

SOME PHILOLOGICAL NOTES ON THE SONS OF BELIAL AND
THE SEPTUAGINT
Notas filológicas sobre los hijos de Belial y la Septuaginta

ANDRÉS PIQUER OTERO
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Resumen: Este artículo estudia la traducción en la Septuaginta de la palabra hebrea בליעל y construcciones derivadas concentrándose en la traducción griega λοιμός, propuesta aquí como Old Greek en los libros de Samuel. El significado del término (y su relevancia para el estudio de las tradiciones de lectura e interpretación en torno a בליעל en el judaísmo del cambio de era) se examina en el contexto de otra evidencia más o menos contemporánea con la Septuaginta, como Qumrán y los Pseudoepígrafos. La imagen trazada por esta comparación parece indicar que, en parte de la tradición de la Septuaginta y otras literaturas, el término presentaba ciertos rasgos cósmico-sobrenaturales de negatividad que conectan con elementos mitológicos del Próximo Oriente antiguo.

Abstract: This paper studies the Septuagint translations of the Biblical Hebrew word בליעל and derived constructions, with a focus on the term λοιμός, which I propose as the Old Greek translation in the books of Samuel. The meaning of the word (and its relevance for the study of the reading and interpretation traditions around בליעל in turn of the era Judaism) is examined in the context of other evidence around the time of the Septuagint, such as Dead Sea Scrolls and Pseudoepigrapha. The picture defined by this comparison seems to indicate that, among part of the Septuagint tradition and other literatures, the word did present some cosmic-supernatural features of negativity which connect with ancient Near Eastern mythological elements.

Palabras clave: Hebreo bíblico, Septuaginta, Crítica textual, Qumrán.

Key words: Biblical Hebrew, Septuagint, Textual Criticism, Qumran.

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When looking backwards to our student careers, we all probably remember some undergraduate classes as key formative experiences which constituted a turning point in our approach to academic disciplines which are now our present. Certainly all classes are formative—one way or the other—but the glass of memory does highlight a handful of teachers and subjects as particularly relevant for those attractions we

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develop to one line of research or another, for those moments where choices are made and our budding life as scholars starts taking its concrete form. If I go down memory lane myself, one of the classes which first springs into mind are Ángel Sáenz-Badillos' sessions on history of the Hebrew language (back then named Hebrew Grammar II.) Nowadays my academic life is more or less evenly split between comparative Northwest Semitic grammar and the diachronic study of Hebrew and textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible with a particular focus on the Septuagint. Those two seemingly unrelated areas did have, beyond any other discussion on interdisciplinary approaches, a very clear point of contact in my life; I was exposed to both of them for the first time in Ángel's classes, from the classification of Ugaritic and discussion on the *Wellentheorie* or the linguistic tree model to his magnificent work on Greek transcriptions of Hebrew words in the Septuagint.¹ Today, then, to honor Ángel Sáenz-Badillos career, I will present a small contribution which tries to approach a Septuagint phenomenon, in this case not a transcription, but rather the remarkable lack of one. In my attempt to lay out some facts the linguistic background of ancient Hebrew will at some point make a cameo appearance, and thus my sojourn to honor Ángel with the memory of those days of 1995 and 96 will run full circle.

1. INTRODUCTION: MEN AND SONS OF BELIAL (ONE DAUGHTER TOO)

For this paper I have chosen a recurring phrase in the Hebrew Bible which I will examine fundamentally in the context of Samuel-Kings, the construction *son(s) of Belial* (with alternative formulations like *men of Belial*, or —once— *daughter of Belial*). Though the meaning of the phrase seems more or less clear as an attribute which reflects impiety or some other sort of generic negative quality of the recipient,² it is also true that an exact explanation and etymology of the construction (regarding the element בליעל in MT) have baffled experts and given rise to a considerable amount of academic discussion and speculation. The situation is even more visible in the versions of the Bible, where there are lexical hesitations in the rendering of the phrase, which shall be described in

1. See, e.g., Sáenz-Badillos, 1975.

2. See Koehler, and Baumgartner, 2001 (*HALOT* from here onwards): 133-134.

detail below, and even instances (mostly in the Latin of Vulgate) of a transcription of the Hebrew בליעל as a personal name, understood in all likelihood as a sort of demonic or at least evil entity. Of course, this last piece of data connects with the presence of a Belial in Qumranic literature and in Jewish apocrypha and pseudoepigrapha, as well as in the New Testament.³ My proposal is that those differences in translating the word בליעל, mostly within a nominal phrase such as those listed above, may reveal some information on the different perceptions and interpretations of the word within developing Judaism at the turn of the Common Era. It may also offer some inklings on the history of the Greek text of Samuel-Kings and ultimately on the etymology of the Hebrew word.

