

Between Scroll and Scripture

Edited by
ANTONELLA BELLANTUONO
EBERHARD BONS
DANIELA SCIALABBA

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*
652

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Studies in Septuagint, Biblical Greek,
and Papyri

edited by

Antonella Bellantuono, Eberhard Bons,
and Daniela Scialabba

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This volume is dedicated to our teacher, colleague and friend
Professor Anna Passoni Dell'Acqua,
Università Cattolica di Milano,
with our gratitude and our best wishes.

Preface

The Greek language of literary collections like the Septuagint, the Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and Roman epochs and the New Testament is influenced by a wide range of linguistic elements that are difficult to reduce to a common denominator. In the past, scholars have identified various categories of Hebraizing and Aramaizing features that are common to most of the books of the Septuagint that were translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic source. Concerning syntax, the almost ubiquitous paratactic style of narrative texts leaps to the eye. With regard to terminology, the particular use of nouns is conspicuous, e. g. of ἄνθρωπος preceded by a negation to mean “nobody” (e. g. Ps 104[105]:14) or of εἰρήνη that leads to strange-sounding expressions like “peace of the war” in 2 Kgdms [2 Sam] 11:7.

Even Septuagint books that have been written in Greek from the outset, e. g. the Wisdom of Solomon, betray certain traces of Hebrew style, namely, the so-called *parallelismus membrorum*. To a lesser degree, the same holds true for some New Testament passages. In fact, here and there, a certain influence of Hebrew terminology or style is undeniable, e. g. the use of a preposition followed by πρόσωπον with genitive (e. g. Luke 2:31; Acts 3:20) instead of a simple preposition. Another Hebraism is the use of προστιθῆμι as an auxiliary verb followed by an infinitive with the meaning “to continue to do something” (e. g. Luke 20:11; the parallel text in Mark 12:4 uses the adverb πάλιν, “again”). These and numerous other features of New Testament texts are reminiscent of the Hebrew language although the books in question were neither written in Hebrew nor translated from a Semitic source. In some way or another, and for whatever reason, the authors of the respective New Testament books may simply have preferred expressions they were familiar with or been aiming at suggesting a certain continuity between the Greek Bible and the New Testament.

Be that as it may, in the past, much ink has been spilt on identifying linguistic features of the Septuagint, Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and Roman epochs and the New Testament that can be explained against a background of Semitic languages, especially Hebrew and Aramaic syntax and typical terminological choices. On the other hand, we should bear in mind that all these books were written in Greek whether they are translations from a Hebrew or Aramaic source or were composed in Greek from the very beginning. Therefore, it is worthwhile studying not only the Semitic heritage of these different literary collections but also their Greek background in the widest sense: the literature of the Classical and Hellenistic eras, inscriptions scattered throughout the Mediterranean region

and, last but not least, spoken Greek and everyday language as reflected by the numerous papyri of Egyptian origin. Furthermore, many of the biblical texts of the Septuagint and the New Testament have left their traces in early Christian literature. Thus, the question arises as to how they were actually understood by readers whose mother tongue was Greek, who were familiar with Greek culture, history and mythology and who were trained in Greek literature. In other words: how did later Christian authors who were not familiar with a Semitic language understand a Greek text sprinkled with Hebraisms or other semiticizing features?

Admittedly, this field of research has not been neglected in the past. However, the sheer mass of texts and documents at our disposal in the first decades of the third millennium, many of which have been accessible for only a few years, requires a fresh approach to old and controversial problems raised by the biblical texts. Added to this, the research landscape has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades. This is the case with biblical studies as well as studies of antiquity in general. In fact, since the end of the 1980s, biblical scholarship has seen a shift of emphasis. Some developments deserve mentioning without any list claiming to be exhaustive: the discovery of the scrolls from the Judean Desert that led to a reassessment of the variety of biblical texts in the last centuries B.C.E.; the attention given to the Septuagint as a version of the Bible to be studied in its own right; a new appreciation of biblical Wisdom literature which had been neglected for a long time in favour of the Pentateuch and prophetic texts; a historical and philological approach that takes into consideration not only the canonical texts of both Testaments but also the large amount of the so-called “intertestamental” literature as well as the works of Philo and Josephus and the Christian Apocrypha; and, finally, the importance of the history of interpretation that provides some more keys to biblical texts and to the trials and tribulations of their interpretation over the centuries until today. With regard to studies of antiquity, it is important to recall some developments, again without claiming to be exhaustive: the importance given to social history including the status and the rights of women, girls, slaves, foreigners and children in the various ancient societies; a re-evaluation of traditional opinions concerning the relationship between occidental and oriental peoples and so-called “barbarians”; a reappraisal of the Hellenistic era, its history, its political structures, its literature and philosophy; a great deal of attention devoted to the topic of emotions, feelings and affections; a new approach to the function of what is commonly called “religion”, namely, phenomena like priesthood, sanctuaries, sacrifices, and, furthermore, the distinction between “official” cults and private or individual practices.

