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Why a Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint?

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Abstract: Since 2010, an international team has been working on the first comprehensive lexicon dedicated to Septuagint Greek, which aims to fill an important gap in the fields of ancient philology and religious studies. The entries include all the relevant word groups used in the translation of the Hebrew Bible, Greek glosses that captured central concepts from classical Hebrew terms and sought to establish suitable expression for certain *Realien*. This lexicon aims to give a wide perspective on selected lemmas, taking the legacy of classical Greek literature as a starting point and subsequently analyzing the diffusion and usage of the word up through early Christian Literature. This paper will address some of the questions that are being faced by the team and will explore the innovative approach of this lexicographical project through the presentation of samples.

Keywords: Greek Bible, HTLS, lexicography, Hellenistic Greek, translation

1 Introduction

In a volume about the understudied profession of the lexicographer, it seems legitimate also to consider the present-day remains of this noble craft. Is there room for new lexicographical projects on ancient languages in the era of accessible information, and, if so, how and why should scholars approach them? This paper aims to present to classical scholars generally and to lexicography enthusiasts in particular some of the issues faced by modern lexicographers by sharing the concrete experience of the ongoing research project, the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (HTLS). This project is ambitious, since it aims to create a new lexicon of a selected (yet by no means short) list of words from the Greek Bible, one of the most prominent texts of Western history, and to trace the development of their meaning(s) from their first appearance in Greek literature to their usage in the Septuagint and, finally, to their reception in the New Testament and patristic literature.

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Scholars gathered around this impressive goal at the start of the new millennium and have begun to compile a new lexicon of Septuagint Greek, one that meets the needs of different specialists (more on this later) and provides in-depth analysis of terms that have been crucial to philosophy and theology for centuries. Last year, thanks to a huge number of dedicated scholars and under the aegis of the editor, the project has reached its first goal, the publication of the opening volume of the lexicon.¹ Along with a theoretical framework, the state of the question that guides this project is presented in the first part of this article, to advocate for the necessity of an enterprise such as the HTLS. In the second part, some examples of the results of the HTLS and their relevance to Septuagint studies are explained.

2 Septuagint Studies at a Crossroad

The question posed by this article is deeply rooted in broad debates around the ‘setting of the scene’ of the Greek translation of the Bible. Understanding the Septuagint in its original context has haunted biblical research for decades. The issue is complex, yet crucial. Two factors are at issue: on the one hand, the status of the text within the history of Judaism (largely recognized in its value by many scholars), and on the other, more recently, its status as a Greek text within the history of Greek literature. The breadth of the questions implicitly calls for an interdisciplinary effort: theologians, historians, anthropologists and philologists should collaborate to examine the historicity of the text as well as its multiple meanings and the history of its reception. Where the contextualization of the Septuagint in Greek literature is concerned, much work remains to be done: Septuagint studies are still underdeveloped in Classics departments, even though it has been largely recognized that the text provides scholars with a tremendous amount of linguistic information and is one of the richest sources for understanding the development of Hellenistic Greek.² It is a real pity that few students enrolled in Classics engage directly with the text of the Septuagint, though many encounter contemporary Greek authors of the Alexandrian milieu in their syllabi.³ For this reason, before attempting to answer the article’s main question, it is relevant to introduce briefly

1 Bons 2020.

2 See e.g. Bons/Joosten 2016, especially parts I and II, 15–128.

3 There are some exceptions: a brief survey on the latest courses in Greek Philology and Literature in Italian universities shows that a small group of major Classics departments include the Septuagint in their syllabi (e.g. Bologna, Padua, Milan, Rome and Naples). Hopefully, the appearance of updated tools will encourage students and teachers to explore this text further.

Septuagint studies and their present status. When we speak of the Septuagint we are referring, by and large, not only to the translation of the Pentateuch, the legendary account of which is to be found in the *Letter of Aristeas*; we are also referring to other texts, which span from the translation of the canonical books of the Old Testament from Hebrew (the Pentateuch, but also prophetic and historical books that were translated in later times), as well as various apocryphal or deuterocanonical writings, some translated into and some composed in Greek. These texts were produced across an extended period of time (roughly from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE) and testify to the diffusion and relevance of koine Greek as a means of cultural assimilation⁴. Until recently, research on the Septuagint has tended to play a secondary role in the study of Old Testament exegesis. Bons traces a clear historical line as to what extent the Septuagint has been overshadowed by concurrent forms of the Bible in the quest for a presumed theological truth.⁵ Modern research is more concerned with the historicity of the text than with its stability, and there is a growing interest in the plurality of forms of Scripture.⁶ From a philological point of view, the *monstrum* of the original as bearer of intrinsic truth has, for some time, given way to a view that embraces the plurality of the versions and the historical value of each. When researching the books of the Hebrew Bible, i.e. the Jewish Scriptures or Christian Old Testament, textual scholars focused first and foremost on the Masoretic Hebrew text, though this vocalized text is the result of a later process of textual harmonization which began in the first centuries CE and thus postdates the Greek Jewish Scriptures, strictly speaking. This process produced a standardized text that could be copied and distributed across Jewish communities. Given the basic interest of biblical research in what, after Jerome, came to be called the *Hebraica veritas*, modern biblical scholars initially used the Septuagint for two main reasons; first, to correct the Masoretic text when it appears obscure, untranslatable or clearly erroneous,⁷ and second, to interpret the New

4 Stuckenbruck 2011, 177 describes the Septuagint as “an ancient collection of Jewish writings in Greek which includes translations of all the books which in their Latin form are also recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as belonging to the Bible”. The canonical status of the books differs depending on religious confession, and scholars must keep in mind how the Bible is a “complex phenomenon” (*ibidem*). On “Septuagint” as a definition, cf. e.g. Wright 2008, 104–105, for whom the term, when used to indicate the whole corpus of the Greek Bible and not the translation of the Pentateuch alone, brings about the imposition of an anachronistic theological category, one that represents Christian reception, more than the original Jewish context. The usage is nonetheless widespread among scholars.

