



And prepare a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah and to Jerusalem, the mighty city.<sup>5</sup>

Targum Jonathan provides too free a rendering to be of any real text-critical value but again it seems to reflect the MT's use of the adjective "fortified", although the Targum applies it to the cities in which fugitives from Jerusalem took refuge:

אורקא אתקין דגיתון בה קטולי חרבא מרבת בני עמון ועל דבית יהודה דנפקו מירושלם למיתב בקרוין  
קרין

Set a road by which those who slay with the sword might come from Rabbah of the Ammonites, against those of the House of Judah who went out of Jerusalem to dwell in fortified cities.<sup>6</sup>

This is the Hebrew text of the verse as reconstructed by H. Cornill in his critical edition of the book of Ezekiel published in 1886 (Cornill 1886: 306):

דרך עיר תשים לבוא חרב את רבת בני עמון ואת יהודה וירושלם בתוכה

Cornill translates the verse as follows:

nach jeder Stadt setzen, dass das Schwert komme nach Rabbath der Kinder Ammons und nach Juda und Jerusalem in seiner Mitte.

Heinrich Cornill<sup>7</sup> belonged to a generation of Biblical scholars that was not at all afraid of conjectural emendation<sup>8</sup> and he reworks Ezekiel's text accordingly. Cornill essentially makes use of retroversion:<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew text he reconstructs at the end of the verse is a translation into Hebrew (בתוכה) of the LXX's ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς.<sup>10</sup> A few years after Cornill's edition, this emendation was accepted in H.C. Toy's critical edition of *Ezekiel*: וירושלם בתוכה (Toy 1899: 74).

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<sup>5</sup> Transl. Lamsa (1957: 847).

<sup>6</sup> Transl. Levey (1987: 67).

<sup>7</sup> On Heinrich Cornill see Rabenau (1957: 367).

<sup>8</sup> On the art of emending the Biblical text see Martone (2012).

<sup>9</sup> On the criteria for retroversion see Tov (1997: 57-89).

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that this is not the only emendation in this verse put forward by Cornill. However the correction of MT's דרך into עיר דרך is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Cornill was not the only scholar who proposed to emend this passage. Some fifty years earlier, another scholar who had no qualms about altering the Biblical text, Ferdinand Hitzig,<sup>11</sup> had proposed to replace the MT's *בְּצוּרָה* with *בְּקִרְבָּה*, “womit alle Schwierigkeit gehoben ist” (Hitzig 1847: 147).<sup>12</sup>

After the use of conjectural emendation in Biblical studies went out of fashion, the difference between the MT and the LXX in Ezek 21:25 received little or no attention, since no *Schwierigkeit* was felt any more.<sup>13</sup>

Be that as it may, it should be noted that this is the only time that the LXX translates *בְּצוּרָה* in this way: In all other occurrences<sup>14</sup> the passive participial form is translated with terms related to the semantic field of strength.<sup>15</sup>

A lexical solution to the tension between the readings of MT and the LXX has been proposed by Joshua Blau (Blau 1956). In a short and elegant note, Blau interprets *מְבוּצָרָה* in mNeg. 1:5 as meaning “in der Mitte”. The passage in question runs as follows:

הִיְתָה בּוֹ מִחַיָּה וְהִלְכָה לָהּ הַמַּחַיָּה, הִיְתָה מְרַבֶּעֶת וְנִעְשִׂיתָ עֲגֵלָה אוֹ אֲרָכָה, מְבֻצָּרָת וְנִעְשִׂיתָ מִן הַצֵּד, מְכֻנָּסֶת וְנִתְפָּזְרָה, וּבֵא הַשָּׁחִין וְנִכְנַס בְּתוֹכָהּ.

This is H. Danby's explanatory translation of this difficult passage (Danby 1933: 677):

or if [on the Sabbath] there was quick flesh but [the next day] the quick flesh was gone;; or if it was four-sided but [the next day] it became round or long; or if it was encompassed but [the next day] it appeared only to the side; or if it was united but [the next day] it was dispersed; or if [the next day] a boil came and entered therein.

Thus, in this case *מְבוּצָרָה* means a rash that is *surrounded* (“encompassed”)<sup>16</sup> by healthy flesh,<sup>17</sup> and this is the general meaning given to the root *בָּצַר* in M. Jastrow's classic dictionary of Talmudic language, with a reference to the passage discussed here:

<sup>11</sup> On Ferdinand Hitzig (1807-1875) see Villiger (1999).

<sup>12</sup> Other proposals in Barthélemy (1992: 175). Barthélemy's attribution of the emendation of *בְּצוּרָה* to *בְּתוֹכָהּ* to Cappel's *Notae Criticae* is mistaken.

<sup>13</sup> On this topic see Catastini (1991, 1995: 5-12), Chiesa (2000; 2002) and Hendel (2010).

<sup>14</sup> Num 13:28; Deut 1:28; 3:5; 9:1; 28:52; Josh 14:12; 2 Sam 20:6; 2 Kgs 18:13; 19:25; 2 Chr 17:2; 19:5; 32:1; 33:14; Neh 9:25; Isa 2:15; 25:2; 27:10; 36:1; 37:26; Jer 15:20; 33:3; Ezek 21:25; 36:35; Hos 8:14; Zeph 1:16; Zech 11:2.

