A theology of the Greek version of Proverbs

This contribution demonstrates that it is possible to formulate a theology of LXX Proverbs. It limits itself to a pilot study of three passages, Chapters 1, 2 and 8. A contextual approach is followed and the following conclusions, that have implications for a theology, are reached:

1. 1:1–7 indicates what Proverbs is not, i.e. speculative philosophical ideas
2. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the wisdom is foreign wisdom – the Hellenism of the day
3. Sophia in chapter 8 has a subordinate role in relation to God.

Introduction

There is a difference of opinion on the question as to whether it is possible to formulate a theology of the Septuagint, as is done with the Hebrew Bible. There are effectively two theoretical positions in this regard. The first is a minimalist view held by, among others, the Septuagint scholars Albert Pietersma and Raija Sollamo, who are more sceptical. But some scholars (Martin Rösel, Joachim Schaper, etc.) adopt a maximalist approach. However, it has become clear that these scholars do not differ so much on the question of whether a theology (depending on definitions) of the LXX is viable, but rather on how this could in fact be achieved as a matter of fact the differences between these approaches seem to be rooted in questions of methodology.

In a keynote article presented at the congress of the International Organisation for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) I argued that it is possible to formulate a ‘theology’ – or rather ‘theologies’ – of the Septuagint. One of the prerequisites I mentioned at that stage was that it is first of all necessary to prepare exegetical commentaries on each individual Septuagintal book. It is the aim of this paper to demonstrate how a theology of the Septuagint, in the broad sense of the word, could be formulated. Naturally, it can deal with this question only within a limited scope (LXX Proverbs), and the results are applicable only to the book of Proverbs.

Methodological issues

This article will focus on one translated unit, the book of Proverbs, always remembering that this book cannot be deemed representative of the LXX. As is well known, this unit poses various problems, a prominent one being that the Old Greek has not yet been determined systematically. The pocket edition by Rahlfs (1979) is used as the basis for this contribution. Basic to all interpretative endeavours is the issue of the way the translator(s) rendered the parent text. This unit is unique in that its translation technique can be defined as extremely free in some instances (Cook 2001a:195–210). This means that one could expect the translator to interpret his parent text. Finally, the object of the interpretations is the Old Greek text. The reception of the LXX is therefore deliberately not included in this stage.

Thematic issues

One of the definite advantages of an exegetical commentary is that one can analyse passages contextually. This ensures that researchers do not fall into the trap of ad hoc interpretations. In

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1. I use standard abbreviations that are applied in LXX studies. I also use less known abbreviations that appear in Liddel and Scott (1968).
3. This article, which I dedicate to Prof. Pieter de Villiers, is based upon Text and tradition – An exegetical commentary on the Septuagint of Proverbs. This monograph will be published by the Society of Biblical Literature as part of the Septuagint commentary series (in preparation). See also Cook (1997b:44–65).
4. In the series of the Septuaginta Unternehmen in Göttingen, Peter Gentry is responsible for the book of Proverbs. The researcher should be aware of pertinent textual problems (Cook 2000:163–173).
5. Text and context should be accounted for in the exegesis of texts. Moreover, this translator had a contextual approach towards the parent text.
this regard I will deal with one central issue in Wisdom literature, the topos wisdom, specifically the role of wisdom. I focus on Proverbs chapter 1 verses 1–7, chapters 2 and 8, which must act as a pilot study.

1 Wisdom in Proverbs 1:1–7 (Cook 1997b: 33–50)

Chapter 1 is as an introduction to the whole book of Proverbs. McKane (1970:262) divides the Hebrew version into three pericopes; 1–7 Introduction; 8–19 (flee sin and violence) and 20–33 (Wisdom as preacher). To be sure, this division agrees with the Massoretic division. This chapter contains many differences in comparison with MT that could be the result of several theoretical possibilities: a different parent text, the translator’s approach, or the transmission history of the manuscripts.

Scholars differ as far as the literary role of this chapter is concerned. D’Hamonville (2000:158) sees verses 1–7 as preface to Proverbs 1–9. McKane (1970:262) argues that verses 1–7 act as an introduction to the book as a whole. In the LXX verses 1–7 form an introduction, since they define what true wisdom is.

Verse 1:

[The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.] παροιμίας Σαλωμῶντος υἱοῦ Δαυιδ ὃς ἐβασίλευσεν ἐν Ἰσραηλ.

[The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, who reigned in Israel.] מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

The term παροιμία is used rarely in the LXX. In Proverbs it appears in chapter 1:1 and in some manuscripts in 25:1 as equivalent for פרש. It is clear from the beginning that the translator is interpreting his parent text. In verse 1 the noun פרש is understood as a verbal phrase ἐβασίλευσεν ἐν Ἰσραηλ. All the other versions follow the construction in MT. D’Hamonville (2000:158) immediately resorts to discussing the reception of the LXX, including the NT. In the NETS project the intention is to focus on the Old Greek text.

