

“God’s Sacred Name in the Bible”

*Was the word for “God” written in Hebrew letters
in the ancient Greek manuscripts
of the Jewish Scriptures?*

*An analysis by Dr Trevor R Allin
of a manuscript fragment reproduced in “Watchtower” magazine*

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“God’s Sacred Name in the Bible”

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¹ CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico>

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

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Note

One Hebrew word is used repeatedly throughout this article. In Hebrew, it is written as יהוה, and the transliteration of these letters into Roman or Latin script is “YHWH”. It is almost-universally accepted that originally this word was pronounced “Yahweh”, although, in an effort to ensure that they did not “take the Lord’s name in vain”, centuries before the time of Christ the Jews decided to say “Adonai” (which means “Lord”) wherever this word appeared in their Scriptures. To see more on this, readers are referred to the article “What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9?” on this website, here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf>

PART 1: A FRAGMENT OF A BIBLICAL MANUSCRIPT

1. Introduction

The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ “Watchtower” magazine number 6 of 2017³ contains an article entitled “The Bible—Why So Many?”. In fact, the article does not focus on answering the question in the title, which appears to refer to the existence of different Bible translations. Instead, in a section entitled “God’s Sacred Name in the Bible” it seeks to justify the use of the word “Jehovah” in the Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible, which they call “The New World Translation”.

About 250 years before the time of Christ, Jewish scholars in Alexandria had translated into Greek the Jewish Scriptures, which had been principally written in Hebrew, with a few pages in Aramaic. This translation is known as the Septuagint (which is generally abbreviated in references by using the Latin numeral seventy, LXX).

The “Watchtower” article states that “a *Septuagint* manuscript fragment from Jesus’ day” contains what the Jehovah’s Witnesses call “the divine name”, written in Hebrew letters, in between the Greek words of the rest of the text.⁴ This singular “a fragment” is changed to a plural “some fragments” in another part of the same article. It is not possible to know which is the correct version. Is there “a fragment” (singular) or are there “some fragments” (plural)?

The Jehovah’s Witnesses consider this manuscript important, since they claim that it provides “proof” that their use of the word “Jehovah” is sanctioned by God and supported by this ancient Biblical manuscript.

If the apparent existence of this word in *Hebrew* letters in a Greek text is so important to them, one might wonder why it does not lead them to conclude that they, too, should write this same word in *Hebrew letters* in their version of the Bible. Even if this manuscript is authentic, it can hardly be used to justify their use of the mistaken English form “Jehovah” in their English version of the Bible.

On the origins of the corrupted English form “Jehovah”, derived in error from the original Hebrew letters יהוה, YHWH, which were almost certainly pronounced “Yahweh”, see the article “What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9? Should we call God “Jehovah?” ”, here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf>, especially p. 8 of the revision current on 27.1.18 (Chapter 2. “The form of this Hebrew name for God”).

2. The identification of this fragment

When a manuscript is discovered, it is catalogued and given a unique number or letter, or a name, by which it can be unambiguously referred to.

Unfortunately, the authors of this “Watchtower” article do not tell us the name, letter or number that has been assigned to this fragment. Nor do they tell us its dimensions, whether it is written on papyrus, parchment or vellum, the Biblical passage that it contains, nor where it was probably written, when or where it was found, the names of the experts who have examined it, where the results of their analysis were published, where it is now located, if it can be consulted there, or if it has been made available on-line for researchers to consult. Nor do they tell us if it forms part of a larger manuscript.

³ p. 12. Their article is also available on the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ website, here: <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/watchtower-no6-2017-november/bible-versions-translations/> Consulted on 26.1.18.

⁴ Op. cit., p.13.

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The article says, “In the mid-20th century”. This vague reference does not permit the document to be identified. This makes independent research on the fragment well-nigh impossible. However, palaeographical analysis of the fragment that the Jehovah’s Witnesses reproduce is most revealing, as we shall see in this brief analysis.

In the absence of the normal identification data, we will refer to this fragment as “The Jehovah’s Witness fragment”.

The “Watchtower” article then makes the following statement:

“It seems that later, copyists removed the divine name and substituted Ky’ri·os—the Greek word for “Lord”—in its place. The New World Translation restores the divine name to its rightful places in the Scriptures.”

It is not clear why the Jehovah’s Witnesses have made this non-standard transcription of the Greek word κυριος [pronounced “kurios”], which means “Lord”. Of course, the capital letter, added symbols and non-standard spacing may serve to impress the uninitiated, a technique that the organisation regularly employs. This is sometimes referred to as “intellectual intimidation”. See here: http://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf, page 7 of the revision consulted on 27.1.18 and here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf>, page 56 of the revision consulted on 27.1.18.

