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TEXTUAL VARIATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHRISTIAN SERMONS

TEXTUAL VARIATION

Most, if not all, Early Christian sermons are based on a biblical passage or theme. Those from the Old Testament the Greek Fathers knew from the Septuagint translation in one form or another. Until 400 CE, the Latin Fathers either used some of the various Old Latin translations of the Septuagint or translated for themselves some Greek version. The gradual process of Jerome's fifth-century Vulgate translation becoming the standard version constituted a major change in the West. Certain patristic authors—especially Origen, Theodoret of Cyr, Eusebius, and Jerome—were especially renowned for their magisterial knowledge of Scripture. In their biblical commentaries and other treatises, they expound detailed commentaries on, among other topics, history, lexicography, and geography. In textual criticism, an especially important exegetical tool in these works, none surpassed Origen, whose *Hexapla*, ostensibly a six-column Old Testament edition, provided the means to compare the Septuagint with the Hebrew Bible and with three, or occasionally more than three, later Greek versions. It is believed that Origen's *Hexapla* was available to ancient exegetes in the library of Caesarea for several centuries. Because of the immensity of the work, it was probably never copied *in toto*, but its Septuagint column was certainly copied—and copied repeatedly. Some of these include interesting variant readings from the other columns of the work, often with letters to mark their attribution to one of the later Jewish translators: Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, or sometimes to 'the other', an unknown translation. Through these extracts, patristic authors were exposed to variants of Greek Bible versions, a presentation that would have foregrounded the fact that their Old Testament was the product of translation and that the translations with which they were familiar might have sometimes been imperfect. Some authors were even aware of textual variation among strictly Septuagint witnesses. The most famous account of this phenomenon is by Jerome, in his preface to the Latin version of Chronicles:

If the version of the Seventy translators is pure and has remained as it was rendered by them into Greek, you have urged me on superfluously, my Cromatius ... that I translated the Hebrew scrolls into Latin words. ... Now, in fact, when different versions are held by a variety of regions, and this genuine and ancient translation is corrupted and violated, you have considered our opinion, either to judge which of the many is the true one, or to put together new work with old work. ... The region of Alexandria and Egypt praises in their Seventy the authority of Hesychius; the region from Constantinople to Antioch approves the version of Lucian the Martyr; in the middle, between these provinces, the people of Palestine read the books which, having been labored over by

Origen, Eusebius and Pamphilius published. And all the world contends among them with this threefold variety. (Jerome, *praef. Par.*; transl. Kevin P. Edgecomb)¹

While scholars dispute the extent to which an awareness of the origin and geographical distribution of the different Septuagint text-forms can be read from this statement, it is clear that the Antiochian Fathers quoted some books of the Septuagint in a specific text-form, which they called variously ‘Lucianic’ or ‘Antiochian’. In addition, many fathers had access to readings derived from Origen’s *Hexapla*—that is, the ‘books which had been labored over by Origen’. Jerome and Augustine even argued explicitly over whether the church should use Jerome’s new translation, which reflected *Hebraica veritas* (the Hebrew truth), or the traditional Old Latin translations based on the Septuagint.²

In this article, I examine four extracts from Origen, Jerome, and John Chrysostom in which these authors refer to variation in the Old testament. These case studies differ in the nature of textual variation as well as how the author expresses awareness of textual variation in a sermon. While the context of sermons differs substantially from that of a commentary, many ancient preachers did make explicit use of their exegetical knowledge at the pulpit. Alongside these case studies, I compare textual variants in witnesses available today. In addition, I assess the homiletical function of explicit references to textual variation.

My earlier research on the textual history of the Septuagint has dealt especially with quotations by patristic authors such as Irenaeus, Cyprian, Tertullian, and Lucifer of Cagliari.³ The present study is related to my work on a critical edition of the Second Book of Samuel for the series *Septuaginta: vetus testamentum Graecum*, by the Göttingen Academy of Sciences, which notes, among other things, the most important patristic quotations of that book. The cases in this paper, however, are not from 2 Samuel, as few noteworthy quotations of the book feature in patristic sermons.

