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Replacing מֶלֶךְ with ἄρχων in the LXX: Self-Censorship or Inner Development of the Jewish Tradition?

1. Bickermann's Theory of Self-Censorship

The strange rendering of מֶלֶךְ by ἄρχων in several key passages of the LXX Pentateuch has long attracted the attention of LXX scholars. The most popular explanation is that of Elias Bickermann, who suggested that the translators of the Greek Pentateuch exercised some self-censorship and that one of the prime examples of such self-censorship is the translation of the word מֶלֶךְ.

“The word *mlk* (“king”), which is common to Aramaic, Hebrew, and Phoenician, – wrote Bickermann, – was rendered exactly by the dragomans and by the Seventy as *basileus*. Nevertheless, in Deuteronomy 17:14–15, when the Hebrews are warned never to choose a foreigner for their king, the Seventy, loyal subjects of the Ptolemies, chose instead to render *mlk* as *archon* (“ruler”), an innocuous word often used for the chief of a local community or tribe.”¹

So, according to Bickerman the translators rendered here the Hebrew word מֶלֶךְ as ἄρχων in order to avoid the accusation of lack of loyalty towards the Ptolemies. The same reason, according to Bickerman, explains why ἄρχων appears as the translation of the Hebrew מֶלֶךְ in some other texts of the Pentateuch (in Deut 28:36, in the predictions of Gen 49:20 and Deut 33:5, in Lev 18:21 and 20:2–5).

A similar kind of self-censorship Bickerman saw also in the Greek translation of the list of unclean animals in Lev 11:6 and Deut 14:7. Among the unclean animals listed there is the hare, the Greek for which was λαγώς. However, wrote Bickerman, “because *lagos* also happened to be the name of the grandfather of Ptolemy II, the Seventy substituted the synonym *dasypous* (‘hairy-foot’) for *lagos*”.²

¹ BICKERMAN, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, 108. He first addressed this topic in BICKERMAN, “The Septuagint as a Translation,” 33.

² BICKERMAN, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, 108.

Bickerman was not the first to pay attention to these details of the Greek Pentateuch. Already the rabbis, listing the changes made by the LXX translators for “king Ptolemy”, discussed the avoidance of “hare” in the LXX lists of unclean animals in Lev 11:6 and Deut 14:7. They explained this by the translators’ desire not to offend Ptolemy “since Ptolemy’s wife’s name was ‘hare’” (a fantastic echo of the fact that the father of Ptolemy I and the grandfather of Ptolemy II was indeed called Λάγος).³ Already Heinrich Graetz stated that this explanation failed to stand the test of criticism, “for *dasytus* and *lagos* are employed by Greek writers indifferently, with precisely the same connotation.”⁴

In the same paper Graetz first suggested that the translators of Deut 17:14–15 avoided the plain rendering of *mlk* as *basileus* out of respect for the foreign ruler to whose government the Jews were at the time subject⁵. The hypothesis was immediately criticized by Swete⁶.

Despite the criticism expressed already in the 19th century, the authority of Bickerman made the theory of self-censorship of the LXX translators popular and widespread in the LXX scholarship.

Recently this theory was again heavily criticized by Sarah Pearce.⁷ Pearce pointed out that *δασύπους* was a normal Greek designation for hare and suggested that the translator’s choice between the two common words for hare – *λαγώς* and *δασύπους* – may have been determined by the context. In the Jewish law there were two things that put a creature in the category of the unclean: what it eats, and how its feet look like. According to Pearce, the elaborate description of the hare’s feet provided by *δασύπους* perfectly fits the context of the lists of unclean animals.

As concerns the translation of the Hebrew אֲרָחָה as ἄρχων, Pearce followed Swete’s arguments. Even if the choice of ἄρχων in Deuteronomy 17 may be explained as an example of self-censorship – what might have been the reason for such self-censorship in other places where the translators rendered אֲרָחָה as ἄρχων, like Gen 49:20, Num 23:21, or Deut 33:5? In these contexts, as Swete put it, “It is difficult to believe that the word was preferred out of any tenderness for royal scruples.”⁸

To my mind, even Deut 17:14–15 is not the text that should have bothered the Ptolemies and their administration. The Jews are told in these verses that when they settle in Palestine and decide to set a king over themselves, like the neighboring nations, they should not choose a foreign-

³ See the discussion of these rabbinic traditions in TOV, “The Rabbinic Tradition,” 7–8, VELTRI, *Eine Tora für den König Talmi*, 100–102.

