# Septuagint Translation as a Form of Jewish Resistance: Illustrations from the *Books of Reigns* (*Samuel* and *Kings*)

# 七十賢士譯本的翻譯乃猶太人反抗的一種形式——以《列國紀》（《撒慕爾紀》和《列王紀》）作例

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**摘要：**儘管七十賢士譯本的譯者精通所翻譯之作品的原文和譯文，但他們翻譯希伯來聖經的方式，令不懂希伯來語的希臘文讀者難以完全理解，甚至無法明白當中的希臘語。本文以《列國紀》（《撒慕爾紀》和《列王紀》）作例，探討如何將七十賢士譯本的翻譯工作，解讀為公元前三至二世紀僑居在外的猶太學者反抗的一種形式。本文從語言、文化和政治三個層面討論猶太人的反抗。

**關鍵詞：**七十賢士譯本、翻譯、反抗、《列國紀》

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***Abstract:*** *Though competent in both the source and the target languages, the Septuagint translators rendered their Hebrew Bible in such a way that it was difficult or at times even impossible for any Greek-speaking readers without a Hebrew tongue to fully understand the Greek of the translation. Using examples from the* Books of Reigns *(*Samuel *and* Kings*), the current paper explores how the Septuagint can be interpreted as a form of resistance on the part of the Jewish translators who lived in the Diaspora in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. Altogether, three dimensions of Jewish resistance are examined, namely linguistic, cultural, and political resistance.*

***Keywords:*** *Septuagint, translation, resistance,* Books of Reigns

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## 1. Introduction

The Septuagint (LXX), commonly known as "the translation of the seventy," is the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The rendering is traditionally dated to the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285-246 BCE). Legend has it that 72 Jewish elders (6 from each of the 12 tribes) worked independently on an island of Pharos off the coast of Alexandria, yet miraculously they all completed their task in 72 days. The translation was in reality made for the Jewish community in Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE when Greek was the lingua franca in the region.[1] At first glance, the Greek of the Septuagint could be taken as Koine Greek. Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie, however, uphold the view that "LXX Greek cannot simply be characterized as Koine Greek. It is first of all translation Greek."[2] Sollamo also contrasts "translation Greek" with "non-translation Greek." She states that interference is a very typical feature in translation Greek (as opposed to non-translation Greek) and that the Greek resulting from the translation of the Hebrew Bible is "Hebraistic translation Greek."[3]

1 On the origins of the Septuagint, see, e.g., Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G.E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 36-39.

2 Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, compilers, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (hereafter LEH), rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), p. xviii. Refer to their discussion on "Translation Greek" on pages xvii-xxi, and especially the footnote on page xvii for the bibliography on the nature of Septuagint Greek.

3 Raija Sollamo, "Translation Technique as a Method," in *Translating a Translation: The Septuagint and Its Modern Translations in the Context of Early Judaism*, ed. Hans Ausloos, Johann Cook, Florentino García Martínez, Bénédicte Lemmelijn, and Marc Vervenne, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 213 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), p. 40.

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Remarking on the Greek of the Septuagint, Rajak puts it:

> The language they adopted, whether consciously or unconsciously, was the common language with a difference. It is an idiosyncratic, purpose-built version of the language with a most unfamiliar ring to those coming fresh to it.[4]

When we reflect on Rajak's interesting observation, three questions arise: How different or even idiosyncratic is Septuagint Greek? What is the purpose behind translating the Jewish Bible using such Greek language? Is there any implication for the Septuagint translation? An exposition with concrete examples from the Septuagint might help solve these queries. In this paper, we will look at some illustrations from the *Books of Reigns* in the Septuagint (i.e. the *Books of Samuel* and the *Books of Kings* in the Hebrew Bible[5]).

The Septuagint *Reigns*[6] has been selected to serve the illustrative purpose on account of its translation. The Greek of the four *Books of*

4 Tessa Rajak, "Staying Jewish: Language and Identity in the Greek Bible," in *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 125.

5 *1 & 2 Reigns* correspond to *1 & 2 Samuel*; *3 & 4 Reigns* correspond to *1 & 2 Kings*.

6 Since the volume of the Göttingen *Septuaginta* for the *Books of Reigns* has not yet appeared, the base text used in this paper is Rahlfs-Hanhart's *Septuaginta*, viz. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta*, Editio altera (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). This is Hanhart's revision of Rahlfs' 1935 edition of *Septuaginta*. For the English translation, quotations will be taken from the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS) version—the latest English translation published in Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), hereafter *NETS*. For the electronic edition, see https://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) will be used for comparison wherever necessary.

