

## The Missing Bones of the Septuagint

Charles R. Lightner

### Abstract

There are eighteen instances in the Hebrew Bible in which the word יום, or “day”, is associated with the word עצם, which most often means “bone.” This paper examines the text of the Septuagint (LXX) translation of those instances to determine whether the Greek translation reflects the presence in the Hebrew text of the word עצם. Direct analysis of the parallel Greek suggests that the Hebrew עצם was not in the text from which the LXX was translated. Analysis of the LXX translations of other Hebrew phrases that reference the word יום supports that conclusion as does analysis of translations of other instances of the Hebrew עצם. A 2002 study done using the CATSS (Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies) database provides specific confirmation of that conclusion in some of the eighteen cases and implicit confirmation in others. Analysis of the English translations of the LXX and of the dictionary understandings of the Hebrew עצם are also reviewed for evidence on the question. We conclude that it is highly likely that the word עצם did not appear in the Hebrew text from which the LXX translations of those eighteen instances were made; that there is nothing in the LXX that demonstrates the presence of the Hebrew עצם with any assurance. This paper is adapted from a discussion of the topic in an unpublished monograph by the author titled *The Hidden Bone Apocalypse*.

There are eighteen instances in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible in which the word יום, or “day”, is associated with the word עצם. The Hebrew עצם most often means “bone” in the MT but forms of it are also used to mean “might”, “power”, “force”, or a large number of persons, as in “a multitude.”<sup>1</sup>

In fourteen of the eighteen instances, the phrase found in the Hebrew is בעצם היום הזה where the preposition ב means “on” or “in” the day being described. In three of the eighteen instances the preposition introducing the phrase is עד, meaning “until.” The phrase in those cases is עד עצם היום הזה. That phrase can be prospective, where “until” conveys the idea of a time period extending forward, as in “until” a certain condition occurs. It can also be retrospective, conveying the idea that a certain condition has existed “until” the day of the reference. In the one remaining instance, the עצם term of the phrase is preceded by the Hebrew direct object marker את, giving us את עצם היום הזה. The direct object marker is not translated.

Table 1, below, identifies those eighteen instances, provides the LXX translations of the Hebrew phrases, and gives the Strong’s Greek Lexicon number for each of the words in the Septuagint phrase.

We used the search function in Sefaria.org to identify the Hebrew phrases that include forms of עצם and several sources of the LXX to check the Greek translations and the Strong’s numbers. Those sources included the versions found in the interlinear Apostolic Polyglot Bible at biblehub.com, Tyndale’s interlinear STEP Bible, academic-bible.com, the interlinear studylight.org version, and the version at ellopos.net.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the entry for עצם in The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. Strong’s Number 6106. Page 782-83 in the seventh printing by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. Peabody, MA.

Table 1: LXX Translations of Hebrew עצם Phrases

<u>MT Verse</u>	<u>Greek Translation</u>	<u>Strong's Greek Numbers (1)</u>
a) Where the Hebrew in MT is: בעצם היום הזה		
Gen 7:13	εν τη ημερα ταυτη	[1722, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Gen 17:23	εν τω καιρω της ημερας εκεινης	[1722, 3588, 2540, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 1565]
Gen 17:26	εν τω καιρω της ημερας εκεινης	[1722, 3588, 2540, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 1565]
Ex 12:17	εν γαρ τη ημερα ταυτη	[1722, 1063, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Ex 12:41	The LXX has no parallel to MT phrase.	
Ex 12:51	εν τη ημερα εκεινη	[1722, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 1565]
Lev 23:21	τατην την ημεραν	[3788, 3588, <u>2250</u> ]
Lev 23:28	τη ημερα ταυτη	[3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Lev 23:29	τη ημερα ταυτη	[3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Lev 23:30	τη ημερα ταυτη	[3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Deut 32:48	εν τη ημερα ταυτη	[1722, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Jos 5:11	εν ταυτη τη ημερα	[1722, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Ezek 24:2	απο της ημερας της σημερον	[575, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3588, 4594]
Ezek 40:1	εν τη ημερα εκεινη	[ 1722, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 1565]
b) Where the Hebrew in MT is: עד עצם היום הזה		
Lev 23:14	εως εις αυτην την ημεραν ταυτην	[2193, 1519, 1473, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]
Jos 10:27	εως της σημερον ημερας	[2193, 3588, 4594, <u>2250</u> ]
Ezek 2:3	εως της σημερον ημερας	[2193, 3588, 4594, <u>2250</u> ]
c) Where the Hebrew in MT is: את עצם היום הזה		
Ezek 24:2	απο της ημερας ταυτης	[575, 3588, <u>2250</u> , 3778]

Note: The Strong's number for the Greek ημερα, meaning "day" is 2250.

Note: The Strong's number for the Greek οσσεων, meaning "bone", is 3747.

We can see three things immediately from Table 1:

- a) In each of the seventeen cases in which the LXX has a phrase parallel to that of the MT, the phrase includes a form of the Greek word *ημερα*, meaning “day.” [Strong’s 2250]
- b) In none of those seventeen cases does any form of the Greek word for “bone”, or *οστεων*, [Strong’s 3747] appear, and
- c) The LXX translations, while similar, are not uniform.

We would expect the LXX translations to vary somewhat simply reflecting differences in context or syntax. We should also not be surprised at translation variations among the books of the MT. As Kim has shown, there were probably five different translators involved in the Pentateuch translation.<sup>2</sup> And, the books of Joshua and Ezekiel were translated by others, probably many decades later. But in the case of these specific phrases, there are different Greek translations of the same Hebrew phrase even within the same book. That is true in Genesis, in Exodus, in Leviticus, and in Ezekiel. So, not only is the translation approach not consistent across the books; it is inconsistent within the books. If each book was translated by a single translator, as has been suggested in the case of the Pentateuch, there is inconsistency at the level of the translator.

