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## **Gog and Magog: the History of a Symbol**

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World politics, like the history of Gog and Magog, are very confused and much disputed. (Winston Churchill, 9 November 1951).

### **Introduction**

Gog from the land of Magog, one of the great enemies of the people of God to appear at the end of the historical process, has vexed and bewildered exegetes for centuries. The prophet Ezekiel seems to speak of an unrepentant nation and its head and communicates God's impending judgement (Ezekiel 38:1-3, New American Standard Bible) :

And the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal and prophesy against him and say, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.'"

An examination of the historical development of this eschatological idea, this *Feindbild*, will introduce us to the never-ending attempts to decipher these millennial foes inhabiting the areas to the far north of Palestine. This brief survey shows how the desire to interpret the signs of the times and understand the period in which one is living can, and usually has entrenched religious believers in an inflexible, nationalistic and self-righteous mind-set. This became abundantly clear in the period of the Cold War. The interpretation of biblical texts has not liberated the interpreter, but bound him (we are dealing almost exclusively with men in this domain) ever tighter with the chains of bigotry tinged with racism.

**English mythology**

Though the following study will limit itself to Judeo-Christian interpretations of this eternal *Feindbild* some examination of how Gog and Magog became the tutelary deities of the city of London might be a good starting point.<sup>1</sup> The two giants, carved by William Goos, welcomed Henry V in 1415 on his return to London after Agincourt and during the following centuries have offered protection to official ceremonies, midsummer pageants, Lord Mayor Shows, banquets and proceedings within the Guildhall. To Queen Elizabeth I they were known as Gogmagog and Corineus as they guided her to her coronation on 12 January 1558. The former, a descendant of Albion, was armed with arrows and a globe of spikes attached by a chain to a pole (known in the Middle Ages as a 'morning star'), the latter, in traditional Roman costume, as a Trojan invader with spear and shield. The figures no doubt contributed to the myth that London was founded by Greek invaders from Troy under the leadership of Brutus (Corineus' commander-in-chief) as *Troja Nova*. Both figures were warriors, bearing the scars of war on their faces and hands, and found a home in the London Guildhall by 1593 at the latest. Gogmagog mutated into two giants – most probably under the influence of Scripture – and Corineus was thrown on to the rubbish heap of history. Gog and Magog continued to 'watch and ward' events in the heart of the English capital and were even used to win votes. A handbill produced during a mayoralty election, dated 4 October 1816 and addressed to the London Tavern Livery and their Spouses, promised the giants would 'dance a minuet by steam' once the candidate had been elected. The honour and liberty of England was closely bound up with the presence and protection afforded by the two warrior-heroes. New giants carved by Richard Saunders in 1708 were destroyed by German bombs which hit the building on 29 December 1940, but in 1953 new statues carved by David Evans were unveiled in the west gallery of the Guildhall, Gog to the north and Magog to the south. A phoenix was added to the shield to underline the resurrec-

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1 Harold Bayley, *Archaic England* (London, 1919), ch. 5; *The Guildhall of London* (Corporation of London, 1990), 20-2; William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries described, especially the English Miracle Plays, founded on Apocryphal New Testament Story* (London, 1823), 262-76; *Transactions of the Guildhall Historical Association*, 2 (1957), 136-141; *Unveiling of Gog and Magog and New Clock in Guildhall on Monday, 8th June, 1953* (in Guildhall Library); George F. Vale, *London Fairy Tales* (London, 1949), 29-35; Sir John J. Baddeley, *The Guildhall of the City of London* (London and Colchester, 1951), 78-80; Lewis Spence, *The Minor Traditions of British Mythology* (London, 1948), 58-62; H. Bieling, 'Zu den Sagen von Gog und Magog', *Wissenschaftliche Beilage zum Programm der Sophien-Realschule Ostern 1882* (Berlin, 1882), 3-23.

tion of the ancient mythical Britons.

A struggle between the two, recorded in Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Histories of the Kings of Britain*, is said to have ended in a wrestling match near Plymouth, Corineus being Trojan general in Cornwall. Gogmagog loses the match and is thrown into the sea at a place Geoffrey said was still called Goëmagot's Leap in the twelfth century. In 1494 figures of the two giants were re-cut into the turf on Plymouth Hoe. Huge rocks known as Gog and Magog can still be seen off Land's End. They also gave their names to the Gog Magog Hills near Cambridge.<sup>2</sup> It is said that semblances of the legendary giants were once cut into the turf of this chalk outcrop which dominates the whole of the plain to the Wash.

### Islamic apocalyptic

Composed in a completely different culture setting, the books of the Persians and Arabians are nevertheless full of stories surrounding Gog and Magog, or *Yajuj and Majuj* as they are called in the Koran (Arabic for 'those who use fire' as in Sure XXI:96 and Sure XVIII:92-98).<sup>3</sup> These two figures play an important role in Muslim eschatology, in particular with regard to the re-appearance of 'Isa (Jesus) and are linked to the cycle of Alexander romances such as the early eleventh century *Life and Acts of Alexander the Macedonian*. The wall, dam or

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- 2 Adrian Room, *A Concise Dictionary of Modern Place Names in Great Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1983), 45; Ronald Russell, *Shire County Guide 23. Cambridgeshire and Cambridge* (Haverfordwest, 1988), 17; P. H. Reaney, *Place Names of Cambridgeshire*, 35-6; T.C. Lethbridge, *Gogmagog: the Buried Gods* (London, 1957), 4-10; I. Wilkens, *Where Troy Once Stood* (London, 1990), 84-90..
- 3 *The Holy Qur'an. Arabic Text and English Translation with Commentary*, ed. by Malik Ghulam Farid (London, 1981), 621, 623, 635, 637, 707, 710; *The Message of the Qur'an*, tr. and explained by Muhammed Asad (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar 1980), 454 (footnote 100); *Handwörterbuch des Islam*, herausgegeben von A.J. Wensinck, J.H. Kramers (Leiden, 1941), 801-2; H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden-London, 1961), 637; Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Koran. Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Md. 1989), 738-742; Allamah Khadim Rahmani Nuri, *The Running Commentary of the Holy Quran* (Shilling 1964), 457-8, 505; *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary*, Volume II, Part II (Rabwah, 1960), 1718-21; *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary*, Volume II, Part I (Rabwah 1969), 1540-43; Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients*, Heft IV (Berlin-Leipzig 1926), 150-1; *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz von Rudi Paret* (Stuttgart-Berlin-Cologne-Mainz, 1977), 320; Sh. Nasir Ahmad, *Islam. 60 Fragen und Antworten* (Zurich, n.d.), 70; *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 15 (1911), 61; Allamah Khadim Rahmani Nuri, *The Running Commentary of the Holy Qur'an* (Shilling 1964), 458, 505; A.R. Bhutta, *Prophezeiungen über die Endzeit* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), 16-19.

iron gate said to have been built 'where the sun rises' (some have associated this with the great wall of China) by Dhu al Qarnayn (generally interpreted by Muslims as being Alexander the Great) between the Caspian and Black Seas to keep back the wild marauding tribes of Central Asia is often referred to as the wall of Yajuj and Majuj.

