

NOTES AND STUDIES

THE UNICORN IN THE MESSIANIC IMAGERY OF THE GREEK BIBLE

INVESTIGATING the peculiarities of the Septuagintal version of Psalm 29 gives the exegete a certain feeling of unease at the various opaque solutions for which the translator opted. A particular set of problems is provided by v. 6. Whereas the Hebrew is quite uncontroversial, the Greek seems to confront us with a veritable *crux interpretum*. It dissolves the *parallelismus membrorum* found in the Hebrew, 'translates' רָקַד with λεπτύνειν 'make thin', 'crush', 'pulverize', שָׂרִין with ἡγαπημένος and בֶּן-רֵאמִים with υἱὸς μονοκερώτων. Let us examine the text and its version:

יִרְקַדְם כְּמו־עֵגֶל לְבָנָן וְשָׂרִין כְּמו־בֶּן-רֵאמִים

was translated as

καὶ λεπτυνεῖ αὐτάς ὡς τὸν μόσχον τὸν Λίβανον,
καὶ ὁ ἡγαπημένος ὡς υἱὸς μονοκερώτων.
'And he will crush Libanon like a [lit. 'the'] calf,
but the loved one [will] be like a unicorn.'

A straightforward explanation of the use of ἡγαπημένος would be to ascribe it to a misreading of שָׂרִין for שָׂרִין since the former is translated in just that way in several, notably post-exilic, biblical passages. Likewise, the problematic use of μονοκέρωτες for רֵאמִים can readily be explained by consulting a distinguished lexicon like *LSJ* that simply indicates it as meaning 'wild ox' (following the Hebrew original without asking further questions about the meaning of the Greek).¹ But μονόκερως means nothing but 'unicorn', as F. W. Mozley stressed earlier this century in his work on the Greek Psalter.² It has been sensed for quite some time that the use of μονόκερως poses an interesting problem in

¹ A common flaw in Septuagint lexicography, as noted by G. B. Caird, 'Towards a Lexicon of the Septuagint I', in: *JTS*, NS, 19(1968), 453 ff. Caird's general evaluation of *LSJ* with regard to Septuagint material names one of the central problems: 'Anyone who tries to read the LXX with the help of *LSJ* soon becomes aware of a ... lack of linguistic method. The admirable principles which have governed the compilation of the Lexicon as a whole are all too often neglected in the Septuagintal entries, and no systematic consideration has been given to the problems raised by the fact that the LXX is for the most part a translation of a Semitic text' (p. 454). The mistranslation of μονόκερως as 'wild ox' in *LSJ* is due to the lack of attention paid to the peculiarities of Septuagintal vocabulary as summarized in nine categories by Caird (p. 455).

² Cf. id, *The Psalter of the Church*, Cambridge 1905, pp. 40 f. (note*).

the context of Septuagintal renderings. Most recently, the issue has been raised in the French edition of the Septuagint, *La Bible d'Alexandrie*.³

The beginning of the second hemistich of v. 6 poses a problem of its own. If we consider the whole verse it becomes obvious that its sense, compared with that of the Hebrew, has been altered totally. Where we had a ἐν διὰ δυοῖν we now find two hemistichs opposing each other. The first one clearly confers the negative note of its Hebrew equivalent whereas the second one, because of the rendering of ἡγαπημένος for הֶרְמֹן (another name for Mt. Hermon), apparently has an entirely positive notion. And since in vv. 5, 6a God's destructive powers are depicted and it is unlikely that they are supposed to extend to and affect his ἡγαπημένος, we detect a gap between vv. 6a and 6b. The *parallelismus membrorum* is replaced by an opposition of the two hemistichs, the καὶ is a καὶ *adversativum*,⁴ and v. 6b is to be read as a half-sentence missing the copula (which is perfectly possible in Greek usage): καὶ ὁ ἡγαπημένος ἔσται; cp. the future form λεπτυνεῖ ὡς υἱὸς μονοκερώτων 'whereas the loved one [will be] like a son of unicorns [i.e. a unicorn]'. What are we to make of this?

[II]

Now μονόκερως is far from being a *hapax legomenon* in the Septuagint. We find it in Pss. 22(21): 22; 29(28): 6; 92(91): 11; Num. 23: 22 and 24:8; Deut. 33: 17; and in Ps. 77: 69 LXX, a special case to which we shall return later.

Of all these cases there is only one indicating a negative usage of the term, i.e. a usage connecting it with, and ascribing it to, ungodly or threatening forces, and that is Ps. 21: 22 LXX, a cry for deliverance from 'the mouth of the lion' and the 'horns of the unicorns': σωσόν με ἐκ στόματος λέοντος καὶ ἀπὸ κεράτων μονοκερώτων τὴν ταπείνωσιν μου.

The negative notion of the 'horns of the unicorns' from which the ταπείνωσις of the afflicted individual is to be delivered is in

³ Cf. C. Dogniez/M. Harl, *La Bible d'Alexandrie, Le Deutéronome*, Paris 1992, p. 350: "'Unicorne": pourquoi les traducteurs de la Septante ont-ils choisi le mot *monokeros*, "muni d'une seule corne", pour désigner ce qui semble bien être en hébreu le buffle, usuellement appelé en grec "boeuf sauvage", et qui a deux cornes (les deux cornes de Joseph-buffle peuvent être les deux tribus d'Ephraïm et de Manassé)? Y a-t-il une intention, ou bien n'ont-ils pas su identifier l'animal, ou bien ce terme était-il connu (en Égypte?) pour désigner une sorte particulière de buffle, ou bien ont-ils voulu faire allusion à une bête légendaire?" These are exactly the questions we shall attempt to answer in this study.

