

GOG IN TWO RABBINIC NARRATIVES

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In this article I will describe two cases where Gog is mentioned in the rabbinic literature. The first narrative has to do with the ethnographic identification of Gog or Magog. In many late antique compositions we find attempts to identify the nationality of Gog or Magog on the basis of geographic direction (the north, according to Ezek. 38:15 and 39:2) and ethnographic considerations. Such considerations are also found in the rabbinic literature.¹ However, in many cases, as with the texts which Gerrit Reinink studied and published, the Syriac *Alexanderlied* and the *Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius*, the identification of Gog or Magog is more concerned with political conditions than with ethnography. In his book, A.R. Anderson surveys the various nations identified with Gog or Magog throughout late antiquity and the Byzantine period: Huns, Alans, Khazars, Turks, Magyars, to mention only a few.² I will present another such case from the rabbinic culture.

In the second part of the article I will present an early rabbinic (Tannaitic) commentary on the last scene of Moses' life, where Moses is being shown the land of Israel. I will suggest that one can recognize two strata in this narrative. I will be indicating the historical conditions found here, which may explain a possible means of identification of Gog in this text.

1. *Japheth receives a place of burial in the Land of Israel*

In the midrashic (Amoraic) composition *Genesis Rabba*³ we find the following narrative:

¹ Two examples are: Palestinian Talmud, tractate *Megilla*, halacha 5; Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 10a, but there are many more. I would like to thank my friends and colleagues Prof. Wout van Bekkum, Dr. Reuven Kipperwasser and Dr. Moshe Lavee for helping me in various stages of writing this article.

² A.R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Enclosed Nations*, Monographs of the Mediaeval Academy of America 5, Cambridge, Mass., 1932, pp. 12-14.

³ *Genesis Rabba* 36:6.

"Then Shem and Japheth took a garment" (Gen. 9:23)

R. Yochanan said: Shem started doing the pious act, and then Japheth came and adhered to him. Therefore Shem merited a *tallit*, and Japheth — a *fibula*.⁴

"... laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father" (Gen. 9:23).

From the words "and they walked backward" I cannot learn whether they did not see their father's nakedness or did. This teaches us that they put their hands on their faces, and [thus] walked backward. And they behaved toward him [Noah] in an honorable manner, as a son should fear his father. The Holy One Blessed is He said to Shem: You covered the nakedness of your father. I swear that I will repay you [and He did, as it says]: "Then these men were bound in their mantles."⁵

...

The Holy One Blessed is His Name said to Japheth: You covered the nakedness of your father. I swear that I will repay you [and He did, as it says]: "On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the Valley of the Travelers; there Gog and all his multitude will be buried; it will be called the Valley of Hamon-Gog." (Ezekiel 39:11, RSV)

The Holy One Blessed is He said to Ham: You scorned your father's nakedness. I swear that I will repay you [and He did, as it says]: "So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the same of Egypt."⁷

The general meaning of this passage seems clear enough: Shem and Japheth, who behaved honorably toward their father, merited a favor; the concept connecting the action and the reward is that they are related to garments. The two sons covered their father with a garment, and therefore Shem merited a *Tallit*, a Jewish prayer shawl, and Japheth a *Fibula*, a pin used to tie up the Roman cloak. These cultural garments typify the nationality of their wearers: Shem is Jewish, and Japheth is Roman. This last identification was a common one in Late Antiquity and is based on the biblical verse in which it is said that the offspring of Japheth are Greek (*Yawan*)⁸; in Jewish culture many attributes, which

⁴ The pin used by Romans to tie up their cloak. The Latin word is used in the Hebrew: נָחָרַב (PYWWL?); see D. Sperber, *Material Culture in Eretz Israel during the Talmudic Period*, Ramat-Gan, 1993, pp. 126-127 (referring to the Greek word *fibula*).

⁵ Daniel 3:21.

⁶ I am skipping here a short discussion between two rabbis as to the exact meaning of the Aramaic word for "mantel," which was apparently incomprehensible for the rabbis (תַּרְמָלָא). One explanation of it is תַּרְמָל, "cloak," but the other word suggested as an explanation (תַּרְמָלָא) is obscure; see M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, Ramat-Gan-Baltimore-London, 2002.

⁷ Isaiah 20:4.

⁸ Based on Gen. 10:4.

were attached to Hellenistic rules and culture (which was conceived as "Greek"), were automatically then attributed to the Romans, who followed them as rulers in the Middle East. Ham, on the other hand, who scorned his naked father, was punished: his offspring were exiled, naked, by the king of Assur. Again, the identification of Ham as the forefather of the Egyptians is based on a biblical verse and is a well-attested convention in Late Antiquity.⁹ Here again the punishment mirrors the crime: he didn't clothe his father, and so his children will be naked while being forced by the Assyrian armies to go into exile.

A certain tension is uncovered when we look into the details of the reward of the two good sons. With regard to Shem, the reward is realized in the story told in the Book of Daniel, that is, the story about the three Judean men who were cast into the fire by Nebuchadnezzar because they did not worship the idol. The three men — Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego — were saved from the fire by a heavenly figure. When coming out of the fire, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had all their clothes intact. The saving of the clothes is indeed a miracle, which takes place within another miracle, the rescue from the fire. The clothes being saved is a worthy reward for covering the nakedness of Noah.

However, when we look at the favor granted Japheth for his good behavior as a son, the picture is very different. To be given a grave is indeed an act of mercy, but does not seem as much of a "happy ending" solution as is the miracle of the unconsumed garments. The relationship between the act and the reward are also different from the relationship in the case of Shem, which is, being granted a burial place can only be understood metaphorically as being given a garment. The "I" or the "us" of the author(s) does not favor Japheth as much as Shem, even though the overall structure of the narrative seems to put the two "good sons" in a favorable light, and in opposition to Ham, the "bad son".

