RE-EXAMINING יְהוָה רֹעִי IN PSALM 23:
IMPLICATIONS FOR AKAN TRANSLATIONS AND
AFRICAN BIBLICAL STUDIES

Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi

Abstract: Psalm 23 is one of the psalms that are familiar to Ghanaians. The translation of יְהוָה רֹעִי in some Akan mother-tongue languages avoid the use of the shepherd imagery. The Mfantse translation, however, is very unique among the Akan translations. Its uniqueness lies in the translation of the shepherd imagery. ‘shepherd’ is an indispensable imagery or a metaphor in the text. The rendering of יְהוָה רֹעִי as Awurade ne me hwéfo in the Twi translations misses the imagery that the source text seeks to convey. This paper examines the place of ‘adônâ rô’i in the source language and its translations in the Akan versions of the Bible. It deduces its implications for African Biblical Studies and suggests that in the next revision of the Twi translations due consideration should be given to the shepherd imagery.

Key Words: Akan translation, Imagery, Ghana, Metaphor, Psalm, Shepherd.

Introduction

The existence of many ethnic groups with different mother tongues in Africa and the rise in the number of Christians on the continent has necessitated the high demand for the Bible in the local languages. The translations are in response to the demand for the use of the Bible in different spheres of life: liturgical, academic, educational, inspirational. One text that has been translated differently by the Akan versions of the Bible is Ps. 23. This Psalm is one of the most popular

2 The Akan is an ethnic group found in some parts of Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire in West Africa with various groupings such as the Asante, Bono, Fante, Ahafo, Sefwi, Nzema, Akuapem and Akyem with each having its distinct dialect with similar vocabulary but different accents. Cf. Emmanuel K. E. Antwi, Isaac F. Adjei and Joseph K. Asuming, “Understanding Wisdom in the Old Testament through Its Akan (Ghana) Parallels: Linkages and Disconnections,” Old Testament Essays 33, no. 3 (2020): 414-415.
psalms in the Old Testament (OT) due to its shepherd-motif and imagery, and its associated assurance of God’s providence, protection, deliverance and guidance to the psalmist and the real reader of the psalm.

The first verse of this popular psalm is rendered differently by the ancient versions: the Masoretic Text (MT), the Septuagint (LXX), and the Vulgate (Vg). The modern translations follow either the rendering of the MT or that of the LXX. Few seem to combine parts of the MT and the LXX. The Akan mother-tongue versions of the Bible do not agree on the translation of the first verse of Ps. 23. Its translation in the Twi versions of the Bible (Asante and Akuapim) differs from that of the Mfantse. The Twi versions render ‘dônâ rô ‘tî as Awurade ne me hwêfo literally translated as “the Lord is my guardian/guard.” In this sense, the translation does not conform to the imagery of the shepherd, which the metaphor seeks to convey to the reader in the ancient versions.

Psalm 23:1

Structure of Ps. 23

Ps. 23 corresponds to Ps. 22 in the LXX and the Vg. It is one of the psalms of trust and confidence in which the psalmist declares his hope of being rescued and protected from his troubles.4 The Psalm could be divided into four parts.

A. V. 1 - The Introductory Part

After the introductory formula, מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד (mizmôr lê dâwid), the psalm continues with two statements, one having YHWH as the subject and the other with the psalmist as the subject.

B. Vv. 2-4 - Imageries of the Role of the Shepherd

This part indicates the psalmist’s description of the shepherd in imageries relating to the role and function of a shepherd. The psalmist

---

3 I render it simply as Adonai Roi to make it easier for readers who are not accustomed to the Hebrew transliteration.

switches from the 1st person singular in the introductory part, to the 3rd person in vv.2-3. In v. 4a, the psalmist speaks in the 1st person. In v.4b, he switches from the 2nd person singular addressing YHWH directly as the motivation for his preceding statements in v.4a.

C. V. 5 - The Shepherd as a Banquet Host

The statements in the 2nd person singular from v.4b continue through v.5, however switching from the description of the addressee as a shepherd to a host at a banquet.

D. V. 6 - The Concluding Part

It is the declaration of the psalmist’s hope and belief in being with YHWH. The psalmist concludes speaking in the first person. He affirms his belief of dwelling in the house of YHWH forever. YHWH is named in the introductory part and it appears in the concluding part, forming as it were an inclusion of the text.

