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## THE NAMES OF GOD IN SWAHILI AND ZULU VERSIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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### In memoriam: Philippe Cassuto

When this article was being prepared for publication, the news of the tragedy arrived. Philippe Cassuto (1 November 1959 – 2 March 2020) was a world leading expert in the field of Biblical Hebrew and *Biblia Hebraica*. An immensely erudite man, he combined profound knowledge of philosophy and theology with subtle philological analysis. His contribution to Hebrew and Oriental Studies go far beyond the parameters of this obituary. A wonderful loyal friend, he was my long-standing co-author, with whom we had been working on a series of papers on the strategies of the Old Testament translations into various languages over the past few years. Till his dying day we had discussed the details of the present article. His sudden death in a Paris street leaves a vacuum both in life and soul that we will never fill.

We will miss him always.

*Victor Ya. Porkhomovsky*

In the present paper the focus is put on the strategies of rendering the names of the Supreme God of Israel in *Biblia Hebraica* in Bantu languages. The data from 3 Swahili versions and a Zulu version of the Bible is examined, with some additions from the Dabida version. Different names of the Supreme God are used in the canonical text. The two principal names are *YHWH* and *'elohim*. Since the period of the Second Temple it has been forbidden to pronounce *YHWH*, the proper name of the God of Israel. The Hebrew tradition (known as *qere-ketiv*) preserved the writing of the four letters of this name *YHWH*, but it was to be read as *'adonay* ('Lord' in Hebrew), or as *'elohim* ('God' in Hebrew) in certain cases. In biblical and religious texts in different languages (but not in Hebrew) the Tetragrammaton *YHWH* is sometimes rendered as *Yahveh* or *Yehovah* (with some orthographic variants). This situation is examined in our paper, as well as the ways of rendering the Hebrew lexeme *tseva'ot*. Special attention is paid to the usage of the name *Allah* as the name of the Only Supreme God corresponding to the Hebrew name *'elohim*. The crucial issue of correlation between the binary masculine/feminine gender system in Biblical Hebrew, on the one hand, and the noun class system in Bantu languages, on the other, is discussed in the final part of the paper.

### 1. Introduction

The present article continues a series of studies of Bible translations by Philippe Cassuto and Victor Porkhomovsky (*cf.* Cassuto & Porkhomovsky 2009, 2013, 2014, 2019). The paper is focused on the correlations between the names of God and the gods in *Biblia Hebraica* and in Swahili and Zulu versions of the Bible.

The source for the Hebrew data in this publication is the Masoretic Text of the *Biblia Hebraica*. The Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible was discovered among the manuscripts of the Dead Sea found on the Qumran site that are dated between the second century BC and the first century AD.

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The great discovery connected with these manuscripts was not the fact that there were different texts from the Hebrew Bible. Those were well known from the medieval copies or the Samaritan version of the Bible. The great discovery made at Qumran was the existence of the *textus receptus* that is still used today. This *textus receptus* has been attested for more than two thousand years, giving it a real authority when compared to other versions, even the old ones. The Greek and the Aramaic versions of the Bible, Targum and Syriac, have no attested *textus receptus*; they only have numerous groups of manuscripts with many differences between them.

For academic work, the reference edition of the Masoretic text is Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). This is the edition based on the manuscript Firkovitch B19a, known as the Leningrad Codex. This manuscript is the oldest complete and dated text of the Hebrew Bible. It is dated 1008, was written in Fostat in Egypt and was discovered in a Crimean synagogue by Abraham Firkovitch. Brought to Odessa in 1838, it was then sent to the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg, where it is kept to this day.

Qumran Bible manuscripts show corrected passages or divergent lessons. The original text was never erased, but the alternate lesson was written over the word or the corrected passage. The Masoretic text has retained four occurrences of these corrections in the form of four letters suspended above the text (*cf.* Cassuto 2014). The scribes passed down to us a list of eighteen corrections, called *tiqune soferim*, that were definitively incorporated into the Bible text very early. In most cases, the scribes did not want to decide between the two lessons. The first lesson is written in the text, it is called (in Aramaic) the *ketiv*, the writing, the second is indicated in the margins of the text and is called the *qere*, the reading. The Leningrad manuscript includes about 1250 lessons of this type (*cf.* Cassuto 1989). This *qere-ketiv* method reflects the situation when it is forbidden to make any changes in the written canonical text of Biblia Hebraica.

The focus in the present paper is made on the names of the Supreme God of Israel in Biblia Hebraica, and the database also contains the names of the heathen gods. It is obvious that this semantic group is of primary importance from the perspective of the canonical text of the Old Testament. The two principal names are *YHWH* and *'elohim*. Since the period of the Second Temple it was forbidden to pronounce *YHWH*, the proper name of the God of Israel. The High Priest of Jerusalem could utter this name once a year on Yom Kippur in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple. After the destruction of the Temple this name could be pronounced under no circumstances (*cf.* Josephus 2011 [94 AD]: B. 2, Ch. 12, Sec. 4).