<sup>15</sup> See Muraoka (2010:166). The case of Zech. 11:2 deserves a separate study.

<sup>16</sup> See also Neusner (1998 *ad loc.*) who translates “encompassed” too: a further proof of the enduring usefulness of Danby's translation of the Mishnah.

Neg I, 5 מְבוֹצֵרָת an eruption surrounded with sound flesh (Jastrow 1950: 185).<sup>18</sup>

The same meaning is given for other occurrences, too, such as jPes 56a:<sup>19</sup>

גגות ירושלים קודש. ר' ירמיה ר' מיישא רבי שמואל בר רב יצחק בשם רב גגות ירושלים חול.  
והא תנינן מן האגוף ולפנים כלפנים מן האגוף ולחוץ כלחוץ פתר לה בגג מבוצר לאויר חצר הא  
מתניתא

The roofs of Jerusalem are sanctified. Rebbi Jeremiah, Rebbi Miasha, Rebbi Samuel bar Rav Isaac in the name of Rav: The roofs of Jerusalem are profane. But did we not state, “From the wing and inside it is like inside; from the wing and outside it is like outside”? Explain it that the Mishnah speaks about a roof surrounded by buildings forming a courtyard.

In this context too, it is clear that the verbal form means “to surround”. The question being debated is whether the roofs of Jerusalem are to be considered profane so as to decide within what limits it is lawful to offer sacrifices. In the discussion a mishnaic passage is reported and interpreted as referring to a roof “surrounded” (מבוצר) by buildings. Thus, it would seem that the meaning of the root in mishnaic Hebrew is not so different from its meaning in biblical Hebrew: “fortified, surrounded”, stemming from the basic meaning “inaccessible, unassailable”, as a participial form of the root בצר I.<sup>20</sup> This brings us back to where we started: Why does the LXX translate the MT’s בְּצֻרָה (“fortified”) by ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς (“in her midst”)? To obtain a possible solution we should take into consideration the fact that the MT of Ezek 21:25 is a rather difficult text, although most modern translations do not mention any problems. A literal translation would run more or less as follows:

Mark out the road for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites *and to Judah in* Jerusalem fortified.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the version most faithful to the MT seems to be the *Vulgata* of Jerome, who had no problem with translating literally the phrase *ad Iudam in Hierusalem*:<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Levy (1876-89: 252).

<sup>18</sup> Other instances are jShav 40a and parallels.

<sup>19</sup> Text and translation (slightly modified by the present writer) in Guggenheimer (2013: 291-292).

<sup>20</sup> See Köhler, Baumgartner, and Richardson (2017: 142), and Gen 11:6; Job 42:2. See also Clines (1995: 246): “be fortified, be inaccessible (alw. passive ptc., oft. as attributive adj., fortified city, etc.)” on the same line also Gesenius (1987: 167) (“befestigen [eigtl. etwas V. dem Daranliegenden absondern, umringen, umgeben”).

<sup>21</sup> Text in Fischer and Weber (1994).

viam pones ut veniat gladius ad Rabbath filiorum Ammon et ad Iudam in Hierusalem munitissimam

It is possible that the LXX translators felt the same difficulty we feel today and tried to overcome it. In other words, as a working hypothesis we might assume that the translator had as his, or less likely her, *Vorlage* the same text as the MT and opted for a free translation to avoid the infelicities of the Hebrew text, aggravated by the omission of the article in the participial form בצורה.<sup>22</sup>

The LXX's free translation of בצורה as “in her midst” remains faithful to the basic meaning of the Hebrew participle, which can mean “surrounded” as well as “fortified”. At the same time, by specifying that Jerusalem is “in the midst” of Judah the LXX overcomes the awkwardness of the Hebrew text according to which Judah is *in* Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, such an interpretive translation might have been influenced by Ezek 5:5, where Jerusalem is defined as set “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ) of the nations:

τάδε λέγει κύριος αὕτη ἡ Ἱερουσαλημ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἐθνῶν τέθεικα αὐτήν καὶ τὰς κύκλῳ αὐτῆς χώρας

Thus says Lord, This is Jerusalem; in the middle of the nations I have placed her and the regions around her.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, if this reasoning is correct, the LXX would have tried to get around the difficulties of the Hebrew text by giving not a literal translation, but an interpretive one, thus opening the road for the other ancient translations, such as the Peshitta and the Targum, which, as we have seen, also choose to present a paraphrasing, or free rendering of the MT.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Joüon and Muraoka (1991: §158).

<sup>23</sup> See also Eichrodt (1970: 297). According to Zimmerli (1969: 482) the Hebrew phrase aims to draw a contrast between the capital of Judah and the great city of the Ammonites, remarking that Jerusalem is “unzugängliche”, although at the expense of clarity (and of grammar).

<sup>24</sup> Transl. Olley (2009: 77).

<sup>25</sup> It may be added that Origen's Hexapla reflects this situation: Α. περιοχης. Σ. εν πολιορχια. Θ. ωχυρωμενη, as also reported in the Syrohexapla: ܩܝܘܡܝܢܐ ܕܝܫܘܥܝܡܐ. See Fields (1875 2: 824). On Origen's Hexapla suffice it to mention here Salvesen (1998).

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