

NB: A much fuller and refined version of this argument can be found in “ ‘Heaven’ and ‘Heavens’ in the LXX: Exploring the Relationship Between שָׁמַיִם and Οὐρανός,” in the *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 36 (2003): 39-59, as well as in the forthcoming published version of my thesis, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*.

Heaven and the Heavens in the LXX

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ABSTRACT: “Heaven” or “the heavens” is a recurrent theme in the Old Testament, connected with both creation and the throne of God, with the cosmology and cult of Israel. The translators of the LXX would have had little trouble deciding which Greek word to use for the common Hebrew, *šāmayim* (“heavens”). There is great overlap in the semantic domain of this word with that of the Greek *ouranos* (“heaven”). Both could convey a variety of meanings, from the sky to the abode of God. Therefore, *ouranos* is used nearly always in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *šāmayim*. Consequently, it is all the more striking that the inherently plural form of *šāmayim* is almost always translated with the singular, *ouranos*. Plural forms of *ouranos* occur in the LXX less than 9% of the time, despite the fact that *šāmayim* is always plural. Contrary to the typical explanation, the plurals that occur in the LXX are neither the result of a belief in multiple heavens nor the Semitic morphology of *šāmayim*. Instead, as D. F. Torm (1934) and Peter Katz (1950) argued, there are poetical and syntactical reasons why plural forms of *ouranos* appear. Additionally, in the Septuagintal Apocrypha other patterns of singular and plural usage can be discerned. As a result, we must alter how we explain the use of *ouranos* in the LXX. The paper ends with brief comments on other areas of interest and a practical suggestion for translation of *ouranos* in the LXX.

Introduction

It must be stated at the outset that, despite the wide-ranging nature of my title, I am not able here, obviously, to present a comprehensive survey of the use of heaven in the LXX.¹ Instead, this paper focuses primarily on one issue in the use of heaven: the singular and plural forms.

My outline today is as follows. First I will survey the usage of שָׁמַיִם and οὐρανός in general. Next I will turn to the main argument of my paper – the question of the origin of the singular and plural forms of οὐρανός (heaven) in the Septuagint. And finally, as time allows, I will conclude with some nuggets of interest that I’ve come across in my research.

1. General usage of שָׁמַיִם and Οὐρανός in the OT Literature

Heaven is a varied, important, and frequent word in the OT. The Hebrew שָׁמַיִם and the Aramaic שְׁמַיָּא, both translated as heaven, occur 458 times (420 Hebrew; 38 Aramaic²) in the MT. שָׁמַיִם plays an important role in many central OT texts including Genesis 1-2, and it occurs quite frequently in certain books: Gen (41x); Deut (44x); Isa (33x); Jer (33x); Ps (74x).

Despite some differences in Greek and Hebrew cosmology, the Greek word οὐρανός served well as a translation for שָׁמַיִם. In the parts of the LXX which correspond to the Hebrew Bible, οὐρανός is used almost exclusively to translate שָׁמַיִם, occurring as a translation

¹ For the use of heaven in the OT in general, comprehensive and exhaustive is Cornelis Houtman’s *Der Himmel im Alten Testament: Israels Weltbild und Weltanschauung* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). This detailed work covers all the various uses of heaven in the OT, focusing particularly on the combination of heaven and earth.

² The Aramaic occurs 8 times in Ezra, twice in Jer 10:11, and 28 times in Daniel.

equivalent nearly 450 times. Conversely, in only a very few instances is שָׁמַיִם translated with another Greek word such as ἄστρον (Job 15:15?) or ἥλιος (Job 8:29). Apparently, the semantic domain of οὐρανός was sufficiently flexible to communicate the varied senses which שָׁמַיִם did, and it became a fairly fixed translation equivalent from the Pentateuch on.

In the Hebrew Bible, we find that the semantic domain of heaven is quite wide indeed. Reference works have categorized the connotations of שָׁמַיִם in sundry ways, but two distinct poles of meaning are universally recognized: heaven as (1) the sky, atmosphere, and space of the created order; and (2) the dwelling place of God.³

1.1 Heaven as the Space of the Created Order

In the first instance, שָׁמַיִם is quite fluid and can refer to the place of meteorological phenomena such as rain, snow, frost, dew, hail, thunder, wind, and clouds (e.g. Gen 8:2; Isa 55:9-11; Job 38:29; Deut 33:13; Josh 10:11; 1 Sam 2:10; Zech 6:5; Ps 147:8), as well as to outer space and the place of the stars, sun and moon (Gen 15:15; Deut 4:19; Job 9:8-9; Ps 8:3). In Genesis 1 we find heaven is also the name given to the רָקִיעַ (firmament or expanse), a solid surface which separates the waters above from the waters below (Gen 1:7-9).⁴ It is best to understand that the term רָקִיעַ is hyponymous to שָׁמַיִם, i.e. what רָקִיעַ refers to is a subset of or included in the broader term שָׁמַיִם.⁵ רָקִיעַ was a more technical cosmological term while שָׁמַיִם was used more widely and fluidly.⁶