Ps. 23:1 in the Ancient Versions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>MT (Ps 23:1)</th>
<th>LXX (Ps 22:1)</th>
<th>Vulgate (22:1)⁵</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Switches from the 1st person singular in the introductory part, to the 3rd person in vv.2-3. In v. 4a, the psalmist speaks in the 1st person. In v.4b, he switches from the 2nd person singular addressing YHWH directly as the motivation for his preceding statements in v.4a.</td>
<td>מְשׁאֵרָ֑ו יְהוָ֖ה</td>
<td>פֶּסְלִֽמְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַנְסַn</td>
<td>Psalmus David. Dominus reget me et nihil mihi deerit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The statements in the 2nd person singular from v.4b continue through v.5, however switching from the description of the addressee as a shepherd to a host at a banquet.</td>
<td>תֵּֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽוָֽv</td>
<td>Psalmoś tò David kyrios poimainai me kai ou den me ostatheis</td>
<td>Psalm of David, the Lord rules/ guides me and I shall want/lack nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transliteration</td>
<td>mizmör liddawid yhwh (&quot;dōnâ) rō’i lō² ehs r</td>
<td>Psalmos tò David kyrios poimainai me kai ouden me husterēsei</td>
<td>Psalm of David, the Lord rules/ guides me and I shall want/lack nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Song of David, YHWH is my shepherd, I shall not lack.⁶</td>
<td>Psalm of David, the Lord shepherds/ tends/ pastures me, and I shall lack nothing.⁸</td>
<td>Psalm of David, the Lord rules/ guides me and I shall want/lack nothing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁶ Cf. King James Version, New American Standard Bible, the Bible in Basic English, Revised Standard Version. American Standard Version (1901) translates directly the MT and has “Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”
⁷ I use the definite article here since the LXX uses ku,rioj without the article in the sense of a proper name for God. In this sense, ‘Lord’ is defined to refer to no other lord, but God.
⁸ The Lord tends me as a shepherd, and I shall want nothing. My translation is supported by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
Ps 23:1 could be divided into three:

- All the ancient versions cited above agree on the translation of the superscription, *mizmôr F dawid*. The phrase introduces 73 of the psalms. *mizmôr* is in a genitival relationship with *F dawid*, attributing the psalm to David. There is no bone of contention with this phrase concerning its translation into the Akan mother-tongue languages. Consequently, it will not call for much discussion.

- In the clause, *"dônâ rô‘i*, the speaker, who is referred to in the first person pronominal suffix, identifies YHWH as his shepherd. The LXX deviates from the MT’s translation in terms of syntax. It translates *"dônâ rô‘i* as κύριος ποιμάνει με. The MT uses the participle form of the verb ṣāḥî, (ra‘ah), ṣêār (rōeh) meaning in the strict and literal sense ‘shepherding, ‘tending or ‘pasturing.’ The participle in biblical Hebrew has two functions as a verb when it is accompanied by the accusative object and as a noun when the accompanying noun is genitive.9 In this sense, it is not always the case that all Hebrew participles should be rendered in the verbal sense as it appears in the LXX. We find other instances of nominalized participles10 in the OT, whereby ṣāḥî occurs in the nominalised form such as in Gen. 13:8; 26:20; 46:32; Isa. 44:28, 63:11; Ezek. 34:2, 8; Zech. 11:17; 13:7. In these instances, the substantive form ποιμήν is used in the LXX, except in Zech. 11:17 where the nominalised participle οἱ ποιμαίνοντες is used. In Isa. 44:28, in the oracle concerning Cyrus, the LXX neither uses the substantive nor the nominalised participle of any of the Greek words for ‘shepherd.’ It avoids referring to Cyrus as γὰ σ (my shepherd) as it appears in the MT.

- *yîrî* is used here in Ps. 23:1 in the construct form with the possessive pronominal suffix to mean ‘my shepherd.’ The LXX uses the verb ποιμαίνω ‘to shepherd,’ ‘to rule’ and ‘to pasture’ with the pronominal accusative με and not the substantive form ποιμήν. Lust, Eyninkel and Hauspie provide the following meaning for ποιμαίνω: “to tend, to guide, to govern, to rule.” However in the context of Ps. 23, they

---


10 The participles used as nouns are referred to as nominalised participles.
provide “to protect, to care for and to nurture.”\textsuperscript{11} “The LXX translates the verb 38 times with \textit{ποιμαίνω}, ‘graze, tend.’”\textsuperscript{12} Considering the above meanings of \textit{הֶרוּם} and its equivalent translations in the LXX, it is clear that the word \textit{הֶרוּם} belonged originally to the vocabulary relating to animal husbandry. It was used to refer to the pasturing of animals and was later used metaphorically to refer to leaders.\textsuperscript{13} The LXX prefers using the verb \textit{ποιμαίνω} to using its substantive form \textit{ποιμήν} to express the action of the shepherd in the MT.\textsuperscript{14}

The Vulgate translates the statement with \textit{Dominus reget me}, literally meaning “the Lord rules/guides me.” In this context, the Vulgate does not use the shepherd imagery or metaphor directly. It reads into the text by assigning to it one of the implications of the shepherd imagery. Rulers were metaphorically referred to as shepherds. The 1986 version of the Vulgate, by \textit{Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum} renders the statement as \textit{Dominus pascit me},\textsuperscript{15} “the Lord pastures/feeds/shepherds me.” It translates the idea of the shepherd in the statement, though in a different syntactical structure. The change of \textit{reget} to \textit{pascit} in the revision might have been because the idea of the shepherd metaphor conveyed in the Masoretic Text (MT) looks hidden in the Vulgate. The revision perhaps identified the importance of the shepherd imagery in the text and saw the need to render it closer to the meaning in the Hebrew text.

The LXX translates \textit{יהוה} (YHWH) in the MT as \textit{κύριος} meaning ‘master,’ ‘Lord’ or ‘owner’ as used in Exod. 21:29.\textsuperscript{16} YHWH is the name of God revealed to Moses in the incident of the burning bush in Exod.