The Hebrew tradition preserved the writing of the four letters of this name *YHWH*, but it was to be read as *'adonay* ('Lord' in Hebrew). In biblical and religious texts in different languages (but not in Hebrew) the Tetragrammaton *YHWH* is sometimes rendered as *Yahveh* or *Yehovah* (with some orthographic variants, e.g. in Swahili – *Yehova*, and in Zulu – *Jehova*). The reading "*Yahveh*" is a later reconstruction of the present form of the verb "to be". The reading "*Yehovah*" is the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton *YHWH* with the vowels of the

word *'adonay*. In the text of Biblia Hebraica there are many cases when the name *'adonay* is combined with *YHWH*. In these cases, in order not to repeat the same name twice, the Tetragrammaton is read as *'elohim*. Below the reading of the Tetragrammon is presented in square brackets. The Hebrew entries are accompanied by French and English translations.

The name *'elohim* (God) is derived from the common Semitic root meaning “god”. In Biblia Hebraica there are several different God’s names derived from this root (see below). It must be noted that in Hebrew this name is formally in the plural (suffix *-im*), but it is used in the singular as one of the principal names of the Only Supreme God of Israel. In some cases it may also be used as a plural with the meaning “heathen gods, deities”.

The rendering of the different names of God in the canonical text of Biblia Hebraica in two Bantu languages, Swahili and Zulu, is examined in the present paper, along with the names of “deities”.

## 2. Sources (with abbreviations)

- (1) BIBLIA HEBRAICA STUTTGARTENSIA: The Masoretic Text of Biblia Hebraica (<https://www.die-bibel.de/shop/bibelstudium/wissenschaftliche-bibelausgaben/hebraeisch/biblia-hebraica-stuttgartensia-5225>)

### *Swahili versions of the Bible*

- (2) SRB: Swahili Roehl Bible. *BIBLIA ndio Maandiko Matakatifu yote ya Agano la kale nayo ya Agano Jipya katika msemo wa Kiswahili*. [The Bible. The Holy Script: the Old Testament and the New Testament in Swahili]. Dodoma: Chama cha Biblia Tanzania [The Bible Society of Tanzania], 2004 (first published 1995).

The text is based on the “Roehl Bible” – the translation of the Bible from Hebrew into Zanzibar areal variant of Swahili, made by Pastor Karl Roehl, a German missionary, with the participation of Swahili speaking Christians of Zanzibar and Tanganyika. This translation was first published in 1890. In 1937 and 1961 this version of the Bible was published by the Württemberg Bible Society in Stuttgart, Germany. The later editions reproduce the text of the German editions, but were published by the Bible Society of Tanzania with the permission of the German Bible Society. The first edition was published by the Bible Society of Tanzania in 1995; the 2004 edition is used for this paper.

- (3) BHN *Biblia. Habari njema kwa watu wote* [The Bible. Good News for All People] Dodoma: Chama cha Biblia cha Tanzania & Nairobi: The Bible Society of Kenya, 2001 (first published 1995). [The Bible in Current Swahili. An Interconfessional Translation].

The translation into standard Swahili was carried out by the joint efforts of the Catholic and the Protestant churches, the Bible Societies of Tanzania and Kenya. The translation of the Old Testament is based on the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, and the New Testament on the

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Greek New Testament. We use the edition of 2001, published jointly by the Bible Society of Kenya and the Bible Society of Tanzania.

(4) BUV *Maandiko Matakatifu ya Mungu Yaitwayo Biblia yaani Agano la kale na Agano Jipya*. [The Holy Scripture of the God, Named the Bible]. Dodoma: Chama cha Biblia cha Tanzania & Nairobi: The Bible Society of Kenya, 2012 (first published 1997).

The Bible in Modern Swahili that was supposed to substitute previous editions of the Bible in several territorial dialects of Swahili.

***Zulu version of the Bible***

(5) ZULU *Ibhayibheli Elingcwele*. London: The British & Foreign Bible Society, 1961. The Bible in Zulu (first published 1959).

**3. The names of God and the gods in Swahili and Zulu<sup>1</sup>**

		<b>YHWH [’adonay] (Genèse 2,4) – Seigneur/The LORD</b>
SRB	Bwana Mungu	‘Lord God’
BHN	Mwenyezi-Mungu	‘God Almighty’
BUV	BWANA Mungu	‘Lord God’
ZULU	uJehova uNkulunkulu	‘Jehovah God’
		<b>’elohim (Genèse 1,1; Isaïe 37,19; Psaume 86,8) – Dieu/God</b>
SRB (Gen; Is)	Mungu	‘God’
(Ps)	Bwana	‘Lord’
BHN	Bwana; Mwenyezi Mungu	‘Lord’; ‘God Almighty’
BUV (Gen)	Mungu	‘God’
(Ps)	Bwana	‘Lord’
ZULU (Gen)	uNkulunkulu	‘God’
(Is)	Jehova	‘Jehovah’
(Ps)	Nkosi	‘Lord’
		<b>YHWH [’adonay] tseva’ot (1 Samuel 4,4) – Iahvé des Armées, Yahvé Sabaot/The LORD of Hosts</b>
SRB	Bwana Mwenye vikosi	‘Lord having military units’
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu wa majeshi	‘Almighty God of Hosts’
BUV	Bwana wa majeshi	‘Lord of Hosts’
ZULU	Jehova-Sebawoti	‘Jehovah Sabaot’
		<b>YHWH [’adonay] ’elohé tseva’ot (2 Samuel 5,10) – Iahvé, Dieu des Armées, Yahvé, Dieu Sabaot/The LORD the God of Hosts</b>
SRB	Bwana Mungu Mwenye vikosi	‘Lord having military units’
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu, Mungu wa majeshi	‘Almighty God, God of Hosts’

<sup>1</sup> All citations will be given in the orthography of the respective sources.

