

MARCELO EPSTEIN

**ON THE “ORIGINAL” SEPTUAGINT**

The author is professor of Mechanical Engineering in the University of Calgary, Canada.

What was the original text of the oldest known translation of the Hebrew Bible? Was there ever a unique original text or, rather, were there a number of early Greek versions out of which, in time, a more or less official version emerged? Questions of this nature have occupied Rabbis, Church Fathers, scholars and researchers for the last two millennia and have crystallized in our day into a whole subdiscipline known as protoseptuagintal research. The present work calls attention to an oft quoted but readily dismissed Talmudic passage to suggest that perhaps the Rabbis were in possession, or had recollection, of a text of the Septuagint closer to the original than any of the extant recensions. The oldest LXX manuscripts date back to the second century BCE, but they are very fragmentary. Earliest complete, or almost complete, codices are from the fourth century CE. Evidence of earlier texts was adduced already by Origen, who claimed that the divine name was written originally as the Tetragrammaton, rather than as the Greek *kurios*, Lord, as it appears in the codices. Although this view was challenged earlier in our century, more recent archeological finds tend to confirm it, showing perhaps that the ancient sources should be taken more seriously. It is in this spirit that the evidence of the Talmud and of archeology will be explored.

**A Talmudic question** A look at the analytic index of the Babylonian Talmud under “Septuagint”<sup>1</sup> reveals one important, unusually lengthy, entry. The Talmudic account of the origin of the Septuagint found therein does not seem to be considered an important document by modern scholarship, where, in discussing the origins of the LXX, mention of the Talmudic passage is omitted or relegated to a footnote.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this is probably that apparently the same account can be found in earlier documents, such as the letter of Aristeas and the works of Philo and Josephus. But the Talmudic account is more than just a story: it points at some of the questions that would occupy Septuagintal studies for centuries to come.

The passage in question appears in the Tractate Megillah. The Mishnaic text upon which the Gemarah elaborates deals with the question of whether or not it is permitted to write sacred texts in languages (or scripts) other than Hebrew. It draws a distinction between the Books themselves, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the short passages of scripture incorporated within the phylacteries and the mezuzahs. The Mishna says: “There is no difference between Books and Tefillin and Mezuzahs save that the Books may be written in any language whereas the Tefillin and Mezuzahs may be written only in Assyrian [script]. R.

---

1 J. J. Slotki, *Index Volume to the Soncino Talmud*, Soncino Press, London (1961), 373.

2 E.g., S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, Oxford University Press (1968), 43n and 76n.

Simeon ben Gamaliel<sup>3</sup> says that Books are also permitted to be written only in Greek".<sup>4</sup>

In typical Talmudic fashion, the following lines appear rather suddenly in an otherwise discursive passage of the Gemarah:

R. Judah said: When our teachers permitted Greek, they permitted it only for a scroll of the Torah. This was on account of the incident related in connection with King Ptolemy, as it has been taught: "It is related of King Ptolemy that he brought together seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two rooms, without telling them why he had brought them together, and he went in to each of them and said to him, Translate for me the Torah of Moses your Master. God then prompted each one of them and they all conceived the same idea and wrote for him..."<sup>5</sup>

This is followed by fifteen instances of alleged differences between the LXX and the Masoretic Text (MT). Before considering these, it is interesting to point out certain aspects of the passage quoted above. The most obvious one is that as late as the second and third centuries CE the Rabbis were absolutely certain that the original LXX had contained only the five Books of Moses. Another significant point is that the Talmud should give its stamp of approval to the LXX, considering that the competing Aquilan translation was already in circulation and that this translation had emerged, at least in part, out of a serious dispute with the early Church.<sup>6</sup>

More interesting, though, is the Talmudic list of fifteen specific examples of alleged discrepancy between the texts. Richard Ottley, whose 1920 handbook<sup>7</sup> is still a good introduction to the subject<sup>8</sup>, points out that even if one could somehow arrive at the original text of the Greek (with the help of textual criticism, etc.), "we have still to consider its relation to the Hebrew .... Where it is a question, not merely of MSS of one book, but involving different books, different versions of a book, or an original book and one or more translations of it, I have ventured to call it intertextual criticism."<sup>9</sup> When undertaking this intertextual criticism,

