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The Septuagint as a holy text – The first 'bible' of the early church

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This article acknowledges the fact that historically there are two phases in the emergence of the Septuagint – a Jewish phase and a Christian one. The article deals first with methodological issues. It then offers a historical orientation. In the past some scholars have failed to distinguish between key historical phases: the pre-exilic/exilic (Israelite – 10 tribes), the exilic (the Babylonian exile – 2 tribes) and the post-exilic (Judaean/Jewish). Many scholars are unaware of the full significance of the Hellenistic era, including the Seleucid and Ptolemaic eras and their impact on 'biblical' textual material. Others again overestimate the significance of this era; the Greek scholar Evangelia Dafni is an example. Many are uninformed about the Persian era, which includes the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanian eras, each one of which had an impact on Judaism. An example is the impact of Persian dualism. Another problem is the application of the concept of 'the *Bible*'. The notion of 'Bible' applies only after the 16th century Common Era, specifically after the advent of the printing press. Earlier, depending on the context, we had clay tablets (Mesopotamia), vella (Levant-Judah) and papyri (Egypt) to write on. This is followed by a discussion of the Masoretic Text and the LXX, including the reasons for the rejection of the LXX by the Jews. This is significant because the LXX was originally a Jewish document. Attempts to re-evaluate the concept of the Bible are discussed. The Septuagint subsequently followed, which leads to the conclusion that the LXX became the first Bible of the Christian church.

Contribution: This article fits into the focus of HTS because it argues that the Septuagint is the first Bible of the early church. It also underscores the scope of this Theological periodical, for the Greek Bible is part of its subject matter that is researched.

Keywords: LXX; Septuagint; Old Greek; Church; Aristeas; Text-theory; Jewish; Christian.

Introduction

Misunderstandings

Historical misunderstandings

There are many misunderstandings about the Septuagint. Because I operate with the concepts of text and context (Cook 2019a), I first offer a historical orientation. In the past some scholars have failed to distinguish between key historical phases: the pre-exilic/exilic (Israelite); the exilic (the Babylonian exile); and the post-exilic (Judaean/Jewish). It seems that scholars are not always aware of the importance of the Hellenistic era, including the Seleucid and Ptolemaic eras and their impact on 'biblical' textual material. Even more may be ignorant about the Persian era, which includes the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanian eras. Furthermore, the Roman world had a devastating impact upon the Persian Empire and especially on the Parthian region. Each one of these eras had an influence on Judaism.

Translational misunderstandings

Other misunderstandings about the Septuagint are, firstly, its depiction as a *translation*, a term which is not applicable. One can at most talk about *translations* in this regard. As a matter of fact, Fernández Marcos (2000:22) prefers the expression 'a collection of translations depending on the book', and because he has also identified diversity in individual verses, he speaks of a range of translation techniques. In this regard I defined the translation technique of LXXProverbs as one of 'unity and diversity' (Cook 2001:205). Moreover, the notion of 'Septuagint' does not only refer to the translations. Initially the appellation 'Septuaginta' had a bearing only on the Pentateuch, whereas Septuaginta, as we all know, literally means 70. There are various theories to explain this apparent anomaly (see Fernández Marcos 2000:42; Wright III 2015:170). The numerical implication

Note: Special Collection entitled Septuagint SA, sub-edited by Johann Cook (SUN).

of the 'Septuaginta' has to do with the 12 tribes of Israel, thus 6 translators from 12 tribes add up to 72. However, 70 is mentioned as the total number of translators. Possible interpretations for this clear anomaly include that the reference to 72 simply fell away over the course of time. Fernández Marcos mentions that the number 70/72 is made up by choosing two translators for each of the 12 tribes, and it probably evokes the old men present at Sinai when Moses received the Law. It is also the total number of members of the Sanhedrin (Fernández Marcos 2000; see also Honigman 2003:120):

> [*A*]s for the philological work, the author of the letter transposes to the event of translation inexact representations about what he thought of the work carried out in Alexandria: i.e. neglected texts were restored and transformed into genuine texts through discussion and comparison carried out by the philologists. (p. 42)

As stated already, the letter of Aristeas initially referred only to the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek in the 3rd century Before Common Era (BCE). However, '[t]he process of the translation of the Hebrew/Aramaic Bible into Greek continued into the 1st and 2nd centuries Common Era (CE). That is to say, the translation into Greek of the Hebrew Bible took about four centuries. Moreover, it was the work of numerous translators and, as is obvious, throughout this period the translation techniques also varied'. Apart from the translation of the Hebrew books, the 'Bible' of Alexandria was enriched by including new books, *de novo* books, written in Greek, such as Wisdom, Judith, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, as well as 1 and 2 Maccabees and the addition of Greek supplements to other books such as Esther and Daniel (Fernández Marcos 2000:50).

