

Πόλις ασεδεκ in Isaiah 19:18: a translator’s wordplay or the actual Jewish name for “Leontopolis”?

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As is well known, the verse Isaiah 19:18 reads differently in the MT, in the LXX, and the Qumran Scrolls. The disagreement between the textual witnesses seems to reflect some kind of polemics within the Jewish tradition and is usually linked with the fact that Isaiah 19:18-19 were used by the Jewish High Priest Onias as a kind of legitimation for the Jewish temple he built in Egypt, near the city of Heliopolis, under Ptolemy VI Philometor.¹

1. THE DATA

Isaiah 19:18-19 belong to a series of additions to an anti-Egyptian prophecy, Isaiah 19:1-15, and foretell the Jewish settlement in Egypt: in five Egyptian cities the inhabitants will speak “the language of Canaan” and express their allegiance to Yahweh. Moreover, a stele and an altar to Yahweh will be erected in the land of Egypt. The prophecy looks like a *vaticinium ex eventu*, but there is no necessity to date it to the time of Hellenistic Jewish diaspora. Immigrants from Asia inhabited the Eastern Delta throughout the whole history of Ancient Egypt and the Jewish diaspora in Egypt was witnessed by the time of Jeremiah.

One of the cities is mentioned by name, but the name is different in different manuscript traditions. Our earliest witnesses, 1QIs^a and 4QIs^b (the verse is absent from other Isaiah Qumran scrolls), say that one of the cities shall be called “the city of Sun”, עיר החרס (Hebrew הָרָס is a rare, probably poetic, synonym to the more common שֶׁמֶשׁ “Sun”). The MT, differently from the Scrolls, reads not עיר החרס, the “the city of Sun”, but עיר ההָרָס, “the city of destruction”.

¹ Josephus, *A.J.* 12.387–88, 13.62–73, 20.236–37, cf. *B.J.* 1.33, 7.421–436. Onias’ use of Scripture to support his claims is often compared to the contemporizing treatment of Scripture in Qumran commentaries (pesharim).

There is a wide consensus in modern scholarship that the Qumran reading represents the original.² The reference seems to be to the city of Heliopolis in the Eastern Delta, which had especially close connections with Asia throughout the history of Ancient Egypt and played a prominent role in the Bible tradition (Gen 41:45,50; 46:20; Ex 1:11 LXX).³ Since Onias also built his temple in the vicinity of Heliopolis, the prophecy, indeed, could ideally serve for the legitimation of his temple.

The MT reading is almost universally judged to be secondary.⁴ Since the verses in question welcome and endorse Jewish settlements in Egypt, the pejorative name “the city of destruction” does not seem to fit the context. Moreover, the word הָרָס, though clearly a derivative from the root הָרַס “to destroy”, does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and looks like an *ad hoc* pun, prompted by the original עִיר הַחֶרֶס. It is important that the verb הָרַס is often used in the Bible when referring to destruction of forbidden cultic objects. The change of one letter turns the text into a mockery of “the city of Sun” and its cultic objects. This might have been caused by a negative attitude of the scribe either towards Egypt as such, or, more probably, towards the followers of Onias, who dared to build their temple, sectarian from the Jerusalem point of view, in the vicinity of Heliopolis.

The reading עִיר הַחֶרֶס is represented in almost all the manuscripts of the Masoretic tradition. The Qumran reading is retained in Symmachus (πόλις ἡλίου), in Vulgate (*civitas Solis*), in several Hebrew medieval manuscripts, and is also reflected in some rabbinic texts.⁵ The Targum combines both exegetical traditions and gives a double translation: קְרָתָא בֵּית־שֶׁמֶשׁ דְּעֵתִידָא: לְמַחְרָב, “the city House-of-Sun, deemed to destruction”. Aquila and Theodotion have ἀρεξ, which can reflect either הָרַס or חָרַס.

