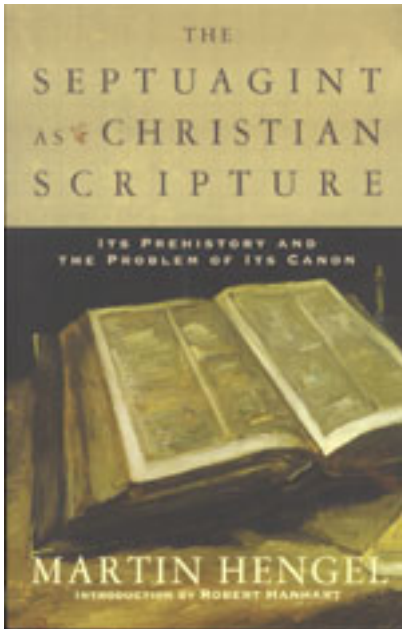


RBL 05/2005



Hengel, Martin

The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon

Translated by Mark E. Biddle

Introduction by Robert Hanhart

Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004. Pp. xvi + 153. Paper.
\$24.99. ISBN 080102790X.

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The English translation of “this series of essays,” as Leonard Greenspoon puts it on the cover, fits into the renewed interest in Septuagint studies. In five chapters, Hengel presents a wealth of information and offers his finely crafted views on issues such as the origin, the status, the authority, and the creation of a Christian Septuagint. The book has a long history—its earliest forms date to the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

In “A Difficult Subject,” Hengel first describes the limitations of his knowledge. He refers to himself as a person who entered “terra incognita” when diving into Septuagint studies, and he immediately questions the issue whether or not one can speak of a genuine Jewish, pre-Christian collection of canonical value. He then sharply points to the issue at stake: “[H]ow did it come about that the collection of Jewish writings in the Greek language, significantly larger than the scope of the Hebrew Bible, becomes under the designation ‘the Seventy,’ the authoritative ‘Holy Scriptures’ of the Old Testament in the Christian Church?” (23).

In chapter 2 Hengel investigates the Christian claim to the Septuagint. Hengel proceeds to analyze the stories that contain reports or references to the origins of the Septuagint and the number of the translators who did the job. In chronological order, Hengel surveys the

Letter of Aristeas (the legend about the translation), the works of Justin (adding a nice section on the disputed interpretation of the translation of Isa 7:14), two fifth–sixth century dialogues, and some early church fathers (after Justin). Hengel then reflects on the Christian appropriation of the Septuagint and how this appropriation can be detected (Hengel points to the contracted *nomina sacra*—though the present reviewer has observed other ways of indicating the divine name in Christian documents and thus questions this criterion). Then Hengel deals with the Jewish reaction to the Christian appropriation of the Septuagint. Hengel believes that the latter led to an intensified process of revisioning of the Septuagint on behalf of the Jews—the present reviewer is of the opinion that the initial process of reviewing the Septuagint started earlier and was an inner Jewish, pre-Christian development, not a Jewish apologetic reaction to a Christian claim. In this section, Hengel also deals with the issue of the so-called “final closing of the Hebrew canon by the Pharisaic teachers” (44), a process that he also defines as “‘anti-heretical,’ indeed anti-Christian” (44). Here Hengel spoils the reader with a nice suggestion regarding a possible wordplay between *hag-gilyōnīm* and εὐαγγέλιον. Hengel also finely points to the “continuing ‘apocrypha problem’ ” (46). Indeed, given the (Hebrew-Aramaic) manuscript evidence of books of Tobit and Sirach, these books should have been included in the Hebrew canon. Hengel then discusses the work of Origen and Jerome, two great scholars who had to balance a tightrope between “philologico-historical truth and church tradition” (48), and Augustine’s endeavor to reconcile these perspectives. Finally, Hengel offers his views on the *Book of Enoch*—a book that, if the present reviewer is not mistaken, is still part of the canon of the Ethiopic Falasja Jews.