5 Bons 2020.

6 Cf. Bons 2020a. See also Bons/Prinzivalli/Vinel 2017.

7 The mere use of the LXX for textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible is cited by Bons 2020a, 6 as a process that does not consider how the Septuagint “does undeniably have its own literary and the-

Testament, which used the Septuagint to formulate Christological and ecclesiological concepts and often quoted the text.⁸ The HTLS does not deny the importance of this historical development. On the contrary, it includes the early reception of the Septuagint in its dedicated lexicon, but at the same time it builds a solid framework for placing the language of the Septuagint in the context in which it was first conceived. It is perhaps time to find new answers to the question of what is gained by a detailed study of the Septuagint, and the structure of the HTLS may encourage new perspectives.

Septuagint studies are undergoing a period of renewed interest:⁹ many current projects are aiming to provide the scholarly community with fundamental tools for further research.¹⁰ Translations into modern languages have been especially successful,¹¹ but it is still necessary to prepare more adequate instruments, editions, translations, and commentaries, as well as grammars and dictionaries with a specific focus on the Septuagint as a corpus.¹² Amidst this happy revival, the fields of both Biblical Studies and Classics seem to need an interdisciplinary tool to enhance collaboration and share discipline-specific competencies. In the field of Biblical Studies, the entire collection of translated and non-translated texts within the Greek Jewish Scriptures represents a document of Hellenistic Judaism, in light of its specific literary and theological features. Some texts are rooted in a

ological features and [...] deserves detailed study in its own right". At the same time, it is possible that some *loci* of the Septuagint are witnesses to a Hebrew *Vorlage* different from the Masoretic text. On this issue, see Tov 2001, especially 135–148.

8 For the Septuagint as a source for the New Testament, see e.g. McLay 2003 and Law 2013.

9 Wright 2008, 103 begins a contribution on modern translations of the Septuagint by noting: "The Septuagint has become cool – or at least a bit hip". The article is a short but exhaustive introduction to the projects in Septuagint research current at the time.

10 To cite only some prominent examples, a complete critical edition of the Septuagint is being completed by the Septuaginta Unternehmen in Göttingen; the same goes for the fragments of Origen's Hexapla in the Hexapla Project (hexapla.org). The International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS), founded in 1968, is active with continuous excellent publications, as is the Center for LXX and Textual Criticism in Leuven and The Greek Bible in the Graeco-Roman World in Reading. For a general overview of current trends, see Ross 2022.

11 See the French "Bible d'Alexandrie" (ongoing), the English "New English Translation of the Septuagint" (finalized in 2004), the German "Septuaginta Deutsch" (2004), the Spanish "La Biblia Griega Septuaginta" (2008–2013) and the Italian "La Bibbia dei Settanta" (2012–2016). On the distinctive traits of the different translations mentioned here, see Ausloos/Cook/García Martínez/Lemmelijn/Vervenne 2008.

12 See the remark by Muraoka 2009, VII, in the introduction to his lexicon, where he wonders "how much longer the serious scientific study of this document [*scil.* the Septuagint] could be contemplated without the proper tools of the trade such as a dictionary and a grammar". See also Muraoka 2016.

social and cultural environment that is different from that of Palestinian Judaism. With respect to certain theological details, the Septuagint turns out to be a kind of ‘update’ of the existing Hebrew Scriptures and to serve the purposes and needs of the diaspora; the study of this context is already relevant *per se*. Moreover, from the point of view of language and conceptualization, the Septuagint turns out to be a textual source not only for New Testament authors, but also for the so-called intertestamentary literature, as well as Philo, Josephus and the Greek Church fathers. The Septuagint must therefore have had an impact on the diffusion of Jewish and Christian beliefs in the ancient world that should not be underestimated. At the same time, the Septuagint is a Greek text within the milieu of Greek literature, and from this point of view new avenues of research could be helpful. These would include the study of specific vocabulary nestled in the text as a key source for the assessment of Hellenistic Greek; amidst the ruins of many Hellenistic works, the Septuagint, with its continuous manuscript tradition, has preserved considerable traces of the linguistic usage of its time. Regrettably, classicists continue to be prejudiced against approaching the Septuagint, perhaps because they tend to deem it as poorly written and too heavily dependent on its Semitic source text.¹³ The peculiar style of translated Septuagint books has in fact been neglected as ‘biblical Greek’, or ‘translationese’, expressions usually associated, especially from a syntactical perspective, with the idea of poor quality, style, and therefore scholarly value.¹⁴ We owe already to Deismann the point that this is not the case,¹⁵ and recently the comparison with contemporary literature and documents has shown how Septuagint Greek is often a faithful witness to koine usage. Special attention should be paid to the level of lexical choices, since these are indicative of the particular commitments of the translators as they rendered the Scriptures of their tradition into a new language. With vocabulary, more than with syntax and discourse structure, translators could use their inventiveness without sacrificing faithfulness to the source text: they forged a number of Greek words into meanings previously unknown, expanding the target language and adapting it to their cultural needs.¹⁶ Even if we concede the fact that vocabulary is the first area subjected to linguistic contact, the creativity and flexibility demonstrated by Septuagint translators remains impressive. Some

13 Cf. the remarks by Boyd-Taylor 2001, 47, who still lingers on the prejudice that studying the vocabulary of the Septuagint *per se* “involves one in the category error of treating a translation-corpus as if it were compositional literature”.

