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Armageddon: A History of the Location of the End of Time

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Abstract: Rev 16:16 is a textbook case for any reception history analysis. Indeed, its reception has several successive tipping points, as in any reception history. In Revelation, as the text makes clear, it is a Hebrew literary name whose interpretation was not easy: from Tyconius to the most contemporary commentators, Armageddon is understood as a code name whose key remains lost. It was not until the 16th century that the name of a mountain was recognised, har Mageddo, the mountain of Magedon, linked to the fortress of Megiddo in the Jezreel plain. From Joachim of Flora onwards, the location of the eschatological battle is sought geographically. This change of lexical category marks a major interpretive revolution, for if one can locate the place on a map, then the war that takes place there becomes concrete. By virtue of geography, what belonged to myth—and thus to non-time—becomes tangible and is inscribed in a future temporality. From Alexander the Minorite to Hal Lindsey, the battle of Armageddon becomes a mirror of the geopolitics of the Latin and Anglo-American world. This ubiquity of the term over the last forty years has had a paradoxical effect: its withdrawal from geographical considerations. Thanks to the mechanism of antonomasia, the toponym tends to cover, by synecdoche, all the events of the end of time. It thus becomes the proper name of the end of time.

Keywords: Armageddon; Harmagedon; Revelation 16:16; final battle; Megiddo; end-of-the-world scenario

On October 18, 2021, as the world prepared for one of the successive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the emergence of a new variant, the New York Times interviewed an epidemiologist who stated, “This is not an Armageddon scenario.”[1]

1 Apoorva Mandavilli, “Two studies suggest that newer variants of the coronavirus are better at traveling through the air,” *The New York Times* Oct. 18th, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/02/world/covid-delta-variant-vaccine (accessed Aug. 15th, 2023).

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How bizarre is the fate of the small fortress of Meggido, still being the talk of the planet 2500 years after its abandonment? From the New York Times epidemiologist to the TV series, from Donald Trump to Rudyard Kipling, everyone has its name on their lips to evoke realities that are far removed from the few stones overhanging the Jezreel Valley. By what routes did a rather obscure and solitary spot become a time, or more exactly a scenario, that of the end of the world? Switching successively from a mythical place to a specific location, then from a site to a time, Megiddo and its literary figure Armageddon constitute a fascinating case study for a history of the reception of the biblical text from theology to popular culture.

1 Variations From Space I: From a Literary Place to a Historical Site and Vice Versa

It all starts with the location mentioned in Rev 16:16: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." After the Seven Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Rev 1–3), Revelation narrates two great visions, one in heaven (Rev 4–11), the other on earth (Rev 12–22). After the dragon chases the woman and her offspring from heaven (Rev 12), the seer describes the sevenfold outpouring of vials on the earth, which represent divine wrath. One of its aspects is the emergence of an alliance of armed forces under the leadership of the kings of the earth that congregates at Armageddon. This gathering will pit the troops of good and evil against each other. At the end of the battle, God will triumph. So, the story tells us that Armageddon is (1) an earthly location of coalition (2) for a battle (3) whose outcome will be in favor of God's people.

Let us take up the first point: Armageddon as a gathering spot for the fight.[2] The seer explains that the appellation of the place comes from the Hebrew. However, the word does not appear anywhere else! Despite some resistance, the scholarly consensus is that it is not a place name in the strict sense but a construction that, when translated, reads, "mountain of Megiddo."[3] The presence of minority

2 A complete survey is provided by Jean-Claude Haelewyck, "Megiddo dans la Bible. Mille ans d'histoire, de Josué à l'Apocalypse," In *De la Nubie à Qadech, From Nubia to Kadesh. La guerre dans l'Égypte ancienne, War in Ancient Egypt,* ed. Christina Karlshausen and Claude Obsomer, Connaissance de l'Égypte ancienne 17 (Bruxelles: Safran, 2016): 43–61.

3 הַר מְגִדּוֹ. See John Day, "The Origin of Armageddon: Revelation 16:16 as an Interpretation of Zechariah 12:11," In *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*, eds. Paul M. Joyce and Stanley E. Porter, Biblical Interpretation 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1994): 315–26. For the discussion of the consensus, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 398; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, ITC (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 157.

interpretations does not challenge our argument, since we are concerned here with the history of reception.[4] Unlike Armageddon, Megiddo is a toponym quoted elsewhere in the Bible. Belonging to a primarily intertextual literary genre that takes up images and symbols from previous texts,[5] the Apocalypse of John thus recycles a specific site to make it a symbolic place.

The Hebrew Bible first mentions Megiddo in the battle between Deborah's forces allied with Sisera against the Canaanites (Judg 5:19). In this account, the narrator does not situate the conflict exactly at Megiddo. He says that "kings fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo." This probably refers to the passage between the two cities, where the road opens onto the plain of Jezreel.[6] Regardless of where the Prophetess was victorious, the Song of Deborah tells us that the Kishon River swept away her enemies. The expression is certainly metaphorical. Possibly, it symbolizes mythical wars where water plays an important role.[7] It should be noted that Megiddo has no central part in this pericope. The city has not yet exerted enough influence on the community to make it the core of the story. Nevertheless, it is associated here with a place where armies have gathered for a battle.

The book of Kings is more explicit about Megiddo. In 1 Kgs 9:15, Solomon ensures its fortification. At this stage of the book of Kings, Megiddo is not the center of attention. The city is only a name in a list, whereas Millo, Gezer and Jerusalem are amply detailed. It is not until 2 kings 9 that Megiddo becomes an important town in the narrative. This passage tells of the battle between the kings Ahaziah, Jehoram and Jehu. Ahaziah, on the run and wounded, takes refuge in Megiddo, where he dies. Once again, the place is not the geographical center of the pericope. Nevertheless, the story gives it a prominent position, since the king of Judah passed away there.

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4 See for example the proposal of Jauhiainen who does not see in this coalition a gathering of the forces of evil against the forces of good, but an alliance intended to destroy Babylon. This option, which is new, has not had any echo in the reception of the text. Marko Jauhiainen, "The OT Background to Armageddon (Rev 16:16 Revisited)," *Novum Testamentum* 47 (2005): 381–93.

5 John J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20. See also Pierre Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean*, CNT II.14 (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2014), 13–24; David Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), lxx–xc. This is especially true of war scenes, see Luca Arcari, "Early Jewish Background of the War Scenes in John's Revelation," In *Ancient Christian Interpretations of "Violent Texts" in the Apocalypse*, eds. Joseph Verheyden, Tobias Nicklas, and Andreas Merkt, NTOA 92 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011): 9–27.

6 Susan Niditch, *Judges. A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 80.

7 Niditch, *Judges*, 80. Peter Craigie, "Three Ugaritic Notes on the Song of Deborah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2 (1977): 33–49 (33–37).