1.2 Heaven as the Dwelling Place of God

From reflection on the majesty of the heights above and a belief in the connection of deity with the always-important phenomena of weather, it was an easy transition to understand the heavens above as the habitation of God. God dwells *above* the created heavenly bodies *in heaven*.⁷ He abides there, sees all things and reveals himself from there (Gen 21:17; 28:12, 17; Job 22:12; Ps 14:2). In heaven is the temple and throne of God (Ps 11:4; 103:19; Is 66:1). And in the post-exilic literature he is many times referred to as the “God of heaven” (e.g., 2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Tob 7:12), a term which emphasizes the universality of his sovereignty.

Von Rad points out that the Bible actually speaks of God’s dwelling place in a number of non-harmonised ways: on Mount Sinai, in the Ark, on Zion, and in heaven.⁸ It is best to understand these as various theologically significant metaphors for God’s dwelling, with heaven being the supreme abode of God.⁹ Speaking of God as being in heaven emphasizes God’s separateness, transcendence and limitlessness.¹⁰ At the same time, there is awareness that not even “heaven or the heaven of heavens” (i.e., the heights above the heavens) can contain God (1 Kgs 8:27).

³ Jürgen Moltmann refers to these two different senses of heaven as “direct meanings” and “symbolic meanings.” *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (trans.: Margaret Kohl; London: SCM Press, 1985), 158, 160.

⁴ רָקִיעַ and שָׁמַיִם are also put in parallel construction, such as in Ps 19:1. At other times we find the phrase, “the firmament/expanse of heaven” (e.g., Gen 1:14; Dan 3:56 Th).

⁵ Tsumura, *NIDOTTE*, 3:1198 (s.v. רָקִיעַ). Tsumura discusses the meaning of hyponyms more fully in “A ‘Hyponymous’ Word Pair: *ʾrṣ* and *thm(t)* in Hebrew and Ugaritic,” *Biblica* 69 (1988): 258-269.

⁶ G. von Rad, *TDNT*, 5:503 (s.v. οὐρανός).

⁷ Failure to make this distinction and to worship the sun, moon, stars or the host of heaven was sternly forbidden (cf. Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16).

⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962-1965), 2:346.

⁹ M. G. Reddish, “Heaven,” *ABD* 3:90.

¹⁰ Donald K. Innes, “Heaven and Sky in the Old Testament,” *EvQ* 43 (1971), 148.

1.3 Heaven and Earth

Another very common use of heaven in the OT is when it is combined with earth. This pairing occurs at least 185 times, depending on how broadly one considers the context. It proves to be a key use of heaven throughout the HB and LXX. In fact, as Cornelis Houtman points out (in his massive *Der Himmel im Alten Testament*), we cannot even speak meaningfully of heaven in the OT without also discussing earth.¹¹

In some senses, the heaven and earth pair can be understood as straddling or combining the two semantic poles we've just discussed – those of the created realm and the abode of God. That is, at times the heaven and earth pair is used to refer to the entire created world (heaven and earth), while quite often, instead it contrasts God (in heaven) with humanity (on earth). Thus, we have an example where a particular word-pair can function both merismatically (heaven and earth) and antithetically (heaven versus earth). Both uses prove to be quite common in the OT, and these two uses play on the different senses of heaven – the cosmological and the metaphorical.

1.4 Heaven in the LXX

When we turn from the HB to the LXX, we find that in each of the variegated uses of שָׁמַיִם, the LXX uses οὐρανός much the same way. Οὐρανός functions in reference to the created order (meteorological phenomena and the starry realm), in connection with earth, and as the place of God's dwelling. In these ways the Septuagintal use of heaven is very close to that of the MT. Again, it appears we have a particularly happy match and standardized translation equivalent between שָׁמַיִם and οὐρανός. Οὐρανός has the flexibility to serve as the “jack of all trades” even as שָׁמַיִם does.

2. Singular and Plural Οὐρανός in the LXX

The nearly coextensive overlap of שָׁמַיִם and οὐρανός highlights, then, a very unexpected incongruity between the two words. As is well-known, the Semitic words for heaven occur only in the plural form.¹² Therefore, it is impossible to distinguish between “heaven” and “heavens” in light of Hebrew/Aramaic morphology. Greek is quite different. Both singular and plural forms do exist. However, quite the opposite of Hebrew/Aramaic, the vast majority of extant forms of οὐρανός in antiquity is singular.