BUV	Bwana, Mungu wa majeshi	'Lord, God of Hosts'
ZULU	uJehova uNkulunkulu-Sebawoti	'Jehovah God Sabaot'
	<b>'adonay YHWH ['elohim] tseva'ot (Isaïe 22,5) – Adonai Iahvé des Armées, Seigneur Yahvé Sabaot/The Lord, the LORD of Hosts</b>	
SRB	Bwana Mungu Mwenye vikosi	'Lord God having military units'
BHN	Mwenyezi-Mungu wa majeshi	'Almighty God of Hosts'
BUV	Bwana, Bwana wa majeshi	'Lord, Lord of Hosts'
ZULU	iNkosi uJehova-Sebawoti	'Lord Jehovah Sabaot'
	<b>YHWH ['adonay] 'elohim tseva'ot (Psaume 59,6) – Iahvé, Elohim des Armées; Yahvé, Dieu Sabaot/the LORD the God of Hosts</b>	
SRB	Bwana Mungu uliye Mwenye vikosi	'Lord God, you having military units'
BHN	Mungu mwenye nguvu	'God Almighty'
BUV	Bwana, Mungu wa majeshi	'Lord, God of Hosts'
ZULU	Jehova Nkulunkulu-Sebawoti	'Jehovah God Sabaot'
	<b>'adonay YHWH ['elohim] (Genèse 15,2; Psaume 71,5) – Seigneur Yahvé/Lord GOD</b>	
SRB; BUV	Bwana Mungu	'Lord God'
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu	'Almighty God'
ZULU	Nkosi Jehova	'Lord Jehovah'
	<b>YHWH ['elohim] 'adonay (Habaquq 3,1; Psaume 68,21; 109,21; 141,8; 140,8) – Yahvé (mon) Seigneur/LORD (my) God</b>	
SRB	Bwana Mungu	'Lord God'
	Mungu, Bwana wangu	'God, my Lord'
	Bwana wangu mwenye nguvu	'my Lord Almighty'
	Mungu Bwana	'God Lord'
BHN	Mwenyezi-Mungu, Mungu wangu	'Almighty God, My God'
	Mwenyezi-Mungu, Bwana wangu	'Almighty God, my Lord'
BUV	BWANA, Mungu wangu	'Lord, My God'
	MUNGU Bwana	'God, Lord'
ZULU	UJehova, iNkosi	'Jehovah, Lord'
	uNkulunkulu	'God'
	Jehova Nkosi yami	'Jehovah my Lord'
	Jehova	'Jehovah'
	<b>'el 'elohim YHWH ['adonay] (Josué 22,22) – Le Dieu des dieux, Iahvé/The LORD, the God of Gods</b>	
SRB	Mungu Mwenyezi ni Bwana	'God Almighty is Lord'
BHN	Mungu wa miungu ndiye Mwenyezi-Mungu	'God of gods is Almighty God'

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BUV	Mungu, Mungu Bwana	‘God, God Lord’
ZULU	UNkulunkulu, uJehova uNkulunkulu	‘God, Jehovah God’
	<b>’elohe ha-’elohim wa’adone ha-’adonim (Deutéronome 10,17) – Le Dieu des dieux et le Seigneur des seigneurs/ God of gods, and LORD of lords</b>	
SRB	Mungu wa miungu, Bwana wa mabwana	‘God of gods and Lord of lords’
BHN; BUV	Mungu wa miungu na Bwana wa mabwana	‘God of gods and Lord of lords’
ZULU	uJehova uNkulunkulu wenu unguNgulunkulu wawonkulu- nkulu, neNkosi yamakhosi	‘Jehovah your God is God of gods and Lord of lords’
	<b>’eloah (2 Rois 17,31) – les dieux/gods</b>	
SRB; BHN; BUV	miungu	‘gods’
ZULU	onkulunkulu	‘gods’
	<b>’el (Deutéronome 7,21) – Dieu/God</b>	
SRB	Bwana Mungu	‘Lord God’
BHN	Mwenyezi-Mungu Mungu mkuu	‘Almighty God’ ‘God the great’
BUV	Bwana	‘Lord’
ZULU	uJehova uNkulunkulu uNkulunkulu omkulu	‘Jehovah God’ ‘God the great’
	<b>’el ‘eliyon (Genèse 14,20) – Dieu Très-Haut/God Most High</b>	
SRB	Mungu alioko huko juu	‘God Most High’, lit. ‘God there high up’
BHN	Mungu Mkuu	‘God the Great’
BUV	Mungu aliye juu sana	‘God Most High’, lit. ‘God there very high’
ZULU	uNkulunkulu oPhezukonke	‘God Most High’
	<b>’elim (Exode 15,11) – dieux/gods</b>	
SRB; BHN; BUV	Miungu	‘gods’
ZULU	onkulunkulu	‘gods’
	<b>’elilim (Lévitique 26,1; Habacuq 2,18; Lévitique 19,4) – dieux/gods, idoles/idols</b>	
SRB (Hab)	Miungu	‘gods’
(Lev)	Vinyago	‘idols’
BHN (Hab)	Sanamu	‘idols’
(Lev)	sanamu za miungu	‘idols of gods’
BUV (Hab)	Sanamu	‘idols’
(Lev)	Sanamu	‘idols, images’