After Ahaziah, Josiah died at Megiddo. 2 Kgs 23:29 explains: "In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him; but when Pharaoh Neco met him at Megiddo, he killed him" (NRSV). The attentive reader of the book of Kings is surprised by this information. The demise of Josiah at Megiddo does not fit the prophecy made in 2 Kgs 22:15–20. The latter forecasts a peaceful death for the king and a burial with his fathers in Jerusalem. Instead, Josiah dies in a conflict situation at Megiddo. The circumstances are anything but clear and historians have to deal with assumptions: is this hubris on behalf of the petty king of Judea who imagines himself triumphant over the powerful Egyptian? Was it a sort of gamble on his part, since Neko had only just ascended the throne? Was it an unfortunate incident caused by a misreading of the intentions of the two parties? 2 Chron 35:22 pleads for a mistake by Josiah.[8] The book relocates Josiah's death from Megiddo to Jerusalem, which connects the narrative with prophecy and serves an anti-monarchical agenda that is specific to the Chronicler.

This comes like a flash of lightning from a clear blue sky. Being the initiator of the Deuteronomistic reform, Josiah is one of the heroes of the Old Testament: supposedly no king was his equal in the past, and no king has been since. Thus, Megiddo becomes the scene of the annihilation of the messianic hope embodied by the just monarch. Megiddo is no longer a simple geographical reference for locating a battle, it evolves into the toponym that conveys the military and religious defeat of the kingdom of Judah.

The literary motif of grief is then taken up again in Zech 12:11, which uses Megiddo as a place of sorrow known to the community to give amplitude to the desolation it announces: "On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo." There is no consensus on the exact nature of the "mourning of Hadad-rimmon." Some have suggested a Canaanite festivity in which bewailing plays an important role, while others think it was a national celebration in honor of a notable king of Judah.[9]

All of these mentions and uses of the toponym in the Hebrew Bible shed some light on the reference to Megiddo in the Apocalypse of John. Considering the military history and therefore the weight of the place in the collective consciousness, the seer of Revelation takes up an ancient location that saw the

8 Abraham Malamat, "Josiah's Bid for Armageddon: The Background of the Judaean–Egyptian Encounter in 609 B.C," in *History of Biblical Israel: Major Problems and Minor Issues*, CHANE 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 282–98. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings*, Anchor Bible 11 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 300–02.

9 Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, AB 25C (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 344.

collapse of the messianic hopes of the community. He transforms the spot of the coalition against God's chosen ones of the past into an area of eschatological victory, since the kings of the earth will not triumph, unlike Neko. In doing so, he supports his depiction of a God who reverses the earthly suffering of his people into an eschatological victory.

However, a question remains; if the seer of the Apocalypse refers to Megiddo in his formula "Armageddon/mountain of Megiddo," it must be noted that there is no mountain at Megiddo! Indeed, Megiddo is a city on the plain, whose improbable exhumation is related by Eric Cline.[10] Its site was dug for the first time in 1903 by an expedition financed by the German society of oriental research led by Gottlieb Schumacher. Excavations continued in 1925, this time funded by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, under the direction of Clarence Fisher, P. L. O. Guy, and Gordon Loud. The beginning of the war in 1939 put the digs of the site on hold. Nevertheless, they brought to light the apartments, the impressive irrigation system, monumental gates, and what some call Solomon's stables. A third series of archaeological excavations was launched in the 1960s and 1970s by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem under the supervision of Yigael Yadin. After the Yadin works, the excavations of Tell Megiddo were permanently attributed to Tel Aviv University.

The archaeological data found at the site and the location of Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley explain why this site was the scene of so many battles in the past. It is an ideal crossing point for conflicts between the two great powers of the time: Syria to the north and Egypt to the south. The Megiddo Passage was a major communication route, both for war and for trade, with no obstacles in between. Clearly, the author of the Apocalypse combines two notions: (1) the collective memory of Megiddo and (2) the symbol of the mountain. The latter is probably linked to texts such as Ezek 38:3–21; 39:2, 4, 17, which make highlands the place where divine anger is poured out. In a general way, mountains provide a spatial boundary between heaven and earth, and are thus a fitting area for the culmination of the struggle between good and evil.[11] The combination with the place of Megiddo was quite appropriate, since Armageddon belongs to the sevenfold of the vials of divine wrath.

By appealing to the collective memory, imbued with Old Testament imagery, the author uses the emotional charge that accompanies Armageddon the place to exploit its full rhetorical potential. Armageddon is a purely literary space, built from references contained in memories and texts. If it turns out to be described with

10 Eric H. Cline, *Digging Up Armageddon: The Search for the Lost City of Solomon* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2020).

11 James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 214.

precision in the text (as the studies on critical spatiality have proven, revealing the importance of the apocalyptic geography),[12] it has no connection with reality. Excavations have indeed shown that the site was abandoned shortly after Josiah's death in 609. Reduced to a mere *lieu de mémoire*,[13] Megiddo-Armageddon is not to be found on a physical map, but on John's spiritual map.[14]

2 Variations on Space 2: From a Symbolic Place to a Definite Spot

The literary use of Meggido/Armageddon is thus akin to what contemporary sociologists would consider a trauma management strategy. The catastrophic defeat of Meggido is reconfigured not as suffering, but as a tactical resource through which Judah gives himself a new identity.[15] This strategy is accomplished in the Apocalypse in what could be called a "reversal of the stigma."[16] What was experienced as a flaw is now claimed as a future victory of God. For centuries, Armageddon thus remained a mythical space with rather vague contours. Only after the 12th century does it become, in some circles, a geographically locatable place, while most interpreters confine it to the spiritual map.

2.1 From the Fathers to the Present Day, the Symbolic Interpretation of the Toponym Is Maintained

During the early centuries of the history of the Church, Armageddon was only a parabolic place, where the final battle was to take place. The very proof that it remains symbolic is provided by the fact that its meaning narrows to its toponym. The significance of the place is revealed by elucidating its etymology, and not by any

12 Kelley Coblentz Bautch, "Spatiality and Apocalyptic Literature," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 5 (2016): 273–88.

13 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24. Even if Pierre Nora restricts the use of the expression "lieu de mémoire" (place of memory) to the historicist age, we can consider that Megiddo corresponds well to a place socially constructed to which to attach a memory.

14 Resseguie, *Revelation*, 213.

15 Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 10.21–23.

16 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 29. See also Goffman, *Stigma*, 113–16; Howard Saul Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 54–55.

reference to the ancient Megiddo. Note that many copyists no longer knew how to write it. A large number of possible orthographies are known, betraying the ignorance of the scribes.[17] We are, in fact, the very heirs of this ignorance, since the name Armageddon is often spelled using an orthography inherited from the Byzantine text (Αρμαγεδδων, present in mss. 2049 and 2081^{c}) mimicked by the KJV, maybe to match the LXX which spells Megiddo Μαγεδδώ. The more prominent manuscripts (א, A, E, and about 95 minuscules), on the contrary, read Ἁρμαγεδών with a single δ, which is the lesson retained by the Textus Receptus and Nestle-Aland. Armageddon should be written "Harmagedôn" (the spelling promoted by the French TOB, or the NRSV), or "Armagedon" following the traditional orthography by the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate.

