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The enemies within: Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38–39

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The most extensive descriptions of Gog and Magog in the Hebrew Bible appear in Ezekiel 38–39. At various stages of their political career, both Reagan and Bush have linked Gog and Magog to the *bêtes noires* of the USA, identifying them either as the 'communistic and atheistic' Russia or the 'evil' Iraq. Biblical scholars, however, seek to contextualise Gog of Magog in the historical literary setting of the ancient Israelites. Galambush identifies Gog in Ezekiel as a cipher for Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, who acted as Judah's oppressor in the 6th century BCE. More recently, Klein concludes that Gog, along with his companions, is 'eine Personifikation aller Feinde, die Israel im Buch Ezechiel gegenüberstehen'. Despite their differences in detail, these scholars, such as Reagan and Bush, work with a dualism that considers only the features of Judah's enemies incorporated into Gog's characteristics. Via an analysis of the semantic allusions, literary position and early receptions of Ezekiel 38–39, this article argues that Gog and his entourage primarily display literary attributes previously assigned to Judah's political allies.

Introduction

The enigmatic figure Gog from the land of Magog makes his flamboyant appearance in Ezekiel 38–39, being accompanied by the other foreign nations such as Persia, Cush, Lud, Meshech and Tubal (38:1–5; 39:1). All of them rise up to invade the land of Israel (38:8–9, 16). They are all subsequently defeated (38:18–23). In the end, they are either left on the ground to be devoured by the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field (39:3–5, 17–20), or they are plundered and buried (39:8–10, 11–16). The identity of this Gog from the land of Magog has garnered much contemporary attention. The US politicians Reagan and Bush have associated Gog with their country's *bêtes noires*, either the 'communistic and atheistic' Russia or the 'evil' Iraq. On the other hand, biblical scholars such as Galambush and Klein associated Gog of Magog with the foreign enemies of the ancient Israelites. Following a brief discussion of the political and scholarly identifications of Gog, this article argues that the semantic allusions embedded in Ezekiel 38–39, the literary position of the Gog oracles within the book of Ezekiel and the early receptions of the two chapters suggest that Gog and his entourage in Ezekiel 38–39 embody primarily Israel's previous allies.

Modern political identifications of Gog

Over the past decades, the biblical figure Gog epitomises the foreign enemies of the USA. Ronald Reagan, who acted as California's Governor between 1967 and 1975 during the Cold War, is reported to have unambiguously cited Ezekiel's prophecy to justify his identification of Gog as Russia. As he reasons:

> *Ezekiel* says that fire and brimstone will be rained upon the enemies of God's people. That must mean that they'll be destroyed by nuclear weapons. They exist now, and they never did in the past. *Ezekiel* tells us that Gog, the nation that will lead all of the other powers of darkness against Israel, will come out of the north. Biblical scholars have been saying for generations that *Gog must be Russia*. What other powerful nation is to the north of Israel? None. But it didn't seem to make sense before the Russian revolution, when Russia was a Christian country. Now it does, now that Russia has become communistic and atheistic, now that Russia has set itself against God. *Now it fits the description of Gog perfectly.* (cited in O'Leary 1994:273, n. 23, which quotes Mills 1985:140–141, 258; cf. Bøe 2001:1; Boyer 1992:162, [*author's own emphasis*])

Reagan was far from alone in his belief of the Russian-Gog's invasion in Israel or the USA. Mein (2013:136) notes that the attempt to associate Gog with Russia had already begun in 19th-century Britain, as a result of the 'competing interests' between Britain and Russia in Central Asia. This Russophobia was compounded by an exegetical 'preference for the Septuagint version of 38:1', which treats the Hebrew ראש not as a common noun, that is 'head' or 'chief', but as the proper name 'Rhos' that was then connected with 'Rus' and Russia (Mein 2013:137). Boyer (1992:162)

further contextualises Reagan's identification of Gog as Russia in 'the stream of apocalyptic teaching about Russia that had coursed through American popular religion for well over a century'. The Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 deepened the fear of the contemporary prophecy writers about the spread of communism in the USA (Boyer 1992:156). This public fear did not falter but it was heightened in the period between 1945 and the early 1990s, when current political events such as Russia's ties with East Germany and China were continuously woven into the biblical prophecies (Boyer 1992:159). As O'Leary (1994:180–183) argues, the apocalyptic colouring of Reagan's political discourse was symptomatic of the New Christian Right's belief in his time.

