

Trajectories of scripture transmission: The case of Amos 5:25–27 in Acts 7:42–43

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Dates:
Received: 13 May 2013
Accepted: 28 June 2013
Published: 04 Oct. 2013

How to cite this article:
Steyn, G.J., 2013,
'Trajectories of scripture
transmission: The case
of Amos 5:25–27 in Acts
7:42–43', *HTS Teologiese
Studies/Theological Studies*
69(1), Art. #2006, 9 pages.
[http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/
hts.v69i1.2006](http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.2006)

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It is the intention of this study to explore the trajectory of the transmission and reception of three elements from Amos 5:25–27 through the stages of its history in ancient religious literature. Four stages in its trajectory are explored, namely in the Amos Masoretic Text (MT), the quotations from the Jewish Damascus Scroll sect, the Jewish-Hellenistic context of the Septuagint (LXX) Amos, and the Early Christian context of Stephen's speech by Luke in Acts 7:42–43. The astral Mesopotamian deities of Amos MT changed to symbols which now stood for the law, the congregation, the prophets and the interpreter of the law in the sectarian context of the Damascus scroll. The LXX, in turn, understood these to be 'the tent of Moloch' and the 'star of your god Raiphan'. This version is used in Acts 7, but whereas the LXX shows traces of a connection with the Heaven-and-Sun god, particularly with the planet Saturn, Luke now places the same elements within the context of the exodus narrative in Stephen's speech. The investigation shows how the mutation of scripture becomes clear in the trajectory of its transmission and how it is constantly being reinterpreted to be relevant within the context of its time.

Research focus

All of the explicit quotations in the Acts of the Apostles are to be found within the speeches of Peter, Stephen, Paul and James. The only exception to this is the Isaiah passage which is read by the Eunuch of Ethiopia when Philip meets him on his journey. It is striking that some of the most prominent of these quotations in Acts were taken from the Scroll of the Twelve Prophets, the *Dodekapropheton* – especially that of Joel in Acts 2 and those from Amos in Acts 7 and 15.¹ Much has been written on all these quotations – on their origins and text forms, the reasons for their selection by Luke, and their intended functions and reinterpretations within their new contexts within these speeches (cf. Steyn 1995, 2004:59–81). It is not the intention of this presentation to merely repeat those studies, but rather to focus on the transmission and reception of one of these passages by following its trajectory through the stages of its history in ancient religious literature. Only one of these will serve as a case study in order to investigate this issue narrower and deeper within the space of this article. The quotation from Amos 5:25–27 in Acts 7:42–43 has been chosen for this purpose. Four stages in the transmission history of this text can be identified in the ancient literature, each of which will be briefly investigated within the context of its particular community. The four stages in the trajectory of this tradition are those of the Mesopotamian context of Amos Masoretic Text (MT), the Jewish Damascus Scroll sect, the Jewish-Hellenistic context of Amos Septuagint (LXX) and the Early Christian context of Stephen's speech by Luke. By comparing the contexts of these groups with each other, we hope to trace its reception in each of these communities. This investigation will thus largely run on two tracks: a *Traditionsgeschichtliche* and a *Rezeptionshistorische* track. Our journey on these tracks should reveal some of the hermeneutical and theological assumptions of each of the four societal groups via their adaptations of three elements of the same text tradition.

The place of the Amos-quotation in the structure of Acts 7

Stephen's speech in Acts 7 largely presents a brief history of the Jewish people. Stephen includes himself by continuously referring to 'our ancestors'. The speech consists of two sections: Part 1 (7:7–50) focuses on history and proof from the scriptures regarding the past. Part 2 (7:51–59) deals with Stephen's appeal regarding the present situation. Part 1 consists of two main narratives, that of Abraham (7:2–8) and of God's people in Egypt (7:9–50) – the latter are references to the Joseph (7:9–16) and Moses (7:17–50) narratives. Part 1 ends in a climax about idolatry. The Israelites reject Moses (and Yahweh) and turn to worship the golden calf. The quotation from Amos 5 is situated within that climax about idolatry. The composition of the speech is in line with Luke's use of the scriptures in the rest of Acts. He typically presents a first part in which a reflection on the history of Israel takes place and which is subsequently buttressed by scripture. Thereafter a second part usually follows which makes an appeal to its readers.

1. From approximately 32 occurrences in the New Testament, explicit quotations from the Twelve Minor Prophets (12P) are largely to be found in Paul's letter to the Romans (6 times), Matthew's Gospel (10 times), Luke-Acts (6 times), and the Johannine literature (6 times).

The quotation from Amos becomes the turning point in Stephen's speech. It forms the transition between the past and the present of God's people. It draws an analogy between the behaviour of the concurrent generation towards Jesus and the behaviour of their ancestors in the desert towards Moses. But between the ancient Amos text and Luke's quotation lies almost a millennium² with different stages and contexts of interpretation. The four contexts referred to above will now be introduced as reflected in four sets of literature: the MT (which reflects a Mesopotamian astral context), the Damascus scroll (which reflects a Jewish sectarian context), the Septuagint (LXX) (reflecting a Judaeo-Hellenistic context), and Acts (reflecting an early Christian context).

Context 1: Mesopotamian astral context (Am MT)

Scholars are of the opinion that the book of Amos probably preserved in Amos 5:25–27, 'a rare glimpse of a Mesopotamian astral cult that through Aramean intervention penetrated northern Israel' (Paul & Cross 1991:197–198; Stuart 2002: 355–356). Astronomy and the association of gods with planets were highly regarded in Babylonia and Assyria (Jastrow 1915:261). During the time of the Babylonian exile (6th century BCE), the Babylonians had a complex idea of heaven – a cosmological perception which eventually led to the idea of a plurality of heavens amongst Jews (Collins 2000:24). It seems as if Amos:

is ridiculing the great cult processions, when statues of gods were carried triumphantly on high by their worshipers. Here, however, he has another processional in mind – one of deportation. They will carry their idols – but into exile. (Paul & Cross 1991:197–198)

But there were also attempts by some scholars to remove the two astral deities from this text. It was argued, on the one hand, that none of the other oracles in Amos refer to idolatry, and that *Sikkuth*, on the other hand, was introduced to Israel only after the Babylonian conquest³:

They either surmise that the verse is a later interpolation, revocalize the nouns in question and thereby 'de-astralize' the passage, or accept the presence of two deities but assume that they are other than the ones referred to in the Masoretic text. (Paul & Cross 1991:197–198)

Three elements in this text tradition will now be traced through the four literary and societal contexts under investigation in this study, namely '*Sikkuth* your king', '*Kiyyun* your star god', and 'beyond Babylonia'.

