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The enigmatic Hebrew word 'אפים' in 1 Samuel 1:5

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The Hebrew word 'אפים' in Samuel 1:5 presents significant challenges for both ancient translations and modern English translations of the Bible. In ancient texts, the Masoretic text presents 'אַפָּיִם' or 'nostrils' (face or anger). The Aramaic Targum offers a different perspective, rendering it as 'בחיר' or '(one) approved (portion)', while the Syriac Peshitta opts for 'ܐܥܦܐ' or 'double'. The Latin Vulgate provides a thought-provoking interpretation, using the word 'tristis' or 'sad'. The LXX, however, prefers 'πλήν'. In modern English Bible translations, the Jewish Publication Society renders it as one portion (cf. New Living Translation [NLT] 'only one choice portion'), whereas the New Revised Standard Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible (NASB) and New International Version (NIV) describe it as a double portion. The King James Version (KJV), on the other hand, interprets it as a worthy portion.

Contribution: Consequently, this research attempts to unveil this mysterious Hebrew word with textual criticism as its methodology.

Keywords: Old Testament; textual criticism; 1 Samuel; אפים; translation.

Introduction

The Hebrew word 'אפים' has been translated differently in both ancient translations and modern English translations of the Bible. Furthermore, the Hebrew lexicon HALOT (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament) introduces an element of ambiguity in its translation of 'אפים' by employing a question mark, indicating that it has not yet reached a conclusive understanding of the term's accurate interpretation.

The Old Testament scholars are also perplexed by the mysterious Hebrew word 'אפים'. Ralph W. Klein, for instance, believes that one portion is the correct interpretation (Klein 2018:92), while Robert Alter (1999:4) and David H. Jensen (2015:29) argue that two portions are favourable. Philip F. Esler, Joyce G. Baldwin, Johanna van Wijk-Bos and Lilian R. Klein interpret 'אפים' in the lens of Peninnah's advantageous status (Baldwin 1988:55; Esler 2012:127–128; Klein 1994:84; Van Wijk-Bos 2011:26). Thus, this article seeks to decipher the mysterious Hebrew word through the lens of textual criticism as its guiding methodology.

Methodology

Textual criticism is frequently described as a harmonious blend of artistry and scientific inquiry. It is deemed a science because of its reliance on data analysis, the exploration of genealogical connections among manuscripts and a comprehensive grasp of copying methodologies. Yet, it is regarded as an art form, as it demands a refined sense of discernment and critical evaluation throughout the process (Boltzman, Ellis & Tully 2016:138). This discipline has two main objectives. The first objective is to uncover the theological significance inherent in the different translations. The second objective is to reconstruct the most precise and authentic text of the biblical writings as they were initially composed. This process entails the comparison and analysis of numerous manuscripts, versions and textual testimonies to uncover errors, variations and modifications that have transpired throughout history (Barthélemy & United Bible Societies Committee of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project 2012:92). This research focuses on the second objective.

Three distinct methodologies of textual criticism exist: rigorous eclecticism, reasoned eclecticism and the majority text approach. This article, however, uses reasoned eclecticism because it focuses on both external and internal evidence. The assessment of external evidence entails a thorough examination of the manuscripts' age, credibility and geographical spread. Typically, manuscripts that are older are deemed to hold greater authority. Conversely, internal evidence encompasses transcriptional probability, which evaluates the likelihood of what a scribe would have written or

replicated, alongside intrinsic probability, which reflects on what the original author might have crafted, considering elements such as context, stylistic choices and theological implications. This internal scrutiny frequently adheres to principles such as *lectio difficilior*, *lectio brevior* and harmonisation (cf. Chia 2025:5–16).

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) offers the reading from Lucian 'κατὰ πρόσωπον' (eds. Elliger & Rudolph 1997). Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, however, omits readings from other various ancient translations such as the Vulgate, the Targum, the Peshitta, the Hexapla and notably the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially 4QSamᵃ. Thus, this research will incorporate these ancient translations and provide an analysis aimed at uncovering the original reading.

External evidence

Table 1 showcases the ancient translations alongside their corresponding texts and translations, complete with their estimated *vorlage* and dates.

Table 1 indicates that 77.78% of the ancient manuscripts favour the Hebrew word 'אפים' as originating from 'אף' in its noun form, while 11.11% (represented by the LXX) opt for 'אף' in its conjunction form or 'אפס'. 4QSamᵃ lacks any informative content because of the absence of 1 Samuel 1:5 from the scroll.

