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Text-Critical Question Begging in Nahum 1,2–8: Re-evaluating the Evidence and Arguments

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1 Introduction

The debate over the apparently partial acrostic in the Masoretic text (MT) of Nahum 1 has existed only recently in interpretive history. Less than one hundred and fifty years have passed since Franz Delitzsch first noted the poetic phenomenon.¹ Since then, much scholarly debate has arisen over whether or not there actually is an acrostic in Nah 1,2–8 at all. That debate is of course directed towards the text as composed, the implication being that the MT is corrupted and needs emendation to »restore« the original form. That initially there was an acrostic is so axiomatic that even the editors of the MT have arranged the text of Nahum 1 as an acrostic.²

Yet the debate remains unsettled. Those who emend the text disagree amongst themselves, and many object to emendation entirely. The reasoning for each position largely hinges upon the versional evidence, including the Septuagint (LXX).³ Yet that the validity of an appeal to the LXX as a text-critical witness depends on its translational character is commonly ignored. Septuagint scholarship has long recognized the importance of understanding the translational tendencies of

¹ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 1, trans. David Eaton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), 205.

² Michael H. Floyd, »The Chimerical Acrostic of Nahum 1:2–10,« *JBL* 113 (1994): 421–437 (421 n. 3).

³ I use »Septuagint« or »LXX« to refer generally to the Greek tradition of the Bible. I assume that the Göttingen critical edition sufficiently reflects the Old Greek translation, and therefore use it throughout my analysis; Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Duodecim prophetae*, Septuaginta XIII (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd rev. ed. 1984).

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a given unit or book prior to judging how Greek renderings function text-critically for the MT, if at all.

In light of certain translational features in LXX-Nah 1,2–8, then, this paper outlines the ways in which arguments for emendation of the Hebrew on the basis of the LXX in fact beg the question.⁴ In the end, it is evident that the LXX is inconsistently applied text-critically – both invoked to justify emendation towards an acrostic and ignored where inconvenient – and that the textual arguments for emendation that employ the LXX are weak or erroneous regardless.

2 Nahum 1: Common Approaches to Emendation

Biblical commentators usually handle the text in one of three ways. The most common is to emend the text to »restore« the acrostic.⁵ Other scholars allow the text to stand as it is, either arguing that the acrostic is intentionally partial,⁶ or that the near alphabetic structure of Nah 1,2–8 is merely coincidental.⁷ Most

⁴ Similarly, Walter A. Maier, in discussing an argument for emending verse 4, forcefully states that it is »a circle argument and proves nothing.« *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 165 f. Certain of Maier's points are built upon here, and extended to other contended aspects of the purported acrostic.

⁵ For example, Jimmy J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 48; John M. P. Smith, *Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1974), 271 f.; 287 f.; Lothar Peritt, *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah*, ATD 25/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 8. More listed in Klaas Spronk, »Acrostics in the Book of Nahum,« *ZAW* 110 (1998): 209–222; idem, *Nahum*, HCOT (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997), 22–26.

⁶ So Tremper Longman, »Nahum,« in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009): 765–830, 775; Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NAC 20 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 165; Thomas Renz, »A Perfectly Broken Acrostic in Nahum I?« *JHS* 9 (2009): 1–26; Simon J. DeVries, »The Acrostic of Nahum in the Jerusalem Liturgy,« *VT* 16 (1966): 476–481; Charles L. Taylor, Jr., »The Book of Nahum: Introduction and Exegesis,« in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 6, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956): 953–969; Duane L. Christensen, »The Acrostic of Nahum Reconsidered,« *ZAW* 87 (1975): 17–30, although he later changes his view; see idem, »The Book of Nahum: The Question of Authorships within the Canonical Process,« *JETS* 31 (1988): 51–58; idem, *Nahum: A Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24F (New Haven: Yale University Press), 173–176.

⁷ Most recently Heinz-Josef Fabry, *Nahum*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2006); Gerlinde Baumann, *Gottes Gewalt im Wandel: Traditionsgeschichtliche und intertextuelle Studien zu Nahum 1,2–8*, WMANT 108 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005), 52–60, cited in Klaas Spronk, »The Line-Acrostic in Nahum 1: New Evidence from Ancient Greek Manuscripts and from the Literary Analysis of the Hebrew Text,« in *The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis*, ed. Raymond de

scholars now agree that if indeed there is an acrostic it only covers the first half of the Hebrew alphabet. But, as shown in Figure 1, what would be the *dālet* (v. 4c), *zayin* (v. 6a), and *yôd* (v. 7b) lines begin with the »wrong« letters.⁸ Below, a survey of common arguments from scholars who emend the text is given for each line.