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*Reigns* on the whole is generally regarded as a very literal rendering of the Hebrew,[7] to such an extent that the translators of *Reigns* are classified as ranking among the most literal translators within the Septuagintal scholarship.[8] Seidman suggests that translational literalism, which she considers a phenomenon related to resistance to translation, can be read as a form of political resistance—how a minority community responds to a dominant culture, as well as a form of theological resistance—how a philosophical tradition with distinct notions of language expresses itself.[9] Where resistance to translation is concerned, Seidman describes it as "a wide-spread phenomenon, an unavoidable byproduct of cultural identity in its differentiating mode."[10] Inspired by this notion of resistance in the contexts of translation,[11] I will investigate how the Septuagint translation of *Reigns* can be interpreted as a form of resistance on the part of the Greek-speaking Jewish translators. Altogether our discussion will

7 Philippe Hugo, "Text History of the Books of Samuel: An Assessment of the Recent Research," in *Archaeology of the Books of Samuel: The Entangling of the Textual and Literary History*, ed. Philippe Hugo and Adrian Schenker, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 5.

8 Refer to the references to the classification of Septuagint translators cited in Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Septuagint of 1 Samuel," in *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators: Collected Essays* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), p. 132, n. 6.

9 Naomi Seidman, "The Translator as Double Agent," in *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 19.

10 Seidman, "Translator as Double Agent," p. 11.

11 In her *Faithful Renderings*, Seidman explores the notion of resistance in various contexts of Bible translation, including Aquila's resistance in revising / (re)translating the Greek Bible into a somewhat unreadable text, Buber and Rosenzweig's resistance to translating the Bible into proper German, and the resistance to translation from Yiddish, etc. She also speaks of Jewish defiance in the realm of the Bible.

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deal with the Jewish resistance in three dimensions, namely linguistic, cultural, and political resistance.

## 2. Overview of the Translation of *Reigns*

To start with, let us familiarize ourselves with a brief overview of the translation of the *Books of Reigns*. Back in 1907, Thackeray identified different layers in the Greek rendering of *Reigns* and divided the four books into five sections.[12] The scholar also proposed that the original line of division between the *Books of Samuel* and the *Books of Kings* was not at the end of the *Second Book of Samuel*, as in the Masoretic Text, but at the beginning of the *First Book of Kings*, after the narration of David's death in 1 Kgs (3 Rgns) 2:11. Hence, David's death functions as the dividing line[13] — that certainly makes

12 Henry St. John Thackeray, "The Greek Translators of the Four Books of Kings," *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1907): 262-278. Though a 1907 contribution, this classical work of Thackeray has laid the foundations for many recent relevant researches. His division of the four *Books of Reigns* (with minor modifications) is as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| α section | = | 1 Rgns 1:1–31:13 |
| ββ section | = | 2 Rgns 1:1–11:1 |
| βγ section | = | 2 Rgns 11:2–3 Rgns 2:11 |
| γγ section | = | 3 Rgns 2:12–21:43 |
| γδ section | = | 3 Rgns 22:1–4 Rgns 25:30 |
| βδ section | = | the combined passages βγ and γδ |

Thackeray, "Greek Translators," p. 263. While Thackeray defines the γδ section as 3 Rgns 22:1–4 Rgns end, Taylor notes that 1 Kgs 22:41-50 (the beginning of γδ) is included within γγ as 3 Rgns 16:28a-h; Bernard A. Taylor, "The Old Greek Text of Reigns: To the Reader," in *NETS*, p. 244.

13 Thackeray, "Greek Translators," pp. 262, 264-266.

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a lot more sense. In analyzing the Greek text of *Reigns*, Thackeray identified ten chief characteristics in two sections (what we now call the καίγε sections): 2 Rgns 11:2–3 Rgns 2:11 (which Thackeray designated as βγ section) and 3 Rgns 22 + 4 Rgns (γδ section).[14] The almost complete absence of these distinctive features in the rest of *Reigns*, i.e. the Old Greek text,[15] allows one to differentiate the Old Greek sections from the καίγε sections.

