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BOOK REVIEW

Ken M. Penner, ed. *The Lexham English Septuagint: A New Translation*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019. xvii + 1482 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-1683593447. \$39.99.

While a plethora of English versions of the Bible exist (both ancient and contemporary), there is a dearth of English translations of the diverse collection of compositions that are commonly known either as the Septuagint (LXX) or the Old Greek (OG). Today, there are only three English translations of the LXX/OG that are widely available in print. According to the editors of the *Lexham English Septuagint* (hereafter LES), each of these works have particular strengths and weakness.

Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton's *LXX Septuagint: An English Translation of the Greek Old Testament* (Pickering, OH: Beloved, 2014) is simply dated (it was first published in 1844) in two respects: its textual basis does not reflect more recent manuscripts discoveries, and it relies on older views of the meanings of certain Greek words. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; hereafter NETS) is up to date with regard to these issues, and it seeks a careful transparency to the Greek. But the NETS editors decided to transliterate rather than translate many proper names that are familiar to English readers. 'David' is 'Dauid' and 'Joshua' is 'Iesous.' This policy is helpful for certain readers in very specific circumstances, but it makes following the narratives more difficult for a general audience. Also, in order to reflect that that the Septuagint is subservient to the Hebrew text, the NETS was designed to be subservient to an English translation. But this means that rather than being an original translation from the Greek, the NETS is a modified NRSV. Similarly, the *Orthodox Study Bible: Ancient*

Faith Edition (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith, 2019) is a revision of the NKJV that draws some vocabulary from Brenton’s translation. In this way, the LES claims to be “the only contemporary English translation of the LXX that has been made directly from the Greek” (x, emphasis original).

The *Lexham English Septuagint* is a diplomatic (as opposed to an eclectic) edition based on Henry Barclay Swete’s edition of the Septuagint (*The Old Testament in Greek: According to the Septuagint*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). According to the editors,

The fact that the LES is based on a diplomatic edition carries some implications for the translation style of the LES—because in a diplomatic edition the text represents an actual manuscript rather than a hypothetical original text. In the case of the LES, this means the point of reference is the person reading that Greek manuscript, rather than the person translating the Hebrew into Greek. In other words, the LES has in mind the translation not as produced, but as received. The LES seeks to replicate in English the same sort of reading experience that an ancient Greek speaker would have had when reading the Septuagint in Codex Vaticanus (xi).

To put the matter another way, the editors of the LES state that “every effort was made to render the Greek in its own right, with no eye to the Hebrew at all. The LES is an attempt to understand the question, ‘How would this text have been read—understood and experienced—by a fourth century, Greek-speaking gentile Christian?’” (xiii).

To contrast the LES and its most comparable alternate, namely the NETS, the LES is presented in a single-column format with running ‘headings,’ i.e., brief summaries or content descriptions, that are located in the outer margin. This is unlike the double-columns of the NETS that are without any ‘headings.’ While some readers may nit-pick the particulars, the over-arching effect is quite pleasing and user-friendly.

In addition to the above, while the NETS renders most individual names, specific places, and particular people groups largely by transliteration, the LES:

Uses the common English form of the related Hebrew proper noun to render the Greek form of that noun: it translates rather than transliterates. For the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books of the Septuagint that have no underlying Hebrew, the LES uses the NRSV to maintain consistency . . . Only in cases where no direct link could be established with the Hebrew does the LES use a transliterated form of the name” (xvi, italics original).

This decision on the part of the editors dramatically improves participant tracking as well as the readability and user-friendliness of the volume as a whole, especially with respect to those individuals whose familiarity with the content at hand is primarily through English translations of the OT.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that because the LES specifically follows Swete (unlike the NETS) it also includes a dedicated section to the fourteen “Odes,” a compilation of poetic ‘prayers,’ such as the Songs of Moses (Exod 15:1–19; Deut 32:1–43), The Prayer of Azariah (Dan 3:26–45 OG), The Prayer of Manasseh, The Song of Our Fathers (Dan 3:52–88 OG), ‘The Morning Hymn,’ etc. Alongside this, for this same reason, the LES (unlike the NETS) also includes some of 1 Enoch (based on the Greek text found in Codex Panopolitanus and a fragment of Enoch in Greek contained in the Chronography of Georgius Syncellus). There are, of course, numerous differences between the Greek Enoch and the Ethiopic version, many of which are flagged by the editors of LES (see 1 En. 3:1; 4:1; 89:42–49; 89:1–5). In addition to this, while the NETS neatly arranges its text according to “Laws,” “Histories,” “Poetic Books,” and “Prophecies,” the format of the books of the LES follows the order of Swete. This may be somewhat counter-intuitive to some readers since Swete’s ordering differs from certain other popular ecumenical translations, such as the NRSV, CEB, and the NETS.