נָקַם יְהוָה וּבָעַל חַמָּה	(א) אֵל קִנּוּא וְנָקַם יְהוָה
וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לֹא יִבְיִי:	נָקַם יְהוָה לְצַרֵּי
וְנִקְוָה לֹא יִנְקָה יְהוָה	יְהוָה אֶרְדָּ אֲפִים וּגְדֹל־כֶּתֶךְ
וְעָנָן אֶבֶק רִגְלָיו:	(ב) בְּסוּפָה וּבִשְׁעָרָה דְרָכָו
וְכָל־הַנְּהַרֹת הַחֲרִיב	(ג) גִּוְעַר בָּיִם וַיִּבְשֶׁהוּ
וַפָּרַח לְבָנוֹ אֲמֶלֶל:	(ד) אֲמֶלֶל בְּשׁוֹן וְכַרְמֶל
וְהַגְבְּעוֹת הַתַּמְנִנּוּ	(ה) הָרִים רָעֲשׂוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
וַתִּבֵּל וְכָל־יִשְׁבֵי בָהּ:	(ו) וַתִּשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵי
וּמִי יָקוּם בְּחֲרוֹן אַפָּו	(ז) לִפְנֵי זַעַמוֹ מִי יַעֲמֹד
וְהַצְרִים נִתְצוּ מִמֶּנּוּ:	(ח) חֲמַתּוֹ נִתְכָּה כְּאֵשׁ
לִמְעוֹז בָּיִם צָרָה	(ט) טוֹב יְהוָה
וּבְשֵׁטֶף עֵבֶר ⁸	(י) וַיִּדְעַ חֲסִי בּוֹ:
וְאִבְיִי יִרְדֹּף־חֲשָׁד:	(כ) כָּלָה יַעֲשֶׂה מְקוֹמָה

Figure 1: The »Broken« Acrostic of Nah 1,2–8

2.1 Verse 4a: The *dālet* Line

The first textual issue is in v. 4c. Here a *dālet* line is expected, yet the line begins with a *pu'lal* verb form, אֲמֶלֶל, »to wither«.⁹ Importantly, the same word also ends the line in v. 4d. Those who emend often note that the LXX and other versions contain different verbs in lines 4c and d (Fig. 2). Since the LXX translation is close to the Hebrew source text on many levels, some take the LXX as a witness to a

Hoop, Marjo C. A. Korpel and Stanley E. Porter, *Pericope 7* (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 228–240, 228 n. 6; Bob Becking, »Divine Wrath and the Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Nahum,« *SJOT* 9 (1995): 227–296; Floyd, »The Chimerical Acrostic of Nahum 1:2–10;« Alfred O. Haldar, *Studies in the Book of Nahum* (Uppsala: Lundequist, 1947); John S. Cochrane, *Literary Features of Nahum* (Th. M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1954); Meier, *The Book of Nahum* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Michael Weigl, »Current Research on the Book of Nahum: Exegetical Methods in Turmoil?,« *CurBS* 9 (2001): 81–130, 85 f.; Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum* (London: Continuum, 2002); David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988).

⁸ Although he fails to mention the missing *yôd* line, Longman adds that at the beginning of the acrostic »all the other letters occur at an interval of one bicolon, but the first line (*alep*) is three times as long.« »Nahum«: 773.

⁹ »אמלל«: HALOT, 63.

Hebrew *Vorlage* in which the verbs also differed. With the acrostic writ largely in mind, these scholars typically propose a form of the verb דלל , »to become small«, as the first word of line 4c.¹⁰

In defense of this emendation, Roberts states that a repeated verb in parallel lines is »a very unusual feature«, and adds that »one *needs* a verb beginning with *daleth* for the continuation of the acrostic.«¹¹ After discussing some of the difficulties with emendation, Spronk insists that to recover the acrostic »we *have to assume* that ... the original *dalet*-word was erroneously replaced by אמלל «, since »repetition of the word strengthens the chiasmic structure.«¹²

Bashan withers , and Carmel	אמלל בשן וכרמל	4c
and the blossom of Lebanon withers	ופרח לבנון אמלל	4d
Basanitis is diminished , and Carmelos	ὠλιγώθη ἡ Βασανίτις καὶ ὁ Κάρμηλος	4c
and the flora of Libanou died ¹³	καὶ τὰ ἐξανθοῦντα τοῦ Λιβάνου ἐξέλιπεν	4d

Figure 2: The Hebrew and Greek of Verse 4c–d

2.2 Verse 6a: The zayin Line

The second textual issue is in v. 6a, where a *zayin* line is expected. Scholars suggest inverting word order and altering syntax to »recover« the acrostic (Fig. 3),¹⁴ although it requires consonantal emendation of לפני to לפניו without witnesses to such a reading.¹⁵ Even BHS recommends the change, also without textual witness, simply noting »t-stropha«. Roberts asserts that »[t]o maintain the acrostic, one should slightly emend the order of the text«, arguing that in the MT »unusual word order in poetic texts« tends to revert to »more common patterns«

