

## Who is the King of Meshech and Tubal? Phrygians and Medes in Ezekiel's Gog Oracle

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**Abstract:** This article proposes that Ezekiel's association of Gog with the geographical areas Meshech and Tubal was derived in part from the involvement of the historical Medes and their king Cyaxares in the part of Anatolia assumed under these biblical terms. These terms correspond to lexical cognates in Assyrio-Babylonian literature and cover specific parts of central Anatolia including the Kızılırmak bend. This Anatolian space was most importantly inhabited by a Phrygian polity known from the site of Kerkenes Dağı. This polity had emerged after the decline of Midas the Great's Gordion-based Phrygian kingdom. The Median confederation was active in Anatolia and presumably had ties to the geographical areas designated by Meshech and Tubal during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The Median connection explains the chronological and geographical scope assumed in Ezekiel's Gog of Magog. Next to the Babylonians, the Medes under Cyaxares and Astyages established the largest land empire during the time of the Judean exile. It became an eschatological symbol for world nations against YHWH in the Gog oracle of Ezekiel 38–39.

**Keywords:** Ezekiel, Gog Oracle, Meshech and Tubal, Ancient Anatolia, Ancient Iran.

### Introduction: Starting with Chronology

Ezekiel (38–39) presents the Gog oracle, an enduring puzzle for Hebrew Bible scholars.<sup>1</sup> The Gog oracle assumes what at first glance seems to be a

<sup>1</sup> This paper builds upon my presentation “The Prophecy against Gog in Ezekiel and the Babylonian Tradition of the Umman-manda: A Comparative Case Study” given on 23 July 2012 at the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held at the University of Amsterdam. Abbreviations used are LXX (= Septuagint; Brenton, 1851) and MT (= Masoretic Text; Alt *et al.*, 1997). Bible verse translations follow the *New American*

king named Gog of the land Magog. The present article proposes a historical background for Ezekiel's Gog oracle, which offers some unique details that can help to understand how an alluded historical entity becomes a symbol for eschatological oracular content. To these ends, the first item requiring attention is Ezekiel's assumed date for the Gog oracle. The oracle is not prefaced by an explicitly written marker for a date but there are other markers that help discern its assumed date. Ezekiel's chronological markers mostly place the oracles against nations (henceforth OANs) (Ezekiel 25–32) around the fall of Jerusalem in 587 or 586 BC, dated mainly by the years provided for Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah.<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 24:1–2 (the start of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem during the ninth year) and 33:21–22 (the end of the siege of Jerusalem) come either side of the oracles in Ezekiel 25–32.<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 29:17 marks a Babylonian campaign against Tyre, dated c. 572 BC.<sup>4</sup> The oracles against Egypt are given dates between c. 587–571 BC.<sup>5</sup> The Gog oracle in Ezekiel is placed after these oracles dated by Ezekiel to c. 587–573 BC and before the Vision of the Temple, dated in Ezekiel to the exile's twenty-fifth year, and to the 28th of April, 573 BC, described also as the fourteenth year of the fall of Jerusalem (40:1).<sup>6</sup> The date of the Vision of the Temple uniquely combines Jehoiachin's exile year with the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> The Gog oracle's conclusive end to evil in the world and ungodly kingdoms also complements the Vision of the Temple (Ezekiel 40–48), as this temple would exist only in complete safety. Given all these considerations, Ezekiel's date for the Vision of the Temple would apply also to the Gog oracle, due to the thematic link with the Vision of the Temple

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*Standard Bible* (NASB) with modifications by the author. Herodotus's *Histories* follows the edition and translation from Godley, 1920–1925, again sometimes modified by the author. I thank Lydia Lee, Johan Lust, Meindert Dijkstra, Luis Saenz, Margaret S. Odell, Daniel I. Block, John F. Evans, and Clyde Billington for sharing electronic offprints during my research. I am grateful to Hyun Jin Kim for suggesting improvements in some of the passages of the article. I dearly thank Paul Lawrence for reading the final version of this article and providing detailed corrections in the use of English. Responsibility for all errors is mine alone.

<sup>2</sup> The basics of Ezekiel's use of dates are discussed in Finegan, 1950 and Kutsch, 1985. For the siege of Jerusalem, see also Tadmor, 1956. Detailed studies of OANs already delineate their multiple historical and ideological aspects (e.g. Hayes, 1968; Boadt, 1980; Crouch, 2011; Lee, 2016). A full appraisal of the interaction between history and literature in these oracles would require discussions much beyond the scope of one article.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, 2016, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Lee, 2016, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Greenberg, 1983, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Freedy & Redford, 1970, p. 469; Block, 1998, p. 513.

<sup>7</sup> Ganzel, 2021, p. 1.

and the distribution of dates provided for Ezekiel's OANs. Although the Gog oracle is not itself explicitly dated, all other dates in Ezekiel fall between c. 587 – c. 572 BC. Ezekiel's assumed period for the Gog oracle is therefore early 6<sup>th</sup> century, more specifically the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

## The Phrygians in the Gog Oracle

Gog's core realm comprises at least three historical names assumed in Ezekiel's transmitted text: Magog (*Māgôg*), Meshech (*Mešek*), and Tubal (*Tubāl*). A fourth historical name could be represented by the spelling *Rōš*, but this is more difficult to establish (discussed below). If one detects who ruled these core areas – at least Meshech and Tubal – during the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Ezekiel's assumed period for the realm of Gog addressed in the oracle, then one can identify the ruler of these realms. Meshech and Tubal are relatively easier to detect because they are also attested mostly in Assyrian cuneiform sources. These are actual historical regions in central Anatolia. Meshech is spelled mostly as *Mešek* in MT and vocalized *Μεσὸχ*/*Μοσὸχ* in LXX whereas MT's *Tubāl* is attested as *θοβελ* for LXX Ezekiel (27:13; 32:26–27; 38:2–3; 39:1; cf. Isaiah 66:19; Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5, 17).<sup>8</sup> The two terms have traditionally been compared with the Assyrio-Babylonian terms *Mušku* (*Mušku*, *Muški*, *Musku*, *Muski*,<sup>9</sup> and *Tabal* (*Tabalu/a*, *Tabali*, *Tabalum*, *Tabal*).<sup>10</sup> The consonantal match between these terms and their biblical counterparts indicates that they are *lexical cognates*.

*Mušku* as a term is first attested in Middle Assyrian sources, starting with Ninurta-apil-Ekur (1191–1179 BC), continuing all the way into the Neo-Assyrian period and Esarhaddon (681–669 BC).<sup>11</sup> Until the reign of Assurnasirpal II (890–884 BC), *Mušku* was a term that referred to a people around the upper Tigris region.<sup>12</sup> Starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, *Mušku* came to denote the Gordion-based Phrygians in central Anatolia.<sup>13</sup> The reason for the change in meaning remains a mystery.<sup>14</sup> The name was probably based on the tribal confederacy which during the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC threatened Assyrian

<sup>8</sup> Brenton, 1851, pp. 1030–1031; Olley, 2009, p. 496; Alt *et al.*, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Bagg, 2007, pp. 178–179.

<sup>10</sup> d'Alfonso, 2012, pp. 175–176, 180.

<sup>11</sup> Wittke, 2004; Radner, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Wittke, 2004, p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Röllig, 1993–1997; Wittke, 2004, pp. 107–112.

<sup>14</sup> Several suggestions are made, some assuming there may be a historical or social connection between the earlier and the Phrygians in central Anatolia (Kossian, 1997; Wittke, 2004; Oreshko, 2020, pp. 113–121). A clear connection between the earlier upper Tigris

interests in their then-northernmost Anatolian frontier. After they were lost to history and another confederacy emerged in Anatolia approximately around the same northern frontier, the Assyrians once again opted to use the term *Mušku* for them. The Midas-dynasty and their Gordion-based Phrygian polity placed between the Sakarya (Sangarios) and Kızılırmak (Halys) rivers was probably not a centralized state but a confederacy.<sup>15</sup> Midas (c. 723 – c. 677 BC) was the best-known Phrygian king in Assyrian and Greek sources.<sup>16</sup> His dynasty is also known from tumuli before Midas.<sup>17</sup> This dynasty entered into a conflict with a kingdom ruled by Hartapu presumably sometime around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. A more precise date is as of yet unknown. Hartapu's royal inscription, dubbed in Luwian studies as TÜRKMEN-KARAHÖYÜK 1, refers to MUSKA (*Mu-sa<sub>3</sub>-ka*) as an area of campaign probably referring to Phrygia between the rivers Sakarya and Kızılırmak.<sup>18</sup> MUSKA corresponds to *Mušku*. MUSKA is also known from a Luwian inscription of Yariris from Karkemish dated to the late-9<sup>th</sup> / early-8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Yariris claims to have fame in Musa (*mu-sa<sub>2</sub>*), Muska (*mu-sa<sub>3</sub>-ka*), and Sura (*su+ra/i*).<sup>19</sup> Muska's identification with Phrygia has been proposed but the limited context resulted in some uncertainty.<sup>20</sup> Hartapu's inscription for MUSKA probably hints at the same geography as that of Yariris. Even if one assumes MUSKA had an earlier history for Luwian inscriptions that is not accessible to present inquiry, at the very least by the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC the geographical range for MUSKA is shaped by its Assyrian usage. This testifies to Assyrian imperial influence across the Near East around those times. The Urartians also used the term *Muški* for Phrygia during the time of Rusa, son of Argišti, in the early-to-mid 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>21</sup>

Tabal is an Assyrian exonym for the eastern part of the Konya Plain in central Anatolia, starting from the time of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC).<sup>22</sup> *Tabal* as an Assyrian term could reflect an earlier Luwian term (e.g. from

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people and the central Anatolian Phrygians with Balkan origins are as of yet unknown. The Phrygians are not known to have expanded into the upper Tigris.

<sup>15</sup> Summers, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Cassola, 1997; Vassileva, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Voigt & Henrickson, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Massa & Osborne, 2022, pp. 12–14.

<sup>19</sup> Hawkins, 2000, p. 124. The possibility Sura here could refer to all or part of the Tabal region is raised in Simon, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Wittke, 2004, pp. 65–75.

<sup>21</sup> Diakonoff & Kashkai, 1981, p. 59. All chronology for Urartian kings in the present study follows Çifçi, 2017, p. 310.

<sup>22</sup> D'Alfonso, 2012, p. 174.

administrators known as the *tapariyalli*),<sup>23</sup> or an older Assyrian usage.<sup>24</sup> Its etymology and origins remain unclear. Around 780 BC, Urartian king Argišti I, son of Minua, campaigned into the territory designated Tabal by the Assyrians, but instead the Urartians referred to it “as the land of Tuatē”, which followed the name of the Tabalian king Tuwati, spelled in Urartian as Tuatē (*tu<sub>2</sub>-a-te*).<sup>25</sup> Tuatē was the most dominant ruler in that region around that time. An Urartian inscription places Tuwati's realm together with the adjacent Melid (Malatya) as part of the “Hatti-land” (Urartian: *Hâte*).<sup>26</sup> By the early-to-mid 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, in the time of Rusa, son of Argišti, the Urartians were using the Assyrian term Tabal as *Tablani*.<sup>27</sup> Along with *Muški*, *Tablani* is among the lands from which Rusa, son of Argišti, claimed to have deported prisoners of war to work in his building projects: *pa-ru-u<sub>2</sub>-bi* LU<sub>2</sub> MUNUS-lu-<*tu<sub>2</sub>-ni*><sup>KUR</sup>lu-lu-i-na-ni<sup>KUR</sup>aš-šur-ri-ni<sup>KUR</sup>tar-gu-ni<sup>KUR</sup>e-ti-u<sub>2</sub>-ni-ni<sup>KUR</sup>tab-la-ni<sup>KUR</sup>qa-i-na-ru-u<sub>2</sub><sup>KUR</sup>Ha-a-te-e<sup>KUR</sup>mu-uš-ki-ni<sup>KUR</sup>ši-lu-qu-ni-ni “From enemy lands, from the land of Assyria, land of Targuni, land of Etiuni, land of Tablani, land of Qainaru, land of Hatti (*Hâte*), land of Muški, land of Šiliquuni, I transported men and women.”<sup>28</sup> *Tablani* is distinguished from Hatti (*Hâte*) by the time of Rusa; *Hâte* probably referred to the Syro-Anatolian city-states. D'Alfonso argues that the Assyrian term Tabal was adopted by the Urartians during the time of Rusa,<sup>29</sup> whereas both Tabal and Mušku as Assyrian terms could have become the basis for the biblical traditions of Anatolian Tubal and Mešek.<sup>30</sup> This confirms the present study's emphasis that the Hebrew terms can be understood by their Assyrian usages.

Understanding the precise central Anatolian territories of Ezekiel's early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC denoted by the terms Meshech and Tubal requires tracing their Assyrian counterparts. The term Mušku referred to the Gordion-based Phrygian kingdom in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and by extension this means that it referred to the Phrygian cultural horizon which spread across Anatolia, recognized for its own architecture and script.<sup>31</sup> The same architecture and script are also known from Kerkenes Dağı, a site within the Kızılırmak

<sup>23</sup> Gerçek & d'Alfonso, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Guisfredi *et al.*, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Weeden, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> CTU A 8–3 ii 15–16 in Salvini, 2008, p. 334; cf. Diakonoff & Kashkai, 1981, pp. 39–40; Weeden, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Diakonoff & Kashkai, 1981, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> CTU A 12–1 vi 10–11 in Salvini, 2008, p. 568.

<sup>29</sup> D'Alfonso, 2012, p. 174, n. 2.

<sup>30</sup> D'Alfonso, 2012, pp. 184–185.

<sup>31</sup> For the cultural horizon, see Rose, 2017; Obrador-Cursach, 2020; Rose, 2021.

