

Do *Nomina Sacra* Influence the Textual Transmission of 2 Esdras 12,12?

The text critic aims to reconstruct two things: an original text (or texts), and the transmission of that text through time. These two tasks are interrelated. Internal evidence sometimes provides explanations for how a text develops in transmission. Similarly, reconstruction of the transmission of a text through time based on external evidence can provide reasons to support or question reconstructions of the earliest readings. Sometimes, external evidence can be seemingly opposed to internal evidence, when there is overwhelming manuscript (MS) support for a reading that makes less sense in context than an alternative. In cases such as these, the opposition can sometimes be resolved if a plausible factor in the transmission of the text can be found to explain why a particular reading might find its way into the majority of manuscripts (MSS). This article raises one such text critical situation, and uses it as an opportunity to examine a factor in the textual transmission of some proper nouns that I do not believe has been previously discussed in print.

At 2 Esd 12,12 (Neh 2,12) the main text of Hanhart's critical edition of 2 Esdras in the Göttingen series has Ἰσραήλ for the Greek word equivalent to ~lvwryl in the Hebrew/Aramaic text. Hanhart's reading has the support of all MSS that witness to the Old Greek tradition.

This situation is interpreted in the apparatus of BHQ as a substitution by the translator. It could also be interpreted as either evidence of a Hebrew/Aramaic *Vorlage* that is variant from the Tiberian tradition, or as a misreading by the translator of ~lvwryl as lafryl. Here is the noun in context in the Tiberian Hebrew, Hanhart's text and Wooden's translation in NETS:

: ~lvwryl twf[l ybl-la !tn yhla hm ~dal ytdgh-alw

καὶ οὐκ ἀπήγγειλα ἀνθρώπῳ τί ὁ θεὸς δίδωσιν εἰς καρδίαν μου τοῦ ποιῆσαι

μετὰ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ and I told no one what God was putting into my heart to do along with Israel

Given Wooden's exegetical interpretation of μετὰ + gen. as 'along with', either Ἰσραήλ or

Ἱερουσαλήμ can make sense here: Nehemiah could be acting 'along with [the people of] Israel', or 'along with [the inhabitants of] Jerusalem'. Both nouns also make sense in the wider context. For example, in v. 17 Nehemiah exhorts 'us' to act to rebuild 'Jerusalem'—where 'us' could mean 'the people of Israel' or 'the inhabitants of Jerusalem'. Though the text as it stands may perhaps be slightly more straightforward, as not all those acting with Nehemiah to rebuild the city were inhabitants of Jerusalem. For an historic example of the interchangeability of these nouns, when correcting their text toward a Hebrew *Vorlage* the Complutensian editors were able to replace one noun for the other without feeling the need to change the preposition: μετα της Ἱερουσαλήμ.

One problem with this exegetical interpretation is that the preposition μετὰ + gen. in the sense of 'along with' translates the Hebrew preposition ל. The only other place in 2 Esdras where μετά is equivalent to ל is 2 Esd 23:6 (Neh 13,6) : ~ymy #qlw

καὶ μετὰ τὸ τέλος τῶν ἡμερῶν And after the end of the days

Here, the preposition μετὰ + acc. forms a temporal expression 'after the end of the days' that translates the Hebrew temporal expression 'up to an end of days'. The use of ל as such a temporal terminative is not unusual . However, in contrast, reading ל in the sense of 'along with' in 2 Esd 12,12 is not a typical reading of this preposition. Given that the translator of 2 Esdras was usually strictly literal in his rendering of the Hebrew, this seems out of character unless one supposes that the translator worked from a *Vorlage* with not merely a different noun, but also a different preposition, such as *larfyb.

Another interpretive option exists where the Greek preposition more comfortably aligns with its Hebrew equivalent. LSJ gives a later meaning of μετά as 'in one's dealings with' . An example of this usage is in Acts 14,27 (quoting NA28 and the NRSV):

ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτῶν that God had done with them

If the μετὰ τοῦ [noun] in 2 Esd 12,12 is interpreted in this way, then the Greek preposition corresponds to a reading of the Hebrew preposition as a 'ל of specification' . In this case, the noun that best fits this exegetical interpretation is Ἱερουσαλήμ because in Neh 2,9-20

Nehemiah is relating what he is doing and will do in regards to the city itself, not to the people of Israel.