3 There are two Rabbis by this name, both belonging to the most "aristocratic" Rabbinic family of all times. Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel I, great-grandson of Hillel and great-grandfather of Judah Hanasi, was martyred by the Romans in 70 CE. He was the "Nasi" (head of the Sanhedrin) just before the Temple was destroyed. Most surely, however, the Mishnah is attributing the saying to R. Simeon ben Gamaliel II, grandson of the former and father of Judah Hanasi. He was head of the Jewish Academy between 140 and 170 CE. (See, e.g., *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Judaica*. (G. Wigoder, ed.), Keter Publ. House, Jerusalem (1974), 555). He seems to be expressing a dissenting view to the one that scrolls of scripture may be written in any language (or script).

4 *The Babylonian Talmud*, translated into English ... under the editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, in 18 Vols., Soncino Press, London (1961). The translation of the Tractate Megillah is due to Maurice Simon (in *Moed* IV). The translation of this passage is slightly misleading. The Hebrew in the crucial last sentence reads: "אף בספרים לא התירו שיכתבו אלא יונית", which is best translated in context as: "even as far as Books are concerned they [the Rabbis] did not permit that they be written [in other languages (or scripts) except in Greek".

5 *Ibid.*, 49.

6 See, e.g., Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, pp 74-76.

7 R. R. Ottley, *A Handbook of the Septuagint*, London: Methuen 1920.

8 Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, V.

9 Ottley, *op. cit.*, 88 and 14.

as the Rabbis are actually doing, a first question comes to mind, namely : what is being compared? As Ottley remarks, "...when we say 'the Greek or the Hebrew', this ultimately means the Hebrew presupposed by the Greek translation or the Hebrew as now extant, which is substantially the same as that before Origen as he worked."<sup>10</sup> To see how relevant this question is I now examine in detail the fifteen rabbinic examples. In the table, on p. 325, MT, T, and LXX mean, respectively, Masoretic Text, Talmudic Hebrew rendition of LXX, and LXX<sup>11</sup>.

Many of these alleged changes are surely seen by the Rabbis either as "improvements" or as necessary to avoid misunderstanding. Indeed, Rashi (1040-1105 CE), in his classical commentary<sup>12</sup>, confirms this view. Following is a brief evaluation of each of the fifteen modifications:

1. According to Rashi it was necessary to start the Bible with the word God, lest Ptolemy or others may think that *Bereshit* (in the beginning) is a proper name and, hence, another creative power apart from God. This modification does not appear in any extant LXX codex.

2. Again, Rashi interprets the singular "I shall make" as necessary to prevent the possible implication of the existence of many creative authorities. No extant codex bears this out. It is interesting to remark that the Talmud does not employ here the possessive forms (**my** image and likeness) but leaves the possessive adjective out, as the Greek (but not the Hebrew) would do.

3. The obvious purpose of this change is to avoid the misinterpretation that God might have done, or at least concluded, some work on the seventh day of creation. Indeed, we find this correction in all codices of the LXX.

4. The contradiction with the original account of the creation of a single human being is avoided by stating "Male and female He created him" (rather than "them"). But this version is not found in the LXX.

5. The same rationale as for Example 2 applies here. Again, this change is not found in the LXX.

6. This is a more interesting instance. Here the Talmud plays with the flexibility afforded by the lack of vowel signs in pre-Masoretic Hebrew texts. Since Abraham's laughing had not provoked God's wrath, the Talmud attempts to draw a distinction between him and Sarah, who is made to have laughed publicly. This is not to be found in the LXX.

7. "Ox" is substituted for "man" to counter the possible inference that the Hebrew forefathers were bloodthirsty people. Not found in the LXX.

