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Before Using the Bible in Translation Studies: The Textual Plurality of the Bible in Its Hebrew and Greek Forms

Teppei Kato[1]

Associate Professor, Faculty of Languages and Cultures, Kyushu University, Japan
kato@flc.kyushu-u.ac.jp https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4107-9873

ABSTRACT • This paper examines the Hebrew Bible and its Greek translation, the Septuagint, to identify two issues that must be resolved before using the Bible in translation studies: the textual traditions underlying the source text and the textual traditions developed in the translated text. This textual plurality makes it difficult to determine mistranslations of the Bible. In other words, a given translation may appear mistranslated because multiple source texts exist or because multiple translations or later revisions exist. To address these issues, this paper refers to the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the *Letter to Aristeas*, Jerome's prefaces to the Vulgate, and revisions of the Greek Bible by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. The study of biblical translation undoubtedly contributes to the study of the Bible as well as the general knowledge of translation, but caution must be exercised when using the Bible in translation studies.

KEYWORDS • Hebrew Bible – Septuagint – biblical studies – translation studies – textual plurality

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG • Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Hebräische Bibel und ihre griechische Übersetzung, die Septuaginta, und benennt zwei Fragen, die geklärt werden müssen, bevor die Bibel als Gegenstand der Übersetzungswissenschaft herangezogen wird: die Texttraditionen, die dem Ausgangstext zugrunde liegen, und jene, die sich im übersetzten Text herausgebildet haben. Diese textuelle Pluralität erschwert es, Fehlübersetzungen der Bibel eindeutig zu bestimmen. Eine Übersetzung kann fehlerhaft erscheinen, weil mehrere Ausgangstexte oder mehrere Übersetzungen beziehungsweise spätere Revisionen vorliegen. Zur Erörterung dieser Probleme behandelt der Beitrag den Masoretischen Text, die Schriftrollen vom Toten Meer, den Aristeasbrief, die Vorreden des Hieronymus zur Vulgata sowie die Bearbeitungen der griechischen Bibel durch Aquila, Symmachus und Theodotion. Die Erforschung biblischer Übersetzungen trägt zweifellos sowohl zur Bibelwissenschaft als auch zum allgemeinen Verständnis von Übersetzung bei. Zugleich ist beim Gebrauch der Bibel in der Übersetzungswissenschaft besondere methodische Vorsicht geboten.

SCHLAGWORTE • Hebräische Bibel – Septuaginta – Bibelwissenschaft – Übersetzungswissenschaft – Textpluralität

[1] I extend my sincerest congratulations to Prof. Bernhard Lang on the occasion of this Festschrift and thank him for his invaluable contributions to the field of biblical studies over the years. This paper is based on a lecture delivered at the Kyushu University Society for Language Studies on January 19, 2023. The aim of the lecture was to provide a coherent account of the topics under discussion to non-specialists in biblical studies. Accordingly, the presentation of some issues in this paper has been simplified for the sake of clarity.

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1 Introduction

Translation studies scholar Michaël Oustinoff once asserted: "Whether you are a believer or not, it is impossible to talk about translation without mentioning biblical texts … (*Impossible de parler de traduction en faisant l'impasse sur les textes bibliques, que l'on soit croyant ou non …*)."[2] The study of biblical translation unquestionably contributes to the study of the Bible and to the overall knowledge of translation. Biblical translation is thus not the exclusive preserve of biblical scholars, but is a vital topic for all translation scholars, "… because," as stated by Oustinoff, "they [sc. the biblical texts] have been, and continue to be, the largest translation undertaking in human history (… *ne serait-ce que parce qu'ils ont été et continuent d'être, de très loin, l'objet de la plus vaste entreprise de traduction dans l'histoire de l'humanité*)." The long history of biblical translation closely parallels the history of translation itself (needless to say, the East possessed its own translation traditions; however, the Bible has undoubtedly played an important role even in the East since the beginning of the modern era). The number of languages into which the Bible has been translated continues to grow.[3] Hence, the significance of the Bible cannot be overstated in translation studies.