Gog takes on a new identity in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA. According to the French report entitled '*George W. Bush et le Code Ezéchiel*', the then US president George W. Bush called the then French president Jacques Chirac and rationalised his intention to invade Iraq by citing the biblical prophecies of Gog and Magog (Rochat 2007:34–41). The European doyen of biblical scholarship Thomas Römer was subsequently contacted by the French authority with regard to the identity of Gog and Magog, and he recalled:

> J'ai encore appris durant ce coup de fil que le président des Etats-Unis avait évoqué Gog et Magog dans une conversation avec Jacques Chirac. La discussion portait sur l'actualité au Proche-Orient. Après avoir expliqué qu'il voyait *Gog et Magog à l'œuvre [Gog and Magog at work]*, George W. Bush a ajouté que *les prophéties bibliques étaient en train de s'accomplir [the biblical prophecies were being fulfilled].* (cited in Rochat 2007:36, [*author's own emphasis*])

The American journalist Kurt Eichenwald (2012:459) further wove this Gog and Magog incident into his gripping non-fiction entitled *500 Days: Secrets and Lies in the Terror Wars*. Spector (2014:546) cautions that the reports about Gog and Magog bear only 'some resemblance to what Bush actually said'. Still, on the basis of other first-hand reports on Bush's foreign policy, Spector (2014:552) concludes: 'Bush evidently believed that he was advancing God's providence when he led the USA into war in Afghanistan and Iraq'. The president clearly adopted a Manichean viewpoint in his foreign policy, breaking everything down rigidly into either good or evil and declaring: 'You are either with us or against us in the fight against terror' (cited in Dashke 2010:158).[1]

Whether Reagan and Bush interpreted Gog's identity correctly, their approaches to fuse foreign policy and biblical prophecies were unmistakably similar, as Dashke (2010:178) remarks: 'Bush showed himself to be the true heir to Reagan as a president with a Bible-based view of evil on the world stage'. The retaliation of the Palestinian cartoonist Baha Boukhari to the Western invasion of Iraq after September 11 is interesting. According to the website of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, Boukhari painted a cartoon in the Arab newspaper *Al-Ayyam* on 04 April 2003, depicting the invaders, the USA and its ally the UK, as Yajuj and Majuj, which are the Arabic names of Gog and Magog in the Quran.[2] In Sura 18:83–98 and 21:95–96, which attest to the influences of the Syrian traditions about Alexander's Wall and the biblical traditions of Gog and Magog, Yajuj and Majuj appear as the eschatological evil nations who 'are causing harm on the earth' and need to be separated from the vulnerable civilised people with an iron wall (Bøe 2001:228–229; Van Donzel & Schmidt 2010:57–62). All these modern political deployments of religious texts further mystify the identity of Gog of Magog. Is Gog Russia, Iraq, the USA, or the UK? Each nation, using its preferred religious text, points the finger at its contemporary political enemy. Which one, if any, holds the key to the identity of Gog of Magog?

Modern scholarly identifications of Gog

In contrast to the politicians and other public figures, biblical scholars generally steer away from contemporary identifications of Gog and seek instead to contextualise Gog of Magog in the historical literary setting of the ancient Israelites. Despite their differences in detail, biblical scholars such as Galambush and Klein share a dualistic mind-set that similarly typifies Reagan's and Bush's aforementioned statements, considering Gog as an embodiment of only Israel's historical enemies.

