

5 In Whom You Trust? King Hezekiah's Piety in the Light of the Textual History of Isaiah 36:4-10 // 2 Kings 18:19-25

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Abstract: This chapter studies the piety and suffering of King Hezekiah of Judah in the context of the textual history of Isaiah 36 and its parallel text in 2 Kings 18. King Hezekiah is generally presented as a positive protagonist, and in Isaiah his personality is paradigmatic. Hezekiah's faith in YHWH's deliverance from Assyria, or indeed from any life-threatening circumstances, points beyond his personal character on the stage of Judah's history. On the other hand, the eighth-century prophecies, including those traditionally dated to Hezekiah's era, are often critical of anti-Assyrian activities. This chapter delves into the diverging textual traditions and provides hints on how the portrait of King Hezekiah developed from a saviour king to a model of faithfulness.

Keywords: literary criticism, textual criticism, Rabshakeh, Septuagint, biblical theology

In the current form of the book of Kings, Hezekiah is promoted as one of the few outstandingly pious biblical characters. According to 2 Kings 18:5, 'he trusted in YHWH (בַּיהוָה ... בָּטָח), the God of Israel, so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him'.¹ The validity of this statement is underlined by the fact that the verb בָּטָח does not appear in relation to any other king, either in a positive or in a negative sense. In the view of the Judaeen historian, Hezekiah should be remembered as the trusting king *par excellence*.²

The motif of trust is explored in even greater detail in relation to Hezekiah in the famous narratives of Isaiah 36:1–37:38 // 2 Kings 18:13–19:37, where the verb בָּטָח 'to trust' and its derivative בִּטְחוֹן 'trust' appear nine times, concentrated especially within the first speech of the Rabshakeh.³ Whilst one may feel inclined to connect 2 Kings 18:5 and 18:13–37 based on the centrality of the motif of trust,⁴ a closer look at these two blocks of texts suggests that the references behind the characterisation of Hezekiah as the trusting king are different. 2 Kings 18:5 parallels the concluding remarks of 23:25 concerning Josiah, highlighting two different religious virtues of two highly appreciated kings of Judah. In relation to Josiah, 2 Kings 23:25 emphasises his unconditional turning to YHWH: 'And there was no king like him before him who turned to YHWH (שָׁב אֶל־יְהוָה) with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the torah of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him'. Importantly, both statements

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¹ All translations of biblical texts used in this article are the author's.

² In descriptions of Israel's history, the motif of trust, specifically trust in YHWH, or the lack thereof, is scarcely addressed, with Deut 28:52 standing as the single text that touches on this topic. אָמֵן hiph. as a synonym of בָּטָח (Mic 7:5; 2 Chr 32:15, cf. 2 Kgs 18:30) is also barely appears in relation to kings, with Is 7:9 (Ahaz-narrative) as a striking exception. The motif of trusting YHWH is rather typical of texts exposing communal or personal piety, especially in Psalms (4:6, 9:11, 13:6, 21:8, etc.) and the Latter Prophets (e.g., Is 12:2, 26:4, 30:12, 15, 31:1, 32:9–11, 42:17, 47:10, Jer 5:17, 7:4, 8, 14, 13:25, 17:5, 7, 28:15, 29:31, Ez 16:15, 33:13, Hos 10:13, Hab 2:18, Zeph 3:2).

³ Cf. Is 36:4–7, 9, 15, 37:10 // 2 Kgs 18:19–22, 24, 30, 19:10. For the importance of the trust motif, see, e.g. Knoppers 1992: 418–425; Olley 1999; Bostock 2003; Panov 2019: 31–32.

⁴ Cf. Knoppers 1992: 418–419; Olley 1999: 75.

immediately follow the short summaries of the religious reforms of these two kings, described in 2 Kings 18:4 and 23:24, respectively. The structural similarities in these conclusions indicate that the statements regarding the pious qualities of the two kings—the full trust (בטח) of Hezekiah and the complete repentance (שוב) of Josiah—refer, in the first instance, specifically to these previously mentioned religious reform actions. Hezekiah removed the high places, the pillars, the Asherah, and even the bronze serpent. Having eliminated all other pretenders to trust, he is presented as one who devoted himself to YHWH alone.⁵ Something comparable is presented in relation to King Josiah, though with a focus on the completeness of the reform, underlining the idea of turning to YHWH completely.

The motif of trust in YHWH appears to be used in a different sense, however, in the Rabshakeh's speech. The first message of the Assyrian king provided through his emissary opens with the question: 'What is this confidence of yours? ... In whom did you trust that you rebelled against me?' (Is 36:4-5, 2 Kgs 18:19-20).⁶ Despite the textual and semantic problems,⁷ it is clear that the motif of trust or confidence is central to this episode and that trust appears here primarily in relation to political alliances rather than religious reforms. The Rabshakeh's continuing argument will discuss Hezekiah's trust in YHWH as an alternative to his trust in Egypt.

The problem with the theological arguments in the Rabshakeh's speech

In general terms, it appears that the overall positive image promoted about Hezekiah in the summary of 2 Kings 18:5 is counterbalanced by other statements which seem more critical (or at least less enthusiastic) about the king. According to 2 Kings 18:7b, he was a monarch rebelling against Assyria and refusing to serve it, who plainly admitted to having done wrong by doing so, and who paid an exceptionally large tribute from the royal and temple treasury to avert the consequences of his political move (2 Kgs 18:14-16). Whilst these statements may be considered neutral from the perspective of the biblical historian of 2 Kings, rebellion against an established order considered traceable to

⁵ Würthwein 1984: 410 (cf. also Panov 2019: 133) ascribes vv. 4 and 5 to different redactional layers, with v. 4 being the late Deuteronomistic text. This later origin is often questioned, however. Cf. Schipper 2009: 370; Young 2012: 10-103, 121; Thomas 2014: 341.

