Septuagint Production and Reception: Conceptualising the LXX as 'African'

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the question of how we might understand the Septuagint to be 'African' and why such a designation is significant. African biblical scholarship has borrowed from African American biblical scholarship an interest in the Bible in Africa and as African. The article focuses on notions of African place, African identity, African production and African reception. The article undertakes an in-depth analysis of ancient African production and reception of the Septuagint, before turning to contemporary African reception, with a particular emphasis on socially engaged reception. The article understands that in contemporary LXX textual criticism production is reception, recognising the presence of more than one Hebrew text and more than one LXX production, moving beyond notions of the LXX as secondary to the Masoretic Text to notions of the LXX as substantive theological literatures (in the plural). This is a particularly resonant aspect of ancient production, forging lines of connection with contemporary South African Black Theology's reminder that the biblical text is a site of struggle, both in terms of interpretation and intrinsically in terms of its production and re-use. The article concludes by reflecting on the purpose or voice of the Septuagint, arguing that engaging with the theologies and ideologies of the Septuagint offers insights into its ancient purposes and resonant lines of connection with contemporary African religio-cultural and socio-historical concerns. An African Septuagint has the potential for contemporary African appropriations.[1]

KEYWORDS: Septuagint, LXX, African, reception, production, Black Theology

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A INTRODUCTION

> Ptolemy II, who ruled Egypt from 285 to 247 BC and his counsellor Demetrius, had a scholarly interest in the law of the God worshipped by the Jews in Jerusalem. So they established relations with the high priest in Jerusalem. In response, the high priest sent 6 x 12 translators with scrolls to Ptolemy's court, where they were well received. But the Egyptian ruler could not understand the Jew's sacred books in Hebrew. A detailed and interesting discussion took place, and the scholars translated the books of the Old Testament into Greek in 6 x 12 days.
>
> This translation, called the Septuagint or 'seventy,' was read aloud to the Jewish congregation in Alexandria, accepted by the believers, and then presented to Ptolemy.
>
> All this happened in Egypt, in Africa, around 260 BC.[2]

With this myth-like account of the African significance of the Septuagint, Ype Schaaf begins his book on "the history and role of the Bible in Africa."[3] Schaaf's claim of an African identity for the Septuagint fits within what Justin Ukpong, from Nigeria, refers to as a form of "Africa-in-the-Bible studies" within African biblical interpretation. Such approaches, says Ukpong, seek "to identify the presence of Africa and African peoples in the bible as well as examine their contribution to biblical history."[4]

The ideological emphasis of such work, prevalent in African American as well as African biblical studies,[5] analysed most fully by African scholars like David Tuesday Adamo and scholars of African biblical studies like Knut Holter,[6] is summarised by Ukpong as follows:

> This is a direct reaction to the de-emphasis and exclusion, in Western scholarship, of Africa and its contribution to the biblical story. Such de-emphasis shows itself for example in that Egypt is often

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2 Ype Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), 3.

3 *Schaaf, On Their Way Rejoicing,* 3.

4 Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Musa Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 14, 16.

5 Charles B. Copher, "The Black Presence in the Old Testament," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Cain Hope Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 146–164.

6 See, for example, David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco: Christian University Press, 1998); Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 93–114.

> considered in biblical studies to belong to the Ancient Near East rather than to Africa.[7]

Ukpong's second sentence here demonstrates the contested nature of the notion 'Africa.' The origins of this designation probably derive from Roman usage,[8] demonstrating its early 'colonial' heritage. Gosnell Yorke and other Africana biblical scholars are right to contest the boundaries of this entity we refer to as 'Africa';[9] and Holter is right in reminding us African biblical scholars that in speaking of an 'African' presence in the Bible "we are introducing a technical – and cartographic and political/ideological – term that is younger than the textual phenomena it is used to describe."[10] However, in terms of what we now consider to be 'Africa,' notwithstanding its blurred boundaries, Holter insists that there is "theological significance" (and I would add, ideological significance) in "that Africa and Africans actually are there, in the Bible."[11]

In this article, I not only engage the contested notion of 'Africa,' but also the contested notion of 'the Septuagint.' For the Septuagint too was (partially) produced here, in Africa.

B ANCIENT AFRICAN PRODUCTION OF THE SEPTUAGINT

In his contribution to the edited volume by Johann Cook and Gideon Kotzé, *The Septuagint South of Alexandria*,[12] which is the first essay in the collection, Siegfried Kreuzer makes the following initial observation: "'The Septuagint south of Alexandria' can be understood in different ways. It may refer to African, especially South African (see below), scholarship on the Septuagint .... [i]t may also refer to Antiquity: The Septuagint south of Alexandria – in antiquity."[13]

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7 Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa," 16.

8 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 40; see also W.F.G. Lacroix, *Africa in Antiquity: A Linguistic and Toponymic Analysis of Ptolemy's Map of Africa, Together with a Discussion of Ophir, Punt and Hanno's Voyage* (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken, 1998).

9 Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke, "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Afrocentric Perspective," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 52 (1995): 49; Randall Bailey, "Beyond Indentification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Cain Hope Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 166–168.