The tension between the expected merit which Japheth was supposed to have gained, and the mediocre mercy which he in fact did gain, along with the contrast between this and what the other sons received, draws attention to Japheth and to his offspring, Gog. Japheth and his offspring represent the "other" of Jewish society in the Palestine of Late Antiquity. The *midrash* makes quite clear to us who this "other" is: it is those who received and wear the *fabula*, that is, they are the Romans.

At this stage in the history of Palestine the Roman Empire might already have become Christian and the Holy Sepulcher might already

⁹ Based on Gen. 10:6.

have been built by Constantine I in 325-6. This could certainly shed a new light on the meaning of the "grave" given to Gog and his multitude, although this last assertion is quite conjectural.

To sum up this topic: this passage in the Genesis Rabba passage seems to be the first time where Gog and his multitude are assigned a Roman nationality. It does so by relying on the genealogical connection between Japheth and Magog, by openly identifying Japheth as a Roman (those of the *fabula*) and by assigning to Gog and his multitude a grave, instead of the full-fledged miracle. The narrative is presented as if Japheth does indeed merit something of a worthy nature, but a closer, more attentive inspection of the content reveals just the opposite.

2. *Sifre on Deuteronomy concerning the last scene of Moses' life*

Chapters 31 to 34 in the Book of Deuteronomy describe Moses' actions and words in the final stage of his life. Moses nominates Joshua as his successor, and he preaches commandments and instructions to the priests and to the people. The scene in 34:1-6 is more concise than in the earlier chapters and is focused only on Moses' seeing the land and on his dying. There is no talk here about Joshua as successor or about preaching or instructing; there are no people and no priests.

Sifre on Deuteronomy, a Tannaitic *midrash*, explains the verses from Deuteronomy 34, the last scene of Moses' life.¹⁰ Moses, in this scene, is standing at the top of mount Nebo, and God is showing him the land into which he is prohibited from entering:

1. "God showed him (i.e., Moses) the whole land."
This means that He showed him the land of Israel populated and peaceful, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.
2. "And the Gilead."
This means that He showed him the Temple standing and peaceful, and then He showed him those who would destroy it.
3. "Until Dan."
This means that He showed him the Temple standing and peaceful, and then He showed him the enemies who would eventually rule it,¹¹ and then He showed him a savior that would arise up for Israel from amongst this [tribe]

¹⁰ *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, par. 257.3.

¹¹ I omit here the sentence "'Until Dan' means that He showed him the tribe of Dan worshipping foreign gods as it says (Judges 18:30): 'and the sons of Dan made the idol'".

and who is this savior? Samson son of Manoah.

4. "And the whole of Naphtali."
This means that He showed him the land of Naphtali, settled and in peace, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.

Another explanation:

This means that He showed him Barak, son of Abinoam, who fought against Siseira and his armies,

since it says here: "and the whole of Naphtali"

and there it says:

"and she sent to call Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh Naphtali."¹²

5. "And the land of Ephraim."
This means that He showed him the land of Ephraim, settled and in peace, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.

Another explanation:

"and the land of Ephraim" means that He showed him Joshua, son of Nun, fighting against the Canaanites

since it says here: "and the land of Ephraim",

and there it says:

from the tribe of Ephraim, Joshua son of Nun¹³

6. "and Manasseh."
This means that He showed him the land of Manasseh sitting peacefully, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.

Another explanation:

"and Manasseh" means that He showed him Gideon, son of Joash, who fought against Median and Amalek.¹⁴

[as] it says: "my family is the poorest amongst [the tribe of] Manasseh"¹⁵

7. "And the whole land of Judea."
This means that He showed him the land of Judea, settled and in peace, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.

Another explanation:

"and the whole land of Judea" means that He showed him David in his majesty since it says here: "and the whole land of Judea"; and it says there: "and the Lord the God of Israel chose me."

8. "Until the last sea."
This means that He showed him all of the West sitting in peace, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.

Another explanation:

Do not read: until the last sea (*yam*), but: until the last day (*yom*).

This means that He showed him all of the world, from its creation until the resurrection of the dead.

¹² Judges 4:5.

¹³ Numbers 13:8.

¹⁴ I omit a sentence which seems to be out of place here: "Another explanation: because Ephraim was the younger son, he included him together with the older son".

¹⁵ Judges 6:15.

9. "and the Negeb."

This means that He showed him the South, settled and in peace, and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.

Another explanation:

"and the Negeb." This means that He showed him the cave of Machpela where the fathers are buried,

since it says here: "and the Negeb",

and it says there,¹⁶ "They went up the Negeb and came to Hebron."

10. "and the plain."

This means that He showed him Solomon, son of David, who is making the utensils for the Temple,

since it says here: "and the plain",

and in another place it says: "in the plain of the Jordan the king mated them."¹⁷

11. "the Valley of Jericho."

This means that He showed him Gog and all his multitude, who were destined to be defeated in the Valley of Jericho.

Another explanation:

since this valley has wheat¹⁸ as it is, and barley as it is, He will thus show him all the world as the Valley of Jericho.

12. "the city of dates."

This means that He showed him the righteous walking around in the Garden of Eden, since they are equated to date-trees.

As the saying is: "A righteous man will bloom as a date tree."¹⁹

Another explanation:

This means that He showed him Gehenna, which is close to its side; and it is narrow above and wide below.

Since it says: "And he moved you away from a narrow mouth wide not stable under it."²⁰

13. "until Zoar."

These are the enemies of Israel, such as the searching troops²¹ who live within the kingdom, and are bound to perish with them.