In light of the universally-plural morphology of שָׁמַיִם, one might expect the LXX to typically translate these words with a Greek plural, οὐρανοί. However, just the opposite is the case. Plural forms of οὐρανός make up less than 9% of the uses of οὐρανός in the LXX. This is true for the Hebrew-canonical as well as apocryphal sections of the LXX.¹³ Moreover, the

¹¹ Houtman, *Der Himmel im AT*, 2. The structure of Houtman's wide-ranging tome conforms to this conviction. The entire middle part of the book (approximately 175 of its 370 pages) is dedicated to various aspects of “Himmel und Erde.”

¹² The consistent plurality of שָׁמַיִם is one of its most curious features. There has been debate for over 100 years about the morphology of this word. A helpful survey of this debate can be found in Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 5-7. Due to its final root being weak, the dual and plural forms are indistinguishable (Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 118). Thus, several scholars argued the word is actually a dual form, reflecting influence of Egyptian cosmology. However, the consensus is now that שָׁמַיִם is in fact plural in form. See GKC §88, 124b; Bernard Alfrink, “L'expression 'šamain or š^cmei Haššmaim' dans l'Ancien Testament,” *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, ed. Eugène Tisserant, *Studie Testi* 231 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1964), 1-7.

¹³ In the canonical sections of the LXX, plurals occur 41 or 42 times (with one variance between OG and Th Daniel) out of 502 total uses (= 8.4%). In the apocryphal writings (excluding Odes but including Ode 12, Prayer of Manasseh) there are 11 instances out of approximately 114 occurrences (= 9.6%). In the Greek Pseudepigrapha, the percentage is slightly higher: approximately 16%. However, this is rather misleading in that

plurals occur predominately in the Psalms (29 of 51-52 instances). The remainder of the LXX has surprisingly few occurrences.¹⁴

In fact, the *singular* οὐρανός for *plural* שָׁמַיִם is such a standard in Septuagintal translation that even in the phrase, “the heaven of heavens” and “heaven and the heaven of heavens” where one might expect plural forms, instead we find the singular (ὁ οὐρανός τοῦ οὐρανοῦ).¹⁵ As a result of this standard practice, the plural only appears once in the Pentateuch (Deut 32:43) and inconsistently elsewhere in the LXX.¹⁶

It is striking that more plural forms were not used in the LXX, especially in the Pentateuch where the LXX typically shows close dependence on the Hebrew *Vorlage*. As our convener, Dr. Wright has recently written about the LXX Pentateuch: it “mimics in Greek many formal aspects of its Hebrew source text, which results in a translation that has at times been called everything from awkward to stilted to simply bad.”¹⁷ Yet, the singular οὐρανός still predominates, despite the plural שָׁמַיִם.

In the predominance of the singular forms, the LXX aligns very closely with the Greek of antiquity. In fact, outside of the LXX, one is hard-pressed to find more than a handful of plural forms of οὐρανός in all of Classical or secular Hellenistic Greek well into the Christian era.¹⁸ It is not until the writings of the New Testament that plural forms of οὐρανός appear alongside the singular with any frequency. Yet, even there they remain in the minority.¹⁹ The notable exceptions are Matthew, Hebrews, and 2 Peter, each of which have more plural forms than singular, while many of the NT books have few or no plurals of οὐρανός at all.

So we have on our hands a bit of a mystery, one that can be described with two related questions: (1) In light of the rarity of plural οὐρανοί in the Greek language, why did the LXX begin to use this form at all? The typical answer, as we will see, is that the Septuagint translators are being influenced by the plural morphology of the Semitic words. However, if this is the case, we can ask a second question: (2) If the plurality of the Semitic words was the cause of the plural οὐρανοί in the LXX, why then do we find so *few* plurals there (less than 1 out of 10)?

Previous scholarly discussions of שָׁמַיִם and οὐρανός offer a number of explanations given for the plural forms in the LXX.

many of these plurals are in Enoch and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, which almost certainly contain later Christian interpolations.

¹⁴ The complete list of plurals is as follows:

Canonical LXX – Deut. 32:43; 1 Sam. 2:10; 2 Sam. 22:10; 2 Chr. 28:9; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 2:4; 8:2, 4; 18:2; 32:6; 49:6; 56:6, 11, 12; 67:9; 68:35; 88:3, 6, 12; 95:5, 11; 96:6; 101:26; 106:26; 107:5, 6; 112:4; 113:11; 135:5; 143:5; 148:1, 4(3x); Prov. 3:19; Job 16:19; Hab. 3:3; Isa. 44:23; 49:13; Ezek. 1:1; Dan. 3:17.
Apocryphal – Jdt. 9:12; 13:18; Tob. 8:5; 2 Ma. 15:23; 3 Ma. 2:2; Pr Man 15 [Ode 12:15]; Wis. 9:10, 16; 18:15; Ps. Sol. 2:30; Dan. 3:59 [Hymn of the Three].

