

Russia in Ezekiel 38-39 (Part 2)

Russia forms a key element in many interpretations of the Gog prophecy and this is based on the identity of Rosh in Ezekiel 39.1. This article will investigate the term and conduct a short survey of scholarly interpretations. In order to establish that Russia is named in Ezekiel 39.1 it is important to demonstrate three things (1) That Rosh is the correct reading (2) That Rosh refers to Russia (3) That the geographical and historical location of Rosh is the Russian state.

History of Interpretation

The older English versions such as the King James Bible of 1611 AD, the Geneva Bible of 1587 AD and the Bishops Bible of 1568 AD (and indeed in the Jewish Publication Society OT of 1917 translate the word “Rosh” as “prince” or “chief” (a title) and not as a proper noun (a name). The Hebrew occurs in the Authorized King James 598 times throughout the OT; and it is always translated as an adjective or title. Rosh is treated as an adjective not a noun as in “Rosh Hashanah” the first (head) of the Year (New Year’s Day) and not Russia Day! It was only in the mid 1800’s (with the rise of Russia) that Rosh began to be interpreted as a name (Ros LXX or Rosh MT) and this was based on the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version: “And thou, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, Rhos prince of Mesoch and Thobel”. (Note that the LXE transliterates Ρωϛ as Rhos not Ros or Rosh)

Thus, “chief prince” Rosh (MT) becomes Ros (Rhos) prince of...(LXX) and modern translators who chose Ros as a name make a conscious choice to regard the Greek LXX reading as superior¹ to the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT). This was a text critical decision that occurred in the mid 1800’s – now, the LXX as well as other ancient version are very helpful in reconstructing the original Hebrew – all of the versions (MT, SP, Th, DSS etc, etc) should be text critically analysed and all have certain advantages and disadvantages. The LXX was read and used by Greek Diaspora Jews and therefore often employed by the apostles but it is not superior, and the MT, although carefully transmitted and closely reflective of many DSS scrolls also has certain

¹ We must not forget that the Greek LXX is a translation/interpretation of the Hebrew text. The question that researchers ask is what Hebrew text(s) [*Vorlage*] did the Septuagint translators work from? They obviously had a selection of texts (scrolls) some of them similar to (or the same) as the Hebrew texts that formed the MT but other texts contained different readings. Of course, in the case of variant Hebrew readings a judgement needs to be made (the MT compilers made similar judgements), however, translating from Hebrew to Greek adds another layer of complexity (and interpretation). On the whole the LXX is a good translation and differences with the MT usually point to differences in the underlying *Vorlage*, however, we cannot discount the case where the translator was simply mistaken, or did not understand the Hebrew (perhaps because he had a difficult or corrupt text) and was therefore tempted to add his own gloss by way of clarification.

anomalies as would be expected of a text that has been updated and smoothed over a thousand plus year period. The textual critic compares the different versions and attempts to reconstruct the original Hebrew version.

Commenting on the Hebrew word for **prince** (*nāśîʾ*) Johannes Botterweck *et al* states; “In Ezekiel we find the basic meaning “one who is elevated, exalted”, with various nuances. Thus in Ezk.1-39 *nāśîʾ* refers to princes in the general sense, as in 7:27 (*melek* has been added here; it is not attested in the LXX) and in 32:29. The title is associated in 19:1 with Jehoiachin, and in 34:24 and 37:25 with the coming ruler. In addition, both the king of Judah (7:27; 12:10, 12; 21:17, 30 [12, 25]; 22:6) and lesser foreign kings (26:16; 27:21; 30:13; 32:29; 38:2 f.; 39:1,18) are designated as *nāśîʾ*. In this context the title *nēśîʾ rōʾš* also appears (38:2f.; 39:1). referring to the first in a series of princes.” The LXX misunderstands *rōʾš* here as the proper name of a country (árchonata Rōs). Greater foreign kings receive the title *melek* as do the king of Babylon (17:12; 19:9; 21:24, 26 [19, 21], and elsewhere) and the pharaoh (29:3; 30:21 f.; 31:2 f.; 32:2). In 30:13 (a passage not attributable to Ezekiel) the title is given to the pharaoh. On balance Ezk.1-39 makes a clear distinction between lesser rulers and powerful kings, whereby the king of Judah receives the *nāśîʾ* title probably not because of his status as a vassal but because of the connection here with the P terminology *nēśîʾê yisrāʾēl* (Nu. 1:44; 4:46; 7:2,84; and Ezk. 19:1; 21:17[12]; 22:6: 45:9, as well as the singular in 21:30[25]).”²

