

THE ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION OF “אַמְצִים” IN
ZECHARIAH 6:3 AND 6:7:
A COMPARISON STUDY OF ANCIENT TEXTS
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Email: pchia275@students.sbts.edu
Author: Philip Suciadi Chia, D.Th., Ph.D (in progress)

Abstract. There are some ancient sacred texts for Christianity such as Hebrew Bible, Syriac Peshitta, Septuagint, Aramaic Targum and Latin Vulgate. However, the translation of these ancient texts is not always having the same nuance or literal meaning. Zechariah 6:3 and 6:7 are one example. The word “אַמְצִים” or strong has been translated diversely in our ancient sacred texts. Therefore, this paper will attempt to discuss multiple translations for the word “אַמְצִים” or strong. The discussion will cover the purpose of these various translations. The possible reason behind the selection of the meaning will also be discussed in this paper.

Keywords. Old Testament, Lexical Studies and Philology.

INTRODUCTION

Most of commentaries on the Bible seek to explain the meaning of the words, phrases, and ideas of the scriptural text in their nearer and wider context: a textual commentary.¹ However, there are some obstacles to find out the meaning; for instance, some of Hebrew Bible and Greek NT texts are unclear in terms of meaning or / and the ancient texts convey different attestation. Zechariah 6:3, for example, conveys these difficulties: both unclear from Hebrew text and have different attestations. Latin Vulgate translates the word “אַמְצִים” as strong; however, the other ancient texts – Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, and Aramaic Targum - employ “spotted-skewbald (horses)” for this word. In other words, this same word of Hebrew has two different

meanings. This word appears two times in the entire Hebrew Bible: Zechariah 6:3 and 6:7. To analyze this word, I am going over to the ancient manuscripts - Biblia Hebraica Quinta, Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, Aramaic Targum and Latin Vulgate -, and list them all. Then, I will compare these texts and explain the reason and the purpose of these diverse translations; this paper does not try to find out the *original* word and meaning as in textual criticism study.

¹ Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the NT 2nd edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche

Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 1.

THE LIST OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

A. Biblia Hebraica Quinta ²

Text : ובמִרְכָבָה הָרְבִיעִית סוּסִים בְּרָדִים אֲמָצִים
 Translation : The fourth chariots are spotted horses, all of them are strong *or* spotted-skewbald horses
 Vorlage : אֲמָצִים

B. Septuagint ³

Text : ἐν τῷ ἄρματι τῷ τετάρτῳ ἵπποι ποικίλοι ψαροί
 Translation : To the fourth chariots are varied dapple-grays horses.
 Vorlage : אֲמָצִים

C. Syriac Peshitta ⁴

Text : *וּבִמְרִכְבָּה רְבִיעִית סוּסִים חֲסִיִּים*
 Translation : And also in the fourth chariots are parti-colored horses
 Vorlage : אֲמָצִים

D. Aramaic Targum ⁵

Text : וּבִרְתִיבָא רְבִיעִיתָא סוּסוֹן פְּצִיחִין קִטְמִין
 Translation : And to fourth chariots are shining (dazzling) ash horses
 Vorlage : אֲמָצִים

E. Latin Vulgate ⁶

Text : *Et in quadriga quarta equi varii fortes*
 Translation : And in the fourth chariots are variegated (party-colored, various, diverse) horses, they are strong
 Vorlage : אֲמָצִים

The Summary of the Ancient Texts.

The list of the ancient texts conveys *the discrepancy* of the description of the fourth chariot. Latin Vulgate seems not only depict the appearance of the fourth chariot, but also the strength. The other texts, however, *only* focus on the color of the fourth chariot. ⁷

THE ANALYSIS OF “אֲמָצִים”

Different Meaning from Hebrew Lexicons

	(1) אֲמָצִים	(2) אֲמָצִים
Translation	Strong (BDB)	Flesh-coloured, skewbald (horses) (HALOT; Holladay)

These four lexicons translate “אֲמָצִים” differently. BDB, for instance, translates it as strong. ⁸ The rests use flesh-coloured or

varied dapple-grays horse; Syriac Peshitta: parti-colored horses; Aramaic Targum: shining (dazzling) ash horses; Latin Vulgate: brown horses.

⁸ Adjective masculine plural absolute from the word “אֲמָץ”. BDB notes that this word appears twice and only in this book (6:3; 6:7). Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, James Strong, and Wilhelm Gesenius, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon: with an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic : coded with the numbering system from Strong's Exhaustive concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).

² Anthony Gelston, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ): Twelve Prophets* (Durham: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft), 2010.

³ Charles Thompson, *The Septuagint Bible* (Indiana: Shekinah Enterprises, 1999).

⁴ <http://call.cn.huc.edu/>

⁵ <http://call.cn.huc.edu/>

⁶ Robert Weber & Roger Gryson, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Germany: German Bible Society, 2006).