Tradition element 1: '*Sikkuth* your king' (סִקְוּת מֶלֶךְךָם)

Some have suggested that מֶלֶךְךָם [‘your king’] should be revocalised to מֶלֶךְ [‘Moloch’] or מַלְכֵם [‘Milcom’], but:

the epithet מֶלֶךְךָם (‘your king’), following the deity’s proper name, is a hierarchical device for ranking gods in Mesopotamia and is indicative of the supreme rank of this deity in the cult the prophet is satirizing. (Paul & Cross 1991:197–198)

².Amos lived around 760 BCE (Wolff 1977:90).

³.See Paul and Cross (1991:197–198) and references there which conclude that it is a postexilic Judean gloss – although these authors refer to the Assyrian conquest.

The Hebrew text reads *sikkūt* (סִקְוּת), which is generally understood to be a name for the planet Saturn with this specific vocalisation. It is argued that the vowels of *šiqqūš* [‘detestable thing’] influenced the word. But others were skeptical of these unexpected vowels and proposed a different vocalisation, based on:

the evidence of early texts that do not interpret the consonants *skt* as a divine name at all but instead translate the word as a singular common noun, ‘tent of, tabernacle of,’ *sukkāt*. (Meier 1992b:904)

– similar to the readings of CD 7.14–19, LXX, Acts and the Vulgate. ‘Thus סִקְוּת is converted by some to סְקֻת (“hut, booth”’ (Paul & Cross 1991:197–198). Paul and Cross (1991) have argued convincingly, however, that here in the context of Amos 5, סִקְוּת:

is the Hebrew transliteration of SAG.KUD, an astral deity known from Mesopotamian sources and also found in a list of gods from Ugarit. There he is identified with Ninurta (and thus secondarily with the planet Saturn), one of the leading gods in the Mesopotamian pantheon. (pp. 197–198)

Tradition element 2: ‘...your images, *Kiyyun* your star-god’ (אלֹהֵיכֶם בְּיַיִן כְּבָב אֱלֹהִים)

The Hebrew text of Amos 5:26 reads *kiyyūn* (קִיּוּן). It is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament and appears only here in Amos 5:26. Scholars generally agree that the Hebrew consonants actually refer to a deity with an Akkadian name (*kajamānu*, literally ‘the steady one’) – ‘which is one of the appellations of the star god, Saturn’ (Meier 1992a:677; Paul & Cross 1991:197–198). ‘Since Akkadian “m” may appear as “w” in loanwords into Hebrew, the Akkadian consonants *kymn* would appear in Hebrew as *kywn*, as in fact occurs in Amos 5:26.⁴ ‘Amos appropriately adds (“the star of your god”) to this deity’s name’ (Paul & Cross 1991:196).

Tradition element 3: ‘Exile beyond Damascus’ (מִלְאָה לְדָמֶשֶׁק)

Paul and Cross (1991) have argued that this allusion has an ironic tone:

Israel, during this period, had extended its boundaries by means of victories in the battlefield as far as Damascus (2 Kgs 14:28). Well, now they shall go even farther, ‘beyond Damascus’ – not in victory, but in exile! ... The people will be driven into exile by ‘The Lord, the God of hosts’ (v. 27), that is, the Lord of all the *astral* hosts will deport them along with their *astral* deities!

Context 2: Jewish Damascus Scroll Sectarian Context (CD) 7:14–15

Turning to the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) for the second context under investigation, it is noted that the 1st century CE *Murabba’at Scroll* (Mur 88) – which contains significant portions of a scroll of the Minor Prophets (Wise 2010:373) – belongs to the group of Hebrew witnesses which is classified as proto-Masoretic. It is considered to be ‘virtually identical to the Masoretic Text’ (Glenny 2009:11). Concerning Amos,

⁴.Meier (1992b:904) states: ‘Frequent references to *kywn* when the planets are invoked in Aramaic and Mandaean texts in the 1st millennium A.D. ... affirms the longevity, popularity, and cross-cultural transfer of this title for Saturn.’

Mur 88 contains only four relatively minor differences compared to the MT (Am 7:15–16, 9:5) (Glenny 2009:12). The section between Amos 5:18 and 6:1 is unfortunately missing, rendering this DSS witness unhelpful for the study of Amos 5:25–27. Neither is there any preserved text of Amos (or parts thereof) that has survived in one of the most significant finds amongst the witnesses of the Minor Prophets, namely the 1st century BCE Greek scroll from *Nahal Hever* (8HevXIIgr) (Ådna 2000:141; Tov 1990).

One important witness, however, that does contain the text of Amos 5:25–27 amongst the DSS witnesses is that of the *Damascus scroll* (4Q266–273). The collection of fragments dates probably to between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. It is a ‘composite work, consisting of an Admonition that serves as the preface to a number of short legal collections’ (Schiffman 2010:271). Long before the discoveries of the DSS in the Judean desert an extensive copy of this document was discovered in a store room at the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo – then known as the *Zadokite Fragments* and thereafter as the *Cairo Damascus* or the *Covenant of Damascus* (CD). The document provides some insight into the understanding of ‘Damascus’ by this sectarian community. Schiffman (2010) summarised the situation as follows:

The sect was constituted by those who perceived the iniquity of their generation, but lacked direction and leadership. The rise soon afterward of the Teacher of Righteousness (or ‘Correct Teacher’) filled this gap. ‘Damascus’ serves as a code word for the sectarian settlement at Qumran (CD 7:19), hence the designation ‘Damascus Covenant’ or ‘Damascus Document’. (p. 145)

This sectarian community interpreted Amos 5:26–27 in CD 7.13–19:

as a justification for those who had separated themselves from the priesthood in Jerusalem and had constituted the ‘congregation of the new covenant in the land of Damascus’ (cf. CD 6.5, 19; 8.21). (Wolff 1977:266).