⁴ GRAETZ, “Septuagint.”

⁵ Ibid. See also GRAETZ, Professor Graetz’s Reply to Professor Swete.

⁶ SWETE, “Graetz’s Theory.”

⁷ PEARCE, “Translating for Ptolemy.”

⁸ SWETE, “Graetz’s Theory.”

er as their king in Palestine. What has all this to do with the Ptolemites? They are kings of Egypt! They have no intention to become kings of the Jews, and the Jewish legislation about who can be king of the Jews does not affect them at all. It stands to reason that this text – both in the eyes of the Jews and in the eyes of the Ptolemaic administration, if they ever read it, – had nothing to do with the Ptolemites.

Studying Greek renderings of words like “king” or “hare”, Bickerman and other partisans of the “self-censorship” theory seem to forget that the Pentateuch is full of passages that should have troubled the Greek readers much more, for example, calling Egypt “the house of slavery” (οἶκος δουλείας, Exo 13:3), or repeated promise by God to lead the Jews from under the tyranny of the Egyptians (ἐξάξω ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς δυναστείας τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, Exo 6:6), or the promise that all the peoples of the earth will fear the Jews (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς... φοβηθήσονται σε, Deut 28:10). There are dozens of passages like these in the Pentateuch, and they should have sounded much more offensive for the Ptolemaic rulers, than listing a hare as an animal forbidden to be eaten by the Jews.

If one rejects the idea of self-censorship exercised by the Septuagint translators, can one establish any consistent pattern behind the different Greek renderings of the Hebrew מֶלֶךְ in the Pentateuch?

2. ἄρχων in the Pentateuch

The most natural and most common LXX equivalent of the Hebrew מֶלֶךְ is βασιλεύς (91 times in the Pentateuch, more than 2000 times in the Bible). On this background, the few but important passages where the MT מֶלֶךְ (or, without vowels, מלך) corresponds to the LXX ἄρχων, 12 times in the Pentateuch, 6 times outside the Pentateuch, indeed draw attention. Let us look at the twelve examples in the Pentateuch.

1) Gen 49:20

מֶלֶךְ שְׂמֵנָה לְחֶמְוֹ וְהוּא יִתֵּן מִעֲדֵינִי מֶלֶךְ:

LXX Ασηρ πίων αὐτοῦ ὁ ἄρτος καὶ αὐτὸς δώσει τρυφήν ἀρχουσιν.

It is not immediately clear whether Jewish or foreign rulers are meant in this prophesy. The Hebrew sg. מֶלֶךְ is rendered with the Greek pl. ἄρχοντες.

2) Num 23:21

לֹא־הָיִט אֲנִי בַּיַּעֲקֹב וְלֹא־רָאָה עַמִּי בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ וְתִרְוַעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ:

LXX οὐκ ἔσται μόχθος ἐν Ιακωβ οὐδὲ ὀφθήσεται πόνος ἐν Ισραηλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔνδοξα ἀρχόντων ἐν αὐτῷ.

Whatever the meaning of the Hebrew text, the Greek translation makes it a prophecy by using the future tense (ἔσται, ὀφθήσεται). Once again, the Hebrew sg. מְלִךְ is rendered with the Greek pl. ἄρχοντες. The context seems to imply that the rulers of Israel are meant.

