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"GARDEN IN EDEN" OR "PARADISE OF DELIGHT"? THE SEPTUAGINT'S RENDERING OF עדן IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

ABSTRACT

Within the first chapters of the book of Genesis, the "paradise" is located in "Eden". At least, this is how the majority of modern translators interpret the Hebrew term עדן. However, within the Hebrew text of Genesis 2-3, the term "Eden" seems to be used with a *double entendre*: on the one hand, the author intended to use the term עדן as a toponym; on the other hand, in his word choice, it appears that the author aimed to characterise the specific nature of the "Eden" as a place of plenty and wealth. Through an analysis of the equivalents used in the Greek version of the Creation narrative, it is argued that the Septuagint translator of Genesis, alternately transliterating and translating עדן, and therefore not manifesting him-/herself as a "consistent" translator, succeeded in producing a faithful rendering of the term.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translators are – in the broadest sense of the word – first and foremost *interpreters* of the text. However, this does not necessarily imply that translators – at least when they aim to fulfil their role conscientiously – are free to do whatever they want. In general, one can take it for granted that a translator aims to transmit a source text faithfully into the target language. However, in doing so, a translator will be confronted with many problems. First, in translating the biblical texts, translators must struggle with the "original" meaning, and search for solutions to the questions that the

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process of translating poses to itself, specifically regarding the relations of the source language and the target language.[1]

In this process, the translators of the Bible into modern languages are often confronted with such difficulties. Not only is the Hebrew language system quite different from Indo-European language systems, but the content of the source text is not always as clear and univocal as one would wish. And even if the translator clearly understands his/her source text, the problem of transmitting it into the target language is not always easy.

Already in the 3rd century BCE, people struggled with the translation of the Hebrew Bible. Similarly to modern Bible translators, the LXX translators were confronted with several peculiarities of the Hebrew language system that may have been difficult to translate (Wevers 1990:VII-XIV).

First, Hebrew and Greek differ on the so-called graphemic level. In contrast to the twenty-two consonants of pre-Masoretic Hebrew, Greek language makes use of twenty-four letters, seven of which are vowels. Written Hebrew had no vowels (with the exception of the three consonants ה, ו and י, which can have the function of a vowel). In particular, this difference between the two phonetic systems becomes clear in words that the Greek translator opted to transliterate from Hebrew into Greek characters (this is done rather frequently).

Secondly, there are important differences between Hebrew and Greek on a morphological level, with respect not only to the noun, but also to the verbal system. Nouns in Hebrew can be masculine or feminine, whereas Greek has three genders (masculine, feminine and neuter). Moreover, Greek nouns can be inflected in five cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, vocative). Hebrew nouns, however, do not have case inflection. For instance, the Hebrew so-called *nota accusativi* את, placed before a noun, indicates the object. A Greek translator will make use of the accusative case, thus leaving this Hebrew particle unrepresented.

Thirdly, the verbal system of Hebrew and Greek differs substantially. For example, contrary to Hebrew, the Greek verb is not inflected with respect to gender. This can create ambiguity in the Greek translation. So, in many Greek manuscripts of the book of Canticles, as well as in modern translations thereof, it is indicated in the margin whether it is the boy or the girl who is speaking (Auwers 2010:689-701). Moreover, many aspects of the verbal systems are dissimilar in Hebrew and in Greek. So the translator

1 This contribution was written during a research visit (April 2015) at the University of the Free State as a tribute to Prof. Dr. Klaas Smelik on the occasion of his retirement as Professor at Ghent University (Belgium) in September 2015.

had to decide whether and how to deal with typical grammatical features of the Hebrew parent text, such as, for example, the so-called paronomastic construction, where the Hebrew infinitive absolute (which does not exist in Greek) is followed by a finite form of the same verb (Sollamo 1998:101-113).

Finally, there are significant problems on the lexical level. Some Hebrew words simply do not have any proper equivalent in Greek, because they are part of the *Sitz im Leben* that the Hebrew-speaking community did not share with the Greek world. For example, how should specifically Hebrew terms such as שבת ("sabbath") or שקל ("shekel") be dealt with? While the first one is mostly transliterated, and simultaneously adapted to Greek morphology (σάββατον), the latter word mostly has been translated by the term δίδραχμον.

