CODEX SINAITICUS AND THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Albert Pietersma

To begin with the most obvious fact: the study of Codex Sinaiticus has entered a new era. Gone are the days of having to rely on someone else’s judgment regarding this or that reading of the important fourth century codex. No longer do we have to see through a glass dimly, since we can now behold Codex Sinaiticus face to face, thanks to the prodigious efforts of all the partners and participants in the Codex Sinaiticus Project. Biblical scholarship stands forever in your debt. Whether one wants to study this codex as an artifact, a manuscript, or a text (rather, a series of texts)—thanks to you, the data is now but a few keystrokes away.

While, as a Septuagint scholar, I wholeheartedly affirm the great importance of Codex Sinaiticus, the history of my discipline nevertheless issues an important caveat: Let us not, with the advent of Codex Sinaiticus on line, return to the era of the so-called Great Uncials, notably Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Sinaiticus. During the reign of ‘the Great Uncials’, it was effectively these three codices that decided the text of the Old Greek text, also known as ‘the Septuagint’. Moreover, while Codex Sinaiticus may be the oldest surviving copy of the Christian Bible,¹ for a Septuagint scholar it can be no more (or less) than a manuscript, dated to the fourth century C.E., of a Jewish translation from Hebrew (or Aramaic), which originated some half a dozen centuries earlier and which became, in time, the Christian Old Testament.

My focus today is but a limited one and my findings are perforce preliminary. The subject of my paper is the Book of Psalms and my chief interest lies in Codex Sinaiticus as a witness to the Old Greek text of Psalms; in other words, the text as produced in distinction from the text as received. As a result, when I speak of Codex Sinaiticus, or MS S, I have in mind, unless noted otherwise, the Book of Psalms. My central question: How faithful a witness is Codex Sinaiticus to the original Greek text of Psalms?

As my point of departure I take Alfred Rahlfs’ Psalms cum Odys,² the best critical edition of the Greek Psalter in print. To do so would seem the more appropriate, seeing that the two aspects of my interest, namely, the witness of Codex Sinaiticus to the Old Greek text, on the one hand, and the history of its own transmission, on the other, are featured in Rahlfs, albeit in quite contrasting ways, the first one by its prominence, the second one by its perceived insignificance.

I begin with Rahlfs’ treatment of the corrections in Codex Sinaiticus. Since his prime interest was in the Old Greek text of Psalms, and since Psalms cum Odys, unlike later volumes of the Göttingen Septuaginta, editio maior, could in any case not be based on complete collations of all known manuscripts, one tends to be sympathetic to how he proceeded. As Rahlfs himself notes:

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² Alfred Rahlfs, Psalms cum Odys (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Gottingensis editum X; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967 [1931]). Though in principle a critical edition, by Göttingen standards Psalms cum Odys is best regarded as a provisional critical edition. A better one is yet to come.
“Hierin [L’] (L + Tht + Sy]) sind stillschweigend eingeschlossen . . . B°C SC RCα3
(the correctors of B S R have been subsumed, without mention, under L
double-prime, i.e. L(ucian) + Theodoret + Syriac). While “SC(corrector)” does at
times occur in the *apparatus criticus*, as does “S=original reading),” typically it
is not possible to infer from the citation of S whether or not the codex at the
point in question, has been corrected. The corrections to S are, therefore,
effectively lost to the reader. At times Rahlfs even ignores SC when SC is
unique.4

All of the above means, of course, that the corrections in this copiously
corrected manuscript cannot be studied on the basis of Rahlfs’ edition, given
that the majority is not explicitly noted. Thanks to the Codex Sinaiticus
Project, that study can now begin. That Codex Sinaiticus was heavily corrected
to the so-called L(ucianic) text, i.e., the Byzantine Psalter text, which from
circa the third/fourth century C.E. onward eclipsed all its rivals, was already
stated by Rahlfs and becomes patently obvious from reading the codex itself.
What remains unclear is to what extent this text is at times our best
attestation to the Old Greek. An example may be apt:

