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“Do you understand what you are reading” (Acts 8:30)

On Septuagint Hermeneutics and the Book of Isaiah

I. Introduction

In this essay I would like to contribute to the ongoing debate on the mode of understanding the Septuagint (LXX) version of the “ancestral” books (Prologue Jesus Sirach). In general, scholars agree that this version is marked by some type of exegesis, be it a basic syntactic comprehension of the source text, or any interpretation at the level of its content, including theological exegesis. Opinions differ however about the question of how to identify and evaluate ‘interpretation’ of the source text in the translation. In a recent study of LXX Isaiah, this issue is typified as the “most basic question of Septuagint hermeneutics”.¹

In the course of time, a variety of approaches have been developed which in one way or another have a bearing on the issue at stake. The variety pertains to the emphasis of the method applied because in evaluating the LXX the focus can be on translation technique, or on the linguistic side of the coin, or alternatively the LXX is analyzed from a literary-theological point of view. Differences in this regard are related to views and assumptions about the function or purpose of the LXX version of a book.

In current LXX research new approaches are being developed on the basis of modern translation theories; so for example the studies by van der Louw, De Crom, O’Hare, Boyd-Taylor, Wagner, and Gauthier.² To van der

¹ J. ROSS WAGNER, *Reading the Sealed Book. Old Greek Isaiah and the Problem of Septuagint Hermeneutics* (FAT 88; Waco, Texas/Tübingen, 2013), 5. On LXX hermeneutics, see also RANDALL X. GAUTHIER, “Toward an LXX Hermeneutic,” *JNSL* 35 (2009), 45–74.

² THEO A.W. VAN DER LOUW, *Transformations in the Septuagint. Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Theories* (CBET 47; Leuven, 2007); DRIES DE CROM, *The LXX Text of Canticles. A Descriptive Study in Hebrew-Greek Translation* (unpubl. dissertation Leuven, 2009); DANIEL O’HARE, “Have You Seen, Son of Man?” *A Study in the Translation and Vorlage of LXX Ezekiel 40–48* (SCS 57; Atlanta, 2010); CAMERON BOYD-TAYLOR, *Reading between the Lines: The Interlinear Paradigm for Septuagint Studies* (Biblical Tools and Studies 8; Leuven, 2011); WAGNER, *Sealed Book*;

Louw, the “early Translation Studies and historical Translation Studies are the most adequate for the study of the Septuagint”.³ Others opt for the *skopos*-theory (O’Hare),⁴ or for the Relevance Theory (Gauthier), but the majority seems to prefer the model of Toury (Descriptive Translation Studies). The way DTS is applied by scholars may vary, but the interesting thing is that this approach is marked by a focus on the translation process on the one hand and on the translation as a product, on the other. It thus has the advantage that a translation can also be taken seriously in its own right by paying attention, among others things, to the meaning of words and phrases in their own (literary) context. In general, there seems to be a growing consensus on the aspect of ‘context’ and ‘content’ in studying the LXX. For example, the method of what may be termed the ‘Leuven School’ is characterized by the perspective of “content and context related criteria”.⁵ Obviously, the field of lexical studies in current LXX research is very important in this regard.⁶

It is not my purpose to discuss the question which model or theory is the most adequate one. Suffice it to say that the modern translation theories offer useful insights and are helpful indeed as they provide an approach for analyzing a translation from different angles.⁷ In this regard it may be appropriate to note that, whereas Toury is emphasizing the linguistic aspects of a translation, other scholars such as Chesterman have pointed out that also the translator’s social and cognitive environment should be taken into account.⁸ Hence, a translation might reflect an ideology by way of shifts of meaning.

In line with the latter view I am of the opinion that one should not only pay attention to the context in the literary sense of the word, but also to the cultural context of a given translation.⁹ Reading contributions to LXX studies, one often gets the feeling however that the field of LXX studies is

Randall X. Gauthier, *Psalms 38 and 145 of the Old Greek Version* (VTSup 166; Leiden, 2014).

³ VAN DER LOUW, *Transformations*, 23.

⁴ For an extensive review, see *JSCS* 45 (2012), 125–132 (Katrin Hauspie).

⁵ See BÉNÉDICTE LEMMELJN, “Singing of Love in Many Ways: A Sketch of Canticles’ Text Material Demonstrating Biblical Textual Pluriformity,” *JNSL* 40 (2014), 63–77 (69).