\textsuperscript{11} J. Lust, E. Eynikel, K. Hauspie, \textit{A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint} (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), 502.
\textsuperscript{14} The Vulgate translation is closer to the LXX and has “Dominus reget me et nihil mihi deerit.” Cf. Gottfried Hoberg, \textit{Die Psalmen der Vulgata: Übersetzt und nach dem Literalsinn erklärt}, (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1906), 71. Hoberg translates it to German from the Vulgate “Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit” as “Der Herr leitet mich und nichts fehlt mir,” meaning the Lord leads/guides me, nothing do I lack.
\textsuperscript{16} Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie, \textit{Lexicon of the Septuagint}, 360. The Vulgate follows the rendering of the LXX and translates YHWH as \textit{Dominus}. 

21| Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology Volume 13 (1) 2023
YHWH is used in the OT when the idea of the deity is concrete. It became the “personal God of Israel according to the exodus and Deuteronomistic traditions.” The LXX translates YHWH as κύριος ‘Lord’ which rightly translates הָדֹנִי (’adôn) appearing also in the following forms; יְהוָה (’yôwâ) and יִדְוָה (’ydôwâ), which does not only refer to God but also Lord in the sense of “master” on the secular level. In this case, the LXX avoids the use of the personal name of God, YHWH, and substitutes it with κύριος which is the title of God.

Two reasons account for the use of κύριος by the LXX for YHWH: the early Jewish religious practice of substitution of YHWH with a title Adonai and the theologization of the name. The substitution of YHWH with the title κύριος by the LXX was influenced by the Jewish religious practice of the substitution of the divine name. The name YHWH was to be held sacred and not to be pronounced according to a Jewish tradition. In early Judaism, the title Adonai was to be read in place of YHWH, which was the real name of the God of Israel. The reader was to pronounce Adonai instead of the unpronounceable YHWH in the text. Since YHWH was not pronounced, the vowels of the Hebrew יָהָה “my Lord” were inserted into the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) to read Yehova.

The LXX was made by bilingual Jews — who knew both Greek and Hebrew — for the liturgical and educational needs of the Diaspora.

17 Charles R. Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” in B. Z. Roy, Vital Old Testament Issues (Grand Rapids: Kregel Resources, 1996), 29. Thus though the name YHWH existed well before the time of Moses, the meaning of that name was not revealed until the time of Moses.
23 It was the name, which was later to be invoked at cultic ceremonies and pronounced once in a year by the high priest at the feast of Atonement.
Jews in Alexandria. They might have already known the practice of the substitution of YHWH with the title ‘Lord’ which influenced their translations. It is also possible that the LXX translators theologized the name YHWH giving it a title worthy of the name. Κύριος implied, as it were, ‘master,’ ‘Lord,’ or ‘owner.’ These words connote relationships. When ‘master’ is applied to someone, it connotes a relationship to a servant. In much the same way, when an owner is named it indicates a relationship to a property. Similarly, to address someone as Lord implies the person has authority and could be superior to the addressee. These could in a similar context refer to God when used in the religious sense to indicate his relationship to the universe and his people. YHWH is the creator and the absolute sovereign of the universe and he has authority over his creation. Through his redemption and the election of Israel, YHWH becomes their rightful owner. Israel is thus described as God’s possession πᾶσα (σεγυλλαχ) in Exodus 19:5.

The LXX differentiates the secular use of Κύριος for ‘master,’ ‘lord’ from its use for the divine name by using Κύριος without the definite article in the sense of a proper name for God. Fernandez affirms that “when the LXX translates Ὁλόχιον (Elohim) by θεός and Yahweh by Κύριος, it has only reproduced in an approximate way and for the Greek-speaking world what the Jews understood by the name of their God.” By using Κύριος and not θεός, which could as well translate the appellative names of God, Ἰα (El) and, Ἁλοχία (Elohim) in the LXX, the LXX seeks to theologize the name by attributing to it his actions as the sovereign Lord and creator. Ἰα and Ἁλοχία “denote a divine person by species rather than an individual divine person.”

- The negative verbal clause ἅρπας ἐστί is consequent to ἱππος χρηστός. ἅρπας is a prefix conjugation of the verb ἅρπας (hāsēr) meaning, ‘to

---

diminish,’ ‘to decrease,’ ‘to fail’ and ‘to lack.’ The negative particle קָרָב (not/no) is used “regularly for the objective, unconditional negation.” It entirely negates the verb בָּשָׁר in the clause. The LXX translates בָּשָׁר with the indicative active future as ὑστερήσῃ, thus changing the 1st person pronoun in the MT to the 3rd person. ὑστερήω usually goes with an accusative case. The LXX does not use the negative particle οὖ (οὐκ, οὐχ) to negate the verb, but instead uses οὐδέν as in other parts. οὐδέν is used here as a substantive and it is the subject of the clause καὶ οὐδέν με ὑστερήσῃ “and I shall lack nothing.” The LXX’s rendering of the clause in this sense will syntactically differentiate it from that of the MT as “I shall not lack.” The LXX puts emphasis on the object of the verb whereas the MT indicates the total negation of the verb. The Vulgate follows the LXX translation.