8. Moses would surely have had better animals (such as camels) than mere asses. Indeed, the LXX uses the term *hupozugion* beast of burden. Elsewhere, the LXX tends to use the more specific term *onos* ass<sup>13</sup>. So this instance is verified in the LXX.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> *Septuaginta*, edidit Alfred Rahlfs, Editio Nona, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung 1935. Also, *The Septuagint Version: Greek and English* (Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, transl.), Michigan: Zondervan 1970.

<sup>12</sup> Included in most Hebrew editions of the Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>13</sup> The best example is perhaps Dt 22.10: "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together", where *onos* is used, since the contrast between the strength of the two animals is to be emphasized in context.

| Example            | MT   | T   | LXX  |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| 1<br>Gen 1:1       | בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים<br>[In the beginning created God   | אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית<br>God created in the beginning   | ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός<br>[In the beginning made God  |
| 2<br>Gen 1:26      | מַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ<br>כְּדֹמוֹתֵינוּ<br>Let <u>us</u> make man in <u>our</u> image and likeness   | אֶמְעַשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמִי<br>וּבְדֹמוֹתַי<br>[I shall make man in [my] image and likeness   | κοιτῶσαντες ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν<br>Let <u>us</u> make man according to <u>our</u> image and likeness   |
| 3<br>Gen 2:2       | וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם<br>הַשְּׁבִיעִי<br>And God finished on the seventh day   | וַיִּכַּל בְּיוֹם<br>הַשֵּׁשִׁי<br>And [God] finished on the sixth day  | καὶ συνετέλεσεν ... ἐν τῇ ἡμέρῃ<br>τῇ ἕκτῃ<br>And God finished on the <u>sixth</u> day   |
| 4<br>Gen 5:2       | זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָרָא<br>Male and female He created <u>them</u>  | זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָרָא<br>Male and female He created <u>him</u>  | ἔφραεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν<br>αὐτούς<br>Male and female He made <u>them</u>  |
| 5<br>Gen 11:7      | הִבָּה נִדְחָה וּנְבִלָה<br>שָׁם שְׁלָטָם<br>Come, let <u>us</u> descend and confound their tongue   | הִבָּה אֲרִידָה וְנִבְלָה<br>שָׁם שְׁלָטָם<br>Let <u>me</u> descend and confound their tongue   | δεῦτε καὶ καταβάντες<br>συχθώμεν αὐτῶν τὴν<br>γλῶσσαν<br>Come, and having gone down let <u>us</u> confound their tongue  |
| 6<br>Gen 18:12     | וַתִּצְחַק סָרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ<br>And Sarah laughed within herself  | וַתִּצְחַק סָרָה בְּקִרְבֵּיהָ<br>And Sarah laughed among her relatives   | ἐγέλασεν δὲ Σάρρα ἐν ἑαυτῇ<br>And Sarah laughed within herself   |
| 7<br>Gen 49:6      | כִּי בְאַפּוֹ הֲרוּ אִישׁ<br>וּבְרִצּוֹנוֹ עָקְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>For in their anger they slew a <u>man</u> and in their self-will they houghed an <u>ox</u>  | כִּי בְאַפּוֹ הֲרוּ שׂוֹר<br>וּבְרִצּוֹנוֹ עָקְרוּ אֹבֵס<br>For in their anger they slew an <u>ox</u> and in their self-will they dug up a <u>stall</u>   | δὲ ἐν τῷ θυμῷ αὐτῶν<br>ἐπέριοντο ἄνθρώπους καὶ ἐν<br>τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ αὐτῶν<br>ἐνευροκόπησαν ταύρον<br>For in their wrath they slew <u>men</u> and in their passion they houghed an <u>ox</u>   |
