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The Septuagint within the History of Greek Praise Epithets

Adjectives used of god serve a function in the Septuagint comparable to praise epithets in Greek religious traditions. Irrespective of the functions of the words in Hebrew, the translators chose vocabulary that conformed to Greek epithets, either by taking existing epithets in the language or choosing words that followed the conventions of epithet formation. Taking the adjectives μέγας and κραταιός from Exod 34:6 as a test case, we see how much the practices of the Septuagint translators conformed to praise epithets in Greek. In the case of μέγας the translators use an epithet well attested elsewhere, but it is only the original Greek compositions that prefer the alternative μέγιστος. The distinction indicates the limits imposed on translation, while also contributing evidence on the history of these epithets. By contrast κραταιός as an epithet is restricted to eastern religions where there is language contact with Semitic or Egyptian. The Jewish translators's choices are intelligible within the context of their neighbours and should be understood within the wider use of Greek in the ancient near east.

Keywords: Septuagint; Praise; Epithets; Greek; Egypt

Inscribed on a pillar in the entrance to the Caracalla baths in Rome, is a dedication that stands out for its notable string of epithets:

Διὶ Ἡλίῳ Μεγάλῳ Σαράπιδι σωτῆρι πλουτοδότῃ ἐπηκόῳ εὐργέτῃ ἀνεικήτῳ Μίθρᾳ χαριστήριον.

To Zeus Helios Great Sarapis saviour wealth-giver listener benefactor Invincible Mithras, a thank-offering (IGUR I.194; RICIS 501/0126)

One striking aspect of this address is the association of multiple gods (Zeus, Helios, Sarapis and possibly Mithras), ~~and~~ is typical of this later period.[1] However, also typical of the period is the list of epithets, which had previously been used in classical times individually to identify specific gods

1 The name Mithra could also be the name of the dedicator and therefore not one of the divine names. See R. Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad: Names, Natures and Transformations* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 132.

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and their roles. Here this conjunction of multiple "praise epithets" (a term adopted from Robert Parker) reflect, if to an extreme extent in this example, a movement since the Hellenistic period to use epithets as general terms of praise rather than identifiers of specific Greek deities. The lack of identifying function allowed multiple ones to be used all at once. In earlier Greek religion gods could have multiple epithets, but when being addressed by a worshipper, one epithet would serve to identify the particular function needed to fulfil the request.[2] "Zeus of the agora" (Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος) was invoked after successful political persuasion (Aeschylus, *Eum.* 973). Alternatively, an attribute that simply encapsulates the deity's power was chosen, such as the common "Zeus the thunderbolt" (Ζεὺς κεραυνός, IG 5/2.288). These are examples of cult epithets used in religious dedication and prayer. In literary contexts poetic epithets are more expansive, where gods are designated by many names. In the Hellenistic period this reaches a peak in the Hellenistic poet Lycophron's *Alexandra*.[3] But it is also in this period that we begin to see the multiplication of epithets even in cultic contexts – titles previously used to designate and dissociate particular gods are now adopted by other gods as part of a litany of epithets. It is as it were a democratisation of titles, as epithets are shared by many deities.

In the Hebrew biblical tradition, there already was a conflation of divine titles whereby earlier divine terms all come to be subsumed as general titles for the god of Israel. El, Yahweh, Shadday, etc., all come to designate the one God of Israel.[4] The Septuagint translators, therefore, in rendering a Hebrew source that already itself contained epithets naturally were bound to provide a series of epithets. They drew upon the stock of Greek epithets, including ones rarely used, to form in Greek divine titles and designations that were in conformity with Greek naming practices.[5] Whatever the terms designated in Hebrew, in Greek they become titles of divine functions. We may therefore legitimately call them epithets conforming as they do in form and meaning to functional epithets of deities. Even if some the terms in Hebrew can be described as metaphors or adjectives, the Greek equivalents followed the

2 R. Parker, "The Problem of the Greek Cult Epithet," *Opuscula Atheniensia* 28 (1990): 174–176.

3 See S. Hornblower, "Lykophron and Epigraphy: The Value and Function of Cult Epithets in the *Alexandra*," *CQ* 64 (2014): 91–120.

4 For an overview of Hebrew divine titles, see T. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

5 See J. K. Aitken, "Divine Epithets in the Greek Psalms: Cultural Accommodation and Translatability," in *Divine Names on the Spot: Towards a Dynamic Approach of Divine Denominations in Greek and Semitic Contexts* (ed. C. Bonnet and T. Galoppin; OBO 293; Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 184–205.

principles for the formation of Greek epithets. Thus, one type of Greek epithet employs substantives, such as Apollo Iatros, "the Doctor,"[6] and this we see in the use in the Psalms of ὑπερασπιστής "shield bearer" (Ps 28[27]:7). The titles βασιλεύς "king" or κύριος "lord" (e.g., Ps 5:3) perhaps serve similar duty to ἄναξ "lord" used of Zeus. Many epithets are functional, and while some of those in the Septuagint or their meanings are not attested elsewhere, their form is not unexpected. God as ἀντιλήμπτωρ or ῥύστης is not a far cry from the common epithet σωτήρ or σώτειρα, and the appearance of ἀντιλήμπτωρ in Ptolemaic petitions means it is not a pure invention.[7] Indeed, masculine σωτήρ is of course also used as a divine title in the Psalms (Ps 24[23]:5). At times a term may be a substantivized participle, as we find in Ps 17(16):7: ὁ σῴζων τοὺς ἐλπίζοντας ἐπὶ σέ "the one who saves those that trust in you." This is again similar to the participial formation of βροντῶν "one who thunders" for Zeus.

