

Issues in Bible Translation 2

When Tradition Prevails over Good Parsing. Reconsidering the Translation of Is 53,11b

Anthony Abela

Historical Background for this Research

The need for this research paper arose from a historical contingency. The Malta Bible Society decided to publish a new edition of its Bible in Maltese, *Il-Bibbja*, first published in 1984, and set up a Revision Commission to prepare the text for the new edition. Towards the end of its revision work in 1995, the Commission was reviewing Isaiah and accepted the proposal to change the 1984 text of Is 53,11b in order to integrate the improvements to the text made by members of the ‘Mitchell Dahood School’. This means that while the 1984 version of the text ran

Il-qaddej il-gust tiegħi jiġġustifika il-kotra...
My just servant justifies the multitude....,

the new translation that eventually appeared in 1996 now reads

Il-Ġust jiġġustifika lill-qaddej tiegħu quddiem il-kotra...
The Just One justifies his servant in front of the multitude...

In 2002 the Malta Bible Society founded as a permanent institution the *Kummissjoni Biblika Permanenti* (hence in this paper KBP) in order to monitor the development of the biblical text of the Society, to study proposals of changes when these are made by the members of the Commission or by others, and to update the text itself in view of the continuing studies that world scholarship undertakes.¹ This Commission meets every two or three months. In October 2003 the members of the Commission were asked to reconsider changing the text

1. Besides the minutes of the Commission’s meetings which are scrupulously kept, there exists also a first report of its proceedings between January 2002 and May 2003. The decisions of the Commission concerning the changes to be introduced in the text were usually published by the Malta Bible Society in her review *Sjion* which could no longer be published for lack of funds. This report is available from the Malta Bible Society office on demand.

of Is 53,11b back to its 1984 version in view of lack of support to this rendering from modern translations of the Bible. As a policy, the KBP does not change a text unless it is clearly proven to be mistaken or new developments in scholarship have taken place which would improve it in exegesis or clarity.² Therefore, the undersigned was commissioned by KBP to study whether the 1996 text could be justified beyond what the school of the late Rev Prof Mitchell Dahood SJ could have said. Another member of the Commission offered to research into St Jerome's views on this text, for while St Jerome was responsible for the translation of the Vulgate as we know it, he felt some unease at his rendering. The writer of this paper presented a report to the KBP on 5th February 2004 in which he shows how the 1996 text was exegetically justified and should be kept; on the other hand, he promised the KBP to bring the issue to the attention of world Academia. And this explains how this paper came about.

What are the exegetical issues involved?

As we shall soon show, in the study of this text one may not separate morphological and syntactical from formal issues. And although the present writer will avoid a detailed study of the macrocosm of the bicolon under review, which is the fourth canticle of the Servant (Is 52, 13-53, 12), in his research he could not avoid situating this half verse in its immediate literary context which is the last stanza of the canticle made up of three strophes.³

We shall start with reproducing the translation of verse 11 in a number of versions:

*pro eo quod laboravit anima eius videbit et saturabitur
in scientia sua iustificabit ipse iustus servus meus multos
et iniquitates eorum ipse portabit*

Biblia Sacra Vulgata

2. The text of *Il-Bibbja* (1984.1996) is formal in orientation though it follows the translation ethos of the United Bible Societies for matters of understandability and clarity. On the latter one may refer to Eugene A. Nida & Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Brill, Leiden 1969; Jan de Waard & Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another. Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, United Bible Societies, New York 1998; Timothy Wilt (ed.), *Bible Translation. Frames of Reference*, St Jerome Publishing, Manchester 2003. Also very useful are the two publications by Carlo Buzzetti, *La Bibbia e la sua Traduzione*, Editrice ELLE Di Ci, Leumann, Torino 1993; and *Traduzione e Tradizione. La via dell'uso-confronto*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padua 2001.
3. For the technical terms 'strophe' and 'stanza' the present writer follows Lynell Zogbo & Ernst R. Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible. A Guide for Understanding and for Translating*, United Bible Societies, New York 2000, 53-57.

*Propter laborem animae eius videbit lucem, saturabitur in scientia eius.
Iustificabit iustus servus meus multos et iniquitates eorum ipse portabit.*

Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum

*A la suite de l'épreuve endurée par son âme
il verra la lumière et sera comblé.*

*Par sa connaissance, le juste, mon serviteur, justifiera les multitudes
en s'accablant lui-même de leurs fautes.*

La Bible de Jerusalem

*Ayant payé de sa personne,
il verra une descendance, il sera comblé de jours;
sitôt connu, juste, il dispensera la justice,
lui, mon Serviteur, au profit des foules,
du fait que lui-même supporte leurs perversités*

La Bible. Traduction Oecumenique

*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his
knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their
iniquities*

King James Version

*Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and shall bear their iniquities.*

New Revised Standard Version

*Out of his anguish he shall see it;
He shall enjoy to the full through his devotion.*

*"My righteous servant makes the many righteous,
It is their punishment that he bears;"*