3–5) Deut 17:14–15. *The law of the king*

כִּי־תָבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וַיְרַשְׁתָּהּ וַיִּשְׁבַּתָּהּ בָּהּ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲשֶׁימָה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כְּכֹל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סָבִיבֶיךָ: שׁוּם תִּשֶׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקִּרְבֵּי אֲחֵיךָ תִּשֶׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ לֹא תֹכֵל לָתֵת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֲחֵיךָ הוּא:

LXX ἐὰν δὲ εἰσέλθῃς εἰς τὴν γῆν ἣν κύριος ὁ θεός σου δίδωσίν σοι ἐν κλήρῳ καὶ κληρονομήσῃς αὐτήν καὶ κατοικήσῃς ἐπ’ αὐτῆς καὶ εἴπῃς καταστήσω ἐπ’ ἐμαυτὸν ἄρχοντα καθὰ καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἔθνη τὰ κύκλῳ μου καθιστῶν καταστήσεις ἐπὶ σεαυτὸν ἄρχοντα ὃν ἂν ἐκλέξῃται κύριος ὁ θεός σου αὐτόν ἐκ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου καταστήσεις ἐπὶ σεαυτὸν ἄρχοντα οὐ δυνήσῃ καταστήσαι ἐπὶ σεαυτὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀλλότριον ὅτι οὐκ ἀδελφός σου ἐστίν.

The rendering of מְלִךְ with ἄρχων in these verses has a parallel in the rendering of מַמְלָכָה with ἀρχή in Deut 17:18,20.

6) Deut 28:36. *A prophetic warning*

וַיֹּלִךְ יְהוָה אֶתְךָ וְאֶת־מַלְכְּךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּקִּים עָלֶיךָ אֶל־גּוֹי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְדַעְתָּ אֶתָּה וְאֶבְרַתְּ וְעַבְדְּתָהּ שָׁם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַלְּךָ וְאַבְּוֹ:

LXX ἀπαγάγοι κύριός σε καὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντάς σου οὓς ἐὰν καταστήσῃς ἐπὶ σεαυτὸν εἰς ἔθνος ὃ οὐκ ἐπίστασαι σὺ καὶ οἱ πατέρες σου καὶ λατρεύσεις ἐκεῖ θεοῖς ἑτέροις ξύλοις καὶ λίθοις.

Among the punishments for not obeying God, the Deuteronomy mentions exile of the people and its leaders. Once again, the Hebrew sg. מְלִךְ is rendered with the Greek pl. ἄρχοντες (this time with an article, because of the Hebrew particle הָ and the possessive pronoun).

7) Deut 33:5

וַיְהִי בִישְׁרוֹן מֶלֶךְ בְּהַתְּאַסָּה רָאשֵׁי עַם יִחַד שְׁבֻטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

LXX καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ ἄρχων συναχθέντων ἀρχόντων λαῶν ἅμα φυλαῖς Ἰσραηλ.

The Hebrew text speaks about the past, but the LXX is a prophecy about a future leader of Israel.

All the LXX passages listed above are either prophecy (examples 1–2, 6–7) or laws for future rulers (sometimes the LXX uses the future tense where the MT employs the perfect forms). The rulers spoken about are not individualized, so the word ἄρχων is used without article (except example 6) and sometimes, differently from the Hebrew original, in plural. Except example 1, where the reference is not clear, the ἄρχοντες referred to are Hebrew rulers.

There is a much discussed group of texts in the Hebrew book of Leviticus, prohibiting the service to “Molech”. Traditionally it is thought that “Molech” is the name of a god associated with child sacrifice. Often it is assumed that “Molech” is a dysphemism of the original name of that god – “Melech” (“king”)⁹. Alternatively, Eissfeldt¹⁰ suggested that “Molech” is not a theonym but a *terminus technicus* for the sacrificial rite itself.

Whatever the original meaning might have been¹¹, it seems that the translators of the Greek Pentateuch had no idea either of a god called “Molech” or of a rite called “molech”. Most likely, they vocalized the word as *melek* and translated it with the Greek ἄρχων in the same way as in examples 1–7, cited above.

8) Lev 18:21

וּמִזְרָעֶיךָ לֹא תִתֶּן לְהַעֲבִיר לְמֶלֶךְ

LXX καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ σπέρματός σου οὐ δώσεις λατρεύειν ἄρχοντι.

