The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs has a complicated history of composition. Some of this history is still in dispute, so I will begin by setting out briefly my own understanding of how this book came to be. I believe that the Testaments started off as a Hebrew composition sometime in the late second or early first century B.C.E. It contained the spiritual last will and testament of each of Jacob’s twelve sons. A Hebrew fragment of this early form of the text has survived in the Qumran manuscripts, 4Q215 Testament of Naphtali. The book as a whole was apparently written by a supporter of the Hasmonean rulers of Judea, a fact evidenced in the frequent, laudatory references to Levi, the traditional ancestor of the Levitical Hasmoneans. This was the book’s earliest form. At some later point, a copyist or editor, someone who apparently felt that the Hasmoneans’ claim to hereditary kingship was unjustified, inserted here and there in these pro-Levi passages further references to the tribe of Judah, asserting that it was the proper tribe of kingship. These insertions are often clumsy and inconsistent (see, for example, T. Reu. 6:5–12); in them one can still see traces of the original author’s blunt command to “obey Levi” in all things, which was then modified by this later editor to “obey Levi and Judah” together (T. Sim. 5:4–6, T. Iss. 5:7–8; T. Dan. 5:4, etc.). It was not that this editor was anti-Levitical; he merely felt that the tribe of Judah—and the family of David from within it—had been chosen by God for kingship in Israel (Gen 49:10, 2 Sam 7:8–16, etc.), and that the Levites ought therefore in principle to devote themselves to priestly things (T. Jud. 21:1–6). In this form the Testaments circulated in Hebrew in the first century B.C.E and beyond.

Sometime later, perhaps as early as the turn of the era, this already composite text was translated into Greek. But the Greek translation was anything but literal; its author often rewrote freely, sometimes
even inserting wholly new passages, many of them repeating the basic doctrines of Stoic philosophy (for example, *T. Reu.* 2:3–3:1). At a still later date, this Greek text acquired a number of specifically Christian interpolations (*T. Reu.* 6:8, *T. Sim.* 6:5, 6; 7:1, 2, etc.). There are thus, in my view, four layers to our present Greek Testaments, which survives in a number of medieval manuscripts and is represented as well in apparently secondary translations from Greek into Armenian, Slavonic, and other languages.¹

The above reconstruction is hardly the only that has been put forward, however. Strikingly different is that of the Testaments scholar Marinus De Jonge, who for the past half-century or so has maintained that this book was a de novo Christian composition originally written in Greek in the second century C.E.² However, De Jonge also holds that this Christian author did not start from scratch; he was a “collector” who incorporated earlier, Hebrew material into his work. In effect, then, these two scenarios are less different than they might first appear: both share the idea that our current Greek text contains at least some material translated from Hebrew.

It is hardly my intention here to compare the merits of these competing views. Rather, what I wish to do is to focus on a few copying and translation errors that, according to either scenario, bear witness to the earlier, Hebrew stage of the Testaments. Such mistakes are far more numerous than the brief sampling given here; in fact, I have found similar errors in each of the twelve Greek testaments. In the following, however, I would like to focus on a few of these, both because they are interesting in their own right and because they may shed some light on the Greek translator. I will treat them in their order of appearance:

¹ This reconstruction is hardly my own alone, but derives from the work of many earlier scholars. For a history of that scholarship, see H. Donald Slingerland, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical History of Research* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), and particularly with regard to the second stage of the book’s composition, 34–37.

² De Jonge has modified his views in some respects from time to time, though the basic claim of Christian authorship remains central to his understanding. See H. Donald Hollander and Marinus De Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).