

Is Hebrews 10:5's 'body' language from the Septuagint?¹
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Introduction

Hebrews 10:5 is part of a longer quotation of Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10. The Epistle presents Jesus as having cited the Psalm and applied it to himself or his 'body' in relation to his sacrifice. However, whilst the term 'body' is appropriate to Jesus' mission in the New Testament context, it is intriguing that in the Hebrew Bible, as represented in the Masoretic Text [MT], from which English Old Testament [OT] versions generally derive, Psa. 40:6 has the body part 'ears'!

Psa. 40:6(KJV)² Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened. (Some margins give 'dugged' not 'opened'. However, 'prepared', I suggest, is a possible sense of the Hebrew, which would then match the Greek of Heb 10:5.³)

¹ I express my thanks to Dr. Jim Aitken for participation in his weekly Cambridge LXX Reading Group.

² This is v. 7 in the MT. Although English OT versions generally translate from Hebrew Masoretic Text, sometimes verse numbers do not correspond.

³ The Greek NT term katērtisō translated 'prepared' (in 'a body hast thou prepared...') can be used to justify that translation for the Hebrew term kryt which the KJV has rendered by 'opened'/'dugged'. A term of similar construction occurs in 2 Kings 6:23 with the sense of 'prepared' (associated with its cognate 'provision'): "And he prepared great provision for them...." This means that in the NT quotation of Psalm 40:6(MT v. 7) in Heb 10:5, 'body' is the only *radically* changed word. Also, 'prepared' in the Psalm does not immediately suggest the practice of boring the ear of a slave that is imagined for 'digging' ears. Some have also considered that the rendering 'prepared' aptly catches the sense of the Hebrew kryt. See F. Delitzsch's *Biblical Commentary on the Psalm*, II, 45, cited in D. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 396, n.58.

Heb 10:5 (KJV) Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.

So, as these texts show, ‘ears’ [Hebrew: אָזְנוֹת ‘znyim] is not reproduced in Heb 10:5, but ‘body’ [Greek: σῶμα / sōma] is given instead.

Faced with this difference, commentators, whether or not they subscribe to a view of Divine inspiration of the Hebrew (OT) or New Testament [NT] writings, do not promote ‘body’ as a(n inspired) NT change, a development *complementary* with the OT/MT’s ‘ears’.¹ Instead, given that MT does not have ‘body’ but (what is referred to as) the ‘Septuagint’ [LXX], a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures begun in the inter-testamental period,² does, this is taken to be the source quoted in Hebrew 10:5. ‘The LXX’³ is thus given the credit for providing ‘body’ for ‘ears’. However, how a pre-NT Greek Psalm translation could have (had) ‘body’ should raise sharp textual or serious

¹ J. W. Adey, “Complementary Difference: Why do NT Quotations often differ from their OT source?” (Unpublished manuscript privately circulated, 1997).

² The LXX is a Greek translation of the Hebrew text said to have been produced by Jews in Hellenic Alexandria in 250 B.C.E. “The Letter of Aristeas”, perhaps datable to the second century B.C.E., tells of the production of a translation of the Pentateuch (or Torah) into Greek. Though its authenticity is questioned, the letter is thought to convey some pertinent and reliable historical information. See: R. H. Charles, ed., *The Letter Of Aristeas*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913.) According to E. Würthwein, this letter influenced the view that the inter-testamental ‘LXX’ was “a single version of the whole Old Testament.” E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 51.

³ Brenton’s (1851) English translation of the LXX based (largely) on Codex Vaticanus 1209, or the Sixtine edition, is the source usually referred to by commentators as ‘the LXX’. Thus, any claim that the 4th Century C.E. Vaticanus, a ‘Christian’ (codex) compilation, is (necessarily) a copy of some Jewish (scroll) precursor containing ‘body’ before the NT, especially given perspectives on LXX’s transmission history, is taken as not proven in my article.

Christological (or ‘Messianism’) questions. This question can also be applied to other NT quotations that are said to derive from the LXX or sources other than an ancestor (text-type) of MT.

Since LXX’s Greek terms for other body parts in the Psalm correspond literally with the Hebrew/MT, what would have prompted this sole non-literal divergence, or radical switch of referents, with ‘body’ instead of the body part ‘ears’? (These Psalm 40/(39 LXX) terms cross-correlate literally between MT and the Greek LXX: my feet, my mouth, my bowels¹, my lips, my heart x2, the hairs of mine head.) NT’s ‘body’ is blended in traditional exegesis with incarnation theology and is, of course, a key NT term, or recurrent theme, focused on the (fact of the) Christ-event. There is Christ’s own sacrificial body (about which Hebrews 10 speaks) and there is his metaphorical body, a set of believers with his identity, or image, formed in them: the ecclesial *body* of Christ.

The view I argue for, which some commentators have raised but typically do not pursue, apart from a recent notable example I report on later (Jobes and Silva, 2000), is that Christian scribes inserted ‘body’ into the Psalm text of a Greek OT translation that now survives under the name ‘Septuagint’ (probably coined in the Second Century C.E.²) This case and other systematically presented examples that I hope to publish in the future, will cumulatively provide a case for recognising Christian harmonising/scribal editing of the LXX in the light of the NT on a scale greater than is normally allowed. This in turn will require some modification of the (often generalised) view of NT dependence on (what is said to be) the LXX.

