

VULGATE IN USE: AN EXEGETICAL APPROACH
HOW DOES THE SUBJECT IN ISAIAH 53:7 ACT?¹

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ABSTRACT This essay deals with the Fourth Servant Song in the book of Isaiah (Is 52:12 – 53:13)³, which, despite numerous detailed exegetic interpretations, still leaves many inquiries to the text unanswered. Considering the dense, poetic language of this text brings the verbs in their manifestations and meanings into focus, too. Through an analysis of the two introductory verbs in Isaiah 57:7, נָגַשׁ and עָנָה, in various text-traditions, an assessment of the subject's behavior and self-understanding is added.

KEYWORDS Jerome, Isaiah 53, suffering subject, Nifal, Fourth Servant Song, text-traditions

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG Dieser Aufsatz befasst sich mit dem vierten Gottesknechtslied im Buch Jesaja (Jes 52,12 – 53,13), das trotz zahlreicher detaillierter exegetischer Interpretationen immer noch viele Fragen zum Text offen lässt. Mit Blick auf die dichte, poetische Sprache dieses Textes, rücken auch die Verben in ihren Erscheinungsformen und Bedeutungen in den Fokus. Über eine Analyse der beiden einführenden Verben in Jesaja 57,7, נָגַשׁ und עָנָה, in verschiedenen Texttraditionen wird eine Beurteilung des Verhaltens und des Selbstverständnisses des Subjekts hinzugefügt.

SCHLÜSSELBEGRIFFE Hieronymus, Jes 53, Viertes Gottesknechtslied, Nifal, leidendes Subjekt, Texttraditionen

1. Introduction

In addition to the prominent subject, the suffering individual, it is above all the dense, poetic language that makes Isaiah 53 unique. Its dense poetic text in its cryptic form leaves much room for exegetical speculations and discussions. This language goes along with many rare, often unique verb forms and aspects that raise further questions for translators as well as for exegetes that up to today are answered controversially.

1. The paper was first presented in a workshop on the Vulgate at the IOSOT Congress on 6th August 2019 in Aberdeen.

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3. Hereinafter referred to as Isaiah 53.

This starting position brings the grammatical analysis of the text into focus. An analysis with the main focus on the question: What can the structure of the text and its grammatical properties say about the content that goes beyond the mere meaning of the word content? Before this question the essay examines the question of the behavior and action of the subject in the text. With this approach, the verbs and their forms move into the center of the investigation. Well over half of all verbs in this text occur in the third person singular (3 p.sg.) and all in all in 9 different aspects⁴. This clearly puts the analysis of the diverse verb forms in the center of interest. Since the analysis concerns the action of the subject, the verses with participial forms or with form in the Nifal aspect are to be particularly considered. Usually they imply a rather passive and durative character of the action described. Thus, in addition to the ambiguous word meaning, a corresponding analysis also involves a given increase in meaning through the choice of a concrete verb aspect.

The question about the basic attitude of the subject in Isaiah 53:7a, located at the center of Isaiah 53, has emerged in the course of the analysis of the linguistic properties of the whole text of the poem text. The entire poem can be described as a transcription of events around an individual subject, which itself does not have a say and which itself is also largely passively portrayed. Much to this impression contribute the many passive and almost passive verb forms.

Verse 53:7 of Isaiah 53 begins with the dense formulation **נִגְשׁ וְהוּא נִעְנֶה**. Under the above-mentioned basic assumptions, this essay seeks to analyze the acting of the individual of this introducing formulation of verse 53:7 by looking into various textual traditions. Thus, the increase in knowledge via a text comparison in contrast to the exclusive work with the Masoretic text (MT) is to be discussed. This complex topic cannot be dealt with conclusively in the context of this essay. It is therefore seen as the basis for further discussions and investigations. It is also obvious that the question on the behavior of the subject in Isaiah 53 goes beyond any grammatical analysis and far into the exegetical discussion. These relationships will be exemplified in the following analysis of verse 53:7a.

How strikingly many verb forms of the poem Isaiah 53 the two verbs of this verse are formulated in the Nifal aspect. This leaves in this verse – like in many other passages of the poem – a wide range of interpretation open, and lets assume a passive individual. In the whole poem there are a total of nine Nifal

4. Special forms of the Hebrew verb system like Qal, Hifil, Nifal etc.

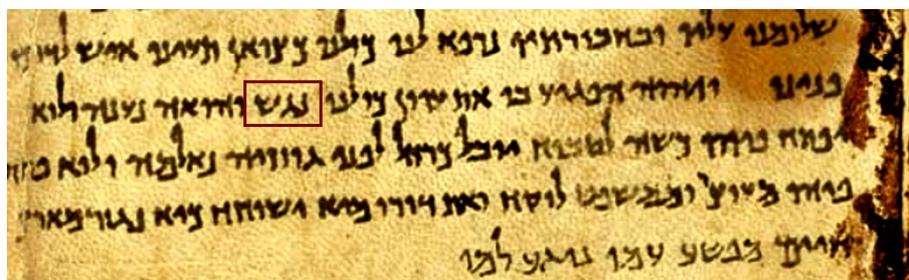
forms, of which three are participles and six are perfect forms in the 3 p.sg. At the beginning of verse 53:7 (53:7a) such a verb-form in the perfect and such a past participle are closely connected. This connection emphasizes the question of the position and inner attitude of the subject.

