



Hiebert, Robert J. V., ed.

“Translation Is Required”: The Septuagint in Retrospect and Prospect

Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies 56

Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010. Pp. xvii + 248. Paper. \$31.95. ISBN 9781589835238.

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This collection of thirteen papers resulted primarily from an international conference in September 2008 at the Septuagint Institute at Trinity Western University of many of the leading lights in Septuagint studies, as well as scholars in other disciplines from France, Germany, England, and North America. Both the conference and this collection of essays address not only the Septuagint as a translation but also issues arising from recent translations of the Septuagint into English (*New English Translation of the Septuagint*), French (*La Bible d’Alexandrie*), and German (*Septuaginta Deutsch*). It will, therefore, be of interest not only to those in Septuagint studies but also to those involved in translation studies more generally.

The collection leads off with an important paper by Albert Pietersma, “Beyond Literalism: Interlinearity Revisited,” which discusses and clarifies his theory first introduced in the 1990s. He stresses that interlinearity as he defines it does not address the *Sitz im Leben* of the Septuagint but rather a linguistic relationship between the Greek and its parent text that has certain inherent and constitutive characteristics. Pietersma’s theory rests on Gideon Toury’s descriptive translation studies (DTS), which does stress the sociocultural position or function of a translation—a small distinction from its *Sitz im Leben*. Furthermore, referring to the theory as the “interlinear paradigm” suggests the modern

interlinear Bible, which has its own function in our society, and would, in accordance with linguistic relevance theory, understandably tilt one's mind toward such construals as Pietersma wishes to distance himself from. So Pietersma's clarification is necessary reading for anyone conversant with this aspect of Septuagint studies.

This interlinear paradigm is one aspect of the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* and the forthcoming Society of Biblical Literature Commentary on the Septuagint, so Pietersma's essay is an apt introduction for the three essays that reflect either on issues of translation or the exegesis of a translated text. Benjamin Wright's "Moving beyond Translating a Translation: Reflections on *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS)" discusses Toury's DTS as a methodological framework of the NETS project, then considers the alleged function of the Septuagint as described by the Letter of Aristeas in view of Toury's principles. He observes that the sociohistorical function of the Greek translation as reported by Aristeas does not match at all the linguistic character of the translated text. He surveys three recent works that start with the character of the translated text and apply translation theory to reflect on possible sociocultural contexts and specific historical circumstances of its origin. According to Wright, Cameron Boyd-Taylor's 2005 doctoral dissertation, "Reading between the Lines" "offers the most detailed articulation of, and arguments for, the interlinear paradigm" (37). Theo A. W. van der Louw's published dissertation *Transformations in the Septuagint* discusses how the Septuagint translation corroborates certain translation universals. Naomi Seidman's book *Faithful Renderings*, while not limited to biblical translation, ancient or modern, explores "translation narratives" as "religious and political" texts, again calling attention to the function and value of translated work.

Cameron Boyd-Taylor makes an important contribution in "*The Semantics of Biblical Language Redux*" by applying James Barr's work of a similar title to exploring the semiotics of a translated text. His chapter discusses the semantics of "hope" (*elpizo*) in the Greek Psalter and how that contributes to a rhetoric of hope, which in turns points toward a theology of hope.

Two papers reflect on methodological concerns in reference to specific biblical books of the NETS project. In "Ruminations on Translating the Septuagint of Genesis in the Light of the NETS Project," Robert J. V. Hiebert demonstrates the importance for developing and consistently implementing sound translation methodology of the distinction between a translation as produced by someone who had access to the *Vorlage* and the translation as subsequently received by those who did not and, consequently, for whom translation was required. Through five examples he critiques Susan Brayford's translation and commentary on Septuagint Genesis in the Brill series, highlighting the theoretical differences between the Brill series and the forthcoming IOSCS commentary series.

In “Translating a Translation: Some Final Reflections on the Production of the New English Translation of Deuteronomy,” Melvin K. H. Peters reviews observations about the Greek translation of Deuteronomy, especially where it disagrees with the Masoretic Text (MT), and uses those data to defend “secular Septuagintalists” (133) against those scholars who, in his opinion, allow their faith commitments to unduly privilege the MT and who resist the idea of the pluriformity of Hebrew Scripture and multiple textual traditions. He argues passionately that the viability and relevance of Septuagint studies depend on ridding the field of the hegemony of the MT.

In “Some Reflections on Writing a Commentary on the Septuagint of Leviticus,” Dirk Büchner remarks primarily on its Greek grammar and syntax, the lexicology of pentateuchal technical vocabulary, the Septuagint Pentateuch, and Greek religion. He highlights two aspects of the translator’s approach: the intent to provide equivalence even at the expense of good Greek and the need to contextualize by making sense of the Hebrew through Greek cultural conventions.

In more narrowly focused studies, Larry Perkins investigates “‘Glory’ in Greek Exodus: Lexical Choice in Translation and Its Reflection in Secondary Translations,” concluding that the Greek translator was emphasizing the theological concept of Yahweh’s *doxa*. Jan Joosten examines the translation of various Hebrew idioms in “Translating the Untranslatable: Septuagint Renderings of Hebrew Idioms,” finding that, though different techniques were employed to translate idiomatic expressions, the form of the source text was often preserved. August Konkel looks at “The Elihu Speeches in the Greek Translation of Job,” arguing that the shorter length of the Greek Job in comparison to the MT is the creative work of the translator in forming an alternate literary version, not because of a shorter *Vorlage*, and should not be taken as a translation equivalent to the Hebrew version.

In “At the Beginning: The Septuagint as a Jewish Bible Translation,” Leonard Greenspoon presents an interesting historical contrast between the approaches of Max Margolis and his student Harry Orlinsky toward the relationship between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text, perhaps providing an example of the point Melvin Peters makes about the hegemony of the MT.

Alison Salvesen’s “A Well-Watered Garden (Isaiah 58:11): Investigating the Influence of the Septuagint” is an excellent survey of daughter versions of the Greek Septuagint in Syriac, Old Latin, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Christian Arabic, Georgian, and church Slavonic. Her contribution gathers much essential information about these daughter versions.

Wolfgang Kraus presents “The Role of the Septuagint in the New Testament: Amos 9:11–12 as a Test Case,” taking the reader step by step through the issues involved in understanding the contribution of the Amos quotation in an important New Testament text and questioning the search for the “original focus” of the biblical text in light of textual pluriformity.

Finally, Brian Anastasi Butcher explores the question of the reception and use of NETS by English-speaking Christians of the Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine-Rite Catholic Churches. In “A New English Translation of the Septuagint *and the* Orthodox Study Bible: *A Case Study in Prospective Reception*,” he argues that the “criteriology” of Orthodox biblical translation, the challenges of confessionalism, and the use of Scripture in the Orthodox liturgy will weigh against the use of NETS by this potential audience.

The volume concludes with the panelists’ introductory statements made at the conference by Pietersma, Wright, Joosten, and Kraus.

A common thread connecting the many issues addressed throughout this volume is arguably the importance, often overlooked, of distinguishing between the translated text as produced and the translation as received by subsequent interpreters in various religious communities, geographical regions, and of different theological persuasions. This volume is a must read for those involved or interested in modern Septuagint studies or the issues of translation more broadly.