

Greek Bible and Hebrew Lexicography

Gesenius' use of the Septuagint

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1. "Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift" (1815)

Linguistic knowledge among the Greek-speaking Jews, a considerable portion of whom were Egyptians and Alexandrinians, appears to be far more incomplete.¹

With this deprecatory statement Wilhelm Gesenius opens paragraph § 22 on the traditional knowledge of the Hebrew language among "Hellenists, foremost Alexandrinians" in his "History of the Hebrew Language and Script" (published in 1815). The comparison "far more incomplete" refers back to the preceding paragraphs in which he touches upon "Palestinian and Babylonian Jews" (§ 20) and "Targums, Talmud and Masora" (§ 21).

He goes on to introduce the *Septuagint* as the most important document of Hellenistic Judaism. He adds that it stems from several translators and began under Ptolemy II Lagos with the translation of the Pentateuch only being finished centuries after that. Later, he also claims that skill levels among various translators were very different.² Thus, at least theoretically, Gesenius anticipated the methodological approach in which each book of the Greek Bible is treated separately. It may come as a surprise for Septuagint scholars to see how far ahead of its time Gesenius was especially given that some colleagues in Biblical Studies still see the Greek Bible as an indivisible unit.

Gesenius' next claim was even more controversial. He argued that it is entirely unlikely that Palestinian Jews were acting as counselors for the translation or that even Aramaic (*chaldäische*) targumim were used by the translators because "there are only a few traces of the critical and exegetical

1 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 76: "Bey weitem unvollkommner erscheint die Sprachkunde der griechischredenden Juden, von welchen die ägyptischen und alexandrinischen einen vorzüglichen Theil ausmachten."

2 Cf. HODIUS, *De biblicorum textibus*, 204–217, where examples from different categories can be found such as the rendering of proper names etc.

cal exactness of the Palestinians” (p. 77). In modern LXX scholarship there are some important voices, including Emanuel Tov³ and Arie van der Kooij,⁴ who hold that there must have been important influences from Israel on the Alexandrian translation because of the proficient understanding of Hebrew traceable in this version. Given that there is also evidence indicating that at least some of the translators were familiar with Egyptian and Greek themes, one could, however, also opt for translators with an Alexandrian background.⁵

In contrast to modern opinions, Gesenius was less than enthusiastic about the *Septuagint*. One reason could have been the lack of good quality LXX editions and lexica available at the time; a fact Gesenius complains about in his preface to the 2nd edition of the *Handwörterbuch* (p. XIII). That notwithstanding, he names several categories of cases in which the Greek version could be of help to the lexicographer:

1. Because the translators were not too removed from the “living Hebrew Language,” many correct and true meanings must have been preserved by them even though serious flaws in respect of grammatical sense and groundwork can be seen.⁶ He gives some examples of correct translations of rare Hebrew words. He also offers some unstable renderings and details cases in which difficult words were transcribed but left untranslated.
2. In a second category, Gesenius listed cases where the Greek version preserved meanings no longer attested in Hebrew but which were nonetheless supported by “related dialects” such as Aramaic or Arabic.⁷
3. The weakest aspect of the translators’ linguistic skills was in respect of etymology, grammar or Hebrew orthography.⁸ This led to the confusion of Hebrew roots such as **ראה** and **ירא** or of Hebrew characters. He explicitly rejects the possibility that inexact translations such as these could attest to variant readings.⁹ Moreover, as far as I can ascertain, Gesenius does not

3 Tov, *Approaches*, 325–338, 336.

4 E.g. KOOIJ, *Greek Bible*, 255–264.

5 See RÖSEL, *Übersetzung als Vollendung*.

6 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 77: “so mußte bey ihnen viel Richtiges und Wahres aufbewahrt seyn, nur wird ihr Mangel an grammatischem Sinn, an Vorarbeiten aller Art u.dgl. oft nur zu sichtbar.”

7 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 78: “eine bedeutende Anzahl von Worten übersetzen die Alexandriner so, dass sie eine wenigstens jetzt nicht mehr als hebräisch vorkommende Bedeutung, die sich aber in den verwandten Dialekten findet, ausdrücken.”