So, in the context of Ezekiel it was common practice to differentiate the power hierarchy with terms like “prince” and “king” and in this context “chief prince” would not be unusual as it designates a first among equals. Also, the syntax militates against a plural reading; “Thee’ in the KJV refers to ‘you singular’. And so clearly one, and not four, is being addressed here: “I am against *thee* O Gog, chief prince of Meshech... I will turn *thee* back, and put hooks into *thy* jaws”.

Survey and discussion

Granville Penn produced a work on Ezekiel in 1814 that identified Ros as Russia.³ Joseph Freiherr (Barron) Von Hammer-Purgstall equated Ros with Russia in Ezekiel in 1825. However, this insight was based on Ras in Sura Qaf 50:12 from the Koran⁴ although he claimed that he

² G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Volume 10 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 3 Feb. 2000 – Religion), 50 (see there for footnotes).

³ Granville Penn, The prophecy of Ezekiel concerning Gog, the last tyrant of the church, his invasion of Ros, his discomfiture, and final fall. [With] Suppl. note [by G. Penn].1814 free eBook available on Google Books.

⁴ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, Sur les origines russes. Extraits de manuscrits orientaux adressés à mgr. le comte N. de Romanzoff, chancelier de l'Empire de Russie, dans une suite de lettres depuis l'an 1816 jusq'à l'an 1825. Par m. J. de Hammer, p.50 Ras (cf. Rosh) is found in many modern Arabic place names such as Ras Shamra, Ras Naqura, Ras el-Ain, etc. and in many ancient personal names: Râshi-ili, Rêsh-Adad king of Apishal, Rêsh-beli father of Tubalîit-Bini, Rêsh-Dumuzi, Rêsh-Ea, Rêsh -ili son of Sulalum, Rêsh-Irra, Rêsh-Marduk son of Ipqu-Amurru, Rêsh-Nabium, Rêsh-Shamash, Rêsh-Shubula son of Ibn-Adad, Rêsh-Sin, and Rêsh-Zababa.

discovered the origins of Russia in the Bible. Christian Lexicographer Wilhelm Gesenius, professor of Theology at the University of Halle in Prussia was influenced by Von Hammer-Purgstall's thesis and by the LXX translation and added Ros as Russia in his Lexicons.⁵

John Thomas published his first edition of *Elpis Israel* in 1849⁶ and much of his writing on this subject is based on the earlier work of Granville Penn.⁷ Granville (and subsequently Thomas) refer to Jerome's translation of the Latin Vulgate in which Jerome combined the MT and LXX as "he did not feel authorised to reject altogether one so ancient, and he has therefore preserved them both" (Granville: 1814, 15; Thomas: 1849, 386) "Gogue, terram Magogue principem capitum (sive Ros) Mosoch, et Thubal" this translates as "Gog, the chief prince of the land of Magogue (whether Ros) and Meshech, and Tubal". This demonstrates that Jerome had doubts about his text critical decision regarding the Hebrew and Greek versions when making his fourth century Latin translation – it hardly serves as a persuasive argument one way or the other and neither does the statement (Thomas); "[the question..] has been long set at rest by the concurring judgment of the learned, who have adopted the primitive interpretation of the Alexandrine Jews". Contra Thomas, if there is any consensus among scholars it leans in favour of the MT – translated as "chief" not as "Ros" (LXX).