Verse 2:

[For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight] γνῶναι παιδείαν καὶ παθεῖν νοῆσαί τε λόγων νοῆσαί τε κατευθύνειν τε δέξασθαι μοσαρ. [To learn wisdom and discipline and to understand words of prudence,]

Verse 3:

[for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity:] δεξιοτείας τε σοφοίς λόγουν νοησάσθαι τε δικαιοσύνην ἐλεήμονα κρίμα κατευθύνειν [and to grasp subtlety of words and to understand true righteousness and to direct judgment]

Verse 3 contains laden renderings such as σοφοίς λόγων for חכמה. The Greek word σοφή occurs only four times in the LXX, in Sap Sal 8:8; Sir 39:2; Ps Sal 12:2 and here in Proverbs. It is used frequently in other Greek sources. Sir 39 (1–11) is instructive in this regard; the word refers to the wise, describing the true, enigmatic nature of his studies. In this context the combination σοφοίς παραβολῶν is used to describe the ‘problematic’ nature of the sayings studied by the wise. The same meaning is found in Sap Sal, where this lexeme is used in conjunction with διώκω, which also occurs very rarely in the Septuagint (cf. Pr 1:6). In the context of Sap Sal 8:8, wisdom is described as the source of knowledge concerning ‘the past, the future, the intricate meanings of arguments and riddles, and even signs and wonders’. To be sure, the same combination of σοφοίς λόγων also occurs in this passage (Pr 1:3). It seems to be a technical term, even though it does not appear frequently. It is therefore evident that the translator of Proverbs had the same intention of stressing the meaning of ‘problematic, complicated’ in using these words. If he therefore actually had the same Hebrew reading as MT (Barucq 1964:48), then it would seem as if he interpreted פרש as deriving from the verb פרש (the Hoftal masc part) ‘to turn aside, to withdraw, to evade’. A hint at to the possible interpretation of this lexeme is in fact found in Sir 6:22, where the Hebrew indeed reads פרש (Skehan & Di Lella 1987:191). The stich provides the necessary semantic contents: ‘For discipline is like her name: she is not obvious to many.’ According to this interpretation, פרש indeed has to do with the ‘enigmatic, problematic’.6

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6 In this regard H. P. Stopp (2014:30–41) adds two prerequisites: ‘Es muss befriedigende Gewissheit über den Wortlaut der Vorlage des Übersetzers herrschen, um die Möglichkeit auszuschliessen, dass er lediglich eine abweichende Lesart reproduzierte’ and ‘Es muss hinreichend gesichert sein, dass der Übersetzer (sic) der Differenz zwischen der Vorlage und ihrer zielsprachlichen Repräsentation bewusst war’.

7. The translation of the Hebrew is the NRSV and that of the Greek NETS (Cook 2007).

8. Unfortunately the Greek version of Sir 6:22 does not have the lexeme σοφή.
On the one hand, it is possible that the verbal form נוֹשֶׁת could be an infinitive as a rendering of the Hif’im (ם) ה’ll. On the other hand, it is also possible that the infinitive was added in conjunction with the previous verse. However, this would then leave רכש unaccounted for. In this regard the combination of פֹּקֶד long is instructive, for לִגְוֹנָ ח seems to have been added in conjunction with the previous verse in order to explicate רכש. The translator consequently probably created the antithesis of the combination לִגְוֹנָ ח פֹּקֶדigsaw πανουργία in verse 2. Contrasting is in fact a specific technique that is used extensively in the LXX of Proverbs (Cook 1997a).

The final two stichs in verse 3 also do not represent a literal rendering of the MT. פֶּתִי is probably taken from נוֹשֶׁת, but הלֶחַיה seems to be an addition either as an adjective or as a noun referring to ‘truth’ (תא הליה). The translator seemingly glossed נוֹשֶׁת with פֹּקֶד long הלֶחַיה. I also think κρίμα is the equivalent of פֶּתִי, whereas κατακθήνους has been introduced in connection with רֵי (א פֹּקֶד) by the translator. This Greek verbal form occurs in Proverbs 1:3 (א פֹּקֶד); 4:26 (דד); 9:15 (ר); 13:13 (;); 15:8 (ר and 21 (ר); 21:2 (הל); 23:19 (ר) and 29:27 (ר). All these lexemes are semantically related.

The fact that רכש is rendered differently in these two verses is interesting. The Hebrew lexeme occurs 28 times in Proverbs. In practically all these passages one Greek lexeme, παιδεία, was used as is the equivalent. This is not the normal practice of this translator, since he tends to vary expressions. In verse 2 רכש is thus translated relatively literally as a noun παιδεία; however, in verse 3 it is brought into connection with the root רכש. Again, this could be the result of the translator’s free approach, or he could have misunderstood the Hebrew. Another possible Hebrew reading is suggested by De Lagarde (1863:3). However, I think this particular reading is not applicable (Cook 1997b:51).

