

Godwin Mhuriyashe Mushayabasa (North-West University)

**שָׁמַם OR שָׁבַר: REVISITING THE TEXT-CRITICAL
NOTE IN EZEK 6:4A IN THE LIGHT OF CURRENT
VIEWS ON THE TEXT OF EZEKIEL**

ABSTRACT

Ezek 6:4a contains a clause with two verbs in the MT but only one verb in the LXX. Textual commentators are not in complete agreement as to the manner in which the LXX treated the Hebrew sentence in translation. Elliger was of the opinion that the LXX translated the first verb in the verse (שָׁמַם) and omitted the second one (שָׁבַר). A more probable explanation would be to understand שָׁבַר rather than שָׁמַם as the Hebrew verb translated in the LXX, while שָׁמַם was absent from the base text used by the Greek translator. Opting for either of these explanations may, to some extent, depend on one's view on the nature and literary development of the text of Ezekiel.

1. INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezekiel is one book in the Hebrew Bible that is well known for its text-critical problems (Cooke 1936:xl); these could be better understood as textual and literary problems. The identification of the problems as being “textual and literary” is more appropriate, since part of the so-called textual problems in the book of Ezekiel could be attributed rather to the literary development of the book than to the process of transmission, whether it be copying or translation into other languages, such as the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (LXX). Focusing specifically on the LXX of Ezekiel, it has been found that this text is about 4-5% shorter than its parallel in the Masoretic Text (MT) (Lust 2006:162-164; Tov 1992:333). In the light of this difference between the two texts, it has been suggested that the LXX may be a witness to an earlier stage, while the MT may represent a later stage in the development of the book of Ezekiel (Tov 1999b:397-410). The two dominant views, then, with regard to the differences between the MT and the LXX of Ezekiel are (1) that the differences should be seen as a result of transmissional changes (otherwise known as glosses and interpolations in the MT), or (2) that they may be a result of changes during the literary development stages of the book (Tov 1999b:398-399). In the case of short phrases and individual words, there is a third possibility: that the differences were the result of the LXX translators employing the

translation technique of abbreviating their target text.¹ Adopting any of those positions may determine how one will attempt to explain the textual differences between the MT and the LXX, as may be demonstrated in text critical note *a* in Ezek 6:4, according to Elliger (1977).

A problem we have when working on the LXX of Ezekiel is that the available witnesses do not themselves present a uniform text. Among the most important LXX witnesses are codex *Vaticanus* (B), *papyrus* 967 (p967) (initially published in parts, as it was conserved in different locations), fragments of *papyrus* 988 (p988), codex *Alexandrinus* (A) and the Old Latin translation of the LXX (La). Of these p967 and p988 are closely related as displaying a significantly shorter text, presumed to reflect an earlier version of the LXX, closer to the original Greek text (Olley 2009:9). The La could also be considered as displaying this shorter Greek text.² The longer text, approximating to the text in the MT, is apparent in, among others, A and Z (*Codex Zuqninensis rescriptus*). It is still not clear where one should place B between these two groups, though it is pre-hexaplaric in form. B is taken by Ziegler as the main text in the Göttingen critical edition of the Septuagint. Ziegler in fact associates B with the shorter text of p967 (Ziegler 1977:23). Another point of view is to understand B and p967 as Greek descendants of an original Greek (OG) translation. These copies were then constantly revised towards a developing Hebrew text, on different occasions and at varying rates, hence the differences between them.³ As far as the book of Ezekiel is concerned, the question of the relation between these Greek witnesses as well as their relation to the MT or other Hebrew witnesses is one that must still be put to rest.

2. THE INTER-TEXTUAL READINGS IN EZEK 6:4A

A special characteristic of the book of Ezekiel is that it exhibits, from the point of view of the MT as compared against the more important OG witnesses (e.g. B, p967 and La), repetitions or several pluses that make the text of the book appear cumbered. Ascertaining the origin of these alleged pluses is difficult, mainly because of the homogeneity of the material in the book (Joyce 2007:9). One such addition occurs in the first part of Ezek 6:4. Unfortunately, there are an insufficient number of Greek

1 Cf. Klein (1974:13).

2 Ziegler treats the La group as part of the shorter, pre-hexaplaric group of witnesses, together with B. See Ziegler (1977:23) and Lilly (2012:322).

