# Psalm 39 (LXX 38): A Retributive Psalm?[1]

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***ABSTRACT***

*This paper is a contribution to the Festschrift for Prof. Phil Botha. As a teacher in Semitic Languages, he specialised in two corpora: poetry (Hebrew) and more specifically the Psalms, and Syriac, a prominent Aramaic dialect. He also demonstrated an interest in the Septuagint. It is an honour to dedicate this contribution to my colleague of many years, who has also had an impact on the international stage. In a recent international contribution, he argues that Ps 39 is effectively a song of retribution. This paper focuses on this Hebrew Psalm from the perspective of the Greek Psalms, as a pilot study, in order to test Botha's assumption; in his own words the psalm is intended "to serve as a wisdom reflection on how to overcome theological frustration caused by delayed retribution."*

KEYWORDS: Septuagint, textual criticism, hermeneutics, isomorphism, isosemantism, theology, translation technique, criteria, paradigm, interlinear, critical edition, exegesis, Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS).

## A      METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Gauthier, the psalms in the Greek Psalter are relatively uniform and bear a striking resemblance to those in the MT.[2] Hence scholars have regarded the Old Greek (OG) translation as isomorphic. To be sure, isomorphism does not entail isosemantism. James Barr stated that there are in fact different ways of being literal and being free, so that a translation can at the same time be literal and free in different modes and on different levels.[3] This applies to different books of the Septuagint.[4] In a paper presented in Helsinki I defined the translation technique of LXX Proverbs along similar lines, as entailing unity and

[2]    See Randall X. Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145 of the Old Greek Version* (VTSup 166; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 5.
[3]    See James Barr, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations* (MSU 15/ NAWG.PH 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 280.
[4]    See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 5.

diversity.[5] Gauthier[6] also correctly warns against a narrow logocentric view of the translation technique of the Psalter. Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn have opened new ways to address this issue by developing content- and context-related criteria in order to refine the process.[7] In this regard John Ross Wagner makes use of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), since it takes into account more than just linguistic issues, but also the social conventions and the reception of the text that was produced in the larger target culture.[8] There nevertheless seems to be a consensus that the Psalms were in general rendered faithfully.

Botha is of the opinion that Ps 39 is a perplexing text, situated at the end of the first Davidic collection, Pss 3-41.[9] He, moreover, deems it a complicated psalm to interpret. Fortunately, we are in a favourable position in that numerous novel sources are available. The influence of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) is a relative novelty, after the research by Emanuel Tov.[10] As far as the Psalms are concerned, Jim Sanders did ground-breaking work on 11QPs[a].[11]

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[5]    See Johann Cook, "Ideology and Translation Technique: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" in *Helsinki Perspectives on the Translation Techniques of the Septuagint: Proceedings of the IOSCS congress held in Helsinki, July 1999* (ed. by Raija Sollamo and Seppo Sipilä; PFES 82; Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 195-210.

[6]    See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 5.

[7]    Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn, "Content-related Criteria in Characterising LXX Translation Technique," in *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Theologien, Einflüsse: 2. Internationale Fachtagung von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 23.-27. Juli 2008* (ed. by Wolfgang Kraus, Martin Karrer and in cooperation with Martin Meiser; WUNT 252; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 356-376. See also Hans Ausloos, Bénédicte Lemmelijn and Valérie Kabergs, "The Study of Aetiological Wordplay as a Content-Related Criterion in the Characterisation of LXX Translation Technique," in *Die Septuaginta – Entstehung, Sprache, Geschichte: 3. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 22.-25. Juli 2010* (ed. by Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser and Marcus Sigismund; WUNT 286; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 273-294.

[8]    John Ross Wagner, *Reading the Sealed Book: Old Greek Isaiah and the Problem of Septuagint Hermeneutics* (FAT 88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck and Waco, TX: Baylor, 2013), 37.

[9]    Phil J. Botha, "Psalm 39 and its Place in the Development of a Doctrine of Retribution in the Hebrew Bible," *OTE* 30 (2017): 244.

[10]   Cf., for example, Emanuel Tov, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible, and Qumran: Collected Essays* (TSAJ 121; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 121. See also Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 177-178. I also mention the contribution by Peter Flint from Trinity Western University (TWU), who untimely died recently. At the turn of the 21st century these scholars were stressing the pluriform nature of the existing textual traditions.

