

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

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***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. The 'shepherd' is an indispensable imagery or a metaphor in the text. The rendering of יְהוָה רֹעִי as Awurade ne me hwεfo in the Twi translations misses the imagery that the source text seeks to convey. This paper examines the place of 'adōnā rō'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.¹ 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 Akan² versions of the Bible is Ps. 23. This Psalm is one of the most popular

¹ Cf. Isaac Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators* (Malaga: Vernon Press, 2022), 3.

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 ^a*dônâ rô ‘î*³ as *Awurade ne me hwεfo* 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, ^{לְדָוִד} ^{מִזְמוֹר} (*mizmôr^l dāwid*), 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.

⁴ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalm I, 1-50: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 16 (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 145.

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

Text	MT (Ps 23:1)	LXX (Ps 22:1)	Vulgate (22:1) ⁵
	מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסֵר	ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ κύριος ποιμαίνει με καὶ οὐ 'δέν με ὑστερήσει	Psalmus David. Dominus reget me et nihil mihi deerit
Transliteration	mizmôr l'ḏāwīd yhwh (ʾādōnā) rō'ī lōʾ e'ḥs r	Psalmos tō David ky- rios poimainei me kai ouden me husterēsei	
Translation	Song of David, YHWH is my shep- herd, I shall not lack. ⁶	Psalm of David, the ⁷ Lord shepherds/ tends/ pastures me, and I shall lack nothing. ⁸	Psalm of David the Lord rules/ guides me and I shall want/lack nothing

⁵ Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado, *Biblia Sacra: Vulgatam Clementinam*. Tertio Editio. (Salmanticae: Matriti, 1958).

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: **לֹא אֶחָסֵר** and **יְהוָה רֹעִי**, **מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד**

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד - 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.

יְהוָה רֹעִי - In the clause, ^a*dônâ rō '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 ^a*dônâ rō 'i* as κύριος ποιμαίνει με. The MT uses the participle form of the verb **רָעָה**, (*ra'ah*), **רֹעֶה** (*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 **רָעָה** 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 **רֹעִי** (my shepherd) as it appears in the MT.

רֹעִי 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

⁹ Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 27 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), 385.

¹⁰ The participles used as nouns are referred to as nominalised participles.

provide “to protect, to care for and to nurture.”¹¹ “The LXX translates the verb 38 times with ποιμαίνω, ‘graze, tend.”¹² Considering the above meanings of רָעָה and its equivalent translations in the LXX, it is clear that the word רָעָה 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.¹³ The LXX prefers using the verb ποιμαίνω to using its substantive form ποιμήν to express the action of the shepherd in the MT.¹⁴

The Vulgate translates the statement with *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 *Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum* renders the statement as *Dominus pascit me*,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 *reget* to *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 יְהוָה (YHWH) in the MT as κύριος meaning ‘master,’ ‘Lord’ or ‘owner’ as used in Exod. 21:29.¹⁶ YHWH is the name of God revealed to Moses in the incident of the burning bush in Exod.

¹¹ J. Lust, E. Eynikel, K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), 502.

¹² G. Wallis, “רָעָה,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), XIII: 545.

¹³ Leyland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, “Shepherd,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 782-784.

¹⁴ The Vulgate translation is closer to the LXX and has “*Dominus reget me et nihil mihi deerit.*” Cf. Gottfried Hoberg, *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.

¹⁵ *Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum*. Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986.

¹⁶ Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie, *Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 360. The Vulgate follows the rendering of the LXX and translates YHWH as *Dominus*.

3.¹⁷ YHWH is used in the OT when the idea of the deity is concrete.¹⁸ It became the “personal God of Israel according to the exodus and Deuteronomistic traditions.”¹⁹ The LXX translates YHWH as κύριος ‘Lord’ which rightly translates יהוה, (*’adôn*) appearing also in the following forms; יהוה (*’adônâ*) and יהוה (*’adônî*), which does not only refer to God but also Lord in the sense of “master” on the secular level.²⁰ 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*²¹ 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.²² The reader was to pronounce *Adonai* instead of the unpronounceable YHWH in the text.²³ Since YHWH was not pronounced, the vowels of the Hebrew יהוה “my Lord” were inserted into the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) to read *Yehova*.²⁴

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.

¹⁸ Emmanuel K. Ennin Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel: An Exegetical Study* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2013), 275.

¹⁹ Antwi, *The Book of Jonah*, 275; cf. Exod. 3:13-22; Josh 24:16-19.

²⁰ Gen. 19:2,18; 23:6; 24:35; Num. 11:28; 12:11; Judg. 6:13ff; 1 Sam. 25:24ff. Δεσπότης appears in some instances such as Gen. 15:2, 8 and Josh. 5:14. Cf. F. M. Gillman, “Lord/Lordship,” in *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. O. Orlando and James B. Nickoloff (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2007), 788.

²¹ Gillman, “Lord/Lordship,” 788.