The fact that the translations of the phrases under study do not appear to reflect the presence of the Hebrew **אָצִיב** suggests that we test the translators’ treatment of the word in other locations. The most direct and relevant comparisons seem logically to be to the texts in which our eighteen instances occur, so our search is for all instances of **אָצִיב** forms in the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ezekiel. Table 2 contains the result of that search.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kim, H. *Multiple Authorship of the Septuagint Pentateuch*. Brill. Leiden. 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis in Table 2 was done using the same sources and approach as the analysis in Table 1.

Table 2: Instances of **עצ** in the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ezekiel  
 With LXX Translation Approach

Verse	Clear Translation as:		Unclear/ Missing	Notes:
	Bone (1)	Power, Size (2)		
Gen 2:23	X			
Gen 18:18		X		
Gen 26:16		X		
Gen 29:14	X			
Gen 50:25	X			
Ex 1:7		X		
Ex 1:9		X		
Ex 1:20		X		
Ex 12:46	X			
Ex 13:19	X			
Ex 13:19	X			
Ex 24:10			x	(3)
Num 9:12	X			
Num 14:12		X		
Num 19:16	X			
Num 19:18	X			
Num 22:6		X		
Num 24:8			x	(3)
Deut 4:38		X		
Deut 7:1		X		
Deut 8:17		X		
Deut 9:1		X		
Deut 9:14		X		
Deut 11:23		X		
Deut 26:5		X		
Jos 23:9		X		
Jos 24:32	X			
Ezek 6:5	X			
Ezek 24:4	X			
Ezek 24:5	X			
Ezek 24:5	X			
Ezek 24:10	X		x	(3)
Ezek 32:27	X			

Ezek 37:4	X		
Ezek 37:4	X		
Ezek 37:5	X		
Ezek 37:7	X		
Ezek 37:7	X		
Ezek 37:7		x	(4)
Ezek 37:11	X		
Ezek 37: 11	X		
Ezek 39:15	X		

- (1) The translation of the form of **עצם** here is clearly as “bone”, using forms of *οστεων*.
- (2) The translation of the form of **עצם** here is clearly as might, strength, power, or a great number. For example: Gen 18:18 has *πολυ* for populous; Gen 26:16 has *δυνατος* for strong or mighty; Deut often uses *ισχυροτερα* in “stronger-than” phrases.
- (3) There is no direct parallel in the LXX for the MT use of **עצם**.
- (4) Two of the instances in 37:7 are clear. The third is less so.

We can conclude from this analysis that the LXX translators of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ezekiel clearly understood the Hebrew word **עצם** in its typical forms and uses. They provided straightforward Greek translations in essentially all instances *except* the eighteen that are the subject of our study.

Another approach to our question is to ask whether the LXX translators use the same, or a similar, translation of MT phrases that *do not contain* the Hebrew **עצם** as they do of the MT phrases that *do contain* the term. If we find the same translation in cases where **ים** occurs without an **עצם** term, that would further suggest that the term is absent in our specific cases. For this analysis we will, again, limit our analysis to the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ezekiel. We will begin with the simplest phrases that include forms of **ים** and proceed to more complex cases. We will use the same search approaches and tools as we did for the analysis in Table 2.

Case 1: LXX Translations of the Hebrew היום:

Most often the LXX translates the Hebrew היום as *σημερον*, simply meaning “today”, which is straightforward and expected. In three cases, though, the LXX treats היום quite differently.

In Deut 5:1 LXX gives the following translation for היום: *εν τη ημερα ταυτη*, which is the same translation found for our עצם phrase at Deut 32:48. That is, the simple היום is translated there in precisely the same way as the much more complex בעצם היום הזה.

In Jos 5:9 and Jos 22:29, היום is translated as: *εν τη σημερον ημερα*, which differs from the עצם phrases at Jos 10:27 and Ezek 2:3 only in the initial term: that is, *εν* replaces *εως*. That difference is not substantive in the context of this analysis. For practical purposes, the treatment of היום in these two verses is the same as in the Deut 5:1 instance.

Thus, in these three cases, the LXX translators of Deuteronomy and Joshua understand the simple היום, with no עצם associated with it, in the same way as they understand the MT phrases that do associate היום and עצם.

Case 2: LXX Translations of the Hebrew היום הזה:

The Hebrew היום הזה without some other introductory element, is uncommon in the texts we are reviewing. In five cases, though, היום הזה is translated by the LXX as *εν τη ημερα ταυτη* which is the same as the LXX for the עצם phrases at Gen 7:13 and Deut 32:48. [See Deut 2:25, 26:16 & 29:9; Jos 3:7, 22:22] It is also the same translation as the Lev 23:28, 29 & 30 phrases, except those lack the initial *εν*.

Case 3: LXX Translations of variations of the Hebrew היום ההוא:

In Jos 9:27 ביום ההוא is translated as *εν τη ημερα εαυτου*, which is the same translation given for the עצם phrases at Ex 12:51 and Ezek 40:1.

In Ezek 39:22 מן היום ההוא is translated in the same way as the עצם phrase at Ezek 24:2.

Case 4: LXX Translations of the Hebrew עד היום:

In three cases: Gen 19:37 & 38 and Ex 20:31, the LXX translates עד היום just as it does the phrase עד עצם היום הזה in Jos 10:27 and Ezek 2:3.