ZULU (Hab)	Isithombe	'idols'
(Lev)	Izithombe	'idols'
	<b>Yah (Exode 15,2; Psaume 89,9) – Iah, Yah/The Lord, Yahweh</b>	
SRB (Ex)	Bwana Mungu	'Lord God'
(Ps)	Bwana Mungu mwenye vikosi	'Lord God with hosts'
BHN (Ex)	Mwenyezi Mungu	'God Almighty'
(Ps)	Mwenyezi-Mungu, Mungu wa majeshi	'God Almighty, God of hosts'
BUV (Ex)	BWANA Mungu	'Lord God'
(Ps)	Bwana Mungu wa majeshi. Ni nani aliye hodari kama wewe, Ee YAHU	'Lord God of hosts. Who is wise like you, Ee YAHU'
ZULU (Ex)	UJehova	'Jehovah'
(Ps)	Jehova Nkulunkulu-Sebawoti	'Jehovah God Sabaot'
	<b>Yah Yah (Isaïe 38,11) – (de facto YH YH is read like YHWH) – Seigneur/The Lord</b>	
SRB; BUV	Bwana	'Lord'
BHN	Mwenyezi-Mungu	'Almighty God'
ZULU	uJehova	'Jehovah'
	<b>Shaday (Genèse 49,25; Ruth 1,21; Nombres 24,4; Job 5,17; 6,4; 8,5) – Shaddai/the Almighty</b>	
SRB (Gen)	Mungu wa baba yako	'God of your father'
	Mwenyezi Mungu	'Almighty God'
(Ruth)	Bwana Mwenyezi	'Lord Almighty'
(Nomb; Job)	Mungu Mwenyezi	'God Almighty'
BHN (Gen)	Mungu wa baba yako	'God of your father'
	Mungu mwenye nguvu	'God Almighty', lit. 'having power'
(Ruth)	Mwenyezi-Mungu	'Almighty God'
(Nomb)	Mungu	'God'
BUV (Gen)	Mungu wa baba yako	'God of your father'
(Ruth)	Bwana	'Lord'
(Nomb; Job)	Mungu Mwenyezi	'God Almighty'
ZULU (Gen)	NgoNkulunkulu kaYihlo	'God of your father'
(Ruth)	UJehova uSomandla	'Jehovah Almighty'
(Nomb; Job)	Nkulunkulu Somandla	'God Almighty'
	<b>'avir (Genèse 49,24; Isaïe 1,24; 49,26; 60,16; Psaume 132,2-5) – Puissant/the Almighty</b>	
SRB (Gen)	amtawalaye Yakobo	'the ruler of Jacob'
	Mchungaji aliye mwamba wa Isiraëli	'Pastor and the rock of Israel'
(Isa)	Bwana	'Lord'
	Bwana Mwenye vikosi amtawalaye Isiraëli	'Lord of hosts, ruler of Israel'

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	Mimi ndimi Bwana, Mwokozi wako	'I am the Lord, your Saviour'
	Mimi Bwana ni Mwokozi wako	'I am the Lord, your Saviour'
(Psa)	Mwenye nguvu aliye Mungu wa Yakobo	'Almighty, who is the God of Jacob'
BHN (Gen)	Mwenye nguvu wa Yakobo	'Almighty of Jacob'
	Mchungaji, Mwamba wa Israeli	'Pastor, the Rock of Israel'
(Isa)	Bwana Mwenyezi Mungu	'Lord Almighty God'
	Mwenye nguvu wa Israeli	'Almighty of Israel'
	Mimi ni Mwenyezi Mungu, Mwokozi wako, mimi ni Mkombozi wako,	'I am God Almighty, your Saviour and your Redeemer'
	Mimi ni Mwenyezi Mungu Mwokozi wako, mimi ni Mkombozi wako,	'I am God Almighty, your Saviour, I am your Redeemer'
	Mwenye Nguvu wa Yakobo.	'the mighty of Jacob'
(Psa)	Mwenyezi-Mungu, Mwenye nguvu wa Yakobo	'God Almighty, the mighty of Jacob'
BUV (Gen)	Mwenye Enzi wa Yakodo	'The Lord of Jacob'
	Mchungaji, yeye Jiwe la Israeli	'Pastor, he is the rock of Israel'
(Isa)	Bwana, Bwana wa majeshi Mwenyezi wa Israeli	'Lord, Lord of hosts, Almighty of Israel'
	Mimi, Bwana, ni Mwokozi wako na Mkombozi wako ni Mwenye Enzi wa Yakobo	'I am the Lord, I am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Lord of Jacob'
(Psa)	Bwana, Shujaa wa Yakobo	'The Lord, hero of Jacob'
ZULU (Gen)	Mninimandla kaJakobe	'Almighty of Jacob'
	uMalusi netshe likaIsrayeli	'Pastor, and the rock of Israel'
(Isa)	iNkosi uJehova-Sebawoti	'The Lord Jehovah Sabaoth',
	uMninimandla kaIsraeli	'Almighty of Israel'
	minaJehova nginguMsindisi wakho noMhlengi wakho, uMninimandla kaJakobe	'I am Jehovah, I am your Savior and your pillar, the Almighty of Jacob'
	<b>Tsuram (Deutéronome 32,30) – Leur Rocher/their Rock; Tsuru (Psaume 18,47) – Mon Rocher/my Rock; Tsuram... tsurenu (Deutéronome 32,31) – Notre Rocher/our Rock</b>	
SRB (Deut)	Bwana, Yule aliye mwamba wao	'Lord who is their Rock'
(Psa)	Bwana Mwenye Uzima	'Lord Absolut'
	Mungu aliyeniokoa	'God, who saved me'
(Deut)	Bwana; Mungu wa dhahabu	'Lord, golden God'
BHN (Deut)	Mwamba wao	'their Rock'
(Psa)	Mwenyezi Mungu; Mwamba wa usalama wangu	'God Almighty, The Rock of my peace'
	Mungu wa wokovu wangu	'God of my salvation'



