Textual Pluriformity and Allusion in the Book of Revelation. The Text of Zechariah 4 in the Apocalypse

Garrick V. Allen

Garrick V. Allen: University of St Andrews, St Mary's College, South Street, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9JU, Scotland; Research Associate, Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, South Africa; ga22@st-andrews.ac.uk

1 Introduction

The book of Revelation relentlessly alludes to Jewish scripture. Linguistic and thematic material from these works is enmeshed throughout the entirety of the Apocalypse. The gravid biblicism of this work and its manifest reuse of scrip-tural traditions raises a foundational question that is often overlooked in current scholarly discourse: *to which form(s) of scriptural works did John allude*?[1] This article examines this fundamental question using John's references to Zech 4 as samples. The identification of the *Vorlage*(*n*) of John's allusions is an open ques-tion which remains debated in current scholarship. Where this question is dis-cussed, its importance is often underplayed[2] and, on occasion, flawed textual assumptions are operative.[3] An in-depth analysis of the *Vorlagen* of allusions in

―――――

1 "Allusion" refers to the author's reuse of linguistic material from antecedent scriptural tra-ditions that are not introduced with citation formulae. I employ the term "reuse" because the evidence below suggests that John intentionally crafted these references to Zechariah using a particular text form. The author of the Apocalypse is referred to as "John" in light of the identi-fication in Rev 1,4.

2 This is particularly true of English language scholarly discourse. For example, see G. K. Beale, John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation (JSNTS 166), Sheffield 1998, 61–62.

3 For example, it is a general assumption of Septuagint Studies that John utilized the OG/LXX because other NT writers depend on this form and because the Apocalypse was composed in Greek. See H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices, London 1911 and T. M. Law, When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and Making of the Christian Bible, Oxford, 2013, 85–116.

Revelation based on textual criteria remains a *desideratum* as no consensus on this issue has arisen.[4] The goal of this discussion is to examine the textual evidence internal to the book of Revelation in order to determine the form of Zech 4 to which the author alluded.

The textual evidence from the Judean Desert suggests that multiple textual exemplars of certain books of the Hebrew Bible and its early Greek versions (OG/LXX) circulated concurrently in Jewish and early Christian communities in the first century CE. Despite the profundity of this evidence, the question of textual form is often dismissed as unnecessary by many sectors of current scholarship.[5] However, this concern is essential to any exploration of John's interpretation of scripture or the rhetoric of allusion in the book of Revelation. This article addresses this lacuna in current scholarship, bringing the question of *Vorlage* to the fore and indicating its critical importance. Quantitative constraints preclude a full study of references to Zechariah in Revelation – two test cases are examined here. There exists no serious scholarly challenge to the assertion that the primary source material for John's "seven spirits" (1,4; 3,1; 4,5; 5,6) and the "two witnesses" (11,1–13) is Zech 4.[6] This study aims to identify the particular form of Zechariah that underlies these allusions and suggests areas of enquiry for which this data is critical.

2 Textual Form

First, it is necessary to delineate John's possible sources and narrow these options based on the textual evidence. It is conceivable that John could have used one or a combination of the following twelve textual forms of Zech 4: 1) a translation of proto-MT (pM); 2) a translation of the *Vorlage* of OG/LXX; 3) a translation of another Hebrew text; 4) Old Greek (OG); 5) the *kaige* recension (8ḤevXIIgr); 6) a (proto) Hexaplaric recension; 7) a translation of a Hebrew text (options 1–3) with adaptations; 8) an adaptation of a Greek version (options 4–6); 9) a free paraphrase of a Hebrew text; 10) a free paraphrase of a text in the OG/LXX tradition; 11) a Greek text influenced by memory of a Hebrew text; 12) a quotation from

---

4 G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text (NIGTC), Cambridge 1999, 77–78.

5 See J. Fekkes, Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development (JSNTS 93), Sheffield 1994, 16–17.

6 The secondary sources that note this are legion. See nearly every German, French, and English language commentary. For example, G. Maier, Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Kapitel 1–11 (HTA), Witten 2009, 300.464; P. Prigent, L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean, Geneva 2000, 193.271.

memory. Because the ancient evidence of Zech 4 is sparse,[7] the primary sources to be investigated will be the Masoretic family of texts (proto-MT) and the Septuagint texts (OG/LXX), including Hexaplaric readings relevant to the discussion. If the allusions are closely aligned with any of these forms, many of the possible options have been eliminated (3, 5–6, 9–12). If the OG/LXX betrays a proto-MT *Vorlage*, the only options remaining are 1, 4, and 7–8.