Case 5: LXX Translations of the Hebrew עד היום הזה:

The Hebrew phrase עד היום הזה is common in the MT texts we are reviewing.

In seven cases the LXX translates this phrase, which does not include עצם, in the same way it translates the phrases that do include עצם at Jos 10:27 and Ezek 2:3. [See Num 22:30, Deut 11:4; Jos 4:9, 5:9, 6:25 & 22:3; Ezek 20:29]

In twenty additional cases, the LXX translates this phrase in the same way as the instance in Ezek 24:2 that reads את עצם היום הזה except that in these cases the phrase is introduced by *εως* instead of *απο*, which is not a significant difference for our purposes. [See Gen 32:33, 47:26 & 48:15; Ex 10:6; Deut 2:22, 3:14, 10:8, 29:3 & 34:6; Jos 7:26, 8:28, 8:29, 9:27, 13:13, 14:14, 15:63, 16:10, 22:17, 23:8 & 23:9]

Case 6: LXX Translation of the Hebrew את היום הזה:



In Ex 12:17 and 13:3 the LXX gives the same translation to את היום הזה that it gives to את עצם היום הזה in Ezek 24:2, except the initial  $\alpha\pi\sigma$ , found in Ezek 24:2, is not in Ex 12:17 or 13:3. That is not a material difference for our purposes.

#### Conclusion of Review Outlined in Cases 1 through 6:

There are several other cases that we could cite to extend the theme of the review outlined in Cases 1 through 6, above, but they are mainly of single instances and, while interesting, none adds materially to the analysis.

The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is clear: The Greek translations of the MT phrases that do include the עצם term are not systematically different from the translations of similar, simpler MT phrases that do not include the עצם term. There is no indication that the LXX recognizes the presence of the Hebrew עצם.

#### Polak and Marquis CATSS Study:

Emanuel Tov and Robert Kraft co-directed a project for the creation of a database designed to allow the study of the Septuagint with the aid of computer technology. The project was known as “Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies”, or CATSS.<sup>4</sup> The database contains “the major types of data needed for the study of the Septuagint (LXX) and its relation to the Masoretic Text (MT) ... in particular ... translation techniques, variant readings, grammar, and vocabulary of the LXX.”<sup>5</sup> Polak and Marquis in 2002 used the CATSS database to produce a comprehensive analysis of the “minuses” exhibited by the LXX of the Pentateuch when that text is compared to the MT. A “minus” in formal terms

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<sup>4</sup> Tov, E. and Kraft, R. eds. *Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies (CATSS): A computerized data base for Septuagint studies: the parallel aligned text of the Greek and Hebrew bible*. United States: Scholars Press, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Polak, F. and Marquis, G. *A Classified Index of the Minuses of the Septuagint: Part 1: Introduction*. Tov, E. ed. Stellenbosch. Cape Town. 2002 Preface.

is found “if a given element is present in the MT, but is lacking ...” in another text form.<sup>6</sup> In regard to a comparison between texts in different languages, such as the MT and the LXX, though, there are two possible explanation for variances. It is possible that the Hebrew from which the Greek was translated did not include the element that appears to be a minus. It is also possible, though, that the apparent minus simply reflects the choice made by a translator. While the data available in the study by Polak and Marquis does not include the Joshua and Ezekiel instances in our study, it does represent a serious approach to our question that we must, therefore, address. In some respects, an analysis that is in part “mechanical” might help us to avoid potential bias. On the other hand, the output of database manipulation is dependent on the accuracy of both the database itself and the method of its manipulation. What does the CATSS database tell us when it is subjected to the analysis of minuses by Polak and Marquis?

First, CATSS finds the entire היום הזה בעצם phrase to be lacking in the LXX of Ex 12:41. In this instance, it supports all of our previous analyses. In five other instances, the CATSS analysis identifies the עצם element of our phrase as a minus; that is, it finds that the word עצם was not in the text from which the LXX was translated. Those five instances are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Instances Identified by CATSS as “Minuses” in the LXX<sup>7</sup>

<u>MT Verse</u>	<u>LXX Translation</u>	<u>Indicated Hebrew Text</u>	<u>Page</u> <sup>8</sup>
Gen 7:13	εν τη ημερα ταυτη	היום הזה	9
Ex 12:17	εν γαρ τη ημερα ταυτη	היום הזה	160

<sup>6</sup> Polak and Marquis. Introduction. p 7

<sup>7</sup> Polak, F. and Marquis, G. *A Classified Index of the Minuses of the Septuagint: Part II: The Pentateuch*. Tov, E. ed. Stellenbosch. Cape Town. 2002 Preface.

<sup>8</sup> Indicates page number in Polak and Marquis Part II.

Ex 12:51	εν τη ημερα εχεινη	היום הזה	160
Lev 23:21	τατην την ημεραν	היום הזה	192
Deut 32:48	εν τη ημερα ταυτη	היום הזה	338

While the Polack-Marquis study does not address the other instances of our study directly, it provides interesting evidence that is potentially supportive. That evidence, though, might equally call into question the validity of their results. For example:

- A. Polak-Marquis does not identify a minus in any of the three Leviticus verses that detail the requirements of the Yom Kippur observance. That suggests that the CATSS database does have the ׀צע element in the MT of Lev 23:28-30. But the LXX text of our phrase in each of those verses is the simple: τη ημερα ταυτη. It does not seem reasonable that the translator of Leviticus would use that translation where the MT *did include* ׀צע but essentially the same phrase; that is, τατην την ημεραν in Lev 23:21, where ׀צע is identified as a minus.
- B. Polak-Marquis does not identify a minus in either of the two verses that frame the text of the Abrahamic circumcision event: Gen 17:23 and 26. The LXX in both cases is εν τω καιρω της ημερα εχεινης. If the MT contains ׀צע in those verses—that is, if there is no minus—we must ask where the word ׀צע is reflected in the Greek. Since we have the word εχεινη in Ex 12:51, which does exhibit a minus, the only “new” element in the Greek phrase in Gen 17:23 and 26 is the word καιρω, meaning “time”, which cannot reasonably represent ׀צע. How is it that there is no minus in these cases?
- C. While Polak-Marquis does not extend to the book of Joshua, we can observe that the LXX of Joshua 5:11, εν ταυτη τη ημερα, is the clear equivalent of the LXX of both Deut 32:48 and

Gen 7:13, which read *εν τη ημερα ταυτη*, both of which are identified as representing minuses with respect to **עצם**. If there is a minus in those two cases, we would expect there to be one in Joshua also.<sup>9</sup>

D. Similarly, Polak-Marquis does not extend to Ezekiel, but we can observe that in Ezekiel 40:1, the LXX has *εν τη ημερα εχεινη* which is identical to the passage in Ex 12:51. That is identified as exhibiting a minus, which suggests that the Ezekiel 40:1 instance would also exhibit a minus.

In each of the five cases where the Polak-Marquis analysis finds that the LXX exhibits a minus relative to the MT, the balance of the phrase; that is, **היום הזה**, is shown as present in the MT. And, as we have seen above (Case 2, p 6), that phrase, lacking the **עצם** term, is translated in exactly the same way as some of our instances that do include **עצם**.

The Polack-Marquis project was ambitious, and its product is impressive and tremendously useful. Raising questions about a small number of the many thousands of conclusions it presents is not intended to impugn either its quality or its value. Our topic is a very narrow one and the set of instances of concern to us would probably not arise in any other context. In this specific case, though, the output of the Polak-Marquis study seems clearly inconsistent. If it is true that, in the case of the five instances specifically cited as minuses (six, if we include Ex 12:41), the text from which the LXX was translated did not include the term **עצם**, both logic and comparison of those instances to others would suggest that most, and perhaps all, of the other instances were also lacking in that term. And that does seem to be likely. We interpret the output of the Polack-Marquis study as explicitly supportive of our analysis in the

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<sup>9</sup> Frank Polack presented paper at the 2004 meeting of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS) on “The Minuses of the LXX on Joshua.” I have been unable to locate a copy of that paper. If I am able to find a copy and it contains material that would alter this analysis, I will make the appropriate changes.

six cases cited and as generally or implicitly supportive overall. At a minimum, it cannot be said to contradict the indications of our other approaches to the question.

We might stop at this point and propose that the Hebrew texts from which the LXX translations were made did not include the word  $\epsilon\zeta\upsilon$  in our eighteen instances. But before we do that, we can check our understanding against that of the translators who have produced English translations of the Greek LXX text. We can ask what they understood the Greek to mean; whether they found any indication in the Greek that the word  $\epsilon\zeta\upsilon$  was in the Hebrew from which the LXX of these phrases derived. Admittedly, that analysis is a further step removed from either the MT or the LXX, but it can show us what those who are expert in the English, in the LXX Greek, and the bible text more generally, have understood the LXX text to mean.

There have been five translations of the Septuagint into English; three in recent years. Three of those five have been made without systematic reference to either the MT or to English translations of the MT. The other two have deliberately looked to the MT, or to translations of it, for guidance, although to different degrees. While no English-speaking bible scholar can completely avoid the influence of the KJV, an approach to the Greek text that does not take deliberate guidance from other texts is importantly different from one that does. We will review the treatment of the eighteen MT  $\epsilon\zeta\upsilon$  instances in each of those translations. The five texts, in order of their publication, are:

- a) Thompson, Charles. *The Old Covenant Commonly Called The Old Testament Translated from The Septuagint*. 2 vols. Philadelphia; Jane Aitken; 1808. [Referred to as Thompson.]
- b) Brenton, Lancelot C. L. *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament*. London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1844. [Referred to as Brenton.]
- c) Pietersma, Albert, and Wright, Benjamin G., eds. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. [Referred to as NETS]

- d) Maximos, Metropolitan, Eugen Pentiu, Joseph Allen, and Jack Norman Sparks, eds. *The Orthodox Study Bible*. Kindle Edition. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. [Referred to as OSB.]
- e) Penner, Ken M., ed. *The Lexham English Septuagint*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. [Referred to as Lexham or LES.]

The translations of Thompson, Brenton, and Lexham are the three that do not explicitly consult or rely upon other translations. All three base their work primarily on the Greek text of the Codex Vaticanus, although Brenton specifically includes “the principal various readings of the Alexandrine copies.”<sup>10</sup> Lexham is based on Swete’s edition of the Codex Vaticanus. Lexham says of that edition, “Where Vaticanus is missing material, the text comes from comparable manuscripts such as the Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Sinaiticus.”<sup>11</sup> Thompson seems to be the only one without access to multiple manuscripts, and he worked alone, with no prior English translation to consult. Brenton apparently knew of Thompson’s translation, but it is said that he did not consult it. Thompson’s work is referenced in somewhat deprecatory terms in the Preface to the 1844 edition of Brenton. It seems Brenton considered Thompson something of an amateur. (We will see that in the instances important to us, Brenton agreed with Thompson more often than not.) Unlike either Thompson or Brenton, the LES was a project that involved many individuals, and those individuals had the advantage of the vastly greater textual, historical, and analytical resources of the current century.