The LXX differs from all other witnesses. The majority of the LXX manuscripts render the name of the city in question as πόλις ἀσεδεκ, which looks like a reflection of the Hebrew expression עִיר הַצְדִּיק (“the city of Righteousness”). Readings of other LXX manuscripts look like a corruption of the original πόλις ἀσεδεκ. Codex Sinaiticus (prima manus, later corrected) contains a peculiar reading πολίς ἀσεδ ἡλίου, which is usually treated as a combination of two readings, πολίς ἀσεδ[εκ] and πόλις ἡλίου (cf. Symmachus).

² For contrary views, see below 2.1.

³ G. J. Steyn “Heliopolis and On in the Septuagint,” in S. Kreuzer *et al.* eds., *Die Septuaginta—Orte und Intentionen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 155–68.

⁴ A contrary view is rarely expressed, most recently by C. Balogh, *The stele of YHWH in Egypt: the prophecies of Isaiah 18-20 concerning Egypt and Kush* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011) 227-229.

⁵ A detailed treatment of all our sources is given in D. Barthélémy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament. 2. Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1986), 143–50.

2. MAIN SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF THE LXX READING

2.1. עיר הצדק as the original reading

Though a number of scholars thought that the reading עיר הצדק, reconstructed as the Vorlage of the LXX πολις ασεδεκ, represented the original text of Isaiah 19:18,⁶ the Qumran findings tilted the scales in favour of the originality of the Qumran reading עיר החרס. Kim calls the latter view the “scholarly consensus”.⁷

The main exception among recent studies is the treatment of the verse by Williamson.⁸ In contrast to the majority of scholars, he construes לאחת at the end of the verse as having a distributive meaning, and suggests, accordingly, that the original text of Isaiah 19:18 read, “In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts; *each one of them* will be called, ‘City of Righteousness’” (עיר הצדק יאמר לאחת). Later, according to Williamson, the partisans of the Onias temple introduced the reading attested at Qumran (עיר החרס), which was changed afterwards, most probably intentionally, by proto-Masoretic scribes (עיר ההרס).

The main objections to this hypothesis are provided by the chronology of our sources (the Scrolls are the earliest witnesses to the text of Isaiah) and by their geographical distribution. The “scholarly consensus” presupposes that the reading עיר החרס originated, with the book of Isaiah, in Palestine. This reading was preserved in Qumran, translated in Vulgate, corrupted in the MT, represented in the Targum, and reflected in the hebraizing revisions of the Greek text. All these traditions are linked with Palestine, not Egypt. The reading עיר הצדק / πολις ασεδεκ, according to the “scholarly consensus”, developed in Egypt and is somehow related to the Onias temple. So it looks quite natural that it is represented in the LXX-Isaiah, which most probably was translated in Egypt.

⁶ I. L. Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah: A Discussion of Its Problems* (Leiden: Brill, 1948), 68, G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 335-337. A list of those who held this view is given in Balogh, *Stele*, 225, note 83. See also P. M. Cook, *A Sign and a Wonder: The Redactional Formation of Isaiah 18–20* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 105.

⁷ K. Kim, *Theology and Identity of the Egyptian Jewish Diaspora in Septuagint of Isaiah* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2009), 81. On the same page, note 215, Kim gives a quite impressive list of researchers and commentators who support this hypothesis. See also Balogh, *Stele*, 223, note 74.

⁸ H.G.M. Williamson, “Egypt in the Book of Isaiah,” in A. Salvesen *et al.* ed., *Israel in Egypt: The Land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 25-55: 44-50.

Contrary to this, the hypothesis according to which עיר הצדק is the original reading, claims that the original text of Isaiah was preserved only in Egypt, in the LXX translation, while the reading עיר החרס, regarded by this hypothesis as Egyptian and sectarian by origin, is reflected by all the different extant sources except the very one that is linked with Egypt. This seems to be less compelling than the majority viewpoint.

2.2. πόλις ασεδεκ as a result of textual corruption

Burkitt claimed that the original LXX reading was πόλις ασεδ, represented by Codex Sinaiticus. He reconstructed its Vorlage as עיר חסד, “the city of mercy”.⁹ This hypothesis was treated with approval in the well-known commentary by Ottley.¹⁰

Balogh also thinks that ασεδ could be the earlier Greek reading and reconstructs its Vorlage as חסד, which, according to Balogh, developed from either החרס or ההרס in the Hebrew original through a metathesis of consonants combined with the substitution of ר with ד.¹¹

The weakness of these suggestions is that they are built on the exceptional reading of Codex Sinaiticus (later corrected). The final -εκ in all other Greek witnesses remains unexplained, and the remarkable similarity between the Greek πόλις ασεδεκ and the Hebrew expression עיר הצדק is deemed to be purely accidental.

