Personal Names in the Septuagint of Isaiah

This study deals with the representation of personal names in the LXX of Isaiah. It focuses on the translational, exegetical, and linguistic aspects of these names, not on the phonetic representation of the Hebrew. These names involve both personal and geographic names. Our focus is the LXX of Isaiah, but this area cannot be separated from the other LXX books nor from the exegesis of the LXX of Isaiah in general, an area to which the honoree devoted many studies.

Personal names are usually transliterated, even if they consist of two Hebrew components. As a rule, both constituents of such compound names were transliterated (e.g. “house of ...”, “mountain of ...”), but sometimes their first element was translated. In other cases both constituents were translated.

Translators constantly struggle with the question as to what constitutes a personal name, usually to be transliterated. For example, in the case of Isa 8:1, modern translations present a transliteration: The Lord said to me, “Get yourself a large sheet and write on it in common script ‘For Maher-shalal-hash-baz’ ... and the Lord said to me, “Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (NJPS, all other translations similarly). However, the LXX translated these words (“... Then the Lord said to me, Name him ‘Swiftly Spoil, Quickly Plunder’”).

With a computer-assisted search of the LXX (based on Rahlfs, Septuaginta), I located 27,413 occurrences of proper names in 10,912 verses in the canonical books of the LXX, with and without Greek endings. For Isaiah, these figures are

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1 Translations of Hebrew Scripture follow the NJPS, and translations of the LXX follow NETS.
2 The study of geographic names in the LXX is somewhat neglected in the literature (see n. 22 for an early study). Thus, Dogniez, Bibliography does not include a section devoted to this topic. On the other hand, the earlier Brock, Bibliography contains sections on “proper names,” “onomastica,” and “transliterations.”
4 For example, ἐκτιχών in Josh 7:24 (ךַּטַּחְו, בֵּית חֹר), ἀραχέσσα in 2 Kgs 25:15 (עשָר תַּדְרָא).
6 The search was performed with the aid of the Accordance computer program version 7.4.
7 The text of this edition hardly differs from that of the volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint, while the apparatuses of variants differ completely.
724 occurrences of proper nouns in 387 verses. When multiple occurrences of the names in the LXX are disregarded, we are left with 3544 different forms of personal names in the LXX (186 in Isaiah) representing a smaller number of names since many Hebrew names are represented by several different forms. Among these 3544 different forms, words with a Hellenized ending in -ος, -ας, -ης, -ικη, -ψ, -ις, and -α, account for an average 31% of the occurrences of the proper names in the LXX (see below). Our analysis refers to the figure that disregards the multiple occurrences of words, since frequently occurring names distort the statistics.

1 Hellenized Endings

Most names are transliterated into Greek without the characteristic case endings of Greek words. Thus, the first verse of Isaiah contains four indeclinable personal names: Αμως, Ιερουσαλημ, Ιωαθαμ, Αχαζ. One of these, Αμως, has a Greek ending, but is not declinable. At the same time, four other words in that verse have Greek endings and are declinable: Ησαίας, Οζίου (nom. Οζίας), Εζεκίου (nom. Εζεκίας), Ιουδαίας (nom. Ιουδαία). According to Thackeray, most names of places and peoples reflect their Hellenized forms, with a minority representing transliterated nouns without Greek endings. However, in view of the long lists of transliterated personal names in Genesis, Joshua, and Chronicles that represent their Vorlagen exactly with non-Greek endings, this view is

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8 For example, the different representations of Kittim are counted separately: Κιτιαίοι, Κιτιεῖς, Χεττιών, Χεττιν, Ρωμαίοι (see below).

9 All statistics are approximate only. I did not count as Hellenized the ending -ων (reflecting Hebrew words ending with נ-) since most words ending with these letters are indeclinable. Further, we did include words ending with -α that represent Aramaic nouns ending with aleph although they are not declinable.

10 The accents and breathings of the Greek words follow the (inconsistent) conventions of the Göttingen Septuagint.

11 Cf. Εἵλως, Εἵλωτος (a Helot, name of the Spartan serfs); εἰδώς participle of οἶδα, etc.


13 Thackeray, Grammar, 166: "... Here <i.e., places and peoples>, however, the Hellenized forms largely predominate. The translators, for the most part, had a fair knowledge of the geography, not only of Egypt, but also of other countries, and adopted the current Hellenized forms." In n. 7, Thackeray lists the following examples: Αἰθιοπία, Ἀντιλίβανος, Ἰόππη, Καππαδοκία (for Kaphtor), Καρχηδών, Μεσοποταμία, Συρία. Thackeray, Grammar, 167 further notes: "Rarely, apart from the later historical books, do we find places of importance like Damascus or Tyre transliterated."