BUV (Deut)	Mwamba wetu	'Our Rock'
(Psa)	Mungu	'God'
ZULU (Deut)	uJehova	'Jehovah'
(Psa)	uNkulunkulu	'God'
(Deut)	Dwala lethu	'Our Rock'
<b>'ehyieh 'asher 'ehyieh (Exode 3,14) – Je suis celui qui est /I am that I am</b>		
SRB	Nitakuwa niliyekuwa	'I am that I am' (lit. 'I shall be that I was')
BHN	mimi ndimi niliye	'I am that I am'
BUV	mimi niko ambaye niko	'I am that I am'
ZULU	nginguye enginguye	'I am that I am'
<b>'el shaday (Genèse 17,1; 28,3; Ezéchiel 10,5) – El Shaddai /God Almighty</b>		
SRB (Gen)	Bwana	'Lord'
	mimi ni Mungu Mwenyezi	'I am God Almighty'
	Mwenyezi Mungu	'God Almighty'
(Eze)	Mwenyezi Mungu	'God Almighty'
BHN (Gen)	Mwenyezi Mungu	'God Almighty'
	Mimi ni Mungu mwenye nguvu	'I am God, powerful'
(Eze)	Mwenyezi Mungu	'God Almighty'
BUV	Bwana	'Lord'
	Mimi ni Mungu mwenyezi	'I am God Almighty'
	Mungu Mwenyezi	'God Almighty'
ZULU (Gen)	uJehova	'Jehovah'
	nginguNkulunkulu	'I am God Almighty'
	uSomandla	
	uNkulunkulu uSomandla	'God Almighty'
<b>'el YHWH ['adonay] (Psaume 118,27) – Iahvé est Dieu/ The LORD is God</b>		
SRB	Bwana ni Mungu	'The Lord is God'
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu ni Mungu	'God Almighty is God'
BUV	uJehova unguNkulunkulu	'Jehovah is God'
<b>Yah YHWH ['elohim] (Isaïe 26,4) – Iahvé, Yahvé/ The LORD (Yah is not rendered in French and English versions)</b>		
SRB; BUV	Bwana	'Lord'
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu	'Almighty God'
BUV	Bwana YEHOVA	'Lord Jehovah'
ZULU	Jehova	'Jehovah'

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<b>Halelu Yah (Psaume 135,3; Psaume 150,6; 135,1) – Louez Yahvé/Praise the LORD, Hallelujah, Alleluia</b>		
SRB	Bwana ni mwema Wamshangilie Bwana... Haleluya Yaleluya! Lishangilieni jina lake Bwana	‘Lord is merciful’ ‘Praise the Lord ... Hallelujah’ ‘Hallelujah, praise the name of God’
BHN	Msifuni Mwenyezi Mungu kwa kuwa ni mwema, Kila kiumbe hai kimsifu Mwenyezi Mungu	‘Praise the Almighty God since he is merciful’ ‘Let every live creature praise he Almighty God’
BUV	Msifuni Mwenyezi Mungu Kila mwenye pumzi na amsifu Bwana Haleluya Haleluya. Msifuni jina la Bwana	‘praise the Almighty God’ ‘Let every one breathing praise the Lord, Hallelujah’ ‘Hallelujah, praise the name of God’
ZULU	Dumisani uJehova, ngokuba uJehova muhle Makudumise uJehova. Haleluya! Haliluya! Dumisani igama likaJehova	‘Let us praise Jehovah, because Jehovah is merciful’ ‘Praise Jehovah. Hallelujah!’ ‘Hallelujah! Praise the name of Jehovah’
<b>YHWH [’elohim] Yir’eh (Genèse 22,14) – Jehova-Jiré/ The Lord Will Provide</b>		
SRB	Bwana aona Mlimani Bwana anakoonwa	‘The Lord sees’ ‘On the hill where the Lord is seen’
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu hujalia Katika mlima wa Mwenyezi Mungu watu hujaliwa	‘God Almighty is merciful’ ‘On the mountain of the Almighty God the people are blessed’
BUV	Yehova-Yire (maana yake ni Bwana atapata),	‘Jehovah-Yire’ (the meaning is ‘the Lord will fathom’)
ZULU	uJehova uyabonelala	‘Jehovah sees’
<b>YHWH [’elohim] Nisi (Exode 17,15) – l’Eternel ma bannière/ The Lord is my Banner</b>		
SRB	Bwana ni bendera yangu	‘The Lord is my banner’
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu ni bendera yangu	‘Almighty God is my banner’
BUV	Yehova – Nisi (maana yake ni Bwana ni bendera yangu)	‘Yehova – Nisi’ (the meaning is ‘The Lord is my banner’)
ZULU	uJehova – Nisi	‘Jehovah is my banner’
<b>YHWH [’elohim] Shalom (Juges 6,24) – l’Eternel est aix/ The Lord is Peace</b>		
SRB	Bwana	‘Lord’
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu ni amani	‘Almighty God is peace’