Though there is no logical connector or particle in the MT, connecting this statement, בָּשָׁר, to its preceding one, אֵלֶּה יִרְאֶת, it is consequent to the idea expressed in the previous statement. The LXX identifies this relationship and provides the conjunctive particle καὶ (and), linking both statements. The psalmist’s affirmation that he will lack nothing depends on the assurance that YHWH is his shepherd. This statement is connected to the imagery of the shepherd, seen in his role as a protector, guide, provider and deliverer. The psalmist affirms that since YHWH is his shepherd, he will not be in want of anything.

**Ps. 23:1 and its Textual Connections through the Shepherd Motif**

*Intratextual Connections*

The statements in Ps. 23:1 have a bearing on the rest of the psalm. The subsequent statements in vv. 2-6 are shadows of the psalmist's

---

34 It reads literally as “and nothing will lack me.” Since the verb governs an accusative, this will be the implication, however to make it sensible in English language, the translation will be “and nothing will I lack” or “I will lack nothing.”
declaration in the first part, substantiating his affirmation that YHWH is his shepherd. Thus, the psalmist’s declaration of the assurance in YHWH as his shepherd finds its extension in the rest of the psalm.

The psalmist changes from the 1st person singular in the introductory part in verse 1, and begins to describe the role of his shepherd in the subsequent sections. In vv. 2-3, he describes his shepherd in the 3rd person pronoun and switches to the 2nd person pronoun addressing him directly in vv. 4b-5. In v. 3, the ‘name’ in לְמָאָן שְׁמֹה (l’m’a’an sh’mö) meaning “for the sake of his name” reflects the name of the shepherd mentioned in v. 1. A name of an entity indicates its identity. The activities, of restoring the soul of the psalmist and guiding him through the path of righteousness, stem from the nature of the addressee who is his God. In v. 4, the elements mentioned, staff and rod, are very significant tools of the shepherd. They were used to protect and rescue the sheep from predators — the wild animals that sought to devour them. Thus, they were used by the shepherd to protect his flock from impending dangers from the enemies.

V. 5 seems problematic in its relationship to the entire psalm. The elements of the shepherd are changed to elements of a banquet host. The addressee is described as the one who sets a banquet for the psalmist before his enemies. V. 5 is syntactically linked to the previous clause in v. 4b through the use of the 2nd person pronouns. In the preceding clauses, the psalmist describes his shepherd in the 3rd person. However, it is in vv. 4b-5 that the psalmist speaks directly to the addressee personally using the 2nd person pronouns. V. 4b indicates elements of a shepherd whereas v. 5 switches to the elements of a banquet host. The anointing of the head of the guest with oil in v. 5 was an oriental custom. The elements of a shepherd switching to the elements of a banquet host must be seen as the shepherd assuming the role of a host and in this case, the addressee in this circumstance becomes a shepherd-host. The image of the table set before the guest

could be compared to the image of the green pasture already mentioned in v. 2.\(^{40}\)

The psalmist declares his hope in YHWH in the introductory section and concludes by declaring his hope in dwelling in the house of YHWH. The shepherd and its associated descriptions are all metaphorical. The psalmist describes his relationship with his God in this metaphorical language. He declares precisely that his shepherd is YHWH in Ps. 23:1 and just as the shepherd protects and takes care of the sheep, so does YHWH protect and care for him. He affirms his being with YHWH in the concluding part. The intratextual context of Ps. 23:1, indicates that the psalmist is describing his relationship to the shepherd whom he mentions as, YHWH, his God. The psalmist describes a shepherd-sheep and a protector-protected relationships.

**Intertextual Connections within the Psalter**

Ps. 23:1 has few intertextual relationships within the Psalter. Instances in the Psalter in which one can talk of direct intertextual connections, in terms of a direct reference to YHWH as a shepherd are very few, such as Ps. 28:9 and 80:2. The motif of the shepherd-sheep relationship however occurs in Ps 95:7 and mostly in the Psalms of Asaph such as Ps. 74:1; 78:52.70 and 79:13.\(^{41}\)

In Ps. 28:9 (27:9 in the LXX), the phrase וַאֲנָחוֹ (ûr’em; and pasture them/be their shepherd), the imperative form of the verb הַעֲרִ, with the 3rd person pronominal suffix referring to the people mentioned in the preceding statements, on a call to God to save and bless his people, appears with YHWH as the addressee. The psalmist appeals to YHWH in this thanksgiving psalm to guide or shepherd his people. The imperative form, which however does not describe what YHWH has done or is doing, elicits an action from him. The LXX does not deviate from the MT. It uses ποιμαίνον (poimanon),\(^{42}\) the aorist imperative form of the same verb which it uses to translate נַשְּגָה in Ps. 23:1.

---


\(^{41}\) Calès, *Le Livre de Psaumes*, 278.

The imperative יְהוָה רֹעִי runs parallel to three other imperatives, יִשָׁרוּאֵל, (hôshiʿâh), יִבְרָאֵק (ûbarek) and וַעֲנַסְתֶּם (w’nass’t’em) which are associated mostly with the acts of YHWH as the one who saves and blesses and lifts up his people.

