

ESCHATOLOGY IN THE
CATALAN *MAPPAMUNDI*

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The Jewish Mallorcan mapmaker Cresques Abraham is associated with several cartographic works;¹ he is also known from abundant documentary evidence, which has been studied in detail by Jaume Riera i Sans, Gabriel Llompart i Moragues, and Jocelyn Hillgarth.² These sources not only shed light on his life, his relationship to his patrons, the King and the Crown Prince of Aragon, but also suggest, as Riera i Sans first pointed out, that he is to be identified with “Elisha ben Abraham Bevenisti, known by the name Cresques,” the scribe and illuminator of the so-called Farhi Bible (1366–1383), one of the most celebrated of the extant Hebrew Bibles. This observation can be supported by art-historical study.³ From the Bible’s

¹ In general Cresques’ workshop is associated with the production of portolan charts; literature on this cartographic genre is abundant and listing it all goes beyond the framework of this short paper; for recent surveys, see Ramon Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes. La representació medieval d’una mar solcada* (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 2007), chap. 5 (this book also contains a translation into English); *L’âge d’or des cartes marines. Quand l’Europe découvrait le monde*, exhibition catalogue (Oct. 2012–Jan. 2013), ed. by Catherine Hofmann, Hélène Richard, Emanuelle Vagnon (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2012). Both these works offer extensive bibliography on portolan charts.

² Jaume Riera i Sans, “Cresques Abraham, jueu de Mallorca, mestre de mapamundis i de brúixioles, in *L’Atlas Català de Cresques Abraham* (Barcelona: Diàfora, 1975), pp. 14–22; Gabriel Llompart i Moragues and Jaume Riera i Sans, “Jafudà Cresques i Samuel Corcós. Més documents sobre els jueus pintors de cartes de navegar (Mallorca, segle XIV),” *Bolleti de la Societat Archeologica Luliana*, 40 (1984), 341–50; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, *Readers and Books in Majorca 1229–1550* (Paris: Editions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), nos. 67, 96, 97, 108, 112, 123; Gabriel Llompart i Moragues, “El testamento de cartógrafo Cresques Abraham y otros documentos familiares,” *Estudis Balearics*, 64/65 (1999–2000), 99–115.

³ Former collection of David Sassoon, ms. 368; the colophon appears on pp. 2–4. For the identification of Cresques Abraham with Elisha ben Abraham, see Riera i Sans, “Cresques Abraham.” These observations were hitherto ignored in research on both cartography and Jewish art history. For the Farhi Bible, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art between Islam and Christianity: The Decoration of Hebrew Bibles in Medieval Spain* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2004), pp. 150–54, with references to the earlier literature; an exception is Sandra Sáenz López Pérez. “El portulano, arte y oficio,” in *Cartografía medieval hispánica. Imagen de un mundo en construcción*, ed. by Mariano Cuesta Domingo and Alfredo Surroca Carrascosa (Madrid: Real sociedad geográfica y real liga naval

colophon we know that Elisha was born in 1325. From the documents we learn that he lived all his life in Mallorca as a well-respected mapmaker in the service of the king and that he died in 1387, only four years before one of the most virulent waves of persecution altered Jewish life throughout Iberia. His entire family was eventually forced into Baptism. As mapmaker Elisha Cresques is most prominently associated with the famous Catalan *mappamundi* in Paris from c. 1375 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, cod. Esp. 30, Fig. 1). Scholars assume that this map is the same work that was commissioned by the Count of Barcelona and Crown Prince of Aragon, later King John I, which was presented to the French court.⁴

The Farhi Codex is made up of the Bible itself and an additional two hundred pages of various texts. These texts, which are found at the beginning of the manuscript, in fact, represent Elisha Cresques' private library, so to speak, as the colophon notes that he wrote the codex for himself and his descendants. The Farhi Codex is a highly intellectual project. Not only was Elisha an accomplished and truly professional scribe, but the additional texts portray him as an erudite and knowledgeable man, who was interested in traditional rabbinic learning, was concerned with scientific – primarily calendrical – and philological issues, and demonstrated a great interest in Jewish and, to some degree, non-Jewish history. Apart from

español, 2009), pp. 129–30 offering iconographic observations; for a stylistic-technical perspective on the identification of Elisha ben Abraham's painting with that of Abraham Cresques, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Observations on the Work of Elisha ben Abraham Cresques," *Ars Judaica*, 10 (2014), 27–36.

⁴ *L'Atles Català; The Catalan Atlas of 1378*, ed. by George Grosjean (Dietikon: Graf, 1977); Hans-Christian Freiesleben, *Der katalanische Weltatlas vom Jahre 1375: nach dem in der Bibliothèque nationale, Paris verwahrten Original farbig wiedergegeben* (Stuttgart: Brockhaus, 1977); *El món i els dies: l'Atles català, 1375*, ed. by Gabriel Llopart i Moragues, Ramon J. Pujades i Bataller, and Julio Samsó Moya (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 2008); *MAPA MONDI. L'Atlas Catalan*, CD-ROM (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1998); <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55002481n/fl.zoom> (accessed March 2014).

his other accomplishments as a scribe, a cartographer, and a generally learned individual, he was a trained miniaturist. The codex reflects a late stage of the Jewish-Islamic cultural symbiosis and contains a wealth of Islamic-style carpet pages and, as common in Sefardi illuminated Bibles, illustrations of the messianic Temple, the latter indebted to Maimonides' thought on the future messianic sanctuary.⁵

Whereas the Farhi Codex raised the interest of scholars of Jewish art, the Catalan *mappamundi* attracted a great deal of attention on the part of historians of cartography. Several facsimile editions have been published, the Bibliothèque nationale de France produced a CD-ROM edition in 1998, and an Internet site offers images of the entire map in high resolution.⁶ Naturally, the *mappamundi* also occupies a prominent place in cartographic surveys, where it is usually described as the principal representative of the so-called “transitional phase” from medieval *mappaemundi* to early modern scientific maps or as a hybrid of a portolan chart and a medieval *mappamundi*.⁷ The map pictures the known world on a broad rectangle (200 × 64 cm) reaching from Iberia and the Canary Islands in the West to China in the East and from Scandinavia in the North to approximately the equator in the South. As common for medieval *mappaemundi*, it displays an abundance of iconographic subjects. These images are accompanied by explanatory captions in the Occitan language.