Whatever this Hebrew text may have meant in its archaic setting, it seems likely that the LXX translators understood it along the same lines as the “law of the king” (Deut 17), namely that the king of Israel (differently from the kings of other peoples) should not acquire too many wives, or silver and gold in great quantity (Deut 17:17), and should not be worshipped (λατρεύειν) by the Israelites (Lev 18:21)¹².

Reading the *העביר* as *העביד* (witnessed to in the Samaritan Pentateuch as well) facilitated this interpretation for the LXX translators. But the translation was not mechanical, since λατρεύω is a standard equivalent to *עבד* Qal, not Hif'il. Using this non-standard equivalent, the LXX translators managed to make sense out of a very difficult Hebrew original. The Greek text means something like “Do not allow your offspring to worship a ruler”. For the meaning of *δίδωμι*, one may compare Isa 43:28, *ἔδωκα ἀπολέσαι* *Ἰακωβ* “I allowed (the enemies) to destroy Jacob”.

The context, Lev 18:6–20, 22–23, deals with violations of sexual taboos, but nothing in the Greek translation points in this direction. Rather, according to the LXX, the reason for the prohibition is that, differently from the heathen kings, only God of Israel should be worshipped by the Israelites. Worship of earthly rulers is a sin.

⁹ The hypothesis first suggested by GEIGER, *Urschrift*.

¹⁰ EISSFELDT, *Molk*.

¹¹ The literature on the topic is abundant, see HEIDER, *The Cult of Molek*; DAY, *Molech*; STAVRAKOPOULOU, *King Manasseh*, as well as the major commentaries on Leviticus. Some works, dealing with the rendering of these texts in the LXX will be treated below.

¹² ROFÉ, “Qumranic Paraphrases,” 171.

9–12) Lev 20:1–5

In Lev 20:1–5 Molech is mentioned several times.

אִישׁ אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִזֶּה־הַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִזְרְעוֹ לְמִלְכָּה מוֹת יוֹמָת עִם
הָאָרֶץ יִרְגְּמֶהּוּ בְּאֶבֶן:³ וְאִנִּי אֶתֵּן אֶת־פָּנַי בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֹתוֹ מִקְרָב עִמּוֹ כִּי
מִזְרְעוֹ נָתַן לְמִלְכָּה לְמַעַן טַמֵּא אֶת־מִקְדָּשִׁי וְלַחֲלֹל אֶת־שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי:⁴ וְאִם הָעַלְם יַעֲלִימוּ
עִם הָאָרֶץ אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם מִן־הָאִישׁ הַהוּא בְּתֵתוֹ מִזְרְעוֹ לְמִלְכָּה לְבַלְתִּי הִמִּית אֹתוֹ:
⁵ וְשִׁמְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־פָּנַי בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וּבְמִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־הַזָּנִים אֲחִרָיו
לְזָנוֹת אֲחֵרֵי הַמִּלְכָּה מִקְרָב עִמָּם:

LXX ἐάν τις ἀπὸ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν προσγεγενημένων προσηλύτων ἐν Ἰσραὴλ ὁς ἂν δῶ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ ἄρχοντι θανάτῳ θανατούσθω τὸ ἔθνος τὸ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς λιθοβολήσουσιν αὐτὸν ἐν λίθοις 3 καὶ ἐγὼ ἐπιστήσω τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐπὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκείνον καὶ ἀπολώ αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ ἔδωκεν ἄρχοντι ἵνα μιάνῃ τὰ ἅγια μου καὶ βεβηλώσῃ τὸ ὄνομα τῶν ἡγιασμένων μοι 4 ἐὰν δὲ ὑπερόψῃ ὑπερίδωσιν οἱ αὐτόχθονες τῆς γῆς τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου ἐν τῷ δοῦναι αὐτὸν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ ἄρχοντι τοῦ μὴ ἀποκτεῖναι αὐτόν 5 καὶ ἐπιστήσω τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἐπὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκείνον καὶ τὴν συγγένειαν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπολώ αὐτὸν καὶ πάντας τοὺς ὁμοιοῦντας αὐτῷ ὥστε ἐκπορνεύειν αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς ἄρχοντας ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτῶν.