¹⁵ Katz, *Philo's Bible*, 6. More precisely, in the three-fold expression “heaven and the heaven of heavens,” singular forms of οὐρανός *always* occur, but the plurals do occur once in the two-fold phrase, “heaven of heavens” (Ps 148:4). However, the other occurrences of “heaven of heavens” (Ps 115:16 [113:24]; 3 Macc 2:15) also use the singular.

¹⁶ Katz states that in contrast, plurals are a distinctive feature of the “Three.” My examination of the Hexapla, however, does not reveal any significant difference in the occasion or use of plural forms.

¹⁷ Benjamin G. Wright III, “Access to the Source: Cicero, Ben Sira, the Septuagint and their Audiences,” *JSJ* 34 (2003), 4.

¹⁸ There are a few occurrences in Anaximander (ca. 6th century BCE) and in Aristotle.

¹⁹ There are 90 plurals in the NT out of 273 total (= 33%). Matthew alone accounts for 55 of these 90 (61%). Apart from Matthew, the rest of the NT uses plural forms less than 13% of the time. This is only slightly higher than the preceding literature.

2.1 Belief in Multiple Heavens

One typical explanation is that the plural forms, at least in the later Septuagintal literature, are the result of a burgeoning belief in multiple heavens. The apocalyptic speculations about the various levels and furniture of heaven are well known to us today. In this theory, then, the plurals are “true plurals” in that they refer to several heavens in distinction. Typically, the argument starts from the phrase “the heaven(s) of the heavens” which is understood as referring to at least two or three distinct heavenly realms. Versions of this phrase occur some seven times in the MT and corresponding LXX passages. Von Rad and others saw in the post-exilic writings suggestive echoes of the Babylonian ideas of multiple heavens.²⁰ Traub, writing in the same *TDNT* article, says that this phrase “presupposes the idea of several heavens, perhaps a plurality.”²¹ These occurrences in Scripture are then connected with the well-known development of belief in multiple heavens in other later second temple literature and rabbinic materials.

However, there is a marked difference between the use of heaven in the LXX (including the Apocryphal books) and the apocalyptic literature. In the LXX and Apocrypha we have no heavenly journeys nor speculations about the levels of the heavens like we find in the later apocalyptic and rabbinic traditions. Any “levels” of heaven that may be discerned in the MT or LXX are quite vague and refer only to perceived differences of height in the created realm.²² This is a quite different sense of “levels of heaven” than the apocalyptic usage.

Moreover, the phrase “heaven and the heaven of heavens” (which uses singular forms despite the plural *Vorlage*) need be nothing more than hyperbolic, poetic language intended to communicate the vast greatness and exaltedness of God.²³ This phrase would have been the perfect opportunity to exploit a plurality of heavens. Yet we still find singular forms of οὐρανός there. Therefore, no direct causal connection can be made between a belief in multiple heavens and the development of the plural forms of οὐρανός. Von Rad himself concludes by concurring that connections with multiple-heavens views are at best “general connections” and not direct borrowing.²⁴

Indeed, any partial causal connection that may exist probably goes the opposite way: the occasional use of plural forms of οὐρανός in the LXX lent credence and opportunity for apocalyptic writers to develop the idea of multiple heavens.²⁵ While later writers may have found in such phrases the “proof” for multiple heavens, this in no way argues that such a belief was in fact widespread and effective in pre- or post-exilic Judaism, nor the cause of the origin of plural forms. Even in the latest LXX apocryphal books, there is no evidence for a plurality of heavens.

2.2 Οὐρανοί as a Semitism

²⁰ Gerhard von Rad, “οὐρανός,” *TDNT* 5:503.

²¹ Helmut Traub, “οὐρανός,” *TDNT* 5:511.

²² As Stadelmann observes: “The few references to different kinds of heaven are either so generic in their scope or metaphorical in their significance that an exact determination of the stages of the heavenly dome is impossible. . . . this space was not conceived as a structured complex of clearly distinguishable levels.” Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception of the World*, 41.

²³ The only instance of plural forms of οὐρανός in the “heaven of heavens” phrase is Ps 148:4. The others, as well as the fuller “heaven and heaven of heavens,” all use singular forms.

²⁴ Von Rad, “οὐρανός,” *TDNT* 5:503.

