

Στερέωμα in the LXX and Related Literature and the Origin of the Quotation from Genesis in Pseudo-Longinus's *On the Sublime*

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This paper explores the history of the Greek word στερέωμα, which is used in the LXX to mean “heavenly firmament.” It surveys the Classical Greek usage of the word and discusses the possible reasons for its LXX usage and the influence of the LXX on the subsequent Greek literature. The last part of the paper claims that the peculiar usage of the word in the LXX may explain the way the opening lines of Genesis are quoted in Pseudo-Longinus's *On the Sublime*, and that this, in turn, may shed additional light on the origin of the quotation.¹

1. HEAVENLY FIRMAMENT (רְקִיעַ) AND ITS COGNATES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

How to render the Hebrew רְקִיעַ, “firmament,” into Greek is among the first problems that the LXX translators faced (at least if we assume that the translation began with Genesis). In describing the creation, the narrator of Genesis 1 usually starts with a descriptive reference to the entity to be created (e.g., light, darkness, firmament, dry land, gathering of the waters). It is only after the entity comes into being that the “real” name is given (day, night, sky, earth, sea). The first reference to the sky in Genesis is רְקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם, “a firmament in the midst of the waters.” The Hebrew רְקִיעַ is a rare word. We do not know whether it had been used with reference to the sky before Genesis 1 was written. Outside of Genesis 1 it occurs in this sense in Psalm 18/19:2, Psalm 150:1, and Daniel 12:3. Its usage in all three passages seems to be dependent on Genesis 1.²

¹ Acknowledgments: The research was funded by RFBR, project № 21-011-44267. Greek quotations follow the editions used in the TLG electronic database. LXX translations follow NETS. Translations of ancient texts, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

² See a detailed treatment in M. Görg, “רְקִיעַ *rāqīa'*, רַקַע *rāqa'*,” *TDOT* 13:646–653. C. Houtmann, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament. Israels Weltbild & Weltanschauung* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

The remaining occurrences of רָקִיעַ are concentrated in Ezekiel (1:22-23, 25-26; 10:1), where the firmament (רָקִיעַ) separates the lower part of God's mysterious chariot from the upper part. Like the sky in numerous texts of the Hebrew Bible, the firmament serves as a pedestal for God's throne. Celestial connotations are strengthened by the mention of a throne above it, which looks like lapis lazuli (Ezek 1:26; compare with Exod 24:10) and is surrounded with brightness "like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day" (Ezek 1:28; compare with Gen 9:13-16). The relative chronology of the רָקִיעַ passages in Ezekiel and Genesis 1 is disputed, but it may well be that Ezekiel is earlier.³

The context of Genesis 1 indicates quite clearly that רָקִיעַ refers to the sky. Of course, שָׁמַיִם, the primary Hebrew word for the sky, was to be translated in the LXX by οὐρανός, the primary Greek word for the sky. To render the Hebrew רָקִיעַ, the translator had to find in Greek a similarly descriptive expression. Obviously, the etymology of the Hebrew רָקִיעַ and the meaning of its cognates affected the translator's choice.

The noun רָקִיעַ is derived from the root רָקַע with the basic (*qal*) meaning "to stamp with the feet, to trample". In the cosmogonic contexts of Isaiah 42:5, 44:24; Psalms 135/136:6 the verb רָקַע in the *qal* describes the creation of the earth (probably in the sense that it was tamped down with God's feet). One may assume that the original meaning of the word רָקִיעַ was something like "solid surface" (again, probably in the sense of being tamped down with one's feet). In Ezekiel and Genesis 1 this rare word acquired specific theological connotations that associated it with a pedestal for God's throne and (perhaps, secondarily?) with the sky. The image of the sky as a solid body is well attested in the literatures of the Ancient Near East.⁴

Another possible line of derivation (intensive *pi'el* from the root רָקַע) produced a verb with the meaning "to beat metal into thin sheets" (Exod 39:4; Num 17:3-4; passive *pu'al* Jer 10:9), as well as "to apply thin metal sheets to an object" (Isa 40:19). This line of derivation could not produce the noun רָקִיעַ since the noun pattern *qāfīl* cannot be related to the *pi'el* stem. However, the connotation of the *pi'el* of רָקַע with making metal sheets resonates with the biblical image of the sky as a metal (bronze or copper) object (Job 37:18, Deut 28:23).

The only passage where רָקַע describes the creation of the sky occurs in the rather late context of Job 37:18, which is also the only instance of the verb in the *hif'il*. It is likely that the *hif'il* form in this case was not derived directly from the root רָקַע, but secondarily from רָקִיעַ (a case of denominative

³ See the discussion in Houtmann, *Himmel*, 225–226.