10 Knut Holter, "The Theological Significance of Africa and Africans in the Bible," *OTE* 36/1 (2023): 2.

11 Holter, "The Theological Significance of Africa," 9.

12 Johann Cook and Gideon R. Kotzé, eds., *The Septuagint South of Alexandria: Essays on the Greek Translations and Other Ancient Versions by the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa (LXXSA)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

13 Siegfried Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria -- in Antiquity," in *The Septuagint South of Alexandria: Essays on the Greek Translations and Other Ancient Versions by the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa (LXXSA)* (ed.

Kreuzer neatly captures here notions of contemporary African reception and ancient African production of the Septuagint. His emphasis is on African production, a worthy focus for the first essay in this impressive collection.

Kreuzer begins his essay in Africa, making it clear that "the Septuagint is a product of the Jewish people in Egypt."[14] Connecting Egypt with Canaan, with Egypt dominating Canaan,[15] Kreuzer goes on to provide a careful review of how a Jewish population came to be established in this region.[16] He then turns, briefly, to the debate about "the reasons for the Greek translation of the Holy Scriptures of Israel,"[17] summarising scholarly consensus within two trajectories:

> British and American scholarship still tends to defend the letter of Aristeas and how it explains the initiative and the support of the Ptolemaic king for making that translation. On the other hand, continental scholarship is largely convinced that the letter is pure fiction and that the translation was made for inner-Jewish reasons only.[18]

Kreuzer is persuaded, as am I, by the second line of evidence and argument,[19] arguing that the growing Jewish population in Egypt not only had juridical but also religious institutions. He notes that in a number of sources "a *proseuche* in Egypt is mentioned."[20] He goes on to argue that this was not only a place of worship, where the people gathered for prayer and religious services, but also probably a site for community activities. "Moreover," he continues, "the elite of the *proseuche* and the *politeuma* were the people who could translate the Holy Scriptures and 'produce' the Septuagint."[21]

In his discussion of the first "fantastic" trajectory,[22] based on the Letter of Aristeas, recounted by Schaaf, Kreuzer notes that the letter "not only explains the origin of the Septuagint ... but also defends it (cf. the solemn obligation that it may not be altered)." "The defense", he argues, significantly for my purposes, "is most probably directed against criticism that the Septuagint not always follows the Hebrew text, at least not its proto-Masoretic version that became

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Johann Cook and Gideon R. Kotzé; Leiden: Brill, 2022), 1.

14 Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria," 1.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 1–3.

17 Ibid., 3.

18 Ibid., 3.

19 Ibid., 4.

20 Ibid., 3.

21 Ibid.; see also Russell E. Gmirkin, "The Historical Context of the LXX and Its Hebrew *Vorlage*," in *The Septuagint South of Alexandria* (ed. Johann Cook and Gideon R. Kotzé; Leiden: Brill, 2022), 43–45.

22 See Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria," 3, though Kreuzer acknowledges plausible elements of this trajectory.

more and more normative in the time of the Hasmoneans."[23] Here is apologetic evidence for the Septuagint as local Egyptian-African translation as interpretation – as sacred text production. Though translation tends to be an elite activity, as Kreuzer acknowledges, the diverse Jewish population in Egypt at that time – captives, migrants, soldiers, merchants, priests, settlers – would have shaped the context which they shared with their elite translators.

The argument that the Septuagint is not merely a faithful follower of the Hebrew text finds a radical form in the work of Russell Gmirkin. The essay following Kreuzer's in *The Septuagint South of Alexandria*, "The Historical Context of the LXX and Its Hebrew *Vorlage*," is by Gmirkin and it is hard to avoid its provocative claim. Gmirkin begins his essay by stating: "Historically, the field of Septuagint studies has operated under the universally agreed premise that the Hebrew *Vorlage* underlying the LXX reflected a significantly older text: that the Pentateuch had developed over the course of centuries in pre-Hellenistic times."[24] He concludes his essay by summarising the body of his scholarly work as follows:

> In my proposed historical model, a team of educated elites fluent in Hebrew and Greek authored the Pentateuch in their native Hebrew language and then translated it into Greek as part of the same literary project under the authority of the Jewish senate ca. 270 BCE.... This in turn would imply the proto-LXX text was the original version of the Pentateuch (or at least Genesis) and that MT represents a later textual tradition.[25]

Gmirkin's analysis has not been widely accepted, with scholars arguing, in summary, that "Gmirkin provides many analogical comparisons but fails to furnish a convincing argument for a genealogical chain of the Hebrew Bible's origination from Alexandria and Plato." "His case, at best," argues Anthony Abell in his review of Gmirkin, "could perhaps provide analogical evidence for late editorial arrangements of the Hebrew Bible that recontextualized biblical content employing Hellenistic sources."[26] However, I mention Gmirkin's work here as it provides a provocative claim concerning a foundational African

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23 Ibid., 5.