Therefore, while both Ἰσραήλ and Ἱερουσαλήμ can make sense in context, the text ποιῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ Ἱερουσαλήμ in the sense of 'to do in dealing with Jerusalem' would be closer to both the Tiberian noun and preposition than the Göttingen text and NETS interpretation ποιῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ 'to do along with Israel'. If this is the case, then why do the overwhelming majority of Greek MSS attest Ἰσραήλ? Evidence is presented here that the reading Ἰσραήλ may be the result of internal textual transmission of the Greek text influenced by the early use of *nomina sacra*.

Discounting the Complutiensis, Hanhart collates the readings of 37 Greek witnesses to the text of 2 Esdras in the apparatus of his edition. These readings provide the dataset for the following discussion. Most MSS in the collation witness to the text of the Old Greek of 2 Esdras : A B S V 44 46 52 55 58 64 68 71 74 98 106 107 119 120 121 122 125 130 134 236 243 248 314 370 379 381 610 728 731 762; and three MSS witness to the Antiochene text of 2 Esdras: 19 93 108 .

The consonantal text ~lṽwry is attested 86 times in the Tiberian text(s) of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is almost always equivalent to Ἱερουσαλήμ in the Old Greek MSS, and in Hanhart's main text. Aside from *nomina sacra*, the exceptions are our text and also 2 Esd 21,22 (Neh 11,22), which is missing from the Old Greek.

In addition, Ἱερουσαλήμ, or a *nomen sacrum* for the word, is attested in four places where there is no equivalent word in the Tiberian text, twice only in a single MS: ἰλημ 106 only at 2 Esd 7,10, ἰλημ 98 only at 2 Esd 10,9; and twice only in the Antiochene MSS: ἰλημ 19 93, ἱερουσαλημ 108 at 2 Esdras 18,1b; ἱερουσαλημ 19-108 at 2 Esd 12,26.

The use of the *nomen sacrum* ἰλημ for Ἱερουσαλήμ has potential to influence the transmission of the Greek text because across the MS tradition of 2 Esdras, ἰλημ apparently undergoes more development in textual transmission than Ἱερουσαλήμ. In the dataset being considered, Ἱερουσαλήμ is written 2960 times with only one variation due to haplography, ἱρουσαλημ, attested twice in MS 108 at 2 Esd 9,9 and 2 Esd 22,29. In contrast, the *nomen*

sacrum is attested 24 times, but in only 11 of these cases is it spelled ἱλῆμ: 71 (2 Esd 6,5), 106 381 (2 Esd 7,10), 44 (2 Esd 7,17), 98 (2 Esd 10,9), 19-93-108 (2 Esd 12,12), 19-93 (2 Esd 18,1), Scpamph (2 Esd 21,22). In two places the *nomen sacrum* has undergone metathesis, ἱλῆμ > ἱηλμ: Scpamph (2 Esd 10,7) S (2 Esd 22,29). This form occurs elsewhere in S, and is one of several *nomina sacra* attested in this MS for Ἱερουσαλήμ. The other 11 cases attest ἱηλ, one of two *nomina sacra* for Ἱσραήλ: 236 (2 Esd 5,16), 19-108 44 (2 Esd 10,7), 121 (2 Esd 12,17¹), 120 (2 Esd 12:17²), 125 (2 Esd 12,20), 55 (2 Esd 14,22), 46-[52] (2 Esd 22,29), 74 (2 Esd 22,43). In all these 11 places the equivalent Tiberian text has ~lvwry and, aside from occasional minuses, the rest of the Greek MSS attest Ἱερουσαλήμ. This situation could only come about if Ἱερουσαλήμ somehow came to be replaced by ἱηλ on multiple independent occasions. It may be possible that these three forms are sequential developments in textual transmission: ἱλῆμ > ἱηλμ > ἱηλ. Such developments, via ἱλῆμ and/or ἱηλμ, leading to the eventual situation where ἱηλ has been substituted for Ἱερουσαλήμ, can be explained on both phonemic and graphical grounds, some of which we now consider.