⁶ See e.g. the Strasbourg project “Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint”.

⁷ For a survey of modern translation theories, see VAN DER LOUW, *Transformations*, 12–23.

⁸ See ANDREW CHESTERMAN, “A Causal Model for Translation Studies,” in *Intercultural Faultness. Research Models in Translation Studies I – Textual and Cognitive Aspects*. (Ed. by M. Olohan; Manchester, 2000), 15–27.

⁹ For this aspect, see also GAUTHIER, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 89.

an isle within the sea of ancient Jewish culture and literature.¹⁰ The issue of how to examine the LXX version in relation to its cultural context raises of course all kind of questions, but in the matter of evaluating exegesis in the LXX I have in mind the following two aspects:

(a) The relationship between the translators of LXX books, on the one hand, and the experts of ‘biblical’ books in Early Judaism, on the other;

(b) The relationship between ‘LXX hermeneutics’ on the one hand, and the ‘hermeneutics’ implied in ‘biblical’ interpretation in Early Judaism, on the other.

It is a well-known fact that the image of the translator “we have in our minds greatly affects our decisions.”¹¹ One might think that this image should be based on the analysis of translations only, but, as is the case in any historical research of ancient texts, one cannot do without external evidence. So in dealing with the question in which circles of ancient Jewish society the translators might have been at home, the social and cultural context needs to be taken into account.¹² As far as the second question is concerned the issue at stake is to see how modern ideas of LXX hermeneutics (as defined above) lie to principles and assumptions underlying the reading and understanding of Scripture in ancient Judaism.

In what follows I shall present first of all my view on the two aspects. Next, I shall deal with the issue of LXX hermeneutics as applied in current research of LXX Isaiah.

II. Paradigm: Translators as Scholars

Seen from the literacy among the Jews in antiquity, translators of the Hebrew Scriptures must be looked for among the intellectual elite. The sacred writings, making up the textual heritage or classics of the Jewish nation, were *literary* texts, a category quite distinct from documentary texts. The ability of reading (studying), writing and translating the former required skills of a higher level¹³ than was required for those who were engaged in

¹⁰ But see e.g. MARTIN RÖSEL, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung. Studien zur Genesis-Septuaginta* (BZAW 223; Berlin, 1994).

¹¹ ANNELI AEJMELAEUS, *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators. Collected Essays. Revised and Expanded Edition* (CBET 50; Leuven, 2007), 59.

¹² Cf. the following statement by Boyd-Taylor: “The translator and his text ought to be situated (to the extent possible) in a specific social and cultural environment” (Book review of Anneli Aejmelaeus’ *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators*, in *Bulletin IOSCS* 42 [2009], 126).

¹³ Cf. MARTIN S. JAFFEE, *Torah in the Mouth. Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE – 400 CE* (Oxford, 2001), 164; JOHANNES UNSOK RO, “Socio-Economic Context of Post-Exilic Community and Literacy,” *ZAW* 120 (2008), 597–611

documentary texts. It is likely indeed that only highly educated people, ‘scribes’ in the sense of ‘scholars’,¹⁴ were able and authorized to interpret literary texts. They were also the ones who wrote new compositions, being based in one way or another on the study of ‘biblical’ books,¹⁵ or produced a translation of sacred books or treasured writings. Jesus Sirach may serve as an example of a scholar-scribe who produced a translation of a literary text (the work of his grandfather). As far as Early Christianity is concerned, the figure of Jerome springs to mind, as a scholar who made a translation of biblical books.¹⁶

As far as terminology is concerned, Hebrew *sofer* is the best-known word for designating a scholar-scribe, but it is important to note that it is not the only term used.¹⁷ It does not occur for example in the book of Daniel, nor hardly so in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and yet these sources do refer to scholars – the former to Daniel and his friends, and the latter to leading officials, as is the case for example in CD 6:2–3 (“men of knowledge from Aaron, and wise men from Israel”, i.e., leading priests and representatives of the lay-people).

This passage in CD actually reflects the polity of the Jewish nation, which was comprised of two components – priests and the people (cf. Aaron and Israel).¹⁸ Being members of priestly families living in Jerusalem, the priests referred to in this regard were high-ranking officials who were permanently employed in the temple. They formed an official body, namely, that of the chief priests under the supreme direction of the high priest (cf. 1QM 2:1–2, see below). As several sources indicate, they were heading the Jewish nation as specialists of the Law (judges).¹⁹

(602). See also DAVID M. CARR, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart. Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford, 2005), 177–184 (on the three levels of education in the Hellenistic world).

