

## THE USE OF *EK* IN REVELATION: EVIDENCE OF SEMITIC INFLUENCE

KENNETH G. C. NEWPORT  
Newbold College  
Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 5AN  
England

The frequency of *ek* ("out of") in Revelation is noticeable. In all, it is used 135 times, a figure exceeded in the other NT writings only in the Gospel of John. Luke comes third with 87 occurrences.

It is often argued that the Greek of Revelation is under heavy and significant semitic influence. The possibility, therefore, arises that the frequency of *ek* in this book may, in part, be the result of its being used to translate Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents. It is the purpose of the present study to investigate this possibility. Where semitic influence does seem likely, I will also suggest new translations in order to make due allowance for this influence in the cases that would seem to require such.

### 1. *Ek Cheiros*

The construction *ek cheiros* ("out of the hand [of]") is found three times in the book of Revelation: 8:4, 10:10, and 19:2. R. H. Charles has noted that the last of these three involves a semitism by inserting "*myd*" after the Greek, but he makes no further comment.<sup>1</sup> He perhaps has in mind the use of *miyyaḏ* following *nāqam*, meaning "to avenge on," as in 2 Kgs 9:7: "I will avenge the blood of the servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord on Jezebel" (Hebrew, *miyyaḏ ʿizābel*; LXX, *ek cheiros Iēzabel*). The following verse, too, has the same idiom.

In translating Rev 19:2 the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures has maintained literalness, rendering the verse, "For he has executed judgment upon the great harlot who corrupted the

<sup>1</sup>R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh, 1920), 2:119.

earth with her fornication and he has avenged the blood of his slaves at her hand.” Most of the other translations (e.g., NIV, RSV, NEB) simply leave out the prepositional phrase altogether, but the NIV seems to capture the sense of the idiom in its rendition, “He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

A similar use of *ek*, though this time without *cheiros*, is found in Rev 6:10: “And they cried out in a great voice saying, ‘How long O Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’” (. . . καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). Here the use of *ek* following *ekdikēō* probably reflects *nāqam min*,<sup>2</sup> a use also found in the LXX (see, e.g., Num 31:2; Isa 1:24).

Hebrew idiom may again be responsible for the occurrence of *ek cheiros* in Rev 8:4. The Hebrew *yād*, of which *cheiros* is the most obvious Greek translation, has a wide variety of meanings. Pertinent perhaps to the present discussion is its use to mean “side” or even “direction.”<sup>3</sup> In Num 24:24 this use is present in the phrase *miyyad Kittîm*, which seems to mean “from the direction of [or, region of] the Kittim.” The LXX translates, “*ek cheiros kitiaion*.” Further evidence is found in 1 Sam 4:18, where *be<sup>c</sup>ad yād* is probably best translated “from the side of” or “beside.” These considerations suggest that Rev 8:4 may need re-examination. A more idiomatic translation might read, “And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the direction of [or, from beside] the angel, going up into the presence of God.” It perhaps makes better sense to view the smoke as ascending from beside the angel or coming from his general direction, than coming up “out of his hand.”

The occurrence of *ek cheiros* in Rev 10:10 does not seem to be under serious semitic influence. The usage could, however, be paralleled from semitic sources.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. *Metanoēō Ek*

Outside of Revelation the construction *metanoēō ek* (literally, “repent out of”) does not appear in the NT. Neither are there any

<sup>2</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1907), pp. 667-668 (hereinafter BDB).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 390-391.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Exod 29:25, LXX (Hebrew, *lāqaḥ min*).

examples in the LXX. The verb does appear in these sources, but *ek* is not used with it (see Acts 8:22; 2 Cor 12:21; Jer 18:8; Amos 7:3, 6; Joel 2:13). The construction seems absent also from the classical sources and extra-biblical Koine literature.<sup>5</sup>

The case for the peculiarity of *metanoēō ek* in Revelation is not weakened when we remember that by Koine times the process of encroachment of *apo* ("from") and *ek* upon one another's grammatical territory was well under way, for while two examples of *metanoēō apo* are found, these are both in places where semitic influence may well have been at work (Acts 8:22; Jer 8:6, LXX).