## 2.1 The Old Greek Sections

According to Taylor,[16] the Greek language of the Old Greek text in *Reigns* is characterized by its close adherence to the Hebrew word order. In Taylor's words, "The translation is literal,[…] overall it is isomorphic. […] It is as if the guiding principle was: *leave no element untranslated* [italics mine]."[17] Such prevalent Semitic flavour may give people an impression that the language of the translation is semitized Greek. However, the Semitic interference is so strong

14 Thackeray, "Greek Translators," pp. 267-274. See the table of overview of the ten characteristics on page 268. Accordingly, Thackeray (p. 263) argued that these two sections: βγ and γδ, collectively referred to as βδ, were later additions and were translated by a single hand.

15 The situation is just the opposite with the tenth characteristic which concerns the usage of the historic present. Its use is almost completely absent in the βγ and γδ sections. Altogether there are only three occurrences of the historic present in the καίγε sections, but their occurrences add up to 220 in the non-καίγε sections. Despite a different pattern of this tenth characteristic from the other nine ones, the contrast between the καίγε and non-καίγε sections is equally clear.

16 Taylor's synthesis of "The Old Greek Text of Reigns: To the Reader" in *NETS* (pp. 244-248) has proved itself a very useful resource right from the outset of this paper.

17 Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 245.

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that the rendering is overall non-literary Greek. To substantiate, the standard Greek *hypotaxis* gives way to imitation of the Hebrew *parataxis*. Also, there is extremely rare use of the particle μέν—only once throughout the Old Greek sections in *Reigns*—and it is used without the corresponding δέ (1 Rgns 20:14). Furthermore, the presence of numerous Hebrew idiomatic expressions makes the resulting Greek sound strange to the Greek reader.[18]

## 2.2 The Καίγε Sections

The Septuagint text has been revised to conform with a Proto-Masoretic Hebrew text (i.e. the καίγε-recension in the middle of the 1st century BCE).[19] Thus, when it comes to the Greek rendering of the καίγε *Reigns*, it is not surprising that across the four *Books of Reigns*, the καίγε text appears even more literal than that of the Old Greek. McLean's summary of his synthesis in *NETS*[20] presents the general picture of the καίγε *Reigns* as follows:

> In both βγ and γὸ the Kaige text reflects a typically isomorphic word-for-word rendering of the Hebrew source text, to the point where one finds examples in almost every sentence of linguistic features native to Hebrew that have been translated quite mechanically into Greek.[21]

18 For more detail, refer to Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," pp. 245-246.

19 Frank Moore Cross, Jr., "The History of the Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries in the Judaean Desert," *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (1964): 283.

20 Like that of Taylor, this synthesis by Paul D. McLean, "The Kaige Text of Reigns: To the Reader" in *NETS* (pp. 271-276) is an indispensable reference for studying the translation of the Septuagint *Reigns*.

21 McLean, "Kaige Text of Reigns," p. 275.

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In a similar fashion, Wevers characterizes the work of the translation of the βγ section as "mechanically literalistic."[22] As he elaborates, "This literalism is so wooden that even obvious errors in H [Hebrew] are reproduced verbatim."[23]

The above brief discussion has provided the big picture of the translation of the *Books of Reigns* in both the Old Greek and καίγε sections. In what follows, I will discuss in detail some specific characteristics of the rendering of the Old Greek and καίγε *Reigns* and demonstrate how the translation can be seen as a form of Jewish resistance.

## 3. Rigid One-to-One Correspondences: Linguistic Resistance

A representative feature of the Greek language in the *Books of Reigns* is the strange use of ἐγώ εἰμι followed by a finite verb. As Thackeray tells us, this peculiarity "'is probably unparalleled outside 'Biblical Greek.'"[24] Its appearance spreads across the καίγε sections, from the very beginning to the very end—first occurring in 2 Rgns 11:5 and last in 4 Rgns 22:20.[25] It is believed to be the intention of the καίγε translator to distinguish the two forms of the Hebrew independent subject pronouns: אני and אנכי, by means

22 John Wm. Wevers, "A Study in the Exegetical Principles Underlying the Greek Text of 2 Sm 11:2–1 Kings 2:11," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953): 34.

23 Wevers, "Exegetical Principles," p. 31. Refer to his examples of literalism in βγ on pages 31-32.

24 Thackeray, "Greek Translators," p. 272. McLean's wording is much stronger: "a barbarism absent from the OG [Old Greek] sections of 1–4 Reigns"; McLean, "Kaige Text of Reigns," p. 271.