⁴ Cf. C. Basevi, 'El Salmo 29. Algunas Observaciones Filológicas sobre el Texto Hebreo y Griego', in: *ST* 22 (1990), 32, n. 54.

stark contrast with the Hebrew, where we find two hemistichs opposing each other:

הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מִפִּי אַרְיָה וּמִקֶּרְנֵי רִמָּיִם עֲנִיתִי

The second half *announces* the deliverance, and it is not a deliverance *from* the horns of the wild bulls (רִמָּיִם) is a defective spelling of (רִאמִּים),⁵ but one that *comes* from these horns (cf. *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos*: 'et de cornibus unicornium exaudi me' with *Psalterium Gallicanum*: 'et a cornibus unicornium humilitatem meam'). The power of the wild bulls is a positive attribute of God. It is essential to keep this in mind when moving on to the exegesis of the other passages.

It is quite obvious why the Greek translation has changed the second part's meaning. The overall context of Psalm 22 posed a severe problem to the translator, who could not understand a verse at the same time crying for deliverance and actually announcing it. So עֲנִיתִי was taken to mean עֲנִיתִי 'my poor one', i.e. 'soul', 'existence', a mistake repeated in modern exegesis, and a very understandable mistake at that, as יְחִידָתִי (v. 21), referring to the afflicted soul, was understood as a direct parallel of the 'scribal error', עֲנִיתִי, which therefore had to be emended⁶ to עֲנִיתִי. The underlying wrong assumption was to regard both v. 21 and v. 22 as synonymous parallelisms and variations on a common theme. In fact v. 21 is indeed a synonymous parallelism whereas v. 22 represents an *antithetic* parallelism and leads over to the praise of God in the assembly (v. 23), a fact not noted by Gunkel because of his preoccupation with the tripartite structure of the psalm.⁷ The English translation of the properly understood Hebrew text of vv. 21–23 would therefore run:

Save my life from the sword,
from the dog's strength my forlorn existence.
Rescue me from the lion's mouth—
and from the wild bulls' horns you answer me!
I shall announce your name to my brothers,
in the midst of the congregation I shall praise you.

That there is absolutely no need for an emendation is also confirmed by the Midrash on Psalm 75 commenting on the 'ten horns' raised up for Israel by God. One of these horns is the 'horn of Jerusalem':

⁵ Cf. H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 6th edn. Göttingen 1986, p. 96.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.* 'das Pf. der Gewißheit paßt nicht zur Parallele'.

⁷ Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 88–90.

קרן ירושלים בבנין,
שנאמר (מקרני ראם) [ומקרני רמים] עניתיני⁸

The relation of this Midrash to the one on Psalm 78 will be subject to a more detailed scrutiny below; suffice it to say for the moment that it supports the Masoretic Text and therefore proves our point that *all* the passages in the *Hebrew* show evidence of a strictly positive connotation of 'the horns of the wild bulls' as a symbol of might and power, whereas the only instance of a negative usage found in the *Greek* Bible originates from a misunderstanding of the Hebrew text.

[III]

Having come across the symbol of 'the horns of the wild bull' in connection with God we also find an instance of it and its Greek equivalent being applied to humans, while it is nevertheless thought of as a divine gift. Ps. 92: 11a has:

וְתָרֵם כְּרֹאם קִרְנִי

The Greek translators read וְתָרֵם:

καὶ ὑψωθήσεται ὡς μονοκέρωτος τὸ κέρας μου.

'And my horn will be exalted like that of a unicorn.'

One should note the change to the future tense that has taken place here.

It is of great importance to realize the similar contexts in which the symbol is used in both (the Hebrew of) Psalm 22 and (the Hebrew and Greek of) Psalm 92. In both cases it is employed to confer the notion of the righteous man in affliction who regains his confidence in God's saving power, in God's might to deliver from evil, and his will to extend mercy to all those who fear him.

[IV]

Let us now discuss what are possibly the most important Septuagintal passages using the term μονόκερωτος.

1. In the second Balaam oracle (Num. 23: 18-24) we find in v. 22 (with an almost exact parallel in the third oracle, Num. 24: 8):

אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּתוֹעַפֶּת רֹאם לוֹ

'God leads them out of Egypt, he has as it were the horns of the wild bull' (in translating תוֹעַפֶּת we follow the suggestion of Gesenius, 17th ed.), or:

⁸ *Midrasch Tehillim* (ed. S. Buber), Wilna 1891, p. 340.

'he is to him [Israel] like the horns of the wild bull'.⁹

The Septuagint here attempts a 'spiritualizing' translation:

θεὸς ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ὡς δόξα μονοκέρωτος αὐτῷ.

'The glory of a unicorn' replaces the 'horns of the wild bull', and again the sentence allows for both interpretations, i.e. that God has the glory of a unicorn or appears to Israel to be like the glory of a unicorn. However, taking into account the Hebrew of Psalm 22 we may assume that God is attributed with (the might of) 'the horns of the wild bull'/'the glory of a unicorn'.

2. The second Pentateuchal passage employing the term μονόκερως is Deut. 33: 17, a most prominent place in the context of the Torah. Moses' blessing over Joseph contains the following verse:

בְּכֹר שׁוֹרוֹ הָדָר לוֹ וְקַרְנֵי רָאִם קַרְנָיו

'His firstling bull has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox' rsv.

In the Septuagint we find something quite different from this:

πρωτότοκος ταύρου τὸ κάλλος αὐτοῦ,

κέρατα μονοκέρωτος τὰ κέρατα αὐτοῦ.

'[Like that of] a first-born bull is his beauty,
the horns of a unicorn are his horns.'¹⁰

This is, just like Ps. 91: 11a LXX, an instance of the symbol of divine power being attributed to human beings, in this case to an individual and a tribe, Joseph. The power conferred on Joseph will enable him to 'push the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth' (Deut. 33: 17b, rsv).¹¹

3. Another problematic reference to a 'unicorn' in the Psalter is Ps. 77: 69 LXX. The Septuagint chooses to translate

יִבֶּן כְּמוֹ-רַמִּים מִקְדָּשׁוֹ כְּאַרְץ יִסְדָּה לְעוֹלָם

with

καὶ ὠκοδόμησεν ὡς μονοκερώτων τὸ ἅγίασμα αὐτοῦ,

ἐν τῇ γῇ ἐθεμελίωσεν αὐτὴν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

'And he built his temple/sanctuary like that of unicorns,
he founded it on earth [to last] forever.'

