

The expression *χειρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω* + dative and LXX Genesis 37:22: A Homerism Linking Calchas and Joseph

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The verb *ἐπιφέρω* is not attested frequently in the Septuagint, and in the Pentateuch it occurs only in Genesis 1:2, 7:18, and 37:22. In the first two instances, the translator skillfully creates an intratextual reference between Noah’s ark “being carried along over the water” (καὶ ἐπεφέρετο ἡ κιβωτὸς ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος) and the divine spirit, too, “being carried along over the water” (καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος) (See Alexandre 1988, pp. 86–87; Dines 1995, pp. 447–448). As the LSJ illustrates, the passive voice is used in similar contexts in classical Greek literature. Herodotus (*Hist.* 8.90) describes how a ship from Aegina bore down upon and sank a ship from Samothracia after the latter had sunk an Attic vessel (ἔτι τούτων ταῦτα λεγόντων ἐνέβαλε νηὶ Ἀττικῇ Σαμοθρηκίῃ νηῦς. ἥ τε δὴ Ἀττικὴ κατεδύετο καὶ ἐπιφερομένη Αἰγιναιή νηῦς κατέδυσσε τῶν Σαμοθρηκίων τὴν νέαν). The verb, however, does not have to describe a violent attack and may simply refer to the floating onward of a raft (τούτων τὴν μὲν θύρην δεδεμένην κάλω ἔμπροσθε τοῦ πλοίου ἀπιεῖ ἐπιφέρεσθαι, Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.96). This is exactly the meaning with which the verb is used in both Gen. 1:2 and 7:18.

In Genesis 37:21–22, on the other hand, we read of Reuben’s intervention to save his brother Joseph from the hands of the other brothers, who were intent on killing him. After rescuing Joseph from them, Reuben urges the brothers not to shed blood (μὴ ἐκχέητε αἷμα) but instead to throw him into a pit (ἐμβάλετε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν λάκκον τοῦτον τὸν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ). He concludes with the injunction, *χειρα δὲ μὴ ἐπενέγκητε αὐτῷ*, “but lay no hand on him” (NETS), which translates the Hebrew יָדְיָוֹקְחֵם־לֹא־תָשִׁיטְוּ.

The expression χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative, “to attack, assail, lay hands on,” although straightforward in meaning at first glance, upon closer inspection reveals something of the educational background of the translator of LXX Genesis.

Laying One’s Hands on Someone or Something in the Septuagint

Outside of Genesis, the verb ἐπιφέρω occurs in the Septuagint fourteen times, ten of which are in the expression χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω. In two instances, the expression governs only an infinitive (ἀμαρτήσαι, 1 Kgdms 22:17; διαφθεῖραι, 2 Kgdms 1:14).¹ In one instance, it governs the dative, as in Gen. 37:22 (τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, Esth. 8:7), and in the remaining seven cases it governs the preposition ἐπί + accusative (1 Kgdms 24:7, 11; 26:9, 11, 23; Prov. 26:15; Zech. 2:9).²