Muslim commentators on the Gog passages in the Koran, just like their Jewish and Christian counterparts, can be grouped into those who seek an historical interpretation, either in the past or in the future, and those who see these eschatological personages as 'purely allegorical, applying not to any specific tribes or beings but to a series of social catastrophes which would cause a complete destruction of man's civilisation before the coming of the Last Hour' (Muhammad Asad). The judgement on earth will be horrific. Yajuj and Majuj will break through the 'wall' in such numbers that they will drink all the water of the Euphrates and Tigris or of the Lake of Tiberias. When they have killed all the inhabitants of the earth they will shoot their arrows against heaven. God in his anger will send plagues of worms or birds upon them which will eat into their nostrils, necks and ears, so that no man will escape.

Many recent exegetes followed the tradition established by the classical commentators such as Tabari and regard the prediction as referring to a definite historical event. The Mongols and Tatars have been identified as possible candidates in the past. Muhammad Asad notes that 'ever since the late Middle Ages, Muslims have been inclined to discern in this dream [Sure XVIII] a prediction of the great Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century, which destroyed the Abbasid Empire and, thus, the political power of the Arabs'. The recent trend amongst commentators to demonise Christian nations as Yajuj and Majuj is, however, predominant. The words may apply, says the commentary in the Koran published in 1960 under the auspices of Hadrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, Second Successor of the Promised Messiah, to the Christian nations of the West as 'they have made much use of the burning fire and boiling water and because all their material progress and great discoveries and inventions are due to the proper use of these things'. Here in the Koran we find the equation of Gog's allies, as listed in Ezekiel, with historical nations: Rosh with Russia, Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolsk. 'The nations of Europe have been legitimately called Gog and Magog in the Biblical prophecy', states the official commentary for Ahmadiyyah Muslims. Reference is made, moreover, to the presence of the effigies of Gog and Magog in the Guildhall: 'these heroes have been connected with Britain from very ancient times'. The commentary produced under the auspices of the Third Successor of the Promised Messiah continues this tradition.

Anti-colonialism has clearly impacted Muslim thinking on the matter. Nasir Ahmad says that Gog and Magog put their roots into the earth exactly one thousand years after Mohammed (born 570) began his public ministry when the Moghul government allowed the English to found a trading station in the Bay of Bengal in 1611. The reign of Gog and Magog is linked here to the era of English imperialism. The 'breaking of the wall', mentioned in the Koran, has thus been seen to signify the spread of the Christian world's tentacles across the globe and the decline of the political power of Islam, particularly of the Turks in Europe. Mawli Muhammad Ali, a translator of the Koran, took the presence of the statues in the Guildhall seriously and similarly linked England with the barbarians behind the gates. Another commentator, Allamah Khadim Rahmani Nuri, sees Gog as a type of the Anglo-American Christian nations and Magog as a type of the Soviet or Communist block. In this vein, A.R. Bhutta says the prophecy relates to war between two superpowers, Gog and Magog, fighting to maintain their interests in the Persian Gulf and, in particular, to keep control of the oil reserves there. Gog and Magog would one day wage war against Irak to gain control of its oil supplies. Even space becomes the scene of their grasping nature. The 'fire' the superpowers play with refer, in his view, to jets and nuclear weapons which will be used in a Third World War.

Like many a Christian commentator, as we shall see, Allamah K.R. Nuri accepted that Majuj represented the tribes of Tubal and Meshech (he refers to Ezekiel 38:2) that occupied the territories to the north of the Black Sea, tribes connected in his opinion with the cities of Tobolsk and Moscow. The Anglo-American 'democratic' Christian block and the Soviet-led 'Communist' block, in this study (as in the Ahmadiyyah Koran), are the Yajuj and Majuj in the Islamic end-times scenario. They represent, metaphorically, the forces of materialism and falsehood. Together they will wage war and no earthly power will be able to resist their military might. God Himself will bring about the circumstances which will usher in their annihilation. The material glory of Christendom, in its Western democratic and Communist expressions, both camps showing in different ways an utter disregard for God and religion, will be destroyed by Allah at the end of history.

### **Jewish apocalyptic**

Ezekiel's prophecy provided images that sparked the imagination of later Jewish apocalypticists. The Septuagint Translation of Numbers 24:7 has *Gog* instead of *Agag* and adds the name *Gog* in Amos 7:1,

where the locusts are at Gog's command. The oldest Jewish Sibylline text (III, 663ff) employs the Gog prophecy in its description of the end times. 1 Enoch 56 and 57 interpret Gog as the wild hordes of Parthians and Medes which, at the time, were a major threat to Israel. Here we have then one of the earliest equations of the eschatological foe with an historical enemy, that is if one does not adhere to the view that Ezekiel was in fact making cryptic reference to Babylon, the one nation not listed in Chapters 25 to 32.<sup>4</sup> The pre-Christian Sibylline books say the country of Gog and Magog 'lies between the rivers of Ethiopia' and it will suffer a bloodbath and be called 'the place of judgement' (Or. Sibyll. III, 315f. 319. 512). Under Satan's leadership Gog and Magog will go to battle against God and his Messiah (Aboda zara 3a). In the Talmud the words of the Psalmist (2:1-3) are repeatedly applied to Gog. Jacob (Genes. rabb. 98), Eldad and Medad (Sanhedrin 17a) prophesy about this last battle and the fall of Gog.<sup>5</sup> In Pesikta 79a Gog and Magog's plans are compared with those of Esau, the Pharaoh and Haman, i.e. those who wished to exterminate the Jews. In Tanchuma Schophetim 19 g.E. the peoples following Gog are filled with an evil spirit prior to rebelling against King Messiah in the final decisive battle.<sup>6</sup>

