

# Exodus 22:27(28)<sup>LXX</sup> in Ancient Jewish and Christian literature

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“Israel and the nations” is a much disputed subject already in the Hebrew Bible, but it is also disputed in the Septuagint where processes of the Jewish quest for identity within a non-Jewish environment are reflected. One of the passages where this issue is debated is Exod 22:27(28). The following short study examines the reception history of this text in ancient Greek Jewish and Christian literature which essentially is based on the Greek version with its differences to the Hebrew text. Therefore, I will first present these differences to the reader before dealing with the ancient Jewish and Christian reception history.

## 1. The differences between the Hebrew and the Greek text

Whereas the Hebrew text reads **אלהים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך לא תאר** (“You shall not revile God, or curse a leader in your people”), the Septuagint offers Θεούς οὐ κακολογήσεις, καὶ ἄρχοντας τοῦ λαοῦ σου οὐ κακῶς ἔχεις (“you shall not revile gods, and you shall not speak ill of your people’s rulers”<sup>1</sup>). Well-known are the three differences: 1. The translators have reproduced the ambiguous word **אלהים** as plural<sup>2</sup>; 2. The preposition **ב** before **עמך** is omitted, due to an inner-Hebrew change or due to the process of translation. 3. The LXX’s not to speak ill is “more limiting than MT.”<sup>3</sup> The second and the third differences make the directive applicable to contexts where Jews had to live under non-Jewish

<sup>1</sup> I thankfully quote this translation from *A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright* (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, New York – Oxford 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Within the Septuagint of Exodus, the other cases of rendering of **אלהים/אל** by θεός in the plural are grammatically conditioned by a suffix in the plural (Exod 23:24, 32, 33; Exod 34:15, 16) or by an adjective attribute in the plural (Exod 12:12; 18:11; 20:3; 23:13) or by a subordinate clause with a verb in the plural (Exod 32:1, 4, 8, 23) or by the context (Exod 15:11; 20:23; 22:19; 23:31; 34:17).

<sup>3</sup> *J. Wevers*, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (SCSt 30), Atlanta, GA 1990, 355. Also κακολογέω may include a broadening of possible failure in comparison with קלל (“to curse”).

state power. Similarly, the purpose of the decision concerning אלהים appears to be to admonish Jews not to cause conflicts by their own provocative behavior towards non-Jewish religion. This interpretation of Exod 22:27(28) is a general consensus in scholarship<sup>4</sup> corroborated by a similar tendency in Exod 19:6 where βασιλειον ιεράτευμα (“royal priesthood”) for ממלכת כהנים is regarded less provocative than βασιλεία ιερέων (“kingdom of priests”). That propensity to attempt not to cause conflict is true despite tendencies of dissociations between the Jewish γένος (Exod 19:6) and the Egypt ἔθνος (Exod 1:9). In the Septuagint of Exodus,<sup>5</sup> the theoretical monotheism in Exod 8:6 is underlined, and the election theology visible in Exod 19:5, which may be influenced by Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18.<sup>6</sup> Within the Septuagint manuscript 106, θεός is replaced by κριτήν. Also the Targumim and the Peshitta on Exod 22:27(28) offer the analog reading “judge”<sup>7</sup> – the context of this change probably is Exod 22:8 where “God” and “judgement” are combined.<sup>8</sup> The exegetical connection between Exod 22 and Ps 81(82):1, 6 discussed below will provide an interesting analogy.

Such proof of loyalty to the host country has not only been shown by the translator of the book of Exodus but also by other translators. In Lev 11:5, the rendering of חַפְזִי (“hare”) by λαγώς is avoided so as not to make any allusion to the name of Lagos, father of Ptolemaeus I.<sup>9</sup> The translator of Deuteronomy is aware of problems of loyalty when rendering of the deuteronomic King’s Law Deut 17:14–20; in Deut 17:14f.,<sup>10</sup> as in Lev 18:21, ἄρχων (“ruler”) is used instead of βασιλεύς (“King”), owing to the real circumstances; in Deut 17:18, כִּסֵּא (“throne”) is not rendered with θρόνος, but with δίφρος (“seat”), and βασιλεύς

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Le Boulluec and P. Sandevour, *L’Exode* (BdA 2), Paris 1989, 230 f. (lit.). According to M. Rösel, “Du sollst die Götter nicht schmähnen!” (LXX Ex 22, 28[27]). Die Übersetzung Gottes und der Götter in der Septuaginta,” in: M. Lange and M. Rösel (eds.), *Der übersetzte Gott*, Leipzig 2015, 54–68, here 64, this translation diverges from other tendencies of emphasizing the difference between the one true God and the non-Jewish “deities” in the Septuagint.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Schaper and E. Weber, “Exodus,” in: M. Karrer and W. Kraus, *Septuaginta Deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament*, Vol. I, Stuttgart 2011, 258–324, here 277.

<sup>6</sup> *Le Boulluec and Sandevour*, *L’Exode*, 199.

<sup>7</sup> Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, 355.

<sup>8</sup> D. Büchner, “Mekilta De Rabbi Ishmael and LXX Exodus 12–23,” in: B. A. Taylor (ed.), *IX Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, Cambridge, 1995 (SCS 45), Atlanta, GA 1997, 403–420, here 416.

<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the ibis is included in the list of unclean birds in Lev 11:17; cf. M. Görg, “Die Septuaginta im Kontext spätägyptischer Kultur. Beispiele lokaler Inspiration bei der Übersetzungsarbeit am Pentateuch,” in: H.-J. Fabry and U. Offerhaus (eds.), *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta. Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel Bd. 1* (BWANT 153), Stuttgart 2001, 115–130, here 118 f.