⁴ See, e.g., Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

hif'il which expresses “the producing of a thing,” *GKC* 53g).⁵ This may explain the seeming paradox that while the *qal* of קָע describes the creation of the earth, the *hif'il* describes the creation of the sky.

As we examine the rendering of קָע in the LXX, we should not overlook the possibility that the translators kept their eye on all the occurrences and associations of the Hebrew noun and its cognates in the Hebrew writings known to them.

2. ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ IN CLASSICAL GREEK

The adjective στερεός is fairly frequent in classical Greek, but the noun στερέωμα is not. Even so, the few occurrences of the noun reflect the spectrum of meanings found in the adjective.⁶ Below are all the occurrences of the word in classical Greek literature up to the second century CE (except quotations of earlier sources in later texts, e.g., quotations from Hippocrates in Pseudo-Galen).

1. Aristotle uses the word with reference to the skeletons of animals: “*The serpents have bones whose nature is that of fish-spine; except the very large species, and they have bones, because (just like the Vivipara) if their bodies are to be strong the solid framework (στερεώματα) of them must be stronger.*”⁷

2. Theophrastus, discussing the types of wood used in shipbuilding, writes: “*the cutwater (=stem, στερέωμα), to which the sheathing is attached, and the catheads are made of manna-ash mulberry and elm; for these parts must be strong.*”⁸

3. Hippocrates: “*steam rising from boiling water, should it meet a solid object (στερέωμα) that it must strike, thickens and condenses, and drops fall away from the lids (πώματα) on which the steam strikes.*”⁹

4. According to *Placita Philosophorum*, Anaxagoras and Democritus claimed that the Moon is “*a red-hot solid body (στερέωμα) which has in itself plains, mountains and ravines.*”¹⁰

⁵ For this suggestion, see Wilhelm Gesenius’ *hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, ed. H. Donner, 18 Aufl. (Berlin: Springer, 2009), 1269 (with further literature).

⁶ The treatment of στερέωμα in G. Bertram, “στερεός, στερεώω, στερέωμα,” *ThWNT* 7:609, is cursory and inadequate; some of the meanings listed there (“basis,” “foundation”) are actually not attested in Classical Greek literature.

⁷ *De partibus animalium* 655a. Translation by A. L. Peck, LCL, 166-167.

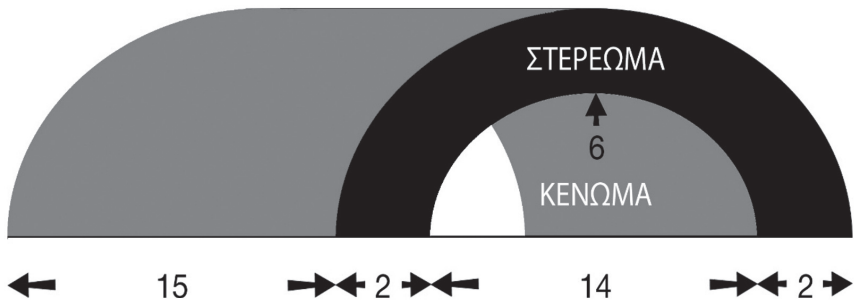
⁸ *Historia plantarum* 5, 7, 3, 6. Translation by A. Hort, LCL, 1:456-459.

⁹ *De flatibus* 8, 2. Translation by W.H.S. Jones, LCL, 2:238-241.

¹⁰ Anaxagoras A77 in H. Diels, W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1952), 2:24.

5. Hero explains how to calculate the volume of an arch “if the width of the empty space within (κένωμα) is fourteen feet, walls on both sides are two feet, the height of the empty space (κένωμα) is six feet, and the length is fifteen feet”. Having calculated the overall volume of the building, including the arch and the space beneath, Hero subtracts from this the volume of the empty space (κένωμα), “the rest is that of the solid part (στερέωμα), forty-four feet.”¹¹

The opposition between κένωμα and στερέωμα in Hero is worth further illustration.