I suspect that the translator of this passage was not sure about its meaning. Differently from Lev 18:21, the worshipping of the king is not explicitly mentioned here. Still, the two passages are very close to each other and I think that the translation of Lev 20:1–5 was inspired by that of Lev 18:21.

In LXX Lev 20:5, differently from Lev 18:21 and Lev 20:1–4, the Greek ἄρχων is in plural and is preceded by the definite article. The article is necessary because the Hebrew article ה requires a Greek equivalent (cf. example 6). As concerns rendering the Hebrew singular with the Greek plural, we have already seen the same phenomenon in Gen 49:20, Num 23:21, and Deut 28:36.

Lust has suggested that in the Leviticus passages of the LXX the reference is to a supernatural being (one of “lesser gods or devils”)¹³. Indeed, in the Greek Daniel, as well as in the Judeo-Hellenistic literature, supernatural beings (angels) are called ἄρχοντες. However, these texts are at least one century later than the Greek Pentateuch. One cannot but agree with Büchner that “until new evidence is found, this option must be discarded”¹⁴.

In evaluating this option, as well as other options listed by Büchner (the Ptolemy, an Alexandrian cultic figure, a local Jewish leader), one should use the Ockham’s razor. There are 12 passages in the LXX Pentateuch, where we see exactly the same phenomenon: the Hebrew מִלְכָּם rendered by

¹³ LUST, “Molek,” 193–208.

¹⁴ BÜCHNER, “You Shall Not Give,” 191.

the LXX as ἄρχων. Unless there are some weighty arguments, it stands to reason that these 12 passages should be explained in the same way. It would be more in line with the principle of economy in explanation to assume that in all of these passages the LXX translators referred to rulers of the Hebrew/Jewish community, and that the logic behind the “demotion” of these rulers from the rank of “kings” (מְלִיכָה) to the rank of mere “rulers” (ἄρχοντες) was the same for all the passages.

Ausloos observes that within the book of Deuteronomy the term βασιλεύς is reserved for foreign kings, while Hebrew kings are called ἄρχοντες¹⁵. This is true with regard to Deuteronomy, but if we look at the Pentateuch as a whole, the situation is more complicated. Not all Hebrew kings are treated in the LXX Pentateuch in this way. In Gen 36:31 we are told that there were kings in the land of Edom before there reigned any king (מְלִיכָה, βασιλεύς) over the sons of Israel. In Gen 17:6, 17:16, 35:11 it is stated that the descendants of Abraham and Jacob will be kings (מְלִיכָה, βασιλεῖς; probably in the context of Genesis the reference is to the dynasty of David).

Moreover, in Gen 23:6 the translators used the word βασιλεύς to render the Hebrew מֶלֶךְ – which is normally rendered by the Greek ἄρχων. The reference is to Abraham. Indeed, the concepts βασιλεύς and ἄρχων were quite close in the language of the LXX Pentateuch. How can we explain the choice between the two words?

Of course, since all the passages of the LXX Pentateuch referring to Hebrew kings as βασιλεῖς happen to be in the first two thirds of the book of Genesis (17:6, 17:16, 23:6, 35:11, 36:31), while the rendering of מְלִיכָה with ἄρχων starts with Gen 49:20, one may simply suggest that there was a change of translator (or translation technique) somewhere near the end of Genesis. But such change is not reflected otherwise in the LXX Genesis.

One can make three observations.

(1) Hebrew/Jewish rulers are called βασιλεῖς as far as the past is concerned.

(2) When the Hebrew word מְלִיכָה occurs in the context of a Pentateuchal law, it is rendered as ἄρχων.

(3) When the Hebrew word מְלִיכָה occurs in the context of a prophecy, that, from the point of view of the translators, refers to their present or future, it is also rendered as ἄρχων.

In other words: other nations may have their own kings (βασιλεῖς); the Jews in the past also had their own kings (βασιλεῖς); but now (at the time of the translation) there are no kings in Israel, nor will there be any in future. It is a quite consistent position.

