ASSIMILATION AND DISSIMILATION
TECHNIQUES IN THE LXX OF THE BOOK OF BALAAM*

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An analysis of translation technique is essential to the text-critical use of the data in the LXX. Moreover, an analysis of specific phenomena both within the individual translation units and the LXX as a whole is needed.¹ The translation technique of the LXX of Numbers 22:2-24:25, aptly known as the 'book of Balaam', warrants particular attention precisely because it is not unique; the specific phenomena found in the LXX of this pericope may be found throughout the LXX. Whether similar phenomena in other places are to be ascribed to different translators is a moot question.² However, in the LXX of the 'book of Balaam' we certainly need reckon with but one translator. Two of the phenomena characteristic to his translation technique,

* The Greek text is that of the Septuaginta, Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Numeri (Göttingen 1982) edited by J.W. Wevers.


² For example, see N. Turner, "The Greek Translators of Ezekiel", JTS 7 (1956) 12-24.
assimilation and dissimilation, will be dealt with below, dissimilation being discussed first because of its prevalence.

Dissimilation

In essence, dissimilation is the rendering of the same Hebrew word by different equivalents. Obviously, however, not every case in which a Hebrew word is rendered by two equivalents is a case of dissimilation. Indeed, in most cases the choice of equivalents is determined by the meaning of the particular word in its context or by the "free" or creative translation of the translator. However, in those cases where two contexts are similar but the equivalents chosen for a particular word are different, the possibility of dissimilation should be considered. The following analysis of parallel contexts will illustrate the principle behind this technique.

Gray has noted that the versions assimilate the message reported in 22:11 to that of v. 5f.\(^3\) However, it is possible, indeed probable, that the insertions, the pluses, were in the Vorlage of our translator. Of interest to us is the translation itself. Far from assimilating, the LXX translation seems to dissimilate:

\(^3\) G.B. Gray, *Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh 1903) 330.
It seems probable that ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς in v.11 reflects a plus in the translator's Vorlage. It is possible that the translator's Vorlage of v.11, repeating the key word, read ἡ καινή and not καὶ ἡ καινή. However, it is not likely that there are other textual problems in the verse. Though ἦν in verse 6 is rendered by the plural ἐξ αὐτῶν, there is no reason to believe that this rendering reflects a variant reading. The translator obviously chose to render ἦν as a plural in v. 6 and as a singular in v.11. He chose to give it a partitive
connotation in v.6 but not in v.11. Similarly, he chose to render יָרֵא in v.6 ἐκ τῆς γῆς. And he chose to render the plus in v.11 ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς. Yet the possible Hebrew plus reconstructed from the translation would necessarily be יָרֵא, as in v.6.

The translation of verses 6 and 11 is remarkable precisely because of the difference in the renderings. Though the renderings of each of the verses reflect the Hebrew, each presents a different understanding of the Hebrew. Had there been no repetition of the Hebrew text, we could not have known that the translator realized that there were two possible ways of interpreting the text. The flow of narrative would have forced the translator to choose a particular rendering, either that of v.6 or that of v.11. In effect, the repetition of the Hebrew text provided the translator with the opportunity to give a double rendering! The translator recognized two possible renderings; he did not consider either to be a preferred rendering; he presented both.4

By its very nature, dissimilation is a technique whereby the translator could honestly express his uncertainty. When faced with a difficult word, when not certain which

4 Compare the similar if not analogous phenomenon described by S. Talmor, "Synonymous Readings in the Textual Traditions of the Old Testament", Scripta Hierosolymitana 8 (1961) 335-83.
Assimilation-Dissimilation

equivalent would be the most precise rendering, he could choose one equivalent for the first occurrence of the word, a different equivalent for the next occurrence of the same word. The differences in nuances between κατεκάλυψεν and κεκάλυψεν, between ἔδω and εἰ ἔδρα, between δυνώμεθα and δυνησομαι, are not reflections of different Hebrew texts, but of differences in interpretation of the same text. Consider, too, the following renderings:

τῶν in 22:6 is rendered ἀρασαι; in the same verse ἡμίν ἡμῖν is rendered καταράσῃ σὺ κεκατηράνται.

τοῦσκλ is rendered ἐνδιαβᾶλλειν in 22:22; εἶς διαβόλην in 22:32.

βῆ is rendered εἰς κατάρασιν in 23:11; καταράσθαι in 24:10. The technique of dissimilation was thus able to express possible morphological, syntactical, and lexical differences when the context allowed.

It seems likely that the technique of dissimilation, of presenting two possible equivalents, developed as part of the translation tradition when it was possible to choose from different equivalents. In other words, at that stage, the translation tradition did not yet have many stereotyped equivalents. It is for this reason that we cannot really determine whether the translator chose two equivalents to render one Hebrew word because of stylistic reasons or because he wished to present a double rendering. Did the translator feel uncertain about the meaning of the Hebrew word, and, therefore, feel he had to choose more than one
equivalent? Or, since there were few established stereotypes, did the translator feel free to vary equivalents for variety's sake? Consider the following examples.