| 8<br>Ex 4:20       | ... וַיִּדְכְּבֵם עַל הַחֲמוֹר<br>... and he mounted them on an <u>ass</u>   | ... וַיִּדְכְּבֵם עַל נוֹשֵׂא<br>בְנֵי אָדָם<br>... and he mounted them on a <u>carrier of men</u>  | ... ἐνεβίβασεν αὐτὰ ἐπὶ τὰ<br>ἄσπογγία<br>...and he mounted them on <u>beasts</u>  |
| 9<br>Ex 12:40      | וּמִשְׁכַּב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם<br>שְׁלִשִׁים שָׁנָה וָאַרְבַּע<br>מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה<br>And the abode of the Children of Israel while they stayed in <u>Egypt</u> was <u>four hundred and thirty</u> years | וּמִשְׁכַּב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם<br>וּבְשָׂאֵר אֲרָצוֹת אֲרִיב<br>מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה<br>And the abode of the Children of Israel while they stayed in <u>Egypt</u> and in <u>other lands</u> was <u>four hundred</u> years | ἡ δὲ κατοίκησις τῶν υἱῶν<br>Ισραὴλ ἦν<br>κατῳκίσθησαν ἐν γῆ Αἰγύπτου καὶ<br>ἐν γῆ Χαναάν, ἑτὴ τετρακόντια<br>τριακόντια<br>And the sojourn of the Children of Israel, while they sojourned in the <u>land of Egypt</u> and in the <u>land of Canaan</u> was <u>four hundred and thirty</u> years |
| 10<br>Ex 24:5      | וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת מַעֲרִי<br>בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>And he sent the <u>young men</u> of the Children of Israel  | וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת זַאֲחָסִי<br>בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>And he sent the <u>elect</u> of the Children of Israel   | καὶ ἐξεπέστειλεν τοὺς<br>νεανίσκους τῶν υἱῶν Ισραὴλ<br>And he sent the <u>young men</u> of the Children of Israel  |
| 11<br>Ex 24:11     | וְהָאֵל אֲצִילֵי בְנֵי<br>יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ<br>And upon the <u>nobles</u> of the Children of Israel he laid not his hand   | וְהָאֵל זַאֲחָסִי בְנֵי<br>יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ<br>And upon the <u>elect</u> of the Children of Israel he laid not his hand  | καὶ τῶν ἐπιλεκτῶν τοῦ Ισραὴλ<br>οὐ διεφάνθησαν οὐδὲ εἰς<br>And of the <u>chosen</u> ones of Israel there was not even one missing  |
| 12<br>Num 16:15    | לֹא חָמַד אֶחָד מֵוָם<br>נַשְׂאֵתִי<br>I have taken not one <u>ass</u> of theirs   | לֹא חָמַד מֵוָם נַשְׂאֵתִי<br>I have taken not one <u>desire</u> of theirs  | οὐκ ἐκίθημα οὐδὲν ὁ<br>αὐτῶν εἴληψα<br>I have not taken away their <u>desire</u>   |
| 13<br>Dt 4:19      | אֲשֶׁר חֲלַק ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ<br>אֶתְּכָל הָעַמִּים<br>... which the Lord thy God distributed unto all the peoples   | אֲשֶׁר חֲלַק ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ<br>אֶתְּכָל לְהַאֲדִיר לְכָל הָעַמִּים<br>... which the Lord thy God distributed to give light to all peoples   | ἃ ἐπένειμεν κύριος ὁ Θεός σου<br>εἰς ἅπαντας τοὺς ἔθνη<br>... which the Lord thy God has distributed to all the <u>nations</u>   |
| 14<br>Dt 17:3      | וַיֵּךְ וַיַּעֲבֹד אֱלֹהִים<br>אַחֵרִים... אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִי<br>And he went and served other gods ... which I have <u>commanded not</u>   | וַיֵּךְ וַיַּעֲבֹד אֱלֹהִים<br>אַחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִי<br>לְעַבְדָם<br>And he went and served other gods which I <u>commanded should not be served</u>  | καὶ ἐλθόντες λατρεύσωσιν<br>θεοῖς ἑτέροις ... ἃ οὐ<br>προσέταξέν<br>And they should go and serve other gods ... which He <u>commanded them not</u>   |
| 15<br>Lev 11:(5),6 | ... (וְהַיְשָׁב) ... וְהָאֲרִיב<br>... (the rabbit)... ... the <u>hare</u> ...   | ... וְהַיְשָׁב ...<br>... the one with small <u>legs</u> ...  | ... (ὀσσοπόδα) ...<br>... χοιροβάλλον ...<br>... (rough-foot) ... ... young-pig ...  |