The eschatological position of this event in the divine timetable varies depending upon the source used.<sup>7</sup> There are other variations too. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the Pentateuch (Exodus 40:11) suggests that the Ephraimite Messiah will vanquish Gog; another late apocalyptic writing (Pesikta Sutarta 58a) has Gog and Magog vanquishing Messiah ben Joseph.<sup>8</sup> The Targum of Ezekiel (on Chapter 39:16) and the Pesikta Rabbati (on Chapter 17:8) both identify Gog as Rome: the final eschatological war would be with Rome which would be visited by the plagues of Egypt. Sanhedrin 94a sees in Gog a reference to Sennacherib, a type of the Evil Enemy. Other Rabbis, however, see Gog-Magog as an eschatological symbol.<sup>9</sup>

The Jewish apocalyptic books – 2 Esdras, 4 Ezra, 1 and 2 Enoch,

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4 J. Böhmer, 'Wer ist Gog von Magog?', *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* (Leipzig) 40 (1897), 346.

5 Moritz Friedländer, *Der Antichrist* (Göttingen, 1901), 171-172.

6 Ferdinand Weber, *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften* (Leipzig, 1897), 387-389.

7 Paul Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie von Daniel bis Akiba* (Tübingen-Leipzig, 1903), 175-176.

8 Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation* (Cincinnati-New York, 1974), 50-52; W. Bousset, 'Gog und Magog', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, Heft 2, July 1899, 119-120.

9 Samson H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh, 1987), 107. Rabbis Akiba, Eliezer and Nehemia all speak of Gog.

Jubilees, 2 Baruch, the Sibylline Oracles, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs – were all written between 167 BC, when the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes began, and 135 AD, when the Jewish nation was effectively destroyed by Hadrian. In other words, the context of these Jewish writings was a struggle for survival, a period of fervent nationalism mingled with pessimism and a feeling of hopelessness in the face of world powers. Apocalyptic writings contain cryptic references to current political events and are in fact a reflection on and a reaction to them.<sup>10</sup>

Josephus was the first to interpret Gog and Magog as being the contemporary Scythians, a name used by himself and other writers of the time, to represent all unknown, barbarian peoples inhabiting the north. He and Pliny say that Alexander had locked up these peoples behind huge gates in 'the hills north of the Caspian Sea', Alexander assuming in the accounts Messiah-like features.<sup>11</sup> Two mountain peaks in the Caucasus still bore the names *Gogh and Magogh* in the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> From the third century onwards, however, the prevailing view among Jewish scholars, following Commodianus, Ambrose and Isidorus, was that the Goths were meant (Jerusalem Talmud, Targum of the Chronicles).<sup>13</sup> The fourth century Targumim of Jerusalem and Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 10:2 both interpret Magog as Germania<sup>14</sup> and this view, too, was common throughout the Middle Ages: the ancient Germans, the Teutons, the ferocious enemies of Rome and of the civilised world were named interchangeably with the Scythians and Gog's confederacy.<sup>15</sup> Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235) generalised the interpretation and claimed the Christians and Turks were meant: the perceived major threats to Jewish life and religion.<sup>16</sup>

Ezekiel 38:12 says Israel is the navel or centre of the earth, the centre of God's plan of salvation, but attacks on Israel are not necessarily to be understood in any geographical sense. Just as, by the Apostolic age, Gog and Magog had become detached from any topo-

10 G.B. Baird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London, 1980), 261.

11 Franz Kampers, *Alexander der Große und die Idee des Weltimperiums in Prophetie und Sage* (Freiburg i.Br., 1901), 81.

12 J. Böhmer, 'Wer ist Gog von Magog?', 346.

13 A. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Enclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass. 1932), 10. The Jerusalem Talmud was written about 400 AD. The Babylonian Talmud (about 500 AD) has China for Magog; A. Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, Band 1 (Stuttgart, 1957), 193.

14 A. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 10.

15 'Die biblische Völkertafel in Talmud, Midrasch and Targum', *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (Breslau), 39 (1895), 7-9.

16 *The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes by Adam Clarke*, ed. Thornley Smith (London, n.d.), 559.



graphical connection with the north (Revelation 20:7-10) and have lost any vague personal sense – the attack on Israel becoming an attack on ‘the saints’ and ‘the beloved city’ – the Gog oracle has taken on allegorical significance, particularly in the oral tradition, throughout the Jewish diaspora, though, following the creation of the state of Israel, it has once again developed a geographical-political character.

Two examples from the modern era will show the tenacity of the prophecy. Martin Buber published his novel *Gog and Magog* in 1943 (its 1945 English edition is called *For the Sake of Heaven*) and is an attempt to come to terms with the outbreak of the Second World War, the atmosphere of crisis, the terrible life and death struggle of political forces and the signs of a ‘false messianism’. A vision in which Buber saw ‘a false messenger with bats’ wings and the facial features of a Jewish Goebbels’ provided the spark for the work which, he said, he wrote very quickly, ‘as if I only had to copy down everything I could see so clearly before me’. The novel is based on the true story of certain East European Hassidim and the prophet of Lublin who pleaded with God, even turning to the use of Cabbalistic magic in the process, to *allow* Napoleon to become the Gog of the final eschaton, this in order to speed up the Coming of the Messiah. The seer has a counterpart in the story, his favourite pupil, Jehudi of Pzycha, who gives his life to stop the experiment in the belief that Messiah can only appear following the repentance and spiritual renewal of individuals. Jewish rabbis read great significance into the historical data of Napoleon’s military exploits and connected his name with Apollyon and Abbadon, the angel from hell. In the same way, Buber wants to remind people of eternal realities which can be a source of strength to resist present realities. He wants to point out a way through the dark night of life, to help people persevere till the dawn breaks, and so survive the struggle between light and darkness, the presence of evil, in the military conflict being waged in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

In passing, let it be noted that Jewish Hassidim were not the only people in the late eighteenth century to regard Napoleon’s military successes as forboding the end of the world. According to N.S. Tikhonravov, there were ‘many credulous persons’ in Russia who looked upon Napoleon as the Antichrist and sought to see in his exploits the fulfilment of the prophecies of Methodius of Patara, to which we will later refer. The prophecies, which have links with the Gog oracle, were extremely popular at the time, not least as a source of comfort due to the promise of an eventual ‘Christian’ victory over the prophesied invaders. In Russia, too, then, the Revelations of

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17 Martin Buber, *Gog und Magog* (Frankfurt a.M., 1957).