<sup>10</sup> E. J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, Cambridge, MA – London 1988, 108. Cf., however, M. Seleznev, “Replacing חַפְזִי with ἄρχων in the LXX: Self-Censorship or Inner Development of the Jewish Tradition?” in: E. Bons, M. Geiger, F. Ueberschaer and M. Meiser (eds.), *Die Septuaginta – Themen, Manuskripte, Wirkungen* (WUNT 444), Tübingen 2020, 302–314, here 313, who names an anti-monarchic tendency within Israel responsible.

is used only for foreign kings.<sup>11</sup> Jews did not want to provoke the Egyptian kings by thinking about Jewish kings. The question arises whether this tendency to emphasize loyalty to the government of the host country can also be found in the later reception of Exod 22.

Without directly quoting Exod 22, the *Letter of Aristeas* offers a comparable reflection. The Jewish author puts the following statement in the mouth of a non-Jew: “the God who gave them their law is the God who maintains your kingdom. They worship the same God – the Lord and Creator of the Universe, as all other men, as we ourselves, O king, though we call him by different names, such as Zeus or Dis.”<sup>12</sup> The fictive non-Jewish speaker assures the king that the Jews share the same Hellenistic, especially Stoic, ideas on God and therefore are worthy of protection and liberation.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Exod 22:27(28)<sup>LXX</sup> in Ancient Jewish literature

### 2.1. Philo of Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria takes up the passage in two contexts, both of which concern the protection of the divine name but have different effects of the prohibition in this passage in mind. In *Mos. 2:205* it is said that one must abstain from insulting pagan gods or their images so that no one of Moses’ disciples gets used “to treat[ing] the appellation of God with disrespect; for that name is always most deserving to obtain the victory, and is especially worthy of love.” I interpret this statement to be a reference to Jewish piety which is conscious of the basis of its own identity, the obligation to the one true God. In *Spec. 1:53*, however, Exod 22:27(28) serves as a warning with regard to the external effect of disobedience of the prohibition. That passage teaches that one should not revile those who consider beings other than the God of Israel to be gods, so that gentiles are not also incited to blasphemies against the true God. This passage can be commented on in both respects, the internal aspect and the external aspect.

<sup>11</sup> T. Pola, in: C. den Hertog, M. Labahn and T. Pola, “Deuteronomion,” “Deuteronomion/Deuteronomium/Das fünfte Buch Mose,” LXX.E I 523–601, here 571. According to C. Dogniez, “Lost in Translation: La désignation des chefs dans le Dodekapropton,” JSJ 39 (2008) 192–210, here 195, however, this tendency of loyalty is missing in the Septuagint of the Twelve Prophets.

<sup>12</sup> *EpArist* 16 (English translation by R.H. Charles (<https://www.ccel.org/c/charles/ot/pseudepig/aristeas.htm>).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. B. Schmitz, “... using different names, as Zeus and Dis. Concepts of God in the Letter of Aristeas,” in: S. Kreuzer, M. Meiser and M. Sigismund, in Verbindung mit M. Karrer and W. Kraus (eds.), *Die Septuaginta – Orte und Intentionen* (WUNT 361), Tübingen 2016, 703–716, here 704–708.

1. Exegetically it is made clear by the introduction of ἕτεροι that neither Moses nor the Jews in general believe in the existence of other deities.<sup>14</sup> From a historical perspective, we can complement that post-exilic evidence of the worship of foreign gods by Jews focuses on early times.<sup>15</sup> In Philo's period, the question dominating the inner-Jewish discourse was no longer which God was to be worshipped, but how the will of the one God was to be fulfilled correctly.

2. Jewish life in the diaspora was a life between tolerance and conflict. Experiences of conflict characterize Philo's reception of Exod 22; Philo does not want Jews to provoke conflicts with gentiles on their own initiative. The edict of the Roman Emperor Claudius, concerning the anti-Jewish turmoil in Egypt, enjoins upon the Jews "not to set at naught the beliefs about the gods held by other peoples but to keep their own laws."<sup>16</sup> According to the Jewish historian Daniel R. Schwartz, it was indeed essential for the safety of the Diaspora communities that they should be restrained from expressing their scorn for paganism by attacks on the cults of the gentiles among whom they lived.<sup>17</sup> Without quoting Exod 22, Philo confirms its content in his treatise against Flaccus by emphasizing Jewish loyalty to Roman rule also in a very dangerous situation, during the pogrom in Alexandria.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, Philo gives an exhaustive exegesis in his *Questions on Exodus* (QE 2:5). The context of his exegesis is the accusation that the Mosaic Law breaks down the customs of others. Philo defends Judaism against this accusation with the following:

"For, behold, not only does it offer support to those of different opinion by accepting and honoring those whom they have from the beginning believed to be gods, but it also muzzles and restrains its own disciples, not permitting them to revile these with a loose tongue, for it believes that well-spoken praise is better. In the second place, those who are in error and are deluded about their own native gods and because of custom believe to be inerrant truth what is a falsely created error, by which even keen and discerning minds are blinded, are not peaceful toward or reconciled with those who do not gladly accept their (opinion). And this is the beginning and origin of wars. But to us the Law has described the source of peace as a beautiful possession. In the third place, he who speaks evil (of

<sup>14</sup> The verb νομίζεν already in Greek tradition is t. t. for the belief in the existence of deities (Plato, *Euthyphr.* 3b; Aeschylus, *Pers.* 497 f.; Aristophanes, *Nub.* 819; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1.5. In Jewish Literature cf. *EpArist* 134; Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* IV, 207; id., *Contra Apionem* II, 237. Cf. F. Siegert [ed.], Flavius Josephus: Über die Ursprünglichkeit des Judentums (Contra Apionem), Vol. II: Beigaben, Anmerkungen, griechischer Text, in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Josephus-Arbeitskreis des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum Münster, Göttingen 2008, whereas trust is formulated with πιστεύειν (Aeschylus, *Pers.* 800; Sophocles, *OT* 646, 1445; *Phil.* 374; Plato, *Leg.* 966d).