בליעל appears 27 times in the Hebrew Bible: Deut 13:14; 15:9; Judg 19:22; 20:13; 1Sam 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 25:25; 30:22; 2Sam 16:7; 20:1; 22:5; 23:6; 1Kgs 21:10; 21:13 (x2); Nah 1:11; 2:1; Ps 18:5 (parallel of 2Sam 22:5); 41:9; 101:3; Job 34:18; Prov 6:12; 16:27; 19:28; 2Chr 13:7. The frequency of the word in the Samuel-Kings narrative is remarkable, and so is its presence in the Deuteronomist's work. Quantitatively, the word appears mostly as the second element of a nominal chain (22 cases), with pretty well-defined *nomina regentia*: בן / בה / בני (10 cases);⁴ איש / אנשי (6 cases);⁵ דבר (2 cases);⁶ other nouns (4 cases).⁷ Amongst the latter «other» nouns, there is also a certain definition: we find either a synonym of איש (אדם; Prov 6:12) or a word which also denotes a type of human being, albeit in a specialized context (עד; Prov 19:28); the parallel passage of 2Sam 22:5 // Ps 18:5, where the *regens* is נחלי, stands as a pretty distinct usage (given its cosmic context) when compared to the other cases, and shall have importance in the discussion below. The remaining five appearances of בליעל have the word

3. With the alternative spelling Βελιάρ, which might be relevant for the history of the noun.

4. Deut 13:14; Judg 19:22; 20:13; 1Sam 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 1Kgs 21:10; 21:13; 2Chr 13:7.

5. 1Sam 25:25; 30:22; 2Sam 16:7; 20:1; 1Kgs 21:13; Prov 16:27. Half of these cases have a determined *rectum* הבליעל (1Sam 25:25; 2Sam 16:7; 1Kgs 21:13), the rest have the noun without article.

6. Ps 41:9; 101:3.

7. 2Sam 22:5; Ps 18:5; Prov 6:12; 19:28.

alone fulfilling a standard nominal syntactic role (nominal predicate / adverbial accusative in Deut 15:9;⁸ subject in 2Sam 23:6 and Nah 2:1; direct object in Nah 1:11 and Job 34:18). This grammatical distribution is remarkable, as it indicates that the word is most frequently used as an «attributive genitive», especially with the generic words referring to the human being which express ultimately an adjectival property or quality, a typical Semitic idiom.⁹

All in all, the word, either singly or in the nominal construction detailed above, defines a negative concept or quality, though its interpretation—and hence its translation, both in ancient versions and in modern works— may differ.¹⁰ The Targumim, for instance, use a very generic negative term, רשע (as a noun) / רשיע (as an adjective), in the vast majority of cases. When the Aramaic presents a different word, it is usually a synonym or it involves an *ad locum* semantic precision, which may reflect the particular translator's ideological setting.¹¹ A small but remarkable number of cases, though, chooses to render the word with טלום (oppression, oppressor),¹² a clear specialization in meaning, which could be reflecting a popular etymology based on על (yoke).¹³

This situation is also reflected in modern translations and in dictionary entries dealing with the word: a general meaning of «badness» is given

8. The syntax of the first sentence in this verse is quite complex, as attested by the paraphrastic approaches of most versions.

9. See e.g. Meyer, 1992: 375-376; Lipiński, 2001: 511.

10. See, e.g., the general but coherent definition in van Der Toorn, Becking, and van der Horst, 1999, (henceforth *DDD*): 1669-171: «In most of its OT attestations, *bēlyya* 'al functions as an emotive term to describe individuals or groups who commit the most heinous crimes against the Israelite religious or social order, as well as their acts.»

11. 2 Sam 22:5 has חייבין (sinners); TN and TPs-J to Deut 15:9 use זדונה / זדונה (malicious / malice); the same two versions to Deut 13:14 specialize contextually: TN בני זדון (children of evil counsel); TPs-J גברין זדונין מאולפנא דהכימא (malicious men from the instruction of the wise); similarly, in Prov 19:28 we find דגלא (false) when speaking of a bad witness (reading with Lagarde vs. the alternate form דגלא; see Jastrow, 2005: 280.)

12. Ps 18:5; 41:9; Prov 6:12.

13. A «yoke-based» etymology is also attested in *b. Sanh* 111b, though in a different sense: The בני בליעל are rebellious (hence wicked and sinners, but the contextual explanation of the text refers to the quotation of Deut 13:14 in *m. Sanh.* 10:4, hence it refers to the action of leading a community astray) because they shake off the Lord's yoke.

more precise renderings out of context.¹⁴ Quantitatively, more space seems to be given to the presentation of different etymological proposals, which, for the moment, will not be considered here. I will present now the materials from the Septuagint, especially focusing on the Samuel-Kings texts, in order to further contextualize the reception of the word.