In Revelation, however, *metanoēō ek* appears five times. This phenomenon needs explanation. Once again, recourse to the semitic languages, and in particular to Biblical Hebrew, seems to provide a possible solution. As noted above, *metanoēō apo*, a close parallel to *metanoēō ek*, appears in Jer 8:6, LXX. Here it is used to translate *niqām* <sup>al</sup>. It is possible, therefore, that the use of *metanoēō ek* in Revelation likewise reflects the Hebrew phrase, and should accordingly be translated as "repent of."<sup>6</sup>

This argument, however, is rather weak, for although *niqām* <sup>al</sup> is extremely common in the OT, it is only at Jer 8:6 that the LXX translators have employed *metanoēō apo* as the Greek rendering. A far more common LXX rendition is *metanoēō epi*, and this usage is paralleled in the NT (2 Cor 12:21).

There is a further possibility as to Hebrew background for *metanoēō ek* in the book of Revelation. Charles has suggested that this expression in Revelation reflects the Hebrew *šûḥ min* ("turn away from").<sup>7</sup> But against Charles is the LXX evidence, for there would seem to be only one example in the LXX of *šûḥ* being translated using *metanoēō* (Isa 46:8). Evidence is, however, available from the later Greek translations. Symmachus uses *metanoēō* as a translation of *šûḥ* in several places, as Charles himself notes (Sym Job 36:10; Isa 31:6; 55:7; Jer 18:8; Ezek 33:12).

It seems possible, therefore, that the explanation of the rather strange Greek construction *metanoēō ek* may be found in the

<sup>5</sup>Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1861), p. 1115; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1979), pp. 511-512.

<sup>6</sup>BDB, pp. 636-637.

<sup>7</sup>Charles, 1:71.

common Hebrew phrase *šûb min*. If so, the occurrences in Revelation will need to be looked at carefully, for if the author had in mind the Hebrew (or Aramaic) phrase when he wrote the Greek, a translation might better read “turn away from” rather than “repent of.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, all five occurrences of *metanoēō ek* in Revelation seem to accept—and indeed, perhaps even prefer—this translation. The phrase in Rev 16:11, for example, could easily be translated, “. . . and they did not turn away from their works.” This rendering is perhaps better than “repent of,” which verb focuses upon the mental transformation of the individual and his “feeling sorry” for past actions. The Vulgate may have completely missed the point in translating the phrase as *et non egerunt paenitentiam ex operibus suis* (“and they did not do penitence for [?] their works”). English translations likewise generally fail to allow for the possible influence of *šûb min*.

### 3. *Nikaō Ek*

The use of *ek* following the verb *nikaō* (“conquer”) in Rev 15:2 is difficult to explain. G. B. Winer suggests that the expression is a Latinism,<sup>9</sup> but Charles rejects this explanation and views *nikaō ek* as deriving rather from *gābar min* (“be greater than”).<sup>10</sup> The LXX does not support Charles’s case. Neither of the examples he gives from the OT is translated using either *nikaō* or *ek*, and Charles wisely covers his remarks with the statement that “no adequate explanation has yet been offered.”

G. C. Ozanne has taken up the issue and offers the construction *hāzaq min* (“be stronger than”) as a possible solution to the problem.<sup>11</sup> Again, LXX evidence is lacking, for none of Ozanne’s texts (1 Sam 17:50; 2 Sam 10:11; 1 Kgs 20:23, 25; 2 Kgs 3:26) lends real support.

Part of the reason for the general confusion is, perhaps, the infrequency of the use of the verb *nikaō* amongst those books of the

<sup>8</sup>BDB, pp. 996-997.