⁶ Cf. also 2 Chr 32:10, which, however, does not mention the rebellion of Hezekiah. In Chronicles בטח appears to take the nuance of staying calm, staying strong (cf. Prv 28:1).

⁷ The differences in MT-Is (אֶמְרָתִי) and MT-Kgs (אֶמְרָתָהּ) create uncertainty in Is 36:5 // 2 Kgs 18:20 regarding the cited speaker (Hezekiah, Sennacherib, or the Rabshakeh [cf. Beuken 2000: 348]). Contrary to GKC §44j, the 2nd pers. interpretation is quite strong. Beside the masoretic interpretation of 2 Kgs, see the traditions in 1QIsa^a; LXX-2 Kgs (cf. Barthélemy 1986: 248; Wildberger 1982: 1381; Catastini 1983: 223). The phrase אֶדְבַר־שְׁפָתַיִם is also vague. דָּא can be used as an emphatic ('surely, certainly'), but also as a restrictive particle ('mere, only'). דָּבַר־שְׁפָתַיִם can be used both in a neutral sense ('speech', cf. Ps 17:4, 59:13), or pejoratively, when mere speech is contrasted with actual deeds, as in Prv 14:23. Cf. also Akkadian *dabābtī šapti* in the succession treaty of Esarhaddon: 'While you stand on the place of this oath, you shall not swear this oath with your lips (*dabābtī šapti*) only but shall swear it wholeheartedly' (SAA 2.6: 385-387). The context suggests that the text cited by the Assyrian king is an illustration of Hezekiah's previously mentioned 'this confidence' (הַבְטָחוֹן הַזֶּה). I incline to interpret this verse as follows: 'You said — though this is mere lip talk — that "Strategy and force are needed for war!"' The citation is probably meant to exemplify the overconfidence (i.e. haughtiness) of Hezekiah (cf. a similar exchange in 1 Kgs 20:11). The citation could allude to an earlier exchange of messages of refusing to pay a tribute. Interestingly, in another context illuminating haughtiness regarding military achievements, Is 10:13 uses the synonyms of עֲצָה and גְּבוּרָה: בָּכֶם יָדִי עָשִׂיתִי: גְּבוּרָה וְכֹחַמִּי 'by the power of my hands I have achieved this and by my wisdom'.

divine will is often rejected by the canonical prophets, contemporaries of rebellious kings.⁸ Furthermore, although remarks concerning the financial costs of an adopted policy also appear in relation to other Judaeans kings,⁹ in the later theological evaluations of history, these actions were often seen as signs of precarious faith, inciting divine disfavour.¹⁰ Finally, it is striking that, in biblical records often dated to the period of Hezekiah, the misplaced trust of Judah is a recurrent theme (cf. Is 30:15, 31:1, 32:9-11). The political reality behind this veiled prophetic rhetoric is probably an alliance with Egypt against Assyria, contrary to Isaiah's explicit advice.¹¹ In Isaiah 36 // 2 Kings 18, the narrator places the reference to the futile trust in Egyptian support in the mouth of the Assyrian messenger (Is 36:6 // 2 Kgs 18:21), who is ultimately discredited, so that the reader might feel compelled to consider the Assyrian communication a false accusation against Hezekiah. Nevertheless, it is strange to see Egyptian support actually appear beyond the Assyrian speech, within a historical framework, presented even as a possible instrument of YHWH in delivering Hezekiah, as a fulfilment of Isaiah's promise concerning the news (נִשְׁמָעָה) that would compel the Assyrian king to return to his country (cf. Is 37:7, 9 // 2 Kgs 19:7, 9).

More importantly, there are multiple problems with the *rhetorical structuring* and consistency of Rabshakeh's speech addressed to Hezekiah. Whereas the idea of trusting Egypt is deeply integrated within the Rabshakeh's discourse, the theological elements in Isaiah 36:7, 10, 15, 18-20 // 2 Kings 18:22, 25, 30, 32-35, including the idea of Hezekiah trusting YHWH, raise numerous problems.¹²

- (1) First, the introductory phrase, 'Say now to Hezekiah...' (Is 36:3 // 2 Kgs 18:19) obviously presents the Rabshakeh's following speech as addressed to King Hezekiah himself. This pattern is consistently implemented in the form of 2nd person sg. verbs and suffixes in the verses preceding and following Isaiah 36:7 // 2 Kings 18:22. The reading tradition which switches (partially) to the 2nd person *plural* form in MT-2 Kings 18:22 and some adjacent witnesses, presupposing the Judaeans emissaries (?) rather than the king himself as testifying in an imaginary confession of trust in YHWH, breaks the rhetorical flow.
- (2) Second, whilst the MT-Isaiah 36:7a (and LXX-2 Kgs) keeps the 2nd person sg. form, presupposing Hezekiah as the subject, consistent with the verses preceding and following, this appears to stumble against the problematic reference in Isaiah 36:7b, which speaks of Hezekiah in the 3rd person, transforming this verse into an awkward construction.

⁸ Cf. Is 18, 20, 30:1-5, 9, 31:1-3, 33:8, Jer 25:11, 27:6-15, 28:14, 43:10; Ez 17:13-19, Hos 7:11, 12:2.

⁹ See 1 Kgs 14:26, 2 Kgs 12:19, 14:14, 24:13. Cf. also 1 Kgs 15:19, 2 Kgs 16:8.