In Ps. 80:2 (79:2 in the LXX), YHWH is referred to as the shepherd of Israel, יָהָה יִרְאֵל (rôeh yisrâ’el). The phrase has a vocative function. The psalmist appeals to YHWH as the shepherd of Israel and describes him in the subsequent clause as the one who leads Joseph like a flock (נָא הַנֶּאֶס יִחְצָה). The psalmist cries for help from God, recalling his activities in the past for his people as a motivation for his need for help. God is portrayed in this psalm of lament as the one who saves. This is emphasized in the choruses of the psalm. The psalmist after invoking his addressee puts his request to him in v. 3. He addresses God in the 1st person plural making himself a representative of his people. V. 3 presents two requests from the psalmist that God should restore them and save them. These imageries of God as the one who saves and restores are repeated in the choruses.

 יִדְרָע occurring with the negative particle in the 2nd clause in Ps. 23:1 as לא appears in a different form in Ps. 34:11 as לא יִדְרָע “they will not lack.” They differ in the LXX’s rendering in terms of vocabulary. Ps. 34:11 uses ἐλαττῶμα ‘to diminish’ or ‘make inferior’ instead of ὀστερέω as found in Ps. 23:1. They are however semantically related in meaning. Ps. 34 is a thanksgiving psalm in praise of the wonderful works of God. V.11 contains two antithetical statements: “the rich have become poor and hungry” and “but those who seek YHWH will not lack any good thing.” Unlike Ps. 23 in which נֶאֶס has no direct object, the statement in Ps. 34:11 is qualified with a direct object — קָל־תֹּב (kol-tôb; good thing). The psalmist’s hope of not lacking anything is dependent on his seeking of YHWH. His reliance on YHWH will not make him suffer poverty and hunger unlike what is in its preceding antithetical statement.

43 I used the LXX’s rendering of יִשָּׁרוּאֵל as πλούσιοι.
Other OT Intertextual Connections

Ps. 23:1 has intertextual connections to other texts in the OT with regards to the shepherd-motif/imagery and the psalmist’s declaration of not lacking anything.

One of the imageries used to describe God in the OT is the image of a good shepherd. There are few instances in the OT in which πηγή is used to describe God as a shepherd. These are Gen. 48:15; 49:24 and Ps. 80:2, as explained above. Though it is not used frequently, its implications could be deduced from other texts such as Exodus 15:13 and Ezek. 34:12. It is derived from Israel’s familiarity with nomadic life. It is used to describe the relationship of God to Israel as a flock. This imagery was in sharp contrast to the imagery of “the false shepherds who feed themselves instead of their sheep.”

The shepherd-motif pervades some texts of the OT. Some of the important biblical figures such as Abel, Abraham, Moses, David and Amos were shepherds by profession. David to whom most of the psalms are attributed was himself a shepherd. The nature of the shepherding profession in ancient Palestine in ensuring shelter, pasture, water, companionship and protection for the flock facilitated and necessitated its use as imagery for the leaders. The relationship of Israel to God and their leaders was described in sheep-shepherd relationship in other OT texts such as Num. 27:17, 1 Kings 22:17 (2 Chronicles 18:16); Isa. 40:11, Jer. 31:10, Ezek. 34 and Zech. 10:20. Israel is thus metaphorically referred to as a flock and God or a leader as a shepherd. Ps. 23:1 mentions God as a shepherd and describes him further in the subsequent clauses as the good shepherd by implication.

God is seen as the shepherd in the sense that he is the one who protects and saves (Ezek. 34:10), guides (77:21, 78:52 [76:21, 77:52 in LXX respectively], Jer. 31:10 [38:10 in LXX]), nourishes (Ps. 95:7) his people and provides for them. The leaders who lacked the qualities of

47 Ps. 79:13 (78:13 in LXX); Ps.100:3 (99:3 in LXX).
protecting, guiding and nourishing the people were not regarded as good shepherds. The good shepherds were rather those who were able to undertake appropriately the task of a shepherd for the people.

Apart from the intertextual connection of the shepherd-motif with Ps. 23:1, the second clause of the verse, אֱלֹהִי, is also intertextually related to other OT texts with regard to the use of אֱלֹהִי in portraying the addressee of the psalm as a provider. אֱלֹהִי is attested many times in the sapiential books, especially in Proverbs, mostly in the context of a lack of understanding and wisdom (Prov. 6:32; 7:7; 10:21; 15:21 etc.). It appears in the Hiphil form in Exod. 16:18 in the incident of the provision of the bread from heaven (לְחָמִי מֵאָדָם) by God. In Prov. 12:9, it is used in reference to the lack of bread. Its reference to the lack of bread also appears in texts like Isa. 51:14, Ezek. 4:17 and Amos 4:6.

In the forty-year wandering in the desert, in Deut. 2:7, אֱלֹהִי appears in a context referring to YHWH’s presence among Israel, guiding Israel so that they lacked nothing in the period of the forty years. It appears in the Qal form in a similar context in Neh. 9:21. In Deut. 8:9, in the promise of the land, it is stated that the people will not go hungry and will lack nothing in the land because of the richness of the land. In these instances, one can easily identify the image of God as a provider, which corresponds to the psalmist’s knowledge of not being in need.