Ruthven⁸ states "Many recent commentaries, lexica, and Bible dictionaries think attempts to identify Rosh are a dead end⁹ —though they sometimes, simultaneously and without offering evidence, list the alternate possibility that Rosh is the name of a people"¹⁰.

⁵ In 1833, Gesenius published a Latin work, the *Lexicon Manuale Hebraicum et Chaldaicum in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, and in 1834 a corresponding issue of the German work, *Hebräisches und Chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*. The *Lexicon Manuale* was subsequently translated to English in America by Edward Robinson D.D. in 1836. The British scholar and theologian Tregelles published his own version in 1846, which was reissued in 1857 with special warnings in a section "To The Student" about scholarly attacks on Christianity and the dangers of Gesenius' rationalism". Wilhelm Gesenius. (2016, February 8). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wilhelm_Gesenius&oldid=703908725 [Retrieved 00:57, August 17, 2016]

⁶ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (first edition, Birmingham [Eng.] C. C. Walker, 1849)

⁷ I have not been able to find any acknowledgement of his sources but certain passages reflect Granville's earlier work.

⁸ Jon Mark Ruthven, PhD, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History* (Salem Publishing Solutions: Xulon Press, 2003) footnotes (below) also attributed to Ruthven

⁹ Eg., the authoritative J. Simons, *Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), *ad loc.* and Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 199. For instance, R. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 930, claims, "There is no evidence from the Ancient Near East that a country named 'Rosh' ever existed" Also J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, New Century Bible (London: T. Nelson, 1969), 202: "The word for head is misunderstood as a proper name, 'Roš,' leading to a bizarre identification by the misinformed with Russia!" Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2, A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 305, "Certainly Rosh 'Chief,' is to be connected with 'Prince' and is not to be interpreted as a geographical indication." Daniel I. Block. *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 434-35. James Coffman and Thelma Coffman, *Commentary on Ezekiel of the Major Prophets*. Vol. 3 (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian Univ. Pr., 1991), 394, "There is no evidence that a country like Rosh ever existed" G.A. Cooke, *A Critical and*

Crane¹¹ comments as follows; “In vv. 2 and 3 there is a difficulty translating נְשִׂיאַ רֹשׁ מִנְשֵׁךְ וְתִבְלַל Block (1998, p434) points out “the syntax is problematic. The issue revolves around whether [רֹשׁ] is the name of an ethnic group or a common noun. Both LXX ἄρχοντα Ρως and the construct pointing of the Masoretes argue for the former”. Cooke (1936, p409 [cf. p.415]) states that MT “by its accents intends *rōsh* to be taken as=*head*, and the phrase is to be rendered *chief-head of M. and T.*”. Interestingly Syriac, Targum, Vulgate, and Aquila (κεφαλῆς), all interpret רֹשׁ as ‘chief/head’. Yet Duguid (1994, p.20) says “*rōš* is not to be understood here as an adjective (‘chief prince’) but as a noun in its own right (‘prince of the chiefs’)”. After his discussions, Block (1998, p.435) concluded that,

if Rosh is to be read as the first in a series of names, the conjunction should precede ‘Meshech’. [רֹשׁ] therefore is best understood as a common noun, appositional to and offering a closer definition of [נְשִׂיאַ]. Accordingly, *the prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal* Ezekiel’s point is that Gog is not just one of many Anatolian princely figures, but the leader amongst princes and over several tribal/national groups.