¹⁴ Cf. ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “Authoritative Scriptures and Scribal Culture,” in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (ed. by Mladen Popovic; JSJSup 141; Leiden, 2010), 55–71 (61–65). I prefer the term ‘scholar’ to ‘scribe’ because of the ambiguity of the latter (scholar, or secretary).

¹⁵ For example, the *Wisdom* by Jesus ben Sirach, and the work entitled *Concerning the Kings in Judaea* by Eupolemus.

¹⁶ On Jerome as scholar, see MICHAEL GRAVES, *Jerome’s Hebrew Philology. A Study Based on the Commentary of Jeremiah* (VCSup 90; Leiden, 2007).

¹⁷ The study by CHRISTINE SCHAMS (*Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period* [Sheffield, 1998]) is however based on the usage and non-usage of *sofer* alone.

¹⁸ Cf. passages like 1 Macc 7:33, and 14:28, 44.

¹⁹ See e.g. Hecataeus of Abdera: “The same men (i.e., priests heading the Jewish nation) he (i.e., Moses) appointed to be judges in all major disputes, and entrusted to them the guardianship of the laws and the customs” (Menachem Stern [ed.], *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. Vol. I: From Herodotus to Plutarch* [Jerusalem, 1974],

Regarding the second component of the polity, people belonging to the civic society could be “sought out for the council of the people”, or for a position “in the assembly” (Sir. 38:32–33). This passage presumably refers to the senate, the council of elders (*gerousia*) as well as to the civic assembly (*ekklesia*) of the ‘people’.²⁰ As Sir 38 illustrates, members of the council of elders as well as those having a position in the assembly were learned persons.

As members of the intellectual elite scholars belonged to the upper class in Jewish society, which, in line with the two components just mentioned, consisted of the priestly aristocracy (e.g., Ezra, Aristobulus, Eupolemus, Josephus) and the lay nobility (e.g., Jesus Sirach²¹). They were people having great authority who could also act as leaders of the Jewish nation. A clear example is the High Priest, who as a scholar and primary exegete of the Law was also heading the Jewish nation.²² The priestly figure of the Teacher of Righteousness is yet another example of the close relationship between leadership and scholarship.

Interestingly, the close relationship between scholarship and leadership can also be illustrated by a passage in the Temple Scroll about a major institution. Based on Deut 17:9, 11QT 57:11–14 tells us that the central court, or High Court, at Jerusalem consists (or should consist) of the following people:

twelve leaders of the people (plus the king),
 twelve priests,
 and twelve levites,
 all sitting together “for judgement and for the law”.²³

The leading officials referred to in this passage are all specialists of the Law. The composition of this body reminds one of the listing of those functioning permanently in the temple as found in 1QM 2:1–3:

28), and Josephus: “With his colleagues (*συντεπέων*) he (i.e. the High Priest) will [...] safeguard the laws, adjudicate in cases of dispute” (*Contra Apionem* 2,194).

²⁰ In line with Greek usage, in Jewish sources of the time the popular assembly is sometimes referred to as *demos*. So e.g. 1 Macc 12:6 and 14:20.

²¹ On Jesus Sirach as layman, and not as priest, see VAN DER KOOIJ, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 68; FRIEDRICH V. REITERER, “Aaron’s Polyvalent Role according to Ben Sira,” in *Rewriting Biblical History. Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes* (ed. by Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol; DCLS 7; Berlin, 2011), 27–56.

²² Cf. the picture of the High Priest as presented by Hecataeus of Abdera, and the Letter of Aristeas. Of note is also the figure of the Interpreter of the Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See VAN DER KOOIJ, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 63–64.

²³ On the notion of “sitting together”, see ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “The *Yahad* – What is in a Name?” *DSD* 18 (2011), 109–128.

twelve priests, being the “chiefs of the priests” behind the High Priest and his second (the deputy),
 twelve “chiefs of the levites”,
 twelve “chiefs of the tribes”.