¹ Some English versions are inconsistent in their rendering, or obscuring of ‘bowels’ (see KJV Psa 22:14 which on this occasion has ‘bowels’, but RSV, ASV, NKJ do not). The KJV is inconsistent in that the same expression ‘in the midst of my bowels’ in Psa 22:14 (15), it renders ‘within my heart’ in Psa 40:8(9). Yet, for comparison, ‘within my heart’ is straightforwardly what the Hebrew has in Psa 36:1. None of this is on the scale of, nor comparable with, a translation that gives ‘body’ for ‘ears’, as has the LXX!

² Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 62.

Indeed, the recognised importance of textual criticism of the Septuagint itself, before raising issues about (possible) Hebrew sources not now extant that might have had ‘body’, or using ‘LXX’ as an instrument for questioning the integrity of the MT, can be applied to this ‘LXX’ Psalm.¹ Given that ‘body’ has such NT theological implications is it conceivable that this loaded term, otherwise rare in the OT, should have sprung to view whenever or wherever the Psalms were translated?

Alongside this, palaeographical and linguistic issues have a crucial bearing in determining the actual identity of (typically fragmentary) Greek OT translation material, or its (datable) placement within, a (projected) transmission chronology. To-date, no text or Greek Psalms whole or part (and with ‘body’ and not ‘ears’) has turned up datable to before the NT era. So when commentators say ‘body’ is found in the LXX, readers are receiving assumptions passed on uncritically, or without qualification, to their readers. What would be more helpful to say, at the very least, is that ‘body’ occurs in that form of Greek translation traditionally called ‘the LXX’, as represented in the Christian codices Vaticanus, Alexandrinus and Siniaticus, dated no earlier than 4th – 5th centuries C.E.

Though prompted by the case of ‘body’, the following questions also have application to other NT quotations that commentators assume derive from the LXX:

(1) What actually is ‘the LXX’ as currently understood?

¹ Change of approach to, and increased respect for, the Hebrew (Masoretic) Text is evident today in the NETS Greek Psalms, translated into English by Albert Pietersma, on which see his “Introduction” in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (And Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title): The Psalms*. (trans. Albert Pietersma; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This is the first English translation of the Greek versions for over 150 years. This production is sponsored by the IOSCS (International Organisation of Septuagint and Cognate Studies.). The acronym NETS represents this project.

- (2) Assumptions aside, how much palaeographical evidence is there for the Greek Psalms, or indeed the whole Old Testament, to have been translated into Greek before Christ?
- (3) How could this particular divergent rendering in the LXX have come about (especially when, as noted above, the LXX offers literal correspondence for body parts in the Psalm)?
- (4) Could a translator have swapped ‘ears’ for ‘body’ and so (coincidentally) anticipated the significance (to be) attached to the body of Christ in NT (con)text?
- (5) Why is it that the writer to the Hebrews makes no mention of this ancient text by Jewish translators as the source for ‘body’?¹
- (6) Is there any *proven* reference to the LXX, or its use, in the NT? How would this be established?
- (7) What relevance has the NT writers’ own viewpoint on OT/NT originals as Divine revelation? That is, are the terms “the lively oracles” (Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb 5:12; 1 Pet. 4:11), “the holy scriptures” (Rom. 1:2; 2 Tim 3:15,16; 2 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:16), or “the word spoken by angels” (Heb.2:2) specific to the revealed Hebrew (and a few parts Aramaic) Bible, our ‘Old Testament’, or do (could) they also include (Divinely unauthorized) Greek translations, or ‘the LXX’?²

Though such questions are not exhaustive, perhaps it will be clear enough to readers that this textual divergence – with ‘body’ – in a LXX Psalm, or any ancient translation, would have been a radical theological development before the actual advent of Jesus! Contrast this with the fact that there is no

¹ For example, it is said that in Acts 17:28 Paul probably quotes from the 3rd cent. B.C.E. poet Aratus’ *Phenomena* (perhaps influenced by Cleanthes), and in Tit 1:12 from Callimachus. His references are to non-Biblical sources, not naming any individual. Some say that 1 Cor 15:33 is from Menander, yet no mention is made of this being a non-Biblical source.

² See T.R. McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1 n.1, and 2-4, for raising some of the issues of what constitutes Scripture in terms of NT’s viewpoint, etc. Sometimes one hears the claim that the NT gave the uninspired LXX translation an inspired seal of approval by quoting from it. However, first convincingly prove that the NT uses the LXX, then deal with this claim.

Hebrew word for (a human) ‘body’ directly associated with this messianic sacrificial concept in the Hebrew Bible/OT. Yet, given Jesus’ life and legacy, the NT is particularly focused on his body, both natural and metaphorical. Further, in relation to such NT contextualized perspectives, it is not until Jude v.9 that we find the (hindsight) description ‘*body* of Moses’ applied to what was being disputed over in the OT, as Zechariah records (Zech. 3:1-2).¹ ‘Body’, in this text, is new information provided by the NT. A parallel could be drawn with Heb 10:5 and Jesus’ ‘body’ that it is new (messianic) information provided by the NT.

My task in this article will not be to offer interpretation about the function of the Greek New Testament’s ‘body’, or to provide Christological reasons for the transformation from the Hebrew Psalms’ ‘ears’. I seek merely to clear the path for exegesis.