¹⁵ AUSLOOS, “The ‘Law of the King’,” 171.

3. Replacing מֶלֶךְ with ἄρχων in the LXX and the Inner Development of the Jewish Tradition

The demotion of Jewish national leaders from the rank of “kings” (מְלָכִים) to the rank of mere rulers (ἄρχοντες), that we observe in the LXX Pentateuch, has a lot of parallels in the world of Second Temple Judaism. Important passages were discussed by A. Rofé¹⁶. Probably the most interesting and relevant of them is the Damascus Document (CD 5:1–2), which refers to the law of Deut 17:14–20 with the words ועל הנשיא כתוב לא ירבה לו נשיים. One sees that, quoting Deuteronomy, CD replaces מֶלֶךְ with נְשִׂיא (“prince”), which is the standard equivalent to ἄρχων in the LXX. Basing himself on this passage in the Hebrew text of CD, Rofé suggested that “the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek Pentateuch contained a recension in which all Israelite ‘kings’ had been turned into ‘princes’.”¹⁷

Rofé also pointed at several passages in the Hebrew Bible itself, where נְשִׂיא was used in contexts where one should have expected מֶלֶךְ (e.g. 1 Ki 11:34, several places in Ezekiel, or Exod. 22:27). For some of these passages Rofé suggested that the earliest Hebrew text was different from the extant one, e.g. that the original text of Exod. 22:27 run as אלהים לא תקלל *ומלך בעמך לא תאר (לא תאר אלהים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך (instead of the received MT אלהים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך (לא תאר אלהים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך).

Rofé’s thesis that the change from “kings” to “rulers” took place already in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX may be too bold. All extant Hebrew Biblical scrolls read מֶלֶךְ in Deut 17:14–20, including the two extant Qumran manuscripts of this passage, 2QDeut^b and 4QDeut^c. Moreover, even if we assume that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX ἄρχων in this passage read נְשִׂיא, it is difficult to imagine what the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX ἀρχή (Deut 17:18, 20) might have looked like.¹⁸

There is no textual evidence either for Rofé’s reconstruction of the original מֶלֶךְ in passages like Exod. 22:27.

However, Rofé’s paper puts the LXX rendering of מֶלֶךְ with ἄρχων into its proper historical context. According to Rofé, the translators intentionally avoided using the word βασιλεύς because in the ideal Israel only God can be Israel’s king¹⁹. This opinion is also shared by Lust²⁰ and Wevers²¹; for the LXX emphasis on the divine kingship see also a recent article of

¹⁶ ROFÉ, “Qumranic Paraphrases,” 169–175.

¹⁷ Ibid, 170.

¹⁸ AUSLOOS, “The ‘Law of the King’,” 164.

¹⁹ ROFÉ, “Qumranic Paraphrases,” 171.

²⁰ WEVERS, *Notes*, 286.

²¹ LUST, “Molek,” 202.

Van der Kooij²². A slightly different perspective is suggested by Ausloos: “the translator’s preference for using ἄρχων instead of βασιλεύς was not meant to ‘devalue’ Israel’s king (in comparison with God as king), but... to distinguish between Israel’s future kings and the actual kings of the nations”.²³ Freund follows Rofé’s insights but also stresses that the LXX accommodates the Biblical text to the political reality of the Jewish community in the Hellenistic world.²⁴

Below we shall put the peculiar rendering of the Hebrew מֶלֶךְ in the LXX Pentateuch within the general context of development of the Jewish society in the Second Temple period.

Under the Achaemenids, a citizen-temple community, organized as a theocracy and headed by the High Priest, emerged in Jerusalem. This political structure continued till the time of Aristobulus (104–103 BCE) who first added to the title of the High Priest (ἀρχιερεύς) that of king (βασιλεύς). For this community, the memories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were predominantly negative, as abundantly witnessed in the book of Kings. The very idea of monarchy is criticized in Judges 9 and 1 Samuel 8. Such criticism was unprecedented in the world of the Ancient Near East.

