

THE TEXT-CRITICAL VALUE OF SEPTUAGINT-GENESIS

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The text-critical situation in the book of Genesis is not nearly as problematic as in books like Samuel or Jeremiah. Nevertheless there is a broad scholarly interest in the transmission of the text of this biblical book. This seems to me an indication of the continued importance of the book of Genesis for faith and practice in both Judaism and Christianity. In other words, this broad interest is part of the reception history of the first book of the Pentateuch. This simple observation already points to the thesis that I would like to develop in what follows. In my view the Septuagint version of Genesis is primarily a document of an early stage of the exposition of the book. In contrast to this (and in contrast to Prof. Hendel's book) the text-critical value of Gen-LXX should be regarded as less important.

1. *The Use of the LXX for the Criticism of the Hebrew Text of the Bible*

For the sake of methodological clarity a few reflections seem appropriate on the use of the LXX for the correction of the Hebrew text handed down to us by the Masoretes. When examining scientific commentaries on particular biblical books or introductions into exegetical methods, one can gain the impression that textual criticism is carried out in an eclectic manner. Variants to *one* lemma are collected from different witnesses and the data evaluated by means of the classical rules of textual criticism such as *lectio difficilior* or *lectio brevior probabilior*. When evaluating the evidence, however, scholars frequently disregard the characteristic peculiarities of the respective versions. This leads to the methodological demand that prior to a judgment about a single variant, an overall assessment of the text-critical value of the version in question has to be made.

When turning to the Septuagint one of the most important results of recent research must be kept to mind, namely that the translations of the various biblical books have to be considered individually¹. There are no generally valid criteria for all books of the LXX because different translators translated them at different times and in different places. Moreover the translators carried out their task with dissimilar techniques of translation. It may suffice to refer to the classical yet inaccurate distinction between "free" and "literal" translations². For this reason I will try to describe the most important distinctive features of Gen-LXX.

2. *Septuagint-Genesis*

Starting with the letter of Aristeas and its intention, which is supported by modern research, one can assume that the Septuagint version of Genesis was translated in the middle of the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria³. But contrary to the letter of Aristeas it seems certain that Genesis was translated as the first book of the Pentateuch, independent of the other four books. The differences in chosen equivalents and especially the distinctive chronological system in Gen 5:11⁴ point in this direction. This suggests a characteristic theological intention. I think that the most appropriate understanding of Gen-LXX is that it was translated as an original Jewish-Hellenistic contribution to the discussions of the *museion* or the famous library in Alexandria. From this *Sitz im Leben* some of the characteristics of the translation can easily be understood, which I will collect in what follows⁵.

¹ Cf. E. Tov, Art. Textual Criticism (OT), *ABD* VI, 1992, 393-412: 403 and J.W. Wevers, The Use of Versions for Text Criticism: The Septuagint, in: N. Fernández Marcos (ed.), *La Septuaginta en la Investigación Contemporánea* (V. Congreso de la IOSCS), Madrid 1985, 15-24 for the translators of the Pentateuch.

² See J. Barr, The Typology of Literalism in ancient biblical translations, NAWG Phil-Hist Klasse 11 = MSU 15, Göttingen 1979; E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, 2nd ed., JBS 8, 1997, 15-29.

³ Compare my proposition that the translation was carried out around 247 BC, this because of the interesting rendering of Gen 2:14: M. Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung*, BZAW 223, 1994, 66. For a different proposal see N.L. Collins, 281 BCE: the Year of the Translation

In this regard it has to be stated that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the translator was very close to the consonantal text which has been preserved in the Masoretic Text⁶. And because the translator followed his *Vorlage* very carefully, special attention has to be given to the deviations between MT and LXX.