¹⁰ The negative character of these actions is debated within the framework of the Deuteronomistic History (cf. the differing standpoints of Mullen 1992: 231-248 and Evans 2010: 33-36), but this is rather obvious in case of the Chronicler. Cf. 2 Chr 12:2-9 [for 1 Kgs 14:26], 16:7 [for 1 Kgs 15:18-19], 24:23-24 [for 2 Kgs 12:19], 25:20-24 [for 2 Kgs 14:14], 28:20-21 [for 2 Kgs 16:8], 36:18 [for 2 Kgs 24:13]. The negative implications may explain why Chronicles dropped this information from its records.

¹¹ As for non-biblical data concerning King Hezekiah's attraction to Egypt, see the royal symbolism attested by seal impressions in Deutsch 2003; Mazar and Ben-Arie 2018, 253-256.

¹² Cf., e.g. Rudolph 1951: 214; Würthwein 1984: 419-420; Na'aman 1995: 183; Panov 2014: 134; Kahn 2020: 130-132. Advocates of the originality of Is 36:7, 10 // 2 Kgs 18:22, 25 (e.g. Childs 1967: 82-83; Young 2012: 104-106; Thomas 2014: 385-387) emphasise the probability of the *realia* described in these verses (Hezekiah's reform or the Assyrian elements of the Rabshakeh's speech) but fail to account for the noted structural incongruences.

- (3) Third, in the Rabshakeh's speech, there is a core idea of the source of Hezekiah's trust being Egypt, as exemplified in Isaiah 36:6 and vv. 8-9. This flow of thought appears to be interrupted by a reference to trust in YHWH in 36:7a, so that the connection between vv. 7 and 8 becomes problematic.
- (4) Fourth, the Assyrian king is consistently referred to by his messenger in the 3rd person form.¹³ It was argued that this structuring intentionally aims to create an analogy between YHWH and Isaiah, on the one hand, and Sennacherib and the Rabshakeh, on the other. Sennacherib is presented as the one countering YHWH, whilst the Rabshakeh is his messenger, similar to Isaiah.¹⁴ Clearly, at least Isaiah 36:10 (and possibly also v. 7) distorts this structure, where the Assyrian king appears unexpectedly in the 1st person.¹⁵
- (5) Finally, the contextualisation of the reference to Hezekiah's cultic centralisation in Isaiah 36:7 // 2 Kings 18:22 is also problematic. Beyond the tensions between the two segments of this verse already noted, it is unclear how this act would be expected to challenge trust in YHWH.¹⁶ Even granting a non-Jewish interpretation of Hezekiah's cultic reform, the presumed rhetoric is clearly infelicitous. The YHWH cultus is not supposed to have been eradicated (as would be required for the argument to have force) but merely centralised in a single place.

The contention of the present study is that the theological elements within the Assyrian argumentation, and implicitly the image of the king as a righteous sufferer, represent later textual stages. The solidification of the image of King Hezekiah as a pious ruler, who firmly trusts in YHWH and is delivered from political constraint, is the result of the development of cultural memory. Whilst this statement is not new in itself,¹⁷ the argument will attempt to move beyond the realm of conjectures. It will be shown that this progress in constructing Hezekiah's image can also be traced in the textual history.

Methodological considerations

Empirical text-historical studies have demonstrated that the phases of textual formation (traditionally the subject of literary-critical studies) and textual transmission (analysed in text-critical studies) can overlap, so that explorations of textual history can potentially contribute to illuminating the literary formation of texts.¹⁸ In terms of empirical data, the synchronistic Hezekiah narratives—with their Hebrew textual bases, each with its entire arsenal of subsequent textual traditions (Hebrew and non-Hebrew)—represent a veritable gold mine.¹⁹ Yet this significant amount of evidence comes at high hermeneutical costs. Mapping the internal relationships of a multitude of sources (manuscript

¹³ Cf. Is 36:4, 8, 9, 12, 13 par. The 1st pers. forms like Is 36:5 // 2 Kgs 18:20 are set as citations mediated by the Rabshakeh, introduced by the 3rd person references to the Assyrian king.

¹⁴ See Rudman 2000; Beuken 2000: 339; Panov 2014: 21, 25.

¹⁵ It is unlikely that the idea of YHWH having sent him against the land (Isa) / the place (2 Kgs) would refer to the Rabshakeh.

¹⁶ As noted also by Wildberger 1982: 1400; Knoppers 1992: 419; Panov 2014: 22, 133. A different attempt by Thomas 2014: 386 to read this segment as a 'veiled protest' of those who disagreed with Hezekiah, put into the mouth of the Rabshakeh, hardly advances a solution.

¹⁷ Cf. Würthwein 1984, 420, arguing for the original 'profane' character of the Rabshakeh's message.

¹⁸ Cf. Person 1997: 75-79; Person 1999; Carr 2011; Vroom 2016: 262-23; Panov 2014: 60-61; Müller *et al.* 2014; Treballe Barrera 2020; Müller and Pakkala 2022.

