CHAPTER SEVEN

JOSHUA 5:2–12: MT—4QJOSHUA—a—CD—LXX

7.1 Introduction

Joshua 5 narrates the first acts of the Israelite people in the Promised Land, which consist of the reinstatement of the rite of circumcision (5:2–8) and the celebration of Passover (5:10–12). The entry into the Promised Land is further marked by the cessation of the manna (5:12), which had been the nourishment for the Israelite people during the period of their wanderings through the desert (Exod. 16). These cultic acts (circumcision and celebration of the Passover) are possible thanks to the fact that the hostile forces are paralysed because of the supernatural event at the river Jordan (Josh. 3–4, 5:1). Verse 9 explains the name of the site Gilgal as a reference to the divine act of rolling away (תל) the humiliation of Egypt. The final verses of the chapter (5:13–15) describe an encounter between Joshua and the commander of Yhwh’s army, which breaks off abruptly after their first acquaintance.

As noted above in section 2.2, the Hebrew and Greek texts of Joshua 5:2–12 are strongly divergent. In verses 1, and 13–15, MT and LXX correspond more closely, and for that reason are of less importance for our discussion. In verses 2–12, MT and LXX offer self-consistent variant versions of the same passage. In verse 2, for instance, the word רָחֵם, a second time, is absent from LXX and the corresponding verb בָּשָׂם, do again (MT) has been understood by the LXX as בָּשָׂם/καθίσσας, and sit. Verses 4–7, narrating the who and why of Joshua’s act of circumcision, are formulated differently in the two versions. Here among other things, the Hebrew lacks the notion present in LXX that not all Israelites had been circumcised in Egypt, a notion that, moreover, is strongly denied in the Hebrew formulation of verse 4. In verse 11 the phrase מָצַחְתֶּה הָעָבָר, on the day after Passover, as well as the phrase מַמָּחֵד, on the following day, in verse 12, is absent from LXX. Another temporal phrase בְּלַעֲמָה הָיָה הָיָה, on the very day, marks in LXX the moment of cessation of the manna (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἔξολισεν τὸ μοννα, on that day the manna ceased), whereas
in the MT is underscores the preceding plus vis-à-vis LXX, in order to stress the preceding statement that the Israelites ate massot on the day after Passover. Furthermore, fragments of the first verses of this chapter (verses 2–7) have been preserved on the 4QJoshua⁴ scroll, which because of their fragmentary character require a study on their own. Another document related to Qumran, the Damascus Document (CD XX), contains an allusion to Josh. 3:6 which may reflect a different Hebrew text. For the sake of convenience a synopsis of the three textual witnesses, MT-Josh. 5:2–12, 4QJosh⁴ frg. 1–2 with Josh. 5:2–6 and LXX-Josh. 5:2–12, is presented below:¹

---

¹ The LXX text is taken from the Rahlfs edition; text-critical notes to this text are offered in section 7.6 below.