Symbolical misunderstandings

The use and symbolism of the number 72 plays an important role in the LXX, early Christianity and in other contexts. Many scholars have dealt with these issues (Major 2013:52, 7–46), but their explanations are vague. These explanations concern the number of languages and nations in the world, especially the number of translators in the Septuagint. According to Major (2013:9), there is no consensus about whether the number should be 70 or 72; Jewish interpreters tend to opt for 70, whereas Christian authors prefer 72. The symbolism developed from its putative origins in the table of nations of Genesis 10 to the 72 translators of the LXX up to the works of Isodore of Sevilla in the 7th century. Two broad stages in the development of the topos are unlocked; for Jews and Christians it has symbolic value, whereas for the Latin-speaking Christians the topos has typological value (Major 2013:9).

As stated above, there are many references to these numbers (70/72). The nations number 70, which is a significant figure: Jacob's household in Egypt numbered 70, there were 70 palm trees and Moses appointed 70 Elders.[1] According to Major (2013:12), these numbers can only be broken down in multiples of twos, threes, fours and sevens. By the 5th century the number 72 had acquired great significance in biblical interpretation.

In the final analysis, Major (2013:45) is probably correct in finding that at the root of the application of the number 72 lies the Book of Aristeas with its reference to the 72 translators of the original Septuagint – the Pentateuch and/or the reference to the 72 disciples of Christ in the Gospel of Luke. There is also no direct relationship between the table of nations, Genesis Chapter 10 and these motifs.

Biblical misunderstandings

A prominent misunderstanding is related to the literature. It is clearly a misnomer to speak about 'the Bible' before the art of printing developed.

Modern interpretations of the origins of the LXX are important from a methodological point of view. There is, firstly, the so-called Ur-text theory presented by Paul de la Garde (Böttiger) – from one to many; secondly, the Targum text theory of Paul Kahle – from many to one; thirdly, Dominique Barthélemy – the Antiochene and Palestinian traditions; fourthly, the Frank Moore Cross School – local text theory; and fifthly, the Jerusalem School of Talmon and Tov – the multiple-text theory, diversity of textual material (Deist 1978:230). The latter is the most useful in my opinion.

To end this part, I briefly refer to additional theories developed by different scholars on the origin of the LXX itself (Cook 2017:14): (1) the translation took place in a religious context, mainly liturgical (Thackaray); (2) it originated in an educational context (Brock and Pietersma); (3) the LXX was deemed to be a legal text, a *nomos* (Bickerman and Stricker); (4) the LXX was needed for the library of Alexandria; (5) the cultural hypothesis, a reaction against the idea that the LXX was translated for utilitarian purposes; and (6) the primary motivation behind the translation was to enhance prestige. Dorival (2010:36–47) added a few additional theories (see also Wright III 2011:304–26).

In the final analysis, I am of the opinion that the educational model[2] offers the most likely hypothesis to account for the origins of the Septuagint. The school-setting hypothesis was suggested by Brock and worked out more systematically by Pietersma (2002:337–364). Pietersma (2002:349–350) has indicated that the LXX originally probably had an educational intent and not a religious one, and that it acted as a school-text crib to educate students, as was also done for Homer. According to this interpretation, Aristeas does not refer directly to this event. In this regard, it is helpful to mention Brock's analysis of the Septuagint because it (Wright III 2006):

> [*H*]as convinced him that the textual-linguistic nature of the translation indicates that it tries to bring the reader to the original, not the original to the reader. (p. 52)

Thus, from the textual-linguistic make-up of the LXX, it is clear that there was originally a relationship of dependence

1.Veltri (2008) accepts this possibility.

2.See Dorival's (1988:43) critique of this theory.

between the Hebrew and the Greek. The Greek is, after all, a translation of the Hebrew/Aramaic (Cook 2017:9).