However, caution must be exercised when using the Bible in the study of translation as it involves the problem of translation errors vis-à-vis the source text, and the problem of mistranslation is extremely difficult to determine in the case of the Bible. At least two issues must be identified before a given passage in a translation of the Bible can be considered a mistranslation: first, the textual traditions underlying the source text, and second, the textual traditions that are developed in the translated text. In other words, scholars must allow for the possibility that a given translation only appears to be incorrect because multiple source texts, translations, or later revisions exist. These issues are certainly not irrelevant to modern translations of the Bible. However, the identification of these issues can elucidate the early history of the transmission of the Bible and is thus immensely rewarding, particularly when researching ancient translations. This study focuses primarily on the Hebrew Bible (the so-called Old Testament) and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) to examine the logic informing seemingly mistranslated passages in these texts.[4] This investigation thereby illustrates the significance of using the Bible in translation studies and the difficulties presented by such an endeavor. (This paper does not address the New Testament.)

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[2] Michaël Oustinoff, *La traduction* (Que sais-je?), Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 2009, 10.

[3] Wycliffe Global Alliance. „2025 Global Scripture Access", 2025. Retrieved October 26, 2025. https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics/. According to 2025 statistics, there are 776 full translations of the New and Old Testaments, 1,798 translations of the New Testament alone, and 1,433 partial translations. In total, there are 4,007 languages with at least some Scripture.

[4] For the formation process of the tripartite structure of the Hebrew Bible and its canonicity, see Bernhard Lang, „A Hellenistic Literary Canon in the Hebrew Bible: The *Writings*", In Idem, *Hebrew Life and Literature: Selected Essays of Bernhard Lang*, Routledge, London 2008, 217–35.

2 Textual Traditions Underlying the Source Text

Two problems concerning the textual traditions underlying the source text must be considered before a translation can be declared a mistranslation. First, the source text of the Hebrew Bible, the so-called Masoretic Text (explained later), comprises consonantal texts and vowel signs (with cantillation signs), each reflecting the textual traditions of discrete periods. Second, the said consonantal texts also incorporate multiple textual traditions. Thus, we must carefully examine the source text on which the translation is based when using the Bible in translation studies.

2.1 Textual Plurality in the Masoretic Text

The first problem with the Hebrew Bible as a source text emanates from the presence of three distinct layers of textual tradition: the consonantal text, the vowel signs, and the cantillation signs.[5] Hebrew was originally written only in consonants; therefore, the Bible was also written only in consonants in ancient times. However, it became necessary to inscribe vowels to prevent misunderstanding by readers because consonantal texts can be read in myriad ways (e.g. the word *SFR* could be read as *SeFeR* for "book" or *SoFeR* for "scribe"). Certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet that originally represented consonants were initially employed as *matres lectionis*, or auxiliary vowel letters (for example, *vav* [ו] to indicate /ō/ or /ū/, and *yod* [י] to indicate /ī/ or /ē/), but this tactic was insufficient. Groups of Jewish scholars/scribes called the Masoretes thus developed vowel and cantillation signs between the seventh and tenth centuries (see Table 1).

Table 1 • Gen 7:10: "And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth."

Consonants	ויהי לשבעת הימים ומי המבול היו על הארץ
Consonants + Vowels	וַיְהִי לְשִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וּמֵי הַמַּבּוּל הָיוּ עַל הָאָרֶץ
Consonants + Vowels + Cantillation	וַיְהִ֣י לְשִׁבְעַ֔ת הַיָּמִ֖ים וּמֵ֣י הַמַּבּ֑וּל הָי֥וּ עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃

The Masoretic Text (MT), incorporating all three layers, is so labeled because this inscription of the Hebrew Bible was transmitted and vocalized by the Masoretes.[6] One of the most representative and oldest codices fully containing the MT is the eleventh-century Leningrad Codex, which served as the basis of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the eclectically edited critical edition of the Hebrew Bible.[7] Another important manu-

[5] See also Joshua Blau, *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*, Eisenbraus, Winona Lake, IN 2010, 5–8.