It is of course natural for the translators to make use of the possibilities of word formation in the Greek language in this way. It is nonetheless also a reminder that when choosing their translation options, they were thinking about the opportunities in Greek and not only the limitations in rendering the Hebrew. The phenomenon of translating epithets in the Septuagint needs to be seen in a wider context, beyond just the translation technique. As the Bible is a literary source, the terms should properly be called poetic epithets as part of the literary creation of the translators rather than actual terms used by everyday users,[8] but such a distinction cannot be fully drawn, especially when we have little epigraphic evidence of Jewish cultic practice in this time. In addition, as we have seen the use of multiple epithets was becoming a common practice in both cultic and poetic contexts, further complicating the distinction. It was also inevitable that with the spread of Greek into Egypt and the east, translation of Egyptian and Semitic titles into Greek would also lead to multiple Greek titles applied to the one god.[9]

6 Hornblower, "Lykophron and Epigraphy," 9.

7 See O. Montevecchi, "Quaedam de graecitate psalmorum cum papyris comparata," in *Bibbia e papiri: luce dai papiri sulla Bibbia greca* (ed. idem; Barcelona: Institut de Teologia Fonamental, Seminari de Papirologia, 1999), 9–120; A. Passoni Dell'Acqua, "La metafora biblica di Dio come roccia e la sua soppressione nelle antiche versioni," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 91 (1977): 417–453.

8 See Parker, "Problem of the Greek Cult Epithet," on the distinction but also on the problems of drawing a rigid separation between them.

9 This phenomenon can be seen the Greek forms of hymns to Isis. Thus, from the first century BCE Isis is addressed as the "good spirit, mighty Sokonopis … good bestower of wealth" (ἀγαθὸς δαίμων, Σοκονῶπις κραταιός … πλουτοδότης ἀγαθός, Isidoros,

A number of distinctive or rare titles used by the Septuagint translators have now been subjected to some investigation and in many cases shown to be part of a wider naming practice in Greek. The exploration of divine names in the Septuagint began with Dodd.[10] More recently many studies have examined such terms as παντοκράτωρ, κύριος, θέος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἐπουράνιος, ὑψιστός, ἀντιλήμπτωρ, βοηθός, and drawn attention to their place within the Graeco-Roman world.[11] That these titles are not the main titles of the Greek pantheon should not be taken as immediate evidence of avoiding "pagan" nomenclature (a suggestion made by both Septuagint scholars and scholars of Greek religion). They are rather titles shared by other small cults in their environment and were adopted as part of the linguistic culture.[12] Furthermore, as we shall see, some of the titles could easily have been associated with major Greek deities and therefore there was not an attempt to exclude them universally. The importance for the history of the Jewish religion of the study of titles has been a neglected phenomenon, and this point has now also been taken up on the Hebrew and Aramaic side by Bernstein, who also emphasizes how the topic has been overlooked in the study of second temple Judaism.[13]

Praise Epithets

Some terms used of god are adjectives that are not functional epithets but are better classed as praise epithets, describing divine characteristics and used in honour of the god. In Hebrew they are frequent, but once translated into Greek they serve similar functions to those seen in our opening

Hymn II, 9–10). See V. F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus and the Cult of Isis* (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1972).

10 C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935).

11 See, e. g., Passoni Dell'Acqua, "La metafora biblica di Dio come roccia"; J. K. Aitken, "The God of the pre-Maccabees: Designations of the Divine in the Early Hellenistic Period," in *The God of Israel* (ed. R. P. Gordon; University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 64; Cambridge University Press, 2007), 246–266; E. Bons, "The Noun βοηθός as a Divine Title," in *The Reception of Septuagint Words in Jewish-Hellenistic and Christian Literature* (ed. E. Bons *et al.*; WUNT II/367; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 53–66; A. Angelini, Divine Names, in this volume.

12 See J. K. Aitken, "Jewish Worship amid Greeks: The Lexical Context of the Old Greek Psalter," in *Temples, Texts and Traditions* (ed. T. McLay; London: T&T Clark, 2015), 48–70.