Verse 4:
נֶعطاء הַלֶחַיה נֶעָר לָתֵ֣ת לִפְתָֽאיִם עָרְמָ֑ה לְנַ֗עַר דַּ֣עַת וּמְזִמָּֽה
[to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young]

In δέ ὁ ἄκακος παιωνηγηνεν, παιδί δὲ νέον αὐτοθεντιν τε καὶ έννοουν
[in order that he might give shrewdness to the innocent and both perception and insight to the young child.]

In verse 4 the infinitive is expressed differently from the way it is done in previous examples. Whereas the final clauses in verses 2 and 3 were expressed by means of infinitives, in this verse the translator uses the particle竞价 as a subjunctive. Only the Latin evidence exhibits a similar possible construction. All available material has the phrase ‘ut detur paralitis …’ This is an indication of the translator’s intention to create cohesion between these verses (Tauberschmidt 2004:112).

The object of the first stich is παιωνηγηα, which appears seven times in the LXX, consistently as a rendering for נוֹשֶׁת. This Hebrew lexeme has the connotation of ‘shrewdness’ as part of its semantic field in certain contexts such as Gen 3:1. This is in accordance with the way παιωνηγηα is used, for example, by Aristotle (HA 488b20) for describing the ‘cunning’ of animals. The meaning of ‘clever’, ‘smart’ also applies in Arist EN 1144a28 and Plu 2.28a.

Ἀκᾶκος appears 9 times in Proverbs, 1:4 (τος) and 22 (τος); 2:21 (τος); 8:5 (τος); 13:7 (τος); 14:15 (τος); 15:10 (*) and 23 (*) and 21:11 (τος). Here it has τος as Vorlage, a Hebrew lexeme that is rendered in various ways in chapter 1. In verse 22 ἄκακος is used, but in verse 32 νόημος is the equivalent. In the other passages the distribution of τος is as follows: 7:7 (ἀφρώνων); 8:5 (ἄκακος); 9:4 (ἀφρών) and 16 (ἀφρών); 14:15 (ἄκακος) and 18 (ἀφρών); 19:25 (ἀφρών); 21:11 (ἄκακος); 22:3 (ἀφρών) and 27:12 (ἀφρών). Three lexemes are thus used as equivalents for τος, with the cluster of lexemes concerning ἄφρων the most frequently used, namely seven times. Four examples are of ἄκακος, with νόημος as the apparent exegetical rendering.

There is a pertinent difference between ἄκακος and ἄφρων in Greek literature. The first denotes the innocent in many contexts. In the LXX, for instance, Job is called an ἄκακος ἄνθρι. This is also the case in Plato’s Timaeus 91d, where the innocent are described as ἄκακος ἄνθρι. Philo Judaeus (Spec III, 119) uses this term in connection with innocent children. He also applies a related term, ἂνθρι, in order to depict the state of existence in paradise. ἄφρων, on the other hand, expresses a more negative meaning in most contexts. The Hebrew lexeme יָסֶר (fool) is rendered, inter alia, by means of this Greek equivalent in the OT. It is also used to render תַּלָּק and יֹהָ in both the Psalms and Proverbs.

The adjective νόης has no equivalent in MT, although יָסֶר does have the connotation of youth (as does adulescentus in V) or novice as part of its semantic field, which probably led to the explanatory addition. This is an example of a combination of words that the translator uses in order to make clear his understanding of the parent text. He is clearly distinguishing between and describing different groups of people. This verse mentions the innocent and the inexperienced, who are in need of prudence, insight and knowledge.

Ἄθεος occurs 22 times in Proverbs and, according to HR, consistently as the equivalent of יָסֶר. The meaning of ‘insight’ is therefore the prevailing one (cf. also Plu Luc 11; Pl Ap 40c and Plot 4.7.15). ‘opus, on the other hand, appears 12 times in Proverbs. In 1:4; 3:21 and 8:12 it is used in conjunction with יָסֶר, whereas in 5:2; 8:12 (2x); 18:15; 23:19 and 24:7 it is applied in the context of σοφος/σοφοι. These contexts stress the meaning of ‘knowledge’, as is the case in Plu Def 414a and 2.1077d.

Verse 5:
נֶعطاء הַלֶחַיה נֶעָר לָתֵ֣ת לִפְתָֽאיִם עָרְמָ֑ה לְנַ֗עַר דַּ֣עַת וּמְזִמָּֽה
[let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill.]

