

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jbl-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php)

## The Septuagint Rendering of שִׁינָן

JAMES A. KELSO

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ALLEGHENY, PA.

TO attempt to write anything new on the word שִׁינָן, Ps. 7 1, Hab. 3 1 (?), evinces considerable temerity, seeing that it has baffled the critical acumen of the greatest Old Testament interpreters. W. T. Davison<sup>1</sup> expresses the despair of the commentators when he writes, "There appears to be nothing either in etymology, tradition, or the character of the two psalms in question to guide modern readers definitely to the meaning of the word." A review of the various explanations offered amply justifies the use of such language, but it is noticeable that no serious attempt is made to account for the LXX translation ψαλμός. The word ψαλμός is treated as a textual error, or cast aside as colorless, and regarded as a leap in the dark by the Hellenistic translator. The eminent scholar Nestle, in many of his critical notes scattered through the *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* and other periodicals, has clearly proved that in many instances an apparently inexplicable LXX rendering conceals a long-lost Hebrew word or root.

The present writer holds the view that in this instance the LXX points to a lost Hebrew root, from which שִׁינָן is derived, and that in the ψαλμός of the Alexandrian version we have preserved for us the etymological meaning of the Hebrew word. It will be seen that this derivation also accounts for LXX μετά φόδης in Hab. 3 1, where the Massoretic text has שִׁינָן לֵל.<sup>2</sup> The later Greek versions and

<sup>1</sup> *HDB*, iv. p. 155 a.

<sup>2</sup> Buhl in his lexicon, following Wellhausen, thinks שִׁינָן was the Hebrew text before the LXX translator in Hab. 3 1. This is a bold conjecture, requiring too many conjectural changes in the text. On our theory, as will be seen, this emendation is entirely unnecessary.

Jerome agreed as to their interpretation of תְּהִי־שִׁיר. Theodotion rendered it ὑπὲρ ἀγνοίας, Aquila ἀγνόημα, Jerome *pro ignoracione*, all three connecting it with the word תְּהִי־שִׁיר (Ps. 19 13). In this case the derivation would be from a root נָשָׁה or נָהָה, signifying to go astray or wander. Both Ewald and Delitzsch<sup>3</sup> have followed these later versions in their etymology and exegesis of the word. According to the view of these two scholars a תְּהִי־שִׁיר was a 'Taufelgedicht,' or a dithyramb, a song expressing the rapid change of violent emotions with corresponding external movements. Halévy,<sup>4</sup> who connects the Hebrew word with the Assyrian *šegá*, interprets in much the same way as Ewald and Delitzsch. The difficulty is that Ps. 7 and Hab. 3 are not accurately described as 'Taufelgedichte' or dithyrambs. As usual, Cheyne<sup>5</sup> has his own peculiar view. After rejecting the derivation of Ewald and Delitzsch, he remarks: "More plausible would be a 'prophetic rhythm' (תְּהִי־שִׁיר = תְּהִי־שִׁיר; cf. Ar. *sa'ja*, the rhyming prose of the Arabian *kāhins* or diviners)." But Cheyne recognizes the difficulty and improbability of even this derivation, because neither the psalm in question nor the prayer of Habakkuk is prophetic. Being rather skeptical about his own theory, he closes his comments by favoring the etymology suggested by Halévy.

Strange to say, none of these writers has considered the translations of the LXX, ψαλμός (cf. μετὰ ψόδης, Hab. 3 1). The rendering may be colorless, as Olshausen<sup>6</sup> maintains, when the word is studied as the title of the psalm, and yet his explanation is wide of the mark as a reason for the use of the two Greek words ψαλμός and ψόδη by the Alexandrian

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Commentaries, *ad loc.*

<sup>4</sup> Halévy states his view as follows: "תְּהִי־שִׁיר est le nom d'un instrument de musique (Hab. 3 1) et probablement aussi la désignation d'un genre de chant dont cette musique était ordinairement accompagnée. A en juger par l'assyrien *šegá* "prière," il semblerait qu'elle se composait de sons doux et languissants peignant la prière fervente d'une âme confiante dans son droit et attendant un prompt retour de la fortune, comme le sont en effet les deux prières qui portent en tête le terme תְּהִי־שִׁיר." — *Revue Sémitique*, 1894, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> EB col. 4465.

<sup>6</sup> Olshausen, *Die Psalmen*, p. 28.

translator. It is more reasonable to suppose that the latter had some definite theory as to the meaning of שְׁגִיּוֹן, colorless and indifferent though it may seem to us, as he lived much nearer to the date of the original composition than any of the later translators.

A Syriac word gives us the key to his rendering. In this Aramaic dialect we have a verb שָׁגַג meaning to sing, and with this sense it occurs in 1 Sam. 21 12. The Syriac also has the noun שְׁגִיּוֹן meaning song or verse (cf. Joshua, the Stylite 52, ed. Wright); in addition there is the *nomen agentis* שְׁגִיּוֹן. These words illumine the LXX rendering of the Hebrew term. In the age of the origin of the LXX version a Hebrew root שָׁגַג, meaning 'to sing,' was current, and later must have become obsolete. According to the law of the mutation of consonants, the Aramaic *Samekh* becomes *Sin* in Hebrew, i.e. Aramaic שָׁגַג = Hebrew שָׁגַג.<sup>7</sup> It is evident that the later translators—Theodotion, Aquila, and Jerome, as well as the Massorettes—mistook the initial *Sin* for *Shin*, and deriving שְׁגִיּוֹן from the root שָׁגַג, took it as a synonym of שְׁגִיּוֹן. This explains why the Midrash and Rashi associate Ps. 7 with some sin of David. We have not discovered the special nuance of the term under discussion, and yet it is difficult to see why ψαλμός or φδῆ is any more colorless as the rendering of שְׁגִיּוֹן than as the translations of מְזִמּוֹר in the titles of the Psalms, if the explanation offered in this paper is correct.

<sup>7</sup> As examples of this change note שִׁיבָה and Syr. شَبَّ (root شَبَّ); שִׁיבָה and Syr. شَبَّ, et al.