

ISAC LEO SEELIGMANN

The Septuagint Version of Isaiah and Cognate Studies

*Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
40*

Mohr Siebeck

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Herausgegeben von

Bernd Janowski (Tübingen) · Mark S. Smith (New York)

Hermann Spieckermann (Göttingen)

40





Isac Leo Seeligmann
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The Septuagint Version of Isaiah and Cognate Studies

edited by
Robert Hanhart
and
Hermann Spieckermann

Mohr Siebeck

ISAC LEO SEELIGMANN (1907–1982): from 1936 up to his deportation 1943 lecturer at the Israelite Seminar in the Netherlands; from 1946 on librarian at the University of Amsterdam; 1948 PhD; 1950–77 Professor of Biblical Literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

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Preface

The present volume makes accessible once more the groundbreaking work on recent Septuagint scholarship – “The Septuagint Version of Isaiah” (1948) – by Isaac Leo Seeligmann (1907–1982). The work is accompanied by two of his studies that have to be seen as prolegomena to the book as a whole: “Problems and Perspectives in Modern Septuagint Research” (1940) and “Phases of Jewish Historical Consciousness” (1947). Both essays were originally written in Dutch; the latter one is made available in English for the first time.

All these works mentioned above document in an impressive way the new approach taken by Seeligmann: to understand the Septuagint – based on a careful methodological basis – as a witness of Hellenistic Judaism striving to maintain the text’s special character as a document of faith. At the same time all of Seeligmann’s works edited in this volume are documents of the suffering of European Judaism during the time of National Socialism as the dates of publication amply demonstrate. Seeligmann mentions this in his studies only in passing. Rather than moving those sufferings into the spotlight, the scholar seeks to conceal them. The careful reader, however, will realise that the history of Israel during the Hellenistic period does not simply represent an object of scholarly research for Seeligmann but also serves as the background for the interpretation of the history of the Jewish people in his own time. The new edition, accompanied by a volume in German containing a biographical sketch of Seeligmann as well as his studies in the field of Biblical exegesis as a whole, aims to prevent the epochal achievement of this scholar from being forgotten and serves, at the same time, as a remembrance to the suffering endured by himself and his family as members of the Jewish people.

Many were involved in the publication of this volume. First and foremost, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Mrs Margot Seeligmann who kindly agreed to the new edition of the works of her late husband and made the hand-written marginal comments in his copy of “The Septuagint of Isaiah” available to us. Without her generous help and interest this new edition would not have been possible. The same has to be said of the co-operation of her daughter, Mrs Judith H. Seeligmann, who already in 1990 translated the essay “Problems and Perspectives in Modern Septuagint Research” into English and gladly agreed to do the same for the essay “Phases of Jewish Historical

Consciousness". We offer our deepest thanks to Mrs Judith H. Seeligmann for preparing these translations which were possible only because of her linguistic competence and her familiarity with the work of her father.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the publisher Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, especially Dr. h.c. Georg Siebeck. He and the fellow editors of the *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*, Prof. Dr. Bernd Janowski and Prof. Dr. Mark S. Smith, immediately and gladly embraced our idea for this publication. The realization of this publishing enterprise has happened through the help of the editor for Theology at Mohr Siebeck, Dr. Henning Ziebritzki. As usual, the co-operation has been a pleasure and we thank him for that.

Many thanks to E.J. Brill, Leiden and Magnes Press, Jerusalem for granting us permission to republish the works of Seeligmann. We would especially like to thank Drs. Hans van der Meij and Prof. Dr. Shemaryahu Talmon.

Collaborators in Berlin and Göttingen offered invaluable help. Sincere thanks to Dr. Anselm C. Hagedorn, Berlin for helping to prepare the English version of the Preface and Introduction. We are equally very grateful to stud. theol. Michael Grimmsmann and stud. theol. Angelika Maske for proof-reading and to stud. theol. Ulrike Verwold for preparing the indices. Without stud. theol. Sarah Oltmanns, not deterred by hard work, this book would neither been published within the tight schedule nor would it have been produced with the desired care. She alone was responsible for producing the electronic version of the articles, the layout, the checking of references and all those countless things that are the daily bread of such an editorial project. Our deepest thanks for that!

Göttingen, March 2004

Robert Hanhart and Hermann Spieckermann

Contents

Preface	V
ROBERT HANHART	
Introduction	3
ROBERT HANHART and HERMANN SPIECKERMANN	
Rules Applied to the Edition of ISAC LEO SEELIGMANN'S Works	19
ISAC LEO SEELIGMANN	
Problems and Perspectives in Modern Septuagint Research	23
(translated by JUDITH H. SEELIGMANN)	
I. The Septuagint in Ancient Tradition and Evaluation.....	24
1. Jewish Hellenistic tradition	25
2. Rabbinic tradition	27
3. Christian tradition	29
II. The Text History of the Septuagint.....	31
1. Text editions	32
2. Paul de Lagarde and the ideal of an Urtext of the Septuagint	34
3. The state of transmission	35
4a. Emendations – method and tools	38
4b. Classification of the manuscripts	40
5. Textual variants before Origen	41
III. Literary Criticism and the Character of the Septuagint as Translation.....	45
1. Distinguishing different hands in the Septuagint	45
2. The origin of the Septuagint as a Targum	47
3. Arguments favouring the Targum character	48
4. Translation character of the various books	50

IV. The Septuagint and the Hebrew Text.....	52
1. Translation technique of the Septuagint	52
2. Retroversion from the Greek	53
3. The Septuagint and the history of the Hebrew language	54
4. The Septuagint and the history of the Hebrew text	60
V. The Language of the Septuagint.....	66
VI. Hellenization and Actualization of the Bible in the Septuagint.....	69
1. Forms of Hellenization in the Septuagint	69
2. Hellenistic theology of the Septuagint	72
3. Actualization of the Bible in the Septuagint	76

ISAC LEO SEELIGMANN

Phases of Jewish Historical Consciousness	83
(translated by JUDITH H. SEELIGMANN)	

ISAC LEO SEELIGMANN

The Septuagint Version of Isaiah	119
--	-----

Preface	123
Introduction	124

Significance of the Septuagint 124. History of the origin of the Septuagint 124. Need of, and a programme for, monographs on the several books, 124. Character of the Isaiah translation, 126. Problems raised by the Isaiah translation and their treatment in the present study, 128. Previous literature on the Isaiah translation, 128.

I. The Text of the Septuagint of Isaiah and its Transmission.	135
Function of this chapter, 135. (1) Accidental factors in the transmission of the text; correct readings, accidentally preserved and scattered, 136. (2) Classification of the available material handed down to us, 140. (3) Hexaplaric and Lucianic recensions, 142. (a) Revisionary processes and their spread, 142. (b) The Origenic material and its character, 143. (c) The Lucianic material and its character, 147. (4) Traces of younger revisions in the transmission outside the Origenic and Lucianic material, 155. (5) Other revisionary processes, 157. (a) Christian elaboration, 158. (b) Quasi-Greek phrasing given to original transcriptions of Hebrew words, 166: (c) Secondary components in unanimously transmitted versions, 167. (5) Doublets in the Septuagint of Isaiah and their character, 168. Traces of the existence of parallel translations and their use in ancient revisions, 174. Great age of some of these variants, 176.	
II. The Technique Employed in the Translation and its Relation to the Hebrew Text.	179
(1) The question of the unity of the translation and the inconsistencies in the translator's working method, 179. (2) The licence shown in the translation a result of an endeavour to produce acceptable Greek; characteristics of the idiom of the translation, 183. (3) Some aspects of the translator's knowledge of Hebrew, 187. (a) The translation, or	

various translations of the Pentateuch as the source of the translator's knowledge of Hebrew, 187. (b) Hebrew an acquired language for the translator; Aramaisms, 193. (c) Examples of the translator's lexicological knowledge of Hebrew, 195. (d) Examples of the translator's grammatical knowledge of Hebrew, 201. (4) The freedom and daring of the translator's technique, the result of defective knowledge of Hebrew and of his striving after free interpretation, 203. (5) The script of the Hebrew manuscripts used by the translator; the theory of WUTZ, 206. Slight value of our translation for criticism of the Masoretic text, 207. (a) Places where the Septuagint preserves a correct reading, 208. (b) Categories of places where the Septuagint may be deemed to reflect an ancient text which really existed, 209. (α) Different stages of the script and the mutual substitutions of letters, 209. (β) Mistranslations pointing to actually existing readings in the Hebrew text, 210. (γ) Correspondence to independent sources, 211. (δ) Differences between the various strata of the Septuagint elucidating an evolution of the Hebrew text, 212. (c) The Septuagint as a document of orthographical peculiarities and copyists' habits in the Hebrew manuscript, 215. Word-substitution, 217.

III. Date and Historical Background of the Translation. 222

Difficulties in dating books of the Septuagint, 222. (1) Relationship of the Isaiah translation to that of other books; the translation of Isaiah is younger than that of the Psalms, the Dodecapropheton and Ezechiel, 222, and older than that of Daniel, ben Sira, Kings, 229. (2) The historical background of the Isaiah translation, 231. The geographical notions of the translator: Hellenistic, Jewish and contemporizing elements, 231. (3) Historical reminiscences, 238. Allusions to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, 239; Onias III, 242; the fleet of the Philistines, 245; Maccabean victories, 246; hatred against Maccabees and Jews in the Phoenician cities, 247; expansion of the Nabatean state, 248; revolutions and Ethiopian rebellion in Ptolemaic Egypt, 249; destruction of the Carthaginian fleet, 250.