1 Kgdms 22:17	καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς παρατρέχουσιν τοῖς ἐφρονηκόσιν ἐπὶ αὐτόν Προσαγάγετε καὶ θανατοῦτε τοὺς ἱερεῖς τοῦ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡ χεὶρ αὐτῶν μετὰ Δαυεὶδ, καὶ ὅτι ἔγνωσαν ὅτι φεύγει αὐτός καὶ οὐκ ἀπεκάλυψαν τὸ ὄψιον μου· καὶ οὐκ ἐβουλήθησαν οἱ παῖδες τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπενεγκεῖν τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν ἀμαρτήσαι εἰς τοὺς ἱερεῖς Κυρίου.
1 Kgdms 24:7	καὶ εἶπεν Δαυεὶδ πρὸς τοὺς ἄνδρας αὐτοῦ Μηδαμῶς μοι παρὰ Κυρίου, εἰ ποιήσω τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο τῷ χριστῷ Κυρίου, ἐπενέγκαι χεῖρά μου ἐπὶ αὐτόν· ὅτι χριστὸς Κυρίου ἐστὶν οὗτος.
1 Kgdms 24:11	ἰδοὺ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ ἐοράκασιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ σου ὡς παρέδωκέν σε Κύριος σήμερον εἰς χεῖρά μου ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ, καὶ οὐκ ἠβουλήθη ἄποκτεῖναί σε, καὶ ἐφείσαμην σου καὶ εἶπα Οὐκ ἐποίησα χεῖρά μου ἐπὶ κύριόν μου, ὅτι χριστὸς Κυρίου οὗτός ἐστιν.
1 Kgdms 26:9	καὶ εἶπεν Δαυεὶδ πρὸς Ἀβεισά Μη ταπεινώσης αὐτόν, ὅτι τίς ἐποίησε χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ χριστὸν Κυρίου καὶ ἀθωωθήσεται;
1 Kgdms 26:11	μηδαμῶς μοι παρὰ Κυρίου ἐπενεγκεῖν χεῖρά μου ἐπὶ χριστὸν Κυρίου. καὶ νῦν λαβέ δὴ τὸ δόρυ ἀπὸ πρὸς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν φακόν τοῦ ὕδατος, καὶ ἀπέλωμεν καθ’ ἑαυτοῦς.
1 Kgdms 26:23	καὶ Κύριος ἐπιστρέψει ἐκάστω τὰς δικαιοσύνας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν αὐτοῦ· ὡς παρέδωκέν σε Κύριος σήμερον εἰς χεῖράς μου, καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησα ἐπενεγκεῖν χεῖρά μου ἐπὶ χριστὸν Κυρίου.
2 Kgdms 1:14	καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Δαυεὶδ Πῶς οὐκ ἐφοβήθης ἐπενεγκεῖν χεῖρά σου διαφθεῖραι τὸν χριστὸν Κυρίου;
Prov. 26:15	κρύψας ὀκνηρὸς τὴν χεῖρα ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ αὐτοῦ οὐ δυνήσεται ἐπενεγκεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ στόμα.

¹ As customary, I refer to the Greek version of 1–2 Samuel as 1–2 Kingdoms.

² Whenever available, I cite the text as presented in the Göttingen editions. For 1–2 Kingdoms I follow *Codex Vaticanus* as edited by Brooke–McLean, while for Proverbs I adopt the text of Rahlfs’s edition.

Esth. 8:7	καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πρὸς Ἑσθήρ Εἰ πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντα Ἀμάν ἐδωκα καὶ ἔχαρισάμην σοι, καὶ αὐτὸν ἐκρέμασα ἐπὶ ξύλου ὅτι τὰς χεῖρας ἐπήνεγκε τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, τί ἔτι ἐπιζητεῖς;
Zech. 2:9 (Mt 2:13)	διότι ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐπιφέρω τὴν χεῖρά μου ἐπ' αὐτούς, καὶ ἔσονται σκύλα τοῖς δουλεύουσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ γινώσθεθε ὅτι Κύριος Παντοκράτωρ ἀπέσταλκέν με.

In the other four cases, ἐπιφέρω governs twice a direct object (Job 15:12; Sus. 53), once both a direct and an indirect object (Jud. 8:8), and once an indirect object (2 Mac. 12:35).

Job 15:12	τί ἐτόλμησεν ἡ καρδία σου; ἢ τί ἐπήνεγκαν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί σου
Jud. 8:8	καὶ οὐκ ἦν ὃς ἐπήνεγκεν αὐτῇ ῥῆμα πονηρὸν, ὅτι ἐφοβέτο τὸν Θεὸν σφόδρα.
Sus. 53	πιστευθεὶς ἀκούειν καὶ κρίνειν κρίσεις θάνατον ἐπιφερούσας, καὶ τὸν μὲν αἰθῶν κατέκρινας, τοὺς δὲ ἐνόχους ἠφείεις, τοῦ κυρίου λέγοντος Ἀθῶν καὶ δίκαιον οὐκ ἀποκτενεῖς.
2 Mac. 12:35	Δωσίθεος δὲ τις τῶν τοῦ Βακχίνορος, ἐφιππος ἀνὴρ καὶ καρτερὸς, εἶχετο τοῦ Γοργίου, καὶ λαβόμενος τῆς γλαμύδος, ἦγεν αὐτὸν εὐρώστως, καὶ βουλομένου τὸν κατάρατον λαβεῖν ζῶγρειαν, τῶν ἱππέων τινὸς Θρακῶν ἐπενεχθέντος αὐτῷ καὶ τὸν ὤμον καθελόντος, διέφυγεν ὁ Γοργίας εἰς Μαρисяά.

