

THE CHANGING OF THE HOST:
TRANSLATION AND LINGUISTIC HISTORY

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Translation was, and remains, one of the most powerful and effective means of literary appropriation. Christianity is unique in that it has quite openly taken the greater part of its scriptures from *another* religion. Translation was historically an essential tool in this, probably the most sweeping appropriation in history.

C. F. Volney's hypothesis in *Ruins of Empire* (1791), namely, that the Old Testament not being the oldest written text in the world, but that the Hebrew Scriptures had appropriated and altered yet earlier Egyptian, Sumerian, and Babylonian writings – which is still a matter of debate today (see for instance the work of Van Seters) – is paralleled both by this well-documented fact of the Christian appropriation of Hebrew Scriptures, and the Protestant appropriation of the Catholic Bible at the Reformation. Each of these appropriations was accompanied by a radical shift in critical and hermeneutic theory to justify the takeover. As Mary Ann Tolbert has pointed out, modern biblical scholarship often starts by assuming that „the New Testament texts were fairly reliable windows onto ... history rather than the ideological products of it". The evidence for the degree to which translation theory is not just culturally variable, but also heavily dependent in shifts in theology, is, surprisingly, still not sufficiently acknowledged by many modern translators (e.g. Eugene Nida).