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THEOLOGICAL AMELIORATIVE TRANSLATIONS IN LXX ISAIAH 6

ABSTRACT

This article argues that LXX Isaiah 6 displays certain “theological ameliorative” renderings that change the sense of the text in relation to its Hebrew counterpart. These ameliorations include avoiding anthropomorphisms, heightening divine uniqueness, greatness and transcendence, among other elements. Seen in the broader context of the translator’s overall approach, these transformations may be conscious or accidental, but even when apparently deliberate, do not seem to presuppose a desire to alter the meaning of the original text, but to communicate it. They are prompted by cues found in the text itself and are shaped by the translator’s own interpretive milieu. The analysis could contribute to the discussion about the place of LXX Isaiah in a “theology of the Septuagint”.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are small but significant differences between the extant Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX) texts of Isaiah 6. Some interest has been devoted to LXX Isa 6:9-13, particularly in connection with the use of these verses in the New Testament, most notably by Evans (1989:61-68). However, there is room for systematic exegetical studies of the ensemble of chapter 6 in Greek. This article seeks to fill this gap. The delimitation of the pericope as spanning the entire chapter is justified by the fact that it represents a coherent, self-contained unit, with clearly distinguishable limits within the flow of the book of Isaiah. In spite of important divergences in their understanding of the composition of the passage and its function in the book, modern commentators unanimously highlight that it occupies a distinctive place, as shown most recently by Williamson (2018).

The exegetical comparison between the MT and LXX versions of Isaiah 6 allows us to see their differences in light of the particular characteristics of the translator’s approach, such as the attempt to convey the meaning of the original clearly while producing an idiomatically good text in Greek, with attention to the conventions of Hellenistic literature. We can also detect certain liberty regarding the form and content of the Hebrew text, here manifested primarily in the form of “theological ameliorative translations”, that is, renderings that alter the content of the original text to

clarify or highlight certain theological conceptions that the translator might have considered important. This terminology is adopted from Baer (2001). My interest is in the functioning of these renderings in the broad panorama of the translator's method.

The plan of our study is as follows. First, I present a parallel translation of the MT and LXX versions of Isaiah 6. The translation of both passages is fairly literalistic and aims at highlighting features of each version in its original language, rather than producing idiomatic English versions. Secondly, I briefly discuss some general aspects of the translator's technique displayed in the chapter. Thirdly, I focus on the theologically significant differences. Finally, I offer some general remarks regarding theological exegesis in LXX Isaiah.¹

2. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

6:1

	MT	LXX
	בשנת־מות המלך עזיהו	<i>Kaì ἐγένετο</i>
	ואראה את־אדני ישב על־כסא	<i>τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ οὗ ἀπέθανεν Οζίας ὁ βασιλεύς</i>
	רם ונשא	<i>εἶδον τὸν κύριον καθήμενον ἐπὶ θρόνου</i>
	ושוליו מלאים את־ההיכל	<i>ὑψηλοῦ καὶ ἐπηρμένου</i>
		<i>καὶ πλήρης ὁ οἶκος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ</i>
		<i>And it came about</i>
In the year of the death of king Uzziah,		in the year when Uzziah, the king, died;
I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne		I saw the Lord sitting upon
high and lifted up;		a high and exalted throne;
And his hem filled the temple.		and the house was full of his glory.

1 A thorough methodology for the study of passages in LXX Isaiah was developed by Van der Kooij (1998:1-19). This method has been critically analyzed in detail by De Sousa (2010a:13-40). Some of the difficulties discussed are the conception of the nature of the "contextual" reading practices of the Isaiah translation, and the relationship between these reading practices and the idea of "actualization". More recently, Van der Kooij (2008) has proposed a more nuanced view of the theology of the translator, arguing for a multilayered process of actualizing interpretation.

6:2

MT LXX

שׂרפֿיִם עֲמֻדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ	καὶ σεραφιν εἰστήκεισαν κύκλω αὐτοῦ
שֵׁשׁ כַּנְפִים שֵׁשׁ כַּנְפִים לְאֶחָד	ἕξ πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνὶ καὶ ἕξ πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνὶ
בְּשֵׁתִים יָכַסָּה פָּנָיו	καὶ ταῖς μὲν δυσὶν κατεκάλυπτον τὸ πρόσωπον
וּבְשֵׁתִים יָכַסָּה רַגְלָיו	καὶ ταῖς δυσὶν κατεκάλυπτον τοὺς πόδας
וּבְשֵׁתִים יְעוֹפֶף	καὶ ταῖς δυσὶν ἐπέταντο

Seraphim stood above him;
six wings, six wings to each;
with two he covered his face,
and with two he covered his feet,
and with two he flew.

And Seraphim stood around him;
six wings to each, and six wings to each;
and with two, they covered the face,
and with two they covered the feet,
and with two they flew.

6:3

MT LXX

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר	καὶ ἐκέκραγον ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον καὶ ἔλεγον
קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת	Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος σαβαωθ
מְלֵא כְלֵי־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ	πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ

And one cried to the other and said:
Holy, Holy, Holy (is) Yahweh of hosts,
all the earth is filled with his glory.

And they cried one to the other and they said:
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Sabaoth,
all the earth is full of his glory.