2. NO BELIAL IN THE SEPTUAGINT?

The Greek text treats constructions with בליעל, generally speaking, in the line explained in the previous section; the word is rendered by a substantive or adjective which expresses ideas of evil or, distinctly, transgression, frequently with a derivate of νόμος: παράνομος (Deut 13:14; Judg 19:22; 20:13 B; 2Sam 16:7; 20:1; 23:6; 1Kgs 20:10 [MT 21:10]; 20:13 [MT 21:13] 1st; 2Chr 13:7; Ps 40:9 [MT 41:9]; 100:3 [MT 101:3]; Job 34:18); ἀνόμημα (Deut 15:9) ἀνομία (2Sam 22:5; Ps 17:5 [MT 18:5]). In contrast, certain books seem to depart from this general tendency and present more specialized meanings: Nah 1:11 (ἐναντία, 'hostile') and 2:1 (παλαιώσιν, 'decay, ruin'); all the instances in Proverbs (6:12; 16:27; 19:28) use ἄφρων ('fool'). Occasionally, quasi-synonyms of παράνομος may be found (ἀποστασία in 2Kgs 20:13¹⁵ [MT 21:13 2nd]; ἄσεβεις in Judg 20:13 A). The A text of Judg 20:13 is also remarkable for including the only transcription of the word, Βελιαλ, even though it is forming a doublet with a more expected translation (ἄσεβεις in A, the most frequent παράνομος in B, which does not include the expansion). This exceptional element will be discussed below.

I have saved for last the translation choice in passages from 1Samuel, as it constitutes a pretty distinct phenomenon which will be key for this paper. In all six cases from the first book of Samuel, בליעל is translated as

14. See e.g. *HALOT* 133-134: «uselessness, wickedness», then nuanced as «illness», «villain», «destruction» according to contexts; second meaning as «adj. good for nothing», in one context «'ne'er do well.'»

15. This reading comes from a philo-MT Hexaplaric addition; it does not appear in GB or GL and it has clear affinities with Aquila renderings of בליעל in other passages (1Sam 1:16; 2:1225:17). Also, the Syro Hexapla marks the passage including the word with an asterisk.

λοιμός, ‘plague’ or ‘pestilent’.¹⁶ This translation is remarkable both by the connotations of the word, which will be examined below, and by its distribution without the ensemble of Samuel-Kings. I will examine first the textual data to continue later with the discussion on the meaning and reception of the term.

All the usages of λοιμός in the *textus receptus* belong to the Old Greek section α,¹⁷ which comprises the totality of 1Samuel, where the G^B text witnesses the Old Greek, often running together with the Lucianic text and the Old Latin evidence (when extant). On the other hand, the cases from the καὶ γε section βγ (2Sam 11:2-1Kgs 2:11), 2Sam 16:7; 20:1; 22:5; 23:6, are rendered by παράνομος, with the sole exception of 22:5.¹⁸ The cases in section γγ (1Kgs 2:12-1Kgs 21:29), 1Kgs 21[20]:10; 21[20]:13) also use παράνομος. At first sight, the translation λοιμός is limited to the first book of Samuel. On the other hand, if one departs from the LXX majority text and examines the Lucianic text, the textual situation becomes more complex, as 2Sam 20:1 also uses λοιμός, while 2Sam 22:5 presents a new term, βίαοι (‘violent’). The situation of 2Sam 23:6 is also quite complicated, as it coincides with a point where the Lucianic text of the Septuagint (in agreement with OL) clearly diverges from the Greek majority text:

16. According to Liddel and Scott, 1996, the word is primarily a substantive. The authorities mentioned in its adjectival usage are all biblical references or come from Christian Literature.

17. This includes the text of 1Sam 29:10 preserved only in the Septuagint, καὶ πορεύεσθε εἰς τὸν τόπον οὗ κατέστησα ὑμᾶς ἐκεῖ καὶ λόγον λοιμὸν μὴ θῆς ἐν καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ἀγαθὸς σὺ ἐνώπιόν μου. The expression λόγον λοιμὸν does fit in with the phrase בְּרַעַל־לֵב attested in Ps 41:9 and 101:3.

18. Where the word of choice is ἀνομία. The fact that this is part of the poem paralleled in Ps 18:5 (where LXX also uses ἀνομίας) could explain this exception.

