

Book Review

Beatrice Bonanno, **The Septuagint of Ruth: Translation Technique, Textual History, and Theological Issues**, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2024, 293 p.

Beatrice Bonanno has recently published a study, as a revised version of her doctoral thesis, focusing on the Septuagint of Ruth. The research was issued by the publishing company Brepols in the series concerning “The Septuagint in its Ancient Context”. The author aims to answer a complex question, regarding whether the Greek translation of the Hebrew text is only a literal one (as has been claimed for several years), or whether it may deviate from its Hebrew *Vorlage*. This question frames the whole study, and the author tries to ascertain it in nine chapters.

In the first chapter, Beatrice Bonanno poses the method of her examination and offers a short introduction to the Septuagint. She then identifies textual witnesses in general, such as the Masoretic text (serving as the reference point, since it is the *textus receptus*, p. 23), Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls fragments. Her study uses the “content-and context-related” approach, which means that the focus is going to be on “specific elements of the content of the biblical text and these are considered within the framework of their context” (p. 22). Those specific elements are personal names, toponyms or *hapax legomena*, since they “oblige [... the translator] to make important translational choices” (p. 23). The author takes also the Greek literary and linguistic background into consideration, such as non-biblical Greek literature, documentary papyri or epigraphs.

The other important element of her study lies in focusing on the textual material of the book of Ruth, which is the main theme of the second chapter. This means Hebrew texts (MT and Dead Sea), LXX and other versions of this book, such as Vetus Latina, Vulgate, Targum, Peshitta and Syro-Hexapla. The Dead Sea Scrolls attest several fragments of four manuscripts – 2QRuth^a, 2QRuth^b (the author herself has already written an article focusing on the composition and identification of this fragment), 4QRuth^b and MS 5441. The Dead Sea Scrolls are emphasized as important for the study of LXX-Ruth (as relevant witnesses concerning the text of the Hebrew Bible). Furthermore, all of these versions serve as external evidence relevant for the textual variants of the Septuagint of Ruth (p. 36).

Narrowing the focus down to the Septuagint of Ruth, the author in the third chapter concentrates on existing studies on this ancient version with the aim of adding new insights. She presents different theories about the place of origin or the genesis of LXX-Ruth. Even though her study does not focus on its textual history, her analysis may still provide evidence for any of those theories. Bonanno recognizes two main streams when referring to the LXX-Ruth characteristic. The first underlines the similarity of LXX-Ruth in relation to MT and in the second it is to “recognize a certain literalism, but also describe and analyse the LXX text” (p. 54). This second stream proceeds a bit further by focusing on specific features of the Septuagint of Ruth, which is also the author’s aim.

The fourth chapter deals with textual variants, which binds the author to explain certain elements that are fundamental when working with them. These are, for instance, the pluses, minuses, or another alteration, such as the usage of a different number, difference at the grammatical level, words order, and others. The chapter itself contains a case study concerning the Greek renderings of the verb *šûb* (“to turn, to return”), which aims to “reveal whether it is simply an unconscious translation of the Hebrew verb” (p. 62). She points out that this verb is rendered by the Greek *strephō*, nevertheless, it is frequently used with three prefixes that slightly change its meaning – *epistrephō*, *apostrephō* and *anastrephō*. For instance, the verb *epistrephō*, meaning “turning towards”, may be used also within the theme of conversion. In 1:10, Noemin’s daughters-in-law reply that they “are returning” with Noemin to her people, which is not only meant in the physical sense but also to the community. Bonanno refers to Targum 1:16, in which Ruth “explicitly says she wants to become a proselyte” (p. 70). By the detailed analysis of these Greek terms as translational equivalents of the Hebrew term *šûb*, the author concludes that the translator is on one hand faithful to the Hebrew text but on the other also “introduces specific nuances to his text, by sensitively accommodating the lexemes to the resources of the target language” (p. 71).

The study in chapter 5 follows by bringing a wide analysis of the Greek renderings of the Hebrew personal names and toponyms, as they represent specific elements, which should shed more light on the LXX translator’s translation technique. The author clearly demonstrates that these specific elements are relevant for the narrative as a whole. For instance, the Hebrew term *mārā’* (connected to the “sense of bitterness felt by Noemin”, p. 83)

is translated as *Pikra* in 1:20. In the Greek, the root *pikr-* was, except for its general meaning “bitter”, used specifically for the names of plants, or the term *Pikros* may be “the Greek equivalent of the Egyptian name *Petsesi*, meaning ‘the one who is bitter’” (p. 84). There is also a noteworthy point concerning the personal name *’Elīmelek* (“my God is king”), which happens to be the only theophoric name in Ruth. This Hebrew name is, nonetheless, rendered as *Abeimelech* (“my father is king”) in the LXX (p. 75), thus there is no theophoric element as in the MT. God is absent in the beginning of the narrative in the LXX and appears in 1:6 when visiting his people and giving them bread. Within this narrative, God appears for the first time with a more positive move than in the MT where God emerges in the name of the person who dies. From the study of these and other ways of translations, the author concludes the chapter by describing the translator to be both faithful (when translating personal names and toponyms) and free when translating some of the personal names, trying to “accentuate certain features of the Hebrew *Vorlage*” (p. 97).