Galambush (2006:255), for instance, identifies Gog in Ezekiel as 'a cipher for Nebuchadnezzar', the Babylonian king who acted as the destroyer of Judah's land, temple and people in the 6th century BCE. Given her consideration that YHWH's vindication of his honour is the single most important theme in the book of Ezekiel, and that Nebuchadnezzar's ravage of Jerusalem poses the most direct threat to YHWH's honour, Galambush (2006:256–258) concludes that Ezekiel 38–39 must be presenting a 'hidden polemic' against the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Central to her argument are the lexical connections between the portrayals of Gog in Ezekiel 38–39 and Nebuchadnezzar in the rest of Ezekiel (Galambush 2006:259). Both Gog and Nebuchadnezzar are described as the enemy from the northern direction (מצפון in 26:7; ἀπὸ βορρᾶ in LXX 23:24; מירכתי צפון in 38:15; 39:2; cf. 38:6); they lead a 'host' (קהל in 16:40; 23:24, 46, 47; 26:7; 32:3; 38:4, 15) consisting of 'many peoples' (עמים רבים in 38:6, 9, 15, 22; 26:7; 32:3; cf. 23:24; 26:3); and they capture 'spoil' and seize 'plunder' (ושלל שללה ובזז בזה in 26:12; 29:19; cf. לשלל שלל ולבז בז in 38:12, 13). These verbatim correspondences between Nebuchadnezzar and Gog lead Galambush (2006:261–262) to morph the two characters into one: 'Gog *is* Nebuchadnezzar, the same "foe from the north" who has commanded the most terrible of nations throughout the book of Ezekiel' (*author's own emphasis*). In my view, Galambush correctly identifies Ezekiel's portrayals of the Babylonian king as one source of inspiration for Gog's characterisations in Ezekiel 38–39, but she goes too far in equating the former with the latter, so as to

1. One of Daschke's sources is CNN's online report: http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/

2. For the cartoon, click on the following link: http://lahoreahmadiyyamessageboard.yuku.com/topic/411/Arab-cartoonist-depicts-USA-and-UK-as-Gog-and-Magog#.WJ2x6vIlJM3

leave no room for discussions of many other sources of influence behind Gog's literary characterisations.

Klein's monograph *Schriftauslegung im Ezechielbuch* contains a more comprehensive treatment of the Gog oracles in Ezekiel 38–39. Klein deserves the credit for observing the Gog oracles' lexical links to not only Ezekiel 25–32 but also Ezekiel 23. That is to say, Gog bears the attributes of not only the Babylonians, but also the Assyrians and the Egyptians:

> Die vielfachen Referenzen zeigen, dass Gog mit Züge gezeichnet wird, die vor allem in Ez 25–32, aber auch in der Bildrede Ez 23 zur Beschreibung der Assyrer, Babylonier und Ägypter verwendet werden. (Klein 2008:131)

For Klein, all these foreign nations are first and foremost Israel's historical enemies. As she stresses: '*Allerdings spricht gerade die Häufung der Stichwortverbindungen in 38,4f. dafür, dass hier bewusst auf vorgegebene Feindesdarstellungen zurückgegriffen wird, um Gog auf diese Weise Züge verschiedenster Gegner zu verleihen*' (Klein 2008:130, *author's own emphasis*). Klein clarifies that these nations, as *Gegner*, are the '*Feinde, die Israel im Buch Ezechiel gegenüberstehen*' (2008:131), and their characteristics are transferred to Gog so that the latter becomes the enemy *par excellence*: '*Gog und seinem Völkerheer wachsen in diesem Auslegungsprozess mehr und mehr Charakteristika von Israels Feinden zu, so dass ihre Zerschlagung im Buchkontext zum endgültigen Sieg über den Völkerfeind schlechthin wird*' (2008:140). It is unclear if Klein draws a distinction between the destroyed kingdom of Judah and the restored Israel in the book of Ezekiel. But one thing is clear: She overgeneralises all the foreign nations in the book of Ezekiel as simply Israel's historical enemies, so that the dualism between Gog and the restored Israel in Ezekiel 38–39 is viewed too simplistically. As I will argue below, Klein's overgeneralisation runs into problems when the semantic allusions and literary position of Ezekiel 38–39 are scrutinised in more detail, but her work fits the *Tendenz* exemplified in later receptions of Ezekiel 38–39.