6. In a declamation by Polemon, the word στερέωμα appears in the speech of the father of Cynaegirus, a hero of the Marathon battle whose hands were cut off by Persians. He addresses the father of Callimachus, another hero of the Marathon battle, who died pierced with so many Persian arrows that even after death he remained in an upright posture. The father of Cynaegirus says: “Barbarians’ arrows serve as support (στερέωμα) for your dead son, the hands of my son serve as support (στερέωμα) for the whole Greece.”¹²

7. Ptolemy (on the immobility of the earth): “It is reasonable to assume that the entire solid body of earth (στερέωμα τῆς γῆς), since it is so great compared with the bodies which fall towards it, remains motionless under blows of very small objects from all sides.”¹³

8. Ptolemy (instruction on how to construct a celestial globe with meridian and latitude rings): “We leave small solid pieces (= pivots; στερεώματα)

¹¹ Stereometrica 2, 37 in *Heronis Alexandrini opera*, ed. J.L. Heiberg (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 5:116-117.

¹² *Declamationes*, 1, 45 in *Polemonis Declamationes*, ed. H. Hinck (Leipzig: Teubner, 1873), 16.

¹³ *Claudii Ptolemaei opera*, ed. J.L. Heiberg (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898-1903), 1.1:23.

in the recessed parts of the rings (κατὰ τὰς ἐκτομάς), which will correspond to the bore-holes for attaching the poles.”¹⁴ This rare word is probably used here to stress the opposition between solid (στερέωμα) and void (ἐκτομή).

9-10. Hero in *Belopoeika* uses the word twice in the general sense of “strength” or “robustness” with reference to parts of a torsion-engine.¹⁵

The word στερέωμα is not found in the known corpora of ancient Greek inscriptions and in the papyri (with the exception of some later magical papyri; see below).

3. ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ IN GENESIS 1

Since στερέωμα is poorly attested before the LXX, it may well be that the word was not borrowed, but was freshly coined by the translators. Nouns ending in -μα were often used in the Pentateuch to render Hebrew verbal nouns or something which looked like a verbal noun.¹⁶ Some of these words are neologisms (e.g., κατάλειμμα “remnant”), or they are used in a sense not attested in classical Greek (e.g., ἀνάστημα “something standing on the face of the ground”). This means that for the translators of Genesis this pattern of word building was well known and productive.

The Greek verb στερεώω is not an ideal fit for the Hebrew רקע, either in *qal* or in *pi'el*.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the connotations of רקע with the idea of creating something solid (beaten earth or sheet metal) are not far from the semantic range of the Greek στερεός and its derivatives. The context of the word רקיע in Genesis 1 might have been even more important for finding a Greek equivalent than the meaning of the root רקע. The semantics of στερεός as well as the Greek examples of στερέωμα cited above suggest what connotations might have influenced the choice of the translators.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.2:183.

¹⁵ E.W. Marsden, *Greek and Roman Artillery: Technical Treatises* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 30-1.

¹⁶ E.g., ὄραμα (= מַחְזָן “vision” Gen 15:1); ἔψεμα (= טָבַח “cooked thing” Gen 25:29); ἀγνόημα (= מַשְׁגָּח “oversight” Gen 43:12); κατάλειμμα (= שְׁאֵרִית “remnant” Gen 45:7); τὰ συστήματα τῶν ὑδάτων (= מַקְוֵה “the gathering of the waters” Gen 1:10); πᾶν τὸ ἀνάστημα (= כָּל־הַקָּיֹם “everything standing on the face of the ground” Gen 7:23); λεπίσματα λευκά (= פְּצִלוֹת לְבָנוֹת “white traces of peeling” Gen 30:37); κλέμματα νυκτός (= לְבָתֵי לַיְלָה “something stolen by night” Gen 31:39).

¹⁷ In the cosmogonic contexts of Job 37:18, Ps 135/136:6, Isa 42:5, and Isa 44:24 the verb רקע was rendered with στερεώω, but these texts were translated later than Gen 1 and obviously followed the equivalence between רקיע and στερέωμα already established in Gen 1.

Solid (στερεός) is the opposite of void.¹⁸ It is tempting to compare the images of στερέωμα and κένωμα in Heron's description of an arch (*Stereometrica* 2, 37) with the biblical image of the heavenly firmament as a kind of vault or ceiling above the earth.

Solid substance (στερεός) is the opposite of liquid substances.¹⁹ Hippocrates's στερέωμα (= πῶμα, *De flatibus* 8, 2) is a lid, with water condensed on its surface and drops falling down from it. Once again, it is tempting to compare this image with the biblical image of the heavenly firmament, with waters above its surface and rain falling down through the "windows of heaven" (Gen 7:11, 8:2; 2 Kgs 7:2, 19).

The connotation "framework, skeleton, support," which στερέωμα has in Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Polemon,²⁰ might also have been relevant for the translators, since the firmament of Genesis 1 functions as a kind of a "skeleton" of the world, insofar as it separates the upper part of the world from the lower one and prevents the waters above from flooding the world.