14 This view is strongly opposed (among others) by Harl/Doigniez 2001, 9, who wish to exclude the possibility that the Septuagint be written in “un grec bâtard”. Cf. Muraoka 2009, IX.

15 Cf. Bons 2020, XI. On Deismann and his fundamental research on the Greek of the Septuagint, see the recent volume Breytenbach/Markschies 2019.

16 See Rajak 2009, 162–175.

examples can be found in the second part of this paper, but broadly, the corpus evidences a marked effort to appropriate concepts, as well as to adapt language to convey messages in Greek specific to the Jewish *Weltanschauung*, remote to Greek culture, especially where the divine is concerned.¹⁷ It is, therefore, in the vocabulary that the Septuagint's navigation between two cultural domains – 'staying Jewish' and 'going Greek' – is most evident.¹⁸ Studying the vocabulary of the Septuagint, as opposed to morphology or syntax (in which the source text has a more palpable impact) can produce excellent results and enhance our understanding of the text. Scholars in the field of Classics can benefit from the study of the Septuagint insofar as it gives insight into the evolution of Greek beyond the classical period. While the study of papyri and inscriptions is consistently increasing our understanding of this evolution, more and more words, expressions and even syntactical choices in biblical Greek appear to have been widespread among native speakers of Greek in the Hellenistic diaspora.¹⁹ In light of such findings, the marginalization of the Septuagint within the history of the Greek language is no longer tenable. The comparison made by Muraoka between the Septuagint and Luther's German version of the Bible is perfectly fitting: no one would exclude Luther's work from German literature just because it is a translation.²⁰ The degree of Hellenization reached by Jews in the Hellenistic diaspora is perhaps best illustrated at the lexical level. This transformation probably occurred for two fundamental reasons: on the one hand, the high level of integration of Jewish communities within Hellenistic cultural spaces and their interest in participating in these spaces, and on the other the permeability and malleability of the Greek language, which permits a considerable variety of word formations and multiple interpretive possibilities of the same word, especially in the case of compounds. Of course, there are many differences that any skilled reader can observe between the vocabularies of classical and Septuagint Greek. These depend on the frequency of occurrence of certain roots or on the selection of secondary or new meanings that help actualize and interpret Scripture through translation. This process has been noted in the lexicon as pertaining to "semantic changes affecting the vocabulary",²¹ and is a constitutive part of the

17 As Emmanuel Levinas would put it, the translators have succeeded in "dire en grec les choses juives"; cf. Dorival 1996, 527–529.

18 Cf. Rajak 2009, 64–92 and 125–176.

19 See e.g. Passoni Dall'Acqua 2019. For the specific role of inscriptions in Septuagint research, see Aitken 2014a.

20 Muraoka 2008, against Boyd Taylor 2001.

21 Bons 2020, XI–XII.

coherent creation of a “language of the patria”.²² If this variance in the meanings of Greek words can be puzzling to exegetes,²³ it should perhaps be considered a sign of the richness of Greek by scholars of the language. Although something of the original sense of the respective words may have been lost in translation, much more was to be gained by linguistic renovation and by the intention of making Jewish ideas available to a Hellenistic public (be it Jewish or not).

In sum, current biblical research is becoming increasingly aware of the specific place of the Septuagint in both the evolution of the Bible and ancient Jewish and Christian theology. A *desideratum* remains for classicists to engage further with this text and to examine its relevance for the history of the Greek language.

3 A New Tool of/for Septuagint Research

The Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint is aimed at bridging a gap in the instruments available for studying the language of the text. For most of the last century, the only dictionary available has been the *Novus thesaurus philologico-criticus*, by Schleusner.²⁴ Though the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, created in the late 1960s, was strongly committed to lexicographical research,²⁵ the first dictionaries based on the corpus only appeared much later. In the first half of the 1990s, Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie produced a *Greek English-Lexicon of the Septuagint* (LEH) in two volumes, undoubtedly still very useful for Septuagint research.²⁶ It provides the English equivalents of all the words attested in the text, together with statistical data about their distribution. To some extent this dictionary is comparable to the more recent *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* by Muraoka (2009). But while both dictionaries take into account the complete vocabulary of the Septuagint, they only provide the most basic information. These dictionaries are certainly essential to the modern translator, and, unlike Schleusner who mostly concentrated on the Hebrew hidden behind the Septuagint, their authors have the important merit of focusing on the Septuagint as a Greek text.²⁷ Their work is nonetheless strictly limited to the Septuagintal corpus,

22 Cf. Rajak 2009, 11: “This vocabulary, far from being a mere series of solutions to challenges of translation, represents the translators’ intensely creative way of melding and contemporizing their different thought worlds”.