Theological misunderstandings

For a 'theological' reinterpretation of the concept of 'Bible', see Reeves and Bowley (2003:3–18). According to them, the manuscript discoveries of the past century have been transforming the scholarly study of the literary history of ancient Judaism. Nowhere is this metamorphosis as clear and more evident than in the academic study of the textual integrity of the Hebrew Bible. The Dead Scrolls especially have prompted a number of intriguing questions about the possible relationships of one text to another. However, it should be remembered there was no 'Bible' in the ancient world, at least not in the sense that most scholars use the term. There were instead local specimens and collections of scrolls, including an indeterminate number of traditional myths and tales, songs and hymns, rituals, oracular pronouncements and visions, royal annals and tax rolls, epigrams, legal compilations and genealogical records (Reeves & Bowley 2003:15; see also Peter Gentry 2009:19–45).[3] Emanuel Tov, to whom I shall be returning below, wrote with great insight on this issue.

To be sure, it is not easy to date these translations and new compositions. For this purpose we have two basic criteria: one is external, from witnesses where these witnesses already exist, and the other is internal, from the analysis and characteristics of the translation (see Cook & Van der Kooij 2012:94). However, according to Dorival (1988:31–83), the titles of the books, their grouping and sequence, the arrangement of the material, the different editions of certain books in understanding this transformation of the Bible through being translated into Greek does not end here. This transformation affects certain books, as well as several other divergences of lesser importance but of great cultural and exegetical interest. All this transforms the 'Bible' of Alexandria, even though it is largely a translation, into a literary work that warrants careful study, *an sich*, for its own sake (Fernández Marcos 2000:51).

Ideological misunderstandings

The next misunderstanding concerns the relationship between Hellenism and Semitism (Cook 2019b). Whereas some would deem one older than the other, Fernández Marcos (2000) agrees with Astour (1965:361):

> [*L*]ong before Hellenism imposed itself over the ancient civilisations of the East, Semitism had exercised no less an impact upon the young civilization of Greece. Hellenism became the epilogue of the Oriental civilizations, but Semitism was the prologue of Greek civilization. (p. 9)

Scholars also differ on the question of whether Greek thought had an impact on the Hebrew Bible and the LXX (Cook 2009:17–36; 2019b). Gordon (1955) was one of the first scholars to address this issue systematically (see Cook 2019b):

> [*T*]he spirits pervading Greek and Hebrew literatures are quite different from each other. Indeed the normal difference between any two nations in an international complex can alter drastically the manifestations of their common heritage. The historical connections between Israel and Mesopotamia are established beyond question; but could any cultures be less similar than the Hebrew and Assyrian? No scholar denies the intimate relations between Ugarit and the Bible, and yet the atmospheres of the two are worlds apart. (p. 46)

He does, in this regard, refer to a common Eastern Mediterranean epic tradition. Kaiser (2000:115) differs from Gordon in that he is of the opinion that the Hebrew Bible was influenced fundamentally by Greek thought, '*ehe sich die biblische im Zeitalter des Hellenismus griechischer bediente und damit der Theologie den Weg denkender Vergegenwärtigung des Glaubens wies*'. Greek thought is thus given pride of place by him.

It has become clear to me that the situation is more complicated on the micro-level than suggested by Gerleman (1950:15), who detects a series of what he calls Hellenistic tendencies in the translator of Proverbs. Cook (1997:138) has warned against an unnuanced approach in this regard. What on the face of it seems to be Hellenistic ideas, in many cases, represent Jewish ideas. He has discussed a number of similar Jewish concepts, for instance, the law as a shield for the righteous in Proverbs 28:4 (Cook & Van der Kooij 2012:126). However, there are seemingly also signs of Platonic and Homeric ideas in LXXProverbs. The lexeme ἐργάτις in LXXProverbs 6:8abc is an appropriate example. It has no equivalent in the Hebrew and goes against the Old Testament (OT) attitude of the bee being an evil and dangerous species. What still needs to be determined, however, is the intention of the Greek translator. Cook (2007:87) has demonstrated that what seems to be Hellenistic (Pr 2:11, 17) could be related to the well-known Jewish concept of the good and evil inclinations that rule in each person (Cook & Van der Kooij 2012:112). To return to the bee: Cook (1997:168) has argued that the translator interprets a religious dualism in order to make clear the intention implicit in the text he had available. 'He thus does not draw Aristotle's philosophical view from this Greek motif, but utilises it in order to explicate a religious issue in the Semitic text he is translating' (Cook 1997:168). Cook is in agreement with Fernández Marcos (2000:314) that '[*p*]erhaps Gerleman's conclusions require refining'. At the recent Septuagint conference, held in Stellenbosch, Cook (2020:225) underlined his awareness of the overwhelmingly Jewish nature of LXXProverbs. This fact has to be taken into account when a theology of the LXX is formulated.