10 דלל : HALOT, 223, where it erroneously reads »Nah 1₁₄«. This emendation first proposed by George B. Gray, »The Alphabetic Poem in Nahum«: 243–273, 253, cited in Renz, »Perfectly Broken«: 17; cf. Spronk, *Nahum*, 40; Kenneth C. Hanson, *Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study* (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1984), 298. See Maier, *Book of Nahum*, 167 for other suggested *dālet*-words. Spronk does not take this view of the versions as textual evidence, which he says is »not conclusive«, but he gives other reasons for emendation, discussed below. *Nahum*, 40.

11 *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, and *Zephaniah*, 44. Emphasis mine.

12 Spronk, *Nahum*, 40. Emphasis mine. As discussed below, he only has to assume this because he assumes the acrostic was in fact originally present.

13 All translations are my own.

14 E.g., Roberts, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, and *Zephaniah*, 44. So also Spronk, *Nahum*, 44.

15 Longman, »Nahum«: 774; 791.

over time.¹⁶ Spronk again suggests that a scribe, unaware of the acrostic, altered the line for »a more clear chiasitic structure.«¹⁷

זעמו מי יעמוד לפניו

His indignation, who will stand before it?

Figure 3: The Emended *zayin* Line

2.3 Verse 7b: The *yôd* Line

The final textual issue is in v. 7b, where a *yôd* line is expected. Some commentators¹⁸ along with BHS suggest emending the text to יהוה ידע, again without textual evidence. Roberts says that to reconstruct the line the conjunction »*must* be dropped« and יהוה added, and that it lengthens the line »closer to the norm.«¹⁹ Oddly, few commentators mention the *yôd* line as a difficulty for the acrostic, presumably defaulting to the second consonant to maintain the alphabetical pattern, or dismissing the conjunction as a later accretion.²⁰

3 The Septuagint in OT Textual Criticism

Taking these common proposals for recovering the acrostic, our question is whether such emendations are warranted. First, a few words are necessary on the role of the LXX in Old Testament textual criticism. One must ask »to what extent the divergences from the Hebrew text are conditioned by the linguistic possibilities of Greek as compared to Hebrew«,²¹ as well as understand the translational characteristics of a given text, prior to positing other reasons for those divergences,²²

16 Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 44. Emphasis mine. Roberts' rationale for the standardization of poetic form from »unusual« to »usual« over time is unclear.

17 Spronk, »Acrostics«: 220; Cf. idem, *Nahum*, 40; 44.

18 E.g., Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 45.

19 Ibid. Emphasis mine. Roberts is again unclear as to how he has arrived at the »norm« for poetic line length.

20 See Maier, »*Book of Nahum*«: 178.

21 Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000), 28.

22 E.g., reading or comprehension error, theological exegesis, textual corruption in transmission, a physically damaged or unclear source text, differing reading traditions, or some combination. See Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker

particularly a different *Vorlage*. Studies show that a text very close or identical to the MT »lies behind the reconstructed text of what we accept as »the LXX«, certainly in the Twelve Prophets.²³ Indeed, the source and target texts in »most units« of the LXX have proved close enough to justify assuming that a relationship exists.²⁴ Therefore, this study takes the MT as its point of departure.²⁵

3.1 The Translational Character of Nah 1,2–8

To determine the value of LXX-Nahum 1 for recovering the supposed acrostic in MT-Nahum 1 the translational character of the former will be overviewed here. Notably, scholars have generally agreed that one person translated the Septuagint Twelve Prophets (LXX-TP).²⁶ While particular textual units still have unique features, this point supplies a principle of translational unity significant for this study.

Academic, 2000), 92; Arie Van der Kooij, *The Oracle of Tyre: The Septuagint of Isaiah 23 as Version and Vision*, VTSup 71 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 5; Theo A. W. van der Louw, *Transformation in the Septuagint: Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies*, CBET 47 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 8; Myrto Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence and Intertextual Allusion in the Septuagint of the Twelve Prophets: Studies in Hosea, Amos and Micah*, LHB/OTS 570 (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 11; Peter J. Gentry, »The Septuagint and the Text of the Old Testament,« *BBR* 16 (2006): 193–218.

23 Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 119. See W. Edward Glenny, *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos*, VTSup 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 2; 10–14; James Karol Palmer, »Not Made With Tracing Paper:« *Studies in the Septuagint of Zechariah* (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 2004), 17 f.; Jennifer M. Dines, *The Septuagint of Amos: a Study in Interpretation* (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1991), 17.

