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 2000a: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

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 (1999b: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 the first 6 verses as a superscription to the whole book. Whybray (1965:37) takes verses 1–7 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:

This verse is filled with sapiential terminology. Σοφία is a significant word in Proverbs, where it occurs 48 times, mostly as equivalent for הָכָה. The lexeme παροιμία is another typical wisdom term. It is used abundantly in Proverbs and Ben Sira, and appears four times in the first chapter of Proverbs (1:2, 7, 8 and 29). In practically all passages in Proverbs it has γραμματεύς as the underlying Hebrew reading. Both lexemes have the meaning of ‘instruction’/‘education’ as part of their semantic field.

Verse 2:

Verse 2 is translated relatively literally, although the abundant use of the conjunction τε in the first 6 verses is a sign of the translator’s literary style and first-hand knowledge of the Greek language. The same applies to the addition of γραμματεύς in verse 3, where in the MT an ellipsis occurs. I think the translator probably took verse 2 into account in this regard, harmonising without a reference to an underlying Hebrew reading.

Verse 3:

Verse 3 contains laden renderings such as στροφής λόγων for כָּל הָמְשִׁלָּה. The Greek word στροφή 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 στροφής 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 δίνω, 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 στροφῆς 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 (Baruqy 1964:48), then it would seem as if he interpreted γραμματεύς as deriving from the verb γράφει (the Hof’al masc part) ‘to turn aside, to withdraw, to evade’. A hint as to the possible interpretation of this lexeme is in fact found in Sir 6:22, where the Hebrew indeed reads יְסָפֵר (Skehan & Di Lella 1987:391). The stich provides the necessary semantic contents: ‘For discipline is like her name: she is not obvious to many.’ According to this interpretation, γραμματεύς indeed has to do with the ‘enigmatic, problematic’.6

6. In this regard H.J. Stoppa (2014:30–41) adds two prerequisites: 'Es muss befriedigende Gewissheit über den Wortlaut der Vorlage des Übersetzers herrschten, 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).
On the one hand, it is possible that the verbal form νοήμα could be an infinitive as a rendering of the Hif inf of יָשָׁר. On the other hand, it is also possible that the infinitive was added in conjunction with the previous verse. However, this would then leave יִשְׁמַ֣ע חָ֭כָם וְי֣וֹסֶף לֶ֑קַח unaccounted for. In this regard the combination of στροφὰς λόγων is instructive, for λόγον seems to have been added in conjunction with the previous verse in order to explicate ἄφρων. The translator consequently probably created the antithesis of the combination λόγων γρονήθηκεν 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. ἀκάκοις is probably taken from ἄφρων, but ἄληθη means to be an addition either as an adjective or as a noun referring to ‘truth’ (τὰ ἀληθῆ). The translator seemingly glossed ἄφρων with ἀκάκοις άληθη. I also think κρίμα is the equivalent of ὥσπερ, whereas κατακόπηκεν has been introduced in connection with ὅσιος (συνεργόν) by the translator. This Greek verbal form occurs in Proverbs 1:3 (συνεργόν); 4:26 (ὁ); 9:15 (ὁ); 13:13 (ὁ); 15:8 (ὁς) and 21 (ὁς); 21:2 (ὁς); 23:19 (ὁς) and 29:27 (ὁς). All these lexemes are semantically related.

The fact that ὅσιος 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 was equivalent. This is not the normal practice of this translator, since he tends to vary expressions. In verse 2 ὅσιος is thus translated relatively literally as a noun παιδεία; however, in verse 3 it is brought into connection with the root ὅσ. 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:

 Corinthians 1:15
 [to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young]
 ἤνα ἐν ἄκακοις παινούσην, παιδί δὲ νεών ἀδικηθέντι τε καὶ ἐννοοῦν
 [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 ἐν παῖσον as a subjunctive. Only the Latin evidence exhibits a similar possible construction. All available material has the phrase ‘ut detur paralis ...’ This is an indication of the translator’s intention to create cohesion between these verses (Taubenschmidt 2004:112).

The object of the first stich is παινούσην, which appears seven times in the LXX, consistently as a rendering for ἄφρων. 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 παινούσην 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.