[11]   For the current paper, cf. James A. Sanders, *The Psalm Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPsa)* (DJD IV; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); idem., "The Pre-Masoretic Psalter

## B     THE PSALMS

## 1     The Settlement of the Psalms

Regarding the settlement of Psalms, Randall Gauthier states:

> Central to the present discussion is the question of whether the
> (proto)-M (MT Psalter  150 or merely MT 150) was compiled and
> settled before the 1st century B.C.E. (so Goshen-Gottstein, Talmon,
> Haran, Schiffman, Wachholder and Tov)[12] and, more specifically, in
> the 4th century B.C.E. (so Skehan), or whether it was finally settled
> during the 1st century C.E. only after a gradual period of editorial
> development that may have had its roots in the 2nd B.C.E. (so Sanders,
> Ulrich, Flint, and Charlesworth).[13]

According to Gauthier,[14] these views have polarised opinions in the
literature and have become distilled as facts.

The views on this issue diverge widely. Schiffman[15] refers to the fact that
exaggerated claims have been made about the Qumran scrolls. Predominant
among them is the view that Qumran had an open canon and that MT was one of
only three text types in the 2nd century B.C.E. He also takes 11QPs[a] as a sectarian
prayer book or liturgical text, but not as a literary text like the canonical text.[16]
Charlesworth[17] has his own view and sees the DSS collection as evidence that the
canon had not yet been closed. The order of 11QPs[a] differs dramatically compared
with other collections.[18] Wilson[19] argues that the Hebrew Mss from Qumran
suggest gradual development from the Psalter when, in a two-stage process, Pss

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Texts," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 114-123. See also Peter W. Flint, "The Book of Psalms in the
Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *VT* 48 (1988): 453-472.

[12]   See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 19.

[13]   See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 20.

[14]   See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 19.

[15]   Lawrence Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism,
the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish
Publication Society, 1994), 161.

[16]   Ibid.

[17]   See James A. Charlesworth, "Writings Ostensibly Outside the Canon", in
*Exploring the Origins of the Bible. Canon Formation in Historical, Literary and
Theological Perspective* (ed. by Craig C. Evans and Emanuel Tov; Grand Rapids, MI:
Baker, 2008), 57-85, here 62.

[18]   Gerald H. Wilson, "The Qumran Psalms Manuscripts and the Consecutive
Arrangement of Psalms in the Masoretic Psalter," *CBQ* 45 (1983): 377-388 and ibid.,
"The Qumran Psalms Scroll Reconsidered: Analysis of the Debate," *CBQ* 47 (1984):
624-642.

[19]   Gerald H. Wilson, "Review of Peter W. Flint, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book
of the Psalms," *JQR* 90 (2000): 515-521.

2-89 were compiled early on (and translated into Greek thereafter), while Pss 90-150 came only later (with the Greek following) in the 1st century CE. According to him, the LXX followed in the same two-stage process, with the second part following much later. It would seem the whole psalter had not necessarily been translated by the 2nd century C.E.[20] Unfortunately he offers no convincing evidence in this regard. Sanders[21] has argued extensively that the 11QPsª was a genuine Psalter edition that reflected a stage in the evolution of the 11QPsª in which the arrangement of the MT Psalter had not yet become standardized.

## 2    Hebrew Psalters in relation to a date of the Old Greek Psalter

There is a broad consensus that the Greek psalter[22] was completed *in toto*[23] by the 2nd century BCE. However, Harl, Munnich and Dorival[24] opt for a dating before the turn of the century.

> The position holding to an early finalization of the Psalter supports the possibility that the Psalter was translated in the mould of MT Pss 1-150 by one person or a team[25] whereas a post-1st century BCE. MT Psalter, on the other hand, would suggest that LXX* came into being over a lengthier period of time in piecemeal fashion or as competing editions, only to be sewn together by a Christian-era editor.[26]

Jim Sanders has argued "that the 11QPsª-Psalter was a genuine Psalter edition that reflected a stage[27] in the Hebrew Psalter in which the arrangement of the Hebrew MT (Pss 1-150) had yet to become standardized. As such 11QPsª represented a pre-standardised, pre-Masoretic phase of an existing development rather th an an aberration of MT Pss 1-150."[28] To be sure, for Sanders 11QPsª

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20    Wilson, "Review of Peter W. Flint."

21    Sanders, "The Pre-Masoretic Psalter Texts," 114-123.

22    There is a difference of opinion on the dating of the books in the LXX. See Johann Cook and Arie van der Kooij, *Law, Prophets, and Wisdom: On the Provenance of Translators and Their Books in the Septuagint Version* (CBET 68; Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 33. See also Wilson, "The Qumran Psalms Scroll Reconsidered: Analysis of the Debate." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1984): 624-642.