13 See Aitken, "The God of the pre-Maccabees"; M. J. Bernstein, "Divine Titles and Epithets and the Sources of the 'Genesis Apocryphon,'" *JBL* 128 (2009): 291–310.

example from Roman baths of Caracalla. In such a context, the revelation of the divine natures in Exodus 34 is not unusual when rendered into Greek:

Κύριος ὁ θεὸς οἰκτίρμων καὶ ἐλεήμων, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός (Exod 34:6)

The Lord, the Lord God is compassionate and merciful, patient and very merciful and truthful

In the free composition of 2 Maccabees (possibly from the first century BCE) this tendency is seen in its fullness, drawing upon the biblical tradition but from an author presumably aware of the wider Hellenistic practices:

Κύριε κύριε ὁ θεός, ὁ πάντων κτίστης, ὁ φοβερὸς καὶ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ δίκαιος καὶ ἐλεήμων, ὁ μόνος βασιλεὺς καὶ χρηστός, ὁ μόνος χορηγός, ὁ μόνος δίκαιος καὶ παντοκράτωρ καὶ αἰώνιος (2 Macc 1:24–25)

O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful; you alone are king and are kind; you alone are bountiful; you alone are just and almighty and everlasting

That this is a more pronounced phenomenon in Jewish composition rather than translation indicates that it is not merely a phenomenon from translating the Hebrew. It is a reminder too that we need to give separate treatment to Jewish Greek compositions from translations. An example of the benefits in so doing is given below. The use of multiple titles was a norm in Greek at least by the later Hellenistic and Roman periods. This meant that specific titles of designation and identification were generalised so that more than one term could be used at a time and consequently they had the function of praising or glorification. Against such a background we may better appreciate the choice of terms in the Septuagint, and we may assess the contribution of Septuagint to the scholarship on the development of this phenomenon.

Rather than focussing on unusual or distinctive epithets in the Septuagint, the aim here is to examine the apparently ordinary and mundane. These are adjectives that we pass over too easily, often because they do not represent unsurprising translations of the Hebrew and since they are words that are ordinary and unremarkable in Greek. However, the manner of the concatenation of words for praise as attributes of the divine means that these words take on a new function and they function in the translations as praise epithets. Our examination will focus on two praise epithets in Deuteronomy 7. Reassurance is given to the Israelites that they will be successful in battle thanks to the support from God, whose attributes are listed in typical manner in the Hebrew and then translated appropriately by the Septuagint:

לא תערץ מפניהם כי־יהוה אלהיך בקרבך אל גדול ונורא׃

οὐ τρωθήσῃ ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν, ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεός σου ἐν σοί, θεὸς μέγας καὶ κραταιός (Deut 7:21)

You shall not be wounded before them, for the Lord your God with you is a great and strong god. (NETS)

The rendering θεὸς μέγας καὶ κραταιός is a natural rendering of the words and elicits little surprise. A distinction should be made at this point as the adjectives here are most probably predicative and not epithets *strictu sensu*. However, predicative adjectives can develop into epithets as we shall see, and at times the distinction between them is hard to maintain. There is a complexity to the use of the adjectives in Greek along with the possible alternate renderings of the Hebrew that there is sufficient to consider in some detail.

The Title μέγας "Great"

The first adjective applied to God (θέος) in Deut 7:21 is that of the unassuming μέγας. Understandably, this is the most frequent equivalent of Hebrew גדול throughout the Septuagint and is therefore unexceptional in itself. Occasional modification to context such as Lev 19:15, where גדול designates a ruler and is rendered by δυνάστης "chief," is indicative that the translators could choose alternatives if they felt appropriate. The use of μέγας is, nonetheless, frequent in the Septuagint.

In Exod 18:11 it is clearly operating as a predicative adjective but already in Deut 10:17 its function as an epithet of praise is observable.

νῦν ἔγνων ὅτι μέγας κύριος παρὰ πάντας τοὺς θεούς (Exod 18:11)

Now I know that the Lord is great beyond all the gods

ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν, οὗτος θεὸς τῶν θεῶν καὶ κύριος τῶν κυρίων, ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ ἰσχυρὸς καὶ ὁ φοβερός (Deut 10:17)

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and fear-inspiring

In Psalm 85 (LXX) we see it as an acclamation, and in other Psalms as well.

ὅτι μέγας εἶ σὺ καὶ ποιῶν θαυμάσια (Ps 86[85]:10)

Because you are great and one who does wondrous things

ὅτι μέγας κύριος καὶ αἰνετὸς σφόδρα (Ps 96[95]:4 = 1 Chr 16:25)

because great is the Lord and highly praised

In the apocryphal books it only appears in the specific form of address that reflects Psalmic language, both in Bel and the Dragon (a Greek composition) and the translation of Judith – in both texts the god is addressed as μέγας εἶ (cf. Ps 86[85]:10 σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς μόνος ὁ μέγας).

καὶ ἐγένετο ἅμα τῷ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς θύρας ἐπιβλέψας ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπὶ τὴν τράπεζαν ἐβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ **Μέγας** εἶ, Βηλ, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν παρὰ σοὶ δόλος οὐδὲ εἷς. (Bel 18)

And it happened that as the king opened the door he saw at the table and called out in a loud voice, "You are great, Bel, and there is none more deceitful than you.

καὶ ἀναβοήσας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ εἶπεν **Μέγας** εἶ, κύριε ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Δανιηλ, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν πλὴν σοῦ ἄλλος. (Bel 41)

And calling out in a loud voice, he said, "You are great, lord the god of Daniel, and there is none other than you."