9. This is an important example because, as Rashi points out, a year count based on Biblical data shows that the Egyptian sojourn could not have lasted as long as four hundred years. The correction settles the issue neatly by including “other lands” in the count. Indeed, the LXX includes “the Land of Canaan”, which permits a variety of interpretations.

10. This case is complicated by the fact that the Talmud has translated back the Septuagint into Hebrew, obtaining thus the curious non-Hebrew word *ואמטמים*, usually understood as “elect”. The LXX uses here *neaniskoi* which is equivalent to the MT *נערים*.

11. Here the LXX uses *epilekton* (chosen), which is probably closer to *ואמטמים* than to *אצילים* (nobles). There are no other similar uses of *אציל* in the Pentateuch.

12. This is a most interesting example. The Talmud takes the LXX term *epithumēma* (desire), looks at the completely unrelated original Hebrew *חמר* (ass), and immediately realizes what might have happened. The *ח-ר* pair is probably the most common source of copyist error in Hebrew, due to the similar shapes of the letters.<sup>14</sup> Thus, having changed *חמר* to *חמר* (desire), the Talmud makes an impressive early display of textual criticism.

13. The added words “to give light” are not found in present LXX texts.

14. The addition “should not be served” is not found in the LXX.

15. This last example is explained in the Talmudic text itself: “They did not write ‘the hare’ because the name of Ptolemy’s wife was ‘hare’, lest he should say ‘The Jews have jibed at me’...”<sup>15</sup> In fact, it was Ptolemy’s father who was named ‘hare’ (*lagmōos*)<sup>16</sup> and we indeed see that the LXX consistently avoids this common Greek term for rendering either ‘hare’ or ‘rabbit’, and substitutes either *dasupoda* (rough-foot, hare) or *choirogrullion*, which is translated as young pig<sup>17</sup>. The only other Pentateuchal occurrence of *שפן* and *ארנבה*<sup>18</sup> is also rendered as *dasupoda* and *choirogrullion*. The term *lagmōos* is used once in a Psalm in only some of the codices of the LXX<sup>19</sup>, but it is remarkable that Aquila’s translation, known for its almost pedantic adherence to the Hebrew original, uses the term *lagmōos* in both Pentateuchal instances<sup>20</sup>. Here again we see the Rabbis displaying some early mastery of textual criticism by attempting to give credence to the Ptolemy story from within the text.

In conclusion, six of the fifteen examples given by the Talmud agree with the LXX, and nine do not. Were the Rabbis deliberately mixing fact with fantasy? And, if so, for what purpose? I tend to believe that the Talmudic Rabbis were stating actual deviations of their LXX texts from

14 See, e.g., Ottley, *op. cit.*, 15.

15 Megillah 9b. Soncino Talmud, *Moed* IV, 50.

16 Ibid.

17 Liddell and Scott’s *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1978, 169 and 890.

18 Dt 14.7.

19 Ps 103(104).

20 E. Hatch and H. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, Graz Akademische Druck u. Verlagsanstalt, 1975.

the Hebrew text, and that probably their tradition had its roots in the times of the oldest version of the LXX, when those differences were first noticed and became a cause of dispute in learned circles.