[6] Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1998; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (4th edition), Fortress, Minneapolis, MN 2022, 35–85.

[7] Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (5th edition), Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1997 [1967/77]; cf. Ernst Würthwein, *Der Text des Alten Testaments: Eine Ein-*

script that contains the MT is the Aleppo Codex, also known as the "Crown." The Aleppo Codex is older than the Leningrad Codex but lacks the Pentateuch, which is supplemented by the Leningrad Codex in the printed edition compiled by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.[8]

The system in which vowel signs are written mostly below the consonantal text, as shown in Table 1, is called the Tiberian system.[9] There were also Babylonian and Palestinian systems in which vowel signs were written above the consonantal text, but these gradually fell into disuse and were replaced by the more elaborate Tiberian system. (In modern Hebrew, however, unless necessary, vowel signs are not used in all cases except in children's picture books, and only consonantal texts are used for reading and writing.)

Assigning vowel and cantillation signs to consonantal texts does not merely inform readers of the correct phonetic reading of a text. It also entails a construal of the text by determining the intended meaning of words and establishing word boundaries and connections. Accordingly, the multiple readings and interpretations allowed by the ancient consonantal text were codified in the MT into a singular possibility through the insertion of vowel and cantillation signs created in a later era. In other words, the MT synthesizes readings from different periods.

The readings inferred from the consonantal text and the interpretations designated by the vowel signs occasionally differ in the MT, although they coincide in most instances. As noted previously, this discrepancy occurs because each construal reflects the reading traditions of a different period. The ancient reading as per the consonantal text is called *ketiv* ("[what is] written"), and the alternate reading effected in the event of problems with the *ketiv* is labeled *qere* ("[what is] read"). For example, a discrepancy between *ketiv* and *qere* is found in Nah 2:6:

יִזְכֹּר אַדִּירָיו יִכָּשְׁלוּ בַּהֲלָכָתָם יְמַהֲרוּ חוֹמָתָהּ וְהֻכַן הַסֹּכָךְ׃

> He calls his officers; they stumble in their step/steps; they hasten to the wall, and the screen is set up. (New Revised Standard Version with some modifications)

In this passage, the *ketiv* or the consonantal text (*bahălikôtām*) reads "in their *steps*," while the vowel signs (*bahălikātām*) suggest the *qere* reading "in their *step*." "Their steps" was assumed to be plural when the consonantal text was written in ancient times, but a

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führung in die Biblia Hebraica, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1952. As a revised edition to replace the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, the Biblia Hebraica Quinta is now being published book by book. See Adrian Schenker et al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2004–.

[8] *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, N. Ben-Zvi Printing Enterprises, Jerusalem 2000; cf. Mordechai Glatzer, *Companion Volume to the Jerusalem Crown*, N. Ben-Zvi Printing Enterprises, Jerusalem 2002; Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider, *Crown of Aleppo: The Mystery of the Oldest Hebrew Bible Codex*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 2010.

[9] Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (The SBL Masoretic Studies 5), Scholars Press, Missoula, MT 1980; Geoffrey Kahn, *The Tiberian Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew*, 2 vols., Open Book Publishers, Cambridge 2020.

tradition gradually formed of reading the term as singular because the plural reading was somewhat unnatural. The singular form was also recorded when the Masoretes later developed the system of vowel signs. Notably, the Masoretes did not modify the consonantal texts despite the apparent irrationality of the readings obtained from the consonantal texts. Instead, they marked what they considered more reasonable judgments in the form of vowel signs without touching the consonantal texts, allowing readers to make their own decision. However, the Masoretes' careful avoidance of revisions and respect for the given text have caused difficulties for those who translated the Bible. As the MT preserved multiple readings as the source text for translation, translators were compelled to determine their meanings. (Section 3 elucidates how the cited passage was translated in ancient translations.)