Ps 103:18 χορογρυπλί/ας S*+ = Rahlfs] λαγωάοις SC O(teste Hi) L’Su A’
2110 Sa = MT (ἜΣΣ) = OG = NETS

Though the question has been asked, the answer has not as yet been given.5

Rahlfs’ collations of the main text of Codex Sinaiticus have proven to be
first-rate, indicative both of his scholarship and of his primary interest.6 It
bears noting as well that, for deciding his critical text, his fourth rule
cites the combined witness of Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (S) as the final
arbiter.7 Consequently, his textual description of Codex Sinaiticus continues
to be of interest and importance. His conclusions may be stated as follows:8

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3 Ibid., 69.
4 For example in 147:3 σε > σοι.
Septuagint,” *HTR* 26 (1933): 57–72, where he calls this the most important
piece of work yet to be done on the Greek text of Psalms (here 71).
6 For a couple of oversights, however, see εξαμαρτωλός (S*) for ἀμαρτωλός
in Ps 138:19, and τῶν δουλῶν (S*) for τοῦ δούλου in 142:2. When a correction is
clearly prima manu, however, it need not be noted.
7 Rahlfs, *Psalmi cum Odis*, 71–72. Rule 1: when the three older groups
(Upper Egyptian, Lower Egyptian, Western) are in agreement, that reading is
counted as OG; rule 2: when the three older groups disagree among
themselves, the reading which equals the Masoretic Text is deemed to be OG;
rule 3: when the older groups disagree with MT, while the younger recensions
(Origen and Lucian) agree with MT, the former should be counted as OG and
the latter should be discounted as being a Hebraizing correction; rule 4: when
none of the first three rules applies, Rahlfs proposes to follow the lead of B +
S, though he is loath to do so when these two stand alone. In principle,
therefore, combinations and configurations of text-groups play a key role in
Rahlfs’ approach, and when these fail to render a decisive verdict, he turns to
the combination of MSS Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, members of the Lower
Egyptian group, according to Rahlfs.
8 Ibid., 26–27.
1. MS S has been written carelessly, frequently omitting not only words and phrases but also entire lines. As well as omissions, the manuscript contains a great many orthographical mistakes, often corrected.

2. Since MS S often omits items that are lacking in MT, the text of S must at some stage have undergone correction to the Hebrew, presumably via Origen’s Hexapla.

3. At times MS S may uniquely have preserved the OG text, a likely example of which he sees in 26:8 where, according to Rahlf’s, ἐξήτησεν το πρῶτον μου matches MT’s consonantal text ἐξήτησεν, while other witnesses attempt to make better sense of the original Greek.

   Whereas Rahlf’s discusses the three points I noted in reverse order, I have deliberately reversed his order for the simple reason that the manner in which a manuscript is written is of direct relevance for the person who aims to assess its textual character and value. Noteworthy in Rahlf’s description is his emphasis on “omissions.” Descriptively, however, “additions,” “transpositions” etc. deserve equal billing. Moreover, an “omission” in S may well turn out to be an “addition” elsewhere.

I have now worked twice through Codex Sinaiticus (Psalms), translating it into English and representing, in English, as many of its corrections as possible. Where this not feasible I have placed a dagger (†).

In light of this, I would suggest that Rahlf’s observation that S has not been written particularly carefully (”besonders sorgfältig”) is an understatement. As I see it, S swarms with “mistakes” of all kinds, producing results ranging from the explanatory to the wholly unintelligible. Most of the mistakes have been corrected but some, interestingly, have not. A few examples must suffice: Ps 43:23 πρότα for πρόβατα (’sheep’), 77:42 ρος for χειρός (’hand’), 85:14 προσέθεντο for προσέθεντο; 102:15 ημεραι ραι for ημεραι; 105:2 ακουστα for ακουστα (’heard’); 129:3 υποστήσητε for υποστήσητε; ριε (Ps 135) for ρια (Ps 131); zero for ριβ (Ps 149). Given that these readings either make no sense or confuse the reader, one might have expected that, at some stage, they would have been corrected.