It is not possible to tell which of these connotations was the most relevant for the translator, but taken together they provide reasonable ground for the translator's decision in using στερέωμα.

Archaic Greek poetry (Homer, Pindar, Theognis) knew the image of solid, metallic (bronze or iron) sky.²¹ These images might have helped the translator to better understand the ancient Hebrew worldview. However, it is doubtful that they might have played a role in the translator's word choice, since the sky in these Greek texts was called χάλκεος, σιδήρεος, πολύχαλκος, but never just στερεός or στερέωμα.

An intriguing suggestion has been made by Martin Rösel, who proposes that the translator's usage of the word στερέωμα in the opening chapter of Genesis might have been prompted by Plato's *Timaeus*.²² Similar to Genesis, this Platonic dialogue describes the creation of the world and often uses the adjective στερεός in this description. Though the sky itself is never described in *Timaeus* as στερεός or στερέωμα, in *Timaeus* 32b Plato states that the body of the universe (τὸ πᾶν, = οὐρανός) ought to be στερεοειδής and στερεός, which in the context means solid, or better yet, three-dimensional.

¹⁸ See, e.g., the opposition between στερεός ("solid") and κενός, κοῖλος ("empty," "hollow") in Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 985b or *Historia animalium* 500a.

¹⁹ See, as an example, the opposition between τὸ στερεόν σῶμα "solid body" and ὁ χυλός "liquid substance" in Hippocrates, *De victu acutorum* 15.463.

²⁰ *De partibus animalium* 655a; *Historia plantarum* 5, 7, 3, 6; *Declamationes*, 1, 45.

²¹ F. Pontani, "Bronze Heaven in Archaic Greek Poetry", *L'antiquité Classique* 80 (2011): 157-162.

²² M. Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 36-37.

4. ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ IN THE LXX OUTSIDE OF GENESIS 1

After the translation of Genesis, στερέωμα became a standard equivalent for the Hebrew רִקִיעַ, both in the books of the Hebrew canon and in Sirach.²³ In Deuteronomy 33:26 it also renders the Hebrew שָׁמַיִם “sky, clouds.”

In Exodus 24:10 the place where God stood is compared, with respect to its cleanliness, to “something made from lapis lazuli brick” (כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנַת הַסַּפִּיר) and to the heaven itself (וּבְצַפְצָם הַשָּׁמַיִם, literally “the bone of the heaven”). It was translated in the Septuagint as: “like something made from lapis lazuli brick and like the appearance of the firmament of heaven” (ὡσεὶ ἔργον πλίνθου σαπφείρου καὶ ὥσπερ εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Instead of simple οὐρανός the translator used a compound expression στερέωμα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, borrowed from Genesis 1 (verses 14, 15, 17, 20). It may well be that the insertion of στερέωμα here was an attempt to render, in a word-for-word translation, the Hebrew עֲצָם *bone*. However, associations with Ezekiel 1:26 & 10:1, where רִקִיעַ (=στερέωμα) serves as a pedestal for God’s throne, looking like lapis lazuli, might have also played a role.²⁴

There are several passages in the LXX in which the word στερέωμα is used without any reference to the sky: Psalms 17/18:3, 70/71:3, 72/73:4 (“firmness”), Esther 9:29 (“confirmation”).

5. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HEBREW AND THE GREEK WORLDVIEWS. ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ IN LATER HELLENISTIC JEWISH, PAGAN, AND CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

Even in archaic Greek poetry the image of the solid sky was already different from that of the Ancient Near Eastern cosmology, because there was no heavenly ocean above the sky. In classical Greek philosophy, the sky becomes a sphere, embracing the world, with a solid earth in the middle. Occasionally, the sky (οὐρανός) is synonymous with the universe (τὸ πᾶν). There can be nothing beyond the sky, as Aristotle explicitly states:

²³ Sir 43:1, 8.

²⁴ J.W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 385 suggests that στερέωμα is added to indicate that what is meant “is not the heavens where God is enthroned, but rather ‘heaven’ in the sense of ‘the sky’.” Indeed, Philo and the Christian Fathers distinguished between two heavens, οὐρανός and στερέωμα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (see below), but this was much later than the translation of Exodus.

