CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED EXEGESIS EMBEDDED IN THE SEPTUAGINT

Es ist eine dankbare, fruchtbare Aufgabe, solche Vorarbeiten zu machen, damit endlich auch einmal eine längst ersehnte Theologie der Septuaginta geschrieben werden kann. (J. Ziegler, Die Septuaginta. Erbe und Auftrag, Festfortrag ... 1962, 28 = Sylloge [Göttingen 1971] 613)

1. Introduction

Every translation of the Bible, or of any work dealing with one or more deities, is bound to contain theologically motivated exegesis. The Homeric songs and hymns, for example, deal extensively with the world of the gods. Thus, any translation of Homer must take positions in matters relating to these gods. It is difficult to know whether such exegesis should be termed ‘theologically motivated.’ In the case of the Hebrew Bible, however, almost any individual translation option is potentially a carrier of theologically motivated (henceforth: ‘theological’) exegesis, because of the central place of the Hebrew Bible in the religions based on it. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine a biblical translation without theological exegesis. Scholars have frequently tried to locate such exegesis in different translations, hoping to find, among other things, certain developments from one translation to the next. Among all ancient translations, the Palestinian targumim probably provide the most data on embedded theological exegesis (see Levine, Aramaic Version).

Like all other biblical versions, the LXX reflects theological exegesis, but probably to a lesser degree than the Aramaic targumim. Yet for many reasons scholars have paid more attention to this aspect in the LXX than to the same phenomenon in other versions.¹ For one thing, the LXX reflects a biblical text that differs considerably from

¹ See the bibliographical appendix to my article “Die Septuaginta in ihrem theologischen und traditionsgeschichtlichen Verhältnis zur hebräischen Bibel,” in M. Klopfenstein and others (eds.), Mitte der Schrift? (Bern 1987) 237–268; M. Harl and others, La Bible grecque des Septante (Paris 1988) 254–259; Dogniez, Bibliography.
MT, and knowledge of its (theological) exegesis could provide many helpful insights into text-critical problems. Such a prospect alone justifies an intensive study of this aspect of the LXX. But there is more at stake. Scholars are very interested to see how the content, ideas, and words of the Hebrew Bible were translated or paraphrased by translators living in the radically different Hellenistic world of Alexandria. For generations scholars have tried to detect and to delineate what the transfer of texts from Hebrew into Greek involved. How much and what type of exegesis can be detected in the translation? And to what extent does the translation contain that special type of exegesis which we name 'theological exegesis'? One should always bear in mind that theological exegesis reflects but one aspect of the general area of exegesis, and that it can neither be separated from the translators' approach towards exegesis, nor from our approach to translation in other matters. There is another plausible explanation for the interest of scholars in the theological renderings of the Greek translators, an explanation which may well point to the major reason for this special interest in the LXX. In many respects the content, vocabulary, and ideas of the New Testament continue the world of the LXX. Moreover, the New Testament contains a plethora of theological terms; that is, many of its words, even common ones, have deep theological meanings. Many of these have been studied often by generations of clergymen and scholars. These studies did not leave the LXX untouched, since it was recognized that the special vocabulary of the New Testament was created in the LXX. Therefore along with the interest in the theology of the New Testament, a special interest developed in the theological background of the LXX.

By way of contrast, I have always preferred to ascribe deviations of the LXX from MT to factors other than theological Tendenz. However, while it may be true that books which reflect an easily perceived degree of theological exegesis form a minority within the LXX canon, it is clear that there are such books. It is also clear that relatively minor amounts of theological exegesis are found in almost all books of the LXX, but more substantial quantities are found in Isaiah, Daniel, Job, and Proverbs. Not only do these books reflect many theologoumena, but most of the examples of theological exegesis in the LXX derive, in fact, from them.

The Greek form of these books does not reflect a systematic theological system, but individual theologoumena, to be exemplified below. Therefore one should not isolate theological exegesis from other aspects of the translation. The books of the LXX contain no special