3 Revisions of OG (*Kaige*) and Michael Labahn's Theory of Memory Influence

To begin: a note on option 5. There is not sufficient evidence to suggest a concrete connection between John's allusions to Zech 4 and the *kaige* (proto-Theodotian) recension or a Greek text similar to 8ḤevXIIgr (R).[8] It must suffice to briefly note the following features: 1) John's use of παντοκράτωρ stands in contrast to the revising tendencies of R; 2) the locutions in question already bear a very literal resemblance to the proto-MT in the OG version; 3) a reconstruction of R based on translation equivalents in the rest of the manuscript demonstrates very little deviance from the OG in these two locutions. The textual characteristics of the references to Zech 4 in Revelation do not cohere with the impulses of the revisions in R. This renders option 5 obsolete.

In terms of options 11–12, M. Labahn has argued that the *Vorlagen* of John's references were Greek and that his textual representations of his *Vorlagen* were occasionally influenced by the *memory* of Hebrew texts, mediated through oral culture.[9] As a result, for Labahn, it is essential to explore the entire breadth of Greek scriptural tradition when analysing the textual form of John's allusions. The OG/LXX is the "primary framework" for the reception of scripture in the Apocalypse.[10]

---

7 Only 4QXII^e witnesses a very fragmentary text of Zech 4,1–4.

8 See D. Barthélemy, Les Devanciers d'Aquila: Première Publication Intégrale du Texte des Fragments du Dodécaprophéton Trouvés dans le désert de Juda (VT.S 10), Leiden 1963.

9 M. Labahn, „Geschrieben in diesem Buche." Die „Anspielungen" der Johannesapokalypse im Spannungsfeld zwischen den Referenztexten und der handschriftlichen Überlieferung in den großen Bibelhandschriften, in: Von der Septuaginta zum Neuen Testament: Textgeschichtliche Erörterungen (ANTF 43), hg. v. M. Karrer, S. Kreuzer, and M. Sigismund, Berlin 2010, 339–384, esp. 366.

10 M. Labahn, Die Macht des Gedächtnisses. Überlegungen zu Möglichkeit und Grenzen des Einflusses hebräischer Texttradition auf die Johannesapokalypse, in: Von der Septuaginta zum Neuen Testament: Textgeschichtliche Erörterungen (ANTF 43), hg. v. M. Karrer, S. Kreuzer, and M. Sigismund, Berlin 2010, 385–416, esp. 386–387.

Labahn's assertion that all pre-Hexaplaric Greek textual forms must be analysed to measure correspondence to John's scriptural references is valid. However, his extrapolation that the early Greek scriptural tradition is the author's primary framework is not universally applicable. The demonstrable textual pluriformity of Jewish scriptures in the first century makes any *a priori* assumptions regarding *form* or language of *Vorlage* hazardous.

Labahn concludes that the use of Zech 4,10b in Rev 5,6b is influenced by John's memory impression of the Hebrew text because of its exotic images.[11] This conclusion is suggestive, but only necessary if one assumes that John did not work directly with Hebrew texts. The following data intimates that, at least in the case of Zech 4, the author *did* utilize the proto-MT. Labahn's theory of memory influence highlights the complexity of the mechanics of reuse in antiquity, but does not cohere with the textual information in this instance. Ultimately, options 11 and 12 are non-falsifiable and are eliminated for this study.[12] The remaining textual options (1–4, 6–10) must be examined as part of the textual analysis of the allusions.

4 Textual Investigation of Allusions

4.1 Revelation 11,4 and Zechariah 4,14

First, it must be corroborated that Rev 11,4 preserves an allusion to Zech 4,14.

Zech 4,14ᴾᴹ	Zech 4,14ᴼᴳ	Rev 11,4
אלה שני בני־היצהר העמדים על־אדון כל־הארץ	Οὗτοι οἱ δύο υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος παρεστήκασι τῷ κυρίῳ πάσης τῆς γῆς	οὗτοί εἰσιν αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι[13] καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνίαι αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἑστῶτες
These are the two sons of oil standing before the Lord of all the earth	These are the two sons of wealth standing before the Lord of all the earth	These are the two *olive trees and the two lampstands* standing before the Lord of the earth

11 Ibid., 408.

12 It is also theoretically possible that John utilized an unknown Greek form of Zechariah. This option, too, is non-falsifiable.