Before turning to the case studies, it is worth considering the tools available to scholars for studying references to textual variation in patristic writings. There are, for instance, biblical indexes for most patristic works, the *Biblia patristica* being especially useful with its online tool BiblIndex. For references pertaining to the New Testament, Amy M. Donaldson has compiled references to textual variation in her impressive two-volume dissertation.⁴ To my knowledge, no comparable work on the Old Testament yet exists. For individual authors, there are studies like Karl Hulley’s (1944) on Jerome, which presents a typology of Jerome’s text-critical argumentation. Passing references to the phenomenon can also be found, for example,

¹ Edgecomb 2006.

² See, e.g., Law 2013, 134, 144–45, 161–67.

³ Kauhanen 2012, 2018.

⁴ Donaldson 2009, 2013.

in Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible*, Robert C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch*, and T. M. Law, *When God Spoke Greek*.

For most of the books of the Septuagint, including the Pentateuch and the Prophets, there exists an up-to-date *editio maior* in the Göttingen Septuagint, the apparatus of which indexes all known and relevant textual variations. Any mention of a variant reading in the Old Testament should thus always be compared with the Göttingen Septuagint. For the books not available in Göttingen editions, such as Samuel, Kings, and 1 Chronicles, the Cambridge Septuagint edition (*The Old Testament in Greek*) is a useful source. Some modern biblical commentaries also treat text-critical issues in some depth, for which the *International Critical Commentary*, though now dated, is a good starting point.

CASE STUDIES

Origen, Homiliae in Jeremiam 14.3 / Jer 15:10

In his Homily on Jeremiah (*Homiliae in Jeremiam* = *Hom. Jer.*⁵), ch. 14, Origen refers explicitly to textual variation in Jer 15:10 between the Septuagint manuscripts:

MT לֹא־שָׁנְנָה־לִּי וְלֹא־שָׁנְנָה־לִּי

I have not lent, nor have I borrowed (NRSV)

LXX^{mss} οὔτε ὠφείλησα, οὐδὲ ὠφείλησέ μοι οὐδεὶς (Ziegler 1957)

I neither owed nor did any one owe me (NETS)

LXX^{majority} οὔτε ὠφέλησα οὔτε ὠφέλησέν με οὐδεὶς (Rahlfs; all other manuscripts)

I have not helped *others*, nor has any one helped me (Brenton)

The difference between the Greek readings ὠφείλησα and ὠφέλησα is only one letter. The former derives from the verb ὀφείλω ‘to owe’; with dat., ‘to be debtor’, the latter from ὠφελέω ‘to help; to be of help’. The underlying Hebrew verb נָשָׂא *nāšā* means ‘to lend’. Interestingly, the reading adopted in the critical edition by Ziegler, ὠφείλησα οὐδὲ ὠφείλησέ (from the verb ‘to owe’) is found in only one manuscript, 106, and partly in the original hand of manuscript 88: ωφε(ι)λησα ... ωφειλησε.⁶ In 88 it is not entirely clear what was written in the original hand of the manuscript; at least in the latter verb, there seems to be more traces of ink than just that of an *epsilon*. The *iotas* might have been erased from what would have been a form of the verb ὀφλισκάνω ‘to become a debtor, to become liable to pay’, perhaps to ensure that the verb would not resemble ὠφελέω ‘to help’. I surmise that the decision in Ziegler’s edition—οὔτε ὠφείλησα ‘I did not owe’ is the original reading—is based on it being a meaningful rendering of the Hebrew reading and the easiness with which it could have been corrupted to ὠφέλησα. Thus, the correct reading—that is, the reading of the Hebrew text and possibly that of the original

⁵ Nautin 1977.

⁶ Ziegler 1957. The sigla refer to the following manuscripts: 106 = Ferrara, Bibl. Comun., 187 II (14th cent.); 88 = Rome, Bibl. Vat., Chig. R. VII 45 (10th cent.): 88* ωφε(ι)λησα ... ωφειλησε 88^c ωφλησα ... ωφλησε.