24 R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 47.

25 Dines rightly cautions that »use of the MT as default is unavoidable, but risky, given the plurality of forms in which Hebrew texts circulated at least until the end of the first century CE.« *The Septuagint*, 119.

26 Few disagree, but see Takamitsu Muraoka, »In Defense of the Unity of the Septuagint Minor Prophets,« *AJBI* 15 (1989): 25–36; Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence and Intertextual Allusion*, 8 f.; Glenny, *Finding Meaning*, 261; Cécile Dogniez, »Le Dieu des Armées dans le Dodekapropheton: Quelques Remarques sur une Initiative de Traduction,« in *IX Congress of the IOSCS*, ed. Bernard E. Taylor, SBLSCS 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997): 19–36.

3.1.1 Fidelity to the Source Text

One of the most prominent features of LXX-Nahum 1 is that the Greek translator, hereafter G, preserves the word and clause order of his source text in the majority of cases (Fig. 4). Most divergences between Hebrew and Greek clause elements have plausible explanations, some of which are discussed more below.²⁷ The only significant plus in the hymn is in line 3a (3b Gk), where the Hebrew phrase וַיְגִדוּל־כֶּהֱ may have been taken as its own clause or clarified. In short, there is substantial fidelity to the source text syntax in the Greek version.

Syntagmatic Alignment	Percentage
=	66.7%
≈	29.6%
Differing Syntagmatic function	8.6%
Greek Plus/Hebrew Minus	3.7%
Greek Minus/Hebrew Plus	2.5%

Figure 4: Statistics from Textual Comparison

In the midst of this fidelity, LXX-Nah 1,2–8 contains what may be misreadings or misunderstandings of the *Vorlage*, which occur elsewhere in LXX-TP²⁸ and may be the source of several of the divergences just mentioned. For instance, G seems to take the phrase ובעל חמה in v. 2 as a compound preposition, rendering it μετὰ θυμοῦ.²⁹ The translation also exhibits concern for poetic structure and meaning. In line 3c (3d Gk), for instance, G may have »resolved« his apparent confusion of the root בסופה with סוף by means of inter- and intra-lingual homophony (Fig. 5).³⁰ Additionally, in line 6c, although both כאש and נתכה may have been misread, as discussed below, the semantic parallelism in the Hebrew is nevertheless preserved in Greek. Space prohibits discussing more instances. Suffice it to say that

²⁷ E.g., lines 6c, 7a, and 8a, where misreadings seem to have occurred, and line 7b, where a semantic change has caused a syntactic shift in the clause object. Throughout I use »divergence«, »difference«, and »deviation« equivalently to denote where the MT and LXX differ on some level.

²⁸ See Anthony Gelston, »Some Hebrew Misreadings in the Septuagint of Amos,« *VT* 52 (2002): 493; 500; but note W. Edward Glenny, »Hebrew Misreadings or Free Translation in the Septuagint of Amos?« *VT* 57 (2007): 524–547.

²⁹ This happens elsewhere in the TP (e.g. Amos 7,15, מֵאֲחֵרֵי הַצֵּאֵן). Cf. *IBHS* § 11.3.3 which states that »complex adverbs are included in the group« of compound prepositions, and that »the combinations [of prepositions] and their nuances are too numerous to catalog.«

³⁰ This rendering may have been exegetically motivated as well by G's eschatology; cf. the words' uses in MT-Hos 8,7; LXX-Hab 1,9.

the Greek translation displays remarkable fidelity to the Hebrew text on many linguistic levels.

	MT / LXX	Phonology
3c		בְּסוּפָהּ וּבִשְׁעָרָהּ דָּרְכוּ
3d	ἐν συντελείᾳ καὶ ἐν συσσεισμῷ ἡ ὁδὸς αὐτοῦ	b ^e sūpāh ūbīś‘arah dārkhō En sunteleia kai en susseismō ‘ē ‘odos autou

Figure 5: Homophony in Verse 3

3.1.2 Introduction of Lexical and Morphological Uniformity

In several places G has treated lexical and morphological features of Nah 1,2–8 in interesting ways. In three places, lexical uniformity is introduced in the Greek translation where the MT shows diversity. First, both סוּךָ in line 3c (3d Gk) and כלה in line 8a are translated with συντέλεια. Then, in lines 6a and b, both זעם and חרון are rendered with ὀργή, and both חרון and חמה with θυμός. If nothing else, this feature of LXX-Nah 1,2–8 demonstrates that G did not feel bound to his source text as a control for the lexical uniformity of his own version.