How can the behavior of the subject be described? is the question that should be further clarified. This is thus a question that directly intervenes in theological interpretation and decisively influences the discussion about the suffering and the victim character of this individual. With this view we will look at the MT and at various other versions of Isaiah 53:7a, among others at the *Vulgata sacra*. It will be shown whether this analysis can provide further information about the attitude of the subject in this verse. All in all the question about the acting of the described subject will be discussed by asking “What is the impact of the verb forms in verse Is 57:7a on the description of the subject in this text?”

Therefore, in this essay only the first part of Isaiah 53:7a, the first three words נָגַשׁ יְהוּא נִעְנָה, will be of interest, because here the acting of the subject becomes obvious. How does the subject act in Isaiah 53:7? This question will be discussed in four steps. First we will have a look at Isaiah 53:7a in the MT and in the translations of the Septuagint (LXX), Symmachus (in the Hexapla of Origen) and the *Vulgata sacra*. Then the peculiarities of this verse in the Vulgate will be presented. In a third step these peculiarities will be compared and finally put in a final concluding thesis for discussion.

2. Isaiah 53:7 in different text traditions

In 1QIsa^a / 1QIsa^b:



[Isaiah 53:7a in 1QIsa^a]

In verse Isaiah 53:7 the differences between MT and 1QIsa^a / 1QIsa^b are small⁵. The consonant stock is virtually identical. But never the less the question about every concrete verb form must be asked. With this view on Isaiah 53:7a in the scroll of Qumran (<http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah#53:11> seen at 20.9.2019) it is not possible to decide whether the third radical of the introducing verb is a ׁשׁ or a ׁשׁ . It cannot be further clarified which verb is finally meant: ׁשׁ or ׁשׁ . This leaves two different possibilities of reading and thus also two variants of the meaning of the verse. But the understanding of this verse depends on the answer to this question. ׁשׁ in the Nifal aspect means to be harassed, to be tormented⁶ and ׁשׁ in the Nifal aspect means to approach, get closer⁷. This means for the initial question, that the second verb certainly implies a much more active role of the subject.

In the Masoretic text:

<i>Masoretic Text (MT)</i> <i>(BHS: Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia)</i>	<i>English Translation</i> <i>(King James Bible)</i>
<p>נגשׁ והוא נעננה ולא יפתח־פיו כשׁה לטבח יובל וקרחל לפני גזזיה נאלמה ולא יפתח פיו:</p>	<p>He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.</p>

[Table 1: Isaiah 53:7 in the Masoretic text (MT)]

As already mentioned above the words and the word order in the MT is identical to the one in the Qumran scrolls. The words of interest are the two introducing verbs with the emphasized personal pronoun in between. The Masoretic authors put first the conjugated verb ׁשׁ in the 3 p. sg. in the aspect of the Nifal Catal. The main meaning of this verb is to press, surround, rush, but in

5. See: Eugene Ulrich. *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 2010.

6. Wilhelm Gesenius: *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, (2013¹⁸), 782.

7. Gesenius: *Handwörterbuch*, 782.

the Nifal it has the connotation of being tormented, harassed. So a probable meaning expressed in the MT is approximately “he was tormented”. This verb is followed by a stressed, independent personal pronoun in the 3 p. sg., which emphasizes the individual on whom this all happens. This short sequence is followed by a participle Nifal m. sg. abs. of the verb **הָנַעַ**. A verb that has four different ranges of meaning.⁸ Since the concrete verb form is in the Nifal aspect, the variants are reduced to two options:

- be answered; be heard and fulfilled;⁹
- be depressed, bowed.¹⁰

Since the concrete verb-form is a Nifal participle in the past, the described passive condition is even more stressed out.