A historical perspective on the Masoretic Text

As stated earlier, the growth of the LXX has occurred historically in two phases – a Jewish phase and a Christian one. To be sure, the Jewish phase applies to the Hebrew Bible

3. According to Gentry (2009:21), the discovery entails 930 fragments of some texts. Circa 200 are biblical books, and the dating is ca. 250 BCE – 130 CE. Moreover, most of the scrolls and fragments are written in Hebrew, but some are in Greek and Aramaic.

and OT as well, which is at most an ecclesiastical distinction. After the Hebrew Bible went through various phases of adaptations (editions, revisions, etc.), it was, according to some, finally standardised at the Knesset Gedola during the early Christian era, most probably in Javneh/Jamnia (Sundberg 1997). It was Heinrich Graetz (Council of Jamnia n.d.) who posited this theory in 1871. However, there is no consensus on this question. Philip Davies (2002:50) thinks it, in fact, took place during the Hasmonean era. In time Heinrich Graetz's theory became largely discredited. One of Tov's (2014:37–45) articles is titled 'The Myth of the Stabilization of the Text of Hebrew Scripture'. The gist of Tov's argumentation is that socio-religious factors played a decisive role in the standardisation under discussion. Neusner (1983) also has his own views in this regard.

Graetz obtained information from the Mishna, which was compiled at the end of the 2nd century. It describes a debate over the status of some books of the Ketuvim, and in particular over Ecclesiastes, about whether they render the hands 'impure'. Yadaim 3:5 calls attention to a debate over Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. The Megillat Taanit, in a discussion of days when fasting is prohibited but that are not noted in the Bible, mentions the holiday of Purim (Council of Jamnia n.d.). Based on these details, and a few similar references, Graetz (1871:155) concluded that there had been a Council of Jamnia (or Yavne in Hebrew), which had decided the Jewish canon sometime in the late 1st century (ca. 70–90) (Council of Jamnia n.d.).

Sundberg (1997) argues that the Christians had access to a larger array of Hebrew writings than just the Hebrew canon. The Church became progressively more Greek, with the result that the Jewish Bible was then taken over by Christianity, which accepted it as Christian scriptures (Sundberg 1997). The Septuagint went through a similar, but not identical, process. After Alexander the Macedonian moved Jews from Palestine to Egypt, and the Jews lost their ability to communicate in their mother tongue. A unique situation developed in that the newcomers could no longer understand the Hebrew Bible. The result was that the scriptures had to be translated into Greek, the lingua franca of the Hellenistic world. This is an unprecedented event (Wasserstein 2004:1) in the history of humankind. The Torah was translated by Jews for Jews. The fact of the matter was that the Torah was translated into Greek to meet liturgical and educational needs. The Book of Aristeas endeavoured in the first place to legitimise the translation of the LXX, which had already been criticised for not using the best Hebrew manuscripts (mss). Hence, the Book of Aristeas stressed the fact that the best books were, in fact, brought from Jerusalem. This issue is central to the theory posited by Sidney Honigman (2003) in an innovative monograph entitled *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas*. The differences between the existing Hebrew and Greek texts were noticed by the author of the prologue. The correcting of differences was done by Jewish authors, followed by the text-critical work of Origen in his Hexapla and of Jerome in his translation of the Vulgate. At this stage the Jewish and Christian phases still ran concurrently. Jerome executed his translation in collaboration with the rabbis from Bethlehem, where he settled and prepared a new translation of the Psalms '*iuxta Hebraeos*' (Fernández Marcos 2000:342).

The Christian phase was extended because of the cultural and theological importance of the LXX, and more specifically the LXX as *praeparatio evangelica* – as the best vehicle for spreading Christianity among the large number of proselytes who converted to Jewish monotheism.[4] To be sure, the Church then accepted the Septuagint as its official Bible. Initially this applied only to the Pentateuch; however, the rest of the text was soon translated in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. It took all of four centuries to complete the rest of the Bible, a task undertaken by various translators, exhibiting various translation techniques. In addition to the Old Greek (OG) text, the LXX also added a number of books entitled *de* novo Greek books, such as Wisdom, Judith, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, as well as 1 and 2 Maccabees, including Greek additions to Esther and Daniel. As already stated, the translation of the Hebrew Bible was not the end of the process. It had an impact on various aspects of the textual material (e.g. the titles of books and chapters, their grouping and sequence, etc.).