The verbal morphology of the translation is also of interest, since there are more divergences here than in syntax, although the two overlap. Throughout verse 2 and in line 7b, G renders all Hebrew participles with corresponding Greek participles.³¹ However, in lines 4a and b, G translated Hebrew finite verbs as Greek participles, extending the use of this verbal form from verse 2 in both Greek and Hebrew.³² The introduction of uniformity in verbal morphology in the Greek translation thus complements the introduction of lexical uniformity in G’s translation.

3.1.3 Introduction of Diversity in Verbal Voice

In four instances verbal voice differs between Hebrew and Greek. First, in line 5a, the active רעשו is translated with passive ἐσεισθησαν. Although the sense of the line is not significantly altered, this translational choice may again have

³¹ Of note here is that G does not shy away from employing the same Greek verb repeatedly in the face of a repeated Hebrew verb, a point to which we will return later.

³² Additionally, in v. 3 G translates an infinitive absolute with a Greek participle, although this is not unusual in the LXX.

been motivated by phonology, since in 5b the Hebrew *hitpa'el* verb is translated with ἔσαλεύθησαν. Here G appears to display further sensitivity to poetic effect in Greek, although the semantics of the line change slightly.

Second, G may have struggled to render the phrase פָּרַח אֶשׁוֹת in line 5c, which still stumps modern translators. He opts for the passive ἀνεστάλη in the face of an active Hebrew verb, thus producing more variation in verbal voice, perhaps for stylistic reasons. The conjunctive *wāw* in this line also has implications upon the emendations suggested to the *yōd* line, discussed below.

Third, in 6c the passive *nip'al* נִתְכַּה is rendered by the active τήκει. While G may have taken the verb as an active *pi'el*, תָּךְ does not occur in that form anywhere in biblical Hebrew, making the active Greek rendering likely intentional.³³ Here G may have read the consonantal text in this verse as פָּרַח rather than כָּאֵשׁ, thus translating ἀρχή, a common lexical equivalent to פָּרַח in the LXX.³⁴ If so, this misreading helps explain the rationale behind the active verb τήκει.³⁵ In any case, it appears that G has altered the voice of the line for the sake of his translation.

Fourthly, lines 4d and e both contain the verb form אִמְלַל. The root מִלַּא occurs only thirteen other times, twelve of which are *pu'el*.³⁶ G, however, does not repeat ὠλιγόωθι from the first line in the second, but instead uses ἐξέλιπε. Of course these lines are central to the question at hand, but for the sake of discussion G's translation of these hypothetically identical Hebrew words employs both different Greek verbs and a different voice from one another.

³³ »תָּךְ«: HALOT, 732–733; so also »תָּךְ«: BDB, 677. But in the *hop'al* it means »to be melted«. The Targum of Nahum also has an active verb: »His anger dissolves like fire«; *The Targum of the Minor Prophets: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*, trans. Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, AB 14 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989), 132.

³⁴ »פָּרַח«: HRCS, 163c–165a; Emanuel Tov, »Three Dimensions of LXX Words,« *RB* 83 (1976): 529–544, 530, who calls פָּרַח the »main equivalent in the source language« for ἀρχή. Cf. Marguerite Harl, Cécile Dogniez et al., *La Bible D'Alexandrie: Les Douze Prophètes: Joël, Abdou, Jonas, Naoum, Ambakoum, Sophonie*, BdA 23.4–9 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999), 201 note that »l'expression qui suit, *kā'ēsh*, »comme le feu«, a pu être lue *rō'sh*, »tête«, par suite d'une confusion possible entre le kaph et le resh et d'une vocalisation différente de celle du TM.«

³⁵ A similar situation occurs in Jer 51,58 (see »ἀρχή«: LEH, 85).

³⁶ The other occurrence, Ez 16,30, is *qal*, in which stem it has a different meaning. Cf. »אִמְלַל«: HALOT, 63.

4 Textual Criticism and the Acrostic: Selectivity and Question-Begging

Having briefly overviewed key points in the translation technique in LXX-Nah 1,2–8, these observations bear upon the usual suggestions for textual emendation as discussed at the outset. Each of the three cases where scholars must emend the text to »recover« an acrostic run into significant problems given the implications of this study.

4.1 Implications for the *dālet* Line

In the face of the general fidelity in syntax to the source text, we have also seen how the translator exercised certain freedom with reference to the verb. G renders the voice of Hebrew verbs in 5a and 5c from active to passive, in 6c from passive to active. In verse 4 what might be a repeated passive verb is rendered in both passive (4c) and active (4d). Recall that G also introduced grammatical uniformity among verbs in verse 4 as well, rendering Hebrew finite verbs with Greek participles like those in the previous verse. In fact, with the grammatical and lexical changes observed, verse 4 itself, where the *dālet*-emendation is proposed, is the most divergent verse in Greek in all of LXX-Nah 1,2–8 with respect to the verbs. These observations alone call into question what is usually presented as clear evidence of a complete acrostic in this verse.