The New JPS Translation

*By his humiliation my servant will justify many;
after his suffering he will see light and be satisfied;*

The Revised English Bible

*Dopo il suo intimo tormento vedrà la luce
e si sazierà della sua conoscenza;
il giusto mio servo giustificherà molti
egli si addosserà la loro iniquità*

La Sacra Bibbia della CEI

All these translations belong to what we may call the ‘formal’ breed; as representatives of the ‘dynamic or functional equivalent’ family of translations⁴ we shall sample the following:

*After a life of suffering, he will again have joy;
he will know that he did not suffer in vain.
My devoted servant, with whom I am pleased,
will bear the punishment of many
and for his sake I will forgive them.*

Good News Bible

*Il Signore dichiara: “Dopo tante sofferenze, egli, il mio servo,
vedrà la luce e sarà soddisfatto di quel che ha compiuto.
Infatti renderà giusti davanti a me un gran numero di uomini,
perchè si è addossato i loro peccati....”*

La Bibbia in Lingua Corrente

*Nachdem er so viel gelitten hat, wird er der wieder das Licht sehen und
sich an dessen Anblick sättigen. Von ihm sagt der Herr:
“Mein Bevollmächtigter hat eine Erkenntnis gewonnen, durch die er, der
Gerecht, vielen Heil und Gerechtigkeit bringt. Alle ihre Vergehen nimmt
er auf sich.”*

Gute Nachricht Bibel

*À cause des souffrances qu'il a supportées, il verra la lumière,
il sera rempli de bonheur.
Mon serviteur, le vrai juste,
rendra justes un grand nombre de gens,
parce qu'il s'est chargé de leurs péchés.*

La Bible. Parole de Vie

4. On the use of this terminology cf. Nida & Taber, 1-11; Waard & Nida, vii-viii; Buzzetti 1993, 71-79; Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation. An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas 1992, 13-16.

*By suffering, the servant will learn the true meaning of obeying the Lord.
Although he is innocent, he will take the punishment for the sins of others,
so that many of them will no longer be guilty.*

Contemporary English Version

An exhaustive critique of the translation strategies adopted by these versions goes beyond the scope of this study; the present writer has to limit his considerations to only some aspects of discourse which may have greater bearing on the understanding of the second bicolon of verse 11:

i) *The yod in ʿabdî* The parsing of the concluding *yod* in the cluster ʿabdî as marker of the first person singular possessive pronoun, led to the supposition in all these translations that there exists in the verse a shift of style from indirect to direct discourse even though no ‘quotative frame’⁵ is given in the Hebrew text. The versions cited here take for granted this shift from indirect (in verse 10) to direct speech as this is a regular feature in Hebrew poetry.⁶ Most of the ‘formal’ translations render the text literally without marking the transition except for what the morphology of ʿabdî implies⁷; the functional equivalent renderings differ markedly among themselves and from formal translations: the CEV drops the qualifying pronoun from ‘my servant’; the GNB and the PdV follow the exegesis done by formal translations while the BLC and GNBibel make direct discourse explicit though they disagree about how much of verse 11 is direct speech. But is this reading of the *yod* in ʿabdî the only possible exegesis?

ii) *šaddîq ʿabdî* What is the precise syntactical relationship of the two apparent nominals *šaddîq* and ʿabdî? Which one is the head? And which one is adjectival at least in use? In translations ʿabdî is often taken as the head while *šaddîq* is parsed as an attributive adjective (see the Vulgate, Nova Vulgata, NJPS, GNB, KJV, TOB; GNBibel); in others the roles are inverted (see NRSV, BJ) with ‘my servant’ standing in apposition to ‘the just one’. A few versions follow a new trend in modern exegesis by dropping *šaddîq* as an unnecessary addition to the original text perhaps introduced into the text in order to explain how at all could ʿabdî justify the many: he was just (see REB, BLC). The problem with this option is that whoever made this presumed addition ignored some basics of Hebrew grammar especially with regard to adjectives functioning as attributives:

5. For this technical phrase cf. Cynthia Miller. “Discourse Functions of Quotative Frames in Biblical Hebrew Narrative” in Walter Bodine(ed.), *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature. What it is and What it offers*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia 1995, 155-182.
6. Cf. Zogbo & Wendland, 50-53.
7. NJPS constitutes an exception in this regard.

they normally follow the head and share its definitiveness.⁸ This also means that the parsing which reads *šaddîq* as an attributive adjective qualifying 'my servant' may also be in need of revision.