Rejection of Septuagint (LXX) by Jews

These developments inevitably led to Judaism dispensing with the Septuagint. The following statements on the negative impact that the LXX allegedly had on Judaism put the issue into perspective (Bowker 1969):

1. Rabbinics is almost exclusively the preserve of Jewish scholars and the Greek Bible.
2. Alleged (Ptolemaic) changes brought about the recognised variants in the Septuagint for legitimate reasons (Bavli Megillah [B MEG] a–b):[5]
   a. '[*I*]n the beginning' concerns issues of the temporality of the phrase. According to Ber Rabba, some Greek philosophers claimed that the preposition B should not be understood as indicating time, but rather instrumentally by means of 'pre-existent material'.
   b. 'I shall make man in my likeness and image.'
   c. 'And God completed his works which he had made on the sixth day and he rested on the seventh day.' This verse contains the well-known variant reading 'sixth' instead of 'seventh'. The Hebrew text reads 'seventh', whereas the LXX has 'sixth'. The Masoretic Text (MT) in fact has an anomaly in that it states that *God* worked and rested on the seventh day. The issue at stake is what the background to this reading is. Did the Greek

4.Martin Rösel (2020:7) dealt with this issue at the LXX Conference held in Stellenbosch in August 2018. He referred to the article by Bertram (1957:225–249).

5.Babylonian Tractate Megilah.

translator deliberately change the reading 'seventh' to 'sixth' in order to avoid the anomaly? It is also possible that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of this reading already read the 'sixth'. Be that as it may, the apparent anomaly 'seventh' unacceptably read that God worked and rested on the same day.

d. 'Male with female parts he created him' – the hermaphrodite man – referring to Gnosticism.
e. 'Now I will descend and confound their tongues.'
f. 'And Sarah laughed among her relatives.'
g. 'For in their anger they slew an ox and in their wrath they tore up a stall.'
h. 'And Moses took his wife and sons and made them to ride on a carrier of man.'
i. 'And the sojourning of the children of Israel in Egypt and in other lands were 400 (and 30) years.'
j. 'For Ptolemy And he sent the elect of the children of Israel.'
k. 'And against the elect of the children of Israel he put not forth his hand.'
l. 'I have not taken one valuable of theirs.'
m. 'Which the Lord thy God distributed to give light to all the peoples.'
n. 'And he went to serve other Gods … which I commanded the nations should not be served.'
o. 'And the slender-footed.'
p. 'And the Hare.'
q. 'Because Ptolemy's wife was called Hare.'
r. 'And he might have said.'
s. 'They are mocking me by putting her name in Torah.' (p. 319)

Rabbinic Judaism reflects some knowledge of the story of the translation of the Septuagint. It is definitely negative in judging the process of translation of the LXX and its aftermath (Veltri 2008). In Bavli Megilla and Soferim 1 we read:

> [*T*]he text of the Torah must not be written in (Old) Hebrew or in Aramaic, or in Median Greek. The Scripture in every language and every writing may only be recited if it was written in Assyrian Script. (9a–b; v.7)

The Rabbis and the Greek Bible

Since late antiquity, mainstream rabbinic Judaism has rejected the Septuagint as a valid Jewish scriptural text (Wasserstein 2004:53). To be sure, the break between Judaism and Christianity as far as the Septuagint is concerned was a slow one. According to Wasserstein (2004):

> [*F*]rom being regarded with great approval for many centuries, it has now, by the end of the later centuries of the millennium, come to be a disaster of vast dimensions. (p. 83)

In time the Septuagint became the 'Greek Old Testament', that is, a Christian canon of writings that incorporated all the books of the Hebrew canon, along with additional texts (Septuagint n.d.; Sundberg 1997). The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches include most of the books that are in the Septuagint in their canons. Protestant churches, however, usually do not (Septuagint n.d.). After the Protestant Reformation, many Protestant Bibles began to adopt the Jewish canon and exclude the additional texts, which came to be called 'Apocrypha', or more correctly the 'Deuterocanonical literature' (Septuagint n.d.). Some scholars were unwilling to deem this corpus as scripture. However, this situation changed in due course.