The articles gathered in the present book address varied questions raised by biblical and non-biblical texts:

– specific vocabulary of the Septuagint and the New Testament and its linguistic background: Antonella Bellantuono, “A Self-Sufficient God – Investigation into

the Meaning of the Epithet ἀπροσδεής (1 Macc 12:9; 2 Macc 14:35; 3 Macc 2:9)”; Eberhard Bons, “Visiting the Sick – The Specific Use of the Verb ἐπισκέπτομαι in Biblical and Non-Biblical Literature”; Dorota Hartman, “Translating Anger in the Bible: The Case of παροξύνω”; Christoph Kugelmeier, “Ἰσοδυναμέω again – Observations on a Key Concept of Translation Theory in the Prologue to the Book of Ben Sira”; Michaël van der Meer, “Perseverance in the Septuagint – The Semantic Fields of ἰσχύω and ἀνδρίζομαι in the Greek Bible and Contemporary Documents”; Nathalie Siffer, “L’usage des hapax bibliques θεομαχέω et θεομάχος à la lumière de la littérature grecque antique”;

– the study of papyri and their importance for biblical scholarship: Ralph Brucker, “Papyri as Textual Witnesses to the Septuagint Psalms – Overview and Preliminary Checklist”; Juan Chapa, “Some Notes on P.Oxy. IV 656”; Patrick Pouchelle, “La relation entre כִּבֵּן et ἐλέγχω dans le Pentateuque : La construction d’une correspondance à la lumière de quelques papyri hellénistiques”;

– the issue of so-called neologisms as well as Hapax legomena in the Septuagint: Rosario Pierri, “Neologisms in Antiquity and in the Septuagint”; Marco Settembrini, “‘Who Has Heard of Such a Thing?’ (Is 66:8) – Hapax legomena in Isaiah 56–66”;

– problems related to the interpretation of difficult verses or expressions in biblical and non-biblical Jewish literature: Miriam Carminati, “The Rejoicing Wisdom in Prov 8:30–31. A Comparison of the Usage of the Hebrew Root שִׁחַ and the Greek Verb εὐφραίνω in Prov 8:30–31”; Flavio Dalla Vecchia, “J’étais auprès de lui en plein accord’ (Pr 8,30a): Sagesse et Créateur/creation”; Giulia Leonardi, “Ruth as γυνή δυνάμεως: An Investigation of the Different Conceptions of Virtue between the Jewish Origins of the Narrative and its Christian Reception”; Adrian Schenker, “Messager du grand dessein – titre messianique ancien? Critique textuelle d’Isaïe 9:5–6”; Daniela Scialabba, “Aseneth, a Woman who Becomes ‘City of Refuge’ for Many: Remarks on the Female Protagonist of the Novel ‘Joseph and Aseneth’”; Romina Vergari, “ψυχὴ εὐλογομένη πᾶσα ἀπλῆ, ἀνὴρ δὲ θυμώδης οὐκ εὐσχήμων (Prov 11:25) – A blessed soul is fully simple; an immoderate man is indecorous”.

The authors of these articles are former students, colleagues and friends of Anna Passoni Dell’Acqua, professor of Biblical Philology at the Catholic University of Milan until her retirement to whom this volume is dedicated. Among her academic teachers, she counted outstanding figures such as Orsolina Montevecchi (1911–2009), papyrologist at the Catholic University of Milan, and Enrico Rodolfo Galbiati (1914–2004), biblical scholar at the same university. Since the early 1970’s, i. e. for more than fifty years, Anna Passoni Dell’Acqua has introduced numerous students to the specific features of biblical Greek, textual criticism, Septuagint studies and papyri. At a time when only very few biblical scholars showed any interest in the Septuagint, let alone the papyri of Hellenistic Egypt, she published her first ground-breaking studies, e. g. on the