iii) *What is the relationship of the bicola in verse 11?* Staying by the translations we have sampled in order to understand how translation tradition handled the problems that Is 53,11 creates for exegetes and translators, one may say that, while the constituents of the two bicola are internally somehow logically linked, there seems to exist no apparent semantic flow from the first bicolon on to the second. The fact that 'my servant' justified many (v.11b) appears to have no or little connection to his suffering described in the first bicolon (v.11a). On the other hand, one would expect some kind of 'intensification' as one reads from bicolon (a) to bicolon (b).⁹ Some versions transfer the adjunct *b²da^ctô* in v.11a on to the subsequent colon (see Vulgate and BJ) leaving the reader to surmise what the meaning of justifying through knowledge may mean. The chiasmic disposition of the first and second colon however would suggest that the adverbial phrase *b²da^ctô* qualifies the verb *yîšbā^c* rather the verb that follows, *yašdîq*, and that the second colon is anaphoric rather than cataphoric in orientation. The poet hints to the reader that the main statement he wants to make is to be found in the second pair of cola (v.11b) or rather in the first colon of the two where the presumed subject of most verbs, *šabdî*, is explicitly mentioned. But if this is the case, the bicolon in v.11a leads to and perhaps qualifies this main statement. But what is the poet saying in the first bicolon?

Most translations swim in troubled waters here as their differences show. There are a number of preliminaries that have to be observed before one may hope to arrive at a correct understanding of this half verse. 1) The two cola have to be read as strictly parallel though they are disposed as a chiasmus. This means that if the two verbs stand in parallel, their qualifying adjuncts *mē'āmal napšô* and *b²da^ctô* must be parsed as being parallel. This does not mean that they are semantically equivalent; they may only parallel each other in their grammatical function.¹⁰ 2) The second colon probably offers an intensification of the first.¹¹ 3) Both have the Servant as the deep structure subject though this subject surfaces

8. Cf. Bruce K. Waltke & M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana 1990, 258-260.

9. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1985, 62-83.

10. A good discussion on this aspect of parallelism is to be found in Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1985.

11. In this we follow the idea of J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry. Parallelism and Its History*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1981.

only in the third colon of the verse; the subject in the first two cola is encoded in the morphology of the verbal heads. 4) The main issue for exegesis and translation has always been the verb *yir²eh* in the first colon, normally translated as ‘to see’. The problem is that this verb is supposed to constantly take an explicit direct object, while in this context no such object for the verb is provided. For which reason, ever since the redaction of IQIsa^a and IQIsa^b a direct object has been added, the nominal *ʔōr*, ‘light’, implying that the Servant will see light after (the preposition *min* prefixed to the noun *ʿāmāl*) the period of his suffering.

The LXX translation followed this kind of emended text (One may also speculate that the two Qumran manuscripts constitute the emended text which the LXX translator used as his/her *Vorlage*). The LXX text of Is 53.11a reads as follows:

...ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ δεῖξαι αὐτῷ φῶς
καὶ πλάσαι τῇ συνέσει

The Lord also is pleased to take away from the travail of his soul, to shew him light, and to form him with understanding...¹²

One should note that the translation strategy followed by LXX implies a number of decisions made by the translator: to make the verb *w^hḥēpēs* of verse 10b the main verb of the period with the verbs in 11a depending upon it; to take the phrase *mēʿāmāl napšō* that opens the next strophe as qualifying the verb *yīslāḥ* of the previous colon in verse 10b; to change the verb *yr²h* originally Qal to Hiphil; and of course to accept the emendation already introduced by some redactor of the Hebrew manuscript. This emendation has found favour also with the Committee that prepared the *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, vol. 4, of the United Bible Societies¹³; the Committee’s ruling is explained in some detail by two of its members.¹⁴

12. Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1851.1980, 889.

13. United Bible Societies, New York 1979, 146.

14. Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle de l’Ancien Testament*, Éditions Universitaires, Fribourg & Vandenhoeck/Ruprecht, Göttingen 1986,405; Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Isaiah. Textual Criticism and the Translator*, 1, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana 1997,196-197. One needs to add that the editorial board which prepared the BHS (but not BHK) proposed to amend the present of the verb *r²h* “to see” to the present of the verb *rwh*, “to be saturated, drink one’s fill” which would thus perfectly parallel the verb *yšb^c* in the second colon. But is such emendation necessary?

5) The present writer holds that this emendation reflects the readers' failure to understand the author who has stretched the semantic range of the verb R^2H and of the noun $da^{\zeta}at$ to their limits: α) The verb R^2H in a number of texts carries the nuance of "to experience" (cf. for instance Deut 1,19,31; Jer 5,12;14,13;20,18; and BDB 907a; KB, 3, 1157). β) Although the verb R^2H is transitive and as such should normally take direct object on both deep and surface structures of the clause, there are cases where it is used absolutely, with the object not explicitly stated at least on the surface structure (see 2Kgs 6, 17,20; Deut 4,28; Pss 115,15; 135,16; and BDB 907a). This means that yir^2eh in Is 53,11a is not necessarily ungrammatical and unacceptable if on the surface structure the verb as the head of its constituency 'governs'¹⁵ no direct object. The emendation of the colon by the addition of an object to the verb yir^2eh in verse 11a implies exactly such parsing. γ) The verb R^2H is often found coupled to the verb YD^{ζ} (1Sam 23, 23; 24, 12; 25, 17) or in parallel positions (Deut 33,9; Job 11,11). One should note that in the second colon we find the noun $da^{\zeta}at$ etymologically related to the verb YD^{ζ} and although the pair yir^2eh - $da^{\zeta}at$ does not appear to satisfy all the criteria set by Wilfred G.E. Watson for word-pairs,¹⁶ the choice of the two lexemes do not seem to have occurred by chance.