23    See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 19.

24    See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 21.

25    See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 21.

26    See Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 21.

27    James A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPsª)*, 7. On recensionally deviating Hebrew texts see Johann Cook's Presidential address at IOSOT 2016, "Interpreting the Septuagint," in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016* (ed. by Louis Jonker, Gideon Kotzé and Christl Maier; VTSup 177; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 18. For a deviating view see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 111.

28    Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 21. Cf. also Sanders, "The Pre-Masoretic Psalter Texts," 114-123.

was both canonical and open-ended.[29] The collections of 11QPs[a] have contributed tremendously to the scholarly discussion. For one thing, the order of 11QPs[a] is different from other collections. Finally, Wilson argues that one should not necessarily accept that the whole of the Psalter was translated by the first century B.C.E. [30]

Gauthier has contributed extensively to the interpretation of the Greek Psalms. In his words: "The present work assumes, however, that the ancient translator, as a member of Jewish scribal circles, was in the unique position to act both as composer and reader."[31] Martin Rösel and Cook hold a similar view. [32]

## 3    Psalm 39 (MT) / 38 (LXX): Text and Translation[33]

From a methodological perspective, I operate on the assumption that the Greek Psalter is based upon (a) parent text(s) that do not differ dramatically from the Masoretic text. However, it does have a different structure, since Greek is an Indo-European language. For this reason, I prefer to place the two texts together in order to compare the two texts[34].

MT    [1]לַמְנַצֵּחַ לִידִיתוּן מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

[1]To the choirmaster; to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

LXX    [1]εἰς τὸ τέλος τῷ Ιδιθουν ᾠδὴ τῷ Δαυιδ

[1]Regarding completion. Pertaining to Idithoun. An ode. Pertaining to Dauid.

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I    A    MT    [2]אָמַרְתִּי אֶשְׁמְרָה דְרָכַי מֵחֲטוֹא בִלְשׁוֹנִי

אֶשְׁמְרָה לְפִי מַחְסוֹם

בְּעֹד    רָשָׁע    לְנֶגְדִּי:

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29    James A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPs^a)*, 11.

30    Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 107.

31    Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 107.

32    Martin Rösel, "Schreiber, Übersetzer, Theologen. Die Septuaginta als Dokument der Schrift-, Lese- und Übersetzungskulturen des Judentums," in *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten: Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 20-23. Juli 2006* (ed. by Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus in cooperation with Martin Meiser; WUNT 219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 83-102. See also Johann Cook, "Were the persons responsible for the Septuagint translators and/or scribes and/or editors?" *JNSL* 21 (1995): 45-58.

33    For the Hebrew I make use of Botha's excellent translation (Botha, "Psalm 39," 242-243). I also compare the Hebrew and the Greek versions of LOGOS and I use the Greek translation of NETS = Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

34    See the various volumes in the project directed by E. Tov and R.A. Kraft, *Computer Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies* (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1986).

²I said: "I want to guard my ways **from sinning** with my tongue;
I want to guard my mouth with a muzzle,
while the **wicked** are in my presence."

LXX ²Εἶπα Φυλάξω τὰς ὁδούς μου τοῦ μὴ ἁμαρτάνειν ἐν γλώσσῃ μου
ἐθέμην τῷ στόματί μου φυλακὴν
ἐν τῷ συστῆναι τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸν ἐναντίον μου.

²I said, "I will guard my ways, that I may not **sin** with my tongue;
I set a watch to my mouth,
when the **sinner** ἁμαρτωλὸς organised against me."

B  MT  ³נֶאֱלַ֣מְתִּי דֽוּמִיָּה֮ הֶחֱשֵׁ֪יתִי מִטּ֥וֹב
וּכְאֵבִ֥י נֶעְכָּֽר׃

³I was mute and silent; I remained silent (far) from good,
but my pain was stirred.

LXX  ³ἐκωφώθην καὶ ἐταπεινώθην καὶ ἐσίγησα ἐξ ἀγαθῶν,
καὶ τὸ ἄλγημά μου ἀνεκαινίσθη.