This statement in their magazine contains two standard claims made by the Jehovah’s Witnesses:

- 1) that a person or persons unknown “*removed* the divine name” from all manuscripts;⁵
- 2) that the *New World Translation* “*restores* the divine name to its rightful places in the Scriptures”.

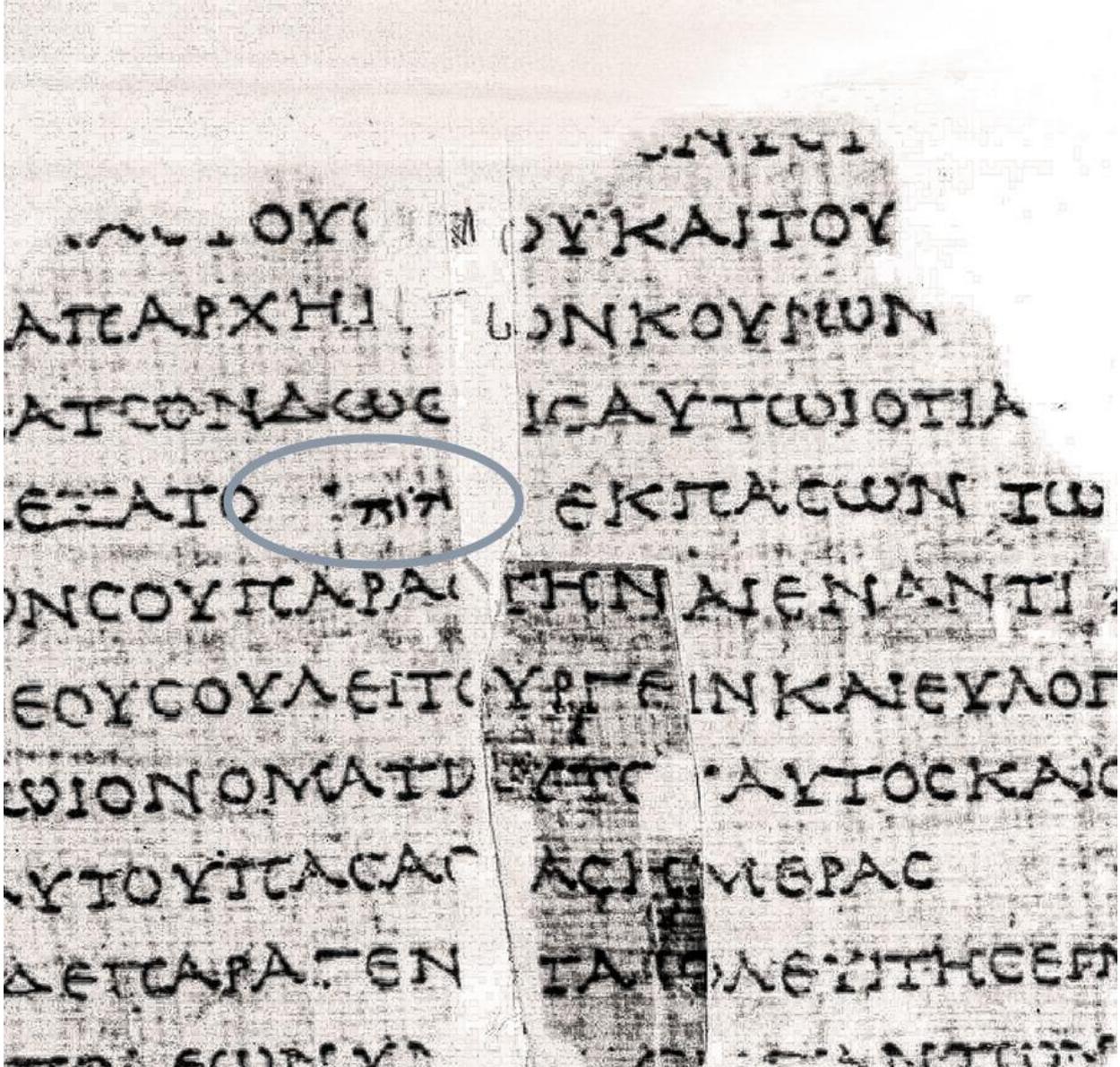
However, there is no historical evidence to substantiate the accuracy of these claims. On the contrary, the abundant evidence that does exist indicates that the claim that “later copyists removed the divine name” is totally without historical foundation.

Indeed, the writers of this article in “Watchtower” magazine clearly recognise that there is no clear evidence to substantiate their claim, so they say “it *seems* that later, copyists removed the divine name.” [emphasis added] This is another way of saying, “we have no evidence to support this claim, but *it may be* that later copyists removed the divine name.” It would have been more transparent if the authors had written, “It seems to us in the Jehovah’s Witness organisation that this is the case, but, world-wide, all the experts in ancient Biblical manuscripts, whether Jews, Christians or people of no declared religious affiliation or belief, disagree with us.”