Greek translation—would be ‘I have not lent’ or ‘I did not owe’, whereas most Greek manuscripts read ‘I have not helped’. On these variations, Origen explains as follows:

But in anticipation I have spoken these lines before I discuss the text, *I have not owed* (οὐκ ὠφείλησα); *no one has owed me*. For the Scripture is in two texts. In most of the copies there is, *I have not helped* (οὐκ ὠφέλησα); *no one has helped me*, but in the most accurate copies and in accord with the Hebrew is, *I have not owed, no one has owed me*. So it is necessary both to discuss the text most common and carried in the churches, and not to leave undiscussed the view from the Hebrew Scriptures. (Transl. J.C. Smith)⁷

It is noteworthy that Origen not only acknowledge that in most churches the text has been read as ‘I have not helped’ but that he does not suggest this reading is incorrect. Of course, if ὠφείλησα is the ‘more accurate’ reading, ὠφέλησα must be a corruption from it. To be sure, in *Homily 15 (Hom. Jer. 15.5)*, he attributes the error to a scribal mistake:

Even though we read it in this way, it is necessary also to know that many of the copies of the edition of the Septuagint do not have it in this way. And later, after we considered the remaining editions, we knew it was a faulty copy. And yet the text will be discussed for both versions. (Transl. J.C. Smith)

Here in *Homily 14* he holds that both readings should be explained, διηγέομαι: Δεῖ οὖν καὶ τὸ καθημαξυμένον καὶ φερόμενον ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις διηγήσασθαι καὶ τὸ ἀπὸ τῶν Ἑβραϊκῶν γραφῶν ἀδιήγητον μὴ καταλιπεῖν. Origen first gives an interpretation of the faulty reading ὠφέλησα ‘I have not helped’: if the listeners do not listen to the prophet Jeremiah—or any teacher or speaker—neither the audience nor the speaker will benefit from his speech. Origen then goes on to explain the reading of ‘the most accurate manuscripts’ (τὰ ἀντίγραφα τὰ ἀκριβέστερα): οὐκ ὠφείλησα, οὐδὲ ὠφείλησέ μοι οὐδεὶς ‘I have not owed; no one has owed me’ at some length. He interprets ‘owing’ as ‘owing respect’ which must be ‘paid’ in light of Romans 13:7 (‘Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due’):

But since another discussion is also required on account of the more accurate variant readings that say, *I have not owed nor has anyone owed me*, let us thus also discuss what the literal text holds. He who *pays* to all their dues—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due (cf. Rom 13:7)—and *pays* duties to everyone ... if he *pays* all of the duties, he does not *owe*. (Transl. J.C. Smith)

Origen thus explains a reading that he knows is a corruption, so long as it both allows for a meaningful exegesis⁸ and is widely attested in the copies of the Septuagint in churches. Nevertheless, he presents the reading that accords with the Hebrew text as ‘more accurate’, thus at least implicitly stating that it is theologically superior. It is, nevertheless, impossible to know how the listeners of this sermon would have received this information on textual

⁷ Smith 1998.

⁸ Kamesar 1993, 18; Law 2013, 145.

variation. To a modern audience, however, Origen’s treatment would at least seem to be constructive: he presents the audience with accurate information that they might probably not have gotten elsewhere; the case is memorable, as a small difference in pronunciation, ὠφέλισα/ὠφέλησα, produces a meaningful difference, and, having heard the correct reading, the reader might actually realize that it fits the context better, as the prophet is making an apology for himself, not simply complaining—as one might think on the basis of the beginning of the verse: “Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land!” (Jer 15:10a, NRSV)

Jerome, Homily 11 on Psalm 77 (78)