¹⁹ Cf. Orlinsky 1939; Person 1997: 305-319.

traditions, ancient translations) of highly varied character poses considerable challenges for the interpreter.²⁰

Even more importantly, beyond the intricacies involved in evaluating the available text-historical data, synchronistic texts preserved across different books bring an additional layer of complexity into the analysis due to constant harmonisation attempts.²¹ Although for the most part, Isaiah 36–39 and 2 Kings 18–20 are closely related in their textual bases, the two main narrative versions occasionally present strikingly different variations, already at their conception, at the authorial (compositional) level of the Hebrew text. The differences may include different conceptual setups,²² with appropriate and conscious grammatical adjustments,²³ rhetorical readaptations, which aim to reintegrate an earlier version within a chosen framework,²⁴ differences in the structural ordering of the material,²⁵ rephrasing of sentences,²⁶ major or minor omissions or inclusions of sections or phrases.²⁷ This intentionally distinctive character of the two base texts has also been preserved, for the most part, by the later translators of the two narrative variants.²⁸ However, on a scribal level, in the transmissional phase, there are often clear tendencies to harmonise what had previously been conceived as a deliberately distinctive variant. Such harmonising intentions can be noted both by the Hebrew scribes of Isaiah and 2 Kings,²⁹ and by the later revisers and copyists of the ancient translations.³⁰ Therefore, any overconfidence among those dealing with this substantial amount of empirical evidence is tempered by the extreme complexities involved in analysing this dataset.

²⁰ E.g. general observations, such as the idea that LXX-Is basically used a text similar to MT, which can be useful when compared to, e.g. LXX-Jer, hardly help here, as occasional deviations show a distinctive underlying base text. Therefore, each case must be researched individually (cf. Troxel 2008: 41; Panov 2014: 83–84, 93). Also, whilst LXX-Is is known to contain many free interpretations, Van der Vorm-Croughs 2014: 305 notes that the translation of Is 36–39 ‘tends to be somewhat more literal than that of the preceding part of the book’. The differing tradition lines within the Old Greek of 2 Kgs (LXX^B, LXX^L, other traditions), or the Old Latin (often close to LXX^L), while having general characteristics (such as LXX^B being a literal recension, closer to the MT, and LXX^L closer to the Old Greek), can have these characteristics overwritten by the noted harmonising tendencies of the Lucianic text LXX^L (cf. Rahlfs 1911: 239–259).

²¹ Cf. Tov 2011: 12–17; Rezetko and Young 2014: 145–155, 162–165.

²² Cf. Is 36:2 vs. 2 Kgs 18:17 (number of Assyrian officials).

²³ Cf. וַיַּעֲמֵד (Is 36:2 – sg.) // וַיַּעֲמָדוּ (2 Kgs 18:17 – pl.); אֶלְיוֹ (Is 36:3 – sg.) // אֲלֵהֶם (2 Kgs 18:18 – pl.); לְהַשְׁחִיתָהּ (Is 36:10 – fem. suffix, congruent with הָאֲרָץ) // לְהַשְׁחִיתוֹ (2 Kgs 18:25 – masc. suffix, congruent with הַמֶּלֶךְ).

²⁴ The phrase וַיְהִי בִּצְרָבֶע in 36:1 signals the beginning of an independent text (cf. Ez 26:1, 33:21, Ruth 1:1, etc.), while the parallel formulation in 2 Kgs 18:13 (וּבִצְרָבֶע) integrates the narrative into a larger framework, beginning at 2 Kgs 18:9. Cf. כִּי־נִסִּית in Is 36:18 vs. כִּי־נִסִּית in 2 Kgs 18:32.

²⁵ Cf. Is 38:21–22 vs. 2 Kgs 20:7–8.

²⁶ Cf. Is 38:8 vs. 2 Kgs 20:7–11.

²⁷ For shorter phrases, see, e.g. Is 36:3 vs. 2 Kgs 18:18; 36:17 vs. 2 Kgs 8:32; Is 38:6 vs. 2 Kgs 20:6. For longer sections, see 2 Kgs 18:14–16, lacking after Is 36:1; Is 38:9–20 (the prayer of Hezekiah) missing from 2 Kgs 19.

²⁸ Occasionally earlier harmonising anomalies were preserved through the translations. Cf. MT and LXX for Is 37:18.

²⁹ Is 37:6 refers to the servants of the Assyrian king in pl., which is inconsistent with the Isaianic version. 2 Kgs 19:8 mentions the return of the Rabshakeh alone, which is consistent with Isa, but strange in the context of 2 Kgs.

³⁰ Cf. Panov 2014: 92–93 for 1QIsa^a and 2 Kgs, and Rahlfs 1911: 239–259 for LXX^L.

The textual history of Isaiah 36:7 // 2 Kings 18:22

	Isaiah 36:7	2 Kings 18:22
MT	וְכִי־תֹאמַר אֵלַי אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּטָהֲנוּ הֲלוֹא־הוּא אֲשֶׁר הִסִּיר חֲזַקְיָהוּ אֶת־בְּמֹתָיו וְאֶת־ מִצְבְּחָתָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לַיהוָה וְלִירוּשָׁלַם לִפְנֵי הַמִּצְבֹּחַ הַזֶּה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:	וְכִי־תֹאמְרוּן אֵלַי אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּטָהֲנוּ הֲלוֹא־הוּא אֲשֶׁר הִסִּיר חֲזַקְיָהוּ אֶת־בְּמֹתָיו וְאֶת־ מִצְבְּחָתָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לַיהוָה וְלִירוּשָׁלַם לִפְנֵי הַמִּצְבֹּחַ הַזֶּה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ בִירוּשָׁלַם:
LXX	εἰ δὲ λέγετε ἐπὶ κύριον τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν πεποιίθαμεν [- - -]	καὶ ὅτι εἶπας πρὸς με ἐπὶ κύριον θεὸν πεποιίθαμεν οὐχὶ αὐτὸς οὗτος οὗ ἀπέστησεν Εζεκίας τὰ ὑψηλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ θυσιαστήρια αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν τῷ Ιουδα καὶ τῇ Ιερουσαλημ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τούτου προσκυνήσετε ἐν Ιερουσαλημ