6:4

MT LXX

וַיַּעֲזוּ אֲמוֹת הַסָּפִים	καὶ ἐπήρθη τὸ ὑπέρθυρον
מִקוֹל הַקּוֹרָא	ἀπὸ τῆς φωνῆς ἧς ἐκέκραγον
וְהַבַּיִת יִמְלֵא עָשָׁן	καὶ ὁ οἶκος ἐπλήσθη καπνοῦ

And the foundations of the threshold shook
at the voice of the one crying;
And the house was filled with smoke.

And the lintel was lifted up at the voice with
which they cried, and the house was filled
with smoke.

6:5

MT LXX

וְאָמַר אֱוִילִי כִי־נִדְמִיתִי	καὶ εἶπα ὦ τάλαις ἐγὼ ὅτι κατανένυγμαί
כִּי אִישׁ טִמְאַ־שִׁפְתַּיִם אֲנִי	ὅτι ἄνθρωπος ὢν καὶ ἀκάθαρτα χεῖλη ἔχων
וּבִתּוֹךְ עַם־טִמְאַ־שִׁפְתַּיִם אֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב	ἐν μέσῳ λαοῦ ἀκάθαρτα χεῖλη ἔχοντος ἐγὼ οἰκῶ

כי את־המלך יהוה צבאות ראו עיני *καὶ τὸν βασιλέα κύριον σαβαωθ εἶδον τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μου*

And I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone,
for I am a man unclean of lips,
and in the midst of a people unclean of lips I
dwell,
for the king Yahweh of hosts my eyes have
seen.”

And I said, “Oh wretched I am for I am
pierced, for I am a man, and unclean lips I
have, in the midst of a people that has unclean
lips I dwell,
and the king Lord Sabaoth I saw with my
eyes.”

6:6

MT LXX

ויעף אלי אחד מן־השרפים *καὶ ἀπεστάλη πρὸς με ἐν τῶν σεραφιν*
ובידו רצפה *καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ εἶχεν ἄνθρακα*
במלקחים לקח מעל המזבח *ὃν τῇ λαβίδι ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου*

And one of the Seraphim flew toward me,
and in his hand (he had) a burning coal
which he took from upon the altar with tongs.

And one of the Seraphim was sent to me,
and in his hand he had a burning coal
which he took from the altar with tongs.

6:7

MT LXX

ויגע על־פי ויאמר *καὶ ἤψατο τοῦ στόματός μου καὶ εἶπεν*
הנה נגע זה על־שפת־ך *Ἴδού ἤψατο τοῦτο τῶν χειλέων σου*
וסר עונך *καὶ ἀφελεί τὰς ἀνομίας σου*
וחטאתך תכפר *καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου περικαθαριεῖ*

And he touched my mouth and said:
“Behold, this touched your lips,
and your iniquity is taken away
and your sin atoned for.”

And he touched my mouth and said:
“Behold, this has touched your lips,
and it will remove your lawlessness
and purify your sins.”

6:8

MT LXX

ואשמע את־קול אדני אומר *καὶ ἤκουσα τῆς φωνῆς κυρίου λέγοντος*
את־מי אשלח ומי ילך־לנו *τίνα ἀποστείλω, καὶ τίς πορεύσεται πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον;*
ואמר הנני שלחני *καὶ εἶπα Ἴδού εἰμι ἐγώ· ἀπόστειλόν με*

And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying,*

“Who shall I send, and who shall go for us?” “Whom shall I send, and who shall go to this people?
 And I said “Here I am, send me.” And I said “Behold, I am (here): send me.”

6:9

MT	LXX
ויאמר לך ואמרת לעם הזה שמעו שמוע ואל-תבינו וראו ראו ואל-תדעו	και ειπεν Πορεύθητι και ειπὸν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ Ἄκοῦ ἄκούσετε και οὐ μὴ συνῆτε και βλέποντες βλέψετε και οὐ μὴ ἴδητε
And he said, “Go and say to this people, Hear, hear, and do not understand And see, see, and do not know.”	And he said, “Go and say to this people ‘Hearing, you shall hear and not understand And seeing you shall see and not perceive.’”

6:10

MT	LXX
השמן לב-העם הזה ואזניו הכבד ועיניו השע פן-יראה בעיניו ובאזניו ישמע ולבבו יבין ושב ורפא לו	ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου και τοῖς ὠσίν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν και τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς και τοῖς ὠσίν ἀκούσωσιν και τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν και ἐπιστρέψωσιν και ἰάσομαι αὐτούς
Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes and with their ears hear and their heart understand and turn and heal them.	For the heart of this people has become dull and with their ears they hear with difficulty and they have closed their eyes lest they would see with the eyes and hear with the ears and with the heart understand and turn so I will heal them.

6:11

MT	LXX
ויאמר עד-מתי אדני ויאמר עד אשר אם-שאו ערים מאין יושב ובתים מאין אדם והאדמה תשאה שממה	και ειπα “Εως πότε, κύριε; και ειπεν “Εως ἂν ἐρημωθῶσιν πόλεις παρὰ τὸ μὴ κατοικεῖσθαι και οἴκοι παρὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀνθρώπους και ἡ γῆ καταλειφθήσεται ἔρημος
And I said, “How long, Lord?” And he said:	And I said, “Until when, Lord?” And he said:

<p>“Until the cities lay waste so there is no inhabitant, and the houses so there is no man and the ground is laid waste, a desolation.”</p>	<p>“Until cities are made desert from not being inhabited and houses from there not being men and the land shall be left a desert.”</p>
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6:12