Despite these problems, the study of the LXX holds great importance for the discipline of textual criticism, not at least because of the fact that the LXX often reflects an older and more original reading of the Hebrew text of the Bible. However, in order to use the LXX in text-critical matters, one should try to understand, to the greatest possible extent, the "techniques" the translators used in dealing with their Hebrew *Vorlage*.[2] One approach to understanding their "translation techniques" is the analysis of their rendering of Hebrew wordplay into Greek (Ausloos 2008:53-71; Ausloos *et al*. 2012:273-294). In cases where one can hardly doubt that the Hebrew author intended to play with Hebrew words, a good translator will at least try to render his/her *Vorlage* as adequately as possible. Taking for granted that a translator did, in fact, notice the Hebrew wordplay, s/he has several possible options (Ausloos 2013:54). Either s/he can add a footnote in order to clarify the wordplay that is present in the source language. Or s/he can transliterate those Hebrew words that are constitutive for the wordplay. Or s/he can translate the Hebrew words and search for good alternatives in the target language.

The present contribution deals precisely with this topic of the rendering of a particular characteristic of Hebrew wordplay (*double entendre*) in the analysis of the translation techniques of the LXX. More specifically, I will focus on the rendering of the term עדן by the LXX translator of the book of Genesis.

2 On the concept of "translation technique", see Ausloos (2017).

2. A GARDEN IN EDEN – A PARADISE OF DELIGHT

In the creation story of Genesis 2-3, the setting is a garden, which is situated in "Eden". At least, this is how the majority of modern translators interpret the Hebrew term עדן. In the book of Genesis, this term occurs six times. In Genesis 2:8, it is said that "YHWH God planted a garden in Eden (בעדן), in the east". Two verses later, the author mentions that "a river comes out of Eden (מעדן) to water the garden" (Gen. 2:10). It is "in the garden of Eden" (בגן עדן) that YHWH God places the human being who has been created (Gen. 2:15), and it is "from the garden of Eden" (מגן עדן) that YHWH God sends him away (Gen. 3:23). After having driven out the human being, YHWH Elohim placed the cherubim and the sword East "of the garden of Eden" (לגן עדן), to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Finally, it is said that Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve, after having killed his brother, settled in the land of Nod, East of Eden (Gen. 4:16: עדן‌קדמת).).

The etymology and precise meaning of the Hebrew term עדן has been the object of much debate. Referring to Akkadian and Sumerian language, the term has been interpreted as "steppe" or "plain".[3] In general, however, scholars consider the term to be a toponym. This is not surprising, especially in light of its use in the book of Genesis. Although the prefixes -ב (Gen. 2:8, 15), -מ (Gen. 2:10; 3:23), and -ל (Gen. 3:24) have a variety of meanings with different functions, there seems to be no controversy that, within the context of the Paradise narrative, they have a spatial sense: "in", "from", and "to" (Waltke & O'Connor 1990:191). Moreover, the use of the term קדם ("east") in Genesis 2:8 and 4:16 also points in that direction (Westermann 1974:287).[4] This toponymical interpretation has led to various attempts to locate Eden.[5] The mention of the river that flows out of Eden, in particular (Gen. 2:10) – a verse that, as part of verses 10-14, has often been considered to be a later addition to the text – and the use of the names Tigris and Euphrates in Genesis 2:14 have led to locating Eden in Mesopotamia.

In critical Biblical scholarship, it is generally accepted that the author of the Paradise narrative (as with every author of Biblical texts) was mainly interested in transmitting a (theological) message. Rather than having the intention to "inform" his/her readers, s/he aimed at entertaining, instructing,

3 See, among others, Wénin (2007:52). For an overview of the etymology of the term, see Cothenet (1960:1178-1179) and Wallace (1992:281-282). On the different interpretations, see Titus (2011:180-184).