Some scholars, including Riera i Sans and Llompart i Moragues, describe Elisha Cresques primarily as a mere colorist, a craftsman who simply put paint on world maps and

⁵ Kogman-Appel, *Jewish Book Art*, pp. 74–88, 156–68, listing the earlier literature on these representations.

⁶ See n. 4.

⁷ Tony Campbell, “Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500,” in *The History of Cartography*, ed. by John B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 371–461; Evelyn Edson, *The World Map 1300–1492* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 79–89; Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes*; Philipp Billion, *Graphische Zeichen auf mittelalterlichen Portolankarten. Ursprünge, Produktion und Rezeption bis 1440* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2011), pp. 184–90.

wooden compass boxes.⁸ The analysis of his art, his cartography, his scribal work, and the texts he collected put into one framework, however, suggests that he was an erudite member of the Sefardi elite, a man who was perhaps not an active scholar or scientist himself, but one who was well versed in what went on in his intellectual environment.⁹ In line with Riera i Sans' approach, Ramon Pujades i Bataller recently argued that the Catalan *mappamundi* is basically a copy of Angelino Dulcert's portolan chart of 1339 and that it does not, in fact, exhibit any original features. Dulcert's chart shows Europe from Iberia to the Black Sea, thus following the common extension of contemporaneous portolan charts. Pujades i Bataller speculates that Dulcert's chart is actually a fragment of a full *mappamundi* showing the known world from Iberia to China and that it served as a model for Cresques' map.¹⁰ However, several visual elements – to be discussed in detail elsewhere¹¹ – suggest that Dulcert's 1339 work was conceived as a conventional portolan chart and not as a full world map, an observation that challenges the assumption that Cresques was simply a copier of portolan charts without any professional background beyond basic training as a miniaturist. Moreover, the Catalan *mappamundi* stands out as a *unicum* without parallel; Cresques is the only mapmaker of his generation known and documented in the Crown of Aragon, and the richness of documentary evidence is indicative of his high status at court. Despite several

⁸ Riera i Sans, "Cresques Abraham;" p. 22; Llompart i Moragues, "Apunts iconogràfics des del port de Mallorca," *Cartografia Mallorquina* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1995), p. 465.

⁹ Elisha Cresques' intellectual profile is the subject of a current project undertaken by the author and supported by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation, no. 122/12; the results will be published in *Elisha ben Abraham Bevenisti Known as Cresques: The Intellectual Profile of a Medieval Scribe, Illuminator, and Mapmaker in Mallorca* (in preparation); see also "The Scholarly Interests of a Scribe and Mapmaker in Fourteenth-Century Mallorca: Elisha ben Abraham Bevenisti Cresques," in *The Medieval and Early-Modern Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean: Production, Circulation and Use*, ed. by Javier del Barco (Leiden: E. J. Brill, in preparation).

¹⁰ For the 1339 chart, see now http://expositions.bnf.fr/marine/grand/por_030.htm (accessed March 2014); Pujades i Bataller, *Les cartes portolanes*, pp. 482, 487.

¹¹ A detailed comparative analysis will appear in *Elisha ben Abraham*, chap. 2 and 3.

features that the Catalan *mappamundi* and Dulcert's chart have in common, these observations indicate that Cresques was a knowledgeable professional, who put his own original stamp on the history of cartography.

A wealth of information of historical, political, religious, and legendary nature is included in the *mappamundi*'s cartography and the iconography, and a profusion of sources, most of them yet to be examined in full, was used to create it: we find echoes of Isidore of Seville, Honorius of Autun, Marco Polo, and Abu Abdallah ibn Battutta.¹² In the following I take a closer look at the most ambiguous image on the *mappamundi*, a reference to an eschatological realm in the northeastern corner of Asia, and suggest a reading against the background of my contention that Elisha Cresques was not simply a copier of maps, but a knowledgeable scholar with a clearly defined Jewish identity, on the one hand, who coped in a sophisticated manner with the expectations of his royal patron, on the other.¹³

Religious elements of Christian relevance on the *mappamundi* are of two types: some are conveyed as references to holy sites, including Jerusalem and Catherine's tomb on Mount Sinai (which is, however, also accompanied by a caption that indicates the Transmission of the Law to the Israelites) and others appear as iconographic references to religious myths. Approaching Elisha Cresques' treatment of Christianity, one makes the somewhat surprising observation that there is only one reference to the New Testament and that several key Christian elements were taken instead from the famous legend of Prester John. The single

¹² Much of the earlier literature about the Catalan *mappamundi* is concerned with the identification of the place names and other elements, primarily of geographic interest, vis-à-vis Marco Polo's text; see, for example, Grosjean, *Catalan Atlas*, Einführung; Freiesleben, *Der katalanische Weltatlas*, chap. 4–15; for a short discussion of the introduction on sheet 2, which constitutes an Occitan paraphrase of parts of Honorius of Autun's *imago mundi*, see Edson, *World Map*, p. 75.

¹³ Recently Philipp Billion suggested some Jewish roots of the portolan method in Iberia, focusing on graphic elements of early portolan charts, in particular in North Africa, Billion, pp. 278–93.

reference to the New Testament is a portrayal of the Magi's journey from Persia to Bethlehem (Fig. 2), but nothing in this depiction relates even remotely to the usual iconography of the Magi venerating Jesus (Fig. 3). Rather, underscoring the Magi's origin in the East leads to another aspect of their story, namely that the Prester was believed to be a descendant of one of the Magi.¹⁴ Among other allusions to the Prester John legend we find a portrait of King Steven, a Christian ruler in eastern India, and we learn from the caption that accompanies the image of the king that the tomb of the Apostle Thomas is to be found in his country (Fig. 4).

The Letters of Prester John, one letter apparently addressed to Manuel I Komnenos of Byzantium and the other to Frederick I Barbarossa, began to circulate around 1165. These letters describe the country of the Prester in terms of a perfect utopian realm, where there is no sin and nobody suffers any need. They also mention the monstrous races of the East, the ten lost tribes of Israel cut off by a stone river, and close with a meticulous description of the Prester's fabulous palaces.¹⁵ During the subsequent two centuries the letters underwent a complex textual development. More than two hundred Latin manuscripts have come down to us, most of which do not reflect the original – what scholars commonly call the “un-interpolated” – version, but rather represent an intricate net of textual recensions, all of which

¹⁴ This goes back to the very first mention of Prester John in the West, the chronicle of Otto of Freising from 1145, *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus* 7:33, ed. by Adolf Hofmeister, *Monumenta Germaniae Historicae* (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1912), pp. 365–66, see now also <http://www.dmgh.de> (accessed March 2014).