Excursus: Onias III and the Onias Temple in Heliopolis. 252

IV. The translation as a Document of Jewish-Alexandrian Theology. 258

Methodology in using the Septuagint as a source of Jewish-Alexandrian theology, 258. (1) Epithets and attributes of God, 260; the heathen deities, 263; religious ceremony and traces of ancient Jewish-Alexandrian liturgy, 267; (2) notions concerning virtue and social conceptions, 269; conceptions regarding divine law, Torah and the sight of the Gnosis, 270; the prophecy, 277; (3) historic consciousness and conception of the Galuth (exile), 279; national symbols and the yearning for liberation, 284; the Remnant of Israel and its increase by proselytizing, 288; the ideal of peace, 290; the Messiah, 291. Jewish and Hellenistic elements in the translation, 293.

List of Original Publication..... 295

Index of Authors..... 297

Index of Passages..... 303

Introduction

ROBERT HANHART

Everybody concerned with the understanding of the biblical tradition has to be deeply moved that those scholarly works which served for the past 50 years as basis and guidance for any research into the Greek translation of the Old Testament originated from the suffering and persecution of the Jewish people during the Second World War: the three early studies by Isaac Leo Seeligmann (10.1.1907–14.5.1982) republished in this volume. The first, a seminal literary-critical study on the “Problems and Perspectives in Modern Septuagint Research”, already inaugurated in pre-war Amsterdam during the year 1933 and finished five months after the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, “one of the last scholarly works written by a member of the Dutch-Jewish community during that period” (thus Seeligmann’s translator into English, his daughter Judith). The second, a first theological and intellectual evaluation on “Phases of Jewish Historical Consciousness: Bible, Jewish Hellenism, Talmud Literature”, originated in the autumn 1942 following an invitation to address this problem and completed in July 1945 after his and his family’s liberation from Theresienstadt. Finally, the second, exegetical, evaluation on “The Septuagint Version of Isaiah, a Discussion of its Problems”, already conceptualized during May 1945, still in Theresienstadt, submitted as a doctoral thesis to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Leiden and published in 1948. The historical work is dedicated “to the memory of my teachers, friends and pupils, who died as Jews 1941–1945”, while the exegetical work is dedicated to the memory of his father in the Isaianic hope for deliverance of the remnant survivors in the new Jerusalem (Is. 37.31–32; 62.6–7). Remembering this past suffering and the hope for this coming joy as a symbol for I. L. Seeligmann’s work has a deeper dimension: The history and faith of Israel in Hellenistic times are an example for his own life. Remembrance and hope in time of suffering are based on the awareness of the earlier brief period of peace given to him. The internal unity of suffering and hope shows itself also realised biographically in that the work on those two topics interferes with his own time of anguish.

I

The work “Problems and Perspectives in Modern Septuagint Research” is – as the title indicates – a history of research focussing on the two major aspects of inquiry: The otherwise never achieved plethora of covered literature on the Septuagint of the past 50 years is not just reported critically but also investigated as a ‘problem’ with regard to the question what each single study can contribute towards an understanding and illumination of the object at hand, and as a ‘perspective’ on how the separate results relate to each other.

First and foremost, the study is concerned with an understanding of the Septuagint “*in its own right*”¹, this means independent from its significance for the Old Testament as a whole, from the literature of the Jewish-Hellenistic and Palestinian environment and without making “it instrumental to the understanding of either Old or New Testament”. All topics of the separate chapters are related to this “own right of the Septuagint” – a significant difference from all other contemporary studies.

According to the author, the independent path of this attempt consists of formulating the question how the Septuagint reflects the new understanding the Bible yielded for its translator and his intention: to shed light on the contents within the dominating cultural atmosphere of the faith-community of the Hellenistic-Jewish diaspora and at the same time to transfer its theological testimony in the Hellenistic world as a whole. Here, “transfer”: “*transponieren*” is not seen as ‘reinterpretation’ but rather, quite literally, as carrying over the testimony – in its own right – into the Hellenistic world.²

This own right of the Septuagint serves as a leitmotif for the first chapter “The Septuagint in Ancient Tradition”; its subtitles – “Jewish-Hellenistic, Rabbinic and Christian Tradition” – provide the external dates for its origin and earliest history as the historical and intellectual frame within which such work of translation in its own right will be developed. The section on the Hellenistic tradition investigates the historical core in the Letter of Aristeas, while that on the Rabbinic tradition focuses on the question that arose early on whether the translation into a foreign language was compatible with Divine Law, while the passage on the Christian tradition finally addresses the discussion – culminating in the work of Origen – over the legitimation of the Greek Holy Scripture, originally accepted by both faith-communities.

The next two chapters, II “The Text History of the Septuagint” and III “Literary Criticism and the Character of the Septuagint as Translation” are part of this own right of the Septuagint too. The most important themes are a

¹ p. 24.

² p. 24.

comparison of diplomatic editorial work (Cambridge Septuagint of BROOKE-MCLEAN-THACKERAY) and critical editorial work (Göttingen-Septuagint from LAGARDE via RAHLFS to ZIEGLER's edition of the Book of Isaiah [1939]), as well as an inventory of the textual sources of the past 50 years; a stadium of research and tradition, who called into question the editorial concept of LAGARDE who thought it possible to reach the original translation by eliminating the three Christian recensions handed down by Jerome in his famous note. It became important for subsequent scholarship to realise the limitations of both editorial concepts: With regard to the diplomatic edition the limitation consists of the – never changed – fact that if Codex Vaticanus, on which the edition is based, is missing the codices Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus are used, because both codices are the most ancient textual witnesses, though not the manuscripts that are closest to Vaticanus, as far as the critical edition is concerned it consists of the fact that the reconstruction of an original form of the text, i.e. "*eines Textes, der einmal Wirklichkeit war*" (ARTHUR ALLGEIER), is impossible, a limitation that nevertheless does not allow the conclusion – often postulated by critics – to do away with such a critical editorial method of texts.

With regard to the conclusions drawn from the new state of the tradition Seeligmann points out the obligation to exercise a careful comparison and evaluation of new textual conceptions emerging from recent findings dating to the period before the Hexapla. A necessary consequence is to correct the *Einheitshypothese* considering the so called 'Targum-hypothesis': His view that the documented plurality of the Septuagint tradition has to be tested, in regard to both conceptions, already for pre- and early Christian times – thus he is able to accept the *Einheitshypothese* in the more subtle form of ALFRED RAHLFS instead of LAGARDE's view with the slight correction that by postulating a process of tradition closer to the Targum several problems of the history of the text can be solved easier –, could have helped to avoid the later confrontation of radical followers of both conceptions often unnecessary and hardly fruitful.

The main character of the Septuagint "in its own right" is that of being a translation. Therefore, it is impossible to recognise its character without asking for the *Vorlage* of each sentence. This conclusion makes it necessary to add two further chapters IV "The Septuagint and the Hebrew Text" and V "The Language of the Septuagint": On translation technique, the possibility of a retranslation of lost *Vorlagen*, on the recoverability of the original Hebrew or Aramaic language and its history as well as on change in the linguistic conception of the target language caused by equivalent terms. Here too, the new level of knowledge on the basis of the data available at that time – before the discoveries from the Dead Sea – is made apparent without ignoring the limits of the correct interpretation that should not be transgressed, a standard

still valid today: a new understanding of the Septuagint's language on the basis of recently discovered contemporary popular language has to be evaluated solely within the sphere of the Israelite community in Hellenistic times.

"Herewith we have crossed the bounds: from history of language into history of culture".³ What Seeligmann calls in chapter VI "History of Culture" under the title "Hellenization and Actualization" can only be understood properly – and this is the overall theme of the whole study –, if the meaning attached to the term "Hellenistic theology" is understood properly: "However, when the translators theologized, theirs was a Jewish theology".⁴ From this perspective, the term Hellenistic gains a new dimension that underlies all phenomena that Seeligmann groups under the heading "Hellenization and Actualization of the Bible in the Septuagint" – and without this presupposition his conception of the Septuagint's character could be easily misunderstood –: 'God', 'Israel', its 'Messianic expectation', 'the Torah': He is concerned with the question how each statement of the given witnesses, under the present condition of a newly shaped history, society and culture, can be rendered according to its original meaning. From here, the categories 'semantic', 'sociological' and 'dogmatic' used in the work are defined once and for all: semantic as a dissociation from using terminology too heavily influenced by common Hellenistic culture; sociological in historical statements of the actualised replacement of "Ἰσραήλ" with Ἰουδαία, and dogmatic for the careful replacement of selected anthropomorphic epithets for Israel's God. This is the starting point for an open consideration of the scholarly positions associated with ADOLF DEISSMANN, GEORG BERTRAM and – programmatically – put forward in the *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, positions that are naturally removed from Seeligmann's own view. Again, it is the Septuagint in its own right and only this that is the starting point.

It is his intention to recognise the Septuagint in its own right which enables Seeligmann in all his questions to define the fine border that, within apparent contradiction, separates the true nature of the Septuagint from a false understanding, that is, one that distorts its true character: It is the fine line between correct and incorrect understanding of diplomatic and critical editorial work, of faith in tradition and conjectural critique, faith in the possibility of reconstructing lost traditions or its renunciation, of changes in meaning through translation and the unchanging nature of original statements. The criterion for correct knowledge of this borderline is made manifest in the last sentence of these three studies – a sentence that is valid right from the beginning for all of them: "It is, therefore, as ancient testimonies of the Jewish

³ p. 69.