Semantic allusions of Ezekiel 38–39

Close lexical links between the Gog oracles and Ezekiel's other oracles against the nations exist, but the literary contexts of the alluded passages present the nations not as Israel's former enemies but as allies. For instance, the beginning of the Gog oracles (38:3–4a) introduces the villain in a way similar to the monstrous portrayal of Pharaoh (29:3–4). Having issued a duel formula 'Behold, I am against you' (הנני עליך or הנני אליך), YHWH describes both Pharaoh and Gog metaphorically as monsters, declaring to put hooks in their jaws (ונתתי חחים בלחייך, 29:4a; 38:4a). In the Hebrew Bible, only Ezekiel 29:4 and 38:4 share the combination of the verbal root נתן, the plural noun חחים and the prepositional phrase בלחייך. The Hebrew phrase 'and I will put hooks in your jaws' is nevertheless absent in the LXX counterpart. The duel formula in LXX 38:3 is immediately followed by the rounding up of Gog's forces, horses and riders (καὶ συνάξω σε καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν δύναμίν σου, ἵππους καὶ ἱππεῖς…) in v. 4. Many have thus suspected that the phrase in Masoretic Text (MT) Ezekiel 38:4 is a later gloss, dependent on the description of Pharaoh in MT 29:4 (Allen 1990:200; Block 1998:436–437; Crane 2008:146; Klein 2008:130; Olley 2009:497; Zimmerli 1983:284). As mentioned, Klein deems Egypt as Israel's historical enemy, whose animosity has been transferred to Gog. A closer examination of the literary context of Ezekiel 29:4 reveals that the enmity exists not between the house of Israel and Pharaoh, but between YHWH and Pharaoh. In fact, Ezekiel 29:6b–9a presents Egypt as the political ally of the house of Israel, painting the former as an unreliable 'staff of reed' for the latter (cf. Is 36:6; 2 Ki 18:21). As argued by Marzouk in his illuminating book *Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel* (2015), Judah and Egypt in Ezekiel share a very intimate religious bonding because the latter is the very origin of the Israelite idolatry with the 'dung gods' (גלולים, 20:7, 8, 16, 18, 24, 31). In the recent monograph, *Mapping Judah's Fate in Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations*, Lee notes that Egypt is the nation with which Zedekiah, the king of Judah, strives to secure a political alliance (17:15; 29:6–7). Lee (2016:123–182) further argues that the prophecies against Egypt in Ezekiel 29–32, alluding to this and other oracles against Judah, present the fates of Egypt and Judah as inextricably linked to each other. As such, when Ezekiel's Gog takes on the literary features of Egypt, he actually embodies the characteristics of Judah's most intimate ally.

Lexical similarities also bind together the portrayal of Gog's army in Ezekiel 38:4b and the descriptions of Assyria and Babylon in Ezekiel 23. Both passages mention the military might consisting of horses and horsemen (סוסים ופרשים in 38:4b; 23:6, 12, 23; cf. 26:7, 10), those splendidly attired (לבשי מכלול in 38:4b; 23:34) and holding weapons such as bucklers and shields (צנה ומגן in 38:4b; 23:24). Tooman (2011:152–153) observes a specific inverted relationship between Ezekiel 23:12 and 38:4b–5. While the description of the Assyrians in Ezekiel 23:12 first lists those splendidly attired (לבשי מכלול), then the horsemen (פרשים) and lastly the horses (סוסים), Ezekiel 38:4–5 tactfully inverts the order in its description of Gog's army. Through this reversed pattern of enumeration, the comparison between Gog's army and the Assyrians is strengthened. Tooman does not further explore the significance of such a comparison. For Tooman (2011:132–133), the author of the Gog oracles merely deploys Ezekiel's prophecies against other nations as 'a quarry for Ezekiel's locutions' in order to 'create cohesion between his new composition and the wider book of Ezekiel'. Klein (2008:129, n. 121), also noting the lexical similarities between Ezekiel 23 and the Gog oracles, describes the Assyrians and Babylonians as the *Feindmächte*. In the light of the literary context of Ezekiel 23, Klein's remarks are only partially true. Both Tooman and Klein have neglected the fact that, even though both the Assyrians and the Babylonians were later involved in the lootings of the capital city of Judah, the two groups of foreigners are presented first and foremost as the 'lovers' (מאהביך) of Oholibah, the anthropomorphised Jerusalem (cf. Ezk 23:22). The undisguised lust of Jerusalem after the Assyrians, Babylonians and Egyptians forms the focus of the whole of chapter 23. These foreign nations are *ipso facto* not Judah's enemies but Judah's partners in the political 'harlotry'