²⁵ Traub argues that the Septuagint “contributed to the Greek word the status constructus form and the plural use” thereby giving Hellenistic thought “the possibility of expressing more easily and quickly” ideas about a plurality of heavens. H. Traub, *TDNT*, 5:511. D. F. Torm rightly remarks that over time there was likely an interplay between the use of the plural and the growing concept of multiple heavens: “. . . der Gebrauch des Pluralis der Vorstellung einer Mehrheit von Himmeln förderlich sein musste, und . . . andererseits diese Vorstellung einen häufigen Gebrauch des Pluralis verursachen konnte.” D. F. Torm, “Der Pluralis Ouranoi,” 49.

By far the most common explanation for plural forms of οὐρανός in the LXX and the NT is an apparently obvious solution: the plurals come about through the influence of the plural forms of עַמְּרָא (Hebrew) and ܥܡܪܐ (Aramaic); thus, the plural οὐρανοί is a Semitism. This explanation is often exemplified by scholars writing from the perspective of the plural forms in the NT and looking back on their origins. For example, one regularly finds comments that Matthew's frequent use of the plurals is "in accordance with the Semitic idiom."²⁶ Likewise, this argument from the Hebrew/Aramaic to the Greek is often used to explain Matthew's "kingdom of heaven," as Davies and Allison state: "βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν... is to be judged a Semitism in view of rabbinic usage, *malkūt šāmayim*."²⁷ In addition to the commentaries, this line of reasoning is found in nearly all of the standard dictionary²⁸ and grammar²⁹ discussions of οὐρανός.³⁰ This seems straight forward enough. But is this a sound interpretation regarding the development of the plural forms in the Septuagint?

Before answering this, we must clarify the terms at hand. What exactly is a "Semitism"? I think Stanley Porter's distinction between different levels of Semitic influence on Greek is very astute and applicable to Septuagintal Greek.³¹ He observes that only an element of Greek that occurs at the level of an *incursion* by a Semitic language can be classified as a Semitism. In the cases when "a rare construction that can be paralleled in Greek has its frequency of occurrence greatly increased due to associations with Semitic literature," this should instead be called a "Semitic enhancement." This is an important clarification of terms. The introduction of "Semitic enhancement" as a category distinct from "Semitism" should caution writers from too quickly calling an apparent linguistic anomaly in Greek (such as plural οὐρανοί) a "Semitism."

It should be clear from this discussion that the plural forms of οὐρανός cannot rightly be classified as a "Semitism" but at best as evidence of "Semitic enhancement" on biblical Greek; plural forms of οὐρανός are not morphologically irregular in Greek, but only uncommon. Is Semitic enhancement, then, the way to describe the development of the plural forms in the Septuagint? The answer is yes, but only in a qualified and careful way – not in the morphological way typically assumed.

Because plural forms of οὐρανός were almost non-existent in Greek before the time of the Septuagint translation (and even subsequently they are found almost exclusively in Jewish Greek literature for some centuries), it is reasonable to view those 51 (or 52) Septuagint occurrences as evidence of Semitic enhancement.

However, this is different from arguing that the plural forms came about as a direct result of the morphological plurality of עַמְּרָא. This needs to be proven, not just assumed, especially in light of the fact that in most cases (over 90%), the *singular* forms are found despite the universally-plural Hebrew counterpart. The plurality of עַמְּרָא and ܥܡܪܐ likely

²⁶ F. W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: a Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 356. Almost verbatim is Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:328.

²⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:81. Similar is David Hill who says that kingdom of heaven "indicat[es] faithfulness to the Aramaic," *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 90.

²⁸ E.g., *TDNT*, *NIDNTT*, *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, and *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s.v. heaven/οὐρανός.

²⁹ For example, Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Vol. III: Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 25, and BDF §4.2, 141.1.

³⁰ A fuller, but still brief argument along the same lines may be found in Elliot C. Maloney, *Semitic Interference in Marcan Syntax* (SBLDS 51; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 190-192.

³¹ Porter distinguishes three possible levels of Semitic influence on the Greek of the NT: a) direct translation; b) intervention, "when a form that cannot reasonably be formed or paralleled in Greek must be attributed to the influence of a Semitic construction"; and c) enhancement, "when a rare construction that can be paralleled in Greek has its frequency of occurrence greatly increased due to associations with Semitic literature." Stanley E. Porter, "The Language of the Apocalypse in Recent Discussion," *NTS* 35 (1989), 587.

made the use of plural forms of οὐρανός a quite easy and a reasonable step when a translator chose to do this. However, it must be emphasized that the plurality of the Hebrew and Aramaic does not appear to be the *cause* of the plural οὐρανοί, either in the canonical LXX or the Apocrypha (most of which likely had Semitic *Vorlagen* as well).³² Instead, there are other identifiable factors which led to the development of the plurals in the LXX. To these we can now turn.³³