The Shepherd Imagery in the New Testament

The shepherd imagery occurs also in the New Testament (NT). Apart from the secular use of ‘shepherd’ as occurring in the birth narratives of Jesus (Luke 2:8.15.20), the term occurs in the metaphorical sense referring to leaders and Jesus Christ. There is no text in the New Testament, in which God is explicitly referred to as a shepherd. Nonetheless, there are few instances in the parables of Jesus in which God is implicitly referred to as a shepherd, notable among them are Matt. 18:12-14; 25:31-46.

The NT takes up the shepherd imagery in referring to Jesus as the good shepherd (cf. John 10:11). Like the LXX, the NT renders ‘shepherd’ with ποιμήν. In some instances, ποιμήν denotes leaders (Matt. 9:36, Mark 6:34, Eph. 4:11) and in other senses, it refers to Jesus
himself (Matt. 26:31, Mark 14:27, John 10:11-17). In Matt. 9:36 and Mark 6:34, the motivation for Jesus’ compassion for the troubled and scattered people is compared to a flock without a shepherd. In Jesus’ last discourse with the apostles before his death in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27, there is the imagery of the good shepherd in reference to Jesus. With Jesus’ absence, his followers will be like a scattered flock. In John 10:11-17, Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd. The text further describes the good shepherd as the one who lays his life for the sheep and protects the sheep from the enemies.

**Akan Mother-Tongue Translations of Ps. 23:1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Texts in Ghanaian Mother Tongue</th>
<th>Resemblance to MT and LXX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mfantse</td>
<td>Ewuradze ny e mo guanhwɛfo; mirinnhia 48</td>
<td>Combination of MT and LXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal Translation</td>
<td>The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asante/Akwa-pim/Kwahu Twi</td>
<td><strong>AWURADE ne me hwɛfo, hwee renhia me</strong> 49</td>
<td>LXX but in an altered form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal translation</td>
<td>The Lord is my guardian/guard, there is nothing I shall want</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mfantse**

The Mfantse translation has *Ewuradze ny e mo guanhwɛfo*. It combines the rendering of the MT and the LXX. The Mfantse translation sticks to the MT in terms of syntax. It does not avoid the translation of ‘shepherd.’ However, it avoids using the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) in the MT and instead translates ‘the Lord’ as found in the LXX. Hence, the Mfantse translation uses *Ewuradze* which translates the Lord, ἱστορ. The Mfantse translation of *Ewuradze* for ‘the Lord’ will not have any semantic problem with its related words. In the

---

Mfantse language, *mo wura* will translate well δεσπότης (despotēs) without any confusion with κύριος referring to the one and the only supreme God, known in the Mfantse language as *Nyankopən*. δεσπότης is used to designate owner or a proprietor. It could refer to one’s master or head. Though κύριος in some senses could translate ‘owner, ‘lord,’ ‘master,’ in the context of the Mfantse language, *mo wura* cannot replace Ewuradze ‘the Lord’ without qualification. For instance, to use *mo wura* for Jesus, one needs to add the name Jesus to *mo wura* making it read *mo wura Jesus*. Ewuradze will never in any way refer to ‘master,’ ‘owner’ in the secular sphere in the Mfantse language. The 2nd clause is translated as *mirinhia*, which rightly translates “I shall not lack” as found in the MT.

**Twi Versions**

The Twi versions have *AWURADE ne me hwɛfo* in the first clause. The translation of the Twi versions is akin to the LXX’s translation but in an altered form. Unlike the Mfantse version, it avoids the word ‘shepherd’ as found in the MT. It provides hwɛfo (guardian/guard) instead of ‘shepherd.’ In this case, it translates a noun and not a verb in the first clause as found in the LXX.

The basis for which the Asante-Twi translation avoids the use of *odwanhwɛfoɔ* /shepherd seems quite unclear. The verb used in the LXX to translate ‘shepherd’ in MT could have other meanings as ‘to tend,’ ‘to shepherd’ or ‘to rule.’ The Twi translators perhaps wanted to avoid the ambiguity in the translation and by so doing omitted ‘shepherd’ in the text. *Awurade ne me odwanhwɛfoɔ* may imply as well the Lord is my shepherd in the sense of the Lord being a shepherd of my sheep. Notwithstanding this syntactic ambiguity, to omit the shepherd-imagery entirely in the text may distort the metaphoric style of the text.

The heading that the Asante-Twi version gives to the biblical text signals its agreement with the shepherd-imagery in Ps. 23:1. Ps. 23 in the Asante-Twi version has the title, *Awurade ne odwanhwɛfoɔpa*. The translators might have read the entire text and attributed to it the heading with the theme of the shepherd imagery, acknowledging the indispensability of the imagery in the text.

---

50 Foerster and Quell, “κύριος,” 1045.
The Twi versions have the translation of ‘shepherd’ in almost all the texts in which the word appears. *Hwefo* in Twi, which translates shepherd, could as well have other meanings as ‘guardian,’ ‘guard’ or ‘care-taker.’ In this context, the translators might have used the dynamic equivalence model of translation in which their interest was not in producing a word-for-word translation, but to capture the sense of the meaning of the source language in the target language. Nonetheless, avoiding the use of the shepherd imagery loses the idea that the narrator wanted to convey to his audience taking into consideration the shepherd imagery in the context of the audience of the source language.

