In 2000, R. E. Gane argued convincingly that if the expression ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπέτασματος (Heb 6:19) is based on the LXX, where “inner veil” is the only possible meaning (Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2, 12, 15), it should also be “inner veil” in Heb 6:19. Gane’s observation that the term καταπέτασμα is qualified by the term ἐσώτερον is important, because it recognizes a trend of the LXX translators with respect to the term καταπέτασμα. That is, while the Greek translators are often inconsistent in what Hebrew term they translate as καταπέτασμα (it can itself refer to any of three curtains in the tabernacle), the presence of contextual qualifiers, such as ἐσώτερον, seemed to have afforded the LXX translators such liberties. This trend, it seems, was readily recognized by NT authors in the six texts in which the term καταπέτασμα appears. The term καταπέτασμα appears in the Synoptics (Matt 27:51a; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) as καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ. It also appears in Hebrews as τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος (“within the veil,” Heb 6:19), τὸ δεύτερον καταπέτασμα (“the second veil,” Heb 9:3), and τοῦ καταπετάσματος τούτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (“the veil that is his flesh,” Heb 10:20). The purpose of this short article is twofold. First, it will explore the etymology of this rare but important word as it relates to its function in the temple, particularly vis-à-vis the variety of other curtain terms in the LXX and Second Temple Judaism. Second, it will attempt to
further demonstrate the importance of Gane’s observation of the definitiveness of the contextual qualifiers in defining which “curtain” is in view by showing that καταπέτασμα is an exclusively cultic term.4

Etymological considerations of a biblical term often translated “veil” (καταπέτασμα) have been largely overlooked in the modern discussion of the term.5 Joseph Henry Thayer and others widely assumed that καταπέτασμα was an Alexandrian Greek word, created by the LXX translators as a Judeo-Christian “specialty.”6 That is, it was thought to have come about by Jewish-Christian interests in tabernacle and temple furniture rather than drawing upon a use outside of these traditions. It was thought to be derived by that tradition from the more common παραπέτασμα, a word well attested up through the first century A.D.7 Herodotus (Hist. 9.82.4) speaks of gold and silver and gaily-colored tapestry (παραπετάσματα ποικίλου κατεσκευασμένη) as possessions of Mardonius. And Menander (c. 344–392 B.C.) speaks of “a curtain of foreign weave” (παραπέτασμα βαρβαρικον υφαντον; Dysk. 923).8 Παραπέτασμα is found in the biblical tradition only in Amos 2:8, where it refers to a curtain made out of garments (ιμάτια).


7“That which is spread before a thing, hanging, curtain” (H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, A Greek-English Lexion, 9th ed., rev. supp. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]). Cf. Aeschylus, Fr. 212.39; Pseudo (?) Philolau, Fr. 19.3; Herodotus Hist. 9.82.4; Aristophanes, Fr. 45.1; 611.1; Ran. 938; Plato, Prot. 316e.5; Pol. 279d.3; Antiphans, Fr. 63.2; 327.2; Demosthesenes, t Steph. 19.1; Aeneas, Pol. 32.9.1; Menander, Dysk. 923, 930; Fr. Lang. 336.9; 405-406.9; 1094.2; Fr. 6.4; 175.2; 336.9; 936.2; Alexis, Fr. 41.2; 340.2; Chrysippus, Fr. Log. 178.7; Diodorus Siculus, Bibl. Hist. 11.56.8.2; Philo, QG 5.69.5.

8Pausanias, Descri. 5.12.4, has a similar description for the curtain of the Olympian temple, though he calls it a παραπέτασμα. Moses Hadas notes that apart from the Samos inscription, discussed below, Καταπέτασμα “does not occur in secular literature . . . until Heliodorus and sixth-century papyri” (Aristeas to Philogrates [Letter of Aristea] [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951], 15).
An inscription from Samos, a Greek island in the northeast Aegean Sea, 346-345 B.C., has overturned this view. The inscription catalogues the furniture of the temple of the goddess Hera (whose Roman name was Juno). Her temple is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and she is known as queen of the gods and bride as well as sister of Zeus. The discovery of her (second) temple in the late nineteenth century not only revealed one of the most primitive of Greek temples, but also provides both the earliest attested use of καταπέτασμα by at least a century and the only occurrence of the word from antiquity outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. The earliest occurrence in that tradition is either the LXX translations, dating no earlier than the middle of the third century B.C., or perhaps the Letter of Aristeas (86) itself. Within Hera’s temple was found a stone inscription with a lengthy list of artifacts and cultic instruments, including a καταπέτασμα τῆς τραπέζης, of which no further comment is made. Its contextual definition provides little illumination for the meaning of the word in general, except that it may have been a term exclusive to cultic furnishings. The discovery of this inscription has vindicated Adolf Deissmann’s earlier conclusions, especially because it predates any Greek literature from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Remarkably, however, outside of this inscription, without exception, every occurrence of the term is in reference to the hangings and veils in the Jewish temple, even well beyond the completion of the first century A.D. The reference in Hera’s temple, as well as its conspicuous absence in secular literature, strongly suggests its proper place in distinctively cultic terminology.