τόνδε γέρ ᾄκακος σοφός σοφότερος ἐσται δὲ νόημοι κυβέρνησιν κτίστω
[for by hearing these things the wise will become wiser and the discerning will acquire direction]
The alliteration in this verse is striking. Syntactically LXX differs from MT, since the Hebrew imperfectum/jussive is rendered by means of a participle. In addition, τῶν δὲ γὰρ has no equivalent in MT and is an attempt to relate verse 5 and the previous verses 2–4, which in their turn refer to the Proverbs of Solomon. פָּרָשִׁים is interpreted freely as סְפָרִים. According to KB, the lexeme פָּרָשִׁים has the connotation of ‘understanding’ in Is 29:24; Proverbs 1:5 and 9:9. In the context of Proverbs 1 it is particularly the wise who have understanding.

The Hebrew form is a noun which, according to KB, is in the final analysis derived from פָּרָשִׁים and which in the Hif expresses the meaning ‘to interpret’ in some contexts. There are only two occurrences of the noun פָּרָשִׁים in the Hebrew Bible, Proverbs 1:6 and Hab 2:6; according to KB, in both contexts the translation ‘allusive saying’ is applicable.

The first six verses are grouped together closely by the translator, that is, by means of the conjunction ταῦτα. It is part of the introduction of the wisdom book and stresses the need for the wise to have wisdom, instruction, insight, prudence, eloquence (dealing in words), direction, discernment and to understand true justice and to make correct decisions. Verse 6 is particularly instructive, for it contains suggestive concepts relating to the unknown, the enigmatic and the uncovered. The final segment in the introduction is verse 7, which acts as a clear statement of the way the wise should endeavour to solve all the riddles and enigmas referred to earlier.

Verse 7:

[The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.]

The addition of two stichs represents the first major plus in the Septuagint of Proverbs. There are conspicuous correspondences and differences between the texts under discussion. Even though the contents of the words in the first stich are formally the same as in the MT, the order of these words is inverted. Moreover, the last stich seems to be a relatively literal rendering of the second stich in MT and the third stich of MT 7a. Finally, the second stich has no equivalent in MT or in any of the other versions. The most conspicuous characteristic of these stichs is the fact that a and b correspond to a large extent to Ps 110 (LXX) verse 10, which reads as follows:

[Beginning of wisdom is fear of God, and understanding is good for all those who practice it, and piety unto God is the beginning of perception; the impious, however, will despise wisdom and discipline.]

In the Septuagint versions of Psalms and Proverbs the first two stichs correspond to a large extent. There are only two differences. The first concerns the name of God. Mss 23, S, B, Arab, Syh, La, 248mg and Ach all read 8θεο. The second is a typical feature of the translator of Proverbs, namely the
abundant application of particles, in this case ὅτε. It is therefore possible that the translator of Proverbs in fact used the Psalm text in this regard. This at least provides an interpretation for the second stich in the current verse in Proverbs that has no equivalent in MT. Moreover, translators used additional textual material, whereas Origen was less apt to apply external material, mostly sticking to his Hebrew text. If in this case the translator actually used the material from the Psalms, then it would naturally mean that the translator of Proverbs already knew the Psalms version of the Septuagint (Cook 2001b:228).

It is rather difficult to determine which of these stichs in the Septuagint are original. If one follows a theory according to which the Hebrew of the translator did not differ substantially from MT, then it would seem as if stichs a and d are the logical candidates for the OG. As already stated, however, one problem in this regard is that the order of the first stich is reversed compared to MT. One could therefore, on the one hand, argue that there are significant differences between the two, an argument which De Lagarde (1863:6) apparently accepts. On the other hand, the translator does vary constructions at times for literary effect. Thirdly, a similar stich occurs in Proverbs 9:10a, but where the order of the Hebrew (MT) is followed in the LXX. It is therefore possible that the translator changed the order of one of the phrases in the light of the other. Fourthly, Weingreen (1973:411) has argued that this verse actually contains an example of rabbinc-type exegesis.

The Peshitta has the same word order as the LXX in the first stich. This could naturally be an indication that there was a Hebrew Vorlage containing this order of words. However, the relationship between LXX and Peshitta is a complex one and I have demonstrated that only in a few cases did the Peshitta translator in Proverbs in fact follow the Septuagint.10 This was seemingly the case when he experienced a specific problem in his Hebrew text. It could therefore be that LXX and Peshitta actually share a common Hebrew Vorlage for which there is unfortunately no evidence except these versions.

On the basis of external material, Fritsch (1973:170) deems stichs a and b as the Old Greek. He follows the Origenian sigla, which were noted in the Syh and according to which stichs a and b have been tagged with the obelus. These instances he calls ‘[r]examples with the Origenian signs correctly noted’. If these sigla are in fact correct, then this is certainly a strong possibility, at least as far as the first stich is concerned. According to him, stichs c and d are closer to the Hebrew and are consequently hexaplaric (1973:170). He does not discuss the fact that Syh also has an obelus in connection with an additional stich that is vaguely related to the third stich in the LXX. De Lagarde (1863:6), contrary to Fritsch, seems to think that stichs a and b are secondary.