MT LXX

<p>ורחק יהוה את־האדם ורבה העזובה בקרב הארץ</p>	<p>καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μακρυνεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ οἱ καταλειφθέντες πληθυνθήσονται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς</p>
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<p>And the Lord sends man far away and (there is) a great forsaking in the midst of the land.</p>	<p>and after these God will send the men far away and those who remain shall be multiplied upon the land.</p>
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6:13

MT LXX

<p>ועוד בה עשריה ושבה והיתה לבער כאלה וכאלון אשר בשלכת מצבת במ זרע קדש מצבתה</p>	<p>καὶ ἔτι ἐπ’ αὐτῆς ἔστιν τὸ ἐπιδέκατον καὶ πάλιν ἔσται εἰς προνομήν ὡς τερέβινθος καὶ ὡς βάλανος ὅταν ἐκπέσῃ ἀπὸ τῆς θήκης αὐτῆς</p>
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<p>And yet in it (shall be) a tenth, and it shall return and shall be for burning, like a terebinth or like an oak, which when it sheds, a stalk in them the holy seed (is) her stalk.</p>	<p>And still upon her is the tenth, and again it shall be for foraging as the terebinth and as the acorn when it falls from its husk.²</p>
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3. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE

There is enough proximity between the MT and LXX versions of Isaiah 6 to warrant the view that the translator worked with a *Vorlage* that is close to a proto-Masoretic form of the text, with some measure of freedom. This accords with the general scholarly consensus regarding LXX Isaiah as a whole. As we shall see, there are aspects of the Greek text that can be

2 My translation of this verse is derived from Van der Kooij (2012, 2014). The imagery of an acorn falling from its “husk” or “sheath” seems to better convey the sense of the Greek than the image of a fallen “acorn tree” presented in *NETS*.

explained by a *Vorlage* that contains small divergences vis-à-vis the MT. Yet, the most significant theological differences, which I will discuss below, are most likely due to translational choices than to a different source text.

Most of the differences between the two versions are additions or syntactical changes that aim at producing a good idiomatic version in Greek. These include, for instance, the addition of *καὶ ἐγένετο* at the beginning of 6:1, which aligns the Greek text with the conventions of Hellenistic Jewish narrative. In LXX Isaiah, the phrase *καὶ ἐγένετο* appears 9 times (6:1; 7:1; 12:2; 36:1; 37:1; 38:4; 42:22; 48:19; 63:8). In 7:1; 36:1; 37:1; and 38:1, *καὶ ἐγένετο* is the equivalent of *וַיְהִי* introducing a narrative, following a standard practice in the Greek versions. *Καὶ ἐγένετο* is the most basic way of introducing narratives throughout the LXX, as well as in the New Testament, undoubtedly under the influence of LXX usage. Ziegler (1934:62) suggests that the *Vorlage* of LXX Isaiah might have contained *וַיְהִי* at this point, but there is no textual support for this proposal.

Throughout the chapter we find small adjustments that preserve or highlight its narrative flow, such as the frequent insertion of *καί* (for instance, in verse 2). Other changes seem to serve the goal of clarification, as in the supply of the verb *εἶχεν* and the relative pronoun *ὃν* in verse 6. It is also worth mentioning the unique use of *ὦ τάλας* in verse 5, which seems to indicate the translator's desire to offer a well-crafted Greek text, with a distinctive literary flavor – and incidentally points to the translator's familiarity with literary classical Greek. The form *ὦ τάλας* is frequent in classical literature (cf. Euripedes' *Fragments* 122, 717; Sophocles' *Ajax* 1025; Pindar's *Fragment* 157). It does not render *וַיֹּאבֵד* elsewhere in the LXX, where *οὐαί* is usually employed (cf. LXX Num 21:29; 1 Kgdms 4:7-8; Isa 3:9, 11; 24:16; Jer 4:13).³

In the same verse, two other features stand out. The first is the use of the verb *κατανύσσω*, which in the LXX can be used metaphorically to denote being “pierced” with grief, or it can also denote being silent. In LXX Gen 34:7 *κατανύσσω* renders *בצב* to denote the distress of Dinah's brothers. This sense of grief is also attested in Ps 109(108):16 (*כאה*), Sir 12:12, 14:1, 20:21, 47:20, Sus 1:10, Theod Dan 10:15 (*אם*), and Acts 2:37. 3 Kgdms (21)20:27, has an explanatory addition in which the verb denotes Ahab's repentance, just before it renders *כנע* in verse 29. In Lev 10:3, it renders

3 A particularly interesting example is Jer 4:31, where *וַיִּינֹא לִי* is rendered by *οἴμμοι ἐγώ*. 4 Macc 8,17 has the form *ὦ τάλανες ἡμεῖς*. Ziegler (1934:108) points out that *τάλας* appears in Wis 15:14 and 4 Macc 12:4.

דמם, with reference to Aaron's keeping silent. The sense of keeping silent also appears in LXX Pss 4:4, 30:13 (29:12), 35(34):15 (דמם), and Isa 47:5 (דומם).⁴

Another issue is the rendering ὅτι ἄνθρωπος ὢν καὶ ἀκάθαρτα χεῖλη ἔχων, which could conceivably be understood as a literal rendering of כִּי אִישׁ טְמֵאָה שְׁפִתָּי אֲנֹכִי, if ὢν is taken to represent the emphatic אֲנֹכִי and καί is taken to be either an intensifier or a copula. While ἄνθρωπος ὢν is a perfectly grammatical way of expressing אִישׁ אֲנֹכִי, it is also possible to read the Greek as a pair of coordinated clauses “For being a man *and* having unclean lips ...” If this is what the translator intended, it can indicate that, in his conception, the simple quality of being human renders one unfit to be in the presence of divinity. This conception is reminiscent of the contempt for bodily existence attested in Hellenistic Jewish Philosophy (e.g. Philo).

