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2014

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citation for published version (APA)

Vlaardingerbroek, H. M. (2014). *Mesopotamia in Greek and Biblical Perceptions: Idiosyncrasies and Distortions*.

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6 East of Mesopotamia

6.1 Media, Elam and Persia

In modern scholarship, there is a growing tendency to date the Hebrew Bible to the Achaemenid (ca 530–330) or even Hellenistic period (after 330), not only books such as Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, which were always considered late, but also large parts of the Pentateuch and of other books that were traditionally considered to have been written earlier, during the monarchical (before 600) or exilic period (ca 600–530).¹ Advocates of these late datings will readily admit that the authors of these biblical books may have made some use of sources from earlier periods, and that perhaps some of this older material is historically accurate, but they insist that the biblical books as we have them reflect the political and intellectual reality of the time in which they were written. Therefore, they can only be used as sources for Jewish history, culture and religion of the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. Biblical historiography is in their eyes strongly biased and totally determined by the objectives and ideologies of the second temple period, and the Hebrew Bible does not give us any reliable historical information about Israel before the Persian period. The only way to learn anything about Israel before the Persian period is through archaeology and extra-biblical sources that are contemporary with the events that they describe. Of course, these ideas have evoked opposition and discussion, but nevertheless there is a marked shift to late datings in biblical scholarship as a whole.

This concentration on the Persian period is in marked contrast to the orientation of the Biblical authors themselves, who seem mainly interested in the time of Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets of the monarchical period. The Persians, let alone the Macedonians and Greeks, are rarely mentioned, except in books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and others that are traditionally considered to be late. Of course, this absence of the Persians can often be explained by the authors' choice of subject matter and their concentration on the past, but not in all cases. Sometimes the absence of the Persians is difficult to reconcile with a dating to the Persian period, for example in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10). The Table of Nations is a

¹ Brett 2000: 4-5; Lemche 2001: 222-224; Wesselius 2002; Gerstenberger 2005: 13.

list of more than seventy nations and peoples of the earth, represented by eponymous heroes, grandsons and great-grandsons of Noah, from whom these nations were thought to have been descended. From this list, the Persians are conspicuously absent. It is strange, to say the least, that its author does not mention what must have been the most important and most powerful nation of his time. Nevertheless Gerstenberger sees clear indications that the Table of Nations reflects the political reality of the Persian period, and speculates that *Madai* (v2) not only represents the Medes, but also the Persians.² The same solution is presented by Crüsemann, who also dates the Table of Nations to the Persian period.³ An alternative explanation is that Elam (v22) includes the Persians.

At first sight, this reasoning seems a *petitio principii*: the Persians are not mentioned in the Table of Nations, the Table of Nations stems from the Persian period, consequently it *must* mention the Persians, and therefore the Elamites or the Medes have to represent the Persians. At first glance, it seems well advised, therefore, to take no notice of this type of argument and to accept the approach of Lipiński, who through careful reasoning reaches the conclusion that the Table of Nations was originally written somewhere between 680 and 540, probably in the first decades of the sixth century.⁴ But the reasoning of Gerstenberger, Crüsemann and like-minded scholars cannot be dismissed as easily as that, because some extra-biblical texts suggest that Elam or Media *could* be used to designate Persia. Therefore, there is reason to investigate how Elam, Media and Persia are used in the Hebrew Bible, and to examine whether Elam or Media could represent Persia.⁵ This chapter contains a concise discussion of the most important texts from the Bible that mention Elam (Hebr. עֵלָם *ēlām*), Media (Hebr. מַדַּי *māday*) or Persia (Hebr. פָּרַס *pāras*).

² Gerstenberger 2005: 318-319.

³ Crüsemann 2002: 64-65. Cf. Bunnens 1979 (who gives a hellenistic date).

⁴ Lipiński 1990: 45.

⁵ In the terminology introduced in chapter two, Elam and Media are exonyms, and Persia is an endonym.