Scholars have different opinions as far as the role and function of Greek in Judaism is concerned. Greek was widely used by Jews in the eastern Mediterranean, from the time of Alexander the Great. However, its role in the translation of Hebrew scripture for Jewish communities did not receive sustained attention. However, this changed, as demonstrated recently by Nicolas De Lange in *Marginalia LA* (2013), where he argued that for too long scholars pursued the study of the Greek Bible and of rabbinic Judaism separately, without devoting attention to their common ground, interrelations and possible mutual influence. There are exceptions, for example Zacharias Frankel (Rösel 2020:7), a leading rabbinics scholar; Abraham Geiger is another example (Rösel 2020:7). They took the Septuagint seriously as a source of rabbinic exegesis and religious concepts. The rabbinic movement emerged in the late 1st century CE in Palestine and favoured the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, whereas the Greek Bible was the product of an earlier age and was used by Jews in the diaspora who did not know Hebrew (De Lange 2013). Of this, Alexandria is the prime example. Many scholars, in fact, think that when the Jews adopted rabbinic Judaism, they abandoned the Greek Bible. The result of this was that the Greek Bible was taken over by the Christian church (De Lange 2013). The Bible of the Jews is the Hebrew MT, which is the basis of all rabbinic exegesis. This does not mean that Greek thought played no role in this exegesis. As a matter of fact, rabbinic Judaism functioned in a context that was far more Hellenised than previously thought. It was Hengel (2001:29) who reminded us that all forms of Judaism from the 2nd century CE were in fact influenced by Hellenism. Hence, the rabbinic texts demonstrate that the rabbis in Palestine were not opposed to Greek Bible translations. BerR iv, 6 has a Greek philosopher quoted by a rabbinic scholar. This is an indication that even rabbis were not opposed to Greek thinking. Moreover, they even quote from the translation by Akylas (also known as Aquila), a convert to Judaism who can be dated to the early 2nd century CE (Fernández Marcos 2000:111). Finally, the fact that the Deuterocanonical writings were included in the Septuagint illustrates the power of Greek at the time.

The LXX in Jewish tradition

It was accepted that the appearance of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion initiated the adoption of the Septuagint by Christians and its rejection by the Jews (Fernández Marcos 2000:109). However, the situation is more complicated. There was a need for translations to be closer to the original Hebrew, for one thing, for the sake of Jewish-Christian polemics, as depicted by the work by Justin the Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon* (Fernández Marcos 2000:109). This would also contribute towards the gradual rejection of the LXX by Jews

before the 2nd century CE, the fixing of the Hebrew canon and the hypothetical Synod of Yamni/Javneh. In the process several biblical books written in Greek and transmitted by the Alexandrian Bible were excluded from the canon.

However, this explanation is also not entirely satisfactory because there is proof of the rejection of the LXX by Jewish communities before the 2nd century CE and earlier than the emergence of Christianity (Fernández Marcos 2000:109). Moreover, extremely surprising is the discovery of the 12 prophet scrolls at Naḥal Ḥever. They exhibit clear signs of correction of the Greek text to fit the Hebrew text then in use. The aim to conform more to the Hebrew texts in these early revisions of the LXX would later lead to the calque translation of Aquila. This was certainly earlier than the Jewish-Christian polemic. According to Fernández Marcos (2000:109), Aquila and Symmachus are independent translators. The complete translation by Aquila was lost, and only a few quotations were found up until 1897. Then more were found by Mercati, Burkitt and Taylor in the Cairo Geniza. The characteristics are fidelity to the Hebrew Text and Semitised syntax. This entails the same Hebrew words being rendered with the same Greek words, as well as its faithfulness to the syllables. Finally, the Hebrew text is seemingly the same as the *textus receptus* (Fernández Marcos 2000:109).

Dominique Barthélemy's (1966) *Les devanciers d'Aquila: première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophéton trouvés dans le désert de Juda* (Brill, Leiden) is arguably the most important publication on the textual criticism from the 20th century. Aquila exhibits pertinent translational characteristics. His fidelity to the Hebrew text is conspicuous.

Symmachus is the one translator not identified with an Aramaic Targum. Geiger identified him as Sumkos ben Yosef of the Talmud, disciple of Rabbi Meir (Fernández Marcos 2000:123), who is mentioned in the Christian tradition by Epiphanius, Eusebius, Jerome and Palladius. According to Epiphanius, Symmachus was a Samaritan despised by his own people. Eusebius and Jerome see him as an Ebionite – of Jewish origin – but according to Schürer he was not a Jew (Fernández Marcos 2000:129). He lived in Galilee circa 200 CE; perhaps he was even Sumkos ben Yosef. Symmachus' sources are fragmentary; for example, Eusebius' commentary on Isaiah has relevant material.

