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Σχοῖνος Revisited – LXX Micah 6:5

Abstract

Building on the argument of an earlier contribution of James K. Aitken (2000), this article aims to explain why the Greek toponym Σαττιν does not translate the word שִׁטִּים (Shittim) in LXX Micah 6:5. The Massoretic text reads ‘from Shittim to Gilgal’. The LXX translator uses σχοῖνος to appeal to all readerships. While the educated reader is aware of the location and significance of Shittim, these might not be obvious for the less educated majority. As the meaning of σχοῖνος varies (*rush, reed, bramble, thorn*, and a *type of measure used in Egypt*, or even a more generic *bush*), its interpretation changes as one contemplates in context each of these meanings. Ultimately, the simplest audience could read this extension of time/space of ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλγαλ as referring to the whole history of Exodus, from the *burning bush* to Gilgal.

Keywords

Σαττιν, השטים, Shittim, Micah 6, burning bush.

The term σχοῖνος (*reed* or *rush*) is the subject of an article by James K. Aitken (cf. presentation in part B). He argues that this word has three meanings in its five occurrences in the Septuagint: *stylus* in Jer. 8: 8; *Shittim* (location) in Joel 4:18 and Micah 6:5; and *way/path* (Jer 18:15, LXX Ps 138:3).¹ Having as support the editors of *La Bible d’Alexandrie*, Aitken states that in LXX Micah 6:5 the rendering of שִׁטִּים with σχοῖνος ‘may, therefore, be an incorrect identification of the *šṭ* the ‘acacia’ tree as ‘rush’, occasioned by the proximity of the place [of Shittim] to the Jordan’.²

¹ James K. Aitken, ‘Σχοῖνος in the Septuagint’, *VT* 50, No. 4 (2000).

² Aitken, p. 434, cf. Marguerite Harl et al., *La Bible d’Alexandrie*, 23, *Les Douze Prophètes*, 4–9, *traduction du texte grec de la Septante, introduction et notes* (Paris, 1999), p. 78: ‘here [Joel 3:18] and in Micah 6:5, the translator renders with *skhoīnos*, ‘rush’, the place name *shittīm*, which means ‘the acacias’ (see the transcription *Sattin* in Num 25:1, Jos 2:1 and 3:1)’.

The interpretation is possible as the point of his article was to explain what meanings σχοῖνος has. Nevertheless, it does not address specific questions of LXX Micah 6. One question is why the text of Septuagint does not follow the translation with Σαττιν for Shittim (cf. Num 25:1; Jos 2:1; 3:1), usually employed when the context suggests a geographical location. Another question would be: what is the meaning of the translation in Greek if it does not mean a geographical location? We also note that interpreting this word as an ‘incorrect identification’ makes the LXX version less clear than the Hebrew original. If one assumes that the LXX readers (unable to read Hebrew) are meant to understand this phrase as ‘from the reeds as far as Galgal’ (cf. NETS version below), the translation fails to accomplish the very thing a translation should do i.e. make sense of a text in a foreign language.

Looking to address the exegetical problem of the LXX translation and assuming that this is not some kind of error, the present article suggests that the plural genitive σχοίνων (from σχοῖνος) does not really translate מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים but it challenges the readers to mull over its possible interpretation in the context of the chapter. The interpretation of σχοῖνος is dependent on a whole range of possible meanings and connotations: *rush, reed, bramble, thorn*, and a *type of measure used in Egypt*, or even a more generic *bush*. By assessing its meanings and its grammatical setting, this article narrows to the conclusion that with the use of σχοίνων as the interpretation for מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים of the Masoretic text (MT), the Septuagint whispers or intimates to the reader a far more distant place and time than Shittim. The use of σχοίνων in LXX constitutes an *interpretation* of the MT original. It creates a concealed reference to the burning bush of Exodus 3 for a section where the MT does not present sufficient support for the translator of LXX to deem מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים as referring to the geographical location of Shittim. Also, I will briefly show how that adds to creating a different perspective for the LXX reader of Micah 6 from the one present in the MT (cf. part C).

MT: עָמִי זְכַרְנָא מַה־יַּעֲזֵן בְּלֶקְ מְלֶךְ מוֹאָב וּמַה־עָנָה אֹתוֹ בְּלָעָם בְּיַבְעוֹר מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים עַד־הַגִּלְגָּל
לְמַעַן דַּעַת צְדָקוֹת יְהוָה:

My people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, planned and what Balaam son of Beor answered him from Shittim to Gilgal, in order to know the righteous deeds of God.

LXX: λαός μου, μνησθητι δὴ τί ἐβουλεύσατο κατὰ σοῦ Βαλακ βασιλεὺς Μωαβ, καὶ τί ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ Βαλααμ υἱὸς τοῦ Βεωρ ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλγαλ, ὅπως γνωσθῆ ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ κυρίου.