ὑμνήσω τῷ θεῷ μου ὕμνον καινόν, Κύριε, μέγας εἶ καὶ ἔνδοξος. (Judith 16:13)

I will sing to my god a new song, "Lord, you are great and worthy of honour."

In Bel 41 the exclamation is intended as a reversal of the king's earlier exclamation Μέγας εἶ, Βηλ and therefore the two occurrences are all part of one narrative unit.

The title μέγας in the Classical period was a specific designation of certain gods, but by the Hellenistic period had become a general title of praise.[14] It was first used of Zeus and of some other major gods such as Kronos, and could be applied with a specification in certain cases. Thus we have the "great god" or "the greats gods" as a periphrastic title of certain gods, and the Great Mother (of the gods) denoting Cybele. In the Classical period there are a number of examples of a great god, but always with a specific context and a circumscribed designation. The Septuagint in using the term is not only translating the Hebrew but choosing a specific designation used in acclamations of gods in Greek. It is notable, however, that the popularity of μέγας develops in the Hellenistic period. In particular, it is used in the ancient near east when translating native Egyptian and Semitic terms such that we can see the Septuagint as part of the wider cultural world of the near east.

In Egypt the epithet μέγας is added to Egyptian deities' names. This can often be repeated as a form of superlative, usually only for minor deities:

καθάπερ Ἑρμῆς ὁ μέγας καὶ μέγας. (OGIS 90 [Rosetta stone], l. 19)

Φραμαρῆτι θεῷ μεγάλῳ μεγάλῳ (Fayoum 1:35, *ca.* 1st cent. BCE)[15]

14 Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 141–145.

15 É. Bernand, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques du Fayoum*, (3 Vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1975–1981).

We even find in a Jewish inscription (*JIGRE* 116, dated 29 BCE) this repetition, although understandably the Jewish identity of the inscription has been doubted.[16] The designation of god as Theos Hypsistos renders it at least possible that it is Jewish:

Θεῶι μεγάλῳ | μεγάλῳ ὑψίστῳ | ὑπὲρ Ἐπιτυχίας | τῆς καὶ Διονυσίας | [κ]αὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς | [Ἁ]ρποχρᾶτος καὶ | τῶν τέκνων | κατ᾽ εὐχήν·

To the greatest and highest God, on behalf of Epitychia also called Dionysia and on behalf of her husband Harpochras and their children, in fulfilment of a vow.

In Egypt this use of μέγας reflects the Egyptian *ʿaʾa*, often encountered in repetition too.[17] Such repetition as superlative leads to the famous Hermes *trismegistos*.

It appears that the trend in the use of μέγας develops when these titles are calques of other titles: in Egyptian *ʿaʾa*; in Aramaic רב; in Hebrew גדול/רב. Thus a common title in Syria θεῷ μεγάλῳ Ναζαλῶν (IGLS V. 2697, 2700, 2702) has an equivalent in Palmyrene in the phrase L'LH' RB' DNZLY (CIS II.3.3911).[18] There is a broad cultural phenomenon of eastern gods using the title great and this being transmitted into Greek. The Septuagint and other Jewish sources do not stand apart in this and were probably not unaware of μέγας as a divine title in Greek. This would account for the consistency in choice of this translation equivalent across the various cultures. This eastern phenomenon would have been supported by internal developments within Greek whereby titles are universalised and become mere terms of praise rather than designations.

The combination of μέγας with other titles is not an infrequent phenomenon. It could be combined with other titles as we see in a Jewish context in *JIGRE* 13 (37 BCE) where god is referred to as both μέγας "great" and ἐπήκοος "one who listens to prayer":

[ὑπὲρ] βασ[ιλίσ]|[ση]ς καὶ β[ασι]|[λ]έως θεῶι [με]|γάλωι ἐ[πηκό]ωι Ἄλυπ[ος τὴν] | προσε[υχὴν] | ἐπόει.

On behalf of the queen and king, for the great God who listens to prayer, Alypus made the proseuche.

16 For discussion see W. Horbury and D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 200.

17 Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 143.

18 Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 144–145. The inscription is discussed in F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 299.

The Title μέγιστος "Greatest"

Although in the Septuagint we have only seen so far the use of μέγας, it is sensible at this point to consider its superlative μέγιστος. It can be treated as a separate epithet, especially when we see a notable difference between the two forms in Jewish literature. There is a marked shift from the translated to the non-translated books: the superlative μέγιστος, which is absent from the translated books, is preferred over μέγας in the non-translated books. This makes one wonder about the limits of the translation norms, and the preferred natural Greek usage. In other words, the non-use of the superlative in the Septuagint may arise from a precise translation method for the Hebrew גָּדוֹל, ~~without~~ in itself does not imply any superlative sense. In Greek it is usually thought that there is no obvious difference between the use of the two titles (any particular god being referred to interchangeably as μέγας or μέγιστος), but the Septuagint evidence raises questions on this.