(classical Halys) bend, with a settlement dating between the late-7<sup>th</sup> to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>32</sup> Two main centres of Phrygian culture were present during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. One was located within the triangle between the modern cities of Eskişehir, Afyon and Kütahya, under Lydian patronage, and the other was located within the Kızılırmak bend, most probably to be identified with Pteria, which remained independent of Lydia until its destruction by the hand of Croesus in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>33</sup> A late-Babylonian economic text from the Achaemenid period refers to Mušku as the satrapy next to the Lydian satrapy, the latter named after its capital Sardis as Saparda.<sup>34</sup> Late-Babylonian sources also distinguished Phrygians and Lydians by referring to them respectively as the Muškeans (*Muškāya*) and the Sapordeans (*Sapardāya*).<sup>35</sup> By labelling as Mušku the satrapy next to Lydia, that is the region around Eskişehir, Afyon and Kütahya, recognized by ancient Greek sources as Phrygia, this Late-Babylonian usage continued the earlier pre-Achaemenid and Neo-Babylonian usage for Mušku which undoubtedly also referred to Phrygia and thus was similar to the Assyrian use of the same term Mušku which had denoted Phrygia since the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Phrygian culture embodied the Kızılırmak bend with Kerkenes Dağı during the late-7<sup>th</sup> to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and with other sites and finds within the bend dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards.<sup>36</sup> Phrygian inscriptions have been discovered at Kerkenes Dağı.<sup>37</sup> Coupled with its likely identification with Pteria, Kerkenes Dağı has been dubbed “Phrygian Pteria”.<sup>38</sup> It follows that as an Assyrio-Babylonian term, Mušku in the pre-Achaemenid period also covered parts of Cappadocia that retained Phrygian culture. Its biblical cognate Meshech covered the same geographical range between central Anatolia and the Kızılırmak bend, corresponding to what later was recognized as Phrygia and Cappadocia. The Achaemenid satrapy of Katpatuka, and the origin of Cappadocia as a geographical concept,<sup>39</sup> was not yet established during the Neo-Babylonian period. Instead, the Kızılırmak bend in central Anatolia would be recognized as Phrygian and as Mušku/Mešek. Tabal is known from a Neo-Babylonian Chronicle as *Tabalu* when recounting the Assyrian king Sargon II’s untimely death in Tabal, at the hand of

<sup>32</sup> Summers, 2021; Summers, 2022; Branting *et al.*, 2024.

<sup>33</sup> Summers, 2023, pp. 123–125.

<sup>34</sup> Zadok, 1985, p. 231.

<sup>35</sup> Stolper, 1985, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup> Summers, 2023, pp. 124–125.

<sup>37</sup> Brixhe & Summers, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Summers, 2023, p. 123.

<sup>39</sup> Weiskopf, 1990.



Gurdi, a local king.<sup>40</sup> Tabal therefore denoted the same area as that assumed by the Assyrian Tabal – south-east central Anatolia covering the regions south of the Kızılırmak bend, within the eastern portion of the Konya plain, especially covering modern day Kayseri, Nevşehir, Aksaray, down to the Cilician Gates.<sup>41</sup> Tabal also covered portions from the lower parts of the Kızılırmak bend since in these areas were found Luwian inscriptions, which are among the markers of Late-Hittite culture characteristic of Tabal.<sup>42</sup> Their joint space and shared frontier led to a biblical usage pairing Meshech and Tubal, the latter similar to the Assyrio-Babylonian usage Tabal.

It was during the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and closer to Ezekiel's specific assumed date of the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, that Herodotus describes the Battle of Halys (also dubbed the Battle of the Eclipse) between the Lydians and the Medes in central Anatolia, which ended after a solar eclipse dated to 28<sup>th</sup> May 585 BC, with the Kızılırmak (Halys) river deemed the boundary between the Lydians and the Medes (Histories I.72–74).<sup>43</sup> Lydian zones of control in central Anatolia are less known, except that Lydian pottery and other material markers point to the Lydian control of Gordion and its environs.<sup>44</sup> There was also a Lydian border near the pass of Sallune leading to the native upper Cilician kingdoms. This border is mentioned for the third regnal year of Neriglissar (556 BC) in a Neo-Babylonian Chronicle commonly dubbed after the Babylonian king as “the Neriglissar Chronicle”. According to that chronicle, after capturing Kirshi, the capital of Appuašu, the king of Pirindu (somewhere along the coast of upper Cilicia, possibly around Gilindere, Aydıncık),<sup>45</sup> the Babylonian king torched an area “from the pass of Sallune to the border of Lydia”.<sup>46</sup> Sallune is probably Selindi/Selinus, on the western coast of upper Cilicia.<sup>47</sup> This places Lydia's control in central Anatolia along the western part of the Konya Plain and west of Tabal. That Tabal is out of Lydia's range is confirmed in the clay tablet BM 45690, which contains a text in which Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605–562 BC) claims to have conquered an area reaching from Egypt to Hume (Que, Plain Cilicia), Piriddu (Pirindu, Upper Cilicia) and Lydia (Reverse, column 4, lines 20–21).<sup>48</sup> “Lydia” here probably

<sup>40</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 76 [Chronicle 1: 6’].

<sup>41</sup> Weeden, 2023, pp. 921–923.

<sup>42</sup> Discussed in Simon, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Leloux, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Summers, 2023, p. 124.

<sup>45</sup> Beal, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 104 [Chronicle 7: 24–25].

<sup>47</sup> Zadok, 1985, p. 265.

<sup>48</sup> Lambert, 1965, pp. 7, 10.

alludes to the frontier area between upper Cilicia and the Konya plain alluded to with the expression “border of Lydia” (*mişir Luddu*) in the Neriglissar Chronicle,<sup>49</sup> between upper Cilicia and Lydia’s portion of the Konya plain. This range excludes certain regions probably under Median control. Excluded also is Tabal, otherwise known in Neo-Babylonian sources.<sup>50</sup> The zone denoted by Tabal/Tubal was probably controlled by the Medes during the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. There is no clear evidence that the Lydians crossed Kızılırmak before 550 BC, in an area that before this period Phrygian culture outside Lydian control was present.<sup>51</sup> The primary sources are mostly silent, but a few hints indicate that after their alliance with Babylonia and their joint defeat of the Assyrians by 610 BC, the Medes under Cyaxares controlled or at least freely operated in parts of the former Assyrian provincial territory in south-east Anatolia around the late-7<sup>th</sup> century BC and onwards, and likely also targeted former Urartu territory in eastern Anatolia, before around 550 BC when Cyrus II wrested the control of Iran from Astyages, the last king of the Mede confederation.<sup>52</sup> The rulers of Phrygian Pteria were likely partners of the Median confederation against the Lydians who were yet to conquer Pteria under Croesus only by c. 550 BC.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, outside Lydian control east of the Konya plain, placed in former Tabal territory, could be polities such as Gomer of Ezekiel 38:6, that is the Cimmerians,<sup>54</sup> and the city of Tegarama, Beth Togarmah of Ezekiel 38:6, as allies of the ruler of Meshech and Tubal for the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the date assumed for the Gog oracle. The identifications of Gomer/Cimmerians and Togarmah/Tegarama (Gürün or a site in the Elbistan plain) are discussed by Ivantchik and Yamada.<sup>55</sup> Lydia is mentioned separately in Ezekiel as *Lûd*, a kingdom supplying mercenaries to Saite Egypt and trading with Tyre (Ezekiel 27:10; 30:5). Ezekiel distinguishes Lud (Lydia) from Meshech and Tubal (Phrygia and Tabal). This leaves Meshech and Tubal the territories assumed by their Assyrio-Babylonian counterparts Mušku and Tabal and covers Phrygian Pteria and polities in Tabal, thus pointing to the king of the

<sup>49</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 104 [Chronicle 7: 24–25].

<sup>50</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 76; Zadok, 1985, p. 300.

<sup>51</sup> Summers, 2023, pp. 124–125.

<sup>52</sup> Diakonoff, 1985, p. 125; Roaf, 2021, p. 279; Reade, 2023, pp. 353–354; Tuplin, 2024, pp. 234–235.

<sup>53</sup> This also revises an earlier proposal that Kerkenes Dağı was a Median controlled urban centre (Summers, 2000, subsequent excavation uncovered that it was a Phrygian centre; Summers, 2023, p. 123), by seeing Kerkenes Dağı as a Phrygian polity collaborating with the Medes.

<sup>54</sup> Ivantchik, 1993, pp. 146–147.

<sup>55</sup> Ivantchik, 1993, pp. 146–147; Yamada, 2006.



Medes as the ruler of Ezekiel's Meshech and Tubal during the assumed period of the Gog oracle. The Median king during the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC could be Cyaxares or Astyages, but is more probably Cyaxares. A precise chronology of the reigns of these two kings is not yet available. One cannot exclude that Cyaxares passed away shortly after the Battle of the Eclipse in 585 BC and the ensuing peace treaty was carried out by his successor Astyages.<sup>56</sup> One can conclude, however, from Ezekiel's assumed date and the core central Anatolian regions discussed, that Ezekiel's ruler of Meshech and Tubal in the Gog oracle is the king of the Medes, either Cyaxares, or Astyages. This helps re-interpreting certain previously difficult aspects of Gog's nomenclature and certain characterizations in Ezekiel's oracle.

## The Medes in the Gog Oracle

Understanding Ezekiel's Meshech and Tubal as regions under the Medes also helps us understand the difficult gentilic Magog. This issue, and the fact that all three terms – Meshech, Tubal, Magog – occur in a part of the Table of the Nations in Genesis 10:2, provide new insight into what Magog means in the Gog oracle's historical background. Genesis 10:2 (followed in 1 Chronicles 1:5) lists “the sons of Japheth” as “Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.” The *terminus ante quem* for Genesis 10 is the Judean exile in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, on the basis of the peoples' list in Genesis 10:2–5.<sup>57</sup> An earlier date for some portions of the Table of the Nations in Genesis is not excluded since some names are known from earlier history.<sup>58</sup> The Hebrew scribal tradition existed before the Exile.<sup>59</sup> The joint mention of certain gentiles as sons of Japheth suggests that they are seen to have some joint features leading to the creation of this joint descent; although this is not explicitly stated in the text. One such feature could be that they are peoples placed in the distant north of Judah and Jerusalem. The Cimmerians were known in the Near East at least since the late-8<sup>th</sup> century BC and were primarily based in Anatolia and western Iran.<sup>60</sup> Madai refers to the Medes of the Zagros range, from northwestern Iran and northern Iraq down to southern Iran along the current Iraq-Iran border. The Medes of the Zagros interacted with and were known by the Assyrians.<sup>61</sup> After the fall of Samaria in 722 BC,

<sup>56</sup> Mosshammer, 1981; Diakonoff, 1985, p. 112; Leloux, 2016, pp. 35–36.

<sup>57</sup> Winnett, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Lawrence, 2011, pp. 35–37.

<sup>59</sup> For this tradition, see van der Toorn, 2007; Nissinen, 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Ivantchik, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> Marf, 2023.

the deported Israelites were moved to some areas of central Assyria, Guzana (Tell Halaf) on the Khabur River, and *‘arê Mādāy* “the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:6). These cities of Media were probably new areas controlled by the Assyrians within the central Zagros, in Median territory, near Hamadan. The areas were controlled mainly by Kišessim (Najafehabad) renamed Kar-Nergal, and Harhar (Tepe Giyan) renamed Kar-Šarruken.<sup>62</sup> Samaritans, members of the former Israelite state, served in different capacities throughout the Assyrian Empire and those deported deep into Median territory lived among Iranians. Their ties and communications with Palestine probably led to a certain degree of dissemination of information about Iranian peoples. The fact that Magog was listed next to the Medes may imply that the former is Iranian in some way as well. One can add here that the city of Hamadan is not mentioned in Neo-Assyrian texts.<sup>63</sup> In fact, the Hamadan plain is very difficult to trace in Neo-Assyrian sources. This does not seem to be a coincidence. The Hebrew Bible term for the Medes more likely agrees with the Neo-Assyrian usage that precedes the Judean exile. Another term was needed to describe the Medians and Iranians beyond the term for Medes which relied on the Assyrian geographical concept and boundaries of Media. I argue that the Neo-Babylonian “Nabonidus Chronicle” met this need by referring to this region and its city Hamadan as “the land of Agamtanu” (<sup>KUR</sup>A-gam-ta-nu) in the context of Cyrus II’s defeat of Astyages and the overthrow of the Median Empire.<sup>64</sup> This term was preferred to the more usual term Media, that is *Mādāya* in Babylonian.<sup>65</sup> The Hebrew Bible also needed another term for the Medians and Iranians beyond the usual term for Media of Neo-Assyrian origin. I propose that the Hebrew Magog serves this purpose and refers to the Magi in Iran. The 10<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine encyclopedia Suda preserves a tradition associating the Magi in its entry for Magog as follows: “A Persian. [Note] that magic and astrology began with Magousaeans. For the Persians are named Magog by their countrymen. And Magousaeans [are] the same.”<sup>66</sup> “Magouseans” refers to an early Christian adaptation of the Syriac term *magūšā*, as a synonym for the Magi and Zoroastrian priests.<sup>67</sup> While it may be assumed that the compilers of the Suda associated the terms Magog and

<sup>62</sup> Radner, 2019, pp. 105–110.

<sup>63</sup> Levine, 1974, pp. 118–119.

<sup>64</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 106 [Chronicle 7: 3, 4].

<sup>65</sup> For the Babylonian term for Media, see Zadok, 1985, pp. 214–215.

<sup>66</sup> Adler, 1967, p. 307 s.v. μαγώγ; Roth & Whitehead, 2002, s.v. mu 29 (μαγώγ); noted also in Parish, 1813, s.v. Gog and Magog.

<sup>67</sup> Jong, 1997, pp. 404–413.