¹⁵ The Latin “*Ur-text*” was published by Friedrich Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 (1879), 831–1028; for a recent translation into English of the *Ur*-version, see Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation. On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 155–60.

were subject to significant interpolations.¹⁶ These recensions led as well to a wealth of vernacular treatments, primarily in Old French and Italian.

The image in question – the eschatological realm to the north of China – borrows not only from traditions about the realm of Prester John, but also from the similarly famous and popular Alexander romance (Fig. 5). Two large compartments are bordered by mountain ranges. In one of them the people of Gog and Magog are led by their “gran senyor,” an emperor underneath a baldachin, who, according to the caption, is to be expected at the End of Times: “exirà en temps d’Antichrist ab molta gent (will come forth at the time of the Antichrist with a large crowd of people).” In the adjacent compartment we find a mature king distributing clusters of golden fruit, which are hanging from leafy branches in his hands, to a crowd of people: secular rulers to the left – we can discern an emperor, a king, and a duke – and clerical authorities to the right. There is no caption near the figures in that compartment. Rather, there are two inscriptions further away, in the ocean, which is an anomaly because everywhere else on the *mappamundi* the captions appear adjacent to their relevant images. One of these inscriptions, in the upper right-hand corner, quotes Isaiah 67 about spreading the word of God among far-away peoples. A second caption, also placed in the ocean reads:

Antechrist. Aquest serà nudrit en Goraym de Galilea e con haurà XXX anys començarà a preicar en Jherusalem e contra tota veritat dirà que ell és Christ fill de Déu viu, e diu-se que rehedifficarà lo Temple.¹⁷ (Antichrist. He will be raised in Chorazin in the Galilee. At the age of thirty, he will begin to preach in Jerusalem. Against all truth he will claim that he is Christ the son of the living God and that he will rebuild the Temple).¹⁸

¹⁶ A great number of these are discussed in detail in Bettina Wagner, *Die “Epistola presbiteri Johannis” lateinisch und deutsch. Überlieferung, Textgeschichte, Rezeption und Übertragungen um Mittelalter* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000).

¹⁷ The transcriptions of captions on the *mappamundi* follow by and large (with some amendments for accuracy) Grosjean; the translations into English are mine.

¹⁸ Most of the literature simply describes the image as a depiction of the Antichrist; recently Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez, “La representación de Gog y Magog y la imagen del anticristo en las cartas náuticas bajomedievales,” *Archivo Español del Arte*, 78 (2005), 263–76, suggested that the

At the meeting point of the two mountain ranges, we find a picture of Alexander enclosing Gog and Magog and the king with his followers behind the mountains, shutting the area off by means of a castle or a town. The caption, a particularly lengthy one, reads as follows:

Muntanyes de Caspis dins les quals Allexandri viu arbres ten alts que les saines tochen a les nuus e aquí cuidà morir, sinó que Setanat l'en gità per la sua art e per la sua art e per la sua art endo 'y aquí los tartres Gog e Magog e per éls féu les II images de matall, los demunt scrits. Ítem encloy aquí molts diverses generacions de gens qui no dupten a manjar tota carn crua, e aquesta és la generació ab què vendrà Antichrist e la lur fi serà foc qui avalar [à] del cel qui ls confondrà. (The Caspian Mountains, where Alexander encountered trees that were so high that their high ends reached the clouds. He almost died there, would not Satan have assisted him. With the aid of his artistry he shut up the Tartars¹⁹ Gog and Magog and set up two metal sculptures. He also enclosed more generations of people, who are not afraid to eat raw flesh. This is the generation from which the Antichrist will come forth. It will come to an end with fire falling from heaven, destroying these peoples).

At first sight this illustrates the widespread story of Alexander shutting Gog and Magog up behind the Caspian Mountains. A second look, however, reveals that the image is more complex and, in fact, has some hidden agendas that confront a motif that had grown during the Middle Ages into a blatantly anti-Jewish tradition. I first sketch these traditions from the Christian point of view and follow their journey from an ancient topos of storytelling into a late-medieval anti-Jewish motif. Then I take a look at the Jewish

king represents the Antichrist as a false prophet performing miracles; for a survey of depictions of Gog and Magog on medieval maps, see Andrew C. Gow, "Gog and Magog on *mappaemundi* and Early Printed World Maps: Orientalizing Ethnography in the Apocalyptic Tradition," *Journal of Early Modern History*, 2/1 (1998), 61–88.

¹⁹ "Tartars" was the common popular name for the Tatars (and the Mongols, as well) in the Middle Ages, as they were associated with *tartaros*, for a discussion, s. Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden. Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. Bis in das 15. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1994), pp. 22–23.

perspective on the same subject matter. Jews, in fact, happened to take an interest in both the Alexander story and the Prester John tradition. I then look at how Elisha Cresques may have made sense of these two legends and created an image of the End of Time that, on the one hand, stood up to the expectations of the Christian monarch who was his patron, but, on the other, did justice to his own Jewish identity. This interplay between two different meanings of the same motif is disguised, so to speak, as part of a scientific endeavor, in a medium that was designed to promote knowledge of the world.

The motif of Enclosed Nations goes back to Flavius Josephus, who reported that on his journey to the East Alexander encountered wild nations who ate human flesh. In order to keep mankind safe from these unclean creatures, *imundas gentes*, Alexander shut them up by pushing two mountains together. Josephus identified the nations with the Scythians and elsewhere in his work with Magog.²⁰ In a much more elaborate eighth-century version of the life of Alexander, the *Revelations of Pseudo Methodius*, the nations imprisoned by Alexander were identified with the apocalyptic people of Gog and Magog of the biblical tradition, found first in Ezekiel and later in Revelation.²¹ The Alexander text also tells us that the man-eaters Gog and Magog will be freed near the End of Time and, together with the Antichrist, who is of Jewish descent, will destroy Christendom just before the Second Coming of Christ.²² Starting in the thirteenth century the Alexander motif was interpolated into later versions of the Prester John Letters. There we read about man-eaters, descendants of Gog and Magog,

²⁰ *De bello judaico* VII: 7: 4; for an English version see *The Great Roman-Jewish War: A.D. 66–70*, transl. William Whiston (New York: Harper, 1960); *Antiquitates* I, 6:1; for a recent translation, see *Josephus Flavius. Translation and Commentary*, vol. 3: *Judean Antiquities, Books 1–4*, ed. by Louis H. Feldman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).