3 See Lilly (2012:48-49).

witnesses available for this early part of Ezekiel. This part is missing in p967, in the fragments of p988 as well as in the La fragments.⁴ The most reliable pre-hexaplaric Greek text we have for this part of the book is B. In the rest of this discussion, I will make reference to the LXX, with B particularly in mind.

The verse in Ezek 6:4a that we are concerned with reads as follows in the MT and in the LXX respectively:

MT:	ונשמו מזבחותיכם ונשברו חמניכם והפלתי חלליכם לפני גלוליכם
TR ⁵	And your altars shall become desolate, and your chapels ⁶ shall be broken down, and I will throw down your slain before your idols...
LXX:	καὶ συντριβήσονται τὰ θυσιαστήρια ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ τεμένη ὑμῶν, καὶ καταβαλῶ τραυματίας ὑμῶν ἐνώπιον τῶν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν
TR:	And your altars, and your chapels shall be broken down, and I will throw down your slain before your idols.

In the MT each of the first two nouns in the verse acts as a subject predicating its own verb phrase: *מזבחותיכם* predicates *ונשמו* and *חמניכם* predicates *ונשברו*. In the LXX, however, the two nouns act as coordinated subjects predicating the one verb phrase *συντριβήσονται*. In explaining this textual variance, Elliger, the BHS editor of the book of Ezekiel, indicates that the LXX omits the second verb *שבר* that occurs in the MT. On closer analysis, it appears rather that it is the first verb (*שמם*) in the MT that is not reflected in the LXX translation.

In the LXX the Greek verb *συντρίβω* that was used in Ezek 6:4 is seldom employed to render verbs from the Hebrew root *שמם*. The only case cited by Hatch and Redpath (1998) in which the Greek verb *συντρίβω* is traceable to the Hebrew root *שמם* is the very questionable case in Ezek 6:4. It appears from Muraoka's analysis that the relation of the Hebrew root *שמם* in 6:4 to the Greek verb *συντρίβω*, as drawn by Elliger and others, was erroneous (Muraoka 2010). Certainly, in Muraoka's index, there is no single case in the Old Testament text where the Hebrew root *שמם* is translated by a form of the Greek verb *συντρίβω*. Furthermore, it is apparent that the Hebrew root most commonly rendered by the Greek verb

4 See Ziegler (1977:13).

5 The letters TR represent my translation of the given non-English text.

6 Or "incense burners". See Hummel (2005:192) and Block (1997:225-226).

form $\sigma\nu\nu\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\beta\omega$ is שבר. The hexaplaric evidence in the second apparatus of Ziegler's edition corroborates this argument in that Aquila and Theodotion have a reading that represents the Hebrew word שמם with $\acute{\alpha}\phi\alpha\nu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ and שבר with $\sigma\nu\nu\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\beta\omega$. According to this evidence, $\sigma\nu\nu\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\beta\omega$ would be an equivalent of שבר and not of שמם. It should therefore be the case that the word occurring in the LXX is a translation of ונשברו and not ונשמו, as Elliger (1977) suggests. It is interesting that most biblical commentators on Ezekiel have tended to follow Elliger's view as presented in the BHS (e.g., Allen 1994:81-82), or they have simply overlooked this textual problem.⁷ Other commentators, such as Zimmerli, attribute the difference between the MT and the LXX to the fact that the original long Hebrew sentence was shortened by the LXX translator (Zimmerli 1979:179).⁸ This is a difficult position to defend, given the literal character of LXX Ezekiel in general (Tov 1999b:399-400),⁹ and the Hebrew equivalent of $\sigma\nu\nu\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\beta\omega$ consistently maintained by the LXX translator. If there could be any chance at all that the LXX translator abbreviated, one would have at least expected the translator to consider translating the first verb he encountered, ונשמו, and then to ignore the second one on grounds of the verbosity of the Hebrew sentence. As it stands, should we uphold the abbreviating hypothesis, we would have to surmise that the first verb was ignored, while the second was preferred to convey the meaning in the Hebrew source text reflected by the MT. If argued that way, it would be the only case in the Old Testament that the Greek verb $\sigma\nu\nu\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\beta\omega$ was stretched to represent a semantic equivalent of the Hebrew root שמם.