⁴ p. 72.

exegesis, that the Books of the Septuagint must be investigated and understood.”⁵

II

This insight, programmatically laid out in the first study, is interpreted in the second study that looks at the nature of Israel's understanding of history in the Hellenistic period: “Phases of Jewish Historical Consciousness. Bible, Jewish Hellenism, Talmud Literature”.

1. The work is first and foremost concerned with Israel's understanding of history according to its biblical testimony as a whole. To begin with, the translation of the Septuagint demonstrates its correct interpretation of the given tradition when Israel's understanding of time, *תע*, is not translated by *χρόνος*, i.e. a course of events, but by *καῖρός*, thus determining the history of Israel as the realization of the divine plan. The characterization of the nature of the given tradition as an entity in its own right, in contrast to the Ancient Near Eastern ideas, corresponds to the aim of the first study to determine the nature of the Septuagint “in its own right”: the text is a statement of Israel's faith that reveals itself as a historical statement on the basis of the prophetic interpretation of history as atonement and redemption from Israel's guilt in view of the divine order “not to be like the other nations”. “Ezekiel, the prophet of the Babylonian exile is the paramount preacher of this theodicy” (20.32-33).⁶

2. The own right of the *Septuagint* for the determination of Israel's understanding of history in this period of its history – the beginning opens still on to the Persian period, the end on to the Roman rule of the world – is seen to lie in the independent statements, compared with the Hebrew-Aramaic *Vorlage* of the Septuagint, that can be found in the realm of Hellenistic Alexandria mainly in the Greek historical witnesses outside the “Alexandrian Canon”, in the realm of Palestine mainly in the apocalyptic tradition. However, the standard for canonical authority during this period – regarding both the original and the translation – remains open: “Neither the nature of the Alexandrian translations of the Prophets, nor Philo's discourses render it likely that prophecy enjoyed any kind of canonical authority in Alexandrian Judaism”.⁷ Nevertheless, the necessary border between ‘biblical’ and ‘Hellenistic’ historical consciousness is taken for granted and on this premise

⁵ The Septuagint Version of Isaiah, p. 294.

⁶ p. 95.

⁷ p. 99.

Seeligmann carefully: “*met behoedzaamheid*”, asks “for traces of difference between biblical and Hellenistic historical consciousness.”⁸ Fundamental changes are recognised in four phenomena: national consciousness, the view of God, the understanding of *Galuth* and the expectation of things to come. It is the change in the definition of Israel as a people exclusively and directly determined by God toward the character as a people bestowed by God as expressed in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 90(89).16. Here, where the request that God may reveal His works to His servants is replaced by the supplication that He may look upon His servants and His works (*ἰδε ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους σου καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου*), a definition that appears to be more significant in the Maccabean historiography. It is the change from the understanding of Israel’s suffering as a judgement imposed by its God toward the emphasis on the injustice Israel suffered at the hands of the nations, how it is stressed in the Septuagint of Isaiah by introducing the term *ἀδικία* several times. It is the change from the *Galuth*’s terminology to that of foreign rule and of longing for Zion as expressed in the Septuagint-Psalter as well as to that of a conscientious mission of the diaspora as expressed in the Septuagint of Isaiah in the blessing of “my people in Assur and in Egypt” (Is. 19.24), further extended in the elevation of Israel within the entire creation in the contemporary Sybilline Oracles (*πάντα δὲ γαῖα σέθεν πλήρης καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα* [III:271]). Finally, it is this change from statements about past events to the expression of current suffering – the “today” – in the Septuagint of Isaiah during the time of Seleucid persecution that is seen as the origin of eschatological expectation – an expectation ultimately expressed in apocalypticism.

3. Based on this definition of Israel’s understanding of history during the Hellenistic Period, in which the Septuagint – notwithstanding the multitude of tradition and the rather problematic use of the term ‘canon’ for this period – is seen as a basis in its relationship to the Hebrew-Aramaic tradition, the last period, the Talmudic period of Midrashic exegesis, – the start of the period is cautiously placed in the year 70 CE – appears as a time, now with a fixed canon, during which the presuppositions of historization and actualization were newly defined: They are the tools of exegesis: “Every branch of Jewish literature succeeding the Bible sees itself in one way or another as a commentary or a lawful continuation of the Bible. This applies most particularly to the entire Talmud literature, which knows no truth that is not yet extant in the Bible. Every religious conviction, every practical wisdom should be retrieved there.”⁹ The structuring principle of the Talmudic system of thought is wisdom in form of Torah.

⁸ p. 97 (in the Dutch original p. 58).

⁹ p. 107.

In this sense and with this premise it is actualization that remains the binding force linking Israel's historical consciousness in the Palestinian and Alexandrian writings of the Hellenistic period with Talmudic era. It is the realization of the suffering of Israel at the hands of the World's Empires which forms a link between the three studies. In Talmudic characterization it reaches its deepest form in the prayer, given to all generations: "*I trust in Your faithfulness during the Babylonian exile; my heart will exult in You in the days of the Persian empire; I will sing to the Lord during the reign of the Hellenistic Kings; for He has been good to me when oppressed by the Romans*". The Babylonian empire is the 'wilderness', the Persian one the 'chaos', the Hellenistic one the 'darkness' and the Roman empire 'the abyss'" ¹⁰: If one remembers that this study originated during a time of the abyss, preceded by a period of still relative calm during which the foundations of the study were laid and which was to be followed by a time of liberation, it seems justified to regard the middle part of the trilogy in the spirit of the author as the core of the work.

III

The third study, in a closer look at the translation of the Book of Isaiah, further develops the insight that the character of the Septuagint can only be determined correctly by investigating and understanding its individual books as witnesses of Jewish exegesis. Here, Seeligmann realises his perception – gained by a reappraisal of pre-war scholarship – of the Septuagint as a whole, exemplified on one book from the Alexandrian canon, that was not merely the only one most readily available based on the textual and editorial work done by JOSEPH ZIEGLER but that was also, because of its translation technique, well suited for gaining insights into the nature of the Septuagint in an individual case: "I. Text and Textual Tradition; II. Translation Technique and its Relationship to the Hebrew *Vorlage*; III. Time and Historical Background of the Translation; IV. The Translation as a Document of Jewish-Alexandrian Theology."

1. Although the first chapter about text and tradition of the Septuagint of Isaiah does not yet move beyond a repetition of the report on the Septuagint as a whole in the first three chapters of the first study – origin, early history up to Origen and contemporary state of tradition –, progress is made by indicating special phenomena in the tradition of this biblical book: Seeligmann points first at textual forms that can be explained as original ones, only weakly attested by some Lucianic manuscripts, in contrast to them the

¹⁰ p. 112f.

best attested readings can be explained paleographically as transformations of the original form. Next, he shows the elements of Hexaplaric and Lucianic recensions whose character is more precisely and completely verified than was the case in the preliminary studies of J. ZIEGLER. Finally he concerns himself with the question of further revisions after the Christian recensions, as well as the pre-Lucianic congruencies with the Masoretic text, the Jewish translations of the 2nd century CE and the so called *interpretationes Christianae*. The astute and careful text selection forms the basis for the actual goal of the investigation: a historical and theological interpretation of a translated text purged from later influences.

2. The oldest possible text of the translation that Seeligmann sets out to interpret has to be determined – right from the outset – as a text whose statements are only understandable and explicable in the light of the presupposed Hebrew *Vorlage*. This is the topic of the second chapter. The inquiry into translation technique and its relationship to the Masoretic Text is therefore a necessary part of the interpretation.

The translated text, purged from all secondary elements, and in a first stage compared with the Hebrew or Aramaic *Vorlage*, is next investigated regarding each individual phenomenon. The first criterion for the comparison is the Masoretic text; the Hebrew Isaiah texts from the Dead Sea were not yet known. The canonical authority of prophecy is stressed much stronger than in the second study and better corresponding to the nature of Israel in Hellenistic times. From this centre-point the plethora of possibilities of translation – faithful translation and degree of freedom, choice of equivalents, foundation in given traditions, especially the Pentateuch – are evaluated in view of their significance for maintaining identity as well as with a view to the conscientious differentiation between archetype and image. The criteria according to which a single translator rather than many is proposed and the arguments for assuming a certain freedom in translation fully intended by the translator rather than postulating a *Vorlage* that differs significantly from the Masoretic text, are here determined in a much more subtle way than before.

