
APOLOGETICS AGAINST THE DEVALUATION OF THE MOSAIC LAW IN EARLY JUDAISM?

AN INDICATION OF AN ANTI-HELLENISTIC STANCE IN LXX-PROVERBS AND THE WORKS OF PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

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Abstract

In a time when Hellenistic culture became the predominant one, other streams of thinking, such as Judaism, were challenged by the Greek way of thinking. Due to this Hellenistic influence, some Jews tended to devalue the Law of Moses. Jewish literature of that time often worked as apologetics against Hellenism. This pilot article analyses the role of the Mosaic Law in the LXX translation of Proverbs as well as the attestation of the Law in the works of Philo in order to determine whether or not there was an actual devaluation of the Law by Jews due to Hellenistic influence in the Early Jewish period and whether or not these works contain an anti-Hellenistic stance.

Keywords: Septuagint; LXX-Proverbs; Philo; Hellenism; Law

Introduction

In recent Septuagint (LXX) scholarly debate, some scholars have been trying to detect the provenance of the LXX and the identity of its translators. Johann Cook has written extensively on the provenance of the LXX translation of Proverbs and the identity of its translator. By looking at theological themes that are present in the LXX version but absent in the Masoretic Text (MT), he has given an indicate answer to the question of the identity of LXX-Proverbs.¹ According to him, the LXX translator of Proverbs was a Palestinian Jew who was presumably living in Alexandria and who warned his readers against Hellenistic influences.² Although Hellenism influenced Jewish culture positively, *e.g.* linguistics, politics and economics, these Hellenistic influences had, according to Cook, a negative impact on Jews because it led to the devaluation of the Law of Moses and brought in foreign wisdom, *i.e.* Greek philosophical thought.³

Philo of Alexandria was also familiar with the LXX corpus and, with regard to this study, also with LXX-Proverbs. Several studies have given an overview of the attestation of

¹ See Cook (1999:448-461).

² See Cook (1999:460).

³ See *e.g.* Cook (1993:397); ID. (1994:474-475). It is important to note that the terms 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' can no longer be juxtaposed. Jewish culture constantly went into dialogue with the dominant Greek culture. Moreover, both were strongly intertwined. However, although a strong juxtaposition between the two terms can no longer be accepted, in times of revolt (*e.g.* revolt of the Maccabees, esp. the decrees of Antiochus IV against the Jews) Hellenisation was often perceived as a threat to Jewish identity. See *e.g.* Tcherikover (1966:75-265), Rajak (2001:3-10) and Rajak (2009:14-119).

LXX-Proverbs in the works of Philo.⁴ This study has proven that six clear quotations from LXX-Proverbs are present in Philo's work, *i.e.* Prov. 3,11-12 (= Philo, *Preliminary Studies*, 177), Prov. 14,4 (= Philo, *On Dreams*, 2.144), Prov. 8,22-23 (Philo, *On Drunkenness*, 30-31), Prov. 3,4; 4,3 en 6,20 (= Philo, *On Drunkenness*, 84).⁵ Although the Law is briefly mentioned in these passages, it is important to study the attestation of the Law in Philo's work and compare it to the results found by Cook in LXX-Proverbs. Such a comparison has not been made in scholarship so far. Will the works of Philo also reveal an anti-Hellenistic stance and a plea for the protection of Mosaic Law?

In this preliminary study I will analyse the role of the Mosaic Law in the LXX-translation of Proverbs according to Cook and afterwards I will look at the attestation of the Law in the works of Philo in order to determine whether or not there was an actual devaluation of the Law by Jews due to Hellenistic influence in the Early Jewish period and whether or not these works contain an anti-Hellenistic stance.

The Role of the Mosaic Law in LXX-Proverbs

The LXX-version of Proverbs is commonly accepted to be a free translation.⁶ Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen has argued that the LXX translation of Proverbs can be considered of equal linguistic quality as Koine Greek literature.⁷ The rather free approach of the LXX translator towards his Hebrew parent text enabled him to insert some ideological and theological nuances in his translation such as the emphasis on God as the sole creator in Prov. 8 and the warning against foreign wisdom in Prov. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9.⁸

⁴ See Cohen (2007); Steyn (2016:294-322).

⁵ See Cohen (2007:157-171); Steyn (2016:297-301). Gert Steyn does not include Prov. 8:22-23 and 6,20 in his analysis.