The earth is situated in the water, the water in the air, the air in the ether, the ether in the sky, the sky is not situated in anything else (ἡ μὲν γῆ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι, τοῦτο δ' ἐν τῷ ἀέρι, οὐτος δ' ἐν τῷ αἰθέρι, ὁ δ' αἰθήρ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ δ' οὐρανὸς οὐκέτι ἐν ἄλλῳ).²⁵

If there is anything beyond the Heaven, it can be only immaterial things:

The region above the heaven (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος) *was never worthily sung by any earthly poet, nor will it ever be ... For the colourless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region, and is visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul.*²⁶

The archaic Hebrew image of solid heavenly firmament with waters above it seems to have become problematic for Hellenistic Jewish intellectuals. Outside the LXX, all the books that use στερέωμα to mean “heavenly firmament” are visions, apocalypses, and “testaments.” Books that try to imitate Greek literature avoid the word. In some of these books the total absence of στερέωμα contrasts with the high frequency of οὐρανός.

Pseudepigrapha that use στερέωμα with the meaning “heavenly firmament” (exhaustive list) ²⁷	Hellenistic Jewish books that <i>do not</i> use στερέωμα (non-exhaustive list)
1 Enoch (2 times) Jubilees (3 times) Testament of Naphtali (once) Testament of Abraham (once) Testament of Solomon (2 times) Testament of Job (once) Apocalypse of Moses (2 times) History of the Rechabites (2 times)	Aristeas Aristobulus (οὐρανός 5 times) Eupolemus (οὐρανός 3 times) Ezekiel the Tragedian (οὐρανός 5 times) Sibylline Oracles (οὐρανός 56 times) Orphica (οὐρανός 3 times) Psalms of Solomon (οὐρανός 6 times) Wisdom (οὐρανός 6 times) Josephus (οὐρανός 39 times)

Books that use στερέωμα in quotations from the LXX but with different connotations	Books that use στερέωμα with a different meaning
Philo (3 times)	1 Macc (9:14, “bulk” of one’s army) New Testament (Col 2:5, “firmness” of faith)

²⁵ Aristotle, *Physica* 212b.

²⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c. Translation by H. N. Fowler, LCL, 474-477.

²⁷ These statistics are based on the electronic edition *The Greek Pseudepigrapha* by C.A. Evans and R.A. Koivisto, distributed with Bible Works software.

Philo uses the word στερέωμα, but with connotations entirely different from what is found in the LXX. Commenting on Genesis 1:6, he describes how, having made the incorporeal world, the Creator proceeded to make the corporeal one:

First of its parts, best of them all, the Creator proceeded to make the Heaven (οὐρανόν), which with strict truth he entitled firmament (στερέωμα), as being corporeal, for the body is naturally solid (τὸ γὰρ σῶμα φύσει στερρόν), seeing that it has a threefold dimension (ὅτιπερ καὶ τριχῆ διαστατόν) . . . Fitly then, in contradistinction to the incorporeal and purely intelligible, did He call this body-like heaven perceived by our senses (τὸν αἰσθητὸν καὶ σωματοειδῆ τοῦτον) ‘the solid firmament’ (στερέωμα).²⁸

The contrast is no more between the solid sky and void space beneath, nor between the solid sky and waters above. Rather, it is between the corporeal sky and incorporeal realities created before it (including the incorporeal sky of Gen 1:1, οὐρανὸς ἄσώματος, *Opif.* 29). This distinction between the incorporeal sky of Gen 1:1 and the corporeal one (στερέωμα) of Gen 1:7-8 will later become widespread with Christian writers.

The same replacement of the archaic Hebrew worldview is seen in Philo’s commentary on Exodus 24:10, where he interprets the image of the place beneath God’s feet looking “like the appearance of the firmament of heaven” (καὶ ὡς ἂν εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), as an allegory of the world perceptible by the outward senses (*Conf.* 96).

Starting from the first or second century CE, the word στερέωμα in the sense “heavenly firmament” is used also in pagan literature. We see this mainly in mystical and magical texts, later also by Neoplatonic philosophers. Interestingly, in the mystical and magical texts there are usually several heavenly firmaments. According to *Corpus Hermeticum* (2 century CE?), between earth and heaven (μεταξὺ γῆς καὶ οὐρανοῦ) there are στερεώματα, also called ζῶναι or πτυχαί, inhabited by human souls²⁹. The treatise Ἰσις προφήτις τῷ υἱῷ Ὠρωφ (first century CE?) mentions an angel “which inhabits the first firmament” (ὃς διέτριβεν ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ στερεώματι).³⁰ *Oracula Chaldaica* (second century CE?) tell us that “the Father elevated seven firmaments of the worlds” (ἐπτὰ γὰρ ἐξώγκωσε πατὴρ στερεώματα κόσμων).³¹ Ioannes Lydus (sixth century CE), probably having in mind something like the *Oracula*

²⁸ *Opif.* 36-37. Translation by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, LCL, 29.