In their translations, Block (1998,p.432), Allen (1990b,p.197), and Zimmerli (1983,p.284), all follow MT with Gog as the leader [רֹשׁ] of these other groups. LXX, Symmachus and Theodotion all transliterate רֹשׁ as Ρως; this can either be seen as the name of an ethnic group, or as a proper noun of a person called ‘Ros’, who is the prince/ruler (ἄρχοντα) of Mesoch and Thobel (cf. Brenton). Yet, most commentators see LXX interpreting רֹשׁ as an ethnic group, especially as it also transliterated and interpreted ‘Magog’ in this way. Both transliterations should

Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Ezekiel, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 409, “The name of a people or a country called Rosh is not known, and the identifications so far suggested are not convincing.” Keith Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1974), 255. “Rosh is certainly not a cryptic allusion to Russia, as has sometimes been supposed.” Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 220, “There have been many writers who connected the name Rosh with the Russians, but this is not generally accepted today.” On the other hand, because of the complexity of the problem of identifying Ezekiel’s Rosh with a contemporary nation, many commentaries avoided even referring to the problem. e.g., John Skinner, *The Book of Ezekiel, The Expositor’s Bible* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900); James Smith, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: A New Interpretation* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930); Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976). Keith Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets, Studies in Biblical Theology* (London: SCM, 1975); James Mays, *Ezekiel, Second Isaiah, Proclamation Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Ralph Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel, Old Testament Guides* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

¹⁰ TW²AT “*rosb*,” Band 6, *ad loc.* Köhler, Ludwig and Baumgartner, Walter. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* 4th ed. (Berlin: DeGruyter. 1994). *ad loc.* H. Müller, “*rosb/ head*,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* edited by Jenni and Westermann; E.t. Mark Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 1997), III, 1185.

¹¹ Stewart Crane, *The Restoration of Israel: Ezekiel 36-39 in Early Jewish Interpretation: A textual-comparative study of the oldest extant Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.*(theses Murdoch University, 2006),176-177

be considered together, as the same thought of another ethnic group as an enemy against them appears to be the influencing factor. LXX also transliterates the other names with slightly alternate spelling as Μεσοχ/Μοσοχ καὶ Θοβελ. Yet, transliterating these particular places is a practice found elsewhere in LXX OT (Gen. 10:2, 23; 1 Chron. 1:5; Isa. 66:19; Ezek. 32:26), which may indicate that LXX scribes did not know the contemporary identification of these countries”.

In summary, “the judgment of the learned” is that Rosh refers to *chief prince* or *prince of the chiefs* and that the Septuagint translators understood Ros as the name of a leader (prince) rather than an ethnic group (just as Gog is the name of a leader). If it was an ethnic reference the translators of the LXX probably did not know the location of the Ros people at the time of writing.

Where is Ros?

Let us assume (against the grain of the available evidence) that Ros is an ethnic group. If that is the case we should expect to find the “Rosh” people shortly before and after the time of Ezekiel. Friedrich Delitzsch identified a people contemporaneous with Ezekiel called the *Rašī*, who were then located on the northwest border of Elam. Other older commentaries made the same connection.¹²

Fred G. Zaspel believes that Josephus was Gesenius’ source and critiques as follows; “The appeal to Gesenius is impressive, but it must be remembered that Gesenius was a great lexicographer and grammarian, not an authority on ancient history. His statement was but a guess also; in fact, it is highly probable that Josephus was Gesenius’ source for this information”¹³ However, Meshech and Tubal are identified by the Greek historian Herodotus (*Moschoi* and *Tibarenoi* in 7.72) as the tribes in eastern Anatolia (modern Turkey) and Josephus agrees with this identification in *Antiquities of the Jews* 1:124.¹⁴ The Scofield Bible of 1917 notes on Ezekiel 38:2 stated that Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal referred to Russia and its cities Moscow

¹² Friedrich Delitzsch, *Wo lag das Paradies?: Eine biblische-assyriologische Studie, mit zahlreichen assyriologischen Beiträgen zur biblischen Länder- und Völkerkunde und einer Karte Babyloniens* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1881), 322. Patrick Fairbairn, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (Wilmington, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, [1872] rp. 1969), 415. William Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel* (London: T. Weston, 1876), 192-193; William F. Lofthouse, *Ezekiel Introduction, Revised Version with Notes and Index* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 277. More recent commentaries include: H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on Ezekiel the Prophet* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1979), 266; W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Book of Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 216. Andrew Blackwood, *Ezekiel: Prophecy of Hope* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 229. *Ibid*, Ruthven footnote 41.