23 See Bons 2020, XII.

24 Schleusner 1820–1821.

25 See Boyd-Taylor 2001, 47–49.

26 Lust/Einikel/Hauspie 1992 and 1996.

27 See Lust 1990.

so much so that any interest in the materials available to the LXX translators or the later development of the Septuagint's vocabulary needs to be satisfied by consulting other works. The limits of these works are probably set by the ambition of covering all the words attested in the Septuagint. A different organizational choice was made for the recent lexicographical project that produced the Demetrios database. Last updated in 2005, it contains around 400 Septuagint words, selected because they make special reference to politics and administration; this particular focus was conceived as part of an effort to conceptualize the Septuagint in the Graeco-Roman diaspora. Some critical thoughts on the corpus-related lexicographical approach to the Septuagint have been presented by Boyd-Taylor: his argument is that it is not relevant to produce a lexicon based on a translated text, since it cannot provide information on the norm of the target language.²⁸ The HTLS partly responds to this criticism by widening the scope of the dictionary to include the evolution of what can be considered the norms within the usage of a single word. It is true that both the LEH and Muraoka fail to provide the user with comprehensive information about the history of Septuagint words prior to their employment in the translation, about the usage of those same words in non-biblical Greek, or about their possible impact on later Jewish and Christian literature. The HTLS is thus a corpus-based tool, which does not limit itself to the corpus, but rather broadens the field of analysis and places each word in a *continuum* across Greek literature.

The editor of the HTLS describes the dictionary as “historical in its method, theological in its subject matter”.²⁹ The aim is to follow a historical methodology to trace the diachronic development of the meanings of a given word, providing detailed information on how the word was used in ancient Greek sources from its first attestation onwards (with a special paragraph on documentary usage in papyri and inscriptions, both of which have repeatedly proven useful for contextualizing the Greek of the Bible). At the same time, the editor is aware that any concept expressed in the Bible must have something to do with theological thought. Though the Bible undeniably participates in (and often sets the foundation for) theological discourse, however, there is no desire for exegesis in the dictionary: if an interpretation of the words is always necessary to the lexicographer, not all interpretations are bound to be exegetical.³⁰

Another reason why the new lexicon proves useful is that, irrespective of whether or not a word is addressed by the available dictionaries, there have recently been significant updates across Greek lexicography, all of which are refer-

28 Boyd-Taylor 2001, 47. Cf. also Muraoka 2008, for his response to these critical views.

29 Bons 2020, XII.

30 Cf. Muraoka 2008, 227, citing the seemingly opposing opinion of Boyd-Taylor 2001.

enced in the HTLS. Progress remains ongoing in all fields related to the Septuagint, and the lexicon seeks to convey this activity by citing all recent achievements of scholarship. If it is true that one of the greatest *desiderata* of Septuagint lexicography is to have access to updated bibliographies,³¹ the HTLS might be a good place to start. Finally, there is a need for a research tool that covers a wide range of words and word groups from the Septuagint in depth and with a historical mindset, analyzing both their Greek background and their reception in later Jewish and Christian thought. The expected audience of the lexicon is therefore broad and includes theologians, historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and, last but not least, classicists.

4 HTLS Paragraphs at a Glimpse

Each article in the HTLS is the result of new and independent research based on the entire corpus of evidence. Occurrences of a given word are carefully read, selected and sorted with the aid of the newest critical editions of the texts considered, as well as commentaries and relevant bibliography. In a typical article, the evidence is organized into paragraphs as follows:

1. Greek Literature
2. Papyri and Inscriptions
3. Septuagint
4. Jewish Literature in Greek
5. New Testament
6. Early Christian Literature

The original research presented in each paragraph goes through the evidence while keeping an eye on what is relevant to Septuagint scholarship, thus stressing similarities as well as differences between Septuagint usage and that of the broader ancient Greek corpus. No lemma is a mere repetition of what can be found in other dictionaries, nor a bare list of meanings, but rather the reader finds a reasoned review of the history of a word with a focus on what would have sounded familiar to Septuagint translators.³² Each word is investigated in its textual history to explore how much the Septuagint has influenced or affected the meaning of a given semantic family. In fact, a detailed study of the lexicon of the Septuagint not only

³¹ See Lee 2008.

³² In this sense, the HTLS follows the line proposed by Muraoka 2009, XII, where he points out the need for “definitions” and not “translation equivalents”.

allows us to acquire specific information on the historical development of biblical Greek, but also provides important data on the evolution of classical Greek. At the start of this project in 2006, the first problem was to define the criteria for selecting words – or word groups – to include in the lexicon, since it would have been impossible to analyze all the terms of the Greek Bible. In addition to fundamental words like θεός “god” or πίστις “belief”, space was allotted to (1) terms that take on a new meaning in the Septuagint with respect to classical Greek; (2) terms that are not attested in Greek literature but which emerge in the Septuagint through the influence of the language of papyri and inscriptions; (3) philosophical and anthropological expressions that have no direct equivalent in the Hebrew Bible but occur in the translated and untranslated books; (4) new words created by the Septuagint translators for theological purposes. In order to illustrate innovative aspects of Septuagint Greek and to better explain the project, we will next analyze a few examples. Some of these have already been published in the first volume of the HTLS, whereas other samples will be part of the following volumes. The analysis will try as much as possible to follow the model of the HTLS itself, in order to give an impression of the content and structure of the articles.