The description given in the other verses of the Psalm reflects the role of the shepherd in Israelite environment. In this context, it could not be wrong to translate it with ‘shepherd’ in order to specify it. In this sense, the meaning is *hwefo* but not in the ordinary sense of *hwefo* but rather *odwanhwefo* to denote the shepherd-sheep relationship. Though the imagery of *odwanhwefo* will not be equally meaningful to the Twi audience as it does to the audience of the ancient Palestinian background, it should not be presumed that it would not make sense to the Twi audience. Else, the Twi translators will have no reason in including it in the heading of the biblical text and use the word *odwanhwefo* as well in the other-related texts such as *mene odwanhwefo pa no* in John 10:11.

Metaphoric elements do exist in the Twi languages as well and it will not create much misunderstanding in interpreting the text as metaphoric.

The 2nd clause *mirinhia hwee* translates the LXXs’ rendering. Like the οὐδέν in the LXX, the addition of *hwee* in the Asante-Twi translation puts much emphasis on the object of the statement “I shall not lack.”

**Implications for African Biblical Studies**

There are some implications from this study for African Biblical Studies concerning the diversity and the similarity between the Ghanaian

---

mother-tongue languages and the ancient versions. To propose a new Twi translation of Ps. 23:1, there is the need to adopt certain criteria, based upon the findings of this paper, for African biblical scholars in general and Ghanaian biblical scholars in particular, when engaging in the translation of biblical texts into the mother-tongue languages.

The Ancient Versions and the Mother-Tongue Translations

From the analysis of Ps. 23:1 in the ancient texts and the Akan mother-tongue languages, some translators choose to follow either the MT or the LXX. Others seem to combine both the MT and the LXX as in the case of the Mfantse translation. There is a preference for one ancient version to the other. This signifies the possibility of the African mother-tongue translators finding one of the ancient versions to be more preferable text than the other.

The translator needs to carefully identify the textual problems in the text in such a way that possible emendations should not distort the text. The MT and the LXX were produced upon cultural needs of the people. It was not the case that the LXX was produced from the MT or the vice versa. The LXX was produced from the extant consonantal text. Though the MT was also produced from the extant consonantal texts, the sharp differences in some portions of the text may indicate that they used different Vorlage. Since the Hebrew words without the vocalization may give different tenses and aspects and even may be problematic in identifying whether a word is a verb or a noun, they could as well have understood some words differently. Modern textual critics are gradually identifying some of these errors. Therefore, in translating the ancient versions into the Ghanaian mother-tongue languages, the translator needs to rely not only on the literal translation of the ancient text but also, on the contextual meaning.

52 Fernandez, The Septuagint in Context, 338-339. The LXX was the Bible of the early Christian church and it influenced greatly the writing of the New Testament and the church fathers.
53 Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie, Lexicon of the Septuagint, XIX.
54 Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie, Lexicon of the Septuagint, XIX.
56 Fernandez, The Septuagint in Context, 27.
Difficulty in Decoding the Source Language into the Mother-Tongue Language

Languages differ from one another. Fernandez affirms that there are no two languages that completely agree in the linguistic categories by which they structure reality. Furthermore, these structures differ much more radically than do the cultural worlds that transmit these extra-linguistic referents to us.\(^5\)\(^6\)

The meaning that a translated text would communicate to its audience may not be precisely and literally the same as the meaning of the original text. The culture and the values of the origin of both the source language and the target language could be different. However, there has to be a point of agreement whereby the ideas expressed by the translated text will arrive at the same truth that the original text seeks to communicate.

Kugel points out some likely problems with the translations of Ps. 23:1 in the MT into English. He identifies that the English translations cannot “capture the telegraphic style of the Hebrew” and they cannot as well “cover the ambiguities of this assertion in the original.”\(^5\)\(^7\) Each translator may in this case give his own syntactic style that he finds suitable to render the text in English. This implies that there is a tendency to give a subjective meaning to the texts in translating them into modern languages when care is not taken. Each language has its own unique syntax and grammar. The syntax and the grammar of the ancient biblical languages differ from those of the modern languages and for that matter the Ghanaian mother-tongue languages. They have their unique grammar and vocabulary. Some vocabulary may be lacking in the other target languages, and the translators will have a big challenge in looking for the appropriate words or vocabulary that will be closer in meaning to the original text. This identifiable problem


will in no doubt affect some of the translations into the Ghanaian mother-tongue languages.

The biblical authors wrote using the literary conventions and the medium of communication familiar to their audience at the time.\(^{58}\) One cannot ignore these media of communication and the literary conventions in the interpretation of the text in our time. Familiarity with them becomes a very significant tool in decoding the text in one’s cultural context. The translator needs to understand the fixed and standard-coined expressions, the genres and the idioms used in the biblical texts in their own context, having in mind the background of the authors, and the socio-historical background of their audience, and not in one’s own context. Such knowledge should help African biblical scholars interpret the text to their audience without losing the intended meaning of the text.

