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LXX Isaiah 24:1-26:6 as interpretation and translation : a methodological discussion

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LXX Isaiah 24:1-26:6 as Interpretation and Translation:
A Methodological Discussion

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door Wilson de Angelo Cunha

I

Against a common view in the scholarly literature, which argues that the reading “poor” (πτωχός) in Isaiah 25:3 was the result of a mistake, it is much more likely in the light of its immediate context, that “poor” is the result of the translator’s particular way of reading his *Vorlage*.

II

The reading ἐν Σιωῶν in Isaiah 25:5 is not the result of lexical confusion due to the rarity of צִיּוֹן “waterless land” in the Hebrew Bible. In the light of its context, it is much more likely the result of the translator’s peculiar way of reading his *Vorlage* (cf. ἐν Σιωῶν in Isa 24:23). Moreover, it is highly plausible that the translator knew צִיּוֹן as “waterless land” because he translated the cognate צִיּוֹן “waterless region” in Isa 35:1 with διψάω “to be thirsty.”

III

Approaches that focus solely on the so-called “free translations” in LXX Isa are methodologically inadequate for the study of Greek Isaiah. Both “free” and “literal” renditions are important as they function as a window to the translator’s interpretation of Hebrew Isa. What the translator has modified from his source text is as important as what he has decided to retain from it.

IV

In the study of LXX Isa, the simplest explanation for divergent renderings found therein is the translator’s unique reading mode. His peculiar reading mode should be given precedence over elucidations that resort to mechanical errors, different Hebrew *Vorlage*, poor knowledge of Hebrew, etc.

V

It is highly plausible that the place of provenance of LXX Isa, or at least part of it, is to be found in Palestine and not only in Egypt as it is generally argued. See, for instance, Isa 25:5: “like faint-hearted men *we*

[= the translator and his group] are thirsting in Zion on account of ungodly men.”

VI

While many scholars doubt the existence of biblical Israel in Canaan prior to Merenptah’s reign (1213-1203 B.C.E.), recent studies of the Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687 strongly point to a proto-Israelite migration to Canaan sometime around the middle of the second millennium B.C.E.

For a recent discussion, cf. P. van der Veen, et al., “Israel in Canaan (Long) before Pharaoh Merenptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Relief 21687,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2:4 (2010): 15-25.

VII

Isaiah 24:14-16 is not a clear example of the genre termed “prophetic disputation pattern.” Rather, it functions as an oracle of salvation for the “godly” (cf. vv. 14-16a) and an oracle of doom for the “ungodly” (cf. vv. 16b).

Contra, e.g., J. Loete, “A Premature Hymn of Praise: The Meaning and Function of Isaiah 24:14-16c in its Present Context,” *Studies in Isaiah 24-27: The Isaiah Workshop - De Jesaja Werkplaats* (eds. H.J. Bosman - H. van Grol) (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 233.

VIII

The question as to whether the New Testament authors interpreted Old Testament passages correctly is methodologically incorrect. Clearly, the New Testament interpretation of the Old is at odds with the more modern historical-critical interpretation of the same corpus. However, it cannot be said that the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old is wrong. The New Testament reading mode exemplifies a particular way of reading of that period that is much in line with Qumran *pesharim* and Targumic literatures.

IX

It is plausible that the gray and rainy weather that characterizes Dutch climate, compounded with a Calvinistic working ethics, have played an important role in the Dutch society's bent towards sobriety and simplicity.