²¹ Ezekiel 38; Revelation 19. 17–18; 20. 7–10.

²² *Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 14)*, ed. and transl. by Benjamin Garstad (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 23–27.

who were enclosed by Alexander and that a wall and sixty-two castles (seventy according to some versions) were supposed to keep them imprisoned.²³

Many medieval *mappaemundi* show images of Gog and Magog. Christocentric in their basic concept, these maps not only reflect symbolic meaning, but actually function as symbols in their own right. The now lost Ebstorf map, for example, presented the world as the body of Christ.²⁴ Medieval maps put Jerusalem prominently in the center of a circular world, often with an indication of the Crucifixion or the Resurrection; they display Paradise;²⁵ show Prester John's Monstrous Races at the edges of the known world;²⁶ and depict the Enclosed Nations, Gog and Magog. In the Ebstorf map,²⁷ to mention only one of the most prominent examples of medieval map making, Gog and Magog are naked, fierce, and

²³ For a discussion of this group of manuscripts and the additional contents in relation to the "Ur-text," see Wagner, pp. 192–21; for an example, see the edition of Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd. 3.16, Wagner, p. 388.

²⁴ For recent discussions of the Ebstorf map, see Jürgen Wilke, *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für historische Landesforschung der Universität Göttingen 39)* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2001); Hartmut Kugler, *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006); Kupfer, Marcia, "Reflections in the Ebstorf Map: Cartography, Theology and *dilectio speculationis*," *Medieval Geographies. Cartography and Geographical Thought in the Latin West and Beyond: 300–1600*, ed. by Keith Lilley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 100–26.

²⁵ Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²⁶ Marina Münkler, "Monstra und mappae mundi: die monströsen Völker des Erdrands auf mittelalterlichen Weltkarten," in *Text – Bild – Karte. Kartographien der Vormoderne*, ed. by Jürg Glauser and Christian Kiening (Freiburg im Breisgau, Berlin and Wien: Rombach Verlag, 2007), pp. 149–73.

²⁷ See n. 24 for the Ebstorf map; see also a caption in the Hereford map, Scott Westrem, *The Hereford Map* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), no. 141; for background on the Hereford map, see (selectively) P. D. A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford Map* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); in general on medieval *mappaemundi*, see Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed their World* (London: The British Library, 1999); Naomi Reed Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001).

ugly; they are shown munching on the dismembered, bloody bodies of their victims (Fig. 6). It is plausible to assume that as a painter of a *mappamundi* Cresques was expected to include such themes.

However, the fierce and ugly man-eaters of the Ebstorf map cannot in any way be compared to the neatly organized crowd of people following the dignified “gran senyor” under the imperial baldachin of the Catalan *mappamundi*. Only the scorpion on the banner they carry offers a remote allusion to the satanic origin of the Enclosed Nations. Neither can the mature, similarly dignified figure of the “Antechrist” be compared to the deceitful, ugly Antichrist of the Christian iconographic tradition, who often bears clearly visible Jewish features or is shown in association with Jews (Fig. 7).²⁸ It appears that albeit their description in the captions, Gog and Magog and the Antichrist in the Catalan *mappamundi* do not exactly conform to the way they were imagined in fourteenth-century popular Christian belief.

The entire area is separated from the rest of the world by a massive mountain range. These mountains are shown exactly as other individual mountains or larger mountain ranges all over the map, for example, the Atlas Mountains in northern Africa, the Edom Mountains to the east of Palestine (Fig. 8), the Amol Mountains at the border of Persia, and the Caucasus Mountains between the Black and the Caspian seas. There are numerous individual mountains all over the world. All these mountains were designed basically in one of two ways, and throughout the map Elisha Cresques used these designs to designate mountainous masses of different sizes. The mountains of Edom, for example, have a baseline to the left and a series of mountainous elevations to the right, with the stony texture indicated by the

²⁸ On the Antichrist in Christian iconography, see Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), pp. 108–45; and recently Debra Higgs Strickland, “Antichrist and the Jews in Medieval Art and Protestant Propaganda,” *Studies in Iconography*, 32 (2011), 1–50, who shows how “flexible” images of the Antichrist could be in appropriating certain visual elements to the Protestant agendas.

coloring. The same applies to the large mountain range that encloses both Gog and Magog and the ambiguous king distributing the golden fruit. A closer look at the mountain range that separates the king from Gog and Magog, however, shows a somewhat different design, which does not appear anywhere else on the map. Instead of the straight bottom line and the hilly elevations found elsewhere, this mountain range is shown with the same rocky structure, but follows the wavy line of a river. There are many rivers on the *mappamundi*, all shown as wavy blue lines. The river between Gog and Magog and the king is much broader, but it follows the same wavy outlines. Within this context the mountain range between them looks like a hugely enlarged river carrying rocks and stones instead of water. One might well assume that what Cresques had in mind applying this particular design to this one mountain range was the legendary River Sambatyon.

As Zvi Ben-Dor Benite explains, it is in post-biblical literature that the lost tribes were assigned a distinct place within world geography and a distinct role in world history.²⁹ Flavius Josephus located the tribes beyond the Euphrates.³⁰ Around the seventh and eighth centuries the tribes began increasingly to be associated with the coming of the Messiah. From this point there developed two different narratives, one Jewish and one Christian. According to the latter, the tribes became in Ben-Dor Benite's words, a "superhuman entity coming with the Antichrist," whereas for the Jews the gathering of the tribes and the return would be the "culmination point of ... a marvelous apocalyptic vision."³¹ According to the Christian narrative Alexander took unclean man-eaters beyond the known world, the *oikumene*, into distant lands, the *eschatiai*, whereas from the Jewish point of view the enclosure of the tribes meant that they had chosen an isolated existence, where no outside influence could affect

²⁹ Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 8.

³⁰ *Antiquitates* X, 9:16.