5 Words with a New Meaning in the Septuagint

One of the most interesting terms modified from classical Greek in the Septuagint is the verb κτίζω.³³ In Homer (*Il.* 20.216; *Od.* 12.263) and Herodotus (1.168, 170; 2.99), the verb is used for the mythical foundation of a city, an event usually attributed to a divinity or to a hero,³⁴ the so-called κτίστης. The verb is frequently attested in ancient historians to express the act of colonization³⁵ (Hdt. 1.149; 2.44; 4.144, etc.), as well as in the case of the foundation of a city that coincides with the colonization of the surrounding territory (e.g. Thuc. 2.68.3). In addition to these usages, in inscriptions κτίζω is employed in reference to public buildings and structures, like city walls and temples, as well as streets, canals and tombs.³⁶ In the majority of occurrences, however, the term is employed in documents of official or commemorative character, according to the ancient practice of inscribing a stone in memory of a famous “founder/builder”. In fact, in antiquity there was the custom of recording for posterity divine or human authorities (e.g. gods, sovereigns, emperors and

³³ The following examples are taken from Passoni/Bons 2011, 173–187.

³⁴ For more information see Leschhorn 1984; Hanges 1995, 494–520.

³⁵ Casevitz, 1985, 13–72.

³⁶ See examples in Casevitz 1985, 38–39.

leading citizens) who “found/built” public works. This might be the reason why the number of occurrences of κτίζω and cognate words found in inscriptions is equivalent to or even higher than occurrences in the papyri, since dedicatory inscriptions are common. In Ptolemaic papyri, the verb κτίζω is employed to denote the foundation of a fortress (*P.Zill.* 1.83; 2.4, 156/155 BCE, Herakleopolis), of a city (e.g. Elephantine, see OGI 1.168 = SB 5.8883.12, September 20, 116 BCE), of a temple (APF 2 [1902], 555, no. 38 = OGI 1.736 = SB 1.5219.2, 69/68 BCE, Euhemeria, Fayum), and of a μνημα, a “monument” (GVI 2585.7, 2ns–1st cent. BCE). If the meaning in classical Greek is fairly static, in the Septuagint, κτίζω, which is attested 60 times, almost entirely loses its original sense. In fact, the verb is employed to translate the Hebrew *bārā*, “to create” (especially in the *Psalms* and in Wisdom literature) or *qānāh*, “create, acquire”, e.g. Gen 14:19, 22. In *Sirach*,³⁷ in which one third of the total occurrences of the verb appear, the Hebrew equivalents of κτίζω are *nā’wəh* “comely” (Sir 10:18A) and *hālaq*, “to create” (qal: Sir 31:13B; 38:1B; 39:25B; 40:1B) or “to be created” (ni.: Sir 7:15A; 31:27A).³⁸ Occasionally, κτίζω corresponds to *yāsad* ni. “to be founded”, which in Exod 9:18 refers to the day of Egypt’s founding; the same sense occurs in non-translated books (1 Esdr 4:53), connected with the foundation of Jerusalem by the population returning from the exile. In Isa 22:11, κτίζω translates *yāšar* “fashion”, in Deut 32:6 *kūn* po’lel “establish”, in Ps 32[33]:9 *‘amad* “stand”, and in Lev 16:16 *šākan* “settle down, dwell”. It is interesting to highlight that even if the general meaning of the verb in the Septuagint is “to create”, the verb is never attested in the creation pericope of Gen 1–3.

In the light of the aforementioned examples, two questions arise: why did the translators choose the verb κτίζω as the standard Greek equivalent for *bārā* “to create”, and why do they not use the verb δημιουργέω, which in classical Greek means “to create/fabricate” (e.g. Pl. *Soph.* 265c)? In order to answer these questions, it is important to highlight that in the Septuagint the subject of κτίζω, even in the cases where it means “to found”, is always God, and that it usually refers to the creation itself;³⁹ in other words, the verb is connected to the figure and the action of God as a creator. According to Foerster,⁴⁰ κτίζω would appear to be

³⁷ The book of Ben Sira was written in Hebrew during the 2nd century BCE and translated into Greek during the 1st century BCE. Unfortunately, unlike its Greek translation, the Hebrew text of Ben Sira is not available in all sections. Fragments survive in some manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah and Qumran. For more information about Ben Sira manuscripts see Martone 1997, 81–94; Olszowy-Schlanger 2019, 67–96.

³⁸ O’Connor 2008, 217–228.

³⁹ E.g. Gen 14:19, 22; Dan 4:37 LXX; Bel 1:5; 1 Esdr 6:12; Jdt 13:18; 2 Macc 2:3; Sir 18:1; 23:20; 39:21; Wis 1:14.

⁴⁰ Foerster 1982, 3.1025.

more appropriate than δημιουργέω. In fact, the latter is employed in a more material sense, as it denotes handcraft, whereas the former has the intelligible meaning of creating. Moreover, the word δημιουργέω may be avoided because the translators are reluctant to depict God as a craftsman. According to Eberhard Bons,⁴¹ the translators probably chose to use κτίζω under the influence of some specific nuances of the verb: “1. The object to be founded or created is new, unique and permanent;⁴² 2. It is useful not only for an individual, but for society. 3. The project requires both detailed planning and a well-organized realization”.⁴³ Finally, the idea of God as κτίστης becomes widespread from the Septuagint onwards; in fact, it occurs in Jewish Hellenistic Literature and in the New Testament.⁴⁴ The original meaning does not disappear, however. In the later ancient historians, for example, the semantic family is still employed as “to found” (e.g. Polyb. 10.21.3; Str. 1.3.15; Plut. *Rom.* 12.1).

