

J. Ross Wagner. *Reading the Sealed Book: Reading Old Greek Isaiah and the Problem of Septuagint Hermeneutics*. FAT 88. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck / Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 295. ISBN 978-3-16-152557-5. €99.00 (hardcover).

Wagner has produced an excellent volume that will greatly benefit Septuagint (LXX) studies. The book unfolds in four sections. First, a discussion of the “problem” of LXX hermeneutics (ch. 1), followed by an interpretive approach to translated texts (ch. 2), and then application of that approach to Isa 1:1-20 and 1:21-31 (chs. 3-4), capped with a characterization of Old Greek (OG) Isaiah (ch. 5) and an epilogue.

Wagner first reviews the debate over “LXX hermeneutics,” which he defines as “how a modern reader is to interpret the translated text” and “how to characterize the translator’s own interpretation of his source [text]” (p. 2, note 8). He sees a need for a “theoretical framework ... that will enable meaningful analysis” of the LXX/OG (p. 5). Wagner’s goal, then, is to characterize the nature of OG Isaiah 1 and model a methodology for interpreting translated texts, although he concedes hope of fully settling debates over OG Isaiah (p. 34).

Gideon Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and the interlinear paradigm of Boyd-Taylor, Pietersma, *et al.*, described below, ground Wagner’s interpretive framework. He also applies Umberto Eco’s work to account for the socio-cultural context of the LXX text. For Eco, a text contains “analyzable properties” that elicit interpretive choices, thereby postulating a “model reader” who can interpret that text within his or her cultural context (p. 39). Wagner appropriates this in a “dialectical manner” by examining the process of translation to determine the character of the LXX text, while considering “cultural norms” that determine where the LXX texts “fits within the target literary system” (p. 45). Naturally, there are “hypotheses” and “conjectures” involved that are “refined” along the way (p. 45).

Wagner conducts a meticulous study of OG Isa 1 (Ziegler’s edition), with attention to lexical, grammatical, discourse, and stylistic features of source and target texts. He proceeds section by section, weighing whether and how differences between the texts bear out the translator’s *Übersetzungsweise*, rather than attempting to reconstruct the *Vorlage* (cf. p. 68, note 12). Wagner finds that the translator (G) “keeps his translation tethered to the source” yet also “succeeds in producing a Greek text of considerable cogency and power” (p. 107; cf. pp. 113, 140, 148, 166, 201). G has clear familiarity with the “full sweep” of Isaiah (p. 219, cf. p. 225) and crafts his text “to be heard and experienced on its own” (p. 234). Still, G engages in “heavy-handed editing” of his source (p. 157), and focuses his translation on judgment of the lawless “upper class” and Jerusalemite leaders more than his source text (see pp. 99, 148, 154, 168-69, 237).

In ch. 5, Wagner describes the “constitutive character” (cf. p. 11) of Isaiah’s vision, overviewing salient points of his study. Unfortunately, qualitative description dominates (e.g. “significant degree,” “consistently,” “occasionally,” “slightly,” “rhythm,” “texture”), even when Wagner describes, for example, *quantitative* fidelity (see p. 228), a tendency that leaves this reader looking for greater specificity at points.

The “interlinear paradigm” is central to Wagner’s work. It posits that the “typical” LXX text was conceived, at least “metaphorically” (cf. p. 12 note 56), as “the Greek half of a Greek-Hebrew diglot” (p. 12). Aquila’s recension is prototypical, as it puts “the Greek language entirely in the service of the source text” so that Hebrew syntax is “mirrored” in Greek (p. 12). This

inevitably produced “semantic oddities” in the target text (p. 13). Aquila, then, sets a benchmark by which to characterize other LXX translations by a metric of supposed source interference.

But this model runs into difficulty elsewhere in Wagner’s work. He proposes that in the century following the translation of the LXX Pentateuch, it attained “scriptural” status, and thereby furnished an “interlanguage,” a kind of written dialect, for later translators (p. 58). This interlanguage encouraged LXX translators to break some of the conventions of Koine Greek, forging new literary models, and thus building Hellenistic Jewish cultural identity (p. 60). In this way the Pentateuchal interlanguage acquired quasi-authoritative cultural currency. To Wagner, the “‘biblical’ sound” of later LXX translations “assured a monolingual audience that ... these scriptural texts faithfully represent their Hebrew parents” (p. 62).

The difficulty lies in Wagner’s statement that “the presence of source-language interference in a translated text from this later period *does not, by itself*, indicate that the translator followed an ‘interlinear’ model ... [but it] may *largely* be due, rather, to the translator’s effort to locate his work *within the broader literary system of Hellenistic Judaism by conforming it to translation norms deriving from the Greek Pentateuch*” (p. 62, emphasis added). According to Wagner, then, what appears to be Hebrew interference may in fact be “interlanguage interference” instead.

This proposal seems to undermine the entire interlinear enterprise, or at least destabilize its foundation, namely the *source text* as the control by which to determine the constitutive character of a text, rather than a Greek Pentateuchal “sociolect” (p. 59). For example, Wagner suggests that G’s use of “markedly un-Greek elements” reminded his audience that the Greek text does “not stand alone, but rather re-presents the Hebrew forebear in whose sanctity it shares” (p. 166). But if a given “un-Greek element” manifests G’s use of the interlanguage, then his target text does not “re-present” *Hebrew* textual sanctity *per se*, but rather sociolectal sanctity.

The notion of an interlanguage raises yet another question: why is the Greek Pentateuch not the “typical” translated text in the Septuagint corpus, rather than Aquila’s recension (p. 16)? This is especially the case if the target audience “expect[ed]” the use of the Pentateuchal interlanguage (p. 234). Should not LXX scholars assume, then, that a LXX translation is dependent upon the Pentateuchal interlanguage – not the source text – until proven otherwise (cf. Boyd-Taylor’s quote on p. 17)? Of course, this would require a paradigm shift from “interlinear” prototype to “interlinguistic” prototype.

These questions notwithstanding, Wagner’s work well deserves careful attention. It will no doubt be of service to LXX scholarship, alongside other Isaianic and Second Temple studies.

William A. Ross
University of Cambridge