Column 7 consists of some kind of thematic commentary (Brooke 2005:155), with references to the texts of Isaiah 7:17, Amos 5:26–27, Amos 9:11 and Numbers 24:17. The latter with its reference to the ‘star of Jacob’ being messianically interpreted and eschatologically connected with a future redeemer (De Jonge 1992:787).

It is thus striking that also the Damascus scroll quotes the two passages from Amos which occur in Acts 7:42–43 and 15:16–17. The two Amos quotations appear directly after each other – first that of Amos 5:26 with its brief explanation in CD 7.14–15 and then Amos 9:11 in CD 7.16. The quotations are situated within the discussion on ‘the future judgment of the disobedient’ (CD 7.9–8.21) and are referred to as that ‘which is described by the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos – upon which a quotation from Isaiah 7:17 follows. The issue at hand is:

the great schism between the two houses of Israel, when Ephraim departed from Judah. At that time all who turned back were delivered to the sword, whereas all who stood fast were vouchsafed escape to ‘the land of the north’. (CD 56,9)⁵

⁵The (Cairo) Damascus Document ([1910] 2002), translation by The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel 1999–2006. Robert Kraft – who revised the Schechter translation (*Fragments of a Zadokite Work*, 1910) in 2002 – translated: ‘When the two houses of Israel separated Ephraim turned away from Judah, and those who turned back were delivered to the sword and those who held fast escaped into the land of the North.’

Hereafter follow two Amos quotations with a brief midrash in which the second Amos quotation is used to explain the first. The quotation from Amos 5:26 reads: ‘I will send into exile *Sikkuth* (סכּוֹת) your king, and *Kiyyun* your images, beyond the tents of (מִאָהָל) Damascus.’⁶

The same terminology that is found in the MT is thus also to be found here in CD: *Sikkuth*, *Kiyyun*, and *Damascus*. Interesting, however, is the midrashic explanation of these terms in the Damascus scroll (7.13b–15a). They are taken symbolically in the exposition of the Amos passage in which *Sikkuth* stands for the Law and where ‘King’ stands for the congregation, whereas *Kiyyun* refers to the prophets, and where ‘Star’ is understood to be every interpreter of the Law who came to Damascus.

The quotation itself in CD contains three differences with the MT: a transposition, an omission and a substitution:

1. *Transposition*: CD has וְהַגְּלִיתִי ('I will remove you or I will take you into exile') preceding the phrase אֶת שָׁבָתָה whereas in the MT it appears a few lines further on after לְךָ at the beginning of verse 27. Both the LXX and Acts follow here the order of the MT.
2. *Omission*: The MT line פֿרְכֵב אֶל־הָיִם ('the star of your god') lacks in CD. Also here the LXX and Acts are following the reading of the MT and include the line.
3. *Substitution*: The MT קָדוֹלָה לִידְמָעָה ('beyond Damascus') is substituted by CD with מִאָהָל דְמָשָׁק ('beyond the tents of Damascus'). The latter was probably understood as the tent (לְגָאָה) of the Lord’s presence that could have been indicated by the term אָהָל (Ps 15:1; 27:5; 61:5; 78:60) (Betz 1960:13). De Waard (1965:42–44) is of the opinion that the LXX recension of Symmachus is the most similar to the CD text (reading τὴν σκηνήν and τοῦ βασιλέως ὑμῶν, plus transcribing Χιῶν), which might mean that Symmachus was based on a Hebrew original such as CD. He thinks that ‘the same also applies to the LXX in virtue of its reading τὴν σκηνήν, on the grounds of its very remarkable translation of ψιλόπιτες by τοὺς τύπους (ἀντῶν) ...’ (De Waard 1965:44).

Tradition element 1: ‘*Sikkuth* your king’ as the ‘tabernacle of the congregation’

Here in CD 7.14–19 the consonants are differently vocalised from שָׁבָת to סְכּוֹת, so that the divine name (*Sikkuth*) becomes a common noun (‘tent, tabernacle, hut’) (cf. also Wolff 1977: 266–267). The latter interpretation surfaces also in the LXX, Acts 7 and in the Vulgate. It is probably an intentional hermeneutical change by the sectarian group(s) of the Judean Desert. By vocalising the word like this – ‘in a manner defying interpretational rules’ (Stuart 2002:356) – a direct connection is being made with Amos 9:11 and with the tabernacle of David. This exegetical method strongly reminds of the second of the seven rules of Rabbi Hillel, namely *gezerah shawah* by which an argument is built on the analogy between similar words in biblical passages. It fits, furthermore, the theology and

⁶The (Cairo) Damascus Document ([1910] 2002), translated by Schechter-Kraft: As he said, ‘And I will cause to go into captivity Siccuth your King and Chiyyun your images, from the tents of Damascus.’

sectarian sentiments of the group(s) who have turned their backs on Jerusalem and have rejected the high priesthood and the temple of mount Zion.

The passage from Amos 5:26–27 is completely reinterpreted by the desert community. Its negative tone and associations with idolatry as contained in the Masoretic Amos text have now been turned around. It is interpreted in a positive manner where *Sikkuth*, the Mesopotamian star deity of Northern Israel, is interpreted here through a different vocalisation to be the tabernacle of David. The phrase ‘*Sikkuth* your king’ is thus now interpreted as ‘the tabernacle of the congregation’, which in turn refers to the books of the Law.

