

Translation Technique and the Reconstruction of Texts¹

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that, because of the complicated history of origin and transmission histories of texts, more avenues need to be pursued than only primary textual witnesses in the task of textual criticism. It argues that the translation technique followed by individual translators is basic to such endeavours. It uses the Septuagint version of Proverbs as a case study and demonstrates that stylistic and translation technical considerations should be taken into account in addition to, or in conjunction with, any 'hard textual evidence' in the reconstruction of texts.

A INTRODUCTION

Definitions of textual criticism are diverse and address more than one issue. According to Klein, 'Textual criticism is the discipline that tries to recover the original copy (autograph) of a piece of literature by comparing its available copies, all of which inevitably contain mistakes' (Klein 1974:vii). This definition is clearly aimed at the Hebrew Bible. However, textual criticism is also a universal science and in Thorpe's opinion, 'The establishment of the text is, normally, the comprehensive act of textual criticism. It is to this act that the textual critic brings all of the accumulation of all of his knowledge and all of his skill and all of his experience. He has one final purpose, and that is to fulfil the intentions of the writer' (Thorpe 1972:202).

Textual criticism is thus a comprehensive endeavour that requires insight into a variety of issues. The question remains how to do just this. Reconstruction of the original text (the older text) is one way of realizing this desideratum. This in itself is a complicated discipline in which an array of issues needs to be balanced, including the question of the relationship between external and internal considerations. In this regard one of the central rules of thumb in textual criticism is the fundamental weight assigned to primary textual witnesses. About this Tov is unequivocal: 'as a rule, this branch of textual criticism aims neither at the compositions written by the biblical authors, nor at previous oral stages, if such existed, but only at that stage of the

¹ I should like to thank Arie van der Kooij for reading earlier drafts of this contribution.

composition which is *attested* (my italics) in the textual evidence'.² Hence textual critics in general remain sceptical about reconstructed texts based on any other considerations but 'hard textual evidence'. However, the extremely complicated history of origin and transmission histories of all textual witnesses force the researcher to search for all available avenues as means of reconstruction. Another discipline called retroversion of reconstructed texts, inter alia of the Hebrew *Vorlage* of a Septuagint unit, also comes into play, but will not be dealt with in this context (Miles 1985). Here I focus on the issue of reconstruction, of determining the Old Greek [OG] text. In short, a balance between external and internal considerations needs to be found. Therefore in this contribution I intend to stress the importance of translation technique in determining older texts, or reconstructed texts.³ This issue is so important that in some instances the translation technique followed by a translator can in fact be the decisive factor in determining the older text, in the case of the LXX, the OG text, and hence it should be considered even weightier than primary textual evidence, or at the least just as important as that evidence. My research into the Septuagint version of Proverbs in fact led me to investigate such avenues. In this contribution I will therefore argue my case based on a number of examples from LXX Proverbs to demonstrate that stylistic and/or ideological factors were considered by the translator and that these considerations should be taken into account by us when determining the OG. However, I shall discuss some preliminary issues first of all.

B LXX PROVERBS

The translation of this biblical book exhibits pertinent and unique characteristics. It is, firstly, one of the books of which the Old Greek text has not yet been determined in detail. The Göttingen *Septuaginta Unternehmen* has addressed this issue by assigning Peter Gentry to prepare a critical edition of LXX Proverbs (he has commenced with this research). The consequence of this situation is that one is forced either to make do with the abridged critical edition of Rahlfs (1935), or to try to reconstruct the OG.⁴ Holmes and Parsons (1732) is an important source in this regard. Secondly (and this is directly related to the first issue), LXX Proverbs is interspersed with textual problems – a representative example occurs in chapter 20 (Cook 2000:163-173). Thirdly, this unit is unique since its translation technique can be defined as extremely free in some

² E. Tov (1992: 288). See also my article 'The Relationship Between Textual Criticism, Literary Criticism and Exegesis – An Interactive One?' to appear in *Textus*, 2007.

