Pillars of the Sacred:
Septuagint Words Between Biblical
Theology and Hellenistic culture

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"[D]er Satz ist die Mauer vor der Sprache des Originals,
Wörtlichkeit die Arkade."[1]

Walter Benjamin, in his celebrated essay on the Task of the Translator, makes an argument for regarding the word, not the sentence, as the basic element ("Urelement") of translation. Sentences are like a wall, blocking sight of the original text; words are like pillars in an arcade: they let the light come through. Like all of Benjamin's writing, his remarks on translation combine deep thought with high poetry in a way that is at once inspiring, and somewhat disconcerting: certainly current approaches to Bible translation follow rather a different path. But whatever the value of Benjamin's reflections in translation studies today, they fit the translation technique of the Septuagint as a glove. The Septuagint almost everywhere proceeds word for word: each Hebrew vocable has a counterpart in Greek; an effort is made to render Hebrew words (and roots) as much as possible with the same Greek word; and the Greek words most often figure in the same order as their Hebrew equivalents.

The translation method manifest in the Septuagint has often been depreciated. James Barr called it an "easy technique."[2] Many others

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[1] Walter Benjamin, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," in idem, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 50–62, quote on 59.

[2] James Barr, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations*, MSU XV (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 26.

speak of the Septuagint's tendency to calque the Hebrew text. In the approach underlying the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), developed by Cameron Boyd Taylor and Albert Pietersma, the translation is regarded as "vertical": the default tendency of the translator is so to speak to have the words descend from the Hebrew line to the Greek line in a virtual interlinear (disregarding the direction of writing).[3] The depreciation may be partially deserved. But it is important to realize that there is an upside to Septuagint translation technique. As Benjamin postulated, the attention to words and the neglect of the sentence make it relatively easy to go back to the original text. The Septuagint is "transparent," and lets the underlying Hebrew shine through. Here is a trivial example:

> Ἐν ἐμοί, κύριε, ἐν τίνι σώσω τὸν Ισραηλ;
> In me, Lord, in/with what shall I save Israel?
> (Jud 6:15)

This is not an elegant translation. A Greek speaker without Hebrew would surely have struggled to make sense out of it. But translating it back into Hebrew is child's play: בִּי אֲדֹנָי בַּמָּה אוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל "Excuse me, sir, how can I save Israel?"

Early readers show awareness of this quality of the Septuagint. Philo describes the achievement of the translators as follows:

> … in every case, exactly corresponding Greek words were employed to translate literally the appropriate Chaldaic words, being adapted with exceeding propriety to the matters which were to be explained; for just as I suppose the things which are proved in geometry and logic do not admit any variety of explanation, but the proposition which was set forth from the beginning remains unaltered, in like manner I conceive did these men find words precisely and literally corresponding to the things, which words were alone, or in the greatest possible degree, destined to explain with clearness and force the matters which it was desired to reveal.[4]

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[3] Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2007), xvii–xviii.

[4] *On the Life of Moses* 2,38–39.

Philo knew very little Hebrew (note how he calls it Chaldaic), but he correctly perceived the way the Septuagint focuses on words, not sentences. And he celebrates this translational approach.

What remains to be evaluated is the adequacy of the words. Philo claims near perfect equivalence between the Greek and the Hebrew. But from antiquity until today, Hebrew scholars have tended to disagree. Many Greek words that function as standard equivalents of Hebrew words do not seem to express the same meaning at all.

