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# On the margins of redemptive history: The antiquarian nations in Deuteronomy 2

## A theological assessment

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### Abstract

This article investigates the marginalization of the nations listed in Deuteronomy 2's canonically narrated Old Testament redemptive history in four parts. Section one provides a theology of history that sets for the theological framework for the investigation. The rhetorical analysis of Deuteronomy 2 in section two seeks to uncover the purpose of the parenthetical notes on these nations. Section three provides a historical evaluation and theological assessment of our knowledge about these nations. The last section briefly examines the nations' dissolution during the reign of David, and to their destination in the netherworld as spirits of the dead and as perceived by the prophets.

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### 1. Introduction

In this article, Deuteronomy 2 is studied in its own literary context, that of Deuteronomy 1-3. The focus will be on the function of the antiquarian nations in the first sermon Moses gave to the gathered Israelites before entering the Promised Land, but after having dispossessed the Amorite kings Sihon and Og of their land in Transjordan.<sup>1</sup> It is the contention of this article that these nations, standing out in the Promised Land by their physical appearance and spiritual attitude, are intentionally marginalised in the canonical traditions of the Old Testament, starting with Deuteronomy 2. In the context of the redemptive narrative, recounted in these traditions, a rudimentary knowledge

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1 See S. Slater, "I have set before you the land": A study of the rhetoric of Deuteronomy 1-3, PhD Department of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1991, 1-29; P.D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1990, 20; C.J. Labuschagne, *Deuteronomium 1A*, Caltenbach, Nijkerk, 1987, 55-63; and D.I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2012, for Dt 1-3 (4) as literary unit.

about these nations is rhetorically modified with the goal to proclaim the power and glory of Israel's God in the history of the nations, encouraging Israel to put their trust in him alone in facing the future.

The final extermination of the antiquarian nations in the monarchical dispensation is interpreted as a way towards the messianic future, while in the (pre-)exilic age their continued existence as spirits of the dead in the netherworld is prophetically understood as a futureless condition.

### **1.1. Outline**

First, the rhetorical nature of the Deuteronomic literature is considered to shed light on the question of what influenced the literary shape of the narrative of the historical recollections in Deuteronomy 2. It clearly alludes to other parts of the Pentateuch, recording the history of the desert journey up until that point in time. The discrepancies between them illuminate the different objectives with which these sources have been composed. Examining this issue will clarify the rhetorical function of the parenthetical notes on the antiquarian nations in Deuteronomy 2.

Next, these nations are briefly discussed against the background of their cultural context in the Mediterranean Basin. Attention is paid to the discussion about the rhetorical intent of Deuteronomy 2: does the author intend to give a historical picture of these nations, or, rather, a theologised one, and for what purpose?<sup>2</sup>

In the third paragraph the role of these nations is traced in the Old Testament. They apparently appear on the margins of Israel's history. This requires a theological assessment of the reason for this marginalization in the context of redemptive history as canonically spelled out in the Old Testament.

But an introduction to the theology of history, centred on Deuteronomy, precedes these paragraphs. The reason for this is that the investigation into the antiquarian nations, as undertaken in this article, presupposes a theological perspective on the way God acts in the history of Israel and the nations. The outline of this theology of history serves to delineate the theological presuppositions of this article as well.<sup>3</sup>

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2 In the literature, the term ideology is used in this context; the term theology is preferred in this article, based upon its writer's Christian presuppositions.

3 The brevity of this section does not do justice to the importance of this issue, and to the extensive scholarly debate on its many aspects.

### 1.2. *Theology of history*<sup>4</sup>

The biblical text bears witness to the fact that many migrations occurred in biblical times, notably Israel's migration to Egypt and later back again from exile in Babylon to Canaan. Israel was a marginalised ethnic entity in Egypt, as well as when they were in exile in Babylon, and as a post-exilic temple-state (Yehud) in the vast Persian Empire. What distinguished them from other nations was their special relationship with the Creator of heaven and earth, who had revealed himself to their ancestors as the God of the covenant. From a historical perspective, they were not different from other migrating nations in the ancient Near East. In Deuteronomy 2, we find evidence of many migrations in the limited space of pre-Israelite Palestine. The question is whether one should see here a specific theology of history at work.

The one thing about Israel's God, that is emphasised in the Old Testament, is that He, as Creator of heaven and earth, is a universal God who reigns sovereign in history over all nations (Dt 32:8-9). Covenanted to only one nation, Israel, He was involved in the history of all nations in ways beyond human analysis.<sup>5</sup> He was not only involved in Israel's migrations, but also in those of the nations mentioned in Deuteronomy 2 and further afield. In Ezekiel 25-32, for instance, He intervenes in the history of Tyre or Egypt;<sup>6</sup> in Isaiah 40-55,<sup>7</sup> He operates in the history of Babylonia; and in Daniel,<sup>8</sup> the fate of nations like Persia or Greece is in his hands. Sometimes these interventions