Two important, distinctive textual traditions exist across both narrative variants regarding the actual addressees. The 2nd person singular form, having Hezekiah as the implied addressee, appears in the MT-Isaiah (תֹּאמַר), the Vulgate (*responderis*), the Peshitta (*t'mr*), but also the Greek versions of 2 Kings (εἶπας in LXX^B and εἶπης in LXX^L).³¹ The 2nd person plural form, having the Judean emissaries (or the people?) as addressees, appears in LXX-Isaiah (λέγετε), arguably in 1QIsa^a (תואמר), MT-2 Kings (תֹּאמְרוּן), and some variant readings of LXX-2 Kings.³² How can one explain these two distinctive reading traditions?³³ Should the 2nd person singular form be considered a secondary adaptation to a context primarily dealing with King Hezekiah? Or should the 2nd person plural formulation be the secondary adaptation aiming to avoid the inconsistencies created with the second half of the verse (Hezekiah as both addressee and reference)? Whilst both options are theoretically plausible and apparently well-founded in independent witness traditions, I believe that a stronger case can be made for the singular תֹּאמַר form as the primary variant, and the plural תֹּאמְרוּן as the secondary adaptation.

The supportive value of the plural variant in LXX-Isaiah is at this point less strong than presupposed. One may observe that the OG of Isaiah *consistently* renders the 2nd person plural form throughout Isaiah 36:7-12, so that it appears to style the second part of the Rabshakeh's speech in Isaiah 36:7-12 (i.e. beginning at the problematic v. 7) intentionally as addressing Hezekiah's emissaries rather than the king himself as in vv. 4-

³¹ Cf. also Targ. Is Ms. Or. 1474 (Sperber's manuscript z) also having תִּימַר (Sperber 2004: 3.71), though this is apparently a minority reading.

³² Cf. the pl. variant εἶπητε attested in Theodoret of Cyrus' rendering of 2 Kgs 18:22 (Fernández Marcos and Busto Saiz 1992: 138). See further Coptic (Bohairic) pl. form *eretengō* for Is 36:7, confirming the majority reading of LXX-Isaiah. Most manuscripts of Targ. Is also adopt the plural variant (תִּימְרוּן).

³³ A distinctive, but probably irrelevant 3rd person (or impersonal) formulation is attested in some Greek (λέγεται – cf. Ziegler 1983: 250) and Latin (*responderit* – cf. Gryson 1987-1993: 732) manuscripts.

6.³⁴ The plural variant is therefore a stylistic adaptation channelling the interpretation of the Rabshakeh's speech.

With respect to 1QIsa^a, the current variant obviously shows the plural תואמרו, but it cannot be excluded that the final ו was inserted secondarily into the manuscript. Note that the space between תואמרו אלי is practically removed by the insertion of the final ו, which is atypical, and the ink colour of the letter ו is also suspiciously darker than by the surrounding letters.³⁵ These may suggest that the ו was inserted secondarily, implying that the primary variant copied by the first scribe was the singular form תואמר. The fact that 1QIsa^a uses the plural form התערבונא in v. 8 and the variant [ותבטח] לכם in v. 9 may entice one to muse over the existence of a reading tradition similar to LXX-Isa. However, both deviations from MT can be explained otherwise.³⁶ Moreover, the singular variants לכה and תוכל in v. 8 in 1QIsa^a underline Hezekiah as the addressee in the base tradition of the Assyrian speech.

On the other hand, the fact that despite the plural תאמרון in MT-2 Kings 18:22, both LXX^B (εἴπας) and LXX^L (εἴπη) follow the singular form is conspicuous. Given the character of especially Codex Vaticanus as a literal translation,³⁷ the singular renderings most likely presuppose a Hebrew base text with the singular variant תאמר, rather than the current plural Hebrew form.³⁸ Of course, we reach the limits of our investigation here by stating that the sg. reading variant is also well-rooted in the textual tradition of 2 Kings.

As noted above, reading Isaiah 36:7a // 2 Kings 18:22a as addressed to Hezekiah creates tension with the second half of the same verse, which refers to Hezekiah in the 3rd person. It is striking, however, that this reference to Hezekiah's reform is missing from LXX-Isaiah. It is often argued that the Egyptian Greek translator of Isaiah intentionally

³⁴ Cf. v. 8: μείχθητε for התערבו, ὑμῖν for לך, and δυνάσθε ἀποστρέψαι for תשיב, the pl. participle οἱ πεποισθότες for the sg. ותבטח לך; v. 12: πρὸς αὐτούς (Ø in Is, but see MT 2 Kgs 18:27), τὸν κύριον ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς ὑμᾶς for sg. אֱלֹהֵיךָ וְאַלֵּיךָ.

³⁵ This aspect is unnoticed in scientific literature, and the current form is generally taken at face value (cf. Kaiser 1969: 308; Wildberger 1982: 1381; Parry 2020: 245).

³⁶ The pl. form התערבו in 1QIsa^a (a reading also presupposed by the OG of 2 Kgs!) is less of a challenge to the contextual interpretation of ערב, and it might even be the original reading. The plural can be understood as addressing Hezekiah *and* the Assyrian king (!), rather than the Judaeans officials. ערב hitp. is interpreted in the sense of 'be mixed up' rather than 'to make a bargain' (cf. Ps 106:35, Prv 14:16; cf. also Beuken 2000: 333). Therefore the pl. התערבו is not necessarily a synchronism with the pl. form תואמרו (contra Wildberger 1982: 1381). Moreover, in 1QIsa^a, the variant לכם in v. 9 is probably a *secondary* correction of the primary לכה form. From a palaeographical viewpoint, the form of the final ם is quite distinctive here. It is difficult to tell whether this correction was made by the original scribe or by a subsequent reviewer. At any rate, ותבטח לכם is grammatically unlikely (cf. תבטחו לכם in Jer 7:4) and probably erroneous. The other tradition line, the LXX^{B+L} 2 Kgs 18:23 also uses the 2nd person plural μίχθητε, but the sg. variant σοι.

