Chapter 9

From Secondary Versions through Greek Recensions to Hebrew Editions. The Contribution of the Old Latin version*

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The history of the Hebrew text is reflected in the history of the Septuagint and the secondary versions. The Septuagint translated an “Old Hebrew” similar to the one revised by the (proto)-Masoretic text. The “Old Greek” was later revised in the Kaige-Theodotionic and Hexaplaric recensions to adapt its text to the (proto-)Masoretic text. In a similar way the Vetus Latina, Coptic, Aethiopic and Armenian versions were based on an “Old Greek”. These old versions were later revised in order to adapt their text to the veritas hebraica represented by the Kaige-Th. and Hexaplaric recensions. The Kaige-Th. recension is to be conceived as “the beginning of the process of revision of the LXX, which in the Jewish world culminated in the literalist version by Aquila.”

This parallel history of the Hebrew text, the Septuagint, its recensions and secondary versions advises to begin research from the recent and marginal stages and to progressively move towards the earliest and more central ones, as suggested in the title of this paper that adapts that of a previous article “From the Old Latin Through the Old Greek to the Old Hebrew (2Kgs 10,25–28).” This title has been taken up by P.-M. Bogaert in his article “De la vetus latina à l’hébreu pré-massorétique en passant par la plus ancienne Septante”, which synthesizes the contribution of OL in three statements: 1. the OL may represent a stage of the Greek text older than that of the preserved Greek manuscripts; 2. this old stage, sometimes a shorter one, may be the original form of LXX,

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particularly in the case of Jeremiah, and 3. it seems plausible and in some
degree demonstrable that the OG of Jeremiah faithfully reflects a Hebrew form
of the book, which was reworked in the MT.³

In my first publications I developed a working method called “recension crit-
icism”, complementary to “redaction criticism”. The methodological analysis
should proceed in four steps:⁴

– from the secondary versions to the Septuagint recensions,
– from the Greek recensions to the Old Greek,
– from the original LXX to its Hebrew Vorlage,
– from the Hebrew textual forms represented by the MT and the Vorlage of the
  Septuagint to an archetype which allows us to explain whenever possible
  the process of formation of these two (or more) editions.

Such was actually the proposal of Paul de Lagarde, who, convinced of the
importance of the versions for editing the Septuagint text, became an expert in
Semitic languages. To the three columns of the Complutense Polyglot Bible –
Latin, Greek and Hebrew – Renaissance polyglots added the texts of the old
versions – Syriac, Targum Jonathan, Arabic, Ethiopic and Persian – as a source
of possible variants that could provide better access to the original Greek and
Hebrew texts. But, being translations and not direct witnesses of a Hebrew text,
their testimony was not sufficiently valid to proceed to the correction of the
traditional text. The Septuagint was regarded as a testimony to the exegesis of
the times rather than reflecting a Hebrew different from the Masoretic text.
Rather than a mere translation the Septuagint was to be considered as literature
in its own right.⁵ A critical edition of the LXX books could be made from the

³ P.-M. Bogaert, “De la vetus latina à l’hébreu pré-massorétique en passant par la plus ancienne
243, esp. 216.
543; id., “Testamento y muerte de David. Estudio de historia de la recensión y redacción de 1
of Kings,” bioscs 15 (1982): 12–35, reprint in Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on
the Deuteronomistic History (eds. G.N. Knoppers and J.B. McConville; Winona Lake IN: Eisen-
brauns, 1999), 475–492.