- 4 See J.G. McConville, *Grace in the end. A study in deuteronomistic theology*, Pater Noster Press, Carlisle, 1993, 33, 134-136; C.H.J. Wright, *The message of Ezekiel*, IVP, Leicester, 2001, 255-272; idem, *The mission of God. Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove Ill., 2006, 454-500; and K. van Bekkum, *From conquest to coexistence: Ideology and antiquarian intent in the historiography of Israel's settlement in Canaan*, Brill, Leiden, 2015, 124-126 for the development of a theology of history in Deuteronomy, and the OT in general. For a Christian view on history see I.H. Marshall, 'Some aspects of the Biblical view of history', *Faith and History*, 110:1-2, 1983, 54-68 (<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>). Cf G. van den Brink and C. van der Kooi, *Christelijke Dogmatiek. Een inleiding*, 2e druk. Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 2012, 156-164, for some systematic reflections on the relationship between revelation and history.
- 5 See K.L. Davis, 'Building a Biblical theology of ethnicity for global mission', *The Journal of Ministry and Theology*, 2003 (91-126), 100.
- 6 See Wright, *Ezekiel*, 2001, 229-255; H.G.L. Peels, "Een slachtoffer heeft Jahweh in het Noorderland (Jer. 46:10)", *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 50(3), 2016, #1999.
- 7 See W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja IIA; IIB*, Callenbach, Nijkerk, 1979; 1983.
- 8 H.J.M. van Deventer, 'Daniel, prophet of divine presence in absence', in: H.G.L. Peels and S.D. Snyman (eds.), *The lion has roared. Theological themes in the prophetic literature of the Old testament*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Or. 2012, 221-234.

are related to what happened to Israel; other times they are seemingly completely unrelated. W. Brueggeman explains this as follows: Yahweh has a life of his own to live among the nations and in their histories; it cannot be monopolized by Israel. It is a prophetic interpretation of international affairs in the ancient Near East,<sup>9</sup> and not a description of these events in accordance with the historiographical norms and values of Western scholarship. A theological understanding and a historical analysis must not be conflated to the detriment of the credibility of both. The question of how this prophetic perspective matches the historical realities on the ground in the ancient Mediterranean Basin does not need to be answered here.<sup>10</sup>

A significant part of this prophetic interpretation is the firm belief that God sits in judgment over the nations, Israel included, for the same transgressions.<sup>11</sup> Israel had not received a privileged immunity against God's judgment. The reason for divine judgment was the blasphemous self-aggrandisement of the nations (Ezk 28:5-6; 29:3; 31:10), which found its own expression in Israel (Dt 8:14-20; Am 2:4-8). Sometimes He used Israel as the agent of his judgment against the nations; sometimes He used the nations as agents against Israel (Dt 28:49-52; Lam 4:21-22). The migrations of the nations and of Israel are evaluated in the context of divine judgment. Israel's immigration into Canaan was a consequence of God's judgment over the sins of Canaan's inhabitants (Gn 15:16; Am 1:6-15);<sup>12</sup> the fall of Babylon or later Persia was the result of divine judgment as well (Ezk 28:11ff; Dan 2:37; 4:17). The background of this prophetic interpretation of world history can be found in the conviction that it is God who authorises world empires and mandates them to rule. But when they abuse their authority by absolutizing their power, their fall is also credited to God, who cannot tolerate arrogant injustice or raw authoritarianism.<sup>13</sup> The rise and fall of empires does not happen outside God's sovereign reign,

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9 See Wright, *Ezekiel*, 2001, 257, 262,

10 See Van Bekkum, *From conquest*, 2011, 7-40, 575-592, on the problematic relationship between Western historiography and the reliability of the OT historical narratives (focusing on Joshua 9:1-13:7).

11 See Wright, *Ezekiel*, 2001, 261; idem, *Mission*, 2006, 7-458.

12 See N. Wolterstorff, 'Reading Joshua', in M. Bergman, M.J. Murray and R.C. Rea (eds.), *Divine evil? The moral character of the God of Abraham*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 236-256; and C.H.J. Wright, *De God die ik niet begrijp. Over lastige geloofskwesties*, 2008, 75-115 on the morality of God's extermination judgment over the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the Promised Land.

13 See Wright, *Ezekiel*, 2001, 264 (quoting Brueggeman); and D.I. Block, *The gods of the nations. A study in Ancient Near Eastern theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Or., 2000, 72.

however impossible it is to chart even the main lines of these historical interventions by Israel's God. This does not exclude, incidentally, an analysis of historical processes in compliance with internal laws of cause and effect. The one does not negate the other.

In this theologised understanding of the history of nations, judgment is not the last word spoken by God; it is not even the first one. In the grand narrative spanning the canonical scriptures, the focus is on the blessing of the nations and their restoration to their full creational potential.<sup>14</sup> The sole reason Israel came into being was to be God's agent in bringing his blessing to the world (Gn 12:3). Through Israel the nations had to come to know God<sup>15</sup> for who He truly is. Knowledge of God would be the source of their blessing and wellbeing. The nations were clearly in view in the prophetic understanding of history (Isa 19:19-22; Jr 12:14-16). The purpose of Israel's mission among the nations was to make God known to them by her exemplary life. In the New Testament, this is taken up in the missionary mandate to the church (Mt 28:16-20).<sup>16</sup> To understand their own history, the nations should know the God of history. Presupposed here is that any nation can be the recipient not only of God's judgment, but also of God's mercy;<sup>17</sup> no one is excluded. These insights shed light on the fate of the antiquarian nations in Deuteronomy 2, which were already partly extinct in the time of Moses.