Regarding theological and religious vocabulary, the translator employs mostly standard equivalents such as θυσιαστήριον for מִזְבֵּחַ (v. 6), ἀνομία for עוֹן and ἁμαρτία for חַטָּא (v. 7), which are common throughout the LXX. Yet, there are also some unique vocabulary choices. For instance, כִּפֵּר, which is more commonly rendered by ἰλάσκεσθαι, is translated with περικαθαρίζειν in verse 7, the only instance in the entire LXX corpus.⁵ The translator employs peculiar constructions, such as κύριος σαβαωθ (vv. 3, 5). *Sabaoth* is a transcription of the Hebrew צְבָאוֹת, which appears exclusively in the expression יהוה צְבָאוֹת. It is a preferred term in LXX Isaiah, which accounts for 53 occurrences out of a total of 66 in the Greek versions.

The rendering of הִכַּל by οἶκος in 6:1 is also noteworthy. The equivalence is not well attested in the LXX outside Isaiah.⁶ Yet, it is the most frequent equivalence in LXX Isaiah, where the translator uses οἶκος in four of the five occurrences of הִכַּל (6:1; 13:22; 39:7; 44:28). The only exception occurs in 66:6, where the more common equivalent ναός is used.

4 A curious case is Gen 27:38, where the LXX adds a clause highlighting Isaac's reaction to Jacob's deceit of Esau: κατανυχθέντος δὲ Ἰσαακ. It is not certain whether this gloss indicates that Isaac was “pierced with grief” or “silent”.

5 כִּפֵּר is sometimes translated as ἐκκαθαρίζειν (LXX Deut 32:43), καθαρίζειν (LXX Exod 29:37; 30:10), and ἀποκαθαίρειν (LXX Prov 15:27[16:6]). The verb περικαθαρίζειν is scarcely attested, appearing in Lev 19:23 (rendering עָרַל), in an addition to LXX Deut 20:12 (according to A and B), and in LXX Deut 30:6 (rendering מוֹל).

6 Cf. LXX 2 Chron 29:16; Est 3:6,10; 4:1; 5:14-16; 6:5; Neh 6:11; Mic 1:2; Zech 6:12,14-15; and Dan 5:2,5. In the recension of Daniel according to Theodotion, we see it also in 1:4; 5:5; and 6:18.

Interestingly, there is the possibility that chapter 66 might have undergone an early recension (Baer 2010). This could suggest that the Isaiah translator followed a specific tradition that preferred the term οἶκος to designate the temple. It is also noteworthy that in Isa 6:4, the Temple is called בית “house”, and there we find the literal translation οἶκος. This shows that both the immediate context of a passage as well as interpretive traditions may influence the choices of the Isaiah translator.

The influence of traditional religious and technical vocabulary can also be felt in verse 13, although there are differences in interpretation. Seeligmann (1948:45) argues that the translation of עשריה by ἐπιδέκατον is derived from sacrificial terminology “which, in its turn, had adopted the word in a figurative sense, from the economic vocabulary of Egyptian Hellenism, where it was understood to mean as much as: additional payment, interest, and capital increment”. Van der Kooij (2012) understands ἐπιδέκατον as the technical term “tithe”, in connection with the functioning of the temple. This proposal tallies with his contextual interpretation of the final verses of the chapter (see below).

Overall, the general characteristics of LXX Isaiah 6 point to a desire to present the content of the Hebrew text with clarity and sensitivity regarding its target language. In the process, the translator served himself of standard equivalences, lexical traditions, and his own considerable command of the Greek language and its literary conventions.

4. THEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND AMELIORATIONS

In light of the general characteristics discussed above, we can have a better understanding of the most distinctive theological elements of LXX Isaiah 6.

4.1 *Stress on the Transcendence of God*

In 6:1, the phrase וּשְׁלֵוֹ מִלְאִים אֶת־הַהֵיכָל is rendered by καὶ πλήρης ὁ οἶκος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ. It is clear that the root שׁוּל refers to the hem of a robe, a skirt or a piece of garment (Exod 28:33-34; 39:24-26; Jer 13:22: 26; Lam 1:9; Nah 3:5). While the observations of Driver (1971) give a fresh perspective on the prophet’s perception of the meaning of the term, the basic apprehension of it as “hem”, remains unchanged. It is unlikely that the use of δόξα to render שׁוּל indicates ignorance of the meaning of the Hebrew word. The translator seems to have taken the entire Hebrew phrase as a metaphor for God’s glory, and his rendering functions well as an explanation of what he saw as its meaning.

It is likely that the chosen phrase was prompted by verse 3, where we read that πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ “all the earth is full of his glory”. This phrase not only provides a suitable parallel to the image of verse one, but it also contains one of the translator’s favored terms. Brockington (1951) has demonstrated that the Isaiah translator showed a marked preference for the word δόξα and employed it for a number of different Hebrew equivalents. It appears 68 times in the book, only 28 of which corresponding to the standard Hebrew equivalent כבוד.⁷ As noted by Brockington (1951:26-28), this term seems to have had a considerable importance in the translator’s overall theological understanding of God and his redemptive actions, and was often prompted by contextual clues.⁸

Thus, the translator read the mention of God’s hem as a metaphor for his glory, and offered an explicative translation of its perceived sense, using a phrase drawn from its immediate literary context. The choice of the phrase seems to have been prompted by its function within the pericope, as well as by the presence of a term that was theologically meaningful to the translator.