25 2 Rgns 11:5; 12:7[2x]; 13:28; 15:28; 18:12; 20:17; 24:12, 17; 3 Rgns 2:2; 4 Rgns 4:13; 10:9; 22:20.



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of rendering אני into ἐγώ and אנכי into ἐγώ εἰμι correspondingly.[26] However, this translator strives for a neat differentiation to such an extent that אנכי is to be rendered by ἐγώ εἰμι, regardless of the presence of a finite verb. What results is unidiomatic Greek translation, like **ἐγώ εἰμι** ἐν γαστρὶ **ἔχω** (Bathsheba announcing her pregnancy in 2 Rgns 11:5). A literal but equally unidiomatic English rendering of the Greek translation would read "**I am have** [a child] in the womb!" To name a few more examples: **ἐγώ εἰμι ἔχρισά** σε εἰς βασιλέα ἐπὶ Ισραηλ καὶ **ἐγώ εἰμι ἐρρυσάμην** σε ἐκ χειρὸς Σαουλ (2 Rgns 12:7); **ἐγώ εἰμι πορεύομαι** ἐν ὁδῷ πάσης τῆς γῆς (3 Rgns 2:2); and ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ λαοῦ μου **ἐγώ εἰμι οἰκῶ** (4 Rgns 4:13). In order to flag this peculiar characteristic, McLean puts the corresponding translations in NETS in the following fashion: "I am—I am pregnant!" (2 Rgns 11:5), "I am—I anointed you to be king over Israel, and I am—I rescued you from the hand of Saoul," (12:7); "I am—I am going by way of all the earth." (3 Rgns 2:2); I am—I live among my own people." (4 Rgns 4:13), and so on.

Thus, with the aim of achieving rigid one-to-one correspondences for the respective renderings of אני and אנכי into Greek, the Septuagint translator of the καίγε *Reigns* went so far as to disregard the basic grammar rule of the Greek language and allow two finite verbs to co-exist within a single clause. Taking into consideration the recurring pattern of ἐγώ εἰμι in apposition with a finite verb, these

26 I have closely examined the renderings into ἐγώ and ἐγώ εἰμι and have found that the differentiation follows a fairly consistent pattern as far as βγ is concerned. There are only a few exceptions out of the dozens of occurrences of ἐγώ and ἐγώ εἰμι: 2 Rgns 14:5, 18, 32; 15:34; cf. also 15:26. The differentiation in γδ, on the contrary, is not obvious. See, e.g., 4 Rgns 1:12; 10:9; 22:20.



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instances of unidiomatic rendering cannot be explained in terms of careless mistakes. Given that the grammar rule involved is so basic, it should not be understood as ignorance on the part of the translator either. It is thus not exaggerating to perceive such stereotyped Greek rendering as a *defiant* act of insistence of the Jewish translator. Insisting on making differentiations corresponding to the Semitic source language, however, at the same time means resisting being bound by the linguistic structure of the Greek target language. Such a manner of translation, I argue, is a reflection of the translator's resistance — a form of linguistic resistance by nature.

## 4. Isomorphism: Linguistic Resistance

Linguistic resistance is also manifested in another typical feature of the Septuagint *Reigns*: isomorphism, a feature common to both the Old Greek and καίγε sections. We have already mentioned the seeming guiding principle of the rendering of the Old Greek text of *Reigns* to "leave no element untranslated." To elaborate, it is, for instance, the practice of this translator to render all the frequent, redundant nominative personal pronouns. What prompts the translator is not the need to use the pronoun for emphasis — as is sometimes required in the Greek language — but rather it is the presence of the corresponding pronoun in the Hebrew. The translator's insistence on representing in Greek *every single* element present in the Hebrew *Vorlage* thus results in a translation sounding totally strange to the native Greek speaker.[27]

27 Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 245.