The third group, “the leaders of the people” (11QT), designated “the chiefs of the tribes” in 1QM, is to be equated with the *gerousia*. All these leading and learned figures were carrying authority, but since the Jewish polity and its official bodies were organized hierarchically, the three groups did not have the same authority. On the contrary, the high priest, together with the chief priests, was vested with the highest authority, with the elders of the senate ranking after them, whereas the Levites occupied a position below the priests. The leading priests thus are to be considered the most important scholars in Jewish society of the time.²⁴

The close relationship between scholarship and leadership evokes yet another important question. One of the main characteristics of Jewish life in the Hellenistic and early Roman times was the presence of different groups (parties and sects), both in Judea and in Egypt.²⁵ So one wonders to which group or party scholars and translators might have belonged. It would lead too far to deal with this issue here, but the following comments may suffice. As is well known, Josephus discerns three groups or sects from the point of philosophical thought. However, in the light of the available evidence regarding groups and parties, this division does not seem to be appropriate.²⁶ Parties we know of in Early Judaism in the Hellenistic era are:

In Judea – (1) Oniad party; (2) the Hellenists; (3) the Hasideans; (5) the Maccabean party; (6) Essenes / Qumran community;

In Egypt – (1) educated families in Alexandria to which scholars like Aristobulus and the author of the Aristeas Letter belonged (an intellectual milieu being marked by a strong and fairly exclusive focus on LXX Pentateuch as Scripture, and by a ‘philosophical’ reading of the Law²⁷); (2) the Oniad party in Leontopolis, and (3) probably – later in the second century

²⁴ Cf. the link between Levi/the (ruling) priesthood and scholarship in Jubilees; see SIDNIE WHITE CRAWFORD, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 2008), 78. In 1QS too priests are the leading authorities within the *yahad*; they are presented here as those who safeguard the covenant, and were authorized to interpret the laws of the covenant. See VAN DER KOOIJ, “The *Yahad*”, 123.

²⁵ On this topic, see ALBERT I. BAUMGARTEN, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation* (JSJSup 55; Leiden, 1997).

²⁶ On the issue of ‘sects’, see BAUMGARTEN, *Jewish Sects*.

²⁷ Cf., at a later date, Philo and his ‘Mosaic philosophy’. For Aristobulus, the Letter of Aristeas, and Philo, see in particular JOHN M.G. BARCLAY, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh, 1996), 138–180.

B.C.E. – leading families in Egypt being in favour of the Maccabean leadership in Judea.²⁸

In view of their great diversity it seems reasonable to assume that the books of the LXX originated in different groups or parties, either in Egypt or in Judea.²⁹ It would indeed be interesting to examine whether a LXX book might contain data, which reflect the interests of a particular group.³⁰ In antiquity, the intellectual elite had not only power over texts, but also exercised power by means of texts.³¹ The generation of new interpretations, among other things by means of translations of literature considered foundational, could well be a matter of deliberate strategy. One could think, for example, of a strategy aiming at legitimizing the present such as leadership claims, through a re-interpretation of ancient texts.

So far the presentation of my picture of translators as scholars, which although being sketched in broad outline may suffice to make clear which image of the translator I have in mind. The basic idea of the paradigm outlined above is that LXX books as well as other ancient versions of Hebrew Scripture were not produced by a translator in the modern sense of the word, nor by people being able to translate documentary texts, but by leading scholars who were acquainted with the study and interpretation of Scripture.³²

III. Hermeneutics: Interpretation and Relevance

I now turn to the second question, the relationship between LXX hermeneutics on the one hand, and the ‘hermeneutics’ implied in ‘biblical’ interpretation in Early Judaism, on the other. LXX hermeneutics as defined by Wagner – how to identify and evaluate ‘interpretation’ of the source text in the translation – has to do with the analysis at the level of context and con-

²⁸ Cf. the Greek version of the Wisdom of Sirach. The fact that the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees were sent to Egypt also suggests the presence of Jewish circles in Egypt supporting the new leadership in Jerusalem.

²⁹ For a discussion of the provenance issue, see JOHAN COOK and ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, *Law, Prophets, and Wisdom. On the Provenance of Translators and their Books in the Septuagint Version* (CBET 68; Leuven, 2012).

³⁰ On LXX Isaiah as containing evidence for the legitimation of the Oniad leadership, see ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “The Septuagint of Isaiah,” in Cook and van der Kooij, *Law, Prophets, and Wisdom*, 63–85.