Regrettably, the LES does not include a ‘general introduction’ to any of the individual books (unlike the NETS). A marked paucity of footnotes also exists in the LES as compared to the NETS. For example, while there are close to twenty footnotes, in total, for the Book of Ruth within the NETS, there are zero footnotes that might assist the reader within the LES. Alongside this,

there are roughly ten footnotes, in total, for Ecclesiastes in the LES while the NETS has (almost) close to that per page. To be clear, the LES footnotes generally seek to explain the meaning of certain Greek terms, expressions or vocabulary (at times in view of the Hebrew), alongside explanations of Swete's versification(s).

With respect to this point, this reviewer is persuaded that there were a number of places where many readers would likely appreciate more clarifying comments than what were provided by the editors. For example, Deut 23:2 is missing from Codex Vaticanus, and, as such, it is not represented within the text of LES. Likewise, the words "they will say" in Isa 45:14 are absent. In addition, within 1 En. 27:2 and 32:6 the variant names of "Raphael," "Gabriel," and "Uriel" are also not footnoted. Lastly, the LES renders Gen 6:2 as containing "angels of God" without a note as to the uniqueness of this specific translation and its dependence upon Codex Alexandrinus. To be clear, according to Henry Barclay Swete (*Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek: With an Appendix Containing the Letter of Aristeas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [126]), because Codex Vaticanus lost thirty-one of its original leaves, he relied heavily upon Codex Alexandrinus until Gen 46:28.

To summarize, while it is understood that the LES is explicitly a diplomatic edition of Swete, and, as such, that it was beyond the mandate of the LES to note all of the peculiarities of Swete's text(s), it is highly unlikely that the vast majority of readers would balk at the inclusion of these types of clarifying comments. Rather, it is reasonable to argue that they might actually welcome them and perhaps be 'at a loss' without them.

Lastly, the introduction to the LES suggests that Swete decided to print Theodotion "alongside" the LXX/OG version of Daniel due to its 'popularity.' The editors state:

In the case of the book of Daniel (with its additions 'Susanna' and 'Bel and the Dragon'), the older LXX translation actually fell out of favor among early Christians; in its place the translation of Theodotion began appearing in manuscripts of the Bible. Because this Theodotionic version of Daniel was so popular in biblical interpretation,

Swete decided to print it alongside the ‘LXX’ version of Daniel, and in the LES it is therefore included as an ‘Alternate Text’ (xii).

The phrasing of this paragraph suggests that Theodotion was actually inserted into the diplomatic text, when, in fact, it is the LXX/OG that was inserted. As Swete states:

It is well known that in Daniel the text of the LXX is preserved in one MS, only, a cursive, and not earlier than the ninth century. Before the days of Jerome the church had ceased to read the Septuagint of Daniel, its room having been filled by the version attributed to Theodotion (Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* [v]).

For the sake of clarity, therefore, the introduction should, perhaps, have been written to represent the LXX/OG as being “inserted” into Swete’s text (since it is in Vaticanus). It is also possible that the wording of the LES here might give the uninitiated the false idea that the Theodotionic version of Daniel occupied a less influential place in Christian (and Jewish) circles than what it actually did. Finally, the fact that the texts are not written side-by-side also makes potential comparisons between the two much more difficult.

From an aesthetics perspective, there are few things to critique about the LES. The binding and look of the volume is quite attractive—the gilt designs and lettering of the cover and spine are an especially nice touch. Regrettably, there is no ribbon marker. The show-through in the pages is acceptable and the book lies open flat. That being said, in contrast to the NETS, the inside margins of the LES are fairly narrow so the text often runs into the gutter. The LES does not include a concordance or any maps (same as the NETS, however, one might add). Minor typographical errors also occur (see Gen 3:24; 10:25; Exod 14:9; 1 Kgdms 21:14; 2 Chr 6:18; Pss 1:1; 18:7; Dan 4:34; 2 Macc 10:5).

For those looking for a new English translation that is based upon Swete’s work, one would be hard pressed to find a better alternative than *The Lexham English Septuagint*. Its primary readers will likely be LXX/OG and OT scholars, students, the invested layperson, and, one hopes, studious pastors.

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