The activity of elucidation does not seem to interest the first interpreter Tyconius Afer (c. 390)—nor his epigone Primasius of Hadrumetus (c. 520)—who limits himself to pointing out that it is simply a place of gathering;[18] in contrast, it fascinates his successors. East and West are divided about the interpretation. For Andrew of Caesarea and his successor Oecumenius, Ἁρμαγεδών is a place of slaughter whose name means cut (διακοπή) or sliced (διακοπτομένη).[19] The origin of this etymology must probably be found in the LXX translation of Zech 12:11 in the LXX that renders מגדון as ἐν πεδίῳ ἐκκοπτομένου (in the cut plain), presumably considering that מגדון comes from גדד, "to cut off."[20]

For the Latins, on the other hand, the significance is much more complex. As is often the case, the source is Jerome's *Liber Interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, which offers four elucidations: *Armageddon consurrectio tecti siue consurrectio in priora. Sed melius mons a latrunculis uel mons globosus* ("Armageddon means the raising of the roof, or the raising at first, but better the mount of robbers or the

17 Μαγεδδών, Μαγεδών, Μαγεδωδ, Μαγιδων, and Μακεδδων. Αρμεγηδων, Αρμεγεδδων, Ἁρμεγεδων, Ἁρμαγεδῶ, Αρμαγεδον, and Αρμαγεδωμ. The Vulgata read also *Hermagedon* or *Magedon*.

18 Tyconius Afer, *Expositio Apocalypseos (textus reconstructus)* 5,44 and 7,24, ed. R. Gryson (CCSL 107A, 2011), 201, 221; Primasius, Hadrumetinus, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* iv,16, ed. A.D. Adams (CCSL 92, 1985).

19 "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. in Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, The Fathers of the Church 123, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 176–77. "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. in Oikoumenios, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, The Fathers of the Church 112, trans. John Suggit (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 142–43.

20 Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 899.

globular mount").[21] The first part is a quotation of an etymology attributed to Origen, Ἀρμαγεδὼν ἐξέγερσις τοῦ δώματος ἢ ἐξέγερσις εἰς τὰ ἔμπροσθεν.[22] It rests on two paronyms or two homophones (γεδ is read as γεγ or גד is read as גג): גג does mean "roof," thus "Gog" in "Gog and Magog" of Rev 20:8 is interpreted as "roof"; מגידו is read as מקדם, marking a point of departure.[23] The *mons a latrunculis* (mount of brigands) could be explained by the same list attributed to Origen, who understood the triliteral גוד as πειρατεύειν (to be a pirate, a bandit). Elsewhere, Jerome interprets Gad as "the brigand" and Magdalgad as the "pirate tower."[24] Finally, the "globulous mount" comes from the etymology of Gad itself: גַּד means "coriander" and can evoke a small ball.[25] These elucidations are meticulously repeated in particular by the influential commentary of Bede.[26] In 784, the very original treatise of Ambrose Autpert (often confused with Ambrose of Milan) attempts an interpretation, which will be adopted after him: just as Christ is called "Mount of the Lord" in a quotation from Mic 4:1 taken typologically, so the Antichrist is called "mount." He is called "mount of robbers" because his servants are perverse men (*a ministris eiusdem peruersi hominis*) and he is called "globular mount" because *diabolus in antichristo, innumeris christianæ fidei insidiantibus bestiis constipatus, densatus atque conglobatus* "the devil, present in the Antichrist, is stuffed, packed, saturated with innumerable beasts laying a snare for the Christian faith."[27]

These traditional etymological clarifications were abandoned during the 16th century and replaced by others. One of the earliest Reformers, François Lambert (1486–1530), suggested reading in the ending of the word "Armageddon," the Hebrew

21 Hieronymus, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, ed. P. de Lagarde (CCSL 72, 1959), 159. Translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

22 Found in the Codex Coislin 224 (BnF): Konstantin von Tischendorf, *Anecdota sacra et profana ex Oriente et Occidente allata* (Lipsiæ: Graul, 1855), 127.

23 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.

24 Wutz, *Onomastica*, 271.

25 Wutz, *Onomastica*, 395.

26 Beda, *Explanatio Apocalypsis* 3,16, PL 93,181.

27 Ambrosius Autpertus, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* vii,16,16, ed. R.Weber (CCCM 27A, 1975). The interpretation is reiterated by 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; Bruno Astensis, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* 5,16, PL 165,695; Gerhohus Reicherspergensis, *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, p. 459. It is then popularized by the *Glossa ordinaria*: Walafrid Strabon, *Biblia sacra, cum glossa ordinaria* (vol. 6; Duaci [Douai]: 1617), 1630.

geded, *fructus seu poma* (a fruit or an apple).[28] Drusius (Jan van den Driessche, 1550–1616) proposed an ingenious explanation that had great posterity since it was embraced by Ribera and Cornelius a Lapide. In Armageddon, one should read חרמה "the destruction," and גדון "their army." Armageddon is therefore a place of devastation, which is also a pun, since חרמה is the paronym of חרם "forbidden."[29]

The 16th century took a major step in interpretation: it systematically recalled that the term comes from the city of Megiddo. This breakthrough was achieved by Ribera (1537–1591), the confessor of Saint Teresa of Avila, who was also the propagator of a preterito-futurist reading of the Apocalypse. He presented the novelty as a personal initiative: "I strongly suspect that the name has been corrupted, as happens from time to time to foreign names, and that it should be read Megiddo."[30]

From the 16th century onwards, three options were therefore possible, which have persisted into modern times. The first is to look for occurrences of Megiddo in the Old Testament to find explanations for Armageddon by investigating the intertextual relationship between 2 kings, 2 Chronicles, Zechariah and Revelation. Bengel, thus, illustrates the clear link between Zech 12:11 and our passage and infers the similarity (*Ähnlichkeit*) of the two accounts expressed by the similarity of the name.[31] Dom Calmet, following the Jansenist Lemaître de Sacy,[32] deploys his usual erudition to list all the events that took place there, in order to conclude: "Armageddon is therefore set for a place of vengeance and carnage." Afterwards, he shows how good a prophet the author of Revelation is, since other terrible calamities arose in the region.[33] Two centuries later, the influential commentary by R. H. Charles refers to the "distant echo" of the biblical texts, hypothesizes that a tradition concerning a return of these events has been established, and proposes a double form of

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

29 Johannes Drusius, *Annotationum in totum Jesu Christi Testamentum, sive præteritorum libri X* (Franekeræ [Franeker]: sumptibus J. Johannis, 1612), 434–35. The interpretation is stated by Francisco de Ribera, *In sacram Beati Joannis Apocalypsin commentarii* (Lugduni [Lyon]: ex officina Juntarum, 1592), 320. Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Apocalypsin S. Iohannis* (Antverpiæ: sumptibus Martinum Nuntium, 1627), 266.

30 *Vehementer suspicor corruptum esse nomen (ut passim in nominibus pergregrinis evenire solet) legendumque esse Mageddon*. Ribera, *In Apocalypsin*, 321.

31 Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis oder vielmehr Jesu Christi* (Stutgart [Stuttgart]: Johann Christoph Erhrard, 1758), 831. See also Johannes Coccejus, *Cogitationes de Apocalypsi S. Johannis* (Lugduni Batavorum [Leiden]: Driehuysen, 1665), 202.

32 "Un grand désastre public qui entraîne après soi de grands maux." Isaac-Louis Le Maistre de Sacy, *L'Apocalypse traduite en françois, avec une explication tirée des SS. Peres & des auteurs ecclesiastiques* (Bruxelles: Frixx, 1703), 251–52.