⁹ Cf. the rendering of the *New Jerusalem Bible*, ad loc.: 'God ... is like the wild ox's horn to him.'

¹⁰ Cf. the translation in C. Dogniez/M. Harl, *Deutéronome*, p. 350 f.: 'Premier-né du taureau, sa beauté, cornes de l'unicorne, ses cornes; avec elles il encornera les nations, toutes jusqu'à l'extrémité de la terre.'

¹¹ Probably the Septuagint passage is an early allusion to the idea of the Messiah ben Joseph. Cf. Gen. R. 75, 6 and 12 where we find allusions to Deut. 33: 17, and the first testimony to the concept of a Josephic Messiah in bT (Suk. 52 a-b).

Apparently the Septuagint translator read רמים (possible form of ראמים) instead of רמים. Gunkel notes¹² that the Masoretic text, כמו־רמים, has to be understood as a faulty rendering of כְּמִרְמִים or כְּמַרְמִים (and compares כְּמַרְוִמִים in Ps. 148: 1), but does not take into account that the Septuagint translation could make sense and necessitate a vocalization and spelling different from that of the Masoretic text. But it is exactly this less obvious vocalization which accounts for the status of רמים as the *lectio difficilior* and finds support in the Midrashim.¹³ *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* further supports this point of view:

'... et aedificavit in similitudinem monoceroton sanctuarium suum'.

As far as the actual content of Ps. 78(77): 69 is concerned, it is of prime importance to realize its link with Deut. 33: 17. The psalm attempts to explain and support the election of David and Jerusalem and the transfer of God's grace from the North, i.e. Shiloh, to the South, and therefore directly contradicts the ancient tradition underlying Deuteronomy 33.

In this context it is highly interesting that, according to our reading, the Hebrew and the Greek texts of Psalm 78(77) demonstrate a continuity of language found in the Greek and Hebrew versions of Deut. 33: 13-17. Both of them employ the symbolism of the wild bull or unicorn found in Deuteronomy to depict the divine characteristics of invincibility now ascribed to Zion. So we find, *sub contrario*, a continuity of these mythical notions in two very different texts.

[V]

The book of Daniel employs unicorn imagery without actually using the word μονόκερως. In 8: 5-8 the author veils the allusion to Alexander the Great by referring to him as a goat with a single horn (וְהַצִּפּוֹר קָרְן חִזּוֹת בֵּין עֵינָיו) and καὶ ἦν τοῦ τράγου κέρας ἐν ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ).

This imagery is not to be regarded as an equivalent of the passages employing the actual μονόκερως image. 'The single horn of the goat ... represents the first of the Greek dynasty, the great Alexander.'¹⁴ In doing so it masks a historical allusion. It does *not* refer to a figure the author understands as messianic. On the other hand, it *does* address the impact an extraordinary man had

¹² Cf. id., *Psalmen*, p. 347.

¹³ Cf. *Midrasch Tehillim* on Psalm 78 (ed. S. Buber, p. 357):

רִבֵּן כְּמוֹ רַמִּים אֵל תִּקְרִי רַמִּים אֵלֹא רַמִּים

¹⁴ J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Edinburgh 1927 (ICC), p. 330.

on his time. Therefore we can assume a certain *structural* similarity in the application of the imagery: both messianic figures *and* outstanding historical personalities could be invested with literary imagery alluding to their virtually super-human powers.

[VI]

Now that the relevant passages displaying μονόκερα¹⁵ as a translation of the Hebrew קרן have been investigated we can turn to a more general discussion of the significance of these terms.

As we have been able to restore the proper sense of the Hebrew text of Ps. 22: 22 we understand the 'horns of the wild bull' as an entirely positive symbol of God's saving power. Num. 23: 22, 24: 8 confer the same idea, whereas in Ps. 92: 11 and in Deut. 33: 17 this symbol is attributed to an individual or a tribe as coming from God. Finally, the (revocalized) text of Ps. 78: 69 uses the bull symbolism to praise the splendour and majesty of Zion.

This would certainly not have seemed alien to a reader acquainted with ancient Near Eastern mythology. Mesopotamian culture and religion held cattle and sheep in high esteem; they were generally regarded as holy animals. Wild bulls were the embodiment of positive attributes, displaying physical might and powerful sexuality. It was therefore an obvious move to use a crown of bull's horns in order to adorn pictures of the gods, and the moon god in particular became associated with the bull imagery.¹⁵ Subsequently the crown of horns also symbolized royal power, for instance 'in the royal correspondence of the Sargonids there is mention of statues to be made of the king and his family, of the transportation of the heavy, human-faced bull statues'.¹⁶

In Exod. 34: 29–35 we find a fascinating example of this concept being applied to Moses. Contrary to attempts to explain קרן 'horn', 'ray' leading to the concept of קרן 'to radiate light', 'to beam', it now seems probable, with regard to archaeological discoveries and to passages in the Midrashim, that Moses is indeed attributed with the royal 'insignia' of the wild bull's horns.¹⁷

The bull symbolism was taken over by the Israelites, and it is

¹⁵ Cf. W. v. Soden, *Einführung in die Altorientalistik*, Darmstadt 1987, pp. 168, 228.

¹⁶ A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Chicago/London 1977 (rev. edn.), p. 329.

