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WHO SAID ARMAGEDDON WAS MEGIDDO?

BY

Régis BURNET

Université Catholique de Louvain
Institut de recherche Religions Spiritualités Cultures Sociétés
Grand Place 45
B-1348 LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE
regis.burnet@uclouvain.be

ABSTRACT

While the hypothesis that the term Armageddon in Rev 16:16 means "the mountain of Megiddo" is often thought to have existed throughout the history of the interpretation of the Book of Revelation, this article shows that it only became widespread in the 1580s, after having been put forward in the 12th century by Bruno of Segni (without any legacy). Its success is largely explained by the humanist return to Hebrew sources, but it also reflects a certain anxiety about the proliferation of etymological elucidations. It is now widely accepted, but often expressed with some reluctance and caveats, even into the 2020s. This article demonstrates the usefulness of a history of interpretation in reminding interpreters to be cautious in the face of certain opinions that sometimes seem obvious and universal.

RÉSUMÉ

Alors que l'on croit souvent que l'hypothèse selon laquelle le terme Armageddon en Ap 16,16 signifierait « montagne de Megiddo » parcourt toute l'histoire de l'interprétation du livre de l'Apocalypse, cet article montre qu'elle ne se répand que dans les années 1580, après avoir été formulée au 12e siècle par Bruno de Segni sans avoir de postérité. Son succès s'explique amplement par le retour aux sources hébraïques initié par les Humanistes, mais témoigne aussi d'une inquiétude face à la prolifération des élucidations étymologiques. Si elle a été largement acceptée depuis, elle est en général exprimée avec certaines réticences et un certain nombre de caveats, y compris jusqu'aux années 2020. Cet article démontre ainsi l'utilité d'une histoire de l'interprétation qui permet de rappeler les interprètes à une grande prudence face à certaines opinions qui apparaissent parfois comme évidentes et universelles.

Καὶ συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἁρμαγεδών, Rev 16:16. Whether enthusiastically endorsed, accepted as a last resort or rejected in favour of a better interpretation, the hypothesis that the city where the seer of Revelation locates the final battle of the kings of the earth could be Megiddo is found in all the commentaries. However, it is mentioned as a truism in the notes of the main Bibles in circulation.[1] The consensus appears to be so strong that their publishers believe that this hypothesis can be disseminated to the general public without justification. When they do take the trouble to clarify why, they split the term into two Hebrew words, *har* mountain and *mageddon*, which is related to Megiddo. Armageddon simply means "the mountain of Megiddo." But where does this conjecture, which seems so reliable, come from? One thing is certain: it is not found in the first commentators of the book: the early Christian writers proposed several symbolic elucidations linked to etymology, but no geographical explanation. We need, therefore, to trace the long history of readings in order to answer the question. Why was Armageddon said to be Megiddo? Why was this opinion not expressed from the beginning of the history of the interpretation of the text? And finally, is this identification as widespread as is often thought?

A Reinvention from the Last Quarter of the 16th century, Shared by both Catholics and Protestants

Strangely enough, the conception that Armageddon could be Megiddo is only around 400 years old: at first glance it seems to originate in the 1580s, without it being possible to be more precise. It appears in books printed during that decade, on both the Catholic and Protestant sides. In view of the very close dates of publication of the texts in which the innovation is inserted, and the multiple editions, it is difficult to discern who invented it and who simply took care of its dissemination.

[1] See for example the notes on Rev 16:16 in *The New King James Version*, Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, 1982; *Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible*, Villiers-le-Bel, Bibli'O – Société Biblique Française / Les Éditions du Cerf, 2010; *Zürcher Bibel*, Zürich, Genossenschaft Verlag der Zürcher Bibel beim Theologischen Verlag Zürich, 2007; *La nouvelle français courant*, Paris, Société biblique française, 2019; *Die Bibel: Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift*, Stuttgart, Katholische Bibelanstalt, 2017; *La Sacra Bibbia, UELCI, Versione ufficiale della Cei*, Alba, San Paolo Edizioni, 1995. Sometimes the information is implied by the reference to Judg 5:19; 2 Kgs 23:29-30; Zech 12:11 as in *The New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011; *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*, La Habra, CA, The Lockman Foundation, 1995; *Biblia traducción interconfesional*, Madrid, Sociedad Bíblica de España, 2015.

As far as I know, the earliest testimony is a very peculiar text by Nicolas Colladon (1530-1586), the *enfant terrible* of Calvinism, who is famous, along with Theodore Beza (1519-1605), for having been the first biographer of Calvin, with whom both worked closely. He wrote in his *Methodus facilima ad explicationem sacrosanctae Apocalypsem Ioannis theologi ex ipso libro desumpta*, issued in 1581:

> Regarding the term Armageddon, many learned men have made conjectures which cannot be refuted because of the obscure meaning of the Hebrew words, written in Greek letters and not found elsewhere. And I have not yet been able to determine which of these I consider worthy of trust. Moreover, while I was submitting this part of our little book to the printer, I kept thinking about what this same word Armageddon was stirring up in me, and at last a conjecture came to my mind, which it pleased it (so to speak) to see exist. I have no doubt that it is the truest, but I leave it to each person to judge for themselves, as it is only fair. Since we find the proper name Mageddon in Scripture, I thought it possible that Armageddon here in Revelation is not a compound name of Arma and Gedon, but of Har and Mageddon: the mountain of Mageddon. Indeed, it seems to fit perfectly with the place where the enemies of God are gathered, whether they be kings or nobles, common citizens or plebeians, to be called Har Mageddon in the figurative sense: We read in Zechariah 12:11 that Magedon (often found elsewhere in the form of Mageddo) is a place of great mourning in the Old Testament narrative, so that in Zechariah it seems to be a proverbial way of speaking: *In that day there shall be a great lamentation in Jerusalem like the lamentation of Adadremmon in the plain of Mageddon*. In this way, the Apocalypse means that the mourning of all the enemies of the Almighty God will be terrible, because of the wrath of his conqueror.[2]

[2] *De voce Armageddon cum plures a doctis efferantur conjecturae, nec eae improbandae in significatione obscura dictionis Hebreae Graecis literis scriptae & quae non alibi reperitur: nondum tamen mihi constituere licuit, cuinam earum magis in haerendum existimem. Caeterum cum hanc quoque partem libelli nostri iam tradidissem operis typographicis, meditabundus tamen hanc ipsam vocem Armageddon apud me agitarem, venit tandem in mentem conjectura, quam affuere (ut ita dicam) libuit: neque dubito verissimam esse, iudicium tamen cuique suum liberum relinquo, ut par est. Mageddon cum reperiatur proprium nomen in scriptura, fieri posse existimaui, ut Armageddon hic in Apocalypsi non esset nomen compositu ex Arma & Gedon, sed ex Har & Mageddon, ut sit mons Mageddon. Bene autem quadrare videtur, locum in quem congregantur hostes Dei, siue reges, & nobiles viri, sive privati, & plebeii homines, dici hic figurate Har Mageddon, cum Magedon, quod legimus Zacharia 12. vers. 11 (qui & Mageddo alibi saepe) magno luctu insignis sit locus in veteris Testamenti historia, adeò ut proverbiali prope modum locutione dici illud videatur apud Zachariam*, In die illa magnus erit planctus in Ierusalem, sicut planctus Adadremmon in campo Mageddon. *Sic enim significat Apocalypsis, horrendum fore luctum adversariis omnibus Dei omnipotentis, ab eius victoris ira*. Nicolas COLLADON, *Methodus facilima ad explicationem sacrosanctæ Apocalypses Ioannis Theologi*, Morgiis [Morges], Le Preux, 1583, 40. This third edition is similar to that of 1581, unlike that of 1584, which was completely revised, see Irena BACKUS, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (OSHT), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, 67.