<sup>9</sup>G. B. Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, trans. W. F. Moulton (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 460.

<sup>10</sup>Charles, 2:33.

<sup>11</sup>G. C. Ozanne, “The Influence of the Text and Language of the Old Testament on the Book of Revelation” (Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1963), pp. 44, 46.

LXX that are known to have had a Hebrew base.<sup>12</sup> The use of the verb in the apocryphal books is also of little or no help, for in their case a comparative study with Hebrew texts is not possible.

What might be said with somewhat more confidence, however, is that the *ek* of Rev 15:2 most probably reflects Hebrew/Aramaic *min* where the semitic preposition is used comparatively.<sup>13</sup> This is true whether *nikaō* reflects *gāḇar*, as Charles suggests, or *ḥāzaq*, as proposed by Ozanne. The translation of Rev 15:2 will be affected, for if the *ek* here does reflect comparative *min*, the word “conquered” is not a suitable translation of *nikaō*. A translation such as “were stronger than” or possibly “prevailed over” is required.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. *Methuō Ek*

The occurrence of *methuō ek* (literally, “be drunk out of”) in Revelation cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as a Hebraism, for the construction is not completely absent from non-biblical Koine sources. Oppianus Apamensis gives an example of it, and Xenophon has at least two.<sup>15</sup> But in Revelation the usage may well be dependent upon semitic syntax, for *methuō ek* appears in the LXX at Joel 1:5; and a close parallel, *methuō apo*, is found in Deut 32:42 as the translation of *šākar min*.

There are two occurrences of *methuō ek* in Revelation: 17:2 and 17:6. In the second of these the repetition of the preposition before each noun perhaps strengthens the case for semitic influence, for such repetition is, as Matthew Black argues, “a characteristic feature of Semitic usage” and “intolerable in literary Greek.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 5. *Ek Denoting Cause*

The use of *ek* to denote cause is certainly not foreign to Classical Greek or extra-biblical Koine Greek,<sup>17</sup> and thus it is not

<sup>12</sup>There are three occurrences only—Ps 50 (51):4; Prov 6:25; Hab 3:9. Symmachus, Theodotian, and Aquila have the verb also at Ps 50 (51):6. In none of these places is the Hebrew verb *ḥāzaq*.

<sup>13</sup>BDB, p. 582.

<sup>14</sup>For such a meaning of *ḥāzaq min*, see 1 Sam 17:50.

<sup>15</sup>Liddell and Scott, p. 1092.

<sup>16</sup>Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 114-115.

<sup>17</sup>H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), sec. 1688.

possible to argue conclusively that causative *min* is responsible for the occurrences in Revelation. But more usually in Classical Greek, cause is expressed by use of the genitive alone or *hupo* followed by a genitive.<sup>18</sup> Further, the several examples of causal *ek* in Revelation (e.g., Rev 8:13, 16:11) could doubtless be paralleled from semitic sources where *min* used in this way is frequently rendered *ek* or *apo* in the LXX (e.g., *ek* in Exod 15:23 and Prov 5:18; *apo* in Exod 2:23 and 6:9). It therefore seems probable that causal *ek* in Revelation is based upon Hebrew idiom.

#### 6. *Ek Denoting Agent (Personal and Impersonal)*

Closely connected with the use of *ek* to denote cause, is its use to indicate agent. Like causative *ek*, *ek* denoting agent is not entirely absent from the classical literature,<sup>19</sup> though in that literature the personal agent is more normally expressed using *hupo*, the impersonal with the dative case.<sup>20</sup> In Revelation, however, there are numerous examples of *ek* used to indicate the agent of an action (e.g., Rev. 2:9; 3:18; 8:11; 9:18). This may be explained by the influence of Hebrew *min*,<sup>21</sup> an influence felt also in the LXX (e.g., in Gen 19:36; and in Isa 28:7 [with *apo*]).