We have already referred to the occasional use of μέγας in the Apocrypha where it is used in reflection of the Psalmic language. The superlative μέγιστος by contrast only and always appears as an epithet in Jewish Greek composition literature (as in 2 Macc 3:36: ἔργα τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ "the works of the very great god"). It appears once in the Additions to Esther:

οὖντας δὲ υἱοὺς τοῦ ὑψίστου **μεγίστου** ζῶντος θεοῦ (Est 16:16 [Addition E.16])

being children of the most high, most great, living god

It is likewise used once in 2 Maccabees, although intriguingly, in the same work, the Jerusalem temple is three times described as μέγιστος (2 Macc 2:19; 14:13, 31):

ἐξεμαρτύρει δὲ πᾶσιν ἅπερ ἦν ὑπ᾽ ὄψιν τεθεαμένος ἔργα **τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ**. (2 Macc 3:36)

He witnessed to all about the deeds of the greatest god, which he had seen with his own eyes.

The book 3 Maccabees is the most consistent in its use, referring to god six times as the "most great":

διακομισθεὶς δὲ εἰς Ιεροσόλυμα καὶ θύσας τῷ μεγίστῳ θεῷ (3 Macc 1:9).[19]

Once he reached Jerusalem, he sacrificed to the most great god.

It is tempting to seek a theological reading into each and every occurrence of the term, and the superlative adjective could lend itself to such an inter-

19 See too 3 Macc 1:16; 3:11; 4:16; 5:25; 7:22.

pretation. It might have been chosen to express the superiority of the god of Israel over other gods, especially in the context of the Maccabean crisis and the possible *theomachia* of 3 Maccabees.[20] In that it would be an echo of the sentiment in Exod 18:11, cited above, of god as greater than all other gods (μέγας κύριος παρὰ πάντας τοὺς θεούς). However, the frequency of μέγιστος as an epithet in Greek should caution against this. When it is realised that this is a standard and frequent designation of a god, the particularity or potential force of the Jewish use is minimized. Indeed, it appears that when μέγιστος is used of gods in Greek, it functions as a term of praise and not of exclusion and the superlative ~~marking~~ the elative use, expressing the highest degree ("most great"), and without the implication of comparison or superiority.[21] For, it is used of many different gods and is not specific to one. In Stratonicea in Caria (IStrat 663), from the Flavian era, three different gods are all exclaimed as μέγιστος equally.[22]

Comparative data from epigraphy for the use of μέγιστος as a praise epithet are almost exclusively Roman period.[23] At that point μέγιστος appears slightly more frequently than μέγας, but little differentiation is clear; both can be used interchangeably. Looking at the Septuagint we see some distinction being drawn, perhaps suggesting that the preferred form is μέγιστος when having the freedom of not translating. The simple μέγας, by contrast, is a suitable rendering of the Hebrew, especially when there is a long history of its appearance as an epithet. Can this be integrated into the history of the Greek terms? All the Jewish apocryphal sources can be dated most likely at the earliest to the first half of the first century BCE, which pushes backwards the dates of use of such terms by some 50 years or more, in comparison to the epigraphy. For, Parker observes that an acclamatory formula "Great is X" is attested from 39 BCE, but that dedications in the form of the "greatest god" do not occur before the second century CE. While he remains correct on these particular formulae, the Jewish evidence is a clear sign of development. The adoption by at least 37 BCE (*JIGRE* 13) in extant Jewish inscriptions of the use of μέγας may well reflect earlier Jewish use, whose traces lie in the

20 See J. R. C. Cousland, "Dionysus *theomachos*? Echoes of the Bacchae in 3 Maccabees," *Biblica* 82 (2001): 539–548.

21 Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 143–144. The translation in NETS of "supreme" for μέγιστος when designating god would, therefore, not appear to be the best choice. One may also compare other divine superlatives in inscriptions, such as ἐπιφανέστατος. On the elative use of the superlative, see E. van Emde Boas *et al.*, *The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), § 32.2.

22 Ç. Şahin, *Die Inschriften von Stratonikeia: Part II,1: Lagina, Stratonikeia und Umgebung* (Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien 22,1; Bonn: Habelt, 1982).

23 Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 142–144.

literary sources mentioned. The acclamation in Bel and Judith of μέγας εἶ comes very close to it. Indeed, the introduction into Egypt of the addition of μέγας to a traditional title is already seen in 240 BCE. Jewish references to the "greatest god" are not dedications as they are found in literary sources, but they nonetheless open up the picture of how much and how early the traditions found later in Graeco-Roman religion already appear in Jewish sources.

