DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MT AND LXX CONTEXTS OF OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: ISAIAH 45:18-25 AS A CASE STUDY

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1. Introduction

Taking into account the Old Testament context of quotations in the New Testament while studying the text of the New Testament should be a sine qua non for analysing these quotations; at the very least, an inquiry should be made as to whether the context in which the quotation originally appeared played a role in shaping the New Testament author’s theology. In many cases this context should be sought in the Septuagint (LXX), seeing that it is the LXX from which most of these quotations were drawn. As a translation, the LXX inevitably conveys a different message to the reader than the Hebrew Scriptures would. In some cases there is a great deal of disagreement between these two texts, due in part to ‘actualization’ – an adaptation of the text to events contemporary to the time of the translators. This is especially true of the book of Isaiah,

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1 This article is the result of part of the research done for an MTh degree at the University of Pretoria under the supervision of Prof. G. J. Steyn.
2 “Quotation” is used here in its broadest sense.
3 The term “Septuagint” is not here used as if it is the original translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, but rather in a sense encompassing all the possible Greek Vorlagen of any given New Testament author.
5 See, for instance, K. Jobes and M. Silva, Invitation to the Septuagint (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 93-101; B. W. R. Pearson and S. E. Porter, “Isaiah Through Greek Eyes: The Septuagint of Isaiah,” in Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition (eds. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans; vol. 2; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 531-546, here 534-536. This concept of ‘actualization’ has proven to be useful to modern-day exegetes as it illuminates the early period of interpretation and application of the Hebrew Scriptures – in this sense, the LXX is “ein herausragender Zeuge eigenständiger und kreativer jüdisch-hellenistischer Exegese, Ethik und Theologie” (M.Tilly, Einführung in die Septuaginta, [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005], 9).
in which scholars such as Seeligmann\(^6\) and Van der Kooij\(^7\) have detected such a form of ‘actualization.’\(^8\)

Studying the Old Testament context of a quotation in the New Testament, then, is of prime importance for New Testament scholars. In any given analysis of a specific quotation from the Old Testament in the New Testament an attempt should first be made to reconstruct the Vorlage(n) of the New Testament author. Urgent work still needs to be done on the methodology of such an enterprise, but this is not the aim of this article. Rather, this study aims only to indicate the differences between the contexts of the Masoretic Text (MT) and the LXX\(^9\) in a pericope which forms the contextual basis of more than one quotation in the New Testament – Isa 45:18-25.\(^10\) For this purpose the study will make use of the text as found in the critical editions of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia and the Götttingen edition of Isaiah.\(^11\) To be sure, this study is only a general investigation. The reader should be aware that the Vorlagen of any New Testament reference to this pericope might not be these exact texts.

The study will first analyze Isa 45:14-25 in the MT, as it is the text most commented upon of the two and will form a good basis against

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\(^6\) I. L. Seeligmann, The Septuagint Version of Isaiah: A Discussion of Its Problems (Leiden: Brill, 1948), especially 95-121. In 2004 Seeligmann’s work was reprinted as The Septuagint Version of Isaiah and Cognate Studies. This work also contains one further essay by Seeligmann and another essay by R. Hanhart.

\(^7\) A. van der Kooij, The Oracle of Tyre: The Septuagint of Isaiah XXIII as Version and Vision (VTSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 1998).

\(^8\) See also the work of S. J. Schweitzer, “Mythology in the Old Greek of Isaiah,” CBQ 66 (2004): 214-230, who argues that the translator kept in mind the mythological background of his Hebrew Vorlage.

\(^9\) The selection of the MT and the LXX as objects of study in this article is not based on the supposition that the LXX was necessarily translated from the MT. Other forms of the Hebrew Scriptures did exist, as attested by the finds at Qumran, and were often used as Vorlagen for translation into Greek. The MT and LXX versions have been selected only to indicate the degree of difference between possible Vorlagen of the New Testament text. Since the MT and the LXX are the Hebrew and Greek texts most familiar to the exegete of biblical literature, they provide a good point of comparison. The diversity of the LXX tradition is well known. For an excellent overview of these problems and some guidance in deciding the textual provenance of a quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament, see R. T. McLay, The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), especially 133-134.

\(^10\) In the list of loci citati vel allegati in the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, references to Isa. 45:18-23 are listed five times: John 18:20; Mark 12:32; Acts 15:18; Rom. 14:11 and Phil. 2:10-11. (B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini and B. M. Metzger, Novum Testamentum Graece [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993], 793.)