ASSYRIA IN THE SEPTUAGINT

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IN THE LXX, most proper names are transliterated into Greek without the characteristic case endings of Greek words. Thus, the first verse of Isaiah contains four indeclinable personal names: Αμως, Ιερουσαλημ, Ιωαθαμ, Αχας. One of these, Αμως, has a Greek ending,[1] but is not declinable. At the same time, four other words in that verse have Greek endings and are declinable: Ησαίας, Οζίου (nom. Οζίας), Εζεκίου (nom. Εζεκίας), Ιουδαίας (nom. Ιουδαία). According to Thackeray,[2] most names of places and peoples reflect their Hellenized forms,[3] with a minority representing

Translations of Hebrew Scripture follow תנ״ך, *JPS Hebrew–English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999). Translations of the LXX follow *NETS, A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title*, A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright (Oxford: University Press, 2007).

1. Cf. Εἵλως, Εἵλωτος (a Helot, name of the Spartan serfs); εἰδώς participle of οἶδα, etc.

2. Henry St. J. Thackeray, *A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint* (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), 160–71.

3. Thackeray, *Grammar*, 166: "… Here [i.e., places and peoples], however, the Hellenized forms largely predominate. The translators, for the most part, had a fair knowledge of the geography, not only of Egypt, but also of other countries, and adopted the current Hellenized forms." In n. 7, Thackeray lists the following examples: Αἰθιοπία, Ἀντιλίβανος, Ἰόππη, Καππαδοκία (for Kaphtor), Καρχηδών, Μεσοποταμία, Συρία. Thackeray, *Grammar*, 167 further notes: "Rarely, apart from the later historical books, do we find places of importance like Damascus or Tyre transliterated."

transliterated nouns without Greek endings. However, in view of the long lists of transliterated personal names in Genesis, Joshua, and Chronicles that represent their *Vorlagen* exactly with non-Greek endings, this view is very unlikely. Thackeray's view can now be refuted by computer-assisted data.[4] Thus, for example, according to our statistics, 41% of the proper names in Isaiah have Hellenized endings, a sizeable number, but still a minority.[5] These statistics imply that most proper names in the Septuagint represent the Hebrew/Aramaic words as such, including some Hebrew/Aramaic morphemes. The numbers of Hellenized endings in Isaiah, as in the other Prophetical books, are higher by 10% than most Septuagint books probably because the Prophets contain a greater percentage of geographic names (places, regions, people) than, for example, the historical books. In geographic names, the translators more readily added Greek endings. Similar percentages of Greek endings, usually approximately 30%, pertain to the Septuagint as a whole. On the other hand, the later biblical books of Esther, Daniel, and 1 Esdras and the deuterocanonical books contain a greater number of Hellenized names

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4. The examination is based on A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Württembürgische Bibelanstalt, 1935). The search was performed with the aid of the Accordance computer program version 7.4. See www.oaksoft.com. The text of the Rahlfs edition hardly differs from that of the volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint, whereas the apparatuses of variants differ completely. The statistics refer only to nouns, and not to adjectives, such as "Moabite" in Ῥοὺθ ἡ Μωαβῖτις (Ruth 1:22) and an "Egyptian maidservant," παιδίσκη Αἰγυπτία (Gen 16:1). Almost all these adjectives have Greek endings.

5. Of a total of 724 occurrences of words classified as proper names, 289 end in -ος, -ας, -ης, -ικη, -ψ, -ις, and -α (40%). If we focus on the individual words occurring multiple times in the Septuagint of Isaiah (168), we note that 69 of them (41%) have Hellenized endings. Troxel presents different statistical data. According to the calculation of this scholar, 79.9% of the 538 toponyms in that book have been transliterated in their Hebrew forms without added Hellenistic endings, while 16% are represented by Hellenized endings (Ronald L. Troxel, *LXX-Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation, The Strategies of the Translator of the Septuagint of Isaiah* JSJSup 124 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007], 190–91). Thanks are due to Prof. Troxel, who kindly showed me parts of his book prior to its publication. Similar statistics are found in an earlier study by Troxel, "What's in a Name? Contemporization and Toponyms in LXX-Isaiah," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients, Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. R. L. Troxel et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns 2005), 327–44 (329).