²⁹ Fragment 26:1, see *Joannis Stobaei Anthologium*, ed. K. Wachsmuth (Berlin: Weidmann, 1884), 1:463 (I, 49, 69).

³⁰ *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, eds. M. Berthelot, C.É. Ruelle (Paris: Steinheil, 1888), 2:29-33.

³¹ *Oracles chaldaïques*, ed. É. des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971), fragment 57.

Chaldaica, tells us that “there are seven planetary spheres, which are called firmaments by the Chaldeans” (ἑπτὰ [...] εἶναι τοῦς τῶν πλανήτων πόλους, οὓς Χαλδαῖοι στερεώματα καλοῦσιν)³².

The older usage, the one that associated στερέωμα not with the sky but with the earth, continued for some time. In a magical papyrus from the end of the third century CE a magician threatens to shatter στερέωμα τῆς γῆς.³³ It is not clear whether “the solid body of the earth” or “the foundation of the earth” is meant.

In Christian literature στερέωμα is used almost exclusively with the meaning “heavenly firmament.” It is quite interesting that Christian intellectuals were more ready to accept both the term and the concept than Hellenized Jewish intellectuals of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Quite often, similar to Philo, Christian writers distinguish between the “invisible heaven” of Gen 1:1 and the “visible heaven (στερέωμα)” of Gen 1:6: “In the preliminary statement in the narrative of the creation of the world, the holy scripture spoke not about this firmament but about another heaven which is invisible to us. Afterwards this heaven visible to us is called ‘firmament’” (οὗτος ὁ ὄρατος ἡμῖν οὐρανὸς κέκληται στερέωμα).³⁴

Still, some theologians were willing to distance themselves from overly “materialistic” connotations of στερέωμα. Basil writes in his commentary on Gen 1:6:

Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἔξωθεν στερεὸν λέγουσι σῶμα τὸ οἶον βαστὸν καὶ πληρεῖς

The profane (= Classical) *authors called στερεὸν a body, so to speak, solid and filled.*³⁵

He refrains from speculation about the nature of the heavenly στερέωμα, but states that the “profane” connotations are inappropriate:

“Ὅτι οὐχὶ τὴν ἀντίτυπον καὶ στερεμνιον φύσιν, τὴν ἔχουσαν βάρος καὶ ἀντέρεισιν, οὐ ταύτην λέγει στερέωμα. Ἡ οὕτω ἂν κυριώτερον ἢ γῆ τῆς τοιαύτης κλήσεως ἠξιώθη.

*Στερέωμα does not denote here something hard and solid, with weight and resiliency. If it were so, the earth would much more deserve this name.*³⁶

³² *Ioannis Lydi liber de mensibus*, ed. R. Wünsch, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), 6 (1, 12, 62).

³³ K. Preisendanz, A. Henrichs, *Papyri graecae magicae* (München: K.G. Saur, 1973), 2:193, pap. 62, 15.

³⁴ Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum*, 2, 13. Translation by R. M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch. Ad Autolyicum* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1970), 49.

³⁵ Basil, *Hexaemeron*, 3, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 7.

6. THE ABSENCE OF ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ IN PSEUDO-LONGINUS'S *ON THE SUBLIME*:
WHAT CAN THIS TELL US ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE GENESIS QUOTATION?

Basil's words, just quoted, give us a clue for understanding the treatise *On the Sublime*, one of the most intriguing texts documenting contacts between Greek culture and the ancient Judaism.

A treatise on eloquence, *On the Sublime* (Περὶ ὕψους) was written presumably in the first century CE by an unknown Greek rhetorician, commonly referred to as Pseudo-Longinus. Among the examples of literature that duly represent the sublime nature of the Divine, just after the Homeric description of Poseidon, the treatise quotes the Bible:

ταύτη καὶ ὁ τῶν Ἰουδαίων θεσμοθέτης, οὐχ ὁ τυχῶν ἀνὴρ, ἐπειδὴ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δύναμιν κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἐχώρησε κἀξέφηεν, εὐθὺς ἐν τῇ εἰσβολῇ γράψας τῶν νόμων “εἶπεν ὁ Θεός,” φησί,—τί; “ἔγενεσθω φῶς,” καὶ ἐγένετο· ἔγενεσθω γῆ, καὶ ἐγένετο.”