While it is possible that one day καταπέτασμα may be discovered on an inscription within a throne room context, as do Semitic cognates to


10Though it does not appear on the usual lists, and perhaps may have been confused with the temple of Artemis in Ephesus (Antipater, Greek Anthology, 9.58; cf. Herodotus, Histories, 1.92; Valerius Maximus, Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri IX, 8.14.5; Strabo, Geography, 14.1.22; Acts 19:23-29, 34-35).


12Charles Clermont-Ganneau has argued that the preferred term καταπέτασμα is used exclusively in Josephus and Maccabees to refer to the hanging of the Jewish temple curtain (Le Dieu Satrape et Les Phéniciens dans le Péloponèse [Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878], 56-60).
("curtain"), 13 this is probably unlikely. For within such a context, Greek has other words from which an author can choose. For example, in Arrian’s *Anabasis* (6.29.5), we find a description of the revered King Cyrus’s sarcophagus covered with a material of “Babylonian” tapestry. 14 The cloth is not called a καταπέτασμα, but ἑπίβλημα. There seem to be simply too many other Greek words that can be used for “curtain” for καταπέτασμα to be required in such contexts. If such an inscription were found it would probably reflect both a strong ANE influence and familiarity with Greek cultic language of mostly Jewish origin. Though these are arguments from silence, the term has, to date, been only found in such cultic contexts. 15

Etymological analyses of this word are incomplete and based on much later evidence, such as H. G. Liddell and R. Scott’s account citing Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 10.28 and *P. Oxy.* 3150.37, both dating from the fifth to sixth century A.D. 16 Only a limited amount of credence can be afforded root analysis, for it can easily distort the meaning of a word, which must ultimately be determined by usage. Yet, here it may be illuminating to examine the etymological construction of καταπέτασμα since lack of raw data may provide only a limited understanding of its


14In addition to occurrences of καταπέτασμα in canonical LXX texts, all others are likewise in exclusively cultic contexts: Sir 50:4; 1 Macc 1.22; 4.51; *Let. Aris.* 86; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.5.4 §212; 5.5.5 §219; 5.5.7 §232; 6.8.3 §389; 6.8.3 §390; 7.5.7 §162; *A.J.* 8.3.3 §75; 8.3.7 §90; 12.5.3 §250; Philo, *Gig.* 53; *Mut.* 192; *Mos.* 2.80, 86, 87 [2x], 95, 101; *Spec.* 1.171, 231, 274, 296. A possible exception is *Jos. Asen.* 10.2, though cf. G. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis*, Early Judaism and Its Literature, 10 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 70 n. 18.

15Cf. Liddell and Scott’s supplement, 171.
meaning. Πέτασμα (—ατος, το) is designated by Liddell and Scott as related to the verbal form πετάννυμι and means “anything spread out,” whether the feelers of an animal (Aristotle, *Hist. An.* 541B.6) or a carpet (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 909). The only occurrence in biblical literature is a variant reading of Num 23:22. Alfred Rahlf’s edition, which reads θεός ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν αὐτούς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ὡς δόξα μονοκέρωτος αὐτῷ, can perhaps be translated: “It was God who brought them out of Egypt; as the horns of a wild ox he is for them.” However, in the variant reading, Aquila reads πετάσμα for δόξα, perhaps explicitly suggesting the “protection” element of the wild ox (or unicorn), which is variously translated as “horns” (NAS), “strength” (ASV; Geneva Bible [1599]; KJV; NIV), “glory” (Brenton’s LXX), and “towering might” (NAB), all likely seeing the ambiguity of the Hebrew נְמוֹן. This variant is only found in Codex VII in the margin of manuscript 2d of Origen’s *Hexapla*. The word πετάσμα itself is relatively rare in Greek literature, with only three uses antedating the LXX17 and a small handful postdating the LXX through the fifth century A.D.18 Its verbal form, πετάννυμι, is better attested and can simply mean “to spread out,” “spread abroad, disperse,” or even refer to “the opening of doors.”19 With the preposition κατά (“down,” etc.), it can then possibly mean “something which is spread downwards”20 vis-à-vis παραπέτασμα, “that which is spread before” a thing.21

Deissmann’s argument against Thayer,22 that the proximity of καταπέτασμα to παραπέτασμα in Hera’s temple inscription refutes an Alexandrian origin for the former term and thus demands that they be