³I became dumb and was humbled, and I was silent from good things,
and my suffering was renewed;

MT  ⁴חַם־לִבִּ֨י בְּקִרְבִּ֗י
בַּהֲגִיגִ֥י תִבְעַר־אֵ֑שׁ
דִּבַּ֗רְתִּי בִּלְשֽׁוֹנִי׃

⁴My heart became hot within me.
As I mused, a fire burned;
then I spoke with my tongue:

LXX  ⁴ἐθερμάνθη ἡ καρδία μου ἐντός μου,
καὶ ἐν τῇ μελέτῃ μου ἐκκαυθήσεται πῦρ.
ἐλάλησα ἐν γλώσσῃ μου

⁴my heart became hot within me.
And in my musing, a fire will burn.
I spoke with my tongue:

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II  C  MT  ⁵הוֹדִ֘יעֵ֤נִי יְהוָ֨ה׀ קִצִּ֗י
וּמִדַּ֣ת יָמַ֣י מַה־הִ֑יא
אֵ֝דְעָ֗ה מֶה־חָדֵ֥ל אָֽנִי׃

⁵"**Yahweh**, make me know my end
and the measure of my days, what it is;
let me know how fleeting I am!

LXX  ⁵Γνώρισόν μοι, κύριε, τὸ πέρας μου
καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἡμερῶν μου, τίς ἐστιν,
ἵνα γνῶ τί ὑστερῶ ἐγώ

⁵"Make known to me, **Lord**, my limit,
and the number of my days – what it is –
that I may know what I lack.

MT  ⁶הִנֵּ֤ה טְפָח֨וֹת׀ נָ֘תַ֤תָּה יָמַ֗י

וְחֶלְדִּי כְאַ֫יִן נֶגְדֶּ֥ךָ
אַ֤ךְ כָּֽל־הֶ֥בֶל כָּל־אָדָ֓ם נִצָּ֬ב סֶֽלָה׃

<sup>6</sup>Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah.

<sup>LXX</sup> <sup>6</sup>ἰδοὺ παλαιστὰς ἔθου τὰς ἡμέρας μου,
καὶ ἡ ὑπόστασίς μου ὡσεὶ οὐθὲν ἐνώπιόν σου·
πλὴν τὰ σύμπαντα ματαιότης, πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ζῶν.
                                        διάψαλμα.

<sup>6</sup>Look, you made my days handbreadths,
and my existence is as nothing before you.
Surely, every person alive is the sum total of vanity.
                                        *Interlude on strings.*

D   MT <sup>7</sup>אַךְ־בְּצֶ֤לֶם ׀ יִֽתְהַלֶּךְ־אִ֗ישׁ
אַךְ־הֶ֥בֶל יֶהֱמָי֑וּן
יִ֝צְבֹּ֗ר וְֽלֹא־יֵדַ֥ע מִי־אֹסְפָֽם׃

<sup>7</sup>Surely a man goes about as a shadow!
Surely for nothing are they restless;
he heaps up and does not know who will gather!

<sup>LXX</sup> <sup>7</sup>μέντοιγε ἐν εἰκόνι διαπορεύεται ἄνθρωπος,
πλὴν μάτην ταράσσονται·
θησαυρίζει καὶ οὐ γινώσκει τίνι συνάξει αὐτά.

<sup>7</sup>"In fact, a person passes through as a phantom.
Surely, for nothing are they in turmoil;
he lays up treasures and does not know for whom he will gather them.

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III   E   <sup>MT</sup> <sup>8</sup>וְעַתָּ֣ה מַה־קִּוִּ֣יתִי אֲדֹנָ֑י
תּ֝וֹחַלְתִּ֗י לְךָ֣ הִֽיא׃

<sup>8</sup>"And now, **Adonai**, for what do I wait?
My hope, it is in you!

<sup>LXX</sup> <sup>8</sup>καὶ νῦν τίς ἡ ὑπομονή μου; οὐχὶ ὁ κύριος;
καὶ ἡ ὑπόστασίς μου παρὰ σοῦ ἐστιν.

<sup>8</sup>"And now, what is my endurance? Is it not the **Lord**?
Even my existence is from you.

<sup>MT</sup> <sup>9</sup>מִכָּל־פְּשָׁעַ֥י הַצִּילֵ֑נִי
חֶרְפַּ֥ת נָ֝בָ֗ל אַל־תְּשִׂימֵֽנִי׃

<sup>9</sup>Deliver me from all my **transgressions**.
Do not make me the scorn of a fool!

<sup>LXX</sup> <sup>9</sup>ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν μου ῥῦσαί με,
ὄνειδος ἄφρονι ἔδωκάς με.

<sup>9</sup>From all my acts of **lawlessness**, rescue me!
As a reproach to a fool you gave me.