³¹ Ben-Dor Benite, p. 62.

them and they could live according to the Law.³²

The early Rabbinic tradition discusses whether the lost tribes will have a share in the world to come. According to Rabbi Akiva, they will not return, but according to Rabbi Eliezer, whose opinion became the accepted one in this matter, “the future will lighten upon them.”³³ *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, finally, reads:

אמר רבי יהודה ב"ר סימון: לא למקום שגלו עשרת השבטים גלה שבט יהודה ובנימין. עשרת השבטים
גלו לפנים מן נהר סמבטיון, שבט יהודה ובנימין מפוזרים בכל הארצות.
)Rabbi Judah ben Simon said: the tribe of Judah and Benjamin was not exiled to the
place to which the ten tribes were exiled, the ten tribes wandered into exile on the
other side of the River Sambatyon, but the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are
scattered throughout all the lands.³⁴

This motif also returns in medieval midrashim associated with the eleventh-century southern French scholar Moses the Preacher.³⁵

In the ninth-century the River Sambatyon figures also in the fictive account of the legendary Eldad Hadani. In a letter that Eldad apparently dispatched to the Jews of Iberia, we read that the tribes are located in various places at the edge of the world between China and Ethiopia. Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher, he noted, are found across the River Sambatyon in Ethiopia. The river carries no water, but rather moving stones. It rests only on the Sabbath, but on that day the Israelite inhabitants of the area across the river cannot set out on a

³² Micha Perry, “The Imaginary War between Prester John and Eldad the Danite and Its Real Implications,” *Viator*, 41/1 (2010), 1–24.

³³ *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10:10; for a discussion, see Ben-Dor Benite, pp. 74–75.

³⁴ *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 73:6, ed. by Yehuda Theodor and Hanokh Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1997); for an English version, see *Genesis Rabbah. The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis. A New American Translation*, ed. by Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

³⁵ For discussions of the early medieval midrashic tradition, see Ben-Dor Benite, pp. 76–77; Micha Perry, *Tradition and Transformation: Knowledge Transmission among European Jews in the Middle Ages* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame’uchad, 2010), chap. 6.

journey.³⁶ Thus, Eldad not only mentions the tribes and the stone river, but, as Ben-Dor Benite points out, he put them into a geographic framework that relied on Arabic geographic knowledge.³⁷ In fact, like the Catalan *mappamundi*, Eldad's world stretched from Iberia to China. Another motif that figures in the texts associated with Eldad Hadani is the protection from the outside world that the stone river offers the tribes: they are independent, secluded, and protected from ritual impurity.³⁸

As noted, the motif of the ten tribes beyond the stone river subsequently also found its way into the Letters of Prester John.³⁹ It is found in the “un-interpolated” so-called original *Ur*-text of the letters; hence it is part of the original composition that defines the realm of Prester John. The letters describe his fabulous Christian realm and go on to explain:

...descendit fluvius lapidum eodem modo sine aqua, et fluit per terram nostrum usque ad mare harenosum... Ultra fluvium vero lapidum sunt x tribus Iudaeorum, qui quamvis fingant sibi regis, servi tamen nostril sunt et tributarii excellentiae nostrae, (there is a river of stones ... without water, and it flows through our kingdom all the way to the sea of sand. ... Beyond

³⁶ Abraham Epstein, *Eldad ha-Dani* (Pressburg: Adolf Alkelay, 1891), pp. 50–55, repr. and rev. Abraham M. Haberman, *The Writings of Abraham Epstein* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1949); for a translation into English, see Elkan N. Adler, *Jewish Travelers: A Treasury of Travelogues from Nine Centuries* (New York: Hermon Press 1966), pp. 5–15; for a detailed recent discussion on the complexity of the Eldad literature, see Perry, *Tradition and Transformation*, pt. 2.

³⁷ Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes*, p. 99.

³⁸ See, for example, in a letter of the community of Kairouan to the Gaon Tsemah, Epstein, pp. 275–90; Adler, pp. 15–21; Perry, “Imaginary War.”

³⁹ Scholars have contemplated the similarities between these two traditions, but have not come up with any conclusive suggestions; for a recent discussion with references to the earlier literature, see Perry, “Imaginary War”; after a careful textual analysis on pp. 8–10, Perry suggests that the author of the earliest letter to Prester John indeed was familiar with the Eldad material, and “recasts it as counterhistory”; Ben-Dor Benite, p. 101, on the other hand, implies, without developing the argument any further, that “it is clear that there is no connection between the legend of Prester John and Eldad’s stories about the ten tribes.”

the stone river are the ten tribes of the Jews, who, though they imagine they have kings of their own, are nevertheless our servants and tributaries to our excellency.⁴⁰

As Micha Perry points out the central point in these discussions about the ten tribes is not merely the different views about their localization in geo-political terms. What seems to be more crucial is, in fact, the question of whether they were politically subordinate or independent. Whereas Eldad Hadani wrote of protection from ritual impurity, even in the early versions of his letter Prester John clearly referred to them as being politically subordinate.⁴¹ Later versions elaborate on attempts to stop the tribes, who threaten to destroy the world, and there are descriptions of large armies led by a powerful king that are stationed in a series of castles near the tribes in order to control them.⁴²

Some of the interpolated versions of the Letters, one of them in Occitan, introduced Gog and Magog and the Alexander story. In most these thirteenth-century versions the two are still separate phenomena affecting the realm of Prester John, as they are both found near the borders of his empire.⁴³ The path from the juxtaposition of the two motifs to the

⁴⁰ Zarncke, pp. 914–15. The translation follows Uebel, p. 157; in later interpolated versions, this claim is made more forcefully and an Old French version reads: “Ja seit i çoe ke vos Judeus de la dient k’il aient rei[s] de ça ke sur lur gent seient regnant, de çoe n’i ad tant ne quant, ke tuz sunt en nostre servage e de lur chief rendrunt triwage (I know what your Jews say: that they have a king that rules over their people. This is not the least true. They are all our servants, and we receive tax from their leader,” Martin Gosman, *La lettre du Prêtre Jean: les versions en ancien français et en ancien Occitan, texts et commentaires* (Groningen: Bouma’s Bookhuis, 1982), p. 130, the quotation in English follows Perry, “Imaginary War,” p. 13.