4 Also in 2 Kgs 19:12; Isa. 37:12; Ezek. 27:23; Am. 1:5, the term undoubtedly is a toponym.

5 See the overview by Albright (1922:15-31). Albright himself located Eden in "the far west" (Albright 1922:26, 29).

inspiring or convincing them. Moreover, scholars generally accept that the majority of authors intended to create "good" literary products. In order to achieve their goal, authors used several literary "techniques". Wordplay was one literary tool that Biblical authors undoubtedly employed, even if it is not always easy for a contemporary reader to discover the different plays-on-words within the Biblical text. Bearing in mind that the Biblical authors, in general, and the author of Gensesis 2-3, in particular,[6] have been very eager to make use of wordplay in its various forms (Kabergs & Ausloos 2012:1-20), it is highly plausible that עדן is also a bit of wordplay. In any case, the text itself points in that direction. Whereas, in Genesis 2:8, the preposition ב- has been connected with the term עדן (גן בעדן – a garden *in* Eden), Genesis 2:15 connects it with the *nomen regens* גן in the construction בגן עדן.. The scene is not located "in Eden", but "in the garden *of* עדן".. By using the term in this particular way, the author seems to connect his/her characterisation of the garden with the noun עדן,, which means "abundance", "luxury", and even "pleasure".[7] This interpretation, moreover, fits completely with the presentation of the garden in Genesis 2:9: "Out of the ground YHWH God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food".[8]

In short, the term "Eden" seems to be used with a *double entendre*:[9] the author plays with two possible meanings of the term (i.e., implied polysemy).[10] On the one hand, the author of Genesis 2-3 probably intended to use the term עדן as a toponym, even if a historicising interpretation such as trying to locate Eden does not make sense. However, this does not imply that s/he had in mind a particular location, somewhere on the globe. On the other hand, in his/her choice for the name "Eden", the author seems to have aimed at characterising the specific nature of Eden, as a place of plenty

6 For wordplay in Gen. 2-3, see De Fraine (1956:47-59), who, nevertheless, does not mention the term עדן. See also Kabergs (2014:109-235).

7 See, for example, Gen. 18:12; 2 Sam. 1:24; Jer. 51:34; Ps. 36:8; Neh. 9:25. Cf. also Van Wolde (2006:12).

8 Due to similarities between the presentations of the garden and Israel's sanctuary, Wenham (1994:399) argues that the "garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him ... These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary". Even if it is correct that "many features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple" (Wenham 1994:399), I do not see any particular link between the term עדן and typical sanctuary vocabulary.

9 With regard to the concept of *double entendre*, see Kabergs (2010:67-75).

10 In her doctoral dissertation on wordplay in Genesis, Kabergs (2012) does not deal with עדן.

and wealth.[11] Both interpretations – Eden as toponym, and as an allusion to luxury – do not exclude each other.[12]

3. EDEN IN LXX GENESIS

As indicated earlier, most of the translations of the Bible have rendered the term עדן in Genesis exclusively as a toponym: Eden. As such, they only render one aspect of the term in its polysemous *double entendre*. The translators cannot be blamed for this choice: translating a wordplay – in particular, a term used with a *double entendre* – is a very perilous undertaking, as the Italian adage correctly summarizes: *Traduttore traditore* (a translator is a traitor). Without adding a footnote to the translation, the translation will hardly reveal both meanings of a term. Nevertheless, this difficulty does not relieve a translator from the task of seeking a creative solution. The way the LXX translator of Genesis has dealt with the Hebrew wordplay on the term עדן in the book of Genesis is presented in the following overview:[13]

Gen. 2:8	גן בעדן	παράδεισον ἐν Ἐδεμ
Gen. 2:10	מעדן	ἐξ Ἐδεμ
Gen. 2:15	בגן עדן	ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ
Gen. 3:23	מגן עדן	ἐκ τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς
Gen. 3:24	מקדם ולג עדן	ἀπέναντι τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς
Gen. 4:16	קדמת עדן	κατέναντι Ἐδεμ

Whereas the term גן has consistently been translated as παραδείσος – a common loanword in classical Greek literature to designate a park laid out for the king's pleasure, distinguished from a κῆπος (a garden planted for

11 One can compare this with the expression "the land of Cockaigne". Probably derived from an ancient French word that was related to the Latin verb *coquere* ("to cook"), thus making a link with delicious food, Cockaigne, written with a capital, became used as toponym. This, however, does not imply that medieval authors using this term had a real existing land in mind.