transformation of the biblical metaphor of God as a rock in the Septuagint (“La metafora biblica di Dio come roccia e la sua soppressione nelle antiche version”, *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 91, 1977, 417–453). A solid knowledge of the biblical languages as well as ancient Greek and Latin enabled her to deepen not only the Hebrew and Greek metaphors and epithets used for speaking of God. She contributed also to the Italian translations of entire books of the Septuagint (e.g. the Third Book of Maccabees, in: P. Sacchi [ed.], *Apocrifi dell’Antico Testamento*, vol. IV, Brescia: Paideia, 2000, 573–664). To this should be added that she published numerous in-depth articles on the particular vocabulary of the Septuagint that testify to her broad knowledge on several fields of research: cultural history, Greek literature, papyri and the Septuagint itself. A striking example is her article on the garments and make-up of the “daughters of Zion”, the young women mentioned in Isaiah 3:16–24. Here, she seeks to explain the very rare technical terms used in the Greek translation of the passage (“Colori e trasparenze nella *haute couture* dell’Egitto greco-romano”, *Semitica et classica* 1, 2008, 113–138). Other articles deal, e.g., with the language of transgressions and sins (e.g. “La terminologia dei reati nei προστάγματα dei Tolemei e nella versione dei LXX”, *Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Papyrology, Athens 25–31 May 1986, Athens 1988, II*, 335–350).

Since 2008 and 2009, when the editors met for initial methodological and thematic considerations and for workshops in Strasbourg and elsewhere in France, Germany and Italy, Anna Passoni Dell’Acqua has accompanied the publication of the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (vol. 1, Alpha – Gamma, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020) as a member of its Advisory Board. A clear highlight in her academic career was the award of the “Chair Gutenberg” at the University of Strasbourg in 2015–2016. Last but not least, many of the authors of the present book owe Anna Passoni Dell’Acqua a great debt of gratitude: as a supervisor of his or her Master or doctoral thesis or as a colleague who spared neither time nor effort to support them with her broad expertise. We wish her continued creativity and, above all, the great satisfaction of being able to experience the fruits of her many years of teaching and research: the persons of a younger generation teaching in Italy and elsewhere in the world who follow in her steps.

In conclusion, we express our gratitude to the authors of the contributions gathered in the present volume who have agreed to honor their former teacher, colleague or friend by writing an article on a topic of biblical philology in the broadest sense. Thanks are due to the editors of the collection “Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament”, namely, Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey (University of Zurich), and the editorial staff of Mohr Siebeck Publishing house, in particular Tobias Stäbler and Markus Kirchner, for supporting this editorial project. Finally, our thanks go to Dr Michael Tait (Ilkley, UK), who proof-read and translated some of the articles of this volume, and to Barbora Landová Mgr., University of

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May 2025

Antonella Bellantuono, Eberhard Bons, Daniela Scialabba

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ROMINA VERGARI

“A blessed soul is fully simple; an immoderate man is indecorous”

(ψυχὴ εὐλογουμένη πᾶσα ἀπλή, ἀνὴρ δὲ θυμώδης οὐκ εὐσχήμων)

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First Part: The Specific Vocabulary of the Septuagint and
the New Testament and Its Linguistic Background

A Self-Sufficient God

Investigation into the Meaning of the Epithet ἀπροσδεής
(1 Macc 12:9; 2 Macc 14:35; 3 Macc 2:9)

ANTONELLA BELLANTUONO

1. Introduction and Overview

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to participate in this volume in honor of Anna Passoni, my mentor and guide during my undergraduate master's years. Professor Passoni was the one who introduced me to the world of the Septuagint and, in particular, to the biblical papyrology, which has become my cherished area of research.

In this article, I shall discuss a topic I began working on with Professor Passoni during afternoons that were rainy but rich in intellectual exchanges at the Catholic University of Milan. I shall investigate the usage of the adjective ἀπροσδεής in the Septuagint and in the *Letter of Aristeas*, trying to understand the reason for the adoption of a such a rare term to talk about God and the motivations that have could inspired the authors to use it. The adjective ἀπροσδεής occurs three times in the LXX and only in the books of the Maccabees (1 Macc 12:9; 2 Macc 14:35; 3 Macc 2:9). In two occurrences, it is an epithet of God; in one it refers to the Jews. From the etymological point of view, the lexeme is a compound of the verb δέω, "to be in need", the preverb πρὸς and an α- privative – a typical construction of the *koine* Greek – and it means "without want of anything, self-sufficient".