This rendering could also have been encouraged by a desire to avoid an anthropomorphic reference to God in human clothing.⁹ A qualification is necessary. Fritsch (1943) identified a systematic anti-anthropomorphic tendency in the Greek Pentateuch. He later argued that the same tendency is not identifiable in LXX Isaiah (Fritsch 1960). Van der Kooij (2016:567) shares this view. My suggestion of an isolated instance of anti-anthropomorphism does not necessarily speak against this consensus. In light of the complex character of LXX Isaiah, the identification of isolated theological readings does not necessarily imply a *Tendenz*, as already argued by De Sousa (2010b). My concern is not to argue for a consistent anti-anthropomorphism in LXX Isaiah, but to point to the possible interjection of a theological sensibility, well attested in early Judaism, in

7 He notes that in the translated books of the LXX, δόξα appears about 270 times. In 180 of these instances it corresponds to the Hebrew כבוד. There is thus a significant proportion of the usage of δόξα for other Hebrew equivalents, but this is more prominent in Isaiah.

8 A telling example is the free rendering of 4:2, where we read that “But in that day God shall shine in counsel with glory upon the earth”. Brockington aptly notes that this latter rendering was prompted by the reference to the theophanic manifestation of God in the pillar of cloud and fire in 4:5.

9 For a discussion of the avoidance of anthropomorphism and the rendering of metaphors, see Olofsson (1990).

the work of the translator, even if the immediate context of a passage (in this example, verse 3) or readings found in other texts, played a more significant role in his method.

This is also the case in verse 2, which narrates the flight of the seraphim.¹⁰ The rendering of the Hebrew מִמַּעַל (“above”) by the Greek κύκλω (“around”) is a subtle change that could serve the purpose of avoiding the notion that the seraphim could be above God. Yet, this reading needs to be considered in light of the use of κύκλω elsewhere. The word appears in depictions of kings surrounded by an entourage of soldiers and servants (1 Kgdms 26:5, 7; 3 Kgdms 11:8, 11; Song 3:7; Ezek 12:14). It also appears in doxological depictions of God surrounded by cosmic elements or by his servants in LXX Psalms (17:12; 49:3; 88:9; 96:2).

Thus, verses 1 and 2 seem to offer slightly “ameliorative” translations that in one way or another enhance and reinforce the sense of God’s transcendence, greatness, and uniqueness. These ameliorations, however, are “embedded” in renderings that reflect a global concern of the translator, namely, to produce a Greek text that is not just internally coherent, but that is also harmonious with other Hellenistic Jewish texts.

In this connection, another noticeable change occurs in verse 8, where the divine question אֵת־מִי אֲשַׁלַּח וּמִי יֵלֶךְ־לָנוּ (“Whom shall I send, and who shall go *for us*?”) becomes Τίνα ἀποστείλω, καὶ τίς πορεύσεται πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον (“Whom shall I send and who shall go *to this people*?”). It is conceivable that the translator misread לָנוּ for לָגִי, or that this is what he actually had in his *Vorlage*, as suggested by Wildberger (1991:250). We can also explain this rendering as influenced by the phrase לְעַם הַזֶּה in verse 9, which produces a more coherent text. This choice also effectively avoids the plural suffix in the prepositional form, thus eliminating any plurality in the first-person phrase. Accidentally or not, the Greek text stresses the uniqueness of God and safeguards against any problematic implications regarding monotheism. As we have seen in the case of verse 1, we have

10 The Hebrew שֵׁרָפִים is transliterated into *σεραφιν*, in 6:2 and 6:6. Van der Kooij & Wilk (2011:2519) mention that in 14:29 and 30:6 verbal forms of the root שָׂרַף are dully translated. The transliteration indicates that the translator does not represent roots mechanically but approaches lexical items in context. It could also indicate that in chapter 6 the translator is employing what was already a current term to designate these beings. The ending in *-ιν* (instead of *-ιμ*) is, for Seeligmann (1948:65), evidence of the influence of Aramaic in the translator’s milieu. The question of Aramaisms in LXX Isaiah has been studied further by Byun (2017).

another instance in which the reading of a verse that is apparently influenced by a phrase in the near context produces theological differences between the versions. The degree of intentionality of this type of occurrence could be an interesting subject of further investigation.

4.2 *Stress on the Righteousness of God and the Wickedness of the People*

It is in the context of these theological “ameliorations” that we need to see the ways in which the translator brings into focus the role of God in salvation. In verse 6, the MT reads *ויעף אלי אחד מן־השרפים* (“And one of the Seraphim *flew* toward me”), whereas in the LXX we have *καὶ ἀπεστάλη πρὸς με ἐν τῶν σεραφιν* (“And one of the Seraphin *was sent* to me”). The rendering of the active form *ויעף* (“flew”) with the passive *ἀπεστάλη* (“was sent”) could be just a reflection of the understanding of the Seraphim as God’s servants. At the same time, the reading emphasizes the saving activity of God, who sends the angel.