¹ An additional feature requires further attention, but is outside my present brief, and that is, although LXX/Zechariah agrees with MT in not having the Greek term for ‘body’ (σώματος / *sōmatos*) found in Jude’s “body of Moses”, how did ‘devil’ (Gk. τῶ διαβόλω / *diabolō*) find its way into LXX/Zech 3:2? (Via Jude v.9?) It is a fair project in objectivity to raise such questions as: Why has LXX (?OG) not got a Greek transliteration, or translation (e.g., as ‘adversary’) for the Hebrew ‘satan’/שָׂטָן? Or, why should not the NT, in interpretative mode, be presenting its own originated commentary that characterises ‘the Satan’ back in Zechariah as ‘the devil’? It would then be telling us that the adversary or satan was (politically or behaviourally) diabolical. The LXX really has a problem with the ‘devil’ and ‘satan’! Compare LXX Paralipomenon 21:1 = 1 Chron 21:1 with II Reigns 24:1 = 2 Sam 24:1. Whilst it is Hebraically permissible to apply ‘satan’/‘adversary’ to God/Yhwh, in an adversarial role, as an angel was to Balaam (Num. 22:22, 32), the Greek ‘diabolos’/‘devil’ of the LXX is a staggering misunderstood application to God in this text. The term ‘diabolos’ connotes the ungodly senses of ‘false accuser’, ‘slanderer’ in NT usage (1 Tim 3:11; 2 Tim 3:3), so, this could only blasphemously and slanderously be applied to God.

Is there such a thing as 'the Septuagint'?

In their well-received recent book, *Invitation to the Septuagint*¹, Jobs and Silva consider the mixed composition that has come to be known as 'the LXX'. They are at pains to point out that this name is used in misleading or in ambiguous ways in theological, or other, literature. They draw on the wider criticisms detailed by their colleague, Septuagint scholar Leonard Greenspoon. He observes that Jerome (340-420 C.E.) "was virtually alone among Christian leaders in insisting that the term LXX should properly refer only to the Greek translation of the Torah."² Professor Emmanuel Tov adds to this perspective: "Some four hundred years separate the translation of the Torah from the latest translation contained in 'LXX'."³

Christian writers from the mid-second century C.E. onwards tend to apply 'Septuagint' to the whole OT, but Greenspoon was still able to identify six different possible referents for the term "LXX" in antiquity:

- (1) The earliest Greek rendering of the Pentateuch.
- (2) The earliest Greek rendering of the entire OT.
- (3) Origen's Koine (Greek).
- (4) Origen's completed fifth column (of his *Hexapla* produced in the third century C.E. This text resulted from his manipulation of the Koine.)
- (5) Any authoritative Greek text; and
- (6) The entire Greek translation.⁴

Twentieth century commentaries, and some works on NT quotations,⁵ have also perpetuated misleading impressions about 'the LXX'. Especially where,

¹ Karen H. Jobs and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Carlisle: Paternoster/Baker Academic. 2000), 30-32ff.

² L. Greenspoon, "The Use and Abuse of the Term LXX and Related Terminology in Recent Scholarship" *BIOSCS* 20 (1987): 27.

³ E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1992), 137.

⁴ Greenspoon, "Use and Abuse", 28.

⁵ E.g., E.E. Ellis, *Paul's use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1957). Although, Ellis does not include Hebrews, of course, nevertheless

without question, it is cited as if it were a homogeneous version of the whole OT translated into Greek in the inter-testamental period.¹ As Pietersma puts it:

...though various parts of ‘the translation of the seventy’ have many features in common, it is also true that, as modern scholarship has increasingly shown, there is wide-ranging diversity and heterogeneity within the collection – to the point that some scholars now question the continued use of the term ‘Septuagint.’²

It is true that *extant* ‘Christian’ codex forms of the Greek version (e.g., Vaticanus, Siniaticus, and Alexandrinus) customarily cited by commentators as ‘the LXX’, do, or did, contain the whole OT (some versions also include

Barr’s criticism of Ellis’ work, and NT scholarship with respect to LXX is apt, here: “It is difficult to avoid the impression that much New Testament scholarship is insensitive to textual criticism in the LXX...to any specialist in LXX who was interested in the New Testament it was immediately evident that Ellis’ handling of the LXX material was deeply faulty.” J. Barr, “Paul and the LXX: A note on some recent work” *JTS* 45 (1994): 593 -601. K. Thomas, however, does at least admit that “the textual origin of the citations in Hebrews has long been an enigma...most commentators ...have concluded that some text of the LXX was used...” K. Thomas, “The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews” in *Studies in The Septuagint: Origins, Recensions, and Interpretations - Selected Essays with a Prolegomenon* (ed., Sidney Jellicoe Jerusalem: KTAV Publishing, 1974), 507.

¹ Homogeneity is a characteristic of (the ideology of) the Bible as Divine revelation, or verbally inspired by a single Divine Author. Jesus’ viewpoint, for example, was that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). Differences that might seem to fracture this perspective commend our consideration as complementary or counter-intuitive facets of its transcendent (or, what it would be to be, the art of ultimate) Truth.