⁵ This claim is examined in more detail in the article “What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9? Should we call God “Jehovah?”” on this website, here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf>, especially in section 5, “A Conspiracy Theory”, which starts on page 11 of the version consulted on 28.1.18.

3. The “Jehovah’s Witness fragment”

The following is the manuscript fragment that is reproduced in the “Watchtower” article. They have added a pale blue oval shape to highlight the letters that are in Hebrew characters.



This illustration is in monochrome even though it is reproduced in a full-colour magazine and also on the Jehovah’s Witness website, which is in colour apart from this illustration, and even though the highlighting that has been added is *in colour*. The copy of the “Watchtower” magazine that I have shows a very faint pink background for this document. This may be a printing error or perhaps it is a well-meaning attempt to simulate colour, added by someone who had never seen an actual ancient Biblical manuscript, since this does not correspond to the actual colour of any known ancient Biblical manuscript. On my computer, the image on the Jehovah’s Witness website reproduces in black and white with no obvious colour background. The fact that the document was photographed in black and white leads us to believe that this photograph that “Watchtower” magazine reproduces is probably more than forty years old. Most relevant evidence can be seen in it, but a newer photograph, in colour, could make other details more easily visible, for instance, by enabling us to see the colour of the ink

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used for the writing of the Greek text, and the colour of the ink used for the one word in Hebrew characters.

Unfortunately, at some point in the past the page appears to have become separated into two parts, with a vertical break down the middle of the fragment. It then appears to have been somewhat inexpertly joined with some sort of transparent tape which, over time, has discoloured the text and the support material beneath it.

It is not immediately obvious which Biblical passage is reproduced in this fragment. The most commonly-used modern printed edition of the Septuagint text⁶ runs to more than two thousand pages and with no complete lines of text in this fragment, even those scholars with a detailed knowledge of the Septuagint text are likely to require some time to identify the source here. It is to be regretted that the authors of this article have chosen to omit most of the relevant information concerning this document, even though they consider it so crucial and decisive in substantiating their claims.

In spite of this, I have identified this fragment. It is from Deuteronomy chapter 18, and part of verses 4-6. In the box below, I reproduce my transcription of the Greek text, in modern, lower-case Greek letters, with spaces between the words and the addition of accents, breathings and modern verse numbers. Where letters or words are missing from the above photograph, I add the presumed missing characters within square brackets, based on the standard Septuagint text of the Rahlfs-Hanhart edition. In part of just one line, the text of this manuscript and the Rahlfs-Hanhart edition diverge. This is indicated in a footnote. I have also added bold and underlining to the word “κύριος” [“kurios”] / “LORD”, for reasons that will become obvious in the following section.

[First words of verse 4 not reproduced in the “Watchtower” photograph]
[Text impossible to reconstitute] τοῦ οἴνου σου καὶ τοῦ [ἐλαίου σου]
τὴν ἀπαρχὴν [τῶν] κούρων [τῶν]
[προβ]άτων σου δώ[σε]ις αὐτῷ⁵ ὅτι α[ὐτὸν]
[ἐξελ]έξατο ὁ **κύριος** σου⁷ ἐκ πασῶ[ν τῶν]
[φυλ]ῶν σου παρεστάναι ἔναντι [**κυρίου**]
[τοῦ θεοῦ σου λειτουργεῖν καὶ εὐλογ[εῖν]
[ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι [αὐτοῦ] αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ]
αὐτοῦ πάσας [τ]ας ἡμέρας⁸
⁶ [ἐὰν] δὲ παραγένηται ὁ Λευίτης ἐκ μι[αῶς]
τῶν πόλεων [ύμῶν ἐκ] πάντων [τῶν υἱῶν]
[Rest of v 6 not reproduced in the “Watchtower” photograph:
Ἰσραὴλ οὗ αὐτὸς παροικεῖ καθότι ἐπιθυμεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν τόπον ὃν
ἂν ἐκλέξῃται **κύριος**]

Below I give the translations from the New English Translation of the Septuagint (“NETS”)⁹ and the New International Version, 2011 revision (“NIV”)¹⁰.