#### 7. *Partitive Ek*

Black has drawn attention to the partitive use of *ek* in constructions such as those found in Rev 2:10 and 11:9, noting that while parallels are found in extra-biblical Koine Greek, occurrences in the NT are more likely to be based upon semitic influence.<sup>22</sup> To the examples of partitive *ek* in Revelation noted by Black, those given by Charles need to be added (Rev 3:9; 5:5; 5:9; 6:1; 7:13; 17:11).

Particularly common is the phrase *heis ek* ("one out of") (5:5; 6:1 [twice]; 7:13; 13:3; 15:7; 17:1; 21:9). This construction is not found in the Epistles, it occurs nine times in the Synoptics, and it is comparatively common in John's Gospel (twelve examples). The

<sup>18</sup>Smyth, secs. 1405 and 1698.

<sup>19</sup>Liddell and Scott, p. 499.

<sup>20</sup>Smyth, secs. 1493 and 1494.

<sup>21</sup>William Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, trans. Samuel P. Tregelles (London, 1857), p. 482.

<sup>22</sup>Black, pp. 107-108.

appearance of *heis ek* in literature suspected of being under semitic influence may be due to the common Hebrew equivalent  $\text{׳eḥad min}$  (e.g., Gen 2:21; 3:22; 1 Sam 9:3; 16:18).

#### 8. *Ek Denoting the Material Out of Which Something Is Made*

That *ek* can be used in Classical Greek to denote the material out of which something is made is unquestionable,<sup>23</sup> but the use of *min* in this way is equally possible. An example of the semitic preposition so used is found in Hos 13:2, which the LXX translates, *epoiēsan heautois xoneuma ek tou argurion* (“and they made for themselves images of silver”). This meaning for *ek* is found also in Rev 18:12: “all kinds of scented woods, ivories and every sort of things made out of costly woods [*ek xulou*].”

#### 9. *Ek Following Esthiō*

Both *esthio apo* (“eat from”) and *esthio ek* (“eat out of”) appear in the LXX as translating the Hebrew  $\text{׳ākal min}$  (e.g., Lev 22:13; 25:12; 2 Sam 12:3). In the NT, *esthiō* is followed by one or the other of the prepositions *apo* and *ek* ten times, yet the construction appears to be lacking in Classical Greek.<sup>24</sup> Such being the case, it would appear that the occurrence of *tō nikōnti dōsō autō phagein ek tou xulou tēs zōēs* in Rev 2:7 is dependent upon semitic syntax.

Similar is the use of *ek* in Rev 18:3, where it follows *pinō* (“drink”): “All the nations have drunk from [*pepōkan . . . ek*] the wine of the madness of her fornication” (see also Rev 14:10). Though *ek* following *pinō* is as old as Homer,<sup>25</sup> in Revelation it may reflect good Hebrew where *min* regularly follows *šālā*, as in Job 21:20: “And he will drink from the wrath of the almighty” (*ûmēḥ<sup>a</sup>maṭ šadday yištē*). Another example is in Gen 9:21, where the LXX gives the translation *kai epien ek tou oinou . . .*

#### 10. *Conclusion*

The evidence suggests that the use of *ek* in Revelation is heavily influenced by the Hebrew (and Aramaic) preposition *min*. This

<sup>23</sup>Liddell and Scott, p. 499.

<sup>24</sup>Smyth, sec. 1355.

<sup>25</sup>Liddell and Scott, p. 1406.

observation may, in part, explain the relative frequency of the Greek preposition in the book. In some cases, allowance for semitic influence will significantly alter the translation, and therefore the meaning, of a verse; in other cases, it is less important in this regard.

The exact extent to which the use of *ek* was influenced by the semitic languages is impossible to tell, for as we have seen, good Greek can sometimes reflect good Hebrew. It may be noted, however, that in the book of Revelation an attempt to track down a usage of *ek* which is solely Greek is a difficult task. Any given usage can normally be paralleled from Hebrew or Aramaic sources.