
FIRSTFRUITS IN *EXODUS* 22:28-29

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the text of Ex 22:28-29. The LXX presents two lessons that have no correspondence in TM: ἀπαρχὰς and καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου. In particular, the first term defines "first fruits." It is hypothesized that the TM underwent haplography due to mechanical causes. The reconstructed Hebrew text returns a parallelism between ראשית and בכור in v. 28. In addition, it is noted that Ex 22:28-29 hints at an archaic phase that included human sacrifice.

KEYWORDS

Hebrew Bible. 2 Septuagint. 3 Book of Exodus (22:28-29).

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el texto de Ex 22:28-29. La LXX presenta dos lecturas que no tienen correspondencia en el TM: ἀπαρχὰς e καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου. En particular, el primer término define las "primicias". Se plantea la hipótesis de que el TM sufrió una haplografía por causas mecánicas. El texto hebreo reconstruido restituye un paralelismo entre ראשית y בכור del v. 28. Además, se observa que Ex 22:28-29 revela rastros de una fase arcaica que contemplaba el sacrificio humano.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Biblia hebrea, Septuaginta, Libro del Éxodo (22:28-29).

In the entry ἀπαρχή of the very recent *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (= HTLS) it is noted¹:

"In sum, ἀπαρχή in the LXX seems to strongly connote produce or goods set apart to the Lord for religious purposes. Apart from the figure regarding the Egyptian firstborn (Ps 77[78]:51; 104[105]:36), the LXX does not use directly of people (e.g. the firstborn Israelites or the Levites), though Exod 22:28-29 comes close. Although later religious literature does not use ἀπαρχή in reference to physical entities as exclusively as the LXX does, the connotation of consecration to God (frequently with harve) continues."

We shall examine, in this connection, *Ex* 22:28-29; this is the text in question²:

28 ἀπαρχὰς ἄλωνος καὶ ληνοῦ σου οὐ καθυστερήσεις· τὰ πρωτότοκα τῶν υἱῶν σου δώσεις ἐμοί. 29 οὕτω ποιήσεις τὸν μόσχον σου καὶ τὸ πρόβατόν σου καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου· ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας ἔσται ὑπὸ τὴν μητέρα, τῇ δὲ ὀγδόῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀποδώσεις μοι αὐτό

("28 You shalt not delay [the offering of] the firstfruits of your threshing floor and of your winepress; thou shalt give me the firstborn of thy sons. 29 You shall do the same concerning your calf and your cattle and your donkey: for seven days he shall stay with his mother; on the eighth day you shall give him back to me")

¹ HTLS 2020, col. 870.

² For the Greek text: Wevers 1991; for a bibliographical *status quaestionis*, cf. Hattingh 2013, 38-48.

To which corresponds the Masoretic Text (= MT) that follows:

28 מְלֶאֱתָהּ וְדָמְעָהּ לֹא תִאָּחַר בְּכוֹר בְּנֶיךָ תִּתְּנֶנּוּ לִי
 29 כֹּוֹתֵמֶשֶׁה לְשׁוֹרָה לְצֹאֲנָהּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים יִהְיֶה עִם־אִמּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי תִּתְּנֶנּוּ לִי

(“28 You shall not delay [the offering of] your harvest and [of] your pressing; you shall give me the firstborn of your sons. 29 You shall do the same concerning your bull, your flock: for seven days he shall be with his mother; on the eighth day you shall give him to me”)

There are variations that are best appreciated when presented in synopsis³:

	ἀπαρχὰς
מְלֶאֱתָהּ	ἄλωνος
וְדָמְעָהּ	καὶ ληνοῦ σου
לֹא	οὐ
תִּאָּחַר	καθυστερήσεις·
בְּכוֹר	τὰ πρωτότοκα
בְּנֶיךָ	τῶν υἱῶν σου
תִּתְּנֶנּוּ	δώσεις
לִי	ἐμοί.
כֹּוֹ	οὕτως
תִּעֲשֶׂה	ποιήσεις
לְשׁוֹרָה	τὸν μόσχον σου
	καὶ
לְצֹאֲנָהּ	τὸ πρόβατόν σου
	καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου·
שִׁבְעַת	ἑπτὰ
יָמִים	ἡμέρας
יִהְיֶה	ἔσται
עִם	ὕπὸ
אִמּוֹ	τὴν μητέρα, [without possessive pronoun]
בַּיּוֹם	τῆ δὲ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ ὀγδόῃ
הַשְּׁמִינִי	τῆ ὀγδόῃ
תִּתְּנֶנּוּ לִי	ἀποδώσεις μοι αὐτό.

The first macroscopic datum that catches the eye is precisely the presence of ἀπαρχὰς where the TM has no equivalent; similarly for καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου; moreover, the use of δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι for the first and second תתן respectively is worth noting.

The presence of ἀπαρχὰς can be understood as an explanatory innovation of the translator, moreover creating a parallelism with בכור that follows: the character of genuineness of the Masoretic lesson would follow.