3. Characteristics of Gen-LXX in Dealing with the Hebrew Text⁷

a) Harmonizations

As most scholars who have worked on the text of Genesis have seen, one of the most important features of the LXX version is its tendency to harmonize different texts among themselves. As a first example, let us look at the account of the flood. In the apparatus of BHS on Gen 6:19-20 one finds the notation that MT is to be improved by inserting a second שנים⁸, for which reference is made to the LXX which reads δύο δύο in both verses. But the Greek version does not witness to a better text; it only harmonizes Gen 6:19-20 with Gen 7:9+15, where

of the Pentateuch into Greek under Ptolemy II, in: G.J. Brooke, B. Lindars (eds.), *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings*, SBLSCS 33, 1992, 403-503; for a critical evaluation see my *op. cit.* p. 10.

⁴ Cf. for this *J.W. Wevers*, *The Interpretative Character and Significance of the Septuagint Version*, in: M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*, Vol. I, 1 Antiquity, 1996, 84-107: 95f. and *M. Rösel*, *Übersetzung*, 10.129-144. Cf. also *R.S. Hendel*, *The Text of Genesis 1-11. Textual Studies and Critical Edition*, 1998, 61-80 on the chronologies of Gen 5 and 11; although Hendel fails to give a convincing explanation for the data of the LXX, he does not even discuss my theory on this problem.

⁵ Cf. also *J.W. Wevers*, *The Use of Versions*, 21, who sees Gen-LXX as a "freer" translation.

⁶ Cf. *J.R. Davila*, *DJD XII*; *M. Rösel*, *Übersetzung*, 12 (with further references).

⁷ Cf. for the following also *J.W. Wevers*, *The Interpretative Character*, 95-107 and *ibid.*, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SBLSCS 35, 1993 for the individual references. Cf. also *J. Cook*, *The Translator of the Greek Genesis*, in: N. Fernández Marcos (ed.), *La Septuaginta en la Investigación Contemporánea* (V. Congreso de la IOSCS), Madrid 1985, 169-182. The theory of *R.S. Hendel*, *Genesis 1-11*, deserves a discussion of its own because our judging of the LXX and its *Vorlage* is hardly compatible.

⁸ See also *C. Westermann*, *BK I/1*, 527.

the text says that the animals enter the ark שנים שנים⁹. In Gen 7:2 this procedure is even more clearly recognizable. Here the MT has the double שבעה שבעה, but only simple שנים; the LXX also corrects this text¹⁰.

In a similar way the text of Gen 7:3 has been aligned. While the MT of 7:2 speaks of clean and unclean animals, 7:3 speaks only of birds. The LXX enhances the differentiation and adds God's commandment that there must also be a distinction between clean and unclean birds. The text of 7:17, which speaks about the 40 days of the flood, is harmonized in a similar way in the LXX version with 7:12, where it was stated that the duration of the flood was 40 days and 40 nights¹¹.

Because a large number of examples of this procedure of the translator can be found, one has to speak of a distinctive feature of Genesis-LXX. It is in light of this result that Gen 1:9, one of the most-discussed verses, should be seen. It is well known that in the first account of the creation the LXX offers structural elements that are lacking in the MT. This is true for the formula καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως in 1:6¹² and 1:20. In Gen 1:9 LXX has the so-called *Ausführungsschilderung* (report of execution?) καὶ συλήθη τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ὤφθη ἡ ξηρά, which exactly follows the formulation of God's commandment in V. 9a. Again, this plus has to be judged as a result of the LXX's tendency towards harmonizing the texts¹³. But a majority of scholars, most recently Prof. Hendel, has assumed the existence of a different *Vorlage*. This assumption has been supported by the tiny fragment 4QGen^k (1) published by James R. Davila in *DJD XII*. According to the editor, the text of the fragment reads ייבן־שׁה

⁹ With *J.W. Wevers*, *Notes*, 87 and *R.S. Hendel*, *Genesis 1-11*, 134.

¹⁰ Again, BHS suggests correcting the text. But in this case also the SamPent as an independent witness shows the doubling.

¹¹ Cf. *R.S. Hendel*, *Genesis 1-11*, *ad loc.*, who comes to the same conclusions when discussing these variants. That is why I cannot understand how he can see comparable harmonizations like those in Genesis 1 as pointing to a different *Vorlage* for the LXX.