*So, too, the lawgiver of the Jews, no ordinary man, having formed a worthy conception of divine power and given expression to it, writes at the beginning of his Laws: “God said”—what? “Let there be light,” and there was light, ‘Let there be earth,’ and there was earth.”*³⁷

Modern scholarship accepts the quotation as genuine. There is a whole array of suggestions relating to the source of the quotation. W.R. Roberts interpreted the reference to Theodore of Gadara in *On the Sublime* iii as an indication that the author of the treatise had been his pupil.³⁸ E. Norden identified the anonymous philosopher with whom the author conversed (as reported in ch. xlv) with Philo of Alexandria.³⁹ Some scholars are even open to the possibility that Pseudo-Longinus was a Hellenized Jew.⁴⁰ But, as we shall see, a closer analysis of the wording of the quotation shows that Pseudo-Longinus had no firsthand acquaintance with either the Greek Bible or Jewish cosmology.

The suggestion made long ago by Theodore Reinach deserves special attention.⁴¹ Reinach suggested that the anonymous author of *On the Sublime*

³⁷ *On the Sublime*, ix. Translation by W.H. Fyfe and D. Russell, LCL, 191.

³⁸ W. R. Roberts, “Longinus on the Sublime”, *Philological Quarterly* 7 (1928): 211-213.

³⁹ E. Norden “Das Genesiszitat in der Schrift vom Erhabenen” in Norden, Eduard & Bernhard Kytzler, *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1966), 305-306.

⁴⁰ E.g., D.A. Russell, ‘*Longinus*’. *On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), XXX; C.C. de Jonge, “Dionysius and Longinus on the Sublime: Rhetoric and Religious Language”, *The American Journal of Philology*, 2012(133): 271-300 [297].

⁴¹ Th. Reinach, “Quid Judaeo cum Verre?”, *Revue des études juives* 26 (1893): 43-44. Recently D. C. Innes “Longinus and Caecilius: Models of the Sublime Author(s)”, *Mnemosyne*, 2002 (55): 259-284 [275].

borrowed the quotation from the treatise with the same name and topic (*On the Sublime*) by a certain Caecilius of Calacte, a Greek rhetorician who flourished at Rome during the reign of Augustus. According to the Byzantine Lexicon of Suda, Caecilius of Calacte was “of a Jewish religion.”

All the books of Caecilius, including his treatise *On the Sublime*, are lost. But this treatise was known to Pseudo-Longinus, who starts his book *On the Sublime* with the statement that the treatise of Caecilius *On the Sublime* “appeared ... to fall below the level of the subject” and promises to cope better with the task.⁴² Afterwards Pseudo-Longinus refers to Caecilius repeatedly, always criticizing him,⁴³ but such criticism would by no means prevent his borrowing material from Caecilius. Pseudo-Longinus might have borrowed more material from Caecilius than he explicitly admits. Plutarch, for instance, accuses Caecilius for having dared to compare the style of Demosthenes and that of Cicero (*Demosthenes* iii). In no extant piece of ancient literary criticism can we find a comparison of this kind, except in Pseudo-Longinus’s Περὶ ὕψους xii.

Caecilius, according to Pseudo-Longinus, “endeavored by a thousand instances to demonstrate the nature of the sublime.”⁴⁴ Since he was “of a Jewish religion,” it would have been more natural for him to include a quotation from the Jewish Scripture than for a pagan rhetorician to have done so. Since Pseudo-Longinus used Caecilius’s treatise extensively, it is plausible that he would have borrowed a Scripture quotation from him.

Now let us look closer at the quotation. The first part of it is very close to the text of the LXX. The only change is purely stylistic, γενέσθω instead of Hellenistic γενηθήτω:

Gen 1:3 LXX: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς γενηθήτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.

On the sublime 9: γενέσθω φῶς, καὶ ἐγένετο.

It is interesting that the same change occurs in Aquila: γενέσθω φῶς, καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.⁴⁵ It may well be that Pseudo-Longinus’s source quoted not the Old Greek, but a revision.

The second part of the quotation, “Let there be earth, and there was earth” (γενέσθω γῆ, καὶ ἐγένετο) is completely different from the LXX. In the Bible (Gen 1:9-10) God does not order the Earth (γῆ) to be; instead he orders the waters to make the dry land (ξηρὰ) visible:

⁴² *On the sublime* 1. Translation LCL, 161.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 1, 4, 8, 31, 32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 1. Translation LCL, 161.

⁴⁵ *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt*, ed. F. Field (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875) I:8.

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς συναχθήτω τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἰς συναγωγὴν μίαν καὶ ὀφθήτω ἡ ξηρά. καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως ... καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν ξηρὰν γῆν.

And God said, 'Let the water that is under the sky be gathered into one gathering, and let the dry land appear.' And it became so ... And God called the dry land earth.

