THE ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION OF “אמעים” IN ZECHARIAH 6:3 AND 6:7: A COMPARISON STUDY OF ANCIENT TEXTS
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Abstract. There are some ancient sacred texts for Christianity such as Hebrew Bible, Syriac Peshitta, Septuagint, Aramaic Targum and Latin Vulgate. However, the translation of these ancient texts is not always having the same nuance or literal meaning. Zechariah 6:3 and 6:7 are one example. The word "אמעים" or strong has been translated diversely in our ancient sacred texts. Therefore, this paper will attempt to discuss multiple translations for the word "אמעים" or strong. The discussion will cover the purpose of these various translations. The possible reason behind the selection of the meaning will also be discussed in this paper.

Keywords. Old Testament, Lexical Studies and Philology.

INTRODUCTION

Most of commentaries on the Bible seek to explain the meaning of the words, phrases, and ideas of the scriptural text in their nearer and wider context: a textual commentary. However, there are some obstacles to find out the meaning; for instance, some of Hebrew Bible and Greek NT texts are unclear in terms of meaning or / and the ancient texts convey different attestation. Zechariah 6:3, for example, conveys these difficulties: both unclear from Hebrew text and have different attestations. Latin Vulgate translates the word "אמעים" as strong; however, the other ancient texts – Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, and Aramaic Targum - employ “spotted-skewbald (horses)” for this word. In other words, this same word of Hebrew has two different meanings. This word appears two times in the entire Hebrew Bible: Zechariah 6:3 and 6:7. To analyze this word, I am going over to the ancient manuscripts - Biblia Hebraica Quinta, Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, Aramaic Targum and Latin Vulgate -, and list them all. Then, I will compare these texts and explain the reason and the purpose of these diverse translations; this paper does not try to find out the original word and meaning as in textual criticism study.

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1 Bruce Metzger, Textual Commentary on the NT 2nd edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 1.
THE LIST OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

A. Biblia Hebraica Quinta ²
Text: וּבַמֶּרְכָּבָּה הָּרְבִּיעִּית סֻוסִּים בְרֻדִּים
Translation: The fourth chariots are spotted horses, all of them are strong or spotted-skewbald horses
Vorlage: אֲמֻצִּים

B. Septuagint ³
Text: ἐν τῷ ἀρματι τῷ τετάρτῳ ἵπποι ποικῖλοι φαροῖ
Translation: To the fourth chariots are varied dapple-grays horses.
Vorlage: אֲמֻצִּים

C. Syriac Peshitta ⁴
Text: ܐܬܒܟܪܡܒܘ ܪܐܕ̈ ܬܒܕ̈ ܪܫܟ ܐܐܕ̈ ܐܟ
Translation: And also in the fourth chariots are parti-colored horses
Vorlage: אֲמֻצִּים

D. Aramaic Targum ⁵
Text: וּבִּרְתִּיכָא רְבִּיעֵיתָא סֻוסָּוָּון פַצִּיחִּין קִטמָּנִּין
Translation: And to fourth chariots are shining (dazzling) ash horses
Vorlage: אֲמֻצִּים

E. Latin Vulgate ⁶
Text: : Et in quadriga quarta equi varii fortes
Translation: And in the fourth chariots are variegated (party-colored, various, diverse) horses, they are strong
Vorlage: אֲמֻצִּים

The Summary of the Ancient Texts.

The list of the ancient texts conveys the discrepancy of the description of the fourth chariot. Latin Vulgate seems not only depict the appearance of the fourth chariot, but also the strength. The other texts, however, only focus on the color of the fourth chariot.

THE ANALYSIS OF אֲמֻצִּים

Different Meaning from Hebrew Lexicons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) אֲמֻצִּים</th>
<th>(2) אֲמֻצִּים</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Strong (BDB)</td>
<td>Flesh-coloured, skewbald (horses) (HALOT; Holladay)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These four lexicons translate אֲמֻצִּים differently. BDB, for instance, translates it as strong. The rests use flesh-coloured or varied dapple-grays horse; Syriac Peshitta: parti-colored horses; Aramaic Targum: shining (dazzling) ash horses; Latin Vulgate: brown horses.