Magi merely due to their partial phonetic resemblance, this connection has more potential. This allows us to best understand the close association in the book of Genesis between the terms Madai/Medes and Magog, that is if they are both understood to be Iranian names. Herodotus regarded the Magi as one of the tribes of the Medes (Histories 1.101): "The Median tribes are these: the Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arizanti, the Budii, the Magi." Herodotus also recognized that the religious class who carried out Iranian religious rituals for the Median empire as well as the subsequent Achaemenid Empire emerged from this tribe (Histories 1.132).<sup>68</sup> The Magi presided over local cults, probably also during the time of the Median Empire across its Iranian domains.<sup>69</sup>

One may object and argue that the Hebrew Magog ends in a consonant different to the final consonant of the Old Persian and probably Median word for the Magi. The Old Persian word for Magi is *magu-* for example, and is mostly declined with a final sibilant consonant.<sup>70</sup> The Median dialect version of the term is not known, but it may also be posited as *\*magu-*.<sup>71</sup> Both Persian and Median are western Iranian dialects. If the Israelites deported after the fall of Samaria in 722 BC picked up a version of the Magi lexeme from the Medes among whom they lived, some of these Medes probably heard the Magi lexeme in all its declined forms, ending in different consonants, and they may have even heard the same lexeme from different dialects in Media since the latter region was multi-ethnic. This diversity in Media raises the possibility that a yet undocumented dialectal form for the Magi lexeme existed without a final sibilant. There may even have existed another western dialectal form or an eastern Iranian form similar to Avestan (which is based on an eastern Iranian dialect). While evidence from Avestan is scarce, it is nevertheless known that Old Persian *magu-* is a variant form of Avestan *maga(van)*, both of which derive from the same Indo-European base *may-/ mǝy-* "to be able, to have power".<sup>72</sup> Another lexeme related to *magu-* is *moyu-*, the latter becoming the basis for different Magi related terms attested in documents from the time of the Parthian dialect (i.e. Arsacid Pahlavi) from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and onwards going as far as the medieval period. These attested terms are mostly without a final sibilant consonant (e.g. *moy*, *moy(ān)*, *mōbed* [*<mow-bed< \*moy-pat<*

<sup>68</sup> Gershevitch, 1964, p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Dandamayev, 2000. This is also assumed by Xenophon for the time of Cyaxares in *Cyropaedia* 4.14 as discussed in Papatheophanes, 1985, p. 120.

<sup>70</sup> Kent, 1950, p. 201.

<sup>71</sup> Boyce, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Itō, 1987, p. 13.

\**magu-pati-*];<sup>73</sup> Turkic *moğoč* with a final voiceless palatal fricative) can also be connected to an earlier Iranian term with a non-sibilant ending which was later adopted by Uighur scribes.<sup>74</sup> One may posit that earlier such forms which existed within the diversity of Iranian speakers remain undocumented. Originally *moyu-* may have meant “tribe”.<sup>75</sup> Potential noun declension endings that would be added to this noun base in Avestan would lack a final sibilant.<sup>76</sup> In any case, it is difficult to escape the fact that the compiler of the Table of the Nations in Genesis intended to list a gentile Magog next to the Medes and show that it is somehow related to the Medes. Magog can therefore be an Iranian element, proposed here to be the Magi tribe and priestly class.

Ezekiel refers to Gog as “Gog of the land of Magog (*‘el-Gôg ereš ham-Magôg*)” (38:2). Given the Median historical background of the Gog oracle discussed above, it may be asked why Gog’s land is named Magog instead of Madai. Ezekiel seems to have deemed the term inappropriate for the oracle’s main protagonist. The Hebrew term Madai in the Bible probably originated with the experience of the Israelites exiled into Media in 2 Kings 17:6, thus it was more connected with Assyria’s dealings in the Zagros as discussed above. The Medes under the Cyaxares-Astyages dynasty ruled an empire beyond “Media”; their mainland around Hamadan was known not as Media, but “the land of Agamtanu” in the Neo-Babylonian sources, and Neo-Assyrian sources did not consider the Hamadan plain as an integral part of Media (see above). Biblical tradition probably took over this final point. The present evidence does not allow speculation that a Hebrew version of Babylonian Agamtanu (cf. Old Persian *Hagmatāna*)<sup>77</sup> changed into Magog; instead, by referring to the Magi, the term Magog seems to refer to all the areas of Iran where the Magi served. The Medes ruled – indirectly – over the whole ancient Iran and beyond Hamadan: these lands included, at the very least, Hyrcania, Parthia, and Persia, also remembered in later Old Persian royal inscriptions.<sup>78</sup> Next to the Babylonians, the Medes under Cyaxares and Astyages had established the largest land empire during the time of the Judean exile. What united these Iranian lands were the Magi, the priestly class of Median tribal origins,

<sup>73</sup> Panaino, 2021, p. 253.

<sup>74</sup> Tangerloo, 1992, p. 65. This term in the text known as The Apocryphon of the Wise Men which was found at the Bulayiq Oasis, Turfan. It dates around the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries and is the oldest inscription of Christian origin in Old Uighur. This text was published earlier in Müller, 1908, pp. 5–10.

<sup>75</sup> Boyce, 1996, pp. 10–11.

<sup>76</sup> Beekes, 1988, pp. 111–112.

<sup>77</sup> Kent, 1950, p. 212

<sup>78</sup> Diakonoff, 1985, pp. 132–133; Tuplin, 2024, p. 233.

who served the Cyaxares-Astyages dynasty as well as the cults across ancient Iran; regardless of whether these cultic practices were pre-Zoroastrian or a form of early Zoroastrianism.<sup>79</sup> I argue that Ezekiel's "land of Magog" refers to all the ancient Iranian lands where the Magi were active and served the Median dynasty at Hamadan. The Median historical origin of Ezekiel's Gog oracle and its Magi connotation of the Hebrew term transmitted as Magog was probably forgotten by later transmitting scribal generations following its original inception, perhaps (or perhaps not) also resulting in the very form Magog whereby the final nasal or other consonant from an Iranian dialect fell to a transmission error. By the time of Josephus, Magog was considered a term for the Scythians (*Antiquities*, 1.6.1).<sup>80</sup> The time of Magog's entry into the book of Genesis must have preceded the Achaemenid Empire since the Aramaic adaptation of Persian *magu-* is *mgwš* as exemplified in the Aramaic version of the Behistun inscription.<sup>81</sup> Genesis was composed and circulated before or during the Judean Exile (mentioned above), well before the time of the Achaemenid Empire. One may conceive that the Hebrew term Magog also circulated along with Genesis before or during the Judean Exile, an event which was also crucial for Ezekiel. This can also explain the use of the definite article with Magog in Ezekiel 38:2 (*ereš ham-Magôg*), to refer to the Magog as a collective group. The peculiarity of this definite article was noted by Zimmerli.<sup>82</sup>

That with its Magi identification Magog assumes several regions in ancient Iran under the Medes in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC can also explain Magog's position in one of Ezekiel's eschatological oracular statements (39:6): "And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them who dwell carelessly in the islands (*'iyyê*) and they shall know that I *am* YHWH." The "islands" (*'iyyê*) refer to ancient regions associated mainly with ancient Greeks and other maritime peoples west of Judah; in which case, Magog would refer to regions east of Judah, in Iran, including all the different Iranian peoples under the rule of the Median dynasty and the religious auspices of the Magi. The western regions assumed by Ezekiel's "islands" (39:6) allude to "islands of the nations (*gôyîm*)" in Genesis 10:2, 4–5. Genesis 10:5 emphasizes the multiple ethnicities involved: "From these, the islands of the *gôyîm* (*'iyyê haggôy*) were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into

<sup>79</sup> Diakonoff, 1985, p. 141.

<sup>80</sup> Franxman, 1979, pp. 103–104.

<sup>81</sup> Greenfield & Porten, 1983, p. 59.

<sup>82</sup> Zimmerli, 1983, p. 283 [38:2].

their nations.”<sup>83</sup> Ezekiel 39:6 seeks to emphasize the global stretch of YHWH’s final judgment from the eastern lands (of Magog) to the west (the islands). Among these peoples of the “islands”, the foremost gentile in Genesis 10:2 is Javan, which corresponds to Neo-Assyrian Yamnāya (pronounced *Yawnāya*) and Neo-Babylonian Yamanāya (pronounced *Yawanāya*), referring to Greeks and other maritime peoples in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>84</sup> “Javan’s sons” in Genesis 10:4 provide Hebrew corresponding names for ancient regions associated mainly with ancient Greeks but also other maritime peoples, such as the Phoenicians: Elisha (Alašiya; most probably a part of Cyprus),<sup>85</sup> Tarshish (Tartessos in Spain or Tarsus in Cilicia, Türkiye; cf. Jonah 1:4; 4:2),<sup>86</sup> Kittim (Kition near Larnaca on the south coast of Cyprus), and Dodanīm (Rhodes).<sup>87</sup> Tiras in Genesis 10:2 is perhaps also connected here, but this is more speculative because the background to the Hebrew term Tiras remains unknown.<sup>88</sup>

Aside from Meshech, Tubal and Magog, the MT tradition transmits the remaining core area of Gog in Ezekiel’s oracle as רֹשׁ (rōš), vocalized as Ρως in the LXX (Ezekiel 38:2–3, 39:1). For LXX, then, Gog is “ruler” (ἄρχοντα) of a land Ρως alongside Μοσσοχ and Θοβελ (Ezekiel 38:2, 3, 39:1). The MT tradition’s construct pointing treats rōš similar to *Mešek* and *Tubāl*, thus all three appear as regional names according to MT tradition, agreeing with LXX.<sup>89</sup> A 6<sup>th</sup> century BC regional name or gentile matching “Rosh” from a Neo-Babylonian context has not yet emerged.<sup>90</sup> This has prompted some alternatives. Zimmerli has regarded the land “Rosh” as a secondary interpretation, and that *nēšī rōš*

<sup>83</sup> Westermann, 1987, p. 508.

<sup>84</sup> Rollinger, 2017, p. 275.

<sup>85</sup> Knapp, 2011. For a critique of Alašiya’s localization, see Merrilees, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> López-Ruiz, 2009 (Tartessos); Day, 2012 (Tarsus).

<sup>87</sup> Westermann, 1987, pp. 504–508. In Genesis 10:4, most Masoretic manuscripts read Dodanīm, perhaps this is a scribal error for Rodanīm – cf. 1 Chronicles 1:7.

<sup>88</sup> It was associated with the Thracians going as far back as Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.6.1). A common identification is with ancient Egyptian *Tw-rw-s* (Turusa), one of the Sea Peoples of the Late Bronze Age from Ramesside documents of the late-13<sup>th</sup> and early-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Westermann, 1987, pp. 505–506; Machinist, 2000, p. 67). Tiras has phonetic similarity with the nominal base *Turs-* attested in exonyms for the Etruscans. These exonyms are attested with *Tuscos* (<\**Turs-cos*) in Latin, *Turskum* in Umbrian, and *Tyrsenoi* (*Tyrs-ēnoi*) in Greek (Bonfante & Bonfante, 2002, p. 51). Hebrew Tiras remains a mystery, but it could be a general term for ancient Italians in general or Etruscans specifically, the latter being well known during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC around the central Mediterranean.

<sup>89</sup> Block, 1998, p. 434; Milgrom & Block, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> Despite efforts in Price, 1985; Billington, 1992b.



“chief prince” should have been connected with *Mešek wa-Tubāl* “Meshech and Tubal” with a *lamed*-preposition.<sup>91</sup> Interpretations along the lines of *něšî rōš* “chief prince” goes as far back as Jerome’s Vulgate translation, but with a reservation, as follows: *principem capitis (sive Ros) Mosoch* as also noted in Hieronymus’s Vulgate commentary.<sup>92</sup> Another proposition posits an earlier \**něšî hārōš* “the chief prince” (cf. Jeremiah 52:24 *kōhēn hārōš* “chief priest”) which later became *něšî rōš* with the added second construct.<sup>93</sup> Odell proposes an original form \**nōšē’ rōš* “head counter” (cf. Numbers 1:2, 44; 4:34, 46) that transformed in MT transmission.<sup>94</sup> Taylor suggests reading *rōš* as a gloss or in apposition to *nasi*: “*nasi*, head (*rōš*) of Meshech and Tubal”.<sup>95</sup> If such interpretations capture the historical origin of the consecutively written *něšî rōš*, then this certainly agrees with the most up-to-date understanding of the Median political structure which was more that of a confederation than that of a centralized state, as the Median dynasty of Cyaxares and Astyages indirectly ruled over their vassal states.<sup>96</sup> The translation “*nasi*, head (*rōš*) of Meshech and Tubal” would also resonate with the historical background proposed in this study because the Medes gained control over these parts of central Anatolia after the Battle of Eclipse, an event which would then be evoked in Ezekiel by referring to the Median king and his empire.

The remaining difficulty is that Hebrew *rōš* in the MT text cannot be an adjective, which requires a definite marker which is openly lacking. Furthermore, the LXX also assumes that *rōš* is a land. It may still be that there is indeed a historical regional name behind the form *rōš* transmitted in the MT/LXX. One possibility is to identify it as (A)*rāšu/i*, a region’s name which appears in cuneiform sources with variant forms *Arāšu*, *Arāsu*, *Arāši*, *Rāšu*, and *Rāši* (one can add the city name *Rāsu* from which the region name probably derives).<sup>97</sup> *Rāšu/i* was near Persia, a mountainous north Transtigris region east of Der (Tell Aqar).<sup>98</sup> Phonetically this region is a perfect fit for *rōš*. The only problem with this identification is the lack of knowledge about this region’s political fortunes during the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

<sup>91</sup> Zimmerli, 1983, p. 284 [b].

<sup>92</sup> Documenta Catholica Omnia, 2006, pp. 354, 357; cf. Billington 1992a, pp. 57–61.

<sup>93</sup> Milgrom & Block, 2012, pp. 9–10.

<sup>94</sup> Odell, 2005, p. 468.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, 1969, pp. 238–239.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Tuplin, 2024, p. 233.

<sup>97</sup> Parpola, 2006–2008, p. 255.

<sup>98</sup> Zadok, 1985, pp. 259–260; Zadok, 1991, p. 230.