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While isomorphic translation of the Hebrew is readily seen in the Old Greek text of *Reigns*, the situation is said to be much more serious in the καίγε text. McLean depicts it as "rigid isomorphism" or "extreme literalism."[28] The following examples in the καίγε *Reigns* gives us a pretty good idea of the rigidity of isomorphism and the extremeness of literalism:[29]

2 Sam / 2 Rgns 12:16

| | |
|---|---|
| Hebrew: | ויצם דוד צום |
| Καίγε: | καὶ ἐνήστευσεν Δαυιδ νηστείαν |
| NETS: | and Dauid fasted a fast |
| NRSV: | David fasted |

2 Sam / 2 Rgns 13:15

| | |
|---|---|
| Hebrew: | וישנאה אמנון שנאה גדולה מאד |
| Καίγε: | καὶ ἐμίσησεν αὐτὴν Αμνων μῖσος μέγα σφόδρα |
| NETS: | and Amnon hated her with very great hatred |
| NRSV: | Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her |

1 Kgs / 3 Rgns 2:4

| | |
|---|---|
| Hebrew: | לא־יכרת לך איש מעל כסא ישראל |
| Καίγε: | οὐκ ἐξολεθρευθήσεταί σοι ἀνὴρ ἐπάνωθεν θρόνου Ισραηλ |
| NETS: | There shall not be utterly destroyed for you a man from upon the throne of Israel. |
| NRSV: | there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel |

28 McLean, "Kaige Text of Reigns," p. 271.

29 For more examples, refer to the list in McLean, "Kaige Text of Reigns," p. 272.

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These examples clearly show that the Septuagint translator(s) followed slavishly the wording and syntax of the Hebrew language, not only at the word-for-word level, but at times even down to the level of morpheme-for-morpheme (e.g., rendering מעל in a parallel fashion into ἐπάνωθεν, both composed of 2 morphemes).

Unavoidably, the Greek resulted from such a manner of isomorphic translation — what Sollamo defines as "Hebraistic translation Greek"[30] — is by its very nature unidiomatic. One might ask if the Septuagint translators employed this kind of relatively simple word-for-word technique because they were incompetent in the Greek language. Based on the studies by various scholars which confirm the underlying competence of the Septuagint translators,[31] Rajak concludes that "the adoption of the language was indeed a matter of choice," rather than a matter of (in)competence.[32] Wright's study on the prologue to the *Book of Sirach*[33] (which Rajak has drawn our attention to), in particular, deserves comment. As Wright points out, the Jewish translator who undertook the task to translate his grandfather Ben Sira's work was well-aware of the deficiencies of his own rendering. Yet such imperfection in his Greek work, the translator explained, was due to the fact that the rhetoric force of

30 Sollamo, "Translation Technique," p. 40.

31 Refer to Rajak's explication and others' studies which provide confirmation of the translators' competence in Rajak, "Staying Jewish," pp. 128-135, esp. 130, 134-135.

32 Rajak, "Staying Jewish," p. 135.

33 Benjamin G. Wright, "Why a Prologue? Ben Sira's Grandson and His Greek Translation," in *Emanuel: Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. Shalom M. Paul, Robert A. Kraft, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Weston W. Fields, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 633-644.



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the Hebrew original cannot be fully carried in the rendering,[34] as stated in Sirach Prologue: 15-20:

> You are invited, therefore … to exercise forbearance in cases where we may be thought to be insipid with regard to some expressions that have been the object of great care in rendering; *for what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is in fact rendered in another language* [italics mine] (NETS).

Wright adds, the quality of the prologue itself — which was composed in non-translation Greek—proves that the writer as author, not translator, was in truth a competent Greek writer. Wright's evaluation of the *writing* style of the prologue of *Sirach* and the *translation* style of the body of the text runs as follows:

> The prologue… is written in fairly good, literary Greek style. The translation, by contrast, is executed in a more or less stilted translationese that is often at pains to represent certain formal aspects of the Hebrew very closely—matters such as word order, for example.[35]

Clearly, at least this translator was producing an intentionally unidiomatic Greek translation. Finally, in response to the suggestion that Septuagint Greek might represent the "not-very-elevated everyday communication of Alexandrian Jews," Rajak asserts: "Septuagint Greek… is evidently the product of the study, of the

34 Wright, "Why a Prologue?" p. 641; cf. Rajak, "Staying Jewish," p. 134.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 638.

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translator's cell, or of the 'house of learning' (*oikos paideias*) of the Greek Sirach (51.23),"[36] rather than ordinary Greek.