10 Cf. Cook (1993:125). This is contrary to Fox (2013). Cf. also the discussion of verse 5.

Evidently there is no consensus concerning these additions. The question as to what the origin of the added stichs is thus remains unanswered. One possibility would be to take them as double translations according to the rules formulated by De Lagarde (1863:3). It is also a question of deciding which of these stichs would in fact be the doublets. One possibility is that stich c is a double translation of MT 7a and stich d of MT 7b. Another viable option would be to argue that c and d actually represent the OG, as stich c is after all not that literal an equivalent of MT 7a. If this is the case, then one could argue that a and b are later additions, as suggested by De Lagarde. It remains to determine what actually led to this extension and when this took place.

As far as double translations are concerned, it remains difficult to determine whether such additions were brought about purposely by the translator (Talshir 1987:27). It is therefore a question of whether it is possible that the translator thought the original statement in this verse somewhat abrupt and consequently decided to interpret. In this case he could himself have been responsible for stichs c and d. Contrary to De Lagarde’s view, it seems more probable that the translator actually made use of Psalm 110 (LXX) in the translation of this verse. The problem, therefore, remains that in a translation unit as freely rendered as Proverbs it is not easy to distinguish between the work of the translator and possible later hands. A lexical study of the lexemes in the pluses, for example, indicates that they are all used relatively regularly in LXX Proverbs, which could point to the fact that the same person has added these stichs. One lexeme, ἐξουθενέω, is found only in this single passage in LXX Proverbs in stich d, but this is the case with a number of other Greek words as well and this is typical of the translator of Proverbs. Therefore either the translator was responsible for this addition, or a later revisor who knew the subject matter added this stich. Significantly, this verse is also the end of the first pericope before the fatherly instructions follow. Perhaps this would naturally lead to explication.

It is difficult to reach a definite conclusion in this instance. Before proposing a conclusion, therefore, it is important to determine to what extent this translator did indeed make use of quotations from other biblical passages (Cook 2010). The external data, especially Syh, attest to stichs a and b being part of the OG. It would then be possible that stich c, being a relatively literal translation of the Hebrew of stich a and d of MT stich b, is part of the hexaplaric text. This conclusion is problematic, for it does not follow logically from the rules of thumb formulated by De Lagarde, because the third stich is not that literal a translation of the MT. The solution is to be found in a more holistic approach to these first seven verses. As I stated above, they act as an introduction to the book as a whole. These verses give an indication of what a wise man needs in order to be wise, or to become even wiser (verse 5); he needs the Σαλωμῶντος. However, says the translator, the most fundamental aspect of wisdom – the beginning thereof – is the φῶς τοῦ. Consequently, no specific form of wisdom, or some speculative or even
esoteric knowledge, is basic to understanding, but a religious phenomenon, the fear of God. This is of course the intention of the Hebrew too, but the translator adds the passage from Psalm 110 (LXX) in order to underscore this meaning.

It is clear to me that the translator deliberately quotes from the Psalm in order to make a clear statement as to where knowledge and wisdom originate. This is of course an indication of the 'ideological' orientation of the translator, for by implication he is remaining within his Jewish tradition by referring to this biblical text. It is moreover interesting that Ben Sira also uses the phrase or idea of 'the fear of the Lord' extensively in his opening chapter (vv. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 27, 28 and 30).

In the final analysis I therefore take all four stichs as the Old Greek. The first two are a direct quotation from the Psalms by the translator, who is also responsible for the last two, which are renderings of the Hebrew that in this instance correspond with MT.

To summarise: these first seven verses have been rendered coherently by the translator and they make excellent sense – the sense he intended his audience to understand. Or as Van der Kooij (1987:127) states fittingly about the book of Proverbs (LXX): it is at the same time an appropriate translation and interpretation. The translator saw these verses as the introduction to the chapter (and to the book as a whole), even though he had a different view on the syntactic coherence of the verses and the chapter as a whole for that matter. The particle τε, for example, is employed extensively to connect the different stichs syntactically. This makes the introduction a closer knit unit than is the case in MT.

Chapter 1 is thus seen by the translator as an introduction to the whole of the book of Proverbs (the collection he had in front of him). It functions especially as an introduction to chapter 2, where the wisdom teacher is directly instructing the son into the ways of wisdom. Chapter 1 is an introduction to these teachings and consequently the dualism between the good and the bad, which is already implicit in the Hebrew text, is depicted much more explicitly in the Greek translation. This dualism is again the overriding theme in chapter 2.