<sup>15</sup> Chronologically, 2 Macc 12:34, 40 and LAB 25.9, 13 are the latest texts.

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* XIX, 290.

<sup>17</sup> D. R. Schwartz, *Reading the first Century. On Reading Josephus and Studying Jewish History of the First Century* (WUNT 300), Tübingen 2013, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Philo, *In Flaccum* 49 f., 94, 98, 99, 101, 103.

others) must of necessity receive the contrary reproach in similar matters. Accordingly, those who have in mind a concern for dignity will refrain from reviling other gods, in order that the power of the truly certain and existent (God) may be well spoken of and praised in the mouths of all. For (thus) we shall seem not to be hearing but to be speaking, as others use our voice. For there is no difference between saying something oneself and inviting others to say it in any way.”<sup>19</sup>

Philo begins his statement with a guarantee to the benevolent among gentiles that the law also exhorts its own people to exercise restraint. In the second part, he names what we would call fundamentalism today as the cause of wars, but distinguishes Judaism from such fundamentalism, regardless of texts such as Deut 7:1–5. The third argument is to be understood as an indication of the consequences of a statement for conflict-oriented or peaceful coexistence. The phrasing “the power of the truly certain and existent (God)” is a confession to biblical monotheism which does not preclude but includes the possibility of a positive relationship of non-Jews to this God.

## 2.2. Josephus

Josephus quotes Exod 22:27(28) also in his paraphrase of the Torah within the Antiquities (4:207<sup>20</sup>), but in peculiar extension. No one, he says, shall defame the gods in which foreign cities believe (Βλασφημείτω δὲ μηδεὶς θεοὺς οὓς πόλεις ἄλλαι νομίζουσιν); nor may anyone steal what belongs to foreign sanctuaries or take away consecrated gifts of any deity. The reference to the foreign nations again ensures that believing in other gods is impossible for an observant Jew. The meaning of the extension by temple robbery is clear: What is regarded as severely frowned upon by gentiles<sup>21</sup>, should also be rejected by the Jews, so that they do not give rise to conflicts of their own accord. Twenty years after the war between the Romans and the Jews it was important to underline the importance of a general Jewish peaceful mind, especially in the context of Roman anti-Judaism.<sup>22</sup> We do not really know whether Jews in Josephus’ period were

<sup>19</sup> English translation by R. Marcus, Philo, in Ten volumes (and two Supplement Volumes), Supplement II, Questions on Exodus, Translated from the Ancient Armenian Version of the Original Greek (LCL 401), Cambridge, MA – London 1970, 40–41.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. L. H. Feldman/Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary (Vol. 3), Leiden 1999, 403–405.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Philo, *De confusion linguarum* 163; Plato, *Resp.* IV 469e; further id. *Leg.* 853d: The temple theft is considered such a serious crime for him that he does not trust a Greek to do such a thing at all. Diogenes of Sinope didn’t think it was impossible to rob a temple (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* VI, 73) – the wording underlines the exceptional character of this statement. The Cyrenaic philosopher Theodoros claimed that the ban on the theft of the temple was merely a result of social agreement, not an expression of the fact that it was inherently reprehensible (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* II, 99). In later Roman law, temple robbery was punishable by death (cf. Ulpian, *Iul. dig.* 48.13.7).

<sup>22</sup> Feldman, *Judaean Antiquities*, 404 n. 623, referring to Pliny the Elder, *nat. hist.* 13:46, and Tacitus, *hist.* 5:5.2 who criticize Jewish contempt of foreign deities. – The warning as such

willing to defile themselves ritualistically by robbing non-Jewish shrines. But we do know that the Greek author Lysimachos formulated a cliché: He names Jerusalem Ἱερόσυλα, due to the “Jewish tendency” (διάθεσις) to act in this way.<sup>23</sup> Manetho also states that Jews “pillage the temples and mutilate the images of the gods [and] ... habitually used the very sanctuaries as kitchens for roasting the venerated sacred animals.”<sup>24</sup>

There is, however, a seeming contradiction within Josephus’ paraphrase of the Torah. According to *A. J.* 4:191, Moses exhorts Israel to demolish all the altars, groves, and temples of their enemies. Perhaps this rendering of the biblical source text includes a reconciliation of both passages: Whereas the possible source text Deut 7:1–5 in general admonishes the Israelites to engage against foreign cults, Josephus restricts this command to “enemies” in the case of war. And in his rendering of Israel’s history, Josephus omits some biblical passages where Jews are characterized as intolerant, namely Judg 6:25–31 (Gideon’s destroying a foreign altar); 1 Kgs 15:12 (King Asa’s ending of the mystery cult); 2 Chr 17:6 (the removing of pagan high places by Jehoshaphat); and 2 Kgs 10:27 (Jehu’s conversion of the temple of Baal into an outhouse).<sup>25</sup>

Once again Josephus takes up Exod 22 in *Contra Apionem* (*c. Ap.* 2:237), but not in the Paraphrasis of the Torah (*c. Ap.* 2:190–219), but later in the context of defending his own polemics against Greek mythology. He writes:

“For all that, the Lysimachuses and Molons and other writers of that class, reprobate sophists and deceivers of youth, rail at us as the very vilest of Criticism of mankind. Gladly would I have avoided an investigation of the institutions of other nations. It is our traditional custom to observe our own laws and to refrain from criticism of those of aliens. Our legislator has expressly forbidden us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others, out of respect for the very word ‘God.’<sup>26</sup> But since our accusers expect to confute us by a comparison of the rival religions, it is impossible to remain silent. I speak with the more assurance because the statement which I am about to make is no invention of my own for the occasion but has been made by many writers of the highest reputation.”<sup>27</sup>

What follows is the well-known critique on the crass and immoral ideas about the gods which Josephus shares with some Greek philosophers. In Josephus’ statement, again the motive of the required respect for the name of God has an

is offered also by Philo, *hypoth I*, quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio evangelica* VIII, 7.3 (GCS 43:430).

