

LXXSA as an international academic association

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Introduction

It is evident that LXXSA refers to Septuagint research in South Africa. What may not be immediately clear is the distinction between *international* and *national*. In short, should the well-known LXXSA be seen as a national or an international association? As there are no formulated criteria readily available in this regard, this article will address this issue by, *inter alia*, referring to existing practices. I suggest five criteria to answer this question.

Criteria

The first one has to do with the article itself. It should be related to the international market. In a chapter entitled 'A concise history of LXXSA and worship' that I was invited to contribute to *Honorary Lectures in Honour of Johann Cook* (in press), edited by Evangelia Dafni and Annette Potgieter, I argued that the roots of this association lie in the research of Frank Charles Fensham, who was one of the first scholars to do original research on the Septuagint in South Africa. He obtained a BA degree at the University of Pretoria, then enrolled for an MA, which was granted *cum laude*. The topic for his master's degree in Greek was the function and role of the Greek lexeme ἄβυσσος in Genesis Chapter 1 verse 2 (Fensham 1950). As far as I could ascertain, this was the first piece of research on the Septuagint in South Africa. Fensham was a polyglot in the true sense of the word. Soon after obtaining his MA *cum laude*, he commenced study on a New Testament theme. He completed his PhD on a New Testament topic under the supervision of Prof. E.P. Groenewald (Fensham 1952) from the theological faculty at the University of Pretoria. In the meantime, he was appointed as lecturer in Semitic Languages in 1950 at the University of Stellenbosch. By this time, he became seriously interested in the ancient Near East. This interest led him to the renowned Prof. Dr William Foxwell Albright at Johns Hopkins. In 1953, he was awarded a second doctoral degree, this time in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, United States of America (USA). Fensham's academic life was conducted in the light of international scrutiny. He had acquired such an international profile that when he returned from the USA he was invited to launch the international periodical *Journal of North-West Semitic Languages* (JNSL). In 1973, he became its first editor. And after a productive 50 years, this journal is still going strong. The latest volume appeared in 2021 (No. 47 Vol. 2). It has five editors (Sakkie Cornelius, Christo van der Merwe, Alex Andrason, Johann Cook and Gideon Kotzé), with the position of volume editor rotating annually. An additional seven academics make up the editorial board: Meir Malul (Haifa), Cynthia Miller-Naudé (Bloemfontein), Jacobus Naudé (Bloemfontein), Herbert Niehr (Tübingen), Hermann-Josef Stipp (München), Arie van der Kooij (Leiden) and Ernst Wendland (Lusaka).

From these names, it is clear that each one of these persons is a specialist in her or his field of research. To be sure, this is a major difference between LXXSA and JNSL.¹ Whereas the latter is a structurally organised periodical, LXXSA is an informal association, but it has an immense output. LXXSA grew from an *ad hoc* movement at the beginning of the 1950s at the University of Pretoria, as a result of the intense interest of Frank Charles Fensham, into an informal association.

The second criterion is an obvious one, namely that it should publish articles of an international standard.

Table 1 gives an indication of the fields of research addressed in JNSL 47/2 2021.

1. Here I am comparing a periodical with an association.

Note: Special Collection: Septuagint and Textual Studies, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).

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TABLE 1: Fields of research addressed in JNSL 47/2 2021.

Articles	Pages
Kyle R. Greenwood, <i>Abandoned ships: A syntactic and lexical reconsideration of Job 40:31</i>	1–19
Young Bok Kim, <i>The functions of Kirta's epithets: A philological and literary analysis</i>	21–35
Kathryn McConaughy Medill, <i>Is this directive he inappropriate? The directive he and fictive motion in biblical Hebrew</i>	37–55
Dmytro Tsolin, <i>Zur Verwendung Der Verbalformen in syrischen Bedingungssätzen. Teil 1: Die faktischen Konditionalsätze</i>	57–81
Christo H.J. van der Merwe, <i>An evaluation of the front matter of the dictionary of classical Hebrew. Volume 1. Aleph. Revised.</i>	83–109

The topic that appears the most in this volume has to do with things Hebrew, one of the prominent *topoi* in JNSL. Naturally, one volume cannot be used as a yard stick of what the overriding field of research is; however, it can be used as a general measure. To be sure, the findings of various other fields of research are also published in JNSL. My own field of specialisation, the Septuagint, has also received more than its fair share of attention. The model of blind peer review that contributions are subjected to is of significant relevance here.