## 2. Deuteronomy 2 as literature

### 2.1. Rhetorical language

"Sometimes a story is the only way of telling the truth."<sup>18</sup> One should analyse the language of a story, employed by its author, as will be done in this section with the help of Slater.<sup>19</sup> One should also consider the tradition of storytelling

14 Wright, *Mission*, 2006, 461-462, 467.

15 For a theological analysis of the concept 'to know God' see Wright *Mission*, 2006, 71-104; Block, *The gods*, 2000, 151.

16 See B. Wielenga, *Verbond en zending. Een verbondsmatige benadering van zending*, Mondiss, Kampen, 1998; idem, 'Covenant and mission: Mission's covenantal character', in: B. Wielenga, *Bible and mission in Africa. Selected articles*, B. Wielenga, Pietermaritzburg, 2014, 126-151; and M.W. Goheen, *Introducing christian mission. Theology, history and issues*. IVP, Downers Grove, 2014 for a biblical-theological theory of mission, addressing the questions involved here based upon a canonical-historical approach to the relevant Biblical sources.

17 Wright, *Mission*, 2006, 460, 474-489.

18 N.T. Wright, *Acts for everyone* (Chapters 1-12), SCPK, London, 2008, 110.

19 S. Slater, *The land*, 1991.

in which the story participates in the time that it was written down, to be distinguished from the narrated time in the story. This will be done in a following section (par. 2.3.5) with the help of Doak's studies.<sup>20</sup>

Slater's rhetorical approach<sup>21</sup> does not treat the parenthetical notes in Deuteronomy 2:10-12, 20-23 as intrusions into Moses' speech from a later source and time. She looks at these parentheses, added by the author,<sup>22</sup> from the perspective of their potential contribution to the communication of his rhetorical intent. Rhetorical language is of a persuasive character, intended to evoke a response from its readers. Paraneitic and hortatory styles are employed, as is clear in Deuteronomy 1-4, to address the concerns its actual readers harboured regarding their possession of the Promised Land.<sup>23</sup> A parallel can be drawn between the first audience, addressed by Moses in the narrated reality of Israel about to cross the river Jordan into the land, and the actual audience, the readers of the author's text at a much later date.<sup>24</sup> Both audiences knew the story Moses recollected in Deuteronomy 1-3: the first audience is understood to have acted in it as participants; the actual audience has been exposed to the tradition of the story from other Pentateuchal sources. The author speaks to the concerns of his actual audience, which were, in a way, also the concerns of the first audience, addressed by Moses. Attention should be paid to the specific ways in which Moses' recollections of the desert journey of Israel are recounted in Deuteronomy 1-3.

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20 B.R. Doak, *The last of the Rephaim. Conquest and cataclysm in the heroic ages of ancient Israel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 2012; idem, 'The topography of the (un)heroic dead in Ezekiel 32:17-32', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 132(3), 2013, 607-624. See also H. Rouillard, 'Rephaim', in: K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of deities and demons in the Bible*, Brill, Leiden, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1999, 692-700.

21 Slater, *The land*, 1991, 1-29.

22 Slater (*The land*, 1991, 190) speaks about a frame breaking strategy to underline the importance of the progress made by Israel to the Promised Land: Its conquest and distribution started with Transjordan. These parentheses contribute to the communication of the author's rhetorical intent, idem, *The land*, 1991, 12.

23 See Block, *The gods*, 2000:101-111 on Lv 26; Dt 28 for the covenantal view of the author on the relationship between God, the people and the land.

24 For a discussion on the dating of Deuteronomy see, for instance, C. Houtman, *Inleiding in de Pentateuch*, Kok, Kampen, 1980, 165-200; and K. van der Toorn, *Scribal culture and the making of the Hebrew Bible*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 2007, 143-172; and the literature mentioned there. These antiquarian notes do not support a Mosaic date of Deuteronomy; the antiquity of the nations must not be mistaken for the antiquity of the notes on the nations. See Slater, *The land*, 1991:188.

## 2.2. *The narrative in Deuteronomy 1:1-3:11*

### 2.2.1. *Deuteronomy 1*

In Moses' first sermon the people are reminded of what happened approximately 38 years ago (Dt 1:9). They obeyed God's command to leave Horeb and to go up and take the Promised Land as their inheritance (Dt 1:6-8). They arrived at Kadesh-barnea and were told to enter and take the land in possession (Dt 1:20-21). They came to Moses with the proposal to spy out the land first, which was approved by him (Dt 1:22-25). But the report of the spies scared them because of the Anakites living in the land, and the cities, fortified to heaven, situated there (Dt 1:26-28). They refused to trust God (Dt 1:29-30) and to obey him. As consequence, God refused entrance into the land to the generation responsible for the calamity, and forced them to turn around back to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea (Dt 1:34-40). The only ray of light in the darkness of God's judgment was his promise held out to the next generation under Joshua and Caleb: They would be allowed to enter and take their inheritance as promised to their ancestors (Dt 1:36-39).

Slater<sup>25</sup> points out that Dt 1:19-46 is dependent on Numbers 13-14. It is noteworthy that Moses brought up just this event from among all what happened to Israel during their journey. The context is, however, different from Numbers 13-14, where Israel stood at the beginning of their 38-years desert journey. Here, in Deuteronomy 1, Moses looks back from their position at the banks of the river Jordan, before entering the land and after having defeated the Amorite kings. From this perspective, the refusal to enter long ago caused a serious delay, but it did not cancel God's promises of old. Their fulfilment was now at hand. In Numbers 14:11-45, cancellation almost happened but for the desperate intercession of Moses; at that time, Israel's act of disobedience immediately afterwards signalled a very insecure future ahead.