¹³ Fred G. Zaspel, “The Nations of Ezekiel 38-39: who Will Participate in the Battle?” (1985): <http://beityeshua.com/genesis-chapter-10/> [accessed Aug 2016]

¹⁴ Yamauchi, Edwin M., *Foes from the Northern Frontier: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes*, (Wipf & Stock Pub; Reprint edition, 2003), 24-27.

and Tobolsk. However, the historian and academic, Edwin M. Yamauchi, comments: “Even if one were to transliterate the Hebrew rosh as a proper name... rather than translate it as ‘chief’... it can have nothing to do with modern ‘Russia.’ This would be a gross anachronism for the modern name is based upon the name Rus, which was brought into the region of Kiev, north of the Black Sea, by the Vikings only in the Middle Ages.”¹⁵

The place name *Rosh* is found ten times in Sargon’s inscriptions, once on Assurbanipal’s cylinder, once in Sennacherib’s annals, and five times on Ugaritic tablets.¹⁶ Sargon II wrote: “I deported (the people) of the lands of Kashu, Tabalu, and Hilakku. I drove out Mite (Midas), king of the land of Muski ... the lands of Rashi and Ellipi which are on the Elamite frontier...”¹⁷

Russell Gmirkin¹⁸ notes that, “Togormah appeared in Ezekiel as a northern invader in association with Gomer in eastern Asia Minor.¹⁹ Later Armenian historians listed Togormah as ancestor of the Armenian people.²⁰ Togormah was possibly identical with *Tegarama* of Hittite documents, located (probably at Gürün) between the upper Halys and the Euphrates.²¹ It has been suggested that Togormah came from the Assyrian *Til-garimmu* a fortress on the border of the Assyrian people called *Tubal*²²...”

Many of the regions in which these ancient northern nations resided are now modern Islamic nations (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, northern-Iran and northern-Iraq). They are also the regions in which the Turkic language spread which is said to be some 8,000 years old.²³ It is notable that Russia is missing from this picture and has different historic origins.

¹⁵ Yamauchi, Edwin M., *Foes From the Northern Frontier: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes* (2003), pgs. 19-20.

¹⁶ For extensive work on the subject see; James D Price, Rosh an Ancient Land Known to Ezekiel, *Grace Theological Journal* (1985) 67-89, [Accessed Aug 2016] note the explanation on semantic shift page 69. https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/OTeSources/26-Ezekiel/Text/Articles/Price-Rosh-Ezekiel-GTJ.pdf

¹⁷ See, Nadav Na’man, *The Historical Portion of Sargon II's Nimrud Inscription*, *SAAB* 8 (1994): 17-20:18 <http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/8.1%2003%20Na'aman.pdf> [Accessed Aug 2016]

¹⁸ Russell Gmirkin, *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch*, (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2006), 149-150.

¹⁹ Ezek.38:6

²⁰ Skinner, *Commentary on Genesis*, 197; cf. Yovhannes Draxanakerte'i, *History of Armenia* 1.14-15. Yovhannes labeled Togormah a son of Tiras, ruler or the Thracians. The Phrygians of central Anatolia came from Thrace (Herodotus, *Histories* 7.73), probably after the fall of the Hittite Empire (Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier*, 77).

²¹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 71; Cassuto, *Book of Genesis*, 192; Simons, *Geographical and Topographical Texts*, §258.

²² *LAR, II*, §239.

²³ Spread of the Turkic language based on computer modelling :<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYvy71C-SA> [Accessed Aug 2016]

Conclusion

The linguistic, historical and biblical evidence rule out Rosh referring to Russia in Ezekiel 38-39, moreover, Israel is surrounded by hostile Islamic nations who have openly pledged to destroy the state.