⁴¹ This aspect is elaborated on in Perry, “Imaginary War.” The political situation touching upon the mythical accounts of the stone river also shines through the travelogue of Benjamin of Tudela; a discussion of this text in the current context goes beyond the scope of this paper and will be considered elsewhere.

⁴² See, for example, texts that are published in Walter, pp. 373–87; 398–405 (both in Latin).

⁴³ Walter, pp. 373–87; 398–405.

identification of the tribes with Gog and Magog was a short one. In the Occitan version, in fact, Gog and Magog and the ten tribes appear in the same context.⁴⁴

Actually, this path had been taken as early as the middle of the twelfth century by scholars such as Peter Comestor, Godfrey of Viterbo, and Roger Bacon. The anti-Jewish implications of the association of the Israelite (Jewish) tribes with the threatening nations Gog and Magog and its later developments have been described in detail by Benjamin Braude and Andrew Gow.⁴⁵ From this perspective, the ugly, naked man-eaters of the Ebstorf or similar maps, that undoubtedly circulated, could be (and were) eventually identified not only with the ten tribes, but with the Jewish population in any given European community.

The most elaborate and yet most peculiar version that identifies the tribes with Gog and Magog is found in the fictive travelogue of Sir John Mandeville. Written somewhere in France around the 1350s, it began to circulate a few years before Cresques completed the Catalan *mappamundi*, but the oldest extant Mandeville manuscript is dated 1371.⁴⁶ Mandeville described a land near China, where “Jews from the Ten Tribes” are locked up; they are referred to as Gog and Magog. Mandeville also noted that these people understood no language other than their own. He concluded this section with a mention of the enclosed

⁴⁴ For the Occitan version, see Gosman, pp. 505–33 (507).

⁴⁵ Andrew C. Gow, *The Red Jews. Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age 1200–1600* (Leiden et al.: E. J. Brill, 1995), chap. 3.2 with a detailed discussion of these twelfth-century scholars; Andrew C. Gow, “Gog and Magog,” 73; Benjamin Braude, “Mandeville’s Jews among Others,” in *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land (Studies in Jewish Civilization 7)*, ed. by Bryan F. Le Beau, Menachem Mor (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996), pp. 130–58.

⁴⁶ For a recent translation, see John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, a new translation and edition by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), with a discussion about the early manuscript evidence in the introduction; Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 6–27.

tribes forming an alliance with the Antichrist, on the one hand, and the Jews living in the Diaspora, on the other, with the ultimate aim of destroying Christendom.⁴⁷

We have no notion as to what degree Elisha Cresques may or may not have been aware of the particulars of these developments. Some modern scholars argue that he used the Mandeville account together with other travel literature.⁴⁸ Still the time frame is tight, and one cannot claim with any certainty that he could have known of this particular version. However, given the popularity and the wide circulation of this motif from the twelfth century on, there is a very good chance that Cresques was well aware that in the Christian imagination the ten tribes were identified with Gog and Magog. It is more than plausible that he was also aware of the implications of this identification on the real-life contemporary Jewish population of Europe.

By the fourteenth century both the Letters of Prester John and the Alexander tradition had aroused the interest of a Jewish readership, and there are several Hebrew versions of both legends.⁴⁹ It appears that Cresques shared this Jewish interest and, as we have seen, seems to have related to Christianity specifically through the lens of the Prester John tradition. What

⁴⁷ *Book of Marvels*, p. 105; Braude; Marion Steinicke speaks about another connection to anti-Jewish murder libels in her discussion of Mandeville's account about poison growing in the area of Gog and Magog, who are identified as Jews, "Apokalyptische Heerscharen und Gottesknechte. Wundervölker des Ostens in abendländischer Tradition vom Untergang der Antike bis zur Entdeckung Amerikas," unpubl. Diss. (Berlin: Freie Universität, 2005), pp. 233–35.

⁴⁸ Edson, *World Map*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ Edward Ullendorff and C. F. Beckingham, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Rosalie Reich, *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian: A Medieval Hebrew Manuscript* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1972); Wout van Bekkum, *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS London Jews' College no. 145* (Louvain: Peters Press, 1992); Eli Yassif, "The Hebrew Traditions of Alexander of Macedonia: Narrative Forms and Their Cultural Significance in Medieval Judaism [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz*, 75/3–4 (2007), 359–407.

then did this tradition imply from his Jewish perspective?⁵⁰ On the one hand, the mention of the tribes in the Letters, embedding it specifically in the motif of the stone river, must have raised Jewish interest in the material; on the other hand, the treatment in the Latin and the vernacular versions clearly represented a Christian point of view. Moreover, we know that these versions make a clear claim regarding the tribes' subordinate position.

The current textual evidence of the Hebrew versions is somewhat problematic. Even though the publishers of these letters, Edward Ullendorff and C. F. Beckingham, assumed that two of these versions were composed in the latter part of the thirteenth century,⁵¹ there is no firm manuscript evidence available for this contention, and Perry, putting such an early date in doubt, argues in favor of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.⁵² One of these Hebrew versions, extant only in a print from 1519, produced in Constantinople,⁵³ seems to confront the particularly Christian elements of the original letters more than the others. It omits a number of these elements and even contains several blatantly anti-Christian points, such as a reference to the “unclean corpse of the Apostle Thomas in India” and the like.⁵⁴ This raises

⁵⁰ Ullendorff recognized a “plainly Judaizing tendency,” arguing on the ground of anti-Christian elements and the obvious echoes from Eldad Hadani’s text, “The Hebrew Letters of Prester John to the Pope and to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa,” *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Tel Aviv, 14–17 April 1980* (Rotterdam and Boston: A. A. Balkema, 1986), p. 511. However, the fact that one of the copies of such a Hebrew text is included in Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia universalis*, Book 4, Basel 1550 (see Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, p. 535) indicates that there was a Christian Hebraist interest as well. For a recent re-visitation of the question of what stands behind these translations, see Perry, “Imaginary War”; and Perry, *Tradition and Transformation*, pp. 74–84.

⁵¹ Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, p. 17–18.

⁵² Perry, “Imaginary War,” n. 57 and 58.

⁵³ For the Hebrew text with a translation into English, see Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, pp. 38–71.

⁵⁴ Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, p. 41) אפושטולו (.

the question as to whether the original *raison d'être* of the Hebrew paraphrases might have served as a polemical confrontation with the original material.