"ריעל" occurs in the phrase "ריעל פר הראיל במאנה" in three verses. In 23:2 and 23:30 it is rendered "καὶ ἀνήγεγκεν;" in 23:14 ἄνεβηκεν;

"שׁוֹב אל כל להב" occurs twice in chapter 23. In v.5 it is rendered ἐπιστράφεις πρὸς Βαλακ σύντος λαλήσεις; in v.16, ἀποστράφεται πρὸς Βαλακ καὶ τὰς λαλήσεις:

"ורק" occurs three times in our unit. In 22:22 it is rendered "καὶ ὅργησεν ἠτμόν." In 22:27 and 24:10 it is rendered "καὶ ἠτμόθη.

When the Hebrew word is rare or difficult, one tends to assume that the difference in equivalents reflects the translator's uncertainty, that it is indeed a double rendering reflecting the translator's attempt to "cover all possibilities". Thus, "ורק אילות אל לבש" is rendered "καὶ ἐφάνη" in 23:4. In the phrase "ורק ה' אל לבש" in 23:16 it is rendered "καὶ συνήνθησεν.发展模式 occurs twice in our unit. In both instances it is parallel to "רובא." In the first instance (23:9), the translator takes his cue from the parallelism and renders it προσνοήσα αὐτόν. In the second instance (24:17), he seems to strive for a different rendering, and, deriving the word from a root "רשא," renders it μακαρίζω.

The second equivalent in a case of dissimilation may, at times, be considered a gloss on the first. An interesting
example of such a case is found in the three different renderings of the term "עולם" in chapter 23. The context of verses 23:3, 6 and 23:15, 17 is virtually identical.

v. 3 עולמ
Stand beside your burnt offering
καὶ παρεστηκει ἐπὶ τῆς θυσίας σου
And in the reconstructed plus,
קאת עולמ
And Balak stood beside his burnt offering
καὶ παρεστηκει Βαλακ ἐπὶ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ
Yet when Balaam returns after receiving the first oracle,
ונה נצב עולמ
And, lo, he was standing by his burnt offering
καὶ οῦδε ἐφειστηκει ἐπὶ τῶν ὀλοκαυτωμάτων αὐτοῦ
Verse 15 is similar to verse 3.
v. 15 עולמ
Stand here beside your burnt offering.
παραστηκει ἐπὶ τῆς θυσίας σου
And again, on Balaam's return,
ונה נצב עולמ
And, lo, he was standing beside his burnt offering
καὶ οῦδε ἐφειστηκει ἐπὶ τῆς ὀλοκαυτωμᾶς αὐτοῦ.
The LXX Vorlage may have read "עולמ" in v. 6, but the choice of the equivalents themselves does not involve textual problems. The translator chose the more general term, "θυσία," in verses 3 and 15. After Balaam's return, verses 6 and 17, the whole offering had been burnt. The
translator chose a more specific equivalent. Indeed, since the repetition in the Hebrew text allowed him to do so, he varied the specific equivalents, choosing ὁλοκαύτωμα in v.6 and ὁλοκαυτώμα in v.17, in effect, giving a double rendering of the specific term.⁵

Our translator was neither unique nor original in his use of this type of double rendering. This is best illustrated by the very first instance of θυσία in the LXX. The Hebrew הָגוֹלָה appears three times in the Cain and Abel pericope. In Gen. 4:3 the equivalent is θυσία; in v.4 δῶρον; in v.5 θυσία. Whether or not the choice of δῶρον (in the plural δῶροις!) is to be explained exegetically,⁶ it is, in effect, a double rendering providing a gloss on θυσία.

It should be noted that the technique of dissimulation is not used indiscriminately in the translation of the 'book of Balaam'. Certainly our translator was not a slave to his technique. Where he felt that he had found the exact equivalent, he did not hesitate to repeat it. Consider ἔσπασμένην, the rendering of הָגוֹלָה in Numbers 22:23,31.

⁵ Cf. S. Daniel, Recherches sur le vocabulaire du culte dans la Septante (Paris 1966) 244f.
⁶ Ibid., pp. 209-10.
Consider, too, the equivalent for ἴση in the formula introducing each of the seven oracles:

Assimilation

Assimilation is, in one sense, the mirror image of dissimilation. Whereas, dissimilation is the rendering of the same Hebrew word by different equivalents, assimilation is the rendering of two or more Hebrew words by the same equivalent. H.B. Swete gave examples of both dissimilation and assimilation, but viewed them in a far different light than we view them. In discussing Num. 23:7-10 he asserts, "Ἐπικατάφρασαί μοι, and καταφράσωμαι in v.8, represent ἴση, whilst ἄρασαί answers to ῥα and ἄρασαμαι (v.8) to ἐπικατάφρασαί, an unusual instance of carelessness or poverty of language on the part of the translator". 7 It is our contention that these are neither instances of carelessness nor instances of poverty of language. They are examples of considered translation technique.