Another possibility is that “Rosh” was originally a Hebrew correspondent of the Neo-Babylonian dialect version of the name for eastern Anatolia, namely Uraštu, which by the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC was already archaic.<sup>99</sup> To explore this possibility, I posit an earlier toponym as opposed to the readings present in the MT and LXX and therefore this postulation needs some elaboration. The posited toponym forgotten and transmitted as *Rōš* in Ezekiel 38:2–3 and 39:1 consisted of a letter sequence now lost in its original form, but partly preserved in transmission error in Ezekiel 38:2–3, 39:1 and Isaiah 66:19. Isaiah 66:19 lists several region names: Tarshish, *Pûl* (probably Put), Lud, מִשְׁכֵּי קֶשֶׁת (*mšky qšt*), Tubal, Javan, and the “distant islands” (*hā-’iyyîm hārḥōqîm*). The sequence מִשְׁכֵּי קֶשֶׁת may represent Meshech (\*מִשְׁכֵּי), followed by this lost toponym \*אַרְשַׁת (or a similar form). The toponym in turn was later rendered קֶשֶׁת and the sequence was changed in the MT tradition into *mšky qšt* and re-read as *mōškê qešet* “those who pull the bow”. LXX tackled the latter sequence by omitting קֶשֶׁת, and translated מִשְׁכֵּי as Μοσσοχ together with its adjacent region names: Λουδ καὶ. Μοσσοχ καὶ. Θοβελ. LXX thus included Meshech (as Μοσσοχ). MT treated the Hebrew letter sequence translated by LXX as Μοσσοχ as a participle of מִשְׁך “to pull”. Some translations follow the MT on this point. *The New American Bible’s* (NAB) translation follows the LXX. The omitted קֶשֶׁת is regarded as a version of Rosh in the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB). It is possible that קֶשֶׁת in Isaiah 66:19 and רֹאשׁ in Ezekiel (38:2–3; 39:1) are remnants of an original region name. This original toponym could have rested on a Hebrew letter sequence akin to \*אַרְשַׁת, an exilic Hebrew adaptation of the Neo-Babylonian toponym Uraštu.<sup>100</sup> This variant of Urartu was probably forgotten, since the Assyrian version of the term, Urartu, was maintained as *ʾArārāt* (אַרְרָת) in Genesis (8:4), 2 Kings (19:37), Isaiah (37:38), and Jeremiah (51:27), all following the Aramaic adoption of this term from Assyrian *Urartu*. Jeremiah 51:27, formally part of an oracular statement dated to c. 594 BC, lists the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz and its historical interpretation has been difficult.<sup>101</sup> This difficulty should be attributed in part to the fact that the time period and geographical region in question – the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC in eastern Anatolia, western Iran and Transcaucasia – is not well known. Ararat in Jeremiah 51:27 is probably an archaic term form for eastern Anatolia following the other biblical references to the same region name, and *ʾArārāt*

<sup>99</sup> On this latter point, see Bonfanti, 2022, pp. 56–57.

<sup>100</sup> The emphatic dental may have been represented with ט, later replaced with another dental letter; manuscript variants exist between dentals, e.g. ת/ ט mentioned in Tal, 2015, p. 103\* [for Riphath in Genesis 10:3].

<sup>101</sup> McKane, 1996, pp. 1317–1322.

is part of the Aramaic nomenclature going back to the Assyrian version of the term which is *Urartu*. The same Aramaic tradition was maintained in the Achaemenid period, as exemplified in the Aramaic translation of the Old Persian Behistun inscription with *ʾArārāt* used for Neo-Babylonian *Uraštu*, both of which referred to the Persian satrapy Armina/Armenia.<sup>102</sup> Jeremiah's (51:27) mention of Ararat alongside Manna and Ashkenaz also hints to their use merely as archaic terms for regions where new polities had emerged. Urartu's historical kingdom had collapsed during the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>103</sup> The Manneans, denoted by the term Manna, were also a spent force by the collapse of Assyria (so far they are not attested after the final Assyrian-Babylonian/Median conflict in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>104</sup> Ashkenaz, a term that referred to the Scythians, is more likely a term in Jeremiah 51:27 for a Scythian kingdom in an area of Transcaucasia adjacent to eastern Anatolia (Ararat) and western Iran (Manna) since the Medes had already overtaken the Scythians as the main power in western Iran. Alongside Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz, Jeremiah 51:28 adds "the kings of Media" (*malkê mādāy*) as set against Babylon. Jeremiah 51:11 refers to a united will on the part of the Median kings and focuses on them alone as the main power against Babylon. This suggests a leader uniting them.<sup>105</sup> The confederate nature of the Median Empire under Cyaxares and Astyages indicates that the Median warlords had significant influence in the state's decision-making. The Median warlords are also assumed when Cyrus II defeats Astyages; they later took the side of Cyrus II, and are described in the Nabonidus Chronicle as Astyages's "army" (*ummānu*) rebelling against him.<sup>106</sup> This was not a centralized army but one led by Median warlords who were Astyages's vassals and other local kings of Media. It may be thus inferred that Jeremiah 51:27–28, dated to 594 BC, referred to the Medes under the Cyaxares-Astyages dynasty and their vassals or allies whose relations with the Babylonian Empire began to deteriorate.<sup>107</sup> In the case of Ezekiel (38:3–3, 39:1), it is possible that in its original inception, Ezekiel's Gog was ruler over eastern Anatolia denoted by the Neo-Babylonian *Uraštu* in a Hebrew version with a letter sequence such as \*אֲרִשְׁתָּ, alongside parts of central Anatolia denoted by Meshech and Tubal. The fact *Uraštu* is not in the Table of the Nations in Genesis was probably another factor as to

<sup>102</sup> Greenfield & Porten, 1983, p. 57.

<sup>103</sup> Grekryan, 2023, pp. 816–820.

<sup>104</sup> Fuchs, 2023, pp. 755–756.

<sup>105</sup> McKane, 1996, p. 1318.

<sup>106</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 106 [Chronicle 7 ii 2].

<sup>107</sup> Zawadzki, 1988, pp. 133–139.

why it was forgotten and transformed in later tradition. After some time since its original inception, at a certain point of its transmission placed before the LXX appeared, some scribes encountered a toponym akin to Neo-Babylonian Uraštu for which by this time they only knew of the Aramaic version *Araraṭ*, thus they re-read in different ways these two mentions of the toponym in Ezekiel and Isaiah. If this detailed postulation is to be confirmed, the sequence of regions names in Ezekiel 38:2–3 and 39:1 agrees with that in Isaiah 66:19 as Meshech, “Rosh” (<\*Uraštu), and Tubal. These are all regions under the Medes’ control during Ezekiel’s assumed date for the oracular address to Gog. Whatever is to be confirmed about these gentilics in the future, it is at least clear from the period assumed for Ezekiel’s Gog oracle that several vassal rulers in central Anatolian regions designated as Meshech and Tubal existed during the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, that Ezekiel’s intention was to refer to the Medes whose power grew anew in Anatolia after the Battle of the Eclipse, also with the support of the Phrygian Kerkenes polity, and actors in Tubal and its environs, such as the Cimmerians and Tegarama. The Median king’s personal name is not given, but this is also known from Ezekiel’s other OANs as will be discussed further below. Ezekiel instead referred to the Median ruler with a particular terminology. It is to this terminology now that attention will be drawn.

### From Magog to Gog of the land Magog: A Neo-Babylonian Context

How do the names Gog and Magog interrelate? Arguments both ways in earlier works have not yet reached a satisfactory result.<sup>108</sup> The oracle’s address to “Gog of the land Magog” (*Gôg ereş ham-Magôg*) (38:2) seems to be a rhyming pair. The name is literary. It can be classified within the framework of biblical terminology as a YHWH-given name for an entity which otherwise had a genuine historical or contemporary name. One example for a YHWH-given name is found in Jeremiah 20:1–4 where the evil deeds of Pashhur, a temple officer, brings him another name given by YHWH, and this literary name is Magor-Missabib, referring to how he will witness Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Jerusalem, the forced exile, and terror all around. The Median ruler’s (Cyaxares or Astyages) actual name was not used, but instead, in accordance with Ezekiel’s eschatological purposes, a literary name was used. A historical context for this literary name can be provided given the present study’s identification of Meshech and Tubal’s overlord ruler in Ezekiel as the king of the Medes entering central Anatolia during the early 6<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>108</sup> Bøe, 2001, pp. 88–99.

BC. The Neo-Babylonian literary and ethnographic term for the Medes under Cyaxares and Astyages was *ummān-manda*, as shown by the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle tradition and Nabonidus's royal inscriptions, from where it is also adopted in the Cyrus Cylinder which Babylonian priests wrote for Cyrus II upon his conquest of Babylon in 539 BC.<sup>109</sup> Zawadzki postulates that the term Umman-manda, as a pejorative term, was used for the Medes during the latter half of Nebuchadnezzar II's reign and from c. 594 BC onwards when relations between the Babylonians and the Medes are known to have started to deteriorate.<sup>110</sup> Once the common Assyrian enemy was eliminated by 610 BC, it did not take long for relations to deteriorate between two large neighbouring empires. During their alliance in the late-7<sup>th</sup> century BC, i.e. during the last years of Assyria, it cannot be excluded that the Babylonian scribal élite associated the Medes with the eastern direction since the omen tradition referred to the Umman-manda from the east, while Nabopolassar was termed king of Akkad. They were probably also wary of the growing Median power that was the deciding factor in tilting the balance in favour of the Babylonians as recounted in the Gadd Chronicle.<sup>111</sup> In any case, it is clear that by the time assumed for Ezekiel's Gog oracle, the Medes were seen as a hostile force and they were named the Umman-manda by the Babylonians. Its etymology is partially unclear but it seems to allude to a powerful army from the east.<sup>112</sup>

Since Sayce's comments that Umman-manda as a term could correspond to Hebrew themes of many nations/peoples such as that in Genesis 14 mentioning Tidal as king of nations (*gôyîm*),<sup>113</sup> the Umman-manda has rarely been picked as a possible term to understand a range of ancient kings or

<sup>109</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 94 [Chronicle 3: 38]; Beaulieu, 1989, pp. 108–109; Weiershäuser *et al.*, 2020, pp. 62, 70, 147, 152, 187; Adalı, 2011, pp. 133–163.

<sup>110</sup> Zawadzki, 2011–2012; cf. Jeremiah 51: 27–28 discussed in Zawadzki, 1988, pp. 133–139. It cannot be excluded that the term *ummān-manda* was used in the Gadd Chronicle because it was part of the nomenclature that also circulated during the period of Nabopolassar. In the Gadd Chronicle Nabopolassar was named king of Akkad (Grayson, 1975, p. 94 [Chronicle 3: 38]). Having used the archaic term Akkad, a corresponding archaic term for a powerful army from the east was deemed suitable for the Medes on the same line would be Umman-manda, also a part of Mesopotamian ethnographic tradition that assumed Babylonian moral and religious superiority, and a recognition of the Medes' military power at the time. This is something conceivable for the time of Nabopolassar, carried into the Gadd Chronicle's description.

<sup>111</sup> Grayson, 1975, pp. 90–96 [Chronicle 3].

<sup>112</sup> Adalı, 2011, pp. 3–34, 173–189.

<sup>113</sup> Sayce's comments can be found in Pinches, 1897, p. 90.

perhaps a barbarian army to explain Gog and Magog. Albright posited that the element *manda* in *ummān-manda* could explain the term Magog.<sup>114</sup> However, this is not the correct Babylonian or Hebrew etymology for either term. Astour drew attention to some similarities between the depiction of the powerful enemy Umman-manda in the Cuthean Legend and Ezekiel's Gog oracle,<sup>115</sup> but because those themes in Ezekiel can also be explained with biblical references,<sup>116</sup> the biblical references would more likely be the explanation for them.<sup>117</sup> Given Ezekiel's Neo-Babylonian context discussed throughout the present study, the Cuthean Legend's influence is not excluded but cannot be proven with certainty. Because the Median historical background of the Gog oracle had not yet been obvious, the more intimate connection between the Neo-Babylonian Umman-manda and Gog of the land Magog was also less apparent. Ezekiel's Neo-Babylonian context is much studied with multiple examples in the recent years, proving that Ezekiel text can be understood as frequently dealing with concepts and terminology from the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>118</sup> The numerous Neo-Babylonian elements already detected suggest a Babylonian milieu for the composition of Ezekiel, at the very least within the framework of the Jewish community in southern Mesopotamia from the early 6<sup>th</sup> century exile up to the centuries of Achaemenid rule, with the potential to assume a late-6<sup>th</sup> century kernel for Ezekiel's text with later updates.<sup>119</sup> By Neo-Babylonian context, I follow Ganzel's remark that one need not always identify exact terms or practices borrowed in Ezekiel, but unique aspects of Ezekiel comparable to Neo-Babylonian elements could point to how the exilic Neo-Babylonian setting could have provided an impetus for certain unique Hebrew concepts.<sup>120</sup> My specific point here is that I am *not* proposing that Gog of the land Magog is a direct derivation or variant of the Babylonian term Umman-manda, *but rather that* the Neo-Babylonian context of Ezekiel and the encounter with the Neo-Babylonian practice of referring to the Medes under Cyaxares and Astyages with the literary name Umman-manda prompted a similar use of a literary term for the same entity on the part of Ezekiel. The more specific timeframe as to the actual composition and transmission of Ezekiel's text and

<sup>114</sup> Albright, 1924, p. 383.

<sup>115</sup> Astour, 1976.

<sup>116</sup> As in Tooman, 2011.

<sup>117</sup> According to the basic ground rules for biblical and non-biblical comparisons discussed in Barr, 1987, pp. 78–97; Talmon, 1991.

<sup>118</sup> Peterson, 2012; Ganzel, 2021, pp. 21–20, with further references.

<sup>119</sup> Stökl, 2015, pp. 51–52.