It has been argued that some of the anti-Christian amendments may have been the work of a sixteenth-century Jewish printer who worked in an Islamic environment and so was not concerned about Christian censure.⁵⁵ Although this makes some sense, it is not very likely that a Jewish printer in an Islamic environment invented these amendments, which undoubtedly emerged in the minds of Jews who lived among Christians. This printer, perhaps one who had migrated from Christian Europe,⁵⁶ might well have been simply the first to dare to put them on paper. Even though the manuscript evidence does not allow us a full apprehension of these polemical elements, their *Sitz im Leben* was surely somewhere among Jews who lived in the Christian world.⁵⁷

There is further evidence of Jewish dealings with this material. Around the same time that the *mappamundi* was produced, Rabbi Joshua of Lorca confronted a convert known as Pablo de Santa Maria, formerly Solomon Halevi. In his argumentation, it appears that Joshua alluded to the Prester John tradition and did so with a particular focus on issues of political independence vs. subordinateness. He noted that even though the Christians claim that the Jews lack political independence, only a small part of the Israelites are under Christian domination, and that others dwell in freedom in Ethiopia, where they are the neighbors of

⁵⁵ Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, p. 40, n. 4.

⁵⁶ It was quite common for Italian Jewish printers to move to the Ottoman empire, as there prevailed severe restrictions to the Jewish practice of the profession, for a recent summary of the circumstances with reference to the earlier literature, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Picture Bibles and Re-written Bibles: The Place of Moses dal Castellazzo in Early Modern Book History," *Ars Judaica*, 2 (2006), 35–52 (pp. 14–16).

⁵⁷ To this one can add, that by the early fifteenth century Jewish printers had developed a degree of professional ethics that implied that they were faithful to and careful about the model text that served them for the prints; I am grateful to Elhanan Reiner for his conversation, July 2012.

Prester John with whom they sign an annual treaty.⁵⁸ In a recent discussion of the Jewish narrative of the lost tribes in the Prester John context, Perry sheds some light on the polemical implications of this relationship. The Jewish narrative, he argues, came as a response to the Christian doctrine that the lack of Jewish political power is clear evidence of Christian triumph. This follows up on Eldad Hadani, who had described the tribes as an independent powerful people who chose isolation in order to guarantee a pristine existence unaffected by any alien influence.

The same story could mean very different things. According to the Christian versions of Prester John's letters the tribes are enclosed because they constitute a threat to the utopian society that is ruled by the Prester: "Beyond the stone river are the ten tribes of the Jews, *who, though they imagine they have kings of their own*, are nevertheless our servants and tributaries to our excellency (my emphasis)."⁵⁹ The independent tribes of the Jewish narrative had been turned into a people subordinate to the Christian priest-ruler. From the Jewish point of view Prester John's tale of the subordinate tribes was understood as a tale of politically independent Israelites who chose isolation. Gog and Magog, identified with the tribes in the Christian imagination, turned into a people that would eventually bring redemption for the Jews. According to Jewish expectation, apocalyptic catastrophes of the Christian imagination turned into hopes for salvation and the Christian Antichrist could mean the Jewish Messiah. It is in this context that I suggest revisiting the *mappamundi*'s ambiguous portrait of Gog and Magog and the king in the adjacent compartment.

⁵⁸ *Das apologetische Schreiben des Josua Lorki an den Abtrünnigen Don Salomon Halevi*, ed. by L. Landau (Antwerp: Teitelbaum & Boxenbaum, 1906), pp. 2–3; for discussions, see Abraham Gross, "The Expulsion and the Search for the Ten Tribes," *Judaism*, 41/2 (1992), 130–48; Abraham Gross, "On the Baptism by Fire and the Designation of Prester John in the Hebrew and Christian Sources," *Materia giudaica. Revista dell'associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo*, 7/2 (2002), 329–34; Perry, "Imaginary War," p. 14.

⁵⁹ See n. 40.

Following up on Ben-Dor Benite's and Perry's reading of the Prester John material these observations shed light on the dynamics of "polemical" interactions of the sort this image seems to represent.⁶⁰ Whereas these were not open polemics or matters of theological debate, they did shape Christian and Jewish eschatological expectations. A medieval Christian *mappamundi* traditionally referenced these matters, but Elisha Cresques integrated his own point of view and showed the dignified emperor of the relatively benignly displayed people across the River Sambatyon. Even though, as expected by his patron, he called them "Gog and Magog," his visual language indicates that he did not envision the fierce and threatening man-eaters that the Christian mind identified with the Jews. Similarly, there is not much malignancy in the representation of the king meant to be understood as "Antichrist;" to make matters yet more ambiguous the relevant captions appears at some distance beyond the shores of the ocean.

The imagery of the Catalan *mappamundi* thus reflects not just familiarity with the Prester John tradition, but speaks of particular Jewish attitudes toward this tradition, attitudes that modern scholars find great difficulty in pinpointing. Elisha Cresques' Jewish approach to the Prester John tradition is not focused only on Gog and Magog per se but rather makes an attempt to present them as benign, yet powerful, people. Moreover, it is the Prester John tradition in its Jewish garb that determined Cresques' overall portrayal of Christianity as a utopian one, a Christianity that does not subordinate the Jews, but enters with them into an alliance of equals.

Finally, the Hebrew versions elaborate on yet another motif. In the Constantinople print of the Prester's letter, for example, we read:

ודעו כי מזו הים של אבנים בא נהר אחד שיוצא מגן עדן והולך בינינו ובין הארץ הגדולה של המלך הגדול
דניאל מלך היהודים וזה הנהר הולך כל ימי השבוע ובשבת אינו זז ממקומו עד יום ראשון ששב לאיתנו.

⁶⁰ Ben-Dor Benite, chap. 3, Perry, "Imaginary War."