13 A02 witnesses a singular variant reading of this word that is not noted in apparatus of NA²⁸ or UBS⁴: αυλαιαι. This singular reading is interesting, but is secondary for our purposes.

The manner in which Rev 11,4 is constructed firmly corroborates its connection to Zech 4,14, although minor differences are present. First, καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνίαι or its Hebrew equivalent is not reflected in any OG/LXX or Hebrew manuscript of Zech 4,14 (מנורה does occur in Zech 4,2.11). Rev 11,4 conflates linguistic material from Zech 4,2.11.14 where the "two sons of oil" (4,14) have been correlated with the "two olive trees" (4,2.11).[14] Also, כל is not represented in Rev 11,4.[15]

Every other linguistic element of Zech 4,14[pM] is represented in Rev 11,4. Of note is the representation of יצהר: ἐλαῖαι. This relationship is consistent with every other translation of יצהר in the rest of the OG/LXX tradition except in Zech 4,14[OG].[16] Rev 11,4 exhibits strong syntactic, grammatical, and semantic similarity to the proto-MT here. However, before exploring the correlation between Rev 11,4 and the Greek tradition, it is essential that the relationship between the OG and the proto-MT be firmly established.

4.2 OG and Proto-MT

The dominant scholarly position, exemplified by T. Pola, embraces the position that the *Vorlage* of the OG Zechariah is the proto-MT.[17] This reality is also reflected in the textual relationship between these traditions exemplified in Zech 4,14. All but one Hebrew word is translated with a common Greek equivalent[18] and they share serial fidelity. Moreover, the syntax of the Hebrew metaphor בני־היצהר is translated literally as υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος, replicating the syntax and preserving the figure of speech of the source in Greek translation. The *Vorlage* of Zech 4,14[OG] and Zech 4,14[pM] are closely related, if not identical. Thus, option 2 is superfluous as it is synonymous with option 1.

---

14 This same conflation occurs in bSan 3,1.

15 בני is absent as well. The entire construct phrase (בני־היצהר) has been replaced by ἐλαῖαι.

16 Outside of Zech 4,14, the word is always translated (twenty-two times) as ἐλαῖαι.

17 T. Pola, The Greek Text of Zechariah: A Document From Maccabean Jerusalem?, in: Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology (LHB 475), hg. v. M. Boda and M. Floyd, London 2008, 291–300. This suggests that options 1 and 2 reflect identical textual realities.

18 With the exception of πιότητος for יצהר.

4.3 OG and Revelation

The final piece of this textual web is the relationship between Zech 4,14[OG] and Rev 11,4. There are multiple lexical and quantitative differences between these traditions. Rev 11,4 omits πάσης and adds the phrase καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνίαι vis-à-vis the OG. Additionally, Rev 11,4 represents the preposition על with ἐνώπιον. Conversely, the OG expresses על with the dative τῷ κυρίῳ. Rev 11,4 retains a modest degree of linguistic transfer from the source language in this instance.[19] Another slight difference lies in the translation of עמדים: Rev 11,4 = ἑστῶτες; Zech 4,14[OG] = παρεστήκασι. Rev 11,4 also commences with οὗτοί εἰσιν while Zech 4,14[OG] does not witness εἰσιν. A further difference between the two texts is the translation of the word יצהר. John's translation, ἐλαῖαι, is more common than the word choice of the OG translator, υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος. In this case, the OG translator has chosen a word on the outskirts of the semantic range of יצהר that retained the Hebrew metaphor while John's translation is in line with the vast majority of other OG/LXX examples.[20] Finally, the lone verb in the phrase differs morphologically.[21]

Differences Between Rev 11,4 and Zech 4,14[OG]

OG/LXX Zech 4,14	Rev 11,4
οὗτοι	οὗτοί εἰσιν
υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος	ἐλαῖαι
Absent	καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνίαι
τῷ κυρίῳ	ἐνώπιον
παρεστήκασι	ἑστῶτες
πάσης	Absent

---

19 For a similar phenomenon see C. Boyd-Taylor, Reading between the Lines: The Interlinear Paradigm for Septuagint Studies (BToSt 8), Leuven 2011, 126.