The Title κραταιός "Strong"

Commentators and text editors seem untroubled by the mismatch between the Hebrew and Greek in Deut 7:21, where נורא is rendered by κραταιός. The nifal of ירא is understood in two principal ways in the Septuagint. Most common of all is the reading φοβερός, as in Gen 28:17:

καὶ ἐφοβήθη καὶ εἶπεν Ὡς φοβερὸς ὁ τόπος οὗτος· οὐκ ἔστιν τοῦτο ἀλλ᾽ ἢ οἶκος θεοῦ, καὶ αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

And he was afraid and spoke, "How awesome is this place. This is none other than a house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

It is clear that the predicate has been understood as derived from the verb ירא "to fear." Probably the same understanding lies behind θαυμαστός in:

θαυμαστὸς ἐν δόξαις, ποιῶν τέρατα (Exod 15:11)

Marvellous in famous deeds, performing wonders

This preferred translation equivalent is repeated in Exod 34:10; Deut 28:58 and Ps 68(67):36.[24] A second interpretation of the verb is as ἐπιφανής "manifest," deriving it from ראה "to see." In Jdg 13:6 this is understandable where the Hebrew verb and cognates are actually used in the context:

ומראהו כמראה מלאך האלהים נורא מאד

and his appearance was like the appearance of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring

καὶ ἡ ὅρασις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὅρασις ἀγγέλου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιφανὴς σφόδρα

The translation equivalent ἐπιφανής is frequent and it therefore is an intentional interpretation, as a manifestation of divine appearance. It is notable however, that whenever נורא is used with reference to God, we do not find ἐπιφανής chosen. This may be an attempt to avoid a direct association with either Hellenistic gods or Ptolemaic kings. We only find in

24 See A. Le Boulluec and P. Sandevoir, *L'Exode: La Bible d'Alexandrie* (LXX/2, Paris: Cerf, 1989), 174, 339.

Mal 1:14 that the name of God is said to be ἐπιφανής and in Zeph 2:11 it is interpreted as a verb rather than an adjective: ἐπιφανήσεται κύριος. Instead φοβερός is most frequently used with reference to God,[25] and θαυμαστός secondarily.[26]

Therefore, the rendering of נורא in Deuteronomy 7 by κραταιός is distinctive. The oddity of the Septuagint choice in Deuteronomy 7 is that κραταιός is most often a rendering of the Hebrew חזק, often in reference to the powerful hand or arm of either Pharaoh or God:

כי בחזק יד הוציא יהוה אתכם מזה

ἐν γὰρ χειρὶ κραταιᾷ ἐξήγαγεν ὑμᾶς κύριος ἐντεῦθεν (Exod 13:3)

For by a mighty hand the Lord brought you out from there.

כי ביד חזקה הוצאך יהוה ממצרים:

ἐν γὰρ χειρὶ κραταιᾷ ἐξήγαγέν σε κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου. (Exod 13:9)

For with a mighty hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt.

In this sense the adjective κραταιός could be said to be a divine attribute, but it is not ordinarily used of God directly. In Deuteronomy there seems to be no obvious textual variant or easy misreading that could have generated it. It is possible that the translator had a Vorlage containing עזז or cognates, since, as we shall see, this is the likely Vorlage for some uses in the Psalms. This does not seem to have come about by textual corruption or misreading, and must have been an association either in the translator's mind or in a scribal copyist who amended the text. We know all too well how variants can arise from substitution of synonyms or near synonyms. This title for God of κραταιός does gain, however, a small degree of popularity in the Septuagint, appearing again in Neh 9:32. In this case there is a Hebrew equivalent for the word, which seems to be הגבור and it is possible that the whole Septuagint section is under the influence of Deuteronomy:

ועתה אלהינו האל הגדול הגבור והנורא

καὶ νῦν, ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ ἰσχυρὸς ὁ μέγας ὁ κραταιὸς καὶ ὁ φοβερὸς (Neh. 9:32)

Here it is in direct address to God and therefore is properly a praise epithet. The adjective κραταιός appears again twice in the Psalms used of God. This time Hebrew MT preserves the readings עזוז and עז:

25 Deut 10:17; Ps 47(46):3; 66(65):6; 76(75):8; 89(88):8; 97(96):4; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5; 4:8; 9:32; 1 Chr 16:25; name of God: Ps 99(98):3; 111(110):9.

26 Exod 15:11; Ps 68(67):36; name of God: Deut 28:58.

יהוה עזוז וגבור יהוה גבור מלחמה:

κύριος κραταιὸς καὶ δυνατός,
κύριος δυνατὸς ἐν πολέμῳ. (Ps 24(23):8)

כמופת הייתי לרבים ואתה מחסי־עז:

I have been like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.

ὡσεὶ τέρας ἐγενήθην τοῖς πολλοῖς,
καὶ σὺ βοηθὸς κραταιός. (Ps 71(70):7)

Here too the adjective appears in direct address and forms a praise of God. Finally, we find it in descriptions of God's nature or character in both Proverbs and Job.

כי־גאלם חזק

ὁ γὰρ λυτρούμενος αὐτοὺς κύριος κραταιός ἐστιν
καὶ κρινεῖ τὴν κρίσιν αὐτῶν μετὰ σοῦ. (Prov 23:11)

For the one who redeems them is a strong lord
and he judges their case with you

חכם לבב ואמיץ

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength

σοφὸς γάρ ἐστιν διανοίᾳ, κραταιός τε καὶ μέγας·(Job 9:4)

For he is wise in mind, both strong and great

Note here in Job the same combination with μέγας that we see in the biblical text of Deut 7:21. The extant MT of Job does not call for such a translation, such that the translator may have chosen the phrase as an allusion to Deuteronomy.