Related to this is the third criterion that a large number of publications should be published, preferably in more than one volume annually. JNSL publishes two volumes per annum. LXXSA is an informal association, but it has a substantial publication output. Five books (collections) were published, and in total, 66 articles over the last 20 years saw the light. I mention a few examples. The first is the proceedings of the congress of the newly formed association that took place at Stellenbosch University, 14–15 August 2008. The proceedings of this conference were published as *VTS 127*; Leiden, Brill, 2009, under the title *Septuagint and Reception*. A collection entitled *Text-critical and Hermeneutical Studies in the Septuagint* was published as *VTS 157*; Leiden, Brill, 2012. These were the proceedings of a bilateral project between Cook and Stipp, who acted as editors.

A final remark is in order. Not all the activity concerning the Septuagint in South Africa is related to LXXSA. The congress on the LXX that took place in 2018 in Stellenbosch, did not take place under the auspices of LXXSA (eds. Cook & Rösel 2020).

Two key characteristics of the LXXSA movement are adaptability and experimentation. It grew from an ad hoc movement at the beginning of the 1950s at the University of Pretoria as a result of the intense interest of Frank Charles Fensham. Fensham moved to the University of Stellenbosch in 1950 and was instrumental in the way the Septuagint was researched in South Africa. As a student of Fensham, I started the systematic study of the LXX in South Africa. Firstly, I completed a BA Honours degree *cum laude* and then enrolled for an MA in Semitic Languages. After completing the Honours degree, I became a part-time lecturer in the Department of Semitic Languages. I subsequently enrolled for a BTh and was responsible for courses in textual criticism in the Theological Faculty in a part-time capacity, while I was still studying theology.

I then specialised in the ancient versions of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, which included Greek, Aramaic (Syriac), Latin, Coptic, etc. texts, but this was initially just in the context of the scientific discipline of textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. Hermeneutics was to follow later.

A fourth criterion has to do with the legal position of the association. Whereas JNSL is a fully formal periodical, LXXSA is an informal association. Hence, it has no international scholars serving in formal positions. This association has nevertheless grown into a prominent institution with room for many researchers and their projects. It is an informal association with 'appointed' officers (servants) – Johann Cook as president, Pierre Jordaan as vice-president and Nicholas Allen and Gideon Kotzé as additional members.

It must be said that this state of affairs has been a topic of discussion for some time, including by the executive. Because of the large output of LXXSA, there is an unwillingness to change a well-functioning system. Some officers also expressed their unwillingness to become involved with time-consuming activities such as the checking of membership fees. Colleagues from the University of the Free State addressed the situation in letters to the president and warned that it is untenable. Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Jacobus Naudé came up with constructive suggestions. Among other things, they formulated a possible constitution for LXXSA, including a way to formally elect the appropriate officers. This situation, clearly, will have to be addressed.

A final aspect, the fifth criterion, is a relationship of sorts with what one can call 'a mother institution'. In the case of LXXSA, the mother institution is the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS). There are not only numerous points of correspondence between IOSCS and LXXSA but also differences. The first and main point of correspondence is surely the fact that the Septuagint is the primary subject matter of both these associations. At the same time, in both instances the LXX is not the sole object of study. In the latest volume of *VTS* (entitled *The Septuagint South of Alexandria*, edited by Johann Cook and Gideon Kotzé), the majority of articles deal in some way with the Septuagint, but there are other related contributions. The contribution by Gudrun Eli Lier, for example, concerns the Targumim. This is an indication of what cognate studies stands for.

Evaluation

From this cursory discussion, it is possible to make an evaluation. Firstly, LXXSA is an association with room for researchers and their projects. The productive Department of Hebrew at the University of the Free State, whose research section is headed so competently by Professors Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Jacobus Naudé, has published a substantial

part of their research with LXXSA. A prominent article is 'Textual interrelationships involving the Septuagint translations of the precious stones in the breastpiece of the high priest' (Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2020). It is a follow-up of previous articles on precious stones, also published in LXXSA. One of their articles has in fact caught the attention of EABS, which has subsequently invited them to present the article at a meeting of EABS.

The same applies to the North-West University, which, under the leadership of Pierre Jordaan, developed a unique approach to the deuterocanonical writings. Whereas Stellenbosch University focuses primarily on the Old Greek texts, North-West University do research in the deuterocanonical literature (Jordaan 2021:6). So this association may be an informal one, but it is a highly productive one. It is also clear that all the rules pertaining to a formal periodical such as JNSL are followed by the executive committee, excepting the structural functioning of all serious periodicals.

I think the time has come to do the right thing in this regard. I will circulate this article among members of the executive and other members of the association in order to find a way forward for the future of LXXSA. I will also make it an item for discussion at the next meeting,

which will take place at Stellenbosch University on 07 September 2022.

Conclusion

LXXSA is an informal association that should perhaps be adapted to become a more formalised international academic association. On this note, it has hopefully become evident that LXXSA is first and foremost an international association, albeit with shortcomings.

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