BUV	Yehova-Shalomu (maana yake ni, Bwana ni amani)	'Jehovah Shalom' (the meaning is 'The Lord is peace')
ZULU	UJEHOVA-SHALOMI	'JEHOVAH-SHALOM'
	<b>'El 'Elohe Israel (Genèse 33,20) – El-elohey-Israël/El Elohe Israel</b>	
SRB	Mungu mwenyewe wa Isiraeli	'God himself of Israel'
BHN	Mungu ni Mungu wa Isiraeli	'The God is the God of Israel'
BUV	El-elohe-Isiraeli	'El-elohey-Israel'
ZULU	Eli-Elohe-Israyeli	'El-elohey-Israel'
	<b>'El Bet 'El (Genèse 35,7) – El-Béthel/El Bethel</b>	
SRB	Mungu wa Beteli	'The God of Betel'
BHN; BUV	El-Betheli	'El-Bethel'
ZULU	iEli-Betheli	'El-Bethel'
	<b>Bet 'El Berit (Juges 9,46) – la maison du dieu Berith/ the temple of El-Berith</b>	
SRB	Nyumbani mwa Mungu wao wa agano	'In the house of their God according to testament'
BHN	Mungu aliyeitwa El-Berithi	'The God who was named El- Berit'
BUV	Ngome ya nyumba ya El-Berithi	'The fortress of the home of God'
ZULU	endlu yase-Eli-Beriti	'The house of El-Berit'
	<b>'elahaya' [Aramaic name] (Jérémie 10,11; Daniel 2,47; 3,25; 2,11) – les dieux/these gods</b>	
SRB (Jer)	Miungu	'Gods'
(Dan)	Mungu aipitaye miungu yote, Bwana wa wafalme	'God, superior to all gods, the Lord of rulers'
	Mungu	'God'
	Miungu	'gods'
BHN (Jer)	Miungu	'gods'
(Dan)	Mungu wa miungu na Bwana wa wafalme	'God of gods and Lord of kings'
	Mwana wa miungu	'child of gods'
	Miungu	'gods'
BUV (Jer)	Miungu	'gods'
(Dan)	Mungu wa miungu na Bwana wa wafalme	'God of gods and Lord of kings'
	Mwana wa miungu	'child of gods'
	Miungu	'gods'
ZULU	Onkulunkulu	'gods'
	uNkulunkulu wakho unguNkulunkulu wawonkulunkulu, neNkosi yamakhosi	'Your God I am God of Gods and Lord of kings'

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### 4. Commentary

The three Swahili versions and the Zulu version of rendering the God's names in the Old Testament demonstrate certain peculiarities that are discussed below.

The major opposition is attested between the Swahili versions on the one hand, and the Zulu version on the other. It pertains to the name *Jehova* (in Zulu orthography; in the Swahili BUV version it is rendered as *Yehova*). The name *Yahveh* is not attested in any of the versions (*cf.* Introductory Notes). It may be added that in our studies of the Bible translations we have observed that these two variants of rendering the Tetragrammaton are mutually exclusive in particular versions, provided they are used at all. In the Zulu version, the name *Jehova* is attested in more than 70% of the lexical entries corresponding to the ones from *Biblia Hebraica* (twenty-four out of thirty-two in our database). Thus, it may be considered as one of the principal names of God on a par with the original Zulu names *Nkosi* and *Nkulunkulu*. It is used not only when the Tetragrammaton *YHWH* is present in the original Hebrew text, but also in cases where the Tetragrammaton is absent – five entries in our database. We have never so far encountered a similar situation in our previous studies of the Bible translation strategies, so we may consider it to be a peculiarity of the Zulu version of the Old Testament.

As to the Swahili translations, *Yehova* is attested only in the BUV version and only in cases that correspond to the use of lexical compounds in the original Hebrew text, i.e. *YHWH Nisi*, *YHWH Yir'eh*, *YHWH Shalom*, *Yah YHWH* (*cf.* below). In the latter case *Yah* is an abbreviated variant of the Tetragrammaton used as a particular name of the God, *cf.* *Halelu Yah*.

Another special feature of the translation of the Old Testament in our data is the absence of the lexeme *Allah* as the name of the Only Supreme God, corresponding to the Hebrew name *'elohim*. The name *Allah* is quite common for the Bible translations in Islamic context, suffice it to mention Hausa translations of the Old Testament. As to the Swahili case, the absence of this name is attested not only in the Bible translations, but also in the *QUR'AN TAKATIFU*, which is a Swahili translation of the Quran by Sheikh Abdullah Saleh Al-Farsy, made between 1950–1967, uploaded by Sheikh Abdullah Saleh Al-Farsy on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016 (*cf.* <https://archive.org/details/swahili-quran-translation>). This is the edition with parallel Swahili and Arabic texts and an extensive commentary. We shall cite here only three formulas, where this peculiarity of the translation is most obvious:

- |          |                                                                                                                                |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sura 1,1 | Kwa jina la Mwenyezi Mungu, Mwingi wa rehema, Mwingi wa ukarimu<br>In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful. |
| Sura 1,2 | Sifa zote njema zinamhusu Mwenyezi Mungu, Mola wa walimwengu<br>Praise be to Allah, the lord of the universe                   |
| Shahada  | Hakuna mungu ila Mungu Mmoja<br>There is no god but Allah. lā 'ilāha 'illā llāh                                                |