³⁷ On the faithfulness of LXX^B towards its Vorlage and lack of harmonising tendencies, see Orlinsky 1939: 44; Treballe Barrera 2020: 2; Schenker 2004: 7, 171-172. Orlinsky concludes that differences compared to the current MT-2 Kgs should probably be regarded as developments in the Hebrew text in a late phase.

³⁸ With Person 1997: 57. Contra Kaiser 1969: 308; Thomas 2014: 387, who hardly avoid the dangers of circular reasoning (due to the 3rd person reference to Hezekiah in the second half of the verse, the pl. form *must* be original).

dropped this reference to the centralised cultus for theological reasons.³⁹ However, whilst theological adaptation of translated sections is a well-documented phenomenon in the OG of Isaiah, the presupposition that translators could have dropped theologically uncomfortable units is questionable. In general, Van der Vorm-Crouchs notes, ‘the number of pluses and minuses in LXX Isaiah that have as their background a change of content for ideological or theological reasons is relatively limited. More commonly, such changes were realised by means of the reshaping of entire sentences rather than by the addition or omission of a mere word or a few words.’⁴⁰ Therefore, the lack of Isaiah 36:7b from LXX-Isaiah more likely suggests that it was missing from the translator’s base text.⁴¹

Nonetheless, although assuming that Isaiah 36:7b was a secondary addition partially solves the rhetorical conflict existing within v. 7 itself, it does not remove the problematic character of the remaining v. 7a within its immediate context, namely the interruption of the argumentation within the Rabshakeh’s speech in vv. 6, 8-9. Moreover, even though we see that in one interpretive tradition (LXX-Isa) this was considered a conceivable reading, in the absence of a proper follow-up, v. 7a appears to be left hanging from a rhetorical perspective.⁴² The discussion of this issue awaits clarification of Isaiah 36:10 // 2 Kings 18:25.

The textual history of Isaiah 36:10 and 2 Kings 18:25

	Isaiah 36:10	2 Kings 18:25
MT	וַעֲתָה הַמִּבְלָעַדִּי יְהוָה עָלִי עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְהַשְׁחִיתָהּ יְהוָה אֱמַר אֵלֵי עֲלֵה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְהַשְׁחִיתָהּ:	עֲתָה הַמִּבְלָעַדִּי יְהוָה עָלִי עַל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַשְׁחִיתוֹ יְהוָה אֱמַר אֵלֵי עֲלֵה עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְהַשְׁחִיתָהּ:
LXX	καὶ νῦν μὴ ἄνευ κυρίου ἀνέβημεν ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν ταύτην πολεμῆσαι αὐτήν [- - -]	καὶ νῦν μὴ ἄνευ κυρίου ἀνέβημεν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον τοῦτον τοῦ διαφθεῖραι αὐτόν κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με ἀνάβηθι ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ταύτην καὶ διάφθειρον αὐτήν ⁴³

With respect to the Hebrew variants, there is an important difference in setting the intent of the Assyrian campaign. In Isaiah 36:10, the Assyrian operation has a broader objective of going up against ‘the land’ (עַל־הָאָרֶץ), while in 2 Kings 18:25, at least for the first

³⁹ According to Van der Kooij 1981: 55, 70, the emphasis on the unique cultic place in Jerusalem would have questioned the legitimacy of the ancient Jewish temple of Leontopolis which was supported by Isaiah’s Greek translator.

⁴⁰ Van der Vorm-Crouchs 2014: 463 (cf. also 481). Although she does reckon with some examples where ‘omission’ can be explained on theological grounds (cf. 463-470), the examples presented are reformulations rather than true omissions (cf. Is 51:9-10). One example of an assumed ‘omission’ would be Is 61:7, but here one can hardly find a theological motivation. Pakkala 2013 and Richelle 2016 attempt to make a general case for omission as an identifiable scribal method in transmitting biblical texts. However, cases for large-scale intentional omissions for theological reasons in the transmissional (and not the compositional) stage fail to appear in these studies. What textual studies (including Pakkala’s) do exemplify is that rewriting problematic passages was a frequently used method (which indirectly also precludes the possibility of an omission).

⁴¹ Cf. also Catastini 1983: 224. Van der Vorm-Crouchs 2014: 482-483 also added this example among those presupposing a different Vorlage for the OG translation.

⁴² Cf. Van der Vorm-Crouchs 2014: 483; Thomas 2014: 385.