24 Gmirkin, "The Historical Context of the LXX," 29.

25 Ibid., 46, 48.

26 Anthony L. Abell, "Book Review: Russell E. Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible*," *Review of Biblical Literature* (2020): 75; citing reviews by John Van Seters, "Review Article: Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch*," *JTS* 59/1 (2008): 212-214; Lester L. Grabbe, "Review Article: Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch*," *JSOT* (2007).

contribution not only to the production of the Septuagint in its own right but also to the production of the MT Hebrew text.

I turn now from the African production of the Septuagint to the African reception of the Septuagint.

C ANCIENT AFRICAN RECEPTION OF THE SEPTUAGINT

In his essay, Kreuzer goes on to offer a detailed summary of scholarship on the early African reception of the Septuagint, beginning with local African liturgical use of the Septuagint. Drawing on South African Gert Steyn's work,[27] he references Philo's use of the Septuagint, particularly the "interesting phenomenon" that Philo's quotations "often agree with quotations in the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, not only in specific readings but also in the extent and sometimes in the exact limits of the quotations." His explanation for this correspondence is "that they depended on a common liturgical usage of such passages." "Such liturgical traditions," he continues, "would have been shared in the Jewish communities. If there were such common traditions between Philo and the letter to the Hebrews, i.e. to the north of Alexandria, it is very probable that such traditions were common not only in Alexandria but also in the Jewish congregations 'south of Alexandria.'"[28] His liturgical explanation is supported, he argues, by evidence in the Septuagint, "a kind of *kethib-qere* in Greek," whereby 'Baal,' is often rendered with the feminine article, "indicating that instead of Baal one should read *aischyne*, 'shame'." This practice, he continues, indicates "that for the original Greek translation (Old Greek) there was a reading tradition that replaced the abhorrent name of the god Baal by *aischyne*," pointing to "liturgical use or at least public reading of the Septuagint."[29]

Having established a local African liturgical use of the Septuagint, with features of this use incorporated into the text itself, Kreuzer documents numerous forms of ancient African reception of the Septuagint. He begins with the location of the papyri in Middle Egypt, Upper Egypt and Nubia, illustrating both the wide use of the Septuagint and the continuing use of the Septuagint alongside other translations of the Septuagint.[30]

He then documents the translation of the Septuagint into Coptic, which had "became the basic language for liturgy and life of the Christian church,"[31]

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[27] Gert J. Steyn, "Torah Quotations Common to Philo, Hebrews, Clemens Romanus and Justin Martyr: What Is the Common Denominator?" in *The New Testament Interpreted: Essays in Honour of Bernard C. Lategan* (ed. Cilliers Breytenbach, Johan C. Thom, and Jeremy Punt; Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[28] Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria," 5–6.

[29] Ibid., 7.

[30] Ibid., 7–12.

[31] Ibid., 13, 12–20.

and which had an early form in "Coptic glosses in Greek manuscripts."[32] The Coptic translation (in its various dialects), he notes, is of text-critical relevance for Septuagint studies because Coptic biblical texts "reflect the development of the Septuagint." "This is quite understandable," he continues, "in the 'country of the Septuagint' and in view of the close relation between Greek and Coptic and because there certainly was also a number of people who spoke both languages in the local Coptic churches."[33] Among the text-critical developments is the presence of Coptic/Sahidic manuscripts "that are evidently based on the Old Greek and there are manuscripts that reflect a varying degree of Hebraizing [*kaige*-type] revision .... useful for explaining the different text forms of the Greek texts,"[34] reflecting both "the earliest Greek text type (OG), and text types that reflect early recensions."[35]

He concludes his discussion of ancient African Septuagint reception with the Ethiopic Bible, stating: "There is another large area of the Septuagint south (or better: southeast) of Alexandria; this is Ethiopia."[36] His focus is on Axum during the fourth to sixth centuries. He argues that the "[t]he most important achievement of this period is the translation of the Greek Bible into Ge´ez, the Old Ethiopian language," with scholarship having established "beyond doubt" that "the *Vorlagen* [of the Ethiopic Old Testament] were Greek."[37] Steve Delamarter, Curt Niccum and Ralph Lee, whose work is cited here, offer the following summary account of the significance of this for Septuagint studies:

> Claims about the precise Greek *Vorlage* of the Axumite Bible are, in many cases, going beyond the evidence. Still the translations of the various books bear some of the distinctive readings of the various *Vorlagen* from which they were translated. Even where representations are relatively free, portions of the underlying text can often be reconstructed. For example Eth-Dan derives from a text similar to minuscule LXX^{130} and Eth-3Ezra (= MT-Ezra-Neh) was copied from a Greek manuscript virtually identical to Codex Vaticanus (LXX^{B}). However, Eth-2Chr may attest to Lucianic or a proto-Lucianic recension of the Greek. What this means is that the corpus of Old Testament books was probably not translated from a

32 Ibid., 14.
33 Ibid., 15.
34 Ibid., 17–18.
35 Ibid., 18; citing Frank Feder, "Coptic Translations," in *Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible* (ed. Armin Lange et al; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 335.
36 Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria," 20.
37 Ibid., 22; citing Steve Delamarter, Curt Niccum, and Ralph Lee, "Ethiopic Translation(s)," in *Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible* (ed. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 350.