3. From this representation of the oldest reachable form of the text arises the question of a relative chronology within the Septuagint as a whole and of an absolute chronology in the framework of the history of Israel in Hellenistic times. This is the theme of the third chapter. A relative chronology can be established only by demonstrating that different books of the Septuagint follow the same translation technique with regard to equivalence of words and syntax: a translation technique which cannot be explained from a common *Vorlage* and thus has to originate independently. An absolute chronology can only be reached by looking at the actualization made by the translator that

Index of Authors

- Abel, F. M.: 67, 252
Abrahams, I.: 211
Albright, W. F.: 233
Allgeier, A.: 5, 31, 33, 42, 49, 61, 139, 141, 155, 170
Allon, G.: 78
Aptowitz, V.: 27, 103, 110
Auerbach, M.: 67
Avi-Yonah, M.: 110
Baab, O. J.: 45
Baeck, L.: 70, 77, 271
Baethgen, F.: 255
Balla, E.: 109
Bär, Jitschak (Fritz): 116
Bardenhewer, O. B.: 142
Bardy, G.: 148
Barr, J.: 12
Barrois, A.: 56, 57
Baudissin, W. W. von: 179, 261, 262, 267
Baumgärtel, F.: 45, 46, 48, 130, 179, 180, 181
Baumstark, A.: 47, 48, 52, 64, 158
Bechörschör, J.: 89
Beek, M. A.: 104, 256
Beer, G.: 256
Bees, N. A.: 28
Begrich, J.: 36, 44, 92
Belkin, S.: 71, 77
Ben Jehudah, E.: 117
Bengel, J. A.: 63
Berdjajew, N.: 86
Bertram, G.: 6, 30, 46, 52, 56, 60, 63, 72, 74, 75, 99, 101, 156, 265, 278, 289
Bevan, E.: 87, 94
Bewer, J. A.: 31, 37
Bi(c)kerman(n), E.: 25, 26, 102, 125, 236, 251, 252
Bialoblocki, S.: 64
Billerbeck, P.: 114
Blau, L.: 56
Blondheim, D. S.: 269
Boer, P. A. H. de: 50
Bolkestein, H.: 68
Bouché-Leclercq, A.: 242
Bousset, W.: 39, 43, 97, 103, 274
Brabant, F. H.: 87
Brand, J.: 255
Braun, M.: 77, 97, 98
Brongers, H. A.: 88, 89
Brønno, E.: 57
Brooke, A. E.: 4, 32
Brüll, N.: 106
Buber, S.: 211
Büchsel, F.: 96, 262
Buhl, F.: 90
Burkitt, F. G.: 35, 137
Cadoux, C. J.: 160
Campenhausen, H. von: 164
Cappellus, L.: 139
Ceriani, A. M.: 36, 155
Charles, R. H.: 256
Churgin, P.: 46, 180
Cohen, D.: 53
Cohn, L.: 43
Collingwood, R. G.: 84
Cornill, C. H.: 36
Croce, B.: 85
Crombach, H.: 164
Daniélou, J.: 160
Danielsmeyer, F.: 45
Deissmann, A.: 6, 28, 32, 43, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 186, 236, 268
Dhorme, P.: 37
Dibelius, M.: 68
Dienemann, M.: 111
Diestel, L.: 47
Dillmann, A.: 126
Dittenberger, W.: 256, 268
Dodd, C. H.: 76, 186, 262, 271, 276
Döderlein, J. Chr.: 139
Dölger, F. J.: 112
Dornseiff, F.: 26, 27, 48
Dörrie, H.: 127, 142, 148, 154, 168, 169
Driver, G. R.: 60, 154, 169, 195, 196, 214
Duhm, B.: 13
Dünner, J. H.: 103
Dürr, L.: 276, 292
Eerdmans, B. D.: 104

- Egli: 235
 Ehrenberg, V.: 23
 Ehrlich, A. B.: 63, 211, 239
 Eichhorn, J. G.: 59, 64
 Eichrodt, W.: 89, 90, 91, 95
 Eisenstein, J. D.: 116
 Eitan, I.: 60, 195
 Eschelbacher, M.: 107
 Euler, K. F.: 133, 165, 166
 Euting, J.: 249
 Ewald, H.: 38
 Faitlovitch, J.: 256
 Feuillet, A.: 220
 Fichtner-Jeremias, Ch.: 87
 Fichtner, J.: 43
 Field, F.: 35, 36, 138
 Finkelstein, L.: 79, 244
 Fischer, J.: 52, 55, 56, 58, 60, 131f.,
 139, 179, 183, 204, 206, 207, 215, 250
 Flashar, M.: 51, 58, 73, 74, 76, 188,
 193, 227, 265, 272
 Foerster, W.: 72, 261
 Frankel, Z.: 59, 77, 78, 127
 Freudenthal, J.: 49, 77, 78, 97, 98
 Friedländer, M.: 266
 Friedmann, M.: 28, 159
 Fuchs, H.: 13, 104, 105, 113
 Galling, K.: 89, 248
 Gandz, S.: 274
 Gaster, M.: 64, 125
 Gehman, H. S.: 42, 46, 180
 Geiger, A.: 47
 Gerleman, G.: 126
 Ginsberg, H. L.: 211, 215
 Ginsburger, M.: 56, 233
 Ginzberg, L.: 107, 266, 293
 Glaue, P.: 64
 Goodenough, E. R.: 43, 101, 275
 Goodhart, H. L.: 43
 Gordis, R.: 44, 61, 63, 147, 215
 Grabar, A.: 106
 Grabe, J. E.: 139, 140, 144
 Graetz, H.: 126
 Gray, G. B.: 179, 180, 181, 220
 Grégoire, F.: 101
 Gressmann, H.: 89, 103
 Gunkel, H.: 89, 265
 Güterbock, H. G.: 87
 Gutmann, M.: 113
 Gutschmid, A. von: 49, 249
 Hadas, M.: 25
 Halévy, J.: 30; 56, 206
 Haller, J.: 84
 Hardt, H. von der: 105
 Harnack, A. von: 29, 166
 Hauck, A.: 67
 Hauptert, R. S.: 56
 Hautsch, E.: 32, 36, 39
 Hedley, P. L.: 42, 51, 155
 Heinemann, I.: 77, 293
 Helbing, R.: 68
 Heller, Ch.: 37, 50, 65, 168
 Hempel, J.: 43, 49, 74, 91, 92, 93
 Herrmann, J.: 45, 46, 48, 86, 179
 Herzfeld, L.: 252
 Herzog, J. J.: 67
 Hesselning, D. C.: 67
 Hilberg, I.: 142
 Hirsch, S. A.: 255
 Hirschberg, J. W.: 172
 Hitzig, F.: 60
 Hodijs, H.: 45, 144
 Holleaux, M.: 242
 Holmes, R.: 35, 36
 Hölscher, G.: 93, 255
 Hommes, N. J.: 166
 Horowitz, J.: 117
 Houbigant, J.-F.: 13
 Howorth, H. H.: 126
 James, M. R.: 38
 Jansen, H. Ludin: 103, 109
 Jellicoe, S.: 41
 Jellinek, A.: 111
 Jeremias: s. Fichtner-Jeremias
 Joel, N.: 28
 Johannessohn, M.: 68
 Johnson, A. C.: 42, 46, 180
 Johnson, S. E.: 158
 Jones, A. H. M.: 236, 249
 Jouguet, P.: 250
 Kadushin, M.: 73, 260
 Kaerst, J.: 93
 Kahana, A.: 256
 Kahle, P.: 43, 47, 48, 60, 62, 64, 65,
 125, 126, 143, 144, 145, 155, 158, 174,
 206, 207
 Kahrstedt, U.: 251
 Kaminka, A.: 50, 60, 227
 Kaplan, J.: 106
 Kappler, W.: 33
 Kase, E. H. Jr.: 42, 46, 180
 Katz, P.: 32, 33, 37, 139, 140
 Kaufmann Kohler, : 274
 Kaufmann, Y.: 90, 92, 93, 103, 263

- Kaupel, H.: 264
 Kenyon, F. G.: 42
 Kern, F.: 118
 Kern, O.: 269
 Kittel, G.: 69
 Kittel, H.: 69
 Kittel, R.: 56, 94, 292
 Klein, S.: 102
 Klostermann, A.: 126, 234
 Kneucker, J. J.: 45, 60
 Knox, W. L.: 26, 98
 Kocken, E.: 105
 Koehler, L.: 90, 95, 198, 201, 218
 Kohler: s. Kaufmann Kohler
 Kohn, H.: 86
 Kohut, Georg A.: 110
 Kolbe, W.: 79, 240
 Krauss, S.: 110
 Kuhn, K. G.: 75, 116
 Küppers, W.: 103
 Lagarde, P. de: 4, 5, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 137, 170, 291
 Lagrange, M. J.: 96, 258
 Laqueur, R.: 85, 103, 255
 Lauterbach, J. Z.: 102, 112
 Leeuwen, W. S. van: 24, 70, 76, 101, 176, 291
 Lefort, Th.: 186
 Levias, C.: 195, 220, 246
 Lewin, B. M.: 112
 Lewy, H.: 102, 112, 248
 Liebermann, S.: 106
 Liebmann, E.: 160, 162
 Lindblom, J.: 95
 Lohmann, P.: 162
 Lohmeyer, E.: 87, 90
 Löw, I.: 218
 Lucian: 142
 Lukyn Williams, A.: 114
 Lumbroso, G.: 25
 Lütke mann, L.: 35, 61
 Luzzatto, S. D.: 58
 Mannheim, K.: 85
 Margolis, M. L.: 30, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 41, 53, 56, 57, 63, 185, 207
 Marmorstein, A.: 113, 115
 Martin, J.: 26
 McLean, N.: 4, 32
 Meecham, H. G.: 25
 Meer, E. van der: 57
 Melamed, Z.: 54
 Meltzer, O.: 251
 Mendelssohn, Moses: 89
 Menes, A.: 91
 Mercati, G.: 35, 58, 144, 148, 206
 Mesnil du Buisson, R. de: 106
 Meyer, E.: 103, 255
 Mez, A.: 43, 155
 Michaelis, W.: 48, 291
 Michel, O.: 43
 Migne, J. P.: 114, 115
 Milligan, G.: 67
 Möhle, A.: 35
 Momigliano, A.: 25, 26
 Montgomery, J. A.: 86, 234
 Moore, G. F.: 32, 44, 90, 255, 255
 Moulton, J. H.: 67, 68
 Mowinckel, S.: 91, 92
 Mozley, F. W.: 188, 227
 Müller, N.: 28, 232
 Nestle, E.: 32, 36, 43, 59, 246
 Niese, B.: 71
 Nock, A. D.: 268
 North, C. R.: 91
 Noth, M.: 89, 93, 94
 Nötscher, F.: 267
 Nowack, W.: 60
 Nyberg, H. S.: 65, 66, 160
 Olmstead, A. T.: 126, 230
 Orlinsky, H. M.: 30, 37, 57, 60, 62, 209, 210
 Østborn, G.: 271
 Ottley, R. R.: 131, 138, 139, 195, 203, 204, 205
 Otto, W.: 254
 Parsons, J.: 36
 Pedersen, J.: 86, 89
 Perles, F.: 54, 108, 149, 216
 Peters, C.: 37, 64
 Pinches, Th. G.: 56f.,
 Plessner, M.: 56
 Preaux, Cl.: 250
 Preisigke, F.: 67, 236
 Pretzl, O.: 30, 37, 40, 42, 44, 58, 151
 Procksch, O.: 30, 40, 94
 Proosdij, B. A. van: 232
 Psichari, J.: 67
 Quell, G.: 89, 90
 Rad, G. von: 88, 89, 92, 93, 94, 95
 Rahlfs, A.: 4, 5, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 58, 61, 64, 67, 137, 138, 148, 151, 155, 264
 Ratner, B.: 111