³¹ Cf. ALAN K. BOWMAN and GREG WOOLF, “Literacy and Power in the Ancient World,” in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (ed. by idem and idem; Cambridge, 1994), 1–16 (6).

³² I leave aside the question whether a literary translation was produced by a leading scholar himself, or by a scribe who acted on his authority.

tent of the Greek text in comparison to its alleged Vorlage. This includes an evaluation of the translation, both on word level as well as at the level of phrases, clauses, and sentences. As far as semantics are concerned, lexical studies are of course most important. Furthermore, a scholar-translator had recourse to a set of devices by which he was able to interpret words and phrases in a way, which, in some respects, is incompatible with our modern philological approach. I have in mind here devices like the interpretative techniques known from the Dead Sea Scrolls, methods of the ‘grammarians’ in Alexandria, as well as principles of rabbinic exegesis.

From the perspective of the paradigm outlined above, specific renderings and content related divergences in LXX against MT are likely due to the interpretation of the source text by the scholar-translator rather than to misunderstandings, or errors. This does of course not exclude the possibility of a different Vorlage, but so-called ‘non-obligatory’ shifts should first of all be examined as readings and renderings, which may reflect a particular interpretation. Seen from the cultural context of the LXX it would of course be of a great help if contemporaneous literary sources of Jewish provenance provide evidence that could shed light on interpretive renderings in the LXX.

It is to be noted though that the extent of exegesis in the LXX and in the ancient versions as well, depends on the choice made regarding the style of translation. To give a few examples, the Vulgate version of Isaiah as well as the Peshitta version of the same book, both containing some interesting renderings due to a Christian reading, attest to a translation style, which leaves not much room for exegesis. They are fairly modest in introducing specific interpretations compared to the ‘rich’ Targum version of the same book. As far as the pre-*kaige* LXX is concerned, most books are likewise fairly modest in this regard,³³ while others such as Isaiah, Daniel, Esther, Proverbs and Job attest an approach, which leaves more room for stylistic improvements and interpretive renderings.

However, hermeneutics have not only to do with methods and procedures of exegesis. It is not enough to go into the details of linguistic and interpretative aspects of translations of the authoritative Scriptures. There is more to it. In trying to understand the LXX, and other ancient versions as well, one should also take into account the hermeneutics implied in ‘biblical’ interpretation in Jewish and other writings in antiquity: Jewish as well as Christian scholars were not interested in the original meaning of the ‘biblical’ text in a way typical of modern scholarship, but rather in a meaning considered relevant for their own time and their own group. Here

³³ This applies for example to LXX Amos; cf. W. EDWARD GLENNY, *Finding Meaning in the Text. Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos* (VTSup 126; Leiden, 2009).

we touch on the hermeneutical issue of the significance and *relevance* of ancient texts for the present as perceived by scholars (interpreters and readers) in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity.³⁴

Ancient texts making up the culture heritage of the Jews, or of other nations (Egypt and Mesopotamia), were regarded relevant for the present, and hence were used in several ways for various purposes. They could be used, for example, to serve the legitimization of the religious and cultural interests of a nation within the context of Hellenism. This could be done by all kind of literary and interpretive means, which might differ from text to text. Sacred texts could be copied (for study and teaching purposes), but the significance or relevance of texts such as laws and narratives could also be enhanced by procedures like reworking, rewriting, etc. Literary sources belonging to the latter category often offer interesting clues about topics that were regarded important. For instance, writings like Sirach, Jubilees, and the Temple Scroll testify to a great interest in issues related to the constitution of the Jews, more in particular to concepts of leadership.³⁵ This type of evidence can help us understand specific renderings in ancient translations.³⁶

IV. The Book of Isaiah

Since, in this essay about LXX hermeneutics, I would like to focus on the book of Isaiah, the hermeneutic issue at stake is, how literate people in antiquity read and understood prophecies. As both Jewish and non-Jewish sources illustrate, prophecies were regarded predictions; ancient oracles were envisaged as being still to be trusted as predictive revelations. This underlying idea is not only typical of early Judaism but is also in line with the way scholars in Egypt and in Mesopotamia read past prophecies.³⁷ Priestly circles of Egypt being largely concerned with maintaining the authority of old texts were engaged in studying past oracles as revealed liter-

³⁴ This hermeneutic principle of relevance is not to be confused with the ‘relevance theory’ in modern translation studies. The latter is a theory of communication, the focus of which is to explain how the phenomenon of translation works (see GAUTHIER, “LXX Hermeneutic,” 52–55; idem, *Psalms 38 and 145*, 84–89).