Evaluation of external evidence

The Samuel manuscript in Qumran stands as the finest example of biblical preservation from Cave 4, despite retaining only approximately 15% of its original text on the leather fragments. Each chapter of 2 Samuel is represented by at least one fragment, whereas 1 Samuel is missing fragments from chapters 13, 16, 19, 21 and 23 (Cross et al. 2005:3). The most well-preserved sections of the manuscript showcase a refined light tan leather, with inscriptions on the exterior (hair side), a customary practice at Qumran, contrasting with later parchments that featured writing on the interior. Regrettably, much of the scroll is in a deteriorated state. The deterioration of the manuscript was accelerated when exposed to light. However, the most significant damage was caused by worms. Evidence of their activity is visible throughout the leather, with trails left by hungry worms

sometimes causing shallow surface damage that removes the inked letters and more frequently creating complete holes in the leather. The combination of wormholes and the crumbling edges of the decaying fragments often made it difficult to piece together and join the fragments (Cross et al. 2005:3). The surviving fragments of 4QSamᵃ contain only 1 Samuel 1:9, 1:11–13, and 1:17–18 from the first chapter of 1 Samuel, as the manuscript is in a deteriorated state (Cross et al. 2005:4). Nevertheless, Andrew Fincke endeavoured to reconstruct 4QSamᵃ into a comprehensive text, presenting his findings through meticulously crafted handwritten notes in his research. His analysis reveals that 'אפים' in 1 Samuel 1:5, as interpreted by 4QSamᵃ, is traced back to 'אפס' (Fincke 2001:283). Nevertheless, the primary issue with Fincke lies in his approach, as he reconstructs the absent text of 4QSamᵃ by drawing parallels with the LXX. Consequently, 4QSamᵃ presents a more extensive reading, akin to that of the LXX. This study will refrain from utilising Fincke's reconstructed version of 4QSamᵃ and will acknowledge the absence of the text from 1 Samuel 1:5 as a notable omission.

The LXX interprets 'אפים' as 'πλήν' or 'but' (Rahlfs 1952). Barthélemy observes that the LXX interprets 'אפים' as derived from 'אפס', noting that the phrase 'אפס כי' is also found in 2 Samuel 12:14 and Amos 9:8, where it is translated as 'πλὴν ὅτι' (Barthélemy, Hulst & United Bible Societies Committee of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project 1982:138). This research, however, introduces an alternative perspective, suggesting that the LXX may have derived 'אפים' from the conjunction 'אף'. In this context, 'אף' means as 'but' (see Ps 44:10; 88:3; and Jdg 5:29; cf. Brown, Driver & Briggs 1996:64). Thus, this article proposes that the LXX's translation 'πλήν' is triggered by the conjunction 'אף'.

A remarkable 77.78% of the ancient manuscripts support the notion that the Hebrew word 'אפים' derives from the noun form of 'אף', as evidenced by the Aleppo codex, the Leningrad codex, Greek Lucian, Ἄλλος, the Peshitta, the Targum and the Vulgate. Despite the support from the majority of texts, the earliest attested text – the LXX – favours the reading 'πλήν' or 'but'. This information indicates that although external evidence is helpful, it is still limited. Thus, internal evidence, especially the argument from the context, will provide a helpful analysis of this enigmatic Hebrew word. Consequently, the external evidence that considers the age, reliability and geographical distribution of the manuscripts supports the noun 'אף' for 'אפים'. Nonetheless, there are

TABLE 1: Ancient texts.

Source	Text	Translation	*Vorlage*	Dates
Masoretic texts	אַפָּיִם	Nostril (face or anger)	אף	Aleppo Codex: 930 CE
				Leningrad Codex: 1008–1010 CE
Septuagint	πλήν	But	אפס or אף	Around the 2nd century BC
Ἄλλος	διπλῆν	Two folds (double)	אף	Around 230–240 CE
Lucian	κατὰ πρόσωπον	Facing (corresponding to face)	אף	Late 3rd–early 4th century CE
Peshitta	ܐܥܦܐ	Double	אף	Around the 2nd century CE
Vulgate	Tristis	Sorrow (sad)	אף	Late 4th century CE
Targum	בחיר	Approved (chosen)	אף	Around the 13th–14th century CE
4QSamᵃ	(missing)	(missing)	(unknown)	Around 50–25 BCE

four reading variants for the noun 'אַף' for 'אַפִּים': nostril (face or anger), double, sad and approved (chosen). Table 2 incorporates the ancient sources with their translations.