Troxel,¹² following an earlier work by Vaccari,¹³ suggested that the original reading עיר החרס was first changed, through metathesis, to עיר הסרה, later corrupted into עיר הסדה, and rendered into Greek as πόλις ασεδεκ. Metathesis like סרה/חרס, as well as the interchange of the letters ד and ר occur sporadically in the Hebrew Bible; the rendering of the Hebrew ה with the Greek κ also occurs in the LXX proper names, though rarely. However, the combination of the metathesis, the interchange of letters and the rare LXX rendering of the Hebrew ה looks less probable than the commonly accepted reconstruction of the Hebrew expression עיר הצדק behind the Greek πόλις ασεδεκ.

⁹ F.C. Burkitt, ‘On Isaiah xix 18.’, *JTS* 1 (1900), 569.

¹⁰ R. R. Ottley, *The Book of Isaiah according to the Septuagint* (London: C. J. Clay, 1904-06), 2:201.

¹¹ Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH*, 229–30.

¹² R.L. Troxel, *LXX Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation The Strategies of the Translator of the Septuagint of Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 169-171.

¹³ A. Vaccari, “ΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΣΕΔΕΚ Is. 19, 18,” *Biblica* 2 (1921), 353–56.

2.3. πόλις ασεδεκ as an allusion to עיר הצדק in Isa 1:26

The majority view is that the reading πόλις ασεδεκ in the LXX is an allusion to עיר הצדק in Isaiah 1:26 (see, e.g., Van der Kooij,¹⁴ Bohak,¹⁵ Collins,¹⁶ Kim,¹⁷ Hibbard,¹⁸ and Piotrkowski¹⁹).

The first chapter of Isaiah is a charge against Jerusalem and Judah, whose rulers and people are referred to as “rulers of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah”. In Isaiah 1:26 the charge is replaced with a promise: “*And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of Righteousness, the faithful city*” (יְקָרָא לָךְ (עיר הצדק קריה נאמנה). In the original context, this was a promise to Jerusalem, but in the turbulent years that followed the profanation of the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus, the partisan war led by the Maccabees, and Onias’ flight to Egypt, the expression עיר הצדק “the city of Righteousness”, taken from Isaiah 1:26, might have been re-applied to Onias temple and the Jewish settlement around it, to glorify it as a “New Jerusalem”.

The semantic and syntactic similarity between יְקָרָא לָךְ עיר הצדק (Isaiah 1:26) and עיר ההרס [ההרס] אָמַר לְאַתָּה (Isaiah 19:18) may have suggested a reading of Isaiah 19:18 in light of Isaiah 1:26 and even substituting one reading for another in translation.

This does not necessarily imply that the change from עיר ההרס to עיר הצדק in Isaiah 19:18 had already been introduced in the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX. Hebrew texts with the reading עיר הצדק in Isaiah 19:18 are unknown. Moreover, substituting עיר ההרס with עיר הצדק in the Hebrew text would not have helped Onias and his followers in the dispute with their Jerusalem opponents. The reading עיר ההרס (“the city of Sun”) pointed to Heliopolis, in whose vicinity the temple of Onias’ followers was located. This played

¹⁴ A. van der Kooij, ‘The Old Greek of Isaiah 19:16–25: Translation and Interpretation’, in: C.E. Cox ed., *VI Congress of the International Organisation for Septuagint and Cognate Studies: Jerusalem 1986* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), A. van der Kooij ‘The Septuagint of Isaiah’, in: J. Cook and A. van der Kooij eds., *Law, Prophets, and Wisdom: On the Provenance of Translators and their Books in the Septuagint Version* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 63–85.

¹⁵ G. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 90-91.

¹⁶ J.J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 69-70, n.31.

¹⁷ Kim, *Theology*, 81.