Methodius were applied to the disordered, seemingly hopeless period of war and momentous change and Napoleon I and his army, it was believed, were the Gog and Magog of prophecy.<sup>18</sup>

The second example of the continuing relevance of the Gog oracle brings us into the 1990s. In late rabbinic legend the place of Gog is taken by Armillus, the wicked one, who will be slain by the word of the Messiah.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* on 17 August 1990, Amnon Goldberg, referring to the events in the Persian Gulf, noted that 'the cryptic name of the British Navy's Armilla Patrol is sufficiently close to 'Armillus', the Anti-Messiah of Jewish tradition, to warrant a possible eschatological interpretation'. Goldberg claimed that, according to Jewish chronology, the Messianic age must commence within the next 249 years and wondered whether the Gog prophecy was about to be fulfilled.<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, in February 1991 Menachem Schneerson, head of a Chassidic brotherhood of the Chabad School in Brooklyn, declared that 'the Gulf War was the final battle against the heathen King Gog from the land of Magog, the battle prophesied by the prophets'. He added that the rebuilding of the Temple would immediately follow the battle'.<sup>21</sup>

Such speculation was understandable at a time when the world was expecting chemical and biological weapons to be employed on a grand scale, when Scuds and Patriots gripped our attention. Book-sellers reported that the sales of astrological and prophetic literature had shot up since the conflict began. Christians, too, were not unaffected. They learned that modern-day Iraq was ancient Babylon, an enemy of God. Zondervan, a leading American publisher of evangelical literature, issued an updated version of John F. Walwood's 1974 bestseller – *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle-East Crisis* – with an initial print order of one million copies. On so-called Christian television, the Rev. Jack van Impe of Detroit, one of the USA's end-times specialists, claimed Scriptural prophecies clearly pointed to an Iraqi defeat but also to an eventual world war in the 1990s between Russia and the West.<sup>22</sup> More will be said about white, middle-class American responses to Gog and Magog later.

Summing up our examination of Jewish responses to situations of

18 A. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 14; A. Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, Band 1, 322; Samuel Cross, 'The Earliest Allusion in Slavic Literature to the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius', *Speculum. A Journal of Medieval Studies*, IV (1929), 331 (footnote 3).

19 Samson H. Levey, *Messiah*, 52.

20 *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 August 1990.

21 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 February 1991.

22 'Apocalypse Now?', *Time*, 11 February 1991.

danger in the past we repeatedly note a willingness to eschatologise the particular situation, equating the threat – whether it be the Teutons, the Goths, the French or the Iraqis – with the Gog of prophecy. This equation clearly had a lot to do with the perceptions and prejudices of the interpreter as well as with the actual behaviour of an aggressor. Actual historical facts – for example, the fact that Napoleon's army brought emancipation to the Jews in Prussia – are not generally taken into consideration when the enemy is demonised by this equation. Much like the seer in Buber's novel, one turns to magic or some form of conjuring trick to make the facts fit the theory, just as the Persian Jewish 'Messiah', Moshéh Eliyahu, used numerology to prove, at the beginning of this century, that Gog was no other than Leon Trotsky.<sup>23</sup> As John Taylor has said in his commentary on Ezekiel, attempts to read too much into the incidentals of prophecy betray the ingenuity of the speculator rather than the sobriety of the exegete.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly true, as we shall see in the following, of Christian commentators.

### Christian apocalyptic

Jewish apocalyptic thinking found a welcoming home in the early Church. Indeed, Christianity considered herself *the* eschatological triumph of God in Jesus Christ, who, following ancient prophecies, was already transforming the world into his new kingdom. The Apostle John, in particular, resorted to apocalyptic imagery to offer hope to those oppressed by the Romans – the hope of an early end of world history as a 'sure way of escape from Roman oppression'.<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel 38 and 39 and the Book of Revelation were mines of useful imagery and Wyclif was by no means the first or last to recognise the 'great polemical use', the propagandistic value of prophetic Scriptures.<sup>26</sup>

Believing the end was nigh, Popes Urban II and Innocent III called for military discipline in the Christian community to prepare for the onslaught of Christ's enemies under the lead of Antichrist.<sup>27</sup> Both Pope Urban and St. Bernhard portrayed Jerusalem as being endangered by the forces of Antichrist against whom God was calling good Christians to crusade. In St. Bernhard's sermons the Saracens were

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23 W.F. Albright, 'Gog', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 43 (1924), 378f.

24 John Taylor, *Ezekiel* (London, 1969), 243.

25 Ernest L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Berkeley, 1949), 9.

26 Ernest L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, 23.

27 Ernst Bernheim, *Mittelalterliche Zeitanschauungen in ihrem Einfluß auf Politik und Geschichtsschreibung* (Tübingen, 1918), 75ff.

the Gog/Magog prophesied long ago.<sup>28</sup>

Yet the oracles could not only be used for clerical-imperialist propaganda. Just as apocalyptic thought contributed to the great Jewish revolts of 60-66 AD and 132-135 AD, eschatological interpretations pushed Hussite Taborites into active resistance and indeed revolution.<sup>29</sup> Norman Cohn has also shown that what he calls the 'eschatological phantasies' of early Christianity were adopted and adapted by men like John Ball, Martinek Hanska, Thomas Müntzer, Jan Matthys and Jan Bockelson for their own purposes, promising their followers the conclusion of history.<sup>30</sup> A Christian's eschatological understanding could easily lead to social unrest and campaigns for more justice and political freedom as well as to militaristic campaigns abroad. Clerical intellectuals could console and support their patrons by interpreting the times in a favourable way and so move men 'to pursue specified aims at once political and religious in nature'.<sup>31</sup> The aim depended on who one needed to demonise.

There is one other approach to such imagery which should be noted. In the patristic literature there is no specific mention of the attack made by Gog and Magog. Irenaeus, who is usually taken to represent traditional Christian eschatology, deals fully with Antichrist and the interpretation of his number, but is silent on Gog.<sup>32</sup> This silence seems to have lasted until the fourth century when a major shift in eschatological understanding took place in the Church. If the very first groups of Christians did indeed believe that the last age of history was about to end – that is, their eschatology was apocalyptic in emphasis – by the fourth century churches were more willing to see the socio-political events of their own time *in the light* of the end of history rather than as the last events themselves. Bernhard McGinn suggests that the reinterpretation of eschatological passages was due not least to the changed attitude to the Roman Empire following Constantine's so-called conversion. Having a more privileged position in society led to political loyalty to Rome and a shift from a literal reading of prophetic passages as descriptions of historical events in the future to an allegorical reading of the same as poems about the perennial struggle between good and evil. This shift is linked with the names of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339), Jerome (347-420) – whose etymological interpretations of the names

28 N. Cohn, *Das neue irdische Paradies* (Hamburg, 1988), 77.

29 *The Jerome Bible Commentary*, 343; Bernhard McGinn, *Visions*, 32.