<sup>23</sup> Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I, 318.

<sup>24</sup> Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I, 249. English translation by *H. St. J. Thackeray* (ed.), Josephus, with an English Translation in Nine Volumes, Vol. I: The Life; against Apion (LCL 186), London – Cambridge, MA 1966, 265.

<sup>25</sup> *Feldman*, *Judaean Antiquities*, 396 n. 561.

<sup>26</sup> Καὶ περὶ γε τοῦ μήτε χλευάζειν μήτε βλασφημεῖν τοὺς νομιζομένους θεοὺς παρ’ ἑτέροις ἄντικρυς ἡμῖν ὁ νομοθέτης ἀπειρήκεν αὐτῆς ἕνεκα προσηγορίας τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>27</sup> English translation by *Thackeray* (ed.), Josephus, 387–389.

effect, as with Philo, *De vita Moysis* II, 205.<sup>28</sup> In addition, as the context, Josephus may also have taken up the passage as a reminder that the Jews do not themselves give rise to conflicts, in my opinion. In another context within *Contra Apionem*, Josephus also emphasizes Jewish loyalty to foreign rulers without quoting the Exodus-text.<sup>29</sup> Josephus does not deal with texts like Isa 44:9–20 or the so-called *Epistula Ieremiae* where mockery on foreign deities is based on mockery on their statues without distinguishing the deity and its representative statue. These texts, however, only become important for ancient anti-Christian criticism late on.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Exodus 22:27(28)<sup>LXX</sup> in Ancient Christian literature

#### 3.1. The reception of Exodus 22:27(28)b in Acts 23:5 and the exegesis of Acts 23:5

The Christian story of the impact of this verse already begins in the New Testament. Exod 22:27(28)b is put into the mouth of the apostle Paul in Acts 23:5, when he tries to apologize after a verbal outburst against the high priest, whom he had not recognized as such.<sup>31</sup>

With regard to textual criticism we have to note: The Septuagint tradition fluctuates between the plural ἄρχοντας and the singular ἄρχοντα; the dominant reading in the Luke text is the singular ἄρχοντα, and sometimes it has the dative ἄρχοντι.<sup>32</sup> In the Latin text tradition the plural *principes* is found occasionally.<sup>33</sup> The last two words, κακῶς ἐπεῖς, occur in reversed order in the text of Acts (ἐπεῖς κακῶς), in analogy to the reading of Exod 22:27(28) in the *Codex Alexandrinus*.

The use of Exod 22:27(28) in Acts 23:5 has an apologetic and at the same time parenetic purpose: It should prove Paul to be true to the Torah (implicitly the Jews who do not believe in Jesus are blamed for the deterioration of loyalty to the Torah) and admonish the Christians, that they should not create unnecessary conflicts of their own accord. This was important at a time of increasing social distrust of this new group. Greeks and Romans knew about the Jewish monotheism of this new group, but they also knew that this group “from every nations, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Apoc 7:9) was not ethnically limited,

<sup>28</sup> Siegert, Flavius Josephus, 123.

<sup>29</sup> Josephus, *Contra Apionem* II, 77. In general cf. W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, London 1998, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (STAC 23), Tübingen 2004, 320.

<sup>31</sup> In general cf. G. J. Steyn, *Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum* (CBET 1), Kampen 1995; M. Müller, “Die Lukasschriften und die Septuaginta,” in: S. Kreuzer, M. Meiser and M. Sigismund (eds.), *Die Septuaginta – Entstehung, Sprache, Geschichte* (WUNT 286), Tübingen 2012, 465–479.

<sup>32</sup> In the minuscules 181 and 1875.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. [https://download.uni-mainz.de/fb07-klassphil-nttf/Apostelgeschichte/Act%2023/Act%2023\\_05.pdf](https://download.uni-mainz.de/fb07-klassphil-nttf/Apostelgeschichte/Act%2023/Act%2023_05.pdf), consulted 25.09.2019.

so that it was perceived as a greater threat to the Greek-Roman way of life. The Judeo-Christian exclusive monotheism intensified demarcation tendencies in a society whose understanding of religion was inclusive only as long as the basic social consensus was not in question. This basic social consensus implied also the individual self-definition by belonging to the Roman Empire and its system of symbols.<sup>34</sup> Not only the Christian cult but also other pre-Christian cults were regarded as subversive because they based one's identity on the loyalty to the cult and not to the Roman Empire.<sup>35</sup> How did ancient Christian theologians understand Acts 23:5 and the quotation of Exodus within it?