> standard form of the Greek text. Individual books are therefore likely to have an individual character with reference to the Greek.[38]

Kreuzer's conclusion is succinct but clear in its emphasis on the Septuagint as African in its ancient production and ancient reception:

> This survey may have demonstrated that the Septuagint was of great importance not only in the east, north, and west of its place of origin, but also "south of Alexandria," i.e., in Egypt as the very "country of the Septuagint," and – together with the New Testament – also far to the south and to the southeast, deep into Africa.[39]

D AFRICAN PRODUCTION OF THE SEPTUAGINT AS IDEO-THEOLOGICAL RECEPTION

In his "Introduction" to the collection of edited essays, *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: the Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*,[40] Adrian Schenker reflects on how the discovery "of a large number of biblical scrolls in the middle of the last century near the Dead Sea and in the Judean desert" has "deeply changed the conditions of research into the text history of the Hebrew Bible." He notes that "the numerous studies of these mostly Hebrew, sometimes Greek and Aramaic biblical scrolls have been numerous" and that the studies have generated the following seminal question: "what importance did the new findings hold for the Hebrew base text or *Vorlage* of the Septuagint, the Hebrew Bible in Greek?" "It soon appeared," he continues, "that these manuscripts of the last three centuries B.C.E. reopened old questions surrounding the interpretation of the text of the Septuagint," which he astutely summarises as follows: "as reflecting another Hebrew/Aramaic Vorlage, or as resulting from interventions that the Greek translators had introduced into their translation for various reasons, or as being a text sometimes corrupted by scribal mistakes accumulated in the transmission of the text through the ages, or as a combination of the three factors."[41]

Textual criticism has shaken off its shackles as the stuff of footnotes and has entered the realm of the main text itself. Lest my sub-heading for this section be considered somewhat overstated, Roland Boer reminds us, "textual criticism

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[38] Delamarter, Niccum, and Lee, "Ethiopic Translation," 350; cited in full by Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria," 23.

[39] Ibid., 23.

[40] Adrian Schenker, ed., *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[41] Adrian Schenker, "Introduction," in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered* (ed. Adrian Schenker; Leiden: Brill, 2003), vii.

opens up questions of political interest and bias."[42] "After Qumran," argues Julio Trebolle Barrera along similar lines, "the role of the textual critic, particularly if working with the historical books, is to explain the plurality rather than the uniformity of the biblical text, the process of diversification rather than the fixed picture of a supposed canonical text."[43] That this role involves the recognition and explanation of "textual variants that make a difference" on ideo-theological grounds is clear in the examples Trebolle (Barrera) considers. For example, in comparing the pre-Lucianic Old Greek text of 1 Kgs 22:20-22 with the Masoretic Text, in which God asks the heavenly host "who will entice Ahab," Trebolle states: "The Masoretic tradition has omitted or censored a surprising piece of textual evidence about Yahweh's Spirit of deceit and the divine origin of his power."[44]

In this case, and in many others, the Septuagint (in its various forms) offers another ideo-theological perspective. Detailed and careful textual critical work post-Qumran has generated a shift from viewing the Septuagint predominantly as a source of potentially useful variants, "with the aim of getting back to a form of the Hebrew text closer to its origins," towards a textual corpus that should be "studied for its own value."[45] The Septuagint, continues Bénédicte Lemmelijn, "is no longer handmaid to the Hebrew," a "'mere' translation, consulted mainly because of its age" in order "to 'correct' the Hebrew text."[46] Her argument is that "next to the multiplicity and pluriformity of the textual material, the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls generated insights that the textual differences with which scholars were confronted were not all of the kind of (minor) changes due to the transmission process, but did actually involve serious redactional, interpretational, and even exegetical activity." "This fact," she argues, has led scholars "to an increasing consciousness of the fact that the 'borders' between the domains of 'textual criticism' and 'literary criticism' were not at all as sharp as had been believed before."[47]

The LXX has emerged from this kind of post-Qumran scholarship as a significant text in its own right, so much so that considerable methodological and hermeneutical reflection, pioneered by our own Johann Cook,[48] has been done

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42 Roland Boer, *Jameson and Jeroboam* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 197.

43 Julio C. Trebolle Barrera, "Yahwe's Spirit of Deceit: Textual Variants That Make a Difference (1 Kgs 22)," *Revue de Qumran* 25/4 (2012): 675.

44 Barrera, "Yahwe's Spirit of Deceit," 640.

45 Bénédicte Lemmelijn, "Textual Criticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint* (ed. Alison G. Salvesen and Timothy Michael Law; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 715.

46 Lemmelijn, "Textual Criticism," 715

47 Ibid., 712.

48 Johann Cook, "Towards the Formulation of a Theology of the Septuagint," in *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007* (ed. André Lemaire; Leiden: Brill, 2010); Johann Cook, "A Theology of the Septuagint?" *OTE* 30/2 (2017).

on a theology (or more accurately, theologies) of the Septuagint.[49] This African text has its own ideo-theological voice/s.

E CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN RECEPTION OF THE SEPTUAGINT

That the Septuagint has its own ideologica voice/s becomes clear in African contemporary contextual appropriation of the Septuagint. African, especially South African, biblical scholarship has done substantive work on the Septuagint, forging a body of published work. Cook has documented the historical and topical dimensions of this contribution,[50] but as the volume edited by Cook, *Septuagint and Reception: Essays Prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa*, demonstrates, 'reception' tends to mean ancient rather than contemporary reception. This section of my article will supplement Cook's analysis by documenting African Septuagintal analysis which has been directly related to contemporary African contextual concerns, continuing the long trajectory of the Septuagint being appropriated by the Early Church, particularly up to the end of the fourth century.[51]

In an article published before South Africa's liberation in 1994, Jonathan Draper uses the Septuagint's rendering of Hos 9:10 to understand the Parable of the Figtree in Luke 13:1-9. The Septuagint, Draper demonstrates, "changes the meaning" evident in the Masoretic Text, distinguishing between "Israel" and "their fathers." Draper argues that:

> This understanding seems to envisage Israel as different from the fathers, who are the ones involved in shameful activity. The fig tree may then refer [in both the Septuagint and in the Lukan parable] to the leaders of the community, not the community as a whole.[52]

Draper concludes his analysis of the parable, prompted by the LXX's rendering, as follows:

> In this context the metaphor of the vineyard and the fig tree, which Jesus found already to hand in the Old Testament, is re-interpreted to

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[49] Martin Rösel, ed., *Toward a Theology of the Septuagint: Stellenbosch Congress on the Septuagint, 2018* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020).

[50] Johann Cook, "LXXSA – a New Association in Old Clothing," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74/3 (2018); Johann Cook, "LXSSA as an International Academic Association," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78/1 (2022): 1–2.

[51] Lois Farag, "The Septuagint in the Life of the Early Church," *Word & World* 26/4 (2006); Johann Cook, "The Septuagint as a Holy Text -- the First 'Bible' of the Early Church," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76/4 (2020).

[52] Jonathan A. Draper, "'For the Kingdom Is inside of You and It Is Outside of You': Contextual Exegesis in South Africa (Lk. 13:6-9)," in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. Patrick J. Hartin and Jacobus H. Petzer; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 251–252.

> analyse and comment on the situation of the unemployed and exploited of his day. Land is the basic means of production, in economic terms. The accumulation of land is the necessary precursor to the growth of the capitalist economy. Land is intended for the production of food to supply the needs of the people. It now becomes a source of enrichment for people not on the land at all, but for whom it provides a surplus to enable them to accumulate capital. Read against this background, the parable of the Fig Tree is a parable about the expropriation of land and the primitive accumulation of capital.[53]

Responsibly, yet explicitly, Draper then goes on to connect ancient texts and contemporary South African context, making it clear that while "[t]here can be no direct or allegorical connection between the parable and our modern industrial, post-Christian South African society," a careful hermeneutic of a correspondence between correspondences has substantive resonance "for the oppressed in South Africa":[54]

> We live in a society where an invading army and a colonising people conquered another society and subdued it to its will. The land, the primary means of production, has been taken away from the colonised people.... The 'correspondence of correspondences' between the parable and our society would suggest that the conquerors stand under the judgement of God who created the land for the production of food for the needs of his people, and who proclaims the good news that he takes the side of the poor and the oppressed.[55]

Draper's argument that the fig tree in Luke's parable "refers to the leaders of Israel," specifically the Jerusalem temple-city leadership, is derived, he argues, from Mark and Q and quite possibly the Septuagint rendering of Hos 9:10.[56] Here, the Septuagint contributes to a South African 'contextual' appropriation of its distinctive ideo-theology.

My own work engages with the Septuagint more fully, in its own right, as a text with its own distinctive ideo-theological voice. Drawing on detailed LXX scholarship on the books of Kings, I have identified 3 Reigns 12:24p-t as a textual unit with a clear economic theological perspective. This text, as Adrian Schenker carefully argues,[57] represents a narrative form that is probably 'prior' to the Masoretic 1 Kgs 12:1-16/18. The 1 Kings MT version, I have argued, tends

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53 Draper, "For the Kingdom Is inside of You and It Is Outside of You," 253.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 254.