Whenever the expression χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω occurs in books for which we have a Hebrew *Vorlage*, we observe that it usually translates (בַּ-יָד שְׁלַחַךְ (Gen. 37:22; 1 Sam. 22:17; 24:7, 11; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14; Esth. 8:7). It also once renders the Hebrew הִנֵּי יָדְ עַל (Zech. 2:9), and once לָאֵל הַשִּׁיב יָדְ אֵלָּא (Prov. 26:15).

In all these cases, except for Prov. 26:15, which refers to the literal act of bringing one's hand to one's mouth (בְּעַלְלֵי יָדוֹ בַּעֲלַחַת נְלֵאָה לְהַשִּׁיבָה אֶל-פִּי), the Hebrew expressions, and consequently their Septuagint renderings, describe deadly acts against someone. Apart from Gen. 37:22, discussed above, 1 Sam. 22:17 refers to the striking of the Lord's priests (לֹא-אָבִי עֲבָדִי וְלֹא-אָבִי עֲבָדִי (הַמְלִיךְ לְשַׁלֵּחַ אֶת-יָדָם לִפְנֵי בַכְּהֵי יְהוָה), while 1 Sam. 24:7 (לֹא-אָשָׂא עֵשֶׂה) (אֶת-יְהוָה בְּרַחֵם הַזֶּה לְאָדָנִי לְמַשִּׁיחַ יְהוָה לְשַׁלַּח יָדִי בּוֹ), 11 (לֹא-אָשָׂא לְשַׁלַּח יָדִי בְּאָדָנִי), 1 Sam. 26:9 (מִי לֹא אָבִיחִי לְשַׁלַּח יָדִי), 23 (חַלִּילָה לִי מִיְהוָה מְשַׁלַּח יָדִי בְּמַשִּׁיחַ יְהוָה), 11 (שְׁלַח יָדוֹ בְּמַשִּׁיחַ יְהוָה), and 2 Sam. 1:14 (אִידִּי לֹא יִרְאֶת לְשַׁלַּח יָדוֹ לְשַׁחַת אֶת-מַשִּׁיחַ יְהוָה), all refer to David's resolve not to raise his hand against the anointed of the Lord, Saul. Similarly, Esth. 8:7 describes Haman's attempt to destroy the Judeans (שְׁלַח יָדוֹ בְּהַרְגֵי), while Zech. 2:13 (LXX 2:9) depicts God's punitive action against the nations that plundered Israel (הִנֵּי מִנִּי אֶת-יְדֵי עַלְיָהֶם וְהֵיוּ שַׁלָּל לְעַבְדֵיהֶם).

It should nonetheless be noted that the Hebrew expression שְׁלַח יָדְ (בַּ-יָד) occurs in different places in Genesis. When it does not denote a deadly

act, it is usually rendered into Greek with the more neutral expression τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χεῖρας ἐκτείνω. In Gen. 3:22, the expression refers to Adam's stretching out his hand to take from the tree of life (μήποτε ἐκτείνη τὴν χεῖρα καὶ λάβη τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς), in Gen. 8:9, Noah extends his hand to take the returning dove (καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἔλαβεν αὐτήν), in Gen. 19:10, the men visiting Lot pull him inside the house (ἐκτείναντες δὲ οἱ ἄνδρες τὰς χεῖρας εἰσεσπάσαντο τὸν Λῶτ πρός ἑαυτοὺς εἰς τὸν οἶκον), and in Gen. 22:10, Abraham reaches out his hand to take a knife (καὶ ἐξέτεινεν Ἀβραάμ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ λαβεῖν τὴν μάχαιραν).³