We can thus say with certainty that the translators of *Reigns* (just like other Septuagint translators) were aware of the idiosyncratic Greek expressions they produced in their work—it would be unimaginable otherwise. They were also believed to be capable of rendering the Hebrew Bible using more sophisticated Greek idioms—had they wished to. Nonetheless, these Jewish translators chose—for whatever reasons—not to conform to the syntactic structure of the Greek language, but stuck to the Hebrew one instead. Greenstein makes it plain: Jewish Bible translation is intended "to lead the audience to the Hebrew source rather than convert the Hebrew source to the audience's idiom."[37] Hence in the phenomenon of isomorphism as exemplified in the *Books of Reigns*, we see another manifestation of linguistic resistance on the part of the Jewish translators.

## 5. Transliteration: Cultural Resistance

Transliteration is frequently found in *Reigns*. This is often true of Hebrew proper nouns. For example, ירושלם "Jerusalem" is always transliterated into the indeclinable form Ιεροσαλημ in the entire corpus of the Septuagint *Reigns*. Taylor provides a list of 25 transliterations of common nouns in the Old Greek sections, of

36 Rajak, "Staying Jewish," pp. 135-136.

37 Edward L. Greenstein, "What Might Make a Bible Translation Jewish?" in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15-16, 1989*, ed. David M. Goldenberg, A Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement 1990 (Philadelphia, PA: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990), p. 87.



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which 13 are found exclusively in *Reigns*[38] and many of them occur only once in the entire Septuagint. McLean focuses instead on the transliteration of those Hebrew words which would seem difficult or unknown to the Septuagint translator. He vividly captures and represents the perplexity involved by transliterating into English the Greek transliteration, for example, "araboth of the wilderness" for Αραβωθ τῆς ἐρήμου (2 Rgns 15:28); "dried araphoth on it" for ἔψυξεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ αραφωθ (17:19); and "saphphoth from cows" for σαφφωθ βοῶν (17:29).[39] Without access to the Hebrew meanings of these transliterations—English and their Greek originals alike—readers (again, English and Greek alike) would probably have no clue at all about what the transliterated words mean.[40]

It is common translation practice for those proper nouns and common nouns which bear no counterparts in the target language to be transliterated. Transliteration might also be an option of last resort when unknown vocabulary or technical terms are involved. Nevertheless, in the Septuagint text of *Reigns*, there are cases in which a Hebrew common noun is transliterated even when its Greek equivalent is available and known to the translator. By way of illustration, in 1 Rgns 5, מפתן "threshold" is transliterated (partially,

38 Refer to the list in Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 246, n. 7. It is noticed that the following transliterations each occurs only once in the entire Septuagint corpus and hence each is a unique Septuagint transliteration: αιλαμμιν (3 Rgns 7:43); Αλεμωνι (1 Rgns 21:3); αματταρι (1 Rgns 20:20); αμαφεθ (1 Rgns 5:4); βαρ (1 Rgns 2:18); βερσεχθαν (1 Rgns 6:8); ελωαι (1 Rgns 1:11); ιααρ (1 Rgns 14:25); νεεσσαραν (1 Rgns 21:8); ραθμ (3 Rgns 19:4); and Φελλανι (1 Rgns 21:3).

39 McLean, "Kaige Text of Reigns," p. 272.

40 Meanings of these transliterations are not provided in the text in order that our English-speaking readers would be able to apprehend the similar perplexity experienced by the Greek-speaking readers of the Septuagint *Reigns*.



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though) into αμαφεθ "amapheth" in verse 4; but then in verse 5 in the *same* context, we see the *same* Hebrew word translated into βαθμός "step."[41] Another example: צבאות (as in the designation יהוה צבאות "Lord of hosts") is transliterated into σαβαωθ "sabaoth" in *1 Reigns*,[42] whereas in *2–4 Reigns*, the term is translated into either παντοκράτωρ "Almighty"[43] or δύναμις "host."[44] Evident as it is, despite the possibility as well as capability of translation, the Septuagint translator still occasionally opted for transliteration. Then in many other cases, transliteration simply makes it impossible for any Greek-speaking readers without a Hebrew tongue to understand the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, as we have seen earlier.

We would normally expect a translator to work in such a way that the fruit of translation will be comprehensible to its target audience. But it seems this is not the case with the Septuagint translators of *Reigns*. In fact, as Greenspahn explains, it is a deep-rooted principle in Jewish tradition that Jewish translations should preserve the feel of the Hebrew text.[45] In transliterating the Hebrew terms, the Septuagint translators were trying to preserve the acoustic sense (if not the articulation) of the Hebrew language,

41 Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 246.