According to some theories of manual copying processes, a written word is always realised phonemically—that is the individual units of sound that carry meaning are perceived by a copyist. This can be either audibly by a reader in a scriptorium, or internally by the inner voice of the copyist reading the exemplar. Whatever the phonetic realisation such units of sound have when produced by a Greek speaker at a given place or period, there are only a small number of different ways to phonemically realise Ἱερουσαλήμ, such as for e.g., /ierusalēm/ where *l* is vocalic or /jerusalēm/ where *l* is consonantal. In contrast, ἱλῆμ could be realised phonemically as the word /ierusalēm/, as an initialism (the letters are spelled out) /i-l-ē-m/, or as an acronym /ilēm/. Each of these possibilities also has multiple alternatives. For example, aside from the possible realisation of *l* as vocalic or consonantal, when realised as an initialism the letters can be pronounced by phonemic value /i-l-ē-m/, by name /iota-lambda-ēta-mu/, or by a mixture of the two /i-la-ē-mu/. The variety of ways that ἱλῆμ can be realised phonemically means that from a phonemic perspective there are more

possibilities for the *nomen sacrum* to develop in transmission than for the written word Ἱερουσαλήμ.

Not all theorists of text criticism would agree that a written word is always realised phonemically. However, even from merely a graphical perspective, the *nomina sacra* for Ἰσραήλ and Ἱερουσαλήμ are more easily confused with one another than the words themselves. The word Ἱερουσαλήμ is significantly longer than Ἰσραήλ, and they differ in a number of ways, Ἱερουσαλήμ contains ε and ου for example. In contrast, ἱηλ differs from ἰλημ and ἱηλμ by only a single grapheme, which represents a final nasal. If phonemic realisation is a factor in transmission (and it presumably was at least some points in the history of transmission), then differing only in a final nasal is significant, as these are some of the most liable sound features to be dropped in speech .

So from both a phonemic and graphical standpoint, it can be argued that the *nomina sacra* for Ἰσραήλ and Ἱερουσαλήμ are more liable to be confused for one another than the words themselves. Yet whatever theoretical explanation is proposed for this phenomenon, the important fact is that on the 24 occasions in our data where a *nomen sacrum* is used for Ἱερουσαλήμ, we find ἱηλ 11 times in contrast to ἰλημ also 11 times. Yet there is otherwise no interchange of the fully spelled words Ἰσραήλ and Ἱερουσαλήμ. These data provide good grounds for believing that Ἰσραήλ can develop to Ἱερουσαλήμ in the transmission of the Greek text due to the substitution of the *nomina sacra* for these words, ἰλημ > ἱηλ.

Therefore, it is possible that the reading Ἰσραήλ, attested in all Old Greek MSS at 2 Esd 12,12 could have arisen from ἰλημ > ἱηλ in an early witness to 2 Esdras. The above data provide evidence that this *nomen sacrum* can be erroneously written where the original word is Ἱερουσαλήμ. The Antiochene tradition may preserve an early variant of the Old Greek tradition with ἰλημ. The Antiochene MSS 19, 93, and 108 attest the doublet την (τη 93) ἰλημ και μετὰ τον (τοῦ 93) ἱηλ. One way this situation could have come about is if a revisor consulted a Hebrew/Aramaic *Vorlage* that agreed with the Tiberian text, but was not confident to remove ἱηλ. However, the Antiochene text is not shy of replacing elements of the inherited Old Greek text elsewhere, and if a *Vorlage* was consulted one might expect

Ἱερουσαλήμ to be written rather than the *nomen sacrum*. A more likely scenario is that a revisor possessed more than one Greek exemplar from the Old Greek tradition with alternative variants ἰλημ/ἰηλ, and being unable to choose between them preserved both in the Antiochene text. If such diversity arose by inadvertent change in transmission, the possibility discussed at length above, then presumably the gender of the preceding article was later harmonised to the *nomen sacrum* as it now appeared. (After all, the two Antiochene textual branches, 19-108 and 93, demonstrate variation among themselves in the spelling of both preceding articles.) The use of two *nomina sacra* in the same verse is unusual, at least in our dataset, but is explicable if the text is a doublet conservatively preserving two traditions that each attested *nomina sacra*.