Some commentators note the lexical and grammatical consistency in v. 2, where all three Hebrew participles are rendered with identical Greek participles, and in v. 6, where זעם and חרון are rendered identically in Greek. They argue that if the translator is lexically and grammatically consistent in these verses, the same principle should hold in verse 4, which then allows for the *dālet*-emendation.³⁷ But this ignores the differing voice and forms in the Greek verbs of v. 4. As we have seen, G felt free to introduce both grammatical uniformity (v. 4) and lexical uniformity (v. 6).³⁸ So this argument requires emending the Hebrew towards verbal *diversity* on the basis of Greek verbal diversity, yet avoids emending the Hebrew towards *uniformity* in the places where the Greek displays uniformity. The mechanism for this double standards the presumed presence of the acrostic in the hymn.

³⁷ Smith, *Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, n.p., cited in Maier, *The Book of Nahum*, 166.

³⁸ Maier also points to 3,19 to illustrate a similar point. *Ibid.*

If evidence from elsewhere in the LXX supports verbal emendation to ללד, it is in the second line, 4d. Within the TP, ὀλιγώω is usually the equivalent to אמל,³⁹ just as in line 4c.⁴⁰ Yet ὀλιγώω never translates ללד, the verb proposed to emend 4c. On the other hand ἐκλείπω, the verb actually used in the second line, 4d, is in fact used to translate ללד.⁴¹ In effect, those who support emending the text do so against the tendencies of G in the TP. Thus, the argument for emending the text to ללד is further weakened.⁴²

Finally, Spronk and others suggest that the original *dālet*-reading may have been replaced erroneously due to »the similarity in the old Hebrew script of *ālep* and *dālet*.«⁴³ Yet that does not explain a consonantal change from ו ל ל ד to ל ל מ א. Moreover, if such a change did occur, it is in fact one step beyond the available text-critical evidence of the LXX itself. Emanuel Tov has shown that the *Vorlage* of the LXX was likely written in the Aramaic style square script,⁴⁴ so a change from ללד to אמל due to confusion of paleo-Hebrew script would have happened prior to the LXX translation according to this hypothesis. In other words, since the change from *dālet* would have already occurred, the variant would have been present in the LXX *Vorlage*, and G would have been looking at an *ālep*-reading in his source text anyway, just like the MT. Within this reconstruction of the textual history, at least, the LXX definitively cannot be said to attest in 4c to an underlying Hebrew verb different from 4d. Simply put, the LXX cannot be used as a witness to a textual variant that would not have been present in its own *Vorlage*. To do so is tenuous at best, and ultimately unfalsifiable. In any case, this argument forces the acrostic into text-critical abstraction and leaves only the presumption of its originality to argue for later textual corruption.

³⁹ Outside the TP, אמל is translated in various ways, most consistently in Isaiah with the verb πενθέω, »to mourn«. Cf. Isa 16,8; 19,8; 24,4 (2×).7; 33,9. Jeremiah uses κενώω two out of two times (14,2; 15,9). Twice ἀσθενέω is used (I Sam 2,5; Thr 2,8).

⁴⁰ Joel 1,10.12; σμικρόνω occurs in Hos 4,3. Cf. Spronk, *Nahum*, 40; Maier, *The Book of Nahum*, 166.

⁴¹ Isa 38,14 and in parallel in Isa 19,6.

⁴² Renz, who maintains that the acrostic is intentionally incomplete, suggests that emending the second instance of אמלל to read ללד on these grounds would reinforce the ironic brokenness of the acrostic, demonstrating the lexical availability of a full-fledged acrostic that is not taken advantage of by the author. »A Perfectly Broken Acrostic«: 18.

⁴³ Spronk, *Nahum*, 44; cf. Maier, *Book of Nahum*, 166 f., discussing Smith, *Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel*, n.p.

⁴⁴ Manifested, for example, by the common confusion of *dālet* and *rēš* letters. Emanuel Tov, »Some Reflections on the Hebrew Texts from which the Septuagint was Translated,« *JNSL* 19 (1993): 107–122, 117. See also Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence and Intertextual Allusion*, 9.

4.2 Implications for the *zayin* Line

Most commentators who emend the *zayin* line suggest reversing the word order, as discussed above. But the close fidelity of the Greek to the word order of the Hebrew we have observed here militates against this proposal. This is true of other portions of the LXX-TP as well, such that we might call this feature of the translation characteristic of this particular translator.⁴⁵ In v. 6a, the prepositional phrase ἀπὸ προσώπου ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ is aligned with the MT. Considering G's tendency to preserve word order, and that it is not a natural Greek phrase, it is unlikely a stylistic choice against the *Vorlage*. If G's text contained a different syntactical order, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that G would have rendered it as such according to his habits elsewhere.