J. R. Buso Saiz focused on the Psalms and J. Conzalez Luis and Salvesen on the Pentateuch (Fernández Marcos 2000:129). They formulated reliable criteria for determining the style and translation technique used by Symmachus:

1. He tends to change Paratactic Hebrew constructions joined by *kai* in the LXX into syntagms of a part + a finite verb.
2. In Greek he usually smooths over the sequence of two consecutive verbs, which reflects a known Hebraism by using an adverb or adjective in apposition.
3. He elegantly translates concepts expressed in Hebrew by more than one word.
4. Unlike Aquila, he does not restrict a particular Greek word to the same Hebrew term.
5. Finally, he tones down anthropomorphisms referring to the deity.

The Septuagint in Christian tradition

Transmission and textual history

The period of acclimatisation of the Greek OT to the Christian Church took place from 70 to 135 CE (Fernández Marcos 2000:192), and includes at least three phenomena that affect the transmission process of the Greek Bible: (1) the displacement of the scroll by the codex (in the Synagogue the scroll continued to be used; the church opted for the codex in the 2nd century), (2) the general use of *kurios* for the Tetragrammaton in Manuscript (MS) transmission and (3) the introduction or at least the general use as a result of Christian influence of the abbreviations in the most frequent *nomina sacra* (Fernández Marcos 2000:192).

The hexapla

Origin, probably the most prominent theologian of his time (Fernández Marcos 2000:204), was apparently the first Christian theologian to learn Hebrew. According to Fernández Marcos (2000:206), he never refers to the hexapla, nor the tetrapla. These terms are used by Eusebius and Epiphanius. These sources were created in order for Christians to study the OT. In his commentary on Matthew, Origin refers to the condition of the Greek text that reached him and how he restored it. This Greek text differed considerably from the Hebrew text he had used. Some scribes were extremely careless.

The Lucianic recension

Lucian was born in Syria and ended up in Antioch. He was a highly qualified theologian and philologist. The Lucianic recension seems to be obscure. The siglum λω (lamda omicron) has occasionally been interpreted as hoi lóipoi or λ, contributing to its obscurity. According to Fernández Marcos (2000:226), this siglum can refer to both, and only a thorough analysis of the readings can resolve the ambiguity. This recension has been observed in all the prophetic books, in the books of the Maccabees, in Judith and in 1 and 2 Ezra. It is also identified in a number of mss (Fernández Marcos 2000:231).

Characteristics

Not all of the characteristics appear in equal measure in the various books. Some features have been noted that are of some guidance in the books and mss mentioned above. Fernández Marcos (2000:231) added criteria of a literary nature. He concludes that the extent and traits of this recension have been nuanced in certain ways and deleted in other books. This has increasingly been confirmed in the historical books.

Hesychian recension

This recension is also called the Alexandrian group of manuscripts. The information about this recension comes from

two passages by Jerome: the prologue to the Chroniclers and the prologue to the evangelist. This is extremely scant evidence, which makes reconstructions problematic. Fernández Marcos (2000:245) does refer to new documents that can throw light on this period of textual history.

Other revisions

In addition to the three classic recensions identified by Jerome, there are additional revisions. These include prehexaplaric revisions, the proto-Lucianic revision and the proto-Massoretic type of Hebrew texts. Fernández Marcos (2000:252) mentions a large number of what he calls parahexaplaric revisions. Finally, it is clear that the textual history of the biblical text is extremely complicated. Fernández Marcos (2000:191) makes the point that the transmission and textual history of the Greek Bible took place mainly in Christian circles.

External transmission

The external transmission of the LXX is linked to the history of the book and of writing in antiquity (Fernández Marcos 2000:194). For the development of the uncials, semi-uncials and miniscule scripts, appropriate material is necessary (Fernández Marcos 2000:194). The collection of the Greek OT comprises a unit with its own textual history (Fernández Marcos 2000:195).

As far as signs of revision in the text of the LXX before the advent of Christianity are concerned, some are stylistic in nature and others are employed to make the Greek fit the current Hebrew text. There are also other changes that the LXX underwent to make it the official Bible of the Church (Fernández Marcos 2000:195).

From the 10th to the 15th centuries, the texts continued to be copied, accumulating new risks of confusion because of the use of the minuscule script (Fernández Marcos 2000:198). Another determining factor in the external history of the LXX is that the sequence of the books in Greek is not the same as those in Hebrew.