2.2 Textual Plurality in the Consonantal Texts

The second problem with the textual tradition underlying the source text stems from consonantal texts because multiple consonantal texts were transmitted in ancient times. This fact was revealed by the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is the general term for the ancient manuscripts of the Bible and other Jewish literature found at Qumran and other sites around the Dead Sea, including Wadi Murabbaʿat, Naḥal Ḥever, Naḥal Ṣeʾelim, Wadi Sdeir, and Masada. Particularly, over 900 parchments and papyri written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and other languages have been discovered across eleven caves at Qumran. Approximately 700 of them contained various previously unknown texts, including legal, exegetical, parabiblical, calendrical, sapiential, poetic, and liturgical texts, in addition to previously known texts such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Additionally, the remaining 200 manuscripts were identified as manuscripts of texts included in the Hebrew Bible and of their Greek translations. The Hebrew manuscripts in the Dead Sea Scrolls are not marked with vowels or cantillation signs.

A close analysis of the biblical manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls reveals an interesting fact: All those found at sites other than Qumran preserved texts that approximated the consonantal texts of the MT (the proto-MT), whereas those found at Qumran exhibit a wide variety of texts.[10]

Two major explanations have been proposed to explain this finding.[11] First, Frank Moore Cross proposed a theory of local texts, classifying the diversity observed in the Hebrew

[10] Frank M. Cross, „The Text Behind the Text of the Hebrew Bible", In *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Harshel Shanks, Random House, New York 1992, 139–55, esp. 145; Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 4.

[11] For other possible explanations of the textual diversity, see Shemaryahu Talmon, „The Old Testament Text," In *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome*, I, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, 1–41. Eugene C. Ulrich, „Multiple Literary Editions: Reflections toward a Theory of the History of the Biblical Text", In *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, ed. Eugene C. Ulrich, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1999, 99–120.

manuscripts into three text-types: the Babylonian, Palestinian, and Egyptian.[12] According to this theory, the consonantal texts of the Hebrew Bible developed distinctively in these three regional Jewish communities. The Babylonian text-type became the basis for the proto-MT; the Palestinian text-type is found in major biblical manuscripts in Qumran and the Samaritan Pentateuch (a text of the Torah written in a special early Hebrew script and preserved by the Samaritan community); and the Egyptian text-type is observed in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Bible made in Alexandria, which will be treated in the next section) and the short version of the Book of Jeremiah in Qumran (e.g. 4QJer^{b}). Cross considered that these three text-types were brought to Palestine at some point and deposited in Qumran.

Second, Emanuel Tov claimed that the diversity of the Qumran texts must be scrutinized more carefully, dividing the corpus into five groups based on textual character rather than on the geographical location of their inscription.[13] These groups include the following: *a*) texts written in the Qumran scribal practice; *b*) Proto-MT (or proto-rabbinic texts) that contain the consonantal framework of MT (the Babylonian text-type in Cross's theory); *c*) pre-Samaritan Qumran texts that reflect the characteristic features of the Samaritan Pentateuch (the Palestinian text-type in Cross's theory); *d*) texts that are close to the presumed Hebrew source of the Septuagint (the Egyptian text-type in Cross's theory); and *e*) non-aligned texts that are not exclusively close to either MT, the Septuagint, or the Samaritan Pentateuch.[14] This classification can be seen as a more precise breakdown of Cross's theory, but Tov goes further into the social backgrounds of the people and communities that had proto-MT. Tov further associated texts more closely aligned with the consonantal MT with the religious elite of the period, while describing the other textual forms as popular texts. Unlike other sites where only proto-MT was found, the Qumran community valued popular texts as well as proto-MT.

Refer to Table 2 for the characteristics of the texts found at the Qumran and non-Qumran sites and their classifications by Cross and Tov.

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[12] Frank M. Cross, „The Contribution of the Qumrân Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text", *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 (1966), 81–95; Id., „The Evolution of a Theory of Local Texts", In *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. Frank M. Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1975, 306–20; cf. Ronald Hendel, „The Contribution of Frank Moore Cross to Textual Criticism", *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research* 372 (2014), 175–82.

The theory of local texts was initially adumbrated by William F. Albright, but was discussed in more detail by Cross. See William F. Albright, „New Light on Early Recensions of the Hebrew Bible", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 140 (1955), 27–33.