Extrabiblical evidence

It is well known that in Greek literature, Μῆδοι and Μῆδος are often used in the meaning of ‘Persians’ and ‘Persian’. Herodotos, for example, sometimes uses Μῆδοι and Πέρσαι almost as synonyms, but not always. In some parts of his *Histories*, he makes a careful distinction between Persians and Medes. Μῆδοι is only used to refer to the Persians from book 5 on, in the description of the Persian wars, but never in the first four books. Favouring the Persian cause is always μηδίζω. The fact that Μῆδοι as a name for the Persians is only found in the description of the Persian wars, and not in the more ethnographical books, suggests that Herodotos followed the usage of the combatants, who probably called their enemies Medes.⁶ As a rule, Μῆδοι is favoured in contexts where they posed a threat to the Hellenes or were presented as conquerors, while Πέρσαι has a more neutral or positive connotation.

Extra-biblical texts that use Elam instead of Persia are more difficult to find. Cyrus is called king of Elam (LUGAL KUR NIM.MA.KI = *šar elamti*) in the Dynastic Prophecy,⁷ and Persian kings are often called king of Anshan, an area on the Iranian plateau which was inhabited by Elamites and had been part of the kingdom of Elam, for example in the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Cyrus Cylinder.⁸ Of course, it is hazardous to draw conclusions from royal titles. In cuneiform texts, Cyrus is called king of Babylon, and king of Sumer and Akkad,⁹ his son Cambyses had himself crowned king of Egypt,¹⁰ and Darius again is called king of Babylon.¹¹ In the Hebrew Bible, Cyrus (Ezr. 5:13) and Artaxerxes (Neh. 13:6) are also called king of Babylon. It is clear that it does not follow from these royal titles that ‘Elamite’, ‘Babylonian’ or ‘Egyptian’ could be used as synonym of ‘Persian’. On the other hand, it is true that Elamites played an important role in the Persian empire, that the Elamite language was used in the royal administration, and that the former Elamite city of Susa became one the

⁶ Drews 1973: 7; Hall 1991: 10, 56, 73; Tuplin 1994.

⁷ Van der Spek 2003, text 5, p.311-324, col. II 17 and 20.

⁸ ABC 7 II 1 (Nabonidus Chronicle); Kuhrt 1997: 602 (Cyrus Cylinder).

⁹ Kuhrt 1997: 602 (Cyrus Cylinder).

¹⁰ Briant 2002: 57.

¹¹ ABC 1 IV 43 (Chronicle concerning the period from Nabu-nasir to Shamash-shuma-ukin).

residences of the Achaemenid kings (Hdt. 7.136; 7.151; Neh. 1:1; Est. 1:2). Perhaps even Persian identity was forged from Iranian and Elamite elements.¹² Therefore, it is possible that sometimes no distinction was made between Persians and Elamites. Yet, the conclusion that 'Elam' is 'Persia' in a certain text can only be reached after a careful examination of that text. Therefore, the most important biblical texts that mention Elam and Media will be discussed in the following sections.

Genesis 14

In the days of king Amraphel of Shinar, king Arioch of Ellasar, king Chedorlaomer of Elam, and king Tidal of Goiim, these kings . . . (Gen. 14:1-2).

Amraphel (אמרפל) of Shinar is probably Hammurabi of Babylon (section 8.2), Arioch of Ellasar is unidentified, and Tidal (תדעל) is the name of several Hittite kings (Hitt. *Tuthaliyaš*). Chedorlaomer (כדרלעמר) seems a genuine Elamite name (Elam. *kudur* means protector, and *Laqamar* is a deity), although no king who bears this name is known.¹³ Clearly, Genesis 14 has been written by someone with some knowledge of the history and language of Elam, but it is impossible to connect this narrative with a historical event, or to determine its time of origin.

2 Kings 17-18

In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2K. 17:6; an almost identical list is found in 2K. 18:11; cf. 1Chr. 5:26, without 'the cities of the Medes').

Obviously, the cities of the Medes must be sought in northern Iran, near Assyria. The Israelites who were deported to the cities of the Medes were probably soldiers who were sent there to guard the borders of the Assyrian empire.¹⁴

¹² Henkelman 2006 and 2011.

¹³ Herrmann in *TRE* sv Elam (1982); Ziemer 2005: 95.

¹⁴ Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 200-201; Becking 1992: 72.

Isaiah 11

On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros (Southern Egypt), from Ethiopia (כּוּשׁ *kūš*, Northern Sudan), from Elam, from Shinar (Babylonia), from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea (Is. 11:11).