Both Ἄλλος (ed. Field 1875:487) and the Peshitta (Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden 1978) render the Hebrew word 'אַפִּים' as 'double'. This translation stems from the dual absolute form of 'אַף'. In other words, 'אַפִּים' is the noun masculine dual absolute from 'אַף', leading both Ἄλλος and the Peshitta to adopt this dual form in their translations. As a result, they both arrive at the translation of 'double', reflecting the inherent grammatical characteristic of duality.

In contrast, the Masoretic texts and the Greek Lucian do not acknowledge the intrinsic grammatical feature of duality (eds. Elliger & Rudolph 1997); instead, they opt for a straightforward literal translation of the term as 'face'. While the Masoretic texts and the Greek Lucian have a literal rendering, both the Vulgate (Weber & Gryson 2006) and the Targum (McNamara 2010) translate 'אַפִּים' figuratively: with sorrow and approved (chosen), respectively. While both translations render figuratively, they interpret 1 Samuel 1:4–5 in distinct ways. For instance, the Latin Vulgate translates the noun 'אַף' and frames it within a context of negativity of sorrow. Elkanah gave portions (plural) to Peninah, his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters (1:4), but (*autem* to indicate contrast in Latin) to Hannah, he offered only a single portion, filled with sorrow, because he loved Hannah. However (*autem* to indicate contrast in Latin), the Lord had shut up her womb. This illustrates that despite Elkanah's love for Hannah, he was unable to provide her with more portions because of her childlessness. Consequently, he presented her with one portion, tinged with sadness. Conversely, the Targum offers a positive interpretation of the noun 'אַף', interpreting it within a context of love. The Targum states that Elkanah gave portions (plural) to Peninah, his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters (1:4), but Elkanah gave one approved (chosen) portion to Hannah because he loved her. Thus, the Targum highlights the significance of the quality of this portion as a true expression of Elkanah's love, rather than focusing on the mere number of portions given.

In summary, the external evidence strongly supports the notion that the Hebrew word 'אַפִּים' originates from the noun form of 'אַף', as confirmed by most ancient manuscripts. Although the noun 'אַף' for 'אַפִּים' is indeed favourable, it can be interpreted in four distinct ways: nostril (face or anger), double, sad and approved (chosen). The variations arise from the author's intention to translate either lexically or grammatically, particularly concerning the dual form of 'אַפִּים'. Should the focus be on lexical translation, the choice between a literal or figurative interpretation will ultimately shape the understanding of 'אַפִּים'.

TABLE 2: Four interpretations of 'אַפִּים'.

Face	Double	Sad	Approved (Chosen)
Aleppo codex	Ἄλλος	Vulgate	Targum
Leningrad codex	Peshitta	-	-
Lucian	-	-	-

Internal evidence

This internal evidence frequently depends on principles such as *lectio difficilior*, *lectio brevior* and harmonisation (cf. Chia 2025:5–16). *Lectio difficilior*, derived from Latin meaning 'the more difficult reading', represents a fundamental concept in textual criticism. It posits that when faced with various versions of a text, the one that presents greater complexity or obscurity is often the original. This notion rests on the belief that scribes tended to simplify or elucidate challenging sections rather than make them more intricate. Consequently, the more difficult reading is frequently regarded as more genuine, as it is less probable that a scribe would have altered it in such a manner (Tov 2012:307–310). *Lectio brevior* (Latin term for 'the shorter reading') is a guiding principle in the realm of textual criticism, positing that when faced with various versions of a text, the more concise reading is frequently the one that is original. This notion stems from the belief that scribes tended to embellish texts by adding content for clarity, consistency, or explanation, rather than removing it. Consequently, shorter readings are often regarded as more genuine, as they are less susceptible to the alterations introduced by scribes (Tov 2012:307–310). Harmonisation in textual criticism denotes the practice whereby scribes or copyists modify a text to ensure its coherence with another related passage or to address perceived inconsistencies. This phenomenon frequently arises in works that present various versions or parallel accounts, such as the Gospels in the New Testament or similar narratives found in the Hebrew Bible. The process of harmonisation may entail the alteration of specific words, phrases, or even entire sections to bring them into alignment with another text deemed authoritative or more recognisable by the scribe (Tov 2012:307–310).