Wisdom in Proverbs 2

The אִשָּׁה זָרָה as foreign wisdom

I have demonstrated in various contexts that the person(s) responsible for the book of Proverbs in its Greek guise adopted a fairly systematic approach towards the parent text. As far as the figure of the strange woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה) is concerned, five chapters from the first nine chapters are relevant. These are chapters 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9 (Cook 1994). This prominent figure plays a decisive role in this first part of the book. Scholars have divergent perspectives on the loose woman. Some see her as a foreigner, others regard her as literary figure, Fox (2000:361) interprets her in a literal sense and yet to others she is a personification of foreign wisdom (Hengel 1973).

Proverbs 2

In the Hebrew this chapter is an acrostic passage, which is the case with chapters 8 and 31 verses 10–31 as well. The chapter can be divided into two main parts: the protasis, verses 1–4 and the rest of the chapter that makes up the apodosis. Verses 16–19 are directly relevant to the issue at stake.

11 Βοόλη καλή φιλάξα σε ἐννοια δὲ ὁσία τερήσα σε
[11 good counsel will guard you, and holy intent will protect you.]
16 τοῦ μακρᾶν σε ποιήσαι ἀπὸ ὀδὸν εὐθείας καὶ ἀλλότριων τῆς δικαίας γνώμης
[16 in order to remove you far from the straight way and to make you a stranger to a righteous opinion.]
17 νεότης, μή σε καταλάβῃ κακή βουλή ή ἀπολείπεσοι διδασκαλίαν νεότητος καὶ διαθήκην θείαν ἐπελελημένη
[17 My son, do not let bad counsel overtake you, which forsakes the teaching of youth and has forgotten the divine covenant;]

As far as contents are concerned, chapter 2 can be divided into two parts. Verses 1–12 refer to the good realm and verses 13–22 describe the bad realm. Verses 11 and 17 are significant and contain related but contrasting concepts. Verses 16 and 17 are especially crucial and contain an addition compared to MT and the other witnesses. Verse 16 in MT reads as follows:

The LXX has:

tοῦ μακρᾶν σε ποιήσαι ἀπὸ ὀδὸν εὐθείας καὶ ἀλλότριων τῆς δικαίας γνώμης;

It is clear that the translator does not deliberately avoid the הַיָּרְץ הַשָּׁבָת, but reinterprets it in order to make a theological point that is expressed even more clearly by the translation of verse 17.

Whereas MT has two stichs:

The LXX has three (Fox 2015:95):

The first strophe has no equivalent in the other textual witnesses and in my view is a deliberate addition by the translator with reference to bad counsel (κακή βουλή). The antithesis of this concept, good counsel (καλή βουλή), is found in verse 11 and is, as stated above, part of the good realm. I have indicated that these two Greek concepts are not typically Greek, but have as their cultural background the Jewish concepts חַיָּרְץ שָׁבָת and דַּרְכֵּים יְרוּשָׁלָיִם (Cook 1997b:134–139). Fox differs from this interpretation, since according to him 'the
counsels’ described here are not internal impulses (Fox 2000:361). I think he does not take seriously enough the fact that the two concepts are part of the two realms, as I demonstrated above. I also do not think our interpretations are that far apart. After all, he concedes that good counsel is wisdom and bad counsel is folly. The difference lies in the fact that he does not accept a further level of abstraction, whereas I argue that bad counsel is indeed a metaphor for foreign wisdom, namely Hellenism. He also seems to accept that the strange woman is a symbol, what he calls a stable metaphor.\footnote{Fox, ‘Strange woman’, 34 footnote 7.}

In my view the conservative Jewish translator has reused typical Jewish exegetical traditions regarding the good and evil inclinations that, according to Judaism, are found in each person. It is clear that the translator did not intend to avoid the sexual issues inherent in the Hebrew – in chapter 7 a corresponding phrase is translated literally. I have taken this interpretation of הקַה בִּנְוַּֽלָּֽה to be a reference to foreign wisdom in the sense of un-Jewish/non-Israelite wisdom (Cook 1994:465).

In this regard I find that the view of Yee, who has argued for a literary interpretation of the various speeches – the seductive words of the loose woman, on the one hand, and those of the father, on the other hand – opens interesting perspectives on the understanding of this figure. According to her, it is not literal things, such as the physical body of the woman, that are dangerous, but rather her words, her speeches. Hence I have argued (Cook 1994:465) that also in the LXX it is not the אִשָּׁה זָרָה herself who is dangerous, but her words, or rather her bad words, bad counsel.

I have demonstrated that bad counsel in this context is indeed a metaphor for foreign wisdom, namely Hellenism (Cook 1994:465). I follow Hengel (1973:281), although he is not clear about what this strange wisdom is, in that I argue that it refers to the strange wisdom, namely the Hellenism of the day.

Proverbs 8

This chapter contains one of the classic passages on creation in the Hebrew Bible. It has been composed beautifully and has a structure of 4 sections in the Hebrew, 1–11; 12–21; 22–31 and a peroration 32–36. It has apparently been structured acrostically. The first and third sections are made up of 22 lines, but the middle section has only 21 lines. However, this is the result of the transmission history of this chapter. This chapter moreover contains crucial exegetical renderings of which many are aimed at emphasising the omnipotence of God. Here I will only deal with verses 22–31.