30 N. Cohn, *Das neue irdische Paradies*, 72, 315.

31 B. McGinn, B. McGinn, *Views of the End. Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1979), 32.

32 S.H. Hooke, 'Gog and Magog', *The Expository Times*, 22 (Oct.1914-Sept.1915), 317ff.

of Gog and Magog (Gog means 'roof', Magog 'from the roof') influenced later writers<sup>33</sup> – Tyconius (330-390) and, above all, Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who has been called 'the fountainhead of all anti-apocalyptic eschatology in the Middle Ages'.<sup>34</sup>

Since Tyconius the 'mystical meaning' of Revelation 20:8 has been emphasised; any connection between Gog and Magog and historical nations, between Jerusalem and the city in Palestine, was rejected. Gog's attack on Jerusalem was transformed into an attack on the substance of the universal church by hypocrites and pseudo-priests.<sup>35</sup> Hieronymus (340-420), in his commentary on Ezekiel (410-411), related Gog and Magog historically to the Scythians or Huns, but eschatologically to the Antichrist. Gog's army was the horde of false teachers, the adherents of Arian doctrines such as the Goths who invaded Italy from the north from about 401 AD, where they desolated places which were in Hieronymus' view holy.<sup>36</sup>

Augustine too refused to see the prophetic passages as a mirror of temporal history. He 'transformed the Apocalypse from a revelation of history into a book of consolation for the spiritually besieged members of the City of God'. Augustine – and in this he was quoted with approval by Thomas Aquinas – did not believe we could read about the course of history by studying the prophetic books.<sup>37</sup> In his view, Gog and Magog are not any barbarian peoples somewhere in the northern hemisphere, but symbols of peoples *inhabited* and in actual fact covertly led by the Devil, the word Gog also meaning in his view 'roof'.<sup>38</sup>

These men had a supreme influence on thought in the Middle Ages. Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202) says Gog is 'the final Antichrist' who leads the 'pagan nations'. In his eschatological timetable Gog and Magog appear in the last attack of evil during the third *status*.<sup>39</sup> In the same manner, the 'north' signifies, in the view of Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), the *pars sinistra*, the 'element of rebellion pure and simple, the antichrist in our nature'.<sup>40</sup> Gerhoch von Reich-

33 R.K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages. A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Manchester, 1981), 85.

34 B. McGinn, *Views of the End*, 3-4, 26-28.

35 Horst D. Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist im Mittelalter: Von Tyconius zum deutschen Symbolismus* (Münster, 1973), 30.

36 Horst D. Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist*, 132.

37 Ernst L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, 17-18.

38 Aurelius Augustinus, *Vom Gottesstaat. Buch 11 bis 22* (Munich, 1978), 615-616. The passage on Gog can be found in the eleventh chapter in Book 20.

39 R.K. Emmerson, *Antichrist*, 87; *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (New York-Toronto, 1979), 136-141.

40 H.D. Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist*, 29-30, 508.

ersberg (1092/93-1169) accepts this interpretation of the 'north' and locates it *within* the Church, that part of the Body of Christ infected by dark forces: heretics, schismatics, hypocrites, false priests. He refers to the many wise believers of his day who said that Gog and Magog had been released and were causing the schism in the Church at that time.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, there was never any lack of medieval exegetes who were able to trace the descendants of Magog, who was one of Japheth's sons – as were Gomer, Tubal, Mesech, who also play roles in Ezekiel 38-39. Any 'barbaric' nation that threatened the interests of western Europe turned out to be a descendant. As Christopher Hill says in his study of *Antichrist in Seventeenth Century England*, the charge was 'part of the normal vocabulary of abuse' employed by medieval politicians.<sup>42</sup> The treatment of the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is a case in point.

Matthew Paris speculates in his *English History from the Year 1235 to 1273* that the growing power of the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century was the gradual revelation of Gog and Magog. The Mongols, he said, were Tartars, for they were inspired by Tartarus (i.e. hell) and have 'the nature of beasts'.<sup>43</sup> The *Historia de Preliis*, written between 1185 and 1236, identifies the Mongols as Gog and Magog.<sup>44</sup> Marco Polo, too, emphasised the association of the Tartars with the Magog nations.<sup>45</sup> A late 13th century itinerant in the Holy Land, the Franciscan C. de Bridia Ricoldo, did much to publicise this interpretation and asserted that 'they themselves [the Tartars] say that they are descended from Gog and Magog whence they are called Moguls, as it were, a corruption of the word *Magoguls*'.<sup>46</sup> As late as 1930 a German ethnographer claimed Goger was the ancient name the Mongol had given themselves and that their sphere of influence south of the Caucasus Mountains was called Gogarene – the land of the Goger.<sup>47</sup>

The Mongols were only one people that suffered such character assassination. The Goths, the Saracens, the ten tribes of Israel, the descendants of Ishmael, the Huns, the Danes, the Magyars all came

41 H.D. Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist*, 457-450.

42 C. Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1971), 7.

43 E.R. Chamberlain, *Antichrist and the Millennium* (New York, 1975), 51-52.

44 Martin Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte in der mittelalterlichen Weltchronistik* (Cologne-Vienna, 1980), 211.

45 C.W. Connell, 'Western Views of the Origins of the "Tartars": an example of the influence of myth in the second half of the thirteenth century', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 3:1 (Spring 1973), 132-133.

46 C.W. Connell, 'Western Views', 127-8; Gian A. Bezzola, *Die Mongolen in abendländischer Sicht 1220-1270* (Bern-Munich, 1974), 129.

47 A. Wagner, *Zur Ethnographie der biblischen Völkertafel* (Saarbrücken, 1930), 17.

in for the same *gogification*.<sup>48</sup> Bishop Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100-1155), in his history of Britain, claimed the Picts, Scots and Irish were all descended from the Scythians and so were related to Magog.<sup>49</sup> Bishop Vergil of Salzburg (700-784) believed the Turks were the true heirs of Magog<sup>50</sup> and this interpretation took on renewed significance during the Protestant Reformation.