8 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 78: “Die bey weitem schwächste Seite ihrer Sprachkenntniß zeigt sich in Hinsicht auf Etymologie, Grammatik und Orthographie, wovon sie eben so wenig genaue Kenntniß besitzen, als sie auch nur Sinn dafür offenbaren.”

9 Cf. KRATZ, *Lower and Higher Criticism*, pp. 364–382, in this volume.

mention the assumption that the Alexandrian translators may have used a deviating *Vorlage* in which those confusions (or “Lese- und Schreibfehler”) could have occurred. He thus contends that the translators were in fact culpable for the mistakes made. He explicitly confirms this when comparing the Samaritan text to the Alexandrian.¹⁰

Gesenius only briefly comments on later Greek translators such as Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion. He certifies that Aquila must have had good etymological knowledge, but also notes the “fearful literal style”¹¹ of his translation.

After the LXX translation had been completed and was circulating among Greek Jews, the study of the original text declined and was finally abandoned. Gesenius mentions Josephus and Philo as proof of how deficient knowledge of the Hebrew language became even among the most educated Greek-speaking Jews. While he admits that Josephus, apart from his Aramaic, had at least some knowledge of Ancient Hebrew (p. 81), he adjudges Philo’s level of Hebrew as inferior to that of Josephus; his knowledge, he charges, is “sometimes not worthy of criticism.”¹²

2. “Handwörterbuch” 1st edition, 1810/1812

This assessment of the LXX was formulated after two volumes of the first edition of Gesenius’ *Handwörterbuch* had been published. His basic methodological principal within his work was to firstly verify the meaning of the Hebrew words from their context in the biblical text without comparison to cognate languages.¹³ With this approach in mind, and having learned about his at best ambivalent assessment of the LXX above, it is hardly surprising that only a few references to the Alexandrian version are made in the first edition of his dictionary. My superficial count ends with an average of less than only one mention per page. One reason for the lack of references was Gesenius’ decision not to include proper names into the main body of the dictionary (p. XXIX) and to collect them in an appendix. It is in the appendix where Greek renderings or transcriptions

10 Cf. GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 84, where he wrote that both recensions show tendencies towards simplifications of difficult readings and the use of more common words instead of rare lexemes or of inserting glosses. In the preface to the 2nd edition of his *Handwörterbuch* he accepts the undeniable fact that there more original variants and better readings in the versions, which would imply a different *Vorlage*, see GES¹, XLVIII.

11 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 80: “ängstlich wörtliche Manier.”

12 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 83: “zuweilen unter aller Kritik.”

13 Cf. the preface to GES¹, vol. 1, III–XXXI; see also MILLER, *Influence*, 22–29.

of Hebrew names are frequently found. This is of course because they are the basis for modern spellings of these names and because they give access to deviating spellings and vocalizations of the Hebrew in ancient times He also commented upon this in his “Geschichte” from 1815.¹⁴

How did Gesenius use the LXX in his first edition? He quite often refers to the Greek version when using words denoting plants, animals or stones which were seldom used or are *hapax legomena*. For example, the first explicit mention of the LXX fits into this scheme because the *hapax* אֲבִי־יִזְבֵּה in Qoh 12:5 is explained with the *Septuagint* reading ἡ κάππαρις “Caper plant.”¹⁵

Likewise, in Cant 6:11, where the man goes down to a “garden of nuts” (GESMD¹⁸), the explanation of the *hapax* תִּגְמֵל comes from the LXX (+ Vulg. + hb. Ausl.¹⁶), which has καρύα a “nut-bearing tree of all kinds” (LSJ s.v.).¹⁷ In his comment on the strange אֲהִי in Hos 13:10.14 he combines his methodological approaches. He takes the meaning ποῦ “where” from the LXX (and Vulg., Chald.)¹⁸ and adds „Only this [meaning] is appropriate in this context.”¹⁹ One should add that Gesenius also refers to other translations such as the Vulgate, the Syriac or Aramaic versions in the abovementioned cases. The LXX however is given top billing.