F    MT    נֶאֱלַ֣מְתִּי לֹ֣א אֶפְתַּח־פִּ֑י
כִּ֖י אַתָּ֣ה עָשִֽׂיתָ׃

$^{10}$I am mute; I do not open my mouth,
for it is you who have done it.

LXX   $^{10}$ἐκωφώθην καὶ οὐκ ἤνοιξα τὸ στόμα μου,
ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ποιήσας με.

$^{10}$I became dumb, and I did not open my mouth,
because it is you who did it.

MT   $^{11}$הָסֵ֣ר מֵעָלַ֣י נִגְעֶ֑ךָ
מִתִּגְרַ֥ת יָ֝דְךָ֗ אֲנִ֣י כָלִֽיתִי׃

$^{11}$Remove your stroke from me;
I am spent by the hostility of your hand.

LXX   $^{11}$ἀπόστησον ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὰς μάστιγάς σου
ἀπὸ τῆς ἰσχύος τῆς χειρός σου ἐγὼ ἐξέλιπον.

$^{11}$Remove from me your scourges;
due to the force of your hand I fainted.

G    MT   $^{12}$בְּֽתוֹכָ֘ח֤וֹת עַל־עָוֺ֨ן ׀ יִסַּ֬רְתָּ אִ֗ישׁ
וַתֶּ֣מֶס כָּעָ֣שׁ חֲמוּד֑וֹ
אַ֤ךְ הֶ֖בֶל כָּל־אָדָ֣ם סֶֽלָה׃

$^{12}$When, with punishments for **<u>sin</u>**, you discipline a man,
you consume like a moth what was desired by him;
surely all mankind is a mere breath! Selah.

LXX   $^{12}$ἐν ἐλεγμοῖς ὑπὲρ ἀνομίας ἐπαίδευσας ἄνθρωπον
καὶ ἐξέτηξας ὡς ἀράχνην τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ
πλὴν μάτην ταράσσεται πᾶς ἄνθρωπος.
                             διάψαλμα.

$^{12}$"With reproofs for **<u>lawlessness</u>** you disciplined a person
and melted his soul like a spider's web;
surely, every person is in turmoil for nothing.
                         *Interlude on strings.*

IV  H   MT   $^{13}$שִֽׁמְעָ֥ה־תְפִלָּתִ֨י ׀ יְהֹוָ֡ה וְשַׁוְעָתִ֨י ׀ הַאֲזִינָה֮
אֶֽל־דִּמְעָתִ֗י אַֽל־תֶּ֫חֱרַ֥שׁ
כִּ֤י גֵ֣ר אָנֹכִ֣י עִמָּ֑ךְ
תּ֝וֹשָׁ֗ב כְּכָל־אֲבוֹתָֽי׃

$^{13}$"Hear my prayer, **<u>Yahweh</u>**, and give ear to my cry;
do not be silent at my tears!
For I am a stranger with you,
a sojourner, like all my fathers.

LXX   $^{13}$εἰσάκουσον τῆς προσευχῆς μου, κύριε, καὶ τῆς δεήσεώς μου ἐνώτισαι
τῶν δακρύων μου μὴ παρασιωπήσῃς,
ὅτι πάροικος ἐγώ εἰμι παρὰ σοὶ
καὶ παρεπίδημος καθὼς πάντες οἱ πατέρες μου.

$^{13}$"Listen to my prayer, **<u>O Lord</u>**, and to my petition give ear;

do not pass by my tears in silence,
because I am a sojourner with you,
and a visiting stranger, like all my fathers.

MT ¹⁴הָשַׁע מִמֶּנִּי וְאַבְלִיגָה
בְּטֶרֶם אֵלֵךְ וְאֵינֶנִּי:

¹⁴Remove your gaze from me, that I may smile again
before I depart and am no more!"

LXX ¹⁴ἄνες μοι, ἵνα ἀναψύξω
πρὸ τοῦ με ἀπελθεῖν καὶ οὐκέτι μὴ ὑπάρξω.

¹⁴Let me be, that I may revive
before I depart and be no more."

Botha has unpacked the structure of the Hebrew psalm brilliantly. The four stanzas are divided into eight smaller divisions, which according to Botha are aimed at, *inter alia*, retribution. Botha identifies the following elements:[35]

I   A   In a self-deliberation, the psalmist explains the reason for composing the psalm. He earlier wanted to keep silent so that he would not sin with his tongue.