The next case concerns the attribution of an Old Testament quotation in Matthew. The textual variation here actually concerns the New Testament, but the case is worth exploring as it raises an important methodological question. The patristic text is from *Tractatus in Psalmos*,⁹ a work traditionally attributed to Jerome, though it has been suggested that the work is actually by Origen, and Jerome is only the translator¹⁰ or translator-redactor.¹¹ Even as a translator, however, Jerome could have taken considerable freedom, and at least the final form of the work can still be attributed to him. I will thus call the author ‘Jerome’ with the caveat that the homily may have been based on Origen’s work. In the homily on Psalm 77 (78 in Hebrew), Jerome offers an allegorical reading of the psalm, attributing its words to Christ. He appeals to the words of Jesus in John 5:39 (‘You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf’) and in Matthew 22:29 (‘You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God’). Combining the themes of error and imperfect understanding, the notion of a Christian meaning of Scripture leads Jerome to examine several putative scribal mistakes that result precisely from the scribes not knowing Scripture well enough (*Tract. Ps. 77*, lines 61–66). The psalm title contains the words $\eta\delta\alpha\lambda\ \text{לִּי־בְשִׁמְךָ}$, probably ‘a wisdom-song of Asaph’. In the quotation of Psalm 77:2 in Matthew 13:35, however, many manuscripts attribute the quotation not to Psalms but to Isaiah.

Matt 13:35 ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ [+ Ησαοιου x* Θ f¹.13 33 pc] τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· ἀνοίξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου (N-A²⁷)

This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth to speak in parables’ (NRSV)

No biblical manuscript known today attributes the quotation to Asaph. Yet Jerome does exactly this: ‘Asaph’, he insists, is the correct reading and can be ‘found in all the ancient copies’. He laments that the faulty reading ‘Isaiah’ found in some manuscripts had been attributed to the evangelist himself, the misattribution having been used as an argument against Christianity:

⁹ Morin 1958.

¹⁰ Peri 1980, 176–79.

¹¹ Coppa 1993, 26–32.

Consequently, Matthew says: ‘All these things were done in fulfillment of what was spoken through the prophet Asaph.’ This is the reading found in all the ancient copies, but people in their ignorance changed it. As a result, to this day many versions of the Gospel read: ‘In fulfillment of what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. . . .’ This is not the utterance of Isaiah, but of Asaph.

Indeed, Porphyry, that unbeliever, makes this very point in his attack upon us and says, ‘Your evangelist, Matthew, was so ignorant that he said: “What is written in Isaiah the prophet. . . .”’ Now, just as this was the scribes’ error, it was, likewise, their error to write Isaiah instead of Asaph. Hence, when the inexperienced (because the early church was a congregation of ignorant people) were reading in the Gospel: ‘In fulfillment of what was written in Asaph the prophet’, the one who first transcribed the Gospel began to ask: Who is this Asaph the prophet? He was not known to the people. And what did the scribe do? While emending an error, he made an error. (Transl. Fathers of the Church 1964, modified in Donaldson 2009, 2:370)

But did Jerome really have any copies of the Gospel of Matthew with the reading ‘Asaph’? As Jerome has a reputation for exaggeration, he may have simply thought that ‘Asaph’ should have been the correct reading and that it must therefore have been in ‘all the ancient copies’, even if he had never seen such a manuscript. His explanation of how the reading ‘Isaiah’ came to be would thus have been based on circumstantial evidence not on transcriptional considerations, as a corruption from ‘Asaph’ to ‘Isaiah’ is not particularly likely to have come about in either Latin or Greek. Moreover, Jerome makes no mention of any Gospel copies that lack the name of the prophet altogether, which is the case in most of the manuscripts known today, including codex Vaticanus (B 03). The editors of the Nestle-Aland and Greek New Testament editions cautiously suggest that the lack of any name was even the original reading: ‘if no prophet were originally named, more than one scribe might have been prompted to insert the name of the best-known prophet—something which has, in fact, happened elsewhere more than once.’¹² Accordingly, I would not use Jerome here as a witness for an actual variant reading ‘Asaph’; rhetorical and apologetic considerations, together with his tendency to stretch the truth, explain his hyperbolic reference to an otherwise unattested variant as being ‘found in all the ancient copies’.

Regardless of the factual basis for the reading ‘Asaph’, reference to the possibility of an error in copies of the Gospels—that ignorant copyists might not have recognized the name ‘Asaph’, changing it instead to ‘Isaiah’—will likely have been memorable for the audience.

