As Robert Gordon has rightly pointed out, the Targumists were as much ‘eschatologists’ as they were biblical expositors (Gordon 1978: 113). While the Targumists’ development of such eschatological concepts as resurrection, Messianism, and final reward (or final retribution) has been explored, relatively little has been said about the Targumists’ interpretation of one of the Second Temple period’s prominent eschatological concepts: the final banquet. In both the MT and the Targums, the foundational text about the banquet is Isaiah 25.6–8. An examination of this text in the Targum tradition can provide some insight into the early interpretation of the book of Isaiah, as well as serve as a case study for some of the translation techniques of the Isaiah Targumist. However, perhaps the most valuable aspect of the passage for understanding the Targumist’s eschatological concerns is revealed in his conception of Israel’s two great enemies and their fate as seen in Tg. Isa. 25:7.

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1 Two important areas of Robert Gordon’s research have been the ancient versions of the Hebrew Bible and studies in the book of Isaiah. In keeping with these subject areas, and mindful of his significant contributions to the field of biblical studies, this essay is offered in his honour. The innumerable students, colleagues, and friends who have benefitted from Robert Gordon’s scholarship as well as his kindnesses over the years will also see a tribute to him in the banquet theme since he and his family have humbly welcomed so many to their own table—a veritable foreshadowing of the blessings of the eschatological feast in every way.

2 In terms of the development and prominence of this theme in the eschatology of the late inter-testamental period, in addition to Tg. Isa. 25.6–8, one thinks of such passages as 4 Ezra 6.48–52; 2 Baruch 29.4; 1 Enoch 60.7–10, 24; Tg. Cant. 8.2; and Tg. Ezek. 39.16–20. Of course this banquet motif continued developing as a part of Jewish eschatological thought in various communities, as reflected in such later texts as Babylonian Talmud B.B. 74b–75a and also the New Testament.
I. The Two Unidentified Enemies in Tg. Isa. 25.7

A variety of Targum translation techniques account for most of the changes in meaning from MT Isa. 25.6–8 to Tg. Isa. 25.6–8 (e.g. the use of stock phrases, the consoling vengeance motif, converse translation, *gezerah shavah* and perhaps the reminiscence of other Targum texts). However, there is one enigmatic translation in the Targum passage that is not so readily explained. Whereas MT 25.7 refers to the swallowing of מַלְכוּתי and בְּנֵי לֹאֵץ, in the hands of the Targumist מַלְכוּתי becomes אֶפֶן רַבְּא אֶפֶן רַבְּא (‘the face of the great one’) and בְּנֵי לֹאֵץ becomes אֵפֶן מְלָכָה עִלָּה לְכָל מְלָכָה (‘the face of the king who rules over all the kingdoms’). This alteration in the Targum takes the MT’s discussion of a covering and a veil (generally understood as garments used for mourning, symbolic of death itself) and transforms it into a condemnation of two unidentified but apparently antagonistic rulers. It is possible that these two kings of Tg. Isa. 25.7 are meant to represent death, since death could be conceived as the final ruling authority over mortals and this would be in keeping with the meaning of the MT. Both the grammar and the theme of the passage in the MT clarify the imagery of the veil and the curtain as death. However, these clarifications are missing in the Targum, and with their absence it seems highly improbable that the Targumist envisaged the singular personified death as the two rulers mentioned in 25.7. Consequently, elucidating the identity of these rulers is necessary for understanding Tg. Isa. 25.7 and the Targumist’s conception of the eschatological banquet.

A. The Collective but Undefined Enemies of Israel

One interpretive option is that ‘the great one’ and ‘the king who rules over all the kingdoms’ do not refer to any specific individuals. In this case, the Targumist may have understood 25.7 as a collective but undefined reference to the enemies of Israel and their rulers whom YHWH would overthrow at the inauguration of his kingdom on Mount Zion—thus a general polemic against the leaders of Israel’s enemies, but nothing more specific. Targum Isa. 54.15b and 56.9 speak of the destruction of ‘the kings of the peoples that gather to oppress’

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3 For the ‘interpretive principle of *gezerah shavah*’ and its relationship to the Targums, see Gordon (2001: 70).