- Redpath, H. A.: 245f.
 Rehm, M.: 37
 Reider, J.: 114
 Reitzenstein, R.: 276
 Rendtorff, F.: 75, 100
 Riddle, D. W.: 136
 Ritter, B.: 77
 Roberts, C. H.: 49, 268
 Ros, J.: 66
 Rosen, G.: 75, 220, 289
 Rosenthal, F.: 54
 Rost, L.: 46, 50, 80, 180
 Rowley, H. H.: 105
 Ruben, P.: 63
 Rudberg, G.: 136
 Rudolph, W.: 38, 57, 60
 Ryle, H. E.: 38
 Saphir, J.: 172
 Sasse, H.: 86
 Schaefer, H. H.: 86, 271
 Schalit, A.: 97
 Schencke, W.: 107
 Schileico, V. K.: 57
 Schlatter, A.: 240
 Schleusner, J. F.: 139, 140, 144, 156
 Schmauch, W.: 275
 Schmidt, H.: 91, 93
 Schmidt, K. L.: 75, 100, 164, 283
 Schmökel, H.: 232
 Schneider, J.: 69
 Scholz, A.: 130, 131, 186, 203f., 250
 Schrenk, G.: 262
 Schröder, A.: 43
 Schürer, E.: 266, 268
 Schwabe, M.: 54
 Schwartz, E.: 30
 Seidelin, P.: 182
 Semler, J. S.: 139
 Shotwell, J. T.: 93
 Silver, A. H.: 115
 Skeats, Th.: 268
 Sluys, D. M.: 252, 256
 Smend, R.: 32, 36, 37
 Smidt, G.: 35
 Smith, J. P. M.: 91
 Speiser, E. A.: 58
 Sperber, A.: 36, 39, 40, 41, 43, 47, 55, 57, 58, 61, 64, 65, 143, 144, 168, 173
 Spörl, J.: 118
 Stählin, G.: 27
 Stählin, O.: 32, 39, 137
 Staples, W. E.: 57
 Starr, J.: 269
 Stein, E.: 25, 72, 78, 126
 Strack, H. L.: 114
 Strathmann, H.: 75
 Swete, H. B.: 29, 32, 94, 143, 211
 Talmon, S.: 217
 Täubler, E.: 93
 Taylor, G.: 35
 Tedesche, S. S.: 33
 Thackeray, H. St. J.: 4, 32, 38, 45, 46, 47, 50, 51, 64, 66, 67, 68, 78, 126, 155, 184, 188, 201, 230
 Thierry, G. J.: 198
 Thomas, D. W.: 60
 Thumb, A.: 66, 67, 68, 186
 Torrey, Ch. C.: 33, 54, 126, 194, 195, 235
 Tracy, S.: 26
 Tscherikover, V.: 253, 255
 Tschernowitz, H.: 107
 Tychsen, O. G.: 55
 Vajda, G.: 28
 Vannutelli, P.: 54, 64
 Vealla, B.: 127
 Vellas, B. M.: 164, 166, 168, 291, 292
 Vercellone, C.: 155
 Vergote, J.: 186
 Vincent, A.: 65
 Visser, C. E.: 264, 265
 Vogt, J.: 114
 Vollers, K.: 194
 Vollmer, H.: 43
 Volz, P.: 94, 264
 Weinberg, W.: 78
 Weiser, A.: 88, 89
 Weiss, I. H.: 106
 Welch, A. C.: 94
 Wellhausen, J.: 31, 61, 139, 256, 256, 257
 Wendland, P.: 29, 30, 42, 43, 143, 155
 Wensinck, A. J.: 265
 Wetter, G. P.: 276
 Wevers, J. W.: 229
 Wiener, W.: 118
 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. von: 31
 Wilcken, U.: 25, 230
 Will, R.: 267
 Willrich, H.: 25, 255
 Wolfsberg, O.: 74
 Wolfson, H. A.: 260, 261
 Woods, H.: 157

Wutz, F. X.: 37, 38, 40, 55, 56, 58, 59,
131f., 166, 195, 198, 206, 207, 216
Yahuda, A. S.: 233
Yalon, H.: 216
Yeelin, D.: 218
Zahn, Th.: 164
Ziegler, J.: 4, 10, 33, 35, 37, 46, 50, 51,
53, 71, 79, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 138,
139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147, 149,
151, 154, 155, 156, 160, 162, 165, 173,
179, 180, 180, 183, 185, 191, 192, 202,
203, 204, 205, 220, 222, 223, 226, 228,
236, 247
Zillessen, A.: 131, 169, 190, 224
Zimmermann, F.: 54
Zunz, L.: 106

Index of Passages

1. Biblical Scriptures

The Biblical Scriptures are arranged according to the sequence of the Septuagint (ed. A. Rahlfs).

Genesis

2.9: 173
2.21: 198f.
3.5: 189
3.22: 189
5.24: 78
6.7: 139
8.4: 233
10.2: 209
10.10: 233
11.2: 190
14.13: 243
15.12: 198f.
17.3: 173
17.5: 173
17.6: 196
24.49: 221
25.23: 196
26.32: 63
27.33: 198
27.38: 198
27.39-40: 110
27.46: 216
30.15: 189
33.11: 189
34.25: 191
38.26: 219
41: 188

Exodus

2.5: 218
3.14: 262
5.6: 71
5.10: 71
5.13: 71
7.19: 189
8.23(19): 280
11.1: 188, 197
12.19: 188

14.13: 188
14.21: 225
15.3: 76, 101, 188, 290
15.11: 268
16.36: 188
17.6: 190, 223
19.5-6: 50, 90
20.11: 50
21.16: 50
22.4: 78
22.20: 88
22.27: 71
23.22: 50
24.11: 78
28.30: 266
32.34: 188
33.5: 188, 197
33.14-15: 63, 212
34.7: 188
34.15: 246
38.22: 50

Leviticus

1.5: 71
1.15: 78
5.7: 187
9.27: 228
10.3: 201
11.36: 189
12.2: 211
14.22: 187
21.13: 78
26.20: 189

Numeri

17.2ff: 50
23.3: 196
24.24: 79
31.7: 191

31.17: 191
31.54: 191
32.22: 219
32.23: 70

Deuteronomium

4.9: 89
4.10: 70
5.14: 50
7.7: 90
10.14-15: 90
11.40: 239
20.13: 191
23.18: 78, 265
24.7: 50
24.24: 239
26.5: 243
26.5ff.: 89
28.25: 100, 282
28.56: 192
28.68: 243
30.4: 113
32.7: 89
32.13: 192
32.15: 192
32.36: 154
33.5: 192
33.26: 192
33.27: 262

Judges

3.3: 245
3.31: 245
4.21: 199
5.8: 37f. (n)
6.13: 89
8.5: 139
9.9: 38
9.13: 38

10.6-13.5: 245

14.1: 245

14.2: 245

14.3-fin: 245

16.14: 138

19.18: 216

43.23: 202

Ruth

4.7: 274

4.11: 36

1 Samuel

1.15: 62, 72, 217

1.16: 271

5.4: 67

5.6: 245

9.25: 63

9.27: 193

12.3: 63, 211

14.2: 193

15.23: 166

26.12: 198f.