⁷ Hebrew text: spotted horses; Septuagint:

skewbald or piebald or dappled (horses).⁹ Although the dictionary of classical Hebrew volume 1 and TWOT choose spotted and dappled (horses) for this word, this dictionary also mentions that the same word could have a different meaning: strong.¹⁰ In short, the dilemma is the word “אָמץ” has two meanings: spotted and dappled (horses) or strong; and this information answers *the reason* of different attestations of the ancient manuscripts.

Different Translations from the Ancient Texts.

	(1) אָמָצִים	(2) אָמָצִים
Textual Witnesses	(Strong) Latin Vulgate reads this word as strong.	(Flesh-Coloured) Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta and Aramaic Targum translate this word as spotted-dappled (horses)

This table reveals that *only* Vulgate reads אָמָצִים as strong.

The Observation from the Text.

Zechariah 6:2-3. The analysis from a word, בְּרִדִים, before the word “strong”. This

word appears four times in the bible (Gen. 31:10; 31:12; Zech. 6:3; 6:6). It is translated as spotted or marked by Hebrew Bible.

The Ancient Texts	The Texts (Gen. 31:10)	The Translations
Biblia Hebraica Quinta	עַל־הַצֹּאֵן עֲקָדִים נְקָדִים וּבְרִדִים	The flock stripped (streaked), speckled and spotted (marked).
Septuagint	διάλευκοι καὶ ποικίλοι καὶ σποδοειδεῖς ῥαντοῖ	Quite white and many-colored (variegated) and ashensprinkled.
Targum Jonathan	והא ברחייא דסלקין על ענא שומא בריגליהון וקרוחין וגביהון חיוורין	Behold, the goats which rose upon the flock were spotted in their feet, or streaked or white in their backs.
Syriac Peshitta	ܘܗܘܘ ܒܪܚܝܝܐ ܕܫܠܩܝܢ ܥܠ ܥܢܐ ܫܘܡܐ ܒܪܝܓܠܝܗܘܢ ܘܩܪܘܚܝܢ ܘܓܒܝܗܘܢ ܚܝܘܘܪܝܢ	The flock white-spotted (bald), and spotted, and variegated (highly decorated).
Latin Vulgate	Feminas varios et maculosos	The females were of divers

⁹ Adjective masculine plural absolute from the word “אָמץ”. HALOT mentions that this word only appears once in the Hebrew Bible. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and M. E. J. Richardson, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Accordance electronic ed., version 3.0. (Leiden: Brill, 2000); William L Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans

Publishing Company, 1972).

¹⁰ Compare page 320 to 313. See David J. A. Cines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Vol. 1: Aleph* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by David E. Green. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 32-327.

	et diversorum colorum	colours, and spotted, and speckled.
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		/ dappled (variegated)
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The Ancient Texts	The Texts (Gen. 31:12)	The Translations
Biblia Hebraica Quinta	עַל־הַצֹּאן עֲקָדִים נִקְדָּיִם וְנִבְרָדִים	The flock stripped (streaked), speckled and spotted (marked).
Septuagint	διάλευκοι καὶ ποικίλοι καὶ σποδοειδεῖς ῥαντούς	Quite white and many-colored (variegated) and ashen-sprinkled.
Targum Jonathan	והא ברחייא דסלקין על ענא שומא בריגליהון וקרוחין וגביהון חיוורין	Behold, the goats which rose upon the flock were spotted in their feet, or streaked or white in their backs.
Syriac Peshitta	ܘܗܘܘ ܥܘܠܝܘܬܐ ܘܥܘܠܝܘܬܐ ܘܥܘܠܝܘܬܐ	The flock white-spotted (bald), and spotted, and variegated (highly decorated).
Latin Vulgate	Feminas varios respersos atque maculosos	The females were of divers sprinkled, ¹¹ and spotted

Based on table observation above, three ancient texts – Quinta, Peshitta and Vulgate - are rather *ambiguous* about the color of the flock; they only mention the characteristic of the flock' appearance such as spotted, speckled and variegated (highly decorated). Targum seems to explain more further, in this case the color, which is white. Septuagint, on the other hand, is obviously describing the color of the sprinkled (spotted): the pale gray color of ash.

If Zechariah emphasizes on the description of the chariots' colors, then *spotted-skewbald* is the most plausible reading; because נִבְרָדִים only gives the appearance of the fourth chariot, not the color. TWOT also supports this reading and points out that because the first three are given colors and it seems incongruous to call the last pair “strong”.¹² Septuagint, Targum and Peshitta' translations seem to maintain the colors description of the chariots.

Zechariah 6:6-7

The Ancient Texts	The Texts (6:6b-7)	The Translations
Biblia Hebraica Quinta	וְהַבְּרָדִים יֵצְאוּ אֶל־ אֶרֶץ הַתִּימָן: וְהַחֲמִצִּים יֵצְאוּ	And the spotted ones go out to the land of the south; and the strong ones or spotted-skewbald ones go out . . .

¹¹ Participle plural perfect passive masculine accusative from *respergo*.

¹² Ibid.