<sup>120</sup> Ganzel, 2021, pp. 6–7, 9, 29.



date of the Gog oracle will be discussed in the conclusion below, but there is – with the existence of a Babylonian literary term for the Medes as now mentioned – for the present purposes enough evidence to recognize the Neo-Babylonian context for the Hebrew term “Gog of the land Magog”.

When Ezekiel opted to use a YHWH-given name for the Median ruler and his empire spreading from central Anatolia to Iran, he did so by referring to his core area of ancient Iran as “the land of Magog” since the term Magog for the Magi of the Iranian world was known from Genesis. Given the evidence of Magog in Genesis, Gog seems to be derived from it with the purpose of creating an artificial term that partially rhymes and assonates, as does the Neo-Babylonian *Umman-manda*, with the repeating /man/ phoneme in *ummān-māda*. This was in no way the intention among Neo-Babylonian scribes,<sup>121</sup> but the Hebrew reception could very well be to regard it as an assonating and partially rhyming literary term, inspiring a similar construction with /gog/ repeating in *Gôg ereš ham-Magôg*. The core lexeme to generate the literary term was probably attained by selecting the Genesis's gentilic term Magog as it suited the core Iranian realm of Cyaxares's Median empire. It follows that the choice to select the phoneme *gôg* as the repeating phoneme for the assonating Hebrew literary term was generated creatively, to keep the second component's element /ma/ singular, as is the case with *ummān-māda*. Tooman draws attention to the Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Theodotian, and Vetus Latina, which replace MT's Agag with Gog in Numbers 24:7, where the Balaam Oracle predicts a “star” (i.e. king) from Jacob will be higher “than Agag” (*mēāgag*).<sup>122</sup> Given that the MT does not have Gog but has Agag, Gog here was probably a later reading.<sup>123</sup> Consequently there is only a slight possibility that Agag was a possible factor when the name Gog was devised in Ezekiel for the Median ruler and the latter's use as an eschatological symbol for all kingdoms against God. The Gog oracle's theme that all the “nations” (*gôyîm*) will unite against YHWH's people, a theme that can be read across Ezekiel 36–39, could hint that Gog was also partly inspired by the Hebrew term “nations” *gôyîm*. Another factor to motivate a creation of a short literary name from Magog thus ties in with the Phrygian abbreviation for the name Cyaxares, known as *Yuv* in Phrygian from a 4<sup>th</sup> century BC inscription on marble (G-224) from Gordion, transcribed *Kun*, compared with the full rendering of the name as *Kunkaros* (*YuvYaros*) on a 6<sup>th</sup> century BC

<sup>121</sup> Discussed in Adalı, 2011, pp. 3–34, 133–167.

<sup>122</sup> Tooman, 2011, pp. 140–142.

<sup>123</sup> Bøe, 2001, pp. 56–60.

gray-ware bowl (G-115) again from Gordion.<sup>124</sup> This abbreviation or a similar abbreviation in the Hebrew tradition could have played a role in the selection of the *Gôg* phoneme from *Magôg* to produce the literary term Gog of the land Magog (*Gôg eres ham Magôg*). Elsewhere in Ezekiel there is a preference to create a chiasm of identical roots.<sup>125</sup> This tendency also seems to be a factor for the creation of the term *Gôg eres ham-Magôg* where *Gôg* repeats as a syllable instead of a root. Gog therefore is not an actual name but part of Ezekiel's literary name which refers to the Medes under Cyaxares or Astyages. The identification of Gog with the 7<sup>th</sup> century Lydian king Gyges,<sup>126</sup> who founded the Mermnad Lydian Kingdom but was killed by the Cimmerians,<sup>127</sup> can be chronologically excluded. Furthermore, the Cimmerians as Gomer are Gog's ally in Ezekiel 38:6. Diakonoff surmises that Gog refers to Alyattes, controlling central Anatolia after the Battle of the Eclipse described by Herodotus,<sup>128</sup> but as discussed above, Lydia is a kingdom known to Ezekiel as *Lûd* and not as Magog. Furthermore, Herodotus's account of the Battle of the Eclipse is better understood with Meshech and Tubal placed under that part of central Anatolia controlled by the Medes, as explained above.

## Gog's Helpers

If by Gog's empire, one is to understand the Median empire of the Cyaxares-Astyages dynasty, then "helpers" (*ôzarêha*) of Gog in Ezekiel's oracle (38:4) may also have a historical background which is best evaluated by also keeping in mind how their descriptions relate to similar descriptions in Ezekiel. Gog's "helpers" are similar to Egypt's "helpers" (*ôzrê*; Ezekiel 30:8) attested in Ezekiel's third oracle against the Pharaoh (30:1–26). Egypt's "helpers" are kingdoms who conducted trade or positive relations with Saite Egypt, or from where mercenaries came and served in the Egyptian army. They are listed in Ezekiel 30:5 as Kush (also 30:4, 9), Put (a part of Libya; cf. the Egyptian gentilic *p(j)d/p(j)t* for a people in Libya, discussed in Graefe 1975),

<sup>124</sup> For these inscriptions, see Obrador-Cursach, 2020, pp. 151, 450, 475. The name is homonymous to the name of the Median king but the name on the two Gordion inscriptions referred to two other different individuals. The Y in question is a Phrygian character which represents an allophone of /k/ and in the case of Cyaxares's name represented foreign sounds in *\*hUvaxštra*, Obrador-Cursach, 2020, pp. 39–41, 46.

<sup>125</sup> Boadt, 1971.

<sup>126</sup> E.g. Bøe, 2001, p. 99; Milgrom & Block, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>127</sup> Adalı, 2023, p. 215.

<sup>128</sup> Diakonoff, 1985, p. 126.

Lud (Lydia), and *Kûb*.<sup>129</sup> Kush, Put and Lud refers to lands with mercenaries for Egypt. This compares with Greek, Rhodian, Carian, Libyan, Phoenician, Jewish mercenaries working for the Saite dynasty (also Jeremiah 46:9).<sup>130</sup> The collaboration between Lydia and Egypt in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC is also known.<sup>131</sup>

Ezekiel's Gog oracle lists "helpers" in the same vein, but this time for the large Median empire, which in turn they collectively become a symbol for World Empire. These similarly functioning "helpers" are described in the Gog oracle to establish a literary merism of a World Empire.<sup>132</sup> Gog's cavalry and other army regiments mentioned in Ezekiel 38:4 agree with the image of the Median cavalry and the more orderly army established by the Cyaxares dynasty.<sup>133</sup> Herodotus writes that it was Cyaxares "who first arrayed the men of Asia in companies and set each kind in bands apart, the spearmen and the archers and the horsemen" (Histories 1.103). Ezekiel 38:4's term for Gog's "army, power" (*ḥayil*), is a polyvalent word that can mean capacity, power, wealth, army, and riches, and it also describes the *ḥayil* "wealth" of Tyre (Ezekiel 26:12; 28:5). The word for cavalry, horses (*sûsim*), also recalls the "horses" of Egypt (Ezekiel 17:15; 23:6), the Assyrians (Ezekiel 23:12, 23), the Babylonians (Ezekiel 23:23), and Tegarama (Ezekiel 27:14). The term for "rider" (*pārāšim*) is also used for Tegarama's "riders", alongside "horses"; hence the doublet "horses and riders" (*sûsim û pārāšim*) are used for both Gog (38:4) and Tegarama (27:14). The description "clothed in perfect attire" (*lābušê mīklôl*) for Gog's army is also used for the once powerful Assyrian army now lost to death and history (23:12). Another unique descriptor for Gog's army is *qāhāl* "company", elsewhere in Ezekiel used as a veiled reference to the Babylonians used by YHWH to punish the sins of Jerusalem (16:40) or for the Assyrian army (32:22). Gog's attributes compare to other dominating foreign powers,<sup>134</sup> who were once favoured at one point or another as an ally by the Judeans, but against YHWH's will.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, Gog's horsepower is deemed similar to that of Tegarama, as inferred from Ezekiel 27:14. Horses

<sup>129</sup> *Kûb* is unidentified. An alternative is that it is an erroneous writing for Lubim, another part of Libya, but two references for Libya in the same 30:5 is problematic (Boadt, 1980, p. 65). *Kûb* could alternatively be an erroneous writing for the land of Punt in Egypt's maritime frontier southeast, or a land yet to be identified in Egypt's eastern frontier. The other directions are covered with Lud (north), Put (west), and Kush (south).

<sup>130</sup> Greenberg, 1997, p. 621; Bar, 2008, p. 33.

<sup>131</sup> Spalinger, 1977, p. 222.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Milgrom & Block, 2012, p. 11.

<sup>133</sup> Cunliffe, 2015, p. 212.

<sup>134</sup> Klein, 2008, pp. 128–132.

<sup>135</sup> Lee, 2017, pp. 2–4, with further references.

were traded and trained for the similarly capable cavalry in Tegarama, a region known for its high-quality horses.<sup>136</sup> The historical Median cavalry therefore served Gog's imagery. Both Gog and Tegarama boast with "horses and horsemen". On the other hand, by evoking attributes of the Assyrians and Babylonians, Ezekiel 38:4 also points to how Gog's army comprises not only cavalry but also regiments of a proper army similar to those of the Assyrian and the Babylonian armies.

Ezekiel 38:5 lists Gog's helpers as Paras, Kush and Put. Because they are mentioned after Gog's cavalry, they probably refer to mercenary groups from these ethnicities, similar to those in the oracle against Egypt discussed above, from where probably these countries were chosen and listed in the Gog oracle, but these helpers cannot be explained only with reference to Ezekiel's Egypt oracle. The Persian Empire also employed mercenaries from different peoples and listed their lands, and a similar thing seems at play here for the Median Empire, a theme used to generate symbols in the Gog oracle. The oracle's phrasing, the mere listing of the land names, indicates that the lands themselves, aside from mercenaries, are to Ezekiel also helpers to Gog. Paras is Persia, at that time vassal of the Medes.<sup>137</sup> Some Persian troops probably did serve in the Median army. Kush and Put represent polities independent of the Medes. Kush and Put refer respectively to regions south and west of Egypt. The joint mention of Kush and Put are probably taken from Ezekiel's oracle against the Pharaoh, just like the hooked monster analogy for the Pharaoh also applies to Gog.<sup>138</sup> Critical here is how the Gog oracle excludes Lud/Lydia whereas the latter is present in the oracle against Egypt. This difference betrays the Median background of the Gog oracle; the Lydians and the Medes were rivals who settled for peace c. 585 BC as detailed above. The Lydians entered into more stable relations with the Medes after the Battle of the Eclipse, and each kept to its own area of control until the end of the Median Empire and the rise of the Persian Empire under Cyrus II. At any rate, the lands of Gog's helpers represent three key directions for a World Empire outreach: east to Persia, south to Kush, and west to Put.

The northern direction is covered with Gog's next allies "Gomer, with all its troops, Beth-Togarmah, the flank of the north and all its armies and the many people with you" (Ezekiel 38:6). Gomer refers to the Cimmerians in Anatolia and Tegarama refers to Gürün or a site in the Elbistan plain as discussed above. Anatolia therefore represents the north. After the demise

<sup>136</sup> Balza, 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. the Cyrus legend in Herodotus 1.107–123; Diakonoff, 1985, pp. 133–134.

<sup>138</sup> Tooman, 2011, p. 68.

of Tugdamme around the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century BC, his successor Sandakšātru (alternatively read Sandakurru) led a weakened Cimmerian kingdom somewhere between central Anatolia and Cilicia during the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>139</sup> The Cimmerians and Tegarama's fortunes by the late-7<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC are not well known. Alyattes was noted to have expelled the Cimmerians from Anatolia (Herodotus 1.16).<sup>140</sup> Since they were in conflict with the Lydians, it is expected that remnants of the Cimmerians allied with the Medes arriving in central Anatolia. Tegarama may have sided with the Medes given their location near Tabal and south-east Anatolia, mostly under Median control during this period. Gomer's "sons" in Genesis are probably also implied here among all the people from "the north" (*šāpon*) (Ezekiel 38:6), as they are Ashkenaz, Togarmah, and Riphath (Genesis 10:3). All are connected geographically, but not from an ethnic point of view. Ashkenaz could refer to Scythia in Transcaucasia, being from the same geographical range as the Scythians mentioned in Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions.<sup>141</sup> Scythians and Cimmerians also share a common history according to Herodotus (1.103–16; 4.11–12), further mentioned in Jeremiah 51:27. The Scythians in Anatolia are different, they fled the Medes and took refuge with Alyattes and the Lydians (Herodotus 1.73–74). Riphath is unknown, Josephus associates it with the Paphlagonians (*Antiquities*, 1.6.1).<sup>142</sup> A certain kernel of truth may be surmised but with due caution. In any case, the Cimmerians did have some connections and activities in Paphlagonia.<sup>143</sup> Both the Cimmerians and Tegarama (biblical Togarmah) are placed in areas of central Anatolia outside Lydian power around the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The peoples from "the north" (*šāpon*) in Ezekiel 38:6 then accentuate the final northern direction of Gog's empire, completing the four directions of Gog's helpers. Among Ezekiel's "northern people" here can also be the polities allying with or serving as vassals of Cyaxares/Astyages dynasty in the regions of Urartu (Ararat), Mannea (Minni), and Media (the kings of Media) mentioned in Jeremiah 51:27–28 (discussed above).

Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish are mentioned as lands with its people inquiring of Gog's plan of attack on YHWH's new community (Ezekiel 38:13). These distant lands are literary tropes to ornament the symbolically intense eschatological portion of the Gog oracle because Sheba (ancient Yemen), Dedan (in central-west Arabia's Hijaz region) and Tarshish (Tartessos in

<sup>139</sup> Adalı, 2023, p. 220.

<sup>140</sup> Ivantchik, 1993, p. 125.

<sup>141</sup> Kashkay, 1997; Adalı 2018, pp. 216–217.

<sup>142</sup> Franxman, 1979, p. 103.

