

# RESPONDING TO A PUZZLED SCRIBE THE BARBERINI VERSION OF HABAKKUK 3 ANALYSED IN THE LIGHT OF THE OTHER GREEK VERSIONS<sup>1</sup>

Joshua L. Harper

Some time before the Ninth Century AD a puzzled scribe wrote the following note at the end of a Greek version of Habakkuk 3:

τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ Ἀμβρακοῦμ οὐχ εὔρον συμφωνοῦσαν οὔτε τοῖς ὁ, οὔτε ἀκύλα, οὔτε συμμαχώ, οὔτε θεοδοτίωνι· ζητήσεις οὖν εἰ τῆς εἰ ἢ τῆς ζ' ἐκδόσεως;— ἐτέρας ἐκδοχῆς προσευχὴ Ἀμβρακοῦμ μετ' ᾠδῆς, τῶν ὁ ἐρμηνεία:

I have not found [this] ode of Habakkuk to agree with either the Septuagint or Aquila or Symmachus or Theodotion; you must therefore search to see whether it is the edition of quinta or sexta. — From another version, the prayer of Habakkuk with a song, the translation of the Septuagint:

This anonymous version of Habakkuk 3, which he had just finished copying, cannot be identified with any of the other known Greek versions of Habakkuk or the Twelve Prophets. It is only found in six Septuagint manuscripts, and has come to be known as the Barberini version of Habakkuk 3 after one of the best witnesses, which was formerly in the library of the Barberini family in Rome.

The goal of my thesis is to describe the Barberini version and the translator responsible for it—to give the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* of its creation in so far as this can be determined by comparing the Barberini Greek version with the other Greek and Hebrew versions of the chapter. As such, the results of the investigation can be broken down under these convenient headings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joshua L. Harper, 'Responding to a Puzzled Scribe: The Barberini Version of Habakkuk 3 Analysed in the Light of the Other Greek Versions' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 2013). Supervisor: Prof. Robert P. Gordon.

**How?** Analysing the translation technique of the translator is perhaps the most concrete focus of the thesis. The version is clearly oriented toward producing clear, stylish Greek, rather than in representing every element of the Hebrew source text. The translator has felt free to transform the Hebrew in various ways, including syntactical modifications, careful choice of vocabulary, translations which clarify obscure Hebrew, flexibility of expression (especially with regard to function words), as well as attempts to produce an aesthetically pleasing and rhetorically elegant translation. These modifications mean that it is not always easy to reconstruct the Hebrew *Vorlage* used by the translator, and the version is therefore not of great value for the Hebrew text of Habakkuk 3. Due to the Greek-oriented nature of the Barberini version, it shares several stylistic features with Symmachus. Although there is no direct connection to Symmachus, it is interesting to see that ancient translators were implicitly dealing with the same tensions as modern translators between keeping close to the Hebrew text and producing a readable translation.

**Who?** The translator was probably Jewish, or at least strongly influenced by Jewish exegetical traditions. For most scholars, the conclusive piece of evidence has been the translation of מְשִׁיחָךָ *your anointed one* as τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς σου *your chosen ones* in verse 13 to be a Jewish anti-Christian polemic, but such a translation could simply be pre-Christian, like the plural τοὺς χριστοὺς σου *your anointed ones* in the Septuagint. On the other hand, there are other resonances with Jewish exegetical traditions, which are discussed in chapter 3. The translator appears to know Hebrew reasonably well, which suggests he has had some training in Hebrew, but the stylistically refined, literary Greek used indicates that he must have had at least a medium level of Greek education.

**What?** It appears that the Barberini version only ever contained Habakkuk 3. If it was part of a larger project, nothing else has been preserved, since the Barberini version cannot be connected with any other known Greek in the Twelve. There are several major agreements with the Septuagint version of the chapter, but much of the material is strikingly different between the two versions. There are two possibilities for the origin of the Barberini version. It could be that the Barberini version was a revision of an existing Greek version (i.e. the Septuagint). Nevertheless, chapter 2 argues that it was a largely independent translation and that the agreements in verses 2, 8, and 18

are the result of cross-contamination during the history of transmission of both versions of Habakkuk 3. All the witnesses of the Barberini version are Septuagint manuscripts.

**Where?** Since the translator has facility with both Hebrew and Greek and appears to have received some Greek education, it is no great leap to suggest that he was working in a Hellenistic Jewish context. Readings from the Barberini version are found in North African contexts (e.g. Cyprian) and in Egypt (e.g. several Coptic versions), and the version was copied in Asia Minor and southern Italy. This does little to limit the geographical scope, except perhaps to the eastern Mediterranean, the area of greatest Greek cultural influence. Beyond this lies speculation.

**When?** The earliest manuscript witness to the full Barberini version dates from the Eighth Century AD, but it was probably translated much earlier. It must predate the death of Cyprian (AD 258), since Cyprian quotes it, and it may predate the translation of the Peshitta, which was probably translated in the Second Century AD. The Barberini version probably postdates the translation of the Pentateuch, from the Third Century BC. Between these two points, however, it is difficult to be more precise. The vocabulary used in the Barberini version fits well with the Greek of the wisdom books and apocrypha, but this may be due more to the poetic subject matter than to chronological proximity. Stylistically, Barberini does not appear to have been influenced by the Atticising grammarians, who became influential in the Second Century AD, but other Greek translations translated in the Second Century (such as Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus) were not influenced by them. Thus, it is difficult to put a specific date to the translation.

**Why?** At the most basic level, a new translation is undertaken when no available version fits a need of the translator or his community. The translator, however, has not left us any specific data other than the translation itself. He has succeeded in producing a clear and elegant Greek translation of a psalm from outside the Psalter. It is possible that this translation was made for liturgical use. The technical psalmic vocabulary present both in Hebrew and in Greek suggest that the chapter is easily adapted to liturgical use, and Habakkuk 3 is used liturgically in several different traditions. It is not clear when these liturgical practices began, but it may well be that the Barberini version was translated for such a use.