At the end of the 15th century writers such as Sebastian Brant (*Revelationes Methodii*, 1498) and Wolfgang Aytinger (*Tractatus super Methodium*, 1496) saw the prophecies of Saint Methodius of Patara – prophecies concerning the eschatological nations under Gog’s leadership whose influence during the Middle Ages was second only to the Canon of Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers, not least due to the fact that they were available in several vernacular translations<sup>51</sup> – being fulfilled in the Turkish advances.<sup>52</sup> The writer of the fifteenth-century *Book with One Hundred Chapters* accepted this end-times role of the Turkish army, interpreting their existence as God’s instrument of punishment for the sins of Christendom.<sup>53</sup> Of course, one also found solace in the idea that the advance of the Muslims was in fact just part of a divine plan to annihilate them.

Martin Luther’s ideas on the Turks and Gog were shaped by a commentary on Revelation written by the Franciscan monk from Eisenach, Johann Hilten (c.1425-1500), who made the identification at the end of the 15th century. In 1518 Luther felt strongly that Christians should *not* physically fight the Turks – their role was to evangelise them, to pray for their conversion and to accept Turkish attacks as a punishment ordained by God for the sins of Christendom.<sup>54</sup> Luther’s new eschatological understanding of the political situation and of the Turks in particular led him to readopt the ‘crusade mentality’. The real causes of this change were no doubt the Turkish victory over the Hungarian King Ludwig II at Mohacs in 1526 and the siege of Vienna by the Turks in 1529. These two events heightened expectations of the end of the world. In calling for a holy war against the Muslim Turks under Sultan Suleiman II (1520-1566), Luther emphasised that Christian armies would ‘not be fighting with flesh and blood but against the Devil’s hosts’ and their ‘blasphemous

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48 A. Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, Band 1, passim.

49 A. Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, Band 2, Teil 2, 688ff.

50 A. Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, Band 2, Teil 1, 484-486.

51 R.K. Emmerson, *Antichrist*, 270 (footnote 39); A. Anderson, *Alexander’s Gate*, 49.

52 M. Haeusler, *Das Ende der Geschichte*, 139.

53 *Das Buch der Hundert Kapitel und der vierzig Statuten des Sogenannten Oberrheinischen Revolutionärs*, ed. Gerhard Zschäbitz (Berlin, 1967), 151.

54 H. Junghans, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546. Festgabe zu seinem 500. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1985), Band II, 960, fn. 97.

Mohammed'.<sup>55</sup> The *finalis furor* was to be shortly revealed, but Christ would come to destroy this Turkish Gog and Magog.<sup>56</sup> With a little help from his friends of course, for Luther did not neglect to soberly exhort Christians to do their politico-religious duty by enlisting in the campaign; the Church was obliged, moreover, to pray for the military victory of the Christian armies. In his 1529 *Military Sermon against the Turks* Luther taught that all those who died fighting the Turks would 'fill heaven as martyrs'.<sup>57</sup> He was careful to distinguish between the Turkish Gog and the Popish Magog (November 1529): both were enemies of the gospel, the former external and overt, the latter internal and covert. Of the two Luther felt Popery was the more dangerous for whereas the Turkish Gog filled heaven with saints, the Popish Magog filled hell with Christians.<sup>58</sup>

Luther's whole attitude to the Book of Revelation changed radically in these years. A new set of ideas and interpretations of Church history was required by the Reformation movement. His commentary on the prophecies was a useful tool in the attempt to refute arguments against the Reformation. Indeed, Bible commentaries became during this period of history propaganda arsenals. Luther's translation and notes on Ezekiel 38-39, written in 1530, incorporated the new approach to the Turks. The whole prophecy had nothing to do with the Jews, he said, the hills around Jerusalem being symbolic of the Christian Churches. Claiming that Gog was Hebrew for 'roof', he stated that the Turks were unconcerned about houses and lived like cattle, covered solely by a roof structure.<sup>59</sup> Neither Luther's reasoning nor application of the text to the Turkish people was new. He did, however, add his own portion of irrational prejudice: the Turks were, he said, 'a wild, rapacious people. . . always ready to rob and wage war', demon-possessed, in fact. The final judgement would immediately follow on from the Turkish advance.<sup>60</sup>

Luther's influence was, of course, enormous. One hundred years later, in 1644, an English translation of his interpretation of the times was published in London under the title 'The Prophecies of the Incomparable Dr. Martin Luther concerning the Downfall of the Pope of Rome and the Subversion of the German Empire, to be overrun by the armies of the Turks, together with the many reasons that he giveth for it'.<sup>61</sup> This was a key to history, popular at a time of Turk-

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55 H. Junghans, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers*, Band 1, 653-658; Band 2, 963 fn. 181.

56 H. Junghans, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers*, Band 1, 653.

57 H. Junghans, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers*, Band 1, 654.

58 H. Junghans, *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers*, Band 1, 655.

59 *Dr Martin Luthers Auslegung des Alten Testaments*, Band 6 (St. Louis, Miss., 1897), 882

60 G. Maier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche* (Tübingen, 1981), 297.

61 Ernst L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, 28.



ish strength and accessible to the common man. The Turk was here 'the battle axe and scourge of God', the 'soul and body of Antichrist'.<sup>62</sup>

English Reformers, strongly influenced by opinion on the Continent, revealed a wide acceptance of apocalyptic eschatology. The Geneva Bible (1560) in the vernacular helped to disseminate through its marginal notes the eschatological views of Bullinger and John Bale to generations of Bible students in Britain.<sup>63</sup> In ways that foreshadowed the 1909 Scofield Reference Bible, these notes 'acquired an authority almost equal to that of the text itself'.<sup>64</sup> Readers will have learned that Gog and Magog represented the followers of Mohammed in league with the papacy. This was the conclusion to which a rather pessimistic Bale came while at work, between 1540 and 1545, on his commentary on Revelation.<sup>65</sup> Bale accepted Luther's view of the open and covert enemies of Christ in his *Image of bothe Churches*<sup>66</sup>, as did John Foxe in his *Actes and Monuments* (1566).<sup>67</sup> Foxe, too, applied Gog and Magog to the Saracens and the Turks. Another English Reformer felt confident enough to pinpoint the time of the release of Gog and Magog. In his *A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of St. John* (1595) John Napier identified the release of the Pontificate of Boniface VIII (1294-1303), the 'covered' enemy of God, and the rise of the Ottoman Turks, the 'discovered' enemy.<sup>68</sup>

English Reformers had similar polemical and psychological needs as their brethren in Germany and revealed the same basic inclination to incorporate contemporary socio-political events into 'a transcendent scheme of meaning', which of course simultaneously gave to their own lives and work religious significance and validation.<sup>69</sup> This need to feel important led many Christian commentators – Thomas Brightman was the first – to read English events, which they felt deserved special prominence, into the interpretations of the Apocalypse.<sup>70</sup> Bible commentaries became the place where one emphasised one's own identity in opposition to the 'Enemy'. King James VI, in a sermon on Revelation 20 published in 1616, saw the Turkish treaty

62 Ernst L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, 29.

63 Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon. English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto, 1978), 39.