The translator’s tendency to stress divine initiative and responsibility for redemption is clear from other texts. Three examples will suffice. The first is in 1:18, where the Hebrew *אם־יהיו חטאיכם כשנים כשלג ילבינו אם־יאדימו* *כתולע כצמר יהיו* (“Though your sins be like scarlet, like snow *they shall become white*; though they be red as crimson, like wool *they shall be*”) is rendered by *καὶ ἐὰν ὦσιν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι ὑμῶν ὡς φοινικοῦν, ὡς χιόνα λευκανῶ, ἐὰν δὲ ὦσιν ὡς κόκκινον, ὡς ἔριον λευκανῶ* (“and though your sins are like scarlet, like snow *I shall make them white*; and though they be as crimson, like wool *I shall make them white*”). There is no direct linguistic or textual justification for the repeated use of the first person *λευκανῶ* to render the third person plural forms *ילבינו* and *יהיו*, other than the translator’s desire to stress God’s role in the purification of his people.

Another example appears in 62:1, where in the context of YHWH’s pledge to redeem Jerusalem, the LXX renders the parallel phrases *עד־יצדק בנורה וישועתה כלפיד יבער* (“until *her righteousness* goes forth as brightness and *her salvation* burns like a torch”) with *ἕως ἂν ἐξέλθῃ ὡς φῶς ἡ δικαιοσύνη μου, τὸ δὲ σωτήριόν μου ὡς λαμπὰς καυθήσεται* (“until the light of *my righteousness* is manifest and *my salvation* burns like a torch”). The translator here changes the possessive markers and focuses again on the saving activity of God.

The third example appears in 63:9. Here, for the Hebrew *ומלאך פניו הושיעם* (“and the angel of his presence saved them”) the LXX has *ἐκ πάσης θλίψεως οὐ πρέσβυς οὐδὲ ἄγγελος ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς κύριος ἔσωσεν αὐτούς* (“of their troubles, not an elder or angel, but the Lord himself saved them”). The rendering was likely prompted by reading the *ketib* *אֵל* as a negation, instead

of the *qere* לָ, which points to the proximity between the translator's *Vorlage* and the proto-MT form of the text. This reading cued another occasion to stress the idea that the people had been rescued by no other than the Lord himself.¹¹

As the translator emphasizes the divine role in salvation, he also stresses two other notions. He seeks to exempt God from any charge that he might be the originator of evil and emphasizes the wickedness of human beings. In verse 9, the translator renders שָׁמַעוּ שְׁמוֹעַ by a combination of a dative noun with a verb in the future tense, and וּרְאוּ רְאוּ by a combination of participle and future.¹² The change begins to lay the stress for the obduracy of the people on their own shoulders.¹³ This notion is further developed in verse 10, where the charge for the obduracy of the people is removed from divine agency and placed squarely within the realm of human responsibility.¹⁴ The MT of the verse has a clear tripartite chiasmic structure

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- 11 In his discussion of the existence of early Jewish expectations of salvation without mediation, Horbury (1998:80), connects LXX Isa 63:9 to 34:5, which reads ἰδοὺ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ἀνταποδώσει αὐτὸς ἧξει καὶ σώσει ἡμᾶς (“Behold, our God shall requite, he himself shall save us”), and the Passover Haggadah, where the affirmation in Deut 26:8, that “the Lord brought us forth” receives the supplement לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי שליח (“not by the hand of an angel and not by the hand of a seraph and not by the hand of a legate”).
- 12 In the Hebrew text of verse 9, the combination of imperative + infinitive most likely denotes the continuous nature of the verb (“keep on hearing”, “keep on seeing”). Cf. Joüon & Muraoka (2006:§ 1231). The combination of words with the same root is often used for emphasis, and maybe the translator sought to represent his reading of the Hebrew as typical infinitive absolute combinations. The LXX representation of this Hebrew feature is diverse (cf. LXX Gen 31:15; Num 11:15; 23:11; Josh 24:10; Jer 22:10; Job 13:17; 37:2; 4 Kgdms 5:11).
- 13 The use of οἶδα with the sense of understanding is common in the LXX and Hellenistic Greek. Cf. LXX Gen 48:19; Exod 1:8.
- 14 Verse 10 is notoriously difficult, which is evidenced even in the Qumran manuscript and exegetical tradition. Kutscher (1974:344) argues that, in 1QIsa^a, the nun was omitted accidentally in השם. He also suggests that the scribe might have read here שמם instead of שמן (p. 292). The change would have been prompted by the frequent combination of שמם + לב, as in Ps 143:4. Barthélemy (1986:40) is open to this possibility but finally follows the proposal that this change is connected to three other changes in the section 6:9-10, namely two changes of אל to על in verse 9 and the reading בלבבו in verse 10, offered by

in which the prophet is commanded to harden the hearts and close the ears and eyes of the people. The translation alters the tenor of the verse primarily in the way it renders the three *hiphil* imperatives that form the core of the prophet's charge. השמן is rendered by the aorist passive $\epsilon\pi\alpha\chi\acute{\upsilon}\nu\theta\eta$ and הכבד by the combination of the 3rd person plural aorist active $\eta\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\nu$ with the adverb $\beta\alpha\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma$ – in this case, the Hebrew אזניו was rendered by the dative construction $\tau\omicron\iota\zeta \acute{\omega}\sigma\iota\nu \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\omega}\nu$.¹⁵ עשה is rendered by another 3rd person plural aorist active ($\epsilon\kappa\acute{\alpha}\mu\mu\sigma\alpha\nu$).¹⁶ Other differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of the verse may be due to linguistic factors or to a different *Vorlage*.¹⁷

The exegetical transformations continue in verse 12.¹⁸ The insertion of $\mu\epsilon\tau\grave{\alpha} \tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ is worthy of note. The expression normally translates אחר or

Brownlee (1964:186). These features indicate for Brownlee – and for Barthélemy – that the reason behind the change is exegetical.