2.3 Poetic and Syntactical Reasons (D. F. Torm and P. Katz)

D. F. Torm was one of the first scholars to examine the oddity of the plural οὐρανοί in the LXX and to argue for an explanation other than a plurality of heavens or Semitic influence.³⁴ He was also the first to point out that plurals in secular Greek were not completely unknown. He disputes the Hebrew plural explanation by first pointing out that in the instances of ὁ οὐρανὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, where the plural would be expected, it does not appear. He goes on to observe that of the 51 plural occurrences in the LXX, more than half occur in the Psalms and most others, similarly, in elevated prophetic speech or prayers.³⁵ He concludes, therefore, that the plurals pertain to the category of poetical and ceremonial speech, and are not the result of Semitic influence.³⁶ Nor should the plurals be understood to indicate a difference in meaning than the singulars. Instead, they should be classified as examples of the poetic technique of *pluralis majesticus*, whereby the poet uses the plural to amplify or extend the expression.³⁷

Some years later, the Septuagintal scholar Peter Katz dedicated an appendix to the question of plural οὐρανοί in the LXX.³⁸ He begins by reviewing Torm's argument, but concludes that his case is inconclusive. Katz argues that the important question is different than Torm's. The real question for Katz is: how did it come about that רַמְיָם could be expressed by both οὐρανός (sg.) and οὐρανοί (pl.)?

Similar to Torm, Katz observes that the singular οὐρανός in the complex phrases, “the heaven of heavens,” shows that there was a consistent translation technique of $\text{רַמְיָם} \rightarrow$ singular οὐρανός at work for this word. The plural occurrences then call for explanation. Katz finds the solution in observing *syntactical* considerations in addition to poetic ones, specifically, where the Hebrew verb governing the phrase is plural and/or there are other plural nouns in a parallel stichus. Thus, in the latter case, many of the plural οὐρανοί can be understood as having been attracted by a parallel noun which is plural: e.g., οὐρανῶν –

³² If indeed the morphology of the Semitic *Vorlagen* were the contributing factor in the plurals, we might expect to find that plurals occur less often in LXX documents which do *not* have a Semitic original. However, just the opposite is often the case: In Wisdom of Solomon (composed in Greek), half of the occurrences are plural, while none are in 1 Esdras or 1 Maccabees (translations of Semitic originals). Clearly, factors other than morphology are at work.

³³ In light of the literalizing tendency of the recensions of the LXX, one might argue that this is the source of the plural οὐρανοί. However, in Theodotion Daniel, we do not find an increase in plural forms (in fact, one less than in OG). Similarly, of the 23 occurrences of οὐρανός in the kaige portion of Samuel and Kings (Reigns), only one plural is found (2 Sam 22:10).

³⁴ D. F. Torm, “Der Pluralis Ouranoi,” *ZAW* 33 (1934): 48-50.

³⁵ There are 29 plurals in the Psalms, though Torm does not make this number entirely clear. When we limit the reckoning to the canonical LXX books, the predominance of the Psalms is even stronger: 29 of 41 (or 42) uses. The variance between 41 and 42 depends on which version of Daniel one uses in the counting. At 3:17 the OG has a plural where the Theodotion lacks a reference to heaven. Typically, reference works refer to the 51 plural occurrences in the LXX, thereby (knowingly or unknowingly) following the Theodotion.

³⁶ G. Mussies' survey of the data of the Septuagint concurs with this conclusion, “the Hebrew equivalent . . . probably did not influence the use of the plural in Greek.” G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John* (SNTS 27; Leiden: Brill, 1971), 84.

³⁷ “Die Dichter brauchen den Plural oft, um den Ausdruck zu amplifizieren.” Torm, “Der Pluralis,” 49.

³⁸ Peter Katz, *Philo's Bible*, 141-146.

ἀβύσσων (Ps 106:26), οὐρανῶν – νεφελῶν (Ps 56:11; 107:5), ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν – ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις (Ps 148:1), ἐν οὐρανοῖς – ἐν ὑψίστοις (Job 16:19).³⁹

But even more strongly, Katz highlights the role that the Hebrew verbs in the *Vorlage* played in the Septuagint's plural οὐρανοί. That is, there are eleven cases in the Psalms where in the Hebrew, עָנַן governs a plural verb, thus, the translator had “either to transform the whole sentence into the singular or to use Hebraizing Greek.”⁴⁰ In cases where the plural verb had more than one subject, οὐρανός, as only one of them, could remain singular (e.g., Gen 2:1). However, when plural עָנַן stood alone with a plural verb, the temptation to pluralize οὐρανός was strong (though not irresistible, it should be added), especially in cases of personification, such as εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοὶ (Isa 44:23) or εὐλογεῖτε οὐρανοὶ (Dan 3:59, Prayer).⁴¹ Stated simply, “the choice of οὐρανοί in some parts of the LXX is caused by the fact that עָנַן was introduced by a plural verb.”⁴²

Therefore, Katz concludes by concurring with Torm that the plurals are elements of poetical and solemn language. But he disagrees with Torm's deduction that this means there is no Semitic influence. Indeed, the Semitic influence can be seen in the fact that plural עָנַן required a plural verb, which in turn often effected a plural οὐρανοί. The *pluralis majesticus* explanation is true as far as it goes, but the additional syntactical considerations are required to explain the phenomenon of plural οὐρανοί.