δ) What is the precise meaning of the nominal $da^{\zeta}at$? Translations often keep to the semantic core of the lexeme: 'σύνεσις, scientia, knowledge' and link the phrase $b^3da^{\zeta}tô$ to the following clause. Mitchell Dahood laments that the rendering 'by his knowledge', often met with in translations, "hardly fits into the context since the words balancing $da^{\zeta}tô$ are $\zeta\bar{a}mal napšô$..."¹⁷ Unfortunately, Dahood himself parses the phrase as qualifying the verb $yašdîq$ of the subsequent colon so that his parsing appears in the end as being rather contradictory. His suggestion though that we should translate $da^{\zeta}tô$ of v.11 as 'sweat' on the basis of Ugaritic $d^{\zeta}t$ ¹⁸ has met with good fortune. It was accepted by two dictionaries: KB,1, 229 which acknowledges also Dahood's contribution in identifying this meaning, and DCH, III, 459 which accepted the word as a hapax of the root $da^{\zeta}at$ VI. These accept Dahood's rendering of the text 'by his sweat will my righteous servant bring justification to the many'. Though technically possible, this translation does not respect the form of the bicolon which as we have seen is disposed as a chiasmus with the second colon oriented

15. On this view of the verb see Liliane Haegeman, *Introduction to Government & Binding Theory*. Blackwell, Oxford, 21994.

16. Cf. *Classical Hebrew Poetry. A Guide to its Techniques*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1984, 128.

17. *Gregorianum* 43:63-64.

18. Cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook. Glossary Indices*, *Analecta Orientalia* 38; Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome 1965, 386 (entry 686).

anaphorically not cataphorically. If on the other hand, we are going to see *b^oda^ctô* in the second colon as somehow paralleling *mē^cāmal napšô* in the first colon, the meaning which would fit the context better would be that identified by DCH as *da^cat* V, ‘humiliation’, also a hapax, and referring to the verb YD^c II.¹⁹

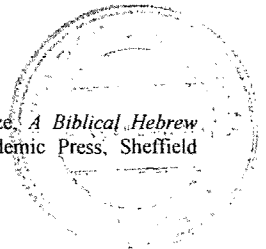
ε) The prepositions *min* and *b^o* in verse 11a. DCH (vol. V, 342-343) identifies as one of the meanings of the preposition *min* as being ‘on account of, because of, for (reason of), through, at’ and reads the meaning in at least one instance of the preposition in Is 53, at verse 8 and possibly at verse 4. To these two instances BDB 580a adds verse 5. In other words, the preposition *min* in these texts ‘indicates the cause of a situation.’²⁰ Verse 11 is cited in neither dictionary. Many of the translations cited above read in *min* here a temporal nuance; but the meaning being discussed fits the context much better. The poet is describing the Servant as being deeply ‘experienced’ or ‘tried’ that is, ‘distressed’ (*yir^oeh*) by the trouble of his soul. His interior life is in turmoil and this constitutes for the poor Servant a source of stress and anguish. He cannot draw solace from feeling himself as the innocent victim of other people’s machinations. The second colon then intensifies this description of the Servant’s psychology. Here the head word of the clause is the verb ŠB^c with ‘the Servant’ as subject; it is normally translated as a positive verb, ‘be sated, satisfied’; but in the context the negative meaning, ‘be surfeited, have enough of someone or something’ seems to serve the context better. Often the verb is accompanied by the preposition *b^o* (see Ps 88, 4; Jer 50, 19) which would thus express the cause for the Servant’s deep dissatisfaction.²¹ He has had more than his fair share of humiliation.

What is verse 11a saying then? The poet describes as succinctly as he can the state of mind of the Servant. This mysterious figure feels deeply tried by the trouble of his own psyche for he has been humbled more than enough. The issue now is to establish the link of this statement to the one in verse 11b though in the bicolon in v.11a we have also to identify the subject of the clause on the surface structure.

19. Cf. DCH, IV, 110-111.

20. Cf. Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Biblical Languages: Hebrew, 3; Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1999, 289.