Old Latin	G ^L	G ^B	MT
23:5 Quoniam non sic domus mea cum Domino; quoniam testamentum aeternum posuit mihi paratum salvare me quae in omnibus et custodiet haec; quoniam omnem adversantem mihi non vult; quoniam omnes qui oriuntur 23:6 Sicut spinas, et reliqui quasi quod emungit de lucerna; ita omnes erunt quoniam non in manu accipietur	23:5 ὅτι οὐχ οὕτως ὁ οἶκός μου μετὰ θεοῦ ὅτι διαθήκη αἰώνιον ἔθετό μοι ἑτοιμὴν σῶσαί με ἐν πᾶσι καὶ φυλάξει αὐτήν ὅτι πάντα τὸν ἀντιθέτον μοι οὐ θελήσει ὅτι πάντες οἱ ἀνατέλλοντες ὥσπερ ἄκανθα καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ὡς ἀπόμυγμα λύχνου πάντες διότι οὐκ ἐν χειρὶ λήγονται.	23:5 οὐ γὰρ οὕτως ὁ οἶκός μου μετὰ ἰσχυροῦ διαθήκη γὰρ αἰώνιον ἔθετό μοι ἑτοιμὴν ἐν παντί κειρῶ περιλαβμένην ὅτι πᾶσα σωτηρία μου καὶ πᾶν θέλημα ὅτι οὐ μὴ βλαστήσει ὁ παράνομος ὥσπερ ἄκανθα ἐξοσμένη πάντες αὐτοῖ ὅτι οὐ χειρὶ λημφθήσονται	23:5 כִּי־לֹא־כֵן בֵּיתִי עִמָּדֹנָי כִּי בְרִית עוֹלָם שָׂם לִי לְעֹרֶכְךָ הַשְׁלֵמָה כִּי־כָל יְשֵׁי רִשְׁעֵי־לְבָב אֵלֶיךָ חֲמָצֵי כִּי־לֹא־יִשְׁעֶה רֶשָׁע כִּי־לֹא־יִשְׁעֶה יְדָיִךְ כִּי־לֹא־יִשְׁעֶה יְדָיִךְ כִּי־לֹא־יִשְׁעֶה יְדָיִךְ

This is not the place to delve into the intricacies of the Old Latin and Lucianic text and their clear divergences from the καὶ γε text of B, the

basis for Rahlfs's manual edition.¹⁹ What is meaningful for my discussion is that the agreement between the Old Latin and the Lucianic text would allow us to determine the Old Greek pre-καὶ γε text of the passage, and such a text presents two important features:

1. It disagrees with the majority Greek in reading the translation of בליעל (the expected ὁ παράνομος) as a subject of the last verb in v.5 (קִצְמִי / βλαστήση). There is in fact no trace of a בליעל *Vorlage* in v.5.
2. In fact, it would appear, at first sight, that the OL and Lucianic text do not contain a rendering of the Hebrew word in v.6 either. Nevertheless, if the two verses (5-6) are carefully studied in a synoptic layout, it is remarkable to notice that the prospective Old Greek (OL+G^L) does not have any pluses or minuses, but seems to be translating a *Vorlage* which is quite similar to MT, though some words would feature different vocalizations or minor consonantal alterations.²⁰ Then, both versions share a phrase which, if taking the majority Greek text of 2Samuel as a guideline, would be hard to translate back into Hebrew: *et reliqui* / καὶ οἱ λοιποί. On the other hand, if we accept the hypothesis of λοιμός being the Old Greek translation of בליעל in the Former Prophets (as its usage in the OG section α would indicate), it is possible to propose an original Greek reading ΛΟΙΜΟΙ which got

19. For a more detailed commentary of the textual problems in the Septuagint version of these verses —and its relationship with the Hebrew *Vorlage*— see McCarter, 1984: 475-479.

20. For instance, in v.5 MT קִצְמִי (GB θέλημα) is read instead as a verbal form (*vult* / θελήσει); the MT כִּל may actually be hiding an earlier בל, reflected in the Lucianic and OL negatives; the reading ἀπομυγμα λύχνου is complex to evaluate, given the already suspicious nature of the Hebrew text —as already noted in the classical commentaries, see Driver, 1913: 360-361; Klostermann, 1887: 248—, but the presence of λύχνου / *lucerna* could indicate a reading of מנרה for מנר, with a frequent *daleth-resh* confusion. The most suggestive presentation of the verses, which considers both LXX sources and their Hebrew *Vorlage* is still McCarter, 1984: 478-479. McCarter considers that בליעל here is actually to be read as the negative בל plus a verbal form יעל. Though his analysis is possible for an early stage of the poem, it does deny the fact that in the Jewish tradition as a whole that was not the way the word was understood, which instead fell in line with the other בליעל constructions throughout the Bible.

corrupted into ΛΟΙΠΟΙ (literally rendered by the OL as *reliqui* and henceforth pre-Lucianic) due to a *mu-pi* scribal confusion.²¹ Whereas the majority Greek text produced a *lectio facilior* by attaching the *casus pendens* בליעל to the previous verb as a subject, the proposed Old Greek chose to create its facilitating reading by postponing it to the following prepositional phrase, while linking ὥσπερ ἄκανθα to the end of the previous verse.