2.4 Evaluation of Katz and Torm

Both Torm and Katz are far better explanations of the phenomenon of plural οὐρανοί than the typical dictionary and commentary accounts that assume a morphological connection. In fact, I've found that most such accounts put Torm's *ZAW* article in a footnote (and Katz less often), but then go straight on with the Semitic-morphology explanation.

In comparing the two, Katz's treatment is a real improvement over Torm's and provides a persuasive explanation for most of the plurals in the LXX. And again, both are far superior to the textbook reports. However, while I think Katz is basically right in his analysis, at times he gives a list of verses with only a cursory and less than satisfactory explanation. Moreover, there are a few trouble passages in earlier sections outside of the Psalms that he rather quickly dismisses as being not from the hand of the original translator. This may be the case, but at times it seems a little too convenient and circular of an explanation. Additionally, there are also a number of passages from the Psalms and other portions which Katz does not mention at all.⁴³

Most importantly, Katz does not deal with the eleven plurals which occur in the LXX Apocrypha. While in several cases his explanations work in the Apocrypha as well (e.g., Tobit 8:5), at times there may be other factors at work in the appearance of the plural. For example, I have discovered what seems to be an intentional singular versus plural distinction in the Wisdom of Solomon. In Wisdom, we have three plural forms of οὐρανός combined with three singulars. There seems to be a pattern of the singular forms referring to the created realm and the plurals to the abode of God. There is no multiple heavens speculation in

³⁹ Katz, *Philo's Bible*, 143-144. Katz gives other examples including a case such as Prov 3:19 where οὐρανοῦς is in direct parallel with (sg.) τὴν γῆν yet it is still embedded in a series of poetical plurals, hence its plurality.

⁴⁰ Katz, *Philo's Bible*, 145.

⁴¹ The solitary occurrence of plural οὐρανοί in the Pentateuch (Deut 32:43), though it contains the phrase εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοὶ and could be explained that way, is instead explained by Katz as being unoriginal, a later borrowing from elsewhere in the LXX (p. 144). The portion of 32:43 containing heaven is indeed a Septuagintal plus as compared to the MT. However, it is found in the Qumran text, 4QDeut 9.

⁴² Katz, *Philo's Bible*, 145. Katz points out that this rule does not generally apply in cases where the plural verb follows at the end of the sentence.

⁴³ 2 Chron 28:9; Neh 9:6; Ps 2:4; 88:3; 95:5; 135:5; Hab 3:3; Ezek 1:1; Dan 3:17, 59.

Wisdom, but the author appears to be using the singular and plural forms in distinction thereby highlighting a dualistic contrast between the divine and human.⁴⁴

Another example from the Apocrypha is found in epithets for God. In Judith 9:12 and 13:18, 2 Macc 15:23, 3 Macc 2:2, Ps Sol 2:30, and Pr Man 12, God is exalted as the Ruler, Lord, and King of the heavens (τῶν οὐρανῶν). Most interesting, in these epithets for God with the plural we do not find the typical word for God (θεός) or even Lord (κύριος) but instead terms that specifically emphasize God's ruling lordship: δυνάστα τῶν οὐρανῶν (2 Macc 15:23); δέσποτα τῶν οὐρανῶν (Jdt 9:12); βασιλεῦ τῶν οὐρανῶν (3 Macc 2:2). Conversely, in no instance does the phrase, "God of heaven" (very frequent in the Apocrypha) use a plural form. Thus, there seems to be a developing pattern that when God is addressed and his reigning lordship is emphasized, plural forms do sometimes appear.⁴⁵

Thus, my point in all of this is that while Katz's observations are usually on target, they do not provide an entirely comprehensive explanation of the plurals of οὐρανός in the LXX. He remains correct that plural οὐρανοί is not merely a function of Semitic morphology. But in addition to his poetic and syntactical explanation, there also appear to be other factors which occasionally contribute to plural forms. These factors are sometimes idiolectic for a particular author or may reflect developing trends and ways of speaking.

