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: Ἀμώς, Ἰερούσαλήμ, Ἰωκαίμ, Αχαζ. One of these, Ἀμώς, 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: Ἡσαίας, Ὀζίου (nom. Ὀζίας), Ἑζεκίου (nom. Ἑζεκίας), Ἰουδαιας (nom. Ἰουδαία). According to Thackeray,2 most names of places and peoples reflect their Hellenized forms,3 with a minority representing


1. Cf. Εἰλὼς, Εἰλωτος (a Helot, name of the Spartan serfs); εἰδώς participle of οἴδα, etc.
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: Ἀιθιοπία, Ἁντιλίβκονος, Ἰόππη, Καππαδοκία (for Kaphtor), Καρχηδόν, Ἑσσοποταμία, 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. Thus, for example, according to our statistics, 41% of the proper names in Isaiah have Hellenized endings, a sizeable number, but still a minority. 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.

4. The examination is based on A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Württemburgische 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 Götttingen Septuagint, whereas the apparatuses of variants differ completely. The statistics refer only to nouns, and not to adjectives, such as “Moabite” in ‘Moabīṯ’ (Ruth 1:22) and an “Egyptian maidservant,” *paidíśkē Aüguptía* (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, -υς, -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. 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.

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. Three examples of such identifications for Mesopotamia follow.

1. The main focus of this brief study is on the renderings of Asshur 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 \( \text{Assyria/the Assyrians} \):

\[
\text{Basilc#& Ass¶ur} \quad \text{in 1–2 Chronicles (12x), Ezra–Nehemiah (3x), Jer 50 (27):17, 18;}
\]

\[
\text{Basilc#& 'Assuríon} \quad \text{(the only}
\]

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.


translation in 2 Kings (43x) and Βασιλεὺς (τῶν) 'Ασσυρίων (with the exception of 10:12 [ἀρχῶν], the only translation in Isaiah [25x]); and Βασιλεὺς 'Ασσυρίως (“the Assyrian king”) in Nah 3:18.

1.

From Genesis 2 onward, the main Septuagint rendering of the singular form Asshur (עָשִׂיר) is the plural 'Ασσυρίων, mainly in the phrase οἱ 'Ασσυρίων 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 Ἰσσουρί 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 'Ασσυρία, but the name of the people, “the Assyrians”: “The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of the Assyrians (‘Assurión).” In fact, 'Ασσυρία does not occur in the translation of the canonical books, although it was used in classical sources from Herodotus 1.178, 185, onward. The equivalent Ῥωσία – 'Ασσυρίοι disregarding the content of the word in the context (“Assyria”) is not natural in Genesis 2, nor is it natural in many subsequent verses.

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 Ῥωσία – Βασιλεύς 'Ασσυρίων 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 (Ῥώσις – τὴν γῆν Ἀἰθιοπίας). 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

9. It occurs only in 4 Macc 13:9. It is difficult to know why 'Ασσυρία 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 κατέναν 'Ασσυρίων represents a neuter plural noun “'Ασσυρία is attractive, since it would explain also the frequent phrase Βασιλεύς 'Ασσυρίων 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 Γάλιγαλα, Γέρα, 'Εκβάτονα, Σόδομα, etc., mentioned by Thackeray, Grammar, 168. However, this option is impossible in view of the occurrence of the nominative and accusative plurals 'Ασσυρίως (Num 24:22; Isa 19:23, 30:31, 52:4) and 'Ασσυρίους (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 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 (מיידא אֱשֶר אֲשֵׁר).” Also this word is rendered in the Septuagint by the name of the people (ἐλθεῖν πρὸς Ἄσσυρίους). 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 (مصر) 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 ‘Ass¢ri¶i. This time the equivalent is matched by similar equivalents in the context, both based on the Hebrew (v 21 קָנָא אֲשֵׁר – קָנָא אֲשֵׁר, 24 בְּכִי – בְּכִי) and not based on the Hebrew (v 24 בּוּרָא – בּוּרָα). The translation of this context is inconsistent, since the second occurrence of אֲשֵׁר, “They subject Asshur” is transliterated as ‘Ass¶¢r (v 24).

In 2 Kings, Asshur is consistently rendered Ἄσσυρίων, almost always in the phrase “king of Asshur” – Βασιλεύς Ἄσσυρίων (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 Ἄσσυρίων occurs 40 times, both in the phrase “king of Asshur” (25x) and in other contexts (17x) such as 10:5 ἐπὶ τῆς Ασσυρίας (to the land of Asshur) – πρὸς Ἄσσυρίους. In the latter verse, the translation of Asshur differs from that of Egypt (مصر), rendered twice with the singular noun Αἰγύπτους (Egypt). In this verse, Ἄσσυρίας is rendered with the name of the people, except for the end of the verse, where the plural form of misrayim in Ἄσσυρίας (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 Ἄσσυρίων. On the other hand, in Jer 2:36 and 50 (27):17, 18 Ασσουρ is used, including in the phrase Ἁσσοῦρ king of Assyria – Βασιλεύς Ασσουρ.
2.

The renderings in Ezekiel are inconsistent: Ἀσσουρ in 16:28 (בנि אשרו) and 27:23; 31:3; 32:22, but in the other verses ‘Ασσύριος (23:5, 7, 9, 12, 23, in all verses except for v 5 rendering בְּנֵי אֶשְׁרִי).11 With two exceptions, the translator of the Minor Prophets used ‘Ασσύριος (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 ’Ασσύριος in Nah 3:18, Mic 5:4, and Zeph 2:13.

3.

Ἀσσουρ also represents Ἴσορα 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 Ἴσορα 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 Ἴσορα with the plural ‘Ασσύριοι may be compared with similar equivalents of בְּנֵי – Αἰθιοπεῖς14


12. This type of rendering resembles the equivalent בְּנֵי – Αἰθιοπεῖς, but that equivalent was used skillfully (see below), whereas Ασσύριοι was used indiscriminately. אֶשְׁרִי – Αἰθιόπει 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 אֶשְׁרִי 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 בְּנֵי, designating
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 ἐκ τῆς φυλής Αἰθιοπῶν. The latter two options are skillfully employed in Isaiah, where Αἰθιοπία (11:11, 18:1, 43:3) appears alongside Αἴθιοψ (20:3, 4, 5; 37:9; 45:14). This is also the case in Ezekiel, the Minor Prophets, and Psalms.