2 Samuel

6.13: 78

7.10: 91

7.12: 63 (n. 96)

16.2: 139

16.14: 139

17.2: 139

17.11: 63, 212

17.29: 139

23.1: 98, 267

23.20: 234

24.16: 266

1 Kings

198

12.28: 88

16.18: 198

2 Kings

198

5.1: 156

15.25: 198

18-20: 186, 230

18.17: 184

18.20: 184

18.31: 184

18.37: 230

19.3: 184

19.4: 184

19.6: 230

19.7: 208

19.9: 214

19.16: 175, 184

19.17: 218

19.23: 219

19.24: 184

19.33: 186

19.35: 240

19.37: 233

20: 279

20.1: 184, 230

20.17: 279

21.13: 139

23.24: 217

23.29: 233

1 Chronicles

9.1: 272

10.13: 272

15.26: 78

17.11: 63 (n. 96)

21.15: 266

24.9: 252

24.14: 252

2 Chronicles

198

32.15: 202

35.19: 217

35.20: 233

36.23: 238

1 Ezra

198

1.23: 234

2.3: 238

Ezra

1.2: 238

7.9: 252

9.1: 246

9.2: 213

Nehemiah

2.13: 215

12.5: 252

12.17: 252

19.29-30: 246

Esther

3.13a-g: 71

3.13b: 238

8.12: 166

8.12 a-x: 71

14.27: 187

Judith

4.2: 68

1 Maccabaeans

75

1.29: 68

5.15: 248

7.41: 79, 240

10.65: 237

10.74-89: 245

11.8: 237

11.61-62: 245

12.6-7: 102

12.20-21: 102

14.27ff.: 102

15.1: 246

15.16: 243

15.38: 237

2 Maccabaeans

75

3.4: 252

3.11: 253

3.31: 268

4: 257

4.3: 252

4.6-7: 244, 253

4.7: 252

4.13: 252

4.26: 252

4.33-38: 256

5.5: 252

5.9: 244, 252, 253

5.10: 252

8.16: 100

8.19: 79, 240

9.28: 79, 241

15.12: 252

15.22: 240

15.22f.: 79

3 Maccabaeans

2.2: 268

2.21: 268

6.3: 100, 280

4 Maccabaeans

269

Psalms

269

9.13: 114

9.29: 56

18.22: 219

23(24).7: 225

34(24).9: 225

24.1-2: 90

27(28).3: 224

29(30).6: 197

34(35).20: 197

35(36).10: 277

36(37).20: 287

44.2: 89

47(48).8: 225

50(51).14: 292

51.9: 214

54 (55): 255, 256

55(56).1: 284

56(55).1: 75, 101

59(60).5: 198, 224

59(60).10: 60

61(62).3: 265

61(62).7: 265

67(68).28: 199

67(68).35: 158

71(71).8: 238

71(72).3: 50

72(71).8: 80

72.10: 164

73.28: 267

75(76).4: 226, 290

75(76).7: 198

76(75).4: 101

78.3: 89

78(77).17: 59, 215

78(77).56: 59

78(79).1: 227

79.1: 227

83(84).7: 60

84(85).9: 224

84(83).12

86(87).5: 284

87(86).5: 101

87(88).11: 225

88(89).7: 158

88(89).13: 215, 227

90(89).16: 8, 74, 99

90(91).1: 274

91.4: 218

95(96).10: 159

103(104).17: 62

106(105).7: 59, 215

108(109).16: 198

115.4-7: 264

121(122).7: 198

121(122).8: 224

128(127).2: 67

129.1: 91

135.10: 197

136.17: 197

137(138).2: 139

148.11: 197

150.1: 268

Proverbs

269

10.5: 199f.

11.26: 196

12.11: 189

12.24: 56

14.28: 196

18.8: 199

19.15: 198f.

27.13: 72

30.19: 293

31.20: 67

31.21: 214

Ecclesiastes

3.11: 266

6.10: 215

Canticles

2.17: 62

4.6: 62

Job

3.2: 211

4.13: 199

4.17: 219

7.18: 219

9.2: 219

14.3: 202

14.12: 60, 212

14.15: 74

17.11: 62

20.5: 197, 219

24.14: 64

26.12: 197

30.25: 62, 217

32.2: 219

33.15: 199

33.28: 285

36.30: 166

37.12: 166

40.30: 246

Sapientia

269

2.12: 166, 211

10.15ff.: 98

13.1ff.: 73

14.15: 78

14.23: 78

Sirach

Sir Prol: 25

Sir Prol. 14: 272

Sir 1.18: 229, 291

Sir 1.25: 229

Sir 2.14: 229

Sir 14.17: 229

Sir 36.9: 100

Sir 40-50: 102

Sir 45.25: 103

Sir 46.5: 268

Sir 46.19: 63, 212

Sir 47.5: 268

Sir 50.19: 266

Psalmi Salomonis

17: 103

17.32: 38

17.36: 159

Hosea

197

2.20: 101, 226, 290

5.7: 225

10.12: 276

12.1: 190

13.14: 158

Joel

1.3: 89

Amos

197

3.7: 74, 99

3.9: 278

4.10: 243

5.22: 265

- 6.6: 226
 6.7: 234
 8.4: 210
 9.12: 75
 9.13: 79
 9.14: 225, 226
Obadiah
 1.19: 221
Jonah
 1.5-6: 198
 1.9: 216
Micah
 1.6: 227
 1.11: 60
 2.9: 269
 2.12: 60
 2.13: 62
 3.12: 227
 5.5(4): 198
Nahum
 3.10: 183, 212
Habakkuk
 168, 226
 2.3: 158, 225, 239
 3.2: 164
Zephaniah
 2.2: 62
 2.9: 226
 3.9: 95
Haggai
 1.11: 212
Malachi
 1.14: 211
 2.9: 75, 99
Isaiah
 1: 269
 1-5: 180
 1-39: 179f., 183
 1.2: 181
 1.3: 181
 1.8: 171, 227
 1.13: 181, 268
 1.16: 101, 200
 1.17: 202
 1.18: 214
 1.19: 192
 1.20: 203
 1.22: 184, 203
 1.24: 204, 271
 1.26: 220, 284
 1.27: 75, 169, 285
 1.29: 152, 170, 181
 1.30: 181
 2.2: 193
 2.6: 227
 2.6b: 225
 2.11: 216
 2.16: 167, 207, 235
 2.18: 181
 2.19: 158
 2.20: 181, 196
 2.20(22): 145
 2.22: 185
 3.2: 171
 3.3: 156
 3.6: 140
 3.8: 194, 200
 3.9: 186
 3.9b: 166
 3.10: 137, 166, 168, 200,
 204, 211
 3.12: 270
 3.14: 171
 3.16: 192
 3.24: 175
 3.26: 223
 4.2: 194, 242, 287
 4.5: 212, 216
 5.1-7: 171
 5.2: 171, 180, 207
 5.3: 186
 5.10: 188
 5.11: 194
 5.12: 88
 5.13: 187
 5.14: 271
 5.16: 262
 5.17: 139
 5.23: 186, 211
 5.24: 203
 5.25: 187, 192, 193
 6.2: 215
 6.4: 225
 6.5: 198f., 201
 6.6: 215
 6.9: 202
 6.9-10: 158
 6.10: 158
 6.12: 287, 288
 6.13: 185, 187, 193, 213
 7.2: 182, 195
 7.4: 204
 7.6: 60, 172, 195
 7.8: 215
 7.9: 236
 7.14: 292, 293
 7.16: 185, 189
 7.20: 140
 7.23: 171, 186
 8: 274
 8-23: 180
 8.8: 79, 239, 242
 8.11: 240, 273
 8.11-14: 273
 8.14: 72, 158, 205, 273
 8.15-16: 273
 8.16: 2723
 8.17: 153
 8.18: 146, 199, 216
 8.19: 184
 8.20: 185, 186, 274f.
 8.21: 36, 137, 194
 8.23: 158, 228, 237
 9.1: 158, 237
 9.4-5: 270
 9.5(4): 194
 9.5: 168, 216, 229, 241
 9.6(5): 156f., 291
 9.6: 141
 9.7(6): 291
 9.9: 190
 9.10: 237
 9.10(9): 233
 9.11: 237, 244
 9.12: 192, 203
 9.14(13): 181
 9.15(14): 156, 181
 10.4: 154, 229
 10.5: 219, 246
 10.6: 246
 10.9: 190, 233f.
 10.10: 216
 10.12: 88
 10.13-15: 79
 10.14: 238
 10.16: 195
 10.20: 99, 183, 281, 287