Lectio difficilior

The LXX's translation of 'πλήν' serves to contrast 'καὶ τῇ Αννα ἔδωκεν μερίδα μίαν' or 'and to Hannah, he gave one portion' with 'ὅτι τὴν Ανναν ἠγάπα Ελκανα ὑπὲρ ταύτην' or 'Elkanah loved Hannah more than this one'. The demonstrative pronoun of 'ταύτην' refers to 'μερίδα μίαν' because it matches the gender and the number. The LXX uses the adverb 'πλήν' to explain the text: Elkanah, despite presenting Hannah with a single portion, held a deeper affection for her that transcended this gift. Therefore, the translation of the LXX does not align with the principle of *lectio difficilior*.

The concept of 'double' translation arising from the dual absolute form of 'אַף' alleviates the harder reading of the Hebrew word 'אַפִּים'. Both the Peshitta and Ἄλλος convey to the audience that Hannah is granted a double portion compared to Peninah and her offspring, a reflection of Elkanah's love for Hannah, especially because the Lord had closed her womb. In essence, while LXX's translation highlights the love of the giver (Elkanah), both the Peshitta and Ἄλλος focus on the quantity of the gift itself.

As previously mentioned, both the Vulgate and the Targum provide interpretations of the Hebrew word 'אפים'. The Vulgate translates the noun 'אף' and places it within a context of sorrow and negativity. Elkanah distributed portions to Peninah, his wife, along with all her sons and daughters (1:4). However, to Hannah, he offered only a single portion because the Lord had closed her womb, reflecting the depth of his love for her. In contrast, the Targum provides a more positive interpretation of the noun 'אף', framing it within a context of love. The Targum notes that Elkanah gave portions to Peninah and her children (1:4), but he reserved one special portion for Hannah, chosen specifically because of his love for her. This interpretation emphasises the significance of the quality of that portion as a genuine reflection of Elkanah's love, rather than merely the quantity of portions distributed.

The Masoretic texts, namely the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex, along with the Greek Lucian, provide a literal translation of 'אפים' derived from the noun 'אף', which can signify nostrils, face, or anger. This translation poses difficulties for two primary reasons. Firstly, the noun 'אף' encompasses three different meanings: nostrils, face, or anger. Secondly, the meaning of the noun 'אף' does not fit in 1 Samuel 1:5. Did Elkanah offer a portion of nostril, face, or perhaps anger? The interpretation of the noun 'אף' does not align with the context in 1 Samuel 1:5. Thus, the Hebrew word 'אפים' stems from the noun 'אף', satisfying the principles of *lectio difficilior*.

Lectio brevior

Most ancient manuscripts render the Hebrew word 'אפים' with a single word, approximately 77.78%, with the exception of the Greek Lucian version, which uses 'κατὰ πρόσωπον'. Consequently, *lectio brevior* does not assist in uncovering the original reading of 'אפים'.

Harmonisation

The Hebrew word 'אפים' appears four times in 1 Samuel (1:5; 24:9; 25:41 and 28:14). In addition to 1 Samuel, 'אפים' occurs 24 times in the Old Testament. Table 3 summarises the appearance of 'אפים' in the Old Testament with its meaning in the context.

Table 3 illustrates that the Hebrew word 'אפים' is predominantly influenced by a preceding or following word, approximately 89.28%. When 'אפים' is followed by the word 'the ground', it signifies a direction: face towards the ground. Conversely, if 'אפים' is preceded by the word 'long', it translates to a state of prolonged anger and vice versa. When 'אפים' appears in isolation, it may denote a proper name (1 Chr 2:31) or anger (Pr 30:33). Consequently, harmonisation provides only minimal insight into the enigmatic Hebrew term 'אפים', as it exists in solitude, apart from the references in 1 Samuel, where it consistently translates to 'face' (1:5; 24:9; 25:41; and 28:14).

TABLE 3: 'אפים' in the Old Testament.

