

September 25 2005
St. Sergius of Radonezh

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

When the obscure kingdom of Lydia (in Asia Minor) came to geopolitical notoriety in the seventh century before Christ, the man responsible for its rise was a ruthless, warring king named Gugu (c. 680-c. 648).

Gugu was, at least, the name by which the Assyrians called him. Indeed, the earliest extant texts mentioning this Lydian king are found in the clay archives of the Assyrian emperor Ashurbanipal (668-633), who was for a while Gugu's suzerain lord. Now it is surely significant of Gugu's political and military importance that an earthen tablet in distant Mesopotamia contains our first inscription of his name.

In Mesopotamian memory, in fact, the name of Gugu lingered on. Ezekiel, writing his prophecies there during the next century (chapters 38—39), remembered the famous Lydian king as "Gug" or "Gog" (the two forms being identical in unmarked Hebrew).

Because of Lydia's inclusion in the greater world of the Greeks, it is no wonder that these latter also spoke of Gugu (whose name they Hellenized to "Gyges," our own "y" and the "u" being identical in Greek). In extant sources, the first Greek to mention Gugu was his contemporary, the poet Archilochus, who referred especially to the Lydian's great wealth. Aristotle quotes a line of Archilochus, "*Ou moi ta Gugeo tou polychrysou meleï, oud' heile po me zelos*—I am not bothered by the wealth of Gugu, nor did I ever envy him" (*Rhetoric* 1418.42b).

Gugu's fame refused to fade. A full two centuries after his death Herodotus (c. 482-c. 425) recorded memorable tales about him. In a rather involved story, for instance, he described how the wife of Gugu's predecessor persuaded him to kill her husband and seize the throne (*Histories* 1.8-12). Other versions of this account (for example, Plato, *Republic* 2.3 359C—360B) differ in the details, but most agree that Gugu murdered his predecessor and married the widow.

This violent seizure of the Lydian throne would have led to a civil war, says Herodotus (1.13), except that the Delphic oracle confirmed Gugu, or Gyges, in his new position. In gratitude whereof, Gugu devoted many gifts to the Delphic shrine (1.14).

No sooner had Gugu taken the throne than he began to wage war on all his neighbors. In fact, says Herodotus, "he accomplished nothing else of note (*ouden gar mega*) in his reign of thirty-eight years" (1.15).

Gugu's great military success was partly purchased by his alliance with the Assyrians, nor could it long outlive that alliance. When, sometime about 648, Gugu

sent forces to Egypt to help Pharaoh Psamtik I (664-610) in his rebellion against Ashurbanipal, the latter abandoned him to his local enemies in Asia Minor. That was the end of Gugu.

As we have seen, however, something about Gugu declined to die. In popular imagination he remained the very type of the barbarian warrior.

Thus, when the prophet Ezekiel, exiled in Mesopotamia a hundred years later, wanted to describe for own his contemporaries the coming judgment of God in the tumultuous events of history, all he had to do was invoke the name of Gugu, or Gog, to describe a menacing barbarian army. This coming Gog holds sway in the land of Magog, a name meaning "(derived) from Gog" (Hebrew *min-Gog*). He is "the head (*rosh*) of Meshech and Tubal" (38:2), the two sons of Japheth and the fathers of most of the world's nations (Genesis 16:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5; cf. Ezekiel 27:13; 32:26; 39:1). This barbarian Gog represents, therefore, the hostile world arrayed for the invasion of God's people.

Six hundred years after Ezekiel, St. John wrote another prophetic book, which he sent to—among other places—Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6), the ancient capital of Lydia, the very place where Gugu had seized the throne and married the queen. In this book too John prophesied that old Gog, along with Magog, was coming back after a thousand years, to visit devastation on the earth: "Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea (Revelation 20:7-8).

Whereas the pagan world recalled Gugu mainly as the type of a ruthless warrior, the Bible sees him more as an enemy of God and an abiding threat to God's people. Gugu remains in this world, in either case, a very real problem.

©2005 Patrick Henry Reardon

All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641
Church Office: (773) 777-0749
<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor
phrii@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:
www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html
Pastoral Ponderings:
http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php