Using the *Septuagint* and context he also derives that אֶלְמָה in Exod 28:19; 39:12 must be a precious stone. The LXX reads ἀμέθυστος, which is still accepted in some modern translations.²⁰ Further, Gesenius uses the Greek χαρδριός („thick-knee“) to explain the אֲנִפָּה (a species which remains unknown) in Lev 11:19 as a curlew (*Brachvogel*).²¹

Gesenius’ *caveat*, ‘that the meaning must fit the context’, also prevented him from accepting the LXX translation “Ibis” (ἰβίς) für תְּנִשְׁתָּה in Lev 11:17. The Greek translator obviously chose this meaning to include the Egyptian god Thot’s holy bird in the list of unclean animals.²² Clearly,

14 GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 191–193; cf. also his *Vorrede* to the 2nd vol. (1812), XV.

15 While the LXX is the first to be mentioned, Syr., Arab., Vulg. are also listed. In *Thesaurus* I, 1,12–13 there is only a short citation on the LXX. Cf. GESMD¹⁸: “Kaper, Frucht des Kapernstrauches.”

16 “hb. Ausl.” = “hebräische Ausleger” refers to Jewish scholars such as Saadja od David Kimchi; cf. GESENIUS, *Geschichte*, 29–30.

17 No reference is made in the 2nd edition to the LXX.

18 “Schreibfehler für אֲהִי” (with reference to the LXX).

19 “[D]ieses allein ist dem Context angemessen.”

20 GESMD¹⁸: “roter Edelstein, herkömmlich Amethyst [...] Bedeutung umstritten;” similar GESB¹⁷.

21 GESMD¹⁸: “Regenpfeifer,” still based on the LXX.

22 Cf. MORENZ, *Ägyptische Spuren*, 250–258. In Deut 14:16 the *Ibis* is used to render תְּנִשְׁתָּה, not תְּנִשְׁתָּה.

Gesenius did not see it this way and instead uses the mentioning of the bird **יְנִישׁוּף** in the context of the wilderness in Isa 34:11 to argue that “the old translators [...] give nothing certain to hand.”²³ He suggests “unclean bird, waterfowl.” He then references Bochart’s explanation “owl,” which he later appears to accept as correct (supported by Chald. Syr.; derived from **נְשָׁף** “twilight”) for his second edition.²⁴ In the 4th edition from 1834 however, he proposes to derive the bird’s name from the root **נשׁף** “blow” and refers to the “authority of the LXX” to propose a kind of heron which produces the sound of a wind instrument (like a flute).²⁵

Several other examples of this type could be mentioned. In some cases Gesenius explicitly states that the LXX meaning should be preferred. Take the adjective **רַךְ** for example. Gesenius translates this with *schwache, blöde Augen* (“weak, stupid eyes”), based on **ἀσθενής** in the LXX of Gen 29:17.²⁶ One could also refer to the noun **רִקְמָה** (“colored cloth, something colorful,” cf. GESMD¹⁸) in Ezek 17:3; 1 Chr 29:2, where Gesenius comments, “the interpretation [...] from both translators is undisputedly the most apposite.”²⁷ Again, and despite his positive evaluation, his entry on **רִקְמָה** no longer references the LXX or Vulgate in the 2nd edition from 1823 (or in the 4th).

Before we scrutinize divergences between the first editions of the *Handwörterbuch* in more detail, we should note that there were also instances where Gesenius struggles somewhat against the *Septuagint*. This can be seen in the entry for **אֲשֵׁרָה**. It is an astoundingly extensive entry with about 3.5 columns (the entry on **יהוה** is almost one column shorter; the entry for **בעל** has only 2 columns).²⁸ Gesenius translates it as “goddess of the Syrians [...] perhaps more general: idol.” He further claims that up until then **אֲשֵׁרָה** had been translated as “grove of idols” (*Götzenhain*) because of the rendering **ἄλσος** in the LXX. To prove the “impossibility of this assumption” he discusses all occurrences of **אֲשֵׁרָה** in the Hebrew Bible

23 GES¹: “weder die alten Übersetzer noch Etymologie geben übrigens etwas gewisses an die Hand.”

24 BOCHART, *Hieroicoicon*, II, 281 ff.

25 *Thesaurus* II, 2, 923: “ardea” (*a heron*; German: *Rohrdommel, Trompetervogel*); GesMD¹⁸: “Identifizierung unsicher (?) eine Eulenart.”