Contextualizing the text will not necessarily imply translating the biblical text word for word, even words that are never known by the target audience. The Catholic Pontifical Biblical Commission in its document on the interpretation of the Bible in the Church buttresses this point and states:

> A translation, of course, is always more than a simple transcription of the original text. The passage from one language to another necessarily involves a change of cultural context: concepts are not identical and symbols have a different meaning, for they come up against other traditions of thought and other ways of life.\(^ {59}\)

The African audience, not being familiar with the socio-historical situation, the language patterns, the worldview, etc., of the original writers and audience of the text, may pose a problem to the African biblical scholars in translating the message of the text to their cultural context. Care needs to be taken to present and translate the biblical text in their cultural contexts, so that the text is not distorted. In that case, in the situation whereby the appropriate vocabulary cannot be found

---


\(^{59}\) Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, 118.
in the local languages, the literal translation of the text could be maintained however, backed by an interpretation.\footnote{Pontifical Biblical Commission, \textit{The Interpretation of the Bible}, 118. “Translation has to be followed by interpretation, which should set the biblical message in more explicit relationship with the ways of feeling, thinking, living and self-expression which are proper to the local culture.”}

In this regard, though contextualization is very significant to the translation of biblical texts, caution must however be taken to avoid over-contextualization which may even distort the sense of the text and adherence to the original message of the source text.\footnote{George Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation of The Bible in Communicative Perspective”, \textit{Ghana Bulletin of Theology} 2 (July 2007): 99-100} It is an indubitable fact that the social milieu of the biblical world is different from that of the African reader. It is not all the entities, which thrived in Israel that exist in the African environment. In case there is no equivalent name in the target language, there is no need to attribute names, which could not rightly translate the text.\footnote{For instance we cannot use the Mfantse \textit{abodoo} to translate bread. \textit{Abodoo} is made from maize whereas bread is made from wheat.}

\textit{Translation of the Names of God}

One element which comes out of the study of Ps. 23:1 is the name of God appearing in the MT as a proper name and appearing in the LXX as a title. In the Akan mother-tongue languages there are names, titles and epithets, which represent the only one supreme God. Most modern languages have stuck to the use of the name YHWH in some parts of the Old Testament.\footnote{For instance, in Exod. 3:15, French Bible Jerusalem has Yahvé, German \textit{Einheitsübersetzung} 1980 has \textit{Jahwe}, the Spanish reina-valera update 1995 has \textit{Jehová} and the Italian NVB San Paolo Edizione 1995 has \textit{Signore} (Lord) with YHWH in bracket and the Spanish reina-valera update 1995 has \textit{Jehová}.}

The Akan language has \textit{Onyankopɔn} to translate God, as the the only one and supreme God. This is however not used to translate YHWH, when it appears alone in the Bible. \textit{Onyankopɔn} has already been used to translate Elohim in other parts of the Akan versions of the Bible. The double divine name ‘Lord God’ is translated as \textit{Ewurade Nyan-kopɔn}, Instances of which are found in Gen. 1; 2:4; 15:2. Changing names in the Bible and giving them, the local equivalents may encounter a lot of onomastic problems. In this instance, the transliterated
name will be more appropriate than the local name. The new Asante-Twi version, though it did not transliterate the name, might have recognized this problem and translated YHWH when it stands alone as the proper name of God with the title κύριος in capital letters AWURADE.

There are already numerous translations into the African mother-tongue languages and for that matter, Ghanaian mother-tongue languages. Every language develops with time. It is possible to find other loan words from other modern or Semitic languages that Ghanaian native speakers are familiar with that could be used in the translations. Transliterated-loan words could also be used as it is not unfamiliar with the biblical text. An example is the use of paanoo, supposedly derived from pão in Portuguese for bread instead of abodoo. The changes in meaning as a result of the use of non-equivalent words to translate the names and entities could affect the theological and educational significance of the original names and words.

Résumé and Proposed Akan Translations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Original Translation</th>
<th>Proposed Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mfantse</td>
<td>Ewuradze nye mo guanhwefo; mirinhia</td>
<td>Ewuradze nye mo guanhwefo, mirinhia (biri-biara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack</td>
<td>The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack (anything)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twi</td>
<td>AWURADE ne me hwɛfo, hwee renhia me</td>
<td>AWURADE ne me dwanhwɛfo, hwee renhia me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>The Lord is my guardian/guard, there is nothing I shall want</td>
<td>The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The shepherd imagery and metaphor are very significant in the OT to such an extent that modern translations do not avoid it. The Akan versions of the OT, except the Mfantse, however do not translate the

---

64 Cf. Talitah qum in Matt. 9:24, Rabbouni in Mark 10:51, Ephphatha in Mark 7:34, Hosanna in John 12:13 are Aramaic words that have been used as loan words in the Greek New Testament.
shepherd metaphor in Ps. 23:1, perhaps due to its ambiguity. The shepherd imagery and metaphor are however translated into other sections of the Twi Bible. Looking at the context and situation of the text, the shepherd imagery is very significant to the original audience of the text and care must be taken in making it more meaningful to its present audience. Based upon the analysis of the text and its intertextual connections, there is a need to reconsider revising the translations of the Twi versions represented in the table above, as the imagery becomes indispensable in the translation of the text.

Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi

eneantwi.cass@knust.edu.gh
Department of Religious Studies
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology,
Kumasi, Ghana