33 Augustin Calmet, *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'ancien et du nouveau Testament* (vol. 9, les épîtres canoniques et l'Apocalypse; Paris: Emery, 1726), 578–79.

the tradition, that of Gog and Magog and that of Armageddon.[34] Zahn with great verve, proceeds to a melancholy meditation on the intertextuality of complaints in the face of defeat.[35] Three centuries later, this is still the option of Leithart who talks about the "titanic battle of Armageddon," and looks for possible connections with the Old Testament. He concludes:

> The fact that the fight of the kings takes place at Megiddo links it with the death of Zechariah's Shepherd and the lamentation that follows. The combat of Har-Magedon is a battle of suffering and martyrdom, carried out by witnesses who recapitulate the cross and vindication of the Son again and again, so that the nations see and repent.[36]

The second option was born in the 19th century. It comes from the first one but takes the word "mountain" seriously. Meggido is only a tell: would the name designate a more important mountain? Alternative identification flourish.[37] Beasley-Murray and Shea[38] suggest Carmel, Van der Waal and Van der Woude propose the Migron Mountains north of Jerusalem,[39] and others opt for Jerusalem.

The third way of understanding the term is present from the 16th century on, in the commentary of the subtle Brás Viegas (1553–1599). While recalling all the previous explanations, he shows their weakness and concludes: "That is why it seems much more appropriate to frankly affirm our ignorance and to say that this place is unknown to us; it is because of this mystery that it is called in Hebrew Armageddon."[40] We find this same interpretation a century later, both in the Catholic

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34 Robert Henry Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 46. See also Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über die Offenbarung Johannis*, KEK 16.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1877), 496–97.

35 Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, KNT 18.2, vol. 2 (Leipzig–Erlangen: Deichert, 1926), 539–46. See also Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 263–64; Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean*, 366–67; Edmondo Lupieri, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, 5th ed., Scrittori greci e latini (Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla – Mondadori, 1999), 244–45.

36 Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, 156–57.

37 Alan James Beagley, *The "Sitz Im Leben" of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies*, BZNW 50 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), 87–89.

38 George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 245; William Shea, "The Location and Significance of Armageddon in Rev 16:16," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980): 157–62.

39 A. S. van der Woude, "Micah in Dispute with the Pseudo-Prophets," *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969): 244–60; Cornelis van der Waal, *Openbaring van Jezus Christus: Inleiding En Vertaling* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1971), 219.

40 *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.

Bossuet, who refuses any conjecture on this location, unlike "some Protestants"[41] than with the Protestant Beausobre, who blithely asserts, "We must remember that all this is mystical and that the literary applications are obscure and uncertain."[42] For Bousset and Allo, Armageddon is a very symbolic word, a place whose very name is a prophecy of disaster;[43] for Bonsirven (repeating his fellow member the Jesuit Viegas 500 years later, likely without knowing it), the Hebrew appellation supposes a figurative sense;[44] while Mounce pleads for the freedom left to the imagination and to a purely literary activity.[45] Eugenio Corsini, in his purely presentist reading of the Apocalypse, sees in it a symbolic place, that of the death of the Logos who, like Josiah, perishes at Armageddon, but unlike him, will bring victory to his people.[46] In the 21st century, too, Jean Delorme speaks of a "wink to the reader who is reckoned to know how to decipher it," but admits that "supposing that there was one, the code is lost."[47]

Whether one seeks to exploit the intertextuality with the Megiddo of the Old Testament, explore the etymological meaning of Armageddon, or sees only a kind of deliberately impenetrable "code name" (because it is "all Hebrew" to the reader), the hermeneutic remains the same: Armageddon is a symbolic toponym, detached from geographical reality, which represents the more or less mythical spot of a possible final battle. Little has changed since the Fathers, and since the 16th century, its exegesis has remained the same.

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41 Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *L'Apocalypse, avec explication par messire Jacques Benigne Bossuet* (Paris: Vve de S. Marbre-Cramoisy, 1689), 348–49.

42 Isaac de Beausobre and Jacques Lenfant, *Le Nouveau Testament de Notre Seigneur Jesus-Christ*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Pierre Humbert, 1718), 681. See also other Anglican or Protestant commentators such as James Durham, *A Learned and Complete Commentary upon the Book of Revelation* (Glasgow: Spencer, 1788), 638.

43 Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, KEK 16.6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906), 399. Ernest-Bernard Allo, *Saint Jean. L'Apocalypse*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1933), 261.

44 Joseph Bonsirven, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean*, Verbum Salutis 16 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1951), 257. See also Eduard Schick, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2; NTSR 25 (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 52.

45 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 301–02. See also Lucien Cerfaux and Jules Cambier, *L'Apocalypse de saint Jean, lue aux chrétiens*, LD 17 (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 144; G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 207; Gerhard Krodel, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 287; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1981), 190.

46 Eugenio Corsini, *Apocalisse Prima e Dopo* (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1980), 431.

47 Jean Delorme and Isabelle Donegani, *L'Apocalypse de Jean. Révélation pour le temps de la violence et du désir*, vol. 2; LD 236 (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 69. See also Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, NTD 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983), 92.

2.2 A Specific Eschatological Place

However, since the 13th century another interpretation has coexisted alongside this large majority reading. It strives to reconcile the biblical text with the geography, to see concrete characters in the textual figures and to identify the position of the final battle. It is by following this line that we will understand the current confusion between a place and a time.

This line finds its origin in an upheaval that began in the 12th century: the invention of a theology of history, or more precisely, of a historicization of the Salvation. As François Hartog has shown, the triumph of Christianity represents a considerable break in the conception of time. Christians substituted the linear time of the Greeks, the χρόνος, with a time of the decisive intervention of Christ, a καιρός. Proclaiming the imminence of Christ's return, they imposed a new regime of time.[48] Such a perspective obviously raises a question: what meaning should be given to the "time left"? Is it simply the eschatological expectation of the One who is coming (back), and therefore a kind of immobile time? Does it undergo any evolution? Rupert of Deutz, and his successors Gerhoh of Reichersberg and Anselm of Halverberg, began to develop a periodization of this time thanks to Revelation and its narrative about the future.[49] Rupert and Gerhoh see it as a decline, Anselm as progress. For him, the historical development of the Church up to his time has taken place in six stages, to be followed by a final seventh stage, which is eternity. This re-ignition of time movement has a major consequence for the reading of Revelation: it inscribes it in history, that is, in the combination of a time and a space.

The iconic figure of this interpretation is, of course, Joachim of Fiore who also undertook an interpretation of the Apocalypse, which enjoyed great posterity. As Henri de Lubac has shown,[50] the center of the thought of the Abbot of Fiore is not "millenarianism" (there is neither radical change of the nature of time, nor installation of a new cosmic order[51]), but a double concordance (*concordia*): the concordance of the two Testaments and the concordance of the New Testament with the time left. In other words, the figures of the New Testament are no longer the accomplished figures of the Old Testament, they remain provisional characters

48 François Hartog, *Chronos: L'Occident aux prises avec le temps*, Bibliothèque des histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 2020), 76.