64 Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon*, 37-38.

65 Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (n.p., 1978), 217-218.

66 Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530-1645* (Oxford, 1979), 55.

67 R. Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, 98.

68 R.K. Emmerson, *Antichrist*, 208, 212.

69 B. McGinn, *Views of the End*, 31.

70 R. Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, 223.

with Philip of Spain as preparing the way for Gog's invasion of Christendom.<sup>71</sup> Politics, not biblical exposition, is the game being played here.

One final example of this misuse of Scripture is provided by Bernhard Capp in his study on apocalyptic thought in Revolutionary England. Capp quotes William Sancroft, who would later become Archbishop of Canterbury, an enthusiastic royalist. Sancroft mocked the 'radical preacher' who cried 'Babylon is fallen!' on hearing of Charles I's defeat at the Battle of Preston. The Scottish Antichrist had been overthrown, it was believed in some circles. This preacher, Sancroft continues, 'having transmuted his quondam brethren into Gog and Magog, is now puzzling to find Armageddon about Preston and Warrington Bridge'.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps mockery is the best response to the politicisation of such biblical prophecies.

### American apocalyptic

The concluding section of this essay deals with the reception of the Gog oracle in God's own country, the United States of America. In the beginning was the work of Joseph Mede (1586-1638), whose 1627 *Clavis Apocalyptica* became 'the handbook of all who wished to interpret current events by biblical prophecy'.<sup>73</sup> Long after his death in 1638 Mede remained the 'undisputed authority' on such matters. His own biblical exegesis was a response to the international tensions of his time, in particular the events of the Thirty Years War and the Protestant struggle with the Papacy.<sup>74</sup> His influence extended to the Puritan experiment in America where men like Increase Mather (1637-1723) and Cotton Mather (1663-1728) and many others 'inaugurated an era of apocalyptic expectation in America'.<sup>75</sup>

American Puritans were upset for the next century by a letter written (1635) by Mede in reply to Mr William Twisse in which he expressed his opinion that America 'might escape the burning of the earth, not, however, because it was pure, but because it was evil, so evil in fact that it had been chosen to house Gog and Magog'.<sup>76</sup>

71 K.R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition*, 131-132.

72 B. Capp, 'The Political Dimension of Apocalyptic Thought', in: C.A. Patrides, J. Wittreich, *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature. Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions* (Manchester, 1984), 113.

73 H. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, Reformation and Social Change* (London, 1967) 247-248.

74 P. Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon*, 126.

75 R. Middlekauff, *The Mathers. Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals 1596-1728* (New York, 1971), 323.

76 R. Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 342; Sacvan Berkovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (University of Wisconsin, 1978), 72.

Increase Mather felt Mede's idea was 'ingenious' and 'may probably come true': 'I am very afraid that in the process of time New England will be the woofullest place in all America' if not 'Hell itself'.<sup>77</sup> His son Cotton – whose initial prediction of the end of the world in 1697 had to be revised to 1736 – could not accept that America would be 'cast off': 'I that am an American must needs be loathe to allow all America still unto the Devil's possession when our Lord shall possess all the rest of the world'.<sup>78</sup> Cotton clearly felt very uneasy about allowing his loyalty to America to influence, indeed to dominate his interpretation of Scripture and for years after completing his *Problema Theologicum* refused to try to explain Gog and Magog. This reaction was symptomatic of the New England response to Mede's conjecture. Another American, Samuel Stoddard (1643-1729), also denied that American Christians would be 'indianised' and thus become Gog and Magog.<sup>79</sup>

Though Cotton Mather wanted to keep the stage of cosmic warfare firmly in Europe, in the middle of the 19th century Protestants nearly unanimously affirmed that 'on the fields of Shiloh, Gettysburg and the Wilderness, a decisive eschatological struggle was being enacted'.<sup>80</sup> The Civil War was, in the eyes of one Methodist preacher in Brooklyn, 'the first great conflict to precede the millennium'.<sup>81</sup> Each battle had been charted out in the Book of Revelation. Chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel were raided by *both* sides for ammunition. A hymn written in 1842 by Arthur Cleveland Coxe, a future bishop of the Episcopal Church, affirmed this millennial expectancy.<sup>82</sup>

We are living, we are dwelling  
 In a grand and awful time  
 in an age, on ages telling,  
 to be living is sublime.

Hark! The waking up of nations,  
 Gog and Magog to the fray.

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77 James W. Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven-London, 1977), 54, 61f; Joy Gilsdorf, *The Puritan Apocalypse. New England Eschatology in the Seventeenth Century* (New York-London, 1989), 134-9.

78 R. Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 342ff.

79 C.A. Patrides, J. Wittreich, *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, 281.

80 James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse. Yankee Protestants and the Civil War 1860-1869* (New Haven-London, 1978), 65.

81 James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, 59.

82 James H. Moorhead, 'Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought 1800-1880', *The Journal of American History*, 71:3 (1984), 524.

83 James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, 81.

Hark! What soundeth is creation's  
groaning for the latter day.

L.S. Weed, the Methodist from Brooklyn, believed Revelation Chapter 12 foretold the defeat of the Confederacy and that Ezekiel 38 prophesied that, shortly after the defeat, a coalition of corrupt European powers would confront the United States, probably on the battle field, where they would be 'entirely overthrown' by the American Israel, for God had ordained the American Republic to be his 'indispensable tool for world renovation'.<sup>83</sup> The Gog prophecy became a source of comfort for those seeking meaning and relevance for their particular historical situation, both in the North and the South.