Is. 11:11-16 probably dates from the Achaemenid period.¹⁵ Before the Persian period, the dispora had not reached this extent. Elam is the satrapy of Elam, as in Dan. 8:2: 'in Susa, the capital, in the province of Elam' (בְּעִלְמַם הַמְּדִינָה *b^{ec}ēlōm hamm^edīnō*).

Isaiah 13

See, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regards for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men. They will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not pity children (Is. 13:17-18).

Is. 13 is an oracle against Babylon. It starts with a very dramatic description of the day of the Lord (יְהוָה *yōm yhw*). This day will be a day of destruction and Gods anger will be executed by warriors from a distant land (5), who will show no mercy (15-16, 18). Even the non-human world takes part in this day of judgement: the sun and the moon will grow dark (10) and the heavens and the earth will tremble (13). At first, Isaiah's oracle seems an announcement of the day of God's wrath against the whole world: 'to make the earth a desolation' (9), and 'to punish the world for its evil' (11). The people against whom God's anger is directed are not given a name, nor are the soldiers who will execute his judgement. Then, the style changes and the oracle becomes specific. The people from the distant land are identified as the Medes (17), and only then, the real subject of Gods anger is mentioned: 'Babylon, the city of the Chaldeans' (19). This magnificent city will become a place of desolation,

¹⁵ Blenkinsopp 2000: 268; Beuken 2003: 318; Schmid 2011: 124-125.

where not even Arabs or shepherds will roam (20), but only wild animals will live (21-22). From an announcement of God's anger against all mankind, the oracle has developed into an oracle against Babylon, the archenemy of the Judeans.

This oracle does not fit the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem, when Babylon was entangled in a struggle against the Assyrians, the most powerful nation of Isaiah's time. According to Blenkinsopp, the date of Is. 13 cannot be fixed,¹⁶ but many scholars think that Is. 13 dates from the period between Nebuchadnezzar's death (562) and Babylon's fall (539).¹⁷ It is not likely that it is a *vaticinium ex eventu*, written after the fall of the city (539), because there is little resemblance between the destruction portrayed in this oracle and the actual events. When Babylon was attacked by the Persian king Cyrus, the city seems to have surrendered without much resistance, and was spared pillaging and destruction. It is possible that Is. 13 was written during the period of growing Persian power, but it also makes perfectly sense when it was written before 550, when the Medes were still a powerful nation. It is even possible that Is. 13 is a reworking of an older oracle against Nineveh, from a period when the Medes were one of the main enemies of the Assyrians. The oracle does not give the reader any useful clues to the identity of Babylon's enemy: they come from a distant land (5), they do not have regard for silver and gold (17),¹⁸ they use bows and will not show mercy to anyone (18). It seems a bit of a stereotype of the ultimate enemy and none of it helps us much in determining their identity.

Isaiah 21

A stern vision is told to me. The betrayer betrays, and the destroyer destroys.
Go up, O Elam, lay siege, O Media. All the sighings she has caused I bring to an end (Is. 21:2).

¹⁶ Blenkinsopp 2000: 277.

¹⁷ Kaiser 1973: 13-14; Wildberger 1978: 509-510; Schmid 2011: 131-132.

¹⁸ Xen. Cyr. 5.1.20 is not a parallel (*pace* Wildberger 1978: 520), because the idea behind Cyrus' words is that he will ultimately be able to reward his followers.

Is. 21 is one of the most enigmatic prophecies in the book of Isaiah. Even its title is obscure: 'the oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea'. The Medes and Elamites are stirred up against an at first unnamed city or nation. Only much later we hear against whom the attack of the Medes and Elamites is directed: 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon' (9). This oracle does not offer many clues to its time and place of origin. A number of interpretations are possible. The most important are:

One interpretation is that Media and Elam together represent the Persian empire.¹⁹ Both nations were conquered by Cyrus and incorporated in the Persian empire. The prophet uses the two well known nations, Media and Elam, to represent the Persian empire, which was new to him. This places Is. 21 in the final days of the Babylonian empire.²⁰ The problem with this interpretation is the anguish about and compassion with the fate of Babylon in the text.²¹ The Babylonians were the archenemies of the Judeans, and normally predictions of their downfall were greeted with joy.