20 Cf. זיתים in Zech 4,3.

21 Beside the OG text in Ziegler's edition, there are two notable variants that agree with the reference in Rev 11,4 against the critical text. First, Greek manuscripts 130, 239, 393 and other later versions do include εἰσιν. None of these manuscripts or versions witness any other agreement with Rev 11,4 against the OG. Second, the Hexaplaric translations of יצהר differ from OG. The Symmachian reading, "ἐλαίου," is similar to the reading in Rev 11,4. The text of 8ḤevXIIgr for this locution, based on the data gathered by D. de Crom, E. Verbeke, and R. Ceulemans, A Hebrew-Greek Index to 8ḤevXIIgr, RdQ 95/3 (2010) 331–349, reflects the OG verbatim (with the exception of the *nomen sacrum* in paleo-Hebrew script).

The six differences between Zech 4,14[OG] and Rev 11,4 do not necessitate a link between the author of Revelation and OG/LXX tradition (options 4, 6, 8, 10). The textual evidence strongly suggests that John translated the proto-MT (options 1, 7). Before exploring the ramifications of this conclusion fully, a further example clarifies the textual picture.

4.4 Revelation 5,6b and Zechariah 4,10b

Again, we begin with corroborating the linguistic dependence of Rev 5,6b upon Zech 4,10b by comparing the proto-MT with Rev 5,6b.

Zech 4,10b[pM]	Zech 4,10b[OG]	Rev 5,6b
שבעה־אלה עיני יהוה המה משוטטים בכל־הארץ	ἑπτὰ οὗτοι ὀφθαλμοὶ κυρίου εἰσὶν οἱ ἐπιβλέποντες ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν	ἀρνίον ... ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ οἵ εἰσιν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν
These seven are the eyes of Yhwh, they go eagerly about in all the earth	These seven eyes of the Lord are the ones looking about on all the earth	a lamb ... having seven horns and seven eyes, those which are the seven spirits of God going about in all the earth

While these texts are semantically similar, the representation of this locution in Rev 5,6b witnesses some lexical differentiation. The first change in the reference proper is πνεύματα for עיני. While morphologically similar, there is no example of πνεῦμα translating עין in the OG/LXX tradition. Rev 5,6b conflates material from Zech 4,10b and 4,6 where Zerubbabel is told that he will rebuild the temple "by my *spirit*." If the proto-MT is the source for this reference, John's translation is literal if the reference to "spirits" comes from Zech 4,6. Rev 5,6b is a nearly identical Greek reproduction of Zech 4,10b[pM].

4.5 OG and Proto-MT

Again, the viability of option 2 must be assessed. The OG translation is a highly literal rendering of the proto-MT. Each Greek word corresponds to a Hebrew equivalent, even to exact serial fidelity. The only difference between the proto-MT and the OG is lexical: the translation of משוטטים as ἐπιβλέποντες. The semantic value

has changed from "to go eagerly"[22] to "to look intently."[23] The alteration reflects either a purposeful change to more appropriately reflect the actions of the "eyes," or a change resulting from a contextual deciphering of an opaque word (משוטטים). The high level of syntactical, serial, and lexical correspondence between these forms suggests a proto-MT *Vorlage* for Zech 4,10b[OG]. Again, option 2 is obsolete as the *Vorlage* of the OG *is* the proto-MT.

4.6 OG and Revelation

Finally, how does Rev 5,6b align with Zech 4,10b[OG]? Both the locutions correspond closely to Zech 4,10b[PM], yet, the question remains as to how these Greek texts relate to one another. If the lexical modification in Rev 5,6b is excluded,[24] they are distinguished by three minor differences. First, Rev 5,6b reads θεοῦ for יהוה while Zech 4,10b[OG] reads κυρίου. Second, משוטטים is represented differently: ἀπεσταλμένοι in Revelation and ἐπιβλέποντες[25] in the OG. The words differ semantically and ἀπεσταλμένοι is a translation that is more faithful to the proto-MT. The words also differ morphologically. Both are masculine plural participles, but Rev 5,6b used a perfect passive construction and Zech 4,10b[OG] preserves the present tense and active voice. This difference is attributable to differences in the reading tradition that each translator employed. Finally, the texts differ in their translation of the preposition ב: Revelation = εἰς; OG = ἐπὶ. The polysemic nature of ב and the influence of the prefix of the verb that the author of Revelation and the OG translator used to represent משוטטים influence this textual difference.

Differences Between Rev 5,6b and Zech 4,10b[OG]

Zech 4,10b[OG]	Rev 5,6
Κυρίου	θεοῦ
ἐπιβλέποντες	ἀπεσταλμένοι
ἐπί	εἰς

These differences suggest that John did not allude to Zech 4,10b[OG].

---

22 BDB, 1002. HALOT, 1440 translates the word as "to roam about."

23 BDAG, 368; Liddell-Scott, 625.

24 Πνεύματα for עיני.