42 1 Rgns 1:3, 11; 15:2; 17:45.

43 2 Rgns 5:10; 7:8, 27; 3 Rgns 19:10, 14.

44 2 Rgns 6:2, 18; 3 Rgns 18:15; 4 Rgns 3:14. While the biblical references cited here and above follow mainly those given in Taylor's discussion on the rendering of צבאות, amendments have been made wherever appropriate; cf. Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 246.

45 Frederick E. Greenspahn, "How Jews Translate the Bible," in *Biblical Translation in Context*, ed. Frederick W. Knobloch, Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture 10 (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2002), pp. 46-47. Refer to Greenspahn's elaboration and examples on pages 47-48.



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which was part of their culture and religion. I believe this is especially true of those terms carrying theological weight and/or having Jewish referent (as in the case of the transliteration of צבאות into σαβαωθ "sabaoth").[46] Taking a slightly different view, Greenstein asserts that a proper Jewish translation "is an aid to reading the source, not a substitution."[47] That is to say, the translation ought to direct its audience toward its source, not vice versa. Accordingly, the Septuagint falls into the category of source-oriented (as opposed to audience-oriented) translation which requires its audience to work to overcome the strangeness of the source.[48] In order to understand the meaning of a certain transliteration, Greek-speaking readers would need to search out the root of the transliteration in its original Hebrew language or to seek help from someone who knew the Hebrew Bible. In this way, the Jewish translators were defending the value of the language of their own root. Different emphases notwithstanding, both Greenspahn and Greenstein would probably agree that transliteration of Hebrew terms into Greek in the Septuagint was aimed at preserving the Jewish culture. The literary

46 The case of the rendering of פלשתים "Philistine" is just the opposite. Instead of being transliterated into φυλιστιμ "Phylistim" (as already seen in other Septuagint books), פלשתים is always translated into (ὁ) ἀλλόφυλος/(οἱ) ἀλλόφυλοι "(the) allophyle(s)" in the *Books of Reigns*; Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 246. As I see it, the reason for the different treatment of פלשתים is very likely because "Philistine" is a pagan referent and it bears no theological significance. Greenspahn also points out that a particular Hebrew term can be translated differently depending on whether or not the referent is Jewish; Greenspahn, "How Jews Translate the Bible," p. 59 and n. 91.

47 Greenstein, "What Might Make a Bible Translation Jewish?" p. 87, where the scholar contrasts Jewish Bible translation with Christian Bible translation.

48 On "source-oriented translation" and "audience-oriented translation," see Greenstein, "What Might Make a Bible Translation Jewish?" pp. 86-87.



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act of the translators, I contend, was a defiant gesture to prevent their culture from being engulfed by Hellenism, hence Jewish resistance in the cultural aspect.

## 6. Neologisms: Political Resistance

Neologism refers to a newly coined word / phrase, or a familiar word / phrase used in a new sense. Taylor identifies a few neologisms in the Old Greek sections, including ἐπακρόασις (1 Rgns 15:22), which is translated "listening" (NETS),[49] and αὐλάπχης (2 Rgns 8:18), translated "chief of the court" (NETS).[50] Although it is not uncommon to find instances of neologism in the Septuagint, the two examples given just now are unique to *Reigns* within the entire Septuagint corpus.[51] In the καίγε sections, there are also neologisms, as identified by McLean. Examples include: παραβιβάζω "to put aside" (2 Rgns 12:13; 24:10); ἐξέλευσις "a going out, way out" (15:20); ἐπιστήριγμα "a support" (22:19); μονόζωνος "a lightly armed (man)" (22:30; 4 Rgns 5:2; 6:23; 13:20, 21; 24:2), and so forth.[52]

49 LEH defines it as "hearkening, obedience."

50 The definition given by LEH reads "mayor of the palace, chief of the court (of the temple?)."

51 Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns," p. 246.

52 McLean, "Kaige Text of Reigns," pp. 272-273. Hugo, nonetheless, remarks that some of McLean's illustrations of neologism in βγ are in fact attested by the Old Greek, namely κολλθρίζω "to roll κολλθρίδας (i.e. rolls)" (2 Rgns 13:6, 8); παραζώνη "belt" (18:11); and ἐξηλιάζω "to hang in the sun (i.e. as a form of torture)" (21:6, 9, 13); Philippe Hugo, "1–2 Kingdoms (1–2 Samuel)," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James K. Aitken (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 130-131; cf. Taylor, "Old Greek Text of Reigns." Then as one might have noticed, the above examples are not all pure neologisms. Some are created by modifying an existing Greek word, by way of adding a prefix or suffix to it.