The same situation is attested by Jan Knappert (*cf.* Knappert 1967). Knappert discusses the traditional Swahili theological concepts as presented in the Swahili translation of the Arabic poem by Abudalla Ba Kathiri “*Durari l’Bahiya*” (‘Pearls of Beauty’). The translator is Mansabu bin Huseini bin Muduri Hemani (*cf. ibid.*, 82). In this paper Knappert cites twenty-six stanzas, four lines each, with his English translations. Whenever the lexeme *God* must be used in the translation, the Swahili equivalents are *Mungu* or *Mola*. The lexeme *Allah* is never attested. The data from this Swahili theological text tallies very well with the peculiarities of the Swahili versions of the Old Testament discussed in the present paper, i.e. the absence of the lexeme *Allah* as the equivalent of the Hebrew name *’elohim*.

Coming back to the native Bantu terms in Swahili translations of the *Biblia Hebraica* we shall present below the statistical panorama of the God’s names as attested in our database. In the SRB version, translated in the nineteenth century, the most frequent names of the Supreme God of Israel are *Bwana* ‘Lord’, which is attested twenty-five times, and *Mungu* ‘God’ attested eighteen times in the database of thirty-two entries, presented in our paper. In seven cases the word combination *Bwana Mungu* is used, and the combination *Mwenyezi Mungu* ‘Almighty God’ is used only three times. The BHN version of the Bible is characterized by an almost exclusive usage of the names *Mwenyezi Mungu* ‘Almighty God’ (thirty times) and *Mungu* ‘God’ (twenty-two times). The name *Bwana* ‘Lord’ is used only five times.

In the BUV version of the Swahili Bible an absolute domination of the names *Bwana* (twenty-four times) and *Mungu* (seventeen) is attested. There are isolated cases of the usage of the names *Bwana Mungu*, *Mwenyezi Mungu* and *Mungu Bwana*. The BUV version is the only Swahili version of the Bible where the name *Yehova* is attested in certain combinations of the Tetragrammaton with the other names in the original text: *YHWH Nisi* — *Yehova-Nisi*, *YHWH Yir’eh* — *Yehova-Yire*, *YHWH Shalom* — *Yehova-Shalomu*, *Yah YHWH* — *Bwana YEHOVA*.

In the Zulu version of the *Biblia Hebraica*, the frequency of occurrence of the God’s names in our database is the following (the origin of the name *Sebawoti* is discussed below):

*Jehova* – twenty-one; *Nkulunkulu* (*uNkulunkulu*) – thirteen; *Nkosi* (*iNkosi*) – six; *Somandla* – five; *Jehova-Sebawoti* – three; *Jehova Nkulunkulu* – three; *Nkulunkulu-Sebawoti* – three; *Nkosi Jehova* – one.

Thus, the Zulu version presents a special case, with the God’s name *Jehova* as the most frequent name of the Supreme God in the Old Testament — the fact that is determined by the frequency of the Tetragrammaton in the Masoretic text.

In order to broaden the typological perspective, we include below some Dabida parallels from the following source:

(6) DABIDA. *Biblia Ilagho Jiboie Kwa Wandu Wose (Taita)*. <https://www.bible.com/de/bible/2138/GEN.1.TAITA>

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Unlike Zulu, Dabida is a minor Bantu language, closer to Swahili; the majority of the native speakers of this language speak Swahili. It is thus not unexpected to find the translation strategies of the Swahili versions of the Bible to be applied in the Dabida version (*cf.* the frequencies of the God names in the Dabida version of the Old Testament: *Mlungu* – fifteen; *Bwana* – twenty-one; *Bwana Mlungu* – eleven; *Mlungu Bwana* – two).

A special case is presented by the lexeme *tseva'ot*. This lexeme is a plural form, derived from the root meaning 'host, army'. In the canonical text of Biblia Hebraica it is used in combinations with the Tetragrammaton: *YHWH tseva'ot*. Other God's names may also be used in these word combinations: *YHWH tseva'ot*, *YHWH 'elohe tseva'ot*, *'adonay YHWH tseva'ot*, *YHWH 'elohim tseva'ot*, etc. This lexeme has the meaning 'the Lord of hosts', but it may be interpreted as the title or the proper name of God. Hence, double approach to the rendering of this lexeme in translations of the Biblia Hebraica is possible: either to translate its meaning into the respective language, i.e. to apply a translation strategy, or to adopt this lexeme into the language of translation with necessary phonetic changes, i.e. to practise an adaptation strategy. This two-way approach to the lexeme *tseva'ot* is attested already in the early authoritative Bible translations: thus, the Septuagint follows the adaptation strategy, while the Vulgate the translation one. In Swahili versions the translation strategy is applied: these combinations are rendered according to the semantics mentioned above: 'Lord/God of Hosts, 'Lord/God having military units' (*cf.* respective entries in our database above). A different approach is applied in the Zulu version, where the adaptation strategy is used: the lexeme *tseva'ot* is considered as a title or a proper name, it is included into the Zulu theological vocabulary with minor phonetic changes – *Sebawoti* – and is used as the God's name or as an epithet of God. In Dabida the version *Bwana wa majeshi* is attested four times, again in correspondence with the Swahili translation strategy, e.g.:

