And from thence we set out and came to a certain place which was waste; and in the midst of that place there was a bird sitting upon a tree without leaves and without fruit, and it had upon its head something like the rays of the sun, and they called the bird the ‘palm bird’ (phoenix).212

II.47 the dog-like animal on the island

The exact origin of this account is unclear. Since the narrator reports that he heard this story from a certain Christian clergyman called Emmanuel, who in his turn had heard it from a certain merchant from Egypt, it is possible that it originated and/or circulated as a part of the folklore of Muslim traders and seamen of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

II.48 the rhinoceros

The text refers to the rhinoceros using the noun *karkdānā*, which is derived from the usual Arabic term for this animal, i.e., *karkadan*, in its own turn a loan from the New Persian *kargadan*.213 In the following inner-textual gloss, the compiler of the *Marvels*

---

212 ܝܵܝܚܪܒܐ ܗܘܬ. ܘܒܓܘ ܗܘܡܢ ܬܡܢ ܐܫܩܠܢ ܘܠܕܘܟܬܐ ܚܕܐ ܐܬܝܢ. ܘܕܘܟܬܐ ܗܦܖܐ ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܗ ܝܬܒܐ ̈ ܐܠܐ ܛܖܕܘܟܬܐ ܦܪܚܬܐ ܚܕܐ ܥܠ ܐܝܠܢܐ ܚܕ. ܕܠܐ ܦܐܖܐ ܕܫܡܫܖܐ ܐܝܬ ܗܒܕܡܘܬ ܙܠܝܩ̇ܐ ܩܪܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܗܘܬ. ܘܥܠ ܪܫܗ̈ ܘܐ. ܘܦܪܚܬܐ ܕܬܡܖܠܲ; ed. Budge (1889, 180 [Syr.], 101 [trans.]).

213 See Sokoloff (2009, 654); Ciancaglini (2008, 198).
also identifies this animal as raymā. The noun raymā is attested already in the Peshitta version of the Old Testament, where it is used to render the Hebrew רְאֵם ‘wild ox’ (cf. Deut. 33.17; Ps. 29.6; 92.11; Job 39.9). As one can infer from such phrases as نܬܐ ܕܪܝܡܐ (Deut. 33.17) and نܬܝ ܐܝܟ ܕܪܝܡܐ (Ps. 92.11), during this early period speakers of Syriac regarded this animal as having more than one horn. At some point, however, the noun came to be used to refer to an animal that had only one horn, often assumed to be the unicorn of Greco-Roman sources, but sometimes also the rhinoceros. One observes this semantic shift in the entry on ئي in the Dictionary of Bar Bahlūl, who quotes the description of this animal by Ḥnanīšōʿ bar Sarošway (9th c.): ‘In its body, it looks like a big and strong deer. And it has one horn in the middle of its head. And it is very tall and powerful’. In this entry, Bar Bahlūl also quotes Moses ibn Ḥunayn, who provides several Arabic synonyms of raymā, such as الحريش, الريم, and, notably, الكركدن ‘rhinoceros’.

As for the source-critical evaluation of the description of the rhinoceros presented in this unit, its two main elements are well attested in the Muslim tradition of zoological and geographical writing. Thus, already al-Jāḥiz in his Kitāb al-ḥayawān refers,
although with some reservations, to a belief held by Indians that
the young of the rhinoceros can graze upon the surrounding veg-
etation by putting their heads out of their mothers’ wombs.  
One comes across several later Arab writers, who also find this
tradition problematic.

The other detail, that is, the report that the horn of rhi-
oceros is used to make exquisite and expensive belts, is like-
wise well represented in Muslim sources. The closest to the text
of this unit among them is perhaps the following passage from
the description of the country of Qāmirūn, situated between In-
dia and China, in Ibn Ḥordāḏbeh’s Kitāb al-masālik:

And there are rhinoceros (الكركدن) here, who have on their
forehead a horn, one elbow (ذراع) long and two handfuls
(قبضتان) thick. This horn is covered with images from be-
inning to end. And if it is cut, you can see images, white
on jet-like black, of humans or an animal, or a fish, or a
peacock, or some other bird. And the inhabitants of China
make from them belts that cost from three hundred dinars
up to three or even four thousand dinars.

