The Septuagint Rendering of \( \text{יִתְנָה} \)

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To attempt to write anything new on the word \( \text{יִתְנָה} \), Ps. 71, Hab. 31 (?), evinces considerable temerity, seeing that it has baffled the critical acumen of the greatest Old Testament interpreters. W. T. Davison\(^1\) 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 \( \psi\alpha\lambda\mu\kappa\varepsilon \). The word \( \psi\alpha\lambda\mu\kappa\varepsilon \) 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 \( \text{יִתְנָה} \) is derived, and that in the \( \psi\alpha\lambda\mu\kappa\varepsilon \) 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 \( \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha \) \( \gamma\delta\varepsilon\varsigma \) in Hab. 31, where the Massoretic text has \( \text{רָפָעָה} \) \( \text{יִתְנָה} \).\(^2\) The later Greek versions and

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\(^1\) HDB, iv. p. 155 a.

\(^2\) Buhl in his lexicon, following Wellhausen, thinks \( \text{רָפָעָה} \) was the Hebrew text before the LXX translator in Hab. 31. 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 ἁμαρτάνει. Theodotion rendered it ὑπὲρ ἀγνόλας, Aquila ἀγνόμα, Jerome pro
ignoratione, all three connecting it with the word ἁμαρτάνει (Ps. 19:13). In this case the derivation would be from a root ἀφίζω or ἀφαίρω, signifying to go astray or wander. Both Ewald and Delitzsch have followed these later versions in their etymology and exegesis of the word. According to the view of these two scholars a ἁμαρτάνει was a ‘Taumelgedicht,’ or a dithyramb, a song expressing the rapid change of violent emotions with corresponding external movements. Halévy, who connects the Hebrew word with the Assyrian segā, interprets in much the same way as Ewald and Delitzsch. The difficulty is that Ps. 7 and Hab. 3 are not accurately described as ‘Taumelgedichte’ or dithyrambs. As usual, Cheyne has his own peculiar view. After rejecting the derivation of Ewald and Delitzsch, he remarks: “More plausible would be a ‘prophetic rhythm’ (אֲשֶׁר מֻסְמָר; 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 φθέγγα, Hab. 3:1). The rendering may be colorless, as Olshausen 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 φθέγγα by the Alexandrian

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8 Cf. Commentaries, ad loc.
4 Halévy states his view as follows: “‘חֲפִלָה’ 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 segā ‘prière,’ il semblerait qu’elle se composait de sons doux et langoureusees 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 חֲפִלָה.” — Revue Sémitique, 1894, p. 1.
6 EB col. 4466.
6 Olshausen, Die Psalmen, p. 28.
translator. It is more reasonable to suppose that the latter had some definite theory as to the meaning of יִרְאָה, 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 הָשָׁה meaning to sing, and with this sense it occurs in 1 Sam. 21:12. The Syriac also has the noun יָשֵׁה meaning song or verse (cf. Joshua, the Stylite 52, ed. Wright); in addition there is the nomen agentis יָשֵׁה. These words illumine the LXX rendering of the Hebrew term. In the age of the origin of the LXX version a Hebrew root יָשָׁה, 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 סָם = Hebrew סין. It is evident that the later translators—Theodotion, Aquila, and Jerome, as well as the Massoretes—mistook the initial Sin for Shin, and deriving יָשֵׁה from the root יָשָׁה, took it as a synonym of יִרְאָה. 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 זִaits or פֹּקִיה is any more colorless as the rendering of יִרְאָה than as the translations of יָשֵׁה in the titles of the Psalms, if the explanation offered in this paper is correct.

As examples of this change note יָשָׁה and Syr. יָשָׁה (root יָשָׁה); יַעֲכֹּב and Syr. יָשָׁה, et al.