O my people, do remember what King Balak of Moab planned against you and what Balaam son of Beor answered him from the reeds as far as Galgal, that the justice of the Lord might be known.³

³ The translations from the Septuagint belong to George E. Howard *The Twelve Prophets* in A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)* (Oxford: 2007), 795–800.

Part A

The presentation will open with a meaning delineation for שִׁטִּים in (a) the MT and its equivalents in (b) the Septuagint and (c) the Vulgate⁴ (cf. also the table below). Alfred Plummer claims with reason that ‘the identification of the many Hebrew words which denote thorny shrubs is a hopeless task’⁵. As a last resort, Jerome prefers to transliterate in the Vulgate and sometimes LXX does too.

- a. The senses of the consonants שט in MT are: (1) As a noun, שִׁטָּה, a feminine and its irregular plural form שִׁטִּים, has 27 occurrences in two formal expressions עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים (‘acacia/shittim wood’) and עַמּוּדֵי שִׁטִּים (‘pillars of acacia/shittim wood’).⁶ (2) As a proper name שִׁטִּים it appears five times⁷ referring to the toponym Shittim, the last camp for the people of Israel before crossing the Jordan to the Promised Land. (3) It appears once in the proper name הַבְּלֵה שִׁטִּים (Num 33:49) ‘well of the acacias’.⁸ (4) The singular form שִׁטָּה is present only in Isa 41:19.⁹ (5) In Ez 27:8, 26, שִׁטִּים represents a participle form of the verb שׁוּט (roam around, rove around), with no bearing on our discussion.
- b. The great majority of its occurrences are translated in the LXX with a rather general term (1) ξύλον ἄσηπτον ‘not rotted wood’ or στῦλος ἄσηπτος ‘not rotted pillar’¹⁰. When the proper name is referred to, LXX uses (2) Σαττι¹¹ and (3) Βελσαττι¹². (4) LXX employs the *hapax* πύξον (box–tree/wood) in Isa 41:19. For שִׁטָּה in Ez 27:8, 26 LXX has (5) κωπηλάται (rowers).
- c. Vulgate prefers transliteration when denoting שִׁטִּים in reference to a type of wood or physical location: (1) *lingna/lignis setthim* (for עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים) or *columnas de lignis setthim*, (for עַמּוּדֵי שִׁטִּים)¹³; (2) *Setthim*¹⁴ and

⁴ The numbers in the parenthesis connect the terms with the same meaning within versions.

⁵ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke* (Edinburgh, 1922), p. 192.

⁶ Exod 25:5, 10, 13, 23, 28; 26:15, 26, 32, 37; 27:1, 6; 30:1, 5; 35:7, 24; 36:20, 31, 36; 37:1, 4, 10, 15, 25, 28; 38:1, 6 and Deut 10:3.

⁷ Num 25:1; Jos. 2:1; 3:1; Joel 4:18; Mic 6:5.

⁸ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT 4)* (Leiden–Boston–Köln, 1994), 1474.

⁹ Isa 41:19 does not contain עֲצֵי or עַמּוּדֵי.

¹⁰ Exod 25:5, 10, 13, 23, 28; 26:15, 26, 32, 37; 27:1, 6; 30:1, 5; 35:7, 24; 36:20, 31, 36; 37:1, 4, 10, 15, 25, 28; 38:1, 6; Deut 10:3; but not in Isa 41:19.

¹¹ Num 25:1; Jos. 2:1; 3:1.

¹² Num 33:49.

¹³ Exod 26:32, 37; 36:36.

¹⁴ Num 25:1; Jos. 2:1; 3:1, and Mic 6:5.

(3) *Belsattim*¹⁵; for Isa 41:19, Vulgate shows (4) *spinam*. In the case of Ez 27:8, 26, Vulgate uses (5) *remiges* (rowers).

		Meaning					
Version Verse	1. wood	2. and 3.: location		4. wood	5. rower		
	Exod 25:5ss	Num 25:1; Jos 2:1; 3:1	Num 33:49	Isa 41:19	Ez 27:8, 26	Joel 4:18	Mic 6:5
MT	עצי שטים	שטים	אבל השטים	הטש	שטים	נהל השטים	שטים
LXX	ξύλον ἄσηπτον	Σαττιν	Βελσαττιμ	πύξον	κωπηλάται	τὸν χειμάρρουσ τῶν σχοίνων	σχοίνων
Vulgate	<i>lingna setthim</i>	Setthim	<i>Belsattim</i>	<i>spinam</i>	<i>remiges</i>	torrentem Spinarum	Setthim

The meanings assumed in 1–5 are clear, as the connection between the MT term and its equivalent in the versions is straightforward and poses no problems of identification.