21. Cf. *Ibid.*, 282.



A closer look at the first colon in v.11b

According to the *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* compiled by Gerhard Lisowsky²², the use of the hiphil of the verb *ṢDQ* is not that frequent in the Hebrew Bible: only twelve occurrences have been identified, three of which in Isaiah: Ex 23,7; Deut 25,1; 2Sam 15,4; 1Kgs 8,32; Is 5, 23; 50,8; 53,11; Ps 82, 3; Job 27,5; Prov 17,15; Dan 12,3 and 2Chron 6,23. A close evaluation of these texts for the morphology and syntax of the verb under study reveals that *ṢDQ* in this form constantly demands the accusative of the direct object that is sometimes encoded within the morphology of the verb by the pronominal suffix attached to it. And if for the moment we leave out Is 53,11b, the action of the verb never passes to the patient through the preposition *l³*. In certain texts the accusative is marked by the particle *²et-*, on other occasions the use of the accusative is not marked by any morphological feature. This regularity in the syntax of these texts where *ṢDQ* is concerned creates room for doubting whether *l³* is governing the accusative of the nominal *rabbîm* since the government of the noun by the verb *ṢDQ* in the hiphil never passes through this preposition²³ or any preposition for that; the verb governs the noun directly as it does in Is 5,23 and 50,8. One would wonder whether the phrase *lārabbîm* is not an adjunct qualifying the head verb *yaṣdîq*. The Vulgate, though, and subsequent versions, seem to have opted for such parsing: *in scientia sua iustificabit ipse iustus servus meus multos...* where *multos* is the direct object of the verb *iustificabit* that renders *yaṣdîq*. This translation of the Vulgate differs sensibly from the LXX text that presumably served as its *Vorlage*:

δικαιῶσαι δίκαιον εἶ δουλεύοντα πολλοῖς,
καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν αὐτὸς ἀνοίσει

Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton translated this bicolon in the LXX thus:

...to justify the just one who serves many well;
and he shall bear their sins.

Such LXX version renders *yaṣdîq* through infinitival *δικαιῶσαι* that depends from the main verb *βούλεται* in verse 10; this main verb has *κύριος* as the subject. The object of the infinitive is *δίκαιον* who is then qualified by

22. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1958.1993. 1206.

23. Even if in theory this is possible, at least according to van der Merwe and colleagues in their 1999 reference book, p.286.

the participle δουλεύοντα; the participle on its part is governed by the adverb εὔ. The LXX translator read the consonantal cluster *ʿBDY* as verbal and rendered it literally with *rabbîm* being seen as the indirect object of the verb ‘serves well’. Seeing the confused state of the LXX rendering that probably predates the Qumran readings, one should not be surprised that this colon is rarely echoed in the NT notwithstanding the high Christological profile that later assumed through the translation of the Vulgate.²⁴

Two recent studies of the first colon in Is 53,11b

In this exercise, we shall discuss two detailed treatments of the text in order to see how others have resolved the problems already listed that this text creates for exegesis.

a) Luis Alonso Schökel & J. L. Sicre Diaz, *Profetas. Commentario*, 1, Ediciones Cristianidad, Madrid 1980, 329-334.

Por los trabajos soportados verá la luz, se saciará de saber;
mi siervo inocente rehabilitará a todos
porque cargo con sus crímenes.

One should comment immediately that the authors consider their reconstruction of the text as essentially hypothetical. The text is uncertain. Their translation strategy includes: 1) adding with the LXX an object to their verb *yirʿeh*; 2) making *ʿabdî* the subject of the verb *yaşđîq* which in turn governs *lārabbîm* as the direct object; 3) judging the nominal *rabbîm* with the article as acquiring a ‘sentido de totalidad múltiple’ (p.334); 4) parsing *şaddîq* as an adjective qualifying the subject *ʿabdî* without bothering to explain the syntactical difficulties that this parsing would entail.

All in all, these two authors remain within translation tradition and offer no new solutions to the cruxes that the texts gave rise to.

b) Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, Anchor Bible 19A, Doubleday, New York 2002, 346-349. Before reproducing Blenkinsopp’s translation one should note that he considers v.11a as belonging to a different strophe than v.11b; the

24. According to the ‘Index of Quotations’ from the OT into the NT found in *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, Stuttgart ⁴1998, 887-890, Is 53,11 was never quoted in any NT writing, while according to the ‘Index of Allusions and Verbal Parallels’ in the same volume (pp.891-901), there is a possible allusion to the verse only in Rom 5,19. But cf. also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible, 33; Doubleday, New York 1993, 421-422.

latter he combines with verse 12 to form the concluding strophe of the poem 52,13-53,12. His rendering runs as follows:

After his painful life he will see light and be satisfied.

iii

By his knowledge my servant will vindicate many;
it is he who bears the burden of their iniquities.

The translation strategy behind this text is clear to delineate: 1) he dislodges the adjunct *b^oda^ctô* from the second colon in verse 11, and as with the Vulgate and other versions, parsing it as a qualifier of the verb *yašdîq* in what we termed the third colon; according to Blenkinsopp's reconstruction MT's second colon does not exist. 2) The adjective *šaddîq* is simply dropped because "it overburdens the verse and was either inserted by error on account of the similar *yašdîq* or by a scribe who wished to identify the *'ebed* with the *šaddîq* of Isa 57:1" (p.348). Of course, if you start by destroying the symmetry of the previous bicolon in transferring the phrase 'in his knowledge' (literal rendering) to the subsequent colon, you will find this colon 'overburdened'; but it would be overburdened not by the nominal *šaddîq* which is in place within the natural order of the clause constituents, but by the intruding *b^oda^ctô*. 3) He parses the accusative after the main verb *yašdîq* as passing through the preposition *l^o*. 4) He accepts together with tradition to provide an explicit direct object for the verb *yir^oeh* in verse 11a.