It is interesting to note that if, on the one hand, this term occurs only three times in the Septuagint, on the other hand, it seems to arise in a Jewish Hellenistic context. Admittedly, it is not possible to affirm this with absolute certainty since the lack of evidence may be fortuitous owing to circumstances related to the preservation of the texts.

However, according to the existing data, never attested in Classical Greek Literature, the term is used for the first time in the *Letter of Aristeas*, § 211 – the dating of the letter is debated – and then it becomes employed frequently from

the Septuagint onwards, both in Jewish authors such as Philo¹ and Josephus² and in Greek writers like Plutarch³ or Lucian⁴.

In order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, I shall begin by analyzing the usage of the semantic family in the documentary sources, then, in a second stage, in the Books of Maccabees, and, finally, in the *Letter of Aristeeas*.

2. The Word Family in Papyrological Sources

The adjective ἀπροσδεής is never attested in the documentary sources. Instead, coming from the same semantic family, the term ἀπροσδέητος occurs here and there in the papyri with the same meaning as ἀπροσδεής i.e. “not needing anything”. This adjective occurs only in letters dated between the 2nd and the 1st cents. B.C.E.

In P.Oslo 3.148, a document of the 2nd/1st cents. B.C.E. written by a person urging the addressee not to reject a supplication, we find the following formulation (lines 6–8): καίπερ εἰδῶς ὅτι ἀπροσδέητος εἶ παρακαλήσεως τῷ σε διαφορὰν καὶ λογισμὸν ἔχειν, “although I know that you do not need any exhortation because you are of a different opinion”. The same usage is attested in P. Tebt. 1.19, a letter dating from 119–114 B.C.E., where a certain Polemon urges Menches to accelerate the collection of the taxes: ἐκομισάμεθα τὰ παρὰ σοῦ ἡμῖν γραφέντα καὶ ὑπὲρ ὧν ἐσήμαινες πέμψαι γεωργῶν ἀπροσδέητοί ἐσμεν “I received what you wrote to me, and, regarding the farmers whom you said you were sending, I do not require them”.

Therefore, though the term ἀπροσδεής is not attested in papyri, the homoradical ἀπροσδέητος has the same meaning and is used in colloquial language. Thus, the adjective means “not to need anything in particular”. It does not have the sense of “self-sufficient”.⁵

3. The Adjective ἀπροσδεής in the Books of the Maccabees

A usage of ἀπροσδεής similar to that of the papyri occurs in 1 Macc 12:9 in the letter sent by Jonathan to the Spartans in order for them to renew the alliance with the Jews: ἡμεῖς οὖν ἀπροσδεεῖς τούτων ὄντες παράκλησιν ἔχοντες τὰ

¹ *Agr* § 54; *Abr*. § 30.

² *Ant. Iud.* 8.111

³ E.g. *Per.* 16.7.6

⁴ *Hist. conscr.* 36.1

⁵ See also P. Tebt. 1. 23, 119/114 B.C.E., Tebtunis: οὐκ ὀρθῶς κρίνομεν πέπρακταί σοι μὴ ἐκ τῆς ἡμῶν προεδρίας πεφροντικέναι ἀπροσδέητον ἐτέρων γενέσθαι. “I consider that you have acted badly in not having been careful that he should be independent of others owing to my superior rank.”

βιβλία τὰ ἅγια τὰ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν ἡμῶν, “now, although we are not in need of these things [i. e. alliance and friendship, see verse 8]) since we have as our source of courage the Holy Books in our hands”.

In the previous verses, Jonathan speaks of the letter that was sent to the Jews around 305 B.C.E. by the Spartan king Areos, during the priesthood of Onias, in order to establish an alliance between the two peoples on the basis of a presumed common descent of Spartans and Jews from Abraham. Although the Jews did not need such an alliance since they had the sacred books, they wished to renew it (see verse 10).⁶

Regardless of the question of the authenticity of the text,⁷ scholars are unanimous in considering that the structure of the letter recalls the typical Greek scheme for official epistles, as is clear from the opening section.⁸

UPZ.1.107, 99 B.C.E., Memphis⁹

1 Macc 12:6

[βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος ὁ ἐπικαλού-
μενος Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ βασίλισσα]
[Βερενίκη ἢ ἀδελφὴ τῷ στρατηγῷ
τοῦ Μεμφίτου καὶ τῷ] [φρουράρ-
χῳ καὶ τῷ ἐπιστάτῃ τῶν φυλακῶν
καὶ ἀρχι-] [φυλακίτη καὶ τῷ ἐπὶ
τῶν προσόδων καὶ βασιλικῷ γραμ-
ματεῖ] [καὶ] τ[οῖς] ἐπιστάταις τῶν
ιερώων καὶ ἀρχιερεῦσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις
τοῖς] [τὰ β]ασιλικὰ πραγματευόμε-
νοις χαίρειν.