26 Cf. *Thesaurus* III, 1288: “oculi debiles i.e. hebetes,” again with reference to the LXX. For a more detailed treatment of this lexeme cf. the article by Zoltán KUSTÁR, *Wortdeutung und Bibelübersetzung*, in this volume, pp. 383–403.

27 “Die Deutung [...] bei beyden Übersetzern ist unstreitig die treffendste.”

28 The length of the article and the broad discussion of all cases concurs with the preface (p. XIII), where Gesenius argued, in relation to his presentation of cases, that he would give longer entries where definitions were not sufficiently acknowledged or if a traditionally accepted meaning were to become untenable.

with the conclusion that the word must denote the goddess usually called עֶשְׂתָּרַת / Astarte or its idol. Gesenius does not ask how or why the translators may have come to this rendering. To tease out the minutiae of this problematic was nearly always going to be out of his scope. He primarily commits himself to discussions on whether or not the versions correctly understood the Hebrew and arguments examining whether their etymological derivation was sound.

In the 2nd edition from 1823, the article on אֲשֶׁרָה was shortened to only half a column. Gesenius now gives the meaning as “name of a Syrian goddess, and statues of her, often venerated by the Hebrews” and makes reference to the biblical texts.²⁹ As for a discussion of the inaccurate rendering derived from the LXX, Gesenius simply refers his readers to his more extensive dictionary.³⁰

One should be clear about the fact that in the case of *Ashera*, Gesenius was correct. His definition still stands even after the findings from Kuntllet Adjrud and elsewhere. It is therefore unfortunate that he did not exercise similar caution with other cases. Namely, he accepted the explanation for שְׁדַי from the LXX, citing it as “the most probable and at the same time most received.”³¹ Gesenius argues that שְׁדַי must mean “almighty” as the LXX, rendering παντοκράτωρ, uses it in most instances in the Book of Job. This view is supported by the proposed etymological connection with the root שִׁדָּד denoting violence. Gesenius does not however explain that the word is decoded in a completely different fashion in the Greek Pentateuch. He mentions an alternative decoding from the book of Ruth (based on רַי “sufficient”), without offering references. However, he then comments that “no detailed refutation is needed.” Gesenius obviously failed to realize that all translators were guessing or interpreting what the name שְׁדַי could mean. As with the example above, the entry was shortened considerably for the 2nd (and 4th) editions. Reference is made to the LXX insofar as he claims, “LXX mostly παντοκράτωρ”, which, as we know, is not entirely correct.³²

29 GES²: “Name einer syrischen Göttin, welche bey den Hebräern öfters verehrt wurde, und der Statuen derselben.”

30 Vgl. *Thesaurus* I, 1, 162. Cf. also the short supplement at the end of the book (“*Nachträge und Verbesserungen*”) on אֲשֶׁרָה in the 2nd edition, 934: “אֲשֶׁרָה bedeutet allerdings: die Glückliche, Heilbringende,” which led to *Thesaurus* I, 1, 162: “fortuna, dea fortuna.” GESMD¹⁸: “Aschera, ug. Gemahlin Els; Bezeichnung für das Kultsymbol der Aschera.”

31 GES²: “Bey weitem die wahrscheinlichste und zugleich recipirteste Erklärung.”

32 On the problem of the translation of שְׁדַי in the LXX cf. Rösel, *Übersetzung der Gottesnamen*, 357–377, 373–374.

In 1817 Gesenius published his “Ausführliches grammatisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache” in which he frequently refers to the *Septuagint*. In most cases however, the references merely illustrate specific features of the Hebrew language. For example, he uses the LXX to illustrate how the Hebrew consonants were spoken (pp. 12–22); he shows instances where a *patach furtivum* is visible in the LXX (pp. 19–80); where a *resch* could be redoubled as with the Names Χαρραν or Σαρρα (p. 144) or how the combination of *patach* and *jod* at the end of the word were spoken at the time, Σιννα and Σαρρα (p. 876). However in this publication, the LXX is not treated as a topic in its own right and we should therefore move on.