Reading Is 53,11b within its immediate literary context

The present writer's intention in this sub-paragraph is not to indulge into a detailed description of the literary dynamics in the stanza that comprises verses 10-12, but only to highlight the more important literary characteristics of this section of its wider macrocosm which is the Fourth Servant Cantic (52,13-53,12).²⁵ One should note how in this stanza the Lord takes a greater share in the action than he does in the previous stanzas. The stanza opens with an inversion which has *YHWH* for subject. The stanza consists of three strophes to be found in vv.10.11.12 respectively. In the first strophe it is the poet who speaks throughout; the strophe opens with the clause *waYHWH ḥāpēs* in the first colon

25. For a more detailed discussion of the cantic as a whole the reader is invited to read Claus Westerman, *Isaiah 40-66*, SCM Press, London 1969; and David J.A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They. A Literary Approach to Is 53*, Sheffield 1976.

and closes with the colon that starts with the phrase *w³hēpēs YHWH*. The poet's wish to construct an inclusio is impossible to deny. While the subject on the surface structure is the Lord, the theme of the strophe is 'him' whom we may identify from the macrocosm with the 'Servant'. A characteristic feature of this strophe is contrast which is rendered visible by the use of the binary *hāpēs-hēpēs*. It pleased the Lord to strike him as well as to give him success. It would seem that the second bicolon is meant to contrast the first.

The second strophe consists of verse 11, now made up of four cola more or less of equal length. If the translation suggested in this study of the first two cola is correct, we have once again the use of contrast: in the first bicolon stands in contrast to the second one. But do we find reference to the participation of *YHWH* in the strophe? For this we have to wait. Of course, if the *yod* attached to the noun *ʿebed* stands for the suffix of the first person singular possessive, the presence of the Lord would be encoded in it. But this creates more syntactical problems that it solves, for then we will have to accept that *ʿabdî* is the subject of the head verb *yašdîq* that normally takes the accusative which will have to pass through the preposition *l^p*, and governs the nominal *rabbîm*; this is what is being contested. In the second strophe it is the poet not the Lord who speaks.

The third strophe comprises the entire verse 12. It is made up of six cola, linked to what went before through the particle *lākēn*, which introduces the prophecy of salvation or glorification of the Servant.²⁶ One should study further whether this strophe is meant principally as the conclusion of the entire canticle or only of the last stanza (vv.10-12). Notwithstanding the absence of the formal marker to introduce speech, this strophe appears as the direct speech of the Lord (encoded in the morphology of the verb in the first colon) who enunciates his own appreciation of the Servant. The use of contrast may also be noticed.

Suggestions about the syntax from the 'School of Mitchell Dahood'

The 'School of Mitchell Dahood' is a blanket phrase used to denote a number of scholars who were trained by Professor Mitchell Dahood at the Pontifical Biblical Institute²⁷ or who used his methodology in handling the text of the Hebrew Bible. One may venture to characterise this methodology by its deep respect for the consonantal text, attention to the rhetorical procedures employed

26. For the literary form of 'prophecy of salvation' or 'oracle of salvation' cf. W. Eugene March, "Prophecy" in John H. Hayes(ed.), *Old Testament Form Criticism*, Trinity University Press, San Antonio 1974, 162-163.

27. The present writer has had the honour of having been one of these.

by the writers of the Hebrew text, and the use of comparative semitic (particularly Ugaritic) linguistics to solve cruxes interpretum.²⁸ Often the suggestions of ‘this school’ made to meet the need of understanding difficult consonantal passages of the Hebrew Bible are original indeed though not necessarily acceptable.²⁹ Concerning Is 53,11b, members of this school have found better solutions to the cruxes of MT than has the translation tradition that goes back to at least the Vulgate if not to the *Vetus Latina*.

They made a number of useful suggestions. For instance they identified in the nominal *šaddîq* with the subject of the colon; this goes directly against the normal trend today that drops this constituent as being overburdening to the colon.³⁰ Instead Prof Dahood and ‘his school’ proposed to read in this nominal a divine epithet that refers to the Lord mentioned twice in verse 10. Dahood himself first proposed this reading in a 1971 study that was published in the *Festschrift* in honour of W.F. Albright who had been his mentor.³¹ This suggested reading was then adopted by Lorenzo Viganò in his monograph on divine epithets. Viganò translated Is 53,11b as follows:

Il Giusto vendicherà il suo servo davanti ai grandi,
perché egli stesso ha portato le loro iniquità.