7 See e.g. Block (1997:220), Greenberg (1983:132) and Cooke (1936:4-5).

8 See also Goshen-Gottstein and Talmon (2004:ט). In many similar passages a representation of שבר by $\sigma\nu\nu\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\beta\omega$ in the LXX could argue for a translator's choice of שבר rather than שמם in the case where he decided to abbreviate, by leaving out one of the two verbs. This, however, would imply, as far as the translation technique of the book is concerned, that the translator rendered sentence clauses rather than that he rendered word for word – an assertion which is very difficult to prove in view of the known translation technique of LXX Ezekiel. If one chooses to maintain the abbreviating view, then the possibility that LXX's source text could have had the two verbs transposed must be supposed. Yet the two verbs do not occur together in the same vicinity in Leviticus, nor in the same verse outside Ezekiel. In Ezek 6:6, where the roots both appear, they appear in the same order as in Ezek 6:4.

9 See also Tov (1997:18-20, 250).

However, should it be the case that the Hebrew verb phrase ונשמו was the one that the LXX did not translate (or did not encounter in the source text), there is a difficulty in establishing the reason for such an omission by the LXX translator from a text-critical viewpoint. The structure of the first part of Ezek 6:4 is such that, had the LXX translator accidentally omitted the first word, he would have been forced to look for it because of the syntax of the rest of the sentence. In other words, it is text-critically difficult to suppose that LXX accidentally omitted the first word of this line. This is probably the reason why Elliger presumed that the LXX rendered the first verb rather than the second one.

Possibly, such a conclusion may have been reached because text-critics were hesitant to understand that the Hebrew base text of the LXX would have been substantially different from that which now appears in the MT (or rather, that the LXX compared to the MT displays textual differences that did not arise from the process of transmission). But it appears that a base text behind the LXX, substantially different from the MT text, is the most plausible explanation in the case of Ezek 6:4a. To support this thesis, three reconstruction possibilities of the text that could have lain in the Hebrew base text of the LXX may be tested.¹⁰ The first possibility is that the LXX translator in this verse might have first encountered the noun מִזְבְּחוֹתֵיכֶם, as the subject, followed by the verb phrase ונשברו and thereafter another subject forming a subsequent clause, but with its verb ellipsed. In that case, the LXX base text in Ezek 6:4a may have read as follows:

2.1 Reconstruction Possibility (a)

LXX Hebrew base text: [... והפלתי חלליכם]
 TR: And your altars will be broken down, also
 your chapels [and I will throw down your
 slain ...]

Although this reading would be the closest to MT (with only the absence of the first verb and the repositioning of the *waw* copula/consecutives as differences), it is nonetheless the least likely text pattern to have occurred in the LXX translator's base text. Firstly, as already noted, the book of Ezekiel is understood to have been translated quite literally. Notably, the LXX translator rarely departed from the word order in his source text in

10 This process is carried out with the necessary precautions in mind that the textual reconstruction of the *Vorlagen* of versions demands; cf. Tov (2012:116-117, 122-124) and Klein (1974:13).

the sixth chapter of Ezekiel.¹¹ Thus, if the above reconstructed text (a) had lain in LXX's Hebrew base text, one would have expected the translator to begin the verse with a noun as well, which is not the case in Ezek 6:4. Secondly, although the sixth chapter of Ezekiel contains some sentences which feature the ellipsis, these are mostly ellipses of the noun (e.g. see Ezek 6:6) or if it is ellipsis of the verb, the clause with the elliptical feature takes the form of a long sub-clause such as the prepositional clauses in Ezek 6:13.