The phenomenon of phonetic spelling looms rather large in S, but for the most part poses no problems to the modern text interpreter. On occasion, however, it gives rise to ambiguity. So, for example, κτίσις (’creation’) for κτισις (’acquisition’) in Ps 103:24 and 104:21. Using the Hebrew as an arbiter of meaning very quickly makes clear that whereas κτισις is the original reading of the Greek, within Greek tradition κτίσις became virtually universal.

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9 Ibid., 26.
10 Similarly, its numerous mistakes tend to raise questions about the circumstances of the codex’s initial production and its prospective function.
11 My use of the dagger (†) for this purpose derives from Hatch and Redpath, Concordance to the Septuagint, which uses it to mark uncertain Hebrew-Greek equivalence.
12 Ibid., 27.
13 If there is a difference in this regard between Scribe D (init. – 97:31 and Scribe A (97:32 – fin.), it is not obvious.
14 To what extent a lack of concern for semantic coherence was characteristic of scribal culture in the fourth century may be an interesting question to entertain. It would not, however, seem to be of direct relevance for the modern interpreter. Like the original Septuagint itself, the text is what it is regardless of the reasons for it.
in 103:24 and very popular in 104:21, including among its supporters S and 2110 (a fourth century papyrus), but not B (Codex Vaticanus).\footnote{See further κληθησαντα for κληθησαντα in 103:5, καινη for καινη in 106:9, ελαιον for ελαιον in 108:24 and, one step removed, ελαιον for ελαιον in 151:4.}

Also of interest is the codex’s use of contracted words, among them the so-called *nomina sacra*. What stands out here is inconsistency in the use and form of contraction, only some of which is attributable to the two individual scribes who are said to have copied Psalms.\footnote{I am indebted here to the information gleaned from the Codex Sinaiticus Project.} More interesting is the frequently mechanical manner in which contraction was applied. So, for example, except for two instances both attributable to scribe D (76:4 and 77:8), πνευμα was contracted in both singular and plural and irrespective of reference. Contextual sense, therefore, played no role whatsoever in its use.\footnote{Curiously, in 26:10 both παθηρ (πιρ) and μυτηρ (μερ) are contracted, as well as μυτος (μεσ) and υσος (υς) respectively in 138:13 and 142:1.}

The second and third points of Rahlfs’ description of S are very closely intertwined, seeing that both have to do with formal agreement with the Hebrew text. Rahlfs’ citation of 26:8 (see above) as an instance of Old Greek, uniquely preserved by S, is the more convincing since P. Bodmer XXIV (Ra 2110)\footnote{See further below.} can now be cited as further support, even though it reads a compound verb (ἐξελεπησαν). Equally striking is 138:14: ἔβαιμασαστοθην S\älG = MT] -θης ἐπικινης. Other instances in which S, either alone or with scattered support, is deemed to have preserved the original text can be found throughout Psalmi cum Odis.

As P. L. Hedley noted in his review of Rahlfs\footnote{Hedley, “The Göttingen Investigation.”} and as I have argued elsewhere,\footnote{Albert Pietersma, “The Present State of the Critical Text of the Greek Psalter,” *Der Septuaginta–Psalter und seine Tochterübersetzungen* (ed. A. Aejmelaeus and U. Quast; MSU 24; Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 12–32.} when Rahlfs produced his edition, he tended to be too tolerant of materials that clearly originated in transmission history.\footnote{Since Rahlfs’ edition, on the one hand, aims to reconstruct the original text of Greek Psalms, but, on the other hand, does so within the cadres of *Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, the accretions of (largely) Christian tradition might be difficult to ignore altogether. Rahlfs’ perspective, however, is internally contradictory, since on the one hand, the object of research is a text circa II BCE, while on the other hand, it is a Christian understanding of that text. That same contradiction has now unfortunately been perpetuated in LXX.Deutsch, which carries the subtitle, *Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung*. Judging by its title, therefore, LXX.Deutsch renders the (Christian) Old Testament in Greek (cf. *text as received*), while according to its introduction it aims to translate a Jewish translation of some centuries earlier (cf. *text as produced*).} At the same time, however, he was well aware that such items could scarcely be included in his critical text, despite the fact they had widespread support. He therefore forged a compromise of sorts: to include such cases of widely attested textual accretion in his critical text but to place them within square brackets. As a result, they were included in his critical text but at the same time were
marked as not really belonging to it. Seemingly, Rahlfs wanted to have his cake and eat it too.