²² Edwin D. Freed and Jane F. Roberts, *The Bible Says So! From Simple Answers to Insightful Understanding* (London: Routledge, 2009), 115.

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.

²⁴ E. C. Conybeare, S. G. Stock and F. M. Gillmann, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek: With Selected Readings, Vocabularies and Updated Indexes* (Boston: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 162.

Jews in Alexandria.²⁵ 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.²⁶ Israel is thus described as God’s possession סְגֻלָּה (*s^egullâh*) in Exodus 19:5.²⁷

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.²⁸ Fernandez affirms that “when the LXX translates אֱלֹהִים (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.”²⁹ By using κύριος and not θεός, which could as well translate the appellative names of God, אֵל (El) and, אֱלֹהִים (Elohim) in the LXX, the LXX seeks to theologize the name by attributing to it his actions as the sovereign Lord and creator. אֵל and אֱלֹהִים “denote a divine person by species rather than an individual divine person.”³⁰

יְהוָה רַעִי - The negative verbal clause לֹא אֶחָסֶר is consequent to יְהוָה רַעִי. אֶחָסֶר is a prefix conjugation of the verb חָסַר (hāsēr) meaning, ‘to

²⁵ Marcos Natalio Fernandez, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 20.

²⁶ Werner Foerster and Gottfried Quell, “κύριος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1081-1082.

²⁷ Antwi, *The Book of Jonah*, 259-260. Cf. the discussion of Israel as God’s Possession.

²⁸ Conybeare, Stock, Gillmann, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek*, 162.

²⁹ Fernandez, *The Septuagint in Context*, 27.

³⁰ Ethelbert Stauffer, “θεός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 81.

diminish,’ ‘to decrease,’ ‘to fail’ and ‘to lack.’³¹ The negative particle לא (not/no) is used “regularly for the objective, unconditional negation.”³² It entirely negates the verb אֶחָסֵר in the clause. The LXX translates אֶחָסֵר with the indicative active future as ὑστερήσει, thus changing the 1st person pronoun in the MT to the 3rd person. ὑστερέω usually goes with an accusative case.³³ The LXX does not use the negative particle οὐ (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 ὑστερήσει “and I shall lack nothing.”³⁴ 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, לא אֶחָסֵר, to its preceding one, יִהְיֶה רֹעִי, it is consequent to the idea expressed in the previous statement. The LXX identifies this relationship and provides the conjunctive particle καί (and), linking both statements. The psalmist’s affirmation that he will lack nothing depends on the assurance that YHWH is his shepherd.³⁵ This statement is connected to the imagery of the shepherd, seen in his role as a protector, guide, provider and deliverer.³⁶ 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

³¹ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *A Bilingual Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 320.

³² E. Kautzch, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2006), 478-479.

³³ James Sweetnam, *An Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek Part One: Morphology* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998), I: 351.

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.”

³⁵ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblischer Kommentar über Die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1883), 240.

³⁶ J. Fabry, “חָסֵר” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), V: 88.

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 לְבִמְעַן שְׁמוֹ (*l'ma'an shemô*) 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 predators³⁷ — 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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

³⁷ Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman III, "Shepherd," 782.

³⁸ James L. Kugel, *The Great Poems of the Bible: A Reader's Companion with new Translations* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 196-197.

³⁹ Gottfried Hoberg, *Die Psalmen der Vulgata: Übersetzt und nach dem Literalsinn erklärt* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1906), 73.

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 metaphoric. The psalmist describes his relationship with his God in this metaphoric 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 וַיִּרְעֵם (ûr^eem; and pasture them/be their shepherd), the imperative form of the verb רָעָה 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 ποιμανον (*poimanon*),⁴² the aorist imperative form of the same verb which it uses to translate רָעָה in Ps. 23:1.

⁴⁰ J. Calès, *Le Livre de Psaumes: Traduit et Commenté: I Introduction Psaumes: I-LXXII* (Vulgate: I-LXXI) (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1936), 279.

⁴¹ Calès, *Le Livre de Psaumes*, 278.

⁴² The aorist imperative verb is used in the sense of the act of the verb being seen as very urgent and terminated. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 719-721; Sweetnam, *Study of New Testament Greek*, I: 117.

The imperative *וְרַעַם* runs parallel to three other imperatives, *הוֹשִׁיעָה*, (*hōshi 'āh*) *וּבָרַךְ* (*ūbarek*) and *וַנְשִׂאֵם* (*w^enass^e '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, *רֹעֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל* (*rōeh yisrā'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 (*נִהְיָ כְצֹאֵן יוֹסֵף*). 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.