49 Julia Eva Wannenmacher, "The Interpretation of John's Apocalypse in the Medieval Period," In *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation,* ed. Craig Koester (Oxford UP, 2020): 411–30. See also Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), vii–xiii.

50 Henri de Lubac, *La Postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, Œuvres complètes de Lubac 27–28 (Paris: Cerf, 2014).

51 Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1970), 15.

who, in turn, will be accomplished at the end of time.[52] The time left facilitates the purification of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit.[53] For our inquiry into Armageddon, the shift in perspective is considerable. Indeed, after Joachim, this toponym was no longer a somewhat imprecise area with a symbolic function, it is the very place of episodes that must be acknowledged to be able to apprehend the transformations taking place: Joachim reads some figures according to the events of his epoch. For instance, the seventh head of the Dragon is Saladin, who had seized Jerusalem in 1187.[54]

Concerning Armageddon, Joachim did not unravel the mystery. If he recalled in his commentary that the place lies in the Josaphat Valley, he admits that no explanation came to him at the moment.[55] It fell to one of his disciples, Alexander the Minorite, to bring it to light. As Sandra Schmolinsky has shown, he made a major innovation with a rosy future. Unlike Joachim, who thinks that Revelation unveils the end of the world to come, Alexander regards it as a prophecy concerning the history of the Church, part of which had already been accomplished.[56] Taking up the old Hieronymian etymology of *consurrectio*, he proposes seeing Armageddon as the very place of resurrection: "in this land, the Lord died and we all in him, and in it he rose from the dead and we in him will all rise again, as Paul says, 'if you are raised with Christ … ' (Col 3:1)."[57] But he immediately adds: "Now, according to history, the land of promise is subdued, the mother of our redemption and of our faith, Jerusalem

52 Lubac, *Postérité*, 43–54.

53 Emmett Randolph Daniel, "The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages," In *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages,* eds. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992): 72–89.

54 Joachim is both cautious and affirmative: *Capitis a rege isto Turchorum Saladino nomine sumptum putem qui nuper calcare cepit sanctam civitatem* ("I think that [the seventh head] must be understood as the king of the Turks, named Saladin, who has just trampled on the Holy City."). Joachim a Fiore, *Expositio magni prophete Abbatis Joachim in Apocalipsim* (Venetiis [Venezia]: Bindoni, 1527), 10r.

55 I think that the name of the place called Armageddon in Hebrew must refer to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but for the moment I have no other interpretation of this name in mind that I could give. *Puto autem nomen loci quod vocatur hebrayce armagedon esse significatium sicut vallis Josaphat, sed non occurit mihi adhuc interpretatio ipsius nominis cui dare possem.* Joachim a Fiore, *Expositio*, 191r.

56 Sabine Schmolinsky, *Der Apokalypsenkommentar des Alexander Minorita zur frühen Rezeption Joachims von Fiore in Deutschland*, Studien und Texte 3 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1991). Sabine Schmolinsky, "Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese," in *Merkmale der Exegese bei Alexander Minorita,* ed. E. Lerner Robert (Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009), 139–48.

57 *Haec est terra, in qua Dominus mortuus fuit et nos omnes in illo, et in qua resurrexit a mortuis, et nos in eo consurreximus omnes, sicut Paulus dicit: Si consurrexistis cum Christo …* Alexander Bremensis (Minorita), *Expositio in Apocalypsim* 16, ed. Alexander Minorita, *Expositio in Apocalypsim hrsg. von Alois Wachtel*, MGH 1 (Weimar: H. Böhlaus, 1955), 354.

is afflicted by the double yoke of captivity,"[58] from the Saracens and the Turks (*Sarraceni and Thurici*). He goes on to describe how the sixth angel, whom he recognizes as the Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus, appealed to Pope Urban II and how the 1096 First Crusade was launched, which saw several battles before peace returned and Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Christians. His long account, full of biblical allusions, is doubly premonitory of the whole tradition that will follow. On the one hand, Alexander identifies the political fate of the Josaphat Valley—and more generally of what he names *terra sancta*—with the salvific destiny of the whole of humanity; on the other hand, he records every event about Megiddo as a sign of the end of time being underway.

2.3 History of the Reception of the Geographical Reading

The futurist reading initiated by Alexander did not follow a linear progression. It was continuously challenged by the previous reading which, as we have said, was widely prevalent. However, it was regularly revived at certain times.

1. The debates between the Catholic and Protestant Reformations. The time of the Reformation is usually seen as the moment when Revelation is considered as a book that hints at the present; examples are often given of the diatribes against the Pope being equated with the Antichrist and Rome becoming the Harlot of chapter 17. Irena Backus has shown, however, that the authors of the commentaries on Revelation did not deem the book as speaking of their time. It was simply useful to them in their polemics with the opposing side and had the pedagogical role of inculcating some rudiments of ecclesiastical history into people.[59] The dialog between Bullinger and Cornelius a Lapide is sufficient to convince anyone of this. For the Zürich Reformer, the frogs of chapter 16 are the jabbering legates of the Pope, wallowing in pools and mud, making night cries, which are the yakking of heretics. But eventually Armageddon will come and see the end of this swarming army of vermin.[60] A few years later, the Louvain Jesuit Cornelius a Lapide answers: "these frogs refer to heretics and heresies, coarse, talkative, indiscreet, and noisy."[61] And he lists them:

58 *Igitur secundum historias terra repromissionis subacta, mater nostrae redemptionis ac fidei Jherusalem duplici captivitatis iugo gravatur*. Alexander Minorita, *Expositio*, 354.

59 Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 136.

60 Heinrich Bullinger, *In Apocalypsim Jesu Christi, revelatam quidem per angelum Domini, visam vero vel exceptam atque conscriptam a Joanne apostolo et evangelista, conciones centum, authore Heinrycho Bullingero* (Basileae: per J. Oporinum, 1559), 220–22.

61 *Hinc rana significat haeresin et haereticos stolidos, loquaces, curiosos et obstreperos*. Cornelius a Lapide, *In Apocalypsin*, 265–66.

Luther, the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians of Karlstadt, all the Protestants whose leader is Melanchthon … How can one think that making Armageddon the pool of a frog fight could be understood otherwise than with great irony?

On the other hand, these humorous debates put the last book of the New Testament in the spotlight and led some commentators to revive the reading of Joachim of Fiore. Both sides of the Atlantic were involved, under the impulse of Puritanism, notably thanks to Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts, and the Wesley brothers.[62] However, they did not say anything specific about Armageddon. They influenced the syntheses that led to the formulation and popularization of the dispensationalist theory, which is a kind of systematization of a new relationship with the "time left."[63]

In their wake, John Nelson Darby proposed a vision of history in several stages, from the age of Adamic innocence to the thousand-year reign of Christ. For him, the world is now living in the time of grace, which will end with the events described in Revelation and thus with the battle of Armageddon. These notions were greatly popularized by the Cyrus Scofield Bible. 38 references to Armageddon were strategically placed from Genesis to Revelation, through the psalms and Isaiah, to give the impression that the final combat is the focal point of the entire Bible.[64] Scofield, however, does not offer any elaboration about the place itself, in imitation of Darby, who in his commentary on Revelation makes a somewhat disappointing commentary:

> We have an intimation of its connection with Hebrew localities: the place has a Hebrew name, Armageddon. But this comes in here, by the bye; for it is the account of God's wrath, and the gathering is all that has this character providentially. If there be allusion to the place and term, Megiddo, I should suppose it was of the two; rather Judges v., than the case of Josiah.[65]

2. The irruption of the "Eastern Question." These speculations certainly delineate the intellectual framework within which Rev 16:16 was understood, but they do not

62 Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000* (Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 37–70.