¹⁷ Cf. the Midrash on Psalm 75 on the 'ten horns' of Israel amongst which we find the 'horn of Moses' alluding to Exod. 34: 30 (ed. S. Buber, p. 340):

קרן משה שנאמר כי קרן צור פניו

Cf. also J. R. Porter, *Moses and Monarchy*, Oxford 1962, p. 20, and A. Jirku, 'Die

against this background that we can finally and fully understand the significance of the imagery in, say, Ps. 22: 22. There the 'horns of the wild bulls' symbolize the concentration of divine power interfering with human affairs and saving the righteous. Num. 23: 22 and Num. 24: 8 further contribute to the understanding of the concept of a powerful god who leads Israel out of Egypt and displays a might which resembles that of a wild bull. Furthermore the 'flexibility' of this concept can be detected in Israel as well as in Mesopotamia. In the course of events it could be extended to the description of human beings in very much the same way as the neighbouring culture had done this before. Just as the Sargonids liked to adorn themselves with the bull imagery, the Israelites employed it in their literature. They even went a step further and 'democratized' the concept inasmuch as the image of the wild bull could now also be applied to non-royal individuals, a development of which Ps. 92: 11a is a telling example.

[VII]

Having shed some light on the background of the Hebrew notion of the אֵרֹס we can now take up the initial question concerning the μονόκερως.

We have already pointed out that the Greek term must not be understood as a mere translation of the Hebrew one. The meaning of a Septuagintal passage employing the word μονόκερως is necessarily misunderstood whenever it is assumed to be nothing else than a one-to-one translation of the Hebrew. Even E. Schrader in his learned study 'Die Vorstellung vom μονόκερως und ihr Ursprung'¹⁸ did not realize this particular problem when he put forward his thesis that the Jewish translator thought μονόκερως conferred the concept of his ancestors' use of אֵרֹס.¹⁹ Even so, Schrader makes clear that there is an essential methodological

Gesichtsmaske des Mose', *ZDPV* 67 (1944/45), 43-45, on Exod. 34: 29-35. J. R. Porter, *ibid.*: 'Jirku has suggested that *qaran* in vv. 29, 30 and 35 ought to be taken in its proper sense and that what is here in question is a mask with horns that Moses wore, as priests did elsewhere, to approach the god, and his interpretation receives strong support from a cylinder-seal found at Ugarit showing a priest wearing a bull's mask bringing an offering to a bull's head, presumably symbolizing Baal. By putting on the mask, the wearer identifies himself with the deity, and, if Moses is to be thought of as wearing a bull's mask, it is significant how frequently both god and king are termed "bull" in the Ancient Near East.'

¹⁸ *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 31 (1892), Berlin 1892, pp. 573-581.

¹⁹ Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 580.

need to keep the question of the nature of the **אָר** apart from that of the meaning of the word **μονόκερως**.²⁰

It is highly unlikely that the translators of the Septuagint, in a somewhat naive manner, considered **μονόκερως** as a perfect equivalent of **אָר**. Since they had been raised as 'Hellenistic' Jews, i.e. Jewish members of the Hellenistic **οἰκουμένη**, they were familiar with the mythology of their culture and must therefore have known the common belief in a fantastic animal inspired by Ktesias' *Indica* which describes a fierce, insuperable wild ass bearing a single horn on his forehead. Possibly they shared this belief as it had found a most prominent, 'scientific' propagator: Aristotle. He had taken over the material provided by Ktesias and had tried to classify the animal in his *Historia Animalium* as well as in *De Partibus Animalium*.²¹ As so often in antiquity, mythology and early science were indissolubly intertwined.

What, then, would have caused the translators to put **μονόκερως** for **אָר**? H. Brandenburg thinks that 'the animal called *re'em* was obviously unknown'²² to them, viz. that the Jewish translators were ignorant of the ancient roots of the use of **אָר** in biblical language and of the wild bulls living in Mesopotamia and Syria that had provided the inspiration for this religious symbolism in Mesopotamian art and literature as well as in the Hebrew Old Testament. According to this thesis the Septuagintal translation simply arose from an embarrassment caused by factual ignorance, and **μονόκερως** was chosen just because of its connotations of fierceness and fantastic strength resembling those of the 'wild bulls' in the Hebrew text.

Such an explanation is inadequate. First, it is most unlikely that the Jewish translators in the second century BCE no longer knew about the existence of wild bulls in Mesopotamia and Syria a few centuries earlier which had kindled the imagination of their forefathers.

Second, everybody who was familiar with the Hebrew Bible and could not understand the bull imagery merely had to look up Job 39 to get an idea of the wild bull's qualities and its place in the natural world, and was thus enabled to understand the origin of the bull metaphor in art, literature, and religion.

Third, the translators of the respective biblical books knew very well what notion they wanted to confer by using **μονόκερως**, as becomes obvious from Isa. 34: 7. There the translator/s of Isaiah

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²¹ *Hist. Anim.* 499 b 16; *De Part. Anim.* 663 a 18 ff.

²² *Id.*, 'Einhorn', in: *RAC* IV, Stuttgart 1959 (cols. 840–862), col. 844: '... denen das mit *re'em* bezeichnete Tier offensichtlich unbekannt war ...'.

chose to render אַמִּים as ἄδρῳί, *not* as μονοκέρωτες,²³ and thereby demonstrated that they did not proceed in any standardized manner, but with great caution. When the connotations of the 'unicorn' did not fit the context they opted for another translation.

[VIII]

What were the reasons for translating אַמִּים not by, say, ταῦρος, but by μονοκέρωτες? The exegetical discussion has given us an idea of the occurrences and the usage of the unicorn imagery in the Greek Bible. Several observations remain to be stated and evaluated.

It is striking to find that the unicorn metaphor is used in those texts which were amongst the most important ones to receive a messianic interpretation. As has been pointed out by W. Horbury, 'by the first century the Davidic hope of the prophets had been linked with the law, especially with the blessings of Judah in Gen. xlix and Deut. xxxiii ..., and with the oracles of Balaam in Num. xxiv; and it is in the law as well as the prophets ... that a Jew of the time would instinctively look for messianic texts'.²⁴ In the Septuagint the said link had been established (on the basis of Gen. 49: 9 f. and several other passages) in the second century BCE. We detect something like a Septuagintal *network* of messianic (or rather 'messianized') texts, parts of which are the psalms we interpreted above. Psalm 77 LXX, for instance, takes up Deut. 33: 13-17 and outlines the transfer of God's election from the North (Joseph) to the South (Judah), at the same time giving a messianic interpretation of David's election (cf. the frequent changes from the Hebrew imperfect consecutive to the Greek future tense). While reinterpreting the Hebrew Psalm 78 in a messianic manner, the Septuagint sticks to the bull/unicorn imagery. Ps. 28: 6 LXX gives a very similar picture of the Septuagintal 'messianization' of Old Testament texts. It is also the prime example of a consequent messianic interpretation in its understanding of שִׁרִן as ἡγαπημένος and in its use of the unicorn imagery which we shall discuss with reference to its messianic significance.