6 Terms Taken from the Language of Papyri and Inscriptions

One of the peculiarities of the Septuagint translation is that, in many cases, it reflects a ‘colloquial’ Greek as attested in papyri and inscriptions. This hypothesis has been proposed by Orsolina Montevicchi. Seeking to demonstrate the Egyptian origins of the Greek *Psalter*, she recognizes a close similarity between the language of the *Psalms* and that of documentary papyri, in particular petitions: e.g. the noun λαξευτήριον, “stonecutter’s tool” (Ps 73[74]:7), which is not known from Greek literature but whose cognates are well attested in Egyptian papyri.⁴⁵ Moreover, when the Hebrew *Psalter* speaks of God as *šûr* and *sæla*, both meaning “rock”, *m^cšûdâh*, “fortress”, *mišgab*, “inaccessible place”, or *mā’ôz*, “stronghold”, the Septuagint translator, who certainly knows the meaning of these terms (see for example Ps 39:3^{LXX}; 77:15, 20^{LXX}), systematically chooses concepts intended to describe God with anthropomorphic, rather than inanimate, characteristics, notably ἀντιλήπτωρ “support”, βοηθός “helper” and ὑπερασπιστής “protector” (e.g. Ps 3:4; 17:3; 30:3; 41:10; 58:17–18; 61:3, 7; 90:2^{LXX}).⁴⁶ These terms are probably well known to the

⁴¹ Bons 2007, 7–8.

⁴² See also Casevitz 1985, 39–40.

⁴³ Passoni/Bons 2011, 7.

⁴⁴ For more examples see Passoni/Bons 2011, 177–178.

⁴⁵ Montevicchi 1961, 293–310; Pietersma 2001, 252–274.

⁴⁶ See Olofsson 1990, ch. 3.

translator, and, even if ἀντιλήμπτωρ and ὑπερασπιστής have no lineage in classical Greek, they appear frequently in papyri from the Ptolemaic period. In fact, the divine epithet ἀντιλήμπτωρ (Ps 90[91]:2) was a designation of the Ptolemaic king; it was also used in the Ptolemaic or Roman periods in a *captatio benevolentiae* when someone was invoked in an appeal to resolve a legal dispute.⁴⁷ The translator of the Greek *Psalter* has not simplified, but rather has avoided the metaphors of the Hebrew *Psalms*, choosing other words absent from common literary use, or even ones not attested elsewhere. This systematic procedure is probably due to the fact that the translator is concerned to replace the rock metaphors, because they may have been ambiguous in a Hellenistic context. Avoiding the possible identification of God with a stone or a material object,⁴⁸ the translator opted for a kind of inculturation, choosing terms – often nouns denoting human beings – that would have been known to Jewish Egyptian readers. In addition, it has been shown that the Septuagint version of the *Psalms* shares some vocabulary with other small eastern cults, particularly those of Isis, Serapis and other Egyptian gods: e.g. the noun εὐίλατος attested in Ps 98[99]:8 is used in *P.Cair.Zen.* 1 59034, 257 BCE, in reference to Serapis and in IK I 147 A, 2–1 BCE to denote Demeter, but never in Greek literature.⁴⁹ Such usage, if interesting from a linguistic point of view, also helps establish a more precise chronology, the better to understand the cultural background of the Septuagint. What emerges from these examples is that Jews and Egyptians had a certain vocabulary in common, as has been noted by James Aitken: “The evidence suggests that there were a number of religious developments among Jews in Egypt during the Hellenistic period. It can be seen that Jews adopted practices and institutions from Egyptians, and this includes some of the language of praise found in Jewish Greek texts from Egypt, and especially in the Septuagint”.⁵⁰

7 Terms Borrowed from Greek Philosophical and Anthropological Language

In this group, we find terms that enter the Greek Bible from classical language, even though they do not have precise correspondents in Hebrew language and culture. An interesting instance is the noun θνητός, “mortal”. This word is frequently attested in classical Greek, specifically to highlight the difference between the

47 E.g. BGU 4.1138, 19 BCE, Alexandria; 4.1139, 5 BCE; 16.2600, 13 BCE.

48 Bons, Brucker 2016, 333–353

49 Aitken 2014, 61–65.

50 Aitken 2014, 69.

ἀθάνατοι, “immortal” gods, and the θνήτοι, “mortal” humans (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 12.242: ἡμεῖς δὲ μέγαλοιο Διὸς πειθώμεθα βουλή, ὃς πᾶσι θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισιν ἀνάσσει “let us be obedient to the counsel of great Zeus, that is king over all mortals and immortals”). Conversely, biblical Hebrew has no word for “mortal”, nor does Hebrew culture seem to address the topic of the difference between mortality and immortality. The word θνητός nonetheless appears in the translated books; in Job 30:23, for instance, it translates as *ʿkāl-hāy*, literally “all living”, and in Prov 3:13 and 20:24 as *ʿādām*, “man”, whereas in Is 51:12 it is employed for the periphrasis *ʿænōš yāmūt*, “a man that shall die”.