Since we assume that our translator applied the same technique in translating chapters 22, 23 and 24, it seems

7 H.B. Swete, An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek, revised by R.R. Ottley, (Cambridge 1914) 332.
advisable to note the exact equivalents in the translation unit as a whole.

The fact that the LXX translator chose two equivalents to render בֵּית in two adjacent verses, 23:7,8, can hardly be explained as carelessness. The translator has chosen two equivalents to render רָעַם in a single verse, 22:6. And, according to Codex B, he has chosen two equivalents to render בֵּן in 23:8. These renderings are not cases of carelessness, they are best explained as examples of dissimilation.
The fact that "אָרָאָב answers to רָאָה and אָרָאָבְיָא (v.8) to נָהֲל" (Swete, as quoted above) can hardly be explained as a matter of carelessness. The translator had already rendered both חוֹר, 22:6, and צִכְבוֹ 22:11, by the same equivalent, אָרָאָב. Consider, too, the renderings in 24:9,10. Surely three instances indicate intention. Nor are these the only instances in which the translator has rendered two Hebrew words by the same equivalent. We need look no farther than the above list: Εὐπλοκάτορά σαν renders צִכְבוֹ in 22:17 and צִכְבוֹ in 23:7. Furthermore, Codex B has καταραταί rendering both צִכְבוֹ and צִכְבוֹ in a single verse, 23:8. Indeed, all manuscript evidence points to the fact that within the LXX of the 'book of Balaam' the translator has rendered all three Hebrew words, צִכְבוֹ, צִכְבוֹ, and צִכְבוֹ, by the same equivalent.

In view of the fact that the translator did have three separate equivalents at his command, we must assume that it was not poverty of language that led him to render all three Hebrew terms by the same equivalent. We can only assume that his rendering reflected his answer to the question facing all translators of this Hebrew text: How does one render different Hebrew words which appear to be synonymous?

RSV is completely inconsistent in its renderings. It considered צִכְבוֹ and צִכְבוֹ to be synonyms and rendered both "curse", while rendering צִכְבוֹ "denounce". NJPS, on the other hand, distinguishes between the three Hebrew words, rendering צִכְבוֹ "curse", צִכְבוֹ "damn", and צִכְבוֹ "doom". With the

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exception of 23:25 where נָעֲרַים נָעֲרַים is rendered "Don't curse them", NJPS is consistent in its rendering. The question whether "curse", "damn", and "doom" are indeed adequate renderings, faithfully reflecting different nuances of רָרָה, בָּרוּךְ, and מְעַרְעָה need not concern us. The point is that the LXX translator could have chosen a different equivalent to render each of the three words in much the same manner as the translators of the NJPS. Apparently, the LXX translator felt the distinctions so drawn would be false distinctions. Recognizing that he could not distinguish between the three terms, he chose to render them by the same equivalent.

Translation Tradition

It should be stressed that our translator was neither unique nor original in his use of assimilation and dissimilation. Both techniques were rooted in the translation tradition as exemplified in the earlier translation of Genesis. Consider the assimilation in Gen. 12:3

רָרָה לָמָּלֵל נָא
cαὶ τῶν καταρριμένους σὲ καταράσσωμαι.

Consider the dissimilation in Gen. 27:29

אָרָה לָמָּלֵל אָרָה
καταρριμένος σὲ ἐπικατάρατος.

As noted above, Swete, though aware of assimilation, did not recognize it as a translation technique. He asserts:

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"... the same Greek word often serves for several Hebrew words. ... Even in the same context or verse this sometimes occurs. Thus in Gen. i-iii γῆ translates לְאֹת, רְאָמָה, לְאֹת, שֻׁרְאָה; in Exod. xii. 23 אָבָרָה and מְסָרָה are both represented by παρέρξασθαι; in Num. xv. 4f συστικά is used for both קָשָׁר and לְאֹת. In such cases it is difficult to aquire the translators of carelessness; but they are far less frequent than instances of the opposite kind".⁹

Surprisingly, though Swete does note the choice of συστικά to render both קָשָׁר and לְאֹת in the LXX of Numbers 15, he does not note its choice in the LXX of Numbers 7. In the detailed listing of the dedication offerings in this chapter, each of the princes brought identical offerings. As a result, the word קָשָׁר is repeated 13 times (vs. 13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 55, 61, 67, 73, 79, and 87) and the word לְאֹת is repeated 13 times (vs. 17, 23, 29, 35, 41, 47, 53, 59, 65, 71, 77, 83, and 88). Both words are consistently rendered by συστικά. It is highly improbable that the translator was careless in using the same equivalent for both Hebrew words. Surely, in using the same equivalent 26 times. he must have been aware of what he was doing!