There is a pertinent difference between ἀκάκοις and ἄφρων in Greek literature. The first denotes the innocent in many contexts. In the LXX, for instance, Job is called an ἀκάκοις ἄνθρωπος. This is also the case in Plato’s Timeaus 91d, where the innocent are described as ἀκάκοις ἄνδρες. Philo Judaeaus (Spec III, 119) uses this term in connection with innocent children. He also applies a related term, ἀκάκοις, 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 ὅσιος (fool) is rendered, inter alia, by means of this Greek equivalent in the OT. It is also used to render ἀνήρ and ἀνήρ in both the Psalms and Proverbs.

The adjective νοήσις has no equivalent in MT, although νοητός 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 parental 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.

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

Verse 5:

 Corinthians 1:15
 [let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill.]}
 τόποις ἕως ἄκακοις σοφός σοφοτέρος ἐσται ὡς νόημαν κυβέρνησεν κτήσει
 [for by hearing these things the wise will become wiser and the discerning will acquire direction]

9.1 use the abbreviations of Liddel and Scott (1968).
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, תָּוָּ֖כַּד הַֽגִּין 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. The Hebrew form is rendered freely as σοφότατος ἔποιεσα. According to KB, the lexeme γίνεται 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 יָרֵד and which in the ἄνειδος expresses the meaning ‘to interpret’ in some contexts. There are only two occurrences of the noun ἀνέιδος 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 ταύτη. 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 6:

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

Verse 7:

[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.]
abundant application of particles, in this case ὅς. 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 rabbinic-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 example of rabbinic-type exegesis.

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 ‘[e]xamples 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.

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 φόβος θεοῦ. However, says the translator, the most fundamental aspect of wisdom – the beginning thereof – is the φόβος θεοῦ. 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 Isaiah (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 (לְהַצִּילְךָ מֵאִשָּׁה 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 διδασκαλίαν καλή φυλάξει σε ἔννοια δὲ ὁσία τηρήσει σε
16 τοῦ μακράν σε ποιήσαι ἀπὸ ὁδοῦ εὐθείας καὶ ἄλληρκυ τῆς δικαίας γνώμης
17 νικ., μή σε καταλάβῃ καλή βουλή ἢ ἄπολείπουσα διδασκαλίαν νεότητος καὶ διαθήκην θείαν ἐπιλελημένη

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:

16 in order to remove you far from the straight way and to make you a stranger to a righteous opinion.

The LXX has:

16 τοῦ μακραν σε ποιησαι απο αρδοι ευθειας και αλλερκυ της δικαιας γνωμης

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

Whereas MT has two stichoi:

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 (κακὴ βουλή). The antithesis of this concept, good counsel (καλὴ βουλὴ), 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 חכם מוץ and דאבר ת דרך ורש (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.11

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 κοινή βούλη 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 θηματική γοητεία 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.

---

11 Fox, ‘Strange woman’, 34 footnote 7.

**Verse 22:**

[The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.]

κύριος ἐκτίσεν μὲ αὐτῆν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἑργα αὐτοῦ

[The Lord created me as 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 κτίζω occurs 63 times in the LXX, but only this once in Proverbs. Seemingly the translator is interpreting. Walters (1973:200) argues that κτίζω in this context is the result of a confusion between it and κτισθηθησάν. 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 κτίσαμαι is conspicuous. The preposition αὐτοῦ (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:**

[Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.]

πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ

[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 יָצָא is a passive and is rendered by means of ἐθεμελίωσαν, he founded me. This is indeed the sole occurrence of this Greek verb for יָצָא.

**Verses 24:**

[When there were no depths I was brought forth]

πρὸ τοῦ τὴν γῆν ποιῆσαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τῶν ἄβυσσων ποιῆσαι, πρὸ τοῦ προελθεῖν τῶν πηγῶν τῶν οὐσίων

[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:

[Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills I was brought forth.]

[The Greek is once again more explicit as to who is responsible for the creation of wisdom, hence the translation ‘he begets me!’ Moreover, stylistically the equivalent of שָׁם אָנִי, namely שָׁם אָנִי, is added in the 2nd stich.]

Verse 26:

[When he established the heavens, I was present with him, and when he drew a circle on the face of the deep.] (Ps 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 28:

[When he made strong the clouds above, and when he made secure the springs beneath the sky.] (Is 14:13–14.) It is naturally possible that this represents an internally motivated harmonisation with verse 28.