[13] Emanuel Tov, „The Biblical Texts from the Judean Desert: An Overview and Analysis of the Published Texts", In *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judean Desert Discoveries*, ed. Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov, The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, London 2002, 139–66.

[14] For a criticism to Tov's theory, see Michael Segal, „The Text of the Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls", *Materia Giudaica* 12/1–2 (2007), 5–20.

Table 2 • The Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls

	Cross's Local Texts Theory	***Tov's Textual Character Theory***
Qumran		Texts Written in the Qumran Practice
	Babylonian (Proto-MT)	Proto-MT or Proto-Rabbinic Texts
	Palestinian (Samaritan Pentateuch)	Pre-Samaritan or Harmonistic Texts
	Egyptian (Septuagint)	Texts Close to the Presumed Hebrew Source of the Septuagint
		Non-Aligned Texts
Other Sites	Proto-MT	Proto-MT

Cross and Tov exhibited partially different views on the classification of texts. Nevertheless, they shared the recognition of multiple traditions of consonantal texts in the Hebrew Bible before the appearance of the MT. Cross attributed the disparities between these earlier traditions to regional differences, and Tov elucidated them through textual character. In any case, the traditions followed by the religious elite were privileged and were eventually adopted into the consonantal texts of the MT. The Masoretes, originally "those who count (the verses and letters of the Bible)," maintained a unified text by counting the number of the letters and paragraphs and sequentially transcribing every word and sentence once the consonantal texts were assigned vowel and cantillation signs and the MT was completed. However, the textual situation of the ancient Hebrew Bible, at least in Qumran, remained fluid, incorporating the coexistence of multiple traditions.

The evidence discussed above indicates that the textual form preserved in the MT combines ancient consonantal traditions with medieval vowel and cantillation signs, while the consonantal evidence itself reflects multiple textual traditions.

3 The Textual Traditions Developed in the Translated Text

The second issue that must be clarified before judging mistranslations of the Bible is the textual traditions that have evolved in the translated text. It has long been known that the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, underwent multiple revisions.[15] Several other Greek translations were produced in later periods, and these versions began to interfere with each other. Therefore, a passage in the LXX that

[15] For recent good introductions to the LXX, see Timothy M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013; Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (2nd edition), Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2015; Edmon L. Gallagher, *Translation of the Seventy: History, Reception, and Contemporary Use of the Septuagint*, Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, TX 2021. For more specialized studies, see Alison G. Salvesen and Timothy M. Law, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2021; William A. Ross and W. Edward Glenny, eds., *The T&T Clark Handbook of Septuagint Research*, T&T Clark, London 2021.

appears inconsistent with the Hebrew text cannot immediately be determined as a mistranslation; instead, diverse problems of textual tradition must be resolved.

3.1 Textual Plurality in the Septuagint

The LXX was the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, created between the third and first centuries BCE. According to the *Letter to Aristeas*, a pseudepigraphal letter written around the second century BCE, King Ptolemy II Philadelphus commissioned the elders of Jerusalem to prepare a translation of the Pentateuch to house it in the royal library in Alexandria. A total of 72 elders, six from each of the 12 tribes, were assembled on a quiet island (probably Pharos, famous for its great lighthouse) near Alexandria to complete the translation in seventy-two days. This is why the resulting translation was named *Septuaginta*, or "The Seventy" (the traditional name rounds seventy-two down to seventy). Later, however, other biblical texts besides the Pentateuch were intermittently translated into Greek, and when those texts, including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, were combined, the LXX came to refer to the Greek translation of the entire Hebrew Bible and other Greek Jewish literature.