- 10.22: 229, 287
 10.23: 79, 158, 229, 239, 239
 10.24: 139, 188, 242, 243, 244
 10.25: 79
 10.32: 167
 10.33: 271
 11.2: 269, 270, 292
 11.3: 269, 292
 11.5: 193, 220, 224
 11.6: 149
 11.9: 182
 11.10: 269
 11.11: 59, 190, 201, 233f.
 11.14: 245, 291
 11.16: 78, 101, 288
 11.19: 269
 11.21: 269
 12.2: 160
 12.6: 167
 13.2: 194
 13.11: 181
 13.13: 193
 13.20: 216
 13.21: 167, 200, 207, 264
 13.22: 149, 195, 225, 227
 14: 240
 14.1: 167, 188, 194
 14.2: 173, 288
 14.6: 139
 14.9: 193, 203
 14.12: 60, 212, 229, 265
 14.16: 193
 14.17: 154, 181
 14.19: 157, 167, 172, 207, 241
 14.19-20: 79
 14.20: 51f. (n. 74)
 14.21: 145, 181
 14.25: 195
 14.27: 176
 14.30: 146
 14.31: 153
 14.34: 245
 15.4: 145, 167, 207
 15.7: 234, 248
 15.9: 177, 234
 16.3: 138
 16.8: 145
 16.9: 145, 167, 207
 16.12: 174, 204
 16.25: 228
 17: 160
 17.1: 211, 226
 17.2: 226, 227
 17.3: 145, 150
 17.6: 193
 17.8: 281
 17.9: 208
 17.10: 265
 17.10-13: 240
 17.11: 204
 17.12: 79, 196, 239
 17.13: 196
 18-20: 240
 18.2: 181, 283
 18.3: 181, 203
 18.4: 75, 220, 284
 18.7: 99, 181, 185, 283
 18.12: 185
 19: 189
 19.2: 71, 158, 236
 19.4: 214f.
 19.5: 201, 204
 19.6: 189, 189
 19.7: 188
 19.8: 184
 19.10: 138
 19.11: 181
 19.12: 181
 19.17: 185
 19.18: 220
 19.19: 244
 19.24: 8
 19.24-25: 288
 19.25: 79, 101
 20: 250
 20.4: 250
 20.5: 250
 20.6: 185
 21.2: 204
 21.7: 181
 21.9: 181
 21.10: 277, 283
 21.11: 110
 21.13: 146
 22.3: 194
 22.5: 249
 22.10: 146
 22.12: 184
 22.14: 150, 152
 22.21: 147
 22.22: 172
 22.24: 145, 174
 22.25: 195
 23: 51f., 250f.
 23.1: 235
 23.6: 235
 23.7: 145
 23.10: 235, 251
 23.11: 193
 23.11-12: 247
 23.12: 140, 281
 23.13: 183
 23.14: 235
 23.17: 201
 23.18: 191
 23.19: 228
 24.2: 181
 24.3: 202
 24.4: 181
 24.5: 272
 24.9: 171
 24.14: 216, 287
 24.16: 269f., 272
 24.20: 171, 227
 24.22: 213
 25: 281
 25.1: 267, 279, 287
 25.2: 197, 203
 25.3: 99
 25.3-4: 183
 25.5: 99
 25.6: 225f.
 25.7: 226, 278
 25.8: 158
 25.9: 150
 26: 160
 26.3-4: 202, 262
 26.4: 265
 26.6-7: 270
 26.7: 269
 26.9: 181, 270, 276
 26.10: 270
 26.11: 181
 26.13: 205, 267
 26.14: 181, 225
 26.14b: 191
 26.15: 205, 271
 26.16-19: 160
 26.17: 163, 269
 26.18: 140, 181
 26.19: 181
 26.20: 158
 26.21: 170
 27.3: 169

- 27.3-5: 160
 27.4: 163, 166
 27.11: 163
 27.12: 163, 236
 27.13: 203
 27.29: 196
 28: 234
 28.1: 182, 223
 28.2: 181
 28.4: 182, 193
 28.5: 288
 28.5: 101, 229
 28.7: 171, 207, 212
 28.8: 201
 28.10: 158
 28.12: 197
 28.16: 158, 175, 184
 28.21: 216
 28.24: 156
 28.28: 223
 29: 176
 29.1: 176f., 234
 29.7: 138, 176f., 224
 29.8: 158, 171, 190
 29.10: 151, 198f.
 29.11: 185, 186
 29.15: 202
 29.19: 146
 29.22: 279
 29.34: 185
 30.4: 201
 30.11: 139
 30.15: 150
 30.19: 202
 30.21: 151
 30.22: 187, 271
 30.26: 213
 30.27: 279
 30.29: 265
 30.30: 202
 30.33: 153, 154
 31.2: 279
 31.3: 150, 185
 31.4: 151, 185
 31.5: 155
 31.8: 184
 31.9: 149, 173, 284
 31.9b: 101
 32.4: 224
 32.5: 167, 200, 207
 32.6: 202
 32.7-8: 270
 32.8: 270
 32.12: 204
 32.13: 140, 204
 32.14: 198
 32.15: 236
 32.16: 236
 32.17: 208
 33.1: 204
 33.2: 219, 228, 272
 33.5: 267
 33.6: 205, 229, 269, 270, 275, 276
 33.7: 149
 33.9: 170, 236, 237
 33.11: 140
 33.12: 279
 33.13: 279
 33.15: 214, 228f.
 33.18: 150
 33.20: 285
 33.22: 261
 34.1: 181, 196
 34.4: 145
 34.11: 184
 34.13: 198, 264
 34.14: 197, 264
 35.2: 262
 35.8: 283
 35.9: 181
 36-39: 186, 230
 36.2: 184
 36.5: 184
 36.16: 184
 36.20: 230, 240
 36.22: 181
 37: 186
 37.1: 181
 37.3: 184, 211
 37.6: 230
 37.7: 181, 211
 37.9: 215
 37.10: 185
 37.12: 232
 37.16: 215, 240
 37.17: 175, 184
 37.18: 208, 217, 218
 37.22f.: 79
 37.24: 219
 37.25: 184, 189, 193
 37.26: 279
 37.29(28): 186
 37.31-32: 3
 37.32: 287
 37.34: 186
 37.38: 36, 137, 194, 233
 38.1: 184, 230
 38.11: 286
 38.18: 221
 38.19: 221
 38.19-20: 262
 39: 279
 39.4: 202
 39.6: 279
 39.8: 221
 40-66: 179f., 181, 183
 40: 180
 40.4: 144
 40.5: 286
 40.11: 219
 40.20: 139, 203, 264
 40.21: 89
 40.22-23: 87
 40.23: 203
 40.25: 138
 40.27: 174
 40.28: 193, 262
 41.1: 196
 41.1a: 289
 41.1ff.: 74
 41.4: 263
 41.5: 193
 41.7: 200, 264
 41.8: 158, 263
 41.9: 193, 263
 41.12: 283
 41.15: 184
 41.17: 201
 41.22: 202
 41.25: 75, 289
 41.27: 219
 41.28: 216
 41.29: 154
 42.1-4: 158
 42.2: 202
 42.6: 166
 42.9: 202, 278
 42.10: 173
 42.11: 193
 42.13: 76, 101, 176, 226, 290
 42.16: 202
 42.19: 203
 43.3: 236
 43.4: 196
 43.9: 196, 202

- 43.10: 164f.
 43.12: 139, 164f., 202
 43.14: 138, 144
 43.15: 75, 282
 43.17: 139
 43.19: 155
 43.20: 101, 166, 264
 43.22: 202
 43.24: 181, 183
 43.26: 202
 44.2: 192
 44.8: 139, 202, 265
 44.11: 181, 201
 44.12: 139
 44.13: 139, 146
 44.16: 209
 44.17: 204
 44.19: 145, 209
 44.22: 139
 44.23: 287f.
 44.24: 228
 44.28: 203
 45.3: 209
 45.8: 263
 45.9: 156
 45.11: 208
 45.12-13: 87
 45.13: 146, 225
 45.14: 145, 215
 45.16: 290
 45.16b: 289
 45.21: 202, 262
 45.23-24: 290
 45.42: 283
 46.1: 232
 46.1-2: 203
 46.2: 139
 46.7: 153, 264
 46.12-13: 262
 47.1: 192
 47.2: 184
 47.3: 282, 285
 47.10: 137
 47.11: 187, 241
 48.3: 202
 48.5: 202
 48.6: 202
 48.8: 202
 48.21: 190, 223
 49.1ff.: 287
 49.1: 99, 196, 216, 278f.
 49.6: 75, 166
 49.8: 166
 49.10: 219, 219
 49.12: 232, 235
 49.13: 50
 49.18: 150
 49.21: 223
 49.24: 99, 281
 49.26: 182, 202
 50.1: 185, 187
 50.4: 278
 50.5: 99, 169, 216, 278
 51.2: 152, 170
 51.4: 196
 51.6: 229
 51.10: 193
 51.12: 144, 224
 51.14: 285
 51.15: 197
 51.16: 99, 278
 51.18: 219
 51.20: 139
 51.21: 223
 51.23: 99, 170, 183, 281
 52.1-53.12: 133
 52.2: 283
 52.4: 283
 52.5: 200, 228
 52.7: 202
 52.10: 286
 52.13-53.12: 133
 52.13: 165, 287
 53: 165
 53.2: 139
 53.4: 165
 53.10: 194, 277
 53.11: 8, 139, 277, 292
 53.11-12: 165.
 54.4: 293
 54.5: 139
 54.15: 75, 289
 54.17: 138, 144
 55.4: 196, 220
 55.5: 221
 55.8-9: 181
 55.12: 138
 56.1: 263
 56.4: 160
 56.7: 266, 289
 56.10: 185
 57.5: 201
 57.9: 202, 228
 57.10: 184, 195
 57.11: 224
 57.13: 285
 57.15: 268
 57.16: 223
 57.18: 219
 58.2: 266
 58.4: 202
 58.7b: 173
 58.14: 192
 59.16: 218f.
 60.2: 196
 60.6: 163, 164, 235
 60.6b: 285
 60.7: 266
 60.10: 263
 60.16: 182
 62.2: 185, 186
 62.6-7: 3
 62.8: 140
 62.11: 202
 63.1: 236
 63.4: 181
 63.5: 218
 63.7: 261
 63.8-9: 212
 63.9: 63
 63.11: 141
 63.16: 205
 63.17: 285
 63.18: 285
 64.4(3): 263
 64.6(5): 187
 64.7(6): 282
 65.2: 168
 65.3: 154, 167f., 264
 65.5: 267
 65.9: 285
 65.11: 264
 65.18: 223
 65.22: 168
 65.25: 182
 66.5: 289
 66.9: 202, 211, 219
 66.14: 272
 66.17: 228
 66.19: 146, 209, 235
 66.20: 267
 66.23: 167
Jeremiah
 198
 1.1: 99