The LXX translations in Joel 4:18 and Micah 6:5, however, are problematic; and it will be important to examine earlier explanations of the presence of σχοῖνος in these verses. Only a limited number of authors deal with the sense of σχοῖνος in Micah 6:5. Smith, Rudolph and the editors of *La Bible d'Alexandrie* presume confusion between ‘acacia tree’ and ‘rush’, given the vicinity to the river Jordan.¹⁶ Instead, Wolff supposes that the Septuagint ‘perhaps had the Reed Sea [*Schilfmeer*] in mind’.¹⁷ McKane seems to reject both ‘acacia tree’ and ‘reed’, as neither of them appears plausible in context; but he accepts Wolff’s suggestion that the phrase ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλαλ could be ‘a reference to the journey from beginning to end, from Egypt to Promised Land, and not just the final stage’.¹⁸ The proposal is problematic, as the key term הַיָּם־הַיָּם (literally ‘sea

¹⁵ Num 33:49. Eusebius transliterates אַבְלֵ הַשִּׁטִּים (Num 33:49) with Ἀβελσαττειν (in Jerome’s translation *Abelsattim*). For the place name שִׁטִּים (Num 25:1), the former records Σαττειν, while Jerome has *Sattim*. Thus, it seems when translating Eusebius, Jerome transliterates the toponym from the *Onomasticon*, not from the Bible, cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, Erich Klostermann, and Hugo Gressmann, eds., *Werke: Onomasticon urbium et locorum Sacrae Scripturae*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1904), pp. 19–20 and 154–155.

¹⁶ J. M. Powis Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (Edinburgh, 1912), p. 119; Wilhelm Rudolph and Alfred Jepsen, *Micah–Nahum–Habakuk–Zephania* (Gütersloher, 1975), p. 108; Harl et al., p. 78.

¹⁷ Hans W. Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 165; cf. also I. Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, London, 2000), p. 503.

¹⁸ William McKane, *The Book of Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 184.

of reed’) is translated *only* with θάλασσα ἐρυθρά, with three exceptions: τῆς ἐσχάτης θαλάσσης (1Ki 9:26), simply θαλάσση (Jer 30:15), or transliterated with θαλάσσης Σιφ (Jdg 11:16). Nevertheless, the Wolff–McKane insight is important as, we shall see below.

Part B

In his article dedicated to σχοῖνος, J. Aitken supposes the meanings assumed in its five occurrences in LXX are as follows: (1) In Jer. 8: 8 σχοῖνος translates שׁוּ (stylus). The use of σχοῖνος here is associated with ‘the use of reeds as pens, since a stylus made from a reed was used for writing on clay’.¹⁹ (2–3) In Mic 6:5 (‘from Shittim to Gilgal’) it represents the rendering of שׁוּ as a proper name. Given the closeness of Shittim to the Jordan River, one could see the connection between the reeds/σχοῖνος of this river and the proper name of שׁוּ. In Joel 4:18 (τὸν χειμάρρου τῶν σχοίνων or ‘the brook of reeds’), its use might be a harmonisation with Mic 6:5 or an incorrect identification of שׁוּ or ‘acacia tree’.²⁰ However, he admits the presence of σχοίνων in Joel 4:18 and Mic 6:5 is ‘slightly puzzling’.²¹ (4–5) Regarding Jer 18:15, he supposes σχοῖνος should be translated as ‘way’ or ‘path’, since the context of the verse and the larger semantic field of σχοῖνος support this theory.²² The same line of thought applies to LXX Ps 138:3, where σχοῖνος is to be translated with ‘path’²³ in accordance with the context implied by τρίβος and ὁδός, and not as ‘bed (of rushes)’ as the Liddell, Scott, Jones Greek–English Lexicon (1968) mistakenly suggest.²⁴

Part C

There are several good reasons for considering Joel 4:18 and Mic 6:5 more than puzzling. First, σχοῖνος is not the only translation for שׁוּ/שׁוּ (when it refers to something other than a location), as in Isa 41:19 we have the *hapax*

¹⁹ Aitken, p. 433.

²⁰ OED (12.04.2017), ‘acacia, n. Any of numerous plants included or formerly included in the leguminous genus *Acacia* (subfamily *Mimosoideae*), which comprises typically thorny shrubs and trees [...]’.

²¹ Aitken, p. 434.

²² Aitken, p. 438.

²³ Cf. E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, 1914/1983), p. 1064.

²⁴ Aitken, p. 442.

πόζον. Secondly, the Vulgate prefers to transliterate when the MT talks about a sort of wood (case 1), a location (cases 2 and 3), or at least when it reasons that the subject involved is a location (Mic 6:5). Nevertheless, it employs *spinam/spinarum* when neither is implied directly (Isa 41:19, Joel 4:18). More startling is the fact that in the case of Micah 6:5, where the evidence of the versions and the context suggest a location, the Septuagint prefers σχοίνων and seems either not be aware of or ignore Σαττιν.²⁵ It appears that the only reason for considering σχοῖνος as toponymic for Shittim is the strong association between Micah 6:5 and Joel 4:18 in the MT text and Vulgate. Furthermore, the sense assumed by שטים/שטם in LXX and the Vulgate is more fluid than we are led to believe.

