1. **Wordplay and the Translation Technique of the Septuagint**

If one would like to understand the full meaning of a biblical text, it is not sufficient to have a good knowledge of Hebrew grammar and syntax. From the first chapters of the Old Testament on, it becomes clear that wordplay—whatever this may be—seems to be constitutive for biblical literature.¹ If the reader does not succeed in tracing present forms of wordplay within a pericope, its full meaning undoubtedly gets lost.

The present contribution does not, by any means, aim to clarify the problem of Hebrew wordplay on a theoretical level.² In this paper, I would like to study if and how the Septuagint (LXX) translator has dealt with the different types of wordplay with which he was confronted in his Hebrew Vorlage. Evidently, it is one of the most difficult problems for a translator to adequately render wordplay from a source language into a target language, as becomes evident from the first pages of the Old Testament.

One of the first examples of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible can be found in the creation narrative in Gen 2–3, where a clear link is made between הָאָדָם who is formed מִן הָאֲדָמָה. Making use of similar-sounding words, the Hebrew author clearly indicates that, in his view, there is a close relationship between human beings and the earth (this does not automatically imply that there is also an etymological link between...

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the two lexemes). In cases where one can hardly doubt that the Hebrew author intended to play with Hebrew words, as is the case in Gen 2, a good translator should at least try to render his Vorlage as adequately as possible. Taking for granted that the translator actually did notice the Hebrew wordplay, he has three possible options. First, he could add a footnote in order to clarify the wordplay that is present in the source language. Doing so, he would indicate that he has noticed the Hebrew wordplay, but at the same time he would admit that he was not able to find an adequate translation equivalent, and therefore failed in his translation. Second, the translator could transliterate those Hebrew words that are constitutive for the wordplay. As such, he equally clearly indicates that he has noticed the Hebrew wordplay and makes clear to his readers that there is a link between the two words. At the same time, however, he does not succeed as a translator in this case either, since he is not giving a real translation. Third, he could translate the Hebrew words and search for good alternatives in the target language. However, in practice, it is an almost impossible task to find two or more terms in the target language that do not only correspond in meaning, but have a similar connotation or sound as well. Taking a look at Gen 2:7, one can conclude that the LXX translator in fact translated הָאָדָם and הָאֲדָמָה מִן as καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς (NETS: “And god formed man, dust from the earth”). In doing so, however, the link between both terms has been completely lost for the reader of the LXX. Nevertheless, one should be wary of drawing generalizing conclusions too easily. For example, within the same context of the Eden narrative (Gen 3:20), the LXX translator succeeds very well in rendering the Hebrew wordplay into idiomatic Greek. “Adam” calls his wife Eve (וָה) because she is “mother of all living ones” (בְּאָמֹתִי). The LXX translates it as καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Αδὰμ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ Ζωή ὅτι αὕτη μήτηρ πάντων τῶν ζώντων (NETS: “And Adam called the name of his wife Life, because she is the mother of all the living”). In this case, the LXX translator did effectively translate the proper name חַוָּה with the Greek Ζωή and thus, he has chosen not to transliterate it. Since ζωή in Greek means “life”, the implicit meaning of the proper name חַוָּה is preserved in Greek. Moreover, the sound similarity with τῶν ζώντων is present as well.

4 Ibid., 8.