Although a lot goes on in the Letter of Aristeas, it is most famous for having the earliest account of the legend of the translation of the Septuagint [lxx]. As all scholars note, in an almost obligatory manner, the legend actually takes up very few of the 322 paragraphs that make up the text. Yet, within that small number, interesting problems reside. The center of attention has often been the famous or even infamous §30 on which Paul Kahle based his argument that Aristeas’s version of the legend was intended to respond to an earlier translation or translations of the Law that competed with the one advocated by Aristeas. Central to the argument was Kahle’s translation of the verb ἵσεσμαι, which he rendered ‘translate.’ Günther Zuntz and later David W. Gooding demonstrated convincingly that the word cannot mean ‘translate’ but must be rendered ‘transcribed’ or ‘committed to writing.’ But dispensing with Kahle’s proposed translation of ἵσεσμαι only resolves one issue. Scholars have also tried to elucidate the other words in Aristeas having to do with transcription, translation, and interpretation. In this short article, dedicated in honor of Prof. Sollamo, who has herself elucidated many aspects of this Jewish-Greek translation corpus, I hope to show that in light of what Ps.-Aristeas (as I shall call Aristeas’s author) claims about the lxx, these terms along with their attendant ambiguities play an important part in what he wants to say about the nature of the lxx.

1 This characterization depends on how one views the account of Aristobulus, which some scholars argue precedes Aristeas’s account. For this paper ‘Septuagint’ and ‘lxx’ refer to the translation of the Pentateuch in Alexandria sometime in the early third century B.C.E.
The *Letter of Aristeas* exhibits a rather rich vocabulary of terms related to transcription, translation, and interpretation. The major stems are ἑρμήν- and its compounds together with γραφ- and its compounds. Less frequent, but no less important, as we have already seen, are σημαιν- and its compounds. After σεσήμανται in §30, the most critical terms are ἑρμηνεύω, ἑρμηνεύει, ἑρμηνεύεις, and διερμηνεύω of the ἑρμήν- group and ἄντιγραφή and μεταγράφω of the γραφ- group. At the center of the issue lies the question of the extent to which the ‘translation,’ which, according to *Aristeas*, Ptolemy II requisitioned, alternatively might be constructed as an ‘interpretation’ of its Hebrew original. While it might not be immediately obvious, the ways that some scholars have approached the questions engendered by *Aristeas*’s Greek vocabulary reveals a fundamental methodological issue in the field of Septuagint studies—how to recognize the presence of theological exegesis in the *lxx*.

I will use only one example here to illustrate the difficulty. In his book on the Septuagint of Psalms, *Lebenzeit und Ewigkeit: Studien zur Eschatologie und Anthropologie des Septuaginta-Psalters*, Holger Gzella focuses on the ambiguity inherent in this vocabulary to argue for the rather extensive presence of theological exegesis in this translation, as the subtitle of the book implies. Gzella begins by asking how one might account for the differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of Psalms. He divides the possibilities into two essential types: (1) differences due to some mechanical factor like a different Vorlage or an erroneous reading on the translator’s part, and (2) conscious change, which he takes to be exegetical in nature. As a result, he speaks of the “theologisches Eigenprofil” of the translation. As part of his argument for such a view, he invokes the *Letter of Aristeas*. He contends that the language of ‘translation’ used in *Aristeas* to describe the *lxx* indicates that the translators who actually made the translations intended their work to be simultaneously translation and interpretation and that this same assessment also applies by extension to the translation of Psalms. Thus, outside of changes made for mechanical reasons, one can detect systematic, theological interpretation in the Greek of both the *lxx* and Psalms.

Besides the problematic claim that whatever *Aristeas* might say about the translation of the Pentateuch also applies to the translation of the

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