This certainty of the approaching end had not a little to do with the speculative literature emanating from the British Isles and disseminated in the United States, particularly after 1840. Authors such as John Nelson Darby, George S. Faber and Dr John Cumming became well-known in evangelical circles. Cumming, a minister of the Church of Scotland in Covent Garden, an anti-Catholic bigot, provided the evangelical world with a political interpretation of Ezekiel which still bedevils a section of evangelicalism today. Two of his works published in 1855 – *Signs of the Times: or Past, Present and Future* (Philadelphia) and *The End: or the Proximate Signs of the Close of This Dispensation* (London) – became, as Dwight Wilson has pointed out, the 'seedbed for many premillenarian volumes'.<sup>84</sup> Cumming linked Rosh, Mesech and Tubal with the inhabitants of Russia, who would one day combine with Gomer, that is Germany, to form a great confederacy. Indeed, Cumming believed that the fulfilment of Ezekiel 38 was taking place before his eyes: 'Is not Prussia practically allied to Russia?' he asked in 1855.<sup>85</sup>

Cumming's and Darby's dispensationalist views were popularised by the C.I. Scofield Reference Bible which 'virtually canonised'<sup>86</sup> the view that Ezekiel 38 identified the modern nation of Russia as Israel's and God's eschatological enemy. Many late twentieth-century premillennialists – John F. Walwood, Herbert Vander Lugt, Jack van Impe, Thomas S. McCall, Zola Levitt, Tom Westwood, Hilton Sutton, Salem Kirban, Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey, to name but a few rep-

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84 D. Wilson, *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel Since 1917* (Michigan, 1977), 24-25.

85 D. Wilson, *Armageddon Now!*, 28.

86 J. Ruthven, 'Ezekiel's Rosh and Russia', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 125 (1968), Nr 500, 324.

87 T.M. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming. American Premillennialism 1875-1982* (Chicago, 1987), 221. On Gog as the first Cold Warrior, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More. Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 152-179.

representatives of this booming market – have spent a great deal of time (and earned a great deal of money) spreading this ‘bad news’. In their book *Armageddon. Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (1974) John F. and his son John E. Walwoord emphasise that the millennial foes in Ezekiel ‘could only refer to what we know today as Russia’.

Hal Lindsey is typical of most evangelical leaders – and nearly all TV preachers – in that he has ‘wedded Biblical interpretation to the needs of various right-wing causes’; he ‘juxtaposes, however awkwardly, eschatology and right-wing politics’.<sup>87</sup> In the name of Christ they vehemently attacked all attempts to relax tensions in the world (for example, when President Nixon sought rapprochement with China, or when peace talks and arms control talks were being organised), thus providing a theological veneer to the bi-polar world. This dualistic, gnostic world view, couched in the language of Scripture, was and is extremely reactionary.

One particularly reactionary spokesman of the Christian Right, Tim La Haye, in his book on *The Coming Peace in the Middle East* (Zondervan 1985), makes no secret of his profound dislike of liberal democracy. One example taken from this book shows how *not* to read Scripture. When Ezekiel 39:6 talks of ‘those who dwell securely in the coastlands’, La Haye sees a clear reference to Marxist spies who, after years of indoctrinating students, will suddenly drop dead. He says: ‘There will be a lot of vacancies in some university chairs’.<sup>88</sup> La Haye was only one of a number of TV preachers who, in the 1980s, claimed that God had foreordained Christian America to fight an eschatological nuclear war with the Soviet Union. The head of what was once called the Moral Majority – critics always claimed it was neither – Jerry Falwell, certainly believed in this future event.<sup>89</sup> And Pat Robertson, a 1988 Presidential candidate, said on his television programme, the 700 Club, in January and again in June 1982, three days after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, that the Soviet Union, in league with Armenia, South Yemen, Libya and Ethiopia, would invade Israel before the autumn of 1982.<sup>90</sup> ‘I mean, from now on, it’s going to be bloodshed, war, revolution and trouble’, he is reported to have said.<sup>91</sup>

President Ronald Reagan seemed to share these eschatological views. James Mills, a Reaganite in the Californian State Senate, went on record as saying that ‘most of Reagan’s policy decisions’ were influenced by his perception of Russia being Gog, the focus of evil in

88 Andrew Lang, ‘Armageddon Theology’, *CALC Report*, Vol. XIII, Nos. 3-4, 13.

89 Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics. Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport, Conn., 1986), 195.

90 Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 40ff.

91 *New York Times*, 27 December 1987.

the modern world.<sup>92</sup> (We now know, of course, that most of his policy decisions were shaped by Nancy Reagan's astrologer). Mills told the *San Diego Magazine* in August 1985 that Reagan was right to believe he had a mandate to spend trillions of dollars preparing for a nuclear war with Gog and Magog; Armageddon, after all, could not take place in a world that had been disarmed.<sup>93</sup> The *New York Times* expressed consternation that the American President was seriously 'reckoning with Armageddon'.<sup>94</sup>

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, fundamentalist Christians of the Old Right like Billy James Hargis and charismatic Christians of the New Right like George Otis Jr. found good reasons to transform Gog into Kazakhstan and the predominantly Muslim states which have since become independent.<sup>95</sup> It is already clear who the 'bad guy' is going to be in the new millennium. Evil in the 21st century will be given a Central Asian or Middle Eastern face.

History is full of examples of how symbols such as Gog and Magog have been manipulated by sectarians. The books of Ezekiel and Revelation are full of imagery, so full in fact that 'intolerance, ignorance, sectarian fierceness, the sanguinary factiousness of an irreligious religionism, the eternal Pharisaism of the human heart, have made of it their favourite camping ground'.<sup>96</sup> In short, religious hatred has driven many to discover their identity and the destiny of others in the happy hunting ground of apocalyptic literature.

### Abstract

All three monotheistic religions face the same problem posed by prophetic-apocalyptic passages in their holy texts: Can names of people and place names be identified with historical persons, places and events? This study reveals inherent difficulties in such an exegetical approach. The war against 'Gog' has proved to be a very flexible form of political rhetoric. While men of varying religious convictions have neatly divided the world into God's camp and an evil empire, they have instrumentalised and politicised eschatological imagery and fitted it into their own socio-political setting. The author reveals how the Gog-Magog oracle has shaped the thought and coloured the judgements of believers in their relations to other ethnic and religious groups.

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92 G. Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 47.

93 G. Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 50.

94 *New York Times*, 25 October 1984.

95 *Charisma*, April 1991.

96 F.A. Tatford, *Prophecy's Last Word. An Exposition of the Revelation* (Thetford, 1978), 14