Verse 30 (Cook 1997b:3–50):

[then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always]

[I was beside him, fitting together, it is I, who was the one in whom he took delight.]

This verse is the locus classicus as far as arguments concerning the so-called Stoic colouring of the LXX are concerned. The verbal form ἀρμόζειν 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 ἀρμόζει occurs only in 10 passages.
have already said, some scholars have indeed connected it with ἀρμοσία ‘master-workman, craftsman’ (Scott 1965:72), which is also how the author of the Wisdom of Solomon understood it. In Sap Sal 7:21 and 8:6 wisdom is described as τεχνίτης. It is not immediately evident how the author would have arrived at this interpretation. Taking into account the Hellenistic milieu in which he lived, it is equally possible that he could have interpreted it in a Platonic manner according to the idea of the Demiurge, or that he simply understood the Hebrew נשים in that sense.13

Because of the limited application of the Greek verb, it remains difficult to decide what meaning the translator actually had in mind. Consequently the context must provide the decisive evidence. To start with, because of the limited evidence, I find it unacceptable to formulate a theory of possible external influence, as was done by Gerleman regarding Stoic perspectives adopted by the translator. Hengel (1973:292) followed 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 Timaeus. 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 ἀρμοσία, which are certainly found in extra-biblical writings, need not to be reconstructed in this context. In my view the verb ἀρμοσία 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 ἐγώ ἢμην ἢ προσέχαρεν, ‘I was the one in whom he took delight’, is less ambiguous than MT. Conspicuous is the addition of the personal pronoun ἐγώ. It could be a case of stressing the subject, underlining the privileged role wisdom actually had beside God. The final hemistiche 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 ἀρμοσία with ‘fitting together’, a meaning that appears in specific contexts. In my view the translator underscores the creative role of God in

The Hebraworks, the LXX: in ii Ki 6:5 (*) and 14 (τοι(*); Ps 151:2 (-); Prov 8:30 (*); 17:7 (τὸν); 19:14 (ὑπο*); 25:11 (ὑπο*) (only in S2); Na 3:8 (*); ii Ma 14:22 and iii Ma 1:39. 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: οὐ τιμωρεῖ ἑκατοντα χρήσιν ποιεῖν διότι χρήσιν ποιεῖν. In this context the meaning of ‘fitting’ clearly prevails. In Proverbs 19:14 the translator underscores the creative role of God in the world:

The Greek seems to be an interpretation of the Hebrew and the verb ἀρμοσία could therefore be related to μερίζομαι as suggested by HR. The problem is that the Hebrew lexeme is also rendered literally as ἀμων.

The meaning of ‘harmonising’ suggested by Gerleman is, therefore, not imperative in any of these passages. I would consequently argue that it is also not necessarily to be accepted in the one under discussion. In extra-biblical writings this lexeme is used with other connotations. In Sap Sal 36:17 in the sense of ‘adapt, accommodate’ and in Hegesipp Com the meaning of ‘to prepare’ applies. Also, the sense of ‘joining, fit together’ occurs in classical Greek sources. It is used, inter alia, to describe the work of a joiner in Od 5.247. Pi N 8.11 applies it in the meaning of ‘to regulate, set in order and to govern’. It also appears in the meaning of ‘fitting’, namely clothes or armour that fit well (Pi P 4.80).

It is therefore not easy to determine what the translator actually had in mind in this specific instance. As I indicated earlier, the Hebrew lexeme נשים is already a problematic one, for it appears only twice in the Hebrew Bible. The main Greek ms has also no text available for Jer 52:15. נשים as a proper noun is also used for the Egyptian god Amun and it can also be related to the root יָסָר (support, assist, bind together). As I

12 De Lagarde (1863:29) has reconstructed a Vorlage of יָסָר.

the creation. This is once again borne out by the translation of the next verse.

Verse 31:

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.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have influenced him in writing this article.

References


Fox, M.V., 2015, Ἡθοποιον μὲν ἔννοια τῆς ἱστορίας: Οἱ Πόροι. A practical edition with introduction and textual commentary, SBL Press, Atlanta, GA.


Rahlf s, A., 1979, Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graeca iuxta LXX interpretes, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.