² Pietersma, “Introduction”, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: The Psalms*, vii.

apocryphal books and other additions.)¹ However, because these OT books have been compiled into a single codex (book) form (probably innovated by ‘Christian’ scribes)², it can give the (false) impression of unity, or textual uniformity, as if this Greek version was always like this.

The original Jewish translations of the OT into Greek would have been (in most cases) of individual books on scrolls of various sizes, by various hands, produced over a considerable period, reflecting various aims and influences. As Würthwein states: “...the history of the transmission of the Septuagint is quite complex. None of the surviving forms of the text has preserved the original form of the version.”³ To which he adds, acknowledging some reference in antiquity (e.g. in the Prologue to *Ecclesiasticus*) to Greek translations of parts of the OT before the time of the NT:

A long period must be allowed for the translation of the entire Old Testament. This precludes the possibility that it was the work of a single translator or group of translators. A close examination of the version’s character yields the same conclusion. The translations of individual books are not at all uniform...We may say in summary that what we find in LXX is not a single version but a collection of versions made by various writers who differed greatly in their methods, their knowledge of Hebrew, and in other ways. This diversity which makes it necessary to consider each book of the Bible individually is a large part of the problem posed

¹ Some accident of history caused the various codices to have missing portions of some of the OT. Nevertheless, overall they combine to show that the whole of the OT was originally represented in them. I make no comment, here, about their apocryphal, or other, additions. *Some* of these do not appear to be translations from the Hebrew (or Aramaic) but composed originally in Greek.

² See Alan Millard’s *Reading And Writing In The Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), chs. 2 and 3. He shows that the shift from the roll form to the codex (books with pages) was a Christian development, at least as early as the second century C.E.

³ Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 59.

by LXX, making it impossible to formulate the value of the version as a whole for textual criticism in any uniform way.¹

For these and other reasons, Jobes and Silva (2000) want to encourage their readers to appreciate the implications that arise because of the complex transmission history of the Greek version:

[LXX] was produced by many people unknown to us, over two or three centuries, and almost certainly in more than one location...when the Greek version of a Biblical book survives in more than one form, it is not always possible to know with certainty which is the older. Nor is it possible to know for sure if the oldest surviving form was in fact the first Greek translation made of that book...The reader is cautioned, therefore, that there is really no such thing as *the* Septuagint...We have no evidence that any Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, or even of the Pentateuch, was called the 'Septuagint' prior to the second century of this era.²

Emmanuel Tov explains how Septuagint scholars now try to apply more precise terms of reference:

Today, the name Septuagint(a) denotes both the original translation of the Bible into Greek and the collection of sacred Greek Writings in their present form. The former use is imprecise, since the name Septuagint(a) is not suitable for a collection which contains, in addition to the original translation, later revisions (recensions) of that translation as well as compositions written in Greek. Because of this, scholars usually distinguish between the collection of sacred writings named Septuagint and the original translation, called the Old Greek [OG] translation. The presumed original is known from two sources: the greater part is included in the collection of sacred

¹ Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 51-52.

² Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, (Carlisle: Paternoster/Baker Academic, 2000), 32.

Greek writings [LXX] and a smaller segment is reconstructed by modern scholars from various later sources. In places where it is necessary to stress the diverse nature of the collection of books included in the LXX, its name is placed in quotation marks [‘LXX’].¹

The quotation of Psalm 40:6 in Heb 10:5 as handled by commentators generated the need for this article. However, these matters about the “so-called Septuagint” form a relevant historical and textual backdrop that need to be taken into account in this and other posited connections of the LXX and the NT. For example, with respect to the Psalms, Sailhamer, in his recent technical work on the Greek translation of Psalms 3-41, is aware of the lack of evidence to date its origins. So, although he is working with post-NT ‘LXX’ or C.E. sources, he simply *assumes* that the state of the text(s) of this later date represent(s) a Greek Psalm text earlier than the NT era. In order to assist this assumption, he has also to assume that the Book of Acts and other documents (not named) “appear” to quote from it:

The Septuagint (LXX) of the Book of Psalms is a Greek translation of the Hebrew psalms. The date, provenance and purpose of the translation are not known with any certainty. It is likely that the LXX Psalms were translated sometime during the period of the second Temple because documents from the later part of that period (e.g., Acts 2:25ff) appear to quote from the LXX translation.²

¹ *Textual Criticism*, 135. Note, as Greenspoon avers, the term OG (Old Greek) mentioned by Tov is rarely found in commentaries or similar works. He regrets, too, that the informative textual labours of 20th century LXX specialists are rarely cited in such contexts. The OG is what specialists seek: a text that is the nearest approach to the Greek original as it left the hands of the translator(s). Another perspective on the OG would be “the presumed initial version of the Hebrew Bible for books other than the Pentateuch”, see Jobes and Silva, *Invitation*, 326.

² J. H. Sailhamer, *The Translational Technique of the Greek Septuagint for the Hebrew Verbs and Participles in Psalms 3-41* (ed., D. A. Carson; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 1.

Of course, there might have been a Greek translation of the Psalms earlier than the NT, whether or not Acts (or Hebrews) quoted from it. It is important to note, though, whatever significance is attributed to it, that there is a paucity of Greek OT manuscript evidence in Palestine (or anywhere) dating from before the Common Era. This palaeographical picture contrasts with the massive amount of Biblical Hebrew manuscripts that compare well with MT, from the same period. Such finds have engaged scholarly interest in the Semitic -Hebrew and Aramaic - background to the Greek NT.