A final appearance of the adjective κραταιός in reference to God is in two passages in the Psalms of Solomon. The Psalms of Solomon are disputed whether they are translations from a Hebrew or Aramaic original or whether they are original Greek compositions.[27] Whichever they are, they continue the language from the biblical text.

εἶπεν Ἐγὼ κύριος γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης ἔσομαι·
καὶ οὐκ ἐπέγνω ὅτι ὁ θεὸς μέγας,
κραταιὸς ἐν ἰσχύι αὐτοῦ τῇ μεγάλῃ. (PssSol 2:29)

He said, "I will be lord of land and sea,"
and he did not know that God is great,
strong in his great might.

27 See D. Pevarello, "Psalms of Solomon," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint* (ed. J. K. Aitken; London: T&T Clark, 2015), 429–430.

In two instances we have God described as κραταιός, in the second of which in the same combination with μέγας that we see in the biblical text:

ἐξάραι ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ποιοῦντας ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ πᾶσαν ἀδικίαν,
ὅτι κριτὴς μέγας καὶ κραταιὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ. (PssSol 4:24)

May God uproot those who perform all injustice with arrogance;
for a great and strong judge is the Lord our God in righteousness.

This small popularity of κραταιός is significant since it is to be found also as an occasional divine title in Egypt. The adjective κραταιός is not standard anywhere else in Greece, but its appearance in Egypt is probably due to its being an equivalent of an Egyptian term.[28] Such examples are most likely translations of Egyptian epithets but the lack of precise parallels between Egyptian and Greek text does not make it easy to be sure. An example comes from in the first-century BCE hymn to Isis, one of four hymns said to be inscribed by a certain Isidorus. In the second hymn ~~one~~, quoted above in note 9, we read of Σοκονῶπις κραταιός ("mighty Sokonopis," II.9). The Egyptian nature of the adjective is matched by others in the same section, including the attribute πλουτοδότης known elsewhere but most common in Egypt:[29]

πλουτοδότι βασίλεια θεῶν, Ἑρμοῦθι ἄνασσα,

O wealth-giving queen of the gods, lady Hermouthis (Isidorus I.1)

Ἄμμωνι | πλουτοδότῃ, |θεῷ ἐπιφανεῖ (IGR I,5 1131.2–4; 1/2 c. CE)

To wealth-giving Ammon, god manifest

The adjective κραταιός continues in later Egyptian texts too (Ἀνούβιδι κραταιῷ, SEG 8:574; Arsinoe-Krokodilopolis, 3rd century CE; κατὰ τῶν κραταίων ὀνομάτων σαλβαθβαλ αυθγερωταβαλ βασυθατεω Audollent, *Defix. Tab.* 237; 2nd/3rd century CE).

This evidence suggests that the adjective did function as a divine epithet, even if the instances are rare and localized. How do we evaluate these data? A cautious evaluation would judge them as cases of polygenesis – that occasionally the Egyptians chose rather general term for strong, and at the same time the Jewish translators also chose the same term to match the Hebrew עז and cognates. It is not such a specialised word to rule this out as a possibility. One weakness in this position, however, is that ἰσχύς and cognates are far more common equivalents for the Hebrew than κραταιός. More likely, the

28 G. Ronchi, *Lexicon theonymon rerumque sacrarum et divinarum ad Aegyptum pertinentium: quae in papyris ostracis titulis Graecis Latinisque in Aegypto repertis laudantur* (5 Vols.; Milano: Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1974–1977); Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 105.

29 Parker, *Greek Gods Abroad*, 109.

particular use represents a term that was acceptable in some circles as an epithet of god. Language operates as part of a wider shared cultural tradition and there were constraints on the choice of terms according to acceptability in the language culture. In this case the Septuagint represents early attestation of the use of this term for god that we find appearing in (dated later) Egyptian sources, although the Isis hymns are not much later from the first century BCE. The similarity in language to what we see in the Isis hymns is also of no surprise. A number of terms that are distinctive in the Septuagint are also found applied to Isis in the hymns of Isidorus. These terms include ἐλεήμων, εὐείλατος, and παντοκράτωρ (in the feminine παντοκράτειρα).[30] We even learn from Stoabaeus (1.41.44; 978) that Isis and Osiris were the "helpers" βοηθοί, the term used of God in the Psalms. It can be seen that Jews adopted practices and institutions from Egyptians, and this includes some of the language of praise found in Jewish Greek texts from Egypt, and especially in the Septuagint. Similar language indicates a shared linguistic tradition, but it is not easy to determine the direction of borrowing. It has sometimes been proposed that some terms are Jewish innovations that were later adopted by other Greek speakers. This would imply that such contact came from both the reading of the Septuagint itself and from personal contact with the liturgical life of Jews in Egypt. Perhaps instead we should be reminded of the fact that the Septuagint comes from the early Hellenistic period when we have few other literary prose sources and it potentially preserves the remnants of a much ~~deeper~~ use of words.