According to Rudolph,²⁶ the Septuagint does not seem to recognise the word as the name of the biblical place שטים, and I would add that this is so because the name itself is not acknowledged as such by MT.

The term occurs six times in reference to a specific physical place in the MT (Num 25:1; 33:49; Jos 2:1; 3:1; Joel 4:18; Mic 6:5); but only in four passages does LXX present it as a name of a specific place which can be determined from the context as a camp location (Num 25:1; 33:49; Jos. 2:1; 3:1). On the one hand, one can see that in these four instances the name of the place is associated with verbs of moving *to settle in* (Num 25:1), *to camp by* (Num 33:49), *to send from* (Jos 2:1) and *to set out from* (Jos 3:1). This is as if one could pin-point the exact location of the camp on the map.

²⁵ It is a matter of debate whether the translator of LXX Twelve Prophets was aware or had access to other books of the LXX. Emanuel Tov seems to believe that the Pentateuch was translated into Greek first and that the 'Greek Torah served as lexicon for the later translators who often turned to that translation when encountering difficult Hebrew words' cf. E. Tov, 'The Impact of the Septuagint Translation of the Torah on the Translation of the Other Books', in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible Collected Essays on the Septuagint by Emanuel Tov*, p. 183. Myrto Theodorou suggests that the translator lived 'at a time when the bulk of what we know as the Hebrew Scriptures will have been known and studied.' cf. Theodorou, *Lexical Dependence and Intertextual Allusion in the Septuagint of the Twelve Prophets*, T&T Clark, 2012, p. 3. Cf. also the divergent theories on the same topic by Johan Lust and James Barr discussed in Theodorou, 25–27.

It is impossible to know with certainty whether the translator of LXX Micah was aware of the Greek Pentateuch renderings of שטים as Σαττιν. Theodorou asserts that there is 'no indisputable evidence that the Greek translator of the TP [Twelve Prophets] was influenced by the LXX version of any book' (p. 7). However, following Tov, I suppose that the Greek translator must have known of the possible geographical location and rendering of LXX Numbers 25:1 and 33:49. Moreover, Shittim is the last stopover for Israel before passing the River Jordan and the events that happened at that passage have a definite prominence in the biblical history (Joshua 2–3: as the ark goes in the middle of Jordan, the flow of water stops and the people are able to pass).

The rendering in LXX Micah is either an 'incorrect identification', as Aitken thinks (which one could interpret further as a mistake of the translator) or, as I believe, an intentional exegetical position taken by the translator.

²⁶ Rudolph and Jepsen, p. 108.

On the other hand, Joel 4:18 MT refers to the watering of a valley in an apocalyptic setting, whereas in Micah 6:5 it is not certain at all to which verb the phrase מְדַלְגֵּל עַד-הַגִּלְגָּל is connected. In these uncertain cases, where the context does not present sufficient information about the place, the LXX turns to σχοῖνος. This situation also resembles the case of Vulgate Isa 41:19 and Joel 4:18, where Jerome abandons his usual technique of transliteration in favour of *spinam*.

The generally acknowledged senses for σχοῖνος are either *rush*, *rush bed* or *reed* or *land measure used especially in Egypt*. The latter sense comes from σχοινίς, ἴδος which means *rope*, and is related to the noun σχοινῶς, *rope-maker* and the adjective σχοινινός, *made of rushes*.²⁷ If we add this semantic information to the meanings proposed by Aitken for σχοῖνος (*stylus*, *Shittim*, and *way/path*), it seems that none of them fits any better the situation of Mic 6:5. The apocalyptic setting of Joel 4:18 allows for σχοῖνος to be understood as *reeds* or *acacia trees* as the verse itself is a projection in the future, and thus uncertain by nature. Nonetheless, this is not the case in Micah, where the places and names are used in reminding of Israel's historical past.

In his quest for the sense of ὁ σχοῖνος, Aitken mentions Muraoka's statement that one should read the Septuagint looking for 'what sense a reader [...] ignorant of Hebrew or Aramaic might have made of the translation'²⁸ (p. 438). He also rightly observes that 'it is not to suppose that the Greek should be interpreted in the light of the Hebrew, but that the Greek can only make sense in its relation to the other parts of the sentence'.²⁹ Muraoka himself reads σχοῖνος as *rush* in Joel 4:18 and *whip* or *place-name* in Mic 6:5³⁰ and, later on, he translates it as 'a place-name or a mechanical rendering'.³¹ It is not evident to which other rendering Muraoka refers to (besides the one in LXX Joel 4:18) so as to become a 'mechanical rendering'.