This background connects with the given Jewish context of the NT, particularly of Jesus' ministry. Presumably, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (the context of "a body hast thou prepared me"), not only in its name, has some relation to this milieu. Of course, this NT picture, having Hebraic continuity with the OT (text(s) and context(s)), is mediated to us in Greek and not Hebrew. Greek was one of the languages in polyglot Palestine (and beyond) in Jesus' day. Yet just because Greek is common to both the NT (on its own terms divinely inspired) and some OT translations, this does not of itself prove that the NT interfaced with, or was influenced by, them. Palaeographical data particularly offers insufficient scope for certainty over this posited relation of the Greek LXX and the Greek NT.

Finds of Greek OT material in the Judean Desert, or Egypt, are few and fragmentary. To-date, no Greek ('LXX') Psalms' text has come to light from before the second century C.E.¹: "...it is surprising to note the relative absence of Psalms and prophetic texts, especially from the Major Prophets, among Greek fragments" (Greenspoon. 1998).² Parts of the Pentateuch and fragments of some of the Minor Prophets are represented as prior to, or overlapping with, the NT era.³ Therefore, to lean on the possibility of a pre-

¹ PBodI5Pss 48-49 (2nd C.E., parchment codex).

² L. Greenspoon, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek Bible" in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A comprehensive Assessment* (2 vols; eds. P. W. Flint and J. C. Vanderkam; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 1:101-127.

³ D. Barthélemy, "Les Devanciers d'Aquila: Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodè-capheton", VTSup 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963).

NT Greek Psalms¹ despite this lack palaeographical evidence for it is one thing, but quite another to claim that this presumed text would necessarily have translated the Hebrew ‘ears’ with the Greek ‘body’. After all, ‘body’ in a Greek translation of the Biblical text features in fourth century C.E. ‘Christian’ LXX compilations worked-over by editors, including particularly the Alexandrian theologian Origen (*ca.* 185-255 C.E.). By contrast, Greek versions produced by Aquila (*ca.* 130 C.E.), Symmachus (*ca.* 170 C.E.) and Theodotion (end of second century C.E.)² have ‘ears’ in their Psalms text, translating the Hebrew text literally. Indeed, they witness to a Hebrew (‘proto-Masoretic’) text that agrees with the consonantal form (later) preserved in the MT, but now also attested in use at Qumran before 70 C.E.

In sum: this foregoing perspective has relevance for assessing any claim that a NT quotation, or ‘body’ in particular, came from the LXX. Given the history and evolution of this Greek version, Würthwein’s observation should occasion no surprise as to the possible origin of LXX and NT agreement: “in the course of time Christian insertions crept into [this] text.”³ Recently, Jobs and Silva have added to this:

...the majority of extant manuscripts of the LXX were transmitted and preserved within the Christian tradition. Such a transmission history raises the possibility that Christian scribes harmonized Greek texts of the OT to agree with the

¹ To-date, no Greek Psalms, only Hebrew Psalms have been discovered at Qumran. 11Q8Ps^d (frag. 6. Inv. 569) contains Hebrew Psalms 39:13-40:2. No more of Hebrew Psalm 40 has been found, or catalogued, yet. See: *DJD* XXIII (1988) pl. VII. That no Greek Psalms have been found at Qumran is interesting. Especially as some scholars believe that “in all probability, the Greek Psalter did not originate in Egypt but in Palestine”, see Arie Van Der Kooj, “The Origin of the Old Greek Psalms” *VT* 33 (1983): 69.

² Barthèlemey recognised in “Les Devanciers d’Aquila” that the Minor Prophets Scroll from near Qumran was a revision of an older Greek text in the direction of the Hebrew (MT), which he called the ‘kaige recension’, or “kaige/proto-Theodotion”; it is thus datable as pre-Aquila.

³ Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 53. On Christian insertions (*additamenta christiana*), cf. A. Rahlfs, *Psalmi cum Odis* (1931), pp. 30-32.

use of those texts in the NT, or that they subtly introduced Christian exegesis into the text of the OT books....¹

Similarly, as long ago as 1842, the Cambridge Greek scholar T. S. Green was alert to this possibility. Though he held the common view that the NT writers did have contact with the (so-called) LXX, he was actually more cautious about this being confirmed by the NT quotations. His remarks are insightful:

[The NT writers', *et al.*] acquaintance with the Septuagint or Alexandrian version is here assumed from its high intrinsic probability. A proof drawn from the quotations made in the New Testament could hardly be conclusive, on account of the possibility of an alteration of the text of the Septuagint by Christian hands combined with the fact of the greater agreement between the quotations and the text of the Alexandrian MS than that of the Vatican. This alteration may not have arisen from a fraudulent motive, since there would be less scruple in interfering with a translation than an original, and it might be done with a desire to improve it in particular places on the authority of inspired writers.²

Finally, in this assessment of the likelihood of NT influence upon the transmission history and text of the Greek version, there is a major case that ought not to be overlooked. As Fitzmyer³ is not alone in concluding, no fragment of Greek OT text ± 200 C.E. contains the Greek word 'kurios' ('Lord') as used in the NT as a replacement for God's name. This shift from OT 'Yahweh' to NT 'Lord' is most evident in NT quotations of the OT.