In the Septuagint (LXX)

<i>Septuagint (LXX)</i>	<i>Translation (NETS)</i>	<i>Translation (Septuaginta deutsch)</i>
<p>καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ τὸ κεκακῶσθαι οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα· ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγῆν ἤχθη καὶ ὡς ἀμνὸς ἐναντίον τοῦ κείροντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος οὕτως οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ.</p>	<p>And he, because he has been ill-treated, does not open his mouth; like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before the one shearing it, so he does not open his mouth.</p>	<p>Und er öffnet nicht den Mund, weil er misshandelt worden ist. Wie ein Schaf wurde er zur Schlachtung geführt, und wie ein Lamm, das vor seinem Scherer stumm ist, so öffnet er seinen Mund nicht.</p>

[Table 2: Isaiah 53:7 in the Septuagint]

The Septuagint describes this first part of the verse in a causative sentence, introduced with *διὰ*. And although the subject is also in an emphasized position with the personal pronoun *αὐτὸς* the Septuagint only puts one verb *κακῶω* in the Perfect Infinitive Medium (*κεκακῶσθαι*) with the meaning to maltreat, to distress. The passive meaning is „to be in ill plight“, „be distressed“. This formula-

8. See: Gesenius: Handwörterbuch, 987-990.

9. Gesenius: Handwörterbuch, 988.

10. Gesenius: Handwörterbuch, 989.

tion describes a totally different state, which stresses causative relationships for the following part of the verse.

In the Hexapla: Symmachus

Hexapla: Symmachus

<p><i>προσηνέχθη</i> καὶ αὐτός ὑπήκουσε. ὑπακούων οὐκ ἤνοιξε τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ. ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγὴν προσηνέχθη.</p>	<p>He was brought in and he (himself) obeyed /performed. Although he obeyed, he did not open his mouth. Like a sheep, he was led to slaughter.</p>
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[Table 3: Isaiah 53:7 in the Hexapla/Symmachus]

In the Hexapla of Origen is for verse Isaiah 53:7 only the version of Symmachus preserved. Syntactically, its beginning is ajar against the MT with the striking repetition of the verb in the second movement. However, the meaning of the verbs is far removed from the Masoretic template as we will see later.

In the Vulgata sacra

<i>Vulgata sacra</i>	<i>Vulgata Tusculum deutsch</i>	<i>English Translation</i> (B. Schmid)
<p>oblatus est quia ipse voluit et non aperuit os suum sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur et quasi agnus coram tondente obmutescet et non aperiet os suum.</p>	<p>Er wurde dargebracht, weil er selbst [es] wollte, und er öffnete seinen Mund nicht. Wie ein Schaf wird er zur Tötung geführt werden und wie ein Lamm vor einem, der schert, wird er verstummen und seinen Mund nicht öffnen.</p>	<p>He was offered because he himself wanted it...</p>

[Table 4: Isaiah 53:7 in the Vulgata sacra]

Looking at the Vulgate it can be said, that Jerome has committed idiosyncratic ways that often leave the impression of an independent, often Christian connoted perception. The transference of Jerome shows two idiosyncratic phrases: *oblatus est* and *quia ipse voluit*. *Oblatus est* is composed of the participle sg perf

pass masc nom of *offero* with a manifold of meanings (to bring before; to present, offer; to show, exhibit; to offer, expose; to bring forward, adduce; to offer, proffer; to bring, cause, occasion, confer, bestow; to inflict, etc.). This participle perfect passive forms together with the verb *esse* the passive form in the perfect meaning “he has been offered”.

In ecclesiastical Latin the main focus is on the meaning to offer to God, to consecrate, dedicate; to offer up, sacrifice. This formulation shows at first sight a closeness to the version of Symmachus and a closeness to the offering theme as well. The second part of this verse *quia ipse voluit* is at first glance an independent formulation of Jerome. To be clear about it a look at Jerome’s commentary *In Esaiam* is not particularly fruitful since he does not use any semantic or grammatical arguments, but rather lays clearly Christian eyes on this verse. Although it would lead to too much detail at this point, it should be noted that in order to clarify the attitude of Jerome, other of his comments mentioning this verse must also be included; as *Adversus Iovinianum* II, 2; *Commentarioli in Psalmos*, 37; *Dialogi contra Pelagianos* III,4; *Epistula* 96; *Epistula* 121; *In Hieremiam prophetam* II, 110; *Tractatus in Marci Evangelium*, 1.

2. Basic Question: does the subject act in Isaiah 53:7?

In QIes^a und QIes^b and the MT

As mentioned above there is an openness in relation to the two forms $\dot{\text{W}}\text{ג}\text{ג}$ and $\dot{\text{W}}\text{ג}\text{ג}$. And with this finding the question of the understanding of the original listener and thus after the original meaning remains unanswered.