The NETS translation, unlike those three, is based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) English translation of the MT. That is, the NETS editors and translators started with a widely accepted English translation of the MT and modified it to accord with the Greek where that was considered necessary. The introduction to the work explains that “NETS translators have sought to retain the NRSV to the extent that the Greek text, in their understanding of it, directs or permits.” (NETS, xvi) Since the

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<sup>10</sup> This language appears on the title page of the book.

<sup>11</sup> Lexham p xi

NRSV aims at a translation that is as literal as possible, the influence of the MT will certainly be found in the NETS version, and that distinguishes it from the versions of Thompson, Brenton, and Lexham. Further, the NETS is not the work of a single translator. Each of the seven books that we are reviewing has been translated in NETS by a different individual. So, we will see the work of seven different translators in the NETS references below.

The OSB, in its own words, “does not claim to be a new or superior translation. The goal was to produce a text to meet the Bible-reading needs of English-speaking Orthodox Christians.” (OSB, Loc 931) The OSB editors and translators began with the Greek text, using the edition of Alfred Ralfs. They approached their understanding of the Greek explicitly guided by the Septuagint translation of Brenton and the KJV translation of the MT. The OSB, therefore, can be expected to show deliberate MT influence, but to a lesser extent than the NETS.

For ease of inspection, the table below is organized to show, first, the three texts without deliberate MT influence, followed by the two with deliberate MT influence. For uniformity of analysis, we attach to each phrase a single letter “S” if the reference is simply specific, as in “that day”; a double “SS” if there is second level of specificity, as in “that very day”; and a triple “SSS”, if there is a third level of specificity, as in “that very same day.”

Table 4: Comparison of English Translations of LXX – Five Versions

Gen 7:13

Thompson:	On that day	S
Brenton:	On that very day	SS
Lexham:	On this day	S
NETS:	On that very day	SS
OSB :	On the very same day	SS

Gen 17:23

Thompson:	that very day	SS
Brenton:	in the time of that day	SS
Lexham:	at the appointed time of that day	SS
NETS:	on that very same day	SSS

	OSB:	that very same day	SSS
Gen 17:26			
	Thompson:	In one and the same day	SS
	Brenton:	at the period of that day	SS
	Lexham:	at the appointed time of that day	SS
	NETS:	on the very same day	SS
	OSB :	That very same day	SSS
Ex 12:17			
	Thompson:	on that day	S
	Brenton:	on this day	S
	Lexham:	in this day	S
	NETS:	on this very day (1)	SS
	OSB :	on this same day	SS
Ex 12:41			
	Thompson:	No parallel to the MT in this verse	
	Brenton:	No parallel to the MT in this verse	
	Lexham:	No parallel to the MT in this verse	
	NETS:	on the very day	Unique (2)
	OSB :	No parallel to the MT in this verse	
Ex 12:51			
	Thompson:	on that very day (verse 50 in this version)	SS
	Brenton:	in that day	S
	Lexham:	on that day	S
	NETS:	on this very day	SS
	OSB :	on that very same day	SSS
Lev 23:21			
	Thompson:	this day	S
	Brenton:	this day	S
	Lexham:	this day	S
	NETS:	On this very day (1)	SS
	OSB :	the same day	S



Lev 23:28

Thompson:	on this day	S
Brenton:	on this self-same day	SS
Lexham:	on this same day	SS
NETS:	on this particular day (1)	SS
OSB :	on that same day	SS

Lev 23:29

Thompson:	on that day	S
Brenton:	in that day	S
Lexham:	on this very day	SS
NETS:	on this particular day	SS
OSB :	on that same day	SS

Lev 23:30

Thompson:	on that day	S
Brenton:	on that day	S
Lexham:	on this very day	SS
NETS:	on this particular day	SS
OSB :	on that same day	SS

Deut 32:48

Thompson:	that day	S
Brenton:	in this day	S
Lexham:	in this day	S
NETS:	that same day	SS
OSB :	on that day	S

Jos 5:11(12)

Thompson:	On that very day (5:12 in this version)	SS
Brenton:	In this day (5:12 in this version.)	S
Lexham:	On this day (5:12 in this version.)	S
NETS:	(No translation.)	Unique (3)
OSB :	On this day (5:12 in this version.)	S

Ezek 24:2

Thompson:	even from this very day	SS
Brenton:	even from this day	S
Lexham:	today	S
NETS:	from this very day	SS
OSB :	the day	Unique (4)
Ezek 40:1		
Thompson:	on that day	S
Brenton:	in that day	S
Lexham:	On that day	S
NETS:	on this very day	SS
OSB :	on the very same day	SS
Lev 23:14		
Thompson:	til this day	S
Brenton:	until this same day	SS
Lexham:	until this very day	SS
NETS:	until this very day (1)	SS
OSB :	until this same day	SS
Jos 10:27		
Thompson:	which still remain (10:28 - Now on that day ...)	S
Brenton:	until this day	S
Lexham:	until this day	S
NETS:	(They remain to this very day.)	SS (5)
OSB :	to this day (10:26 in this version)	S
Ezek 2:3		
Thompson:	even to this day	S
Brenton:	to this day	S
Lexham:	up to the present day	S
NETS:	to this very day	SS
OSB :	up to this very day	SS
Ezek 24:2		

Thompson:	from this day	S
Brenton:	from this day	S
Lexham:	beginning today	S
NETS:	this very day	SS
OSB :	from this day	S

- (1) In each of these cases the NETS provides a translation note giving a literal translation of the **דצע** term of the phrase. In Ex 12:17, for example, the translation note reads “*Heb* ‘On the bone of this day...’”
- (2) NETS reflects the MT basis of the NRSV here. There is no parallel Greek text in the LXX but NETS, nevertheless, supplies this phrase.
- (3) Here, NETS chooses not to translate a phrase that is found in the MT. The translation note tells us: “The Hebrew text adds ‘on this same day.’ This is somewhat redundant in English and has not been translated.”
- (4) The OSB here is unique in that no degree of specificity is attached to the “day” reference.
- (5) The NETS reference here is provided parenthetically.