This analysis of 2Sam 23:6 would indicate, together with the Lucianic materials of 2Sam 20:1, that it is possible to find remains of a previous translation with λοιμός in the καὶ γε section βγ when using the Lucianic and Old Latin evidence. It would not be a strict OG vs. καὶ γε opposition—or at least it is not possible to posit it as such with the preserved materials we have—, given the presence of the form παράνομος in the OG section γγ, but the usage of παράνομος could be defined as a «καὶ γε-like» feature²² which does replace a previous Old Greek reading in the Former Prophets.²³

Therefore, in the Septuagint we may find a «standard» interpretation of בליעל which alludes to lawlessness and/or impiety, in line with the traditional Jewish conception of the term, and which is usually reflected in derivatives of νόμος with a prefix indicating negativity or transgression. Besides cases discussed above involving specializations of meaning or contextual renderings, two divergent translations are noteworthy for the history of interpretation of the term: one case of transcription of the Semitic word in the A text of Judg 20:13 and several instances of λοιμός in the Old Greek layers of the Former Prophets. As mentioned above, the case of Judges is actually a doublet, as one may see when comparing texts A and B:

21. Besides the graphic similarities of the uncial and semi-uncial forms of both letters, an aural mistake could also explain the error (or operate in synergy with the graphic confusion), given the proximity between two labial sounds.

22. For the concept of καὶ γε —like features, see. e.g., Piquer Otero, Torijano Morales, and Treballe Barrera, 2005.

23. Also, the presence of παρανομίας as a Theodotion reading in the Hexapla fragments of 1Sam 10:27 and as a Symmachus one in 30:22 seems to point towards the recensional character of the term.

Judg 20:13 LXX A	Judg 20:13 LXX B	Judg 20:13 MT
καὶ νῦν δότε τοὺς ἄνδρας τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς τοὺς ἐν Γαβαα τοὺς υἱοὺς Βελιαλ καὶ θανατώσομεν αὐτοὺς	καὶ νῦν δότε τοὺς ἄνδρας υἱοὺς παρανόμων τοὺς ἐν Γαβαα καὶ θανατώσομεν αὐτοὺς	וְעַתָּה תָּבוֹ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּנֵי־קַלְיֵעַל אֲשֶׁר בְּגַבְעָה וְנָמְיָתָם

The interest of text A of the Septuagint lies in that, on one hand, it is using a peculiar rendering of the word, ἀσεβεῖς, right in the place where the B text presents the majority version παρανόμων; on the other hand, the tradition of the A text did not just change the choice of terms between two functional quasi-synonyms; it also added an alternative translation, actually a transcription, τοὺς υἱοὺς Βελιαλ, which would be working as a gloss: «the impious ones who were in Gabaa, [that is,] the Children of Belial». ²⁴ It is also remarkable that some of the secondary versions which rely on the A text present the alternative transcription *Beliar*. ²⁵ Given the presence of Βελιάρ in 2Cor 6:15, it is quite possible that the Christian versions changed the word due to New Testament influence, ²⁶ though it is also remarkable that the Greek *Vorlage* of these versions has preserved the form with -λ. All in all, text A of Judges seems to be attesting a change of tendency in the interpretation of בליעל, where it is seen as a personal name, instead of the common noun used in an adjectival construction which is reflected in the majority of the Septuagint as well as in other Jewish sources such as the Targumim. This tendency will be developed further and further in the Christian transmission of the Bible, as it is visible in the options taken by Jerome in the Vulgate, where בליעל is transcribed (*Belial*) in a considerable number of cases (Deut 13:14; Judg 19:22; 1Sam 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 2Sam 16:7; 2Sam 20:1; 2Sam 22:5;

24. The Syro-Hexapla takes care to mark the reading with an obelus, which indicates that the tradition perceived ἀσεβεῖς as the translation of the Hebrew text and the phrase with the transcription as a gloss. Cf. Targarona Borrás, 1979: 496, 506, where the double translation is classified as a doublet of groups 2 (Hexaplaric) and 4 (Antioquene-Lucianic, with the suppression of the transcription and the inclusion of the majority reading: ... ἀσεβεῖς τοὺς ἐν Γαβαα τοὺς υἱοὺς παρανόμων).