Spronk suggests that emending the text does not disrupt the poetic structure on the level of the verse's strophes. But to make this argument he must go on to posit that a later scribe »felt free to ›improve‹ the [Hebrew] text« to create the chiasmic structure present in the MT noted by some scholars.⁴⁶ But given the translational character of this pericope and the LXX-TP generally, it is again more reasonable to hold that G preserved the word order of his source text, as usual, than to conjecture later scribal alteration of poetic structure for which there is no textual witness. This is especially true since Spronk's position implies that this later Hebrew scribe himself was unaware of or indifferent to the acrostic yet somehow attuned to fine chiasmic structures.⁴⁷ These arguments for emending the *zayin* line are implausible in the face of the actual textual evidence at hand, and thus attest again to a foregone text-critical conclusion among those who hold them.

4.3 Implications for the *yôd* Line

Finally, in v. 7 we come to the last problematic line of the so-called »acrostic«. Interestingly, neither Longman nor Spronk, among others, mention this as a »missing« line. As mentioned, the connective *wāw* is often overlooked in וידע,

⁴⁵ As discussed below, studies elsewhere in the LXX-TP have also found G to represent his source text faithfully in his translation; see, e.g., Palmer, *Not Made With Tracing Paper*, 67; 176 f.

⁴⁶ Spronk, *Nahum*, 44. For example, Longman notes this structure in the Hebrew. »Nahum«: 791.

⁴⁷ Spronk states of such a scribe in both instances thus far that »[a]pparently he was unaware of the fact that now the alphabetic sequence was disturbed.« »Acrostics«: 220. But Maier demands, »How could an editor be so stupid or perverse either carelessly or willfully to change the word sequence and to destroy the alphabetical order?« *Book of Nahum*, 173 f.

which in effect preserves the acrostic that requires a *yôd* here. To do so is somewhat understandable, given the difficulty of text-critically establishing connective *wāw*/καί beyond doubt.⁴⁸ As such, it is nearly as easily dismissed as it is preserved. So admittedly the text critic need not necessarily deduce that a corresponding *wāw* was ever present in the LXX source text. However, to dispense with the *wāw* in v. 7a to keep the *yôd* raises the question why אַשְׁתּוּ in v. 5c should legitimately count as the *wāw* line. One could just as easily dispense with the *wāw* in 5c as in 7a, text-critically speaking. Of course, this would produce a *tāw* line in 5c (i.e., אַשְׁתּוּ) and thus ruin the acrostic again.

Even more problematically, while the *wāw* in v. 7b is dismissed without textual witness in order to »recover« the *yôd* line, textual evidence to do the same is simultaneously overlooked in line 5c. There, in the Syriac and Latin Vulgate, the conjunction is in fact absent. And though some interpreters refer to the LXX, Syriac, and Latin Vulgate to determine the sense of אַשְׁתּוּ in v. 5c,⁴⁹ they do so while overlooking the absence of the conjunctive *wāw* in the latter two versions.

So although the LXX is used as a witness to support textual emendation of the *dālet* line in v. 4c, versional evidence – including the LXX – is ignored in vv. 5c and 7b since recognizing it puts at risk the potential acrostic features in those lines. Put differently, on the one hand emendations are made without evidence in v. 7b while on the other hand evidence is overlooked in v. 5c to avoid emendation, in both cases apparently driven by the desire to »restore« a presupposed acrostic. This goes to show once more that scholars attempting to reconstruct the acrostic do so by way of selective use of the evidence, thereby begging the text-critical question.

4.4 The Unity of LXX-TP & Emendation

As a final point, studies in LXX-TP show significant consensus in the features of its translation technique, with which the tendencies in Nah 1,2–8 discussed here also agree.⁵⁰ Indeed, these characteristics of LXX-TP corroborate conclusions against emendation. Firstly, Glenny finds that G displays respect for his source

⁴⁸ Emanuel Tov discusses this problem, which he calls a »non-variant.« See *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor LTD., ²1997), 154–162. He says that the »addition or omission of a καί or of the connective *waw* may have derived either from the translator’s literary feelings or from his *Vorlage*.« Ibid., 157 f.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 44.

⁵⁰ Much of the following is dependent upon W. Edward Glenny, »Translation Technique in the Minor Prophets,« *Paper presented at the International Congress of the International Organization*

text by the »coherence of the word order and component parts of the Hebrew and the Greek in the translation.«⁵¹ That this feature is characteristic of G's work overall strengthens the argument against emending the *zayin* line by reordering the text against this observed tendency.