John Chrysostom, Sermones in Genesim 6.2 / Gen 2:23

According to Robert Hill, in his homilies on Genesis—more than 70 altogether—John Chrysostom appeals to alternative versions of the biblical text only once (*Serm. Gen. = Sermones in Genesim 6.2*).¹³ The passage is about the creation of Eve in Genesis 2:23:

Gen 2:23

Then the man said, “This at last (הִנֵּנִי) is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (NRSV)

¹² Metzger 1971, 33.

¹³ Hill 2005, 68–69; Brottier 1998.

καὶ εἶπεν Ἀδὰμ τοῦτο νῦν ὅστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου καὶ σὰρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός μου (Wevers 1974)

τοῦτο νῦν ὅστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου] σ' θ' τοῦτο ἅπαξ ὅστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων (οστων 569-761) μου (> 761^c)
135 569^{cat}-761^{cat}; σ' τοῦτο ἅπαξ M (Wevers 1974, second apparatus)

The Hebrew word **עַתָּה**, usually translated as ‘now’ or ‘at last’, means, among other things, ‘occurrence’. In the Septuagint translation of Genesis, it is most often rendered with the Greek **νῦν** ‘now’. In some other books, including Judges and Samuel, the usual rendering is **ἅπαξ** ‘once’. That reading is found here in Genesis 2:23, too, in the alternative translations by Symmachus and Theodotion, which would probably have been known to Chrysostom through marginal notations in the Septuagint manuscripts he used. Chrysostom presents this reading as ‘more precise’:

This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Now, some commentators claim that he is suggesting not simply that fact but also the manner of creation, and that by saying *This is now* (Τοῦτο νῦν) he suggests that such a genesis would not apply also to a woman—the meaning given by another translator as well in rendering it more precisely (ἀκριβέστερον) ‘This once’, (Τοῦτο ἅπαξ) as if to say, Only now is a woman made from a man alone, whereas later it will not be in this manner but from both. (*Serm. Gen. 6.2*; transl. Hill 2005, 69)

That is, only this one time was woman—or any being—created ‘from man alone’, and, in the future, more people will come forth from both man and woman. The same notion can be found in Chrysostom’s ‘long series’ *Homilies on Genesis* (*Hom. Gen. 15*), Hill suggesting that the formation of womankind may have been of particular interest to Antiochian exegetes.¹⁴ I find it noteworthy that Chrysostom implies favouring another translation over the Septuagint, presenting it as ‘more precise’ (ἀκριβέστερον); a more nuanced understanding of the text would either have been dependent on knowledge of either Hebrew, which was extremely rare in a Greek congregation of the time, or of other Old Testament translations, such as Symmachus and Theodotion, quoted above. The homiletical function seems to be to give the audience expert information that they could not have known otherwise. Text-critical or translation-critical insight then leads to a more refined exegesis of a passage that is otherwise likely to have been familiar to Chrysostom’s audience.

John Chrysostom, Expositiones in Psalmos 10 / Ps 10:7–10 (9:28–30 LXX)

The previous case can be complemented with a very different discussion of textual variation by Chrysostom. As Hill has noted, in his *Expositiones in Psalmos* (ch. 10; PG 55:137), Chrysostom offers little exegesis of the textual variants he mentions, and it is debatable whether these ‘expositions’ are even homilies as such. Nevertheless, there is an implied reader or listener who is expected to have benefitted from Chrysostom’s insights. In support of this claim, Hill refers to a passage in which Chrysostom cites Psalm 10:7–10 (9:28–31 LXX) with variant readings from an otherwise unknown ‘another version’. I will present the citation in

¹⁴ Hill 2005, 69.

brief excerpts in English together with the Greek Septuagint text and occasional readings from other versions, interspersed with my own comments. The cited text begins as follows:

Whose mouth is full of cursing, bitterness and treachery, under their tongue suffering and trouble

[πόνος] (another version, “useless” [Ἀνωφελές]). (transl. Hill 2005, 69–70)

Ps 9:28 (10:7) οὗ ἄρα τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ γέμει καὶ πικρίας καὶ δόλου, ὑπὸ τὴν γλῶσσαν αὐτοῦ κόπος καὶ πόνος. (Rahlfs 1931)

The reading ‘useless’ for ‘trouble’ by ‘another version’ is unattested in any other source. However, in other witnesses for this psalm, there are several other variant readings attributed to ‘another translation’, Ἄλλος,¹⁵ and it is not impossible that Chrysostom could have known of more such renderings that have not been preserved to us.