In the Masoretic text

The MT shows two verbs in the Nifal and in a pronounced position. The meaning of the first verb $\dot{\text{W}}\text{ג}\text{ג}$ in the Nifal is to oppress, humiliate, afflict. As already mentioned above the meaning of the second verb $\text{ע}\text{ג}\text{ג}$ is difficult to determine, because there are four different lines of meaning. Just two of them are represented in the Nifal and it is striking that both of them bear multiple meanings. Gesenius¹¹ chooses for the second verb the meaning “to be depressed,

11. Gesenius: Handwörterbuch, 989.

bowed” and defines it as a conjecture that means a guess or an interpretation of the editor. All in all the whole formulation shows an intensification of a passive condition of the subject and in between stands the independent pronoun “he” as an additional emphasis. Here the Subject «he» is passive, emphasized with a double passive verb construction: he lets things happen to him.

In the LXX: καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ τὸ κεκακῶσθαι ...

In the Greek text of the LXX the personal pronoun stands in the stressed position at the beginning of the verse and with διὰ follows an introductory causative reasoning in the accusative. κεκακῶσθαι, the Verb in the Infinitive perfect passive (to mistreat) of the verb κακόω. This is a verb with diverse connotations (to do evil, harm; passive: to be in ill plight, to be distressed). This version is the description of a state close to the Hebrew version that stays sketchy, because it describes the situation with a not very specific verb and with the conjunction it is also involved in a reasoning context. The Hebrew text and Symmachus on the other hand put it in two different verbs.

In Symmachus? προσηνέχθη καὶ αὐτός ὑπήκουσε...

The meaning of the introductory verb stands in the context of the sacrificial theme. The form προσηνέχθη is the 3 p.sg. indicative Aorist passive of the verb προσφέρω means «he was added». With this meaning this verb is also used in offering sacrifices. Close to the verse construction of the MT Symmachus also introduces the personal pronoun between two conjugated verbs. The second verb brings a variety of connotations from listening up to obeying. Symmachus chooses an independent translation and surprisingly the second verb shows a hearing, obeying individual. According to him the verse can be translated: *He was brought in and he (himself) obeyed / performed*. Symmachus incorporates the verse in the sacrificial context and describes the active participation of the subject in the event. Moreover raises the first verb the fundamental question if a translation into Latin can or must entail *oblatus*. The second verb of the MT is translated by Symmachus within its first meaning of “to hear”.

In der Vulgata? *Oblatus est quia ipse voluit...*

As stated above indicates the phrase *oblatus est* a state in the general sense of “to carry, bring, represent”.

- literal analogies in Latin are *humiliare, affligere, suprimere*;
- different possible connotations are in the figurative sense: request, sacrifice, consecrate;
- the commentary suggests sacrificial theology from a Christian perspective.

All in all is Jerome with this formulation close to the one of Symmachus, but far from being identical to it. Although in the MT obeying is not directly expressed, it is indirectly hinted at passively by the use of the Nifal form. But so far it cannot be clearly concluded that Jerome has worked with the MT. Obviously, he knew Symmachus well and goes his own way with this knowledge. It can be recorded that although Jerome derives his translation probably from the version of Symmachus, he then goes beyond this template with the second verb in the sense of a willing subject. His text sets an active will of the subject to the beginning of the verse. In contrast to the Greek versions the idea of obeying is here over-written with the free will of the subject.

So far it cannot be clearly concluded with which textual template Jerome has worked with. Obviously, he knew Symmachus well and probably he also worked with a premasoretic Hebrew text, but he goes his own way with this knowledge and he went far beyond this known translations. His second verb form *ipse voluit* is clearly active and self-determined, what gives the subject an active part in the verse that it has not in any other version.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be recorded that this analysis has shown that the MT is ambiguous and that this also remains through an accurate word analysis. The same must also be assumed for the premasoretic text, which in some form must have been present to Jerome. It was probably just as ambiguous in its written expression and in the meaning of the words and has been probably been understood as such. The first verb in the examined verse, ׀ָנַג , remains vague in meaning because its written form cannot be conclusively clarified. The same applies to the meaning of the second verb, ׀ָנַה , since at least two variants are possible in the Nifal aspect.

This ambiguity, which also adheres to every translation, has to be explained and appreciated in its individuality. This means for Isaiah 57:7a and the main

question of this essay an openness in terms of meaning, which every translation and exegesis must take into account.

Thus it is reasonable to assume that there are two possible lines of interpretation to answer the question: How does the individual in Isaiah 57:7 act? First we can speak of a tradition found in the Qumran scrolls, in the Septuagint and in the Masoretic text. In their choice of words and the corresponding syntax they pass on the idea of a passive suffering individual. On the other hand there is the tradition of Symmachus and *Vulgata sacra*, which describe quite another subject and have quite another focus: the suffering of an individual with a sacrificial character and the added aspect of voluntary, personal devotion to it.