A final point can be noted about κραταιός. The association of strength with the deity is elaborated in a number of terms in the Septuagint. The same idea is conveyed in the title παντοκράτωρ that appears after the Pentateuch, but also as noted is found in its feminine form in the Isis hymns. Hebrew metaphors of god as "rock" or "fortress" imply strength and these are accordingly rendered at times by terms denoting "strength." One odd equivalent is the noun στερέωμα, which is twice used of god (Ps 18(17):3; Ps 71(70):3), in each case rendering the Hebrew for "rock":

κύριος στερέωμά μου καὶ καταφυγή μου καὶ ῥύστης μου,
ὁ θεός μου βοηθός μου, καὶ ἐλπιῶ ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν (Ps 18[17]:3)

The Lord is my firmness and my place of refuge and my rescuer;
my God is my helper, and I will hope in him,

This noun is known in Greek, but it or its adjectival equivalent στερεός do not appear to have been used of gods elsewhere in Greek. Nor was it adopted

30 Aitken, "Language of Praise."

as a divine epithet in Judaism or Christianity, apart from in obvious biblical quotations. Its lack of attestation in Christian inscriptions underlines its slight oddity.[31] It is nonetheless the semantic equivalent of κραταίωμα, another noun that appears in the Psalms but one that is not attested before the Septuagint:

ὅτι κραταίωμά μου καὶ καταφυγή μου εἶ σὺ (Ps 31[30]:4)

because you are my empowerment and my refuge

It appears a total of four times in reference to god (Pss 25[24]:14; 28[27]:8; Ps 31[30]:4; 43[42]:2), and is ~~attempting~~ to draw an association with the adjective κραταιός.

Conclusion

I have tried to outline the possible significance of some seemingly unimportant adjectives in the Septuagint. Once translated from Hebrew into Greek the adjectives become praise epithets in address to god, and comparable uses can be found in non-Jewish sources. One methodological problem we encounter from the start is the question of what makes an epithet. Irrespective of the functions of the words in Hebrew, the translators chose vocabulary that conformed to Greek epithets, either by taking existing epithets in the language or choosing words that followed the conventions of epithet formation. Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic evidence helps to place the Septuagint within its context. Examination of the Hebrew only partially explains the lexical choices. Although the multiple use of adjectives, most common in the Greek Psalms but also seen in Exodus and 2 Maccabees, arises from the translation of the Hebrew, its conformity to Hellenistic praise practices is also of significance.

In this period the development in Greek of the use of certain adjectives as praise epithets is itself motivated by language contact in the Mediterranean region. In Egypt, Syria and Palestine Greek was in contact with local languages and this led to similar adoptions of terms. This linguistic and cultural nexus is coupled with developments within Greek that result in a fruitful expansion in the use of divine epithets. The Septuagint plays its part in that history and should be accorded its place within it. The adoption by Jewish writers of these adjectives is not merely for the sake of representing

31 See Aitken, "Divine Epithets."

the Hebrew semantics, but to present terms that were in conformity with developments within Greek.

There is a tendency in the study of the Septuagint to examine words in detail with close attention to translation features, and secondarily to bring in the evidence of the Graeco-Roman world where relevant. In this we are perhaps not as ambitious as we might be. The complexities of dealing with a translation, and a translation that has a difficult source text primarily preserved in far later witnesses, render the analysis of the Septuagint provisional. It is rarely (though occasionally) utilized by historians of Greek religion, while Septuagint scholars themselves are unpractised in the study of Greek religion in general and often content with minor observations. And yet, the value of the Septuagint as a Hellenistic period literary source and a major body of religious Greek writing, should be recognized. It is not only what we may learn about the Jewish view of divine names that is important, but also what the Septuagint contributes to the history of Greek and the history of the Greek religion.

While the Septuagint spans some centuries (up to first or second centuries CE), for the larger part it is derived from the third to first centuries BCE, encompassing the Hellenistic period proper. There is a remarkable lack of Greek literature from this period and especially the literary evidence for Greek religion is lacking. Even epigraphic evidence before the Roman period is sparse for the study of religion. Therefore, the Septuagint as largely datable from a period where other evidence is slight stands out as so important. It is noteworthy that much of our evidence for the translation of gods in the Semitic speaking world is later. While we can learn from the translation of the gods in the eastern Mediterranean, interest in that area is often drawn from Roman sources. Thus Palmyrene bilingual inscriptions are particularly helpful but largely deriving from second to third centuries CE. The same applies to Punic and Nabatean evidence. Egypt does provide a better source for evidence, and is of direct relevance to the Septuagint, but remains underutilized. The Septuagint therefore serves as an early stage in the development of translating Semitic divine titles into Greek but can easily be overlooked. A tendency to focus on the stereotyped rendering in the Septuagint leads to seeing the translation choices as accidental consequences of translating. However, the range of titles that are commonly shared with Greek religious tradition, despite possible sensibilities towards pagan terms, suggests they were well aware of the choices they were making.

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