The Just One will vindicate his servant in front of the great,
because he himself has carried their iniquities.³²

A few comments: i) One should not bother that the level of determination in Viganò’s translation seems to differ from that of the MT: In Hebrew *šaddîq*

28. One may read the introductions written by Professor Dahood to *Psalms I. Psalms 1-50*, Anchor Bible 16, Doubleday, New York 1965, 1966; *Psalms II. Psalms 51-100*, Anchor Bible 17, Doubleday, New York 1968; and especially *Psalms III. 101-150*, Anchor Bible 17A, New York, 1970 which contains also a chapter entitled ‘The Grammar of the Psalter’ (pp.361-456) compiled by himself and Prof Tadeusz Penar.

29. The present writer has been quite critical of some positions of Prof Dahood on Psalm 82. Cf. Anthony Abela, “Understanding *Tinhal b’* in Psalm 82,8 within the Macrocosm of the Composition” in Anthony Abela(ed.), *In Joyful and Serene Service of his Lord’s Word*, Melita Theologica Supplementary Series,5; Malta 2003,191-212.

30. Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 348. Lorenzo Viganò, in his monograph *Nomi e Titoli di YHWH alla luce del semitico del Nord-ovest*, *Biblica et Orientalia*,31; Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, Rome 1976,171, note 84, lists a number of other scholars who likewise excised *šaddîq* as superfluous.

31. “Phoenician Elements in Isaiah 52,13-53,12” in Hans Goedicke(ed.), *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of W.F. Albright*, Baltimore & London 1971,63-73.

32. This translation of Viganò’s rendering belongs to the present writer.

carries no article as we find in the Italian version of the text. As we find in Joüon and Muraoka's grammar³³ the use of the article with nominals and epithets in Hebrew is not very regular. In note 1 on p.507 these grammarians write: "In poetry the use of the article is very free. There is a tendency to leave it out in cases where it would lengthen a word by one syllable. This phenomenon is perhaps due to metrical considerations, to a certain studied elegance, to a tendency toward brevity." ii) In this translation the object of the verb *yašdîq* is not *rabbîm* as normally thought, but *ʿabdî*. This suggestion is much better and simpler than the traditional explanation which sees the accusative passing through the preposition *Iʔ* which as we have seen it never does, or than the solution proposed by Sigmund Mowinckel who read in *yašdîq* a case of 'internal causative': "My Servant will show himself to be righteous (and so stands righteous before the many),"³⁴ a proposal which seems to make little sense. As it was the Lord who made the Servant pass through all the suffering (v.10) and thus contributed to his humiliation, it is more than fitting that the Just One, the Lord himself, will vindicate the Servant rather than that the Servant will vindicate himself. And this agrees with the other instance of the verb *šdq* in Is 50, 8 which has the Lord for subject and the Servant for object. Such understanding coheres also with the LXX translation as we have seen though this translation creates other problems. iii) Viganò's translation interprets the *yod* attached to the nominal *ʿbed* not as a pronominal suffix of the first person singular forcing upon the exegete the obligation to read verse 11b as direct speech of the Lord, as part of his concluding oracle. Instead, he reads it as pronominal suffix of the third person singular, 'his servant' with the poet still speaking upon the Servant and the Lord as he/she has been doing in the previous strophe. Viganò identifies this grammatical feature in a number of verses within the Fourth Cantic of the Servant itself: Is 52, 13.14; 53, 8.9.10.11.³⁵

Conclusions

In the light of what the present writer has written on verse 11a and the suggestions of the School of Mitchell Dahood on verse 11b, one may arrive to a number of conclusions and may venture upon a translation that is alternative to what the translation tradition has so far proposed for verse 11b: a) The grammatical subject of the clause in the first colon of verse 11b is not *ʿabdî* as is

33. Paul Joüon & Timothy Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 14/1 & II, Editrice Istituto Biblico, Rome 1991, §§ 137-138.

34. *He that Cometh*, Oxford 1959, 187-260. Cf. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 267-268.

35. Dahood discusses this feature in *Psalms III*, 375-376 and elsewhere.

normally believed but *ṣaddîq* which is an adjective used as a divine title. The noun *ʿabdî* instead is the direct object of the verb *yaṣdîq*, which in the hiphil form necessarily takes the object. The absence of the accusative marker may be explained by the nature of the text as poetry³⁶ or even by the irregularity in its use as our short study of the lexeme *yaṣdîq* has shown. b) The pronominal suffix attached to the noun *ʿebed* is not marker of the first person singular but of the third person singular: one has to translate the complex *ʿabdî* as ‘his servant’ not ‘my servant’, as Dahood and his colleagues have suggested. This coheres well with the poetics of the second strophe (verse 11) where it is the poet who addresses the reader and not the Lord; the poet shifts to direct speech only in the third strophe which is verse 12 where the poem reaches the climax with an oracle of salvation in favour of the Servant. c) Consequently the cluster *kārabbiim* is not the direct object of the verb *yaṣdîq* as the traditional parsing ever since the Vulgate pretended. Others parsed the *I*² as commanding a *dativus commodi*, ‘give righteousness to’³⁷ which is perhaps close to what Christo H.J. van der Merke and his colleagues about the *I*² in 1Sam 23,10 wrote in their *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*(1999): that the accusative passes through the preposition.³⁸ If the verb *yaṣdîq* does not normally make use of the preposition *I*² to govern the accusative of the object, why should we insist in making it work in this manner in this particular text, especially when the preposition could be seen in carrying out another grammatical function: that of showing ‘in reference of whom’ the action of the main verb was done. This means that the phrase *kārabbiim* is an adverbial phrase of manner. The Just One vindicated his Servant ‘before the many’ or before the ‘great, or people of importance’.³⁹ The poet is saying that after passing his Servant through excruciating suffering described in the rest of the canticle, the Lord decides to show that his Servant’s suffering was unmerited since he endured it not for his own guilt but for that of others. This intervention on the part of the Lord was called forth since otherwise the Servant would appear to have suffered for his own misbehaviour (the theology of retribution).