1.6: 73
 2.11: 215
 2.24: 218
 3.19: 17, 75, 267
 6.11: 216
 10.3: 276
 10.3-5: 264
 14.13: 73
 15.4: 100
 16.5: 265
 16.14: 88
 20.15: 211
 23.29: 292
 26(46).2: 234
 26.18: 227
 27.4-6: 87
 28(51).27: 233
 29.7: 110
 31(38).2: 197
 31(38).8: 78
 31.32-33: 95
 31.35: 197
 32(39).17: 72
 33(26).3: 204
 33(26).13: 204
 33.18: 227
 33(26).19: 204
 34(41).17: 100
 35(28).15: 202
 36(29).31: 202
 38(31).15: 204
 38(31).21: 166

39(31).19: 291
 39(32).23: 202
 46.9: 209

Threni

198
 2.17: 162
 4.3: 215
 4.20: 38, 159

Ezekiel

2.10: 59, 215
 7.23: 228f.
 8: 228
 8.3: 228
 8.7: 228
 8.10: 228
 8.14: 228
 8.16: 228
 9.8: 215
 16.4: 159
 20.32-33: 7, 95
 25.16: 228, 237
 26.16: 197, 219
 27.12: 235
 27.13: 209
 27.25: 235
 29.3: 215
 32.2: 215
 32.10: 197
 32.26: 209
 34.12: 59 (n. 90a)

36.19: 283
 36.20: 283
 36.20-23: 228
 38.13: 235
 41(34).17: 282
 44.24: 229

Daniel

Sus 35a: 262
 Sus 42: 262
 3-31-32: 100, 280
 3.38 (= Th.): 282
 5.27: 229
 5.28: 229
 8.18: 199
 9.6: 76
 9.18: 266
 9.20: 266
 9.26: 256
 9.27: 79, 110, 239
 10.9: 198f.
 10.25: 239
 11.10: 239
 11.27: 239
 11.30: 79, 110, 239
 11.36: 79, 110, 239
 11.40: 79
 12.2: 283
 12.12: 100

2. Pseudepigrapha

AscJes 6.8: 268 ?

OrSib 3. 271: 8, 101
 OrSib 5.143-154: 104

EpArist: 25, 27
 EpArist 18.45: 261

Henoch 90.8: 256

Jub 6.17: 89
 Jub 32: 102
 Jub 34: 102

TestBen 1: 215

TestLev 8.4: 102
 (and passim): 102

TestJud 3: 102
 TestJud 21.3-4: 102
 SyrBar.: 11.1-3: 104

3. Qumran

4QJes^a: 213

4QJes^a 9.3: 215

4QJes^a 40.12: 216

4. Jewish-Hellenistic Literature

- Josephus**
 155
 AJ I 3.6 § 93: 233
 AJ IV 207: 71
 AJ IV 215: 71
 AJ XII 4.7-9 §§ 196-222: 253
 AJ XII 5.1 §§ 237-239: 254
 AJ XII 5.5 § 261: 237
 AJ XII 9.7 § 387: 254
 AJ XII 111-118: 27
 AJ XIII 1-3 §§ 62-73: 254
 AJ XIII 3.1 § 68: 244
 AJ XIII 3.2 § 70: 254
- AJ XIV 3.2: 103
 AJ XX 10.3 § 236: 254
- BJ I 1.1 § 33: 254
 BJ VII 10.2 § 423: 255
 BJ VII 10.2-3 §§ 423-432: 254
 BJ VII 10.3 § 431: 255
 BJ VII 10.4 § 436: 254
- Philo**
 Ebr 36.149-150: 217
 Migr Abr 5.25: 98
- Mut Nom 92: 215
 Praem Poen 8.164ff.: 101
 Rer Div 51. 249: 198
 Spec Leg I 199: 71
 Spec Leg II 13: 99
 Vit Mos II 7.43: 114
 passim: 155, 190, 269

5. New Testament

- Matth. 2.11: 164
 Matth. 8.17: 165
 Matth. 12.18-21: 158
 Matth. 13.14-15: 158
 Matth. 15.14: 143
 Matth. 24.7: 158
- Luke 2.30: 164
- John 7.17: 158
 John 8.18: 164
 John 12.40: 158
- Acts 3.13: 166
- Rom. 9.27: 158
 Rom. 11.8: 158
- I Cor. 15.55: 158
- Galat. 1.17: 234, 249
- Phil. 2.9: 166
- I Thess. 2.9-10: 158
- Hebr. 10.37: 158
- Jac. 2.23: 158
- I Petr. 2: 176
 I Petr. 2.6: 175
 I Petr. 2.9: 166
- Rev. Joh. 2.17: 266
 Rev. Joh. 3.12: 266
 Rev. Joh. 14.8: 104
 Rev. Joh. 17.6: 104

6. Patristic Literature

- Ambrosius: 165
- Augustinus: 142
 Augustinus, Enarr. in Psalmos 56.9: 114
 Augustinus, Enarr. in Psalmos 6: 115
 Augustinus, Epistolae 197, 198, 199: 115
- Basilii: 141
- Chrysostomus (Pseudo-Chrysostomus): 141
- Constitutiones Apostolorum V, 19.5: 161
 Constitutiones Apostolorum VIII, 12.25: 274
 Constitutiones Apostolorum VIII, 12.31: 161
 Cyrillus Alexandrinus: 140
- Epiphanius, de mens. et pond. 2.3: 143
- Eusebius: 141, 142, 143
 Eusebius, Hist. eccl. VI 16: 30
 Eusebius, Onom: 234
- Filastrus Brixensis: 138
- Hieronymus: 138, 140, 141
 Hieronymus, Epistolae 106.7: 30, 143, 145
 Hieronymus, Epistolae 112: 142

- Irenaeus: 165
 Justinus Martyr: 137
 Origenes, ad Afr 5: 30, 143
 Origenes, ad Matth XV.14: 30, 143
 Pamphilus: 142, 143
 Paulus Tellensis: 141
 Tertullianus: 140, 165
 Theodoretus Cyrrhensis, comm. in Is.: 36, 137, 141
 Theodorus Mopsuestenus, comm. In Psalmos: 255, 256
 Tyconius: 137, 140

7. Rabbinical Literature

- mShevu'ot 3, 6: 99
 mYoma 5, 2: 266
 tMegilla 3, 21: 23
 tSanhedrin 13, 11: 114
 yHagiga 2, 1 (77b): 117
 yMegilla 1, 9 (71d): 27
 ySukka 5, 1 (55b): 124
 yTa'anit 1, 1 (64a): 110
 bBaba Qamma 92b: 107
 bBaba Qamma 93^o: 107
 bBerakhot 9b: 262
 bBerakhot 21b: 117
 bBerakhot 33b: 116
 bGittin 17a: 108
 bHagiga 5b: 115
 bMegilla 6a: 108
 bMegilla 9: 27
 bMegilla 16b: 108
 bMegilla 29a: 113
 bMenahot 29a: 117
 bMenahot 109b: 255
 bNidda 70: 108
 bPesahim 87b: 108
 bPesahim 88: 116
 bPesahim 117a: 118
 bRosh haShanah 21a: 269 ?
 bShabbat 56b: 108
 bShabbat 88b: 107
 bShabbat 156ab: 263
 bSotah 12^b: 218
 bTa'anit 21a: 263
 bYoma 82b: 118
 Soferim 1, 7: 27
 Bamidbar Rabba 16, 15: 234
 Bamidbar Rabba 16, 25: 235
 Bereshit Rabba 1: 113
 Bereshit Rabba 17, 5: 199
 Bereshit Rabba 26, 32: 63
 Bereshit Rabba 33, 4: 233
 Bereshit Rabba 63, 9: 118
 Ester Rabba 7, 13: 118
 MekhY Bo 14: 212
 MekhY Beshallah Petihta: 212
 MekhY Beshallah 2: 243
 Midrash Gadol u-Gedola 20: 111
 Midrash Tehillim 1, 8: 211
 Midrash Tehillim 9, 13: 114
 Midrash Tehillim 13, 4: 113
 Midrash Tehillim 110, 6: 114
 Midrash Tehillim 137, 3: 114
 Pesiqta Rabbati 5: 29
 Pesiqta Rabbati 28: 114
 Rut Rabba Petihta 2: 199
 Seder 'Olam Rabba 21: 199
 Seder 'Olam Rabba 25: 111
 Shir HaShirim Rabba 1, 3: 115
 Shir HaShirim Rabba 1, 10: 117
 Shir HaShirim Rabba 1, 13: 118
 Shir HaShirim Rabba 5, 9: 114
 Shir HaShirim Rabba 7, 3: 115
 Sifre Bamidbar: 108
 Tanhuma Shelaḥ 25: 115
 Tanhuma Wayiggash 11: 111
 Yalquṭ Shim'oni II.589 ad Mal. 3.1: 111
 Targum Onqelos ad Gen. 8.4: 233
 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan ad Gen. 8.4: 233
 Targum Yerushalmi ad Ex. 28.30: 266
 Targum ad Is. 27.3: 197
 Targum ad Eccl. 3.11: 266
 Targum ad Job. 24.14: 64

8. Greek-Roman Literature

Callimachus: 124

Callimachus, fr. 244: 138

Callixenus (Ath. V, 197d):
265

Diodorus Siculus, XXX.7.2.: 257

Hesiodus, Opera et dies 287-
292: 72

Platon: 73

Platon, Phdr. 244a: 199

Platon, Phdr. 265b: 1

Forschungen zum Alten Testament

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Alphabetical Index

- Barthel, Jörg: Prophetenwort und Geschichte. 1997. *Volume 19*.
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