Jerome, a fourth- and early fifth-century Latin Church Father and biblical translator whose work formed the basis of the Vulgate, described three regional textual forms of the LXX. He commented on the revisions to the LXX as follows:[16]

> *Nunc vero cum pro varietate regionum diversa ferantur exemplaria et germana illa antiquaque translatio corrupta sit atque violata … Alexandria et Aegyptus in Septuaginta suis Hesychium laudat auctorem, Constantinopolis usque Antiochiam Luciani martyris exemplaria probat, mediae inter has provinciae Palestinos codices legunt, quos ab Origene elaboratos Eusebius et Pamphilius vulgaverunt, totusque orbis hac inter se trifaria varietate conpugnat.*
>
> However, different manuscripts are now being circulated according to regional diversity, and the true translation in antiquity has been corrupted and violated … Indeed, instead of their own translation of the Seventy, Alexandria and Egypt praise Hesychius as an authoritative compiler, while from Constantinople to Antioch they sanction the edition of the martyr Lucian. And the intermediate regions between them read the Palestinian manuscripts, which were prepared by Origen and propagated by Eusebius and Pamphilus. The world is at war over this threefold diversity, which is mutually distinct.

Jerome asserted the presence of regional differences in the manuscripts of the LXX: Hesychius' version was read in Egypt, Lucian's version in Asia, and Origen's version in Palestine. Jerome viewed this state of confusion in the LXX as a problem, referring to the situation as *trifaria varietas* ("threefold diversity").[17]

Did only one translation exist when the LXX was created and before the three revisions were created? Scholars have advanced two hypotheses.[18] First, Paul de Lagarde's *Ur-*

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[16] Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, eds., *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (5th edition), Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2007, 546. English translation is mine.

[17] Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, Clarendon, Oxford 1968.

text theory posits that all manuscripts of the LXX date back to a single ancestral type.[19] De Lagarde believed that there was a single Hebrew archetype behind all MT manuscripts, and he applied this idea to the LXX to construct such a theory.[20] According to De Lagarde, the original LXX could ultimately be grasped by organizing, classifying, and examining the extant manuscripts. He therefore attempted to reconstruct the original text before it had been turned into the three stated revisions. De Lagarde's theory is accepted by numerous scholars and serves as the methodological basis for the so-called Göttingen edition, a critical imprint of the LXX that is still being published.[21]

Second, Paul Kahle conceptualized multiple translations, asserting the existence of manifold translations of the LXX from the outset and explaining the discrepancies between manuscripts through this multiplicity of translations.[22] He cited passages from the *Letter to Aristeas* as the basis for his theory. In this passage (§ 30), King Ptolemy describes the situation before he had Jewish elders produce a Greek translation of the Pentateuch:[23]

> τοῦ νόμου τῶν Ἰουδαίων βιβλία σὺν ἑτέροις ὀλίγοις τισὶν ἀπολείπει· τυγχάνει γὰρ Ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασι καὶ φωνῇ λεγόμενα, ἀμελέστερον δέ, καὶ οὐχ ὡς ὑπάρχει, σεσήμανται …
>
> The books of the Law of the Jews are missing (from the library collection), along with a few other books. They happen to be written in Hebrew and Hebrew scripts, but they are extremely carelessly written/translated and not as they should be …

Kahle read the verb σεσήμανται not as "they are written" but as "they are translated." In Kahle's construal, some translations already existed before King Ptolemy ordered the elders to generate a Greek translation. However, these versions were translated "extremely carelessly … and not as they should be," and a new translation was hence required. However, scholars have not completely accepted this interpretation.

The current debate on the origin of the LXX is often approached through a mediating position between De Lagarde's and Kahle's theories, as advocated by Elias Bickerman and Emanuel Tov.[24] It has been posited that a single translation of the LXX existed ini-

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[18] Emanuel Tov, „The Septuagint", In *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. Martin J. Mulder and Harry Sysling, Van Gorcum, Assen 1988, 161–88, esp. 165–68.

[19] Paul de Lagarde, *Anmerkungen zur griechischen Übersetzung der Proverbien*, Brockhaus, Leipzig 1863.

[20] Eugene C. Ulrich, „The Old Testament Text and Its Transmission", In *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From Beginnings to 600*, I, eds. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, 83–104, esp. 96.

[21] *Septuaginta: Vetus testamentum graecum auctoritate academiae scientiarum Gottingensis editum*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1931–.