THE VOCABULARY OF THE SEPTUAGINT: PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before we start looking at some interesting divergences, let us briefly consider the vocabulary of the Septuagint as a whole.[5] Globally, the Greek words rendering the Hebrew text are relatively adequate. This is true particularly for everyday words, which make up a large proportion of any language: בית "house" is οἶκος, and הלך "to go" is πορεύομαι, etc. Even where the semantics of a Greek word appear to diverge from the Hebrew source, the divergence may be only apparent. By some quirk of circumstances, much of the language of the Septuagint does not accord with classical Greek, but reflects the vernacular of Hellenistic times.[6] When western scholars rediscovered the Septuagint, in the Renaissance, they were surprised to find many differences between biblical and classical Greek. Much of the vocabulary of the Septuagint—and the New Testament—differs from that of Plato or Thucydides. Perhaps the Jews spoke a peculiar dialect of Greek. Or perhaps the Holy Spirit prepared a special idiom for the expression of divine truths? At the end of the nineteenth century, these issues were put to rest. The discovery of a large

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[5] More extensive prolegomena and some sample studies may be found in Eberhard Bons and Jan Joosten, eds., *Septuagint Vocabulary: Pre-History, Usage, Reception*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 58 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011).

[6] See the recent review of literature in Stanley E. Porter, "History of Scholarship on the Language of the Septuagint," in *Die Sprache der Septuaginta / The Language of the Septuagint*, LXX.H 3 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2016), 15–38.

amount of documentary texts—ostraca, inscriptions, and, in particular, papyri—allowed Adolf Deissmann and others to show beyond doubt that the Septuagint (as well as the New Testament) habitually draws on non-literary forms of Greek.[7] The translators wrote Greek more or less the way they spoke it. The verb ἀγαπάω is not a *vox biblica* chosen especially to show that the love of which the Bible speaks is different from that of the world. It is the normal word for "to love" in Hellenistic Greek, which is slowly taking over from classical φιλέω. The choice of the Septuagint isn't a theological one, but a mere matter of register.[8] Many odd usages of the Septuagint—odd in the eyes of scholars familiar with classical literature—can be explained in the same way. The use of non-literary Greek is most probably to be explained from the translators' level of schooling: they wrote Greek as well as they were able. They were literate, and they mastered the kind of Greek they wrote very well, but they had not been trained in Greek letters.

Even after Deissmann, however, and after more recent research by John Lee, Anna Passoni dell'Acqua, James Aitken and others,[9] some lexical usages of the Septuagint remain unparalleled in non-Biblical Greek. The main factor accounting for the Septuagint's originalities is the difficulty of rendering Hebrew into Greek. Hebrew and Greek belong to unrelated language families. Moreover, the social, cultural, and religious horizon of the Hebrew Bible differs widely from that of Ptolemaic Egypt. As a result, the Septuagint translators were regularly at a loss how to render given Hebrew terms. They responded to the challenge in various manners. When a Hebrew word is wholly untranslatable it can simply be borrowed. For want of an English equivalent of the

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[7] See, e.g., Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901).

[8] See, e.g., S. P. Swinn, "Ἀγαπᾶν in the Septuagint," in *Melbourne Symposium on Septuagint Lexicography*, ed. Takamitsu Muraoka, SCS 28 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1990), 49–81.

[9] For an exhaustive overview of recent publications, see John A. L. Lee, "The Vocabulary of the Septuagint and Documentary Evidence," in *Handbuch zur Septuaginta/Handbook of the Septuagint, Vol. 3: Die Sprache der Septuaginta/The Language of the Septuagint*, eds. E. Bons and J. Joosten (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2016), 98–108.

word "churro," English and other languages use the Spanish one. Similarly, the Septuagint uses loanwords like χερουβιν for Hebrew כרובים "cherubs" and σίκλος for שקל "shekel." Incidentally, some of the Septuagint's loanwords, such as πασχα and σαββατα are from Aramaic, not Hebrew, showing that these words were borrowed, in a real-life setting, before the translation was begun. Another solution was to create new words in Greek: ערלה "foreskin" is rendered as ἀκροβυστία, and a legitimate altar is referred to as θυσιαστήριον, both words unattested in non-biblical Greek. There were Greek words for "foreskin" and "altar," but the Jewish context appears to have required the production of new ones.