Tradition element 2: ‘*Kiyyun* your image(s)’ as the ‘books of the prophets’

Although the phrase ‘*Kiyyun* your image(s)’ remains the same as that of MT Amos, the author(s) of this sectarian group do not interpret this in a negative manner with regard to idolatry, but again change the meaning to a positive tone by interpreting the phrase as reference to the books of the Prophets which were despised by Israel. ‘The star of your God’ is interpreted as another entity on its own and separately from the preceding phrase. This figure does not refer now anymore to the astral deity of Northern Israel, but is understood by the sectarian group to be the interpreter (‘searcher’) of the Law.

Tradition element 3: ‘Beyond the tents of Damascus’

The word ‘beyond’ (*מִהָלָה*) is misread by the Damascus sect as ‘beyond the tents of’ (*מִאַחֲלָה*). The text from Amos 5:27 is now ‘interpreted in light of Amos 9:11 – “I will re-erect the fallen tent of David” – as a reference to the neglected books of the Law which were reestablished in Damascus’ (Abegg, Flint & Ulrich 1999:433). It is difficult to determine what was meant here with ‘Damascus’ and scholars propose two possibilities:

1. It could be taken literally as a geographic locale and could refer to Damascus in Syria (Carson *et al.* 1994:27). Wolff favours this possibility on the basis that ‘the name “Damascus” from Amos 5:27 is cited in CD 7.15 (“beyond the tents of Damascus”) but, unlike the other key words in the Amos text, is not specifically interpreted’ (Wolff 1977:266–267). However, the fact that the phrase is not specifically interpreted here – like the other key words in the Amos text – does not necessarily support the option of a geographic locale.
2. Alternatively, it might just as well fit the option of a symbolic reference to the community which was so obvious to them, that no explanation on this point was needed. It could be understood as God’s chosen place for the community’s location (Hempel 2010:511) and as a cipher for the place of their sojourn in the wilderness of Qumran. The land of ‘Damascus’ occurs frequently (cf. CD 6.5, 19; 7.19; 19.34; 20.12) with allusions to the exile and covenant-making (Davies 1992:8). The Damascus document

states explicitly that ‘the Interpreter of the Law (CD 6:7) brought the sect into being during the exile in Babylon, which it called “Damascus” (CD 6:19; 8:21; 19:34; 20:12)’ (Murphy-O’Connor 2000:249). Many scholars are thus of the opinion ‘that the Qumran community understood Damascus as a figure for the Babylonian exile when they spoke of the new covenant made in the “land of Damascus”’ (cf. CD 8.21 and 19.34) (Abegg *et al.* 1999:433).

Summa: The quotation from Amos 5:25–27 is thus present in CD 7.17–19. It combines Amos 5:27 and 5:26 in a quotation ‘which is interpreted as a promise of deliverance’ (Wolff 1977:266–267). The reference to Amos 5:26–27 is here no longer understood in an ironical manner in the sense that God’s people would not be led to victory, but to exile. The phrase is now positively interpreted as a promise of deliverance which refers to all those who came as ‘stars’, as interpreters of the Law, to ‘Damascus’. Its eschatological inclination is one of hope for the restoration of a Davidic monarchy (Schiffman 2010:272–273) and not eschatology of judgement anymore. The imagery of exile to Damascus (CD 7.15–18) should probably be taken as messianic (Schiffman 2010:272). This sectarian group – which is evidently ‘a Jewish community at variance with its fellow Jews’ (Davies 1992:9) – read its original preexilic Amos passage in a clearly postexilic manner and probably understood itself to be those who were now ‘in exile beyond Damascus.’ The section of CD 7.13–19 thus interprets Amos 5:26–27:

as a justification for those who had separated themselves from the priesthood in Jerusalem and had constituted the ‘congregation of the new covenant in the land of Damascus’ (cf. CD 6.5, 19; 8.21). (Wolff 1977:266–267)

Context 3: Jewish-Hellenistic context (Am LXX)

Although the LXX version of Amos 5:25–27 is largely in agreement with the MT text, it provides some very interesting translation equivalents for ‘*Sikkuth* your king’ and ‘*Kiyyun* your star god’. The former has been translated with ‘the tent of Moloch’ and the latter with ‘the star of your god Raiphan’.

Tradition element 1: ‘Tent of Moloch’ (*τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μόλοχ*)

The phrase *מִלְכֹוּת סֶכֶן* in the MT became *τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μόλοχ* in the LXX.⁷ Interestingly, however, is that no reference whatsoever is made to a ‘tent’ in the reading of the MT – a reference which is found in CD 7.15:

1. The Hebrew *סֶכֶן* must have been a proper name (Barrett 1998:369) and probably referred to *Sakkuth* (the Assyrian god Nin-Ib), but the LXX translator mistook the Hebrew consonants as *κέρας* (tent or booth), (Fitzmyer 1998:382; Archer & Chirichigno 1983:151; Isbell 1978:98; Haenchen 1968:235; Conzelmann 1963:55) for which *σκηνή* was an

⁷Cf. Archer and Chirichigno (1983:151): ‘It is highly probable that this refers not to any human being (since Israel had no king in Mosaic times) but to a divine king, such as the *שָׁלֵם* of the Canaanites.’ In 2 Kings 23:10 and Jeremiah 32:35 it was indeed translated in this manner (Haenchen 1968:235). Roloff (1981:124) assumed that the whole phrase was changed ‘*in der Weise targumistischer Schriftauslegung*’.

- established translation equivalent to the LXX.⁸ Reading the consonants מָלֵךְ as Molech, or Moloch, and not as מלָךְ, [king], then resulted in the LXX reading: τὸν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μολόχ.
2. Alternatively, though, the LXX translator might not have misread the consonants, but might already have had a different Hebrew *Vorlage* in this case, one which probably read מָלֵךְ (from סֶכֶת = 'Hütte'), and not מָלֵךְ (שְׁוִית = 'dwelling'). (Borger 1988:77).