<sup>143</sup> Adalı, 2023, p. 217.

Spain or Tarsus in Cilicia, Türkiye) are very distant lands in biblical tradition (e.g. the Queen of Sheba coming to Solomon from her distant homeland).

Gog's helpers in Ezekiel's oracle represented the control of the world's four corners as an eschatological symbol for the powers of the world.

## The Eschatological Transition

The earliest content associated with eschatological notions is found among the books of the Hebrew prophetic tradition dated mostly to the Exilic period.<sup>144</sup> It may be assumed that some of these notions are post-exilic and fall more into the apocalyptic genre.<sup>145</sup> Certain Babylonian prophetic genres also contain oracles about kingdoms and may recall aspects of the Hebrew tradition although strictly speaking there is no word-for-word use of Babylonian themes in the Hebrew prophetic tradition, and the Babylonian traditions are known from both the exilic period and well into the Hellenistic era.<sup>146</sup> Aside from the Hebrew prophetic tradition, scholarly interpretations of eschatology and apocalypse are much focused on extant evidence from later periods. It would be wrong to import content from these post-exilic sources to interpret the Exilic period. On the other hand, there is no *a priori* reason to assume a form of eschatology did not exist during the Exilic period and during the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>147</sup> The transmitted textual tradition of the Hebrew prophets show that various eschatological notions circulated among the Exilic community in Babylon and Ezekiel expressed some of these.

Ezekiel's OANs address a foreign kingdom on the occasion of a historical event, but the historical content transitions into eschatological content. This happens when the predictions describe complete destruction which Ezekiel's contemporary audience would know does not correspond to what actually happened. The oracles against Ezekiel's contemporary Edom (35:1–15) and Sidon (28:21–26) also contain statements of complete destruction. Sidon is promised “pestilence, and blood shall flow in its streets; within it shall fall those slain by the sword that comes against it from every side” (Ezekiel 28:23). Sidon was attacked by Apries of Saite Egypt (r. 589–570 BC) (Hophra in Jeremiah 44:30) but it continued to exist as a polity afterwards.<sup>148</sup> Edom was allied with Babylonia during Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, but it came under heavy attack

<sup>144</sup> Gowan, 1999.

<sup>145</sup> E.g. Müller, 1969; Ahroni, 1977; Barr, 1992.

<sup>146</sup> Lambert, 1978.

<sup>147</sup> Odell, 2005, pp. 463, 466.

<sup>148</sup> Peckham, 2014, p. 373.



by Nabonidus during his campaign c. 553 BC.<sup>149</sup> The destruction was limited, however, and is perhaps exemplified by destruction levels at Busayra, Tawilan, and Tall al Khalayfi.<sup>150</sup> This contrasts Ezekiel's oracle against Edom, which contains promises such as to make it "desolate" (35:3), "with the slain I will fill your hills, your valleys, and all your ravines" (35:8), "I will make you an everlasting desolation and your cities will not be inhabited" (35:9). The oracle against Edom is specifically addressed to its main oronym Mt. Seir (Ezekiel 35:2,3), and predicts its complete desolation, which is clearly eschatological. Thematic connections between Ezekiel 34 with YHWH as the shepherd of Israel, the Edom oracle in Ezekiel 35 and the following oracle against Israel's mountains are recognized.<sup>151</sup> The oracles following the last oracle against Edom concern exiled Israelites and Judaeans. They start with an eschatological oracle addressing "the mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 36:1). The eschatological nature of the Mt. Seir/Edom oracle therefore agrees with the ensuing eschatological establishment of a new community for YHWH, with Israel and Jerusalem becoming its symbols. The oracle is framed within cosmic events, starting with the emergence of the divinely imbued new spirit (Ezekiel 36), connected with a scene of the dry bones undergoing miraculous resurrection (Ezekiel 37), followed by the Gog oracle (Ezekiel 38–39), depicting the war against all nations in the final days of the world, and the ensuing establishment of the Vision of the Temple (Ezekiel 40–48).

Ezekiel's OANs with a very clear transition from the historical to the eschatological realm are the oracles against the ruler of Tyre, the Pharaoh of Egypt and Gog of Magog. The historical episode for the Tyre oracles is Nebuchadnezzar II's Tyre campaign (Ezekiel 26:7–14). Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Tyre, if one follows Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.19; *Antiquities of the Jews* 10.228), for thirteen years, c. 586–573 BC. Ezekiel's dates for the oracles against Tyre are 587–586 BC (for 26:1) when the siege began and the immediate aftermath of the end of Tyre's siege by Nebuchadnezzar II in 572 or 571 BC (29:17).<sup>152</sup> After the Babylonian siege, Tyre's trade network never proved to be as prosperous as before.<sup>153</sup> However, Tyre continued as a city, even after Alexander the Great's sack of the city.<sup>154</sup> The oracle's emphasis is the

<sup>149</sup> Lindsay, 1976.

<sup>150</sup> Crowell, 2021, pp. 133–135.

<sup>151</sup> Odell, 2005, pp. 435–446.

<sup>152</sup> Freedy & Redford, 1970, p. 469; Greenberg, 1997, p. 8; Lipschits, 2004, p. 40; Lee, 2016, p. 36.

<sup>153</sup> Peckham, 2014, p. 369.

<sup>154</sup> E.g. Saur, 2010, pp. 210–211.

proclamation of God's dealings with the nations (Renz 2000), but the historical portion is explicitly connected with the Neo-Babylonian period. Ezekiel names Nebuchadnezzar II as Tyre's destroyer (26:7, cf. 26:12–18). The oracle however is not in its main purpose historical, but Tyre becomes a symbol for YHWH's destruction in a distant future of a different, and spiritual, agent with influence to a world where YHWH seems absent to the Exilic community addressed by Ezekiel. The two oracles addressed to the city of Tyre (Ezekiel 26:1–21; 27:1–36), followed by the one for its *nāgîd* (Ezekiel 28:1–10), elaborate with many genuine geographical names and peoples who were partners of Tyre's trade network.<sup>155</sup> The oracle's transition to the eschatological begins with the heightened manner by which Tyre's trade network is described. It symbolizes world dominion, in preparation for the final Tyre oracle. The change in terminology from *nāgîd* to *melek* in the final Tyre oracle (Ezekiel 28:11–19) is another mark of this same transition. It starts a new oracle again for the leader of Tyre, ending with a similar promise to destroy the leader, mentioning his untruthful trade (28:18–19), but this last oracle describes this figure in ways showing that it is addressing a spiritual entity. It is not explicitly named in Ezekiel, but instead is described as a cherub who once inhabited the Garden of Eden and was expelled by YHWH on account of its sin (Ezekiel 28:12–16). This point has been recognized at least since late antiquity.<sup>156</sup> The entity in Eden refers to the one who persuaded Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden and itself expelled in Genesis 3, described there as the Serpent (*nāḥāš*). The Book of Job names this entity as Satan, describing it as wondering the earth, with YHWH allowing Satan on occasion to come to His presence (1:6–7). Job's story reflects the doctrine that with YHWH's consent Satan can bring an individual material or bodily prosperity or destitution, to test the person's faith in God. Ezekiel's last oracle against Tyre's *melek* also addresses this same Satan, as emulating powers of a *melek*, thus implying it can also operate on the level of kingdoms, and wanders the earth among ungodly rulers and nations. Ezekiel's oracle predicts YHWH will eventually destroy Satan. This explains the very strong language of the Tyre oracles. The destruction of Satan is eschatological. Tyre's ruler and his trade empire become a symbol for Satan to fulfill the eschatological part of the oracle. Tyre's trade network is expanded globally to describe Satan's influence over the world due to the existence of sin. Nebuchadnezzar represents a symbol for YHWH's punishment to come in the end times.

<sup>155</sup> Millard, 1962; Elat, 1983; Liverani, 1991; Elat, 1991; Diakonoff, 1992; Saur, 2010.

<sup>156</sup> Patmore, 2012.

Ezekiel contains connected oracles against Saite Egypt and its rulers, all addressed to the Pharaoh. Ezekiel's oracles ensure that the Pharaoh remains unnamed, formally following the Exodus tradition.<sup>157</sup> This is also the general practice in Ezekiel. The oracles address the Pharaoh, e.g. "the Pharaoh, king (*melek*) of Egypt" (Ezekiel 29:2), but at the same time the land of Egypt, "against him and all Egypt" (*ālāyw wə'āl-Miṣrāyim kullāh*). This recalls the address to Gog and his land Magog, referring both to the figure and his land. Ezekiel's general terms of address cover different Pharaohs involved in the historical episodes that help initiate the oracles against Egypt. The first oracle dates to c. 588 BC (29:1).<sup>158</sup> The historical background is the Babylonian-Egyptian rivalry after the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC between these powers vying for hegemony in the Levant.<sup>159</sup> Ezekiel's second Egypt oracle dates to 571 BC (29:17).<sup>160</sup> This probably alludes to events culminating with the 568 BC campaign by Nebuchadnezzar II against Egypt under Amasis.<sup>161</sup> The fragmentary text BM 33041 refers to a campaign of Nebuchadnezzar II involving a defeat of Egypt and Greek mercenaries around his thirty-seventh year (568 BC).<sup>162</sup> The 605 and 568 BC episodes, and the eventual decline of Egypt as Babylon's rival to control the Levant, comprise the historical episodes alluded in Ezekiel's Egypt oracles. YHWH promises Egypt will no longer be a great power (Ezekiel 29:1–18), and Nebuchadnezzar as the annihilator of Egypt (29:18–20), but the alluded historical episodes did not annihilate Egypt. The eschatological transitions recognized especially with Ezekiel's third and fourth Pharaoh oracles which appear subsequently in the transmitted text but date earlier to 587 BC (30:1, 20) whereas the fifth and sixth date to 585 BC (32:1).<sup>163</sup> Their ordering is not a coincidence but reflects the eschatological turn. This is a period when Egypt is still active in the Levant and yet in the oracles Egypt's defeat and destruction are described as comprehensive, even called "YHWH's Day" and the destruction of nations (*gôyîm*) (Ezekiel 30:3). These phrases of complete destruction did not historically materialize as was also recognized by the Exilic community. Ezekiel's use of Nebuchadnezzar's victories over Egypt as symbols for YHWH's victory over Satan also explains Nebuchadnezzar II's epithet *ārîṣ gôyîm* "master of nations" (30:11). YHWH

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Idestrom, 2009; Na'aman, 2011.

<sup>158</sup> Freedy & Redford, 1970, p. 470; Greenberg, 1983, p. 8.

<sup>159</sup> Grayson, 1975, p. 99 [Chronicle 5, obv. 1–5]; Eph'al, 2003, pp. 179–181.

<sup>160</sup> Freedy & Redford, 1970, p. 472; Greenberg, 1983, p. 8.

<sup>161</sup> Freedy & Redford, 1970, p. 483.

<sup>162</sup> Wiseman, 1985, pp. 39–41.

<sup>163</sup> Greenberg, 1983, p. 8, 10, n. 11.

uses Nebuchadnezzar to subjugate Tyre and Egypt (Ezekiel 26:7, 29:18–19, 30:10). YHWH also used him to punish Jerusalem for its sins (Ezekiel 17:12). Such descriptions agree with the notion, also found throughout Jeremiah,<sup>164</sup> that Nebuchadnezzar is ultimately under YHWH's control. The fifth Egypt oracle contains a comprehensive destruction symbolizing eschatology, such as the drying of Egypt's rivers (32:14), which did not historically happen as would be obvious to the Exilic community. Ezekiel's first Egypt oracle had already likened the Pharaoh to an aquatic monster, possibly a crocodile with mythological overtones connected with the Egyptian deity Sobek of the Nile river,<sup>165</sup> but in ways that recall Satan's serpentine aspect even if strictly speaking the lexeme *tannîn* "serpent" refers to aquatic monsters from nature. The lexeme *tannîn* "sea monster" is added as an adjective to the Pharaoh's epithet as *melek-Miṣrāyim ḥatannîm haggādôl hārōbēšbatôk yā'ôrāy* "king of Egypt, the great sea monster that lies in the midst of his rivers" (29:3). YHWH promises to pull the hooks in the sea monster's jaws (29:4). YHWH also pulls the jaw of Gog in Ezekiel 38:4, and this imagery is the same as the one against the Pharaoh. Both Pharaoh and Gog are called *nāsi'* (30:13 and 38:3; 39:1 respectively). It is not a coincidence that the ruler of Tyre, the Pharaoh of Egypt and Gog of Magog all display the same eschatological turn. They omit personal names but use general terms for these leaders and Ezekiel dates these oracles to around the same portion of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Gog oracle's eschatological content has been described above and so the tradition is clear. It is really with its dates the core realm associated with him and his "helpers" that helps recognize that the Median empire of that period has become a symbol similar to Tyre and Saite Egypt.

Several historical aspects of the Median empire appear to have inspired eschatological descriptions for Gog and his army's demise in Ezekiel's oracle. This conclusive end of Gog is described as a wholesale destruction (e.g. Ezekiel 39:4–21), whereas the historical polity, the Median empire that became the eschatological symbol, would not be destroyed in Ezekiel's lifetime or in the near future. Gog and his army's deceased soldiers are predicted to lay in the valley and city of Hamonah (39: 11–16). The lexeme *hamōnah* "multitude" recalls the descriptions of dead kingdoms and their "multitudes" in Ezekiel 32, emphasizing the finality of death. The city of Hamonah in 39:16 also signals that the description is a reflection of the sins of Jerusalem that caused the Exile.<sup>166</sup> The lexeme *hamōnah* also somewhat resembles Hamadan (cf. Old

<sup>164</sup> Smelik, 2014.

<sup>165</sup> Marzouk, 2015, pp. 156–170.

<sup>166</sup> Odell, 1994.