If one is to embrace these two recommendations, σχοῖνος could be read in the generic sense of *bush*. Accordingly, the message of the LXX stands like this: 'My people, remember [...] [what I have done] from the bushes to Gilgal'. In lack of any other historical events in the Exodus history which would support a different geographical location or time for the passage of LXX Micah 6, the idea of a bush here alludes to God's communicating his first commands to Moses from a *bush*, ἐκ τοῦ βάλτου (Exod 3:2–4). The sense of ὁ βάλτος,

²⁷ Henry George Liddell et al., pp. 1746–1747.

²⁸ Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Twelve Prophets* (Louvain, 1993), p. VIII.

²⁹ Aitken, p. 438.

³⁰ Muraoka, 1993, p. 226.

³¹ Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain/Walpole, Mass., 2009), p. 667.

ου is *bramble-bush* (OED: *a rough prickly shrub*),³² and it also refers to the Jewish measure of liquids.³³ Both βάτος and σχοῖνος refer to a type of bush and measure.

Before going further, the syntactic interpretation of this passage requires two clarifications. (1) In translating the MT, the Septuagint mirrors the syntactical situation of the original with the expression לְגַלְגַל עַד־הַיַּם־שֵׁנִים being appended at the end of the two clauses relating the Balaam and Balak episode, but with no syntactical connection to them. The most likely answer to this problem is offered by Taylor who supposes the ellipsis of הַיַּם־שֵׁנִים before מִן, as it takes into consideration an expression already present earlier in Mic 6:3, a further argument to believe the existence of an ellipsis.³⁴ (2) It is obvious that ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλγαλ has no connection with the Balaam story as that happened before the crossing of the Jordan. If this is a separate event, it means that the initial μνήσθητι (Mic 6:5) refers to ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλγαλ as to an independent syntactical phrase. Incorporating the above suppositions (1) and (2), the Greek variant reads a much clear message:

[μνήσθητι] [τί ἐποίησά] ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλγαλ, ὅπως γνωσθῆ ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ κυρίου.

[Remember] [what I (God) have done] ‘from the reeds [bushes] as far as Galgal, that the justice of the Lord might be known’ (NETS, 779)

Returning to the sense of רִשָּׁף, the Vulgate shows that its translation was not limited to *rush* or *measure*, because in Isa 41:19 and Joel 4:18 Jerome translated with *spinam/spinarum*. This suggests that the difference in meaning between ὁ σχοῖνος and ὁ βάτος is not that clear, as the former can have the same property of having thorns. Thus, the translation of ὁ σχοῖνος can be flexible, and should not be confined to *rush* or *measure*, but it can refer also to a generic *bush*.

Botanists do not agree about what kind of plant רִשָּׁף is. Fausset’s *Encyclopaedia* thinks that it corresponds to ‘the thorny acacia, a pure Egyptian term’.³⁵ He comes at the end of a long line of modern commentators from the 1800s, starting with Carpenter–Abbot who think that the shitta trees were

³² OED (12.04.2017), <http://www.oed.com/Entry/22583>.

³³ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1889/1974), p. 99.

³⁴ John Taylor, *The Massoretic Text and the Ancient Versions of the Book of Micah* (London, 1891), pp. 134–135. Subsequent research also supposes an ellipsis. Barthélemy suggested מִן הַיַּם־שֵׁנִים לְגַלְגַל עַד־הַיַּם־שֵׁנִים, cf. Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament* (OBO 50/3; Fribourg/Göttingen, 1992), p. 757. The most recent proposal belongs to Jan Joosten, ‘YHWH’s Farewell to Northern Israel (Micah 6,1–8)’, *ZAW* 125, No. 3 (2013), p. 449: ‘(Remember) [when you crossed?] from Shittim to Gilgal,/that you may recognize the saving acts of YHWH’.

³⁵ A.R. Fausset, *Bible Encyclopaedia, Critical and Expository* (Hartford, Conn., 1911), p. 104.

‘*acanthus* or the *acacia vera*’.³⁶ Morris continues this tradition, adding that the Shittim wood ‘was the product of one or more species of the acacia tree [...] *Acacia gummifera*, or the *Acacia seyal*’.³⁷ Tristram associates the common bush of Acacia with שִׁטִּים (from the Egyptian *Sünt*, cf. also ‘Wadi es–Sunt, or ‘Acacia Valley’, 14 miles southwest of Jerusalem’³⁸), which can be either the *Acacia nilotica* or *Acacia seyal*.³⁹

In more recent times, שִׁטִּים is considered by Moldenke⁴⁰ as the shittim tree or *Acacia nilotica*. Zohary disagrees as *Acacia nilotica* does not grow in Sinai; instead, he proposes *Cassia senna*, given its linguistic resemblance with *Sünt*.⁴¹ He is referring to one member of the *Acacia tree* family, but the presence of other members of the same family is clearly attested in Middle Eastern desert areas.⁴² The difference between שִׁטִּים and שִׁטִּים becomes less clear as both of them are referring to the same type of tree, which could be any of the *Acacia tree* family apart from *Acacia nilotica*.