Mostly, however, such drastic measures were eschewed and the translators made do with what the Greek language had to offer. This led to many mismatches. Often the choice of an equivalent is defensible globally, but raises problems in particular respects. A frequent problem is that a given Greek word may be well chosen to render certain meanings of a given Hebrew word, but not so well for other meanings. Since the Septuagint translators tend to "stereotype," i.e. to render a Hebrew word with the same Greek word throughout, this leads to problematic usages. Thus the Greek verb εὐλογέω "to speak well of" is an acceptable equivalent for Hebrew ברך "to bless" where it refers to humans "blessing" God: to bless God is, roughly, to praise him. However, were God blesses human beings or animals, εὐλογέω is odd in Greek. Nevertheless, it is the standard equivalent of ברך throughout. Another, milder, form of mismatch is when a Greek word correctly renders a Hebrew word, but brings in different connotations. In Gen 17:1, God commands Abram to be תמים "complete, whole, perfect." The word implies moral integrity. In the Septuagint תמים is translated as ἄμεμπτος "blameless, beyond reproach." The translation is tolerably exact, but it suggests, unlike the Hebrew, that perfection is something one acquires in the public arena. Abraham's perfection will be manifest in that no one will blame him (μέμφομαι).

In other cases, the mismatch reflects a divergent understanding of the Hebrew word. The vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible was already partly archaic by the time the Septuagint was begun. Many words were

no longer in use in spoken Hebrew, or had taken on a different meaning. A clear example of this is were Hebrew גר "resident alien" is translated with words—notably γειωρα—meaning "proselyte," thus importing a post-biblical meaning into the biblical text.[10] In many cases the motivation for the choice of equivalent is not immediately clear. Various proposals have been made to explain why the translators used διαθήκη, a word most often denoting a "will" or "testament," for ברית "covenant," but so far no hypothesis has been accepted widely.

Mismatches between Hebrew words and their standard Greek equivalents may alter the meaning of the biblical text radically, but this does not always happen. In some cases, indeed, it seems Greek ideas are imported into the text. Of course—as was pointedly argued by James Barr some 50 years ago—one should refrain from mixing up language and thought. But no one contests that language and thought are closely related. Uprightness is conceived of as integrity in the Hebrew text of Gen 17, but in terms of public approval in the Greek translation. The change may well be connected to differences of culture and mentality between Ancient Israel and the Hellenistic world. In other cases, however, the cultural influence seems to go in the opposite direction. The Greek language adapts to the Hebrew source text, whose meaning is consequently preserved. The constant use of the verb εὐλογέω in contexts requiring the meaning "to bless" leads to a reinterpretation of the Greek verb. In biblical Greek, εὐλογέω really does mean "to bless," as can be seen particularly in the case of texts originally written in Greek such as the Gospels. In Rom 12:14 εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς διώκοντας ὑμᾶς, means: "bless those who persecute you," not: "speak well of those who persecute you" as it would be in non-biblical Greek. The Greek language has been enriched with a new usage, imported from the biblical world.

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[10] The case of the Greek noun προσήλυτος is more complex. It is now likely that the word originally meant "immigrant" or something similar, see C. Jakob Butera and David M. Moffitt, "P.Duk. inv. 727: A Dispute with 'Proselytes' in Egypt," in *ZPE* 177 (2011): 201–206.

Two Case Studies: "Blood" and "Mercy"

Translation is a two-way street. It involves an exchange between the culture of the source text and that of the host society. Greek notions are brought into the scriptural text, and Hebrew notions rub off on the Greek language. It is tempting to schematize the process. But it is also important to realize that each Greek word of the Septuagint has its own story. In what follows, the dynamics of cultural exchange will be illustrated with two examples, the use of the word αἷμα in the Septuagint, and the rendering of Hebrew חסד "loving-kindness" with ἔλεος "pity."