¹ Jobs and Silva, *Invitation*, 290. For a particular case of exegesis in the LXX, see D.W. Gooding, *Relics of Ancient Exegesis: A study of the miscellanies in 3 Reigns 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Jobs and Silva also comment on the significance of this work in *Invitation*, 295-6.

² T. S. Green, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Dialect* (London: 1842), 6.

³ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Wandering Arameans: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 121; see also his n. 44 & n.51, pp. 138-9.)

Translators would naturally transliterate or transcribe names, and this is what the few pre-NT Greek OT fragments reveal. The Divine name is found in the Greek text, usually written in Hebrew (both paleo-Hebrew and Aramaic or ‘Square’) characters, but sometimes with matching Greek letters (e.g. IAΩ/IAŌ¹). Fitzmyer observes:

Moreover it seems clear that the *widespread use* of *kurios* in the so-called LXX manuscripts dating from Christian times is to be attributed to the habits of Christian scribes. Indeed, the widespread use may well have been influenced by the use of *kurios* for Yahweh in the NT itself...As far as I know, there is no earlier dated manuscript ± 200 AD of the so-called LXX which uses *kurios* for Yahweh. (Fitzmyer’s italics.)

I recall here that in a Cambridge seminar in 2007 on “The Greek Bible: Transmission and Reception”² Emanuel Tov (Jerusalem) publicly stated that the Greek representations of the Divine name, like the aforementioned IAΩ or paleo-Hebrew (pre-exilic Hebrew script) forms of ‘Yhwh’/יהוה, reflected the Old Greek or original version. Therefore, Tov made it clear that he did not agree with John William Wevers’ published position (following his Toronto colleague Albert Pietersma), since he endeavours to maintain that *kurios* (of later mss or codices) was original.³ I would couple Tov’s position on these pre-NT era Greek OT translations (fragmentary Pentateuchal remains from the Judean Desert that do not display *kurios*) with an argument for the NT innovating *kurios*, within the presupposed perspective of revelation and theophany, in which the name ‘Jesus’ takes over from ‘Yahweh’ whilst Jesus manifested and came in his Father’s name (John 5:43; 10:25; 17:6).

¹ Cave 4 Lev^b (1st B.C.E.).

² A Seminar of the Art & Humanities Research Council Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism Project (13th February, 2007, University of Cambridge). Prof. Emanuel Tov (Jerusalem), one of the speakers, spoke on: “The Greek texts from the Judean Desert and the early history of the Septuagint”.

³ For example, see J. W. Wever’s “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint”, in *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, 38 (2005): note on pp. 22-23.

Commentators' Bodily Assumptions

Commentators generally seem confident that Christ's 'body' derived from 'the Septuagint'. Yet, evidence has always been available to question this view, not least historical or textual perspectives as sketched above, to do with the transmission history of the Greek version(s). In this section, building on these foregoing perspectives, I will draw attention to more recent work, including the publication of Pietersma's *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: The Psalms*. This latest English translation, the first in English for over 150 years, has 'ears' in the Psalm text and not 'body', leaving 'body' to originate in Heb 10:5. It will be interesting to see if forthcoming commentaries reflect this development. Below, I consider how commentaries have until recently presented 'body', since it is salutary to see how they can mislead (e.g., by what they ignore), or be inconclusive.

A typical comment on Heb 10:5 from a standard commentary, *The Interpreter's Bible* (1955), is—

...instead of the Hebrew 'mine ears hast thou opened'...the LXX reads 'a body hast thou prepared for me.' This word 'body' is essential for the author [of Hebrews], and his dependence on the Greek translation is nowhere more obvious than here.¹

This brief comment is supposed to suffice. This commentary has a short attention span where detailed analysis or required proof is concerned.

Another approach favouring the LXX reading suggests that it has preserved for us what the Hebrew had originally, and so deems the present Masoretic text corrupt:

...the Hebrew text ['Ears hast thou dug for me']...is regarded as corrupt by the majority of modern commentators.²

¹ G. A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, (12 vols; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951-1957), 11:704 -705

² W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (2 vols; London: SPCK, 1939), 1:233.

Yet, proof for corruption of the Hebrew text is not advanced. In any case such conjecture is unconvincing and disputed.¹ Indeed, this claim fails to tell that this is conjecture based on the extant LXX's having 'body' *and* the assumption that LXX preserves an original Hebrew reading not represented by MT. We have already noted that other Greek versions of the OT ('the Three': Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion) have 'ears' suggesting their Hebrew source agreed with the MT, and may well have been its precursor. As a start towards proving this charge of corruption, a missing Hebrew text from antiquity containing 'body' would have to be found. Allegations of "Hebrew corrupt" or "uncertain", found in some English OT versions are