Acts 23:5 is one of the passages of Acts where Christians have to find an answer on critical questions which anti-Christian critiques or intellectual believers could put forward. Paul's fierce word "God will smite you, you whitewashed wall" (Acts 23:3) is already excused in Acts with the fact that Paul did not know that he had the high priest before him. In his seminal monograph "The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism", John Granger Cook does not quote any anti-Christian polemics based on Acts 23:5.<sup>36</sup> John Chrysostom, however, recognizes the problem of this argumentation: "Could someone other than the high priest be called so? Paul himself had issued another maxim: 'If we are reviled, we bless; if we suffer persecution, we endure'" (1 Cor 4:12). These words of Acts 23:5, however, according to John Chrysostom, do not testify to the anger, but to the frankness (παρρησία) of the apostle.<sup>37</sup> Ps.-Oecumenius of Tricca defends Paul's argument in Acts 23:3 as not harmful, but well considered (οικονομοῦσα), for frankness at the wrong time (παρρησία ... ἄκαιρος) is detrimental to truth.<sup>38</sup> The Venerable Bede offers a context-based argument: Paul does not say this in a confusion of the Spirit, and he does not say it in the optative, but in the indicative, to indicate what will happen, namely the replacement of the Jewish high priesthood by the priesthood of Christ, which the apostles now proclaim.<sup>39</sup> Within a treatise on patience, also Augustin deals with Acts 23:5 a couple of time before the Venerable Bede. According to Augustine, the believer has such admonitions (Mt 5:39–41; Rom 12:21) in the heart, but it does not always have an actual effect. So it was when Christ resisted the cheek

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* X, 96.6–8; Lucian of Samosata, *Peregrinus Proteus* 13 ("the gods of Greece"); id., *Alexander cf Abonoteichos* 38, where atheists, Christians and Epicureans stand in a row of dissenters. The philosopher Celsus despises Christian monotheism as the language of revolt and self-discernment of Christians by all other people (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8:2, GCS 3:221–222).

<sup>35</sup> J. A. North, *Roman Religion. Greece and Rome (New Surveys in the Classics 30)*, Oxford 2000, 66.

<sup>36</sup> J. G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism (STAC 3)*, Tübingen 2000.

<sup>37</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Actus Apostolorum* 48.2 (PG 60:334).

<sup>38</sup> Ps.-Oecumenius of Tricca, *In Actus Apostolorum* (PG 118:276ab), similarly Theophylact, *Expositio in Acta Apostolorum* (PG 125:801c).

<sup>39</sup> Bede the Venerable, *Expositio in Actus Apostolorum* (CCSL 121:89).



puff of the servant of the high priest (John 18:23), so it was with Paul who tore down the hypocrisy of the Jewish priesthood with the words “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall.” It is hardly believable that he who grew up among the Jewish people and under Jewish law should not have known the high priest.<sup>40</sup> The quotation of Exod 22 often is not commented on in treatments of this passage, but it is clear: Paul is obedient to Holy Scripture, the others are not,<sup>41</sup> and Paul’s obedience is a moral paradigm also for Christians.

### 3.2. *Parenetic reception in Ancient Christian literature*

In the period before 325, the Christian reception of Exod 22:27(28) is sometimes shaped by the opposition of Christians and non-Christians, but sometimes not. In a general moral application, despite of external conflicts, Cyprian quotes Exod 22:27(28) “against speaking ill.”<sup>42</sup> The text-form quoted by Cyprian is interesting. In the quotation (*Non maledices neque principi populi tui detraxeris*), the term *deos* is omitted.

For Cyprian, the term *deos* perhaps was awkward. The opposite is true in contexts of ecclesiastical order where Exod 22:27(28) is received as admonishing obedience to the bishop or deacon. According to the Apostolic Constitutions, the bishop is to be seen “close to God as an earthly god.”<sup>43</sup> Also in the work of Gregory the Great, Exod 22:27(28) is quoted as an admonition to be obedient to the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>44</sup> Whereas Philo and Josephus actualize the verse within a context dealing with foreign rulers, the authors of church order take its validity for granted also in an inner-Christian context.

Origen, however, follows the interpretation line of the Septuagint when quoting Exod 22:27(28) in his apology *Against Celsus*. He opposes the accusation that the Christians would heat up the conflict on their own by a public defamation of images of the gods. Exod 22:27(28); Rom 12:14; and 1 Cor 6:10 are the decisive passages he uses to explain why Christians in fact abstain from such reviling.<sup>45</sup>

But also the anti-Christian critique was aware of Exod 22:27(28) in the attempt of refuting Christian claims of truth.<sup>46</sup> “Simon Magus, in his debate with Peter about the existence of other gods, uses Exod 22:27(28) to establish the exist-

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *Epistulae* 138.13 (CSEL 44:139). In opposition to such exegesis, Theophylact, *Expositio in Acta Apostolorum* (PG 125:801c), refers to the longtime of Paul’s absence from Jerusalem.

<sup>41</sup> Cf Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 110.5 (CSEL 50:272), who only quotes Acts 23:3b.

<sup>42</sup> Cyprian, *Testimonia ad Quirinum* 3:14 (CCSL 3:104). In addition, he refers to Ps 33:13 f.; Lev 14:13 f.; Eph 4:29; Rom 12:14; Mt 5:22.

<sup>43</sup> *Constitutiones Apostolorum* 2:26; 2:31/93 (SC 320:329; 336).

<sup>44</sup> Gregory I. of Rome, *Epistolarum libri quatuordecim* 14.17 (PL 77:1325ab).

<sup>45</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8:38 (GCS 3:253).

<sup>46</sup> Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament*, 312–14, collected all the relevant material.

ence of many gods.”<sup>47</sup> The anonymous anti-Christian critique refuted by Macarius Magnes quotes Exod 22:27(28); Josh 24:14; and 1 Cor 8:5 in his attack on Christian exclusive monotheism.<sup>48</sup> The Christian author answers first by equating the deity with its material representation in a statue, in line with Isa 44:9–20 and the so-called *Epistle cf Jeremiah*; he argues that anything which is not able to understand the blasphemy cannot be blasphemed at all.<sup>49</sup> Macarius Magnes argues in a way well-known to us by Philo of Alexandria that if someone is called god without being god, he insults the designation “god.”<sup>50</sup> Julian the Apostate also quotes Exod 22:27(28) and Deut 32:9 in order to refute Christian monotheism and Christian contempt of ancestral traditions.<sup>51</sup> In his answer to Julian, Cyril of Alexandria refers to the motif of biblical coherence. He argues that Deut 12:1–3 precludes a literal understanding of Exod 22:27(28)a; its real meaning is cleared by the following “you shall not speak ill of your people’s rulers.”<sup>52</sup>