than do the earlier ones. In Esther and Daniel the 61% and 46% respectively of such Hellenized names are either the majority or a very sizeable group.[6] For these books, Thackeray's statements are correct. Likewise, Josephus always reflects the Hellenized forms of biblical names, whereas Jewish Greek papyri from Egypt reflect both Semitic and Hellenized forms.[7]

While the translators turned more to transliterations than to Hellenized nouns, they, too, reflect several remarkable geographic identifications that were known to people living in the Hellenistic period.[8] Three examples of such identifications for Mesopotamia follow.

> פדן (ארם), ארם נהרים, ארם – Μεσοποταμία (Μεσοποταμία Συρίας in Gen 33:18). This term occurs in the Septuagint from Gen 24:10 onward. In Greek literature, it is evidenced from Polybius V.44.6 onward (second century B.C.E.).
>
> חדקל – Τίγρις (Τίγρης). This identification occurs in Gen 2:14 and Dan 10:4. The Greek form of the river is attested for the first time by Herodotus I.189.
>
> שנער – Βαβυλωνία. In Genesis, Shinar is transliterated as Σενναάρ (10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9), while elsewhere Shinar is correctly identified as Βαβυλωνία (Isa 11:11) and Βαβυλών (Zech 5:11 and Dan 1:2).

The main focus of this brief study is on the renderings of Asshur (אשור) in the books of the LXX. The differences between the various Septuagint translators come to the fore in the renderings of this word. That Asshur was rendered in different ways can be seen most clearly through the three ways of representing the phrase מלך אשור (king of Assyria/the Assyrians): Βασιλεὺς Ασσουρ in 1–2 Chronicles (12x), Ezra–Nehemiah (3x), Jer 50 (27):17, 18; Βασιλεὺς Ἀσσυρίων (the only

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6. For details, see my paper, "Transliterated Personal Names in the Septuagint—Some Statistics," forthcoming. In Job, Proverbs, and Lamentations, this percentage is equally high, but in each of these books the data are not numerous enough for a significant analysis.

7. See Naomi G. Cohen, "Jewish Names as Cultural Indicators in Antiquity," *JSJ* 7 (1976): 97–128. Most of the names recorded in the *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, ed. Victor A. Tcherikover, Alexander Fuks, and Menahem Stern (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press/Magnes Press, 1957–1964) are of the type of Ἄβραμος, which are rare in the Septuagint.

8. For early insights in this area, see Henry A. Redpath, "The Geography of the Septuagint," *AJTh* 7 (1903): 289–307.

translation in 2 Kings [43x]) and Βασιλεὺς (τῶν) Ἀσσυρίων (with the exception of 10:12 [ἄρχων], the only translation in Isaiah [25x]); and Βασιλεὺς Ἀσσύριος ("the Assyrian king") in Nah 3:18.

1.

From Genesis 2 onward, the main Septuagint rendering of the singular form Asshur (אשור) is the plural Ἀσσύριοι, mainly in the phrase מלך אשור and only in the Torah and Prophets in additional contexts. The translator of Genesis distinguished between the eponymic figure Asshur, whose name he transliterated as Ἀσσούρ in 10:11, 22, and the geographic unit Asshur = Assyria (2:14 MT "The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur"). In that verse, he did not employ the equivalent geographic term Ἀσσυρία, but the name of the people, "the Assyrians": "The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of the Assyrians (Ἀσσυρίων)." In fact, Ἀσσυρία does not occur in the translation of the canonical books,[9] although it was used in classical sources from Herodotus I.178, 185, onward. The equivalent אשור – Ἀσσύριοι disregarding the content of the word in the context ("Assyria") is not natural in Genesis 2, nor is it natural in many subsequent verses.[10] Accordingly, it seems as if this equivalent was determined by the translator of Genesis regardless of the first occurrence of the word in Hebrew Scripture. It is not impossible that the equivalence מלך אשור – Βασιλεὺς Ἀσσυρίων in the later books formed the background for the standard equivalent of Asshur in the Septuagint from its first occurrence onward. The equivalent in Gen 2:14 is the more surprising in view of the equivalent of a geographic unit in the previous verse, v 13 (כוש – τὴν γῆν Αἰθιοπίας). The next geographic units are transliterated (8:4 Ararat; all the names in the Table of the Nations in chapter 10; Egypt in chapter 12, often