The exposition of the hypothesis is very interesting, as it is presented as a very personal conjecture, one that came to the writer's mind at the last minute, almost reluctantly, and which he ended up believing to be the most truthful. Colladon is very conscious of going against the whole tradition and clears his name, so to speak, by blaming a kind of inner voice. This presentation tends to suggest that he sees himself as the inventor of this new theory, which he leaves to his readers to judge.

A few years later, this hypothesis appeared in the notes of Theodore Beza's bilingual edition of the New Testament.

> Armageddon Ἀρμαγεδών. In Arethas [of Caesarea], written Ἐρμαγεδών. It cannot be said enough how corruptly most Hebrew words are written in Greek copies. And since many have worked on this term to explain it, it seems to me that this is the place referred to in 2 Chronicles 35:22 where Josiah was killed. Therefore, this term should be written in Hebrew הר מגדו [*harmeghiddo*] i.e., the mountain of Meghiddo. And this opinion does not contradict the fact that in this passage הר [*har*] was written for בקעה [*bikhah*] i.e., the valley or plain between mountains, for where there is a valley there must be mountains.[3]

It is likely that Beza was the real disseminator of the new theory. Colladon's volume was published in only a few editions, without very large print runs, which is obviously not the case for the famous edition by Calvin's successor in Geneva. Did he invent it, or did he find it in the book of Colladon, with whom he had collaborated in composing his Life of Calvin?[4] The fact remains that it appeared in his third edition, that of 1582, whereas it was not present in the second, of 1565, which attempted to explain the variant Ἐρμαγεδών found in Arethas (9th century).[5] Only the first two sentences of this long excursus survive, the rest having been replaced by a hypothesis which Beza evidently considered more certain, although he did note that Megiddo was not referred to as a plain. With the common sense of a Genevan surrounded by the Chablais massif, he brushed aside

[3] *Armageddon Ἀρμαγεδδών. Apud Aretham scribitur Ἐρμαγεδών. Dici enim non potest quam corrupte scripta sint Hebraea pleraque vocabula in Graecis exemplaribus. Quum autem multi in hac explicanda voce laborarint, mihi videtur omnino ille ipse locus esse cuius mentio fit 2. Paralipom. 35,22; ubi fuit caesus Iosias. Hebraice igitur fuerit vox haec scribenda הר מגדו [*harmeghiddo*] id est, mons Meghiddo, neque huic sententiae obstat quod illo loco pro הר [*har*] scribitur בקעה [*bikhah*] id est convallis, sive panities inter monta sita, quum ubi convallis est, etiam montes oporteat esse*. Theodorus Beza, *Testamentum Novum: sive novum fœdus Iesu Christi, D.N.*, vol. 2, Genevæ, Estienne, 1582, 476.

[4] The contours of this cooperation are very difficult to define, see Daniel Ménager, "Théodore de Bèze, biographe de Calvin", *BHR* 45 (1983) 231-255.

[5] Theodorus Beza, *Testamentum Novum: sive novum fœdus Iesu Christi, D.N.*, vol. 2, Genevæ, Estienne, 1565, 649.

the difficulty: where there are valleys, there are always mountains! It is interesting to note that the Reformer also presents it as a personal interpretation (*mihi videtur*).

A few years later, Francisco de Ribera (1537-1591), another great figure of the time, put forward the new theory. This brilliant scholar, who had become Rector of the University of Salamanca at the age of thirty (1567-1569), had joined the Jesuits in 1570. He is also known for a biography: that of Teresa of Avila, who chose him as her confessor and whose first Life he wrote in 1590. He was also the author of a commentary on the Apocalypse, which he worked on during the last years of his life and which was published in the year of his death.

> [The seer] described the name as "Hebrew" because it was a place of the Hebrews and was not known or named among others. Where it was, however, none of the commentators taught, nor did the author of the book on Hebrew names [Jerome], and we cannot know for certain, for the Scriptures never mention it. I suspect, however, that this place is near Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where the judgement will take place; if it was little known in the time of the apostles, it will be famous in the last days. The authors offer many interpretations of this name, but they do not seem to be entirely relevant. The most probable would be to say that ערמגדן comes from ערם, *haram*, which means to act cunningly, and from גדד *gadad*, to gather an army, so it seems that God gathered the army of these kings by cunning, so that one day they would perish, they and theirs. That is why Divine Providence seems to have named this place after what will happen there. Of course, as no one has been able to say where this place is, and as it is not found in Scripture, I strongly suspect that the name is corrupted (as happens here and there with foreign names) and that it should be read as Mageddon. Mageddo, or Mageddon, as we see in Zech 12, was a city near Jezreel, the ancient metropolis of the ten tribes, and lay at the foot of Mount Gelboe to the west. Mageddon was the site of a large camp where Josiah was killed in battle against the king of Egypt. The Second Paralipomena mentions this camp, ch. 35 and Zech. ch. 12. And I think this is exactly what John means, because it was the most suitable for the armies of kings, and because he speaks of it as a well-known place in Scripture. Tyconius indicates this by writing in his 13th homily: *In a place called Mageddon in Hebrew*. If it is established that we must read Armageddon, we will say that the same place is called a camp, because it was a large plain, and Armageddon, i.e., Mount Mageddon, because this plain was situated on a high place.[6]

[6] *Nomen Hebraicum posuit, quia Hebraorum locus erat, nec apud alios notus, aut nominatus. Ubi autem sit, nullus expositorum docuit, nec autor libri de nominibus Hebraicis, nec certo scire possumus, quia nusquam eius meminit Scriptura. Suspicor tamen locum esse prope Ierusalem, & vallem Iosaphat, ubi iudicium futurum est, temporeque Apostoli fuisse obscurum, extremo autem tempore futurum nobilem. Varias eius nominis interpretationes scriptores asserunt, sed quae ad rem pertinere non valde videantur. Verisimilius esset dici* ערמגדן *ab* ערם, haram *quod significat dolosè agere, &* גדד gadad,

Like Colladon and Beza, Ribera seems to present himself as the creator of a new interpretation, which he develops after a more traditional explanation. It was this innovation that Cornelius a Lapide credited him with, some thirty years later, in his famous commentary on the interpretations of the moderns and the ancients. Cornelius himself was rather unconvinced of the solution he attributed to Ribera.[7]