25. It is the case of the Sahidic Coptic and the Armenian.

26. Which, in turn, shares the reading in —ρ with the Pseudoepigrapha.

1Kgs 21:10; Nah 2:1; Ps 101:3; 2Chr 13:17). Furthermore, in several passages the Vulgate presents the term *diabolus/diabulus* (or the adjective *diabolicus*) to translate the word: 1Kgs 21:13; Ps 18:5; 41:9. This is remarkable given that the usage of *diabolus* is quite scant in the Vulgate of the Old Testament,²⁷ limited in the canonical books to the cases above and Hab 3:5, where *diabolus* is translated as רִשְׁפָּי. This last case is interesting for the present discussion, as it confirms Jerome's tendency to interpret both בלעל and the Semitic deity *Reshep* as manifestations of a negative personal supernatural entity,²⁸ which he translates as *diabolus*, the reference name for such a character in the Christian tradition. This tendency will be relevant for the placement of the OG form λοιμός in the ideological context of Judaism at the turn of the era.

3. NE'ER DO WELLS AND PLAGUE IN QUMRAN AND THE PSEUDOEPIGRAPHA

The same tendency to personification outlined above in Vulgate (and perhaps in the single LXX instance of text A of Judg 20:13) is well attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where Belial is clearly presented as a personal negative entity in a large number of instances, saliently 1QM and 1QH,²⁹ where Belial is presented as leader of the forces of darkness, in frontal opposition to the «Sons of Light».³⁰ There are also references to the evil spirits of Belial, which are the source of humans' sinful actions.³¹ These ideas are remarkable given the continuity they establish with the Greek Pseudoepigrapha, especially the relationship between Beliar and his spirits and the evil or sinful disposition among humans.³² There is a continuity

27. Jerome tends to use a transcription of the Hebrew *Satan* in cases where LXX translates διάβολος. Cf. e.g. Zech 3:1,2; Job 1:6-9; 1Chr 21:1.

28. This is not the place to detail the history of the Semitic god Reshep and its relationship with a negative or Underworld portfolio. Cf., for a summary, *DDD*, 700-703.

29. Dead Sea Scrolls references are taken from and cited according to García Martínez and Tigchelaar, 1997-98.

30. See e.g. Schiffman, 1989: 50.

31. See, e.g., CD 4:15-18, אשר הוא תפש אשר עליהם לוי בן יעקב. הראשונה היא הזנות השנית ההון השלישית טמא המקדש בהם בישראל ויתנם פניהם לשלושת מיני הצדק. פשרו על בלעל ועל רוחי גורלו, 11Q13.

32. See *DDD*: 170-171.

between some of the Qumran presentations (such as CD 4:15-18, the «three traps of Belial», perhaps not coincidentally attributed to Levi), the overall vision to be gleaned from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,³³ and the general definition proposed for the Biblical term, one of heinous socio-religious crime.³⁴ Also, the references to Darkness as antithesis of the «Sons of Light» in Qumran are echoed in the Greek materials³⁵ and, ultimately, this could be connected to the variant spelling in the Pseudoepigrapha and in the NT passage where the word appears, also in connection with darkness, 2Cor 6:14-15,³⁶ as a form Βελιάρ may be interpreted as «lightlessness», that is, בלי אור. Definitely, this has the looks of a popular-ideological etymology, but is indicative of the conceptions surrounding Belial in the mentioned literature, which goes well beyond the mere qualification of lawlessness implied in the majority reception.

It is then between two main lines of interpretation, either a common noun which creates a negative attribution or a supernatural being associated with evil and hence negative behavior, that one has to attempt the placement of the Old Greek term λοιμός as a choice for translation. The issue is not simple, given that the primary meaning of the word in Greek, «plague», may have mythological resonances if it is understood in the Near Eastern context of the translators of the Hebrew Bible. «Plague» (דבר) is attested both in the Hebrew Bible³⁷ and in other literatures of

33. See e.g. *T. Reub.* 2:1-8; 4:11; *T. Sim.* 5:3 (fornication); *T. Dan* 1:7; 4:7; 5:1; *T. Benj.* 7:1 (wrath and murder); this rings of the references to fornication and desecration of the Temple in CD 4:15-18.

34. See above, n. 10.

35. See e.g. *T. Levi* 19:1, ἔλεσθε οὖν ἑαυτοῖς ἢ τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς, ἢ νόμον κυρίου ἢ ἔργα Βελιάρ; *T. Joseph* 20:2, ὅτι ἀναγομένων τῶν ὀστέων μου κύριος ἐν φωτὶ ἔσται μεθ' ὑμῶν, καὶ Βελιάρ ἐν σκότει ἔσται μετὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων.

36. Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις· τίς γὰρ μετοχὴ δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἀνομία, ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος; τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Χριστοῦ πρὸς Βελιάρ, ἢ τίς μερίς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστου.