Verses 22–31 the role of Wisdom in creation

The LXX’s understanding of this pericope differs from that of MT.

Verse 22:

[The Lord created me at the beginning of his ways, for the sake of his works.]

There are a few exegetical renderings in these passages. The translator has opted for a specific meaning as far as the polyvalent Hebrew lexeme יְֽהוָ֗ה is concerned (‘to acquire’/‘to create’). This Hebrew verb is used 11 times in Proverbs. The verb קֻרְיוּ (before) is never used with the connotation of εἰς, but it is used once in Proverbs. Seemingly the translator is interpreting. Walters (1973:200) argues that קֻרְיוּ in this context is the result of a confusion between it and קֵכָּז. Be that as it may, from the context it is clear that this verb is used in order to underscore the meaning of creation and not that of ‘to acquire’. The deliberate omission of the combination יְֽהוָ֗ה is conspicuous. The preposition υἱοῦ (before) is never used with the connotation of εἰς (for the sake of) and is an exegetical rendering. I think the interpretation of wisdom being created ‘for the sake of’ the works is a deliberate endeavour by the translator to play down the ‘independent’ role of the wisdom. Hence she was created for the sake of ...

Verse 23:

[Before the present age he founded me, in the beginning.

The tendency to underscore the creative action of God is continued in this verse. The Hebrew verb יְֽהוָ֗ה is a passive and is rendered by means of εἶθεμελίωσεν, he founded me. This is indeed the sole occurrence of this Greek verb for יְֽהוָ֗ה.]

Verses 24:

[Before he made the earth and before he made the depths, before he brought forth the springs of the waters.]

The first part of the first stich is part of verse 23 in the Hebrew. In the second stich the Greek has God as the subject where the Hebrew is ambivalent or uses a passive form. This is in line with the trend discussed above. Stylistically this verse and the next one exhibit an interesting phenomenon. The combination πρὸ τοῦ plus an infinitive is applied abundantly. In these instances the subject of the verbs is consistently the Lord, deliberately avoiding misunderstanding.
Verse 25:

It is difficult to determine whether the deviations in stitch b to stress the specific position of wisdom. This is underscored by the addition of ἡσυχία to MT or LXX. It therefore seems to me that which is a much more independent role than is the case either in MT or LXX. It represents an interpretation of Sophia's role in the creation, and understanding. The terminology attributed to Solomon is used in three passages only in the LXX: in To 12:12; here in Proverbs 8:27 and Sap Sal 9:10. It has no indication of vaults, but apparently only in the heavens. Θρόνον could therefore be an acceptable translation of this lexeme. If this is indeed the case, then a throne would hardly be situated in the deep, which could have prompted the translator to change the location to the winds. Elsewhere in the Old Testament reference is made to the Lord sitting on his throne on the heavens (Pss 11:4; 47:9 and 103:19. It is also implied in Is 14:13–14). It is naturally possible that this represents an internally motivated harmonisation with verse 28.

Verse 26:

When he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains on the deep.

There is a tendency to avoid referring to the 'deep' in verses 27 and 28, which is probably the result of internal harmonisation.

Verse 27:

When he made strong the clouds above, and when he made firm the skies above, he established the heavens.

The first two stichs are omitted in the main LXX manuscripts and therefore do not appear in Rahlfis.

Verse 28:

When he assigned the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth

Verse 30 (Cook 1997b:3–50):

This verse is the locus classicus as far as arguments concerning the so-called Stoic colouring of the LXX are concerned. The verbal form ἅρμοζεν has been taken as ‘to join, to accommodate, bring into harmony’, which is then seen as an idea ‘indigenous to the Stoic view of nature’ (Gerleman 1950:26). The Greek lexeme ἅρμοζεν occurs only in 10 passages
in the LXX: in ii Ki 6:5 (*) and 14 (ὑπ’); Ps 151:2 (-); Prov 8:30 (ὑπάρχει); 17:7 (*ὑπαρχεῖ); 19:14 (ὑπάρχει), 25:11 (ὑπάρχει) (only in S2); Na 3:8 (*ὑπάρχει); ii Ma 14:22 and iii Ma 1:19. It is thus used to render different lexemes in Proverbs. In Proverbs 17:7 the Hebrew contains a contrast between the speech of a fool and of a king:

The Septuagint has the following translation: οὖχ ἁρμόζει ἄφρονι γελή ποταύ ὠδόν δικαιό γελή φανερή. In this context the meaning of ‘fitting’ clearly prevails. In Proverbs 19:14 the Hebrew reads: ἡ ἀρμόζειν ἐφήσεις ἀμωνικά ἄφρονι ποταύ ὠδόν γελήν γελήν φανερήν. House and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. οὖς καὶ ὑπάρχειν μερίζουσιν πατέρες παπάν παρά δὲ θεοῦ ἁρμόζεται γυνὴ ἀνδρὶ. In this context the meaning of ‘betroth’ is dominant. Nahum 3:8 is the closest parallel to the passage under discussion.