With a few exceptions, there is nothing unusual in the language of those translations. The only systematic similarity is that they reference specific days. And that was the only systematic similarity in the Greek, as we saw in Table 1. In some cases, the level of specificity is stressed, even unusually so, but we saw that in the Greek as well, with some having two “day” words or specifiers, which might produce something like “today’s day”, in a literal translation. Lexham’s use of “appointed time” or NETS’s use of “that particular day” are stylistic more than substantive.

It is clear that NETS reflects a unique approach to the text. The fact that in one instance it chooses to add text that does not appear in the Greek, and in another to exclude text that does, probably says more about the diversity of translators than it does about the translation approach though. And NETS specifically provides translation notes that identify the literal Hebrew of the MT.

There is more consistency among Thompson, Brenton, and Lexham than there is among the full array of translations. In ten cases, all three of those use the same level of specificity. In twelve cases, Thompson and Brenton find the same level of specificity. The OSB finds maximal specificity in three

cases, while NETS finds that in one instance. None of the three translations without deliberate MT influence uses a “SSS” level of specificity in any of the instances under study.

The OSB, in the instances studied, seems to clearly reflect the KJV, which uses the term “selfsame” in eleven of the eighteen cases, and to have understood that term as conveying an unusual level of specificity. (It is interesting that Brenton uses that term also in his understanding of Lev 23:28, which might indicate how difficult it is to fully disengage from the KJV.) And, in fact, the word “selfsame” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) in interestingly redundant terms, “(The) very same, very identical.”<sup>12</sup> The KJV use of selfsame for the עצם term can be illustrated in its rendering of the term in the first instance encountered: Genesis 7:13 in KJV begins “In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japhet ...” And, indeed, we now find “selfsame” as a defined meaning for עצם. KJV was not the first English version to use the word, though. Tyndale’s translation of 1530 used “selfe same daye” in eight of the Pentateuch instances of בעצם היום הזה. The OED notes that the word was used by John Lydgate in a work titled “Reason and Sensuality” in 1407. But Tyndale might have known it from Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”, written in 1386, which contains the following passage, “My liege and lady, in general, said he, ‘A woman wants the self-same sovereignty, over her husband as over her lover, and master him, he must not be above her.’”<sup>13</sup> Chaucer’s usage, which predates the KJV by 225 years, clearly intends the term “selfsame” to mean something like “exactly.”

We saw, above, that the LXX translators treat the term עצם in clear and straightforward terms in essentially all cases except those that we are studying. The thesis we are testing is that the LXX translators did not reflect the term in those locations because it was not there. The KJV translators, and Tyndale before them, though, did have the Hebrew of the MT, and it did contain the עצם term. They

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<sup>12</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*. Entry for “selfsame.”

<sup>13</sup> Lines 1037-1040. Some editions lack this word in this location, but other instances of it in hyphenated or two-word form are found in *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Nun’s Tale*.

needed to decide what to do with those eighteen unusual cases, in which a “day” was somehow associated with a “bone.” Before we proceed to that issue, though, there is one more source that we should consult.

A Comment on the “Dictionary Objection”:

To return to the issue of definitions: an objection can be raised that the standard dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew allow the understanding of the word **עצם** to have a meaning different from “bone” or “strength” or “a multitude”— that it can mean “self”— and that is the meaning reflected in the LXX of the instances we are studying. The two most commonly consulted English dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew: Strong’s Hebrew-English Dictionary<sup>14</sup> and the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon,<sup>15</sup> both allow the singular **עצם** to be understood as “substance” or “self”, where “self” is understood as an expression of essence. Strong also allows “body” in the singular.<sup>16</sup>

Strong, in his concordance, finds 126 instances of **עצם** in the MT with this distribution of definitions:<sup>17</sup> a) 104 times as “bone”, b) 11 times as “selfsame”, c) 5 times as “same”, d) 2 times as “body”, e) 2 times as “very”, f) 1 time as “life”, and g) 1 time as “strength.” Of the instances that are not understood as “bone”, almost all—18 of the 22 cases<sup>18</sup>—are the instances we are studying. Our instances effectively represent a distinct class of usage; those in which the Hebrew words **עצם** and **יום** are associated. That clearly presents a challenge to both translators and to those who create lexicons. How are

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<sup>14</sup> We have used the version found in: Strong, James. *A Complete Bible Reference Study Library*. Bestbooks. 2015. Kindle Edition. (Strong’s *Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary* was originally published with the 1890 edition of his *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Eaton and Mains. New York.)

<sup>15</sup> Brown, F, Driver, S., and Briggs, C. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson; Peabody, MA Seventh Printing. Reprinted from 1906 edition by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston. p782

<sup>16</sup> In the plural, the possibility of a meaning “as representing the entire person = one’s whole being”, is given by BDB.

<sup>17</sup> Ideas of strength, might, and large numbers are conveyed in the MT in plural forms of **עצם**. This analysis is of the singular form found in the instances under study.

<sup>18</sup> 11 cases of “selfsame”, 5 of “same”, and 2 of “very”

we — and how were they — to understand the character of a “day” that shares, in some way, the attributes of a “bone?”