NETS	NIV
⁴ [And the first fruits of your grain and] your wine and your oil and the first of the fleeces of your sheep you shall give him. ⁵ For your Lord has chosen him out of all your tribes, to stand before the Lord your God to	⁴ You are to give them the firstfruits of your corn, new wine and olive oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, ⁵ for the LORD your God has chosen them and their descendants out of all your tribes to

⁶ Rahlfs-Hanhart “Septuaginta: Duo volumina in uno”, © Stuttgart, 2006: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft

⁷ Here Rahlfs-Hanhart has: κύριος ὁ θεός σου

⁸ For this line, Rahlfs-Hanhart has αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ

⁹ “A New English Translation of the Septuagint” (“NETS”), © 2007 by the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Inc. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Used by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

¹⁰ “The Bible: New International Version” © NIV Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by the International Bible Society

minister and to bless in his name, he and his sons all the days. ⁶ Now if a Levite ¹¹ departs (from one of your cities, from all the sons [Rest of v 6 not reproduced in the “Watchtower” photograph: of Israel wherever he sojourns, as his soul desires) for the place that the LORD may choose]	stand and minister in the LORD’s name always. ⁶ If a Levite moves from one of your towns [Rest of v 6 not reproduced in the “Watchtower” photograph: anywhere in Israel where he is living, and comes in all earnestness to the place the LORD will choose]
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4. The portion that the Jehovah’s Witnesses selected from the fragment

We note that in the full Greek text of Deuteronomy 18 verses 4-6, which is partially reproduced in the Jehovah’s Witness article and on their website, the word κύριος [“kurios”, “Lord”]¹² occurs three times. However, in the section of the photograph that they reproduce this word only occurs once.

We also observe that, apart from at the top of the image, the edges of the illustration that they have reproduced do not coincide with the edges of the manuscript fragment: the manuscript fragment clearly contains more text beyond the left and right-hand edges of the illustration, and beyond the bottom of the illustration. The publishers of this article have chosen to cut off text at the left and right-hand edges and at the bottom (and, incidentally, they have not quite got the text square, so that it seems to slope up from left to right, which was virtually certainly not the case with the original text). This is how it is reproduced on the Jehovah’s Witness website. In the printed magazine, the fragment is cut even further.

These cuts are unfortunate, since after the line where they highlight the Hebrew letters for YHWH (יהוה), on the very next line we would expect to see the word κυρίου [“kuríou”, “of the Lord”] – or of course the Hebrew equivalent of it! – immediately after the last word of that line that is included in the image. This is immediately after the word ἐναντι [“enanti”, “before, in front of”]: “before the Lord”. Even if only a tiny part of the word is present in the fragment, it would immediately be obvious whether it is in Greek or Hebrew letters.

Likewise, at the end of verse 6, part of which they do reproduce, we would expect to see the word κύριος [“kurios”] – or, of course, the Hebrew equivalent! Again, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have cut off the text, this time, half way through a line of text. We appreciate that in a short article it may be appropriate to crop an image. However, to have cut this image in two places where the word κύριος [“kurios”, “Lord”] (or יהוה, YHWH) should occur is inexplicable. It would certainly be advisable to show the rest of the fragment. It may favour their thesis, or it may not, but to cut off the photograph in two such crucial places is most regrettable.

5. The context of this fragment

In fact, the word κύριος [“kurios”] occurs nineteen times in the Septuagint text of this chapter alone and it also occurs near the end of the previous chapter 17 (in verse 19 out of 20 verses) and right at the beginning of the next chapter (three times in the first three verses).

Remembering that there were no chapter divisions in the original text, we wonder how big this “fragment” is. The section that is reproduced is from near the beginning of Deuteronomy chapter 18, but does the fragment extend back into the end of chapter 17? If there is in fact more than one fragment, as stated in one place in the article, does the fragment or do the fragments also extend into the beginning of chapter 19? If so, what word for “Lord” is present? The Greek or the Hebrew?

¹¹ NETS spelling for “Levite”

¹² Or a variant form of it, such as the genitive κυρίου [“kuríou”], “of the Lord”

PART 2: A PALAEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE “JEHOVAH’S WITNESS FRAGMENT”

1. What can be learnt from a palaeographical analysis of this fragment?

Examination of this manuscript fragment indicates that the Greek text is written in an excellent “hand” (to use the term employed by palaeographers), with clearly formed Greek letters of uniform height and spacing, clearly positioned on the straight line that would have been marked with an indentation on the support material. It was not the intention of scribes that these indentations should be obvious to readers, and usually the papyrus or vellum “recovered” over time, so that these lines were no longer visible to readers. The use of “serifs” for letters such as the “I”, the “T” and the “N” add to the evidence that this manuscript was produced by a professional scribe. The Greek letters in the fragment can be easily read.

Of a similar style of writing in a different manuscript, the former Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum, Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, writes:

“The writer of this MS ... may be regarded as an expert, capable of producing the best examples of the book-hand¹³ for the literary market. There is a certain amount of ornamental calligraphy in touching off with little finials or thickenings which indicate much practice and readiness with the pen. The letters are very accurately spaced and great endeavour is evident to make the lines of writing uniformly even. ... This studied type of writing was probably practised, ordinarily, for literary purposes, with little variation through the course of the first century A.D.”¹⁴

2. The Writing Instrument used

The Greek letters in the Jehovah’s Witness fragment are formed with a writing instrument with a fine point.