Rahlfs includes the following eight items in square brackets, thereby indicating their questionable originality.

134:17-5 πίνας - σωτῶν[1ε] = ex Ga, Sm L Tht Sy 55 Cyρ = MT.

Interestingly, no manuscript makes its appearance more often than does S in the eight instances Rahlfs brackets. As a result, one might conclude on that basis that S is a very good witness to the Old Greek text of Psalms.22

The reason for Rahlfs' judgment is not difficult to find. All eight items are, on the one hand, lacking in MT, and, on the other hand, the intra-textual origin of most of them is patently obvious. In that light, it is not surprising that, in Rahlfs' apparatus criticus, one frequently encounters the notation "ex" followed, typically, by a Psalms reference suggesting the possible origin of a given variant. What is surprising—to echo P. L. Hedley—is that Rahlfs did not take his own notation more seriously, at least to the point of placing more square brackets to signal many more items are of doubtful originality.

Two of the eight instances, 13:3-10 and 65:1, Rahlfs identifies as additamenta christiana along with other secondary readings in 37:14 (2013 2110 Sahidic), 37:21 (Bohairic), 50:9 (1093 2110 Sahidic), and 95:10 (R La G 1093 Bohairic Sahidic). Even though several of these are at least as old as the fourth century, none appears in Codex Sinaiticus, with the sole exception of 13:3-10. Since S, therefore, lacks five out of the six additamenta christiana, S again shows itself to be a worthy exemplar of the Old Greek text.

The flip side of Rahlfs' contention that S apparently—and at times uniquely—has preserved the Old Greek text, is that, at some stage, its text must have been influenced, albeit indirectly, by Origen's Hexapla. While Rahlfs' general conclusion may well be correct, since some readings are difficult to explain on any other basis and few, if any MSS, are entirely free of them, the evidence he cites in supporting of his thesis fails to convince. Three instances are cited in which S reads uniquely with MT: 17:11 χερουβιν] χερουμ S* = MT; 103:16 πεδίου] κυριου S* = MT; 106:29 και ἐπέταξεν τῇ καταγιγίδι] και ἐστιν καταγιγίδα αὐτής S* cf. MT.

Most of Rahlfs' evidence for Hebraizing in MS S, as already noted, consists of "omissions" that correspond to MT. But "omissions" that equal the Hebrew cannot help but bring into view a central issue in the evaluation of a

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22All eight have been excluded from NETS, but Rahlfs' practice has been extended to other items of questionable originality. See, for example, 135:16-3-4: τῶ ἐξαγαγόντι -σωτω[2ε] S Sm GaAug L"A" 2011 = MT.
translated text: when does such correspondence reflect the original text and when is it indicative of Hebraizing corrective activity? Or might it indicate neither and simply be a careless mistake by a scribe? An example may help illustrate:

30:2 καὶ ἔξελοὺ > S LaG Ga = MT.

Is the absence of this clause from S to be read as (1) a correction to the Hebrew; (2) an attestation to how the Old Greek read; (3) a copying mistake by the scribe of S? Rahlfs refers to Ps 70:2 where an identical line, including the clause at issue, occurs, and where MT features two verbs instead of one. Moreover, (καὶ) ἔξελοὺ occurs ten times in Psalms. Rahlfs suggests that in Ps 30:2 MS provides us with a correction to the Hebrew. But might one not reasonable ask how 30:2 differs from the bracketed items noted above? On the one hand, MT lacks the clause in question, and, on the other hand, Rahlfs himself provides an intra-textual origin.