Interestingly, the first and only other occurrence of (-ב) תַּךְ נָחַץ in Genesis (22:12) to denote a violent act is translated with the verb ἐπιβάλλω rather than ἐπιφέρω, when the angel of the Lord urges Abraham not to strike his son Isaac (μὴ ἐπιβάλης τὴν χεῖρά σου ἐπὶ τὸ παιδάριον μηδὲ ποιήσης αὐτῷ μηδέν). The same equivalence in similar contexts is also found in 2 Sam. 18:22 (תְּהַרְגֵנִי-יָדְכָּהּ יָדְךָ נִחָצְתָּ // οὐ μὴ ἐπιβάλλω χεῖρά μου ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ βασιλέως) and in Esth. 6:2 (שִׁירְיִשְׁתָּ תְהַרְבֵּב תִּי נִחָצְתָּ יְדִיכָא // ζητήσῃ ἐπιβαλεῖν τὰς χεῖρας Ἀρταξέρξης).⁴

The reason why the verb ἐπιβάλλω was first selected by the Genesis translator is easy to identify if we consider its use in Greek literature. We first encounter the expression τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χεῖρας ἐπιβάλλω in a fragment attributed to Cratinus (fr. 309), where we read τὴν χεῖρα μὴ ἴπιβαλλε, μὴ κλάων καθῆ, “do not lay a hand (on me), or you will sit down being sorry.” An almost identical line occurs in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (l. 933): κλαύσει, τὴν χεῖρ' ἦν ἐπιβάλλης, “you will be sorry if you lay a hand

3 The same pattern can be observed for the other occurrences of (-ב) תַּךְ נָחַץ outside the book of Genesis. The Greek expression τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χεῖρας ἐκτείνω is even more regularly used in the Septuagint to translate the synonymous Hebrew idiom תַּךְ תַּסֵּב.

4 Additional similar cases, although with different equivalents, occur in Isa. 5:25 (יִחָצְבּוּ יָדְכָּהּ יָדְךָ וְיָדְךָ וְיָדְךָ // καὶ ἐπέβαλεν τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἐπ' αὐτούς καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτούς), 11:14 (נִחָצְתָּ מִיָּדְכָּהּ יָדְךָ וְיָדְךָ // καὶ ἐπὶ Μωάβ πρόωτον τὰς χεῖρας ἐπιβαλοῦσιν), 11:15 (נִחָצְתָּ מִיָּדְכָּהּ יָדְךָ וְיָדְךָ וְיָדְךָ // καὶ ἐπιβαλεῖ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν πνεύματι βιαίῳ, καὶ πατάξει ἐπτά φάραγγας ὥστε διαπορεύεσθαι αὐτὸν ἐν ὑποδήμασιν), 19:16 (יָדְכָּהּ יָדְכָּהּ מִיָּדְכָּהּ יָדְכָּהּ יָדְכָּהּ // ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς χειρὸς Κυρίου σαβαώθ ἦν αὐτὸς ἐπιβαλεῖ αὐτοῖς), and 25:11 (יָדְכָּהּ יָדְכָּהּ מִיָּדְכָּהּ יָדְכָּהּ // καὶ ταπεινώσει τὴν ὕβριν αὐτοῦ ἐφ' ἃ τὰς χεῖρας ἐπέβαλεν).