חָסַר occurring with the negative particle in the 2nd clause in Ps. 23:1 as *חָסַר לֹא אֶחָסַר* appears in a different form in Ps. 34:11 as *לֹא יִחְסְרוּ* “they will not lack.” They differ in the LXX’s rendering in terms of vocabulary. Ps. 34:11 uses *ἐλαττώω* ‘to diminish’ or ‘make inferior’ instead of *ὕστερέω* 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 rich⁴³ have become poor and hungry” and “but those who seek YHWH will not lack any good thing.” Unlike Ps. 23 in which *חָסַר* has no direct object, the statement in Ps. 34:11 is qualified with a direct object — *כֹּל-טוֹב* (*kol-tōb*; 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 *כַּפְּרִיִּים* 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 רֹקֵחַ 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. 34:12.⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ 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 flock⁴⁷ 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

⁴⁴ Jack W. Vancil, "Sheep, Shepherd," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), V: 1189.

⁴⁵ Benhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (New Jersey: Longman, 1988), 443. Cf. Ezek 34.

⁴⁶ Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, "Shepherd," 782.

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, לֹא אֶחְסֶר, is also intertextually related to other OT texts with regard to the use of חָסַר in portraying the addressee of the psalm as a provider. חָסַר 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 (לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם) 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, חָסַר 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

Language	Texts in Ghanaian Mother Tongue	Resemblance to MT and LXX
Mfantse	Ewuradze nye mo guanhwɛfo; mirinnhia ⁴⁸	Combination of MT and LXX
Literal Translation	The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack	
Asante/Akuapim/Kwahu Twi	AWURADE ne me hwɛfo, hwee renhia me ⁴⁹	LXX but in an altered form
Literal translation	The Lord is my guardian/guard, there is nothing I shall want	

Mfantse

The Mfantse translation has *Ewuradze nye 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, κύριος. The Mfantse translation of *Ewuradze* for ‘the Lord’ will not have any semantic problem with its related words. In the

⁴⁸ The Bible Society of Ghana *Nwoma Kronkron: Ahyemu Dadaw nye Fofor no* (Accra: The Bible Society of Ghana, 1994).

⁴⁹ The Bible Society of Ghana, *Anyamesem anaa Twere Kronkron Akan Kasa mu* (Accra: The Bible Society of Ghana, 1964); The Bible Society of Ghana, *Anyamesem anaa Twere Kronkron Akan Kasa mu* (Accra: The Bible Society of Ghana, 1989). International Bible Society, *Asante Twi Nkwa Asɛm: Apam Dada ne Apam Foforɔ* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2020); Ghana Bible Society, *Kyerew Kronkron anaa Bible* (Accra: The Bible Society, 2012).

Mfantse language, *mo wura* will translate well δεσπότης (*despotês*) without any confusion with κύριος referring to the one and the only supreme God, known in the Mfantse language as *Nyankopɔn*. δεσπότης is used to designate owner or a proprietor.⁵⁰ 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 *odwanhwɛfo*/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 odwanhwɛfo* 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. *Hwɛfo* 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.⁵¹ 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 *hwɛfo* but not in the ordinary sense of *hwɛfo* but rather *odwanhwɛfoɔ* to denote the shepherd-sheep relationship. Though the imagery of *odwanhwɛfoɔ* 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 *odwanhwɛfoɔ* as well in the other-related texts such as *mene odwanhwɛfoɔ 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

⁵¹ Randolph W. Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation: An Essential Guide to Methods, Terms, and Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 130.

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 LXX⁵² 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*.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ Modern textual critics are gradually identifying some of these errors.⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁵ Dahood, Psalm I, 1-50, xxii-xxiv.

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.⁵⁶

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.”⁵⁷ 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

⁵⁷ He explains that “...apart from the absence of tenses (in our sense) in Hebrew verbs, poetic style in the Bible often works by omitting those little words and particles that otherwise would make explicit the relationship between adjacent clauses. Their omission invites the reader in Hebrew to fill in the blanks, at least mentally.” Kugel provides this translation “Since the Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I lack.” Kugel, *The Great Poems*, 195.

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

⁵⁸ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 78-79.

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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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.⁶³

The Akan language has *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. *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 *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

⁶⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *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.”

⁶¹ George Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation of The Bible in Communicative Perspective“, *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (July 2007): 99-100

⁶² For instance we cannot use the Mfantse *abodoo* to translate bread. *Abodoo* is made from maize whereas bread is made from wheat.

⁶³ For instance, in Exod. 3:15, French Bible Jerusalem has Yahvé, German *Einheitsübersetzung* 1980 has *Jahwe*, the Spanish reina-valera update 1995 has *Jehová* and the Italian NVB San Paolo Edizione 1995 has *Signore* (Lord) with YHWH in bracket and the Spanish reina-valera update 1995 has *Jehová*.

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.⁶⁴ 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

Language	Original Translation	Proposed Translation
Mfantse	<i>Ewuradze nye mo gwanhwɛfo; mirinhia</i>	<i>Ewuradze nye mo gwanhwɛfo, mirinhia (biri- biara)</i>
Translation	The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack	The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack (anything)
Twi	<i>AWURADE ne me hwɛfo, hwee renhia me</i>	<i>AWURADE ne me dwanhwɛfoɔ, hwee renhia me</i>
Translation	The Lord is my guardian/guard, there is nothing I shall want	The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

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. *Talitha 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.

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