There are two further matters to be considered. The first one concerns the use of the preposition ἀπό instead of the usual ἐκ in Mic 6:5. Smyth points out that the usual preposition for expressing ‘immediate origin’ is ἐκ, but ἀπό is preferred when referring a remote origin⁴³ or ‘in prose of more remote ancestry’.⁴⁴ Moreover, ἀπό with the genitive case as a replacement for the usual accusative of the extent of space and time appears to be ‘good Greek’.⁴⁵ As a result, it is less likely that LXX translators would have had in mind solely the small distance of time/space between Shittim and Gilgal. The association between time

³⁶ W. Carpenter and G.D. Abbott, *Scripture Natural History* (Boston, 1833), pp. 294–295.

³⁷ F.O. Morris, *Bible Natural History* (Manchester, 1856), p. 135.

³⁸ Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The People’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1893/1904), p. 80.

³⁹ H.B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (London, 1875), p. 438; cf. John Hutton Balfour, *The Plants of the Bible* (London/Edinburgh/New-York, 1885), 81; William H. Groser, *Scripture Natural History* (London, 1888), p. 77.

⁴⁰ Harold N. Moldenke and Alma L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass., 1952), pp. 23–24.

⁴¹ Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 140.

⁴² Morris, p. 135; Balfour, p. 81: ‘Its wood [acacia-tree] is hard and durable, and is susceptible of a fine polish. The plant grows in dry situations, is a native of Egypt, and is scattered over the whole Sinaitic peninsula. It grows also near the Dead Sea’; Groser, p. 227; Rice, p. 197.

⁴³ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), § 1688c, p. 377; cf. Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1961), § 209.3, p. 113.

⁴⁴ Smyth, §1684.c.1, p. 373. His example from Isocrates I.12.81 shows the opposition between ἀπό and ἐκ/ἐξ: τοὺς μὲν ἀπὸ θεῶν, τοὺς δ’ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν θεῶν γεγονότας – ‘some descended (remotely) from the gods, others begotten (directly) of the gods themselves’.

⁴⁵ Blass, Debrunner, and Funk, §161.1–2, p. 88.

and space in this kind of genitive is very close, so it is difficult to determine to which coordinate it might belong.⁴⁶

The second matter concerns the special tie between ὁ βάτος and its MT equivalent הַבִּזְיָה. There seems to be a striking difference in the way in which the LXX and Vulgate behave when referring to various Hebrew terms designating types of bushes. On the one hand, there is the fixed triad of הַבִּזְיָה–βάτος–rubus (MT–LXX–Vulgate), which only refers to the *burning bush* (Exod 3:2–4; Deut 33:16),⁴⁷ and that of הַבִּזְיָה–ράμνος–ramnum, which refers to *bramble* (Jdg 9:14–15; Ps 58:10). On the other hand, קַיִן, הַבִּזְיָה, קַיִן, הַבִּזְיָה, קַיִן, הַבִּזְיָה (all referring to a thorny bush) are rendered with ἄκανθα and *spina* (19 occurrences).⁴⁸ In the first case, the LXX and Vulgate use specific terms to translate a theologically loaded word from Hebrew and a plant which they both interpret as being *bramble*, respectively. By contrast, in the second case they use one generic term for all of them (ἄκανθα and *spina*). Given this evidence, one might argue that in

⁴⁶ An examination of the uses of ἐκ and ἀπό in LXX Micah is not conclusive; still we can say that ἀπό is preferred when it comes to relating great distances in time and space.

ἐκ is used 30 times with the meanings: *from* (a place or something) with no clear or limited movement (1:2, 10; 11; 1:7 (twice); 2:3, 9, 11, 12; 4:2 (twice); 4:10 (twice); 5:5; 9, 11, 12, 13; 7:15, 16); 1:3 is trickier as there is no geographical place to start from: ‘the LORD is coming out of his place’. There are 2 uses with ἐκ *from a distant place* (4:8: ‘daughter Sion, to you it shall come, and the former dominion, a kingdom out of Babylon, shall enter daughter Ierousalem’; 6:4 (twice: ‘I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from a house of slavery’). Other uses of ἐκ are: *instead* (3:6 – twice); *whereby/from these* (6:12) and *because* (7:13). There are two occurrences of ἐκ discussed below in 5:1, ‘from (ἐκ) you’ and ‘from (ἐκ) days of yore’.

As a result, out of 30 occurrences, there are 2 uses of ἐκ referring a long distance and a long time.

ἀπό is used 13 times with the meanings: *in front of* or *before* (1:4; 3:4; 7:17); *from/away from something* (1:16; 3:2 (2 times); 3:3; 7:2; 7:5); and *from then on* (4:7).

Three cases are peculiar in use of ἀπό: 6:5 which is discussed in this article; 7:12 clearly suggests a long geographical distance (cf. Charles S. Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis*. p 205); and 5:1 ἀπό is used in a temporal construction with ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (‘from the beginning’), suggesting *from the beginning of time*.