(on him)”.⁵ The expression is also used multiple times by Polybius for acts of aggression. For instance, in *Hist.* 3.2.8 Philip and Antiochus’ κακοπραγμονεῖν, “to do ill,” is explained as τὰς χεῖρας ἐπιβάλλειν Φίλιππος μὲν τοῖς κατ’ Αἴγυπτον καὶ Καρίαν καὶ Σάμον, Αντίοχος δὲ τοῖς κατὰ Κοίλην Συρίαν καὶ Φοινίκην. In *Hist.* 3.5.5 it describes the Romans’ attack on Carthage (οἱ δ’ αὐτοὶ μετ’ οὐ πολὺ Καρχηδονίοις ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας), while in 5.16.3 hands are laid on Megales to take him to prison (τίς ἐτόλμησεν ἐπιβαλεῖν τὰς χεῖρας Μεγαλέα καὶ τίς εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν ἀπαγαγεῖν). The expression is likewise attested in two Ptolemaic papyri from the 3rd century BCE. In P. Franf. 7 (ll. 14–17), from the late 3rd century, the petitioner refers to hands being laid both upon his property and upon himself (ὅπως Δωριμάχῳ μὲν γράψῃ [μὴ ἐπιβάλλειν] τῷ κλήρωι μου τὰς χεῖρας, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πρότερον [ἐμοῦ σε ἀξιώσαν]τος γράψαι αὐτῷ μὴ ἐπιβάλλειν μοι αὐτὸν [τὰς χεῖρας]). In another fragmentary petition from the mid-3rd century BCE (P. Messeri 24, ll. 3–4), the same expression seems to refer to the appropriation of the petitioner’s property (ἐπισκέψασθαι ἵνα μὴ δοκῶ χ[εῖρας ἐπι]βάλλειν). In all these occurrences, both in classical and early Hellenistic literature and in papyri, the offended party occurs in the dative. In the Septuagint, on the other hand, the dative is found only in Isa. 19:16 (αὐτοῖς) and Esth. 6:2 (Ἀρταξέρξη). In the other occurrences, the preposition ἐπί is repeated, a faithful and isomorphic reproduction of the Hebrew source. The question arises as to what led the translator of Genesis to adopt the verb ἐπιφέρω in 37:22, instead of continuing with ἐπιβάλλω, given that the latter is a good Greek equivalent conveying the same meaning as the Hebrew.

χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative as a Homerism

Quite surprisingly, contrary to τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χείρας ἐπιβάλλω + dative, only three attestations of χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative can be found in texts written before the translation of LXX Genesis. All come from Homer (*Il.* 1.89; 19.261; *Od.* 16.438).