A second reconstruction possibility could be that LXX's translator had a Hebrew source text whose sentence structure at Ezek 6:4 was significantly different from the one reflected in 6:4a of the MT. Retroverted from the LXX text given above, the base text used by LXX would read along the following lines:

2.2 *Reconstruction Possibility (b)*

LXX Hebrew base text: [... והפלתי חלליכם] ונשברו מזבחותיכם והמניכם
 TR: And your altars and your chapels will be
 broken down, [and I will throw down your
 slain ...]

For a third possible alternative, one may want to suggest that the nouns (subject phrase) in this clause appeared first, followed by the verb, resulting in the structure in 2.3 below.¹²

2.3 *Reconstruction Possibility (c)*

LXX Hebrew base text: ¹³... והפלתי חלליכם נשברו והמניכם ומזבחותיכם

If option (c) should reflect the text in the LXX's *Vorlage*, it would imply that at Ezek 6:4 the LXX translator deviated significantly from the word order in the source text. However, such treatment of the source Hebrew text is quite uncharacteristic of the LXX translator. The syntax in the MT text shows that the writer prefers to start sentences or clauses with verbs rather nouns (subjects or objects). However, the Hebrew text may on rare

11 Cf. Marquis (1986:63-84).

12 There is no material difference for an English translation between Reconstruction b and c.

13 See 2 Chr 23:17b. However, there are significant differences between the text represented in reconstruction possibility (c) and the one in 2 Chr 23:17b, the most significant being that the latter is written in an active voice (with the verb taking the Piel active voice) while the former is in the passive.

occasions depart from this characteristic and have sentences start with objects. The LXX translator, it appears, was not bothered by these syntactical changes and thus followed the Hebrew text word order, rendering as faithfully as possible whatever syntactical pattern was found in the source Hebrew text. In Ezek 5:17, for example, there is a sentence that begins with a copula and two compounded nouns, which predicate a single verb, reflecting a similar syntactical pattern as in (c) above. In that case, the LXX typically follows the word order in its Hebrew base text (which here approximates to MT). Nor is it likely that the Hebrew text in Ezek 6:4a had this part of the verse begin with two substantives when later in the verse, and everywhere else in the chapter, the simple substantives follow the verb. Following these observations, the most likely text to have lain in LXX's Hebrew base text is the one represented in reconstruction possibility (b) above. This reading in (b) does not appear anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. However, there is sufficient evidence, in the form of syntactical patterns, from the surrounding text to suggest that it is the one most ideally portraying a Hebrew text behind LXX Ezek 6:4a. From Ezek 5:14 to 6:4, the style whereby two compounded nouns (subject or object phrases) are linked to a single verb is characteristic and replete, though mostly in the object field of the sentence. Not only so, but it is usually the verb that begins a sentence followed by two coordinated nouns (cf. Ezek 5:14, "I will cause you to suffer desolation and shame";¹⁴ Ezek 5:15, "and she will become a reproach and a laughing stock, a warning and an object of horror"; Ezek 5:17, "I will send against you famine and wild beasts"). Accordingly, LXX's *Vorlage* in Ezek 6:4 probably continued this poetic stylistic feature within this prophetic monitory evocation of impending disaster, as suggested in the reconstructed reading (b) above. Furthermore, the LXX text between Ezek 5:14 and 6:4 shows not only a number of omissions (5:14, 15 and 16) but also a significant number of variant readings (no less than six in all), thus pointing towards a *Vorlage* with some divergences from the text behind the MT.