56 Ibid.,251.

57 Adrian Schenker, "Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom in the Ancient Septuagint: LXX 3 Kingdoms 12.24 Az, Mt 1 Kings 11-12; 14 and the Deuteronomistic History," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 230.

to mitigate the economic message through ethnic-oriented and religious-oriented interpolations. In my South African contextual appropriations, I connect the 3 Reigns 12:24p-t version with biblical studies pedagogy,[58] colonial and post-colonial economies of extraction (including ancient and contemporary 'state capture'),[59] decolonial biblical scholarship,[60] contemporary African Bible translations[61] and Ujamaa Centre community-based development work.[62]

A second example of Ujamaa Centre community-based work focuses on 2 Sam 13:21,[63] which reads: "When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry [, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn]" (NRSV). I have added square-brackets to the New Revised Standard Version translation, noting that this extended portion of the text is not found in the Masoretic Text and consequently is not found in many translations, including for example the commonly used South African isiZulu or isiXhosa translations. The extended text is found in the Septuagint and Qumran manuscripts and may well represent earlier Hebrew versions. The Septuagint version of 2 Sam 13:21 exposes David's patriarchal impunity. The extended text could be either an editorial interpolation or the Hebrew text the Greek translators of the Septuagint used was slightly different from the one that has been preserved in the Masoretic Hebrew Bible. "To be sure," Tuukka Kauhanen explains, "most differences in the text concern details of the stories... Nevertheless, some of these differing details are by no means unimportant."[64] The Hebrew text, she explains, continued to change after the Septuagint translation was made, so that the Septuagint preserves a more ancient version of the Hebrew text. Significant for my argument is Kauhanen's argument that "learned circles interested in the ideological and theological nuances of the text introduced minor changes that aimed at promoting the better side of David and Yahweh's fidelity to his promise of the eternal kingship."[65] In this view, the shorter Masoretic Hebrew version of 2 Sam 13:21, used as the basis for most English and most African language

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58 Gerald O. West, "In Search of an Economic Remnant of Resistance: 3 Reigns 12:24p-T," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78/1 (2022): 8.

59 West, "In Search of an Economic Remnant of Resistance," 8.

60 Gerald O. West, "Decolonial Post-Tribal Interpretation: Proto-Tribal Socio-Economic Contestation in 3 Reigns 12: 24p-T," *OTE* 36/1 (2023): 106-125.

61 Gerald O. West, "Textual Criticism, Literary Criticism, and State Capture: Returning 3 Reigns 12:24p–T to the Canon of Local African Communities," *JSem* 32/2 (2023).

62 West, "Textual Criticism,"

63 Gerald O. West, "Tamar Summons the Church to Account: Resisting Patriarchal (and Ecclesial) Impunity in 2 Samuel 13:21," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 22 (2025): 361-378.

64 Tuukka Kauhanen, *2 Samuel*, Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) (Helsinki, 2015), https://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/2015/10/28/editing-the-septuagint-of-2-samuel/.

65 Kauhanen, *2 Samuel*.

translations, attempts to redact David's callous condoning of Amnon's abuse of Tamar. Fortunately for Tamar and the Church, such "small late changes can be recognized with the help of the Septuagint."[66] The Septuagint recognises and depicts David's impunity.

My final example, for now, comes from a recent essay by Hendrik Bosman, "Claiming Economic Space: the "Courageous Woman" ("אשת־חיל") of Prov. 31:10-31 within the Context of Her Ancient Household."[67] In this essay Bosman makes use of the Septuagint's rendering of Prov 31:16, arguing that the Septuagint's appropriation of the Masoretic Text "opts for less generic and more official and administrative vocabulary that made sense in a Hellenistic and Egyptian economic context."[68] Bosman's careful lexical and ancient contextual argument demonstrates that the Septuagint version of Prov 31:16 "is much more appreciative" of the extent to which the 'courageous woman' (Prov 31:10) "claims economic space, and this resonates with the Egyptian context within which a major part of the Greek-speaking audience of the Septuagint lived."[69] The Septuagint accomplishes this ancient contextual appropriation through a careful choice of lexical terms.

The Septuagint's rendering of the MT's שדה is Bosman's first example. The Greek translation-as-appropriation of שדה in the MT, Bosman argues, chooses the verb γεώργιον, which "is more specific than the Hebrew *Vorlage* because it refers to 'an area of land used for cultivation' – therefore it is clear," continues Bosman, "that the Septuagint translation depicts the 'courageous woman' as someone that did not just buy any field but choose one that was suitable for cultivation, illustrating her careful consideration."[70] Bosman's second example focuses on the MT's לקח. The MT makes use of this generic verb, Bosman argues, "to describe the act of acquiring the land and literally means 'taking the land,' which the LXX translates with πριάμαι, which "is often used in juridical documents related to the transfer of ownership."[71] Bosman's third example draws attention to the Hebrew noun כרם as the object of the verb 'planted,' which the LXX translates-as-appropriation as κτημα, which "designates," Bosman argues, "a more elaborate property or farm – much more

66 Ibid.

67 Hendrik L. Bosman, "Claiming Economic Space: The "Courageous Woman" of Prov. 31:10-31 within the Context of Her Ancient Household," in *Claiming Space in the Bible and Beyond: Exploring the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Economic Realities* (ed. Juliana L. Claassens, Gerald O. West, and Sithembiso Zwane; New York: T & T Clark, 2025).

68 Bosman, "Claiming Economic Space," 106.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

than a single vineyard.”[72] Taken together the Septuagint’s choices cohere in portraying a more economically engaged woman than her MT sister.