The last of the specific nuances, which the author analyzes in chapter 6, are the Greek renderings of the Hebrew *hapax legomena*, since no scholars have focused on this element in Ruth (p. 100). She lists all of the *hapax legomena* in MT-Ruth, outlines them in a synoptical table, and moves on to their analysis. For instance, the Hebrew *mōda’tānū* “our relative” in 3:2, is rendered as *gnōrimos*, meaning “known person”, which creates a shift in meaning. There is an excursus made on the text in Ruth 2:7b, which remains enigmatic, and, therefore, it obliges the Greek translator to make choices in his translation. The author elaborately demonstrates how the translator departs from his *Vorlage*, emphasizing the context (p. 121).

Apart from analyzing specific names, the focus is also put on the Greek rendering of Hebrew legal aspects in chapter 7. These are complicated to render in a language different than Hebrew, which creates space that also obliges the translator to make translational choices (p. 123). One legal aspect is attested in 4:4 when Boaz invites the “Hidden One” at the gate and in front of the elders of the city not only to acquire the field but also Ruth. The author examines the people involved in legal actions, place, legal custom, elements of the acquisition and legal actions. The legal character of the place is expressed by the term *ša’ar* (“gate”) used in this context for the people who gathered, albeit also having other nuances. This term is interestingly rendered once by the noun *pylē* in 4:1.11 and by *phylē* in 3:11; 4:10 (the reason behind it,

as the author shows, must be the different *Vorlage*). In the narrative, there is a description of the custom in Israel when a man removes his sandal and gives it to the neighbor (p. 140). The translator attempts “to produce not only a clearer text, but also a clearer understanding of the Jewish culture for a Greek-speaking society” (p. 146), which is indicated by certain pluses in 4:5. The author indicates how the legal action is rendered differently in LXX-Ruth than in the Masoretic text where Boos and the Hidden One will redeem Ruth, in contrast to the LXX where one of them will act as the next-of-kin in her regard (p. 149). She tries to expose that “legal aspects in MT-Ruth revolve around the topic of ‘redemption’ [...], LXX-Ruth highlights the dynamics of ‘close kinship’” (p. 152). The chapter is concluded by highlighting the importance of examining legal aspects, which offers us a characterization of the translation technique as well as showing innovations of the LXX text (p. 151).

Lastly, in chapter 8, Bonanno focuses on the theme attracting interest recently (p. 155) – the theological accents in LXX-Ruth. She deals with the question as to whether it is appropriate to speak of “theology” of LXX. She claims that even though the Septuagint surely includes theological affirmations, it “may not represent the specific theology of the LXX” (p. 156). And therefore, she weakens her statement and speaks of “theological accents” rather than “theology” of the Septuagint. Her focus is put on the Greek renderings of the Hebrew divine names, the physical representation of God or His absence from the first scene of the narrative. For instance, the author points at two remarkable renderings of the term *'elohim*, which is usually rendered by the Greek *theos* (“God”). In 1:15, the term *theos* is used in the plural form when addressing Orpha’s return “to her people and to her θεοί [*theoi*]” (p. 162). The Greek translator in this sense respects the plural aspect of the religion of Moab (p. 163), since they “may have been polytheistic” (p. 163). Another remarkable finding is in 1:16 where it is stated that Ruth will follow Noemin’s people and God! The English translation, however, does not properly render the nuance of *ho theos su theos mu*. The first *theos* is preceded by an article, but the second is not. It may, therefore, be literally translated as “‘the’ God of Noemin is ‘a’ God of Ruth, and not necessarily ‘the’ God of Ruth” (p. 164). The author concludes this chapter by accenting the difficult nature of ascertaining the theological aspects of LXX Ruth, however, characterizes the translator to be faithful when depicting God.

The author, after her precise analysis, concludes (chapter 9) that one finds both a literal and faithful translator but free and unfaithful as well, bringing

new meaning to the narrative. She considers the translator to be also skillful by showing knowledge of the Greek language and the Greek social and legislative structures, nevertheless, she stresses caution when connecting LXX-Ruth to the Kaige-Th group. It would also be necessary to compare the translation technique of LXX-Ruth with other LXX books. The research is equipped with two appendixes – a synopsis of the textual material and a focus on 2QRuth^b (Ruth 3:13–18) and its identification. New routes for the author's future research are going to be focused on textual history of LXX-Ruth: “from its origin to Origen's Hexapla” (p. 181).

Beatrice Bonanno's study was successful in bringing more light on the question of the origin of the Greek text of Ruth and demonstrated that working with the Greek text goes hand in hand with working with the Hebrew text. The question which has been posed in the beginning of author's monography regarding the literality of the Greek translation of the Hebrew text was clearly answered and examined into depth throughout the whole study. The author has definitely enriched the studies of the Septuagint of Ruth – especially in her focus on elements which have not been even dealt with in the past by other scholars or by taking into consideration other versions of the book of Ruth and thereby expanding the knowledge regarding LXX-Ruth. She has also proved to have a broad scope by taking into account the Greek non-biblical literature. Her ability to dive deep into the analysis has been clearly demonstrated, as well as the capability to emerge from particularities back into a more general level. Many noteworthy examples of how the Greek translator manipulated with the Hebrew text have been presented in the study. Nevertheless, it is not a task for the review to relate this for one must immerse oneself in the book to ascertain it.

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