Are there arguments corroborating the critique put forward by the anonymous speaker quoted in Macarius Magnes und Julian the Apostate? We can suggest that the effect of Exod 22:27(28) is occasionally limited by conflicting texts, e.g. Jer 10:11 (“gods who did not make the heaven, the earth ...”), quoted in the martyr acts of Carponius of Caesarea,<sup>53</sup> Euplius of Sicily, Crispina of Thagara,<sup>54</sup> and later on in the *Passio Artemii*.<sup>55</sup>

In the situation of martyrdom, it is understandable that Christians did not orient themselves towards Exod 22:27(28). But after 325, Christians did not understand that their new dominance must also lead to institutional self-criticism, which must also express itself in a personal tolerant behavior towards non-Christians. After 325, therefore, we have examples of Christian violence against non-Christians, *i. e.* against pagans and Jews but also against inner-Christian dissidents, which must shame us.<sup>56</sup>

Despite such failure, we can observe an ongoing reception history of Exod 22:27(28) in a parenetic line. Procopius of Gaza, writing far after 390 AD, re-

<sup>47</sup> Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament*, 313, referring to Ps.-Clementine, *Homiliae* 16.6.4; 16.8.1 (GCS 42:220, 222).

<sup>48</sup> Macarius Magnes, *Apocriticus* 4:23.1–3 (TU 169:402).

<sup>49</sup> Macarius Magnes, *Apocriticus* 4:29.4 (TU 169:432).

<sup>50</sup> Macarius Magnes, *Apocriticus* 4:29.5 (TU 169:434).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Cyril *cf Alexandria, Contra Julianum* 7:28 (GCS NF 21:508).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum* 7:31 (GCS NF 21:512–513).

<sup>53</sup> *Martyrium Carponii*, rec. gr. 10/rec. lat. 2 (*H. Musurillo* [ed.], *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs. Introduction, Texts and Translations* [Oxford Early Christian Texts], Oxford 1972, 22–24).

<sup>54</sup> *Martyrium Euplii* (rec. lat.) 5 (*Musurillo* [ed.], *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 316); *Martyrium Crispinae* 2.2 (*Musurillo* [ed.], *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 304).

<sup>55</sup> John of Damascus, *Passio S. Artemii* 33 (PTS 29:220).

<sup>56</sup> M. Meiser, “Gewaltphantasien der Johannesoffenbarung in altkirchlicher Auslegung,” in: M. Labahn and M. Karrer (eds.), *Die Johannesoffenbarung. Ihr Text und ihre Auslegung* (ABG 38), Leipzig 2012, 331–345, here 337–340.

news the understanding of this passage in the sense of a warning to obey the meanwhile Christian state authorities, inferred from the second part of the verse. He adds an anti-Jewish invective: He who despises the judges despises the law, and he ultimately despises the one who gave it. The Jews have proved this by the killing of the prophets and the killing of Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ admonishes his disciples to follow the teachings but not the deeds of the Pharisees and Scribes (Mt 23:2–3a), and Paul corrects himself after his undue failure against the high priest (Acts 23:5).<sup>57</sup>

There are not many references to Exod 22:27(28) within Christian parenetic writings. I suggest that Christians were oriented to other texts, e.g. Mt 22:21 or Rom 13:1–7 or 1 Tim 2:1–4. A reference to Exod 22:27(28) is missing in commentaries on these passages,<sup>58</sup> but also in comments on analogous texts like 1 Cor 4:12f.<sup>59</sup> Exod 22:27(28) also was not regarded an obstacle against texts like Isa 44:6–20<sup>60</sup> or Jer 10:11 (“Let gods who did not make the sky and the earth perish from the earth”).<sup>61</sup> And in the ancient Christian exegesis of Apoc 13:1, Exod 22:27(28) is not relevant, because the “beast” is not referred to the Roman Empire.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.3. Exod 22:27(28) and parallel texts in Ancient Christian literature

The astonishing plural “gods” at the beginning of the verse sometimes caused the question where the term “gods” is used elsewhere in the Bible in an unusual

<sup>57</sup> Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Exodum* (PG 87/1:621).

<sup>58</sup> Bede the Venerable, *Expositio in Evangelium Matthaei* (PL 92:97ab); Theophylact, *Enarratio in Evangelium Matthaei* (PG 123:123:389a–c); Euthymius Zigabenus, *Evangelii secundum Matthaeum enarratio* (PG 129:577b); Christian Druthmarus of Corvey, *Expositio in Evangelium Matthaei* (PL 106:1441c–1442c); John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 60:613–618); Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretatio Epistolae ad Romanos* (PG 82:193b–196c); Gennadius, *Fragmenta in epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 85:1720d–1721c), John of Damascus, *In epistolam ad Romanos* (PG 95:545a–48b). Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos* (CSEL 81/1:416–422). John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Epistolam primam ad Timotheum* (PG 62:529–532, 534–536).

<sup>59</sup> I did not find any reference to Exod 22:27(28) in John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in primam epistolam ad Corinthios* (PG 61:108–110); Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in Epistolam primam ad Corinthios* (CSEL 81/2:48).

<sup>60</sup> I did not find any reference to Exod 22:27(28) in Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Isaiam prophetam* (PG 70:924a–933c); Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentaria in Isaiam* (SC 295:472).