Did Ribera find this idea in Theodore Beza or did he invent it? Like Colladon and Beza, he presents the reading as a personal hypothesis, but unlike them, he relies on an authority: that of Tyconius, the late 4th-century Donatist whose memory was preserved by Augustine. At the time of Ribera, it had not yet been established that a large proportion of the earlier commentaries (those of Caesarius of Arles, Primasius of Hadrumetum and Bede the Venerable) depended on him; even the reconstruction of his commentary was still a long way off (an undertaking led by Roger Gryson in 2011).[8] Meanwhile, 18 homilies on the Apocalypse had been attributed to him by Zegerus (Nicholas Tacitus Zegers, ca. 1495-1559), a scholar from Louvain. As they had previously been ascribed to Augustine, the Louvain theologians republished them in their large edition of the complete works of the Bishop of Hippo of 1570, but with a note confirming their colleague's attribution. In Sermon 13 on Rev 16, they presented two readings of the text of the expositor: they printed the traditional Ermagedon in the main text, indicating another text, Magedon, in the margin.[9] This text is now

congregare exercitum, quod videatur Deus quasi dolosè congregasse exercitum illorum regum, ut vno die cum suis perirent. Itaque Divina providentia loco nomen inditum videtur ab eo, quod in illo futurum est. Verum, quoniam nemo ubi hic locus sit indicare potuit, nec in Scriptura invenitur, vehementer suspicor corruptum esse nomen (ut passim in nominibus peregrinis evenire solet) legendumque esse Mageddon. Mageddo enim, sive Mageddon, ut videmus Zach. 12 urbs fuit prope Iezrahelem metropolim olim decem tribuum, sitamque ad radices montis Gelboe versus Occidentem. Habuit autem Mageddon campum magnum aptissimum ad pugnandum, in quo contra regem Aegypti pugnans Iosias interfectus est. Huius campi meminit secundus Paralip. cap. 35 & Zach. cap. 12. Atque hunc omnino significari arbitror à Ioanne, & quia exercitibus regum aptissimus erat, & quia de illo, quasi de loco noto ex Scriptura loquitur. Quod ostendit Tyconius, qui Ho. 13 legit: In loco, qui vocatur Hebraice Mageddon. *Quod si constiterit legendum esse Harmageddon, dicemus eundem locum vocari campum, quia magna quaedam planities erat, & Harmageddon, id est, montem Mageddon, quoniam haec planities erat in excelso loco*. Francisco de Ribera, *In sacram Beati Joannis Apocalypsin commentarii*, Lugduni [Lyon], ex officina Juntarum, 1592, 320.

[7] Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Apocalypsin S. Iohannis*, Antverpiæ, sumptibus Martinum Nuntium, 1627, 255.

[8] Ticonius, *Tyconii Afri "Expositio Apocalypseos"* (CCSL, 107), Turnhout, Brepols, 2011.

[9] "Expositiones in Apocalypsin Beati Ioannis," in: *Expositiones in Apocalypsin Beati Ioannis*, vol. 9, Lugduni [Lyon], 1586, 352-366, 362.

recognised as a commentary on the Apocalypse by Caesarius of Arles, which was later transformed into a sermon. Roger Gryson's edition confirms that some manuscripts do indeed bear Magedon.[10] When Ribera was preparing his own commentary on the Apocalypse, was he so impressed by the spelling he found in these so-called "Homilies of Tyconius" that he thought he had solved the mystery of Armageddon?[11]

The answer to this question is linked to another conundrum. In 1589, a year before the publication of Ribera's work, Gaspar de Melo († 1599), an Augustinian professor in Valladolid, wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse.[12] The paragraph devoted to Rev 16:16 is identical to Ribera's, except for a few changes.[13] So who plagiarised whom?

To address this issue, more detailed research would be needed. But it is safe to say that it was the quartet of Colladon, Beza, Ribera and Melo who seem to have come up with the idea that Armageddon merely means "Mount of Megiddo." The solution is simple and straightforward. One might expect that everyone would have thought of it beforehand. And that is almost exactly the case: this invention is a reinvention. Someone had already suggested the

[10] Caesarius Arlatensis, *Expositio de Apocalypsi Sancti Iohannis* (CCSL, 105), Turnhout, Brepols, 2019, 196. The MSS Chartres, bibliothèque municipale 43 (destroyed in 1944) and München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek clm 3101 read *magedon*.

[11] It is curious that this attribution to Tyconius survived into the 19th century: it is found in Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (KEK, 16.2), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1865, 499.

[12] Manuel Vidal, *Augustinos de Salamanca: historia del observantissimo Convento de S. Augustin*, Salamanca, Eugenio Garcia de Honorato, 1751, 177.

[13] The attentive reader can see this for himself by comparing it with Ribera's text quoted above. *Suspicantur hi locum esse prope Hierusalem, & vallem Iosaphat, ubi iudicium futurum est, tempore Ioannis fuisse obscurum, tempore autem juidicii futurum nobilem. Varias huius nominis interpretationes ut viimus authores asserunt, sed quae ad rem pertinere non valde videntur. Verisimilius est dicere Armagedon a verbo Aram quod significat dolosè agere, & a verbo gadad, congregare exercitum, quod videatur Deus quasi dolosè congregare exercitum illorum regum, ut uno die cum suis pereant. Itaque Divina providentia loco nomen inditum ab eo, quod in illo futurum est. Verum, quoniam nemo ubi hic locus sit indicare potuit, neque in Sacra Scriptura inveniatur, vehementer suspicantur isti corruptum esse nomen ut passim in nominibus peregrinis evenire solet. Legendumque esse Mageddon. Mageddo enim, sive Mageddon, urbs fuit prope Iezrahelem metropolim olim decem tribuum, sitamque ad radices montis Gelboe versus Occidentem. Habuit autem Mageddon campum aptissimum ad pugnandum, in quo contra regem Aegypti pugnans Iosias interfectus est. Huius campi meminit secundus Paralipomenon cap. 35 & Zacharias cap. 12. Atque hunc omnino significari à Ioanne arbitrantur nonulli, qui de eo loquitur hic quasi de loco noto ex sacra scriptura. Quod ostendit Tychonius, qui Ho. 13 legit:* In loco, qui vocatur Hebraice Mageddon. *Quod si constiterit legendum esse Armageddon, dicemus eundem locum vocari campum, quia magna quaedam planicies, & vocari Armageddon, id est, montem Mageddon, quoniam haec planities erat in excelso loco*. Gasparo a Melo, *Commentaria in Apocalypsin divi Ioannis evangeliste*, Pintiæ [Valladolid], Heredes a Bernardini Sancto Dominico, 1589, 633.

idea, but no one had followed it up. Bruno of Segni (ca. 1045-1123), in his 12th-century commentary on the Apocalypse, explains:

> Magedon is in fact the place where, as we read in the Book of Kings and Paralipomena, Josiah, the most righteous king, was killed. And it is of this very place that the prophet Zechariah, speaking in the name of the Lord who is coming to judge, says, *and they shall look upon me, whom they have crucified*. And shortly afterwards: *In that day there shall be a great lamentation in Jerusalem like the lamentation of Remonon in the plain of Mageddon and the families of the earth shall mourn, families apart*. They will gather in the plain called in Hebrew Armageddon, that is, before the face of the Almighty God, who will look upon them, not to be tested, but to judge.[14]

Is he original too? While he seems to be the only one to develop the link between Armageddon and Megiddo, the scribes' hesitation over the spelling of the name shows their embarrassment when faced with a term they could not identify. And the fact that several manuscripts in Greek contain both Μαγεδών (about 80 minuscules) and Μαγεδδών,[15] or in Latin Magedon or Mageddon,[16] indicate that some had made the connection (especially with regard to orthographies with two d's or two δ's), but that the assumption had not crossed the barrier of received opinions worthy of inclusion in the comments.