[22] Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (2nd edition), Blackwell, Oxford 1959, 209–14.

[23] Henry G. Meecham, *The Letter of Aristeas: A Linguistic Study with Special Reference to the Greek Bible*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1935, 9, with some modifications.

[24] Elias J. Bickerman, „Some Notes on the Transmission of the Septuagint", In *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, ed. Elias J. Bickerman, Brill, Leiden 1986 [1950], 137–66; Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (3rd edition), Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN 2015, 10–15.

tially. However, this translation was not sustained for long in its pure form and quickly branched off into several textual traditions. Moreover, some of the textual traditions were transmitted during the Christian period, whereas others fell into disuse, ultimately resulting in the compilation of the three previously mentioned revisions.

3.2 Textual Plurality in Other Greek Translations

In addition to the LXX, new Greek translations emerged when multiple revisions of the LXX were extant. These translations were produced by the so-called "Three": Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. The translations associated with Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion all tended to 'Hebraize' the text, that is, to bring the Greek wording into closer agreement with the Hebrew. Few manuscripts of the translations produced by the Three have survived and only a few fragments remain. Nevertheless, it is possible in some instances to reconstruct the original forms of the translations from citations made by the Church Fathers. Some portions of the translation attributed to Theodotion have been proven to predate the second century, when he lived, and are labeled *kaige*-Theodotion because of the characteristics of the translation.[25] In other words, translations evincing the Hebraizing tendency appeared in actuality in the order of *kaige*-Theodotion, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

An early witness of this new translation movement, which could also be labeled the "non-Septuagintal" tradition,[26] is noted in a manuscript of the Greek translation of the Twelve Minor Prophets found in the cave of Naḥal Ḥever near the Dead Sea.[27] This manuscript preserved the *kaige*-Theodotion translation of Nah 2:6, which encompassed the previously discussed discrepancy between *ketiv* and *qere*. A comparison of an extract from the MT, the *kaige*-Theodotion (8ḤevXII gr), and the LXX is presented:[28]

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[25] Dominique Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila: Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophéton*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1963.

[26] Adam Kamesar, „The Bible Comes to the West: The Text and Interpretation of the Bible in Its Greek and Latin Forms", In *Living Traditions of the Bible: Scripture in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Practice*, ed. James E. Bowley, St. Louis, MO 1999, Chalice Press, 35–61.

[27] Emanuel Tov with Robert A. Kraft, eds., *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIgr)*, Clarendon, Oxford 1990. The newly discovered fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which made international news in March 2021, have been identified as parts of the Naḥal Ḥever manuscript. In other words, they are not a new discovery in the purest sense of the word, but new fragments of an already known manuscript. For further details, see Beatriz Riestra, Oren Ableman, Tatiana Bitler, and Ofer Sion, „*These Are the Things You Are to Do*: A Newly Discovered Fragment of the Book of Zechariah from the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll (8ḤevXIIgr)", *Textus* 31 (2022), 159–89.

[28] English translation of 8ḤevXII gr is mine, while that of the LXX follows *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, eds. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

MT	יִזְכֹּר אַדִּירָיו יִכָּשְׁלוּ בַּהֲלָכָתָם יְמָהֲרוּ חוֹמָתָהּ וְהֻכַן הַסֹּכֵךְ׃
	He calls his officers; they stumble in their step/steps; they hasten to the wall, and the screen is set up.
8ḤevXII gr	μνησθήσεται δυναστῶν αὐτοῦ, [ἀσ]θενήσουσιν ἐν ταῖς πορεία[ι]ς αὐτῶν [κ]αὶ ταχυνοῦσιν ἐπὶ τὰ τείχη καὶ ἑτοιμάσε[ι] [τ]ὸ ἐπικάλυμμα.
	He shall remember his powerful people; they shall become weak in their steps and hurry to the walls and he shall prepare the cover.
LXX	καὶ μνησθήσονται οἱ μεγιστᾶνες αὐτῶν καὶ φεύξονται ἡμέρας καὶ ἀσθενήσουσιν ἐν τῇ πορείᾳ αὐτῶν καὶ σπεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τὰ τείχη καὶ ἑτοιμάσουσιν τὰς προφυλακὰς αὐτῶν.
	And their great people shall remember and flee by day, and they shall become weak in their step and hasten to the walls and prepare their outposts.