Another possibility has been proposed by MacIntosh.²² He believes, that Is. 21 is a sixth century re-interpretation of an eighth century oracle. In the eighth century context, the Elamites and Medes were allies of the Babylonians and the enemies of the Assyrians, and they were summoned to attack Nineveh or Kalah. But Isaiah prophecies disaster for the anti-Assyrian coalition, culminating in Babylon's fall. This explains the compassion for Babylon: the city is not Judah's enemy, but its ally. In the sixth century, this oracle was re-interpreted and changed: the Elamites and Medes were described as enemies of the Babylonians, and the name of the Assyrians was removed, but traces of the original situation were preserved in the mentioning of Elam, which was a powerful enemy of Assyria in the eighth century, but not, as far as we know, an active opponent of the Babylonians in the sixth century. This interpretation has found support with Childs and Beuken.²³

¹⁹ Kaiser 1973: 102, 105, 124; Wildberger 1978: 770, 774; Blenkinsopp 2000: 325-326.

²⁰ Schmid 2011: 152.

²¹ Childs 2001: 149-151.

²² MacIntosh 1980: 110-116.

²³ Childs 2001: 149-151; Beuken 2003: 131-134.

Of course, even if Is. 21 is a palimpsest (MacIntosh) or a multilayered text (Childs), which it probably is, in its final form it announces Babylon's fall. The compassion of the prophet with an enemy in the eminent destruction of the city is not a decisive argument against a sixth century dating. It is likely that in an earlier (hypothetical) version of this oracle Elam and Media represented the lands of the Elamites and the Medes, but in the final version Elam and Media represent the Persian empire.

Isaiah 22

Elam bore the quiver with chariots and cavalry, and Kir uncovered the shield. Your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and their cavalry took stand at the gates (Is. 22:6-7).

Is. 22 is perhaps even more obscure than Is. 21. It is a prophecy against Jerusalem, not an oracle against a foreign nation, like the other prophecies in Is. 13-23. Its historical setting is unclear, perhaps intentionally so.²⁴ This makes it impossible to know how to interpret Elam and Kir.

Jeremiah 25

So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, . . .; all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media (Jr. 25: 17, 25).

Jr. 25 contains a long list of nations who will be forced to drink 'the cup of the wine of wrath'. Most of these nations are from the west – from Syria, Palestine and Arabia – but at the end we find Elam and Media, together with the unexplained Zimri.²⁵ In this chapter, Elam and Media are clearly predecessors of the Babylonian empire, not its successors, as the Persian empire was, which makes an interpretation of Elam or Madai as Persia impossible.

²⁴ Kaiser 1973: 138-139; Beuken 2003: 248-249; Schmid 2011: 156.

²⁵ Zimri is often emended to Zimki, which is an atbash of Elam (Holladay 1986: 671; Allen 2008: 279-281). According to Carroll (1986: 500) this is 'possible, but unlikely'. Both Carroll and Lundbom (2004: 264) regard Zimri as an unidentified nation.

Jeremiah 49

The word of the Lord that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of king Zedekiah of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am going to break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might. And I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven. And I will scatter them to all these winds, and there shall be no nation to which the exiles from Elam shall not come (Jr. 49:34-36).

The prophecy concerning Elam differs from the other oracles in Jeremiah in style and language. Both its authorship and its dating are debated.²⁶ There is no reason to believe that Elam represents Persia in this text, as MacKane does. Nothing specific is said and there are no indications for the identity of Elam.

Jeremiah 51:11

The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the Lord, vengeance for his temple (Jr. 51:11b).

It is almost unanimously accepted that Jr. 51:11b is a clarifying remark, which has been added afterwards to Jr 51:11-14.²⁷ The original prophecy did not mention the attackers of Babylon, and 11b was added in imitation of Jr. 51:28 or Is. 13:17. Many scholars suppose that 'Medes' refers to the Persians in this oracle.²⁸ This implies an emendation. The text speaks about 'kings (plural) of the Medes' (cf. Jr. 25:25; 51:28), which fits what we know about the Medes, who probably never knew a centralised government, but were governed by a number of petty kings.²⁹ If *Madai* refers to the

²⁶ Weiser 1952: 425 (perhaps by Jeremiah); Rudolph 1968: 295-297 (by Jeremiah, but v39 has been added after Jeremiah's time); Holladay 1989: 387-388 (by Jeremiah, but v39 has been added later); MacKane 1996: 1248 (not by Jeremiah; Elam represents Persia); Huwlyer 1997: 256-266 (not by Jeremiah, exilic or post-exilic); Fischer 2005: 556.