There is an easily recognizable structure underlying this passage: the text follows the sequence of places shown to Moses according to the biblical verse. Each place is explained by repeating a fixed formula, stat-

¹⁶ Numbers 13:12.

¹⁷ I Kings 7:46.

¹⁸ I corrected a word which seems to be a scribal error (רִיחַ) to "wheat" (רִיחַ or רִיחַ) according to another version (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, Beshalach, tractate Amalek, 2). It is assumed that the letter *tet* was mistaken for *yod* and *waw*, and the letter has lost its loose stroke and became a *resh*.

¹⁹ Psalms 92:13.

²⁰ Job 36:16.

²¹ Hebrew: *balashim*, the translation here is according to the Even Shoshan dictionary. This root appears in *Mishna Middot*, 1:7; *Mekhilta on Deuteronomy* 12:2; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, par. *Mispainim*, tractate *Nezikin* 17 — the same narrative appears in all these compositions. The search was apparently conducted using a stick (*Mishna Kelim*, 15:4). Groups of searchers could be Romans (*Mishna Avoda Zara*, 5:6). I thank Matthew Morgenstern for this information.

ing that God showed Moses the place in a peaceful state, and then showed Moses "the enemies occupying it" (מִיָּד הַרְבֵּי עַמִּים וְיָדוּם הַרְבֵּי עַמִּים), adapting it each time to the linguistically correct gender of the word or changing the verb slightly according to the event.

In those cases where the place name refers to a particular tribe, after the formulaic grim picture painted for Moses, we find an expansion, which starts with the words "another explanation". The expansion, which is also formulaic most of the time, gives a much more optimistic outlook on the history of the Israelites: it is telling of a savior that will come to Israel from the tribe under discussion, because the word from the verse under discussion appears also in a verse about the savior. Thus we hear about Samson who comes from the tribe of Dan, Barak son of Abinoam, from Naphtali, Joshua son of Nun, from Ephraim, Gideon son of Yoash, from Manasseh and King David from the tribe of Judah. The attribution of the savior to this particular place is then supported by a verse from the biblical text, a verse which mentions the place under discussion. There are some place names that are not affiliated with a particular tribe, such as "the last sea" of "the Negeb".

The explanation regarding the last place mentioned in the text, Zoar, does not follow the formula, and does not have the expansion of "another explanation".

A schematic presentation of this structure is this:

- a. "quoted word from verse"
- b. This means that He showed him....
- c. and then He showed him the enemies occupying it.
- d. Another explanation: "quoted word" means that...
- e. since it says here "the quoted word again"
- f. and there it says "a quote from a difference verse"

Items a to c in the structure give a sequence of "peaceful living" to "desolation". Items d to f continue the sequence, giving it a "happy ending" by referring to a savior from the tribe affiliated with this place. This structure is complete in those cases where the place names are associated with names of tribes. The first two sections of the text only have items a and b of this structure; the four last sections do not follow the structure systematically.

I would like to suggest here that this passage from *Sifre on Deuteronomy* is combined from an earlier composition into which were later added, systematically, the "another explanation" sections; these later additions convey a different view from that of the earlier composition. The early composition portrays the history of the Israelites in a gloomy light, where only at the End of Days would the righteous be rewarded.

The later additions, which start with the words "another explanation", convey a more optimistic view of Israelite history, stating that in every generation a savior may arise to Israel.

I will ignore the "another explanation" elements for a moment and concentrate on what I believe is an earlier form of this passage. Let me list the various elements that appear in the text. The first two places mentioned in the verse are the country as a whole and the Temple. These serve as an introduction of a general nature. Then we hear about the five tribes (Dan, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh and Judah). The next two sections are again about general areas in the land without any tribal affiliation (the last sea, which is the Mediterranean, on the west; and the Negeb, the desert area to the south of the Land of Israel). Then we have the last four words relating to what was shown to Moses, and these are explained as being four more places. None of these last four explanations contain the formula "being in a state of peace" and then "being occupied by enemies"; these four words represent for the author the events of the End of Days, when such a formula would no longer apply. The place names and events are: the Plain, which represents Solomon the son of David, making utensils for the Temple; the Valley of Jericho, which represents the place where Gog and his multitude are defeated; the City of Dates, which represents the righteous walking in the Garden of Eden; and Zoar, which represents the oppressors of Israel, particularly the searching troops of the foreign rulers, the *balashim*, and it is said in the text that these *balashim* will perish together with the authorities whom they serve.

Why Gog and the righteous in the Garden of Eden are counted among those involved in the events of the End of Days is clear: Gog is the king that will head the war of the *eschaton*, and following this war and some other events, a new cosmic order will prevail, and the righteous will indeed be living in Edenic conditions. But what can one conclude about Solomon making the utensils for the Temple and what about the perishing of the searching troops? I would like to present two reconstructions for these two sections.

3. Solomon son of David

The mention of Solomon, the son of King David (in section 10), seems misplaced.²² Why should he and the Temple be mentioned here,

²² The name Solomon is missing from the (one) Geniza manuscript of this passage, due to a tear in the page; see M.I. Kahana, *The Geniza Fragments of the Halakic Mishnah*, I, Jerusalem, 2005, p. 336.

when the temple has already been mentioned previously with regard to the word "Gilead" in the verse in Deuteronomy? I would like to suggest that originally the reference here was not to Solomon, but to the Son of David, that is, the Davidic messiah. There is one difficulty with this suggestion, however, because the idiom "Son of David", as reference to a Davidic messiah, does not appear in rabbinic literature until the period just after the Tannaitic, the Amoraic period (third and fourth centuries). We find this title in the Palestinian Talmud, for example, "when R. Akiva used to see Bar Kokhba, he used to say: this is the King Messiah. R. Yochanan son of Torta (a Tannaitic sage of the second generation) said to him: Akiva, [even if you wait until] grass will grow on your cheeks, the Son of David will still not come!" This narrative is attributed to the Tannaitic sages, even though it does not actually appear in a Tannaitic composition.²³ One could consider the alternative title "branch of David" as a possible replacement for Solomon son of David.