Comparing the *kaige*-Theodotion and the LXX yields various textual divergences. Especially noteworthy is that the *kaige*-Theodotion pluralized "in their steps" (ἐν ταῖς πορεία[ι]ς) in correspondence to the *ketiv* of the MT (*bahălikôtām*). Conversely, the LXX utilized the singular "in their step" (ἐν τῇ πορείᾳ), or the *qere* of the MT (*bahălikātām*).[29] Both translations were generated in antiquity when the Hebrew text was not marked with vowel signs. The consonantal text enabled the reading of this part as plural; thus, the *kaige*-Theodotion translated it that way. Why, then, did the LXX translate this phrase into the singular?

Two possible explanations have been proposed for this discrepancy. The first is that there were at least two versions of the Hebrew consonantal text, one of which preserved the plural form and the other maintained the singular, and the *kaige*-Theodotion was based on the former and the LXX on the latter. (In the later Masoretic tradition, the former was preserved in the consonantal text, while the vowel signs reflected the latter reading). The second is that the Hebrew consonantal text only encompassed the plural form, and the *kaige*-Theodotion translated it as inscribed. However, the LXX read it as the singular form to adjust for grammatical irregularities. (The Masoretes transmitted the singular form tradition through the vowel signs.) In any case, any deliberation of this singular/plural problem requires contemplation of the difficulties associated with the textual traditions underlying the source text, as well as the issues related to the textual traditions developed within the translated text.

The LXX underwent multiple revisions and other Greek translations also existed. Hence, we must be cautious about deeming any apparent inconsistency with the Hebrew text a mistranslation.

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[29] Sebastian Brock, „To Revise or Not to Revise: Attitudes to Jewish Biblical Translation", In *Septuagint, Scrolls, and Cognate Writings: Papers Presented to the International Symposium on the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Writings (Manchester 1990)*, eds. George J. Brooke and Barnabas Lindars, Scholars Press, Atlanta 1990, 301–338, esp. 314–16.

4 Conclusions

We have identified two issues that must be resolved before using the Bible in translation studies: the textual traditions underlying the source text and the textual traditions developed in the translated text. These aspects make it extremely difficult to determine mistranslations of the Bible. First, as a source text, the MT encompasses consonantal texts and vowel signs (along with cantillation signs) that preserve different traditions while also incorporating multiple consonantal texts and maintaining discrete readings. Second, the LXX remained extant alongside various revisions and Greek translations of the Bible besides the LXX. In other words, both the original and translated texts demonstrate a problem of multiplicity.

It is undeniable that the Bible is vital to translation studies. However, as our discussions have shown, the Bible also evinces characteristics of textual plurality. Therefore, the two issues outlined above must first be addressed if the Bible is to be adopted as a subject of translation studies, particularly to determine the accuracy of its translations. In addition to the two issues related to textual plurality, we must also consider other issues (even though the present study could not include them), such as interpretive renderings, in which a translation may reflect a particular interpretation of the biblical text,[30] the textual variation preserved in medieval manuscript traditions.[31] The apparent divergence of a translated text from the original does not signify that it is a mistranslation. This awareness should not only inform the study of the Hebrew Bible and the LXX but also the analysis of the Vulgate.

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[30] Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, „Jewish Traditions in the Writings of Jerome“, In *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, eds. Derek R.G. Beattie and Martin J. McNamara, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 420–30; Teppei Kato, „Two or Three in the Bed? Jerome's Interpretation of Isaiah 28:20 Reflecting Jewish Traditions“, *Vulgata in Dialogue* 8 (2024), 11–16.

[31] Bonifatius Fischer, *Lateinische Bibelhandschriften im frühen Mittelalter* (Vetus Latina 11), Herder, Freiburg 1985; Frans Van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014.