(תזנות), which ultimately incurs YHWH's wrath against Judah.

Nations such as Paras, Cush and Put (פרס כוש ופוט) constitute part of Gog's entourage (38:5), and their presence strengthens the link between Gog and Judah's allies. In contrast to Meshech and Tubal (38:2, 3; 39:1) as well as Gomer and Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north (38:6), Paras, Cush and Put lie in the south of Israel (cf. Block 1998:440; Eichrodt 1970:381). The deployment of the third-person plural in reference to Gog and his entourage (אתם) in verse 5 also contrasts with the second-person singular addresses to only Gog in the surrounding verses (cf. 38:3b–4, 6). The reference to the three southern nations is thus likely a later insertion. Wevers (1969:287) is so puzzled by the insertion of these nations that he comments: 'Nor does the list make good sense'. Meanwhile, Zimmerli (1983:306) asserts that the inserted nations 'basically have no business in the army of these wild, warrior tribes who are capable of waging their own wars'. It is Block (1998:441) who gives a plausible explanation for their presence, stating that the inserted southern nations, accompanied by the remote northern nations, point to a 'universal conspiracy' initiated by Gog. I would like to add that these southern nations are depicted in Ezekiel as the traditional allies of Tyre and Egypt. In Ezekiel 27:10 and 30:5, these nations, along with Judah, help multiply Tyre's wealth and offer military support to Egypt (cf. Biberger 2010:45). That is to say, these southern nations represent those who formerly stood in the same line with Judah. All in all, the insertion of 'Paras, Cush and Put' not only enriches Gog's military strength, but also aligns Gog's entourage with Judah's allies.

Further textual connections can be found between the Gog oracles and Ezekiel's other prophecies concerning the nations, especially those about Egypt. For instance, the divine retributions upon Pharaoh and Gog both fall 'on that day' (ביום ההוא, Ezekiel 38:10, 14, 18, 19; 39:8, 11; cf. 29:21; 30:9). YHWH's casting of Gog and his army in the open field to be devoured by carrion birds and wild animals corresponds to the posthumous treatment of Pharaoh's monstrous body in the wilderness (לעיט צפור כל כנף וחית השׂדה נתתיך לאכלה in 39:4–5; לחית הארץ ולעוף השׁמים נתתיך לאכלה cf. in 29:5; 32:4–5). The root קבר 'to bury', in its various grammatical forms, characterises the ultimate destiny of the bodies of Gog and his allies (39:11–16), as well as the graves of Egypt and other nations in the netherworld (32:17–32, esp. vv. 22–26). The discovery of all these lexical links is not entirely ground-breaking because they have long been noted by different commentators (Batto 1992:157; Biberger 2010:67–68; Fitzpatrick 2004:154; Klein 2008:128–132; Tooman 2011:132–133, 137–195).