Ancient contextualisation summons particular lexical appropriations, appropriations which offer tentative contemporary African appropriations according to Bosman, namely “that despite the ‘curation’ of the household economy by patriarchy and Persian economic policy” as *invited space*, the “אשת־חיל” “establishes an *invigorated space* where she contends with the patriarchal and Persian dominated invited space, thereby establishing an *invented space* where she can exert influence – among others, in the economic spaces within and beyond the family household.”[73] Bosman concludes by affirming potential contemporary appropriations: “in agreement with Juliana Claassens, this discussion aims at establishing a ‘creative space’ that stimulates the contemplation of the theological significance of the ‘courageous woman’ (who claimed economic space) for millions of women across the globe who are struggling to survive economically.”[74]

I would like to see African biblical studies[75] privileging the Septuagint in its contextual-appropriation work. Just as ancient Septuagint reception studies have secured an institutional place in South African biblical studies, so too should contemporary Septuagint reception studies.

F AFRICAN INSTITUTIONAL SEPTUAGINT RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION

It is appropriate to include an institutional dimension to this article, focusing on the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa (LXXSA). This scholarly body is a site for South African, African and international scholarly forms of reception of the Septuagint. In a recent article, Cook has proposed that the LXXSA be consolidated institutionally, moving from “an informal institution” to a (South) African based “international” organisation.[76] Documenting “the vibrant character of the research activity of LXXSA” in two

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72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 112–113.

74 Ibid., 113; citing L. Juliana Claassens, “The Woman of Substance and Human Flourishing: Proverbs 31:10-31 and Martha Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32/1 (2016): 5.

75 Andrew M. Mbuvi, “African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 15/2 (2017); Andrew M. Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

76 Cook, “LXXSA as an International Academic Association,” 1. See also Johann Cook, “LXXSA 2023,” 32/1 (2023).

historically oriented articles[77] and in numerous collected volumes,[78] Cook makes a compelling argument that LXXSA, at present "an informal association," "should perhaps be adapted to become a more formalised international academic association."[79]

LXXSA could become, I would argue, an African institutional site within which contemporary African contextual appropriation resides alongside ancient linguistic, literary, socio-historical and theological study of the Septuagint. Indeed, as I have demonstrated above, contemporary African contextual appropriation would require and depend on the careful work of this ancient focus. I would make a similar argument for the Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTSSA), arguing that the Septuagint should become as significant a source for African 'Old Testament' contextual scholarship as the Hebrew Bible. African contextual biblical and theological work should reconsider and reconceptualise the Septuagint as an African sacred text.

G WHAT IS THE (AFRICAN) SEPTUAGINT?

Finally, as this article demonstrates, methodological considerations and innovations are central to contemporary LXX studies. I return in this final section to my introduction, revisiting the African origin-location of the Septuagint. However, instead of focusing on who and where, I ask the question: What is this African Septuagint?

In an important analytical and summative essay, Jan Joosten asks these questions: "What was the original function of the Septuagint? What were the needs that called forth its creation?"[80] Joosten reiterates the three primary responses to these questions,[81] namely, that the Septuagint was a translation of the Jewish law commissioned by the Ptolemaic King law "in order to give it a place in his library";[82] that the main motivation for the production of the Septuagint "was not to satisfy the curiosity of the Greeks, but to provide the Jewish community of Egypt with a code of law;"[83] and that the Septuagint "came to being in a liturgical setting, in a broad sense... for reading in the assemblies

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77 Cook, "LXXSA – a New Association"; Cook, "LXXSA as an International Academic Association."

78 See the citations in this article.

79 Cook, "LXXSA as an International Academic Association," 3.

80 Jan Joosten, "Reflections on the 'Interlinear Paradigm' in Septuagintal Studies," in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo* (ed. Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 163.

81 For a similar analysis, see Johann Cook, "Interpreting the Septuagint," in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016* (ed. L.C. Jonker, Gideon R. Kotzé, and Christl M. Maier; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 3–6.

82 Joosten, "Reflections on the 'Interlinear Paradigm'," 163.

83 Ibid., 164.

and for study in the schools."[84] These three answers to the question of what the (African) Septuagint is, Joosten aptly states, "share one central postulate, to wit, that the Septuagint was from the beginning a freestanding text, meant to be read on its own."[85]

In order to assess this postulate, Joosten invokes Albert Pietersma's notion of the "interlinear hypothesis"[86] in which:

> What is postulated is that the Greek translation was originally meant to serve the study of the Hebrew text in a school setting. It was designed to remain subservient to the source text and to be fully understood only in a conjoint reading of the Hebrew and the Greek.[87]

Both Pietersma and Joosten offer detailed analysis, but Joosten concludes that the arguments in favour of the interlinear hypothesis, which locate the Septuagint as pedagogical aid to the Hebrew text, are "too ambiguous and speculative, and the arguments against it too weighty, to be able to embrace it." "On balance," Joosten continues, "it is much more likely that the project of the Septuagint translators was that of creating a freestanding, independent text,"[88] even if this text has been shaped through comparative dialogue with the Hebrew text.