As far as we know, the hypothesis was not taken up again, as can be seen from a search of the Latin databases or the ordinary gloss, and above all from the fact that the 16th-century authors seem to have treated this idea as a new one. In fact, the precious suggestion had been lost in the depths of the manuscripts preserved in libraries, and only reappeared with the first critical edition of Bruno's works in the 17th century, that of Mauro Marchese.[17] This leads to a second question: why did the commentators not adopt this hypothesis, which seems so obvious in retrospect?

[14] *Magedon namque locus est in quo (sicut in libro Regum et Paralipomenon legitur) Josias rex justissimus est interfectus (II Paral. XXXV, 22), de quo loco et Zacharias propheta in personam Domini ad judicium venientis loquitur, dicens:* Et aspicient ad me, quem crucifixerunt *(Zach. XII, 10). Et paulo post:* In die illa magnus erit planctus in Jerusalem, sicut planctus ad Remonon in campo Magedon, et plangent terrae familiae, et familiae seorsum *(Zach. XII, 11, 12). Congregabuntur ergo in campo, qui vocatur Hebraice Armagedon, id est ante faciem Dei omnipotentis, qui non quasi probaturus, sed quasi judicaturus eos aspiciet*. Bruno de Segni, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* v,16, PL 165,695.

[15] Bruce M Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London, United Bible Societies, 1994, 681.

[16] Roger Gryson and Ignace Baise (eds.), *Apocalypsis Johannis* (VL, 16.2), Freiburg in B., Herder, 2003, 577.

[17] Bruno Astensis, *S. Brunonis Astensis Signiensium Episcopi Opera*, Venetiis [Venezia], Apud Bertanos, 1651.

Why Was Armageddon Never Called Megiddo Before?

This fact is largely explained by the development of the exegetical discipline from the 6th century onwards. While the first centuries of Christianity saw a flourishing of methods, proposed readings and speculations, the rise of the monastic institution led to the creation of compendia of previous opinions. As Henning Graf Reventlow reminds us, from the time of Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville and Bede the Venerable, exegesis took on the task of transmitting the patristic heritage and putting it into a systematic form.[18] This is not to say that there was no innovation, but that it took place on the fringes, after the verdict of the great ancestors had been recalled.

What were the medieval exegetes supposed to say about this strange term Ἁρμαγεδών? It seems almost certain that the meaning the seer intended to give to this word was lost among the communities only a few years after it was written. In fact, there is no consensus on the matter. The first known commentary, that of Hippolytus of Rome († ca. 235) at the beginning of the 3rd century, suggested that the name Armageddon referred to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. An Arabic commentary preserved in the MS BnF arabe 67 of the 15th century states: "The place called Armageddon in Hebrew means the low place [the valley]; and as for its location, Hippolytus says that it is the Wadi Josaphat."[19] The hypothesis is easy to understand: Joel 4:12 (3:12 in some editions) predicted the judgment of the nations at that place. But just like Armageddon, nobody knows where it is (Even if the name is easier to understand, since it means "Yahweh will judge"). Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Onomasticon*, and then Jerome, in his revision of the same book, identified it with the Kidron Valley.[20] After them, the first pilgrims to Jerusalem labelled a part of the Kidron Valley as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but this was a late designation,[21] which, moreover, is not very satisfactory,

[18] Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation: From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2, Atlanta, GA, Society of Biblical Literature, 2009, 3-136.

[19] يوشافاط وادي أنه أنقوليطس ذكره فقد تعيينه اما و الوطي لموضع اللفظ هذا وقوة ارماكاذون العبرانية باللغة المدعو الموضع Ms BnF arabe 67, fol. 238r. Paul de Lagarde, *Analecta syriaca*, Lipsiæ [Leipzig], Teubner, 1858, 27. See also Hans Achelis, *Hippolytus Werke* (GCS, 1,2), vol. 2, Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs, 1897, 236.

[20] Joan E. Taylor (ed.), *The Onomasticon by Eusebius of Caesarea: Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.*, transl. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville; indexed by Rupert L. Chapman III, Jerusalem, Carta, 2003, 67; James L. Crenshaw, *Joel* (AB, 24C), New York, Doubleday, 1995, 174-175.

[21] Ora Limor, "Placing an Idea: The Valley of Jehoshaphat in Religious Imagination," in: Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt (eds.), *Between Jerusalem and Europe. Essays in Honour of Bianca Kühnel* (Visualising the Middle Ages, 11), Leiden, Brill, 2015, 280-300.

since the Hebrew word used (*'emeq*) designates a plain wide enough to gather a great multitude of people, and not a narrow *wadi* like the Kidron.[22] After Hippolytus, Tyconius Afer (ca. 390) and his epigone Primasius of Hadrumetum († ca. 560) offer no explanation. Others venture hypotheses based not on geography but on etymology. East and West were divided. For Andrew of Caesarea († 614) and his successor Oecumenius (7th century?), Ἁρμαγεδών is a place of slaughter whose name means a cut (διακοπή) or something sliced (διακοπτομένη).[23] The origin of this etymology is probably to be found in the translation of Zech 12:11 in the LXX, which renders מגדון as ἐν πεδίῳ ἐκκοπτομένου (in the cut plain), presumably considering that מגדון comes from גדד, "to cut."[24]

For the Latins, however, the meaning is much more complex. As is often the case with Hebrew names, the source of interpretation is Jerome's *Liber Interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, which offers four explanations: *Armageddon consurrectio tecti siue consurrectio in priora. sed melius mons a latrunculis uel mons globosus*,[25] "Armageddon means the raising of the roof, or the raising at first, but better the mount of the robbers or the spherical mount." As always, the origin of these deductions is highly conjectural. The first part is a quotation from an etymology ascribed to Origen, Ἁρμαγεδὼν ἐξέγερσις τοῦ δώματος ἢ ἐξέγερσις εἰς τὰ ἔμπροσθεν.[26] It relies on homophonies: γεδ is read γεγ or גד is read גג; מגידו is

[22] John BARTON, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary* (OTL), Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 99.