³ Charles Thompson, The Septuagint Bible (Indiana: Shekinah Enterprises, 1999).
⁴ http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/
⁵ http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/
⁶ Robert Weber & Roger Gryson, Biblia Sacra Vulgata (Germany: German Bible Society, 2006).
⁷ Hebrew text: spotted horses; Septuagint: varied dapple-grays horse; Syriac Peshitta: parti-colored horses; Aramaic Targum: shining (dazzling) ash horses; Latin Vulgate: brown horses.
skewbald or piebald or dappled (horses). Although the dictionary of classical Hebrew volume 1 and TWOT choose spotted and dappled (horses) for this word, this dictionary also mentions that the same word could have a different meaning: strong. In short, the dilemma is the word “אמוץ” has two meanings: spotted and dappled (horses) or strong; and this information answers the reason of different attestations of the ancient manuscripts.

**Different Translations from the Ancient Texts.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textual Witnesses</th>
<th>(1) אֲמֻצִּים</th>
<th>(2) אֲמֻצִּים</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin Vulgate</td>
<td>(Strong)</td>
<td>(Flesh-Coloured)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>διάλειχοι</td>
<td>και ποικίλοι και σποδοειδεῖς ροντοι</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targum Jonathan</td>
<td>והא ברחייא דסלקין על ענא שומא ברגליון ואנוחין חיוורין</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syriac Peshitta</td>
<td>܂ܐܟܥ܂ܐܚܪ̈ܟܘ܂ܣܝܦܟ̈ܐܝܦ܂ܐܬܚܪܘ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Vulgate</td>
<td>Feminas varios et maculosos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table reveals that only Vulgate reads אֲמֻצִּים as strong.

**The Observation from the Text.**

**Zechariah 6:2-3.** The analysis from a word, ‘אמוץ, before the word “strong”. This word appears four times in the bible (Gen. 31:10; 31:12; Zech. 6:3; 6:6). It is translated as spotted or marked by Hebrew Bible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Ancient Texts</th>
<th>The Texts (Gen. 31:10)</th>
<th>The Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblia Hebraica Quinta</td>
<td>עַל־הַצֹֹ֔אן עֲקֻדִִּּ֖ים נְקֻדִִּּ֖ים וּבְרֻדִִּּֽים</td>
<td>The flock stripped (streaked), speckled and spotted (marked).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>διάλειχοι και ποικίλοι και σποδοειδεῖς ροντοι</td>
<td>Quite white and many-colored (variegated) and ashensprinkled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targum Jonathan</td>
<td>והא ברחייא דסלקין על ענא שומא ברגליון ואנוחין חיוורין</td>
<td>Behold, the goats which rose upon the flock were spotted in their feet, or streaked or white in their backs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syriac Peshitta</td>
<td>܂ܐܟܥ܂ܐܚܪ̈ܟܘ܂ܣܝܦܟ̈ܐܝܦ܂ܐܬܚܪܘ</td>
<td>The flock white-spotted (bald), and spotted, and variegated (highly decorated).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Vulgate</td>
<td>Feminas varios et maculosos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Based on table observation above, three ancient texts – Quinta, Peshitta and Vulgate - are rather ambiguous about the color of the flock; they only mention the characteristic of the flock’ appearance such as spotted, speckled and variegated (highly decorated). Targum seems to explain more further, in this case the color, which is white. Septuagint, on the other hand, is obviously describing the color of the sprinkled (spotted): the pale gray color of ash.

If Zechariah emphasizes on the description of the chariots’ colors, then spotted-skewbald is the most plausible reading; because לְבֻרַדִּים only gives the appearance of the fourth chariot, not the color. TWOT also supports this reading and points out that because the first three are given colors and it seems incongruous to call the last pair “strong”. 12 Septuagint, Targum and Peshitta’ translations seem to maintain the colors description of the chariots.