¹⁸ J. T. Hibbard, ‘Isaiah 19:18: A Textual Variant in the Light of the Temple of Onias in Egypt’, in: E. K. Holt et al. eds., *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 32–52.

¹⁹ M.M. Piotrkowski, *Priests in Exile: The History of the Temple of Onias and Its Community in the Hellenistic Period* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 333-335.

into their hands: the very place of the “New Jerusalem” had been predicted by the great prophet. The edited text עיר הצדק (“the city of Righteousness”) might have been richer in positive connotations, but the geographic reference would have become less clear and therefore less advantageous for them.

The translator of the LXX Isaiah is known for his liberties in dealing with the Hebrew original, and those scholars who treat πόλις ασεδεκ in Isaiah 19:18 as an allusion to עיר הצדק in Isaiah 1:26 usually presuppose that the expression πόλις ασεδεκ was introduced in the LXX text of Isaiah 19:18 not by the Hebrew Vorlage, but by the translator himself. If he was a follower of Onias, then, by this move, he would both create an intertextual link with the prophecy of Isaiah 1:26 and allude to the righteousness of the “New Jerusalem” in Egypt.

The main problem of this hypothesis is the necessity to explain why he *transliterated* the Hebrew expression עיר הצדק in Isaiah 19:18. This is even more strange since in Isaiah 1:26 he *translated* the same words עיר הצדק as πόλις δικαιοσύνης.²⁰ As we have said, there might have been two reasons for the translator to use in Isaiah 19:18 the expression borrowed from Isaiah 1:26. Firstly, it created an intertextual link with Isaiah 1:26 and, secondly, alluded to the righteousness of the “New Jerusalem”. Introducing in Isaiah 19:18 the transliteration πόλις ασεδεκ, instead of translation πόλις δικαιοσύνης, as in Isaiah 1:26, he destroyed both the intertextual link and the allusion.

The problem remains, even if we assume that the reading עיר הצדק in Isaiah 19:18 was present already in the Hebrew Vorlage. What may have prompted the translator to remove the intertextual link and the allusion created by the scribe of the Vorlage?

Some more observations on the translation technique of the LXX-Isaiah are relevant for the discussion.

Transliterations are not typical for the translator of Isaiah. He used transliterations almost exclusively for proper names and toponyms (in some very rare cases for uncommon Hebrew words, whose meaning was unknown to him).

Giving symbolic names and appellations to cities and localities often occurs in the Hebrew text of Isaiah. One can mention Isaiah 1:26 (יְקַרְא לָךְ), 35:8 (עִיר הַצְּדִק (יְקַרְא לָהּ), 47:5 (וְדַרְךְ הַקִּדְשׁ יְקַרְא לָהּ), 56:7 (יְקַרְאוּ לָךְ גְּבֻרַת מַמְלְכוֹת), 60:14 (בֵּיתִי בֵּית־תְּפִלָּה יְקַרְא), 18 (יְקַרְאֵת יְשׁוּעָה חֹמְתֶיךָ).

²⁰ This question is posed by a number of scholars. See, e.g., Balogh, *Stele*, 225, Troxel, *LXX-Isaiah*, 169-171, Williamson, *Egypt*, 48, Hibbard, *Isaiah 19:18*, 36-37.

לא־יֵאמֶר לָךְ עוֹד צְוֹבָה וְלֹא־רָצָךְ לֹא־יֵאמֶר עוֹד שְׂמֵמָה כִּי לָךְ (62:4); וְשִׁעְרֶיךָ תִּהְיֶה וְקָרְאוּ לָהֶם עַם־הַקְּדוֹשׁ גְּאוּלֵי יְהוָה וְלָךְ יִקְרָא (12), (יִקְרָא הַפְּצִי־בָהּ וְלֹא־רָצָךְ בְּעוֹלָהּ (דְרוֹשָׁה עִיר לֹא נִצְוָהּ). In the Greek text, these symbolic names are always translated, to convey the meaning and the symbolism involved (as in Isaiah 1:26). They are never simply transcribed. Isaiah 19:18 is the only exception.