What makes this article different in comparison with the aforementioned studies is the thesis that the foregoing lexical allusions form a specific pattern that points to a reformulation of the identity of Israel's former allies (cf. Lee 2016:209–216). On the one hand, this thesis differs from Tooman's analysis, which minimises the exegetical values of these allusions, perceiving 'no interpretation, reapplication, or updating of Ezekiel's OAN [*oracles against the nations*] in GO [*the Gog oracles*]' and viewing the verbatim correspondences as merely 'harmoniz[*ing*] the book with a wider body of traditional religious literature, literature found in today's canon within the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms' (Tooman 2011:35, 37, 133). On the other hand, this thesis refines the textual analyses of Galambush and Klein, which view Gog monolithically as either a specific enemy or a conglomeration of Israel's historical enemies. All in all, my analysis shows that the Gog oracles purposefully allude to the other passages, which present the foreign nations as Judah's political or idolatrous allies, so as to transform these allies into a metahistorical evil power that stands in opposition to YHWH and the restored Israel in the eschatological era.

Literary position of Ezekiel 38–39

That Gog embodies primarily Judah's allies becomes more apparent when the literary position of chapters 38 and 39 in the book of Ezekiel is taken into account. Klein suggests that text-critically Ezekiel 36:23bβ–38 '*zu den jüngsten Texten des Ezechielbuches gehört*' (2008:81; cf. Lust 1981:517–533), and that the original textual connection between Ezekiel 36:16–23abα and 39:23–29 was later breached by the inserted Gog oracles (2008:112). The different chapter order between the Greek Papyrus 967 (P967) and the Hebrew MT seems to add further support to Klein's hypothesis about the secondary nature of the Gog oracles. While the MT places Ezekiel 38–39 after chapter 37, the pre-hexaplaric Papyrus 967 (2nd or 3rd century CE) differs from this order by situating chapters 38 and 39 before chapter 37 (cf. Johnson, Gehman & Kase 1938). The Vetus Latina Codex Wirceburgensis (6th century CE), which is considered 'the earliest and best preserved form of the Vetus Latina text of Ezekiel', also testifies to the same order of P967 (Lust 1981:518). Scholars including, *inter alia*, Lust, Crane and Schwagmeier suggest that the chapter order in P967 Ezekiel reflects the Hebrew *Urtext* (Crane 2008:236–250, 257–263; Lust 1981:517–533, esp. 521–525; 2003:83–92; Schwagmeier 2004:313–317, 366–368). On the other hand, the discovery of the Masada Ezekiel manuscript, which dates earlier than P967 but bears close resemblances with the MT, prompts Patmore (2007:231–242, esp. 241; cf. Lilly 2012:22–25) to take a more critical stance on the chronological priority of the *Vorlage* of P967. While the textual relationship between P967 and MT Ezekiel remains a contentious issue, Tooman (2011:77–82) insightfully remarks that the fluid position of Ezekiel 38–39 in the manuscripts constitutes one of the main evidence for the addition of the Gog oracles to the book of Ezekiel towards the end of its literary evolution.

Granted that the Gog oracles were added later into the book of Ezekiel, the more pertinent question is: Why should the Gog pericopes be constructed and inserted later, when the book of Ezekiel has already incorporated the prophecies against Mount Seir in chapter 35? For Klein (2008:126), the insertion of the Gog oracles between Ezekiel 36:16–23abα and 39:23–29 shows a reinterpretation of YHWH's way to honour his name: YHWH will vindicate his name not simply through the gathering and returning of God's people (39:23–29), but

in the first place through the destruction of Gog on the Mountains of Israel. However, such an assessment can equally be applied to the prophecies against Mount Seir in Ezekiel 35. The first oracle against Mount Seir (35:3–4) begins with a messenger formula 'Thus has the Lord YHWH declared', continues with YHWH's vow to annihilate Mount Seir and culminates with the recognition formula 'Then you will know that I am YHWH'. The repetitions of the recognition formula in verses 9 and 15 further highlight YHWH's determination to vindicate his name through the destruction of Mount Seir. Many other parallels exist between the two groups of oracles. Both of them are directed against nations other than Israel and begin their oracles with the prophetic word formula 'the word of YHWH came to me saying'. The destruction of both nations is situated in a way leading to Israel's restoration. Given so many similarities, what then distinguishes the rhetorical function of Ezekiel 35 from that of Ezekiel 38–39? If we follow Klein's textual analyses that the Gog oracles emerged later than the prophecies against Mount Seir, we can then deduce that the editor(s) of the Gog oracles were aware of the presence of the pericopes concerning Mount Seir (cf. Klein 2008:350–380, esp. 378–380). The question remains: Why was there then a need to add another collection of the oracles against the nations in Ezekiel 38–39 after the indictments against Mount Seir in Ezekiel 35?