- 15 It is possible that the translator here was influenced by Deut 32:15 in his choice of $\epsilon\pi\alpha\chi\acute{\upsilon}\nu\theta\eta$. Cf. Ziegler (1934:108). Barthélemy (1986:40) points out that the relationship with the Deuteronomy passage is striking as in that context $\epsilon\pi\alpha\chi\acute{\upsilon}\nu\theta\eta$ corresponds to עבית and not to שמנת . He notes further that LXX Deut 32:15 renders שמנת by $\epsilon\lambda\iota\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\eta$, and that Symmachus, conscious of the LXX's mistranslation, corrects the rendering of the latter in Isa 6:10.
- 16 Brockington (1973) has suggested that השמן , הכבד , and עשה could be read, not as *hiphil* imperatives, but as *hophal* perfects. This is not a new suggestion, however, and can be traced back to 16th century commentators. For a survey and critique of this view, cf. Barthélemy (1986:36).
- 17 The last clause in the Hebrew text of verse 10 is difficult and has generated much debate among commentators. The first difficulty is the MT reading ולבבו , which breaks the parallel structure of the clauses. 1QIsa^a has בלבבו , which is also the reading of the LXX ($\tau\eta\ \kappa\alpha\rho\delta\iota\alpha$), Vulgate (*corde suo*), Targum (בלִיבֵהוּן), and Peshitta (ܠܒܒܗܘܢ). Since MT has the *lectio difficilior* it is possible that all these readings are secondary attempts to address this difficulty. It is also possible, however, that the MT was corrupted in the course of transmission. The phrase לו ושב ורפא is also problematic. The first question to be asked is who is the subject of שוב ? The LXX assumes that it is the people, hence the plural rendering $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\rho\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\omega\sigma\iota$. As for רפא , the form of the verb makes a decision difficult. The most natural interpretation is that רפא also has the people as subject, with לו functioning with a reflexive sense, as proposed also by Wildberger (1991:250).
- 18 On verse 11, which remains close to the Hebrew just a few passing notes are necessary. First, Wildberger (1991:250-251) argues that the Greek indicates the reading השאר instead of the *niphal* תשא of the MT, which to him does not fit

אחר כן to indicate subsequent events (LXX Gen 23:19; Exod 5:1; Josh 24:5; Judg 1:9; 3 Kgdms 17:17; Ps 48[49]:14. Cf. also the mistranslation in Ps 15[16]:4). It is also used in some legal contexts (LXX Lev 15:28; Num 4:15; 5:26). In light of the insertion of *καὶ ἐγένετο* in verse 1, the addition is in line with the translator's attempt to create a narrative flow in Greek.

The expression also has significant use in prophetic or oracular passages (LXX Gen 41:30-31; Num 32:22; Deut 21:13; Hos 3:5; Joel 3:1; Isa 1:26; Jer 16:16; 21:7; Ep Jer 1:50; Ezek 20:39; Dan [Theod] 2:29, 45). While it normally indicates a simple sequence of events (Sir 3:31; LXX Jer 5:31), it could have acquired eschatological nuances. In the context of LXX Isa 6:12, it creates a temporal sequence that is more marked than in the Hebrew text. This could be related to a particular theological conception characteristic of the Isaiah translator, according to which God's favor towards his people is manifested after a limited period of wrath and judgment, as argued by De Sousa (2010a:58-63).

In 6:12, the first clause after *μετὰ ταῦτα* is translated very closely to the Hebrew, so it is difficult to ascertain any theological interference in the translation. The idea that the translator sees here an expulsion of the gentiles from Judea, as argued by Baer (2006:36-38), is certainly plausible, but not demonstrable. The second clause offers a wider window into the translator's method and ideology. The translator seems to have understood *ורבה* as a *wegatal* form, with *העזובה* as its subject. The expression *οἱ καταλειφθέντες* could be an explanatory rendering of *העזובה* ("the abandoned one"), understood as a metaphor of "those who remain".

Thus, Seeligmann (1948:116) could be right in arguing that "the word *עזובה* is not conceived in its abstract but in its concrete meaning, *i.e.* the community which was left behind and spared". Comparing this verse with other occurrences of participial forms of *καταλείπω* in texts such as LXX Isa 4:2; 11:16 (cf. 28:5); 19:24-25; 24:14; 25:1; 52:13; LXX Ps 36[37]:20; 44:23; and 49:1-5, he sees in the term a key theological notion for the Isaiah translator, one which arose as he "combined Isaiah's expectations regarding the future with his own". In general lines, this notion centers on the vindication of the "remnant", the community of those who survive the

well with the *qal* *אש* and is thus to be preferred. Cf. Ottley (1906:136). Secondly, the rendering *καταλειφθήσεται* for *תשא* (possibly reading *תשא*?) speaks against a special theological significance for the verb *καταλείπω* elsewhere. Finally, the choice of forms derived from *ἐρημ-* (a verb for *אש* and a noun for *שממה*), shows that there is no immediate concern to precisely reproduce form.

divine judgment and who will increase in numbers and power and who will enjoy an exalted position vis-à-vis the gentiles.¹⁹

The consequent adjustment of the verb רבב to the plural πληθυνθήσονται is in keeping with a tendency seen elsewhere in the chapter. In verse 2, the MT has the singular form of the verbs כסה (2x), and ען. In the LXX these verbs are represented by the plural forms κατεκάλυπτον and ἐπέταντο. The same phenomenon occurs again in verse 3, where the plural verb ἐκέκραγον corresponds to the singular form of the verb קרא in the MT, and in 7:1. It should nevertheless be borne in mind that in all these cases, the manuscript evidence from Qumran supports the LXX reading, which could simply indicate a different *Vorlage* rather than a translational move. Also, the use of a passive form is not strictly justified by the form of the Hebrew verb, but it is coherent with the translator's accent on the agency of God in the restoration of his people.