Moloch was a Canaanite-Phoenecian deity, particularly an idol of the Ammonites, with a human form but with the head of an ox. He was believed to be the Heaven-and-Sun-god (New English Translation [NET] Bible 2006; Gesenius & Prideaux Tregelles 2003:478; Roloff 1981:124; Schneider 1980:465), or a representative of the sun god. Moloch (or Molech) was associated with cultic child sacrifices (Heider 1992:895) which took place when his hollow brass statue was heated from below and the children were cast into his arms:

The Moloch of the Ammonites and the Saturn of the Carthaginians both represented the planet *Saturn*, which was regarded by the Phoenician-Shemitic nations as a κακοδαιμόν, to be appeased by human sacrifices. (Gesenius & Prideaux Tregelles 2003:478)

Moloch was also referred to as Milcom (מִלּוּכָם), abomination of the Ammonites (1 Ki 11:5; 1 Ki 11:33; 2 Ki 23:13). The name Moloch occurs in the Old Testament five times in Leviticus (18:21; 20:2, 3, 4, 5), twice in Kings (1 Ki 11:7; 2 Ki 23:10) and once in Jeremiah 32:35. Many of these occurrences report how the Israelites worshiped him several times with human sacrifices in the valley of Hinnom – although they had been reminded not to give their children to Molech (Lv 18:21; Lv 20:2–5).

Tradition element 2: 'Star of your god Rephan' (τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑμῶν Ραιφάν)

The MT phrase קַיִן וְאַתָּה צְלָמָם was translated by the LXX to read καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑμῶν Ραιφάν.⁹ As there is no agreement about the first vowel of Ραιφάν (codices A and B), different alternative forms of the word are found (Meier 1992a:677), such as ρεμφαν/μ,¹⁰ or ραφαν.¹¹ The text tradition here points to the uncertainty about what was meant by Ραιφάν.¹² It points to a variety of different transliterations for the name of the deity *kiyyün* in the Hebrew text of Amos 5:26. Acts 7:43 seems to follow the same Greek tradition in referring to the god 'Rephan'. Because the existence of a deity with such a name is unknown, Meier is of the opinion that 'the Hebrew text should be given priority over the Greek

⁸Cf. Genesis 33:17(3x); Leviticus 23:34, 42(2x), 43; Deuteronomy 16:13; 2 Kings 11:11, 22:12; 3 Kings 21(20):12; 2 Chronicles 8:13; 2 Ezra 3:4; Nehemiah 8:14, 15, 16, 17(2x); Job 36:30(29); Psalms 17(18):11; Psalms 26(27):5; Psalms 30(31):20; Psalms 107(108):7; Isaiah 1:8; Amos 9:11; Jonah 4:5.

⁹For a discussion on this difference between the MT and the LXX, cf. Isbell (1978: 97–99). According to Roloff (1981:124) this was changed due to 'targumistischer Schriftauslegung'. Codex V of the LXX later revised here as one of four places that favour the MT, overlapping with Theodotion and reading αἰμαρρώσιν εἰδόλων <υμῶν> αἴστρον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑμῶν (Howard 1982:128).

¹⁰Witnesses minuscule 239, codex Constantiensis, Armenian translation, Theodor of Mopsuestia.

¹¹Arabic translation, Justin Martyr.

¹²The name occurs only here in the LXX. The Hatch-Redpath Concordance has a misprint, referring to Hosea 5:26 instead of Amos 5:26.

transliterations' (Meier 1992a:677). Scholarship suggested at least three possible explanations for the Greek translation of Ραιφάν for the Hebrew *Kiyyün*:

1. The most popular explanation for the totally different spelling of Ραιφάν and Ραιφάν is found in the form of the Aramaic alphabet used by the Jews of the Elephantine colony in the 5th century BCE. It shows some common confusion in the text of the Old Testament between the letter *kaph* which was very similar to the letter *resh* in appearance, and the letter *pe* which was much like *waw* (Meier 1992a:677; Archer & Chirichigno 1983:151).¹³ Furthermore, 'the Greek letter *phi* points to a pronunciation of the Hebrew *waw* as consonant' (Meier 1992a:677). A copyist could then easily have misread these letters and taken them to denote the Babylonian god, Kaiwānu, a name used for the planet Saturn. As this was the name of a non-Hebraic pagan deity, a later copyist would then probably have found it difficult to correct a garbled spelling in the *Vorlage* of the LXX (Archer & Chirichigno 1983:151).¹⁴ This hypothesis, however, 'leaves unsolved the problem of explaining why a single Babylonian astral deity is referred to by two different names in the same verse' (Isbell 1978:97).¹⁵
2. Another possibility might be that the LXX earlier also read an additional καιφάν, referring to the Hebrew Kaiwan, which later became Ραιφάν.¹⁶
3. Others, however, see in this alteration 'a deliberate substitution of *Repa*, a name of Seb, the Egyptian god of planet Saturn' (Gooding 1996:1008) Seb (the Father), Isis (the Mother) and Horus (the Child) formed an Egyptian Trinity.

Tradition element 3: 'Beyond Damascus' (ἐπέκεινα Δαμασκοῦ)

The LXX translation maintained the word 'Damascus'. A marginal note in codex Marchalianus and the reading of minuscule 26 which read βαβύλωνος at this point were most probably later influenced by the text in Acts 7:43.

Context 4: Early Christian context (Ac 7:42–43)

The context preceding the quotation from Amos 5 in Acts 7 contains vital clues about how Luke understood the Amos passage. Especially three elements are of relevance for Luke's interpretation of the Amos passage:

'Their hearts turned back to Egypt' (Ac 7:39)

Luke's account here deals with the exodus narrative and the events of their ancestors in the desert. The scene is set

¹³Borger (1988:72) holds a similar theory, that is, that the *k* looked like a *r*.

¹⁴Cf. Borger (1988:80): 'Der Kajwan = Saturn hat gewiß nicht zum gängigen Wortschatz der Hebräer gehört.'

¹⁵Also Fitzmyer (1998:382): 'Whether the two names, Hebrew *sikkūt* and *kiyyün* in Amos and *Sakkud* and *Kaywan* in Akkadian, refer to the same star-god, *Saturn*, is debatable.'