This question can be addressed when we compare the semantic allusions embedded in Ezekiel 35 with those found in Ezekiel 38–39. As argued by Lee (2016:198–207), in addition to allusions to chapters 6 and 36, the prophecies against Mount Seir in Ezekiel 35 reuse several lexical features characteristic of the oracles against Ammon, Moab, Philistia and Edom in Ezekiel 25. For instance, Ezekiel 35:5 describes Mount Seir as showing an 'everlasting enmity' (איבת עולם), which is a phrase found elsewhere only in the accusation of the Philistines in Ezekiel 25:15. The root word ירשׁ also binds the oracles in chapters 25 and 35 together. Whereas Ammon and Moab appear as the 'possession' (מורשׁה) of the sons of the east in 25:4 and 10, Mount Seir emerges as the inimical force taking possession of the land of Israel (וירשׁוה, 35:10). Furthermore, Mount Seir's *Shadenfreude* (שׂמח) in the laying waste of the inheritance of the house of Israel mirrors the Ammonites' light-hearted joy (שׂמח) and frivolous contempt (שׂאט). In chapter 25, these nations, be they Ammon, Moab or Philistia, are presented as hostile towards Judah during the latter's destruction. When chapter 35 adopts the locutions of Ezekiel 25, Mount Seir is depicted as not only embodying the characteristics of Judah's enemies, but also transcending all these other nations to become the adversary *par excellence* (Lee 2016:203). In comparison with the foregoing analysis of the semantic allusions of the Gog oracles, it can be deduced that whoever composed the Gog oracles felt that it is not sufficient for YHWH to vindicate his name only in front of Judah's enemies embodied by Mount Seir. His total sovereignty over the restored Israel must be escalated to such an extent that even Israel's former allies are judged. Therefore, Gog is constructed in such a way to embody the characteristics of mighty powers, such as Babylon, Assyria and Egypt, who have formerly engaged in political 'harlotry' with and served as the patrons of Judah. Thus, the distinguishing rhetorical function of Gog in Ezekiel 38–39 is that it primarily embodies the characteristics of Judah's allies. The full restoration of Israel can only be achieved when all foreign nations, whether friends or foes, standing in the way between YHWH and his people are eliminated.

Early receptions of Ezekiel 38–39

The literary process within Ezekiel 38–39 that has radically transformed all foreign elements, whether friends or foes, into one mythological symbol of evil or chaos is mirrored and further developed in the Septuagint. For instance, the Hebrew version of Balaam's blessing envisions an Israelite king coming out of Egypt and rising above Agag, the historical king of Amalek (MT Numbers 24:7: וירם מאגג מלכו). Interestingly, the Septuagint, along with the Samaritan Pentateuch and Vetus Latina, reads Gog instead of Agag (LXX Numbers 24:7: καὶ ὑψωθήσεται ἢ Γωγ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ). Despite a contrast between Gog and the Israelite royal figure, Bøe (2001:58) helpfully notes that the text 'does not directly speak of any warfare between the two'. A more antagonistic presentation of Gog finds its way in Codex Vaticanus, one of the oldest extant manuscripts of the Septuagint, where Gog instead of Og was the Amorite king of Bashan, whose land was taken over by the tribe of Manasseh in the days of Moses (Dt 3:1, 13; 4:47). Gog's presence in these passages of the manuscript can be explained as a result of the scribal confusion of the Hebrew גוג and עוג in the process of translating from Hebrew to Greek (Bøe 2001:59; Tooman 2011:140). However, the unconscious conflation of Og with Gog, in my view, can still reflect a larger cultural background, where Gog was increasingly identified with any foreign opponents of Israel. This interpretation of Gog comes to a head when one late Septuagint manuscript identifies Haman the wicked Persian vizier, who plotted to annihilate the whole Jewish population in the empire of Ahasuerus, as the Gogite (ms. 93 Es 3:1 γωγαῖον; 9:24 ὁ γωγαῖος), whereas the MT reads the Agagite (האגגי in MT Es 3:1; 9:24).