The negative attitude towards the monarchy is reflected already in the Hebrew text of the “law of the king” in Deuteronomy 17. Such “constitutions”, limiting the power of a king would have been unthinkable in the Ancient Egypt or in Ancient Mesopotamia. Later, the development of this attitude produced the texts of LXX and CD that refuse even to use the word “king” in this passage, calling the national leader just “prince” (נְשִׂיךָ) or “ruler” (ἄρχων).

The ideal Jewish society, as it was depicted in the Great Utopia of the Priestly Codex, was a theocracy headed by the High Priest. This ideal helped to legitimate the hierocratic organization of the Second Temple Jerusalem city-state. The best description of this theocratic ideal was given by Josephus (*Contra Apionem* II, 16):

...ούκοῦν ἄπειροι μὲν αἱ κατὰ μέρος τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ τῶν νόμων παρὰ τοῖς ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις διαφοραὶ – κεφαλαιωδῶς ἂν ἐπίοι τις οἱ μὲν γὰρ μοναρχίαις οἱ δὲ ταῖς ὀλίγων δυναστείαις ἄλλοι δὲ τοῖς πλήθεσιν ἐπέτρεψαν τὴν ἐξουσίαν τῶν πολιτευμάτων ὁ δ’ ἡμέτερος νομοθέτης εἰς μὲν τούτων οὐδοτιοῦν ἀπεῖδεν ὡς δ’ ἂν τις εἴποι βιασάμενος τὸν λόγον θεοκρατίαν ἀπέδειξε τὸ πολίτευμα θεῶ τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὸ κράτος ἀναθείς.

Now, there are innumerable differences in the particular customs and laws that are among all mankind, which a man may briefly reduce under the following heads: – Some legislators have permitted their governments to be under monarchies, others put them under oligarchies, and others under a republican form; but our legislator had no regard

²² VAN DER KOOIJ, “Theocracy.”

²³ AUSLOOS, “The ‘Law of the King’,” 169.

²⁴ FREUND, “From Kings to Archons.”

to any of these forms, but he ordained our government to be what, by a strained expression, may be termed a Theocracy, by ascribing the authority and the power to God.

If we had only this small passage from Josephus, and not his Antiquities, one might have concluded that Josephus knew nothing about the kingdoms of Israel and Juda. Of course, Josephus knew that there were kings in Israel, but they did not belong to the mainstream of the Jewish history.

“Against Apion” was written by Josephus in his late years, when his view of history became closer to that of Pharisaic/Protorabbinic circles. The view was reflected later, in Rabbinic Judaism, in the opening words of Pirque Avot:

משה קיבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה.

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly.

Of course, the authors of Pirque Avot, like Josephus, knew that there were kings in Israel. But they did not belong to the mainstream of the Jewish history.

Even before Josephus and Pirque Avot, the same view of the Jewish history resulted in the remark of Hecateus (c. 300 BCE) that the Jews never had a king (Hecataeus apud Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca Historica, XL, 3):

διὸ καὶ βασιλέα μὲν μηδέποτε τῶν Ἰουδαίων, τὴν δὲ τοῦ πλήθους προστασίαν δίδοσθαι διὰ παντὸς τῷ δοκοῦντι τῶν ἱερέων φρονήσει καὶ ἀρετῇ προέχειν. τοῦτον δὲ προσαγορεύουσιν ἀρχιερέα, καὶ νομίζουσιν αὐτοῖς ἄγγελον γίνεσθαι τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ προσταγμάτων.

...the Jews never have a king, and authority over the people is regularly vested in whichever priest is regarded as superior to his colleagues in wisdom and virtue. They call this man the high priest, and believe that he acts as a messenger to them of God's commandments.

The gradual development of this antimonarchic or theocratic tendency is clearly seen in the book of Ezekiel, both in Hebrew and – to an even larger extent – in the Greek text.

The last kings of Judah in the Hebrew text of Ezekiel are called either מְלָכִים or נְשִׂאִים “rulers”, sometimes these words are used as synonyms (Ezek 7:27). In Ezek 34 and 37 the future ruler, who is identified as the (new) David, is called both מֶלֶךְ (37:22, 24) and נְשִׂאִי (34:24, 37:25). However, in the prophecies of Ezek 40–48 the future ruler of restored Jerusalem is never called “king”, even in the Hebrew text, but just “ruler” (נְשִׂאִי).