### A controversial clue

The main question thus posed as to the nature of the original Septuagint (also called Urtext, Vorlage and Proto-LXX), it becomes obvious that, as in so much other historico-archeological research, this too assumes a Sherlock-Holmesian dimension<sup>21</sup>. But instead of an ever approving Dr. Watson, every new piece of evidence and interpretation published brings about the publication of yet more evidence and interpretation to the contrary, to the bafflement of the uninitiated<sup>22</sup>. The search for the Urtext is further complicated by the fact that, according to one school of thought started by Paul Kahle in 1915, there might have never existed "an original 'official' translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek which was universally recognized as such and accepted as authoritative".<sup>23</sup> The positive view as to the existence of an Urtext is usually associated with the name of Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891), who presented his principles of protoseptuagintal research in a number of epoch-making papers starting in 1863. This view has its antecedent in the third century CE when Origen (186-253) set himself the task of restoring the original LXX by, for the first time among Christian scholars, giving primacy to the Masoretic Text. What emerged is the monumental six-column work known as the Hexapla, containing the Hebrew, a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, the Greek translation of Aquila (a 2nd century CE convert to Judaism), the Greek translation of Symmachus, the LXX, and the Greek translation of Theodotion.

Origen maintained that, before the Christian era, when the LXX was a purely Jewish document, the divine name was rendered not by the Greek *kyrios* (Lord) but rather by the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. This claim seems to make perfect sense, given the sanctity of the explicit Name and given that Aquila's translation, which was endorsed by the Rabbis, used the tetragram. Origen's view, however, was seriously challenged in 1929 with the publication of W. W. Graf von Baudissin's treatise "Kyrios als Gottesname im Judentum"<sup>24</sup>. According to Baudissin the LXX had rendered the divine name as *kyrios* right from the beginning. Today, however, Baudissin's view is generally discarded, mainly because of the discovery of two crucial LXX fragments dating to pre-Christian times. The first is the so-called Fouad papyrus 266, made partially known in 1944.<sup>25</sup>

21 This Holmes of fiction should not be confused with Robert Holmes, professor of Poetry at Oxford, who started in 1788 a monumental Septuagint edition. The work was completed in 1827 by James Parsons after Holmes' death (1805). Cf Jellicoe, *op. cit.* 2-3 and Ottley, *op. cit.* 67 and the humorous footnote therein.

22 This situation is well illustrated in the lucid review paper by E. Tov, "Jewish Greek Scriptures", in *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*, (R. A. Kraft and G. E. Nicklesburg, eds.), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981, 223-237.

23 Jellicoe, *op. cit.*, 61.

24 The full reference is given in Jellicoe, *loc. cit.*

25 W. G. Waddell, "The Tetragrammaton in the LXX", *Journal of Theological Studies* (1944), 45,

This papyrus dates back to the early first century BCE at the latest<sup>26</sup>, and contains several chapters of Deuteronomy in Greek. The importance of this document is that every occurrence of the divine name is written with the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. In the older Rylands Papyrus 458 the divine name is not preserved. But Kahle<sup>27</sup> concludes: "there can be no doubt that here in line 27 the divine name was written as Tetragrammaton with Hebrew letters and in this way completed the [damaged] line". The Judaean Desert findings brought a second new piece of evidence. In 1953, P. Barthélemy published an important paper<sup>28</sup> in which a fragment of Habbakuk is reproduced from a Greek leather scroll. Although Barthélemy is interested in other aspects of what he calls "the missing link", one can quite clearly discern, after careful comparison with a modern LXX, that the penultimate line of the right-hand column contains 'Tetragrammaton Ω C'.<sup>29</sup> This is very fortunate, since the divine name does not appear very often in Habbakuk and the rest of the line is missing. In modern editions of the LXX this line is a part of verse 2:14, in which the name is given in the genitive case: "... *kuriou hōs* ...". Barthélemy himself adds in a footnote: "On notera ... l'écriture du tétragramme en lettres 'phéniciennes'".<sup>30</sup>