We can compare the two prepositions. ἐκ is used in 3 occurrences for longer distances out of 30 (1 in 10), while ἀπό shows 2 suggestions of a long distance in 13 occurrences (1 in 6): one temporal (5:1) and one geographical (7:1). This shows that ἀπό is more likely to be used for long distances rather than ἐκ.

To complete our count, the preposition η of the MT appears in all the cases outlined above (43) and in further 8 instances (1:12; 2:8 twice; 2:9; 5:(6)7; 6:8; 7:12 three times; and 7:20) with no hint of movement from a distance place or time – 7:20 is a static κατὰ τὰς ἡμέρας τὰς ἐμπροσθεν (‘you swore to our fathers in former days’). Cf. NETS for the translation from Greek. This is to say that the other LXX translations of η do not interfere with the conclusion above.

⁴⁷ There are three exceptions where they suppose the same concept *bush*: Job 31:40 (הַבִּזְיָה–βάτος–*spina*), Hos 2:8 (הַבִּזְיָה–σκόλοψιν–*spina*), Nah 1:10 (הַבִּזְיָה–σμίλαξ–*spina*).

⁴⁸ Gen 3:18; Exod 22:6; Jdg 8:7, 16; 2Sa 23:6; Ps 117:12; Jer 4:3; 12:13; Ez 28:24; Ecc 7:7; Isa 5:6; 9:18; 7:25; 32:13; 33:12; 34:13; Prov 15:19; 26:9; Sol 2:2. A slight variation presents Ψηνη–ἀκάνθινα ξύλα/ἄκανθαί–*urtica* (Prov. 24:31; Isa 34:13; Hos 9:6).

Micah 6:5 there is no reference to the burning bush as βάτος should have been used instead of σχοῖνος to support my interpretation.

However, despite the fact that each of them was probably indicating a specific type of thorny bush, the Septuagint translates all five Hebrew terms (קוץ, סירה, קדק, שִׁמְרִיר, and חוה) with ἄκανθα. It stands to reason that the above-mentioned observation by Plummer is a close description of the situation in the time of the Septuagint too. There is no reason for us to think that the Septuagint found it easier to render Hebrew plant names or toponyms than we do.

The juxtaposition of what should be two self-excluding elements of a definite article and an apparent proper name in שִׁטִּים presents the Septuagint translator with the ambiguity: either a place with reeds/bushes or the actual time/location of Shittim.⁴⁹

Considering the possible Greek terms for שִׁטִּים present in Exodus and Minor Prophets, choosing a suitable rendering for it in Mic 6:5 poses for the LXX a ‘thorny’ problem, with 3 possible resolutions for translation:

- (a) The normal variation with the triad שִׁטִּים–ἄκανθα–Setthim (cf. above); for Micah 6, the LXX probably discarded ἄκανθα as it seems to be connected in Gen 3:18 and in Exodus 22:5(6) with an agrarian setting (ἄκανθα refers to thorns that grow in one’s field) which is not relevant to this passage;
- (b) שִׁטִּים–βάτος–Setthim; סירה–σκόλοπιν–spina (Hos 2:8) and הַרְסִי–σμίλαξ–spina (Nah 1:10). The last two options are themselves *hapax* and less likely to be understood by anyone. βάτος is a technical word for *burning bush*. If LXX had introduced it, the passage would have generated a very strong association in the mind of the reader with the *burning-bush* passage and thus would have created a cross-reference not really present in the MT original.
- (c) שִׁטִּים–σχοῖνος–Setthim made it into the final version due to its capacity to combine the idea of *thorn bush* that grows near water (suggested by the שִׁטִּים) and *thorn bush* in general. So between choosing an unclear reference to the location of Shittim (his less educated readers may not be able to locate it geographically on the left bank of Jordan anyway), and a place of reeds, the LXX picks the latter.

In contrast with the previous option, by using σχοῖνος the literalness of the passage is preserved as the reader can still connect the reeds with the place near Jordan and Shittim. If the reader is not sufficiently informed to make that connection, the passage conserves its broader message (that of Israel’s journey

⁴⁹ The presence or absence of the article הַ does not make any difference as in all instances where the MT refers a geographical place (cf. the table above) the article is present: בְּשִׁטִּים (Num. 25:1), מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים or מִן־הַשִּׁטִּים (Jos. 2:1 and 3:1, respectively), and בְּלִשְׁטִים (Num. 33:49). One cannot rely on the presence or the absence of the article to differentiate between the toponymical use and that as *wood/reed*.

from a foreign country to the Promised Land) by its soft association with the *burning-bush* passage of Exodus 3.