3. *IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF EZEKIEL*

If the findings in the preceding section are anything to go by, we have to concede that the LXX text in Ezek 6:4a represents a literary textual tradition, to some extent different from that reflected in the MT. This

14 The LXX has a variant reading at the beginning of Ezek 5:14.

different literary tradition is perhaps one that could be earlier to that reflected in the MT (Tov 1999b:400). Otherwise, it could simply be a variant Hebrew text that is not necessarily earlier. The argument that a shorter Hebrew Ezekiel text is necessarily earlier than a longer one has recently been questioned.¹⁵ Accordingly, in view of the likely presence of a number of textual traditions in the history of the Ezekiel text, the evidence furnished by Patmore (2007) confirms the commonly understood view that a shorter text in a manuscript is not necessarily closer to the *Urtext* than a longer one, but also that an earlier manuscript is not necessarily closer to the *Urtext* than a later one.¹⁶ Since the Qumran findings, scholarship has had to come to terms with the realisation and accept that there is a possibility of the existence of a plurality of variant texts in the history of the development of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷

As far as the literary growth of the text is concerned, I have argued in a separate discussion that the longer MT text in Ezek 6 could have been the result of the reworking of a shorter Hebrew text such as the one reflected in the LXX to conform to some kind of a prophetic, poetic genre that still reflects a prosaic style of writing, common elsewhere in Ezekiel (Mushayabasa 2014). Several commentators have accepted the notion that parts of Ezekiel have been edited in line with such passages as the covenantal curses in Lev 26.¹⁸ Portions of text verses in Ezek 6:4 and 5 have thus been traced to Lev 26:30 (Stromberg 2008:71). Both the verbal roots שָׁמַם and שָׁבַר are employed several times in Chapter 26 of Leviticus, though none of them ever occur together with the substantives מִזְבַּח and הַמִּזְבֵּן. The root שָׁמַם occurs seven times in Chapter 26 of Leviticus, while שָׁבַר occurs only three times. One may therefore deduce that owing to the prevalence of both these lexical items in Lev 26, a manuscript editor working on Ezek 6 and making reference to Lev 26, would most likely have wanted to incorporate a lexical item such as שָׁמַם, along with its literary counterpart שָׁבַר, into a textual portion that originally only displayed שָׁבַר.

It may be objected that the additional text in MT is simply a result of glosses or additions introduced in the proto-Masoretic tradition that could

15 See Patmore (2007).

16 Cf. Klein (1974:14-15).

17 Cf. Tov (1992:188).

18 See Stromberg (2008:68-86). See also Zimmerli (1979:179) and Cornill (1886:208).

have started as marginal notes or marginal corrections.¹⁹ In line with the fact that B is 4-5% shorter than the MT, the sixth chapter of B is about 28% shorter than the corresponding chapter in the MT. This additional material, nearly a third of the MT in Ezek 6, militates by virtue of its proportion against us understating it as simply the result of glosses. Furthermore, the style in which the additional material is set within the text shows some intelligence of execution that disqualifies it as strictly typifying glosses (Tov 1999a:53-59).²⁰ Again, if we should understand such material as interpolations (or exegetical material), the amount of such material in Ezek 6 alone is too much to attribute to the stages of copying, at least as far as Tov is concerned (1999a:56-60, 69-72). On the other hand, should the abbreviating thesis be maintained, one has to weigh the possibility of either a translator or a copyist embarking on a mission to abbreviate the sacred text by as much as 28% in Chapter 6 of Ezekiel alone. From my point of view, such a possibility is quite slim, based on the same reasons as those which Tov (1999a:56-72) offers to set aside glosses and interpolations as possible causes of the longer MT Ezekiel text. In that case, the unique way in which the Greek text differs from the MT in Ezek 6:4a could go some way towards attributing the additional MT layer (at least in Ezek 6:4) to a literary stage in the development of the book. This is besides the possibility of other literary stages as reflected in the shorter text of Greek witnesses such as p967, as compared, for example, to the MT or the Greek codex, B.

Although the more conservative position in the debate of the textual history of Ezekiel at the moment may be to understand the LXX (represented by B) and the MT as representing texts that reflect different textual traditions,²¹ the idea of “literary development” between the LXX *Vorlage* and the MT of Ezekiel is not easily dismissible (Tov 1999b:410; Lind 1984:135-139). The fact that at Masada and Qumran, Hebrew manuscripts dated earlier than p967 (though fragmentary) have been found to contain the longer text reflected in the MT should not necessarily nullify the possibility of literary growth, as could be concluded from Patmore’s findings (2007).²² It could surely serve to alert us to the fact that literary growth might not have been linear, but such a finding does not refute its existence.