The narrative is interrupted by an unrelated story about the appointment of leaders and judges (Dt 1:9-18). In contrast with Exodus 18:17-27, here the function of this recollection for the actual audience is to communicate the message that the people cannot be excused in any way for the divine judgment that struck them. Their own chosen leaders, and the institutions they themselves established (Dt 1:13-17), were to be held responsible.<sup>26</sup> In this connection, the extraordinary omission of God's initiative to spy out the land (Num 13:2), and Moses' choice to emphasise that Israel made the first move to do so

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25 Slater, *The land*, 1991:77-80.

26 Slater, *The land*, 1991, 67-69.

(Dt 1:22-23), highlights the culpability of the people themselves. The implied accusation of lack of trust and obedience in a faithful God connects the first audience of this narrative and the actual audience in the author's own time.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.2.2. Deuteronomy 2-3

In chapter 2, Moses turns to the events, that had recently taken place at the end of their wilderness years. His account of what occurred between Israel and Edom (Dt 2:3-8), Moab (Dt 2:8-13), and Ammon (Dt 2:18-23) on the one hand, and the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Dt 2:24-36) on the other, differs from the other Pentateuchal sources<sup>28</sup> relating this narrative, upon which Deuteronomy 2 is dependent. The differences are intentional changes (consonant with the message of the narrative) made by the author to communicate his message to his actual audience.

The first change relates to the emphasis on the perceived kinship relations between Israel and the nations descending from Abraham and Lot (Gn 19:30-38; 36:9-43). Such genealogical connections did not exist between Israel and the Amorites of Sihon and Og. The author believes that genealogically related peoples should behave towards one another in solidarity, and this especially when the same God is sovereignly in control of their fates.<sup>29</sup> Block<sup>30</sup> even suggests the possibility that the God of Abraham also fulfils, in a way, his promises of old to these descendants of the patriarch. They, too, received their territories from God as an inheritance from his hand, in the process dispossessing the previous, antiquarian inhabitants of their land, just as Israel was going to do, when it was their turn to receive their inheritance in Cisjordan from God. As pointed out in the section on the theology of history (par. 1.2), God, as Creator of heaven and earth in control of the history of the nations, cannot be monopolised by only one nation, Israel.<sup>31</sup>

Second, in Numbers 20:14-21 Edom was the one intimidating Israel, here it is Israel who instils fear in Edom. This agrees with the theology of history, as

27 Slater, *The land*, 1991, 90-91.

28 See for Dt 2:1-8 Num 20:14-21; for Dt 2:9-13, 14-16 Ex 14-15; for Dt 2:26-37 Num 21:21-32; for Dt 3:1-11 Num 21:23-35. Slater (*The land*, 1991, 119-142) discusses the textual relationship between the Dt and the Ex-Num texts.

29 Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 1990, 37.

30 Block, *Deuteronomy*, 2012, 81.

31 It must be noted that the claim of these nations that their own gods have provided them with their inheritance, is completely ignored in Dt 2 (Block, *The gods*, 2000, 82-84). The statement in Dt 2:22 that the Lord defeated the Horites from before the Edomites, would have sounded outrageous in their ears (*idem*, 2000, 84-87). See also Dt 2:4-5.



propounded in Deuteronomy, which extols the magnitude of God's power and glory in the history of nations. In this way, God creates the way along which Israel could 'pass through'<sup>32</sup> these hostile but genealogically related nations. This recollection of Moses encouraged his listeners, but its message was aimed at reassuring the actual audience of the author as well.

These changes must be seen against the background of Deuteronomy 2:14-16: God's wrath had turned into grace; the time of judgment had passed into a time of new hope and expectation; God's promises of old were about to come true. The spiritual climate in chapter 2 is in sharp contrast with the one pictured in chapter 1.

This contrast is also stressed in the recollections of the defeats of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og. The magnitude of these victories is geographically pointed out in Deuteronomy 2:36-37; 3:6, 8-10. That God, as 'holy Warrior',<sup>33</sup> delivered these enemies into Israel's hands, is told in Deuteronomy 2:30-31; 3:3. In contrast with Numbers 20-21, Israel's participation in the battles is not mentioned; only God's sovereign and gracious intervention is highlighted in line with Deuteronomy's theology of history. A reason for the total extermination (ban) of the Amorites is not given; the spoils of war are devoted to God, anticipating what happened to the inhabitants of Cisjordan (Dt 7:1-6; Josh 6:17; 7:11). The message to the first audience, but no less to the second one, is clear: the God of their fathers can be trusted to fulfil his promises of old about the land as their inheritance, on the covenantal condition of their trust, and obedience, only in and to him.

### 2.3. *The antiquarian nations*

In this section, the historical information about the antiquarian nations mentioned in Deuteronomy 2:10-12, 20-23; 3:11 (Rephaites, Anakites, Emites, Zamzummites, Horites, and Avvites), is evaluated. The question, to be answered, is whether Deuteronomy 2 intends to provide historical information, or whether this information is rhetorically modified to communicate a message to the audiences involved here.