³ On the task and method of OT Textual Criticism see F. E. Deist (1988:198).

⁴ I have done that for a selection of chapters in Cook (1997).

instances.⁵ In close conjunction with this, I have demonstrated in the *Festschrift* for Michael Fox (Cook 2005:407-419) that the text-critical value of this unit is extremely low, a situation which naturally impedes the task of reconstruction. Fourthly, as is to be expected in a freely rendered unit, the translator had a clearly definable inclination to contextualise.⁶ He therefore tended to interpret his parent text (Cook 2004a:1-19). He also had a predilection for contrasts (Cook 1997a:403-414).

1 The textual history of LXX Proverbs

The fact that the OG has not yet been determined systematically complicates the task of reconstruction. It is well known that this book contains double translations and evidence of Hexaplaric activity (Cook 1997:12-20). Useful criteria have been devised by de Lagarde.⁷ Chapter 1:21 contains a representative example of possible Hexaplaric activity:

בְּרֹאשׁ הַמִּיּוֹת תִּקְרָא בְּפֶתַח שָׁעִרִים בְּעִיר אֲמָרֶיהָ תֹּאמַר
At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks.

ἐπ' ἄκρων δὲ τειχέων κηρύσσεται
ἐπὶ δὲ πύλαις δυναστῶν παρεδρεύει
ἐπὶ δὲ πύλαις πόλεως θαρροῦσα λέγει
and on the top of the walls she proclaims,
and at the gates of the powerful she waits,
and at the gates of the city she speaks boldly.⁸

It is not immediately evident which one of stichs b or c has been added. According to de Lagarde's rules, stich b seems to be a less literal translation of the MT which could be an indication that it represents the OG. It is possible that the translator had a somewhat different *Vorlage*, since δυναστῶν could be an interpretation of the Hebrew lexeme שַׁר instead of שַׁעַר; it is also possible that

⁵ I have formulated it as one of *diversity* and *unity* in Cook (2001:208).

⁶ See my contribution to the IOSOT congress that took place in Ljubljana, 2007: 'Towards the formulation of a theology of the Septuagint' (in press).

⁷ P. A. de Lagarde (1863:3): 'wenn ein vers oder verstheil in einer freien und in einer sklavisch treuen übertragung vorliegt, gilt die erstere als die echte'. The second rule is related to the first, for 'Wenn sich zwei lesarten nebeneinander finden, von denen die eine den masoretischen text ausdrückt, die andre nur aus einer von ihm abweichenden urschrift erklärt werden kann, so ist die letzere für ursprünglich zu halten'. See also the remarks by D'Hamonville (2000:49).

⁸ The translation of LXX Proverbs is based upon my translation of NETS available at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/prov.pdf>.

the translator deliberately interpreted this lexeme. Be that as it may, stich c is a literal rendering of the Hebrew and therefore is probably the Hexaplaric text.

Not all cases are as clear cut as this one. I have demonstrated that in some instances stylistic considerations should be taken into account in order to determine the OG (Cook 2004:542).

2 Proverbs Chapter 8

This chapter has been composed beautifully in the Hebrew, and has a structure of four sections, verses 1-11; 12-21; 22-31 and a peroration in 32-36. In the MT the first and third sections are made up of 22 lines, but the second has only 21 lines. However, in the LXX verse 21 contains an addition compared to MT.

לְהַנְחִיל אֲהָבֵי יְשׁוּ וְאַצְרֵיהֶם אֲמָלָא
endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasures.

ἵνα μερίσω τοῖς ἐμὲ ἀγαπῶσιν ὑπαρξιν
καὶ τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν ἐμπλήσω ἀγαθῶν
1 ἐὰν ἀναγγείλω ὑμῖν τὰ καθ' ἡμέραν γινόμενα
μνημονεύσω τὰ ἐξ αἰῶνος ἀριθμῆσαι
21 in order that I may assign possessions to those who love me
and fill their treasures with good things.
21(a). If I report to you the things that happen daily,
I will remember to enumerate the things of old.