3. “Handwörterbuch”, 2nd edition, 1823

It has already been noted that references to the LXX were reduced for the 2nd edition of the *Handwörterbuch*. For this edition, Gesenius often only offers translations of the words in question accompanied by the biblical references. Information on where the definitions came from, in our case references to LXX and Vulgate, are no longer given. As far as my research has shown, there are no explanations given as to why the versions are still listed in some cases³³ and have been omitted in others,³⁴ since no additional evidence from Semitic dialects is recorded. Although a cursory look through its pages may give one the contrary impression, the LXX is in fact less present in the 2nd edition than the 1st. One could be forgiven for thinking the former because the 2nd edition also includes proper names in the main body of the dictionary.³⁵

Again, there are entries where Gesenius explicitly rejects meanings suggested by the Greek version. For instance, let us examine צמץ (Zech 6:3; LXX: ψαρός). While his 1st edition leaves the question open as to whether the word could mean the color of the horse, his 2nd edition argues that “ash-grey colored” from the LXX (and Chald.) cannot be etymologically proven.³⁶

33 E.g. אגורה “payment,” cf. LXX ὀβολός; 1 Sam 2:36; קסיל (a kind of locust in 1 Kgs 8:37; but cf. the similar ילק in Nah 3:16 (without mentioning of the versions); LXX has in both cases βροῦχος “locust”; סרפד “Flöhkraut” in Isa 55:13.

34 E.g. אגרתל “basin”? in Ezr 1:9; אל “mighty one, hero” in Ezek 31:11; the people of the פסלחים in Gen 10:14; מוטא and מוט “staves for bearing the ark” in Lev 26:13; Num 13:23; רגמה “heap, crowd” in Ps 68:28.

35 Cf. GES², preface, XLIX.

36 But see GESMD¹⁸: “Pferdefarbe falb, graugelb.”

Nevertheless, there are some instances where Gesenius concludes that meanings attested by the *Septuagint* can be accepted into his dictionary. This is clear with the case of **שִׁיֶּשֶׁה** (2 Sam 6:19; 1 Chr 16:3; Hos 3:1; Cant 2:5). In the 1st edition he gives the meaning “syrup of grapes” and claims that “the old [versions] do not lend anything certainty” – they have the meaning “cake.” In his 2nd edition he now accepts the meaning “cake” and claims that the LXX has the translation “pancake/honey cake” (λάγανον ἀπὸ τηγάνου).³⁷

Another example is the *hapax* **הִבְחָה** / **אֲבָחָה** in Ezek 21:20 where the 1st edition does not mention the LXX at all. At that time, Gesenius was struggling with meanings like “relinquish” (*preisgeben*) or “demolish” (*vertilgen*). In the 2nd edition he ponders whether “threat” (*Drohung*) could be an adequate translation. However, he then concludes the entry with reference to the LXX, “the reading is probably completely wrong and **טְבַחְתָּ־הֶרֶב** [...] is what should be read (based on εἰς σφάγια ῥομφαίας).”³⁸ Thus a reading of the LXX became grounds for a conjecture.

A similar improvement based on the LXX can be seen in the entry on **אִלְאִי** which occurs several times in the Book of Job. In the 1st edition Gesenius rejected the meaning “really!” (*wahrhaftig*) and proposed “but/notwithstanding.” In the 2nd edition he not only cites the LXX reading οὐ μὴν ἀλλά, but offers some rare praise, “LXX very good.”³⁹

It must also be noted that in some instances Gesenius’ explanations in the 2nd edition were actually poorer due to reliance on the *Septuagint*. A good example is the word **רִים/רָאִים**, denoting a wild ox.⁴⁰ The LXX has μόνόκερωσ “unicorn” as a standard equivalent⁴¹ which Gesenius alleges was “sufficiently disproved” by Bochart in his 1st edition.⁴² In the 2nd edition however, he accepts the translation “unicorn” (*Einhorn*) for **רָאִים** because he heard about the existence of wild horses with one horn. Moreover, he adds that unicorns were known from reliefs found at Persepolis. Some doubts remained however:

37 GESMD¹⁸: “Trauben-, Rosinenkuchen.”

38 “Am wahrscheinlichsten ist mir aber, daß die Lesart überhaupt falsch und **טְבַחְתָּ־הֶרֶב** die Schlachtbank des Schwertes zu lesen sey.” Cf. the similar statement in the 4th edition and in GESMD¹⁸ s.v.

39 Also in the 4th edition s.v. In GESMD¹⁸ s.v., there is no reference to the LXX at all.

40 GESMD¹⁸: “Wildstier, -rind, sog. Wildochse.”

41 Cf. SCHAPER, *Unicorn*, 117–136.

42 Cf. above note 24.

That אַרְי were obviously quite common, and unicorns by all accounts quite seldom occurring animals in the Bible's environs militates against the accuracy of the explanation offered in the LXX.⁴³

In his 1853 Thesaurus (III, 2, 1248), Gesenius no longer promotes the above meaning for אַרְי but still maintains that unicorns exist.

4. The Septuagint and Egypt

In the time between the publication of the 1st and 2nd editions, Gesenius read the early works of Champollion⁴⁴ and thus had the opportunity to broaden his knowledge of the Egyptian language;⁴⁵ although he admitted that only a few ancient Egyptian documents had been read and understood.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that the LXX was one of the main sources for Gesenius' understanding of Egyptian words based on the Coptic tradition; a tradition he termed the "daughter" of the Greek.⁴⁷

In some cases however, he missed the Egyptian meaning for words. In one example, he deems יִאֵ (Gen 41:50) to be an Egyptian name originally meaning "light, sun." As it is attested by the Coptic he adjudged the Greek Ἡλίου πόλις to be a valid translation of On.⁴⁸ Also interesting is the case of אֶרֶץ in Gen 10, which Gesenius combined with Egyptian *Chemi*. This was very close to the correct reading *kemet* – the black land. He also observed (as with the name מִצְרַיִם) that Hebrew also has its own secondary etymology which renders the meaning "hot, south" from the same word.⁴⁹

43 GES², s.v.: "Gegen die Richtigkeit dieser Erklärung der LXX möchte aber wohl sprechen, dass אַרְי ein offenbar auf dem Schauplatz der Bibel ziemlich häufiges, das Einhorn aber ein auf jeden Fall seltenes Tier war."

44 Cf. the report by SCHRADER, *Geschichte*, vol. II, 138: "When Champollion brought the first light into the Egyptian hieroglyphs, he (sc. Gesenius) chose his paper for his own studies in the fall holidays, and before their end he deciphered hieroglyphic inscriptions in the museum in Dresden." Unfortunately, Schrader gives no exact date, so it is not clear which paper by Champollion is meant.

45 Cf. the explanation of סְוֵנִיָּה (Syene/Assuan), which is in the 1st edition based on the Coptic spelling supported by the LXX. In the 2nd edition this is complemented by a strange etymology based on Champollion, according to whom Coptic *Souan* means "open;" Syene being the key to Egypt.

46 Preface to GES², XLI.

47 Ibid.; cf. the article by SCHIPPER, *The History of Egyptology*, in this volume, pp. 485–508.

48 In the 1st and 2nd edition of the *Handwörterbuch*. The original Egyptian word is *iwnw*; "city of pillars," which reflects the obelisks which were built to venerate the sun. In *The Saurus* I, 1, 52 Gesenius mentioned the obelisks as a symbol for the *superstitia* of On.

49 But also cf. his strange explanation that the *dual*-ending of מִצְרַיִם must refer to the division of the Land by the Nile (GES¹, s.v.).