Ἰωνᾶθαν ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ ἡ γερουσία τοῦ ἔθνους
καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς δῆμος τῶν Ἰουδαίων
Σπαρτιάταις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς χαίρειν

King Ptolemy, called Alexander, and
Queen Berenice, his sister, to the
strategus of the Memphite nome, to
the commander of the garrison, to the
epistates of the guards and to the chief
of police, to the administrator of the

Jonathan, the high priest, and the senate of the
nation and the priests and remaining citizen
of the Judeans to their brothers the Spartans,
greeting.

⁶ The origin of this legend is uncertain. Stephanus of Byzantium, in his work *Ethnica*, 334,11, s.v. Ἰουδαία, identifies a certain Oudaeus from Thebes as the progenitor of the Jews: Ἰουδαία. Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ πολυίστωρ, ἀπὸ τῶν παίδων Σεμράμιδος Ἰούδα καὶ Ἰδουμαία, ὡς δὲ Κλαύδιος Ἰούλιος, ἀπὸ Οὐδαίου Σπάρτων ἐνὸς ἐκ Θήβης. The story of the relationship between their ancestors and the philosophers or poets of classical Greece probably circulated among the Jews of the diaspora. In the fragments of the Jewish Alexandrian historian Aristobulus (2nd cent. B.C.E.) handed down by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep. Ev.* VIII.10; XIII,12), the author shows that Greek philosophy depends on ancient Judaism and that Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato derived their theories from a Greek translation of the Bible. See L. TROIANI, “Il libro di Aristea e il giudaismo ellenistico”, II, 31–61.

⁷ A. MOMIGLIANO, *Prime linee di storia della tradizione maccabaica*, 141–151; E. BICKERMAN, “Makkabäerbücher”, 786 c; J. A. GOLDSTEIN, *I Maccabees*, 447–452.

⁸ F. X. EXLER, *The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri (3rd c. B.C. – 3rd c. A.D.): A Study in Greek Epistolography*.

⁹ M.-T. LENGIER, *Corpus des Ordonnances des Ptolémées*, 180–182.

UPZ.1.107, 99 B.C.E., Memphis

1 Macc 12:6

the revenues and to the basilicagram-
mateus, to the epistates of the tem-
ples and to the high priests, as well as
to the other civil servants of the royal
administration, greetings.

Moreover, the Greek style of the letter does not look like a translation from Hebrew. This is particularly evident both from the presence of a great variety of connective particles instead of *καί*, which is the usual Greek usage in the translation from Hebrew, and the frequent employment of participles, e.g. *παράκλησιν ἔχοντες* (verse 9)¹⁰ or the expression *τοῦ βασιλεύοντος ἐν ὑμῖν* (verse 7). In other words, although most of 1 Macc was a translation from Hebrew, the letter in its original form was surely written in an elegant Greek. This is also clear from the use of *ἀπροσδεής*. If a double translation is assumed, it is possible to hypothesize the original letter contained *ἀπροσδέητος*, a term attested in the language of Greek epistles (see above) and that, in Hebrew, this may have been translated with *לֹא חָסַר* (see 1 Kgs 17:16) or with *לֹא צָרִיךְ/לֹא חָסַר* (see Sir 42:21^{B,M}) and then retranslated with *ἀπροσδεής*. Be that as it may, in 1 Macc 12:9, the term *ἀπροσδεής* indicates the same meaning as in the papyri, i.e. independence and self-sufficiency, without theological or philosophical undertones.

This is in marked contrast to an innovative use of the word in 2 Macc 14:35 and 3 Macc 2:9: in both attestations the adjective occurs in prayer as an attribute of YHWH.

In 2 Macc 14:35, the word is inserted in the supplication that the priests of the temple address to God after the visit of Nicanor. In fact, the commander had ordered the priests to surrender Judas Maccabaeus, threatening them that if they helped the man to escape, he would raze the temple to the ground, transforming it into a place of worship to Dionysus. At that point, the priests raised a prayer for God's protection of the temple: *Σὺ κύριε τῶν ὅλων ἀπροσδεής ὑπάρχων ηὐδόκησας ναὸν τῆς σῆς σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι*, "Although you are not in need of anything, you, Lord, thought it right that there be among us a sanctuary for Your tenting."

