I should like to draw attention to some remarkable features of the Old Greek (OG) of Isaiah. Since it presents a fairly faithful, yet creative, translation of its Hebrew Vorlage, one of its great attractions lies in the fact that it serves as a mirror of the Hellenistic Jewish world that produced it. I. L. Seeligmann observes the translator’s inclination to bring “geographical facts and names” up to date and points out “another general tendency which has caused the Isaiah translation, more than any other part of the Septuagint[,] to show the historical background of the smaller and larger Hellenistic states”: its rendering of אֶרֶץ as οἰκουμένη, which occurs eight times in Isaiah and only once (!) in all the other books of the Greek Bible. The translator uses this term, which is so typical of the political world of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, “either in a context in which God’s punishment is prophesied to all

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1 On categorizing the character of the “translation technique” informing the OG of Isaiah, and on the translation’s use of mythological terminology, cf. S. J. Schweitzer, “Mythology in the Old Greek of Isaiah: The Technique of Translation”, *CBQ* 66 (2004), pp. 214–30. Schweitzer claims (p. 217, n. 16) that “[n]o previous analysis of mythological elements in any OG book has been published, to my knowledge, so this analysis will be the first such investigation on a topic important for study of both the LXX and the Hebrew Bible”; he obviously overlooked J. Schaper, “Die Renaissance der Mythologie im hellenistischen Judentum und der Septuaginta-Psalter”, in E. Zenger (ed.), *Der Septuaginta-Psalter: Sprachliche und theologische Aspekte* (HBS 32; Freiburg im Breisgau a.o., 2001), pp. 171–83. Schweitzer also fails to mention the discussion of mythological concepts in the LXX found in J. Schaper, “The Unicorn in the Messianic Imagery of the Greek Bible”, in *JTS* N.S. 45 (1994), pp. 117–36. Most remarkably, there is another work omitted by Schweitzer, one in which we find numerous detailed discussions of mythological terminology in the Septuagint: I am referring, of course, to W. Bousset and H. Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (HNT 21, 3rd edn.; Tübingen, 1926).

peoples, or where the central figure of an (Assyrian) world ruler loudly puts forward his claim to world sovereignty”.3

Apart from “[r]eminiscences of the diaspora of the period of the translator, of the frontier towns of Hellenistic Egypt, of the terminology of the Hellenistic administration, of the hostility of the Greek coastal towns towards Palestine, and of the ambitions of a king to acquire the sovereignty over the οἰκουμένη”, the Septuagint of Isaiah “also contains allusions to historical personalities and events, enabling us to assign a more exact date to this translation”, as Seeligmann points out.4 He assumes that the mighty ruler threatening Israel in the Hebrew original of the Isaianic prophecies “was transmuted in the translation into a Hellenistic ruler of the translator’s own period”.5 He is able to demonstrate that the translation of Isaiah 10:24 may be understood as an “echo of the idea of a Jewish emigration from Palestine to Egypt to escape the religious persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes”,6 given that the way the Greek translation renders the passages about the fearsome Assyrian ruler makes it likely that it refers to Antiochus. Seeligmann dates the Greek Isaiah to the mid-second century B.C.7 and assumes Egypt, and more precisely Alexandria, as its place of origin.8

In the present paper I shall, taking Seeligmann’s observations as my starting-point, investigate the way in which the Old Greek text of Isaiah introduces pagan deities and religious concepts that are not mentioned in its Hebrew Vorlage and shall try to understand them against the background of the religious history of Hellenistic Egypt in the second century B.C. It is my aim thus to throw some light on the relationship between Alexandrian Jews and the dominant non-Jewish culture which surrounded them. In so doing, I hope to contribute to the exploration of a significant aspect of Jewish religious history in Hellenistic Egypt and thus to follow the lead of such great scholars as Z. Frankel and I. L. Seeligmann, who have taught us to use the Septuagint not just as a tool for the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible but as a – if not the – major cultural and religious monument of Hellenistic Judaism.

3 Seeligmann, p. 81.
4 Seeligmann, pp. 81–2.
5 Seeligmann, p. 82.
6 Seeligmann, p. 85.
7 Cf. Seeligmann, p. 91.
8 Cf. Seeligmann, p. 86.