Verse 13 is considerably shorter in Greek than in Hebrew.²⁰ Its particularities are often seen as hermeneutically significant, although there is no consensus regarding their meaning. For instance, Troxel (2002) reads the ensemble of verses 11-13 as enhancing the focus on the motif of economic oppression. Van der Kooij (2012) develops his idea of ἐπιδέκατον as the technical term “tithé” (which we have encountered above), together with other aspects of the verse, and proposes a global reading of v. 13 as an example of anti-priestly polemics. In spite of the fundamental differences between these two proposals, they acknowledge the fundamental continuity that exists in the final verses of the pericope in Greek.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis above indicates that the key concern of the Greek translator of Isaiah 6 was to communicate the meaning of his source text clearly. This accounts for key linguistic features of the chapter, such as the additions that

19 For Seeligmann (1948:117-118), the use of πληθυνθήσονται here and in the free rendering of 14:2, in connection with γιώρας = גיורא, indicates that, for the translator, the multiplication of the remnant is to be achieved by means of the proselytising of gentiles.

20 The absence of any equivalent for the phrase זרע קדש מצבתה in the LXX could point to a different *Vorlage*. Williamson (2018:32, 86-88), however, while arguing that the verse is a late addition to the MT, sees it as part of the *Vorlage* of LXX Isaiah. Van der Vorm-Crouchs (2014:473-474) explains the minus as resulting from parablepsis.

seek to preserve or highlight the flow of the narrative (vv. 1, 2) or clarify difficult syntax (v. 6). Within this main goal, there are attempts to embellish or give a more “literary” flavor to the text (v. 5). The use of vocabulary indicates both the adoption of standard equivalences and some unique or innovative readings (vv. 3, 5, 6, 7). It also gives clues on how some choices are influenced by tradition and by cues in the text, often simultaneously (vv. 1, 3).

Occasionally, these renderings seem to encompass certain “ameliorations”, which would have “enhanced” the text’s message by: avoiding anthropomorphisms (v. 1), heightening divine greatness and transcendence (v. 2); stressing monotheism (v. 8); emphasizing the initiative and sovereignty of God in redemption (v. 6); exempting God from the sin and obduracy of the people (vv. 9, 10); depicting a particular understanding of what is entailed in the salvation of the faithful “remnant” (vv. 12, 13).

These transformations do not seem to indicate a desire to “alter” the meaning of the text, but to communicate it. In addition, even the degree to which these translations represent an intentional or conscious move is open to question. This analysis should add some nuance to the proposals of authors such as Troxel (2008) and Wagner (2013), who, while correctly stressing the translator’s commitment to his *Vorlage*, draw a sharp and somewhat anachronistic dichotomy between theological interpretation (which includes actualization and other theological adaptations) and the “faithful” or literal communication of the text’s meaning. The primacy that these authors give to linguistic analysis is an important methodological principle, but it must be held in tandem with sensibility to the specificities of the hermeneutics of LXX Isaiah, as proposed by Van der Kooij (2008) and De Sousa (2010a).

Secondly, it shows that the study of the theology of the Greek Isaiah can go beyond the often-stressed category of “actualization” and explore other dimensions of the version’s theological outlook. In the present case, the analysis indicates that one possible question to be further explored is how the Greek Isaiah (as well as other LXX books) may help us to perceive the development of Early Jewish monotheism in a Hellenistic context.²¹ The

21 Some of the theological characteristics identified in our text find parallels in other LXX books. For instance, Cook (2013) identifies a consistent tendency in LXX Proverbs to stress the primacy of the Mosaic law to the extent that the theology of this book seems to be more “conservative” than that of its Hebrew counterpart. In his view, this signals a response to Hellenizing tendencies that

conceptions displayed in LXX Isaiah 6 fit well with historical trends highlighted in studies such as those of Mach (1999), Bauckham (2007), and Hurtado (2013). Also, Kister (2006) has pointed out that the question of monotheism was key to certain developments in Early Jewish hermeneutical debates. LXX Isaiah 6 gives us some perspective on how translation practices could be similarly affected.

Finally, the analysis shows that LXX Isaiah can be a strong dialogue partner in a discussion about a “theology of the LXX”. Yet, following the proposal of Cook (2017), much work still needs to be done on hermeneutical issues related to this version. To properly consider the theological dimension of an LXX text, its overall linguistic and hermeneutical character must be taken into account. When this is done, it becomes clear that theology is but one of the many factors interwoven in the complex task of translation.

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threatened the identity of Palestinian Jews. Some similar “radicalizing” elements can be found throughout LXX Isaiah, but in our present stage of knowledge of the version, we are not yet in a position to be able to see consistent tendencies in the version.

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