Persian *Hagmatāna*; Babylonian *Agamtanu*, both cited above), the capital of the Median confederation. These points also help us understand the thematic connections between Ezekiel's theme of resurrection (37), the rising ungodly world opposition in the end times (38–39). The hostile world is symbolized by the Medes and their grand empire of many peoples which during the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC was larger than Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire due to its control of Iranian lands, denoted as “the land of the Magog/Magi” in Ezekiel as discussed above. Ezekiel 39:4 states the following: “Upon the mountains of Israel you shall fall, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you. To birds of prey of every kind and to the wild beasts I am giving you to be eaten.” Lee adds that the birds and animals feeding on the corpse are also mentioned for the Pharaoh in Ezekiel 29:5.<sup>167</sup> This verse contains similar phases: “I will cast you into the desert, you and all the fish of your “rivers”;<sup>168</sup> you shall fall upon the open field, you shall not be taken up or buried; To the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air I give you as food”. The first part of Ezekiel 29:5 utilizes Egypt's own setting with fish feeding on the dead (with the Nile's branches and canals summarized as “rivers”) whereas the second part of the verse completes the topos with birds and animals by providing the same topos as Ezekiel 39:4. The birds and animals are missing in a similar oracular statement in Ezekiel 35:8.<sup>169</sup> Ezekiel's oracle against Seir interacts with and probably draws from themes and topoi from the oracles in Ezekiel 6, 25 and 36.<sup>170</sup> The topos of birds and animals feeding of the corpses is unique to Ezekiel. Lang noticed how this topos in 39:4 resembles the practice of corpse exposure known from Zoroastrian sources.<sup>171</sup> Lang and Russell postulated that the resurrection account in the vision described in Ezekiel 37 evokes Zoroastrian themes of judgment and resurrection.<sup>172</sup> Zoroastrian sources are difficult to date, with elements assumed to go back to at least the Achaemenid period,<sup>173</sup> with the script and written text going back perhaps to the Sassanid king Xusrow I (AD 531–579) with later redactions.<sup>174</sup> Thus it is speculative to connect Zoroastrianism with Ezekiel. However, certain Iranian practices,

<sup>167</sup> Lee, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>168</sup> This same word “rivers” *yā'ōr* in the plural refers to the Nile's branches and canals in Exodus 7:19.

<sup>169</sup> “With the slain I will fill your hills, your valleys, and all your ravines, in them the slain shall fall by the sword.”

<sup>170</sup> Lee, 2016, pp. 204–207.

<sup>171</sup> Lang, 2008, p. 87.

<sup>172</sup> Lang, 1986, pp. 307–316; Lang, 2008; Russell, 2003.

<sup>173</sup> Boyce, 1996.

<sup>174</sup> E.g. Malandra, 2000.

among them those carried out by the Magi across ancient Iran, probably existed before Zoroastrianism and also made their way into the later Zoroastrian tradition. An example is the use of fire in rituals – present in Zoroastrianism as the veneration of fire,<sup>175</sup> but it also existed before Zoroastrianism, as attested from archaeological evidence for fire installations in the temple of Haji Khan in Iran's Hamadan province, dating to the Median period (c. 800–550 BC).<sup>176</sup> Structures with similar dates to Haji Khan are known from Nushi-Jan, Gunespan, Baba Kamal, Moush Tepe, Tepe Yalfan, Tepe Ozbaki, Sagzabad, Zar Bolagh, with further sites from this same Median period on the basis of their pottery assemblages, point to Median outreach from eastern Anatolia to the Median heartland based on Hamadan and across Iran.<sup>177</sup> Corpse-exposure seems to be a similar case. The practice is mentioned in part of the Zoroastrian scriptures known as the *Vidēvdād* (6.44–46): “Where, O Ahura Mazdā, shall we carry the body of a dead man, where lay it down?” Then said Ahura Mazdā: “On the highest places, Spitāma Zaratuštra, so that most readily (lit., “often”) corpse-eating dogs (*sunō kərəfš.xvarō*) or corpse-eating birds shall perceive it...”<sup>178</sup> The practice seems also to be carried out by the Magi before the formal spread of Zoroastrianism as it is known today. Herodotus (Histories 1.140) writes that “... the dead bodies of Persians are not buried before they have been mangled by bird or dog. That this is the way of the Magians I know for a certainty; for they do not conceal the practice.” Given the Gog oracle's historical background discussed in the present study, it is conceivable this practice of corpse-exposure – unusual for the Hebrew consumers of Ezekiel – was associated with Magog/the Magi, perhaps known the same way the Magi were known since the fall of Samaria and the exiled Israelites (mentioned above), or by Ezekiel and/or his exilic period readers,<sup>179</sup> then creatively added to the topoi for improper deaths used in Ezekiel. It seems however only to be an ornamental trope and it only supplements the main trope of improper death found in Ezekiel's oracles. The Gog oracle also has many themes and phrases found in different parts of Ezekiel,<sup>180</sup> and therefore to find a similar improper death trope in the oracle against the Pharaoh (Ezekiel 29:5), outside the Gog oracle, is no surprise. Both the Pharaoh and Gog represent Satan, and the trope of improper death, with birds and animals scavenging on unburied

<sup>175</sup> Boyce, 1987.

<sup>176</sup> Hemati Azandaryani *et al.*, 2022, pp. 57–64.

<sup>177</sup> Hemati Azandaryani *et al.*, 2022, pp. 43–45 [esp. Fig. 1 for a map of the sites], 87.

<sup>178</sup> Cited from Boyce, 1993.

<sup>179</sup> Lang, 1986, p. 312.

<sup>180</sup> Lee, 2017, pp. 2–4.



corpses, is not meant to refer to the Magi. It is only that in the Gog oracle the specific wording and place of the trope also contains an ornamental allusion to Magog/the Magi. The main thrust of what resembles corpse-exposure in Ezekiel's descriptions is to express a kind of death that is non-ideal and gruesome, the horrible end of those who deny YHWH.<sup>181</sup>

## Meshech and Tubal in Ezekiel's Kingdoms of the Past

Ezekiel's sixth Pharaoh oracle (32:17–32) alludes to kingdoms of the past to emphasize that contemporary kingdoms will also one day vanish, in contrast to YHWH's eternal reign in the end times. In doing so the reader is also provided further information on ways in which the regions Meshech and Tubal, later attributed to the Median kingdom in the Gog oracle, were regarded as the realms of the former Midas-dynasty's Phrygian kingdom, coupled with awareness of earlier Anatolian and Near Eastern history as recounted from the Genesis tradition by Ezekiel. Among the historical kingdoms is that of Assyria, which became a memory in the Near East after 610 BC despite Egypt's efforts to preserve it.<sup>182</sup> Ezekiel had earlier likened Assyria to a cedar tree (31:3), once envied by the trees in the Garden of Eden (31:9).<sup>183</sup> The allusion to Eden recalls themes involving the Eden account in Genesis and Satan, similar to what is discussed above for the oracles against Tyre. The kingdoms of the past are described as *'êlêy gibborîm* "powerful leaders", the now-deceased kings, kingdoms, armies, who will greet the Egyptians in Sheol, i.e. death (Ezekiel 32:21). Mentioned altogether are Assyria "and all its company" (32:22–23; *'Aššur wākāl-qəhālāh*), Elam "and all its multitude" (32:24–25; *'Elām wākāl-hamōnah*), Meshech and Tubal "and all its multitude" (32:26–27; *Mešek Tubal wə kāl-hamōnah*), Edom, "her kings, and all its rulers" (32:29; *Ēdôm mālākēhā wākāl-nəsi'ēhā*), and rulers of all the "north" (*šāpon*) and all of Sidon (32:30; *nəsikē šāpon kullām wākāl-Šidōnī*). The historical Assyrian Empire and its kings are therefore mentioned alongside Elamite, Phrygian, Tabalian, and "northern" (*šāpon*) peoples which in Ezekiel elsewhere includes – but is not limited to – Tegarama and the Cimmerians in Anatolia (cf. Ezekiel 38:6, discussed above). The Elamites were influential in the Near East and

<sup>181</sup> Stavrakopoulou, 2010.

<sup>182</sup> For Assyria's historical demise, see Frahm, 2017, pp. 191–193.

<sup>183</sup> The oracle also incorporates Mesopotamian imagery, since the tree of life represented kingship in Assyrio-Babylonian art. For the tree of life, see Giovino, 2007; Osborne, 2018. Assyrian kings often boasted with felling cedar in the Levant (Radner, 2000, pp. 239–240). This is also a trope in the Hebrew Bible, with the Mesopotamian king as the cutter of trees (cf. Isaiah 14:8). Osborne, 2018, pp. 122–131.

several Elamite kings are named during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, until the Assyrians in several campaigns reduced them to weaker polities by the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century BC, after which it is even more difficult to trace them in the written evidence<sup>184</sup>. The Elamites were also recognized for their deep political and cultural heritage neighbouring Babylonia in the east. Most famous were the Elamite kings with the title *sukkalmah* (“grand regent”), whose influence was also felt in Babylonia starting from the late 21<sup>st</sup> century BC and especially until the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>185</sup> The ensuing period, especially c. 1500 – c.1100 BC, is marked by certain powerful dynasties, especially the Kidinuids, Igihalkids, and Shutrukids; from the latter dynasty the most famous kings were Shutruk-Nahhunte, Kutir-Nahhunte, and Shilhak-Inshushinak who dominated Mesopotamia c. 1200–1100 BC.<sup>186</sup> Their memory was perhaps retained in Genesis 14 with the mention of an Elamite king by the name Kedor-laomer attributed to the time of Abraham. The same passage also refers to kings such as Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar and Tidal of “the nations” *gôyîm* (Genesis 14:1), which since the early days of Assyriology were compared with certain Late-Babylonian historical-literary texts dubbed the Spartoli tablets, referring to ancient kings attacking sacred spaces in Babylonia, including an Elamite king Kutir-Nahhunte.<sup>187</sup> Tidal is another interesting name for a king of old, and it recalls the Hittite name Tudhaliya I/II.<sup>188</sup> Tidal’s designation in Genesis 14:1 as *melek gôyîm* “king of nations” and his Anatolian background places him closer to the “northern” (*šāpon*) nations in the Genesis tradition.<sup>189</sup> Ezekiel distinguishes such peoples from Meshech and Tubal, the latter (38:2) is therefore differentiated from “Gomer with all its troops; Beth-Togarmah from the remote parts of the north (*šāpon*) with all its troops” with “many peoples” from the same northern areas (Ezekiel 36:8). This agrees with how Ezekiel’s Meshech and Tubal refers to the Phrygians and the Tabalians, both of whom go back to ancestors carrying these names in Genesis (10:2), whereas Tidal is an ancient king of peoples, inferred to be from the “north” (*šāpon*) due to his Anatolian connection. Tidal seems to belong better to that northern direction of Tegarama, Syria and Anatolia (all under Hittite control in the Late Bronze Age), and among the dead kings of the *šāpon* “north” in Ezekiel 32:30.

<sup>184</sup> Bartelmus, 2023, pp. 659–663.

<sup>185</sup> Potts, 2004, pp. 160–187.

<sup>186</sup> Potts, 2004, pp. 188–258.

<sup>187</sup> Pinches, 1897; Lambert, 1994; Jon Taylor in George & Taniguchi, 2019, p. 3.

<sup>188</sup> Astour, 1966, p. 78.

<sup>189</sup> Lauha, 1943, pp. 20–21.

*Mešek Tubal* (Meshech-Tubal) appear jointly in 32:26 together with the term *hamôn* (cited above). The connective *wə*-conjunction is lacking between Meshech and Tubal in 32:26 to avoid repetition and instead the same conjunction is used when both Meshech and Tubal are mentioned with *hamôn*. LXX uses Greek καὶ “and” to connect Meshech (Μοσοχ) and Tubal (Θοβελ), and once again to connect these two place names with the translation for *wəḱāl-hamônah*, which is πᾶσα ἡ ἰσχυς αὐτῶν. The plural αὐτῶν shows that the Hebrew possessive pronoun was also meant for a plural subject, hence the two adjacent regions of Meshech and Tubal (their joint space and shared frontier is explained above). In Ezekiel's Gog oracle, the *wə*-conjunction joins Meshech and Tubal (38:2–3; 39:1; *Mešek wə Tubāl*). The terms Meshech and Tubal are joined because they share a real historical boundary, similar to Ezekiel's “Moab and Seir” (Ezekiel 25:8), the latter being the oronym used in the Bible to describe Edom known for its boundary with Moab.<sup>190</sup> Hebrew *Mešek* goes back to an Assyrian term *Mušku* that refers to Gordion-based Phrygia and its extensions across central Anatolia since the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Among their deceased and legendary kings is Midas I (c. 723 – c. 677 BC),<sup>191</sup> and his Phrygian predecessors from the same dynasty known only from multiple burials in the archaeological record.<sup>192</sup> Tubal corresponds to the Assyrian term Tabal, an artificial term for a Late-Hittite cultural zone in central-southeast Anatolia, covering an area on the lower portions of the Kızılırmak bend, several regions south of the bend, the eastern portion of the Konya Plain, especially covering modern day Kayseri, Nevşehir, Aksaray, and regions down until the Cilician Gates and Upper Cilicia.<sup>193</sup> Kings from this zone include Tuwati and his son Wasusarmas (mid-7<sup>th</sup> century BC),<sup>194</sup> Gurdi the Kulummean (late-eighth and early 7<sup>th</sup> century BC) who killed Sargon II on the battlefield,<sup>195</sup> and Mugallu (670s BC),<sup>196</sup> who once rivalled the Assyrians in Anatolia.<sup>197</sup> The Phrygian and Tabalian zones share a boundary along the upper Kızılırmak and across the Konya plain (discussed above), and this explains their pairing similar to Moab and Edom mentioned immediately above. Ezekiel 32's remaining regions with historical kings now in the grave

<sup>190</sup> Moab and Edom shared a frontier in the central Transjordan region (Tebes, 2022, pp. 639–640).

<sup>191</sup> Berndt Ersöz, 2008, p. 29.

<sup>192</sup> Voigt & Henrickson, 2000; Voigt, 2009.