Secondly, other scholars have noted G's tendency towards eliminating repetition specifically of verbs,⁵² possibly to avoid tautology, conform to Greek style that preferred lexical variety,⁵³ or due to an attitude of semantic neutrality.⁵⁴ Dines observes that G often employs »synonyms to render close occurrences of the same Hebrew word«, and that this tendency indicates that G was »trying to reproduce stylistic features in *both* source and target texts.«⁵⁵ J. Ross Wagner's recent study in Old Greek Isaiah found the same tendency, suggesting it was not unique to the translator of the TP.⁵⁶ While variation in v. 4 of LXX-Nah 1 is suggestive of differing underlying Hebrew verbs, then, it is better explained a result of G's observed tendency towards adherence to Greek style.⁵⁷ Indeed, if G made a habit of introducing lexical diversity in his translation, emendations on those grounds must be dismissed out of hand.

for *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* (Munich, Germany, August 2013). Thanks to Dr. Glennly for a pre-publication version of this paper.

51 Glennly, »Translation Technique«: 3.

52 See especially Jan Joosten, »A Septuagintal Translation Technique in the Minor Prophets: The Elimination of Verbal Repetitions,« in *Collected Studies on the Septuagint*, ed. Jan Joosten (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012): 15–21.

53 See John A. L. Lee, »Translations of the Old Testament, I. Greek,« in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.E. – A.D. 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 775–783, 777 f.

54 Glennly, »Translation Technique«: 3.

55 Jennifer Dines, »Stylistic and Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of the Twelve,« in *Et sapienter et eloquenter*, ed. Eberhard Bons and Thomas Kraus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011): 23–48, 34. She says the variation in Nah 1,4 »suggests aesthetic variation« (26) and the Greek repetition in 1,6 »may be deliberate« for stylistic reasons (32–33).

56 J. Ross Wagner, *Reading the Sealed Book: Reading Old Greek Isaiah and the Problem of Septuagint Hermeneutics*, FAT 88 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 229.

57 A tendency confirmed recently by James A. E. Mulrone, *A Stone Shall Cry Out from a Wall: Studies on the Translation Style of Old Greek Habakkuk* (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2014).

5 Conclusion

While it is true that the MT preserves a hymn in Nah 1,2–8 that is *nearly* an acrostic, observations throughout this paper have repeatedly indicated on textual grounds that one cannot legitimately emend the text to »restore« it. Though many scholars have argued forcefully in favor of emending the text, it has become evident that doing so usually arises out of text-critical question begging.

Moreover, in the course of doing so, scholars who emend the text selectively employ, ignore, or even misuse textual evidence from the versions. Tov states that textual criticism proper deals with Hebrew manuscripts and the versions. »Conjectural criticism« on the other hand is acceptable only when neither »transmit satisfactory evidence«. ⁵⁸ But this analysis of the LXX has shown how conjectural emendation of the Hebrew is in fact unacceptable according to Tov, since LXX-Nah 1,2–8 supplies versional evidence against emendation within textual criticism proper.

Abstract: The idea that Nahum 1 contains an acrostic poem is held by many scholars. This paper reinvestigates the proposals for emending Nahum 1,2–8 in light of the Septuagint (LXX) as a text-critical witness. LXX scholarship has long noted that the translation technique employed in a given unit, book, or corpus is essential to discerning properly whether and how Greek renderings function text-critically for the MT. In light of an analysis of the translation technique of Nahum 1,2–8, then, this paper outlines the manner in which arguments for textual emendation of the Hebrew on the basis of the LXX beg the question.

Zusammenfassung: Nahum 1 wird von vielen Auslegern als Akrostichon angesehen. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Vorschläge zur Emendation in Nah 1,2–8 auf dem Hintergrund der LXX-Überlieferung. Die Forschungen zur LXX haben lange schon auf die Bedeutung der Übersetzungstechnik für die Auswertung der LXX Varianten zum MT-Text aufmerksam gemacht. Entsprechende Einsichten werden für die Bewertung der Emendationen in Nah 2,1–8 fruchtbar gemacht.

Résumé: De nombreux exégètes pensent que Nahoum 1 contient un acrostiche. Cet article réexamine les propositions pour corriger Na 1,2–8 à la lumière de la Septante (LXX). La recherche sur la LXX a observé depuis longtemps que la technique de traduction utilisée dans une unité, un livre ou un corpus donné est essentielle pour discerner correctement si et comment les traductions en grec

⁵⁸ Emanuel Tov, *Text-Critical Use*, 5.

peuvent être utilisées par rapport au TM dans une logique de critique textuelle. À la lumière d'une analyse de la technique de traduction de Na 1,2–8, cet article soulève la question de la correction du texte hébreu sur la base de la LXX.