Even the concept of a Davidic messiah is not prevalent in the Second Temple and early rabbinic literature.²⁴ End-of-Days events are of course mentioned and known: the gathering of the exiles, Jerusalem regaining its place of prominence, a final war, judgment and other things, but the messiah himself is not mentioned in Second Temple literature, according to Flusser. In Tannaitic early rabbinic literature the word "messiah" does appear, but the figure is not designated as the descendant of David.

One of the few places where the Davidic messiah does appear in the Second Temple period is in sectarian compositions found in Qumran.²⁵ The community in Qumran retained the belief in two messiahs, a kingly one and a priestly one. They put more emphasis on the priestly messiah, since they themselves were a priestly sect. But the kingly messiah was of Davidic descent. Here is one example where he is mentioned, in a *pesher* (a Qumranic interpretation) of verses from Isaiah: "A rod will grow from Jesse's stock, a sprout will bloom [from his roots; upon him will rest the spirit of the Lord: a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of good counsel and strength...]"²⁶

²³ As a matter of fact the idiom 'Solomon son of King David' does not appear in the extant Tannaitic literature either, except in the passage under discussion here.

²⁴ D. Flusser, "The Messianic Belief in the Second Temple Period", *Mahanyim* 124 (1970), pp. 68-74. This is a short survey of this topic, which is otherwise too broad to even summarize here. About Qumran see, among many other articles and books, the conference of Qumranites believing in four messiahs: D.C. Mitchell, "The Fourth Deliverer, a Josephite Messiah in 4QTestimonia", *Biblica* 86.3 (2005), pp. 454-553.

²⁵ Flusser, "The Messianic Belief" refers also to Sirach 45:46-47, where the mention of the Davidic messiah appears, as well as the third Sibylline oracle.

²⁶ Isaiah 11:1-5.

[The interpretation of the word concerns the shoot] of David which will sprout in the final days, since with the breath of his lips he will execute] his [en]emy and God will support him with [the spirit of] courage [..... thron[e] of glory, [h]oly] crown and multi-colour[ed] vestments [...] in his hand. He will rule over all the people[s] and Magog [...] his sword will judge all] the peoples. And as for what he says: "He will not [judge by appearances] or give verdicts on hearsay", its interpretation: which [...] and according to what they teach him, he will judge, and at their authority [...] with him will go out one of the priests of renown, holding in his hand clothes!.....]²⁷

This passage offers an interpretation of the prophecy from Isaiah about the "rod from the stock of Jesse", a figure of supernatural qualities of wisdom and power, a future ruler. This is interpreted in the Qumranic text as referring to a messianic figure. The image of the Messiah here is one of the House of David, which is ruling all the nations, even the Magogites. God will bestow on him the spirit of wisdom, but he will be accompanied by renowned priests.²⁸ The spirit bestowed by God is the literal meaning of the biblical verse, but the advice of the priests is an interpretation peculiar to the Qumranic text. This interpretation agrees with the prevailing trend of the Qumran community, which was of priestly descent, to attribute more importance to priests and priestly figures (in this case the priests are not said to be messianic figures). There are other instances in Qumranic literature where the Davidic messiah is mentioned.²⁹

The Magogites that are mentioned in this text are not in a state of war; they are under the rule of the kingly messiah who conquered them, but they seem not to have yet left the confines of their own country. This is their state of being before King Gog assembled them among other nations to travel to the land of Israel and start the "Gog and Magog" war there. This sequence of events agrees with the prophecy from the Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 38-39.

So if my conjecture is correct, our text could have, in its original form, contained a reference to a Davidic messiah. This would make the passage fit well with the other passages, which refer to the End-of-Days events.

²⁷ 4Q161 3:15-29. J.M. Allegro, *Discoveries of the Judean Desert* (DJD) V, pp. 11-15. The translation is from F. Garcia Martinez and E.J.C. Tigchehar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, Leiden, 1977, I, p. 317.

²⁸ This is how scholars interpret the "they", who accompany the messianic figure.

²⁹ Fragments 4Q174 3:11; 4Q252 5:3, and in at least four more instances, where the context is very fragmentary.

4. *The Garden of Eden, Gehenna and the searching troops*

Section 13 deviates from the general flow of topics in the text. This section assigns the searching troops to Zoar. One would expect here a reference to an issue relating to the End-of-Days period, but instead we find a reference to the problems of the day. I suggest that a scribal error is the cause for this non-fluent text: the item which appears under the place "the city of dates" as being "another explanation" should in fact be the identification item for "Zoar". Then we would have "Zoar" explained by the word "narrow" (Hebrew: *tsar*), which is found in the verse quoted from Job. This would explain that the opening of Gehenna is narrow, therefore the place is called Zoar, but its lower part (the one which is under the earth) is very big. The sequence would then be:

The City of Dates: this means the righteous walking in the Garden of Eden.
Zoar: this means Gehenna, which is narrow above and wide below.

If we accept this sequence, the sentence about the "searching troops" will be the item d in the structure of this section, the "another explanation". The new sequence just described is found and is, in fact, documented in other versions of the text,³⁰ versions which are usually considered less reliable, but in this case I think they actually preserve the more original form.