In chapter 3 Hengel deals with the later consolidation of the canon of the Septuagint. Hengel analyzes the evidence from the first codices regarding the writings they contained and their often presumed, but not established, sequence. Then he examines the earlier canon lists, which give “a substantially different picture” (60). These indicate a smaller number of acknowledged books and add a second group of books of lesser importance. Hengel then proceeds to discuss precisely the evidence for the use of the second group of books, labeled Apocrypha, and for the rejection of the “Authentic ‘apocrypha’ ” (e.g., *Book of Enoch*, *Assumption of Moses*, *Jannes and Jambres*).

In chapter 4 Hengel focuses on the Jewish prehistory of the Septuagint. Hengel picks up his analysis of the *Letter of Aristeas* and references to its contents in the works of Josephus and Philo. He also deals with other translations (such as the work produced by the grandson of Sirach) and the different Greek versions of, for instance, Joshua (esp. ch. 19), Judges, Tobit and Daniel. In this section Hengel also discusses a number of what he calls more free Greek translations that have additional material taken up in them, such as 1 Esdras, Esther, and the like. In this chapter, one would also expect a section on

translation technique of the Old Greek book; unfortunately, Hengel does not deal with this aspect of Septuagint studies. Hengel then surveys the writings not found in the Hebrew canon. The chapter ends with a discussion about the canon in the Jewish Diaspora, dealing with the prologue by Jesus ben Sirach, Philo's *Therapeutae*, and Josephus' *Contra Apionem* (1:37–43). I humbly suggest that a reprint of this book might include a reference to or study of the contribution of Eugene Ulrich on "The Non-attestation of a Tripartite Canon in 4QMMT" (*CBQ* 65 [2003]: 202–14).

In chapter 5 Hengel goes at length to describe the origin of the "Christian Septuagint" and its additional writings. According to Hengel, "[i]t was believed to be self-evident that one could know what were 'Holy Scriptures' and that one could refrain from making any definitive distinction" (105, with reference to John Barton). Hengel states that "approximately 60 per cent of all the direct citations of the Old Testament come from three books: Psalms, Isaiah and Deuteronomy" (107; the present reviewer notices that precisely these three books are also on the bestseller list of the Qumranites), with Paul preferring Isaiah over the Psalms. Hengel also discusses the difficult issue of the source of the quotations of the Bible in the New Testament. He claims that "[t]he text employed was, as a rule, that of the LXX" (108). He also, however, elaborates on some exceptions. The last section of this chapter deals with the insoluble "question of why the Old Testament attained in the church precisely the form present—still not completely uniformly—in the great codices of the fourth and fifth centuries" by way of going over all the evidence regarding the writings outside of the "Hebrew canon" and the independent documents outside the "Hebrew canon" and by pondering on why (and how) these writings ultimately prevailed in church use.

The English translation of this book comes with an introduction by Robert Hanhart—the "Septuagint god" from Göttingen, that is, the former director of the *Septuaginta Unternehmen*. Hanhart's take on the Septuagint deviates from Hengel's on many points. Hanhart claims that "Hellenistic Judaism had a relatively well defined canon of 'Holy Scripture' already in the second century B.C." (2), leading the way for the later distinction between canonical and apocryphal. Hanhart points here to the pre-Christian, Jewish Alexandrian canon that indeed has more books than the Palestinian canon and to the *Damascus Scroll*, which witnesses to an early fixing of acknowledged Scripture. Hanhart then elaborates on the relationship between original and copy. The Greek Scriptures derived their authority from the canonical value of the Hebrew Scriptures, and hence all translations were constantly revised toward the (or a) Hebrew text. Hanhart also states that when Christian writers quoted Scripture, they sometimes turned to an already revised version of the Septuagint, not the Old Greek as it came out of the hands of the first translators. Hanhart also remarks that the name of God was already rendered with κύριος in the pre-Christian era—not, as Hengel claimed, in the Christian era. Finally,

Hanhart deals at length with the issue of authenticity and falsification of Scripture (in translations), positioning Origen and his work precisely in this debate.

This is a wonderful book on the Septuagint written by an incredibly fine scholar whose knowledge is unfathomable. That the book comes with an introduction that sincerely questions the book truly witnesses to the classy greatness of the author and his opponent.