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Essays in Honour of Roger Omanson—An Editorial Reflection

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Keywords
Roger Omanson

August 8, 1975, the phone rings in a house in Ibadan, Nigeria: "Dr. Stine, it's Roger Omanson." Click, the phone goes dead. A few minutes later, it rings again. "Where are you?" But the phone goes dead. A third ring: "I'm at the airport in Lagos." "Stay there." And so began Roger's introduction to West Africa. Fresh from finishing his doctorate at Southern Seminary in Kentucky, he was spending a few weeks with several UBS translation consultants for us all to find out whether this work was for him. Unfortunately, communications were poor and no word had reached me of his schedule, and the Nairobi office had sent him first to Ghana, not Nigeria. Happily, the airline had allowed him to use a rare working phone in their office, so several hours later we finally met.

Over the next few weeks, his dismay at working conditions in Nigeria and Ghana mounted as he experienced the difficulties of living and travel. But he also got a real taste of the joy of assisting translators who were working to make the Scriptures accessible in their languages. And I also quickly realized he certainly had the knowledge and skills that would make him the first-class consultant he became.

Roger had the ability to explain an exegetical issue to translators whose own biblical background was very limited, and he could show them how it could affect their translation. Further, he was able to offer workable translation

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solutions. Most significantly, the way he quickly established rapport and trust with translators meant they received his advice readily even when it contradicted some long-held notions.

It was not only translators who learned from him. So did his colleagues and seniors. We worked together on many translations from Chad to Mali over the years, and although technically I was supposed to be training him, I am certain I learned more from him.

In the course of his consultancy work, Roger developed a keen awareness of linguistic issues. This was particularly true of issues of discourse, to the point that when it became appropriate to revise the punctuation apparatus of the fourth edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament* so that the segmentation apparatus better reflected the discourse structure, the task was turned over to Roger. His subsequent work, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament*, grew out of the need to help translators comprehend textual issues that were relevant for their work.

"Accessible" is a key word in discussing Roger's contribution. Whether the issue was exegetical, linguistic, cultural, or textual, he was skilled in finding ways for translators to comprehend the issues and apply them to their work, so that, in turn, their readers would have access to the message of the Scriptures. The topics discussed in this present volume reflect this wide range of subjects and the ways they relate to translation.

Two papers address cross-cultural problems. Bascom is concerned with some translation implications of differing cognitive environments, drawing particularly on the work of Mary Douglas and George Lakoff, who have described human experience through a network or matrix of cognitive frames. Individuals negotiate their relationships with others based on the framework which shapes their self-understanding. Bascom describes key biblical concepts such as "faith," "righteousness," "salvation," and "sin" in the cognitive framework of Hebrew culture to point out the sorts of issues this raises for translators in cultures where the basic communication assumptions are different.

"Right hand" and "left hand" have significant symbolic value in many cultures, including those of the Bible. Drawing on a number of West African languages, Zogbo points out the problems for translators when these symbols have either different values or no meaning in a receptor culture.

Several papers offer suggestions on some troublesome but typical translation problems. Clark presents issues he found in nine different languages when translating Acts 13.1–12. Translators had to ask, for example, whether unfamiliar place names need classifiers. For some, the transliteration or spelling of proper nouns was often an issue, as was the best way to render some basic theological terms from the Greek New Testament. In that he is

an amateur magician, Roger will no doubt be especially interested in Clark's discussion of "the magician" in v. 8, which in this context has a negative connotation, unlike Roger's magic, which is entirely benign.

Rhetorical questions are used in some languages for emphasis; the answer is understood. But this is not true for many languages. Ellingworth describes the kinds of adjustments translators may have to make to be sure the real meaning of the question is conveyed clearly.

Sipilä is concerned with "nostrils" in 1 Sam 1.5. The word used literally makes no sense, but it can also be used figuratively to mean "anger." But who is angry with whom? Sipilä believes that contemporary commentaries are not as helpful as Jerome, and suggests that the verse is best understood as Elkanah being angry with God for not granting Hannah a child.

Porter asks whether in 1 Thess 2.14, 15 Paul's condemnation of "the Jews" is comprehensive or restricted to those Jews who killed Jesus and the prophets. It all depends on the punctuation of the Greek text. But by examining restrictive and non-restrictive clauses in the Greek, Porter concludes that the best evidence is for a restrictive sense and that the unhelpful comma has helped foster anti-Semitism.

Bullard raises a question of literary genre, pointing out that scholars for the most part have moved from form criticism to studies of larger literary types in the Bible. But, he asks, why is there no epic or heroic poetry, especially since passages like the Song of Deborah show that the Hebrews had the facility for it? The answer might be, Bullard suggests, that for the Hebrews there was no hero but Yahweh; heroic or epic poetry would not have been appropriate.

The contributions which will appear in the second part of this Festschrift in August cluster around two themes: textual issues and classic translations. Crisp, Ebojo, Schenker, and Lind deal with the source texts. Crisp takes up a topic that is near and dear to Roger's heart—the interrelationship of New Testament manuscript study, variant readings, and Bible translation. He skillfully leads us into the topic via a survey of T. C. Skeat's discussion of variants and their implications for translation, which develops into a more intensive engagement with Skeat's treatment of the variants at Luke 6.1. He then shows how the history of the discussion of this problem found its way into tools to be used by translators through the editions of Metzger's *Textual Commentary* and Roger's own *Textual Guide*, arriving finally at the latest development of this story in decisions taken by the N/TOB editors.