The Genizah fragment of *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, which contains this passage,³¹ assigns Gehenna to "the City of Dates", and the troops to "Zoar". Even though the Genizah manuscripts tend to contain a relatively early version of the texts, I think that in this case the reconstruction I presented above is more plausible, since there is no way of explaining the verse from Job when it is assigned to "the City of Dates", while when assigned to "Zoar" there is a lexical connection, one that is present in all the other explanations as well.

5. *Why Jericho?*

The Valley of Jericho is mentioned as the place where Gog and his armies will be defeated. But Jericho is not mentioned in the prophecy of Ezekiel as the place of Gog's defeat or burial. Why then did the *midrash* choose to elaborate on the biblical text and point to this specific place?

³⁰ *Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy, Midrash Lelach Tov* (11th century) and *Yalkut Shimoni* (13th century). All these versions will be described below.

³¹ Kahana, *The Genizah Fragments*, p. 336.

A look into the role that Jericho played in the life of the rulers at the end of the Second Temple period might clarify the picture. The Valley of Jericho lies around twenty kilometers away from Jerusalem. It is, and was in the past as well, a fertile oasis with many economic advantages. It served as a resort place ever since the Hasmonean period (167-37 BCE). At that period it had a large winter palace, which included, among other elements of leisure, seven swimming pools. Herod the Great (reigned 71 BCE-1 CE), who eventually followed the Hasmoneans, built a new palace on the ruins of the Hasmonean one (which had been destroyed in an earthquake in 31 BCE) and even built another palace just across the valley. The palace was built on an artificial *tel*, and looked down on groves of palm trees, exotic gardens with an artificial lake and baths in the Roman style. Two kilometers to the north of the palace, Herod built a hippodrome and a theater; both institutions symbolized for the Jewish population the (unwanted) influence of Roman culture. After Herod's death the palace in the Valley of Jericho was burned down by one of Herod's slaves;³² later Vespasian has built a fort in Jericho.

Other oases in the area of Jericho were known for their groves of the balsam plants (*opobalsamum*) — a large bush from which balsam is extracted.³³ Balsam was an expensive material used for medicine and ritual, and in Egypt was used for mummification. Its price was twice the price of silver. The groves of balsam were a source of wealth for the king.³⁴

It is most probable that the Valley of Jericho came to represent in the eyes of the Jewish population in *Ioudeea* the richness and lavishness of the Roman life style, which was so much loved by the local rulers, espe-

³² The information is taken from the following works (which are in Hebrew): M. Broshi, "Major Trends in the Economy of the Land of Israel in the Herodian Period", in: N. Gross (ed.), *Jews in the Economy*, Jerusalem 1985, pp. 27-33; *ibid.*, "King Herod and his Period", in: M. Naor (ed.), *Iadan 5*, Jerusalem, 1985, pp. 1-7; *ibid.*, "Agriculture and Economy in the Roman Land of Israel according to the Babata Papyrus", *Zion* 55 (1990), pp. 269-281; E. Netzer, "The Winter Palaces of the Hasmonean Kings and the House of Herod in Jericho", *Kadmoniot* 7 (1974), pp. 27-36; *ibid.*, "The Swimming pools from the Hasmonean Period in Jericho", *Eretz Israel* 18 (1985), pp. 344-352; *ibid.*, "Herodion — A Multi-Functional Architectural Complex", *Kadmoniot* 22 (1982), pp. 201-202; *ibid.*, "Jericho — A Garden-City from the Second Temple Period", *Studies in Judaea and Samaria* 12 (2003), pp. 77-89; *ibid.*, "The Contribution of the Hasmoneans and Herod to the Development of the Valley of Jericho", *Studies in Judaea and Samaria* 15 (2004), pp. 73-84. For an English article by E. Netzer, see his "The Winter Palace of the Jewish Kings at Jericho at the End of the Second Temple Period", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 228 (1977), pp. 1-13.

³³ In Hebrew: תבואת הכרם.
³⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates* 4.8.

cially Herod. The idea that the war of Gog would be finalized in the Valley of Jericho must have originated during the period of Herod's life, during the "golden age" of the Valley of Jericho. This would have been between 80 BCE and 1 CE. Our text is, of course, much later (after 70 CE), since it talks about a desolate Temple, and the messianic figure preparing the utensils for the one at the End of Days, but the narrative could have originated much earlier.³⁵

6. *Antique background for this text*

A. Sequence of events in the eschatological period

If the above-stated reconstruction is accepted, the root text of *Sifre on Deuteronomy* presents the following sequence of events at the end of time: the coming of the Messiah and the building of the Temple; the war of Gog; and the state of Bliss, which is a new cosmic order where the righteous are in the Garden of Eden and the wicked in Gehenna. We see here two salvations: one which is a political one, for the Israelites, and the other, after the war of Gog and Magog, which will entail a complete renewal of the cosmic order.

This sequence of events is known from antique Judaism. It is described, for example, in the rabbinic chronography of the second century, *Seder Olam*:

In the second year of Ahaziah Elijah was hidden away and is not seen until the Messiah comes. In the days of the Messiah he will be seen and hidden away a second time and will not be seen until Gog will arrive.³⁶

Analyzing this passage in his article, Milkowsky concludes that *Seder Olam* describes two stages in the eschatological period: the messianic period and the next-world redemption.³⁷ The messianic period

³⁵ It is possible to conjecture an earlier version, in which the Temple is still standing; this would be with regard to the first paragraph of the text from *Sifre* on *Deuteronomy* where the area of Gilead is mentioned. In our version the Temple is mentioned with connection to this area, but in the biblical geography this area was designated to Reuben and Gad, and is not associated particularly with the Temple of Jerusalem. The biblical designation could have been there in some early version of the text of the *Sifre*; if this was the case, there are other passages in the text which should be considered alteration as well. Therefore, at this point in the history of transmission it is impossible to reach a final conclusion about this conjecture.