A special case is Ezek 43:7–9, where God orders the people of Israel no more to defile his name בְּזִנוּתָם וּבַפְּגָרֵי מְלָכֵיהֶם (“by their fornication, and by the corpses of their kings”). Earlier commentators saw here a reference

to the kings' graves²⁵, modern commentaries suggest that the reference is either to memorial stelae erected in honor of kings²⁶, or to funeral offerings for their dead kings, Israel's royal ancestors²⁷.

The Greek text of Ezekiel renders נְשִׂיאַי as ἀφηγούμενος, ἡγούμενος or ἄρχων. The Hebrew מְלָכִים is mostly translated as βασιλεύς. However, in Ezek 34 and 37, where already in the Hebrew text there was a variation between מְלָכִים and נְשִׂיאַי, both words מְלָכִים and נְשִׂיאַי are rendered as ἄρχων. Lust sees here influence from LXX Deuteronomy 17²⁸.

As concerns Ezekiel 43:7–9, it seems that the translators did not grasp the meaning of the Hebrew text and decided that the rulers of the restored Israel were meant.

וְלֹא יִטְמְאוּ עוֹד בַּיַּת־יְשׁוּרָאֵל שֵׁם קְדֹשִׁי הַמָּה וּמְלָכֵיהֶם בְּזִנוּתָם וּבַפְגְּרֵי מְלָכֵיהֶם
בְּמִוְתָם...⁹ עֲתָה יִרְחֲקוּ אֶת־זִנוּתָם וּפְגְרֵי מְלָכֵיהֶם מִמְּנִי וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם: ס

... και οὐ βεβηλώσουσιν οὐκέτι οἶκος Ἰσραηλ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ἅγιόν μου αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ ἡγούμενοι αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐν τοῖς φόνοις τῶν ἡγουμένων ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν ...⁹ καὶ νῦν ἀπώσασθωσαν τὴν πορνείαν αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς φόνους τῶν ἡγουμένων αὐτῶν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ καὶ κατασκηνώσω ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν τὸν αἰῶνα

The house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their fornication, and by the corpses (LXX: murders) of their kings...⁹ Now let them put away their fornication and the corpses (LXX: murders) of their kings far from me, and I will reside among them forever.

Whether φόνοι τῶν ἡγουμένων should be understood as Genetivus Subjectivus or Genetivus Objectivus is not relevant for our investigation. What is important is that these rulers of the restored Israel are called ἡγούμενοι, the title used for the ruler of the restored Israel in the prophecies of Ezek 44–45 (Hebrew נְשִׂיאַי, Greek ἡγούμενος).

Contrary to Rofé, there is no need to postulate for the Greek Ezekiel a Hebrew *Vorlage*, where מְלָכִים would have been changed to נְשִׂיאַי. The tendency to call the leaders of the ideal Jewish society not “kings” (מְלָכִים), but “rulers” (נְשִׂיאַי, ἄρχοντες, ἡγούμενοι, ἀφηγούμενοι) was gradually becoming stronger and stronger during the Second Temple period. However, it was much easier for a LXX translator to abandon the standard equivalent, than for a scribe to replace a word in the Hebrew text itself.

²⁵ COOKE, *Ezekiel*, 464.

²⁶ ZIMMERLI, *Ezekiel*, 417.

²⁷ BLOCK, *Ezekiel*, 584–585; Allen, *Ezekiel*, 256–257.

²⁸ LUST, “Le Messianisme,” 8–9.

4. Conclusions

Theological and ideological changes in the LXX in most cases witness to developments that started long before and continued well after. The Greek translation was but one link – though often the most visible link – in the chain of such developments.

The LXX rendering of אֲרֹנִים as ἄρχων is a link in the chain of “anti-monarchic” developments that started with the Hebrew Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic History and continued through centuries, as late as Pirque Avot.

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