d) Now is the time to focus on the precise meaning of the verb *yaṣdîq*. Together with this verb we have to take into consideration also the meaning of *ʿāwônôtām* which in the next colon is forefronted and thus made the head word

36. Cf. Ernst R. Wendland(ed.), *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures*, United Bible Societies, New York & Reading 1994,1-27.

37. Cf. BDB, 511.

38. These authors do not mention the textual variants that we meet in a few mss of 1Sam 23,10(cf. BHS apparatus); these could have perhaps arisen because the copyists found it difficult to accept that the verb *ṣHT* needed the preposition *kā* to control the accusative of the noun *ʿr* and hence they dropped the preposition and wrote instead *hāʿr*.

39. Cf. BDB, 912-913 for this mean of *rabbiim*.

of the colon.⁴⁰ Robert B. Chisholm, in his *Handbook on the Prophets*⁴¹ offers a short discussion on the meaning of *yaḥdīq*. He does not contemplate the possibility that the verb may have another subject instead of ‘my servant’. “God’s servant will justify (or better ‘acquit’) many; he will declare them innocent (see v.11b). The precise meaning of the verb translated ‘justify’ is debated. Elsewhere the form is used at least six times in the sense of ‘make righteous’ in the legal sense, that is ‘pronounce innocent, acquit’ (see Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1; 1Kings 8:32=2Chron 6:23; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23). It can also mean ‘render justice’ (as a royal function, see 2Sam 15:4; Ps 82:3), ‘concede’ (Job 27:5), ‘vindicate’ (Isa 50:8), and ‘lead to righteousness (by teaching and example, Dan 12:3). In this context the legal sense of the term makes excellent sense. Because the servant is willing to carry the people’s sins, he is able to ‘acquit’ them.”

In our short study of the verb in several literary contexts we have noticed that the legal meaning tends to prevail over the other meanings. D.R. Hillers⁴² shows how in the contexts where the verb *SDQ* in the hiphil form appears in opposition to the verb *RŠC* also in the hiphil carries the meaning of ‘declaring someone to be innocent’, with the latter verb meaning ‘declaring someone to be guilty’.⁴³ And this seems to be the meaning that fits our context better. Besides, the nominal *ʿāwōn* that features prominently in the following colon has the general legal meaning of ‘guilt’. e) In the light of what the present reader has been saying about the various constituent members of the four cola in verse 11 one may venture to translate this verse in this manner:

Though the Lord’s servant is deeply distressed by the troubles of his soul
for he had more than enough of humiliations,
the Just One will vindicate him in front of the multitude,
since it is their guilt that his servant carries.

This suggested translation may be depriving Christian traditions of a proof text for the justification of the multitude, understood in the Pauline manner, by Jesus for whom the Servant of Isaiah was seen as a prophecy. But the translation of the Vulgate, (or perhaps of the Vetus Latina), which started the ‘traditional

40. The last colon of the verse stands in what Ernst R. Wendland would call ‘causal correlation’ parallelism with the preceding colon. Cf. *Analyzing the Psalms*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas & Eisenbrauns. Winona Lake, 1998, 75-85.

41. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids 2002, 122.

42. Cf. “Delocutive Verbs in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86(1967) 320-324.

43. Cf. also Pietro Bovati, *Ristabilire la Giustizia*, *Analecta Biblica* 110; Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 1997, 321(note 14).

rendering', was only guesswork about what the real meaning of this difficult text could be. The translation offered here guarantees full respect for the MT, especially in its consonantal structure, and of the rhetorical dynamics of its wider context which is the last stanza (vv.10-12). The *Kummissjoni Biblika Permanenti* of the Malta Bible Society was justified therefore in maintaining their 1996 text for verse 11b though it may need some retouches in view of the other things that the present writer has offered here.⁴⁴

44. For instance, the verb *jigġustifika* for the translation of *yašdīq* may communicate the wrong meaning since in modern Maltese it may also mean *sablu skuża, spjega xi nuqqas ta' xi għemil* which is not what the text is saying. Cf. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, Midsea Books, Malta 1987, 416. Instead the present writer would suggest *iddikjarah innoċenti*.