[23] "Armageddon is interpreted as 'deep cut' or 'that which is cut in two.' For there, the nations, being gathered together, being minded to follow, and being commanded by the devil, who delights in the blood of people, are to be cut down." Andrea Caesarensis, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* 17,51 transl. ANDREW OF CAESAREA, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (FaCh, 123), transl. Eugenia Scarvelis CONSTANTINOU, Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2012, 176-177. "This is to be translated as 'a cleft' or 'a cleaving.' So, then, as a result of the forthcoming slaughter and butchery of those assembled in it, he named the place of war Megiddo." Œcumenius Triccensis, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* 9,9 transl. OIKOUMENIOS, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (FaCh, 112), transl. John SUGGIT, Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2006, 142-143. It should be noted that this translation is based on Hoskier's edition, which chooses to retain the Megiddo lesson, although he notes the existence of several manuscripts bearing ἁρμαγεδών: ŒCUMENIUS, *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1928, 179. The fact that Oecumenius attempted an etymological investigation shows precisely that he did not have this solution at his disposal.

[24] David E. AUNE, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC, 52B), Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, 1998, 899.

[25] Hieronymus, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, ed. P. DE LAGARDE (CCSL, 72, 1959), 159.

[26] Found in Codex Coislin 224 (BnF): Konstantin VON TISCHENDORF, *Anecdota sacra et profana ex Oriente et Occidente allata*, Lipsiæ, Graul, 1855, 127.

read as מקדם, marking a starting point.[27] The *mons a latrunculis* (mount of brigands) could be explained by the same list attributed to Origen, who interprets the triliteral גוד as πειρατεύειν (to be a pirate, a brigand, presumably from גְּדוּד). Finally, the word *globosus* comes from the etymology of Gad itself: גַּד means "coriander" and can evoke a small ball.[28] These elucidations are repeated religiously, especially in Bede's influential commentary.[29] In 784, the highly original exposition of Ambrose Autpert (often confused with Ambrose of Milan) attempted an explanation that would be accepted by all: just as Christ is called "Mount of the Lord" in a quotation from Mic 4:1 read typologically, so the Antichrist is called "Mount." He is called a "mountain of robbers" because his servants are perverse men (*a ministris eiusdem peruersi hominis*), and he is called a "globular mountain" because *diabolus in antichristo, innumeris christianae fidei insidiantibus bestiis constipatus, densatus atque conglobatus*, "the devil, present in the Antichrist, is stuffed, packed, saturated with innumerable beasts that lay a snare for the Christian faith."[30] This interpretation became the norm. It was repeated by Haymo of Halberstadt († 853), Anselm of Laon († 1117), Rupert of Deutz († 1129), Gerhoh of Reichersberg († 1169), the pseudo-Hugh of Saint-Cher (13th century), Richard of Saint-Victor († 1173), and eventually became part of the ordinary gloss.[31] Even Bruno of Segni felt obliged to repeat it before proposing his new theory.[32]

Why Did this Hypothesis Emerge in the 16th Century?

The early 15th century opened a new chapter in the possibilities of innovative reading. Thanks to Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) and then Lefèvre d'Étaples (1455-1536), the return to the original Greek marked a hiatus

[27] Franz Xaver Wutz, *Onomastica sacra: Untersuchungen zum "Liber interpretationis nominum hebraicorum" des hl. Hieronymus* (TU, 41.1), vol. 1, Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs, 1914, 395.

[28] *Onomastica*, 395.

[29] Voir Beda, *Explanatio Apocalypsis* 3,16, PL 93,181.

[30] Ambrosius Autpertus, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* vii,16,16, ed. R. Weber (CCCM, 27A, 1975).

[31] Haymo Halberstatensis, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 14,16, PL 117,1135; Anselmus Laudunensis, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsin* 16, PL 162,1158; Rupertus Tuitiensis, *Commentarium in Apocalypsim Iohannis apostoli* 9,16, PL 169,1126; Gerhohus Reichersbergensis, *Commentarius aureus in Psalmos et cantica ferialia continuatio* 149, PL 194,100; Richardus Sancti Victoris, *In Apocalypsim Ioannis*, 5,8, PL 196,829; Pseudo Hugo de Sancto Caro, *Super Apocalypsim expositio I ("Vidit Iacob")* xvi, *in* Thomas de Aquino, ed. Parmensis, t. XXIII, 1869, 459. Walafrid Strabon, *Biblia sacra, cum glossa ordinaria*, vol. 6, Duaci [Douai], 1617, 1630.

[32] Bruno Astensis, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* 5,16, PL 165,695.

with the old scholastic interpretations, while Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459) and Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) revived the expertise in Hebrew.[33] The new knowledge broke with the seemingly sacrosanct interpretation. But the revolution is not as complete as one might think.

The example of Armageddon shows that the etymological approach used until then was not discarded: other interpretations were proposed without abandoning the method. As early as the beginning of the 16th century, the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, in its supplementary volume, suggested reading, "a fruit [*pomus*], i.e., a chosen fruit."[34] The idea probably comes from the word מֶגֶד, the fruit, the precious gift. It was adopted by one of the very first reformers, François Lambert († 1530), who suggested that the end of the word should be read as the Hebrew *geded*, "*fructus seu poma*," a fruit in general (*fructus*) or, more specifically, a seeded fruit (*pomum*).[35] A few years later, Antoine du Pinet († 1584) added: "Armageddon, interpreted as the Mount of the Gospel, or the Mount of Fruitful Apples."[36] The hypothesis was not limited to the Protestant world: the Carmelite Claude de Montmartre repeated Lambert's formula literally.[37] Drusius (Jan van den Driessche, 1550-1616) proposed a different, ingenious etymology, which had a great legacy since it was confirmed by Ribera and Cornelius a Lapide. Armageddon should be read as חָרְמָה, "destruction," and גדון, "their army." It is therefore a place of devastation that is also the subject of a pun, since חרמה is the paronym of חָרַם, "forbidden."[38] Drusius may have been inspired by Aretius (1505-1574), who had already said: "I am pleased to say that the name comes from *chaitz* [probably חָרַם], which means anathema and curse, and *gedud* [probably גְּדוּד], which means the crowd, as if to say the accursed army."[39] Earlier, Sebastian Meyer (1465-1545),

[33] Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation* (RBSt, 62), vol. 3, Atlanta, GA, Society of Biblical Literature, 2010, 5-46.

[34] *Pomum id est fructus electus. Vocabularium hebraicum atque chaldaicum totius veteris testamenti*, vol. 6, In Academia complutensi [Alcalà de Henares], Industria Arnaldi Guilielmi de Brocario, 1515.

[35] Franz Lambert, *Exegeseos in sanctam diui Ioannis Apocalypsim, libri vii*, In Academia Marpugensis [Marburg], Rhode, 1526, 258.

[36] *Armageddon qui est interprété mont de l'Évangile, ou mont de pommes fructifiantes.* Antoine du Pinet, *Exposition sur l'Apocalypse de Sainct Jehan l'Apostre*, Genève, Jehan Girard, 1545, 317.

[37] Claude de Montmartre, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsin*, Parisiis [Paris], apud Ioannem Maceum, 1549, 186v.

