

Identities and Ideologies: The Greek Translator(s) of the Pentateuch and God's Arm

Often used in the so-called Deuteronom(ist)ic expression “with mighty hand and outstretched arm”,¹ God's hands and arms are associated with His power and might, and often refer to God leading the Israelites out of Egypt.² In fact, *all* the references to God's “mighty hand” in the Pentateuch refer directly to the *exodus*, and these references often couple God's hand with other concepts denoting power and might.³ God's arm is, then, used to underline God's might⁴ — but is it only used metonymically to denote power, or does it constitute a part of God's physical body? This article will focus on God's outstretched arm, and how this is portrayed in the LXX-Pentateuch, examining possible anti-anthropomorphic tendencies visible in the renderings, as well as subtle instances of Egyptian influences in the depiction of the divine outstretched arm.

1. Introduction

Bodies and their significances are gaining increased interest within Biblical Studies.⁵ As an aspect of this “Körpergeschichte,”⁶ also divine embodiment is addressed. Indeed, God, in the Bible, is described as having a body and His body is often described with humanlike (*i.e.*, anthropomorphic) terms.⁷ Fritsch (1943) proposed that LXX-Pentateuch, sporadically, spiritualizes these anthropomorphic conceptions of God.⁸ The recent development of a Septuagint-theology re-opened the debate regarding the so-called anti-anthropomorphisms as an element of LXX's theology.⁹ Against this background, we explore one particular anthropomorphism: God's uplifted arm in the Pentateuch (usually βραχίων ὑψηλός). Some interesting variants appear in the LXX-Pentateuch. This leads to the first question addressed our paper: what does the Greek translation of God's arm tell about the translators' stance on anthropomorphisms? Can the LXX-variants be seen as reflecting a particular (anti-anthropomorphic) ideology?

¹ Cf. H. Ausloos, *The Deuteronomist's History: The Role of the Deuteronomist in Historical-Critical Research into Genesis-Numbers* (OTS 67; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 18, 150.

² P. Biard, *La puissance de Dieu* (TICP 7; Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1960), 28-31.

³ A. Coetsee, “YHWH's ‘Greatness’, ‘Mighty Hand’, ‘Deeds’ and ‘Mighty Acts’ in Deuteronomy 3:24,” *OTE* 34/1 (2021): 114-40 (129).

⁴ KJV for instance in Deut 5:15 does not translate God's outstretched arm, but instead speaks of God's power. A note explains: “the hand and arm symbolize divine activity and strength.”; Ancient commentators, such as Eusebius similarly interpret the arm and hand of God metaphorically (see Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 8.10.7-8), but also more recently, e.g. Coetsee, “YHWH's ‘Greatness’,” 136; C. Houtman, “‘YHWH is My Banner’ — ‘A ‘Hand’ on the Throne of YH’: Ex xvii 15b, 16a and Their Interpretation,” in *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament: A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap and the Retirement of Prof. Dr. J. Mulder* (ed. A. van der Woude; OTS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 110-20 (114).

⁵ E.g., A. Wagner (ed.), *Göttliche Körper – Göttliche Gefühle: Was leisten anthropomorphe und anthropopathische Götterkonzepte im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament?* (OBO 270; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2014); G. Etzel Müller & A. Weissenrieder (eds), *Verkörperung als Paradigma einer theologischen Anthropologie* (TBT, 172; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); T. Kamionkowski & W. Kim (eds), *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (LHB 465; New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

⁶ A. Wagner, “Menschenkörper – Gotteskörper: Zur Einführung,” in *Göttliche Körper – Göttliche Gefühle: Was leisten anthropomorphe und anthropopathische Götterkonzepte im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament?* (ed. A. Wagner; OBO 270; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2014), 1-30.

⁷ Cf. A. Wagner, *God's Body: The Anthropomorphic God in the Old Testament* (transl. M. Salzmann; New York: T&T Clark, 2019).

⁸ C.T. Fritsch, *The anti-anthropomorphisms of the Greek Pentateuch* (Princeton: University Press, 1943).

⁹ E.g., M. Rösel, “Eine Theologie der Septuaginta? Präzisierungen und Pointierungen,” in *Theologie und Textgeschichte. Septaginta und Masoretischer Text als Äußerungen theologischer Reflexion* (eds F. Ueberschaer, T. Wagner & J.M. Robker; WUNT 407; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 25-43.