²⁷ Rudolph 1968: 308; Holladay 1989: 397.

²⁸ Weiser 1952: 442; Rudolph 1968: 308; MacKane 1996: 1304; Fischer 2005: 605.

²⁹ Sancisi 1988 and 1994; Rollinger 2004.

Persians, we have to read ‘king (singular) of the Medes’, i.e. Cyrus, as most of the Septuagint manuscripts do (Sept. Jr. 28:11). But it is easier to explain the dominant reading of the Septuagint as secondary – the translators lived after Cyrus’ victory over Babylon and therefore translated this oracle with the knowledge they had – and regard the masoretic reading as original (*difficilior lectio potior*). Perhaps, the whole discussion is spurious, and the scribe who added 11b did not give much thought to the precise historical circumstances, but simply added this explanatory remark in imitation of Jr. 51:28 or Is. 13:17.

Jeremiah 51:27

Raise a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations. Prepare the nations for war against her (Babylon), summon against her the kingdoms, Ararat (Urartu), Minni (Mannae), and Ashkenaz (Scythia). Appoint a marshal against her, bring up horses like bristling locusts. Prepare the nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes, with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion. The land trembles and writhes, for the Lord’s purposes against Babylon stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant (Jr. 51: 27-29).

These verses contain another summons to attack Babylon, again directed to the Medes, this time with the Urartians (Hebr. אַרְרָט *ʾararat*), Mannaeans (מִנִּי *minni*) and Scythians (אַשְׁכְּנַז *ʾaškʿnaz*) as allies. The Scythians lived north of the Caucasus, but from the seventh century on, they undertook extensive campaigns and raids into Asia Minor, Armenia and north-western Iran. Mannae lay south of Lake Urmia. It consisted of several small kingdoms, which were never unified, and were often attacked by the Assyrians. The first time that the Mannaeans are mentioned in an Assyrian source is in 843, the last time is in 616.³⁰ Urartu, called Ararat in the Hebrew Bible, lay near Lake Van. It became a unified kingdom during the ninth century. During the eighth century, it developed into one of the foremost opponents of Assyrian expansion. During the seventh century, the power of Urartu waned. The last time Assyrian sources mention a Urartian king or state dates from

³⁰ Postgate in *RLA* sv Mannäer.

643.³¹ In neo-Babylonian sources, Urartu (Akk. ^{KUR}*Uraštu*) is found as a geographical designation.³² Even in the Persian period, the name Urartu (אֲרָרַט) is still used in the Aramean version of the Bisitun inscription that has been found in Egypt,³³ but in Persian and Greek this region became known as Armenia. The Medes, Urartians, Manneans, and Scythians were all traditional enemies of the Assyrians in the eighth and early seventh century. Therefore, it is surprising to find them in an oracle against Babylon, ascribed to Jeremiah, who prophesied in the first decades of the sixth century.

Things have to be complicated a bit further. It is often assumed that the names of the kingdoms in v27 – Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz – and v28 in its totality, or only the first two lines of v28, have been added afterwards to the oracle.³⁴ The names of the nations ‘break the poetic unity’ (Holladay), and the first words of v28 (‘prepare the nations for war against her’) are a repetition of a line from v27. By removing these lines, we get 4x2 lines with a neat parallelism. There are two arguments against this reasoning. Firstly, the poetic unity is also restored, and the repetition removed, by deleting ‘prepare the nations for war against her’ from v27, which leaves us with 5x2 parallel lines. Secondly, already in the early sixth century, Ararat and Minni were nations of the past. If Ararat and Minni were added later, perhaps much later, they must have been even more remote, and their addition becomes harder to explain. Therefore, it is better to accept the names of the nations as original.³⁵ But this still leaves us with the problem of explaining the presence of the Urartians, Manneans, and Scythians among Babylon’s enemies. More than one explanation is possible.

³¹ Kuhrt 1997: 558; Salvini 1995: 111.

