Yhwh versus the Kings of Middle Earth:
Royal Polemic in Ezekiel's Oracles Against the Nations

Dr. Madhavi Nevader
Oriel College, Oxford

Integral to the book of Ezekiel, as to many of the major prophetic collections in the Hebrew Bible, is the series of Oracles against the Nations. Unique to this series, however, is its explicit royal tone, insofar as a substantial number of the oracles are addressed specifically to the king of a given nation, not the body politic. The attack against the royal post-holder, more than the mere threat of punishment or extermination, I argue can be construed as a polemic against the larger royal institution itself. The paper proceeds with an examination of the oracle against the king of Tyre in Ez 28, those against Pharaoh in Ez 29, 32, and ends outside the oracles series with a discussion of the Eagle Allegory in Ez 17. With regard to the oracles, I suggest that the purpose of the polemic, beyond that of levelling an accusation of hubris, is to dismantle the ideological structure typically associated with royal rhetoric. The Eagle Allegory, though not a condemnation outright, is nevertheless a skilfully constructed comparison between Yhwh and the king of Babylon, whereby Yhwh is shown to be the superior of the two actors, which ultimately provides the means by which he is able to dissolve the 'awe of power' surrounding the instrument of his wrath. In doing so, Yhwh vanquishes all political competition, whether it manifests as an upstart Napoleon (the king of Tyre) or the 'Great Kings' of the Near East (Pharaoh and the king of Babylon), so as to make himself known not simply as an effective deity, but as the sole sovereign King.