	<b>YHWH ['adonay] tseva'ot (1 Samuel 4,4) – Iahvé des Armées, Yahvé Sabaot/The LORD of Hosts</b>	
SRB	Bwana Mwenye vikosi	'Lord having military units'
BHN	Mwenyezi Mungu wa majeshi	'Almighty Lord of Hosts'
BUV	Bwana wa majeshi	'Lord of Hosts'
ZULU	Jehova-Sebawoti	'Jehovah Sabaot'
DABIDA	Bwana wa majeshi	'Lord of Hosts'

### 5. The problem of noun class system in Bantu versions of the Bible

The present paper is focused on the linguistic aspect of the translation strategies, namely on lexical correspondences in the semantic group of the names of God and the gods between the original text of Biblia Hebraica and Swahili and Zulu versions. Of course, there are other very important aspects, namely theological, philosophical, cultural, social, the role of the Bible translations in the formation of writing and written standards in languages without written traditions, etc. A special case is presented by the correlation between grammatical gender in

Biblical Hebrew and noun class systems in Bantu languages. Papers by Aloo Osotsi Mojola, a renowned expert in Bible translation, are most important in this respect (*cf.* Mojola 2014, 2018, 2019). One of the most interesting problems discussed by Mojola is the problem of correlation between the binary masculine/feminine gender system in Biblical Hebrew, on the one hand, and the noun class system in Bantu languages, on the other (*cf.* Mojola 2019).

A somewhat different, very specific case of gender correlation in the Bible translation, mentioned by Mojola (2019), is attested in the way the name of the God Most High of *Biblia Hebraica* is rendered in Iraqw, a Cushitic language spoken in East Africa. According to Iraqw religious tradition, the highest deity is a female god, *Mother Looa*. She created the world and has been the source of all positive, beneficial, true and beautiful qualities, while evil, calamity, and suffering are attributed to *Neetlanqw*, the male deity. Hence, as Mojola reports, in correspondence with the traditional Iraqw beliefs the Supreme God of *Biblia Hebraica* was named *Mother Looa*, and only in the later version of the Iraqw Bible the name *Mungu* was borrowed from Swahili to replace *Mother Looa*. This is a clear example of a situation, pertaining not to the linguistic aspect of the Bible translation problems, but to theological, social and cultural ones when beliefs, social and cultural characteristics of the people condition the way the Sacred Text is translated.

In his works Mojola (*cf.* the references below with further bibliography) discusses in detail the semantics and pragmatics of the attribution of the names of God and the gods to particular noun classes in Bantu languages. This issue is presented below.

In Swahili the meaning “(a) god” is rendered by the noun *m-ungu* belonging to Class three, that traditionally contains the names of “natural phenomena, body parts, plants, animals” (Katamba 2006: 115); it has a plural form *mi-ungu* ‘gods’, belonging to Class four, and is written with a small letter. The same situation is attested in Dabida: ‘god ~ gods’ are rendered as ‘*m-lungu* ~ *mi-lungu*’ (Class three/four). These very lexemes in both languages are used as the principal names of God. In this case they belong to Class one – “class of human beings”, the only noun class in Bantu languages that includes semantically homogeneous nouns. These lexemes do not have plural forms and are written with a capital letter (sometimes all letters of this name are capital): *Mungu* or *MUNGU* (Swahili), *Mlungu* or *MLUNGU* (Dabida). The noun *Bwana* ‘Lord’, as well as ‘master, owner, Sir’ belongs exclusively to the class of human beings.

In Zulu all the names of God: *u-Nkulunkulu* – ‘God’; *u-Jehova* – ‘Jehovah’; *Sebawoti* – ‘tseva’ot’; *u-Somandla* – ‘Almighty’; *u-Mninimandla* – ‘Almighty’ belong to the class of human beings. When the name *u-Nkulunkulu* means ‘a god’ it still belongs to Class one and has the plural correlate *o-Nkulunkulu* ‘gods’, belonging to Class two. Writing with a small letter is also attested in this case.

Noun classes in Bantu languages have no correlation with masculine/feminine gender. When it is necessary to specify the sex of an object, the languages use special lexical or morphological means.

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## 6. Conclusion

The discussion in this paper is focused on the lexical aspects of the Bible translation strategies in the semantic group of the names of God and the gods. It continues our previous publications on this subject, as mentioned above. At the same time, this analysis presents a case study of the correlations that are found in the Bible translations from a language with the masculine/feminine gender opposition into languages with noun class systems.

Among the most specific features of the translation strategies used in Swahili and Bantu versions of the Ancient Testament the following aspects should be named:

- different ways to render the proper name of the Supreme God, i.e. the Tetragrammaton *YHWH*, including late artificial forms based on the vocalization of this consonant combination: *Yahveh* and *Yehovah*;
- interpretation of the Biblical name *tseva'ot* as the proper name or as the title of *YHWH* in different combinations of the God's names in the text of *Biblia Hebraica*;
- the absence of the name *Allah* in the general nomenclature of the God's names in Bantu versions of the Old Testament;
- correlation between the gender opposition of masculine vs. feminine in the canonical Hebrew text and the noun class system in Bantu versions of the Bible.

The present study of the names of God in Swahili and Zulu versions of the Old Testament (with some additional data from Dabida) presents a very important special case in the general panorama of the Bible translation strategies into the different languages studied so far by the authors of this paper.

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