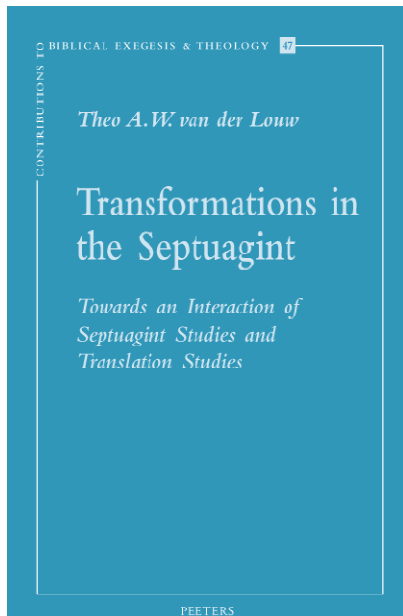


RBL 10/2008



Louw, Theo A. W. van der

Transformations in the Septuagint: Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies

Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 47

Leuven: Peeters, 2007. Pp. xv + 403. Paper. €42.00. ISBN 9042918888.

Francis Dalrymple-Hamilton
Peebles, Scotland, United Kingdom

1. General

Without doubt van der Louw has taken the cause of Septuagint studies and translation studies a step further by his avant-garde project in uniting these two disciplines, which hitherto have been progressing along similar, but separate lines of enquiry. In his own words, van der Louw states that the aim of this study is to promote interaction between translation studies and the study of the Septuagint. It should be noted that this work is the published version of his doctoral thesis, which was defended at Leiden University on 31 January 2006. In the preface van der Louw notes that, “Although one of the first major translations, the Septuagint has largely been neglected by Translation Studies, and, although a translation, it has been barely studied with the help of methods from Translation studies. Thus the aim of this work is to see how Translation Studies and Septuagint Studies may profit from each other.”

2. Plan

As has already been stated, this study inaugurates interaction between Septuagint research and translation studies. From the field of translation studies van der Louw has singled out approaches that are suited to Septuagint research. He then proceeds to provide a very

appropriate survey of the views of translation in antiquity that reveals that among the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Jews similar disputes about language and translatability existed. To make this practical to his cause, van der Louw has then selected three chapters in the Septuagint, namely, Gen 2, Isa 1, and Prov 6, which he has then analyzed in depth, in order to categorize the transformations (shifts) in each text with the help of linguistic translation studies. Before the advent of this work, any deviations in the translation were usually ascribed either to that of the translator's ideology or a variant in the Hebrew parent text, but in this work van der Louw has sought to show that the deviation may have a purely translational origin. To be sure, every transformation does have a reason for its existence, and van der Louw has sought to categorize the reasons behind all transformations in tabular form, so that the translational hierarchy that (un)consciously guided the translator may now be detected. In his study van der Louw has sought to show that the rationale that lies behind a transformation can be detected by his analysis of the literal alternative that the translator has rejected.

3. Presentation

In the introductory chapter, van der Louw seeks to show how translation studies and Septuagint studies may profit from each other. He seeks to evaluate various approaches from the field of translation studies and selects two that he feels are appropriate to the task in hand, which are historical translation studies and that of early translation studies. It should be further noted that these are the two legs upon which this study stands.

In chapter 2 van der Louw selects the topic of historical translation studies and in this chapter he concentrates on translating and translations in antiquity. This chapter seeks to show that through classical antiquity the same (opposite) views of language and translation can be found everywhere, irrespective of language or religion.

In chapter 3 van der Louw provides an inventory of the said "transformations." Under each category he gives a good number of illustrations that he has taken from published modern translations. In order to demonstrate their validity for antiquity, he also provides examples from ancient translations as well.

In chapters 4–6 he analyzes three sections from the Septuagint—Gen 2, Isa 1, and Prov 6—and in so doing utilizes the catalogue of transformations already selected in the previous chapter. He chose these biblical chapters more or less at random, but the choice of the books themselves is deliberate, since it is known that these books were translated differently and presumably at different times. He also makes the point in his introductory remarks that these chapters have the character of an in-depth interview. The advantage of

this method is that it provides a very good picture of the backgrounds and motives of the translator in question.

The study is rounded off with an appropriate chapter detailing the conclusions to this study.

4. Particular

In the introduction where van der Louw has defended the choice of the books of Genesis, Isaiah, and Proverbs, he states that “[a]t the same time the source texts used by the LXX-translators did not differ notably from MT, for all we know” (2.). This is further expanded as follows: “The point of departure of this thesis is that knowledge of transformations is necessary in order to reach conclusions about the source text of the Greek translator. We will therefore limit our discussions to biblical books of which previous research has made plausible that their *Vorlage* was very close to MT” (92.). I would have to say that I find both of these statements somewhat problematical. While it may be the case that in the book of Genesis the rendering of the Septuagint may justify the contention that the *Vorlage* of that book may be very close to that of the MT, it is necessary to add that there would be some difficulty in justifying it in the case of both Isaiah and Proverbs. In the case of the latter, it is known that there is a certain amount of additional material in the Septuagint that evidently belongs to an original Hebrew collection now lost. In addition to modifications in the text, there are also reason for believing that the Greek version reflects the influence of haggadic interpretation, which is also to be found in the Targum and the Peshitta. In the case of the prophet Isaiah, the translation is generally judged to be somewhat free, sometimes even paraphrastic. In such circumstances it is somewhat difficult to know what the original Hebrew was as it lay before the translators.

What these salient facts mean is that what van der Louw has classified as transformations may be more properly judged to be due to the free nature of the translation, or due to haggadic influences in the case of the book of Proverbs, or may be due to the fact a somewhat different *Vorlage* could be posited in the case of Isaiah and/or Proverbs. In these circumstances one should really ask: Can such an exercise be undertaken at all, given the problematical question of what text was actually used by the Septuagint translators? It seems to me that this question deserves more attention than van der Louw devoted to it.

That said, chapters 4–6 do give a lot of attention to the texts of the MT and the Septuagint, and consideration of every verse is first of all preceded by the texts themselves, which are printed in their original languages, to which is added an appropriate translation. This feature alone will be of great help to readers when they consider the transformations of

the text that van der Louw details in his commentary of the text. The results of the commentary that van der Louw has provided are then collected in tabular form in which the first column details the Hebrew word or words in question; the second column contains the rendering by the Septuagint translator; the third column details the obligatory transformations, by which van der Louw means the transformations caused by the differences between the two language systems; and the fourth column details the nonobligatory transformations, by which van der Louw means the transformations that are due to the translator's own style and preferences. Without doubt, these features represent in my thinking the most valuable part of this work.

5. Conclusion

Without any doubt this is a thought-provoking work that adds to the much-neglected subject of the translator's style and technique and as such ought to be valued for the contribution it seeks to make.