SEPTUAGINT LEXICOGRAPHY AND HEBREW ETYMOLOGY*

Takamitsu Muraoka

In Hos 6:1 we read in the Septuagint

'Εν θλίψει αὐτῶν ὀρθριοῦσι πρὸς λέγοντες Πορευθῶμεν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωμεν πρὸς κύριον τὸν θεόν ἡμῶν, ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠρπακε καὶ ἱάσει ἡμᾶς, πατάξει καὶ μοτώσει ἡμᾶς.'

This roughly corresponds with the following MT:

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Ziegler, in his edition, correctly makes 5:15c of the Hebrew text begin a new paragraph or chapter. 'Εν θλίψει . . . λέγοντες is better construed with what follows it rather than with what precedes it.

ὁρθριοῦσι is a future of ὀρθρίζω, a Greek verb which is not at the moment attested prior to the LXX. Lee is inclined to think that its non-attestation is accidental, whereas some believe that our translator is engaged in etymological analysis, ὀρθρος vs. ῥηξ. Tov attributes the same approach to the translators of Psalms and Isaiah.

* It is a great honour and pleasure to be allowed to present this modest study to someone who has kept the flag of biblical languages flying in the Nordic corner of Helsinki through her own scholarly contributions, nurturing upcoming scholars at home, and maintaining and promoting contacts with scholars outside of her national boundaries.

1 The Greek text is that of Ziegler’s edition (Duodecim Prophetae [vol. XIII of Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967]).

2 The Hebrew text is that of bhs.


4 Eberhard Bons, Jan Joosten, and Stephan Kessler, Les douze prophètes: Osée (vol. 23.1 of La Bible d’Alexandrie; Paris: Cerf, 2002), 103.

5 Emanuel Tov, “Greek words and Hebrew meanings,” in Melbourne Symposium on Septuagint Lexicography (ed. T. Muraoka; SBLSCS 28; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1990), 121.
We have identified three senses of this verb:  

1. to rise from bed early in the morning  
2. to seek and turn to sbd in eager anticipation  
3. to act eagerly.

The fact that this verb is used in the Pentateuch nine times to translate הָעַרְרָה hi. in the sense 1, and never רַעְשָׁנִי pi., seems to indicate that for the translator(s) of the Pentateuch the Hebrew etymology was of no concern. If anything, it was an inner-Greek semantic extension: ‘early morning’ > ‘to rise from bed early in the morning.’ The notion of the early hour of the day is reinforced by the added τῷ πρωΐ (e.g. Gen 19:27) or τὸ πρωΐ (e.g. Exod 8:20, 1 Macc 4:52) in line with the Hebrew יָרָא, but in its first occurrence (Gen 19:2) it is used without any temporal expression, but on its own: καὶ ὀρθρίζοντες ἀπελεύσθησθε. The case for the inner-Greek development is supported by the use of this verb at Dan lxx 6:19 to render ἐνθρασθείν in Aramaic.

Of course, the possibility cannot be precluded off-hand that, when the translators of Job, Psalms, the Twelve Prophets, Isaiah or the grandson of Ben Sira decided to use ὀρθρίζω to render רַעְשָׁנִי (as well as הָעַרְרָה), he had the noun רַעְשָׁנִי ‘dawn, daybreak’ at the back of their mind. Indeed, in a case such as Job 7:21 the Hebrew text has nothing to do with daybreak, but just ‘seeking,’ so that the facile etymologising must have played a major role here in the translators choice of ὀρθρίζω to render רַעְשָׁנִי, see below.

The sense in which this verb is used in our Hosea passage represents another step farther down its semantic evolution. One of the passages where this sense, 2, can be identified shows clearly that the time of the day when the action takes place plays no semantic role: ἐκ νυκτὸς ὀρθρίζει τὸ πνεῦμά μου πρὸς σέ, ‘since when it was still night...’ Isa 26:9. From a syntagmatic point of view it is to be noted that in all the cases except one the verb in this sense collocates with πρὸς τινα

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6 See Takamitsu Muraoka, A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Chiefly of the Pentateuch and the Twelve Prophets (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), s.v.

7 As early as 1901 Thumb argued against Hebrew influence here, pointing out that a semantically and derivationally related ὀρθρεύω is attested in Theocritus (3d century b.c.e.) (Albert Thumb, Die griechische Sprache im Zeitalter des Hellenismus: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Beurteilung der KÖNH [Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1901], 123). As a matter of fact, it is already used by Euripides.

8 Gehman (Henry S. Gehman, “Hebraisms of the Old Greek version of Genesis,” VT 3 [1953]: 147) too facilely imposes the Hebrew meaning on the Greek verb used here.