Blood[11]

Semantic divergences are expected to occur with abstract terms expressing ideas or conceptions, but not with words designating concrete objects or substances. Nonetheless, even such words may pose a problem when they are used in a figurative meaning. The translation of Hebrew דם would seem to be straightforward: "blood" in Greek is αἷμα, there is no other word.[12] In the Septuagint, then, דם is regularly rendered with αἷμα. Exceptions are easily understood: in Proverbs, which is a relatively free translation unit, דם is sometime interpreted contextually. In Prov 28:17, for instance, דם נפש "blood of a person" is correctly rendered as φόνος "murder." In the Pentateuch, expressions such as "his blood is on his head" or "there is no blood to him," allocating guilt in capital cases, are paraphrased, usually with ἔνοχός ἐστιν "he is guilty." These same phrases are usually rendered literally in the other books: for example Ezek 33:4 τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ἔσται "his blood shall be on his head." These renderings show an increasing desire to render

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[11] This section is heavily indebted to the article on αἷμα prepared by Dirk Buchner for the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (for which see the conclusion below).

[12] The equivalence even extends to the grammar of the words: both דם and αἷμα can be put in the plural in order to express special nuances – the translator at times (though not always) exploits this possibility.

the Hebrew text word for word, but they may also indicate that the expressions could in fact be understood in Greek. Certainly the use of αἷμα in reference to murder and blood guilt is well attested in Greek literature. Note, for instance, Demosthenes' use of the phrase: ἐφ' αἵματι φεύγειν in the meaning: "to avoid trial for murder by going into exile" (Demosthenes, *Mid.* 105.7).

The lexical equivalence between דם and αἷμα is on the whole managed reasonably in the Septuagint. Both words refer to the blood of humans and animals. Both can stand for murder and blood guilt. They function well in sacrificial contexts where blood is assigned a symbolic value. Of course, one does not know whether Israelites and Greeks perceived the symbolic meaning of blood exactly in the same way. But certainly sacrificial blood was used in cleansing and expiatory rites in Greek religion as much as in ancient Israel. Both דם and αἷμα are used in reference to wine, and to the color red. Yet there is an important difference in the usage of these words. In Greek literature, alongside the figurative meaning of murder and bloodshed, which is paralleled in Hebrew as we saw, αἷμα is very often used in reference to kinship and genealogy. "Thou art of noble blood (αἵματός εἰς ἀγαθοῖο), dear child, that thou speakest thus" says Menelaus to Telemachus (*Od.* 4.611). This mode of expression is easily understood, since it is used also in English and other European languages: to be of someone's blood is to be related to him or her; to be of noble blood is to descend from aristocrats. This trope is completely unattested in biblical Hebrew. In Hebrew, blood relationships are expressed in terms of flesh, בשר or שאר: "Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh" says Judah when he wishes to save Joseph from being murdered by his brothers (Gen 37:27).

Now this disparity in the figurative usages of blood language would not necessarily cause problems to a translator. Where the Hebrew text uses דם the Septuagint translator uses αἷμα, with a few exceptions as we saw. Where the Hebrew text uses בשר or שאר in reference to kinship, the translator has a choice. He can render the Hebrew literally, with σάρξ "flesh" (as he does in most passages) or freely with forms of οἰκεῖος

"pertaining to the family" (as in the incest laws of Leviticus 18 and 20). But something else happens too. It is fascinating to observe that blood-as-kinship language "seeps in" to the Greek version in various ways. The trope of blood as relatedness appears to be so dominant in Greek culture that it cannot be kept out of the Greek Bible, even if the Hebrew gives no occasion to use it. I will indicate three separate areas where this process can be seen:

1) Firstly, the use of αἷμα in reference to blood relationships emerges, though very marginally, in the textual history of the Septuagint. In 2 Sam 21:2 the Septuagint in Rahlfs' edition refers to the Gibeonites as being ἐκ τοῦ λείμματος τοῦ Αμορραίου "from the remnant of the Amorites." The reading λείμματος is found only in two very late minuscules. The majority text has instead: ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Αμορραίου "from the blood (i.e. the race) of the Amorites." The Hebrew source text has יתר "remnant," indicating that the original reading must indeed be "remnant," the reading retained by Rahlfs in his edition. The variant reading αἵματος must have come into being by mistake: in the uncial writing, the alpha and the lambda are very similar, and epsilon-iota exchanges freely with simply iota in all Septuagint manuscripts. But it wasn't just a mistake: the variant text made good sense in Greek, which explains its success in nearly supplanting the original rendering.