It is generally assumed that this part of the quotation is a paraphrase of Genesis 1:9-10, but the change is too drastic. The explanation that Pseudo-Longinus changed the text to make the second part of the quotation a syntactic and rhythmic parallel with the first is not compelling. Additionally, why did Pseudo-Longinus omit the second day of creation (Gen 1:6-8) and proceed directly to the third? He is concerned with examples of magnificent revelation of the divine nature—but what can be more magnificent than the creation of the sky?

Had he preferred to retell the story of the first two days of creation, he might have arranged the two parts of the quotation in strict parallelism without any significant change of the LXX text, compare:

Gen 1:3 LXX καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς γενηθήτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.

Gen 1:6 LXX καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς γενηθήτω στερέωμα... καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως.

Why did he omit the creation of Heaven? It looks as if Pseudo-Longinus did not omit Genesis 1:6 from his source, but rather misunderstood it. Let us aim at reconstructing how a Greek rhetorician, experienced in classical literature, but not in the Bible, would have interpreted the words of Genesis 1:6 (γενηθήτω στερέωμα). It seems that he would have understood στερέωμα as a reference to the earth rather than to the sky (cf. the explicit reference to στερέωμα τῆς γῆς in Ptolemy, *Syntaxis Mathematica*, and, especially, the words of Basil cited above).

Could he have guessed the LXX understanding of στερέωμα from the immediate context of the word (Gen 1:6)? This is unlikely, because a Greek philosopher or rhetorician could not have understood the phrase στερέωμα ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ὕδατος—“a solid body in the midst of the waters”—as a reference to the sky. Rather, they would have understood it as a reference to the earth. Let us compare:

Gen 1:6 LXX: στερέωμα ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ὕδατος

Aristotle, *Physica* 212b: ἡ μὲν γῆ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι (*The earth is situated in the water, the water in the air, the air in the ether, the ether in the sky, the sky is not situated in anything else.*)

Could he have guessed the right meaning of στερέωμα from the broader context? The next verses (Gen 1:7-8) read: “And God made the firmament,

and God separated between the water that was under the firmament and between the water that was above the firmament. And God called the firmament (στερέωμα) Sky (οὐρανός).” Anyone who reads these verses would understand that here στερέωμα means οὐρανός. The question is whether these verses were present in Pseudo-Longinus’s source.

I suggest that the source of Pseudo-Longinus (Caecilius?) wanted to demonstrate that the Books of Moses were not inferior to the Greek literature in duly representing the magnificent nature of the Divine. The first lines of Genesis were quite fit for this. In order to bring the biblical text more in line with the rules of Greek rhetoric, one probably had to get rid of repetitions and unnecessary details. The biblical quotation in the source of Pseudo-Longinus might have looked something like this (limited to the first two days of creation):

“Εἶπεν ὁ Θεός”, ‘γενέσθω φῶς,’ καὶ ἐγένετο, ‘γενέσθω στερέωμα ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ὕδατος,’ καὶ ἐγένετο.”

(Cf. Gen 1: 3, 6 LXX: Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός γενηθήτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς... καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός γενηθήτω στερέωμα ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ὕδατος ... καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως.)

If this suggestion is plausible, Pseudo-Longinus did not make any substantial (from his point of view) changes to his source. For the sake of style, he simply replaced the unusual στερέωμα with the word γῆ, a more customary word, an interpretive move prompted by the context. The Greek worldview, different from that of the Hebrew Bible and the LXX, prevented him from realizing that by doing this he changed the meaning of the passage.

Taking into account the meaning of the word στερέωμα in classical Greek literature, the concepts of sky and earth in Greek philosophy, and the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek worldviews, the misunderstanding seems to have been almost inevitable.

7. SUMMARY

The LXX, as well as Jewish visions, apocalypses, and “testaments” preserved the ancient Near Eastern worldview with the heavenly στερέωμα as a solid body above the earth. The Hellenistic Jewish books that tried to follow the rules of the Greek literature avoided the word. The major exception is Philo, who advanced the conception of two skies, incorporeal and corporeal, and used στερέωμα to denote the “corporeal” one. Christian intellectuals turned out to be more willing to use the word, often combining a more

literal understanding with the Philonic exegesis. Pagan Greek writers (except later writers, such as the Neoplatonists, influenced by the biblical tradition and/or magical texts) were unaware of the semantic development that took place in the LXX—sometimes, as in the case of Pseudo-Longinus, probably even to the point of misunderstanding biblical quotations.

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