In one of the most central messianic texts of the Septuagint, Num. 24: 7-8, with its striking reinterpretation of the Hebrew

²³ Aquila simply transliterates and writes ριμειμ, whereas Symmachus has μονοκέρωτες.

²⁴ Id., 'The Messianic Associations of the Son of Man', in: *JTS*, NS, 35 (1985), 39.

חל-מים מדליו חרעו במים רבים

as

ἐξελεύσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ καὶ κυριεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν,

we again find the μονόκερως metaphor, this time referring to the Messiah, since 'the Septuagint rendering could hardly have arisen unless ἄνθρωπος were already recognized as a messianic title'.²⁵ That it was *indeed* used as a messianic title has been demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt by G. Vermes in his study *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*,²⁶ in dialogue with suggestions made as early as 1954 by W. H. Brownlee.²⁷ Num. 24: 17 LXX is the text that, in comparison with other relevant sources (i.e. the Targums, the Peshitta, and some of the Qumran documents),²⁸ elucidates the messianic usage of ἄνθρωπος when it employs it in order to render שבט, a term which in another messianic context (Gen. 49: 10 LXX)²⁹ has been translated as ἀρχὼν and points towards the messianic ruler.³⁰ Let us now consider both the original of Num. 24: 17b and its Greek version.

דרך כוכב מיעקב וקם שבט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

has been rendered as

ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακώβ, καὶ ἀναστήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ.
'A star will rise from Jacob, and "Man" will rise out of Israel.'

That this is one of the great messianic texts of the Septuagint³¹ becomes obvious not just from a comparison of this text with Num. 24: 7 f., which will be given below, but also from the

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 49.

²⁶ Id., *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism, Haggadic Studies*, rev. edn. Leiden 1973 (SPB 4), pp. 56–66.

²⁷ Cf. below, n. 30.

²⁸ Cf. n. 31.

²⁹ With a view to the network of messianic interpretations emerging in the Septuagint it would be interesting to investigate the possible interpretations of Gen. 49: 10 (ἀρχὼν = שבט) and Num. 24: 17 (ἄνθρωπος = שבט) and analyse more closely the relation between the use of ἄνθρωπος and of ἀρχὼν in messianic contexts.

³⁰ Cf. W. H. Brownlee, 'The Servant of the Lord in the Qumran Scrolls II', *BASOR* 135 (1954), 33–38 (p. 37, n. 30): 'For the choice of *gebher* as a messianic designation, cf. II Sam. 23: 1; Zech. 13: 7. Cf also the use of *anthropos* with messianic significance in LXX Numbers 24: 17; Testament of Judah 24: 1; Test. Naphtali 4: 5; John 16: 21. *Anthropos* translates *gebher* in the LXX at Num. 24: 3, 15; Jer. 17: 5; Dan. 8: 15.'

³¹ Cf. n. 30 and G. Vermes, op. cit., p. 59: 'As Brownlee correctly remarks, *Man* (ἄνθρωπος) clearly refers to the Messiah. This biblical verse has indeed been used messianically by all the exegetical sources, by the Targums (Targum Onkelos = the Messiah; Ps. Jonathan = the Messiah, the mighty Sceptre of Israel; the

passage and firmly adjusted the messianic vision of Num. 24: 7 f. to the mythological outlook of his own time, the second century BCE.

Before we venture to discuss this change in greater detail, it remains to be said that another significant reinterpretation informed the translation of Num. 24: 7b. The unanimously attested מלכו of the original was rendered as βασιλεία αὐτοῦ. This was done in order to remove ambiguities concerning the relation between ἄνθρωπος/Messiah and the κύριος. It also serves to centre the attention on the messianic figure by mentioning its eschatological achievement: the Messiah's kingdom will be 'exalted over Gog' and greatly enlarged.

The comparison with Gog has significant exegetical consequences. First, the Greek translation of Numbers could be younger than the Gog 'apocalypse' in Ezekiel 38–39. On the other hand, the mythological material behind the latter passage by definition predates that passage and must have been part of Jewish folklore. The translators of Num. 24: 7 and the author of Ezekiel 38–39 are therefore likely to have received their knowledge of the story independently.³⁵

Secondly, the reading of Gog for Agag has a strong messianic connotation. In the context of the speculation about the Messiah ben Joseph and the Davidic Messiah, the fight against Gog is of major significance. Probably the first mention of the Messiah ben Joseph, his struggle and his subsequent death (paving the way for the coming of the Davidic Messiah), is to be found in the Babylonian Talmud, Suk. 52 a–b.³⁶ It follows from relevant pas-

³⁵ Cf. C. A. Keller, 'Gog und Magog', in *RGK* (3rd edn.), vol. II, Tübingen 1958, col. 1684: 'Der Stoff der Weissagung ist—*abgesehen von der Person des G[og]* [my italics]—sicher älter als Ezechiel (38, 17!) und scheint, wie die endzeitliche Heilsdramatik überhaupt, in Zusammenhang mit dem alten Heilskultus, dh mit bestimmten Riten und liturgischen Äußerungen des vorexilisch-israelitischen Herbstfestes ... zu stehen Den traditionellen Stoff hat der Verfasser der Vision mit dem Namen G[og] verknüpft. Dieser ist im AT vor Ezechiel nicht mit Sicherheit zu belegen. Vermutlich handelt es sich weder um eine mythische (etwa den babylonischen Gott Gaga oder eine Chaosgestalt) noch um eine symbolische (etwa =sumerisch gug, "Finsternis") Figur, sondern um eine historische Persönlichkeit: entweder um einen noch nicht identifizierten Zeitgenossen des Propheten oder um den Lyderkönig Gyges (7. Jh.).' This approach is unlikely to provide an appropriate explanation. At least in the Septuagint, 'Gog' seems to be a mythical force of evil more than anything else. However, this observation does not necessarily exclude a historical explanation, since the historical reminiscence may later have been 'mythologized'. For a precise and detailed attempt to find a historical figure behind the text cf. H. Greßmann, *Der Messias*, Göttingen 1929, p. 124 f.