In other cases, the Septuagint borrows terminology from contemporary philosophical contexts and endows it with Jewish meaning, e.g. in Ps 50 (51):14, the word ἡγεμονικός, “governing”, occurs in association with the noun πνεῦμα (ἀπόδος μοι τὴν ἀγαλλίασιν τοῦ σωτηρίου σου καὶ πνεύματι ἡγεμονικῶ στήρισόν με, “Restore to me the joy of your deliverance, and with a leading spirit support me”).⁵¹ As already hypothesized by Posner,⁵² this expression could be an alleged borrowing from Stoic language, but it is not an extraordinary case. In Wisdom of Solomon 7:22–23, the main character of the book, divine σοφία, is praised with 21 attributes, many of which are also used to describe the Stoic πνεῦμα.⁵³ From a rhetorical standpoint, the nearest parallel to this passage is the so-called *Hymn to Zeus* by the Stoic Cleanthes,⁵⁴ handed down by Clement of Alexandria.⁵⁵ It is a hymn to the god that features a series of 26 attributes in nine iambic trimeters. Considering the closeness of Wis 7:22–23 to Stoic language, it is possible that this is the model chosen by our author. One example might suffice: the first adjective used to describe σοφία is νοερός. The word is a stranger to the Septuagint but quite at home in Greek philosophical language. Employed for the first time by the Pre-Socratics,⁵⁶

51 In the Hebrew text the spirit is not “leading” but “noble” *nādiyb*.

52 Posner 1925, 276.

53 ἔστιν γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα νοερόν, ἅγιον, μονογενές, πολυμερές, λεπτόν, εὐκίνητον, τρανόν, ἀμόλυντον, σαφές, ἀπήμαντον, φιλάγαθον, ὀξύ, ἀκώλυτον, εὐεργετικόν, φιλόανθρωπον, βέβαιον, ἀσφαλές, ἀμέριμνον, παντοδύναμον, πανεπίσκοπον καὶ διὰ πάντων χωροῦν πνευμάτων νοερῶν καθαρῶν λεπτοτάτων “For there is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, of many parts, subtle, agile, clear, unpolluted, pure, invulnerable, loving the good, sharp. Unhindered, beneficent, lover of humanity, secure, unfailing, free from troubles, all-powerful, all-surveying who penetrates through all the spirits that are intelligent, pure, most subtle”. For more information, see Larcher 1969, 369–376; Scarpata 1996, 2.112–116; Leproux 2007, 201–209; Edwards 2012, 68–70.

54 von Arnim 1903, 1.557.

55 Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.*, 6.72.2

56 Diels/Kranz 1903–1910, 1.12; see also Des Places 1976, 418 n. 25.

it is associated in the Stoa with the cosmic πνεῦμα⁵⁷ and the soul,⁵⁸ considered the most elevated level of the spirit.⁵⁹

It would not be surprising for Stoicism to be a linguistic and stylistic source for Wisdom's word selection here. In fact, along with Epicureanism, it was one of the most widespread philosophies in Alexandria in the 1st century BCE, when the Book of Wisdom was composed. Moreover, use of Stoic language is probably employed by the author to give weight to his description of Wisdom since, in the contemporary world, that language expressed the purest and most elevated idea of the divine. Behind this choice is probably the desire for a terminology that does not limit God's power to his people. The author does not use the classical adjectives of the Jewish tradition, but terms that can easily be understood by a cosmopolitan and diverse audience. Every contemporary reader would thereby have been able to understand and assimilate the argument: Hellenised Jews could rapidly grasp the underlying meaning of these romanticized adjectives, while Greek pagans could usefully recognise that contemporary philosophical speculation on the divine was a simplified and inexact representation of the Jewish God.

8 New Terms in the Septuagint

An interesting case is the term θυσιαστήριον, "altar", the correspondent article for which will appear in the second volume of the HTLS. This noun comes from the term θυσιάζω, "to sacrifice" and has been created by Septuagint translators for the Hebrew *mizbēah*, "altar". As is well known, there is an earlier Greek term for the altar, βωμός, that is employed in the Greek Bible as well, also as a translation of *mizbēah*. How do these terms differ and why did the translators decide to coin a new term for the altar? Suzanne Daniel has tried to theorize the opposition between these two words. βωμός is used as a negative term to define a "bad" altar,⁶⁰ whereas θυσιαστήριον is the positive term for a "good" altar,⁶¹ namely the altar of the Israelites. As Romina Vergari states in her HTLS article, "θυσιαστήριον is a specific term in Israelite religious jargon for the legitimate altar of burnt offer-

57 von Arnim 1993, 1.110.

58 von Arnim 1994, 2.519.

59 Larcher 1983–1985, 2.483.

60 Daniel 1966, 16–17: "lorsqu'il est question des autels cananéens, qu'on ordonne aux Israélites de détruire, afin de ne pas se lasser contaminer par les pratiques abominables de ces populations".

61 Daniel 1966, 21: "quand un autel est mentionné à propos du culte rendu par tel personnage exemplaire, comme Noé, les Patriarches ou Moïse, ou bien prescrit par le code mosaïque". See also van der Kooij 2003, 603.

ings (as its etymology and its *ad hoc* introduction seemingly suggest).⁶² In fact, as she notes, all the altars built by Noah, Abraham (including the one of the binding of Isaac) and Jacob in Genesis are θυσιαστήρια, which means that they have been legitimated.⁶³ This usage of the noun is also attested in later books, e.g. in 1 Maccabees, where the noun θυσιαστήριον is used for the temple of Jerusalem and, on the contrary, βωμός is employed for the one at Modein (1 Macc 2:23), for all the altars scattered throughout the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding regions (1:47; 1:54; 2:45), for the foreign altars of Azoton (5:68) and for the sacrilegious altar erected by Antiochus Epiphanes to replace the Jews' θυσιαστήριον (1:59). In this respect, Septuagint translators adopt a strategy different from the one they use for Stoic philosophy: they select a new and uncontaminated word to identify their own altar. This term, which did not exist before in Greek, starts to be used by Hellenistic Jewish authors like Josephus (e.g. *AJ* 8.243) and Philo (e.g. *Vit. Mos.* 2.106.1), as well as by the Church Fathers (e.g. Origen, *De Orat.* 2,17).