However, when we examine the Hebrew letters in this manuscript, we observe that the writing instrument used was not the same one that was used for the Greek text. It produces letters in which the strokes are significantly wider than the strokes that form the letters of the Greek text.

3. The Handwriting

In addition to this, when we examine the “hand” in which the Hebrew letters are written, we see that it is not the same as the one that produced the Greek text: the Hebrew letters were written by a different person. We note that they do not have the same height as the Greek letters: they are much smaller, in spite of the fact that it was normal to write Hebrew letters in the same sizes as Greek letters (in other documents, naturally).

Furthermore, the Hebrew letters in this manuscript are not written on that indented line that provided the base for the rest of the text. This may be an indication that they were written a long time later, possibly years later, so that the indentations that had previously served as guide lines had recovered and were no longer visible.

Nor are these Hebrew letters written with the same skill as that which is visible in the Greek text. Most Hebrew letters normally fit within an imaginary square shape that sits flat on the scribed guide line, with a few letters being smaller than the full square. Here, however, the Hebrew text is crooked: the letters are not upright and the base line for the word tilts down from its beginning on the right to its

¹³ A technical term used by palaeographers to designate a handwriting style used in the professional production of books.

¹⁴ Maunde Thompson, Sir Edward, “An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography”, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1912, recently reprinted (no date), p. 122.

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end on the left¹⁵, with the letters going down at an awkward angle below the base line for the original, Greek text.

At the time when the Septuagint was produced, text was written entirely in capital letters and without spaces between the words (both for Greek and Latin, and many other languages), and this continued to be the case over many centuries, at least into the 5th century AD. Indeed, in this fragment we observe that there are no spaces between the Greek words. However, *there is a large gap to the left of the Hebrew letters*. This may indicate that the scribe who produced this manuscript did not know Hebrew, so he left a gap so that someone else could write in the Hebrew letters later.

However, since the scribe is clearly a professional copyist who shows a high level of skill and would have been working for a Jewish client (assuming the date ascribed to this manuscript by the “Watchtower” article), it seems highly unlikely that he or she would not have had the skill to copy the *three* Hebrew characters used in this word¹⁶ – especially if this Hebrew word was *normally used, even in Greek manuscripts*, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim.

Evidence from the time indicates that some scriptoria employed some female scribes. However, **in contrast with the Greek text, this Hebrew word does not appear to have been written by a professional scribe.**

In fact, the space available at this point in the text seems just right for the letters of the *Greek* words ὁ κύριος σου [“ho kurios sou”], “your Lord”. (Remember that this would be written without spaces between the words.) We note that the Septuagint texts consulted by the translators of NETS did indeed have the Greek for “your Lord”. This leads to two possible conclusions:

- 1) Either the Greek words were originally here, and they have been erased by a person who subsequently acquired this manuscript and who decided to insert the Hebrew letters in the place previously occupied by the original Greek words in the text – even though he or she clearly lacked the skill of the original scribe. Over many centuries, it was not uncommon for people who acquired ancient manuscripts to erase the whole of the original text and re-use the parchment for a quite different text.¹⁷ Thus, erasing just one short phrase would not have been difficult, nor even an innovation of any sort.
- 2) Or, if we accept the Jehovah’s Witness claim that from the start the text contained just *one* word in Hebrew, then we must conclude that the original highly-skilled, scribe, who was probably Jewish, had *no knowledge* of the Hebrew letters that would be inserted nor how much space would be required for them, and so he left space for the word to be added later by a different scribe, but in his ignorance of the length of the Hebrew word, *he in fact left far too much space*.

This indicates to us that the use of Hebrew letters in Greek manuscripts was at least *extremely rare*, and that probably they were *never used* in other manuscripts, since this professional scribe who earned his or her living producing high-quality copies of Jewish religious texts had *no idea* how much space would be required for this one word, a word which, according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, would be *the one word* that he or she *would* know.

For the purposes of evaluating this Jehovah’s Witness article, it does not matter which of these two possible causes applies with this particular manuscript, since in either case it is clear that the Hebrew letters were not written by the original scribe, **and may indeed have been inserted centuries later.**

In either case, **it is additionally clear that the Greek text from which the original scribe was working also did not contain the word Yahweh in Hebrew characters.** Otherwise, a professional scribe with

¹⁵ Hebrew is written from right to left.

¹⁶ One character is used twice in the word.

¹⁷ Such a re-used document is known as a “palimpsest”.

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the level of skill demonstrated in this document would at least have left a space of the correct size – or indeed would almost certainly have copied out the Hebrew characters him- or herself.