[38] Johannes Drusius, *Annotationum in totum Jesu Christi Testamentum, sive præteritorum libri X*, Franekeræ [Franeker], sumptibus J. Johannis, 1612, 434-435; *In Apocalypsin*, 320; *In Apocalypsin*, 266.

[39] *mihi placet dici nomen a chaitz, quod est anathema & maledictio, & gedud quod sonat turmam, quali dicat, maledictum exercitum.* Benedictus Aretius, *Commentarii in Apocalypsin D. Joannis apostoli*, Morgiis [Morges], Jean Le Preux, 1581, 370.

probably identifying הֶרֶס in Armageddon, suggests *exercitus vastationis sive interfectionis*,[40] "the army of destruction or slaughter." This hypothesis was taken up by Artopoeus († 1553), Strigel († 1569), Chyträus (1530-1600) and Osiander (1498-1552).[41]

The proliferation of hypotheses, while stimulating the sagacity of scholars, has the paradoxical effect of making interpreters anxious about the best solution. In contrast to the old, worn-out and reassuring explanations, it makes them feel insecure. This feeling is expressed by all the commentators, from Colladon, who speaks of the learned men and their conjectures (*cum plures a doctis efferantur conjecturae*), to Ribera and Melo, who voice their dismay, with Melo being a little more dramatic: *Varias huius nominis interpretationes ut viimus authores asserunt*. The Har-Magedon hypothesis, in its simplicity, resolves the cognitive discord and allows the reader to cling to what is known.

Is the Hypothesis Finally Accepted by All?

Although the hypothesis has the weight of a lack of sophistication, it runs into a number of difficulties, which were highlighted in a famous article by Charles Torrey, but which can already be found in commentaries from the 16th century onwards.[42] Firstly, there are no mountains in Megiddo, it is a plain, and if Theodore Beza's pleasant answer – where there are valleys, there are mountains – could hold up for a while, it would not survive a visit there. Megiddo is not a valley, it is a plain. Secondly, no prophetic announcement of a great eschatological fight mentions Megiddo: Zech 12 and 14; Joel 4; Isa 29 and even 4 Esd 13 obviously locate the great final battle in Jerusalem, in Judea, and certainly not in Galilee. On balance, the ancient identification with the Valley of Jehoshaphat remains the most serious candidate. Thirdly, the expression καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστί suggests that the place has several appellations and that Armageddon is its Hebrew name. But Megiddo has only one name, and it is already a Hebrew one.

[40] Sebastian Meyer, *In Apocalypsim Iohannis Apostoli*, Tiguri [Zürich], Froschoviana [Froschen], 1539, 69v.

[41] Petrus Artopoeus, *Apocalypsis Iohannis, breviter iuxta eius effectum explicata*, Basileae, [Heinrich Petri und Peter Perna], 1563, 176; Victorinus Strigel, *Hypomnēmata in omnes epistolas Pauli et aliorum apostolorum et in Apocalypsin*, [Leipzig], Voegelin, 1565, 587; David Chyträus, *Explicatio Apocalypsis Iohannis Perspicva Et Brevis*, Vitebergae [Wittenberg], Ioannes Crato [Krafft], 1571, 330; Lucas Osiander, *Epistola ad Hebraeos Iacobi, Prima et Secunda Petri, Prima, Secunda, & tertia Ioannis, Iude & Apocalypsis Ioannis*, Tubingæ [Tübingen], Gruppenbachius, 1584, 440.

[42] Charles C. Torrey, "Armageddon", *HTR* 31 (1938) 237-248.

Either way, a Hebrew meaning has to be found for the bizarre Greek word. This rationale, presented in a modern way in Torrey's article, will be taken up again by all those who doubt the Megiddo solution. The first versions can be found in the encyclopaedic commentaries of Alcázar, Vitringa and Cornelius a Lapide, who start from the Megiddo hypothesis, contest it, list all the other possible solutions and then focus on another option.[43] For Luis del Alcázar (1554-1613), it is the ancient mountain of the robbers of Jerome; for Campegius Vitringa (1693-1723), it is a synthesis between Megiddo and the mountain of the massacre; for Cornelius (1567-1637) the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for Torrey (1863-1956) and Jeremias (1900-1979), the Mountain of the Assembly (מוֹעֵד, the Greek *gamma* in *magedôn* could be a transliteration, not of the Hebrew *gimel* but of *ʿayin*).[44] Bousset (1865-1920) is certainly the most original: after carrying out the exercise, he proposes a comparison with the god he identifies as the husband of the Babylonian goddess of the underworld, Ereshkigal, called Yesemigadon, known from PGM IV, 296-433 (= P. Mich 757); he suggests that the name Armageddon comes from an ancient Babylonian tradition.[45] He refers to an article by Jensen (probably the historian Peter Jensen 1861-1936) in the *Rheinisches Museum* which is said to have made this connection; however, although Yesemigadon is mentioned in this article, its author is Kuhnert (1862-1952) and he does not comment on the link with Armageddon.[46] The difficulty is that the papyrus is late, that "υεσεμμειγαδων" (with a

[43] Luis ALCÁZAR, *Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi*, apud Heredes Martini Nutii, 1619, 736-737; *In Apocalypsin*, 256; Campegius VITRINGA, *Anakrisis Apocalypsios Joannis Apostoli*, Franekeræ [Franeker], Halmann, 1705, 981-984.

[44] Joachim JEREMIAS, "Har Magedon (Apc 16 $_{10}$)", *ZNW* 31 (1932) 73-77. The suggestion had already been made by the Orientalist Fritz Hommel (1854-1936) in a cursory footnote of an article: Fritz HOMMEL, "Inschriftliche Glossen und Exkurse zur Genesis und zu den Propheten", *NKZ* 1 (1890) 393-412, 406-407.

[45] Wilhelm BOUSSET, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (KEK, 16.6), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906, 399.

[46] Ernst KUHNERT, "Feuerzauber", *RMP* 49 (1894) 37-58. Bousset indicates p. 49 of the article, which is in the fact the place where Kuhnert cites this name of υεσεμμειγαδων. The error stems from a comment by Heinrich Zimmern in a note to Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos*, which attributes the conjecture to Jensen and refers to Kuhnert's article in an ambiguous sentence: Hermann GUNKEL, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12, mit Beiträgen von Heinrich Zimmern*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895, 389. Is Zimmern the author of this comparison? The idea is taken up by Cheyne in his *Encyclopedia Biblica* article, which supports this view, before distancing himself from it a year later: Thomas Kelly CHEYNE, "Armageddon," in: Thomas Kelly CHEYNE and John Sutherland BLACK (eds.), *Encyclopedia Biblica*, London, A & C Black, 1899, 310-311; Thomas Kelly CHEYNE, "Archaeology and Biblical Criticism", *OLZ* 3 (1900) 150-152.

lunate sigma) is a term about which nothing is known, and that it probably does not refer to Ereshkigal's husband, but could in fact refer to Jesus.[47]

Looking at the history of exegesis, we are surprised at how long it took for the Megiddo hypothesis to gain acceptance, splitting commentators into two camps that have little to do with denominational divisions, since Catholics and Protestants can be found in both camps.