⁵ See also Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* ll. 439–440

<p>Il. 1.84-91</p>	<p>Τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς· θαρσέσθας μάλα εἰπέ θεοπρόπιον ὃ τι οἴσθα· οὐ μὰ γὰρ Ἀπόλλωνα Διὶ φίλον, ᾧ τε σὺ Κάλχαν εὐχόμενος Δαναοῖσι θεοπροπίας ἀναφαίνεις, οὐ τις ἐμεῦ ζῶντος καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένου σοὶ κούληρ παρὰ νηυσὶ βαρείας χεῖρας ἐποίσει συμπάντων Δαναῶν, οὐδ' ἦν Ἀγαμέμνονα εἴπηρ, ὅς νῦν πολλὸν ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν εὐχεται εἶναι.</p> <p>Then in answer to him spoke Achilles, swift of foot: "Take heart, and speak out any oracle you know, for by Apollo, dear to Zeus, to whom you pray, Calchas, and declare oracles to the Danaans, no one, while I live and have sight on the earth, shall lay heavy hands on you beside the hollow ships, no one of all the Danaans, not even if it is Agamemnon you mean, who now declares himself far the best of the Achaeans."</p>
<p>Il. 19.257-265</p>	<p>εὐξάμενος δ' ἄρα εἶπεν ἰδῶν εἰς οὐρανὸν εὐρύν· "ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα, θεῶν ὕπατος καὶ ἄριστος, Γῆ τε καὶ Ἥλιος καὶ Ἐρινύες, αἱ ἔ' ὑπὸ γαίαν ἀνθρώπους τίνυνται, ὅτις κ' ἐπίορκον ὁμόσση, μὴ μὲν ἐγὼ κούρη Βρισηίδι χεῖρ' ἐπένεικα, οὔτ' εὐνής πρόφασιν κεχρημένος οὔτε τευ ἄλλου. ἀλλ' ἐμὲν ἀπροτίμαστος ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἐμῆσιν. εἰ δέ τι τῶνδ' ἐπίορκον, ἔμοι θεοὶ ἄλγεα δοῖεν πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα διδοῦσιν ὅτις σφ' ἀλίτηται ὁμόσσας."</p> <p>And he spoke in prayer, looking up to the broad heaven: "Be Zeus my witness first, highest and best of gods, and Earth and Sun, and the Erinyes, that under earth take vengeance on men, whoever has sworn a false oath, that I never laid hand on the girl Briseis either by way of a lover's embrace or in any other way, but she remained untouched in my huts. And if anything in this oath be false, may the gods give me many woes, all those that they are used to give to anyone who sins against them in his swearing."</p>
<p>Od. 16.434-440</p>	<p>τὴν δ' αὐτ' Εὐρύμαχος, Πολύβου πάις, ἀντίον ἠύδα· "κούρη Ἰκαρίου, περίφρον Πηνελόπεια, θάρσει· μὴ τοι ταῦτα μετὰ φρεσὶ σῆσι μελόντων. οὐκ ἔσθ' οὗτος ἀνὴρ οὐδ' ἔσσειται οὐδέ γένηται, ὅς κεν Τηλεμάχῳ σὺ υἱεὶ χεῖρας ἐποίσει ζῶντός γ' ἐμέθεν καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένου. ᾧδε γὰρ ἐξέρεω, καὶ μὴν τετελεσμένον ἔσται·</p> <p>Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered her: "Daughter of Icarus, wise Penelope, be of good cheer, and let not these things distress your heart. That man lives not, nor shall live, nor shall ever be born, who shall lay hands on your son Telemachus while I live and behold the light upon the earth. For thus will I speak out to you, and truly it shall be brought to pass.</p>

In these three passages Achilles and Eurymachus (the latter deceitfully) swear that no one has laid, or will lay, hands on Calchas (*Il.* 1.89), Briseis (19.261), and Telemachus (*Od.* 16.438). In the first (*Il.* 1.88-89 οὐ τις ἐμεῦ ζῶντος καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένοιο / σοὶ κοίλης παρὰ νηυσὶ βαρείας χεῖρας ἐποίσει) and third (*Od.* 16.438-439 ὅς κεν Τηλεμάχῳ σῶ νιέει χεῖρας ἐποίσει / ζῶντός γ' ἐμέθεν καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένοιο), the expression occurs in similar formulaic phrases.

Interestingly, in *Codex Venetus A* 13v the verb ἐποίσει in *Il.* 1.89 is glossed interlinearly with ἐπιβαλεῖ, which, as noted above, is the more common variant of the expression and the one initially used by the translator of LXX Gen. in 22:12.⁶ It is therefore remarkable that in LXX Gen. 37:22 the translator chose the much rarer construction with ἐπιφέρω, otherwise attested only in Homer.

The reason for this choice lies in the narrative context of chapters 37–50, that is, the Joseph story. In 37:22 Reuben is defending his brother Joseph, whom the other brothers intend to kill. Significantly, a few verses earlier (37:19), his brothers mockingly refer to Joseph as ἐνυπνιαστής ἐκεῖνος, “that dreamer.” The noun ἐνυπνιαστής is not attested in any extant source prior to or contemporary with LXX Genesis. Philo later employs the term in *De Somniis* 2.42 alongside ὄνειροπόλος, itself previously attested only in Homer (*Il.* 1.53; 5.149) and Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.107.6; 1.108.5; 1.108.8; 1.128.4; 5.56.8), and ὄνειροπλήξ in *De Josepho* 12, a term otherwise unattested before Philo.