<sup>61</sup> The comments on Jer 10:11 do not always include a quote of Exod 22:27(28); cf. (Ps?)-Polychronios, *Fragmenta in Jeremiam* (PG 64:860d–861a); Theodoret of Cyrus, *In Jeremiae Prophetiam interpretatio* (PG 81:565d–568a); Rabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in Jeremiam* (PL 111:879a). In Olympiodor’s fragments, the explanation of Jer 10:11 did not survive (Olympiodor, *Fragmenta in Jeremiam* [PG 93:649a]).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Andreas of Caesarea, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (PG 106:332c–333a); Arethas of Caesarea, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* (PG 106:672a–d); Primasius of Hadrumetum, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* 4:13.1 (CCSL 92:193 f.), who refers the “beast” to the devil.

way. In such exegesis it is often presupposed, that the *καί* in Exod 22:27(28)b does not introduce a parallel clause but is to be understood as an explaining, epexegetic *καί*. Parallel texts are especially Exod 7:1, where Moses is called the god for the Pharaoh; Deut 10:17 Θεὸς τῶν θεῶν; Ps 49(50):1 Θεὸς θεῶν κύριος; Ps 81(82):1 “God stands in the assembly of gods”; and Ps 81(82):6 “I say, ‘You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.’”

Augustine considers two possible interpretations of the term *Deos*: (1) the reference to the judges as also Moses was given to Pharaoh by God (Exod 7:1)<sup>63</sup> and as becomes clear by exposition in the following *et principem populi ...*, or (2) as a reference to the beings which according to Paul (1 Cor 8:5) are “the so-called gods”; one should not revile them, but one should also not worship them.<sup>64</sup> Similarly Jerome refers the second part of the verse to Christ or the high priest because of *sine rege, sine principe*.<sup>65</sup> Gregory the Great distinguishes between a transferred (*nuncupative*) and an essential (*essentialiter*) usage of the term “god” in the Bible. Exod 7:1; 22:8; 22:27(28); and Ps 81:1 belong to the first group.<sup>66</sup> In his view, preachers or wise men are meant by this use of “gods.”<sup>67</sup> Even Gen 6:2, *ad vocem* υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, evokes quotations of Exod 22.<sup>68</sup>

In his comment on Psalm 49(50):1, Eusebius of Caesarea underlines that the Septuagint names judges and rulers “gods,” based on Ps 49(50):1; Ps 81(82):1; and Exod 22:27(28).<sup>69</sup> John Chrysostom lists all such texts including Ps 81(82):1;

<sup>63</sup> On Exod 7:1, cf. e. g. Photius, *Amphilochia sive in Sacras Litteras et quaestiones diatribae* 53 (PG 101/1:389d–92a).

<sup>64</sup> Augustine, *Quaestiones in heptateuchum* (CCSL 33:113). Augustine’s treatise is the referred text also in: Walafrid Strabo, *Glossa ordinaria, in Exodum* (PL 113:262a).

<sup>65</sup> Jerome, *In Osee I*, 3,4–5 (CCSL 76:37).

<sup>66</sup> Gregory the Great, in Ez. 8.3 (SC 327:278).

<sup>67</sup> Gregory the Great, Gregory I. of Rome, *In librum primum Regum* (CCSL 144:47–614), in *IReg.* 1:44 (CCSL 144:78) (*ordo praedicatorum*); 3:100 (CCSL 144:255) (*sublimes et sapientes viri*); 5:99 (CCSL 144:480) (*electi praedicatorum*). In all these references, Exod 7:1 and Exod 22:27(28) are combined.

<sup>68</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (PG 80:76a–528a). *qu. Gen.* 47 (PG 80:149a): In combination with Ps 49:1 and 81:1–3, 6, Exod 22:28 proves that the υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ are not angels which is, however, clear from the context Gen 6:3. In Theodoret’s *qu. Deut.*, however, the problematic terms in Deut 32 are not explained. – Ambrosiaster, *qu. V. N. T.* 101,3 (CSEL 50:201) refers the “sons of God” (Gen 6:2) to the Jews whereas Ambrosius, *de Noe* 4/8 (CSEL 32/1:418), and Filastrius of Brescia, *haer.* 80/108.1 (CSEL 38:69), Filastrius of Brescia, *Diversarum hereseon Liber* (CSEL 38), refer this term to the angels. – Ps 8:6 does not evoke a quotation of Exod 22:27(28) in John Chrysostom, *expos. Ps.* 8.7 (PG 55:116). According to Theodoret, *Interpretatio in Psalmos* (PG 80:857a–1997b, here 80:917b), Ps. 8:6 refers not to the supralapsaric but to the infralapsaric status of Adam. Perhaps Theodoret was aware of the motif of superiority of human beings over angels before the fall.

<sup>69</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentaria in Psalmos* (PG 23:433d). Similarly, Diodor of Tarsus, *Commentarii in Psalmos* (CCSG 6:301), comments Ps 49(50):1, but without other references.

1 Cor 8:5; Exod 22:27(28); Gen 6:2; and Jer 10:11, concluding from Exod 22:27(28)b that in all these texts the so-called gods are the ἄρχοντες.<sup>70</sup> According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ps 49(50) refers to the Jews, but the author actualizes this interpretation in an anti-Jewish way: The psalm emphasizes “the dignity given them by God so as to charge them with greater ingratitude.”<sup>71</sup> But Theodore does not quote Exod 22.