It is an open question whether this addition should be taken as the OG text. From a methodological perspective it should be interpreted in the context of the whole chapter. Within the smaller context of the subsection, verses 11-21 have only 21 lines in the MT, a circumstance which is different from the first and third sections in MT, which have 22 lines. Verse 21 in the LXX has an extra stich balancing the text to 22 lines.⁹ This addition acts as a logical and smooth bridge between the previous verses and the creation pericope, what happened of old. From this perspective it would seem that the translator was responsible for the addition. In this case the Greek text is supported by the textual evidence, since the mss do not differ substantially. However, the whole of the chapter has to be taken into account, and when this is done it becomes clear that there are some apparent anomalies in the Septuagint version. Firstly, verses 1-10 actually have 23 lines compared to MT. The problem occurs in verse 10, which includes a Hexaplaric addition 'and knowledge rather than choice gold'. This addition should be discarded (Cook 2004:542). The same applies to verse 13, which contains three stichs in both MT and LXX. The problem is that the LXX does

⁹ Cook (1997:205). See also my discussion in Cook (2004:531-543).

not agree with the Hebrew as far as contents go. For instance, the third stich is not a literal version of MT. According to the rules of de Lagarde, this stich should be taken as a later addition. It has also been omitted in a number of mss. If one takes this stich as an addition by a copyist, then the structure indeed conforms to the structure of 22 lines mentioned earlier. Therefore I argue for a combination of textual evidence and stylistic (translation technical) considerations in this case (Cook 2004:542). The situation is somewhat different in Chapter 11, although I still detect translation technical factors at play.

3 Proverbs Chapter 11

This chapter has a rather complicated transmission history, as can be observed in the fact that some verses have no equivalent in Rahlfs' study edition.

VERSE 4

לֹא־יִוָּעֵיל הָיִן בְּיוֹם עֲבָרָה וְצַדִּיקָה תִּצְלִיל מָמוֹת

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

Rahlfs has no equivalent, but this is understandable, since no primary textual witnesses have applicable equivalents. HP has no references at all, whereas Field (1964:331) does mention a reading under the asterisk¹⁰ οὐκ ωφέλησει υπάρχοντα ἐν ἡμέρᾳ θυμοῦ δικαιοσύνη δὲ ρυσεται ἀπο θανάτου. This is clearly a direct translation of the Hebrew and can surely not be taken as the Old Greek text. On the face of it, I cannot find any translation technical factors that could have influenced the translator in deliberately omitting the equivalent of this phrase. However, I would argue that the situation is different in verses 10 and 11.

VERSE 10

בְּטוֹב צְדִיקִים תִּעֲלֶיךָ קִרְיָה וּבְאַבְדֹת רָשָׁעִים רָנָה

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish there is jubilation.

ἐν ἀγαθοῖς δικαίων κατώρθωσεν πόλις

By the good deeds of the righteous a city succeeded.

There are smaller variations of the first stich. According to HP, Ms 296 has κατώρθωσε for κατώρθωσεν which they deem a corruption of κατώρθωται. The second stich is omitted in Rahlfs but equivalents are mentioned in various mss. The Hexaplaric Ms 23 has a phrase added to πόλις namely καὶ ἐν ἀπωλείᾳ ἀσεβῶν ἀγαλλισμα ἐν εὐλογίᾳ εὐθειῶν υψωθησεται πολεῖς, that is, according to HP, under the asterisk. This phrase occurs with smaller ortho-

¹⁰ As is well-known these sigla cannot be trusted.

graphical differences in mss 68, 103, 254, 295, 296 and 297 as well. Clearly these additions are not representative of the OG since they represent literal versions of the Hebrew of verses 10 and 11.

As part of verse 10 HP prints the phrase σομασι δε ασεβων κατεσκαφη. (But the flesh of the wicked is torn down). HP do not indicate the basis of this reading but it seems to be the equivalent of verse 11a. As a matter of fact, HP has no equivalent for verse 11 in the LXX. Clearly the translator/scribes experienced problems with this text, or simply interpreted. The question remains, why? Verse 11 provides a clue.