Strong’s Concordance provides only one instance where the meaning of עצם is “substance”, in Psalm 139:15. There the form is the possessive עצמי, which the NRSV, the ESV, the ASV and the NJPS all translate as “my frame.” That more directly reflects the “bone” understanding of עצם. The KJV uses “substance”, which is the source of Strong’s reference. The BDB illustrates the idea of "one's whole being" with the passage in Psalm 6:3 (6:2 in some versions), which contains the same עצמי form found in Psalm 139:15. There the NRSV, ESV, ASV, NJPS, and even the KJV recognize the Hebrew to mean “my bones.” While an association between “bone” and ideas of substance, firmness, essence, etc. seems to make sense intuitively, the majority of translators, certainly the more recent ones, adhere to the more literal understanding of the עצם term.

Both the BDB and Strong’s lexicons owe a great deal to the earlier work of Wilhelm Gesenius, who published the German language *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures* in 1829. Several subsequent editions were published in German and one in Latin. Samuel Tregelles published an English translation of Gesenius’s lexicon in 1857.<sup>19</sup> Gesenius provides the typical meanings of עצם; that is, “bone” and “strength” and “numerous” that we have seen expressed elsewhere. For the atypical uses that we are interested in, he says that the word עצם “...is used instead of the pronoun *itself*...but only of things e.g. בעצם היום הזה, in that very day, Gen 7:13, 17:23, 26 ...”<sup>20</sup> Gesenius does not make the leap from the specific “itself” to the idea of “self” in the singular or to “one’s whole being” in the plural that the BDB and Strong make, which perhaps suggests the influence of the KJV translators on

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<sup>19</sup> Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux. *Gesenius Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures*. Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd. London. 1857.

<sup>20</sup> Tregelles. p 648

the English lexicographers. And that raises the interesting question of the role of lexicographer versus that of the translator. Whose decision was it that the Hebrew עצם could be understood to mean "self" or "one's whole being"? Does the dictionary maker find that understanding in a translation and then report it as an alternative definition? Or does a translator look to a dictionary to determine how to render a phrase in the new language? What does a translator do when a usage is clearly unusual?

A translator of Hebrew would likely look to earlier rabbinic literature for guidance in understanding the meaning of a word found in an unusual relationship to others. That would be the case, certainly, for a usage as unusual as one that associates "day" and "bone." The early rabbinic notices of the phrase בעצם היום הזה understand it to mean that the event described occurred either: a) at mid-day, or in broad daylight, (e.g., *Sifre Devarim* 337.1, and Rashi, following that interpretation) or b) immediately, without delay (e.g., *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael* 12:40, Sforno to Gen 17:23, Ramban to Gen 17:26, etc.). But, in fact, there are surprisingly few mentions of the עצם phrases in the most important of the early rabbinic writings; the Mishnah and the two Talmudim. What we do have, however, seems to support the idea that the phrase can be interpreted as Gesenius did; that is, as a specification and limitation. The question is not that straightforward, however.

Rashi, following *Sifre*, makes his case that the phrase means something like "in the middle of the day", which some interpret as meaning "in broad daylight", with respect to only three instances of the phrase: Gen 7:13, Ex 12:17, and Deut 32:48. That interpretation would not be relevant to any of the Leviticus, Joshua, or Ezekiel instances. Sforno, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra, apparently following the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, all find the phrase to mean "without delay" in the Abrahamic circumcision instances, and the Exodus event, but again that interpretation does not seem appropriate in most of the other cases. What would "immediately" mean, for instance, in the cases of the Ezekiel visions? In most of our cases there is no explanation of the phrase provided in the early rabbinic literature. But commentators, translators, and dictionary makers must work with what is available. And so, Samson Raphael Hirsch

(1808–1888), for example, the German commentator who was a contemporary of Gesenius chose to write in his commentary on Genesis 17:23–26, “Our sages take it that wherever it says **בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה** it means in broad daylight.” That is clearly not accurate, but Hirsch represents an authoritative voice, and some will follow his lead. So, for instance, a 2010 interlinear edition of the Pentateuch by Mesorah Publications<sup>21</sup> translates the phrase wherever it is found as “in the midst of that day.” *Sifre* did not make that claim. Rashi did not make that claim. But over time interpretation evolves.

We have seen that the translators of the KJV might have based their conclusion that when **עֵצֶם** is associated with **יוֹם** it most often means "selfsame" on the earlier work of Tyndale. And that Tyndale, seeking a word that conveyed the idea of exactness, might have found his model in Chaucer. But how did Tyndale decide that exactness was the sense of the word? It can certainly be argued, in defense of the dictionary makers, that the sense of “selfsame” can support an extension to essence or substance or self, but that is an exercise in the analysis of English, not of Hebrew.

We do have another source that might have informed some early translation decisions. The Hebrew texts of the bible were translated in the early centuries CE into Aramaic. Those translations are called the Targumim, meaning “translations”, but they are more accurately “explanations” since their aim was more to explain or make clear than to literally translate. The Targum known as Onkelos, which is roughly contemporaneous with the Babylonian Talmud, renders the Hebrew **בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה** as **בְּכֶרְן יוֹמָא** **הַדִּין** in the Aramaic. The Aramaic dictionary of Marcus Jastrow defines **כֶּרְן** as "roundness, fullness, essence" and gives as examples Leviticus 23:28 and Ezekiel 24:2.<sup>22</sup> While Jastrow’s understanding of the Aramaic as including a meaning like “essence” seems to support the notion of “self” or “substance” in the

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<sup>21</sup> *The Schottenstein Edition Interlinear Chumash*. Artscroll Mesorah Publications, Ltd. Brooklyn. 2010

<sup>22</sup> Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. The Judaica Press. New York. 1971. p 671



Hebrew, the definition as a whole does not really clarify the matter. And we are left to consider the value of Jastrow's English translation of Onkelos's Aramaic translation of the Hebrew phrase.