³⁵ Cf. Sir 45–50; Jub 31; 11QT 56–59.

³⁶ For passages in LXX Pentateuch, which seem to reflect a particular view of the polity of the Jews, see ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “The Septuagint of the Pentateuch,” in Cook and VAN DER KOOIJ, *Law, Prophets, and Wisdom*, 42–56.

³⁷ Cf. DAVID FRANKFURTER, “The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (ed. by James C. VanderKam and William Adler; CRINT III,4; Assen/Minneapolis, 1996), 129–200 (147).

ature, recopying them with interpretations. Interesting examples are the Oracle of the Lamb and the Oracle of the Potter.³⁸

Jewish texts such as Dan 9, Tobit 14, and the *pesharim* from Qumran testify to this hermeneutic principle of prophecy fulfilment. They all reflect a mode of reading ancient prophecies “as fulfilled in contemporary (or imminently expected) events” of one’s own day.³⁹ Although not all the older prophecies were applied to the present,⁴⁰ it is clear from the texts just mentioned that their significance for the present was the main interest of the scholar-interpreters involved.

As to the book of Isaiah and its ancient versions, it has been pointed out that Targum Isaiah contains traces of fulfilment interpretation. In a number of cases Isaianic oracles have been applied to dramatic events up to the present of the translator. Examples are: Targ Isa 22:1–15, alluding to events in 63 BCE, 29:1–2 and 32:14 to events in 70 CE, and 25:2 to events in 132 CE.⁴¹ Other passages though were taken as referring to events that were expected to happen soon; so for example Targ Isa 54:1 (“the children of desolate Jerusalem will be more than the children of inhabited Rome”). The (priestly) scholars who produced the Aramaic version of Isaiah apparently shared the view that the book contains prophecies relevant for their own time as well as for the near future.⁴² Their significance was made explicit, or hinted at, by way of specific transformations of the source text.

³⁸ See Andreas Blasius und Bernd Ulrich Schipper (Hrsg.), *Apokalyptik und Ägypten. Eine kritische Analyse der relevanten Texte aus dem griechisch-römischen Ägypten* (OLA 107; Leuven, 2002); ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “The Old Greek of Isaiah and Other Prophecies Published in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Theologien, Einflüsse* (Hrsg. von Wolfgang Kraus und Martin Karrer; WUNT 252; Tübingen, 2010), 72–84.

³⁹ JOHN BARTON, *Oracles of God* (London, 1986), 196. See also the chapter on “Mantological Exegesis” in: MICHAEL FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985), 447–524.

⁴⁰ Tobit 14:3–5 is an interesting passage in this regard. While from the perspective of its author the prophecy of Nahum (the destruction of Nineveh) was fulfilled in the past, the rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem, as promised by the prophets, was expected at a later date (at the author’s time, presumably).

⁴¹ See ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, *Die alten Textzeugen des Jesajabuches. Ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (OBO 35; Freiburg/Göttingen, 1981), 170–173, 194; BRUCE D. CHILTON, *The Isaiah Targum. Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible, 11; Edinburgh, 1987), 49, 57, 63.

⁴² For the view that the Aramaic version of Isaiah was made by priestly scholars, see ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “Josephus, Onkelos and Jonathan: On the Agreements between Josephus’ Writings and Targumic Sources,” in *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon* (ed. by Geoffrey Khan and Diana Lipton; VTSup 149; Leiden, 2012), 253–267 (261–265).

Scholars like Seeligmann, Das Neves, Koenig, and myself, have argued that this also holds for LXX Isaiah.⁴³ This view has been criticized however by Troxel and Wagner.⁴⁴ Both subscribe to the view that LXX Isaiah offers interpretive renderings at the level of the literary context or at the level of the book as a whole. Both also believe that the cultural context should be taken into account in analyzing textual data of LXX Isaiah. Troxel does so by pointing out that the translator is to be compared with the ‘grammarians’ of the time (*γραμματικοί*), i.e., a scholar who was able to read and interpret literary texts. So does Wagner by referring to what he calls “the cultural encyclopedia” which should be part of the method of analysis: “interpretation of a translated text requires that we identify the encyclopedia common to the translator and his target culture”.⁴⁵ However, as to the relevance issue both share the opinion that LXX Isaiah does not offer sufficient evidence for the assumption of prophecy fulfilment. Instead, in their view the translation is better understood from the following two perspectives:

(1) Although Troxel does not say explicitly so, both assume that the translator considered the prophecies of Isaiah as referring to persons and events in the past – the time of Isaiah and of the Babylonian exile –, in line with modern scholarship. In his work, which offers a detailed and very stimulating analysis of LXX Isaiah 1, Wagner for example asserts that the phrase “the besieged city” in LXX Isa 1:8 “presages the coming Assyrian invasion, a crisis that overshadows chapters 1–39”.⁴⁶

(2) On the other hand, Troxel and Wagner believe that the translator adapted in a few cases the text to the reality of his own day, attesting to a contemporization, or actualization, albeit in a rather global or incidental way. Troxel points to fiscal policies of Hellenistic rulers as reflected in the version, as well as to “a pervasive concern for the Torah”,⁴⁷ whereas Wag-

⁴³ ISAAC LEO SEELIGMANN, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah. A discussion of its problems* (MEOL 9; Leiden, 1948); JOAQUIM CARREIRA MARCELLINO DAS NEVES, *A Teologia da Tradução Grega dos Setenta no Livro de Isaías (Cap. 24 de Isaías)* (Lisboa, 1973); JEAN KOENIG, *L’herméneutique analogique du Judaïsme antique d’après les témoins textuelles d’Israël* (VTSup 33; Leiden, 1982); ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, *The Oracle of Tyre. The Septuagint of Isaiah 23 as Version and Vision* (VTSup 71; Leiden, 1998). See also FLORIAN WILK, “Between Scripture and History: Technique and Hermeneutics of Interpreting Biblical Prophets in the Septuagint of Isaiah and the Letters of Paul,” in *The Old Greek of Isaiah: Issues and Perspectives. Papers read at the Conference on the Septuagint of Isaiah, held in Leiden 10–11 April 2008* (CBET 55; Leuven, 2010), 189–209.

⁴⁴ RONALD L. TROXEL, *LXX-Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation. The Strategies of the Translator of the Septuagint of Isaiah* (JSJSup 124; Leiden, 2008), and WAGNER, *The Sealed Book*.

⁴⁵ WAGNER, *The Sealed Book*, 56

⁴⁶ WAGNER, *The Sealed Book*, 95.

⁴⁷ TROXEL, *LXX-Isaiah*, 246.

ner notes that the Hellenistic accent is perceptible in two themes – the division between people relying on wealth and power, and those trusting of the Lord, on the one hand, and the role of the Torah, on the other.⁴⁸

Although allowing for elements betraying the cultural milieu of the translator, both scholars basically read LXX Isaiah in line with our modern understanding of the book of Isaiah. The implied hermeneutics of their contributions thus differ from the prevailing view among scholars in Early Judaism and beyond.⁴⁹ Hence, as far as this aspect is concerned their approach tends to be anachronistic.

In line with the above, my approach is based on the following two assumptions: (a) Ancient versions of the Bible, including the LXX, were produced by scholars, Jewish as well as Christian, who were familiar with the reading and understanding of the Hebrew text that was current in their time. (b) In line with the hermeneutics implied in ‘biblical’ interpretation in antiquity the mind-set of these scholars was marked by a particular mode of reading prophetic or oracular texts. This is why, in the case of LXX Isaiah, my approach includes, beside other aspects, an evaluation from the perspective of fulfilment hermeneutics.⁵⁰ True, specific renderings in LXX Isaiah as such may not represent sufficient evidence, as Troxel and Wagner claim, but things are different if the hermeneutic perspective just mentioned is part of the method of evaluation.

To give a few examples: LXX Isa 23 is characterized by “Carthage” as rendering of “Tarshish”. Troxel asserts, that the “translator wanted to identify Tarshish [...] with a city allied economically with Tyre in his day”.⁵¹ In line with the above however this case is better understood as resulting from “one of the techniques used for interpreting oracular texts” in apply-

⁴⁸ WAGNER, *The Sealed Book*, 237. For a similar view, see Glenny’s work on LXX Amos: The translator’s method of interpretation is “one of contemporization and actualization of the text through incidental betrayal of his milieu” (*Finding Meaning in the Text*, 258–59).