As mentioned above, the first occurrence of the expression χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative in *Il.* 1.89 appears in Achilles' promise to Calchas that no one, not even Agamemnon, will harm him. Calchas first enters the narrative after Achilles proposes consulting (*Il.* 1.62-63) a prophet (μάντις), priest (ιερεὺς), or interpreter of dreams (ὄνειροπόλος), since “a dream too is from Zeus” (καὶ γάρ τ' ὄναρ ἐκ Διός ἐστιν). Shortly thereafter (*Il.* 1.69), Calchas is introduced as the foremost of the augurs (Κάλχας Θεστορίδης οἰωνοπόλων ὄχ' ἄριστος). The augur had, in fact, already demonstrated his skills in Aulis (*Il.* 2.299-332), where the

⁶ The same scholion occurs also in codices ZYQ and belongs to the so-called *D scholia*. See van Thiel 2014, p. 33; for an overview of the Homeric scholia, see Schironi 2018, pp. 6–15.

Achaean halted to offer a sacrifice on their way to Troy. There Calchas interprets a portent that appears on a tree beside the altar: a serpent sent by Zeus emerges from beneath the altar and climbs a plane tree, where eight sparrow nestlings are found. The serpent devours them and their mother (2.317 *αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατὰ τέκν' ἔφαγε στρουθοῖο καὶ αὐτήν*), catching her by the wing as she flies around the nest. Calchas interprets the sign as foretelling that, just as the serpent devoured eight sparrows, nine including the mother (2.327 *ὀκτώ, ἀτὰρ μήτηρ ἑνάτη ἦν, ἧ τέκε τέκνα*), so the Achaeans will fight at Troy for nine years before capturing the city in the tenth.

Joseph, the *ἐνυπνιαστής*, dreams of his parents and brothers (37:5–7, 9), and these dreams provoke the brothers' hatred and murderous intent. Just as Achilles protects Calchas from Agamemnon (*Il.* 1.88–89 *οὐ τις ἐμεῦ ζῶντος καὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ δερκομένοιο / σοὶ κοίλης παρὰ νηυσὶ βαρείας χεῖρας ἐποίσει*), so Reuben defends Joseph from his brothers (37:22 *εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς Ρουβὴν Μὴ ἐκχέητε αἷμα· ἐμβάλετε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν λάκκον τοῦτον τὸν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, χεῖρα δὲ μὴ ἐπενέγκητε αὐτῷ· ὅπως ἐξέλθαι αὐτὸν ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ἀποδῶ αὐτὸν τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ*). Moreover, in Gen. 44:5 and 44:15 the Greek text describes Joseph as a diviner who practices ornithomancy (*αὐτὸς δὲ οἰωνισμῷ οἰωνίζεται* and *οἰωνισμῷ οἰωνιέται ἄνθρωπος οἷος ἐγώ*). Joseph, the dreamer and augur, is summoned to interpret Pharaoh's dream, in which seven ugly and scrawny cows devour (*κατέφαγον*) seven healthy ones (41:4, 20). The fourteen cows signify two periods of seven years, the first of prosperity and the second of famine, not unlike the devoured eight nestlings and their mother, which represent nine years. Meanwhile, Joseph's brothers later deceive Jacob by claiming that a wild beast has devoured (*κατέφαγεν*) Joseph (37:20, 33).

As these parallels suggest, a number of thematic analogies link Calchas and Joseph. The translator appears to have reinforced this association by employing Homeric diction, drawing the two figures closer through the deliberate use of similar words and expressions. The occurrence in 37:22 of the Homeric expression *χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω* + dative, instead of the more common *τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χείρας ἐπιβάλλω* already employed in 22:12, points to a conscious choice on the part of the translator.