25 The only variant reading to this word is witnessed in manuscript 538 and reads "βλέποντες."

4.7 Identification of Textual Form
of the Two Allusions

Again, both Zech 4,10b[OG] and Rev 5,6b are closely related to the proto-MT (one difference each) but differ from each other (three differences). This suggests that both of the allusions analysed above are *independent translations of the consonantal Hebrew text of Zech 4*. The difference between the voice of the verb in Zech 4,10b[OG] and Rev 5,6b is direct evidence that both the OG translator and John applied different reading traditions to the same consonantal Hebrew text. The voice of משוטטים is ambiguous in the proto-MT. Likewise, the differing translation of עמדים in Rev 11,4 and Zech 4,14[OG] is attributable to differences in reading tradition. We are forced to posit that the textual form that the author of Revelation used to craft his reference in both 5,6b and 11,4 is the Hebrew consonantal text of Zechariah (option 1).

Because Rev 5,6b and 11,4 are nearly identical to their Hebrew source locutions, the options for source text have been winnowed to options 1 (a translation of proto-MT) or 7 (a translation of a Hebrew text with adaptations). Options that rely on Greek forms or free paraphrases of sources (options 4–6, 8–10, along with 11–12) are not viable. Furthermore, as no alternative Hebrew form of Zech 4 exists in the ancient evidence and, because the proto-MT is the *Vorlage* of the OG, options 2–3 become obsolete categories. Consequently, the evidence suggests that John used a combination of two options: he translated the proto-MT (option 1), but made small-scale alterations to his source (option 7).

5 Conclusion

These findings are preliminary, but suggestive. There are numerous examples at Qumran and in the New Testament where authors cite and/or allude to different textual forms of the same text within their own compositions.[26] In the specific case of the use of Zech 4 in Revelation, there is little evidence to suggest such variation, but these findings are not definitive for the entirety of John's scriptural sources. There is significant evidence that the author of Revelation refer-

---

26 For example, see J. D. H. Norton, Contours in the Text: Textual Variation in the Writing of Paul, Josephus and the Yahad (LNTS 430), London 2011.

enced OG/LXX forms of scriptural books including Genesis,[27] Ezekiel,[28] Isaiah,[29] Daniel,[30] and the Psalter.[31] Why John would reference a Hebrew form of Zechariah when he elsewhere reused Greek forms of other scriptural works is a question in need of further consideration.

A few concluding observations are pertinent: first, John had access to the proto-MT text of Zechariah and could read Hebrew. Second, the textual culture in which the NT works were composed was complex and simple *a priori* assertions pertaining to textual form can no longer be tolerated. When analysing scriptural quotations or allusions it is imperative that the precise textual form referenced by a given author be determined with as much clarity as the evidence allows. The internal textual data is the primary source for making this determination. Finally, the small-scale alterations identified in this study are fertile ground for further analysis: the quest for the *Vorlagen* of scriptural references provides data for analysing John's interpretation of scripture and the rhetorical force of these allusions.

---

27 M. Labahn, Ausharren im Leben, um vom Baum des Lebens zu essen und ewig zu leben: zur Textform und Auslegung der Paradiesgeschichte der Genesis in der Apokalypse des Johannes und deren Textgeschichte, in: Florilegium Lovaniense: Studies in Septuagint and Textual Criticism in Honour of Florentino García Martínez (BETL 224), hg. v. H. Ausloos, B. Lemmelijn, and M. Vervenne, Leuven 2008, 291–316, esp. 293.

28 M. Karrer, Von der Apokalypse zu Ezechiel: Der Ezechieltext der Apokalypse, in: Das Ezechielbuch in der Johannesoffenbarung (BThSt 76), hg. v. D. Sänger, Berlin 2004, 84–120.

29 M. Karrer, Zur Rezeption des Jesajabuches in der Johannesoffenbarung, in: Überlieferung und Auslegung des Jesajabuches in intra- und interreligiösen Spannungsfeldern (BETL), hg. v. F. Wilk, Leuven 2014 (forthcoming).

30 Beale, John's Use (see n. 2), 62.

31 See J. De Vries, Ps 86^{MT}/Ps 85^{LXX} in Apk 15,4bß. Anmerkungen zum Text von Psalter und Johannesoffenbarung, in: Von der Septuaginta zum Neuen Testament: Textgeschichtliche Erörterungen (ANTF 43), hg. v. M. Karrer, S. Kreuzer, and M. Sigismund, Berlin 2010, 417–423.