However, when we examine the text more carefully, we notice that in the gap between the word [ἐξελ]έξατο [“exelexato”, “he has chosen”] and the Hebrew word there is an almost triangular mark at the top of the space, apparently pointing down, and a shape that is almost a dot beneath it, at the base point for the original text. These marks look like the top and the bottom of the two diagonal lines that formed the end of the letter “K”, inadequately erased by the person who inserted the Hebrew letters – a very clear indication that here the text originally had the Greek word κύριος [“kurios”], “Lord”. In fact, above some of those Hebrew letters we also see faint marks that look like the remnants of other Greek letters. *These marks are not part of any Hebrew script.*

PART 3: IS THE “JEHOVAH’S WITNESS FRAGMENT” SIGNIFICANT?

In order to answer this question fully, we would need to have the key minimal information that is not revealed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ “Watchtower” magazine: the unique document identification, where it was found, when it was found, its dimensions, the material it is written on, previous published analysis of it or descriptions of it, the dating proposed by experts, the Bible passages included, and much more.

However, we can form an evaluation that is significantly valid, based on the enormous amount of information that is provided by thousands of other Biblical manuscripts.

1. The evidence from thousands of manuscripts

In their article the Jehovah’s Witnesses show “a fragment” of just one manuscript. According to the Wikipedia article “Septuagint manuscripts”, “There are currently over 2,000 classified manuscripts of the Septuagint.”¹⁸ If more than one Greek manuscript of the Jewish Scriptures had been found containing the Hebrew letters for Yahweh¹⁹, we can be certain that the Jehovah’s Witnesses would have told us. However, what they refer to is fragments of just one manuscript, the name of which they do not give to us.

Thus, in round numbers, the manuscript evidence is more than 2,000 to one against Hebrew letters for God’s name normally being used in the Greek text of the Septuagint. In other words, the manuscript referred to in the “Watchtower” article represents less than 0.05% of surviving ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint. This is not even a tenth of one per cent of Septuagint manuscripts; it is half of that: one twentieth of one per cent!

The “Watchtower” article claims, “It seems that later, copyists removed the divine name and substituted Ky’ri·os—the Greek word for “Lord”—in its place”. But the evidence of thousands of manuscripts actually points overwhelmingly in the opposite direction. It indicates that the normal practice of copyists was to use the Greek word κυριος [pronounced “kurios”], but that just one copyist – if that! (see above) – decided to introduce Hebrew letters to one copy.

In fact, when we examine the fragment that this “Watchtower” magazine reproduces, even this seems unlikely.

2. What is the frequency of occurrence of the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] in ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Jewish and Christian sacred writings?

What are the chances of finding the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] in ancient manuscripts of the Jewish and Christian religious writings (the Old Testament and the New Testament)?

It is important to emphasize that the only manuscripts that provide valid evidence are ancient manuscripts, by which we mean manuscripts from the pre-Christian era through to the first centuries of the Christian era, perhaps including the fifth or sixth century A.D., although it is generally difficult to date ancient manuscripts precisely and some dates are disputed, so giving a hard cut-off date could well be meaningless. What is clear, however, is that manuscripts – or even printed texts! – produced thousands of years later do not provide relevant evidence.

We will look at three aspects of the evidence.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint_manuscripts Consulted on 26.1.18. This article gives its source for this figure as: „Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. „Herzlich willkommen auf den Seiten des Göttinger Septuaginta-Unternehmens!“ (in German). adw-goe.de. Retrieved 2013-09-17.”

¹⁹ The Hebrew letters for this word, יהוה, are usually transliterated as YHWH.

A. Use of the word יהוה [“YHWH”] in the Hebrew Jewish Scriptures

The Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] is of course expected in Hebrew texts of the Jewish Scriptures, so its presence in them is undisputed and non-controversial. However, its presence in Hebrew texts does not provide any guidance on whether or not speakers, writers and scribes used this Hebrew word when speaking or writing in other languages.

If we do a search for יהוה [“YHWH”] in the Hebrew text of the Jewish sacred Scriptures (the “Old Testament”)²⁰, we discover that this word occurs 6,007 times, spread over 5,195 verses.

It is, however, the Jehovah’s Witness claim that this Hebrew word was present in Greek sacred texts that separates them from the consensus of academic opinion world-wide. The Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] was also used in:

- the Christian text, the New Testament, which was written in Greek;
- the translation into Greek of the Jewish Scriptures, the Septuagint.

If the Jehovah’s Witnesses are right when they claim that this Hebrew word was used in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, with more than 2,000 ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint, we should expect a total in excess of twelve million examples of the use of this Hebrew word in ancient Septuagint manuscripts²¹.

So we will now look at the evidence in these two categories of Greek texts.