A second question addressed in the latter part of this article concerns the theme of Egyptian influences on the lexicon of the LXX. In fact, recent studies have argued that some renderings reflect the socio-cultural environment of the Greek translator, presumed to be Ptolemaic, leaving traces or constituting so-called “Egyptian influences” in the LXX.¹⁰ The image of the “uplifted arm” is attested in Egyptian art from the Middle Kingdom until Graeco-Roman times.¹¹ Now, does the Greek translation of the divine uplifted arm show a vicinity to this Egyptian imagery? If yes, could we say that the translators were influenced by the Egyptian context and that this is reflected in their translational choices?

In sum, by addressing God’s uplifted arm in LXX-Pentateuch through the lens of anthropomorphism and Egyptian imagery, we interact with two recent themes of LXX-research. We will show how the translation of the divine arm in the LXX-Pentateuch can tell something about the *ideology* and *identity* of the Greek translators.

2. God’s outstretched arm in the Pentateuch

In the Pentateuch, the theme of the *mighty divine hand and outstretched arm* recurs quite frequently.¹² In fact, two types of references can be distinguished:¹³ (1) references containing only the mighty hand of God; and (2) references joining the mighty hand to the outstretched arm motif (in what follows, this will be called “*expanded formula*” or “*double formula*”). In Hebrew, these references read: (1) בַּיָּד הַזֹּקָה / בְּהֹזֶק יָד,¹⁴ and (2) בַּיָּד הַזֹּקָה וּבִזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה.¹⁵ Remarkably, the last type of reference, namely the combination of the strong hand and the outstretched arm, is found only in Deuteronomy, and has therefore been considered part of the Deuteronom(ist)ic language.¹⁶ The expression “with mighty hand” or the combined “with mighty hand and outstretched arm” are considered as one of the *Mächtighkeitsformel* of Deuteronomy and Deuteronom(ist)ic literature, formulae expressing God’s mightiness, usually associated with the exodus-tradition.¹⁷

The occurrences of the mighty divine hand and outstretched arm are somewhat different in the LXX. Two major differences with the MT can be observed. 1) LXX-Ex 6:1 and 32:11 no longer contain God’s hand present in the MT, but instead refer to God’s *arm*; 2) LXX-Deut 3:24; 6:21; 7:8; 9:26.29(LXX^B) refer both to God’s mighty hand *and arm*, whereas the MT refers only to God’s mighty hand. This all can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Overview			
	Mighty hand	Mighty hand and outstretched arm	Outstretched arm
LXX	Ex 6:1; 13:3.9.14.16	Deut 3:24; 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8.19; 9:26.29(B); 11:2; 26:8	Ex 6:1.6; 32:11;
MT	Ex 6:1 (2x); 13:3.9.14.16; 32:11; Deut 3:24; 6:21; 7:8; 9:26.29	Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8	Ex 6:6

¹⁰ S. Pfeiffer, “Ägyptische Elemente im Griechischen der LXX,” in *Die Sprache der Septuaginta* (eds E. Bons & J. Joosten; LXX.H; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2016), 229-243.

¹¹ B. Strawn, “‘With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm’: On the Meaning(s) of the Exodus Tradition(s),” in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice* (eds I. de Hulster, B. Strawn & R. Bonfiglio; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 103-16; J. Jeon, “Egyptian Iconography and the Battle with Amalek (Exodus 17) Revisited,” *Semitica* 61 (2019): 89-115.

¹² A list of all the occurrences is presented here: K. Martens, “‘With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm’: The Meaning of the Expression *byd hzqh wbrzrew’ ntwyh*,” *SJOT* 15/1 (2001): 123-141 (124).

¹³ Distinction by Brent Strawn: Strawn, “With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm,” 104.

¹⁴ “with a mighty hand”: Ex (3:19; 6:1 – hand of God or hand of Pharaoh ?); 13:3,9,14,16; (Num 20:20 – the only time a ‘mighty hand’ is not attributed to God); Deut 3:24; 6:21; 7:8; 9:26; 34:12.

¹⁵ “with mighty hand and outstretched arm”: Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8.

¹⁶ Strawn, “With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm,” 105; Ausloos, *The Deuteronomist’s History*, 18, 150.

¹⁷ S. Kreuzer, “Die Mächtighkeitsformel im Deuteronomium: Gestaltung, Vorgeschichte und Entwicklung,” *ZAW* 109 (1997): 188-207.