They lie in wait with the rich in ambush so as to slay the innocent (another, ‘lying in ambush by the halls’).

Ps 9:29 (10:8) ἐνκάθηται ἐνέδρα μετὰ πλουσίων ἐν ἀποκρύφοις ἀποκτεῖναι ἀθῶνον, σ’ ἐγκάθηται ἐνεδρεύων παρὰ τὰς αὐλάς ἐν ἀποκρύφοις (Field 1867)

Here, Chrysostom cites a reading (ἐνεδρεύων παρὰ τὰς αὐλάς) that other witnesses present as originating from Symmachus.

Their eyes watch for the needy, they lie in ambush like a lion in his lair [μάνδρα] (another, ‘as in his den [περιφράγματι]’),

Ps 9:29 (10:8) οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν πένητα ἀποβλέπουσιν· 9:30 (10:9) ἐνεδρεύει ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ ὡς λέων ἐν τῇ μάνδρᾳ αὐτοῦ,

The Septuagint reading μάνδρα denotes any ‘enclosed space’. It renders here the Hebrew word חֵטְל ‘thicket; hut’. The ‘other’ rendering Chrysostom cites, περίφραγμα ‘place fenced round, enclosure’, is no more accurate a description for the space in which a lion would lie in ambush, unless it refers to an enclosed arena, from which a lion is let loose to fight dogs¹⁶ or kill people. Note that the English translation has merely opted for two words that otherwise share the same meaning: ‘lair’ and ‘den’.

they lie in wait to rob the poor, to rob the poor in the act of releasing them [ἐν τῷ ἐλκύσαι αὐτόν]

(another, “in release of them” [Ἐν ἐλκυσμῷ αὐτοῦ]);

9:30 (10:9) ἐνεδρεύει τοῦ ἀρπάσαι πτωχόν, ἀρπάσαι πτωχὸν ἐν τῷ ἐλκύσαι αὐτόν·

The difference in the readings, albeit with no real semantic difference, is between an infinitive construction and a genitive construction with a verbal noun. Again, the variation is known only in Chrysostom’s quotation, though it is hard to discern any exegetical significance from it.

¹⁵ See Field 1867, 2:97–102. In the footnotes, Field notes Chrysostom’s readings with the parenthetical remark ‘(apud) Chrysost.’

¹⁶ See, e.g., Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 17.92: εἰσήγαγεν εἷς τι περίφραγμα λέοντα τέλειον καὶ τῶν δοθέντων κυνῶν δύο τοὺς εὐτελεστάτους προέβαλε τῷ λέοντι (Fischer & Vogel 1888–1906).

in their snare [παγίδι] they will humiliate them (another, “in the net” [σαγήνη]).

Psa. 9:31 (10:10) ἐν τῇ παγίδι αὐτοῦ ταπεινώσει αὐτόν,

σ' ἔλκυσας αὐτόν ἐν τῇ σαγήνῃ αὐτοῦ (Field 1867)

‘Net’ (σαγήνη) is a more accurate translation for the underlying Hebrew word, נֶשֶׁךְ. The same reading may be preserved in Syriac, in the so-called Syro-Hexapla, where it is attributed to Symmachus: ܡܫܕܬܐ *māṣīdtā* ‘net’. There are no other Greek witnesses for the word σαγήνη, and Field has essentially back-translated the Syriac reading, adopting σαγήνη from Chrysostom.

They will stoop and fall down in their act of dominating the poor (another, ‘But they will be bruised and bent as they join forces with the strong against the weak’).

Psa. 9:31 (10:10) κύψει καὶ πεσεῖται ἐν τῷ αὐτόν κατακυριεῦσαι τῶν πενήτων.