#### 2.3.1. *Anakites*

Apart from the Horites, the antiquarian nations mentioned in Deuteronomy 2 have in common their gigantic stature. This is one of the reasons that the Anakites formed an insurmountable obstacle for Israel in their first attempt

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32 Slater, *The land*, 1991, 119.

33 Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 1990, 40, 42; Slater, *The land*, 1991, 172.

to enter the land (Num 13:22, 28-33). They seem to have been centred around Hebron;<sup>34</sup> they were defeated by Joshua (Josh 11:21-22), and Caleb (Josh 14:12-15); only a small remnant could survive among the Philistines. In Numbers 13:33 a link is forged between the Anakites and the Nephilim, known from Genesis 6:1-4 for their suspicious origin as descendants of a mismatch between 'the sons of God and the daughters of men'.<sup>35</sup> The Nephilim are also called Gibborim, mighty men or heroes (Gn 6:4), of whom Nimrod, the bigger than life hero of prehistoric times (Gn 10:8-12), is a prime specimen.<sup>36</sup>

In the context of Genesis 1-11, these monstrous, pre-Flood ancestors of the gigantic Anakites form a threat against God's created order;<sup>37</sup> they overstep the boundaries between God in heaven and humans on earth in their longing for immortality along an alternative route, now the Tree of Life has become beyond reach (Gn 3:24). The Flood narrative could have been God's response to this threat (Gn 6-9). The building of the tower of Babel, whose top will reach into heaven (Gn 11:4), is another example of this mentality, which is found back with the Anakites who built cities fortified to heaven (Dt 1:28).<sup>38</sup> In short, the Anakites are the heirs of the Nephilim in body and in spirit. They are counted among the Gibborim of old.<sup>39</sup>

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34 See Num 13:22; Josh 14:15; 15:13-15; Jdg 1:20. In Dt 9:1-2 it looks as if they were spread all over Cisjordan. See also Doak, *The last*, 2012, 73-74.

35 See Doedens, *The sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, Kapatalis Printing House Hungary, Debrecen, 2013; R. Hendel, 'The Nephilim were on earth: Genesis 6:1-4 and its ancient Near Eastern context', in: C. Auffarth and L.T. Stuckenbruch (eds.), *The fall of angels*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2004, 11-34.

36 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 68, 78, 189-194.

37 Doedens, *The sons*, 2013, 289-292.

38 See Doedens, *The sons*, 2013, and Doak, *The last*, 2012, for the discussion about the literary conventions used in the narratives about the gigantic nations, which also touches on the question of their historical value. There is no archaeological evidence at all for the existence of giants in the ancient Mediterranean Basin (Doak, *The last*, 2012, 16-25). For influence from the ancient Greek epic literature, celebrating their heroes/giants from the prehistoric, glorious past, see Doak, *The last*, 2012, 149-171; Doedens, *The sons*, 2013, 271-273, 279-283; Hendel, *Nephilim*, 2004:11-34, and C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn (BKAT 1/1), 1974:500-517. Acceptance of this influence does not signify the denial of the narrated time as a true reflection of the time of Moses. The actual time of the author must, however, be set at a much later moment in Israel's history. See also note 23.

39 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 80.

### 2.3.2. Rephaites

Next, the Rephaites and the Emmites are mentioned (Dt 2:10-11) in the same breath as the Anakites. In Dt 2-3, the gigantic nations (Anakites, Rephaites, Emmites and Zamzummites) are conflated; about the last two nations mentioned not much is known.<sup>40</sup> Here they are not referred to for historical but rhetorical reasons, even though the author must have thought to pass on reliable information about them, considering his reference to the bed of king Og, the last of the Rephaites (Dt 3:11). The gigantic stature of Og, not mentioned in Numbers 21:33-35,<sup>41</sup> also classifies these nations as the physical and spiritual heirs of the Nephilim and Gibborim, mentioned in Genesis 6:1-4.

They were mainly found in Transjordan,<sup>42</sup> where Israel had just faced down Og and his ally Sihon not that long ago (Dt 2:30-36; 3:1-10). But these original inhabitants of Transjordan were dispossessed<sup>43</sup> of their land by the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites.<sup>44</sup> Intentionally, the author stresses their physical appearance to highlight the extreme danger Israel faced in Trans- and Cisjordan, and how great the victory was God gave them, taking possession of their inheritance. As Doak writes: "The fate of these aboriginal inhabitants forms part of the pattern of possession and exile in which Israel partakes (...)."<sup>45</sup> The Avvites, dispossessed by Caphtorites (Philistines),<sup>46</sup> and the Horites,<sup>47</sup> dispossessed by Edomites (Dt 2:22-23), were also part of this pattern.

### 2.3.3. The Horites

Not much is known about the Avvites (Josh 13:3-4), except that they inhabited the coastal plain of Palestine before they were dispossessed by the Philistines

40 These names are probably local alternatives referring to the same people. Doak, *The last*, 2012, 86-87.

41 Also in Gn 14-15, the gigantic stature of the Rephaites is not mentioned, even though they are put together with the terrifying nations, inhabiting pre-Israelite Palestine, which formed the fixed number of 7 nations also mentioned in Dt 7. See Van Bekkum, *From conquest*, 2011, 128-142; A. Versluis, *Geen verbond, geen genade. Analyse en evaluatie van het gebod om de Kanaänieten uit te roeien (Deuteronomium 7)*, Boekencentrum Academic, Zoetermeer 2012, 141-147; H. Rouillard, 'Rephaim', in: K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of deities and demons in the Bible (DDD)*, Brill, Leiden 1995, 1319.