³² *ABC chron.* 4, line 3 (p.97). Rollinger (2004) argues that Urartu (and not Lydia) has to be restored in the Nabonidus chronicle (*ABC chron.* 7, col. ii, line 16), but this is controversial. See also Van der Spek 2014: 256 n. 184 (who argues that the text mentions Lydia).

³³ Porten en Yardeni C2.1 line 9, 12, 16, 20.

³⁴ Weiser 1952: 444; Rudolph 1968: 310; Holladay 1989: 398; MacKane 1996: 1317.

³⁵ Bright 1974: 357.

It is possible that Urartu, Mannea, and Scythia are regions under Media's control, as Carroll and Allen believe.³⁶ Nevertheless, the Manneans and Urartians seem a bit out of place in an oracle against Babylon. They were not powerful nations whose armies could attack Babylon, and whose power could bring the Babylonians down.

It is also possible, and even likely, that Jr. 51:27-28 reflects the political reality of an older period. In the eighth and early seventh century, the Urartians, Manneans, Scythians and Medes were among the most bitter enemies of the Assyrians, and an attack of these peoples against Nineveh, or another Assyrian city, seems more likely than against Babylon. Of course, during much of this period Assyria was too powerful to have much to fear, and its enemies were divided, but such an attack might have seemed possible to a prophet from Judah. The enmity between Assyria and Urartu was known in Judah, as is proven by the story of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, whose sons murdered him, and afterwards fled to Ararat (2K. 19:37; Is. 37: 38). This suggests that Jr. 51:25-33 was originally an oracle against an Assyrian city. Perhaps the oracle originally mentioned Nineveh as target of the attack, and Nineveh was later changed into Babylon to fit the new political situation. It is also possible, that Babylon was from the start used to denote the Assyrian capital, as Dalley has argued.³⁷ The name Babylon could be used in certain genres in cuneiform literature to denote other prestigious cities in Mesopotamia, including Kalah, Ashur, Arbela and Nineveh. One of these genres was the lamentation, and Jr. 51:25-33 shows characteristics of a lamentation. Perhaps this convention was known and used in Judah. In that case, there was no need to change the oracle, when it was included in the book of Jeremiah. Only a heading (24) was added, which interpreted it as an oracle against Babylon.

Those who changed this prophecy into an oracle against Babylon in the eve of the Persian attack on the city, or perhaps even after its fall, probably interpreted the names of the nations as regions under Persian control, in so far as they still knew them, or, more likely, simply left them as they had found them in the original.

³⁶ Carroll 1986: 840; Allen 2008: 529.

³⁷ Dalley 2008.

Ezekiel 27 and 38

Paras and Lud and Put were in your army, your mighty warriors. They hung shield and helmet in you. They gave you splendour. Men of Arvad and Helech were on your walls all around. Men of Gamad were at your towers. They hung their quivers all around your walls. They made perfect your beauty (Ezk. 27:10-11).

Persia, Ethiopia and Put are with them, all of them with buckler and helmet. Gomer and all its troops; Bet-togarmah from the remotest parts of the north with all its troops – many peoples are with you (Ezk. 38:5-6).

The lamentation over Tyre (Ezk. 27) must have been written before or during the siege of the city by Nebuchadrezzar, which lasted for thirteen years (Jos. *Ant.* 10.228; *cAp.* 1.144).³⁸ The verses 9^b and 11 are often regarded as an addition, because they do not fit the *qīnā* metre, the metre employed here, which is typical of lamentations,³⁹ and because the image of the ship is abandoned, but there is no ground to dispute the originality of v10. It is metrically sound when the words ‘your mighty warriors’ are deleted (*BHS*), and there is every reason to believe that merchants needed soldiers on board to protect their merchandise.

In Ezk. 27 and in Ezk. 38, the Persians (Hebr. פֶּרַס *paras*) are mentioned as soldiers in the army of a foreign nation, in Ezk. 27 of Tyre, in Ezk. of Gog, king of Magog. In Ezk. 27 the Lydians (Hebr. לֹוד *lūd*) and Libyans (Hebr. פֹּוּט *pūt*) are mentioned alongside the Persians, in Ezk. 38 the Ethiopians (Hebr. כּוּשׁ *kūš*) and the Libyans. There is some doubt whether פֶּרַס *paras* refers to the Persians in these texts, because they seem out of place here. Persians are never mentioned as mercenaries in ancient near eastern texts, and they are not ‘sons of Ham’ such as לֹוד *lūd*, פֹּוּט *pūt* and כּוּשׁ *kūš*.⁴⁰ Yet, it

³⁸ Dating the siege of Tyre is difficult: it is not mentioned in the Babylonian chronicles; see Wiseman 1985: 27-29; Kuhrt 1997: 591.