Likewise, the consistent rendering of the verb ψῆν with the fairly rare οἰωνισμός and οἰωνίζομαι (Gen. 30:27; 44:5, 15; Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10; 1 Kgs 20:33; 2 Kgs 17:17; 21:6; 2 Chron. 33:6), as well as the noun ψῆν (Num. 23:23; 24:1) with οἰωνισμός and οἰωνός, may have been determined at the time of the translation of LXX Genesis on the basis of famous scenes of ornithomancy in Greek literature, such as the one discussed above or the episode in *Il.* 12.200–209, in which an eagle and a snake fight in mid-air before the latter is cast down among the Trojan army, a portent that Hector calls οἰωνός, “augury” (l. 243). The characterization of Joseph and Calchas as οἰωνοπόλοι (implicit in LXX Genesis) is therefore particularly apt in light of the parallels between the two: both interpret dreams or portents involving animals that devour other animals, whose number symbolizes years, and both face mortal dangers because of their skills, requiring others (namely Achilles and Reuben) to intervene on their behalf. The choice of the Homeric χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω over τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χείρας ἐπιβάλλω is a skillful touch on the part of the translator or, as Wevers (1993, p. 622) puts it, “it represents a fine interpretation”.⁷

The Expression χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω in the Other Books of the Septuagint

Finally, this rare Homerism is then taken over from Genesis by other translators. As mentioned above, the expression occurs elsewhere nine times, in 1 Kgdms 22:17; 24:7, 11; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Kgdms 1:14; Prov. 26:15; and Zech. 2:9. Nevertheless, one can observe that it is only the Genesis translator who faithfully quotes Homer: as in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in Gen. 37:22 there is no definite article before χεῖρ nor any possessive pronoun accompanying it, and the verb governs a dative. In the other occurrences, the noun χεῖρ is either definite (1 Kgdms 22:17; Prov. 26:15; Esth. 8:7), has a possessive pronoun (1 Kgdms 24:7, 11; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Kgdms 1:14), or both (Zech. 2:9). In seven instances, that is, when

⁷ The suitors’ plotting against Telemachus in *Od.* 16.364–448 constitutes another interesting parallel to the episode in Genesis 37. The translator was probably influenced by both episodes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

the verb does not govern an infinitive, the preposition ἐπί + accusative is used instead of the dative. The Genesis occurrence of χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω may therefore be counted among those attributable to the same phenomenon whereby the lexicon of the Pentateuch served as a source for the translators of other books of the Septuagint (see Tov 1981; 2016; D’Hamonville 2000, pp. 75–78; and Yardney 2019, with the bibliography cited there).

Conclusion

As other scholars have already demonstrated, the translators of the Pentateuch were trained native scribes, well versed in the *litterae Graecae* and, most importantly, well acquainted with Homer.⁸ This short essay has examined the expression χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative occurring in LXX Gen. 37:22. Although a more common synonymous expression (τὴν χεῖρα / τὰς χείρας ἐπιβάλλω) appears earlier in LXX Gen. 22:12, in LXX Gen. 37:22 the translator adopts the rarer χεῖρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative construction, attested only in Homer prior to the translation of LXX Genesis. In addition to identifying a Homeric expression, this study has also attempted to account for the translator’s use of it. The explanation may be found in the similarities between Calchas, of whom the expression is first used in the *Iliad*, and Joseph. A deeper and more comprehensive study of the Joseph story, and of Genesis more broadly, may well bring to light more examples of Homerisms.

⁸ See Evans 1999; 2001, pp. 193–197; Casevitz 2001; Aitken 2011; 2014; Lee 2018. For Homeric allusions or Homeric language in other books of the Septuagint see, for instance, D’Hamonville 2000, pp. 102–103; Usener 2011; 2016; Aitken 2020. See also the 14th-century translation of the Pentateuch, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentation, and Daniel preserved in Ms. Marcianus gr. 7 (Aslanov, 2012). More generally, Homer and Homeric scholarship played a relevant role in Hellenistic Jewish authors, as demonstrated by Niehoff (2011).

Abstract

The expression χείρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative and LXX Genesis 37:22: A Homerism Linking Calchas and Joseph

This article examines a Homeric allusion in LXX Genesis 37:22, where the Greek translator employs the rare expression χείρα / χείρας ἐπιφέρω + dative, otherwise attested only in Homer. This deliberate lexical choice establishes a link between the figure of Joseph and that of Calchas. The study further highlights additional shared features between the two figures in order to strengthen and contextualize this parallel.

Keywords: Septuagint, Homer, Ancient Greek, Translation Technique

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