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In all these cases, instead of simply transliterating the Hebrew terms which seem to have no adequate equivalents in Greek, the Septuagint translators endeavored to forge new words. On one hand, I acknowledge the translators' efforts in coining new Greek vocabulary; on the other hand, I query the intention behind their invention of Greek neologisms. And I am inclined to perceive their act as a way to uphold Jewish identity and autonomy. As Rajak puts it, the distinctive Septuagintal terminology marks the "self-conscious divergence" of Greek-speaking Jews.[53]

The Septuagint translators belonged to a minority Jewish community living under the dominant Hellenistic culture in the Diaspora in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. These translators, like other Hellenized but devout Jews, had to submit themselves to the non-Jewish ruling authorities. Even though probably no political uprising was intended by those taking up the task of translation, resistance to complete submission to the foreign power should not be ruled out. By means of creating new Greek vocabulary in their translation, the Jewish translators availed themselves of the opportunity to exercise authority of their own—an authority even beyond the control of the Hellenistic ruling body. In other words, it was a manifestation of Jewish autonomy, a defense of Jewish identity, or a reaction of "counteridentity" in Assmann's term. As Assmann explains, in situations in which minorities exists, there is a tendency for the culturally and ethnically distinct group "to build up a deliberate 'counteridentity' against the dominating system." This is a mechanism of "immune reaction" which the minority group

53 Rajak, "Staying Jewish," p. 172.



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develops in defiance of the political and cultural system. In the realm of Bible translation, the approach adopted is to defy translatability.[54] In line with this argument, I am of the opinion that neologisms in the Septuagint *Reigns* reflect the political resistance of the Jewish translators.

## 7. Conclusion

The above exposition on the representative characteristics of the rendering of the *Books of Reigns* is by no means exhaustive. Still I believe I have managed to demonstrate that the Septuagint translation can indeed be understood as a form of Jewish resistance to submission to Hellenism in the linguistic, cultural and political dimensions. It seems more appropriate to say that we have looked at the characteristics of the Septuagint translation through the lens of resistance. Resisting linguistically, the translators preserved the differentiation in the source language (rendering אני and אנכי distinctively) and preserved the Hebrew syntax (isomorphism); resisting culturally, the translators preserved the Hebrew sound (transliteration); resisting politically, the translators created new elements in the target language (neologisms). Yet, it is important to point out that the Septuagint translators' resistance as manifested in different dimensions did not appear independently or separately.

54 Jan Assmann, "Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability," in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 29.



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Linguistic, cultural, and political resistance were interrelated and oftentimes appeared all at once.

Assmann mentions that new religions typically emerge under the conditions of resistance to political and cultural domination.[55] The case of translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek under the conditions of resistance to Hellenistic domination, however, turned out to be a different story. What has emerged is not a new form of religion, but rather surprisingly a new form of language. We have seen how different and idiosyncratic the Septuagint Greek is from the illustrations in the *Books of Reigns*. Rajak rightly remarks that "Septuagint Greek is unique and altogether … peculiar."[56] I would go further and suggest taking this language to be a new form of Greek for it has unheard-of qualities which are strange even to native Greek speakers.

In his elucidation of the faithfulness / betrayal dilemma faced by every translator, Ricoeur puts forward the notion of "creative betrayal of the original."[57] That is a mode of translation which creatively presents in the target text certain elements of the source text, yet in a way different from the original. Thus, it is both preservation and betrayal of the source language at the same time. By a simple twist of the concept, I propose interpreting the Septuagint translation as a "creative betrayal of the target language" on grounds of the

55 Assmann, "Translating Gods," p. 29.

56 Rajak, "Staying Jewish," pp. 133-134.

57 Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan, Thinking in Action (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 37.

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awkwardness imprinted on the Greek created. The rationale behind this creative betrayal of the Greek language, I affirm, was the defiant resistance as demonstrated by the Jewish translators of the Septuagint. And the driving force behind this Jewish resistance was their reverence for the Hebrew language and, above all, their reverence for the sacred texts of the Hebrew Bible. After all, the ultimate reason why the Jews produced the Septuagint translation was to safeguard their faith and religion.

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