---

17Aeschylus, *Ag.* 909; Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 541b.6; and possibly Sib. Or. 8.305.
19Liddell and Scott say a closer verbal form may be καταπέταννυμι, meaning to “spread out” or “spread over.” Its attestation, however, is extremely scarce, with the only two occurrences prior to the ninth century A.D. coming either in the first or second century A.D. (Plutarch, *Rom.* 5.5; Harpocration, *Lex. Atticos* 248.7).
21Cf. Liddell and Scott.
distinct terms, is convincing.\(^\text{23}\) In Deissmann’s opinion, \(καταπέτασμα\) was a technical term “connected with the apparatus of worship,” and he defines it literally as “that which is spread out downwards, that which hangs down.”\(^\text{24}\) Others simply designate it as a veil of the temple or tabernacle.\(^\text{25}\)

The etymology of \(καταπέτασμα\) perhaps tells us more about how it hung (downward)\(^\text{26}\) and where (cultic setting) than its particular function. Indeed, the term does not seem to occur in noncultic contexts until at least the eighth century A.D. By itself, the word seems to have no special meaning, though one should note its presence solely in cultic contexts before assuming it is synonymous with \(παραπέτασμα\), which was typically not used in cultic contexts, except in Hera’s inscription.\(^\text{27}\) Naturally, however, its significance becomes enhanced by the use of grammatical qualifiers in both the LXX and NT and how the

\(^{23}\)Deissmann, 101 n. 3.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 101; Schneider, 628.


\(^{26}\)Contra Hadas, 14, following R. Tramontano (La Lettera di Ariste a Filostrate [Naples: Ufficio succursale dell' civilità cattolica in Napoli, 1931]), who, in turn, follows Clermont-Ganneau, who argues the preposition suggests how veils were drawn (Le Dieu Satrape et Les Phéniciens dans le Péloponèse, 56-60). Pausanias, Descr. 5.12.4, speaks of the curtain “with Assyrian weaving and Phoenician purple,” which Antiochus presented to the temple of Zeus at Olympia, and he remarks on its peculiarity in being let down to the ground by cords instead of drawn upwards to the roof. It has been plausibly conjectured that this was the very curtain that Antiochus plundered from Jerusalem in 170 (Cf. 1 Macc 1.22). B. Celada insists that a \(παραπέτασμα\) unfolds, while a \(καταπέτασμα\) hangs downward (“El velo del Templo,” \(CB\) 15 [1958]: 110).

\(^{27}\)On line 26 of the inscription, we read \(παραπέτασμα\) \(δύο χαρακτική ποικίλα\) (“two ornate foreign curtains”). \(παραπέτασμα\) occurs as often as \(καταπέτασμα\), with an exhaustive TLG search revealing 32 references occurring through the end of the first century A.D. It is often used in reference to furnishing in a common home (Herodotus, \(Hist.\) 9.82.4; Menander, \(Dysk.\) 923, 930), a decoration (Aristophanes, \(Ran.\) 938), or an act of deception, concealing the truth (Demosthenes, \(1\) \(Steph.\) 19.1; Philo, \(QG\) 4.69.5) or covering an attribute (Plutarch, \(Trans. an.\) 471A:10), a skin (Plutarch, \(Reck. rat. aud.\) 41D:5), a curtain concealing a queen (Plutarch, \(Art.\) 5:3; here it is explicitly said to be pulled up, so that the queen was in view. This is perhaps revealing of the direction in which a \(παραπέτασμα\) worked) or the “awning” (not the sail) on a ship (Plutarch, \(Pomp.\) 24.3.7). Cf. also Aeschylus, \(Tet.\) 26 Fr. 212.39; Philolaus, Fr. 19.3; Aristophanes, Fr. 45.1; 611.1; 45.1; Plato, \(Prot.\) 316E.5; \(Pol.\) 279D.3; Antiphanes, Fr. 63.2; 327.2; Aeneas, \(Pol.\) 32.9.1; Menander, Fr. 336.9; 405-406.9; 1094.2; Fr. 6.14; 175.2; 336.9; 936.2; Alexis, Fr. 41.2; 340.2; Chrysippus, \(Fr. Log.\) 178.7; Diodorus Siculus, \(Bibl. HIs.\) 11.56.8.2; Plutarch, \(Rom.\) 29.8.3. Each of these occurrences indicate that, apart from the inscription at Hera’s temple, \(παραπέτασμα\) occurs exclusively in noncultic contexts.
καταπέτασμα is used in cultic life. It seems, then, that though a relatively rare word, καταπέτασμα is to be associated in some way with cultic life in antiquity. It has become for the Greek OT tradition a technical term for the hangings and veils of the tabernacle and temples.\(^{28}\)

\(^{28}\)See D. H. Madvig, “τὸ καταπέτασμα,” *NIDNTT*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 3:794. In only one occurrence (Num 4:5) is there mention of the καταπέτασμα being used as a “table-cover” as in Hera’s inscription, though that is referring to the same ῥηρ ("veil") being used for such a purpose.