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Invitation to the Septuagint

2nd edition

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Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva offer a new edition of their comprehensive and useful introduction to the Septuagint, which first appeared in 2000.¹ The book is divided into three parts, for a total of fourteen chapters and five appendices, plus indices. The three parts are entitled: (1) “The History of the Septuagint”; (2) “The Septuagint in Biblical Studies”; and (3) “The Current State of Septuagint Studies.”

The book covers all aspects of the Septuagint and its scholarship. Part 1 contains four chapters: “The Origin and Transmission of the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions”; “The Transmission of the Septuagint”; “The Septuagint in Modern Times”; and “The Septuagint as a Translation.” Part 2 offers six chapters: “The Language of the Septuagint”; “Establishing the Text of the Septuagint”; “Using the Septuagint for the Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible”; “The Judean Desert Discoveries and Septuagint Studies”; “The Septuagint and the New Testament”; and “Interpreting the Septuagint.” Part 3 contains four chapters: “Our Predecessors: Septuagint Scholars of a Previous Generation” (see below); “Current Studies in Language and Translation”; “Reconstructing the History of the Text”; and “Theological Development in the Hellenistic Age.”

1. Editor: For James Barr’s review of the first edition, see https://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/1341_3027.pdf.

The five appendices present the major Septuagint organizations and research projects, reference works, glossary, differences in versification between English versions and the LXX, and symbols and abbreviations of the Göttingen critical apparatus, in my opinion, one of the strengths of the entire book.

With respect to the first edition, as confirmed by authors in the preface, every chapter is now longer, with bibliography added and the text expanded. I will point out an additional important aspect later.

This introduction to the Septuagint is certainly a great and useful guide not only for students but also for specialists for several reasons. First of all, the language is simple and clear, and there are many examples that make it possible for students to follow along and permit them to assimilate the most important concepts about the Greek version of the Bible. For example, in “The Transmission of the Septuagint” (34–62), the reader finds a simple, but exhaustive, presentation of the recensions, the Hexapla, the manuscripts (papyri, uncials, and minuscule), as well as ancient citations. The language not only presents these arguments, as well as their problematics and difficulties, but also offers a useful summary about the recensions that explains in a simple way the textual history of the Greek versions.

Second, the parts and chapters are organized very well, and the figures help readers to comprehend the material. For example, in “Establishing the Text of the Septuagint” (128–55), the authors present the aims of the textual criticism and the evaluation of internal and external evidence. I found particularly exemplary figures 6.1–4, which present the differences between the editions (Cambridge, Rahlfs, Göttingen) and explain the apparatus of every edition, a difficult task that students will find useful in order to approach the textual criticism of the Septuagint.

From the same point of view, appendix E, as noted above, presents the symbols and abbreviations of the Göttingen critical apparatus, offering valuable help to the student approaching to the critical edition of the Septuagint.

Third, the bibliography is carefully updated, and at the end of every chapter the reader can find a section entitled “To Continue Your Study.” This material enables students in particular to deepen their knowledge and research.

A noteworthy addition, absent in the first edition, is the chapter “Our Predecessors: Septuagint Scholars of a Previous Generation” (265–88). They are von Tischendorf, Hatch, de Lagarde, Rahlfs, Swete, Brooke, McLean, Thackeray, Margolis, Montgomery, Ziegler, Soisalon-Soinien, Brthélemy, and Wevers. This chapter puts readers in touch

with the most important scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In my view, this is a great contributing to the usability of the book by students: they can have in mind not only names but also persons with their academic life and publications. This chapter shows that these scholars “were primarily preoccupied with the textual criticism of the Greek text, in the hopes of reconstructing the original translation of each book and producing ancillary resources, such as concordances and grammars, for future scholars” (287–88). Students consulting the Hatch-Redpath concordance or a volume of the Göttingen critical edition will be enriched by personal information offered by these pages.

Only few remarks are in order. (1) Hebrew words are not transliterated, and this might be a problem for the readers coming from classical studies. (2) In the section “Is the Goal Unreachable?” about establishing the text, the authors could quote Paul Kahle, who was a prominent example of this theory. About Paul Kahle’s theories (310–11), the bibliography can be updated with the proceedings of the Congress held in Turin in 10–11 April 2014, published in *Henoch* 36 (2014). (3) In the clear and useful section “The Text of Samuel at Qumran” (192–198), about the episode of Nahash king of the Ammonites present in 4QSam^a, the authors write: “no trace of the paragraph in question is found in any of the Greek manuscripts of Samuel.” This is true for what the biblical sources it concerns, but the addition of Nahash is present in Flavius Josephus (*Ant.* 6.68–70), a Greek witness. (4) Finally, about the translation of the Septuagint into Italian (“La Bibbia dei Settanta,” 73), not only the Pentateuch has been published, but also the poetical books (2013) and the historical books (2016).

In short, this book represents a very important tool for Septuagint studies, a rich introduction and a compendium, as well as a reference work for the current state of research on the Greek version of the Bible.