63 See Gribben, *Millenialism*, 71–91. Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 48–100.

64 Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible. The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Oxford UP, 1917), 48 (Gen 36:1), 255 (Judg 5:19), 608 (Ps 110:1), 688–89 (Isa 10:20. 24), 94 (Isa 17:1), 700 (Isa 18:20), 02 (Isa 26:21), 10 (subtitle to Isa 34), 42 (Isa 63:3), 46 (Isa 66:6), 76 (Jer 25:29.34), 842 (Ezek 25:8), 58 (Ezek 38:21), 76 (Dan 2:31), 82 (Dan 7:14), 91 (Dan 12:12), 903 (Joel 1:4), 07 (Joel 3:9), 18 (Obad 12), 22 (Mic 1:6), 25 (Mic 4:11 subtitle and note), 39 (Zeph 3:8), 52–53 (Zech 10:3, 12:4), 56 (Zech 14:4), 1005 (Matt 21:44), 314 (Introduction to Revelation), 322–323 (Rev 8:1, 9:14), 329 (subtitle to Rev 14:4–20), 330 (Ap 16:2), 332–334 (subtitle to Rev 19:1–20:6 and notes). See Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Changed Religion for Ever* (Oxford: Lion, 2014), 138.

65 J. N. Darby, *Notes on the book of Revelations* (London: Central Tracts Depot, 1839), 131–32.

supply the geographical framework. The geopolitical situation in the 19th century and what is usually called the "Eastern Question" provided it. With the decomposition of the Ottoman Empire, the major European powers and Russia tended to regain influence over the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, and Palestine was the scene of several fights reminiscent of the Great Eschatological War. This arose against the background of a general apocalyptic atmosphere in which churches and governments partook, but which was more akin to a great cultural movement:[66] the European nations had the impression that they were "making history" and participating in the creation of a new world order. Britain had considerable weight in the process, as England has identified itself since at least the 9th century as the "Tarshish and the young lions thereof" of prophecy.[67]

In 1855, the Crimean War had all the characteristics of an eschatological war. It took place in the East, it marked the defeat of the powers "of the East," and it constituted one of the first examples of tragic modern wars whose savagery was regarded as "apocalyptic."[68] From the outset of the conflict, Daniel Nihill (1791–1867) multiplied considerations on the battlefields, the terrain of the war, the political situation to argue that the world was facing Armageddon.[69] A few years later, a Master of Arts of the University of Cambridge (Charles Beales, actually) summoned all the best of historical exegesis to demonstrate that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was the beginning of the end of the world.[70] From then on, Armageddon was "in the air," and would never leave it. For example, US Citizens like to recall Theodore Roosevelt's thunderous declaration at the 1912 Progressive National Convention: "We Stand at Armageddon, and We Battle for the Lord."[71]

3. WWI or Armageddon in the making. The First World War revived speculation concerning the proximity of the end of the world. From the onset, the war was considered a catastrophe, as evidenced by the work of the famous editorialist of the *Daily Telegraph* William Leonard Courtney (1860–1928), who immediately took up

66 Jenkins, *Great and Holy War*, 136–37.

67 Andrew Mein, "The Armies of Gog, the Merchants of Tarshish, and the British Empire," In *In the Name of God: The Bible in the Colonial Discourse of Empire,* eds. Carly L. Crouch and Jonathan Stökl, Biblical Interpretation Series 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 133–49.

68 Eric Michael Reisenauer, "Armageddon at Sebastopol: The Crimean War and Biblical Prophecy in Mid-Victorian Britain," In *"Perplext in Faith": Essays on Victorian Beliefs and Doubts,* eds. Alisa Clapp-Itnyre and Julie Melnyk (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015): 39–74.

69 Daniel Nihill, *Is Sebastopol Armageddon?: A Short Summary of Historical Facts Calculated to Prove that Sebastopol is Armageddon* (Philadelphia: Myers, 1855).

70 Charles Beales, *Armageddon; Or, A Warning Voice from the Last Battlefield of Nation* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh and Hunt, 1858).

71 Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt and the Golden Age of Journalism* (London: Viking, 2013), 703.

the religious reference by secularizing it.[72] On the day England declared war against Germany, Rudyard Kipling, one of the most fervent supporters of British imperialism, jotted in his wife's diary the line: "Incidentally, Armageddon begins."[73] Armageddon became the metonymy of every horror of war, and more generally, of warfare. The last year of the conflict induced an end-of-the-world atmosphere with a succession of events: Hell in Verdun, October Revolution, Collapse of the German Empire, etc.[74]

The impression of living in eschatological times was reinforced by a clever communication operation steered by Edmund Allenby. The General, who was not averse to being called Allah Nebi, the prophet of God, arranged, after having triumphantly entered Jerusalem, to launch the final battle against the German and Ottoman coalition troops in the Jezreel Pass.[75] The "Battle of Megiddo" against the King of the East, the Sultan, was reported in the newspapers of the time and served the prestige of the British Army, which led its last cavalry charge there, and, of course, that of General Allenby, who was created Viscount of Megiddo.

A fascinating publication by the Adventists is even more precise. Illustrated with numerous photographs of the war, it reviews the sequence of dreadful events to reach this conclusion: "The final clash of the nations, however, does not come until Turkey falls. The great Moslem power occupies the pivotal point between East and West. In the prophet's vision of the gathering of 'the whole world' to the last great conflict, he first saw this Moslem power by the Euphrates come to its end."[76] This is precisely the scenario that has affected the mental geography of the West until now, in a surprising permanence of the "Eastern Question."

4. The revival in the late 1970s. If the worries about Armageddon halted a little after the end of the First World War, they were revitalized from the 1970s onwards. Here again, it was a complex intertwining of religious and political issues that were involved. As Crawford Gribben has shown, the first part of the twentieth century challenged millenarianism and saw a relative retreat of evangelical movements,[77]

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72 William Leonard Courtney, *Armageddon – And After* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1914).

73 Cecil D. Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870–1914* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 171.

74 Jenkins, *Great and Holy War*, 138. Eric Michael Reisenauer, "'The Merchants of Tarshish, with all the Young Lions Thereof.' The British Empire, Scripture Prophecy, and the War of Armageddon, 1914–1918," *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 4 (2017): 287–318.

75 Marianne Michel, "Les batailles de Megiddo du roi Touthmosis II et du général Allenby. Questions d'itinéraires," In *De la Nubie à Qadech, From Nubia to Kadesh. La guerre dans l'Égypte ancienne, War in Ancient Egypt*, eds. Christina Karlshausen and Claude Obsomer, Connaissance de l'Égypte Ancienne (Bruxelles: Safran, 2016).