¹² MT has ייהי only in 1:7. Cf. also *J. Cook*, *Genesis 1 in the Septuagint*, 27; *J.W. Wevers*, *Notes*, 4; For a discussion cf. *M. Rösel*, *Übersetzung*, 37. Even *R.S. Hendel*, *Genesis 1-11*, 120-122 sees these variants of the LXX as a "harmonizing plus".

¹³ With *J.W. Wevers*, *Notes*, 5.

וּתְרָא¹⁴. Because the verb lacks the ך, so the supporters of this theory argue, it cannot be part of the *Wortbericht* (report of speech) but has to be seen as a witness for the otherwise lacking *Tatbericht* (report of action). Thus Gen 1:9 serves as an important proof that the LXX attests to an original text which is not preserved in the MT because of a scribal error¹⁵. For William Brown it is even the most important argument for his reconstruction of the older text of Genesis 1¹⁶.

Even if one assumes that the text preserved on the tiny fragment is really part of Gen 1:9 and that the reading of James Davila is actually correct (both seem to me far from certain), serious doubts remain. The manuscript 4QGen^k is otherwise in line with the MT, especially in those cases where the LXX shows its additions. Moreover, the manuscript displays several variants in connection with vocalic letters (cf. also 4QGen^g in 1:22: ךְּרִבָּה; M יִרְבֵּ ; 4QGen^h title: בְּרִשְׁיָהּ). Thus, in my opinion, the fragment is a witness for a linguistic variant of the MT if it has preserved the text of Genesis 1. One can also think of Gen 3:6: וּתְרָא הָאִשָּׁה. Therefore, against the majority of scholars¹⁷ I conclude that evidence for the existence of an older *Vorlage* of the LXX is still lacking. Gen 1:9 should be regarded as another instance of the harmonizing tendency of Gen-LXX, which should not be ascribed text-critical significance¹⁸. One can

¹⁴ New Qumran Readings for Genesis One, in: *Of Scribes and Scrolls*, FS J. Strugnell, ed. H.W. Attridge, J.J. Collins, T.H. Tobin, College Theology Society Resources in Religion 5, Lanham / New York / London, 1990, 3-11: 9f.; cf. also *DJD* XII.

¹⁵ R.S. Hendel, *Genesis 1-11*, 27: "Hence, the *Tatbericht* in v 9, as preserved in G and 4QGen^k (and presumed in Jub), should be taken as the archetypal or original reading."

¹⁶ W.P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1-2:3*, SBL Diss.Ser. 132, 1993. But cf. the critical review of this thesis by A.v.d. Kooij in *JSJ* 61, 1996, 129-132.

¹⁷ See e.g. E. Tov, *The Nature and Background of Harmonizations in Biblical Manuscripts*, *JSOT* 31, 1985, 3-29: 22 ("the plus derived from a Hebrew Text") and his contradictory position in *The Text-Critical Use*, 88: "it can be substantiated that the harmonization occurred at the translation level" with reference to Gen 1:9 and the afore-mentioned article (I).

¹⁸ Compare also J. Cook, *Genesis 1*, 31f. In his later article "The Exegesis of the Greek Genesis" (in: C.E. Cox [ed.], *VI. Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, Jerusalem 1986, SBLSCS 23, Atlanta 1987, 91-125: 104f.) Cook then assumed that

assume that such revisions were carried out to produce a better, more consistent text.

b) Exegetical Reasons for Textual Variants

Another distinguishing feature of the Greek Genesis is the existence of translations that reveal the translator's own understanding of the biblical text. Here one has to consider passages like Gen 4:7 where the translator is using the available elements of his *Vorlage* and produces a new text. The advantage of this version is easily recognizable as an explanation of the apparently unjust events. No doubt is left that Cain alone is responsible for the rejection of his sacrifice¹⁹. A similar technique is apparent in Genesis 49. Here the translator accents the evaluations of the eponymous tribal ancestors quite differently from the MT. This is especially apparent in the well-known and extremely influential first messianic interpretation of the saying for Judah in 49:10: "A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, and he is the expectation of nations"²⁰. Again, the translator obviously has tried to express his understanding of the text in a way that meshes with the hermeneutical presuppositions of his time and environment.