The beginning of the 16th century ushered in the period of printed editions, albeit still with primitive textual criteria. Then came the polyglot and scientific editions, some of them, as yet incomplete, proposing as their goal the restoration of a text as close as possible to what the original LXX might have been (Fernández Marcos 2000:198).

The Septuagint and Christian origins

According to Fernández Marcos (2000:129), unlike Jewish communities, Christian communities did not feel themselves to be bound to the Hebrew texts. The new translations, unlike the Targumim (TGG), became independent and took the place of the original in the lives of the various communities.

I end by addressing a relevant question posed by Gert Steyn: 'Which Septuagint are we talking about?'

Not all explicit quotations in the New Testament (NT) were related to the MT. On the contrary, according to Gert Steyn (2008:697), 'most of the NT quotations show closer similarities with a form of the Greek OT rather than with that of the Hebrew OT'. The publication of Alfred Rahlfs' version in 1935 presented a standardised 'Septuagint' edition, which could be referred to as 'the Septuagint' and was used as comparative textual material.

Subsequently many developments have taken place in the discipline of Septuaginta research: (1) the publication of a series of critical text editions by the Göttingen Septuaginta Unternehmen – it was understood that although it represented the so-called Old Greek text, it was not the only such text available; (2) the identification of an OG that is *the* original LXX; (3) a possible proto-Lucian textual tradition taken by F. M. Cross and others as a revision of the OG 'toward a Hebrew text similar to the Samuel scrolls of Qumran cave 4' (Steyn [2008:698] refers to Tov [1986:231], who is not convinced by this postulation); (4) Barthelemy's research on a *kai/ge* recension and its similarities with Theodotion (Ur-Theodotion) took the textual world by storm; (5) the discovery of 8ḤevXIIgr, which demonstrated 'that the collection of Greek scriptures grew through continuous revision of previous translations' and 'that already before the work on the "new" translations from the 2nd century CE had begun, there had already been attempts to amend the Greek text'. It was thus realised that the origin and the development of 'the LXX' was a long process of textual transmission that involved different translators at different places and times, and that it differed markedly from book to book, consisting of different revisions, versions, strands and layers, and of 'shorter and longer texts'.

All these insights, according to Steyn (2008:699), led to an understanding of a much more complex textual situation and one that testifies to a textual theory that supports a multiplicity of available texts 'which stem from a plurality of redactions, or even of original editions/diversity during the 1st century AD'. Tov (1989) and Stipp (1990) have demonstrated this in respect of the books of Jeremiah, whereas Cook (2003:277) has rejected Tov's view that LXXProverbs was the result of a deviating Hebrew *Vorlage*. Tov accepts that the difference in the order of some chapters in LXXProverbs in comparison with MT is the result of deviating Hebrew *Vorlagen*. Cook bases his argument on a translational technical study. Hence, he ascribes the differences to the Greek translator.

It remains an open question what NT scholars are referring to when they talk in general of 'the LXX' – the Pentateuchal OG, a particular codex, a specific OT book in Greek (and in what form), a collection that includes the Deuterocanonical books, Rahlfs' edition or a 'critical ('eclectic') text edition' (Steyn 2008:697)? In this regard one should remember that eclectic texts never had a religious function in religious societies. Thus, the intention of texts is of determinative significance.

In the final analysis, one can hardly speak any longer in general of 'the LXX' with the assumption that we have a mutually agreed upon, reconstructed and standardised text available to use in comparative studies with the explicit quotations in the NT. At the best, 'the LXX' can be used only technically as a collective term – but then again in what form (Steyn 2008:698)? Using a uniform name could lead to the idea that this is the work of a single hand. Jobes and Silva (2001) are clear about this issue: 'there is really no such thing as THE Septuagint', and the one name 'is used to mean quite different things'.

An important prior question to the hermeneutic applied by the author is, where did he find these quotations (origin), and in particular how did they read (version)? A study of the *Vorlage* is thus a prerequisite in order to deal with the function of those quotations in their specific NT contexts (Steyn 2008:706).

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, the conclusion can be drawn that the LXX, *inter alia*, functioned as 'the Bible' of the early church. To be sure, that notion of 'the Bible' differs from the modern concept. Perhaps 'scriptures' is a more appropriate term to use – but then 'scripture' in the sense of ancient writing material. Hence, when Jesus in the NT opened the Bible, it should be understood that he scanned the vellums. Another insight emerging from this research is that the changes that took place when religious literature was canonised came about through a steady and very long process. It would seem that the interpretation that the Council of Jamnia was a significant reality has lost ground.

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