   Something similar happens in marginal readings on Lev 18:6, 12, 13; 20:19. The Septuagint translated שאר "flesh" with forms of οἰκεῖος "pertaining to the family" in the laws on incest, as mentioned above. In Aquila (if the attribution is correct) this was corrected to λῖμμα "remnant," reflecting the reading שְׁאָר "remnant" instead of שְׁאֵר "flesh" as in the MT. In many marginal readings, however, the reading λιμμα turns up as αιμα "blood." Again, this is a mistake, but one that makes good sense: "No man shall have sex with anyone of his blood."

2) Secondly, the use of αἷμα in reference to kinship is found several times in the non-translated books of the Septuagint. In an addition to Esther, Esth 8:12[k], Haman is said to be ἀλλότριος τοῦ τῶν Περσῶν αἵματος "a foreigner to the blood of the Persians" (this explains why he's so wicked). Wis 7:2 says of humans that they are παγεὶς ἐν αἵματι ἐκ σπέρματος ἀνδρὸς "compacted of blood, from the seed of man" (this seems to link up with an idea, circulating in antiquity, that a person's blood was given by the mother). Finally, the usage is attested in Judith, a book that until

recently was regarded as a translation from Hebrew. Judith 9:4 refers to rape of Dina told in Gen 34 with the following words: "the sons loved by you... ἐβδελύξαντο μίασμα αἵματος αὐτῶν detested the defilement of their blood." The aspect underscored here is not the harm done to the person of Dina, but the tainting of Israel's bloodline.[13] This detail shows, with many other data that Judith is an original Greek composition, as is widely admitted today.

The non-translated books link up with the translated books in their style and subject matter. Judith is written in a kind of pseudo-Septuagintal patois de Canaan. Yet the authors, quite naturally, let some typically Greek expression slip in. The blood-as-kinship language exemplifies this phenomenon.

3) Thirdly, a question arises in regard to the expressions ὁ ἀγχιστεύων τὸ αἷμα (Num 35:12–27; Josh 20:3), ὁ ἀγχιστεύων τοῦ αἵματος (Deut 19:6, 12), and ἀγχιστεύς τοῦ αἵματος (2 Sam 14:11), all rendering Hebrew גאל הדם "the redeemer of the blood" – i.e. the person designated to execute a murderer. In Hebrew, of course, the blood here refers to the blood of the victim. But the Greek is different: ἀγχιστεύων and ἀγχιστεύς do not mean "redeemer," but "closest (relative)." "The one closest in regard to the blood" suggests the notion of kinship. Note that Philo, in paraphrasing the laws on asylum, refers to the redeemer as οἱ γένει προσήκοντες τῷ τεθνεῶτι "the relations by birth of the man who has been slain" and τῶν ἀφ᾽ αἵματος "his blood relations" (*Spec.* 1:160). Whether the translator thought of kinship when he wrote ὁ ἀγχιστεύων τοῦ αἵματος is uncertain. But Philo's paraphrases show that at reader coming to the Greek text without knowledge of Hebrew would naturally be drawn to this interpretation.

Translation is not a purely linguistic phenomenon. Language is bound up with wider cultural coordinates. Although the Septuagint translators followed the Hebrew text word-for-word, the Greek language itself weighed on the translation, so to speak.

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[13] See Judith H. Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 129.