The argument that the standard dictionary entries are broad enough to allow the possibility that the text from which the LXX was translated did include the עצם term is understandable and should be considered seriously. But when we ask how those who created the dictionaries determined the meaning of the words, the issue becomes cloudy. If the argument that the singular עצם can mean "selfsame" rests primarily on the use of that word in the KJV, for example, and that usage is an extension from Tyndale, who might have found it in Chaucer, can we really attribute that meaning with any confidence to the Hebrew original? Does the fact that a meaning like "substance" might seem intuitively reasonable to those familiar with the English phrase "bred in the bone" tell us anything about the intended meaning of the Hebrew author of Ezekiel, for example. Not necessarily, I would argue.

Unfortunately, we have no dictionary of Biblical Hebrew from the age in which the bible was written. Our phrase does not appear in any of the texts discovered in the Judean desert, and none of the early rabbinic writings address the phrase in all of its instances. What might seem a quite appropriate understanding in some instances is clearly not appropriate in others. But both translators and dictionary makers needed to deal with this unusual phrase, and they had to make choices in conditions of ambiguity. As well intentioned and as well-educated as their choices were, they were limited by the scarcity of evidence. We cannot attribute to a nineteenth century dictionary

maker, or to a sixteenth century translator, a more certain understanding of an unusual phrase than is offered by the earliest rabbinic literature. And that understanding lacks both breadth and consistency. The argument based on alternate definition raises interesting issues but it does not settle the question posed.

Summary:

In eighteen instances, the text of the MT associates the Hebrew for “day” with the Hebrew for “bone.” In one case the LXX has no parallel to the MT. In the seventeen cases where the LXX does have a parallel, none contains the Greek for the word “bone”; no form of the Greek *οστεω* parallels the Hebrew **עצם** (see Table 1).

It is clear, however, that the LXX translators understood quite well the two common meanings of **עצם**. In the biblical books in which the instances we are studying appear, we can find many other cases in which forms of **עצם** are used and in essentially all of those cases the LXX translators provide clear Greek equivalents. Our eighteen instances are notable as exceptions. It is the association of “bone” and “day” that defines those exceptions as a class (See Table 2).

Analysis of the LXX translations of other MT instances of the word **יום** finds that the same Greek translations that are parallel to our instances are often used to translate Hebrew phrases that do not include the word **עצם**. That is, a Hebrew instance as simple as **היום** can be translated in the LXX in the same way as the more complex **בעצם היום הזה**. (See Cases 1–6, above). There is no indication that the

inclusion of the Hebrew **עצ** has affected the LXX translation of the instances under study. One obvious explanation for the lack of a reflection of **עצ** in the Greek is that it was not present in the Hebrew.

Frank Polak and Galen Marquis produced a comprehensive study of the cases in which the LXX does not contain material that is found in the MT, which they term “minuses.” For that study, they used a database created under the direction of Emanuel Tov and Robert Kraft. The database is a part of the *Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies*, or CATSS. The Polak and Marquis study found that the LXX had no parallel for the MT instance at Exodus 12:41, confirming other approaches detailed above. It also identified five other of our instances as specific “minuses”; that is, cases in which the LXX does not reflect a Hebrew that contained the word **עצ**. The Polak-Marquis study was only of the Pentateuch, but we can see by direct examination that instances in both Joshua and Ezekiel would fit the pattern of “minuses” produced by their study. Additionally, there are several instances about which we can say: if Polak-Marquis found *that* instance to exhibit a minus, then *this* even simpler Greek phrase must also be a minus. The Polak-Marquis study provides clear support to the argument that the Hebrew text from which the LXX was translated lacked the **עצ** term in the instances we are studying.

We examined the English translations of each of the eighteen instances produced in each of the five English translations of the LXX. That is admittedly an analysis that is a step removed from the LXX translation itself. But it provides a window on the views of experts in the LXX Greek text. Nothing in the approach of any of the translators suggests the presence of the Hebrew **עצ**. The only systematic similarity across instances and translators is that all convey the idea of a specific day.

We also addressed the objection that might be raised on the basis of a tertiary understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew **עצ** and ultimately came to question the source of that tertiary understanding. Where a dictionary relies on the interpretation of an earlier translator, the meaning given by the dictionary can only be as reliable as the understanding of that earlier translation. The instances we are studying

presented an unusual problem to the earliest translators. The early rabbinic notices of our יום עצם plus phrases do not provide an understanding that can be applied to all of our cases. In fact, the two explanations provided in early rabbinic literature are clearly not appropriate to many of the instances. The argument that a nineteenth century dictionary definition, which is based on translations made many centuries after those early rabbinic notices, can explain the decisions of LXX translators, is not tenable. We cannot point to Strong's "selfsame" for authority if Strong is simply reporting the understanding of the KJV translators, for instance.

Conclusion:

Without a copy of the Hebrew source itself, we will never be able to say with complete assurance that the Hebrew עצם was not in the texts from which the LXX of our eighteen instances were translated. We can say, though, that it is far more likely that the word was not in the Hebrew sources than that it was. We can also say that there is nothing in the LXX that clearly demonstrates the presence of the עצם term in those eighteen instances.

## Abbreviations

ASV	The American Standard Version
ESV	The English Standard Version
KJV	The King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	The Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible
NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version

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