<sup>193</sup> Aro, 2011–2013; Weeden, 2023, pp. 921–923.

<sup>194</sup> Weeden, 2010.

<sup>195</sup> Frahm, 2017, p. 183.

<sup>196</sup> Frahm, 2017, p. 256.

<sup>197</sup> Melville, 2010.

include those from Edom (32:29), as well as the rulers from the north and Sidon (32:30). Edom and Sidon are smaller polities compared to Assyria or Phrygia, but their promixity to Judah, highlighting YHWH's power over these neighbours of Judah – and over Judah – could explain why they were included.<sup>198</sup> Edomite leaders are assumed or mentioned in Near Eastern texts since the Late Bronze Age by outside powers, starting with Egyptian texts and continued by documents of the Assyrian Empire.<sup>199</sup> Rarely are kings openly named in Assyrian royal inscriptions; examples are Qauš-malaka in a list of tribute-bearers c. 734 BC during Tiglath-pileser III and Ayarāmu c. 701 BC during the reign of Sennacherib, Qa'uš-gabri c. 674 BC during Esarhaddon and c. 663 BC during Assurbanipal.<sup>200</sup> A tradition of rulers for Edom was recognised across the Levant. Furthermore, Genesis 36 mentions kings who ruled in Edom before any king ruled the Israelites (36:31).<sup>201</sup> The same can also be said for Sidon, which was in conflict with the Assyrians especially in the latter part of the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC; their kings are mentioned in Assyrian sources.<sup>202</sup> Added next to Sidon in Ezekiel 32:30 are those from the “north” (*šāpon*), referring to other entities in Phoenicia, Syria and Anatolia since *šāpon* suggests these regions in this direction.<sup>203</sup> The precise identity of these “northern” peoples is not explicitly stated, but the mention of the north in relation to the Cimmerians and Tegarama in Ezekiel 38:6 may suggest that they are situated in the text as peoples inhabiting spaces near Tegarama. The joint mention of Tegarama and Gomer also alludes to the Genesis (10:3), where Tegarama, as Togarmah, is mentioned among “the sons of Gomer”; the other “sons” are Ashkenaz (the Scythians) and Riphath (Paphlagonians?). The Cimmerians and Tegarama in Ezekiel 38:6 therefore provide a range from Tabal's Anatolian regions to Syria-Phoenicia. As to the types of historical kings assumed, an example for a deceased royal figure can be the Cimmerian king Tugdamme (Lygdamis in Greek) who died around the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century BC after raids in Anatolia.<sup>204</sup> The generic term “north” is meant to cover all historical peoples and kings to emphasize that no ancient king escaped death. Ezekiel 32's selection of Assyria, Elam, Meshech, and Tubal may also relate

<sup>198</sup> Lee, 2016, pp. 174–175; Crowell, 2021, p. 246.

<sup>199</sup> Crowell, 2021, pp. 97–133.

<sup>200</sup> Crowell, 2021, pp. 112–113, 118–119, 120–123.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Lawrence, 2011, p. 35.

<sup>202</sup> Peckham, 2014, pp. 171–172.

<sup>203</sup> Lauha, 1943, p. 16.

<sup>204</sup> Ivantchik, 1993, pp. 113–117.

to their shared history of warfare and conflict,<sup>205</sup> with Edom these lands represents opposing corners of the world: east (Elam), west (Meshech), north (Assyria), and south (Edom). Ezekiel 32 also implies criticism of the hero-exalting traditions among the Israelites, and the wider known world.<sup>206</sup>

## Conclusion: Revisiting the Gog Oracle in Ezekiel

One manuscript, dubbed the Chester Beatty-Scheide LXX manuscript Papyrus 967, dating to the late-2<sup>nd</sup>/early-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, inserts Ezekiel 38–39 before Ezekiel 37 and also omits Ezekiel 36:23c–38.<sup>207</sup> This version places the Gog oracle before the resurrection of Israel and Judah whereas MT and other LXX traditions place it after the resurrection (Ezekiel 37) and before the Vision of the New Temple (Ezekiel 40–48). While it may be argued that the order in the earlier Hebrew *Vorlage* cannot be completely determined based on the current evidence,<sup>208</sup> the Masada Hebrew manuscript,<sup>209</sup> covering Ezekiel 35:11–38:14 (hence, also part of the Gog prophecy), probably dating to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, agrees with the MT. In any case, even this variation suggests the Gog oracle was closely associated with the narrative involving the resurrection and the new temple. Ezekiel scholarship at certain periods attests to works that would regard the Gog oracle to be a later insertion into the text,<sup>210</sup> but Fitzpatrick,<sup>211</sup> Odell,<sup>212</sup> and others have discussed ways in which the oracle agrees thematically with the rest of Ezekiel as the book stands in the MT tradition.<sup>213</sup> It would be beyond the present study's available space and stated intentions to venture into all this earlier scholarship; but the eschatological character of most OANs in Ezekiel as briefly discussed in this study hints at how these eschatological oracles now transition to a more explicit and heightened eschatology in Ezekiel 36–48, thus including the Gog oracle. The different receptions of variant MT and LXX traditions and manuscripts for Ezekiel's OANs and their assumed connections to Ezekiel 36–39, including the Gog oracle,<sup>214</sup> are discussed at

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<sup>205</sup> Boadt, 1980, p. 163.

<sup>206</sup> Doak, 2013.

<sup>207</sup> Crane, 2008, pp. 9–10.

<sup>208</sup> Patmore, 2007; Klein, 2008, pp. 81–112; Lilly, 2012, pp. 22–25.

<sup>209</sup> Talmon, 1999.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Taylor, 1969, pp. 235–236.

<sup>211</sup> Fitzpatrick, 2004.

<sup>212</sup> Odell, 2005.

<sup>213</sup> Fitzpatrick, 2004, with earlier literature; cf. Odell, 2005, pp. 465–479.

<sup>214</sup> Dijkstra, 1989, p. 145.

length by Lee.<sup>215</sup> One could argue that the original historical background to the Gog oracle was forgotten and later interpretations assumed different realities behind various geographical names, allowing Lust for example to note that an LXX manuscript, Papyrus 967, may be representing a mythical pair of Gog's allies to appear in the final eschatological battle and that Meshech and Tubal are conceived as being in Sheol in Ezekiel 32, thus not contemporaries of Gog.<sup>216</sup> Lust also points out that LXX does not refer to Meshech or Tubal in Ezekiel 27:13, where they are Tyre's trading partners in the MT's transmitted Hebrew text.<sup>217</sup> Whether Papyrus 967 actually conceives it this way could be disputed. LXX replaces Yavan, Meshech and Tubal with "Hellas and all those together" (ἡ Ἑλλάς καὶ ἡ σύμπασα) in Ezekiel 27:13, which may alternatively mean that the LXX translation summarised Meshech and Tubal with the generic expression ἡ σύμπασα ("all those together"). At any rate, what Papyrus 967 intended or how readers perceived it in later periods is beyond the present study's primary topic. The various strands of evidence and comparanda discussed above about the names Meshech and Tubal in this study points out that the original Hebrew usage was most probably similar to the Assyrian usage and referred to central Anatolian regions. This can further be confirmed with the MT tradition where Meshech and Tubal were trading partners of Tyre in Ezekiel 27:13.<sup>218</sup> The Phoenicians clearly traded up to central Anatolia as evidenced by the use of Phoenician script in the kingdom of Tuwana (classical Tyana),<sup>219</sup> considered within Tabal in Neo-Assyrian usage. Similarly, as discussed above, Ezekiel 32 refers to kings of other regions to proclaim that Egypt's Saite dynasty will also fade away and become history.

The present study has attempted a new approach to the historical background of Ezekiel's Gog oracle. Some of its shared features with the other Ezekielian OANs suggest it could be as historical as the latter whereas the OANs have an eschatological aspect as does Gog. This oracle is similar to other oracles in Ezekiel in terms of its use of historical elements. They all integrate genuine historical names or assume historical episodes. They also often use literary names, and never refer to real individual names of foreign rulers in the OANs. Nebuchadnezzar is the logical exclusion as the text assumes his period for its own background. The Gog oracle is not alone in employing a literary name. The oracles against Tyre and Egypt also only refer to the ruler's

<sup>215</sup> Lee, 2016.

<sup>216</sup> Lust, 2003, p. 88.

<sup>217</sup> Lust, 2012, p. 501.

<sup>218</sup> Rösel, 2012, p. 362.

<sup>219</sup> For this usage, see Röllig, 2013. Tyre's wide network is also mentioned above.



title; even “the Pharaoh” is in itself a literary name as it signals various themes starting from Exodus. Most OANs contain descriptions of complete destruction, at which point it is obvious they no longer refer to historical episodes, but instead they become symbols for Satan, sometimes symbolized as a serpent. Satan is mentioned in Genesis and Ezekiel often alludes to Genesis in forming the OANs as discussed throughout the present study. The eschatological aspect reaches its peak starting with Ezekiel 36 and onwards. The Gog oracle's thematic connection with the dated oracle of the Vision of the Temple (Ezekiel 40–48) is so strong that the latter's date applies also to the Gog oracle. Other dates in Ezekiel also support the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC for Ezekiel's assumed date for the latter oracle. This, when combined with the Hebrew usages of Meshech and Tubal, clearly following Assyrian usage and not contradicted by the few attestations of the Neo-Babylonian usage, point to Cyaxares of the Median Empire as the ruler assumed in the Gog oracle.

Surrounded by oracles dated to the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Ezekiel's Gog is named the ruler of Meshech and Tubal for this period. The parts of central Anatolia assumed by these terms refer to areas under the Medes after around 585 BC and the Battle of the Eclipse. The Kerkenes Dağı polity, most probably Phrygian Pteria, alongside certain peoples and entities south of this polity, allied with the Medes against the Lydians who were trying to expand further in Anatolia. Ezekiel's “land of Magog”, Gog's homeland, relies on the Genesis term Magog and can be explained as a reference to the Magi who were the common denominator across Iran where the Medes under the Cyaxares/Astyages dynasty ruled. Whether a toponym “Rosh” existed cannot be fully clarified but if this was the case, it probably referred to a land controlled by the Medes and two possible such region names (Rāšu/i and Uraštu) have been discussed. Gog's helpers from around the four directions support him and their support is a symbol for his global proportions, such global influence being also attributed to Tyre and Egypt when they symbolized Satan. The Babylonians around the Jewish exilic community in Babylon referred to the Medes under Cyaxares and Astyages as the Umman-manda, and the practice of referring to them with a literary name provides a Neo-Babylonian context for the same practice, but now using Hebrew terms, as *Gôg ereš ham-Magôg*. Gog is artificially derived from Magog to form a literary term similar to Umman-manda, but with inspiration from Hebrew names and terms like Agag, *gôyîm*, as well as the practice of abbreviating Cyaxares's name (regardless of whether it was Cyaxares or his successor who was in power when the oracle was first performed and later transmitted). The present study has tried to discuss these basics with certain detail with the pertinent biblical and ancient Near Eastern

sources. There are multiple and dense literary layers and allusions in the Gog oracle, which require discussion beyond the scope of one article. It would be wrong to assume *a priori* that eschatology is post-exilic. The present study seeks only to lay out the basics for the historical and literary background of the Gog oracles and therefore various details need to be delegated to future research. The topics raised could be explored further but at present the aim was to try to detect a Neo-Babylonian historical background.

The historical background of the oracle of Gog also reflects the relationship between Ezekiel and the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The oracles against Tyre and Egypt leave the impression that Ezekiel adopts a pro-Neo-Babylonian stance. Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns and the establishment of Neo-Babylonian hegemony in the Levant proved for Ezekiel that there is no other viable option than to submit to the Babylonians.<sup>220</sup> If indeed Ezekiel advocated Judean allegiance to Babylon, similar to Jeremiah, who found himself in opposition to the pro-Egyptian prophet Hananiah, then it is plausible that Gog of the land of Magog is another enemy of the Babylonians, just like Tyre and Egypt. Gog can be equated with a Median king, one of the arch-enemies of the Babylonians.

The present study has sought to demonstrate that Ezekiel's oracles have both a historical background and a final eschatological purpose. This also includes the oracle of Gog which also has a historical background. This oracle's eschatological dimension is the most heavily underscored among other oracles of Ezekiel. What distinguishes Gog is that it is the final OAN and is part of the eschatological account of the last days. The symbolism takes the form of a story in the future tense, emphasizing progress of YHWH's control in history and its final climax, ending with YHWH's power becoming visible to all the nations in the suffering and restoration of YHWH's new Israel.<sup>221</sup> Debates about its precise position vis-à-vis Ezekiel 36–37 and Ezekiel 40–48 are therefore secondary to the question about its historical background. The fact that the Gog oracle's phraseology is so closely intertwined with other parts of Ezekiel, as emphasized in several studies,<sup>222</sup> could suggest it is an integral part of the text and its transmission, during the latter part of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. If the Gog oracle's text is added later as discussed by Tooman,<sup>223</sup> this later date does not need to be placed in the Hellenistic period, but could be earlier.<sup>224</sup> A pre-Hellenistic, post-Exilic setting may be

<sup>220</sup> Iancu, 2022, pp. 322–323.

<sup>221</sup> Dijkstra, 1989, p. 144.

<sup>222</sup> Lee, 2017, p. 4, with further references.

<sup>223</sup> Tooman, 2011.

<sup>224</sup> Block, 2013.

proposed,<sup>225</sup> but given that the Gog oracle's historical background is now intelligible within a Neo-Babylonian context and setting, a strongly posited period for it can be a later point in Nebuchadnezzar's reign or perhaps Nabonidus's period when the term Umman-manda is also strongly used. When the dates provided in the text of Ezekiel are followed, the Neo-Babylonian period historical background for the Gog oracle becomes available. This significantly enhances our understanding of the puzzling text of Ezekiel's Gog oracle.

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. Ahroni, 1977, pp. 20–21.

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