The translation can be construed in two ways: considering *τῶν ὅλων* as a complement of specification of *κύριε* (see *Lett. Ar.* § 211) or of *ἀπροσδεής* (see 3 Macc 2:9). The Syriac follows the first hypothesis with *ܠܗ ܕܥܡܢ ܕܥܡܢܐ* "Lord, Saint of all", while the Vulgate reads *tu Domine qui universitatis nullius indiges*, "You, Lord, who need nothing of the universe". The latter reading seems to me more appropriate since *ἀπροσδεής* followed by a complement of specification appears also in other occurrences, e.g. 3 Macc 2:9 (see below); Josephus (*Ant. Iud.* 8.111:

¹⁰ J.A. GOLDSTEIN, *I Maccabees*, 453–454.

ἀπροσδεὲς γὰρ τὸ θεῖον ἀπάντων. “for the Deity stands in need of nothing”); and Philo (*Deus* 56; *Agr.* 54, *Abr.* 30). Moreover, the phrase κύριος τῶν ὄλων is never attested in the LXX.¹¹

In 2 Macc 14:35, the adjective ἀπροσδεής is inserted in a praise in order to emphasize the fact that though YHWH did not need to be praised and did not require a sanctuary, he decided to place his authority in the temple among his people.¹² Even if it recalls Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kgs 8:27) and his letter to Hiram (2 Chr 2:5), this phrase is full of innovative elements such as the presence of the term σκήνωσις, “tenting”, which is first attested in this very passage. Therefore, it is not surprising that our term appears in this context.¹³ Like ἀπροσδεής, the noun σκήνωσις does not occur in Greek Classical literature although the verb σκηνέω is frequently attested. However, the noun is attested in SB 1.3924, a papyrus from the 1st cent. CE, and an edict of the emperor Germanicus. Thus, the language of the text is clearly influenced by the colloquial Greek of the papyri.

The intent of the prayer is to emphasize that God’s choices are all dictated by his will. He does not need prayers, nor does he need to reside in a temple in order to be venerated. On the contrary, his acts are deliberate choices performed in favour of his people. Therefore, seeking his protection and exalting his benevolence, the faithful worshipper emphasizes God’s self-sufficiency and the fact that God needs nothing besides himself.

A similar usage occurs in 3 Macc 2:9, in the prayer that the Jews address to YHWH, imploring him to prevent Ptolemy IV from entering the “Holy of Holies” in the Temple:

σύ, βασιλεῦ, κτίσας τὴν ἀπέραντον καὶ ἀμέτρητον γῆν ἐξελέξω τὴν πόλιν ταύτην καὶ ἡγίασας τὸν τόπον τοῦτον εἰς ὄνομά σοι τῷ τῶν ἀπάντων ἀπροσδεεῖ καὶ παρεδόξασας ἐν ἐπιφανείᾳ μεγαλοπρεπεῖ σύστασιν ποιησάμενος αὐτοῦ πρὸς δόξαν τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ ἐντίμου ὀνόματός σου.

“When you created the infinite and boundless world, you, O king, chose this city and consecrated this place for your name, although you do not need anything, you have glorified with a splendid manifestation, by establishing the building of this place for the glory of your great and honored name”.

Extending from the first verse to the twentieth, this prayer contains a succession of attributes of God and his acts. The text shows a tripartite structure: the incipit (verse 2), the aretalogy (verses 3–9) and the supplication (verses 10–20). The adjective ἀπροσδεής occurs in the aretalogy: YHWH chose the city of Jerusalem to erect the Temple in which His presence would be manifested. This choice is

¹¹ See also J.A. GOLDSTEIN, *II Maccabees*, 490–491.

¹² For more information about the temple as a place chosen by God, see J.A. GOLDSTEIN, *II Maccabees*, 491.