³⁶ The translation is by Ch.J. Milkowsky, *Seder Olam. A Rabbinic Chronography*, Diss. Yale 1981, pp. 497-498.

³⁷ Ch.J. Milkowsky, "Trajectories of Return, Restoration and Redemption in Rabbinic Judaism: Elijah, the Messiah, the War of Gog and the World to Come", in: J.M. Scott (ed.), *Restoration, Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001, pp. 265-280, pp. 265-277.

will end with the war of Gog, and only later will the new cosmic order of the "world to come" take place. The order of events found in the text from Deuteronomy fits very well with the view of *Seder Olam*.³⁸ While this view is not exclusive to *Seder Olam*, it is not all-prevailing in the Second Temple period and in rabbinic literature.

B. The vision of Moses at the end of his life

There are other late antique compositions, which center on the last scene of Moses' life. One such composition is the Qumranic *Dibre Moshe* ("The Words of Moses"),³⁹ where Moses is expounding the laws to the people, the Levites and the priests. In *Dibre Moshe*, unlike in the biblical text about the last words and deeds of Moses (Deuteronomy, Chapters 29-34), there is an emphasis on the priestly class receiving authority from Moses (via Elazar son of Aharon). The priestly chain of authority is the basic narrative of the Qumran community.⁴⁰

Another antique composition in which the narrative takes place during the last period of Moses' life is the pseudepigraphic text, *The Testament of Moses*. The latest date assigned to *The Testament of Moses* is the last decades of the first century A.D.⁴¹ In this composition Moses is telling Joshua about the events that will follow his (Moses') death, and about the straying of the Israelites and the exile that will follow. The main heroic figure is described as the Levite Taxo, who will die because of his insistence on not giving up his faith.

These two compositions are quite different, and were composed in different periods, but there is one issue which ties them together and puts them on a continuum with the same cultural trend: the priestly emphasis. *Dibre Moshe* tells the story of Moses' last words from a priestly point of view, and the narrative in the *Testament of Moses* exalts the faithful Levite.

Seen in the light of these two compositions, the text from *Sifre on Deuteronomy* seems very silent about priestly issues; even the Temple is

³⁸ About other orderings of events, see Milikowsky, "Trajectories of Return, Restoration and Redemption", pp. 268-269.

³⁹ J.T. Milik, *DJD* I, p. 91-97. The translation is from Garcia Martinez and Tigheleaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, I, pp. 58-62.

⁴⁰ For analysis of this text, and some other "Mosaic" texts from Qumran, see J. Strugnell, "Moses Pseudepigrapha at Qumran: 4Q375, 4Q376, and Similar Works", in: L.H. Schiffman (ed.), *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 8, Sheffield, 1990, pp. 221-256. *Dibre Moshe*, which is 1Q22, is also discussed in this article.

⁴¹ J. Priest, "Testament of Moses," in: J.H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I, New York-London, 1983, pp. 919f.

not associated with priests in any way, but instead with the word "Gilead", which is the area affiliated with the tribes of Reuben and Gad.

The non-priestly tribal focus of this composition agrees with the biblical text underlying it, the last chapters of Deuteronomy. There also, ever loyal to the Deuteronomistic approach, little attention is paid to priests (and even when a priestly issue is mentioned, it is with a tribal affiliation, Levi), while the idea of the "twelve tribes" is accentuated (in the blessing of Moses to the tribes). The distinction between the "tribal" approach vs. the "priestly" approach seems to have been still relevant in the early centuries CE.

Perhaps the text from the *Sifre*, which almost *pesher*-like commentary on verses from Deuteronomy, without even mentioning a single priestly issue, was a way for rabbinic culture to present an alternative to the priestly-focused narratives of the period, and to promote a non-priestly agenda, which would allow for heroes from a variety of tribal origins.⁴²

7. The additions

The text, stripped of the additions, presents a worldview which sees the land of Israel as desolate and looks to the future in search of better times. Now to turn back to the 'full version', as we have it in the *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, we may try to typify the nature of the added sections, that is, those of the "another explanation".

If the text without additions tells about the desolate situation of all the places in the land of Israel and is looking forward to the end-of-time period as the period of regained peace, the addition adds exactly the opposite view. Here it is claimed that in each generation a savior may arise for Israel from one of its various tribes. Again, we may refer to the quote made above about R. Akiva's view regarding Bar-Kokhba, which presents a view similar to what we find in the addition:

When R. Akiva used to see Bar Kokhba, he used to say: this is the King Messiah. R. Yochanan son of Torata said to him: Akiva, [even if you wait until] grass will grow on your cheeks, the Son of David will still not come!

⁴² For studies about the priestly vs. non-priestly trends in the Late Second Temple period see, for example, M.E. Stone, "The Axis of History at Qumran", in: E.D. Chazon and M.E. Stone (eds.), *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Leiden, 1999, pp. 133-149; C. Werman, "Oral Torah vs. Written Torah(s): Competing Claims to Authority", in: S. Fraade, A. Shemesh and R. Clements (eds.), *Rabbinic Perspective: Rabbinic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 175-197.

This conflict is a well-known one in early rabbinic literature: should the Jews accept the conditions of a destroyed Temple and find a different manner to exercise their culture, or should they strive towards political resistance against Roman rule and try to gain control over their country again? R. Akiva is portrayed as the fervent supporter of the second option; the parts which I designated as "additions" in the *Sifre on Deuteronomy* text seem to present this activist view in a positive manner.