Van der Kooij thinks that the transliteration fits well with the “Canaanite language” mentioned in the same verse.²¹ This explanation is accepted by Kim: “It seems that the translator wanted to show that a city in Egypt is called by a “Canaanite” name.”²² To my mind, the translator could have used a transliterated “Canaanite” name here, only if the city in question was actually called a “Canaanite” name by its inhabitants.

3. ΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΣΕΔΕΚ: A TRANSLATOR’S WORDPLAY OR THE NAME THE “LEONTOPOLIS” JEWS ACTUALLY GAVE TO THEIR SETTLEMENT?

“Leontopolis” has become the standard name for the place of Onias temple in modern scholarship and popular literature.²³ However, as concerns the ancient sources, the name (Λεόντων πόλις) is mentioned only twice, in the fictional letter exchange between Onias and Ptolemy, quoted by Josephus. In these letters, the correspondents mention Λεόντων πόλις as the *Egyptian* name for the place where the *future* Jewish temple should be built. Some scholars think that these letters were fabricated by Jewish opponents of Onias temple with the aim to show that the temple was built in a ritually impure place, namely on the ruins of a pagan sanctuary.²⁴ In any case, there is no indication that the toponym “Leontopolis” was used by any of Onias’ followers *after* the temple was erected.

²¹ Van Der Kooij, *Old Greek*, 137.

²² Kim, *Theology*, 79-80. Monsengwo-Pasinya thought that the translator wanted to avoid, in Isaiah 19:18, the name that he gave to Jerusalem in Isaiah 1:26 (L. Monsengwo-Pasinya, “Isaie XIX 16-25 et universalisme dans la LXX,” in J.A. Emerton ed., *Congress Volume Salamanca 1983* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 201). However, as we have seen, the very point of introducing the expression πόλις ασεδεκ in the Greek text of Isaiah 19:18, was to create an intertextual link with Isaiah 1:26. Another explanation is suggested by Hibbard (*Isaiah 19:18*, 50), namely that עיר הצדק (πόλις ασεδεκ) may have been a technical or symbolic term associated with Jerusalem even among the Jews who spoke Greek. The problem with this explanation is that Jerusalem is mentioned many times both by Greek writers and by Hellenistic Jewish writers, but we have no indications of such technical or symbolic terms associated with Jerusalem.

²³ A Google search for a combination of names “Onias” and “Leontopolis” produces about 14,000 results.

²⁴ Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 27.

Josephus, our only reliable source for Onias temple, never mentions “Leontopolis” as the place of the temple, except while quoting the above mentioned fictional letters. He is content to describe it as being located in the vicinity of Heliopolis.²⁵

Can we suggest that the Jewish settlement, centered around Onias temple, had a Jewish name, probably a symbolic name? I suggest that עיר הצדק / πόλις ασεδεκ (“the city of Righteousness”) with reference to an Egyptian city was not a wordplay created by the translator of Isaiah but the name by which the city was actually called by its Jewish inhabitants. As far as I know, such a possibility has not yet been explored.

There are a lot of narratives in the Hebrew Bible, where a symbolic name is bestowed upon a city, e.g. *Bethel* (“the house of God”, Gen 28:17-19), *Beersheba* (“the well of the oath”, Gen 21:31). Even if the historicity of these narratives may be in doubt, they could have served as models for Jews of a later time. The toponymics of Modern Israel, where new cities and settlements are often given symbolic names, taken from the Bible, like *Petah-Tikva* (“the Gate of Hope”), *Neve-Shalom* (“the Abode of Peace”), or *Rosh-Pinna* (“Cornerstone”), may provide an example.

Though I do not know any examples of bestowing a symbolic name of this kind upon a city or a settlement in the world of Hellenistic Judaism, symbolic city names were widespread in the Greek world: Νικόπολις, Εἰρηνοῦπολις, Ἱεράπολις.

An important analogy may be provided by the Qumran usage of the expression באי הברית החדשה “those who entered into a new covenant” as the self-designation of the community.²⁶ Though not a toponym, this is an example of using an expression taken from a biblical text (Jeremiah 31:31) to refer to a new social-religious structure. The Qumran community emerged at about the same time as the community of Onias temple and both communities understood their existence as the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. Differently from the Qumran community, the followers of Onias had a temple and a city. Therefore, in the case of the Qumran community, the quotation from Jeremiah became a designation for the *community*, while in the case of Onias’ followers, if our suggestion is right, the quotation from Isaiah became a designation for the *city*.