חסד **"Loving-kindness" and** ἔλεος **"Pity"**[14]

More overtly theological issues are connected to our second example, the Septuagint rendering of חסד "loving-kindness" with ἔλεος "pity." The rendering is found throughout the corpus, although it intensifies over time: in the Pentateuch, the earliest part to be translated, חסד is translated with ἔλεος in little over half the time (12 cases out of 20), whereas in the other books the ratio increases to well above 90 per cent. The equivalence is surprising. חסד is a difficult word to translate, but it most certainly doesn't mean "pity" or "compassion." חסד expresses an attitude: "kindness" or "benevolence" approximate its meaning whereas ἔλεος designates a feeling provoked by a stimulus. חסד can be manifested between two parties of equal rank, while ἔλεος is necessarily exerted by a stronger party in favour of a weaker one. In light of these differences one wonders why the translators chose the Greek term to render the Hebrew one. It seems that χάρις "grace" or εὔνοια "goodwill" would have been a better choice.

Some scholars have sought to solve the problem by postulating a semantic shift in the Greek word.[15] In their view, ἔλεος in biblical Greek means more or less the same as חסד. But this is hard to sustain: alongside חסד, ἔλεος also renders the root רחם "to have compassion, to take pity." Moreover, the cognates ἐλεέω and ἐλεήμων keep their usual meaning in the Septuagint. It would be strange indeed if only ἔλεος had changed its meaning. As it seems, the mismatch was caused in this case on the Hebrew side. While biblical חסד means "kindness" etc., in post-biblical Hebrew the word took on the specific meaning of "act of charity." The earliest attestation of this meaning is in Sir 7:33, "Give gener-

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[14] For this section, see with more details Jan Joosten, "חסד, 'Benevolence', and ἔλεος, 'Pity': Reflections on their Lexical Equivalence in the Septuagint," in idem, *Collected Studies on the Septuagint: From Language to Interpretation and Beyond*, FAT 83 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 97–111.

[15] See, e.g., Albert Pietersma, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title: The Psalms* (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), xxii.

ously to all the living וגם ממת אל תמנע חסד and also from the dead do not withhold a charitable act (i.e., burial – as in Tobit)." In Rabbinic Hebrew this meaning is very frequent. If the Septuagint translators knew the word חסד in this meaning specifically, this may explain the rendering ἔλεος.

Whatever the background of the rendering, its effects are clearly felt in the translation. The skewed equivalence clearly affects the understanding of certain passages. One example will show the kind of divergence the mismatch may produce:

> כִּי חֶסֶד חָפַצְתִּי וְלֹא־זָבַח וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מֵעֹלוֹת
> For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God
> rather than burnt-offerings
> (Hos 6:6, NRSV)

The noun חסד here refers to the steadfast love, or piety, or faithfulness, of Israel toward God. This is clearly shown by the logic of the verse, and by the parallelism. This changes in the Greek translation, however:

> διότι ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν καὶ ἐπίγνωσιν θεοῦ ἢ ὁλοκαυτώματα
> For I want mercy and not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than
> whole burnt offerings.

Since God does not need his people to have mercy on him, the word ἔλεος must here mean mercy toward humankind. While in Hebrew, Hos 6:6 calls Israel to genuine piety instead of vain ritual, in Greek the verse spells out some sort of double command of love: have mercy on your neighbor, and know your God. The meaning expressed in Greek is excellent. It harmonizes well with the biblical context. But it is not the meaning expressed, in this verse, in Hebrew.

The difference is no doubt accidental. חסד is practically always translated as ἔλεος in the Minor Prophets: the translator did not choose the word here to make a theological point, he simply applied the standard equivalent. The difference was created by accident, but it became productive in turn. It is one of the forerunners of the double commandment of love as formulated in the Gospels. In Mark 12:32–33, the scribe who asked Jesus about the great commandment answers:

[32] You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; [33] and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength," and "to love one's neighbor as oneself," — *this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*

The main texts standing behind this statement are of course Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18. But Hos 6:6 is also in the background, as shown by the reference to "burnt offerings and sacrifices."