Subsequent Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, either naming Gog of the land of Magog as a single figure or treating Gog and Magog as two mythological figures, enrich the biblical traditions by relating the figure(s) to contemporary threats. Composed, if not originated, in Babylon between the late first and early 2nd centuries CE, the Targum Jonathan on Ezekiel 39:16 reserves the city Hamonah, the burial ground of Gog, for 'the slain of Rome' (Bøe 2001:192; Levey 1987:107). Inflamed by the Jewish-Christian conflicts in medieval Europe, the Jewish exegete Rashi rendered Christianity, whom he designated 'Esau', as an ally of Gog and Magog, and even conflated them (Grossman 2012:54–56; Wechsler 2015:509). Ezekiel's prophecies also inspire the New Testament, where Gog appears alongside Magog and both comprise 'the nations in the four corners of the earth', which have fallen under the spell of Satan to join in a battle against 'the camp of the saints and the beloved city' after 1000 years of messianic reign and before the establishment of God's

eternal reign (Rv 20:7–9). Based on this passage, the Greek and Latin Church Fathers reached various conclusions, so that Gog and Magog were personified by either the Romans, who persecuted the growing Christianity, the Huns, who incurred Europe, or the Goths, who brought the Western Roman Empire to an end (Lust 1995:375; van Donzel & Schmidt 2010:13–14). The Quran embellishes the Judeo-Christian traditions with elements similar to the 6th century CE 'Syrian Christian legend Concerning Alexander', such that Gog and Magog (Yajuj & Majuj) become the chaotic powers locked behind a barricade built by 'the two-horned', which probably refers to Alexander the Great (Sura 18:83–98; cf. Kaltner 1995:37, 43–44). The Quran also stresses the eschatological role of Gog and Magog, because in the last days they will swarm through the barricade, gain access into the land and inaugurate the ultimate divine judgement, during which the believers and unbelievers will be saved and damned, respectively (Sura 18:101–109; 21:95–105; cf. Kaltner 1995:42–43). These passages spurred the imaginations of later Islamic works, which correlated Gog and Magog with the Turks, who posed threats to Baghdad and northern Iran during the 10th and 11th centuries CE, and the Mongols, who devastated many important Islamic cities in 1220 CE (Filiu 2011:30; van Donzel & Schmidt 2010:82–84). Wieringa (2011:123–152) sheds light on a 19th-century Javanese narrative poem, which conflates the Quranic figures Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog) into a single villain called Juja-Makjuja. According to cantos 9–12 of the poem, Juja-Makjuja, as the demonic grandson of Jesus Christ (designated Ngisa), aims to bring down the prophet Muhammad's authority in Asia. Wieringa argues that Juja-Makjuja in the poem represents the Christian Dutch colonial administration that intruded the central Javanese court of Surakarta in the 19th century.

All these interpretations of Gog (and Magog) do not differ much from the modern political identifications of Gog, in that they all are eager to associate the mythological figures(s) with their contemporary enemies. Irony arises when we compare these interpretations with the Gog figure portrayed in the Hebrew version of Ezekiel 38–39. The semantic allusions and literary position of the biblical prophecies suggest that Gog of Magog first and foremost embodies Israel's historical allies. When Bush identified Iraq as one of the biblical 'Gog and Magog', declared war on his political enemies, and threatened the other nations that 'you are either with us or against us', little did he know that the ancient Hebrew prophecies in Ezekiel 38–39 pronounce judgement on the symbolic collection of those nations who had formerly served as the allies of God's people.

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