⁴³ LXX^B and LXX^L show only minor differences here. Instead of LXX^B ἄνευ κυρίου, LXX^L has ἄνευ τοῦ κυρίου, and instead of LXX^B εἶπεν, LXX^L has εἶπε.

part of the verse, Assyria goes up against ‘the place’ (עִיר־הַמָּקוֹם). The consequences of the lexical choice are grammatically fully integrated into the larger context, with the appropriate adaptations of the suffixes and pronouns to the feminine (אֵלֶּהָ, Is) and masculine (מִן־הָמָקוֹם, 2 Kgs) terms. The textual divergence is probably more than pure literary variation or a scribal memory variant. On a geographical level, אֵרֶץ is a broader term that assumes a campaign against Judah as a country.⁴⁴ מִן־הָמָקוֹם, however, has a more limited connotation. While מִן־הָמָקוֹם is used in a wide variety of constructions, it is also well known as a designation of Jerusalem, or more specifically, its cultic place (the temple), especially frequent in Deuteronomy and the so-called Deuteronomistic phraseology.⁴⁵ It appears, therefore, that compared to Isaiah, 2 Kings wishes to emphasise the threat posed not merely to Judah as a country, which has indeed been devastated (cf. 2 Kgs 18:13), but specifically the city of Jerusalem, or perhaps even Jerusalem as the cultic place. At the same time, however, it is striking that the second part of the phrase in both Hebrew variants adopts the reading אֵרֶץ. To this phenomenon I shall return below.

Again, even more importantly, in the OG of Isaiah 36:10b, the phrase purporting to be a direct revelation of YHWH to the Assyrian king is entirely missing. Theological motivations can hardly account for this phenomenon. Alternatively, it is often argued that the omission of this verse could be accidental, the result of a parablepsis.⁴⁶ Vroom highlights the methodological problem that ‘when a variant can be explained as either a secondary insertion or an accidental omission, text-critical judgements become arbitrary’.⁴⁷ In an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of parablepsis, he raises serious questions regarding the possibility of large chunks of text being omitted due to parablepsis.⁴⁸

Given that the number of cases where LXX-Isaiah is much shorter than MT is suspiciously large within the Hezekiah narratives,⁴⁹ this could be considered another instance where the Vorlage of the OG was shorter than the current MT.⁵⁰

However, the missing equivalent in LXX-Isaiah of 36:10b is not the only problem with this verse. The Greek variant of the remaining Isaiah 36:10a is also unusual in an Isaianic setting. Two aspects in the phrase μὴ ἄνεν κυρίου ἀνέβημεν of LXX-Isaiah look suspicious. In the context of the theological consistency with which the Greek

⁴⁴ Cf. the remark in 2 Kgs 18:13 stating that the king of Assyria came up against all the cities of Judah (עַל כָּל־עָרֵי יְהוּדָה).

⁴⁵ מִן־הָמָקוֹם is often used in Deut in relation to the special cultic place (cf. 12:2, 14:23, 16:2, etc.). See further מִן־הָמָקוֹם הַזֶּה in relation to Jerusalem, or more specifically to the temple in 1 Kgs 8:29-30, 35, 2 Kgs 22:16-17, 19-20 (cf. 2 Chr 6:20-21, 26, 40, 7:12, 15, 24:24-25, 27-28). מִן־הָמָקוֹם, especially the expression מִן־הָמָקוֹם הַזֶּה, is particularly frequent in Jeremiah (cf., e.g. Jer 7:3, 6, 7, 14, 20, 14:13, 16:3, 9, 12, 19:11, 12, 22:3, 24:5, 27:12, 28:3, 4, 6, 29:14, 32:37, 33:10). This frequency is striking, especially when compared to the general absence of מִן־הָמָקוֹם in other prophetic books.

⁴⁶ Cf. Catastini 1983: 224; Van der Vorm-Crouchs 2014: 473. The final words in the two phrases of Is 36:10 are similar (וְהַשְׁחִיתָה / לְהַשְׁחִיתָה). Van der Vorm-Crouchs 2014: 473-474 presents seventeen examples of possible larger examples of parablepsis, but she admits that other explanations, like textual condensation or a different Hebrew base text, may also explain the shorter Greek translation.

⁴⁷ Vroom 2016: 263.

⁴⁸ Cf. Vroom 2016: 273-279. He does not exclude this possibility in the exceptional case when the visually similar words leading to haplography occupied approximately the same position within the copied or read scroll (276).

⁴⁹ See Is 37:8, 14, 25, 28, 34, 38:6, 14-15, 17.

⁵⁰ So also Person 1997: 40; Person 1999: 376. Some of the seventeen examples provided by Van der Vorm-Crouchs as possible cases of omission by parablepsis in LXX-Is also return in a later chapter discussing the option of a different Hebrew Vorlage (cf. Van der Vorm-Crouchs 2014: 481-484).

translator of Isaiah renders references to YHWH when mentioned by non-Jewish speakers—a feature hardly noticed in scholarly literature—the rendering κυρίου calls for attention. In all other cases where an Assyrian mentions Judah’s divinity, the Greek translator of Isaiah consciously avoids having a foreigner refer to YHWH as κύριος. In such cases, the Judean God יהוה is consistently translated as θεός.⁵¹ The current Greek variant of Isaiah 36:10a is hardly coherent with the translator’s principle.

In addition, one may note an unusual plural 1st person variant of ἀνέβημεν ‘we have come’ in Isaiah 36:10a, which is also found in both Greek textual traditions of 2 Kings, LXX^B and LXX^L. In neither Isaiah nor 2 Kings does this plural form concur with the current Masoretic 1st person sg. עָלִיתִי. This data suggests that the OG of 2 Kings had a reading variant in its base text. The plural form ἀνέβημεν / עלינו might eventually be argued to concur with the narrative version of 2 Kings 18:17-18, with its three messengers arriving at Jerusalem and addressing the Judean king, in contrast to Isaiah having the Rabshakeh as the sole protagonist.⁵²

Given the inconsistencies of the LXX-Isaiah 36:10 noted above, I suggest that the unconventionally rendered Isaiah 36:10 was not present in the original translator’s *Vorlage* and was incorporated into the Greek translation of Isaiah only during a revisional phase. Revision in LXX-Isaiah has been discussed mostly in relation to double translations in the OG Isaiah, as double translations provide the most appropriate cases for studying this phenomenon. Thus Seeligmann notes that particular renderings may indicate revision when we ‘come across more lengthy doublets that do not merely constitute a different rendering, but actually give evidence of a totally different system of translation’.⁵³ A careful re-examination of the double translations by Van der Vorm-Croughs comes to the conclusion that substantial translational differences may indeed indicate revision.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the work of revisers can hardly be limited to double translations, and — whilst more difficult to prove — the unconventional translational phenomena in Isaiah 36:10 align well with this phenomenon.