²⁵ See Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 27-28 for a detailed argumentation against “Leontopolis” being the name used by the Egyptian Jews with reference to the temple of Onias and the surrounding settlement. From his point of view, there was no need for a separate name for the place where Onias temple was erected, since it was located in the city of Heliopolis. Bohak treats the plot of “Joseph and Aseneth” as “a justification for the Jewish presence and the Jewish temple in Heliopolis” (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 74, italics are mine).

²⁶ CD vi.19; viii.21.

Our suggestion fits well with the translation technique of the LXX-Isaiah.

If עיר הצדק was the actual name used by the followers of Onias to refer to their settlement, it would be natural to render it into Greek through transliteration. Toponyms, in contrast to symbolic names, were usually transliterated in the LXX, even if they had a clear Hebrew etymology.

The peculiar way the Hebrew expression עיר הצדק is half-translated, half-transliterated (πόλις ασεδεκ), also has multiple parallels in the LXX treatment of toponyms, e.g. ποταμὸς Εὐφράτης (= נְהַר פְּרָת, *passim*), ὄρος Γαλααδ (= הַר גִּלְעָד, *passim*), πόλις Αρβοκ (= קְרִית אֲרֻבַּע, Gen 23:2), πόλις Ιαριμ (= קְרִית יַעֲרִים, Jos 15:60), πόλις Σαμες (= עִיר שָׁמֶשׁ, Jos 19:41).

In the Greek Isaiah we meet πόλις Αγγαι (= עֵיִת, Is 10:28), πόλις Σεπφαριμ (= סְפַרְיִים, Isaiah 36:19; 37:13), πόλις Αρτηλ (= אֲרִיאֵל, Isa. 29:1). Although these cases are different from ours in that the word πόλις does not have any equivalent in the Hebrew Vorlage, they confirm that the combination of the word πόλις with a transcription of a foreign word was normally used by the translator of Isaiah to refer to what he perceived as a toponym, not as a symbolic expression.

There is no necessity to insist that the translator of Isaiah, who rendered the Hebrew עיר ההרס “the city of Sun”, presumably found in his *Vorlage*, as πόλις ασεδεκ, was himself a follower of Onias. It may well be that this rendering did not pursue any polemical agenda.

If he thought that עיר ההרס “the city of Sun” in Isaiah 19:18 referred to the place in Egypt that, in his days, was called by its Jewish inhabitants עיר הצדק / πόλις ασεδεκ, he just updated geographical terminology in his translation, in the same vein as he rendered the Hebrew תְּרִשִׁישׁ “Tarshish” as Καρχηδών “Carthago” (Isaiah 23), or the Hebrew פְּלִשְׁתִּים “Philistines” as Ἕλληνες “Greeks” (Is 9:11), or the Hebrew אֲרָרַט “Ararat” (= “Urartu”) as Ἀρμενία “Armenia” (Is 37:38). The presence of actualizing translations of this kind in the LXX-Isaiah is nowadays a scholarly consensus.

SUMMARY

Among different explanations of the peculiar reading πόλις ασεδεκ in Isaiah 19:18, the most probable seems to be the one that regards this expression as an allusion to עיר הצדק in Isaiah 1:26. However, the hypothesis that this allusion was created by the translator of Isaiah himself is undermined by the fact that in Isaiah 1:26 the Hebrew expression is translated, while in Isaiah 19:18 it is transliterated, which is a strange way of creating an intertextual allusion.

The present paper suggests an alternative, namely that the wording of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 1:26 may have influenced the Greek text of Isaiah 19:18 indirectly, first becoming the name the “Leontopolis” Jews gave to their settlement, not in the imagery of the book of Isaiah, but in the real world of Ptolemaic Egypt, and only afterwards finding its way into the LXX-Isaiah. Our analysis of the translation technique of the LXX-Isaiah lends support to this scenario.

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