¹ A few Hebrew Biblical scrolls have been found at Qumran which contain a text that at times is closer to the Septuagint. Some scholars think that the LXX is an indirect witness to its *Vorlage*, that is, to a Hebrew parent text from which it was translated that is not identical with the MT. However, none of its extant (divergent) fragments helps in the case for 'body' being available in a Hebrew text for LXX translators to adopt. In any case, the (4th Century C.E.) LXX version of the Psalm correlates literally with the MT in Psalm 39/40 except in having 'body'. So, retroverting from the Greek LXX Psalm to construct a Hebrew 'original' would produce a text that matched the MT. As these divergent Hebrew mss cannot assist this case, it is worth bearing in mind what Cambridge Semitic philologist Professor Geoffrey Khan says in an unpublished manuscript he kindly provided me with: "The majority of apparent differences between the [Septuagint] translation and the MCT [Masoretic Consonantal Text] are likely not to be the result of a different Hebrew *Vorlage* but rather due to the exegesis of the translator, a concept of etymology different from our own, or corruptions in the transmission of the Greek text. The style of the translation varies in degrees of literalness. This reflects the approaches of different translators... Retroversions of the Greek into the Hebrew are far safer in the literal sections of the Septuagint" ("The Masoretic Hebrew Bible and Its Background", 1998, p. 12). Khan does not raise the issue of 'Christian harmonising' as having a bearing on the LXX's divergences from the MCT, where such divergences happen to involve agreement with New Testament quotations. In my argument I would appropriate his "Corruptions in the transmission of the Greek text" and extend it to include deliberate post-NT changes in the LXX in the light of the NT.

typically the legacy of textual emendation, “a most unscientific practice”¹, when “many scholars practically preferred [the LXX] over the Masoretic text.”² Today, it is viewed as essential to construct first an ‘original text’ of the LXX, or ‘Old Greek’ form, which could then be compared with MT as a unified whole. The Göttingen editions, starting with Rahlfs’ publication of the Psalms (1931, revised in 1967), attempt to do this, but they are not yet complete for the whole OT, and even then are still likely to be subject to subsequent revision.

F.F. Bruce, however, is among those scholars who disputed the presence of textual corruption, and offered an alternative approach:

He [the writer of the Epistle of Hebrews] quotes the Septuagint version, in which the Masoretic reading ‘ears hast thou digged for me’ is replaced by the clause ‘a body didst thou prepare for me’. The Greek version cannot well be explained as representing a variant or corrupted Hebrew reading; it [LXX] is rather an interpretative paraphrase of the Hebrew text.³

The Roman Catholic *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1997 Student Edition) offers a contrast with *The Interpreter’s Bible* cited above. It raises the possibility that ‘body’ is a Christian addition, although it does not follow-up a suggested lead (in an added note) for the benefit of the reader, and there is no further discussion. Clearly, such an outcome would have some impact on interpretation:

The words of Ps 40:7-9a are here attributed to the son at his incarnation. The quotation follows the LXX in substance. In v. 7b of the Ps, the M reads “ears you have dug for me” (to hear and obey God’s will). The majority of LXX mss have the reading given in Heb[rews]: “a body you prepared me.”...Since

¹ Cited in L. Greenspoon, in “It’s All Greek to Me”, *CurBS* 5 (1997): 153-4.

² Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 63-64.

³ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott. 1967), 232.

Jesus' obedience was expressed by his willing offering of his body (i.e., himself) in death, the LXX reading of v. 7b is peculiarly applicable to him, so much so that it has been thought that the reading was introduced into LXX under influence of Heb[rews].¹

In sum: quests for answers in commentaries can be tedious and what they offer can be of mixed or uncertain value. Small wonder then, that Septuagint scholar Sidney Jellicoe, in his major mid-twentieth century contribution *The Septuagint and Modern Study* could say that 'body' in the LXX was "a deviation which has yet to receive satisfactory explanation."² However, his comment highlighted Rahlfs's (1931) work on the Psalms, and his subsequent (1935) critical edition of the LXX, in both of which Rahlfs considered that the textual evidence favoured 'ears' as original to the Greek version. This points the way to a "satisfactory explanation." Rahlfs seems to have believed that 'body' was not likely to have been in the original or OG. Hence, unlike the great fourth/fifth centuries C.E. uncial codices of the LXX (Vaticanus, Siniaticus, and Alexandrinus), Rahlfs' edition has 'ears' in his main text relegating 'body' to footnotes.³ A conclusion influencing Pietersma in the NETS publication mentioned above, to retain 'ears' with the Hebrew Psalm.⁴

Invitation to the Septuagint

Bagster's 1851 publication of 'the LXX', with Lee Brenton's English translation is readily available and has been influential. Yet it is not 'the' LXX. It is based on the fourth century C.E. ('Christian') Codex Vaticanus [LXXB], or that form of it reproduced via J. Field's edition of 1665 and the

¹ M. M. Bourke, "Hebrews", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (eds., R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy; London: Chapman, 1997): 920-941 (938 - section 58).

² S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 318-319.

³ A. Rahlfs, *Psalmi cum Odis*, 143, reads *ōtia* ('ears') in his Psalms' main text with the sixth-century Old Latin Codex *Lat.* 11947 and the Gallican Psalter.

⁴ Pietersma states in his "Introduction", xvi: "For the purposes of NETS, the term 'Septuagint' is understood to be exemplified by, but not in all respects...congruent with, Alfred Rahlfs's Septuaginta (1935)."

Sistine edition of 1587.¹ Bagster is a product of its time and inevitably lacks the wider range of OT Greek translational material now available. Critical, book-by-book, editions of the Septuagint, published or forthcoming from Göttingen in Germany, aim to collate and utilise these wider resources and 20th century (and continuing) endeavours in Septuagint research.