The presence of καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου could also be considered secondary, due to the possible reminiscence of *Ex* 20:17, where שור and חמור recur together and are rendered in this case with βοῦς for the former term but with ὑποζύγιον for the latter, as in 22:29⁴. Nevertheless, even in this case it is more likely to think of a haplography derived from the assonance between שור and חמור which led to a slip of omission.

³ The lesson ἀπαρχὰς finds correspondence in the Peshitta, the targumim and the Vulgate, while the same cannot be said for καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου.

⁴ With the use of μόσχος in 22:29 the translator wanted to specify the young animal, the “calf”.

Finally, the use of ἀποδίδωμι, “to return”, for the second תתן can be explained by the fact that the animals mentioned above and that they must spend the seven-day period with their mother belong by right to Yahweh⁵ and then at the end of the period they are returned to him.

The most conspicuous discrepancies between the Hebrew and Greek texts thus seem justifiable as innovative interventions by the translator. Nevertheless, they are also assessable from another perspective.

For the case of ἀπαρχὰς one could conjecture the original presence of ראשית on the basis of Ex 23:19. At this point it is interesting to appreciate the implications of a segment that includes, in addition to the conjecture of ראשית, the last two words of v. 27:

תֹּאחֶר לֹא מִלֶּאֱתָךְ וּדְמַעַךְ רֵאשִׁית 28 תֹּאֲרֵ לֹא

The bold letters serve to highlight a presence of *aleph* and *resh* that can easily cause a *lapsus calami* in the copyist’s memorisation and self-dictation of the text, in this case resulting in very likely haplography⁶.

Also with regard to the presence of καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου without equivalent in the Hebrew text, the accident of a haplography derived from the assonance between שור and חמור that led to a omissive *lapsus* is very plausible.

The reconstructible Hebrew text therefore sounds as follows:

28 רֵאשִׁית מִלֶּאֱתָךְ וּדְמַעַךְ לֹא תֹאחֶר בְּכֹר בְּנֵיךָ תִּתְּנֵנִי לִי
29 כְּפִן־תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשֹׂרְךָ לְצֹאֲנֶךָ וְלַחֲמֹרְךָ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים יִהְיֶה עִמָּאמוּ בְיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי תִתְּנֵנִי לִי

“28 Thou shalt not delay [the offering of] the firstfruits of your harvest and [of] your pressing; thou shalt give me the firstborn of thy children. 29 You shall do the same concerning your bull, your flock and your donkey: for seven days he shall be with his mother; on the eighth day you shall give him to me”)

Returning to what is stated in HTLS and specifically the words “Apart from the figure regarding the Egyptian firstborn (Ps 77[78]:51; 104[105]:36), the LXX does not use directly of people (e.g. the firstborn Israelites or the Levites), though Exod 22:28-29 comes close”, it should be noted that ἀπαρχὰς - traceable to ראשית - does not “come close” to referring to persons, but rather forms a parallelism with בכור which in fact concerns persons. Not only that, but what follows in v. 29 makes explicit the sense of נתן and (ἀπο)δίδωμι. The iterated use of נתן determines a further parallelism between the human בכור and the provisions for the offering of animals, which must also be firstborn. This correlation is diriment for

⁵ Cf. Ex 13:1-16, 22:28-29, 34:19-20; Lv 27:26-27; Nm 18:15, 18:15-18; Dt 21:15-17.

⁶ Cf. Balduino 1979, 55: “Quando il copista alza gli occhi dall’esemplare che sta redigendo e torna a leggere un nuovo frammento del modello, non è detto che la sua lettura riprenda sempre dal punto esatto dov’era stata interrotta, ma può saltare un verso o una riga, oppure ripetere una parola o tralasciarne un’altra che aveva letto ma non trascritto, e così via” (“When the copyist looks up from the specimen he is redacting and goes back to read a new fragment of the pattern, his reading does not necessarily always resume from the exact point where it was interrupted, but he may skip a verse or a line, or repeat a word or omit another that he had read but not transcribed, and so on”) and Stussi ⁵2015, p. 97: “Immaginando di scindere l’atto di copiare in fasi successive, tra la percezione visiva delle lettere scritte sul modello e la loro riproduzione manuale, c’è una zona intermedia dove avviene l’autodettatura: ciò comporta una lettura interiore (o immagine acustica che dir si voglia) nella quale il copista introduce proprie abitudini fonetiche, causa di errore” (“Imagining splitting the act of copying into successive stages, between the visual perception of the letters written on the model and their manual reproduction, there is an intermediate zone where self-dictation takes place: this involves an inner reading (or acoustic image as you like) in which the copyist introduces his or her own phonetic habits, the cause of error”).

establishing the meaning to be attributed to $\eta\delta$ / οὕτως: ‘in the same way’⁷. A further, albeit disturbing, consequence concerns the fate of the human first-born: if this fate, as it appears, is analogous to that of the animal first-born, it is tantamount to bloody sacrifice⁸. It is true that the sacrifice of the first-born progressed in the practice of redemption (*Ex* 13:13, 34:20; *Nm* 18:15), but the case of *Ex* 22:28-29 reveals traces of the more archaic phase.

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⁷ Cf. Clines 1998, 429.

⁸ Cf. Catastini 2020.