The fact that the translator did not feel compelled to render קָשָׁר and לְאֹת by different equivalents does not imply

⁹ Swete, op. cit. p. 329
that he was unaware of the distinction between the Hebrew words. Rather, the fact that he rendered the two Hebrew words by the same equivalent, the general term ἡσσία, would seem to indicate that our translator felt that both הַנַּם and הָנִּים were general terms whose meaning was defined by their context. His choice of the same equivalent for both words indicates neither carelessness nor indifference "to technical accuracy". ¹⁰ The only inference to be drawn is that his technique of assimilation is far different from the translation techniques of today.

Interestingly, one of the clearest examples of the reverse phenomenon, dissimulation, is also found in Numbers. The word שָׁלֹם occurs five times in Num. 35:2-7. The LXX has "no less than four renderings: προδότια, ἀφορίσματα, ὀμορά, and συγκυροῦντα".¹¹ Here too, one cannot indict the translator with carelessness. The choice of different

¹⁰ G.W. Gooding, The Account of the Tabernacle, Translation and Textual Problems of the Greek Exodus (Cambridge 1959)

¹¹ Gray, op. cit. p. 468.
equivalents of necessity involves a conscious effort. One can only conclude that the choice of four different equivalents to render יִצְכָּל is reflection of the translator's technique. This technique need not be taken as a rejection of the modern view expressed by Gooding: "Technical terms ought to be (italics mine) rendered with unvarying precision".\textsuperscript{12} It is quite possible that the Greek translator was in full agreement with this view. However, when uncertain of precision, he did not hesitate to provide varied, possible alternative renderings. Indeed, it appears that the translator's very real concern with accuracy and precision led to his use of dissimilation.

Implications

It is generally accepted that the LXX of the Pentateuch was completed before the LXX of the other books. Indeed, the impact of the LXX of the Pentateuch on the translation of the other books has been analyzed in detail by E. Tov.\textsuperscript{13} In light of his analysis, it should not be

\textsuperscript{12} G.W. Gooding, op. cit. p. 9.
surprising to find that the translation technique of the LXX of the Pentateuch influenced that of the later books of the LXX; we have yet to learn the extent of this influence. Does dissimilation account for the fact that there is no consistency with regard to the treatment of individual technical terms in the LXX? Does it account for the fact that the LXX is less consistent than the other ancient versions in rendering the names of precious stones and metals? Does assimilation account for the use of "favourite words" in the Greek Psalter? And, as important,

14 E. Tov, "Loan-Words, Homophony, and Transliteration in the Septuagint", Biblical 60 (1979) 231. Of interest, too, is Tov's observation, "There is no consistency in the employment of either a translation or a transliteration of a given name. ... In fact even within the individual translation unit there is no consistency with regard to the translation or transliteration of the proper nouns" (p. 229) Nevertheless, one might hazard two generalizations: 1) the translator will translate a place name when the flow of narrative will permit a reasonable translation, 2) the translator will use both translation and transliteration in the same translation unit whenever the context allows. The latter may be considered a particular case of dissimilation (Note e.g. the equivalents of δεσποτα: Num. 21:20, 23:14 λελαξευμένου; Dt. 3:17 φασγα; Dt. 3:27 λελαξευμένου). It must be noted, however, that in those instances where we have the translation alone, as e.g. in Num. 21:30, 23:14, one can never be certain that the translator did indeed understand the Hebrew as a place name).


to what extent do the answers to these questions have a bearing on text-critical problems?

Most significant, however, in our text-critical use of the data in the LXX is the recognition of assimilation and dissimilation as translation techniques. Indeed, failing to put ourselves "in the shoes of the Septuagint translator of old",\textsuperscript{17} we will fail to understand his translation and the text whence it derives. Of course, assimilation, the rendering of different words by the same equivalent, makes it difficult to determine the Vorlage. Of course, dissimilation, the rendering of the same Hebrew word by different equivalents, makes it difficult to determine the Vorlage. However, the translators were merely interested in transmitting their Vorlage in the Greek. We know almost nothing of the translators' intended audience. Perhaps they wrote for an audience, readers or listeners, who knew no Hebrew. Perhaps their audience included a good number who could at least read Hebrew and had the Hebrew text before them. In either case, the translators' aim was to convey the sense of the Hebrew. To achieve this aim the translators had their own translation techniques. Two of their techniques have been discussed above. Their significance is such that they warrant further study.

\textsuperscript{17} H.M. Orlinsky, "The Septuagint as Holy Writ and the Philosophy of the Translators", \textit{HUCA} 46 (1975) 104.