As such, while Hanhart has Ἰσραήλ, which is supported by all the Old Greek MSS, the superior text is likely to be ἰλημ, which can account for the variations in the Antiochene text and the relationship of the Old Greek MSS to the Tiberian text. This form is not a reconstruction, but a minor variant, as the Antiochene doublet is interpreted here as a witness to an early attestation of this form at this place in the Old Greek text.

The suggested development ἰλημ > ἰηλ may have been conditioned by the exegetical factors discussed earlier, and the sequence of events might be reconstructed as follows. First, the original translation attested ποιῆσαι μετὰ την Ἱερουσαλήμ with the intended meaning 'to do in dealing with Jerusalem', reflecting a straightforward interpretation of the Hebrew preposition. As noted earlier, 'Jerusalem' is a more natural fit with this exegesis, because Jerusalem is the recipient of Nehemiah's actions; he is dealing with the city of Jerusalem. If the noun was replaced with the *nomen sacrum* and the clause ποιῆσαι μετὰ την ἰλημ was interpreted by some early copyists as 'to do along with Jerusalem', then as also noted earlier, 'Israel' is a more natural fit with this exegesis because the people of Israel are acting alongside Nehemiah; they are dealing with the city of Jerusalem together. This psychological factor may encourage the replacement of one *nomen sacrum* with the other, which I have argued is a plausible development that might arise due to phonemic and/or graphical factors. Once ἰλημ had developed to ἰηλ, the change in gender την > τοῦ was a harmonising slip. It is

not even necessary to assume this step occurred separately to the development $\bar{\iota}\lambda\eta\bar{\iota}\mu > \bar{\iota}\eta\lambda$. If a scribe was copying several words at a time, and $\bar{\iota}\eta\lambda$ were mis-read (or mis-heard) for $\bar{\iota}\lambda\eta\bar{\iota}\mu$, then it is quite natural that they would simply write the *nomen sacrum* with what they considered to be the correct article.

The specific question of whether Ἰσραήλ or Ἱερουσαλήμ is the best text in 2 Esd 12,12 is not of great significance in and of itself. However, the above discussion illustrates two things. First, the text and interpretation put forward here, ποιῆσαι μετὰ τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ 'to do in dealing with Jerusalem', agrees with the noun in the Tiberian text and makes sense of the ι preposition. However, it rests on scant external evidence. In contrast, the traditional text and interpretation, ποιῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ 'to do along with Israel', disagrees with the noun in the Tiberian text and does not make sense of the ι preposition, but does enjoy the support of almost the entire MS tradition. This situation illustrates the decision Septuagint text critics must make of the relative weight to give external support for a reading against the explanatory power a reading can have for the relationship between the Greek text and its presumed Hebrew *Vorlage*.

Secondly, the above discussion illustrates how *nomina sacra* can influence textual transmission. Whatever the most convincing text is for the noun being considered at 2 Esd 12,12, the use of abbreviation for these words is a factor that should be considered in the recovery of the original text and the reconstruction of the history of transmission. Further matters of investigation that arise are the extent to which the *nomina sacra*, ΙΗΛ, ΙΗΜΛ, ΙΗΛΜ, are confused for one another elsewhere, and whether this phenomenon is liable to occur with other abbreviations.

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SUMMARY

At 2 Esd 12,12 (Neh 2,12), main text of Hanhart's critical edition of 2 Esdras has Ἰσραήλ equivalent to ~lvwryl. There are various possible explanations for this. The author introduces a possibility not previously considered, that the form Ἰσραήλ is due to the influence of *nomina sacra* on Greek textual transmission.