¹³ D.R. SCHWARTZ, *2 Maccabees*, 486.

even more significant if we consider that God did not need to make such a gesture to show His power. This passage recalls 2 Macc 14:35 insofar as, on the one hand, it refers to the temple as the place where God has chosen to dwell and, on the other, underlines his self-sufficiency. This similarity would suggest a dependence between the two texts, an hypothesis already pointed out by several scholars, foremost among them, C. W. Emmet.¹⁴ The latter listed the lexical and syntactic similarities between the two books but rejected the hypothesis of a common author. Instead, he supposed that the two works were composed in the same period in Alexandria, probably by members of the same school of thought. Moreover, Emmet highlighted the strong connection between the style of 3 Maccabees (and consequently of 2 Maccabees) and the papyri: “The evidence of the papyri confirms the general accuracy of the official and technical language of the book, and suggests that it belongs to the Ptolemaic period, not the Roman.”¹⁵

The occurrences of the term ἀπροσδεής in the supplications in 2 and 3 Maccabees could support the hypothesis that the concept of God’s self-sufficiency has been inserted with the aim of highlighting the difference between the Lord of Israel and his faithful, who are δέοντες, i. e. in need of divine help.

In the light of what is stated above, some questions arise: where does this idea of a “self-sufficient” God come from, since it does not seem to occur elsewhere in the LXX? What inspired the authors to use such a language to speak of God? Moreover, the LXX, expresses, rather, the idea of the believer who needs nothing because he has divine help (e. g. Ps 22:1^{LXX}), not that of a self-sufficient God. An answer could be found in the *Letter of Aristeas*, a text more or less contemporary with the books of Maccabees, where the meaning of ἀπροσδεής seems to be clearer.

4. The Adjective ἀπροσδεής in the Letter of Aristeas

The adjective in the *Letter of Aristeas* occurs in the banquet section in § 211. In this paragraph, Ptolemy II wishes to understand the essence of the state of kingship:

Τίς ὄρος τοῦ βασιλεύειν ἐστίν; Ὁ δὲ ἔφη· Τὸ καλῶς ἄρχειν ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ μὴ τῷ πλούτῳ καὶ τῇ δόξῃ φερόμενον ὑπερήφανον καὶ ἄσχημόν τι ἐπιθυμῆσαι, εἰ καλῶς λογιζοιο πάντα γάρ σοι πάρεστιν ὅσα δέον. Ὁ θεὸς δὲ ἀπροσδεής ἐστίν καὶ ἐπιεικής. Καὶ σὺ καθόσον ἄνθρωπος ἐννοεῖ, καὶ μὴ πολλῶν ὀρέγου, τῶν δὲ ἰκανῶν πρὸς τὸ βασιλεύειν.

¹⁴ C. W. EMMET, *The Third Book of Maccabees*, 156. For more information about the literary affinity with other Greek authors, see J. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Troisième livre des Maccabées*, 35–39.

¹⁵ C. W. EMMET, *The Third Book of Maccabees*, 157. For more information about date and authorship, see S. RAUP JOHNSON, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity*, 129–181.

“What is the criterion of kingship?” And he answers “To dominate oneself well and not be carried away by wealth and glory to desire anything arrogant and unseemly, if you would reason well in fact you have everything you need. But God is one who needs nothing and is equitable. And you, for your part, think like a human being does and do not aspire to many things, except those things sufficient to kingship”.

As Wright affirms, the term ὄρος is usually translated with “limit”, but, in this case, the meaning of the term is more “criterion” or “standard”. The king wants to understand “by what standard is true kingship measured?”¹⁶ The question is inserted in an exhortation to self-control, a concept presented already in § 197 and returning again in § 222, where the king is invited to dominate himself (τὸ κρατεῖν ἑαυτοῦ) without letting himself be carried away by instincts. Thus, the *Letter of Aristeas* wants to compare the king to God, clearly stating the fundamental difference between the two: while the ruler possesses what he needs, God needs nothing at all. In fact, the king is human and finite, unlike God.

The section is certainly a polemic against the deification of Hellenistic rulers.¹⁷ This hypothesis is strengthened by the presence of the adjective ἐπιεικής, “fair”, i. e. towards his subjects, a term often used in petitions addressed to the king in the Hellenistic period.¹⁸ Therefore, unable to reach the self-sufficiency of God, the ruler must place himself in the path to reach it, despising wealth and vain goods. Only in this way can he properly lead his people.

The concept of self-sufficiency, of not needing anything and being self-sufficient, seems to be a *motif* present in the books of the Maccabees and in *Aristeas*, but not in other biblical books. However, on closer examination, this idea recalls the concept of ἀυτάρκεια, a topic dear to Greek philosophy from Plato onwards. In fact, the virtue of ἀυτάρκεια makes the one who possesses it self-sufficient, both from a spiritual and material point of view, because the virtue satisfies every desire of both soul and body. According to Platonic philosophy, the Good that is the ultimate aim to which humans must aspire, does not need anything for its intrinsic perfection: therefore he who achieves it needs nothing but the Good itself. During the Hellenistic period, this idea flowed into Stoic philosophy where ἀυτάρκεια constituted the way to seek inner freedom and the highest level of moral perfection. In the Hellenistic period, the concept occurs in the treatises on kingship such as the one by Epphantus in which the king is

¹⁶ B. G. WRIGHT, *The Letter of Aristeas*, 371.