**Zechariah 6:6-7**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Septuagint</td>
<td>καὶ οἱ ποικίλοι εξεπορεύοντο ἐπὶ γῆν νότου, καὶ οἱ χαροὶ εξεπορεύοντο.</td>
<td>And the variegated ones were going out to the land of the south; and the dappled-greys ones were going out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aramaic Targum</td>
<td>וּפַצִּיחִין נְפַקֻו לַאֲרַע דָּרוֹמָּא׃ וְקִּטְמָּנִּין נְפַקֻו</td>
<td>And the shining (dazzling) ones went out to the land of the south; and the ash horses went out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syriac Pesshita</td>
<td>ܗܲܐܲܐܘܲܐܟ ܢܝܩܦܢ لܐܕܪܐܪܢܡܒܐܟܩܟܐܩܣܘܢܝܩܘ</td>
<td>And the parti-colored ones go out to the land of the south; and the red ones go out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Vulgate</td>
<td>Et vari egressi sunt ad terram austri; qui autem erant robustissimi exierunt</td>
<td>And the variegated (party-colored, various, diverse) were gone out to the land of the south; yet they which</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geography plays important role in these verses. Because of the geography of Palestine, all of Israel’s enemies came against her from north or south. The east of Israel and Judah is Arabian deserts; on the other hand, the west side is sea Mediterranean. The appellation of North and South is also related to geography. Old Testament prophetic texts display on going tradition of the threat from the north country. The north country is the place from which attacks come from Assyria and Babylon (Isa. 14:31; Jer. 1:14-15; 6:1, 22; 15:12; 46:20, 24; Ezek. 26:7; 38:6; 39:2; Zeph. 2:13). 13 For the South, there are three occasions where Edom is associated with the ‘south’ (Josh. 15:1; Jer. 40:20; Obad. 8-9), and given the significance of Edom elsewhere in the Book of the Twelve as an enemy of God’s people (Am. 9:12; Obad. 1:1; Mal. 1:4). Alternatively, it probably refers to Egypt (Is. 43:6) and it was another implacable and long-term enemy; the place which some Judah fled after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 44). 14 In short, it was from the north and the south that the traditional enemies came into their land. It is these directions in which the horses and chariots go out.

All the ancient texts concur that both the black and white chariot go to the North - Assyria and Babel - to execute God’s judgment, and the spotted chariot go to the South. Also, Peshitta, Targum and Septuagint keep consistently the depiction of the fourth chariot both appearance and color. The distinction is Targum and Septuagint give no information about the red chariot which is

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mentioned earlier in verse 2; Syriac-Peshitta, nevertheless, adds one word “the red ones” in 6:7 which it is not appeared in Peshitta text in verse 3. It seems that Syriac-Peshitta discusses the destination and activity of all the chariots including the red ones which went and patrolled the earth (6:7). Thus, Syriac-Peshitta depicts every destination for every chariot.

Latin Vulgate, on the other hand, follows Targum and Septuagint in respect to disregard the red chariot. Then, Vulgate not only uses the word “strong” (same in 6:3), but also use that word in the superlative form in the verse 7 (“issimi” in Latin). Whether the usage of relative pronoun qui in the beginning of verse 7 modifies the fourth chariot only or the whole chariots, this superlative form is unique because it is not attested in any ancient texts. It seems Vulgate reminds and encourages the reader that Yahweh is the true king over all the earth (14:9), he will judge his enemies (1:21; 2:9; 6:8-9) and save his people (2:11; 8:20; 9:7; 14:16), and he is in control. Although the people of God feel fall short of promising and restoration of Israel’ fortune, the imagery of the strongest chariot(s) of God that go and patrol the earth confirms Zechariah’ message: God is in control and God is more powerful than their situation.

**CONCLUSION**

The different translation of the word “אֲמֻצִּים” in the Hebrew text not only because that word has two different meanings, but also there is a reason behind the selection of the meaning. Targum and Septuagint, for example, consistently and faithfully maintain the harmony of colors of all chariots (6:2-3): red, black, white and spotted-gray (ash). Then, when the red chariot is missing from the Hebrew text, they faithfully omit the red chariot (6-7). Syriac-Peshitta, on the other hand, consistently preserves the harmony of colors like Targum and Septuagint (6:2-3), but it does not faithfully commit to Hebrew manuscript. Rather, Syriac-Peshitta adds the word “red” so that Peshitta could be consistent to verse 2-3 and provide a clearer information about the “red chariot” that is missing in all ancient manuscripts (6:6-7). Latin Vulgate is the only ancient manuscript that employs the word “strong” (6:3). This uniqueness continues to verse 7 when Latin Vulgate uses the superlative form that is not even attested in the Hebrew text. This research conveys that Latin Vulgate probably is eager to encourage Jewish people amongst their unpleasant situation (theological implication).

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Website


Secondary Source