The Hebrew has:

The LXX reads:

The Greek seems to be an interpretation of the Hebrew and consequently argue that it is also not necessarily to be accepted therefor, not imperative in any of these passages. I would therefore, not accept Gerleman in this regard and on the basis of the passage under discussion talks about ‘popularphilosophische Züge’. Indications of such signs are the pre-existence of wisdom (verse 22); the fact that she was created for the sake of God’s works (v. 22) and the question of wisdom experiencing joy (vv. 30b and 31) in this regard. Hengel (1973:293) poses the question whether the description of wisdom is not to be seen ‘als eine Art von Weltseele’, which is the way it functions in Plato’s Timeus. He opts for this explanation, because the typical Stoic notion of the identification of God and matter would certainly have been a problem for a Jewish translator. According to Hengel, the Platonic version with its reference to Demiurges as personal creation gods would have been more acceptable to Jews.

I do not regard the small number of references to typical Stoic or popular philosophical traits referred to by the above-mentioned scholars as convincing evidence. The connotations of ‘to join, prepare, harmonise’ for ἁρμόζειν, which are certainly found in extra-biblical writings, need not to be reconstructed in this context. In my view the verb ἁρμόζειν actually describes wisdom’s relationship with the creator. It is not used to depict her relationship towards creation. This relationship is described in the rest of the verse as well. The Greek ἐγὼ ἡμὴν ἤ προσέχαρεν, ‘I was the one in whom he took delight’, is less ambiguous than MT. Conscious is the addition of the personal pronoun ἐγὼ. It could be a case of stressing the subject, underlining the privileged role wisdom actually had beside God. The final hemistich is a literal rendering of the Hebrew.

The emphasis of the whole pericope in its Greek version is thus on God’s activity in the creation process. She has no other role to play than that of being happy and joyful, which also need not to be seen as an exclusive characteristic of Stoicism. Therefore I translate ἁρμόζειν with ‘fitting together’, a meaning that appears in specific contexts. In my view the translator underscores the creative role of God in...
the creation. This is once again borne out by the translation of the next verse.

Verse 31:

The problematic Hebrew lexemes שָׂחַק and תֶּבֶל (Pi’el participle feminine singular of שָׂחַק) overlap as far as specific meanings in their respective semantic fields are concerned. They are apparently rendered interchangeably in these verses, as the verb εὐφραίνω is the equivalent in both verses 30 and 31. This could of course be the stylistic work of the translator, for he uses εὐφραίνω in the last instance. This lexeme occurs only in these two passages in the LXX and also in different mss.

There are, however, significant differences between the Hebrew (MT) and the LXX. Syntactically this verse is structured differently from MT, in that it is a final clause. The Hebrew simply placed verses 30 and 31 paratactically next to one another. Moreover, the Pi’el participle feminine, שָׂחַק, was intentionally changed into a third person masculine singular by the translator. In addition he interpreted the noun phrase מְשַׂחֶק בְּתֵבֵל ארץ as a verbal phrase τὴν οἰκουμένην συντελέσας. It is difficult to decide what the underlying Hebrew was in this case. In verse 26 נָשַׂא was probably translated as οὐράνιος, although it is possible that the translator actually referred to οἰκουμένα in this regard. I suppose it is theoretically possible that he had the root נָשַׂא (to mix, prepare) as underlying Hebrew for נָשַׂא in this verse. He deliberately changed the person from feminine to masculine, in order to leave no room for misunderstanding that it is indeed the Lord that is creating and not Lady Wisdom.

This chapter contains many differences compared to MT and other textual witnesses. The translator applied the acrostic principle more stringently than the author of the Hebrew. One example is the addition to verse 21. This chapter also contains the classical pericope on creation and I argued that in the LXX it should not be interpreted in line with Platonic and/or Stoic perspectives. Rather, the translator consistently emphasised the fact that the Lord is the independent creator and that Lady Wisdom has only a secondary role to play in the creation process.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the translator of the Septuagint Proverbs adopted a contextual approach towards its parent text. Hence inter- and intra-textual interpretations abound. In some instances he applied external exegetical perspectives, primarily Jewish-orientated traditions in order to formulate an ideological view. Three aspects play a role in connection with the formulation of a theology of LXX Proverbs:

1. 1:1–7 indicates what Proverbs is not, i.e. speculative philosophical ideas
2. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the wisdom is foreign wisdom – the Hellenism of the day
3. Sophia in chapter 8 has a subordinate role in relation to God.

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