³⁶ The Talmudic interpretation leading to the concept of a Josephic Messiah relies strongly on Deut. 33: 17.

sages in Rabbinic writings that the Messiah ben Joseph will be the leader in the eschatological battle against Gog and Magog. The messianic age of the (Davidic) Messiah was expected to come after the *defeat* of Gog and Magog. This order of events is proposed, for example, by the Babylonian Talmud, Sanh. 97b, recording a remark of R. Hanan b. Tahlipha:³⁷

לאחר ארבעה אלפים ומאתים ותשעים ואחת שנה לבריאתו
של עולם העולם יתום מהן מלחמות תנינים מהן מלחמות נגו ומנו
והשאר ימות
המשיח ואין הקדוש ברוך הוא מחדש את עולמו אלא לאחר שבעה
אלפים שנה³⁸

There are only a few Tannaitic passages mentioning the Messiah ben Joseph, and they are not very specific. However, it is obvious from the Targums and references in post-Tannaitic writings that the Josephic Messiah was expected to conduct the war against Gog and Magog *for* the Davidic Messiah in order for the latter to introduce the messianic age.³⁸

Thirdly, Num. 24: 7,8 LXX is likely to prove the importance of this eschatological speculation—concerning the beginning of the messianic age after the defeat of Gog—in the third century BCE (the time of the Pentateuch's translation). This seems a fair interpretation of the passage in the context of Ezekiel 38–39 and the Jewish writings quoted above. The assumption was made earlier in this century that the allusions to the messianic struggle against Gog count amongst the oldest traces of this speculation.³⁹ However, Bousset and Greßmann did not endeavour to discuss

³⁷ L. Goldschmidt, *Der Babylonische Talmud mit Einschluss der vollständigen Mishnah. Siebenter Band*, Haag 1933, pp. 422 f.

³⁸ Cf. J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel. From Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (transl. W. F. Stinespring), New York 1955, pp. 496 f.: 'Tannaitic passages referring to Messiah ben Joseph are so few and brief that we can determine from them only the untimely death of this Messiah. Where and when this will occur, and what Messiah ben Joseph will do in general are not recorded. But in the relatively early Targum, it is clearly asserted that Messiah ben Ephraim will, in the latter days, conquer Gog, the mighty enemy of Israel. In the post-Tannaitic literature this idea is found frequently. A hint that the wars of the Messianic age are to be waged not by Messiah ben David himself but by a Messiah who precedes him, is already present in the Baraita of R. Simeon ben Yohai quoted above: "In the seventh (year of 'the week [seven-year period] when the son of David comes'), wars; and at the end of the seventh year, the son of David will come." Messiah ben David will come, therefore, *after* the wars. It likewise follows from another passage, also quoted above, that the Messianic age itself comes after "the wars of the dragons" and after the war with Gog and Magog. The military commander in these great battles can be none other than Messiah ben Joseph.' The latter passage alluded to is Sanh. 97b.

³⁹ Cf. W. Bousset/H. Greßmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, 3rd edn. Tübingen 1926, p. 219, and *ibid.*, n. 6.

Numbers 24 LXX in greater detail, whereas we have here attempted to put this particular passage into perspective.

In Num. 24: 3-9 we have an oracle dating back to Saul's kingdom, which the translators transformed into the announcement of a warlike Messiah restoring Israel to power. It is no accident that the allusion to the 'lioness' (לביא) was altered into one to a σκῦμος '[lion's] whelp' as this, together with the image of the λέων, must have seemed more appropriate to the concept of the Messiah's Davidic origins. What is more, we find the expression גור אריה 'lion's whelp' to denote Judah in one of the classic messianic texts in the Pentateuch, Gen. 49: 9. Here the translators precisely rendered the Hebrew as σκῦμος λέοντος,⁴⁰ and Num. 24: 9 and 23: 24 display a conscious bringing into line of these passages with Gen. 49: 9 f.⁴¹

So we have found, in Num. 24: 8 LXX (and possibly also in Num. 23: 24), a further witness to our theory of a network of 'messianized' texts in the Septuagint which, in the case of the passages in Numbers, were partly modelled on the oldest messianic text in the Pentateuch—Gen. 49: 9.

[IX]

The foregoing analysis has finally paved the way for an appreciation of the μονόκερως imagery and the reasons for its use in the Septuagint.

We have seen how prominent a place the unicorn imagery has been given in the Septuagintal 'messianic network', and, since it is impossible to follow H. Brandenburg's explanation of its use, we shall have to attempt a more satisfying understanding of its origins. Given the regular occurrence and prominent rôle of the unicorn symbol and its conscious and controlled usage, it becomes highly likely that it was employed as a literary instrument within a certain framework. It is in all the 'messianized' Septuagintal passages, especially in Num. 24: 8, Deut. 33: 17, Ps. 28: 6, and Ps. 77: 69, where it figures as something like a key-word, whereas on the other hand one finds, in non-messianic texts, a non-specific usage (Job 39: 9) or its total absence (Isa. 34: 7) where it was felt to be inadequate.

Taking into account all the exegetical observations made and

⁴⁰ The expression is also used in Hellenistic Greek literature, cf. Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 308. This may point to a literary influence exercised on the translators by contemporary Alexandrian literature.