¹⁷ R. TRAMONTANO, *Lettera*, 192; M. HADAS, *Aristeas to Philocrates*, 183; L. CERFAUX, L. TONDRIAU, *Un concurrent du Christianisme. Le culte des souverains dans la civilisation Gréco-Romaine*, 208–218. For an insight on the relationship between the Letter and Hellenistic kingship, see O. MURRAY, *Aristeas*, 371, P. HADOT, art. *Fürstenspiegel*, VIII, 587–589.

¹⁸ W. SCHUBART, “Das hellenistische Königsideal nach Inschriften und Papyri”, 1–26; H. PREISKER, art. Ἐπιείκεια κτλ, 588–590; A. BELLANTUONO, *The Biblical God And His Greek Shape*, I Part.

invited to become αὐτάρκης following the example of God,¹⁹ i. e. the Stoic λόγος (Stobaeus, *Flor* 277.12). The passage is very similar to the one in the *Letter of Aristeas*: ὁ δ' ἐπίγειος ἀμῶν βασιλεὺς πῶς οὐχ ὁμοίως αὐτάρκης; ἀπεικάζων τε γὰρ αὐτὸν ἐνὶ ἄν ἀπεικάσειε τῷ κρατίστῳ “And our earthly king, how will he likewise be self-sufficient? By making himself as similar as possible to the one and most powerful being.” The author also explains the meaning of αὐτάρκεια (279,10) ἀλλὰ αὐτῷ τις οὔσα ἀρχὰ πάντα μὲν ἀγοῖ, ἀγοῖτο δ' ἄν ὑπ' οὐδενός. ὅπερ ἔντι μὲν τῷ θεῷ “but because it [αὐτάρκεια] is a domain of self it is capable of governing all things, it is not commanded by anyone; it is a quality that God possesses”.

However, Stoicism understood αὐτάρκεια not only as self-sufficiency but as a detachment from the things of the world in order to achieve ἀπραξία and ἀφορία, which would lead to εὐδαιμονία, happiness. Such a spiritual path was not appropriate for the God of Israel, nor did the idea of detachment from the world, understood as his own creation. For this reason, it is possible that, in Jewish circles in Alexandria, God was considered αὐτάρκης, but in the more Platonic sense of the term. Nonetheless, the adjective was connoted and it became necessary to use a new word, ἀπροσδεής, to describe YHWH, especially in prayers. In other words, from what we know so far, the LXX created a neologism which subsequently entered into the Greek language. This hypothesis can be corroborated by another observation: when the semantic family of αὐτάρκεια is found in sapiential texts such as the book of Sirach, it always refers to humans, e. g. Sir 5:1 μὴ εἴπῃς αὐτάρκη μοί ἐστιν, “and do not say, I am self-sufficient”.²⁰

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, by contrast with what usually happens in the LXX, where translators borrow terms from Classical Greek, in this case it is not a word that has been borrowed, but an idea, a concept. The adjective ἀπροσδεής is a term “modelled” on the figure of YHWH and influenced by the contemporary philosophical and literary context. Well known to the Alexandrian Jews, the idea of self-sufficiency suited the description of the God of Israel perfectly and is particularly appropriate in invocations. The usage of the term αὐτάρκης, on the other hand, would have generated too violent an overlap with the profane literature, and, probably for this reason, while taking up the concept, the authors

¹⁹ For more information about the *Περὶ Βασιλείας* and their authors, see E. W. GOODENOUGH, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship”, 55–10; L. DELATTE, *Les traités de la Royauté d'Ecphante, Diotogène et Sthénidas*; A. SQUILLONI, *Il concetto di regno nello pseudo-Ecphante*, 8 n. 15; F. MUCCIOLI, *Gli epiteti ufficiali dei re ellenistici*, 357–358.

²⁰ In Hebrew, the text indicates the power in my hands. An exception is Deuteronomy 32:10 (LXX) in which God makes his people self-sufficient, αὐτάρκησεν, but this is a misinterpretation of the Hebrew see DOIGNEZ, HARL, *Le Deutéronome*, 327.

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