42 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 81-83.

43 For the Hebrew verb *yarash/to* (dis)possess see Block (2000:79-80).

44 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 93-99.

45 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 89.

46 E. Noort, *Die Seevölker in Palästina*. Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1994.

47 R. de Vaux, 'Les Hurrites de l'histoire et les Horites de la Bible', *Revue Biblique* 74 (1967), 482-503.

(Am 9:7). They are, perhaps, included here to complete the pattern of (dis) possession covering the whole of Palestine.

A fair amount is known about the Horites.<sup>48</sup> The problem is, however, that it is doubtful whether the Horites of the Bible are identical with the Hurrites of history. De Vaux contends that the Hurrites, a nation of military sophistication, did not live in Transjordan, where the Horites of the Bible were, supposedly, dispossessed of their land by Edom. Rather, after 1500 BCE, the Hurrites occupied villages dominating the thoroughfares from Palestine to Egypt.<sup>49</sup> In short, there is no historical evidence that there ever have lived Horites/Hurrites in Transjordan. This suggests that the author has included them in his narrative for rhetorical reasons. As descendants of an ancient empire, they had a fearsome military reputation; but they could not oppose the God of Israel, who destroyed them from before the Edomites (Dt 2:22). They shared a presumptive titanic spirit with the gigantic nations.

#### 2.3.4. Historical evaluation

In the relevant literature, it is pointed out that there is no easy match between the historical information about these antiquarian nations in the Hexateuchal sources and what is known from the ancient Near Eastern archaeological and historical sources. This is, remarkably enough, also true of the information about the seven nations in Cisjordan, destroyed by God from before Israel after they entered the Promised Land. Attention is therefore paid to these nations to find out how they function in the conquest and settlement narrative in Deuteronomy 7, with the intention to uncover the scope of the rhetorical use of the antiquarian nations in Deuteronomy 2.

It is not too far-fetched to observe here a parallel with the seven nations Israel had to dispossess of their land in Cisjordan (Dt 7). Not too much is known about four of the seven nations (Perizzites, Hivvites, Jebusites and Girgashites). They seem to have been added to give credence to the ancient roots of the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine, whose names evoked awe and fear for their imperial reputation. The number seven also suggests the completeness of the number of enemies Israel had to face in Cisjordan and to overcome in the strength of their God.

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48 De Vaux, *L'histoire*, 1967; K.R.Veenhof, 'Geschiedenis van het oude Nabije Oosten tot aan de tijd van Alexander de Grote', in: M.J. Mulder e.a. (red.), *Bijbels Handboek I: De wereld van de bijbel*, Kok, Kampen 1981, 354-357.

49 De Vaux, *L'histoire*, 1967, 496.

About the Hittites, Amorites and Canaanites, again, much is known, probably also in Israel at the time of the author. At the same time, the references to them in the Old Testament are mostly vague and not always consistent with the ancient Near Eastern archaeological sources.<sup>50</sup> Even though one could, cautiously, admit that the ethnic classification of these nations in the Old Testament goes back to traditional knowledge, available to the author and perceived to be historically reliable, it is plausible that he uses this material for his own purposes, and rhetorically modifies it to serve his intentions with his narrative. By mentioning these three nations, the author intends to evoke fear and awe, and to highlight the magnitude of God's intervention in the history of Israel and these nations.

What is true about Deuteronomy 7, is also true about Deuteronomy 2. It is not the historical value of the information about the antiquarian nations that is the issue, but its rhetorical value. The rhetorical function of the antiquarian nations must, therefore, be investigated.

### 2.3.5. *A theological assessment*

To do a theological assessment of the appearance of the gigantic and terrifying nations in Deuteronomy 2 requires an interpretative framework, within which this appearance, here as well as later in the time of the monarchy,<sup>51</sup> makes sense. Doak's proposal<sup>52</sup> to see Israel as part of the greater Mediterranean Basin with a common *koinè* is well-reasoned. In this ancient world, in which, apart from Israel, Greece, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Phoenicia, Palestine and Egypt also participated, Greek migrants, like tradespeople and mercenaries, spread their culture with its very distinct mythology far and wide.<sup>53</sup> The giants were perceived here as a distinct human race, having lived in a bygone era, where epic battles took place between people bigger than life, whose stature and deeds greatly exceed that of humans living in the present times. These epic narratives, transmitted through the different local mythologies, could have been rooted in historical origins, which have long since become inaccessible to the present

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50 Van Bekkum, *From conquest*, 2011, 142; Versluis, *Geen verbond*, 2012, 244-246; C. Houtman, 'Die ursprünglichen Bewohner des Landes Kanaan in Deuteronomium. Sinn und Absicht der Beschreibung ihrer Identität und ihrer Charakter', *Vetus Testamentum* 52(1), 2002, 52-63.

51 See par. 2.3.1. for the appearance of the ancestors of these titanic nations in the pre-Flood era (Gn 1-11).

52 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 200-211. Idem, 2012, 25-27 about the *koinè*.