⁴¹ The symbol of a lion or a lion's whelp for the King Messiah has always been a tradition well known in Judaism; cf. G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, pp. 42 f., on its usage in Gen. 49: 9, Qumranic and other texts.

the course of Jewish Hellenistic history in general, it seems that we should probably understand the replacement of the bull imagery in favour of the unicorn metaphor as the *interpretatio graeca* of an old, traditional element of Hebrew and ancient oriental myth. A mythical image of the Israelite forefathers, still known to the Septuagint translators but no longer useful as a literary means of depicting God's might and glory, had to be reinterpreted to a Hellenistic Jewish audience living in a cultural sphere very different from that of their Israelite ancestors. Therefore any translation had to fall back on well-known concepts, and especially in the area of mythology it had to introduce subtle changes into the textual framework and yet still to convey a sense similar to that of the original text. The translators were well equipped with a stock of mythical motifs from Greek sources. One of these motifs was that of the *μονόκερως*. It is not clear whether certain mistaken observations in nature or pictorial representations, especially in ancient palaces, originally inspired the ideas about 'unicorns'.⁴² However, the concept of animals with a single horn as a symbol of might was widespread in many different times and cultures, not only amongst the Greeks but also in Iran, India, and Palestine. The Septuagint translators, by choosing the *μονόκερως* imagery, made an effort to mediate between their sacred scriptures and 'modern culture', being faced with very much the same problems biblical translators have been confronted with right through the ages.

[X]

Unfortunately very little is known about Hellenistic mythology with respect to its impact on contemporary Jewish thought. However, using the *μονόκερως* symbol as a key we find an interes-

⁴² Cf. H. Brandenburg, *op. cit.*, col. 855, opposing E. Schrader, *op. cit.*, p. 576 ff.: 'Auch die auf den Treppenwangen im Palast von Persepolis dargestellten Kämpfe zwischen einhörigen Stieren und Löwen, dürften Ktesias kaum zu seiner Geschichte vom Indikos onos inspiriert haben, wie dies angenommen worden ist Wir haben keinen Anlaß zu vermuten, daß er diese Reliefs, die das in der oriental. u. griech. Kunst beliebte Thema des Zweikampfes zwischen Löwe u. Stier darstellten, mißverstanden hat. Eher beruht sein Bericht auf entstellten Nachrichten vom einhörigen indischen Nashorn' Cf. also J. Wellhausen, *The Book of Psalms*, London 1898 (*Haupt's Polychrome Bible*), pp. 173: 'The idea of the existence of the unicorn seems to be derived from Persian sculptures at Persepolis and Susa. We see here the King struggling with a powerful one-horned animal ...; on another relief a one-horned animal is attacked by a lion This animal is, of course, a bull with two horns and cloven feet, although it looks like a horse. The Persian reliefs were undoubtedly influenced by Assyro-Babylonian sculptures.'

ting passage in the *Orphicorum Fragmenta*.⁴³ Proclus, 'certainly the fifth-century Neoplatonist',⁴⁴ amongst whose sources was Orphic poetry, comments on a passage in Hesiod's *Works and Days*⁴⁵ and reports that 'in Orpheus' (παρ' Ὀρφεῖ) the first day of the new moon was called μονόκερως μόσχος, probably, we may infer, because of 'the common sight of "the old moon in the new moon's arms"', when a thin crescent is lit by the sun and the rest of the disc is faintly visible by light reflected from the earth'.⁴⁶ Ancient astrology employed the imagery of a single-horned young bull in connection with the first day of the lunar month, the ἐνὴ καὶ νέα of the Greeks which was held by them to be sacred.⁴⁷ Whether this influenced the Septuagint translators when choosing a new way of rendering the Hebrew מֵאֵל is, up to now, a matter of speculation. But it does not seem to be improbable that the notion of a sacred beginning, a divine advent, could have been the motive for their decision to use the μονόκερως metaphor in a messianic context. (As pointed out above, the 'wild bull' of ancient Mesopotamia too had, from early on, been associated with the moon god.) There is no doubt that Hellenistic Judaism was heavily influenced by astrological speculation.

We find similar mythological speculations in many of the Jewish legends. L. Ginzberg, in his collection of Jewish legendary material,⁴⁸ tried to extract this material from Talmudic and Midrashic literature, the writings of the Church fathers, Jewish mediaeval literature, and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Jewish legends provide a number of allusions to the image of the unicorn and to that of a single-horned bull. One is tempted to ask what the significance of such imagery in popular Jewish material could possibly have been. The answer to this is a quite extraordinary one. According to some of these legends Adam offered up a unicorn as sacrifice. In Ginzberg's edition we find the following passage:⁴⁹

The first time Adam witnessed the sinking of the sun he was also seized with anxious fears. It happened at the conclusion of the Sabbath, and Adam said, "Woe is me! For my sake, because I sinned, the world is darkened, and it will again become void and without form. Thus will be executed the punishment of death which God has pronounced against

⁴³ Ed. O. Kern, Berlin 1922.

⁴⁴ Hesiod, *Works and Days* (ed. M. L. West), Oxford 1978, p. 68.

⁴⁵ Cf. op. cit., p. 765 ff., esp. p. 770.

⁴⁶ Op. cit., p. 351.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, fragm. 273.

⁴⁸ Id., *The Legends of the Jews*, vols. I-VII, Philadelphia 1946-61.

⁴⁹ Vol. I (1961), p. 89 (transl. H. Szold).

mel" All the night he spent in tears, and Eve, too, wept as she sat opposite to him. When day began to dawn, he understood that what he had deplored was but the course of nature, and he brought an offering unto God, a unicorn whose horn was created before his hoofs, and he sacrificed it on the spot on which later the altar was to stand in Jerusalem.