B. Use of the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] in the Greek Christian Scriptures (the “New Testament”)

The New Testament was undisputedly written in Greek. However, the Jehovah’s Witnesses also claim that the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] was also used in the Greek manuscripts of the Christian Scriptures (“the New Testament”). According to them, it was used 237 times. They quote this figure frequently. See, for example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ interlinear version of the New Testament, “The Kingdom Interlinear Translation”, Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1969, p. 19.

There are over 5,500 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament²² that have been examined by experts. If the Jehovah’s Witnesses are right, there should be in excess of 1.3 million examples of the use of the Hebrew יהוה [“YHWH”] in ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.²³ Of course, not all ancient manuscripts from the New Testament contain the whole of its text. Even so, there should still be hundreds of thousands of examples of the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] in Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. However, up to the date of writing this review, not a single Greek New Testament manuscript from the first centuries of Christianity has been located that contains the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”].

C. Use of the Greek word κύριος [“kurios”] in both the Greek Jewish Scriptures and the Greek Christian Scriptures (the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament”)

In the Septuagint, the standard Greek word that is used whenever the Hebrew has יהוה [“YHWH”] is κύριος [“kurios”]. This is also the word that is used in the New Testament texts. The Jewish Scriptures are much longer than the New Testament. We will now do a search of the combined Greek text of the Septuagint and of the New Testament for the word κύριος [“kurios”]. If the Jehovah’s

²⁰ Using the electronic Westminster Leningrad Codex text as reproduced in the program Bible Works 10

²¹ 6,000 × 2,000 = twelve million.

²² This figure is widely attested. See, for example, Köstenberger, Andreas J and Kruger, Michael J, “The Heresy of Orthodoxy”, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010, pp. 207-8 and fn 11 on p. 208.

²³ 237 × 5,500 = 1,303,500.

Witnesses are right, this word should not occur at all with reference to God, since they claim that the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”] was always used. (In Greek, κύριος [“kurios”] can be used as a term of deep respect when speaking to a person of higher social status than the speaker, for instance, by a slave to his or her master. However, the overwhelming majority of the uses of this word in the Old Testament refer to God, and in the New Testament, the overwhelming majority of its uses refer to Christ.)

Doing this search for all forms of the word κύριος [“kurios”]²⁴ in the combined Greek text of the Septuagint and the New Testament, we find that it occurs 9,321 times, spread over 7,758 verses. In how many of these more than nine thousand occurrences have ancient Greek manuscripts been found in which the *Hebrew* word for “Lord”, יהוה, “YHWH”, is present within the Greek text, and not the Greek that we would expect? With over 2,000 ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint and over 5,500 ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, a quick calculation reveals that we should expect there to be a total of over *eighteen million* occurrences of the Greek word κύριος [“kurios”] – *or its Hebrew equivalent יהוה [YHWH]!* – in these manuscripts.²⁵

We recognise that not all ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint have the complete text. However, this quick calculation does not allow for the fact that the number of ancient Greek manuscripts of the *New Testament* is not 2,000 but in excess of 5,500 – again, not all of them containing the complete text of the New Testament. Even with these riders, we can see that if the Jehovah’s Witnesses are right, there should be *millions* of examples of the use of the Hebrew word יהוה [YHWH] in ancient Greek manuscripts of the Bible. This is, however, not the case. On the contrary, there are ***millions of instances of the use of the Greek word κύριος [“kurios”] in the Greek texts of Scripture.***

Even if 90% of the text of surviving ancient Greek manuscripts were missing (which is not the case), that would still indicate, on the basis of the above rough calculation, that if the Jehovah’s Witness claims are correct, we should expect at least 1.8 *million*²⁶ occurrences of the *Hebrew* word יהוה [“YHWH”] in these *Greek* texts. However, the absolutely overwhelming weight of evidence reveals conclusively that this is not the case.

We realise, that centuries or even millennia later (for instance, approximately 1,600 years after 300 BC, when the Septuagint was translated, to 1300 AD), some producers of manuscripts *introduced* the form יהוה [“YHWH”] into some places in some beautifully-illustrated manuscript copies. This is, however, irrelevant in assessing whether the ancient Jews, or even Christ himself, used the Hebrew word יהוה “YHWH” *when speaking Greek*. One hundred percent of the evidence currently available indicates that they did not.

3. The evidence provided by the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Watchtower Organization

We would assume that the writers of the Watchtower Organization, who have been researching this for the more than eighty years since their president told them in 1931 that they had to use the word “Jehovah”²⁷, will have a comprehensive listing of all of the occurrences of this *Hebrew* word within the ancient *Greek* manuscripts of Scripture. However, such a listing is not forthcoming, since most of the examples that they have produced of texts with the Hebrew letters come from texts *that are written in Hebrew – and some of them written as recently as the twentieth century AD* (often New Testament texts translated into Hebrew by Christian missionaries seeking to proselytise Jews).

²⁴ Again using the program Bible Works 10

²⁵ $9,000 \times 2,000 =$ eighteen million.