---

216 Ed. Hārūn (1965–1969, 7:123–24).
217 Cf. polemic against the report of al-Jāḥiẓ in al-Mas’ūdi’s Murūḡ al-
dāḥab; ed. de Meynard et al. (1966–1979, 1:215), or Abū Ḥāmid al-
Garnāṭi, Tuhfat al-albāb; ed. Ferrand (1925, 109–110). For a discussion,
see Ettinghausen (1950, 15–16).
218 Ed. de Goeje (1889, 67–68).
Similar accounts of the use of rhinoceros’ horn can be found, with some variations, in the works of many other Arab and Persian writers.\textsuperscript{219}

\textbf{II.52 the bridge and vestibule made from the rib of a fish}

While the exact origin of this tradition is not clear, the mention of the city of Basra (see also units I.49, I.50) points to a Muslim milieu. For a close parallel, cf. Buzurg Ibn Šahriyār’s \textit{ʿAğāʾib al-hind}:

\begin{quote}
Abu Muhammad al-Hasan b. Amr told me: With my own eyes I have seen the side of a fish that a shipmaster brought us. He had cut a piece that measured five cubits on the side where the bone is thick; and then put it over a brook like a bridge, by the gate of a garden that we had in an island. The remaining portion was about twenty cubits long.\textsuperscript{220}
\end{quote}

Similar accounts are found in works by later Muslim authors.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{219} Cf. Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, \textit{Aḥbār al-ṣīn wa-l-hind}; ed. Mackintosh-Smith & Montgomery (2014, 40–43); Muḥammad al-Idrīsī (12th c.), \textit{Nuzhat al-muṣṭaq fi iḥṭirāq al-āfāq}; trans. Ahmad (1960, 30); Ḥamdāllah al-Mustawfī al-Qazwīnī, \textit{Nuzhat al-qulūb}; trans. Stephenson (1928, 28). For a discussion, see Ettinghausen (1950, 53–55, 101–104).

\textsuperscript{220} Trans. Freeman-Grenville (1981, 21).

\textsuperscript{221} Cf. al-Qazwīnī, \textit{ʿAğāʾib al-maḥlūqāt}; ed. Wüstenfeld (1848–1849, 1:141); Ḥamdāllah al-Mustawfī al-Qazwīnī, \textit{Nuzhat al-qulūb}, on \textit{Qustā fish}; trans. Stephenson (1928, 57).
II.53 the fish called ‘sea-locust’

The reference is most likely to the flying fish (Exocoetidae family). Compare the following passage from Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī’s Aḥbār al-ṣīn wa-l-hind: ‘They have also reported that in a certain part of the sea there are small flying fish that fly over the surface of the water, called ‘water locusts’ (جراد الماء).’

II.57 the whale stranded ashore

The toponym Kīš is well known and refers to the island located in the lower Persian Gulf. Similarly to the story in unit I.40/II.31 that also mentions this island, this account might have originated and/or circulated as a part of the folklore of Muslim traders and seamen of the Persian Gulf. A similar story is found in ‘Aḡāʾib al-hind by Buzurg Ibn Ṣahriyār, who relates how Ahmad b. Hilal, a ruler of Oman, came across a whale stranded ashore, and had ‘the fat from its eyes’ extracted. One comes across mentions of ‘oil’ (مܫܚܐ) being extracted from whale eyes in some medieval Syriac works, such as the Book of Natural Beings and the Dictionary of Bar Bahlūl.

---

222 Ed. Mackintosh-Smith & Montgomery (2014, 34–35).
223 For references, see the commentary to unit I.40 above.
224 Trans. Freeman-Grenville (1981, 9). Cf. also Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, Aḥbār al-ṣīn wa-l-hind II.16.1; ed. Mackintosh-Smith & Montgomery (2014, 126–27).
225 Ed. Ahrens (1892, 53 [Syr.]).
226 See the entry ܩܐܛܘܤ; ed. Duval (1888–1901, 2:1691).