37. See, esp., Hab 3:14, with *Deber* and *Reshep* in parallelism; Ps 91:6, with Yahweh as deliverer from the danger of a «night demon» Deber. Cf. *DDD*: 231-233.

ancient Syria-Palestine³⁸ either as a god or as a term connected to spaces of the Underworld/negativity. Although the Septuagint does not translate דבר as λοιμός, as one would first expect, this could be actually due to a perception of these terms relating to supernatural negativity which takes then as a whole, where the exact choice of Greek words would not be as important (from our contemporary conceptions of accuracy) as a reflection of the global vision. In this sense, it is remarkable that the standard translation of דבר in the Septuagint is θάνατος, «Death», which would be, at first sight, closer to the Hebrew מות, another word susceptible of reflecting, besides its standard meaning, personalized negativity.³⁹ One could therefore suspect the Greek text of a certain lack of precision when rendering these terms⁴⁰ involving tenuous notions of their supernatural-personalized mythological background. Going back finally to the proposed Old Greek choice in the books of Samuel, λοιμός, it is also remarkable how non-biblical sources, again, show no evidence of the word used primarily as an adjective denoting human vice or lawlessness.⁴¹ It is likely, then, that the meaning of «a pestilent one», scrupulously rendered as *pestilentiosus* in the Old Latin extant materials, is a Septuagint coining, which may be reflecting these connotations of supernatural negativity commented above. Further in this sense, it is interesting to present, briefly, other cases in the Septuagint where λοιμός is used to translate different Hebrew words:

38. Mainly in the Ugaritic corpus, as a name for underworld territories associated to the abode of the god Mot (KTU 1.5 VI, 6 and parallels.) See De Moor, 1971: 186. Ugaritic texts are cited according to Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín (eds.), 1995.

39. Besides the evident treatment of Mot as a god in the final part of the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* (KTU 1.4 VII - 1.6 VI) and in other compositions such as KTU 1.23, *The Birth of the Goodly Gods*, see *DDD*: 598-603, for other references (including biblical passages.)

40. There is nothing in the extra-biblical usage of θάνατος which might indicate an explicit semantic connection with plague (besides the basic idea of it being a cause of death), hence this translation forms part of the Septuagint's literary style and ideological framework. See Liddel and Scott, 1996: 784.

41. Liddel and Scott, 1996: 1060. There is one reference to Demosthenes applying the word to a man, saying he is «a plague», but, still, the usage is a metaphor from the substantive meaning. On the other hand, the LXX materials have developed the word as an adjective.

לצון/ליץ	Ps 1:1; Prov 19:25; 21:24; 22:10; 24:9; 29:8; Hos 7:5. ⁴²
עריץ	Jer 15:21; Ezek 28:7; 30:11; 31:12; 32:12.
פריץ	Ezek 18:10
רשע	Ezek 7:21

These items are of interest for the earlier discussion both because of their basic meaning and the contexts in which they appear in the biblical text:

1. the words עריץ and פריץ allude to the idea of violence, in consonance with the attributes of the Belial-spirits commented above;
2. the texts belonging to prophetic books are characterized by quite common patterns; all the Ezekiel texts are oracles of doom (the vision of destruction of chapter 7; the oracle against Tyre of chapter 28; oracles against Egypt in 30-32.) The resonance of these texts in Jewish tradition could have implied an eschatological outlook of these «cruel» or «violent ones» fitting with a personalized conception of Belial as detailed above. This is particularly visible in the LXX version of Ezek 32:12, where the Hebrew *בְּחַרְבוֹת גְּבוּרִים אֶפִּיל הַמוֹנֵד עֲרִיצֵי גוֹיִם כָּלֵם* is translated as *ἐν μαχαίραις γιγάντων καὶ καταβαλῶ τὴν ἰσχὺν σου λοιμοὶ ἀπὸ ἔθνῶν πάντες*; the choice of rendering *גְּבוּרִים* specifically as «giants» does point to a particular mytho-eschatological context in which the usage of *λοιμοὶ* could be retaining some of its supernatural specificity.

In this sense, it is also interesting to consider the word *ליץ / לצון* in the wider context of the reception of the Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The «Scorner(s)» or «Man/Men of Scorn» is certainly a recurring character or group which, if in all likelihood human, does incorporate an eschatological dimension in his role as an opponent to the Master of Justice,⁴³ as visible in the *Damascus Document* and the *Hodayot*.⁴⁴ This