Ebojo also considers the close study of the New Testament manuscripts, focusing on P^{46}. His particular interest is in scribal habits and, in this case, in regard to the non-textual feature of the space-intervals that occur. He sets

out for us the various functions space-intervals might serve, including structural signals for readers, aesthetic signals, punctuation signals, and grammatical markers.

Schenker examines an interpretive problem arising at Zeph 3.8–10 due to two textual traditions: that represented by the MT and that contained in the Old Greek. He illustrates the differences by considering English translations before exploring the textual traditions upon which they depend. When he finally addresses the relevance of the problem and the existence of two equally significant traditions for translators, he sets out the relative gains and losses, and suggests that the use of notes might allow a most helpful way to treat the two traditions in Bible translation.

Sarah Lind worked closely with Roger, and most recently on the English translation of the introductions to the first three volumes of Barthélemy's final report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project. She offers a presentation of Barthélemy's argument, in the case of Deut 32, for the need to distinguish between scribal and Masoretic contributions in the preparation of critical editions, concluding with some reflections on the relevance of this distinction for Bible translation.

Winedt and Soesilo take us into the world of "classic" translations and their characteristics, cultural reception, and use. Winedt tells the story of the KJV in the Caribbean, its entrance and its influence on shaping theology, in cases of subsequent non-Anglophone and Anglophone Bible translation. He considers the influence or potential of the KJV for emancipation and indigenization, setting up at last Creole Bible translation as an example of indigenization that continues in the spirit of the KJV, and that in its own right and time was an epic, culture-changing, and emancipating translation.

Soesilo's topic is the translation of Matthew's Gospel into Malay by A. C. Ruyl. This was the first portion of the Bible to be translated into Malay, completed in 1612. After introducing the linguistic and historical background of this translation, Soesilo examines closely and in some detail the characteristics of Ruyl's translation, drawing conclusions about a *skopos* that included the use of Portuguese, Arabic, and Sanskrit loanwords available in Malay, and explaining how in doing so Ruyl chose a path that diverged from the translation policy of the sending Reformed Church of his home country.

It is really for these authors, friends, and colleagues, with their own words of appreciation and demonstrations of expertise, to pay just tribute to Roger. We two Phils simply and gladly jumped on to the bandwagon as it rounded our corner. As we indicated above, the range of topics covered offers something of a sketch of the breadth of Roger's interest, and Roger's

scholarship and support have benefited his UBS colleagues and those in the wider academy engaged in field translation and numerous areas of scholarly research.

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Roger's point of entry into my life is different from that of Phil Stine's. When I entered the UBS in 1996 and Phil Stine was occupying some lofty throne in Reading, UK, Roger was, I believe, already serving as an Inter-Regional consultant. Our boss at the time, Basil Rebera, had wanted to get us together, and we may have exchanged a few emails early on, but it was at the Triennial Translation Workshop in 1997, in Merida, Mexico, where we first met in person in the lobby of the hotel.

We were assigned to different fields of work. Yet since our scholarly interests were closely aligned, our friendship grew according to the annual rhythm of Society of Biblical Literature meetings, where Roger chaired the Bible Translation unit. With my own transfer from Asia-Pacific to the Americas Region (as it was known then), in addition to SBL, I then also saw Roger at the annual Regional Translation Consultation. There were opportunities to talk about everything from theology to translation to basketball to politics, to laugh and commiserate about a lot of things beyond the scope of this reflection. Assigned to one of Roger's areas of work, I found myself in Guadeloupe, where Roger was consultant to a project, to assist him with a workshop. He introduced me to the local Bleu Cheese Pizza, to the Caribbean Bible Society's mysterious ways, and displayed his technique for handling hecklers bent on exposing the secrets of his magic—which collection of talents indicates the bizarre range of requirements for the post of Translation Consultant. Roger was over-qualified even before his language ability and scholarship came into the equation!

Beginning from all of these memorable moments with Roger, my deep esteem for him as a scholar, a translation consultant, and a human being continued to grow as our opportunities to collaborate multiplied. When later I was based in Reading, Roger had succeeded Hal Scanlin as Consultant for Scholarly Editions, agreed to succeed me as editor of *The Bible Translator—Technical Papers*, and we served on committees and took part in initiatives together. None regard Roger more highly than the German Bible Society's Committee on Scholarly Editions (COSE), on which he served faithfully for several years as secretary, giving critical guidance and influencing the directions scholarly editions would take. He is equally esteemed by the *Biblica Hebraica Quinta* editorial board, which he served for several years as English editor. And during my tenure in Reading, Roger fielded all manner of unusual requests from me. At my invitation, Roger presented a fine paper

as a respondent to a German anthropologist in the experimental three-year section on Orality, Culture and Translation in the Society for New Testament Studies. He represented me in various contexts and did so skillfully and without hesitation, always strengthening the UBS reputation for scholarship, professionalism, congeniality, and relevance as he did so.

These Festschrift issues in honour of Roger rightly draw attention to his scholarship, warm collegiality, and professional contributions, but as we two Phils here would argue (and all of these contributors and those who know him would join in), such accolades, all well deserved and more, only begin to take the measure of this fine friend and outstanding colleague.