The need for uncontaminated words is also behind the choice of the term μακρόθυμος as a divine epithet. The adjective μακρόθυμος, “slow to anger”, “longsuffering”, “patient”, is a compound of the adjective μακρός, “long, wide”, and the noun θυμός, “soul”, and occurs 19 times in the Septuagint, usually in translated texts where it mostly corresponds to the Hebrew *ʾeræk* *ʾappayim*, literally, “long-nostriled”.⁶⁴ This term is seldom attested in the literature prior to the Septuagint, but the most ancient occurrence is in Menander, fr. 549.⁶⁵ ἄνθρωπος ὦν μηδέποτε τὴν ἄλυσίαν αἰτοῦ παρὰ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ τὴν μακροθυμίαν. ὅταν γὰρ ἄλυσος διὰ τέλους εἶναι θέλῃς, ἢ δεῖ θεὸν σ' εἶναι τιν' ἢ τάχα δὴ νεκρὸν, “Being a man, never ask the gods for the absence of pain, but resignation. If you wish to be in everything without pain, it would be necessary for you to be a god, or perhaps dead”. In the passage, the author wishes to emphasise the idea of renunciation and resignation. People cannot call for the absence of pain, since this is exclusively a divine prerogative. Instead, it is necessary to aspire to the ability to endure and accept suffering. Other attestations of the word postdate the Septuagint. In Strabo, (5.4.10), the adjective refers to the tenacious resistance of the enemy that amazes Hannibal. In Plutarch, the term occurs three times, twice in the *Luc* 33,1, where it describes

⁶² Vergari 2020, 1721.

⁶³ Vergari 2020, 1721–1722.

⁶⁴ For Jews, the nose was the organ manifesting anger. See Skehan, Di Lella 1987, 182. The substantive, *ʾap*, has two meanings, “nose” and “fury”. It is a reasonable assumption that this is an allusion to the laboured breathing provoked by a state of anger (just as θυμός refers to the blood boiling because of an emotion), while, like μακρός, *ʾeræk* indicates length, which, in this case, has the meaning of duration, extension. See Koehler/Baumgartner 1994, 77; 88.

⁶⁵ Kock 1820–1901, 3.167.

the commander's action, and once in *Gen. Socr.* 24.593, in which μακροθυμία is the strenuous resistance of one who finds himself at the mercy of the sea and battles with all his strength to reach a harbour and escape death: αὐτοὺς ἐξαμιλλᾶσθαι καὶ μακροθυμεῖν δι' οἰκειᾶς πειρωμένους ἀρετῆς σώζεσθαι καὶ τυγχάνειν λιμένος, "to struggle and suffer in our efforts to save ourselves by our own virtues and come safely into port".⁶⁶ It is clear, then, that the term was not widely used in classical Greek. On the contrary, it is of pivotal importance in the Septuagint, because it replaces the traditional epithet of YHWH and appears for the first time in the so-called "formula of grace" of Exod 34:6, one of the most important passages of the entire Old Testament from a theological point of view. This is the moment at which God reveals Himself to Moses.: κύριος ὁ θεὸς οἰκτιρῶν καὶ ἐλεήμων, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός, "The Lord God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and full of mercy, and true". Even in this case, the translators, although not introducing a new term, prefer to use a rare term to speak of the God of Israel.

9 Conclusions

Septuagint translators had a rich and varied vocabulary at their disposal, so much so that they could make lexical choices based on precise criteria and for particular purposes. The authors of the Septuagint can no longer be viewed as Jews who, having no real command of the Greek language, made stereotypical and mechanical choices solely related to the source text. It is also true, however, that Septuagint vocabulary has distinctive peculiarities that make it unique within the corpus of available Greek texts, both literary and documentary. It is not possible to trace a linear chronological evolution of Greek words that is valid to all cases; on the contrary, in-depth study of each concept is to be encouraged, study that is not limited to any linguistic aspect, but rather which seeks to look at the evidence through many methodological lenses. As we have shown, sometimes Septuagint translators forge new meanings for old, well-known words, whereas in other instances they prefer to use neologisms. At the same time, the new meanings expressed by the Septuagint do not imply the disappearance of other nuances that continue to be attested in later authors. Sometimes the impact of the Septuagint is clearly visible in later texts, while at other times it is more difficult to assess. Another important aspect of the language of Septuagint translators is that they are not ashamed of using colloquial expressions that would be considered too popular to appear in literary Greek. This variety of situations makes the prospect of a lexicographical tool all the

⁶⁶ Translation by Nesselrath 2010.

more exciting. The HTLS is a useful instrument for acquiring relevant information on the history and reception of the words used by Septuagint translators, helping researchers place the language of the Septuagint in its native setting. Each article opens a window onto the translators' workshop, where words and concepts were assessed, manipulated, forged, and finally given over to history.

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