²⁶ That is one million eight hundred thousand (1,800,000).

²⁷ See the article “What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9?” on this website, here: <http://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf>, especially p. 8 of the edition consulted on 26.2.18.

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The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ “Kingdom Interlinear Translation”, 1st edition, lists these sources on pages 28-31.²⁸ All of the sources listed by them were translated from the Greek original into Hebrew, by various translators between the 16th century AD and the 20th century AD, and more than half of these translations were published in the 19th or 20th century.

Such examples are clearly irrelevant in helping us to determine whether or not *in ancient times* the Greek-speaking Jews used the *Hebrew* name for God even when they were speaking and writing Greek, as is claimed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

²⁸ “New World Bible Translation Committee: The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures”, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1969. The second edition of the same book gives a shorter list on pages 1133-1136: “New World Bible Translation Committee: The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures”, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1985.

Conclusion

The manuscript evidence leads unavoidably to the conclusion that this manuscript fragment, which the Jehovah’s Witnesses view as crucial to support their claims, actually does the opposite: *it demonstrates that the Hebrew letters for “Yahweh” were not normally used in Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint.* On the contrary, it indicates that they were probably *never used* in ancient Greek manuscripts of the Jewish sacred texts, since it appears that this skilled, professional scribe had never seen a Greek manuscript of the Jewish Scriptures that contained the Hebrew characters for “YHWH”.

The “Watchtower” article states that “The New World Translation restores the divine name to its rightful places in the Scriptures.” In fact, worldwide, this Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible has not found acceptance by any Jewish or Christian group. This will not surprise us when we see that they appeal to this manuscript fragment to provide support for their practice of *adding* the word “Jehovah” hundreds of times in their version of the Bible. However, the evidence of this very manuscript does in fact indicate that what they do in their Bible is not to “*restore*... the divine name to its rightful places in the Scriptures” but to *insert* a mistaken English version of the Hebrew word “Yahweh” into texts that never originally contained it.

The overall manuscript evidence

We saw at the beginning of Section Three that there are over 2,000 ancient manuscripts of the Septuagint (none of which contain the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”]). The Jehovah’s Witness fragment consists of a tiny part of just *one* manuscript of the Septuagint. However, the odds that this fragment might be significant are massively less than *two thousand to one against*, since we saw near the end of Section Two that there are *millions* of examples of the use of the Greek word κύριος [“kurios”] in ancient manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament and of the Greek text of the New Testament. Against this overwhelming mass of evidence, the Jehovah’s Witnesses offer *just one instance* of the use of the Hebrew word יהוה [“YHWH”]. The possibility that this one example may be significant is therefore reduced to *millions to one against* – even if the Hebrew word was originally part of the text, which is extremely unlikely, given the results of the palaeographical analysis of the text.

Here, as with many of their teachings, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have started with their *beliefs* and gone out to find anything that might be claimed to support these doctrines, rather than starting from what the Biblical texts – including the ancient manuscripts – *actually show us*.

In contrast with the Jehovah’s Witness approach, unprejudiced researchers modify what they had previously believed, if necessary, to reflect the data that are demonstrated by an unbiased analysis of the texts.

The Jehovah’s Witness text fragment reveals that, far from incorporating a Hebrew word – in Hebrew characters, moreover! – into their Greek translation of the sacred Hebrew religious texts, the translators took the *meaning* of that word (like all the other words in the original) and translated that meaning into a *Greek* word with an equivalent meaning, κύριος [“kurios”]. That is what translations do! The English equivalent of this word is “Lord”, which is therefore an appropriate translation.

By trimming the photograph of this fragment, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have excluded two further instances of the word for “Lord”, whether in Greek or in Hebrew, *in the very same text*. We can already see, in the only place that they have shown us, the lack of skill of the person who erased the original Greek words and inserted the Hebrew word instead. Could it be that in the two instances that have been cut out of this photograph, the later writer who had modified the text once was even less successful in erasing the original Greek and in substituting the Hebrew? (Or perhaps the writer did not

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even try to do this a second or third time!) We will be forgiven for wondering this, considering that the evidence has been withheld from us by the Jehovah’s Witness organization.

However, in their desire to justify their preconceived teachings and their version of the Bible, the Jehovah’s Witnesses read into this manuscript fragment (and other documents) “information” that is not there. They then withhold the key information that would enable independent experts to examine this text fragment. Inevitably, scholars in the field do not take their claims seriously.

In spite of these tactics, the evidence that is *easily visible* in the very document that the Jehovah’s Witnesses appeal to, in their attempt to demonstrate that their claims are true, actually *does the opposite*: it shows that their claims are totally erroneous and lacking in any foundation in ancient Biblical manuscripts, ***even in this one***.