וכשזה הנהר מלא על כל גדותיו מביא אבנים יקרות הרבה מאד ובזה הנהר לא יש בו מים וכל מה שהוא מוצא הכל מביא אל הים אורינושו ולא יש אדם שיוכל לעבור כי אם בשבת. אבל אנחנו נותנים משמרות במעבר שאם היהודים יכולים לעבור יעשו היזק גדול בכל העולם בנוצרים ובישמעאלים ובכל אומה ולשון שתחת כל השמים כי אין אומה ולשון שיוכל לעמוד בפניהם. אבל אני יש לי בזה המחוז ששה עשר מדינות בנויות מאבנים גדולות ובצורות ויותר חזקים שבכל העולם ומעיר לעיר מהלך חצי מיל. ויש לי בכל עיר מאלו אלף פרשים ועשרת אלפים רגלי ועשרת אלפים תופשי קשת לשמור ההרים ומקום המעברות שלא יעברו היהודים כי הם כל כך רבים שאם יוכלו לעבור ילחמו עם כל העולם ודעו שאם אני יש לי עיר מבצר אחת יש למלך הגדול מלך דניאל עשרה ויש להם כל כך זהב ואבנים יקרות שמתקינין בתינו באבנים צבועים. ואל תקשו עלי שאני כותב לכם המלך הגדול כי יש תחת ידו של המלך דניאל שלש מאות מלכים כלם יהודים וכולם יש להם ארצות תחת יד דניאל המלך. ויש תחת ממשלתו שלשת אלפים דוקים וקונטים ואנשים גדולים ואנו יודעים שארצו אין לה חקר. ומי שלא שמע מכת שלהם לא שמע דבר בעולם.

(And you may know that from that sea of stones there issues a river which comes from Paradise and flows between us and between the great country of the great king Daniel, king of the Jews: and this river flows all the days of the week, but on the Sabbath it does not move from its place, until on the Sunday it returns to its strength. And when this river is full beyond its banks, it carries very many precious stones. And in this river there is no water. And everything that it encounters it carries to the sea Orenoso, and no one can cross it except on the Sabbath. But we are placing guards at the passages, for if the Jews were able to cross they would cause great damage in the whole world against Christians as well as Ishmaelites and against every nation and tongue under the heaven, for there is no nation or tongue which can stand up to them. But I possess in this district sixteen cities built of large stones and fortified and stronger than any in the world, and from one city to the other is a distance of half a mile. And I possess in each of these cities 1000 horsemen and 10,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 archers to guard the mountains and passes, so that the Jews shall not cross; for they are so numerous that, if they were able to cross, they would fight with all the world. And may you know that if I have one fortified city, then the great king, King Daniel, possesses ten. And they have so much gold and precious stones that they adorn their houses with precious stone as we adorn our houses with colored stone. And do not raise objections against me when I write to you, oh great King, that there are under the rule of King Daniel 300 kings, all Jews, and all of them possess countries under the power of King Daniel. And also under his governance are 3000 dukes and counts and great men and we know that his country is

unfathomable. And he who has not heard of their community has not heard anything in the world.⁶¹

This King Daniel, King of the Jews, appears as a positive counterpart to the powerful destroyer mentioned in the Christian versions. Unlike the Christian tradition, the Hebrew text presents the situation between the Prester and the Israelites not in the sense that the Christians courageously defend the threatened world against the fierce and evil Israelite powers, but rather that the latter are a dominant, mighty force, “for there is no nation and tongue which can stand up to them.”

Hence we can take our interpretation yet further and suggest that Elisha Cresques took the motif of the great king known as “Daniel, King of the Jews” and put him up in lieu of the Antichrist, who is mentioned in the captions, but apparently not depicted. In the Jewish mind the Antichrist could, in fact, be identified with the utterly negative image of the “עוין קריסטו”, the evil Christ,” which is also mentioned in the Constantinople print:

וכשהעוין קריסטו יולד אלו האנשים יעשו רע גדול בעולם

and when the evil Christ is born these men [from the tribes] will be doing great evil in the world.⁶²

The king, in contrast, is mature, impressive, authoritative, gentle, and generous. He distributes clusters of gold fruit reminding us of abundant gold and precious stones mentioned in the Hebrew versions of the letters in relation to King Daniel. Under him we find several other kings, rulers, and princes, representing, as it seems, the “3000 dukes, and counts and great men...”. Cresques also added the clerical authorities to this motif of dominance, as if to indicate that when the time comes and Israel is free from foreign domination and exile, Christianity will follow the Jewish king.

⁶¹ Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, pp. 56–61.

⁶² Ullendorff and Beckingham, *Hebrew Letters*, p. 47.

Faithful – to a certain degree – to the tradition of the medieval *mappamundi*, Elisha Cresques depicted an eschatological realm in the northeastern corner of the world. He included Gog and Magog and a figure that at first sight was supposed to be associated with the Antichrist. Gog and Magog were placed behind the River Sambatyon, thus alluding to the Christian identification of Gog and Magog with the ten lost Israelite tribes. Against the background of a possible Jewish interest in the Letters of Prester John, however, the meaning of these elements has different implications.

Drawing conclusions regarding this matter is not easy. Apart from the question of dating the Hebrew Prester John material, there is also no certainty about its *raison d'être*. Were they documents born out of a wide-ranging exchange with Christian culture and the wish on the part of the Jews to enjoy that sort of literature as their Christian neighbors did or were they a polemical response to anti-Jewish elements that were interpolated especially into the later strata of the Prester John tradition? We have seen that Jewish coping with the material was careful and sophisticated, and could, in fact, take a clear polemical turn. Even if the actual written versions known to us today postdate the Catalan *mappamundi*, as Perry implies, this does not necessarily mean that Jews did not deal with the material earlier on. It is true that there are several possible channels through which Cresques could have familiarized himself with the Prester John legend. Vernacular versions abounded and we have seen that an Occitan text also survived. But we also saw that the latter belongs to those versions that put the ten tribes into the same context as Gog and Magog and the arrival of the Antichrist. Hence, knowledge of this tradition among Jews undoubtedly created reactions to its anti-Jewish elements, even if we cannot prove that the actual surviving Hebrew versions predate Cresques' work.

In the Catalan *mappamundi* Gog and Magog stand for the politically strong and independent tribes and the king represents the mythical King Daniel, who was interpolated

into the Hebrew versions in order to underscore the motif of expected political independence, as opposed to the original Christian notion of subordinateness. Embedded in a project that was aimed at promoting up-to-date geographical knowledge, this image, ambiguous as it may be, manages to confront official with personal imagery and a royal *Weltbild* with concerns of Jewish identity. Fewer than twenty years before Sefardi Jewish society experienced one of its most severe crises, a crisis the forced, among others, Elisha Cresques' son, Jafudà, and his entire family (including Elisha's widow) into baptism, this ambiguous representation marks an attempt at coming to terms with Diaspora life accompanied by the hopes of redemption.