¹⁶Represented by the witnesses Papyrus 74 N° A 453 1175 pc.

with the Israelites in the desert awaiting the coming of their leader Moses. They have left Egypt and find themselves *en route* to a promised land and a new future. But the dream of liberation and independence soon disappears when Moses is absent. They become impatient and desire to return to the security of their residence in Egypt. Rather than looking toward the future, 'their hearts turned back to Egypt.' They want to rather return to their previous life of bondage, slavery and oppression than continue their journey into the unknown. The situation recalls their context in Egypt from where they came.

'Make gods for us who will lead the way for us' (Ac 7:40)

This is simultaneously a narrative about the rejection of Moses as leader. The Israelites felt lonely and vulnerable during his absence and were in need of a leader. As Moses' return to them was delayed, they became impatient and desired leadership which could give them direction and could lead them in the desert. They demanded from Aaron that Moses should be substituted with visible gods, with handmade idols, who would lead the way for them. Neither could they perceive the invisible monotheistic Deity who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, nor did they see his servant Moses. Luke portrays a picture of the Israelites in Acts 7 who were contaminated by the polytheistic context of Egypt. They were familiar with the cultic worship of idols who determined the destiny of their followers. They have observed how the Egyptians found direction in the formation of the heavenly bodies and how they practiced astral worship to these deities in their embodiment of visible idols.

'... they made a calf' (Ac 7:41)

After the request for gods who could lead them, Luke narrates how the Israelites made a calf. The explicit connection with Egypt in Luke's exodus narrative immediately raises associations with the Egyptian bull-god Apis, 'the holy calf of Memphis, by which the god, Ptah-Socharis-Osiris, was represented on earth' (How 2000:184). This deity symbolised fertility and sexual strength for the Egyptians (Hannah 1985: 155). A living bull was chosen:

by the presence of certain physical characteristics, 29 in total according to some classical authors, a number that was influenced by the 29 days of the lunar cycle (the Apis had a certain relationship with this celestial body). (The Global Egyptian Museum n.d.)

Herodotus of Halicarnassus (b. 484 BCE) made mention of some of these characteristics:

This Apis, or Epaphus, is a calf born of a cow that can never conceive again. By what the Egyptians say, the cow is made pregnant by a light from heaven, and thereafter gives birth to Apis. The marks of this calf called Apis are these: he is black, and has on his forehead a three-cornered white spot, and the likeness of an eagle on his back; the hairs of the tail are double, and there is a knot under the tongue (Herodotus 3.28, 2–3). (Godley 1920)

During the time of the Ptolemies, Apis, the holy calf of Memphis, became identified with the god Ptah-Socharis-Osiris (How 2000:184) and became a major ingredient of

the Greco-Roman deity 'Serapis' (Redford 1992a:278), who was the chief god in Egypt and whom the Greeks identified with Epaphus, son of Zeus and Io (cf. Aeschylus Prometheus Bound 850–851) (How 2000:184). Ptah was considered from the earliest times to be the principal god of Memphis (Redford 1992a:278), the one 'who made all and created the gods':

who gave birth to the gods, and from whom everything came forth, foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things. Thus it is recognized and understood that he is the mightiest of the gods. (Lichtheim 1973:55)

But the fame of Apis eventually outlived that of Ptah (Redford 1992b:691).

But some scholars are skeptical to see possible connections with the Apis cult in the exodus narrative. Especially the lack of evidence to prove that Apis was worshiped as an image is posed as reason for this skepticism (Hannah 1985:155).

'Written in the book of the prophets'

A clear introductory formula introduces the quotation from Amos 5:25–27 (Holtz 1991:107). Καθὼς γέγραπται as part of the introductory formula, is not only a typical and familiar introductory formula in the New Testament, but it also pre-dates it (Pesch 1986:256; Fitzmyer 1998:381). Although some have claimed that amongst the 18 explicit quotations to be found in Acts, the expanded form of this introductory formula is only to be found here (Ac 7:42) and in Acts 15:15 where the other Amos quotation appears (Van de Sandt 1992:73–97; see also Van de Sandt 1991:67–87). A similar expanded form is also to be found at other places, such as in Acts 13:33 where Psalm 2:7 is quoted. Noteworthy is the fact that the corpus from which this quotation is taken by Luke, is clearly specified with the qualification of the phrase ἐν βίβλῳ τῶν προφητῶν (Pesch 1986:255; Schneider 1980:234; Haenchen 1968:235; Conzelmann 1963:55). The quotation per se, does not seem to fit the context in which it is found, that is, the time that Israel spent in the desert (Holtz 1991:108).

Text form of Acts 7:42–43 is closest to that of the reconstructed LXX (similar also Holtz 1991:15; Braun 1966:319; Reicke 1957:150–151), and differs more from those of the MT and CD. However, despite the fact that the text form of Acts 7:42–43 agrees mainly with that of the LXX, it actually neither corresponds with the readings as found in the MT, nor with those of the LXX. Several differences¹⁷ between Acts and the LXX were encountered. As these have been discussed elsewhere (see Steyn 2004:59–81), the focus will stay here exclusively on the three elements in the trajectory of the Amos 5:25–27.

Tradition element 1: 'Tent of Moloch'

It is clear that Luke is using a version of Amos that is close to the LXX text which translated the Hebrew 'Sikkuth your king' (or 'the tent of your king') with the 'tent of Moloch'. The name Moloch is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament

¹⁷Against Smits (1955:192) and Witherington III (1998:272) who stated that only προσκυνεῖν is added and that Damascus is changed to Babylon.

and is found only here in Acts 7:43. Fact is, the Canaanite deity of Amos is now interpreted by Luke in Acts as if there were an Egyptian connection with him when Luke situates the quotation within the exodus narrative. Moses ordered in Leviticus 20:2 the execution of those Israelites who had sacrificed their offspring to Moloch, that is, the ‘ancestors’ of those who are now listening to Stephen’s speech. Luke manipulates this history and applies it to Stephen’s Jewish audience. An analogy is drawn between the situation of idolatry, sacrifices to foreign gods and the rejection of God’s prophet Moses, on the one hand, and the rejection of Jesus on the other hand.