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9. It occurs only in 4 Macc 13:9. It is difficult to know why Ἀσσυρία was not used in the Septuagint. If this non-use was intentional, possibly the translators wished to avoid a confusion with Συρία = Aram.

10. The possibility that the phrase κατέναντι Ἀσσυρίων represents a neuter plural noun *Ἀσσύρια is attractive, since it would explain also the frequent phrase Βασιλεὺς Ἀσσυρίων as well as the lack of the article in most instances. Such a neuter form, not recorded anywhere, would parallel such neuter place names as Γάλγαλα, Γέραρα, Ἐκβάτανα, Σόδομα, etc., mentioned by Thackeray, *Grammar*, 168. However, this option is impossible in view of the occurrence of the nominative and accusative plurals Ἀσσύριοι (Num 24:22; Isa 19:23, 30:31, 52:4) and Ἀσσυρίους (Gen 25:18; 2 Kgs 15:29, 17:6, 23; Hos 5:13, 7:11; Isa 19:23) for Asshur.

rendered in later contexts as "Egyptians"). The rendering אשור – Ἀσσύριοι of Gen 2:14 is to recur often in the laterbooks of the Septuagint.

When we meet Asshur again in the Torah, we read in Gen 25:18 MT "They dwelt from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur (באכה אשורה)." Also this word is rendered in the Septuagint by the name of the people (ἐλθεῖν πρὸς Ἀσσυρίους). As in Gen 2:14, this rendering is unexpected not only because of its content, but also because the other geographic term in 25:18, Egypt (מצרים) is rendered by a Greek noun "Egypt" (Αἰγύπτου).

In the third occurrence of Asshur in the Torah (Num 24:22 "When Asshur takes you captive"), we find again the equivalent אשור – Ἀσσύριοι. This time the equivalent is matched by similar equivalents in the context, both based on the Hebrew (v 21 קיני – Καιναῖον, 24 כתים – Κιτιαίων) and not based on the Hebrew (v 24 עברי – Ἐβραίους). The translation of this context is inconsistent, since the second occurrence of אשור, "They subject Asshur" is transliterated as Ἀσσούρ (v 24).

In 2 Kings, Asshur is consistently rendered Ἀσσύριοι, almost always in the phrase "king of Asshur" – Βασιλεὺς Ἀσσυρίων (44x). This equivalent is applied in such a wooden fashion that it includes such renderings as 2 Kgs 18:11 MT "and the king of Asshur deported the Israelites to Asshur" – LXX "and the king of the Assyrians deported the Israelites to the Assyrians." Similar renderings are found in 2 Kgs 15:29; 17:6, 23.

In Isaiah, the rendering Ἀσσύριοι occurs 40 times, both in the phrase "king of Asshur" (25x) and in other contexts (17x) such as 10:5 הוי אשור – οὐαὶ Ἀσσυρίοις; 19:23 אשורה (to the land of Asshur) – πρὸς Ἀσσυρίους. In the latter verse, the translation of Asshur differs from that of Egypt (מצרים), rendered twice with the singular noun Αἴγυπτος (Egypt). In this verse, אשור is rendered with the name of the people, except for the end of the verse, where the plural form of *miṣrayim* inועבדו מצרים את אשורה ("and the Egyptians shall serve together with Asshur") is matched by a Greek plural for Asshur. Isa 31:8 contains yet a different rendering (see below, Ασσουρ).

As in Isa 19:23, in Hos 9:3, 11:11, 12:2; Zech 10:10, 11; Jer 2:18, Egypt is rendered by a noun in the singular, whereas Asshur is represented by the plural noun Ἀσσύριοι. On the other hand, in Jer 2:36 and 50 (27):17, 18 Ασσουρ is used, including in the phrase מלך אשור king of Assyria – Βασιλεὺς Ασσουρ.