With regard to the sections about the eschatological events, in two places the additions point to contemporaneous situations. One is the "searching troops", and the other case is the "another explanation" of the Valley of Jericho. Here the Valley is presented not as the place where the last war takes place, but as a cultivated fertile land, and it serves as a model for the rest of the world. We see no traces in the area of the rulers' lavish life-style, which was so much hated by the population of the Herodian period.

These two contemporaneous situations may give a clue as to how to date these additions. The situations should originate in a period where there is foreign rule in Palestine, with the searching troops at the service of this rule, and it should be after the destruction of the palaces in the Valley of Jericho. Furthermore, the overall positive view about saviors, which is found in these additions, suggests a date that is quite some time after the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed (70), but earlier than the disappointment that followed the unsuccessful revolt of Bar-Kokhba (132). Therefore, it would appear to be somewhere at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second.

8. Other versions of this narrative in Tannaitic literature

The narrative which we have just discussed must have been redacted in its present form in the third century at the latest, as this is, at the moment, the accepted date of the redaction of the *Sifre on Deuteronomy*. We have one other Tannaitic composition, which is also centered on the Book of Deuteronomy, *Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy*. Even though the text in *Midrash Tannaim* is less systematic in using the formula, "then He showed him the enemies ruling it", it is still almost identical to the one in *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, when not taking into account differences in spelling, some minor lexical changes and abbreviated syntaxes. There are three meaningful differences, though, one of which we have encountered when discussing the reference to Gehenna with regard to the word Zoar in the biblical verse. Another deviation

from our text in *Midrash Tannaim* is found in the section about Solomon son of David making the temple utensils; *Midrash Tannaim* adds the words "and then he saw them [i.e., the utensils] going into exile in all the lands".⁴³ This sentence seems to have been added because the compiler or a later scribe assumed that the Temple under discussion here was the one of Solomon in Jerusalem, and not the one of the future, in the days of the messiah, as we suggested previously. This sentence imitates the formula "and then He showed him...", but the use of the verb "to show" in the original formula is in the causative sense, while the use here, in *Midrash Tannaim*, is in the indicative sense. This further supports the conjecture that the sentence here is a later addition.

The first section in the *Midrash Tannaim* is also different, where Moses is shown "the whole land"; here Moses is shown the land divided among the tribes (Judah, Benjamin Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned). Moses' seeing of the land is then compared to that of Abraham (Gen. 13:17) and that of Joshua, concluding that Abraham's seeing was the best, then Moses', and Joshua — did not see the land at all.⁴⁴ There are other instances where we find tendencies in Tannaitic literature to portray Moses not in the most positive manner,⁴⁵ as has been done here. Still this negative tendency seems out of place in this text, and was probably brought from a different composition or oral tradition.

There is another version of this narrative in Tannaitic literature, the one found in the compositions of the *Mekhilta* on Exodus.⁴⁶ In the two *Mekhilas* the state of desolation is not mentioned at all; only the various redeemers who originated in the places mentioned in the verse are pointed out. The structure of the *Mekhilta* is such that the narrative begins with a reference to the savior, and then the place name is mentioned and the biblical verse about the place is quoted; for example: "How [do we know that] He showed him Gideon? As it says 'and Manasseh', and in another place it says 'behold, my thousand is the poorest among Manasseh.'" When relating to the final words of the verse, the *Mekhilas* have different interpretations, which have less to do with the events of

⁴³ The Hebrew is: וְכֵן הִרְאָה אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְמֹשֶׁה.

⁴⁴ וְכֵן הִרְאָה אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְמֹשֶׁה וְכֵן הִרְאָה אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְאַבְרָהָם וְכֵן הִרְאָה אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְיֹשׁוּעָה וְכֵן הִרְאָה אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. *Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy*, chapter 34 verse 1; with parallels in: *Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy* chapter 3 verse 27 and *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, par. *Beshalach*, tractate *Amalek* 2.

⁴⁵ R. Nikol'sky, "God Templed Moses for Seven Days: The Bush Revelation in Rabbinic Literature," in: G.H. van Kooten (ed.), *The Revelation of the Name, Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, Themes in Biblical Narrative 9, Leiden, 2006, pp. 89-104.

⁴⁶ *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, par. *Beshalach*, tractate *Amalek* 2; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon b. Yochai* 17.

the *eschaton*. Thus “the Plain” is interpreted as referring to the Sodom and Gomorrah event, “the City of Dates” to the prophetess Debora, and “Zoar” is interpreted as referring to Lot’s wife. These events, even if they do not follow the general structure of the text in the *Mekhilta* version (these figures are not known to be saviors), are not future events at all but are all events described in the biblical text, i.e. belonging to the past.

The narrative in the *Mekhilta* agrees with what I called ‘addition’ in *Sifre on Deuteronomy* version, the text studied above. There is not enough data to decide as to which text influenced the other — did the *Sifre on Deuteronomy* incorporate an independent text into the narrative of the peace-desolation formula, or have the *Mekhilta* heavily edited a text similar to what is found in the *Sifre on Deuteronomy*?

9. *Ideas, motifs and formulae from our text in later rabbinic literature*

Our text does not appear and is not quoted as-is or even partially in Amoraic literature. Some ideas and formulas similar to what is found in it do appear later on, but not in a manner that can point to any acquaintance with the actual text as is found in the Tannaitic compositions on Deuteronomy or the *Mekhilta*s. For example, we do find the following in Amoraic literature: God shows future events to a few biblical figures (next to Moses we find Adam, Abraham, Jacob and Job); the words “this teaches us that He showed him...” are quite common; we even find the sequence about the Temple being built, desolated and re-built (this is shown to Abraham a few times,⁴⁷ but also to Jacob). While another close, but not similar narrative, is found in the Amoraic composition *Leviticus Rabba*, where “R. Joshua of Saknin, in the name of R. Levi said: this teaches us that The Holy One Blessed be He showed to Moses each [future] generation and its wise men, its teachers, its judges, its officers, its priests, its Levites and its kings”.⁴⁸ All these ideas are remotely, or not so remotely, similar to what we find in our text, but do not point to acquaintance with the actual text, only with the ideas or narratives.