   B   Initially he did keep silent, but his thoughts could not be suppressed; thus he began to address Yahweh in prayer.

II  C   He explains how he said to Yahweh that he had to know exactly how fleeting his life is. He told Yahweh that, in comparison to Yahweh, all humanity is a mere breath.

   D   Because of human frailty, all activity potentially becomes meaningless. Human existence is only shadowy and there is no control over who will inherit what people have gathered during their lives.

III E   The psalmist now prays and tells Yahweh that, in view of the uncertainty of life, his only hope for meaning is located in Yahweh. To give meaning to his life, he asks Yahweh to forgive his transgressions and to save him from the ridicule of fools.

   F   He acknowledges in his prayer that his fate is in the hands of Yahweh and promises to remain silent henceforth, but asks Yahweh to stop disciplining him.

   G   In a universalising conclusion of the stanza, the psalmist ascribes the transitoriness of possessions and human life to the abrasive effect of Yahweh's discipline for sin. Yahweh's discipline is portrayed as the reason why all mankind is a mere breath.

IV  H   The psalmist once more pleads with Yahweh to take note of his plight. Human feebleness implies that he only has the status of a

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[35]   I quote the summary of the psalm's structure and content from Botha, "Psalm 39," 244-245.

guest in the presence of Yahweh. Consequently, he would like to have some respite before he dies.

## 4        Psalm 39 and the Septuagint

Even though there is consensus that the LXX Pss is a relatively faithful rendering of its Semitic parent text (which corresponds with MT to a large extent), it differs from the Hebrew in some respects. From a methodological perspective, two aspects are important. Firstly, one has to take into account that the essence of the Greek translation is translational literature.[36] This literature requires a different methodology than compositional literature. The so-called interlinear paradigm which is best understood in a relation of dependence and subservience (Greek) to its parent text (Hebrew/Aramaic), is a useful paradigm[37] for the analysis of texts, as long as it is not idealized. Secondly, the Septuagint is written in an Indo-European language that has a different language structure from Semitic languages.[38] These aspects have an impact on the view one has, i.e., on the segmentation of the Psalms. Botha argues that the use of three forms of address of Yahweh, which in this psalm seem to serve as transition markers, appear in Ps 39:5 and 13 where the poet uses the divine name Yahweh, and in v. 8, where he addresses Yahweh as "Adonai." According to Botha, each of these introduces a new stanza (II, III, and IV). The Septuagint, however, consistently uses κύριος as equivalent. Within the context of this psalm, there are also other examples. The Hebrew text refers to the act of sinning (חטא) in verse 2 and relates it to the רָשָׁע "wicked." The LXX, however, uses the lexeme ἁμαρτωλός, in both instances. It seems that to the translator sinning and wickedness were related. The lexeme ἁμαρτάνειν, in turn, is used 11 times in the Psalms and in 7 instances the parent text is חטא. The lexeme ἁμαρτωλός, to be sure, is used close to 100 times in the Psalms and in more than 80%, including the verse under discussion, is the rendering for רָשָׁע. A final example is ἀνομία, that appears umpteen times in the Psalms. In the passage under discussion, verse 9, the parent text is פֶּשַׁע. At the least it is clear that the Greek translator is consistent.

Finally the LXX being translated in an Indo-European language has a different structure. This can be observed by comparing the two texts. The translator of Ps 39 clearly had a word for word intention in his translation. Seemingly he was not interested in its structure.

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[36]    See Cameron Boyd-Taylor, *Read between the Lines: The Interlinear Paradigm for Septuagint Studies* (Tools and Studies 8; Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

[37]    See Boyd-Taylor, *Read between the Lines,* VII).

[38]    Johann Cook, "The Translation of a Translation: Some Methodological Considerations on the Translation of the Septuagint," in *XII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Leiden, 2004* (ed. by Melvin K. H. Peters; SBLSCS 54; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 29–40.

## C    CONCLUSION

As an answer to the question posed at the beginning of this paper – whether MT Ps 39 / LXX Ps 38 is a retributive Psalm – one should take into account the fact that the LXX version is of a different order. Firstly, from a methodological perspective, the essence of the LXX is translational literature. This literature requires a different methodology for analysis from that used for other literature. Hence the comparative method takes pride of place. Secondly, the interpreter has to work with two language structures – a Semitic and an Indo-European one. From this perspective, Botha has put forward more than enough arguments to convince us that Ps 39 is a retributive Psalm. The Greek Psalm, on the other hand, shows no special signs of retribution.

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