In conclusion, the presence of a definite article in מִשְׁפַּחָה prompted an actual translation (not transliteration) in the LXX, because in Mic 6:5 there is no clear indication that σχοῖνος refers to a location as is the case in Jos 2:1, 3:1, and Num 25:1. William H. Groser has suggested that in the special case of מִשְׁפַּחָה ‘it is safest, perhaps, to leave the name untranslated’.⁵⁰ Jerome does just that in most of the cases when a localisation or type of wood is referred to. Nevertheless, Wolff’s intuition, proposing an extension of time scale from the Jordan crossing (Shittim–Gilgal) to Reed Sea–Gilgal, paves the way for a broader understanding of the passage; and the reading of ὁ σχοῖνος as *bush* continues that line of thought. The prepositions introducing the two places favour the existence of a greater distance of space/time than that between Shittim and Gilgal.

The impact of this investigation on the interpretation of LXX Micah 6 is twofold.

First, it sheds more light on a difficult LXX passage. Given the elliptic setting of the verse (cf. ellipsis of ‘[μνήσθητι] [τί ἐποίησά]’), the Septuagint translator opted for a more inclusive sense by using σχοῖνος, having in mind the entire pallet of meanings from *rush/reed* and *type of measure* to *bush*. Thus, the term σχοίνων of LXX Micah 6:5 extends the reference from the limits of Shittim-Gilgal to the whole Exodus history starting with Moses’ first calling to mission. After the two summons to attention in Mic 6:1–2, the prophetic message continues with two rhetorical questions (3ab), a calling to testimony against God (3c), and an enumeration of God’s work for his people: salvation from Egypt, the house of slavery (4ab); the sending of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as leaders (4c); and the protection from Balak’s plot (5ab). Inserted at the end of this list, the sentences [μνήσθητι] [τί ἐποίησά] ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλααλ (‘[Remember] [what I (God) have done] from the reeds/bushes to Gilgal’) represents a unique précis of God’s deeds towards the people during Exodus.

Second, the last segment of verse 5 (ὅπως γνωσθῆ ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ κυρίου) receives a whole new reading. Its main purpose is to show what the aim of this dispute between God and his people (in Micah 6:1–8) was: to make known God’s justice (verse 5) and that the appropriate response is ‘to be ready to walk with the Lord’ (verse 8).

It is worth nothing that the singular ἡ δικαιοσύνη translates the plural נִקְיָא. Whereas MT Micah 6:3–5 contains a list of items of justice that ends with the crossing of the Jordan from Shittim to Gilgal, a six-word abstract (ἀπὸ τῶν σχοίνων ἕως τοῦ Γαλααλ) closes the Septuagint version. Consequently, we

⁵⁰ Groser, p. 78.

can compare the impact on the reader of the two versions. With the use of the plural נִקְדָּשׁ, the MT seeks to overwhelm the reader by bringing back into memory a large number of acts performed by God (cf. verse 6:4–5) which are labelled ‘God’s justices’ (NRSV: ‘the saving acts of the LORD’). The effect is extended right through the subsequent rhetorical questions of how one should not praise or ‘come before’ the Lord.⁵¹ This ends with the positive contrast of how one should indeed behave towards God (verse 8).

In the Septuagint, the text creates the sense of a summary of Exodus with the reading ‘from the reeds/bushes as far as Galgal’. The hidden reference to Exodus continues with equating it with *one item of justice*, or God’s δικαιοσύνη.⁵² This act of justice would expect some kind of giving thanks or gratitude from Israel which is reflected in the following rhetorical questions, as examples of how that justice should not be honoured. The impact on the LXX reader is more contained with the creation of a contrast between God’s accomplishment of justice (the safe passage of Israel from Egypt) and the injustice of the people who chose to praise him with an abundance of things or extreme human sacrifices.

Thus, according to the LXX, God contends that he saved Israel by accomplishing the ‘justice’ or δικαιοσύνη of the Exodus. Israel returned to the customs of empty sacrifices, instead of offering the proper sacrifice expressed in verse 8: ‘Has it been told to you, O man, [...] what the Lord seeks from you, but to do judgment and to love mercy and to be ready to walk with the Lord, your God?’ (NETS). Reading together the end of verses LXX Micah 6:5 and 6:8, one understands that Israel honours God’s act of justice, the Exodus, by resolving ‘to be ready to walk with the Lord’, as they have previously done so during that time.

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⁵¹ Watson counts here seven rhetorical questions in Micah 6, cf. Wilfred G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 339. I assume that there are eight rhetorical questions, because 7d (פָּרִי בְטֵנִי הַטָּאָה בְּפִשִׁי) is not an apposition for בְּיֹרֵי, but as a hendiadys of ‘my firstborn’ – ‘the fruit of my body’ which should be interpreted as an elliptical but self-standing sentence: ‘Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, [Shall I give] the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ (following NRSV).

⁵² I should also note that Kennicott mentions two manuscripts 17 and 126 as containing a variant with the singular construct of צדקת יהוה, which corresponds to ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ κυρίου of the Septuagint, cf. B. Kennicott, *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum*, vol 2 (Oxford, 1780), 278.

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