When discussing Thebe's name אַב in the 1st edition Gesenius explicitly stated that "the Alexandrian [...] is known to be an excellent guide when it comes to Egyptian names"⁵⁰ and accepts an etymology based on Nah 3:8, where the LXX changed the complete sentence and thus reads μερίς.⁵¹ Thus he comes to the explanation "best part = residence of the God Ammun." In the 2nd edition he repeats his praise for the LXX reading, the incorrect etymology however, remains.

There are other instances in which the LXX led Gesenius to incorrect conclusions. Take the case of אַבְנֵי (Gen 45:10) which is translated by Γεσσημ Ἀραβίας in the LXX. Based on a reference to Arabia and the translation καθ' Ἡρώων πόλιν⁵² εἰς γῆν Ραμεσση for אַבְנֵי in Gen 46:28, Gesenius presumed that this area of land lay opposite the Arabian Peninsula and therewith he came to the incorrect conclusion that the land of Goschen must have been in Lower and Middle Egypt.⁵³

Further, when Gesenius tries to explain the Urim and Tummim in Ex 28:30, he alleges an etymological connection between אור "fire" and the meaning "lot, oracle" which was apparent from the context. He cited the LXX translation "the Manifestation and the Truth" (τὴν δῆλωσιν καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν) and assumed a metaphorical understanding of "light."⁵⁴ He found support for this explanation in short reports from the Diodorus Siculus library (I,48+75) and in Aelian (various histories XIV,34), where it was claimed that the high priest or judge in Egypt wore golden chains with an image of the truth.⁵⁵ From this, Gesenius concluded in his Thesaurus that the Hebrews were imitating the Egyptians (Thes. I, 1.55).

I will offer two further examples to emphasize the constructive and positive inspiration the LXX can provide. Regrettably, Gesenius was never to recognize this aspect. The *hapax* אַבְנֵי in Isa 19:7 puzzled the lexicographer. He derived it from the root ער"ה "being naked" and translated "bare places, place without forest" (*nackte Plätze, Plätze ohne Waldung*). The LXX has a much more appropriate rendering with τὸ ἄχι τὸ χλωρόν.

50 Here Gesenius conceals that the LXX incorrectly uses Μέμιφις as a translation of *No.* in Ezek 30:15.

51 LXX is using אַבְנֵי (part, portion) because of the preceding אַבְנֵי in אַבְנֵי.

52 For Heroopolis, Pithom, and Goschen cf. TIMM, *Joseph*, 219–228.

53 This explanation was also given in the Thesaurus, cf. *Thesaurus* I, 1, 307 with the remark: "Ac Alexandrinus idem, in rebus ægyptiacis fide dignissimus."

54 Cf. GESMD¹⁸, where the LXX is still cited.

55 Cf. MÖLLER, *Amtsabzeichen*, 67f. As the chains with the image of truth (egypt. *ma'at*) are only attested from the Late period onwards, the Israelites cannot have "imitated" the Egyptians. But it stands to reason that this image of ἀλήθεια / *ma'at* was one motif for the rendering in the LXX.

Gesenius rejected it for etymological reasons (1st edition) even though he knew there was an Egyptian loanword in Hebrew, מֶרְחָרְחַי denoting reed etc. (1st edition; s.v. מֶרְחָרְחַי). Gesenius never revised this position. Nowadays we know that 'r is an Egyptian loanword attested since the Old Kingdom.⁵⁶ Thus, in this case at least, the LXX translator was on the mark.

Another Egyptian word in Hebrew is the *Hin* (a unit of measurement). In his 1st edition, Gesenius, used the Greek rendering ιν or Ειν to claim it as “an Egyptian measurement, whose name was known to him from Egypt.”⁵⁷ It is in fact an Egyptian cubic measure. Gesenius however, did not trust his own musings and failed to mention this deduction in the 2nd edition of the *Handwörterbuch*.⁵⁸

5. The Septuagint as a version in its own right

On several occasions it became obvious to Gesenius that the Greek version could only function as an aid for his lexicographical interests. Although his *Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache* and his introduction to the 2nd edition make it clear that he knew about the different characteristics of each translation; he generally considered the LXX to be a mere etymological quarry and nothing more. That is why he occasionally failed to grasp the grounds for some translations and then defined them bluntly as “wrong.” One striking example of this should suffice to make this clear.