76 *Armageddon and the Kingdom of Peace* (Mountain Views, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1916), 38–39.

77 Gribben, *Millenialism*, 92–109.

while the years 1970–2000 established their domination, notably by the expansion of a new evangelicalism in the United States, mediated (more or less symbolically) by the election of four openly evangelical presidents: Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George Bush.[78] This new evangelicalism, more individualistic and more political, consecrates the rise to power of people who were until now the spectators and the analysts of the society, and who became its actors.[79] While they were a subculture of American Christianity, Evangelical ideas became popular.

This passage of dispensationalist ideas into popular culture was made possible by Hal Lindsey's bestseller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which purports to describe an end of time, where Armageddon is constantly present.[80] Lindsey is not the first to propose a scenario—he borrows it from the Adventists, as we just saw, as well as from other authors[81]—but he is by far the most popular. The main points of his storyline are as follows. Everything begins with a treaty between East and West under the aegis of the Antichrist, which ensures the return of peace to the Middle East and the reconstruction of the Temple (3rd Temple). Three and a half years later, the Antichrist holds a press conference on the esplanade to say that he is God incarnate. This leads to a chain of events. The Arab–African confederacy headed by Egypt [King of the South] "launches an invasion of Israel. This fatal mistake spells their doom and begins the Armageddon campaign."[82] The Soviet Union uses the invasion as an excuse to plan its own attack: an amphibious assault in the Mediterranean, striking both Egypt and Israel, is coordinated with a push southward through Israel to join forces in Egypt. The Europeans destroy the Russians; two hundred million Eastern soldiers march to Armageddon for the final battle. At the height of the fight, as a nuclear weapons exchange threatens to obliterate all life on the planet, Jesus Christ returns at the head of the legions of heaven. On a white horse, he descends from the sky through the clouds. Although the arsenals of mass destruction are turned against him, the armies of earth are powerless.

We see Lindsey's strategy: he conflates biblical prophecy with current geopolitical conflicts. He manipulates the apprehension of the nuclear age, civil rights movement, and "wars and rumors of wars" in the Middle East. Within his book, Lindsey provides two maps depicting his narrative for the battle of Armageddon. The maps are devoid of borders, and only show troop movement via thick black arrows,

78 Gribben, *Millenialism*, 110–24.

79 Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

80 Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971).

81 Albion Fox Ballenger, *Before Armageddon* (Riverside, CA: Albion Ballenger, 1918). Arthur A. Bloomfield, *Before the Last Battle Armageddon* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1971).

82 Lindsey and Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 142.

which also symbolize future temporalities.[83] Lindsey's pointers potentiate a narrow geopolitical future: an East–West confrontation. The political circumstances that led the United States to focus its foreign policy on the Arab world seemed to confirm these predictions, making Israel the site of the final battle.[84]

The book was a worldwide success and was soon reinforced by a series of volumes that took up these same ideas. The influence of the book is considerable, including on American politics. In a famous editorial, the American writer Gore Vidal denounced an American foreign policy oriented by Armageddon. He grounds his opinion on Grace Halsell's essay,[85] which demonstrates the importance of the discourse of televangelists (Hal Lindsey, Jimmy Swaggart,[86] Jerry Falwell) among the American public, and in particular on President Reagan. Halsell substantiates the influence of these ideas on him when he was governor, especially through his links with Billy Graham.[87]

The downfall of the USSR does not change the scenario. In 1997, Hal Lindsey proposes an update, *Apocalypse Code,*[88] which replaced the defunct Empire by a "Russian–Muslim confederation" involving new players in the world game, Iran and Turkey. Eventually, this belligerent herd rushes to Armageddon to precipitate the end of the world.[89] These ideas are popularized by Tim LaHaye's fifteen-book series *Left Behind*, of which volume 11 is about Armageddon,[90] and whose film adaptation was a great success. And if Lindsey, now too old, did not continue with the revamps, others took care of them: bin Laden and ISIS supply contemporary visages to the "kings of the East" of the prophecy.[91] Sometimes they are helped by the protagonists of the news themselves. Did not the founder of the Aum sect, Shoko Asahara, clearly proclaim that he wanted to bring about Armageddon?[92]

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83 Tristan Sturm, "Hal Lindsey's Geopolitical Future: Towards a Cartographic Theory of Anticipatory Arrows," *Journal of Maps* 17 (2021), 39–45.

84 Edgar C. James, *Arabs, Oil & Armageddon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991). Edgar C. James, *Armageddon and the New World Order* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

85 Gore Vidal, "Armageddon?" in *Armageddon? Essays 1983–1987* (London: Grafton Books, 1987), 101–14. Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1986).

86 Jimmy Swaggart, *Armageddon* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, 1987).

87 Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 40–50.

88 Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1997).

89 Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code*, 239.

90 Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Armageddon: The Cosmic Battle of the Ages*, Left Behind 11 (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003). Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, Left Behind 1 (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995).

91 David Jeremiah, *The Book of Signs: 31 Undeniable Prophecies of the Apocalypse* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019).

92 D. W. Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), 95–96.

3 Variations on Time: From a Space to a Time (by Antonomasia)

Popularized by the North American evangelical reading, the word Armageddon is employed in everyday language to designate the event that triggers the collapse of the world and the havoc that follows. This usage is prevalent in academic circles where financial analysts speak of Financial Armageddon to elucidate the successive meltdowns of the last 30 years.[93] It is also found among historians who use it in their interpretation of past crises.[94] The journalistic world does not shy away from utilizing it in its explanations of the ups and downs of the international political situation.[95] Martin J. Sherwin's book *Gambling with Armageddon* is emblematic: Armageddon thematizes the localized deployment of the first nuclear bombs and the anxiety of a subsequent global nuclear war. The military exploitation of nuclear power has awed generations and constitutes a turning point in our civilization. Armageddon thus becomes a metonymy for global worries: it depicts a catastrophic event that plunges the world into a new era. But it also describes a whole period marked by the anxiety surrounding nuclear energy, its risks and the stakes for our world. The historian of culture Margaret L. King comes to characterize the Cold War using Armageddon: "For nearly 50 years, the prospect of Armageddon loomed—the great final battle of the nations of the world."[96] This quote is characteristic. The term Armageddon, which served as a metonymy for all catastrophic events, has become an antonomasia: the proper noun functions as the common substantive for disaster.

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93 Michael J. Panzner, *Financial Armageddon: Protecting your Future from Four Impending Catastrophes* (New York: Kaplan, 2007); John Hagee, *Financial Armageddon*, 1st ed. (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2008); Gretchen Morgenson and Joshua Rosner, *Reckles$ Endangerment: How Outsized Ambition, Greed, and Corruption Led to Economic Armageddon* (New York: Times Books, 2011).

94 Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); Clive Ponting, *Armageddon: The Reality behind the Distortions, Myths, Lies, and Illusions of World War II* (New York: Random House, 1995); Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944–45* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2004); Thomas Whigham, *The Road to Armageddon: Paraguay versus the Triple Alliance, 1866–70*, Latin American and Caribbean Series (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2017); Michael Lüders, *Armageddon im Orient Wie die Saudi-Connection den Iran ins Visier nimmt*, Beck Paperback (München: C.H.Beck,2019); Mark Edele, *Stalinism At War: The Soviet Union in World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

95 Robert Drinan, F., *Vietnam and Armageddon: Peace, War and the Christian Conscience* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970); Dana Adams Schmidt, *Armageddon in the Middle East* (New York: John Day, 1974); Martin J. Sherwin, *Gambling with Armageddon: Nuclear Roulette from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1945–1962* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020).