The analogous use of the plural “gods” causes quotations of Exod 22:27(28) in some commentaries on Ps 81(82):1.<sup>72</sup> Already Origen seems to be aware of this verse when referring to the Jewish tradition, where judges are called “god,” due to their καθαρόν ἦθος.<sup>73</sup> Theodoret and Procopius of Gaza identify the “gods” in Exod 22 with the “judges” named in Ps 81(82):1, because the terms “gods” and “judges” are combined in this psalm.<sup>74</sup> In his question on Deut 10:17, Theodoret identifies the gods as judges, and in his comments on Ps 49(50):1, he identifies these as priests and mandates of the law. To call such persons “gods” in the plural, he says, is a specific expression within the Septuagint.<sup>75</sup> Cyril of Alexandria identifies the addressees with the priests. According to him, the apostle Paul quotes Exod 22:27(28) in full length, not only the second part.<sup>76</sup> Photius of Constantinople regards the addressees as the friends of virtue and ministers of law.<sup>77</sup> According to Nicephorus Blemmyda, who also refers to Exod 22:27(28)a, the Pharisees and scribes are the addressees of Ps 81(82):1, whereas the judges are referred to in Ps 81(82):6.<sup>78</sup> Also Euthymius Zigabenus in his commentary on Ps 81:6 clearly shows awareness of the question where we can find such uncommon use of “gods” in the Old Testament. Based on Exod 22, he refutes some who identify the addressees of the divine speech with human beings in general,

<sup>70</sup> John Chrysostom, *Expositio in Psalmos* (PG 55:240–241).

<sup>71</sup> R. C. Hill (ed.), Theodor of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Psalms 1–81*, translated with an Introduction and Notes (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 5), Atlanta, GA 2006, 650.

<sup>72</sup> In some commentaries, such references are missing, cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentaria in Psalmos* (PG 23:981c–984a); Athanasius of Alexandria, *Expositiones in Psalmos* (PG 27:365a).

Cf. in general C. Gers-Uphaus, *Sterbliche Götter – göttliche Menschen: Psalm 82 und seine frühchristlichen Deutungen* (SBS 240), Stuttgart 2019, who presents the reception of this Psalm which was used in order to justify Jesus’ naming as God.

<sup>73</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4:32 (GCS 2:301–302). Cf. Targum of Psalms 82: “As for God, his Shekinah dwells in the assembly of the righteous who are mighty in the Law; he judges among the judges of truth.” (*D. M. Stec*, *The Targum of Psalms Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* [The Aramaic Bible 16], Collegeville 2004, 160).

<sup>74</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (PG 80:273b); Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Exodum* (PG 87/1:621).

<sup>75</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (PG 80:416bc); id., *Interpretatio in Psalmos* (PG 80:1229bc).

<sup>76</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commerntarius in Psalmos* (PG 69:1204ab).

<sup>77</sup> Photius, *Amphilochia sive in Sacras Litteras et quaestiones diatribe* 89 (PG 101/1:564b), quoting Gen 6:2; Ps 81(82):6; Exod 22:27(28); Exod 7:1.

<sup>78</sup> Nicephorus Blemmyda, *Expositio in Psalmos* (PG 142:1525d–1526a).

according to Gen 1:26; in his view, the “rulers” are addressed.<sup>79</sup> This exegetical tradition is also the background of the change in the Septuagint manuscript 106 mentioned above.

Filastrius of Brescia, not always a reliable author, writes sometimes about heresies without mentioning the names of their founders and prominent representatives or without classifying them in the general history of theology. His invention of some heresies is fanciful, and his exegesis may be wrong, but he points out divergences already mentioned in Jewish exegesis. Some of these so-called heretics, he says, misunderstand Exod 22:27(28)a (*Diis alienis*<sup>80</sup> *non maledicetis*) thinking it dealt with the *vanitate paganorum*; Moses had ordered the altars of the Gentiles to be burned (Exod 34:15), and Abraham was justified because he broke the idols, similar to Gideon (Judg 6:28), and David said, “shall those who worship them be similar to them” (Ps 114:8). He also felt it referred to the saints who should not be reviled, as Barnabas and Paul were also called gods (Acts 14:11),<sup>81</sup> and Moses was a “god” for Pharaoh (Exod 7:1).<sup>82</sup> At least, Filastrius’ book draws attention to inner-biblical contradictions.

#### 4. Conclusion

In Judaism, two lines of reception of Exod 22:27(28) were important. They were related to the self-obligation of Jews within a non-Jewish environment and to the holiness of the divine name. In Christianity, it was chiefly adopted as a general moral admonition, and with relation to exegetical problems concerning an unusual biblical phrasing. In Christianity before 325 AD the topics of the holy name of God and the existence of Christianity in non-Christian environments were not widespread or common; pagan anti-Christian critique recurred using Exod 22:27(28) in order to refute Christian claims of truth.

I can only speculate why both Jewish lines of interpretation have lost their relevance in Christianity. Perhaps the problem of justifying the veneration of Jesus Christ was more urgent than the problem of the holiness of God’s name, which was of course presupposed also in Christian circles. Christians were well aware

<sup>79</sup> Euthymius Zigabenus, *Commentaria in Psalmos* (PG 128:853cd).

<sup>80</sup> The exegetically clearing addition ἀλλοτρίους re-occurs also in the Septuagint-manuscripts 58 und 72, the addition alienis, like the plural maledicetis, also in the Old Latin manuscript 103.

<sup>81</sup> I did not find, however, any reference to Exod 22:27(28) in John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Actus Apostolorum* (PG 60:223–224); Ps.-Oecumenius of Tricca, *In Actus Apostolorum* (PG 118:213ab).

<sup>82</sup> Filastrius of Brescia, *Diversarum Hereseon Liber* 119/147 (CSEL 38:116–118). – Exod 22:27(28) is not commented by Isidor of Sevilla, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum* (PL 83:304a–d); Bede the Venerable, *Commentarii in Pentateuchum* (PL 91:321a–322b).

of the challenge to reconcile their Christology with Deut 6:4 f.<sup>83</sup> Concerning the admonition to live peacefully within a pagan environment, New Testament passages like Mt 22:21 and Rom 13:1–7 were the leading texts.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 13,6 (FC 34, 154); Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (PG 80:409ab).

<sup>84</sup> I warmly thank Ed Glenny for improving my English.