σ' ὁ δὲ θλασθεῖς καμφοθήσεται, ἐπιπεσόντος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἰσχυρῶν αὐτοῦ τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν (Field 1867)

Again, the same alternative reading, with minor modification, is found in the Syro-Hexapla, in which it continues a previous reading attributed to Symmachus.

On the textual variation as a whole, Hill ponders whether Chrysostom’s audience would have been ‘grateful for all the textual embellishment they were offered by the preacher on these verses, especially as he had earlier made some typically pejorative remarks about “the scholars”.’ Further, Hill surmises that the style might have been that of a young Chrysostom trying to impress his audience. Alternatively, it has been suggested that all of the ‘other’ readings here might have been added later, not by Chrysostom.¹⁷ On the other hand, Chrysostom expected much from his audience in his attempt to make his sermons more memorable.¹⁸ Perhaps, then, the repetition of some expressions from ‘another version’ was meant to enhance the retention of his sermon.

It can be noted, at any rate, that at least some of the alternative translations might be seen underlining the feral nature of ‘the wicked’ or ‘impious’ (Ps 9:23 = 10:2)—the ‘they’ of the citation above. Since a predator uses its mouth to devour its prey, when used for cursing, it thus becomes ‘useless’ (v. 28). Lying in ambush ‘by the halls’ (v. 29) might similarly mean lying in ambush even by a human settlement, something a hungry predator might do, while the use of the word περίφραγμα in v. 30 could suggest an image of a lion awaiting for its prey at the arena. On the other hand, the more specific term ‘net’ (v. 31) for a snare by ‘the other’ might relate to a context of hunting. This interpretation would also suit Chrysostom’s concluding question: ‘do you see them [i.e., the wicked] turned into a wild beast?’ The notion of ‘the wicked’ as wild beasts is, however, also in the Septuagint version, and not all of the ‘other’ readings do expand on this interpretation.

¹⁷ Hill 2005, 70.

¹⁸ Maxwell 2006.

CONCLUSION

In the first example, Origen offers an exegesis of the traditional reading ‘I have not helped’ in the Septuagint of Jeremiah (15:10), even though he holds that reading to be corrupt. Presenting a variant reading more in accordance with the Hebrew text, ‘I have not owed’, he is able to offer an interpretation that better fits the context. I trust that the audience would have benefited from such a reference to Old Testament textual variation. As is well known, Origen did not consider textual variation in the Bible to be a problem as such. His text-critical work with the Septuagint was meant to provide means to compare the Jewish with the Christian Bible, not to eliminate variations by producing a standard text. This approach fits his exegesis well in the example cited, as the textual variation may have benefited the congregation by fostering a more nuanced interpretation of the text.

In contrast, Jerome aimed to present the Church with a critical Latin Old Testament. While he considered variation to have emerged essentially from corruption, he did not conceal it from his audience but discusses it explicitly in scholarly commentary. In the second example, in his introduction to a quotation from Psalm 77(78):2 in Matthew 13:35, Jerome refers to a factually correct reading ‘Asaph’ putatively found in ‘all the ancient copies’. While Jerome may have made the claim solely for apologetic purposes, without having seen such a copy of the Gospels, his reference to textual variation in copies of the Gospels would likely have been memorable to the listeners.

The examples from Chrysostom’s sermons, or expositions, presented two very different approaches to referencing textual variation; in his homily on Genesis 2:23, knowledge of another translation (‘once’ for ‘now’), known via Origen’s *Hexapla*, offers a small but not insignificant nuance to his interpretation of the creation of womankind. In his *Expositions on Psalms*, by contrast, Chrysostom simply mentions variants from ‘another’ translation, perhaps that of Symmachus, which is occasionally our only extant source for such readings. These readings may have been used to underscore the feral nature of ‘the wicked’ in Ps 9 (10), but it is not at all clear what Chrysostom is aiming to achieve with such references. It is perhaps the very arbitrariness of the references that have made some scholars doubt whether they even stem from Chrysostom himself.

Ultimately, knowledge of various versions and text-forms of the Old Testament may be of use to a modern scholar studying the patristic homilies in context.

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