Focusing now only on the idea that Gog and his multitude will be defeated in Jericho, this idea is absent from Amoraic literature, Palestinian as well as Babylonian, and also from Saboraic literature. Both Talmuds

do not assign any place of burial or of defeat for Gog and his armies. Other extant compositions of the Amoraic period have the general designation of “a place of burial in [the land of] Israel”⁴⁹ or the even more general term “south”⁵⁰ which is taken from the verse in Ezekiel.⁵¹ The later midrashic strata, the corpus *Tanchuma*,⁵² continue the Amoraic notion.⁵³ The designation of “Valley of Jericho” as the place for the final defeat of Gog, as well as the meaning of this designation, seems to have been lost or ignored in the Amoraic compositions which we now know.

In the later strata of rabbinic literature, the Saboraic period, we do find traces of our text in the *Tanchuma* corpus.⁵⁴ This corpus is assumed to have been compiled around the eighth century in Palestine. It seems to have been an important text for the branch of rabbinic literature, which moved from Palestine to Europe in the later Byzantine and early medieval periods.⁵⁵ Here is the passage:

[This] teaches us that the Holy One Blessed be He showed Moses all that happened and all that is bound to happen; He showed him Samson who rose from [the tribe of] Dan, and Barak son of Abinoam of Naphtali, and every generation with its judges, every generation and its leader, every generation and its evil-doers, every generation and its righteous.⁵⁶

This passage seems to combine some of the content of the text from *Sifre on Deuteronomy* (about Samson and Barak), combining it with a formula which is found in the Amoraic composition *Leviticus Rabba*, “every generation and its...”, all of which has undergone heavy reworking.

The content of the text from *Sifre on Deuteronomy* seems to have been in the background of what Targum Ps. Jonathan is adding to the translation of Deuteronomy 34:1-4. We hear again about Samson of

⁴⁹ *Genesis Rabba* 36:6.

⁵⁰ *Leviticus Rabba* (Margalioth edition) 9:6.

⁵¹ Ezekiel 39:11.

⁵² *Midrash Tanchuma Hanidpas*, par. *Behalolekha* 12.

⁵³ The composition *Midrash Song of Songs Zuta* (1:4) does mention an area close to the Valley of Jericho: the Valley of Qidron, which runs just south of what was probably meant by ‘the Valley of Jericho’. The dating of *Song of Songs Zuta* is uncertain (and more so than the usual uncertainty for midrashic dating).

⁵⁴ Albert not of the Jericho tradition.

⁵⁵ About this branch see I.M. Ta-Shma, “Cultural Connections between the Jews of Byzantium to Ashkenaz”, in: *ibid.*, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature, Italy and Byzantium*, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 177-187, and other articles in this volume; about the prominence of this composition, see, for example, R. Nikolsky, “Trajectories of *Tanchuma* in the *Zohar*” (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ *Tanchuma Hanidpas*, par. *Mas'ey* 4:4; *Tanchuma Baber*, par. *Mas'ey* 3:3; *Numbers Rabba* 23:5.

⁴⁷ For example in *Genesis Rabba* 65:23.

⁴⁸ *Leviticus Rabba* (Margalioth edition) 26:7.

Dan, Barak of Naphtali, Gideon of Manasseh and the war of Gog, which is associated with Jericho.

The text from *Sifre on Deuteronomy* is copied into at least two medieval compilations of *midrash*. The one is *Midrash Lekah Tov*, an eleventh century compilation of narratives from Late Palestinian *midrash*, as well as from the *Babylonian Talmud* and Tannaitic compositions.⁵⁷ The other is a later medieval (thirteenth century) collection of *midrashic* text — *Yalkut Shimoni*. The version in *Lekah Tov* is the one from *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, while in *Yalkut Shimoni* we find the two Tannaitic versions, the one from *Sifre* and the one from the *Mekhilias*.

10. Concluding summary

In this article I have described and analyzed two passages from the rabbinic literature where Gog appears. In the first part I analyzed the ethnic identification of Gog found in an Amoraic composition *Genesis Rabba* as Roman. In the second part of the article I described and analyzed a passage from *Sifre on Deuteronomy*. I suggested here that there were two layers to this composition. The earlier is a non-priestly narrative with a tendency similar to *testament* literature, which describes the various areas in the land of Israel in a peaceful state, and then being desolated. Here salvation is expected to arrive only at the End of Days, where two stages of salvation are described, the coming of the messiah and the re-building of the Temple, and the second stage, the war of Gog, which will be followed by a new cosmic order where the righteous will be in the Garden of Eden and the wicked in Gehenna. The second layer is found in additions to the text, which have a more positive worldview, claiming that in each generation a savior arises for Israel from one of its various tribes. I suggested that the early layer represented a rabbinic (or a Pharisean?) alternative to priestly-oriented testamental composition. I dated here the idea of Gog being defeated in the Valley of Jericho to the time of Herod's reign, and the combined version of the narrative in *Sifre on Deuteronomy* to the end of the first century CE or the beginning of the second.

⁵⁷ See I.M. Ta-Shma, "Midrash Lekah-Tov — Its background and Character", in: *ibid.*, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature, Italy and Byzantium*, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 259-265.

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