This has been my assumption, based on the extensive contemporary work being done within LXX studies, much of which is in South Africa. Whether as an African liturgical, an African legal or an African cultural text, the Septuagint is "a freestanding Greek text."[89] My emphasis in this article is that it is an 'African' text – in varying senses[90] – in its own right.

I will end with Cook's argument "that scholars largely agree that it is possible and also appropriate to speak of a theology, or then at least of theological exegesis, of the LXX."[91] My own formulation would insist on 'theologies' of the Septuagint, as Cook acknowledges may be an appropriate formulation,[92] lest

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84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 See Albert Pietersma, "A New Paradigm for Addressing Old Questions: The Relevance of the Interlinear Model for the Study of the Septuagint," in *Bible and Computer: The Stellenbosch AIBI-6 Conference: Proceedings of the Association Internationale Bible et Informatique* "*from Alpha to Byte.*" *University of Stellenbosch 17-21 July, 2000* (ed. Johann Cook; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

87 Joosten, "Reflections on the 'Interlinear Paradigm'," 165.

88 Ibid., 178.

89 Ibid., 176.

90 Here, I follow Kreuzer, with whose work I began my analysis; Kreuzer, "The Septuagint South of Alexandria," 1.

91 Cook, "Interpreting the Septuagint," 14.

92 Ibid.

Septuagint theological analysis fall into the dilemmas confronted by the quest for a singular 'Old Testament theology.'[93] Having offered a similar detailed analysis of possible Septuagintal purposes to Joosten,[94] but emphasising the comparative potential of the interlinear paradigm,[95] Cook turns to hermeneutical considerations, foregrounding methodological issues. Central to Cook's analysis is a distinction between discerning the purpose(s) of the Septuagint either in relation to its "Hebrew (Aramaic) parent text"[96] (following comparative interlinear understandings) or as literature in its own right (following the orientation of the *La Bible d'Alexandrie* project).[97] In either case, I would argue, the purpose(s) of the Septuagint may be discerned in the distinctive theological and ideological voice(s) of Septuagintal texts.

Cook helpfully suggests that the following four aspects should be taken "into account when attempting to formulate a theology of the Septuagint."[98] First, "the diversity of the Septuagint should be taken into account. The OG is not a unity. Each translated unit should be dealt with independently." Second, "such a theology should only be formulated in conjunction with the OG text." Third, "this endeavour must be a diachronic one. Hence, confronting the reality of diversity, it must be acknowledged that there are many theologies and it is possible that each book will present a different perspective depending, inter alia, on its context."[99] Fourth, "a 'theology' (theologies?) of the LXX should be more than, and hence different from, what is formulated in a theology of the Hebrew Bible."[100]

This is important work, particularly if we seriously consider his fourth point, permitting the Septuagint to have its own theological-ideological textual integrity, whether speaking in conversation with its parent text or independently. African biblical scholarship, I suggest, should be willing to embrace the reality of this African 'Bible,' facilitating a conversation between contemporary African religio-cultural and socio-political concerns and the kinds of religio-cultural and socio-political[101] concerns that may have shaped the purposes of the Septuagint.

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93 Gunther H. Wittenberg, "Old Testament Theology: For Whom?," *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 73 (1996); Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Mark G. Brett, "Canonical Criticism and Old Testament Theology," in *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (ed. A.D.H. Mayes; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63-85.

94 Cook, "Interpreting the Septuagint," 3–6, 7–9.

95 Ibid., 9–12.

96 Ibid., 7.

97 Ibid., 9.

98 Ibid.,14.

99 Ibid., 14

100 Ibid., 15.

101 For a recognition of the presence of the political, see Sylvie Honigman, *The*

African biblical hermeneutics may then offer innovative methodological and interpretive insights to the work of LXX studies.

H CONCLUSION

Reflecting on why he chose to translate the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text in his translation, *The Bible* (2023), Nicholas King, who lived and worked for many years in South Africa, has this to say:

> [T]he LXX is the version of the Bible that is standardly cited by our New Testament authors; that the existing manuscripts of it are centuries older than those of the Hebrew scriptures and in some cases preserve manifestly superior readings; and that it serves as a reminder that the scriptural texts were at no stage 'set in stone' until the invention of movable type in the late fifteenth century gave us the illusion of an unchanging book called 'The Bible.'[102]

King offers those who read their Bibles in English, another 'bible.' My article conceptualises in what ways this 'bible' might be considered an African Bible.

The Septuagint has become a 'bible' in its own right, as Cook so aptly contends.[103] Biblical scholarship has had to recognise that the Septuagint has irrupted from the zone of scholarly footnotes, taking up its subject position in the main text as a 'bible' in its own right with its own theologies and ideologies. This 'bible' has accrued a significant and growing body of literature, to which, I argue, African contextual appropriation should constitute a significant component. The Septuagint is, after all, the African Bible.

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[102] Nicholas King, "Questions of Translation," *The Way* 53/2 (2014): 62. See also the "Preface" in Nicholas King, *The Bible* (London: Bible Society, 2023).

[103] Cook, "The Septuagint as a Holy Text," 15.

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