On the side of the supporters of this interpretation, we always find the same argument, of which David Pareus (1548-1622) offers a kind of remarkably concise summary:

> Neither doth it hinder that the field Megiddo was tragicall, not unto the adversaries, but to good Josias: for it may be answered, that two things are here aimed at: The opportunity of the place, as being most fit for battle: and the mourning which there was of old for the death of Josias: the which at last shalbe here, in regard of the destruction of the adversaries.[48]

The Megiddo hypothesis not only anchors the eschatological combat on an already known battlefield, but also provides an intertextuality of suffering and mourning appropriate to the final battle. The same argument can be found in many commentaries, with some nuances, mostly in Du Jon, aka Junius (1545-1602), whose annotations were popularised by the Geneva Bible, but also Libert Froidmond (1587-1653) or Piscator (1546-1625).[49]

Following in Alcázar's footsteps, we are surprised to find that, more than 400 years after Beza and Ribera, the hypothesis has not fully taken hold. Not only have the proponents of the Valley of Jehoshaphat hypothesis not disappeared, from Menochio (1575-1655), to De Wette (1780-1849) in the 19th century, and even Easley and Tonstad more recently.[50] With a hint of concordism, Keener bluntly said that the Valley of Jehoshaphat is "probably" the plain of Megiddo.[51] But also ancient suggestions were

[47] David G. Martinez, *P. Michigan XVI: A Greek Love Charm from Egypt (P. Mich. 757)* (MichPapy, 16), Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press, 1991, 39-40.

[48] David Pareus, *A Commentary upon the Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John*, transl. Elias Arnold, Amsterdam, CP, 1644, 397.

[49] François Du Jon, *Apocalypse ou Revelation de S. Iean, apostre et evangeliste de nostre seigneur Iesus Christ*, [Genf], par P. de Sainct André, 1592, 349; *The New Testament of our Lord Iesus Christ, Translated out of Greeke by Theod. Beza*, transl. Lawrence Tomson, London, Barker, 1599, 118; Johannes Piscator, *Johan. Piscatoris Commentarii In Omnes Libros Novi Testamenti*, Herbornae Nassoviorum [Herborn], 1613, 1556; Libert Froidmont, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin S. Ioannis Apostoli*, Lovanii [Louvain], Nempaeus, 1657, 251.

[50] Wilhelm Martin Leberecht De Wette, *Offenbarung Johannis* (KEH, 3.2), Leipzig, Hirzel, 1862, 183-184; Kendell H. Easley, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding the Bible*, Nashville, TN, Holman Bible Publishers, 2002, 297; Sigve Tonstad, *Revelation* (Paideia), Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2019, 229-232.

[51] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity, 2014, 762.

revived by Caird (1917-1984), who speaks of the marauding mountain, Charles (1851-1933) of the fruitful mountain, Beckwith (1843-1946) of the mountains of Israel, LaRondelle (1929-2011) of the mountain of slaughter, Jauhiainen of the cutting down of the mountain, Johnson (1933-2018) of the assembly of the troops, an etymology Berger (1940-2020) recalls with approval.[52] And on the other hand, even those who finally agree with Megiddo are not entirely convinced, with a few exceptions, including Zahn (1838-1933), who writes an encyclopaedic note on Megiddo to justify its inclusion in this passage.[53] We often find a form of resignation that Torrey describes with great humour: "The textbooks of the present day, after accepting 'Megiddo' with hesitation, proceed to express their dissatisfaction and to record various more or less improbable conjectures."[54] This was the case for Hengstenberg (1802-1869), Düsterdieck (1822-1906), Swete (1835-1917), Lohmeyer (1890-1946, who eventually said it was Mount Carmel, a claim revived by W. Shea), R. T. France (1938-2012), L. Morris (1914-2006), Robert H. Mounce (1921-2019), R. L. Thomas, and more recently Satake and Craig Koester.[55] Pierre Prigent is certainly the most honest, saying: "Like Swete, I find this connection more enlightening than any of the others, and end appropriately by confessing my awareness of not having solved the mystery of Armageddon!"[56]

[52] Robert Henry Charles, *Revelation of S. John 15-22* (ICC), vol. 2, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1920, 50; Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, New York, Macmillan, 1922, 108; G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (HNTC), New York, Harper & Row, 1966, 206-207; Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Biblical Concept of Armageddon", *JETS* 28 (1985) 21-31; Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation", in: Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (eds.), *Revelation*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1994, 1125-1232, 1202; Marko Jauhiainen, "The OT Background To Armageddon (Rev. 16:16 Revisited)", *NovT* 47 (2005) 381-393; Akira Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (KEK, 16), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, 238-239; Klaus Berger, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes: Kommentar*, vol. I, Freiburg, Herder, 2017, 1167; Klaus Berger, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2020, 1032.

[53] Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (KNT, 18.2), vol. 2, Leipzig – Erlangen, Deichert, 1926, 543-547.

[54] 239.

[55] E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, New York, Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853, 217–220, 499-501; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text*, London, Macmillan, 1909, 206-207; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT, 16), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1926, 133-134; William Shea, "The Location and Significance of Armageddon in Rev 16:16", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980) 157-162; Leon Morris, *Revelation* (TNTC), Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 1987, 191; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 an Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 2, Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1995, 268-271; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation* (AYB, 38A), New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2014, 660-661.

[56] *Comme Swete, je trouve ce rapprochement plus éclairant que tous les autres, et termine comme il se doit en confessant avoir conscience de n'avoir pas élucidé le mystère*

Should we conclude from this that Rev 16:16 is a *crux interpretum* and that nothing new is happening under the sun of exegesis? A close analysis of recent commentaries shows that this is not the case. Since the beginning of the 21st century, two phenomena have been at work.

While the end of the 20th century had led to the assumption that the Megiddo hypothesis would eventually triumph, as evidenced by the aforementioned notes in the Bibles and a large body of commentaries defending the location in the Jezreel Valley, such as those of Behm (1883-1948), Bonsirven (1880-1958), Martindale (1879-1963), Cerfaux (1883-1968), Ladd (1911-1982), Krodel, Lohse (1924-2015), Hughes (1915-1990), Harrington, Thompson, Lupieri, Roloff (1930-2004), Aune and Beale (these last two suggest that the name should be understood as a transliteration of the Hebrew for "city," which is עִיר, a suggestion already made by Bengel).[57] At the beginning of the 21st century, a certain form of retreat is emerging. On the one hand, there is an undeniable caution in the way the Megiddo thesis is articulated. This caution can undoubtedly be explained by the political and religious context of the late 20th century. While fundamentalist ideas – in the literal sense of the word – were on the rise, thanks to the meteoric success of books such as Hal Lindsey's,[58] the denunciation of these ideas was also on the rise, notably through the criticism of the collusion between certain circles espousing these ideas and successive American administrations.[59] These links, real or supposed, undoubtedly struck the

d'Armaguedon ! Pierre PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean* (CNT, 14), Geneva, Labor et Fides, 2014, 367.