53 Doaks, *The last*, 2012, 152-171.

generations.<sup>54</sup> Israel must have had knowledge of these epic narratives about giants and their titanic ventures, and about their ultimate downfall. Especially the Greek myths, known from the works of Hesiod and Homer (8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), could not have been unknown in the Israelite milieu.<sup>55</sup> The 'flattening' of the hubris of these giants in these myths, overreaching their human condition in a titanic battle with the gods (Doak 2012:123-133), is matched, for instance, in the pre-Flood narratives of Israel (Gn 1-11).<sup>56</sup> Only, in the Old Testament, it is God who cut the giants down to size (Gn 6:3; 11:8; Dt 2:20-22), and eliminated the chaotic disorder their titanic gigantism stood for. He marginalised the antiquarian nations in history not only for the sake of Israel's 'landed cousins' (Slater 1991:87), but, at last, for the sake of Israel and the world of nations. Where God reigns, creational order should rule.

In short, Doak assumes with good arguments that an extensive, ancient Mediterranean conversation regarding the existence and faith of the heroes/giants as figures both in epic and cult, in which Israel has participated, has been going on.<sup>57</sup> But the modification of this conversation in the canonical Old Testament, dominated by Israel's covenantal monotheism, has been considerable. Compared with the extensive literature on heroes/giants outside Israel, inside Israel one finds only echoes, glimpses and hints of these ancient and widespread epic traditions.

In Deuteronomy 2 it is the God of Israel, Creator of the world, Lord of the nations and Redeemer of his people, who defeats the gigantic nations, and almost obliterates their memory. They survive as footnotes to the history of the ancient Near East. Their disempowerment anticipates that of the fixed number of nations in Cisjordan. There is no place in the Promised Land, at both sides of the river Jordan, for titanic nations who forget their human limitations and violently distort, in the process, God's created order for humans. Inside the Promised Land Israel will find 'rest' (Dt 12:12).<sup>58</sup>

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54 H. Rouillard, *DDD*, 1995, 1318.

55 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 123-133, 176.

56 Doak argues for a Mesopotamian root of the Greek myths about the Flood (2012, 138).

57 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 152. At this juncture of the discussion quite often the correspondence between history and myth in the Old Testament is brought up. The premise of this article is that myths have been rhetorically employed in its historiography. One could call this a hostile takeover of a foreign cultural inheritance for use in a new context.

58 See Block, *The gods*, 2000, 97-99 for a discussion about 'rest' together with 'security' in the context of the land as grant of God to his chosen people (Ezk 34:25-29).

### 3. A future closed

Apart from the Hexateuchal sources, information about the giants can also be obtained in monarchical literature (1 Sm 17; 2 Sm 21:15-22/1 Chron 20:4-8). But, surprisingly, in Isaiah 14:3-20; 26:14-19, and Ezekiel 32:17-32 they reappear, albeit as the spirits of the dead. Attention is now given to both these traditions, which are only mentioned on the extreme margins of the Old Testament.

#### 3.1. Rephaites in monarchical times

In 1 Samuel 17, the Philistine-Rephaite Goliath<sup>59</sup> appears on the scene of the battle between Israel and the Philistines in the time of king Saul. He is killed by future king David in an unequal contest. His actual dimensions, approximately 3-meter-tall, carrying weapons too heavy for any normal human being to carry (17:4-7), show that he is, in the memory of Israel, a frightening monstrosity of a man. His description as ‘the Philistine’ (15 times) refers to his spiritual state as uncircumcised (17:36), despising in his arrogance not only Israel but also their God. It is just this God, whom David professed as the Lord Almighty, the actual commander-in-chief of Israel (17:45), who gave victory to David, his anointed one, for the sake of his people. The titanic Goliath, uncircumcised in body and soul, is totally disempowered.

In 2 Samuel 21:15-22,<sup>60</sup> David’s definite defeat of the Philistines, probably at the beginning of his reign in Jerusalem, is described as a victory over the unruly forces of chaos and disorder, which troubled Israel in the time of the Judges.<sup>61</sup> Philistines, Anakites and Rephaites are conflated here for rhetorical reasons. In this way, they are embodying the “quintessential ‘giant’, the foreign monster that must be resisted and eliminated to secure a prosperous nation” under God.<sup>62</sup> From the perspective of the Deuteronomistic history,<sup>63</sup> this pas-

59 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 102-108.

60 B.S. Childs (*Old Testament theology in a canonical context*, SCM Press, London 1985:118-119) points out that 2 Sm 21-24 offer “a highly reflective, theological interpretation of David’s whole career as adumbrating the messianic hope.” So, the passage of 21:15-22, too, had to play a role in establishing an eschatological, messianic perspective on Israel’s history.

61 K.A. Deurloo, ‘Geen koning in die dagen’, in: H. Blok e.a. (red.), *Geen koning in die dagen. Over het boek Richteren als profetische geschiedschrijving*, Ten Have, Baarn, 1982, 89-106.

62 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 114.

63 A.S. van der Woude, ‘De wordingsgeschiedenis van het Oude Testament’, in: A.S. van der Woude (red.), *Inleiding tot de studie van het Oude Testament*, Kok, Kampen 1986, 11-28; H.L. Bosman, ‘Die Deuteronomistische Geschiedenis’, in: H.L. Bosman and J.A. Loader (red.), *Vertellers van die Ou Testament*, Tafelberg Uitgewers, Kaapstad 1987:44-74.

sage provides hope in chaotic times. The new Davidic rule crushes a world order in opposition against the Lord, God of Israel, operating in the time of the Judges and during the reign of Saul. The gigantic nations with their titanic hubris, symbolised here by the combined Philistine and Rephaite forces as representative figures of primordial evil, stood no chance against the messianic world order shaping powers of the Davidic monarchy (2 Sm 7). God's anointed one is called to eliminate forever this threat to God's world order.<sup>64</sup> In the parallel text in 1 Chron 20:4-8, this passage functions in the narrative context of David as temple builder. Where God dwells among his people in the temple, built on the place chosen by himself (Dt 12:5; 2 Sm 24:18-25; 2 Chron 3:1), the promised rest and security (Dt 12:10-12) is found.