2.

The renderings in Ezekiel are inconsistent: Ασσουρ in 16:28 (בני אשור)
and 27:23; 31:3; 32:22, but in the other verses 'Ασσύριοι (23:5, 7, 9, 12, 23, in
all verses except for v 5 rendering בני אשור).[11] With two exceptions, the
translator of the Minor Prophets used 'Ασσύριοι (15x). The exceptions are
Ασσουρ in Hos 14:4 and Mic 5:5 (probably because of the transcription of
Nimrod in the parallel phrase) and 'Ασσύρίος in Nah 3:18, Mic 5:4, and
Zeph 2:13.

3.

Ασσουρ also represents אשור in Ps 83 (82):9; Lam 5:6; Ezr 4:2, 6:22;
Neh 9:32; and Chronicles (16x).

Isa-LXX thus reflects the main Septuagint practice of rendering אשור
with the plural 'Ασσύριοι.[12] In the first chapters of Genesis, this
equivalent occurs quite unexpectedly and inappropriately, possibly
reflecting knowledge of the later books in that translation, which involves
the further assumption that Genesis was not rendered first among the
Scripture books.[13] The rendering of the singular אשור with the plural
'Ασσύριοι may be compared with similar equivalents of כוש – Αἰθίοπες[14]

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11. The differences are thus not related to the possible distinction between three
     different translators in this book: chapters 1–27; 28–39; 40–48. See H. St. J.
     Thackeray, "The Greek Translators of Ezekiel", *JTS* 4 (1902–1903): 398–411; E.
     Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch—A Discussion of an Early
     Revision of Jeremiah 29–52 and Baruch 1:1–3:8*, HSM 8 (Missoula, Mont.:
     Scholars Press, 1976), 135–51. On the other hand, P. D. M. Turner, *The
     Septuagint Version of Chapters i-xxxix of the Book of Ezekiel* (Ph.D. dissertation,
     Oxford University, 1970) maintains the unity of the translation.

12. This type of rendering resembles the equivalent כוש – Αἰθίοπες, but that
     equivalent was used skillfully (see below), whereas Ασσύριοι was used
     indiscriminately. מצרים – Αἰγύριοι does not provide a good parallel because
     of the possible confusion between *miṣrayim* and *miṣrim*.

13. Barr expressed the opinion (oral communication, July 2002) that the
     translation of Isaiah preceded that of the translation of the Torah because of
     the lack of a consistent translation approach in the Greek translation of Isaiah.
     As the sequence in which the books of Greek Scripture were translated is not
     known, the translation of Judges was not necessarily produced after that of
     Joshua, etc.

14. The eponymic ancestor כוש is transliterated as Χούς in Gen 10:6, 7, 8 and 1 Chr
     1:8, 9, 10. At the same time, from the very first occurrence of כוש, designating

עֵילָם – Αἰλαμῖται (Isa 21:2; 22:6), מָדַי – Πέρσαι (21:2), whereas most renderings of "Egypt," "Babel," "Ethiopia," "Juda" are rendered with singular forms. The translator's special approach to these nations may be shown in Isa 11:11, ἀπὸ τῶν Ἀσσύριων καὶ ἀπὸ Αἰγύπτου καὶ Βαβυλωνίας καὶ Αἰθιοπίας καὶ ἀπὸ Αἰλαμιτῶν καὶ ἀπὸ ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν καὶ ἐξ Ἀραβίας, where the Masoretic Text has only singular forms.

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the country, it is represented by Αἰθιοπία (Gen 2:13). Often the word is represented by an adjective designating the Ethiopians, as in 2 Kgs 19:9 כּוּשׁ מֶלֶךְ – Βασιλέως Αἰθιοπων. The latter two options are skillfully employed in Isaiah, where Αἰθιοπία (11:11, 18:1, 43:3) appears alongside Αἰθίοψ (20:3, 4, 5; 37:9; 45:14). This is also the case in Ezekiel, the Minor Prophets, and Psalms.