Tradition element 2: ‘Star of your god Rephan’

Luke also follows the LXX tradition in the second element of the Amos quotation by presenting the reading of ‘the star of your god Rephan’, instead of the Hebrew tradition’s ‘*Kiyyun* (כַּיּוֹן) your star god.’ The LXX Rephan is thus now also re-interpreted by Luke with an Egyptian connection, as an idol within the context of the exodus narrative and as an analogy of idolatry by Stephen’s listeners. Some have indeed pointed to a direct Egyptian link by arguing that ‘*Paiqān* was an Egyptian name for Saturn (Gesenius & Prideaux Tregelles 2003:395).

Egyptian cosmology is interconnected with Babylonian cosmology and with Pythagorism. Especially the *zodiac* is an arithmetic symbol which was most likely developed by Babylonian (Chaldean) astronomers.¹⁸ Some scholars are of the opinion ‘that the zodiac did not appear in developed form until the Persian period’ (Heck 1990:23–24). It consisted of a disc that was divided into twelve equal zones of 30 degrees each and which contained twelve astrological signs,¹⁹ such as the Capricorn, Taurus (bull) and Libra (scales). Greek astronomy adopted it during the 4th century BCE and it became well established during the Hellenistic period where it was used more in astrology than in astronomy. By the 2nd century BCE astrology was already deeply rooted in Palestine and had reached Rome – where the Senate first banned it in 139 BCE, but where the zodiac or its signs later appeared on Roman coins of many provinces (Negev 1990). The oldest known relief of the zodiac to be found dates from *circa* 50 BCE – due to the identified positions of the planets and stars at that time. This bas-relief was discovered in the Hathor Temple at Dendera in Egypt, within the ceiling of the pronaos of a chapel that was dedicated to Osiris.

Tradition element 3: ‘Remove beyond Babylon’

The replacement of the LXX Δαμασκοῦ by Luke’s Βαβυλῶνος,²⁰ could be ascribed to Luke’s knowledge of the context and the

¹⁸Cf. Moehring (1995:147): ‘We do not know exactly what Pythagoras adopted from Babylonia, what he himself discovered and what was attributed to him by his immediate and later disciples.’

¹⁹Cf. 2 Enoch 21:6 (‘And I saw the eighth heaven ... and the twelve zodiacs, which are above the seventh heaven. And I saw the ninth heaven ... where the heavenly houses of the twelve zodiacs are’) and also 2 Enoch 30:3–6.

²⁰The only major support amongst LXX witnesses is found by the Alexandrian tradition with a prominent gloss in Q. Also in the hexaplaric edition, ascribed to ὁ Ἐβραῖος and supported by Cyril of Alexandria.

history (Conzelmann 1963:55),²¹ that is, that they were taken through Damascus to Babylon.²² It was, therefore, probably ‘modified to suit a Judean audience for whom the Babylonian exile was a remembered experience’ (Witherington III 1998:272). The possibility that Luke could have meant that this prophetic text indeed had the meaning of Babylon, was postulated in the past.²³ The problem is however, that the *hapax legomenon*, ἐπέκεινα, remained in the reading of the New Testament, so that now it is not ‘beyond Damascus’ but ‘beyond Babylon’ that they would be sent.²⁴ Codex D attempted to put this into perspective by changing ἐπέκεινα to ἐπὶ τὰ μέρη.²⁵ Something else might be considered at this point. It certainly could not be a coincidence that Luke included the same Amos quotations that are to be found in CD. He might have somehow known these quotations via a tradition which had connections with the ‘Damascus community’. The fact that a copy of the Damascus document was also found in Egypt points to a broader use and knowledge of this particular document than merely in the Dead Sea region itself (Betz 1960:177; Johnson 1957:140). If the theology of such a community was such that they saw themselves as exiles in Damascus, and if they interpreted Amos 5 in this way, contrary to its interpretation as the Babylonian capture of Israel, then it could be that Luke’s very conscious change in this case was deliberately made to avoid such misunderstanding.²⁶ Interestingly ‘Damascus’ is used 16 times in the New Testament, of which 13 instances occur in Acts alone – all of them used in connection with Paul’s conversion. ‘Babylon’ is used 12 times in the New Testament²⁷ of which only one reference occurs in Acts – and that is where it was changed from Damascus to Babylon!

Summary and conclusion

This investigation explored the reception of three elements from Amos 5:25–27 in four different ancient contexts:

1. It was established in the first place that ‘*Sikkuth* your king’ and ‘*Kiyyun* your star god’ were probably Mesopotamian

²¹According to Roloff, (1981:124) it was changed via the ‘*targumistischer Exegese*’ in order to refer to the actual event in the history of Israel.

²²Kilpatrick (1979:83) related ‘the passage not to the exile of Israel in the eighth century B.C. as in the original text of Amos but to the exile of Judah in the sixth.’ Archer and Chirichigno (1983:153) similarly see this variant ‘... to be a valid inference from Damascus, because the captive Jews dragged off to Babylonia by the Chaldeans in 586 B.C. had to pass through Damascus on their way, so Babylon was indeed beyond Damascus.’

²³Cf. Reicke (1957:151): ‘Erstens nähmlich war der geographische Horizont nunmehr weiter geworden als in den Tagen des Amos, und das Volk hatte schon einmal “über Damaskus hinaus” ins Exil gehen müssen; zweitens war eben Babylon das Zentrum des astrologischen Aberglaubens, der in V.42b und 43a gerügt wird. Folglich schien Babylon weit besser als Damaskus der Prophezeiung eine persönliche Bedeutung verleihen zu können. Es ist zu beachten, dass weder Lukas noch spätere Abschreiber diese Eigentümlichkeit geändert haben, obwohl sie durch einen Vergleich des Zitats mit dem Septuagintatext doch ganz leicht die Nichtübereinstimmung hätten feststellen können.’

²⁴Cf. Reicke (1957:152): ‘diese Sternenanbetung ist wiederum eine schwere Schuld geworden, die mit dem Exil des Volkes in eine sogar über Babylonien hinaus liegende, also noch verachtetere, Gegend bestraft werden müsse.’