19 See Tov (2012:9-10, 241; 1999a:53-59).

20 Cf. Mushayabasa (2014).

21 Cf. Patmore (2007:240-241).

22 See Patmore (2007:231-242).

4. CONCLUSION

The present discussion revisits the textual variant in Ezek 6:4a between the LXX and the MT. It clarifies the nature of the variant reading reflected in the LXX over against the erroneous understanding reflected in the critical notes of the BHS. Furthermore, the discussion attributes such erroneous understanding of the dynamics between the texts to the view that one may hold in respect of the development and transmission of the Ezekiel text. At least, one is confronted with the possibility that the MT and the LXX belong to two variant textual traditions, with the MT displaying a longer text than the LXX. Tentatively, the shorter LXX text could reflect an earlier literary version of the text now reflected in the MT.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, L C 1994. *Ezekiel 1-19*. Dallas: Word Books Publisher.
- Block, D I 1997. *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 1-24* (NICOT 25). Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Cooke, G A 1936. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC). Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Cornill, C H 1886. *Das Buch des Propheten Ezechiel*. Leipzig: Hinrichs.
- Elliger, K (ed) 1977. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Librum Ezechielis*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
- Goshen-Gottstein M H & Talmon, S 2004. *The Hebrew University Bible: the Book of Ezekiel*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University / Magnes Press.
- Greenberg, M 1983. *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB 22). New York: Doubleday.
- Hatch, E & Redpath H A 1998. *Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (Including the Apocryphal Books)*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Hummel, H D 2005. *Ezekiel 1-20* (Concordia Commentary). St. Louis: Concordia.
- Joyce, P M 2007. *Ezekiel: A Commentary*. New York: T & T Clark.
- Klein, R W 1974. *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

- Lilly, I E 2012. *Two Books of Ezekiel: Papyrus 967 and the Masoretic Text as Variant Literary Editions*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lind, W A 1984. A Text-critical Note to Ezekiel 1: Are Shorter Readings Really Preferable to Longer? *JETS* 27(2), 135-139.
- Lust, J 2006. The Ezekiel Text, in: Goldman Y A P, Van der Kooij, A & Weis, R D (eds). *Sofêr Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker Offered by Editors of Biblia Hebraica Quinta*. Leiden: Brill, 153-167.
- Marquis, G 1986. Word-Order as a Criterion for the Evaluation of Translation Technique in the LXX and the Evaluation of Word-Order Variants as Exemplified in LXX-Ezekiel. *Textus* 13, 59-84.
- Muraoka, T 2010. *A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-way Index to the Septuagint*. Louvain: Peeters.
- Mushayabasa, G 2014. Shorter or Longer Text in Ezekiel 6: The Role of Genre. *HTS* 70(3), 1-7.
- Olley, J W 2009. *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiël in Codex Vaticanus*. Leiden: Brill.
- Patmore, H M 2007. The Shorter and Longer Texts of Ezekiel: The Implications of the Manuscript Finds from Masada and Qumran. *JSOT* 32, 231-242.
- Stromberg, J 2008. Observations on Inner-Scriptural Scribal Expansion in MT Ezekiel. *VT* 58(1), 68-86.
- Tov, E 1992. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Tov, E 1997. *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*. Jerusalem: Simor.
- Tov, E 1999a. Glosses, Interpolations, and Other Types of Scribal Additions in the Text of the Hebrew Bible, in: Tov, E. *The Greek and the Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*. Leiden: Brill, 53-74.
- Tov, E 1999b. Recensional Differences in Ezekiel, in: Tov, E. *The Greek and the Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*. Leiden: Brill, 419-431.
- Tov, E 2012. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Ziegler, J 1977. *Ezekiel (Septuaginta XVI 1)*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.