³⁹ It is not always easy to tell verse and prose apart in Hebrew. See e.g. O’Connor 1980; De Moor and Watson 1993. Despite these, and other, studies, the only certain characteristic of Hebrew verse seems still its parallelism.

⁴⁰ Fohrer 1955: 155-156; Zimmerli 1969: 643-644; Pohlmann 2001: 519.

could easily be argued that they are mentioned, because they do not fit in. Ezk. 27:10 is meant to create an impression of grandeur: men flock from all over the earth to serve in Tyre's army, Lydians from the north-west, Libyans from the south-west and Persians from the south-east. And in Ezk. 38:5, the Persians, Ethiopians and Libyans stress the power and aspirations of Gog, king of Magog, who is forging a world wide coalition against the land of Israel. The presence of the Persians shows that people from the corners of the earth will fight in his army. Especially in Ezk. 38, a text with an almost apocalyptic character, down to earth geographical matters like distances and vicinity can be expected to play a subordinate role.

Ezekiel 32

Elam is there (in the Sheol, the Pit), and all its hordes around its grave; all of them killed, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised into the world below, who spread terror in the land of the living. They bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit (Ezk. 32:24).

Elam is mentioned among the empires and kingdoms that have been powerful in former days, but that have fallen since: first Assyria (v22-23), then Elam (v24-25), and finally Meshech and Tubal (v26-28). In this chapter, like in Jr. 25, Elam is a predecessor of the Babylonian empire.

Conclusions

The question whether and how often Elam and Media refer to Persia or the Persian empire in the Hebrew Bible is difficult to answer. Some of the texts in which Madai and Elam are mentioned are particularly obscure, while others are not specific enough to make certain conclusions possible, but a few conclusions are possible:

1. In the Table of Nations, *Madai* clearly refers to the Medes, and not to the Persians, because *Madai* is one of Japheth's sons, and they are at home in the north and west, while the Persians lived in the east, near Elam, one of Shem's sons.

2. Sometimes, Elam is a nation from the (remote) past (Gen. 14; Jr. 25; Ezk. 32).

3. Sometimes, Media and Elam are provinces or satrapies of the Assyrian empire (2K. 17:6; 2K. 18:11) or the Achaemenid empire (Is. 11:11; Dan. 8:2; Ezr. 6:2).

4. There are a number of prophecies – often very obscure texts – that announce the destruction of Babylon by the Medes, or by Media and Elam together (Is. 13; Is. 21; Jr. 51). These prophecies have often been read as announcements – possibly after the fact – of the conquest of Babylon by the Persian king Cyrus, not only by modern scholars, but also by the translators of the Septuagint and by the author of Ezr. 1:1. Yet, two of these prophecies, and perhaps more, show traces from the Assyrian era, when Media and Elam were more important and better known nations than Persia. This makes it clear that the question which is discussed in this chapter – whether עֵלָם *ēlām* or מַדַּי *māday* may represent Persia in the Hebrew Bible – is ambiguous. These prophecies about the destruction of Babylon have been reworked and reread, probably more than once. In one stage, עֵלָם *ēlām* or מַדַּי *māday* referred to Elam and Media, in a later stage, they referred to Persia or, probably better, to the Persian Empire, because *Fars*, the Persian heartland, remained outside the world that the biblical authors knew. But as soon as the Persian empire becomes better known, this use of עֵלָם *ēlām* or מַדַּי *māday* to refer to the Persian empire quickly vanishes. Daniel, Ezra and Esther use פָּרַס *paras* instead. The Medes are only mentioned in the combination 'Persia and Media' ('Persians and Medes') and in the enigmatic 'Darius the Mede' (Dan. 5:30; 9:1; 11:1).

Summing up the consequences for the interpretation of the Table of Nations, it is impossible that Media represents Persia. It is possible that Elam represents Persia in Genesis 10, but it is not very likely. There are no specific grounds to believe that Elam is anything else than Elam in the Table of Nations