Septuagint	καὶ οἱ ποικίλοι ἐξεπορεύοντο ἐπὶ γῆν νότου; καὶ οἱ ψαροὶ ἐξεπορεύοντο	And the variegated ones were going out to the land of the south; and the dappled-grays ones were going out
Aramaic Targum	וּפְצִיחִין נִפְקִין לְאַרְעֵ דְרֹמָא: וְקִטְמִנִין נִפְקִין	And the shining (dazzling) ones went out to the land of the south; and the ash horses went out.
Syriac Peshita	ܩܘܿܠܘܿܬܐ ܩܘܿܠܘܿܬܐ ܩܘܿܠܘܿܬܐ ܩܘܿܠܘܿܬܐ ܩܘܿܠܘܿܬܐ	And the parti-colored ones go out to the land of the south; and the red ones go out.
Latin Vulgate	Et varii egressi sunt ad terram austri; qui autem erant robustissimi exierunt	And the variegated (party-colored, various, diverse) were gone out to the land of the south; yet they which

		were the strongest ones have gone out.
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The geography plays important role in these verses. Because of the geography of Palestine, all of Israel’s enemies came against her from north or south. The east of Israel and Judah is Arabian deserts; on the other hand, the west side is sea Mediterranean. The appellation of North and South is also related to geography. Old Testament prophetic texts display on going tradition of the threat from the north country. The north country is the place from which attacks come from Assyria and Babylon (Isa. 14:31; Jer. 1:14-15; 6:1, 22; 15:12; 46:20, 24; Ezek. 26:7; 38:6; 39:2; Zeph. 2:13).¹³ For the South, there are three occasions where Edom is associated with the ‘south’ (Josh. 15:1; Jer. 40:20; Obad. 8-9), and given the significance of Edom elsewhere in the Book of the Twelve as an enemy of God’s people (Am. 9:12; Obad. 1:1; Mal. 1:4). Alternatively, it probably refers to Egypt (Is. 43:6) and it was another implacable and long-term enemy; the place which some Judah fled after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 44).¹⁴ In short, it was from the north and the south that the traditional enemies came into their land. It is these directions in which the horses and chariots go out.

All the ancient texts concur that both the black and white chariot go to the North - Assyria and Babel - to execute God’s judgment, and the spotted chariot go to the South. Also, Peshitta, Targum and Septuagint keep *consistently* the depiction of the fourth chariot both appearance and color. The distinction is Targum and Septuagint give no information about the red chariot which is

¹³ James D. Nogalski, *The Book of The Twelve Micah-Malachi* (Macon: Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 877.

¹⁴ Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah*

& *Malachi* (Downers, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 178.

mentioned earlier in verse 2; Syriac-Peshitta, nevertheless, adds one word “the red ones” in 6:7 which it is not appeared in Peshitta text in verse 3. It seems that Syriac-Peshitta discusses the destination and activity of *all* the chariots including the red ones which went and patrolled the earth (6:7). Thus, Syriac-Peshitta depicts every destination for every chariot.

Latin Vulgate, on the other hand, follows Targum and Septuagint in respect to disregard the red chariot. Then, Vulgate not only uses the word “strong” (same in 6:3), but also use that word in the superlative form in the verse 7 (“*issimi*” in Latin). Whether the usage of relative pronoun *qui* in the beginning of verse 7 modifies the fourth chariot only or the whole chariots, this superlative form is unique because it is not attested in *any* ancient texts. It seems Vulgate reminds and encourages the reader that Yahweh is the true king over all the earth (14:9), he will judge his enemies (1:21; 2:9; 6:8-9) and save his people (2:11; 8:20; 9:7; 14:16), and he is in control. Although the people of God feel fall short of promising and restoration of Israel’ fortune, the imagery of the strongest chariot(s) of God that go and patrol the earth confirms Zechariah’ message: God is in control and God is more powerful than their situation.

CONCLUSION

The different translation of the word “אֲמָצִים” in the Hebrew text not only because that word has two different meanings, but also there is *a reason* behind the selection of the meaning. Targum and Septuagint, for example, *consistently* and *faithfully* maintain the harmony of colors of all chariots (6:2-3): red, black, white and spotted-gray (ash). Then, when the red chariot is missing from the Hebrew text, they *faithfully* omit the red chariot (6-7). Syriac-Peshitta, on the other hand, *consistently* preserves the harmony of colors like Targum and Septuagint (6:2-3), but it does not *faithfully* commit to Hebrew manuscript. Rather,

Syriac-Peshitta adds the word “red” so that Peshitta could be *consistent* to verse 2-3 and provide *a clearer information* about the “red chariot” that is missing in all ancient manuscripts (6:6-7). Latin Vulgate is the *only* ancient manuscript that employs the word “strong” (6:3). This uniqueness continues to verse 7 when Latin Vulgate uses the superlative form that is not even attested in the Hebrew text. This research conveys that Latin Vulgate probably is eager to encourage Jewish people amongst their unpleasant situation (*theological implication*).

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