More globally, the semantic divergence between the two terms could be of theological relevance. Both חסד and ἔλεος most often appear in the Bible as divine attributes. The God "abounding in benevolence" (רב חסד) of the Hebrew Bible is not exactly the same as the God "of great mercy" (πολυέλεος) in the Septuagint. The terms imply two different images of God. It is true that the Hebrew Bible also attributes qualities such as compassion and pity to God, with the use of the roots רחם and חנן for example. Inversely, divine benevolence is of course present in the Greek Bible. Yet through the translation of חסד by ἔλεος, the notion of divine mercy receives a much more important place in the discourse about God in the Septuagint than in the Hebrew Bible. The condescending character of God's attitude toward his creature is underscored. Moreover, in giving such importance to a divine emotion, the Septuagint seems to be more open than the Hebrew Bible to an analysis of the interiority, the psychology, of God.

The theological inflection in favor of the notion of "pity" is rooted in a linguistic accident. It would seem, however, that it is fully embraced by the Greek translators, who never hesitate to attribute pity to God. On the contrary. One book that stands out in this regard is Isaiah, a relatively free translation unit. Where the translation becomes less literal, the ideas of the translator are more easily identified. It is interesting, therefore, to observe that, in the Septuagint of Isaiah, ἔλεος and ἐλεέω are not only employed to translate the word חסד, but also the roots רחם, נחם, חנן, and חמל, whose meaning are indeed "to have pity," and in addition a series of words of different meaning: צדקה, "justice" (1:27; 28:17; 56:1; 59:16), אמת, "truth" (38:18), ישע, "salvation" (45:8) and רצון, "good-will" (60:10). In addition, the notion of "mercy" is in-

troduced freely in the Greek text in 44:23; 52:8; 59:2 and 64:3. All these cases, where the translator has accentuated or added this notion, concern the mercy of God. In this way, the Septuagint of Isaiah shows that God's pity was not, in the Jewish community of Alexandria, a strange idea imposed for better or for worse by the Hebrew scriptures but, on the contrary, a central and cherished notion belonging to their theology.

Conclusion

Although only a small number of examples could be developed, I hope they suffice to show how the study of the vocabulary of the Septuagint can throw light on the process of translation. Although the Septuagint translators generally render their source text word-for-word, a lot of interpretation is going on within the words themselves. Not all of this interpretation reflects conscious decisions on the part of the translators. Nor can all of it be easily understood. What did the Hebrew word mean to the translators? What meaning did they intend the Greek equivalent to express? Why did they make the lexical choices they made? Often the answer to these questions is uncertain. One is led to speculate, and at times one is led to admit one doesn't know. But even so, the investigation of lexical equivalences provides rich data about the version and its sociocultural background.

The vocabulary of the Septuagint is a fascinating object of study. So fascinating that a small group of scholar set up a research project in order to study it. *The Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint*, or *HTLS*, of which I am editor-in-chief together with Eberhard Bons, offers a platform for reflection on translation and interpretation of Scripture in antiquity. The *HTLS*, to be published by Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, will propose extended studies on the history of some 450 words whose usage is in one way or another characteristic of the Septuagint. In principle, each article will explore:

- the meaning of the word or word-group in classical literature and documentary sources;
- the use of the word in the Septuagint with special attention to divergences from non-biblical Greek in meaning and usage;
- the reception of the biblical word, with its special meaning or use, in Jewish and Christian writings in Greek—Philo, Josephus, the New Testament, apocryphal writings and Church Fathers—up to the end of the second century CE.

The first volume, covering words beginning with the letters alpha to gamma, is projected to appear in 2018, and a sample edition of six articles has just been published.

In Walter Benjamin's model, the words of the Septuagint are like pillars in an arcade, revealing the source text that stands behind the translation. This is an important aspect: the word-for-word translation technique typifying the Septuagint retraces the source text and renders it present to the reader. But one should not be tricked into thinking that the Septuagint is a perfect replica of the Hebrew text. The words follow the source text step by step, but they do not represent them in a neutral way. In the perspective of translation as interpretation, the words are less like pillars and more like windows, allowing a view of the life and times of the translators. Some of the windows are obscured. But enough can be seen to suggest an outline of the Jewish community standing behind the Septuagint.