### 3.2. *Rephaites as spirits of the dead*

Wildberger<sup>65</sup> is not yet convinced that the Rephaites, mentioned in Isaiah 14:9, mostly rendered as 'spirits of the dead', are identical with the Rephaites known from the historical narratives in Hexateuchal sources. Doak,<sup>66</sup> however, points to the dual identity of heroes/giants in the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean Basin, especially in Ugarit, one of Israel's neighbouring city-states.<sup>67</sup> The name Rephaim has been discovered there on sacrophagi from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE,<sup>68</sup> referring to the dead, the common mass of departed spirits, the shades, as is also the case in Psalm 88:11b; Proverbs 2:18; 9:18; 21:16. In Isaiah 14:9; 26:14, 19, it could be that Rephaites refer to a special class among the dead, the deceased notables, who were believed to be healers in a sense.<sup>69</sup> Doak uses here the term 'interpenetration of religious meaning':<sup>70</sup> the celebrated heroes/giants of a bygone era, spreading terror on earth among their enemies, continue to do so from the netherworld as spirits. Outside Israel, these powerful spirits are consulted and exalted for their healing and protecting powers.<sup>71</sup> Antithetically, in Israel this was strictly forbid-

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64 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 121.

65 H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 2 (13-27)*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn (BKAT X/2) 1978, 548-549.

66 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 180-183. See also B.R. Doak, *Topography*, 2013, 613-614; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Doubleday, New York (AB 5) 1991, 162.

67 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 185-186; H. Rouillard, *DDD*, 1995, 1307-1324.

68 Rouillard, *DDD*, 1995, 1314.

69 Rouillard, *DDD*, 1995, 1308, 1315, 1322.

70 Doak, *The last*, 2012, 186; idem, *Topography*, 2013, 613.

71 In this context, the link between *rp'* (to heal) and the Rephaim in Ugarit is noteworthy, Rouillard, *DDD* 1995:1307-1313, 1322.



den (Dt 18:10-11; 1 Sm 28:3; Isa 8:19) as in direct conflict with the first commandment (Dt 5:6-7).

Doak also refers to Ezekiel 32:17-32 as of possible importance.<sup>72</sup> Here a parody on the heroic laments, known from the Mediterranean Basin from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards, is identified, even though it is not the Rephaites that are mentioned here but the Gibborim (Ezk 32:21, 27), the mighty fallen<sup>73</sup> heroes of times gone by (Gn 6:1-4). Among Israel's neighbours they continue to spread their terror on earth as spirits of the dead. But Ezekiel denigrates those Gibborim in the netherworld: they have no access anymore to the world of the living; they are only good for welcoming powerful people like the defeated Pharaoh of Egypt in the world of the shades (Ezk 32:31-32). Only their fading memory will remain on earth.<sup>74</sup>

Isaiah or Ezekiel do not, explicitly, establish any identity between the terrifying Rephaites, and Gibborim, on earth and the dead ones, still spreading their now ghost-induced terror on earth. This omission is in line with the whole tradition of marginalisation around the antiquarian nations since the time of the conquest, and around the heroes/ giants from the monarchical era. Ezekiel does not only emphasise God's power here to save his people from the world powers oppressing them during the exilic times; he also stresses that it is the God of Israel who sits in judgment over titanic nations like Tyre and Sidon, Egypt, or Babylon (Ezk 32:1-32). Here judgment over the nations signals redemption for God's people.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4. Epilogue

At three moments in the historiography of the Old Testament, the giants/ heroes, and the nations descending from them, are introduced: In the primeval times before the Flood (Gn 6-9); in the pre-conquest era before Israel settled in the Promised Land (see Dt 2; 7); and during the monarchical dispensation (1 Sm 17; 2 Sm 21). At these crucial times, the chaos, lawlessness and disorder, injustice and idolatry, that had to be combatted and overcome,

72 Doak, *Topography*, 2013; idem, *The last*, 2012, 189-195. See also W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2 (25-48)*, Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn (BKAT XIII/2) 1969, 773-793; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 2001, 253-255.

73 See Doak, *The last*, 2012:64, 189 about the use of the verb *naphal* in Ezk 32; see Hendel, *Nephilim*, 2004, 21-22 for its use in Gen 6:1-4.

74 Doak, *Topography*, 2013, 618.

75 B. Wielenga, 'Eschatology in Malachi. The emergence of a doctrine', *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 50(1), 2016, #2091.

are rhetorically enlarged with the use of mythological material, known in Israel from the world they were part of. The norms and values embodied by these giants/heroes, and the nations descending from them, had to be suppressed and even rooted out. Therefore, their existence was intentionally acknowledged only on the margins of redemptive history, and then only to highlight the glory of God the Creator and to enhance his reputation as Redeemer of old.

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