Verse	Hebrew text	English translation
Genesis 19:1	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
Genesis 42:6	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
Exodus 34:6	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Number 14:18	ארך אפים	Long of anger
1 Samuel 24:9	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
1 Samuel 25:41	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
1 Samuel 28:14	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
1 Kings 1:31	אפים ארץ	Face towards the ground
1 Chronicles 2:31	ובני אפים	And the sons of Appaim
1 Chronicles 21:21	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
2 Chronicles 7:3	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
2 Chronicles 20:18	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
Nehemiah 8:6	אפים ארצה	Face towards the ground
Nehemiah 9:17	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Psalm 86:15	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Psalm 103:8	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Psalm 145:8	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Proverbs 14:17	קצר־אפים	Short of anger
Proverbs 14:29	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Proverbs 15:18	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Proverbs 16:32	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Proverbs 25:15	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Proverbs 30:33	אפים	Anger
Isaiah 49:23	אפים ארץ	Face towards the ground
Joel 2:13	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Jonah 4:2	ארך אפים	Long of anger
Nahum 1:3	ארך אפים	Long of anger

In conclusion, although the internal evidence offers a limited understanding of the mysterious Hebrew term 'אפים', *lectio difficilior* and harmonisation suggest that 'אפים' or 'face' is likely the original reading.

'אפים' in 1 Samuel 1:5

Both external and internal evidence suggest 'אפים' is derived from the Hebrew noun 'אף'. The inquiry at hand is the rationale behind the author's choice of the mysterious word in 1 Samuel 1:5. It is plausible that the Hebrew word 'אפים' forms part of the Hebrew expression 'ולחנה יתן מנה אחת אפים'.

When 'מיפא' is examined in isolation, its meaning becomes obscure. Certain Hebrew expressions may appear strange when translated into other languages. A prime example is found in Genesis 1:2. The direct translation of 'סוהת ינפ־לע' reads as 'on the face of the deep sea', yet such a literal rendering fails to convey the intended sense. A more coherent translation would be 'over the surface of the deep'. Therefore, the term 'face' cannot be interpreted independently; it must be viewed through the context of the Hebrew phrase. Similarly, the word 'מיפא' should be understood within the framework of the Hebrew expression 'מיפא תחא הנמ ןתי הנחלו', which signifies that he bestowed one favourable portion (cf. Alfasi & Skoss 1936; Cappellus 1689; Rashi, Werndorfer & Kahn 2022).

Conclusion

What is the original reading of the Hebrew word 'אפים'? The external evidence robustly and strongly supports the idea

that the Hebrew word 'אפים' derives from the noun form of 'אף', as confirmed by numerous ancient manuscripts. While the noun 'אף' is indeed a compelling basis for 'אפים', it can be interpreted in four distinct ways: 'face' (the Aleppo codex, the Leningrad codex and the Greek Lucian); 'double' (the Peshitta and Ἄλλος); 'sad' (the Vulgate); and 'chosen' (the Targum). These interpretations stem from the authors' intent to convey meaning either lexically or grammatically (the Peshitta and Ἄλλος), especially regarding the dual form of 'אפים'. If one prioritises lexical translation, the decision between a literal (the Aleppo codex, the Leningrad codex and the Greek Lucian) or metaphorical understanding (the Vulgate and the Targum) will ultimately influence the interpretation of 'אפים'. Although the internal evidence provides only a partial insight into the enigmatic Hebrew word 'אפים', the principles of *lectio difficilior* and harmonisation indicate that 'אפים', from the Hebrew noun 'אף' or 'face', is probably the original reading. LXX's translation highlights the *love* of the *giver* (Elkanah), whereas both the Peshitta and Ἄλλος focus on the *quantity* of the *gift* itself. The Vulgate translation demonstrates a sense of sorrow or *negativity* associated with the giver, while the Targum narrates a more *positive* perspective by contextualising 'אף' within a context of love.

The translations of the Masoretic texts and the Greek Lucian adhere to the principles of *lectio difficilior*. This particular translation presents challenges, as the noun 'אף' carries three distinct meanings, and its literal interpretation does not align with the context of 1 Samuel 1:5. Regarding harmonisation, the references in 1 Samuel indicate that 'אפים' is translated as 'face' (1:5; 24:9; 25:41; and 28:14). In short, both external and internal evidence suggest 'אפים' is derived from the Hebrew noun 'אף'.

The final inquiry to consider is the significance of 'אפים' within the context of the Hebrew expression 'מנה אחת אפים ולהנה יתן'. It signifies that Elkanah gave one favourable portion to Hannah because he loved Hannah.

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