⁴⁹ While assuming that the translator read part of Isaiah as referring to the time of Isaiah and Hezekiah, Wagner also states that the translator “believed that much of the book of Isaiah spoke of a time yet to come” (*The Sealed Book*, 218). According to the logic of the fulfilment interpretation however the reliability of the predictions that remain to be fulfilled was based on the idea that parts of the prophecies had come true in the present. See JOHN J. COLLINS, “Prophecy and History in the Pesharim,” in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (ed. by Mladen Popovic; JSJSup 141; Leiden, 2010), 209–226 (216).

⁵⁰ This is not meant to say that every prophecy in Isaiah was considered as referring to the translator’s time. On this issue, see ARIE VAN DER KOOIJ, “The Septuagint of Isaiah and the Mode of Reading Prophecies in Early Judaism. Some Comments on LXX Isaiah 8–9,” in *Die Septuaginta – Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten* (Hrsg. von Martin Karrer und Wolfgang Kraus; WUNT 219; Tübingen, 2008), 597–611 (601–602).

⁵¹ TROXEL, *LXX-Isaiah*, 199.

ing prophecies to the present, introducing in this way ‘hints’ of the time of the interpreter.⁵²

In other instances though the name used in the original source was not changed. A well-known case in this respect is to be found in Dan 11:30 where the prophecy of Num 24:24 about the “Kittim” is taken as a reference to the “Romans”.⁵³ The reference to the “Assyrians” (“Ashur” in MT) in LXX Isaiah is a similar case. Although in LXX Isa 36–37 this name was taken as referring to the Assyrians in the time of Isaiah and Hezekiah, elsewhere in LXX Isaiah, e.g. in ch. 10, it was understood, due to a sense of analogy between past and present, as a cipher for the Syrians, or Seleucids.⁵⁴

V. Concluding remarks

The basic idea of this essay is best summarized by quoting the well-known phrase *audiat et altera pars*. New approaches in LXX research are being developed, which are based on modern translation studies, and which are very helpful indeed. However, the other side – the culture and literature of Early Judaism – should also be heard. In this essay I have tried to let this party speak about two questions which have a bearing on the matter of evaluating exegesis in the LXX: who were the translators, and what kind of hermeneutics is implied in ‘biblical’ interpretation in Early Judaism and beyond. As to the former, it is argued that the translators of the LXX are to be looked for among the intellectual elite, i.e., scholars, who could also

⁵² JEFFREY H. TIGAY, “An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation. Studies in biblical and cuneiform literatures* (ed. by H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld; Jerusalem / Leiden, 1984), 181. – For another example in LXX Isaiah, see Isa 9:11 where “Aram” and “Philistia” in Isa 9:11 are represented as “Syria” and the “Greeks” resp. See EMANUEL TOV, “Personal Names in the Septuagint of Isaiah,” in *Isaiah in Context. Studies in Honour of Arie van der Kooij on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. by Michael N. van der Meer, Percy van Keulen, Wido van Peursen, and Bas ter Haar Romeny; VTSup 138; Leiden, 2010), 413–428 (420–21).

⁵³ For an example of this kind of reapplication in omen texts from Seleucid Babylonia, see SAMUEL K. EDDY, *The King is dead. Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism* (Lincoln, 1961), 131.

⁵⁴ For the sense of analogy between past and present, see VAN DER KOOIJ, “The Septuagint of Isaiah and the Mode of Reading,” 602–605. For the reapplication of (Isaianic) Ashur to the Seleucids in Dan 11, see FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation*, 490, and ANDREW TEETER, “Isaiah and the King of As/Syria in Daniel’s Final Vision: On the Rhetoric of Inner-Scriptural Allusion and the Hermeneutics of ‘Mantological Exegesis,’” in *A Teacher for All Generations. Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*. Vol. One (ed. by Eric F. Mason, Samuel I. Thomas, Alison Schofield, Eugene Ulrich; JSJSup 153/1; Leiden, 2012), 169–199.

have leading positions in the society of their time. And as far as 'LXX hermeneutics' are concerned, it is pointed out that the way scholars in antiquity read and understood ancient texts, in particular past prophecies and oracles like in the book of Isaiah, should be part of the method of evaluation of exegesis in the LXX. Ancient writings were regarded relevant for their own time, which, in case of prophecies, led to the mode of fulfilment interpretation.