96 Margaret L. King, *Western Civilization: A Social and Cultural History*, 2 vols. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), 868.

Armageddon is not only used in non-fictional literature. It can also be found in crime and spy series,[97] in science fiction and heroic fantasy.[98] It became even more popular thanks to the film industry, as demonstrated by the 1998 film *Armageddon*. This film does not describe an eschatological battle, but the threat of a meteorite heading straight for the Earth.[99] This celestial hazard epitomizes the notion of threat already present in the *Gambling with Armageddon* example. It becomes clear that Armageddon represents both a cataclysmic event that plunges the world into a dystopic post-apocalyptic era, and this very same era that it initiates. However, in this last instance, Armageddon (the destruction of Earth by a meteorite) can be avoided.

In 1995, Hal Lindsey, sensing the threat of the overwhelming use of antonomasia, wanted to correct this language habit and explains:

> But there is often a misunderstanding about Armageddon. It is vastly understating it to describe it only as a 'battle.' Actually, Armageddon is the fiercest battle of the greater war of the great day of God Almighty it describes […]. A war—a long escalating war, an intense war which will trigger an ultimate global nuclear holocaust—will be fought in and around the Valley of Jezreel which lies beneath the ancient fortress of Megiddo.[100]

His admonition came too late. Despite his preoccupation to see in Armageddon both a climatic event and a precise location around Megiddo, popular belief uses Armageddon to describe an imprecise time and space: the time of the end. This generalization leads to a metonymic interpretation of Armageddon, which then represents the entire eschatology.

Popular culture progressively shifts its reading of Armageddon. Whereas the 1990s were marked by an optimistic approach to the post-apocalyptic dystopia, the 2010s had a different perspective on the world.[101] It is sufficient to consider productions such as *Greenland* (2020), *World War Z* (2013), *X-Men Apocalypse* (2016), *Legion* (2010), *Knowing* (2009) to witness a major trend: the scenario does not focus so much on the post-apocalyptic situation as on the triggering event itself. The break

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97 Leon Uris, *Armageddon. A Novel of Berlin* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964); George R. R. Martin, *The Armageddon Rag* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1983); Larry Collins, *The Road to Armageddon* (Beverly Hills: New Millennium, 2003); Wolfgang Hohlbein, *Armageddon - Die Nephilim*, Der Armageddon-Zyklus (München: Piper, 2019).

98 Robert Sandor Tralins, *Android Armageddon* (New York: Pinnacle, 1974); Anne Perry, *Come Armageddon* (London: Headline, 2001); James Patterson, *Armageddon*, Daniel X (London: Young Arrow, 2012); Aaron Dembski-Bowden, *Armageddon: Helsreach, Blood and Fire*, Warhammer (Nottingham: Black Library, 2015).

99 *Armageddon*, Michael Bay, dir. (Touchstone Pictures, Jerry Bruckheimer Films: 1998).

100 Hal Lindsey, *The Final Battle* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1995), 234.

101 See, for instance, *The Day After* Tomorrow (2004), *2012* (2009), *The Day the Earth Stood* Still (2008).

with *Mad Max*, the great saga of the 1980s that showed how the world survives after its end. *Knowing*, for example, narrates how the Earth comes to its end.[102]

The reasons for such a shift are probably linked to the climate emergency which, at the same time, has become a worry for society as a whole. This concern for the planet has been pushing a whole generation to consider not the distant future, but the close horizon. The eschatological clock is ticking. One of the characters in the famous sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, an experimental physicist, worries that his "infinite persistence gyroscope" will be used by the military for disastrous purposes that "will bring about Armageddon."[103] In this sense, Armageddon retains its metonymic quality to qualify both the triggering incident and the post-apocalyptic era, with the emphasis on the event.

4 Conclusions

Rev 16:16 constitutes a textbook case for any analysis of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Indeed, if its reception has several successive tipping points, as in any history of reception, these are materialized by successive definitions of the lexical class to which the word "Armageddon" belongs. In Revelation, it is a Hebrew *literary name*, as the text plainly states, εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστί, in which geographers can clearly recognize an *oronym*, a mountain name: הַר מְגִדּוֹ.It refers to the stronghold of Megiddo in the plain of Jezreel, mentioned several times in the Bible, a battlefield, a *polemonym*,[104] that functions as a *lieu de mémoire*. If the identification of this place is easy, its interpretation is not, and from Tyconius to the most contemporary expositors, Armageddon is understood as a *cryptonym*, a code name whose key remains lost. From Joachim of Flora onwards, however, the geographical value of the *toponym* is rediscovered, and the location of the eschatological battle is sought to be situated geographically. This change of lexical category marks a major interpretative revolution, because if one can pinpoint the spot on a map, then the war that

102 *Greenland*, Ric Roman Waugh, dir (Anton, Thunder Road, G-BASE Film Production, Riverstone Pictures: 2020). *World War Z*, Marc Foster, dir. (Skydance Productions, Hemisphere Media Capital, GK Films, Plan B Entertainment, 2DUX2: 2013). *X-Men: Apocalypse*, Bryan Singer, dir. (Marvel Entertainment, Bad Hat Harry Productions, Kinberg Genre, The Donners' Company, TSG Entertainment: 2016). *Legion*, Noah Hawley, creator (26 Keys Productions, The Donners' Company, Bad Hat Harry Productions, Kinberg Genre, Marvel Television, FXP: 2017–2019, 3 seasons, 27 episodes). *Knowing*, Alex Proyas, dir. (Escape Artists, DMG Entertainment: 2009). *Mad Max,* George Miller, dir. Kennedy Miller Productions: (1979).

103 *The Big Bang Theory*, Season 9, episode 20, Warner Bros production.

104 Marie-Anne Paveau, "Le toponyme, désignateur souple et organisateur mémoriel: L'exemple du nom de bataille," *Mots: les langages du politique* 86 (2008): 23–35.

takes place there becomes concrete. By virtue of geography, what belonged to the myth—and thus to non-time—becomes tangible and is inscribed in a future temporality. From Alexander the Minorite to Hal Lindsey, the battle of Armageddon becomes the mirror of the geopolitics of the Latin and Anglo-American world. The balance of power between East and West can be read, the West being on the side of good, and the East—from Saladin to the Islamic State—on the side of evil. This pervasiveness of the term over the past 40 years has led to a paradoxical effect: its withdrawal from geographical considerations. Moreover, thanks to the mechanism of antonomasia, the toponym tends to cover, by synecdoche, all the events of the end of time. It thus becomes a kind of *chrononym:*[105] the proper name of the end of time.

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105 Dominique Kalifa, "Dénommer le siècle: 'chrononymes' du XIX^{e} siècle," *Revue d'histoire du XIX^{e} siècle* 52 (2016), 9–17.

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