12 Cf. Noort (1999:28): "In the stories of Gen 2-3, Paradise is not located; it is far away. But in this mythic-geographical fragment, probably a learned addition to the original text, a (partial) localization is tried"

13 For the text of the LXX, see Wevers (1974). As scholars generally accept, the Greek translation of Genesis originated in the 3rd or first half of the 2nd century BCE (Scarlata 2015:15).

fruit or vegetables)[14] –, two translation equivalents are used for the term עדן: in Genesis 2:8, 10 and 4:16, the term has been transliterated,[15] whereas, in Genesis 2:23, 24, the term is translated.

- In Genesis 2:15, the term does not have a translation equivalent.[16] It is not impossible that this *minus* is due to haplography (parablepsis), either by the copyist or the translator, because of the identical ending of the words גן and בעדן (cf. Tov 2012:222-224).
- In Genesis 2:8, 10 and 4:16, the term עדן has been transliterated as Ἐδεμ.[17] In general, a translator transliterates in two instances: either s/he does not understand the term in his/her source text and opts for the easiest solution, or s/he considers the term as a proper name. Without doubt, in Genesis 2:8, 10 and 4:16, the LXX translator considered Ἐδεμ to be a place name (Harl 1986:101; Wevers 1993:25).[18]
- In Genesis 3:23, 24, the LXX translator did not transliterate the term. Rather, the translator used the Greek noun τρυφή. The "garden of עדן" is interpreted as a paradise of "delight". In choosing this translation equivalent, the translator clearly linked the term עדן to the identical noun.

4. EDEN AND LXX'S TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE

Consistency (or stereotyping) is often considered to be a good parameter for characterizing a translation's literalness.[19] This means that one investigates whether a translator has consistently chosen the same word to render a particular term in the original, and that the result of this investigation is used as one of the arguments for characterizing a translation as "literal" or "free". Although this distinction between the concepts "literal" and "free" does

14 Cf. Harl (1986:101); Wevers (1993:25).

15 On the transliteration of Hebrew terms in the LXX, see Tov (1999a:165-182).

16 Symmachus reads ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τῆς ἀκτῆς (Field 1875:14).

17 The final נ has been rendered by a μ, probably because of the frequent interchange between מ and נ. Therefore, it is possible that the translator's *Vorlage* read a מ instead of a נ. .Tov (1999b:305) suggests that a number of the מ/נ interchanges are "evidenced in Hebrew sources, so that a number of these cases must be ascribed to Hebrew variations".

18 Cf. also the translations of the LXX: Hiebert (2004:7) ("an orchard in Edem"); Fernández Marcos *et al*. (2008:53) ("un jardín en Edén"); Prestel & Schorch (2009:6) ("ein Gartenpark in Edem").

19 Cf. Marquis (1987:405-424); Olofsson (1992:14-30); Tov (1997:20-21). On the utility of the concepts "consistency" and "non-consistency" within the analysis of the translation technique, see Ausloos (2017). For the characterisation of the translation technique of Genesis, see Cook (1987:91-125).

make sense, one should also be careful to not use it too strictly: a third concept – "faithfulness" – is needed to characterize a translation and the translator's "techniques".[20] Indeed, a very literal translation is not always "faithful", while a "free" translation is not necessarily "unfaithful".

In the case of rendering עדן, the LXX translator of Genesis does not seem to be a "consistent" translator. Leaving aside the *minus* in Genesis 2:15 as a potential error by the copyist or translator, עדן has been transliterated as Ἐδεμ – thus interpreting the word as a place name – in only three of the five instances, whereas in Genesis 3:23, 24, the term has been translated. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the translator failed to produce a faithful translation. Even if s/he failed to render the *double entendre* of the term עדן by one single word, the translator still searched for an adequate rendering. Alternately, transliterating and translating the term עדן was the best possible option s/he had at his/her disposal. Whether this wordplay became clear to the reader of the LXX is questionable. In any case, in spite of this lack of consistency, the translator cannot be blamed for not having been faithful towards his/her source text.

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20 Cf. Aejmelaeus (1987:378): "A distinction should be made between literalness and faithfulness". See also Ausloos & Lemmelijn (2014:59-62).

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