²⁵Metzger (1971:351) pointed out that ‘With Ropes and Haenchen the Committee regarded the Western reading as an improvement, bringing the statement into better agreement with historical fact.’

²⁶Braun (1966:156) reckons, however, that this could not have been the case, as according to Acts 7:43 the deportation is punishment for Israel, whereas in CD 7.14 it is the saving deed of God to the Qumran community.

²⁷It is used in a negative sense in both Revelation and in Matthew – where it is used exclusively in terms of the Babylonian exile. One other occurrence is found in 1 Peter 5:13 where reference is made to the congregation in Babylon.

- astral deities whose names were derived from, or connected to, those from the Akkadian world. The MT of Amos reveals that there was some influence from these deities in northern Israel. Amos refers to these deities and the triumphant carrying of their statues in cult processions by their worshipers. He ironically and satirically interprets such a procession with a procession of another nature, namely the transport of the idols into exile – ‘beyond Damascus’!
2. The sectarian context of the Damascus scroll separated the sect from the priesthood in Jerusalem by constituting a ‘congregation of new covenant in the land of Damascus.’ The text from Amos 5:26–27 is quoted as justification for this separation within this sectarian context (CD 7.13–19), immediately followed by the quotation from Amos 9:11 which serves as a key to interpret the first. Both Amos quotations are also present in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles. The issue at hand is the great schism between the two houses of Israel. The phrase ‘the star of your god’ from Amos 5:26, which referred to another astral deity, lacks in CD and the Damascus scroll interprets the ‘star of Jacob’ from the references of Amos 9:11 and Numbers 24:11 in a messianic and eschatological manner, in the expectation of a future redeemer. The section contains a brief commentary (7.13b–15a) which no longer interprets the elements from Amos 5:26–27 in a negative manner with regard to idolatry, but symbolically in a positive manner. *Sikkuth* now stands for the Law, ‘King’ for the congregation, *Kiyyun* refers to the prophets, and ‘Star’ to every interpreter of the Law who came to Damascus. The phrase ‘beyond the tents of Damascus’ is probably a symbolic reference to God’s chosen place for the community’s location and as a cipher for the place of their sojourn in the wilderness of Qumran.
 3. Within the Jewish-Hellenistic context of the LXX translation, interesting translation equivalents were chosen by the translator. ‘*Sikkuth* your king’ has been translated with ‘the tent of Moloch’. The reference to a ‘tent’ lacks in the MT but is present in CD 7.15. It seems likely that the translator of LXX Amos mistook the Hebrew consonants of ‘*Sikkuth* your king’ and read it to be ‘the tent of Moloch’ – which now resulted in a connection with the Canaanite-Phoenician deity believed to be the Heaven-and-Sun-god. ‘*Kiyyun* your star god’, in turn, has been translated with ‘the star of your god Raiphan.’ The existence of a deity with the name Ραιφαν is unknown and it also seems likely that the translator here has misread these letters and taken them to denote the Babylonian god, Kaiwānu, a name used for the planet Saturn. This explanation, however, results in a single Babylonian astral deity who is referred to now by two different names in the same verse. It is interesting that the LXX is closer to CD in reading the ‘tent’ of Moloch, but closer to the MT in reading ‘beyond Damascus’ and not ‘beyond the tents of Damascus’ as in CD.
 4. It is clear that the text version which Luke utilises for his quotation from Amos 5:25–27 is closest to that of the LXX. But there are a number of differences between the text of

the LXX and Luke’s version in Acts – some which might point to an alternative version that he might have used (e.g. ἐν τῇ ἑρήμῳ), but most of them are actually changes that Luke made to his LXX text. Some changes are stylistic in nature (e.g. the order of ἔτη τεσσεράκοντα and the omission of αὐτῶν), but several others are of a hermeneutical nature – such as the addition of προσκυνεῖν and the substitution of Δαμασκοῦ by Βαβυλῶνος. Luke’s conscious change in this case was probably deliberately made to avoid a symbolic interpretation of Amos 5 – similar to that of the Jewish Damascus Scroll Sect – by explicitly referring to the Babylonian exile. As Luke uses Damascus exclusively in connection with the conversion of Paul and as this is the only occurrence of Babylon in Luke-Acts, it is clear that he interprets the same quotation in a different manner than CD. The passage from Amos is now re-interpreted by Luke in Stephen’s speech in terms of the exodus narrative. Luke now superimposes the Amos passage – which was closely linked to a Mesopotamian context – to the idolatry of the Jews during their exodus from Egypt. Although Luke also refers to ‘the tent of Moloch’ and ‘the star of your god Raiphan’, this deity (these deities) of Amos is (are) now interpreted by Luke in Acts as if there is an Egyptian connection with him (them) when Luke situates the quotation within the exodus narrative. He draws an analogy between the situation of idolatry, sacrifices to foreign gods and the rejection of God’s prophet Moses, on the one hand, and the rejection of Jesus on the other hand. Several interpretative pointers to the exodus narrative are introduced prior to the quotation, such as that ‘they were unwilling to accept Moses’ and ‘pushed him aside’, that ‘their hearts turned back to Egypt’, that they requested the ‘making of gods for them who will lead the way for them’, and that ‘they made a calf’. It remains an open question, however, whether the astral deities of Mesopotamia are now deliberately intended, understood, and interpreted in terms of some possible connections with Egyptian deities. Were connections with the Mesopotamian Moloch (as heaven and sun god) and Raiphan (with possible links to Saturn) understood to be present in the Egyptian context (as well) – and did these already exist by the time that the LXX translation of Amos was made against an Egyptian backdrop? Fact is, Luke uses his re-interpretation within the exodus narrative as a springboard for his appeal to Stephen’s listeners to reflect on their own relation regarding Jesus. Similar to the rejection of Yahweh by the Israelites and their idolatry are Stephen’s listeners who are rejecting Jesus. Stephen accuses his audience that they ‘are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet they have not kept it.’

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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