42. To this group one might add Is 5:14, where *עלו* was understood as *הלץ* due to an aural mistake.

43. For a basic treatment, see VanderKam and Flint, 2002: 282-288.

last work is particularly interesting, as it associates in the same sentence the «violent men» (עריצים) and «scoffers» (לצים) in 1QH^a 10:10-11,⁴⁵ later in the same column, the עריצים are explicitly said to be an «assembly of Belial», עדה בליעל (1QH^a 10:22.) Then follows a description of the poet's struggle against these evil men in terms which move from military to cosmic/mythic images in the depiction of the foes: חנו עלי גבורים סבבום בכל (10:25-26, military imagery); ויפרו חצים לאין מרפא ולהוב חנית (10:26, their weapons start to take hyperbolic supernatural features);⁴⁶ וכהמון מים רבים שאון קולם נפץ זורם להשחית רבים למזורות יבקעו אפעה (10:27-28, the enemies are depicted as a force of nature, roaring waters or breakers which rise up to the stars.) This description is at least reminiscent of biblical presentations of enemies of Yahweh endowed with an elemental cosmic imagery which has a definite Near Eastern / Canaanite tinge, such as the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15, particularly the image of gigantic breakers.⁴⁷

This summary of materials from Qumran compared to the salient Hebrew terms which the Septuagint renders as *λοιμός* (besides בליעל) do seem to indicate that, at least partially (and/or in part of the reading traditions of the Bible in the Judaism of the time) these words were perceived or literarily developed with some degree of cosmic-mythic imagery in the presentation of the struggle of Good versus Evil. This attitude towards the words could explain the choice of *λοιμός* by the

44. See, e.g., CD 1:14, מימי כזב ויתעם בתוהו לא דרך, ואהיה על עון רשעים דבה בשפת עריצים לצים יחרוקו שנים, 1QH^a 10:10-11; להשח גבהות עולם.

45. The association of these two adjectives goes back to the Bible, as it features in Is 29:20, a text which did play a role in Qumran exegesis as preserved in the fragments of the *Isaiah Peshet* (the text in question is partially preserved in 4Q163 frags. 18-19.)

46. A biblical echo of the text, also with visible resonances of the Near Eastern background of Israel, could be Ps 91:5-6, which does present a series of demonic enemies of Yahweh (see *DDD*: 232; 673-674; 700-703), including the «arrow that flieth by day»; «pestilence», and «destruction that wasteth at noonday.» It is quite possible that the poet had this Psalm in mind when presenting himself in a struggle against a vast horde of enemies, which, as the demonic beings of Ps 91, are defeated by the Lord's agency.

47. Concretely, the image of a foe spanning from the depths of the sea to the stars themselves is featured in the description of the Ugaritic god Mot in KTU 1.5 II, 2-3 as well as in the depiction of the Gracious Gods' appetite in KTU 1.23 61-63. The similarity between that text and the poetic formulation in *Hodayot* is at the very least remarkable.

Septuagint translators to translate both בליעל and some other terms. The image of plague did aptly express the mainstream «unmythological» meanings (including the «standard» meaning of בליעל as discussed above) but at the same time did preserve some association to a more intense (mythically and symbolically speaking) kind of evil in agreement with traditional depictions in earlier Hebrew conceptions together with the ancient Near East. The Former Prophets (1-2 Samuel in this case) give us a particularly interesting vista of these different conceptions, as a progressive revision of the text towards a form more in agreement with a proto-Masoretic text (akin to the *καί γε* recension) seems to have replaced some of these mythic references with the standard interpretation of the constructions with בליעל as mere references to lawlessness or impiety (*παράνομος*.)

4. CLOSING CONCLUSIONS

In the previous pages I have proposed an Old Greek reading in 1-2 Samuel for the Septuagint translation of בליעל and then tried to place that reading in a wider context of turn of the era Judaism. This context is based in the presence of mythic-supernatural conceptions of Belial (in its different incarnations) as a personal being. Granted, the Septuagint rendering I defend as Old Greek in Samuel would reflect a sort of intermediate stage or middle ground, given that, as anticipated in my opening words, there is no transcription of the Hebrew word as a personal name except for the astray case of Judges 20:13 in text A. This middle ground does offer an additional small (tiny) piece in the complex scenario of plurality of reading (and of textual transmission and interpretation) in the period of the Septuagint and Qumran. The only remaining question, though not one to be solved in this essay, would be whether this information is relevant for discussing the etymology of the Hebrew word בליעל. Definitely, a quite later interpretation offers no safe grounds for constructing a whole hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that quite a few of the proposed etymologies of the term do agree with the scenario I have tried to illustrate in giving a cosmic/mythic background for the word's origin, such as its connections to a designation of the

Underworld.⁴⁸ This would complement the cosmic usage of the word in 2Sam 22:5 and Ps 18:5, in parallelism with מוֹת. Though I will draw no further conclusions, the Septuagint translation discussed and contextualized in this essay may be an additional argument defending etymologies which draw from the cosmic/mythic element in future research, where, I hope, the joint examination of the Bible's textual and reception history in its versions plays a role together with the historical and comparative approach. That should be the philologist's trade, an art in which Ángel Sáenz-Badillos has excelled both as craftsman and as teacher.

48. Cf. *HALOT*: 133-134; *DDD*: 322-328.

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