It is a well known fact that while the LXX was being translated, Jewish communities were reluctant to spell out God’s name. Because of the use of *kyrios* for the *Tetragrammaton*, and because of the translation of Lev 24:16, the Septuagint is one of the most important testimonials of this process. The Hebrew text in this passage has וְנִקְבַּ שְׁם־יְהוָה מוֹת יִנָּמֹת – “He, who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be surely put to death.” The Greek version reads quite differently with ὀνομαζέων δὲ τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, i.e., already the naming of the name is forbidden.⁵⁹ In his entry on נִקְבַּ, Gesenius noted the LXX translation and attested that the Alexandrian

56 MUCHIKI, *Proper names*, 252–253. In *Theis*, I,1,67, Gesenius had explained מֶרְחָרְחַי as Egyptian loanword with reference to Isa 19:7 (LXX). Cf. GESMD¹⁸, s.v. עֲרָה “Binse oder Pflanzenstengel.”

57 “Vielleicht, dass es ein ägypt. Maaß war, dessen Name ihm daher als ägyptisch bekannt war.” – See ELLENBOGEN, *Foreign Words*, 68.

58 Cf. *Thesaurus* I, 2, 372: “de etymo nil defino.” GESMD¹⁸: “Hin, ein Maß für Flüssigkeiten”, with reference to Egyptian “HNW, Topf, Flüssigkeitsmaß;” cf. MUCHIKI, *Proper names*, 243.

59 Cf. RÖSEL, *The Reading*, 411–428.

misunderstood the Hebrew.⁶⁰ Thus he failed to apprehend the transitional element this translation documents.

6. The Septuagint and Textual Criticism

My final example aims to demonstrate that Gesenius also used the LXX for text critical purposes:⁶¹ In Ezek 47:13 we find the strange גְּבִיל גֵּה . In the 1st edition of his *Handwörterbuch*, Gesenius concluded, based on the deviating reading in the Septuagint ($\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha \tau\grave{\alpha} \acute{\omicron}\rho\iota\alpha$), that the Hebrew text must be corrupt and should be corrected to גֵּה . My research to date has not been able to confirm whether Gesenius was the first to suggest this correction, but it has been generally accepted since then.⁶²

7. Conclusion

Only a brief summary is possible due to the divergent conclusions within the above overview. Considering that Gesenius' main emphasis was on the immediate context of a word and on cognate dialects of the Hebrew, the LXX's relevance for his lexicographical work was inconsequential. He mostly used it for obscure words denoting plants, stones or animals. In some cases he underestimated the relevance of the LXX, as was demonstrated with the Egyptian loanwords. This eventually led him to inaccurate explanations of the Hebrew. In other cases he underestimated the exegetical relevance of the Greek version. Again, this led to faulty assumptions. However, given that he had no knowledge of the Egyptian, Ugaritic and Akkadian languages, we should conclude, as an act of historical fairness, that even the detection of some flaws in Gesenius work cannot diminish the credit due for his Hebrew lexicography and, *mutatis mutandis*, for his Greek Bible lexicography too.

60 "Die Zweydeutigkeit des Wortes verursachte übrigens, daß man früh die Stelle 3 Mos. 24,11.16 mißverstand, und vom Aussprechen des Gottesnamens faßte." In the 2nd and 4th edition of the *Handwörterbuch* only the possibility of a misunderstanding is mentioned – without reference to the LXX.

61 For this topic, cf. the article by TOV, *Hebrew lexicography and Textual Criticism*, pp. 331–347 in this volume.

62 In *Thesaurus* I, 1, 270 Gesenius refers to Jos 18:19, which has גֵּה גְבִיל and states: גֵּה unanimiter expresserunt LXX, Vulg, Chald. + Cod. 10 Kennicott + 4 de Rossi, [...] nos tamen nulli dubitamus quin mendum sit." GESMD¹⁸: "Schreibfehler;" cf. ZIMMERLI, *Ezechiel*, 2. Bd., 1204.

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