In *Invitation to the Septuagint* Jobs and Silva retain, although with some modifications, the commonly held view that some NT quotations support the use by the NT of the LXX. Jobs and Silva also retain the view that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was using an OT Greek translation, even if they do not regard it as *‘the LXX’* of commentators. They believe that ‘body’ originated with the NT, and came into the LXX via Hebrews 10:5. Given this restored agreement of the OT Greek version with the Hebrew Masoretic text, it is a pity that they make nothing further of this. Not least, they could have considered whether the Hebrew text itself had a role in Hebrews! Further, systematic inspection based on their approach, and less referenced through institutional canons, might have led them to question other LXX passages that are said to be quoted by the NT. Perhaps, though, their approach is a start.

This extract rightly records their surprise at the approach taken by commentators over ‘body’:

[The] popular solution assumes that the Psalms text used by the author read *sōma* [body] - an assumption shared by virtually all Hebrews commentators, many of whom seem not

¹ The Roman or Sixtine edition reproduces the “Codex Vaticanus” almost exclusively. Published under the direction of Cardinal Caraffa in 1586, by the authority of Sixtus V, it has become the *textus receptus* of the Greek Old Testament and has had many new editions, such as that of Holmes and Parsons (Oxford, 1798-1827), the seven editions of Tischendorf, which appeared at Leipzig between 1850 and 1887, the last two, published after the death of the author and revised by Nestle, the four editions of Swete (Cambridge, 1887-95, 1901, 1909), etc.

to have even considered the possibility that his LXX text had ōtia [‘ears’]¹.

Their surprise particularly relates to commentators’ neglect of textual options offered by Alfred Rahlfs’s available two-volume ‘Septuaginta’:²

Indeed, one could read several of the standard commentaries without so much as learning that Rahlfs, both in his handy edition of the LXX and in his critical edition of the Psalms for the Göttingen LXX, accepted ōtia as the original translation. Because the sole basis for this decision is the Latin rendering *aures* (“ears”), found in the Gallic Psalter and OL [Old Latin] manuscript G, NT commentators either express surprise at Rahlfs’s judgement or ignore it altogether. But given the generally literal character of LXX Psalms, Rahlfs must have (rightly) deduced that the use of sōma [body] as a rendering of znym [Hebrew: ‘ears’] was out of character for the Greek translator.³

Comparing how Hebrews 10 makes use of Psalm 40 (LXX 39), confirms their belief that ‘body’ with other subtle linguistic changes in the NT text, could only result from hindsight of Jesus’ life and sacrifice. They (or Karen Jobes drawing on an article she wrote in 1991⁴) state:

In the light of these considerations, we have good reason to believe that the author of Hebrews had before him a Greek text of Psalms with the reading ōtia [‘ears’] and that therefore he is the one responsible for changing this word to sōma

¹ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation*, 196

² Note that Rahlfs’s critical edition of the Greek version is not accompanied by (a German, or) an English translation. Now, of course, the NETS publication effectively puts Rahlfs’s Psalms text into English. It is thus the first Göttingen Septuagint in English form.

³ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation*, 196

⁴ Karen H. Jobes, “Rhetorical Achievement in the Hebrews 10 ‘Misquote’ of Psalm 40,” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 387-96.

['body'], which then spread through nearly the whole tradition. In other words, it was he rather than the LXX translator who came up with the *pars pro toto* metonymy as a means of highlighting the messianic significance of the Psalm.¹

Conclusion:

With the NETS publication, and Jobes and Silva's *Invitation to the Septuagint*, it will be interesting to see if future commentaries revise their view of how 'body' is found in 'the LXX'. Will its probable insertion into the Greek version influenced by Heb 10:5 be admitted, or even-handedly considered? Will this outcome generate respect for the integrity of the Hebrew text of Psalm 40, over-ruling indecisive text-critical matters, or conjectural emendations? Will exegetes of Heb 10: 5 in the future spend more time considering the significance of (what they are then left with) the transformation of 'ears' to 'body'?

Perhaps, a reminder, or caution is apt to conclude with. It is taken from Sidney Jellicoe's *The Septuagint and Modern Study*. In the section, "The Hebrew Text and the Septuagint", having considered a particular, albeit different, case, his remarks can be connected with my own contention in this article. Among other relevant perspectives to be borne in mind when using the LXX, he mentions that not only will some readings be due to Christian modification, but also where this is identified they should be rejected:

We have taken this particular reading as affording an example of the extreme care which must be exercised in deciding against MT in what would seem, quite plausibly, to be in favour of LXX. But when it is recognised, though too often overlooked, that the Greek version was made initially for Jews by Jews - a fact continually underlined by H.M. Orlinsky and constituting Rahlfs's opening statement in his 'History of the Septuagint Text' - we must take into full consideration Barnes' concluding observation: 'In weighing readings we must use all the knowledge we can gain of Jewish exegesis and of Haggadic (or Halachic)

¹ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation*, 197-8.

comment. Some LXX readings which sound strange to Gentiles ears will prove to be right: while some readings **(due to Christian modifications of the text, intentional or accidental)** will have to be rejected as too definitely Christian. [My bold type.]¹

END

¹ *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, 322.