The origin of the theological component of Rabshakeh’s speech

The above investigation of the textual history of the Assyrian speech addressed to Hezekiah suggested that at least Isaiah 36:7b+10ab were later additions. Although no explicit text-historical data can be extracted regarding Isaiah 36:7a, the Greek translational peculiarities of this segment tend to concur with the observations regarding v. 10a. Less clear-cut than Isaiah 36:10a,⁵⁵ yet, from an Isaianic viewpoint, the rendering of יהוה יְהוָה by κύριον τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν is similarly unconventional. One might argue that this verse is also a later Greek revision rather than the original translation of Isaiah.

⁵¹ See Is 36:15, 18, 20. Cf. also Is 37:20, where the foreigners will know the uniqueness of YHWH also in the form of θεός (יהוה לְבַדָּהּ = ὁ θεὸς μόνος). The original textual form might have been here יהוה אֱלֹהֵימָהּ, as preserved in 2 Kgs 19:19 (cf. also 1QIsa^a). Nonetheless, the OG appears to have translated a variant identical to the current MT of Is 37:20, rendering יהוה rather than אֱלֹהֵימָהּ as θεός.

⁵² Note that the pollution of the Isaianic narrative variant due to harmonisation is also observable in Is 37:6, where the plural מַלְאֲכֵי מֶלֶךְ-אַשּׁוּר ‘the servants of the king of Assyria’ is most likely an import from 2 Kgs.

⁵³ See Seligmann 1943: 33.

⁵⁴ See Van der Vorm-Croughs 2014: 184, cf. also 150-153, 171-176.

⁵⁵ Whilst one could argue that this is only partially a case of a divine name uttered by a non-Judean, in that it cites what Judeans say, the name is nonetheless ultimately pronounced by a foreigner, even in the form of indirect reference.

At any rate, reading Isaiah 36:7a+10a // 2 Kings 18:22a+25a as a distinct argumentative layer makes perfect sense: ‘If you say (to me): “In YHWH, our God we trust!”, now,⁵⁶ is it without YHWH that we/I have come up against this country/place?’ This concise Judaeen theological-historiographical concept that the history of Judah is not a sequence of coincidental events, but the result of divine planning, is put into the mouth of a foreigner. Echoes of this very idea appear later again in the same narrative cycle at Isaiah 37:26 // 2 Kings 19:25, where the prophet argues that Assyria’s activities have long been planned by YHWH himself. It is striking to see, yet again, that this theological evaluation is missing from the LXX^B-2 Kings, probably hinting at another later addition.⁵⁷

The verses Isaiah 36:7a+10a // 2 Kings 18:22a+25a could once have stood beside one another,⁵⁸ being relocated in the course of textual development, partly due to extensive bidirectional harmonisation, of which we have examples within this narrative cycle as well.⁵⁹ The empirical data, especially the missing Isaiah 36:7a, 10a in LXX-Isa, suggests that this enhancement took place in more than one step. First, v. 10b was added, probably primarily to the Isaianic context (speaking of the Assyrian invasion of the ‘country’), from which it was synchronised back to 2 Kings 18:25. This could explain the discrepancies in the terminology, הַמִּקְוִים הַזֶּה in 2 Kings 18:25a and עַל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת in 18:25b. Still later is the reference to Hezekiah’s cultic reform, including the unusual claim of cultic centralisation in Isaiah 36:7b // 2 Kings 18:22b (cf. 2 Kgs 18:4 and 2 Chr 32:12).

The reconstruction of the textual history of Isaiah 36:4-10 // 2 Kings 18:19-25 also has implications for the image of Hezekiah in the biblical tradition. If the theological component in the Assyrian message is argued to be a later construct, this brings Hezekiah’s reliance on Egypt as a source of power more into the foreground. This data is not only closer to the glimpse we get of his era from other contemporary sources but may eventually also explain how an early form of the narrative could have played a role during a late pre-exilic period of Judean history, in King Zedekiah’s struggle for salvation.⁶⁰ In a subsequent literary stage, the image of the confident Hezekiah was reshaped into that of a trusting and delivered pious sufferer, thereby transforming royal historiography into a paradigmatic narrative.

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⁵⁶ Note that the direct citation is also followed by וְהָיָה in 2 Kgs 18:21. Note also that, like in v. 21, in v. 25 (the purported follow-up of v. 18:22a) there is no ך in the MT.

⁵⁷ Even within the Antiochene recension (LXX^L), the originality of this fragment is debatable. Cf. Brooke *et al.* 1930: 367; Fernández Marcos and Busto Saiz 1992: 142.

⁵⁸ This option has been raised by Kahn 2020: 131 n. 26, though making a different suggestion.

⁵⁹ Note especially the extensive relocations in Is 38 // 2 Kgs 20.

⁶⁰ Some scholars argued for the close connection between the Hezekiah-narratives and Judah’s final days as described in Jer 37, whereby the Hezekiah-narrative appears to have served as a model for the Judaeen king. Cf. De Jong 1984: 139; Hardmeier 1990.

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