Similar examples are not difficult to find in Codex Sinaiticus, and typically the same question arises: What does it mean that its text, often shorter than the “majority text,” coincides with the Hebrew? Does it reflect the Old Greek? Does it indicate Hebraizing corrective activity? Should it be attributed to scribal carelessness? There is clearly no pat answer. Each case must be studied on its own terms. That scarcely means, however, that the textual-linguistic make-up of Greek Psalms fails to provide us with pertinent guidelines.

On the most general level it deserves to be noted that, though Hebraizing corrective activity did occur and materials from Origen’s Hexapla intruded into the transmission history of the Septuagint, it scarcely follows that correcting toward the Hebrew ever became the norm. But if it was the exception rather than the norm, such activity should not be posited until other options fail. A solution of last resort, one might thus call it.

Since the Greek translation of Psalms is literalistic and often isomorphic, it began its history of transmission with a *linguistic deficit*, which was only gradually and sporadically diminished in transmission history, as is clear from the witnesses we have. That is to say, translationese Greek tended to be adjusted to standard usage.

Since the Greek Psalter was copied more often than any other biblical book, we can expect that much traditional material lies deeply embedded in our present body of evidence. Even by Rahlfs’ standards, all our present witnesses have gone astray on thirteen occasions, and on at least two dozen

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23 Since Rahlfs, despite his four rules, at times adopts readings with a seemingly Hexaplaric hue, the textual support here poses no problem. For a particularly noteworthy example see 58:12: λαοῦ μου GaHi νομοῦ σου B” R L Su 55 2110 ex 11861.109.153; οὐνομάτος σου Sa SySc 1219 ex 4321.

24 As it happens, S* lacks καὶ ἔξελοὺ in 70:2 as well, apparently through parablepsis, and in 143:11 ἔξελοὺ has dropped out for no apparent reason, leaving the text barely intelligible. S* thus agrees with MT once while disagreeing with MT twice.

25 21:18; 21:32; 29:12; 41:9; 48:10; 58:5; 64:4; 68:27; 73:8; 77:36; 77:54; 118:33; 137:2.
other occasions Rahlfs selects as Old Greek a reading with extremely slender support. Some of the latter have now been bolstered by new evidence.

Since 1931, the date of Rahlfs’ *Psalmi cum Odis*, the number of early papyri of Psalms has increased by more than a hundred. While most of these texts are small and often of little help in establishing the critical text, at least two are notable exceptions: Pap. Bodmer XXIV (Rahlfs 2110) and Pap. Chester Beatty XIII (Rahlfs 2149). 2110 has been dated to the third/fourth century C.E. and 2149 to the fourth century. Hence both are roughly contemporaneous with Codex Sinaiticus.

I conclude. When I recently translated the Greek Psalter for NETS and in the process had occasion to reassess Rahlfs’ critical text, in no fewer than forty-one instances, contra Rahlfs, I selected as Old Greek the text supported by Codex Sinaiticus. Nearly half of these (19) are also supported by 2110, and four of them by 2149, even though the latter contains only Ps 72–88 (76 is omitted by parablepsis. Be it noted, however, all forty-one are readings that can be reflected in English translation. When one adds readings that are too Greek to be translated, the total rises considerably. Articulation especially looms large, since the Greek translator often deferred to his source language against Greek usage and since Greek articles are regularly made to represent other morphosyntactic elements in Hebrew. I close with a single example.

Although Rahlfs calls attention to MT’s preposed *lamed*, his rule about “older” versus “younger” witnesses may have prevented him from selecting the obvious as Old Greek. If there ever was any doubt about what the Old Greek

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28 Rodolphe Kasser and Michel Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer XXIV, Psamaues XVII – CXVII*. Cologne–Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1967. It contains, with lacunae, Ps 17:46 – 118:44. This early and extensive papyrus, an excellent witness to the Old Greek, has made it much more difficult to assume Hebraizing corrections in MS S.
read, that doubt has now been further dispelled by the addition of ancient witness.\textsuperscript{31}

New evidence and better access to old evidence demand a new study of Codex Sinaiticus as a witness to the Old Greek text of Psalms. The Codex appears to have more to offer than even Rahlfs thought.

\textsuperscript{31} For exact parallels see Ps 134:11 and 135:19–20.