[57] Johann Albrecht BENGEL, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, Tubingæ [Tübingen], Schramm, 1759, 1311; Johannes BEHM, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11.2), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1935, 376; Joseph BONSIRVEN, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean* (VS, 16), Paris, Beauchesne, 1951, 257; Bernard ORCHARD and Reginald C. FULLER (eds.), *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, London/New York, Nelson, 1953, 1205; Lucien CERFAUX and Jules CAMBIER, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean, lue aux chrétiens* (LeDiv, 17), Paris, Cerf, 1964, 143; George Eldon LADD, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1972, 216; Eduard LOHSE, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983, 92; Gerhard KRODEL, *Revelation* (ACNT), Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1989, 286-287; Philip Edgcumbe HUGHES, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary*, Leicester, Inter-Varsity, 1990, 178; Jürgen ROLOFF, *A Continental Commentary: The Revelation of John*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 1993, 191; Wilfrid J. HARRINGTON, *Revelation* (SaPaSe, 16), Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1993, 167; Leonard L. THOMPSON, *Revelation* (ANTC), Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 1998, 156; G. K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1999, 838-841; Edmondo LUPIERI, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni* (Scrittori greci e latini), Milano, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla – Mondadori, 1999, 244-245.

[58] Hal LINDSEY and Carole C. CARLSON, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1971.

[59] Gore VIDAL, "Armageddon?," in: *Armageddon? Essays 1983-1987*, London, Grafton Books, 1987, 101-114; Timothy P. WEBER, *On the Road to Armageddon: How*

exegetes and led them to be cautious. From then on, it was no longer possible to discuss the geographical aspect of Armageddon without a kind of "disclaimer," insisting on the symbolic and/or hypothetical nature of this localisation. Ian Boxall is particularly representative in this respect, clearly stating the dangers of geographical location before agreeing to the Megiddo hypothesis. He is joined by Mounce (1921-2019), Osborne (1942-2018), Yeatts, Smalley, Blount, Yong, Leithart.[60] It is noticeable that these caveats come a little later than the more pastoral commentaries: Joseph Exell (1849-1910) had already seen the danger of literalism in his exposition of the verse in *The Biblical Illustrator series* and reacts with passion.[61]

Another movement also emerged; this time driven by a greater awareness of the literary strategy of the text of the Apocalypse. Noting the literary productivity of this signifier with no obvious sense, many writers claimed that it was a kind of "code name" with a long-lost meaning, whose significance lay not in what it specifically designated, but in its evocative power.[62] Jean Delorme (1920-2005) sums it up clearly: "This name, given in Hebrew, seems to function as a wink to the reader, who is supposed to know how to decipher it."[63] But even if a code once existed, it has been lost, as Holtz (1931-2007) thinks.[64] As Beasley-Murray (1916-2000) puts it, we are not talking about a place here, but an event.[65] Allo (1873-1945)

Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2004; Daniel G. Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. See also Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Studies in Cultural History), Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992, 124.

[60] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1998, 301-302; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT), Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2002, 594-595; John R. Yeatts, *Revelation* (Believers Church Bible Commentary), Scottdale, PA, Herald Press, 2003, 298; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John. A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, London, SPCK, 2005, 412; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, London, Continuum, 2006, 232-234; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (NTL), Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, 306; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12-22* (ITC), London, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018, 156-157; Amos Yong, *Revelation* (Belief), Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2021, 195.

[61] Joseph S. Exell, *Revelation* (BI, 66), London, Nisbet, 1909, 523-525.

[62] 301-302; 898-899; John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2016, 288.

[63] *Ce nom, donné en hébreu, semble fonctionner comme un clin d'œil au lecteur censé savoir le décrypter*. Jean Delorme and Isabelle Donegani, *L'Apocalypse de Jean. Révélation pour le temps de la violence et du désir* (LeDiv, 236), vol. 2, Paris, Cerf, 2010, 69.

[64] Traugott Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, 112.

[65] George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCBC), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1978, 245.

speaks of an allegorical spot whose very name is a prophecy of disaster.[66] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains: "The multivalence of the author's mythological-symbolic language cannot be reduced to a single one-dimensional definition! Such multivalence expresses the author's interest in giving prophetic interpretation rather than geographic-eschatological information." Witherington concludes: "While John's interest may not be geography, it is certainly history and how history will turn out."[67] Joseph Mangina makes himself clearer: "The attempt to locate Armageddon with precision is a fruitless enterprise. […] 'Har-mageddon' could loosely but creatively be translated as 'Mount Doom,' with a nod to J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*."[68] In truth, this was in line with earlier interpretations, also sensitive to the literary nature of the text, such as that of Brás Viegas (1553-1599): "Therefore, it seems much more appropriate to openly admit our ignorance and say that this place is unknown to us; it is because of this mystery that it is called Armageddon in Hebrew."[69] The same interpretation is found a century later by the Catholic Bossuet (1627-1704), who, unlike "some Protestants," refuses to make any assumptions about this place.[70] Beausobre (1659-1738), finally, blithely asserts, "We must remember that all this is mystical and that literary applications are obscure and uncertain."[71]

A history of the readings of Revelation 16:16 leads us to be cautious about the commonly accepted interpretation that Armageddon should be read as Har-Mageddon, meaning "the mountain of Megiddo." In fact, this view dates back only to the 1580s (despite the precedent set by Bruno of Segni), and while it testifies to a return to Hebrew sources, it also expresses an undeniable uneasiness at the proliferation of etymological hypotheses that seem to have no possible conclusion. Although it has now become

[66] Ernest-Bernard Allo, *L'Apocalypse* (EBib), Paris, J. Gabalda, 1921, 240.

[67] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation*, Garden City, NY, Image Books, 1981, 94; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (NCBC), Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 211.

[68] Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible), Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press, 2010, 189.

[69] *Quare convenientius videtur, ut inscitiam nostra profiteamur, dicamusque, hunc locum esse nobis incognitum; proptem mysterium autem appellari hebraice Armagedon.* Brás Viegas, *Commentarii exegetici in Apocalypsin Johannis*, Turnoni [Tournon-sur-Rhône], sumptibus H. Cardon, 1614, 820.

[70] Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *L'Apocalypse, avec explication par messire Jacques Bénigne Bossuet*, Paris, Vve de S. Marbre-Cramoisy, 1689, 348-349.

[71] *Il faut se souvenir que tout ceci est mystique et que les applications littéraires sont obscures et incertaines.* Isaac de Beausobre and Jacques Lenfant, *Le Nouveau Testament de Notre Seigneur Jesus-Christ*, vol. 2, Amsterdam, Pierre Humbert, 1718, 681.

quite widespread, it is often presented as unsatisfactory by a large number of commentators. Is it not a rather simple solution, convincing more by its transparency than by its scientific weight? The old conjecture that the final battle took place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (according to the Book of Joel) and before the walls of Jerusalem probably still deserves serious consideration.