2.5 Summary

In sum, there is little evidence that the occasional plurals in the LXX came about as a result of a belief in multiple heavens. They may be called Semitic enhancement, but not in the directly morphological way that is usually assumed (plural Hebrew to plural Greek). As a result, this common assumption in scholarship (especially at the reference-work level) needs to be qualified. Instead, there is often, though not always, an indirect Semitic influence stemming from the influence of the syntax of the Hebrew verbs. Additionally, poetic factors played a significant role, both attraction of words through parallelism and the use of hyperbolic and expansive speech. This poetic and syntactical combination is the best explanation for most but not all of the occurrences of οὐρανοί in the LXX, particularly in the canonical portions. Other instances of the plural may reflect early textual corruption, or at times there may be theological reasons that contribute to the use of plurals in the later writings. Regardless of the cause or causes, this new, Septuagintal usage of plurals eventually encouraged a wider use of plural forms in secular Koine Greek as well as the NT and Patristics. The developing belief in and exploration of multiple heavens likely sped up this process in a mutually combusive way.

3. *Select Nuggets of Interest*

If there were more time I could develop some other interesting findings about the use of οὐρανός in the Septuagint. I will only mention a couple as "nuggets" for your future interest. For example, an examination of the pluses and minuses of οὐρανός relative to the MT reveals that there are very few minuses (only about 7) and about 45 pluses. The few minuses usually reveal different underlying source-texts and confirm the close semantic connection between רָקִיעַ and οὐρανός. The pluses often make more explicit the meaning of the Hebrew and at times create a heaven and earth pair that is lacking in the MT. A significant portion of the pluses, however, occur in the OG of Job (14 of 45). There we find the phrase ὑπ' οὐρανόν used as a circumlocution for "earth." I would suggest that this strong

⁴⁴ I believe this is also at work in a nuanced way in the Gospel of Matthew.

⁴⁵ It must be acknowledged that this pattern is not entirely consistent or developed, however. For example, in 2 Macc 15:3-4, God is referred to as the ἐν οὐρανῷ (sg.) δυνάστης. However, in this case, the difference may reflect that God is not being addressed but is being spoken about. In 1 Esdras, which has no plural forms, we find "the king of heaven" (βασιλεὺς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) with the singular form (4:36). Likewise, the Sinaiticus reading of Tobit has βασιλεὺς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (1:18; 13:13, 17).

pattern of pluses in Job serves to highlight God's exaltedness, a theme certainly prevalent in Job. That is, to regularly refer to the created world of humanity as that which is "under heaven" simultaneously highlights the extent of God's dominion and the lower place of humanity from the God who dwells in the height of heaven (22:12).

Another nugget of interest relates to the two different textual traditions of Tobit (Sinaiticus versus Alexandrinus and Vaticanus). As you know, the Qumran documents have generally supported the longer, Sinaiticus reading, thus reversing the previous opinion. As a result, the NRSV now follows the Sinaiticus tradition while the RSV relied upon Alexandrinus. Regarding the use of heaven, the longer Sinaiticus has several more uses of οὐρανός (15 versus 7) and especially in reference to God as "King of heaven" (1:18; 13:17), "Lord of heaven" (6:18; 7:12; 9:6; 10:14), and "God of heaven" (7:13; 8:15) (all singular).⁴⁶

I will conclude today with a note of a different sort: a practical suggestion for the translation of οὐρανός in the LXX. As mentioned, there are two distinct poles of meaning in the use of אֲשֶׁר and οὐρανός – the created realm and the abode of God. Unfortunately, in neither Hebrew or Greek can we distinguish between these meanings via morphology. In English, however, we do use the singular and plural forms in distinction. Singular "heaven," under the influence of Christian tradition, is used for the metaphorical place of God and saints who have departed from earth. Conversely, plural "heavens," usually in the articular form, "the heavens," is reserved for the skies (though this usage is dying out). Therefore, I would recommend that when we encounter οὐρανός in the LXX, we determine which of the poles in the semantic domain to which it refers – cosmological or divine abode – and then we convert this into the appropriate English form. In other words, modern English is well-suited to accommodate and distinguish the two main meanings of heaven in the OT by use of singular, "heaven" and plural, "the heavens." Additionally, the use of "the heavens" is generally better than "sky" as it retains the concordance found in the polysemous אֲשֶׁר of the MT and οὐρανός of the LXX.

⁴⁶ Unfortunately, of the many Tobit fragments in 4Q196-200, only one aligns with a heaven reference in Greek Tobit: 4Q196, Frg 17ii confirms the AB reading of 13:7. Interestingly, 4Q196, Frg 7 apparently read "[the ligh]t of hea[ven]" which is not in AB Tobit, while in S we find φῶς τοῦ θεοῦ.