This insight is also the key to understanding two further text complexes. The data given in Genesis 5-11 concerning the life spans of the patriarchs differ considerably in the three versions, MT, Sam and LXX. The Greek translation shows a "long" chronology that is obviously directed to the year 5,000 since creation as the year in which the 2nd temple is built²¹. This alteration avoids a conflict with the tradition preserved by Manetho, especially well-known in Egypt, according to which the duration of the reign of the Pharaohs was 3,000 years. Again we can detect the contemporary interest of the translator, possibly shaped in discussions in Alexandria. This insight should prevent future attempts like the one of *Jeremy Hughes*, who has

MT is a later correction of the older text which is preserved in LXX; in his recent article "Following the Septuagint Translators" (*JNSL* 22, 1996, 181-190: 184, n. 2) he now points to the "convincing" evidence from 4Q.

¹⁹ M. Rösel, *Übersetzung*, 104-107; *J.W. Wevers, Notes*, 55.

²⁰ M. Rösel, *Die Interpretation von Gen 49 in der Septuaginta*, *BN* 79, 1995, 54-70. Cf. also E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use*, 78.

²¹ So M. Rösel, *Übersetzung*, 136-144.

reconstructed an older *Vorlage* of the LXX that is thought to give witness to an "original priestly ideology."²²

Another variant that has its basis in exegetical considerations is in Gen 7:11. While in the MT the flood begins on the 17th day of the 2nd month, according to the LXX version the rain begins to fall on the 27th of the 2nd month. In Gen 8:14 it is then stated that the earth was dry again at the 27th of the 2nd month of the following year. This means that according to the MT the duration of the flood was one year and 10 or 11 days. Following the LXX it took exactly one year²³. The LXX also changes the statement in 8:4, so that now the ark comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat on the 27th of the 7th month after exactly five months. The MT again dates this event on the 17th. Other secondary witnesses such as *1 Enoch* 106:15, *Jub.* 5:23-31 and 4Q252 also give evidence for exactly one year as the duration of the flood. So one has to assume that the Greek version stands in the same exegetical tradition, although the exact length of the year is not given because this was self-evident for the recipients of the respective version. One can think of a 354-day lunar calendar, a schematic 360-day calendar, an ideal 364-day calendar or a 365-day solar calendar, but because Gen-LXX occasionally shows allusions to Egyptian conditions²⁴, the 365-day calendar is the most probable solution for this version.

In any event, it is apparent that the data offered by the LXX should not be adduced for a text-critical solution to the problem, as recently Prof. Hendel or the German scholar *Horst Seebass* (in his commentary on Genesis) have proposed²⁵.

c) A third category of variants comprises passages where the differences can be traced back to linguistic phenomena. As an example one can again point to Genesis 7, where in v. 9

²² So *J. Hughes, Secrets of the Time, Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOT.S 66, Sheffield 1990, 240f.

²³ Cf. *M. Rösel, Die Chronologie der Flut in Gen 7-8: keine neuen textkritischen Lösungen*, forthcoming in *ZAW* 110/4, 1998.

²⁴ See *J.W. Wevers, Interpretative Character*, 105.

²⁵ *R.S. Hendel, 4Q252 and the Flood Chronology of Genesis 7-8: A Text-Critical Solution*, *DSD* 2, 1995, 72-79; *ibid.*, *Genesis 1-11*, 54-55, 136-138 (without new arguments); *H. Seebass, Genesis I. Urgeschichte* (1,1-11,26), 1996: 217.

כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים אֶחָדָּה has been translated by the smoother *καθὰ ἐνετειλατο αὐτῷ οὐθεος*. In 7:11 י"ם is not translated for idiomatic reasons²⁶. In neither instance can the rule *lectio brevior probabilior* be cited as grounds for preferring the text of the LXX²⁷.

Another striking example can be found in Gen 48:13. The text recounts how Joseph tried to change the position of his sons before Jacob, his own father. In the Septuagint the suffixes of בִּימִינִי and בַּשְּׂמָאלוֹ are not translated. Rather, the contrast is expressed by the common Greek sequence δὲ . . . δὲ . At the end of the verse the LXX has ἡγγισεν αὐτοὺς αὐτῷ for the Hebrew וַיִּשָּׂא אֵלָיו. The consonantal text obviously has to be understood as an intransitive in the Qal-stem. Joseph first brings his sons to Jacob and only then does he present himself. The Greek translator understood the verb as transitive and thus was in need of an object. To solve the grammatical problems of the verse, the first finite verb was rendered by the participle λαβὼν and the intransitive וַיִּשָּׂא was rendered by the transitive ἡγγισεν αὐτοὺς. The copulative *וַאֲשֶׁר* connected with both verbs has been ignored and the result is a logical sequence in the Greek version that deals only with the sons²⁸. There is no reason to add אֶת־אֲבִי as witnessed by the LXX to the MT as the apparatus of BHS proposes²⁹. Later, the Masoretes did interpret the verb as transitive and punctuated it as a *hiph'il*.

4. Conclusion

These few examples may suffice to show how I came to my thesis that the text-critical value of the Septuagint version of Genesis should be regarded less highly than its value for the history of interpretation and reception. I am fully aware that there are instances where the LXX gives good reason to improve the incompletely or incorrectly transmitted Hebrew text. One can allude to the well-known problem in Gen 4:8, where LXX and

²⁶ *J.W. Wevers, Notes*, 93.

²⁷ As *R.S. Hendel, 4Q252*, 76f. has done with regard to 7:11. For 7:9 he rightly argues for the secondary character of the LXX in *Genesis 1-11*, 136.

²⁸ See also *J.W. Wevers, Notes*, 813f. for a similar explanation.

²⁹ Cf. also *C. Westermann, BK I/3*, 201, who corrected the text without any notice.

other versions have Cain's request "Let us go out into the plain," which is obviously missing in the MT³⁰. In this verse, as in others that show a comparable situation, it seems important to me that the LXX is supported by other independent witnesses like the Samaritanus, reliable Qumran readings or the Targumim. It is also worth noting that those verses that can be corrected with the LXX have only limited significance regarding their contents.

Consequently, I am of the opinion that the vast majority of variant readings cannot be traced back to a different *Vorlage*. I am aware of the fact that there are alternative viewpoints in Septuagint research which hold that a Hebrew *Vorlage* has to be assumed even if there is no manuscript evidence³¹. But in the light of the aforementioned examples from Genesis this theory seems no longer tenable to me. For the sake of methodological clarity it seems appropriate to formulate the following principle: A variant of the LXX that is not supported by independent witnesses can claim text-critical significance only when it cannot be assigned to one of the three categories mentioned above. Only if one can exclude with a high degree of probability that the variant in question cannot be explained as a harmonization or an exegetically or linguistically motivated deviation can the MT be corrected with the help of this variant. This principle is formulated with the concerns of one of the great authorities on Gen-LXX, John William Wevers, in mind. In his view— and following him in my view — the LXX should not be used as a "grab bag for emendations"³² but should be seen as a "humanistic document of interest by and for itself"³³.

³⁰ The discussion about this question is interminable: cf. the compilation of positions in *M. Rösel, Übersetzung*, 108 or *E. Tov, Textual Criticism*, 236f.

³¹ See for such a position e.g. *A. Aejmelaeus, What Can We Know about the Hebrew Vorlage of the Septuagint? ZAW* 99, 1987, 58-89.

³² *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, SBLSCS 30, 1990, xvi.

³³ *The Interpretative Character*, 95.