VERSE 11

בְּבִרְכַּת יְשָׁרִים תָּרוּם קִרְתָּ וּבִפִּי רָשָׁעִים תִּהְיֶה

By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

στόμασιν δὲ ἄσεβων κατεσκάφη

but by the mouths of the impious it was levelled.

Again Rahlfs omits a stich. In the text-critical notes Rahlfs refers to later Hexaplaric readings that appear at the end of mss BS[†]: (Ⲣ 3) τελειοτης ευθειων οδηγησει αυτους και υποσκελισμος αθετουντων προνομευσει αυτους (Ⲣ 4) ουκ ωφελησει υπαρχοντα εν ημερα θυμου και δικαιοσυνη ρυσεται απο θανατου.

It is an open question whether the text as quoted in Rahlfs should be seen as the OG. There is no additional primary evidence available to reconstruct the Old Greek text in these two instances. I am of the opinion that another avenue should be followed. In the Latin words by Richard Bentley quoted in McCarter (1986:25) *Ratio et res ipsa centum codicibus potiores sunt*, ‘reason and the facts are preferable to a hundred manuscripts’. I would add contextuality as an additional factor. This chapter in the LXX exhibits the same trends as the previous ones.¹¹ Even though it contains fewer exegetical renderings than, for instance, chapter 9 (Cook 1997:247), nevertheless the translator is still interpreting. In verse 3 the noun מִצָּר is taken as deriving from מוֹת. The translator uses ἀποθανών as equivalent, although it is possible that the beginning of verse 7 had an intertextual impact upon this interpretation. There the verbal form, inf cs בְּמוֹת is used. Again the diverse approach of the translator is observed; he applies the verb τελευτήσαντος in this instance. There are also more contrasts in LXX than in the Hebrew, for example verse 7, where a synonymous parallelism is turned into a contrast. In this instance the

¹¹ See my exegetical commentary *Between Text and Interpretation – An Exegetical Commentary of LXX Proverbs* to be published in the series of SBL.

noun רָשָׁע is interpreted as a righteous man. As stated already, it is possible that the translator actually took account of verse 3, where the Greek also differs from the Hebrew. In addition the negation particle is applied for ‘theological’ reasons in order to stress the contrast between the righteous and impious.

Verse 16 is another appropriate example. The LXX has two more stichs than the MT. On account of these, the NRSV has in fact added two stichs, as suggested by BHS. The contrasts in the additions γυνὴ εὐχάριστος against γυνὴ μισοῦσα δίκαια and ὀκνηροὶ against οἱ ἀνδρεῖοι are in line with the translation technique of LXX Proverbs and leaves the impression that the translator is indeed at work adapting the text.

Verse 15 is also rewritten and in part religiously interpreted. The Greek contains a contrast between a wicked and a righteous person, a contrast based upon יִרְיָע, interpreted as coming from רָעָה. Moreover, intertextual and intratextual readings also took place in this chapter, that is, between verses 3 and 7.

I therefore think that it is possible that the two *stichoi* in these adjacent verses were deliberately omitted by the translator since the remaining stichs in verses 10 and 11 in fact contain a contrast! The equivalent of the Hebrew is simply removed in order to underline the contrast.

C CONCLUSION

I have argued that the complicated history of origin and transmission history of textual witnesses, especially the Septuagint, force the researcher to investigate further avenues for reconstruction of older texts, beyond the classical stress on primary textual evidence – in short, to find a balance between external and internal considerations. Basic to all these endeavours is the way the translator in fact rendered his parent text, the translation technique. In the Greek book of Proverbs I discussed examples of the decisive role of stylistic and contrastive considerations. These should be taken into account in conjunction with primary textual evidence in the complicated process of reconstruction.¹²

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¹² See the analysis of LXX Ezekiel 1 and 10 by A. H. M. Evans (2007:37-71).

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