Although this evidence seems to destroy the very foundation on which Baudissin's theory might have relied, an incisive paper by Albert Pietersma<sup>31</sup> is able to at least present a possible scenario whereby the fragments, being Palestinian rather than Egyptian recensions, represent an "archaizing tendency" in whose framework a "revisionary activity" took place at the time of the production of the oldest extant manuscripts of the LXX. Although Pietersma's argument is too lengthy to be reproduced here in full, one of its main thrusts relies on the use of oblique cases and articulation. To make this clear one must realize that, as a foreign linguistic element, the Tetragrammaton is indeclinable and thus, whenever the dative case was required, it would have had to be preceded by the dative article *tō*. Otherwise, the meaning of the text would have been ambiguous. Now, reasons Pietersma, if those dative occurrences of the Tetragrammaton had been systematically replaced later with *kuriō* (i.e., *kyrios* in the dative case), the article would have stayed in most cases, so that the correspondence *Lh* = *tō kuriō* would have prevailed over *Lh* = *kuriō*, both grammatically correct. The fact is, however, that the opposite is true, namely, there is a much higher degree of occurrence for the second form than for the first. "Now, if we posit that the original LXX did not have *kyrios* but the indeclinable tetragram instead, we would have to believe that the *kyrios* surrogator ... hit on such a remarkable degree of

---

157-161; cited in P. Kahle, "Problems of the Septuagint", N.Y., reprinted in *Studies in the Septuagint: Origins, Recensions and Interpretations* (S. Jellicoe, ed.), N.Y.: Ktav Publ. House Inc., 1974, 67-77.

26 Kahle, *op. cit.*

27 *Ibid.*, 69.

28 P. Barthélemy, "Redécouverte d'un chaînon manquant de l'Histoire de la Septante", *Revue Biblique*, LX, 18-29.

29 *Ibid.*, Planche I.

30 *Ibid.*, 24n.

31 A. Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram, a renewed quest for the original LXX", in *De Septuaginta* (A. Pietersma and C. Cox, eds.), Mississauga: Benben Publ., 1984, 85-101.

correspondence." Concludes Pietersma in Holmesian style : "Impossible it is not, but certainly improbable."<sup>32</sup>

If I understand Pietersma's argument correctly (it is more convoluted than my simplified explanation), I fail to be led to his conclusion. Why would it be improbable that the revisor would have decided in each case, according to context or personal taste, whether to leave out or to retain the article? The concept of probability is meaningless unless the rules of the game have been at least tentatively established. For all its brilliancy and excellent documentation, Pietersma's article is not convincing and the fact remains that, in his own words, "we have early, even pre-Christian, MS evidence for the tetragram and no such MS evidence to the contrary."<sup>33</sup> Not all pre-Christian manuscripts use the Tetragrammaton. One of the Greek Leviticus fragments found in Qumran offers a phonetic transcription (iota, alpha, omega)<sup>34</sup>, thus raising the intriguing question as to the origin and pronunciation of the divine name, a topic beyond the limited scope of this work.

### Concluding remarks

The Rabbis of the Tannaitic period either had or remembered (or invented?) a Vorlage of the LXX which differed from our version in at least nine places, including the opening statement of Genesis, but which coincides with our LXX in some non-trivial instances of discrepancy between the MT and the LXX. Apparently, none of the pre-Christian papyri found so far contains any of the relevant passages, so that, unfortunately, comparisons cannot be made. On the question of the primacy of the Tetragrammaton over the *kurios* translation, despite some strong arguments against it, the fact remains that all pre-Christian papyri found so far are consistent in their use of either the Tetragrammaton or a phonetic equivalent. Thus the question of the original Septuagint is still open and may remain so until more archeological evidence is found and made available. Perhaps then, even the neglected attempt of the Talmudic Rabbis at intertextual criticism will be vindicated or, at least, explained.

JOSEPH HONG

## THE TRANSLATION OF THE NAMES OF GOD IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC LANGUAGES

The author is a UBS translation consultant for the South Pacific, located in Suva, Fiji.

### INTRODUCTION

Before discussing the translation of the names of God in the South Pacific Christian context, it is fitting to take a philological look at the region. It is estimated that about three hundred languages are spoken in the island

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>34</sup> C. W. Buchanan, "Some unfinished business with the Dead Sea Scrolls", *Revue de Qumran*, 13, 1988, 411.