The material given by Ginzberg is drawn from *Abodah Zarah* 8a and *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* 1, 7.⁵⁰ One may also compare *Shabbat* 28b and other passages in Rabbinic literature, and especially *Midrash Tehillim* on Psalm 39 where the background of the concept of a one-horned bull becomes apparent:

By the words *that had horns and hoofs* is meant that the bull-calf (שור) which Adam offered had horns before he had hoofs, for the verse is to be read *that had horns and [then] hoofs*. Over there [i.e. in Palestine] it was taught: The bull-calf which Adam offered had one horn in his forehead, for what the verse really says is a *bull-calf ... that had a horn (mkrn) and hoofs*. Note that *mkrn* as written calls for the pronunciation *mekoran*, meaning "it had one horn".⁵¹

According to the remarks of Ginzberg, the significance of this imagery is that of an animal of primordial creation:

The ox which Adam offered, the bullock which Noah offered (upon leaving the ark), and the ram which Abraham sacrificed (instead of Isaac) got their horns prior to their hoofs. The idea implied is that these animals belong to primordial creations, that they came to the world completely developed ..., so that when these animals came forth from the earth, they put out their heads first, with their horns on them.⁵²

So we have here a witness confirming our thesis that the motif of a single horn and the imagery of the unicorn was taken as point of departure for extensive speculation. The evidence drawn from the Orphic fragments and the Jewish legendary material suggests a connection between the concept of the μονόκερως and the notion of a *beginning*. Whereas in Hellenistic thought the unicorn was linked with the movements of the heavenly bodies, Jewish legend intertwined it with the idea of primordial creation. These notions may have exercised some influence on the translators of the Psalter, since their work undoubtedly draws upon the concept of a pre-existent Messiah.

Jewish pseudepigraphal literature provides further instances of the bull/unicorn imagery in the framework of a messianic text. That a single large horn had the connotation of formidable

⁵⁰ Cf. L. Ginzberg, op. cit., vol. V, p. 116.

⁵¹ W. G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* I, New Haven 1959 (YJS 13), p. 430 f. Cf. S. Buber (ed.), *Midrasch Tehillim*, Wilna 1891, p. 256.

⁵² Cf. note 50.

strength is again confirmed by what is most probably an allusion to Judas Maccabaeus in 1 Enoch 90: 9:

And I looked until horns grew upon those rams, but the ravens broke their horns; and I saw till there sprouted a great horn of one of the sheep, and their eyes were opened.⁵³

This is clearly a messianic vision of Judas Maccabaeus, as M. Black has convincingly argued in his commentary.⁵⁴ The passage in 1 Enoch makes us aware of the fact that, both inside and outside canonical literature, Jewish authors and translators entertained a peculiar 'unicorn' symbolism which carried messianic overtones. In fact, this imagery later firmly established itself as an element of religious symbolism, founded both on its use in the Greek Bible and in non-biblical religious literature. It was thus taken over by the early Church, and there is a significant sector of Christian theological literature that displays the unicorn metaphor: the works of the Church fathers. As a representative quotation out of an enormous number of allusions to the bull/unicorn imagery, let us take Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* III, 2-4,⁵⁵ interpreting Deut. 33: 17:

Ioseph et ipse Christum figuratus, nec hoc solo, ne demorer cursum, quod persecutionem a fratribus passus est ob dei gratiam, sicut et Christus a Iudaeis, carnaliter fratribus, cum benedicitur a patre, etiam in haec verba, Tauri decor eius, cornua unicornis cornua eius, in eis nationes ventilabit pariter ad summum usque terrae.

The use Tertullian makes of the unicorn imagery is one of many patristic examples witnessing to its long Jewish-Christian tradition. Its messianic application goes back to the third century BCE, when it was first used by the Jewish translators of the Pentateuch.

⁵³ M. Black (ed.), *The Book of Enoch or I Enoch. A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes by Matthew Black in Consultation with James C. Vanderkam with an Appendix on the "Astronomical" Chapters (72-82) by Otto Neugebauer*, Leiden 1985 (SVTP VII), p. 81. In the same book we are confronted with the bull imagery (90, 37): 'And I saw that a white bull was born, with large horns, and all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air feared him and made petition to him all the time' (op. cit., pp. 82 f.). We see that the bull imagery had not everywhere been abandoned in favour of the unicorn metaphor. Different Jewish religious circles expressed their messianic beliefs in different ways whereas the basic symbolic concept seems to have been held in common. Let us note in passing that the zodiacal sign of Taurus had become associated particularly with birthgiving. The birth of a white bull may convey an idea like this, i.e. Jewish Messianism may have had an astrological substratum.

⁵⁴ Cf. op. cit., p. 276.

⁵⁵ Ed. F. Oehler, Vol. II, Leipzig 1854.

[XI]

The instances of the unicorn metaphor found in Jewish and Hellenistic Greek, as well as in Patristic, texts are used in contexts of messianic beliefs, astrology, and Christology, as well as other Christian theological applications.

We are now able to summarize the main results of our investigation:

1. The 'translation' of אָרְיָס as μονόκερως has been seen to be an *interpretation*.

2. The unicorn metaphor acts as a reference to the benevolent power of God and to the might of kings.

3. Accordingly its use in some of the texts is seen to have messianic overtones. Apparently the idea of the μονόκερως gained significance as an element of messianic language very early—at the latest, it must have been known at the time of the Pentateuch's translation into Greek. Possibly the messianic connotation had been established much earlier. In any case, it is an instance of the pre-Christian development of Jewish Messianism in connection with the central Jewish document, the Pentateuch.

The unicorn/bull metaphor is a help in the investigation of the 'messianization' of Jewish religious thought as documented in the Septuagint, for it is a key to a network of very significant messianic passages in both the Pentateuch and Psalter. At the same time, it is an example of what has been called the 'renaissance of mythology'⁵⁶ in Jewish thought, because it amply testifies to a certain openmindedness and a tendency towards subtle translation of the Hebrew text with a view to 'dialogue' between the Jews and Hellenistic culture. On both counts, therefore, the 'unicorn' of the Greek Bible emerges as a not unimportant element in what some have called 'Septuagintal theology' and what should rather be classified as the 'Hellenistic features' of the Greek Bible.

J. L. W. SCHAPER

⁵⁶ A. Bentzen (ed. G. W. Anderson), *King and Messiah*, 2nd edn. Oxford 1970, p. 79.