⁶ The translation technique of LXX-Proverbs has been studied by multiple scholars using different approaches to characterise the translation technique of the LXX translator. Bénédicte Lemmelijn makes a distinction between two different approaches that have been developed to study the translation technique of the LXX translators: the quantitative and the qualitative approach (see Lemmelijn, 2001:43-63). The former has been introduced by James Barr in his work *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations* and takes different aspects of literalness as a starting point (see Barr, 1979). This approach has been further developed by Emanuel Tov who analysed the degree of literalness by means of statistics and computer data using the CATSS database (see Tov & Wright, 1985). The second approach, the qualitative approach, has been developed by the Finnish Helsinki school, *i.a.* Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen, Raija Sollamo, Seppo Sipilä and Anneli Aejmelaus. This approach looks at the freedom of the translator and the quality of the Greek language by studying the rendering of Hebrew grammatical features into Greek (see Lemmelijn, 2001:54-55) and by means of example: Sollamo (1979), Soisalon-Soininen (1987), Aejmelaus (2007)). Beside these two approaches, and in line with the qualitative approach, Bénédicte Lemmelijn and Hans Ausloos have developed a new approach: the so-called 'content- and context-related approach' (see Ausloos & Lemmelijn, 2014). This approach studies the rendering of content- and context-related criteria such as Hebrew *hapax legomena*, Hebrew wordplay in the context of parallelisms and Hebrew wordplay in the context of aetiologies. These criteria confronted the translator with a difficult situation in which he was forced to make a specific choice of rendering. By looking at these isolated cases, one can characterise the translation technique the LXX translators applied to translate their Hebrew *Vorlage* (see Ausloos & Lemmelijn, 2010 and Lemmelijn, 2014:137). All three approaches, *i.e.* quantitative, qualitative and the content- and context-related approach, characterise LXX-Proverbs as a free translation on the basis of their own specific analyses. Moreover, the content- and context-related approach characterises the LXX-translator as a free and creative translator who remained faithful to his Hebrew *Vorlage* (see Lemmelijn, 2014:148 and Beekman, 2017:588). On the faithfulness of a translation see *e.g.* Aejmelaus (2007:278) and Ausloos & Lemmelijn (2014).

⁷ See Soisalon-Soininen (1965:208).

⁸ See Cook (1994), Cook (1999) and Cook (2006).

Johan Cook has written extensively on the LXX-translation of Proverbs. In his work he has also looked at the role of the Law in LXX-Proverbs. Against the opinion of scholars such as Dick, Gerleman and Hengel, Cook observes that the Law of Moses plays a prominent role in LXX-Proverbs.⁹ According to him the role of the Law of Moses can be detected when looking at (1) the Hebrew and Greek lexemes used to denote the Law, (2) pluses in the Greek text that emphasise the role of the Law and (3) parallels with certain Jewish writings in relation to Prov. 28,4 (οἱ δὲ ἀγαπῶντες τὸν νόμον περιβάλλουσιν ἑαυτοὺς τεῖχος/ but those who love the law build a wall around themselves).¹⁰

(1) The Hebrew lexeme *הַחֹק* is attested 12 times in LXX-Proverbs and is translated with different Greek lexemes: νόμος (7x), θεσμός (2x), λόγος (1x), ἔννομος (1x) and νόμιμα (1x).¹¹ Cook argues that when the singular form of νόμος, θεσμός and λόγος is used, the translator is referring to the Law of Moses.¹² When the plural of these nouns is used the translator wants to convey a different meaning, *i.e.* the teachings of the parents.¹³

(2) In several passages the prominent role of the Law of Moses is attested. An example hereof is Prov. 9,10 and 13,15:¹⁴

10 ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος κυρίου,
καὶ βουλὴ ἁγίων σύνεσις·

יְהוָה יְהוָה קִדְשֵׁי בִימָה: **10**

10a τὸ γὰρ γινῶναι νόμον διανοίας ἐστὶν
ἀγαθῆς·

10 The beginning of wisdom is the fear
of the Lord,
and counsel of the saints is
understanding,

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning
of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the holy is
understanding.

10a for to know the law is the sign of a
sound mind,

15 σύνεσις ἀγαθὴ δίδωσιν χάριν,
τὸ δὲ γινῶναι νόμον διανοίας ἐστὶν
ἀγαθῆς,
ὁδοὶ δὲ καταφρονούντων ἐν ἀπωλείᾳ.

שֵׁשׁ-כֶּלֶב יוֹב יִתְנוּ נַחֲמֵי בְּגֵימִים אִתָּן: **15**

15 Sound discretion wins favor,
and to know the law is the sign of a
sound mind,
but the ways of scorners end in
destruction.

15 Good understanding giveth favour,
but the way of transgressors is hard.

⁹ See Cook (1999:448); *Id.* (2016:63-64).

¹⁰ See Cook (1999:448).

¹¹ See Cook (1999:449).

¹² See Cook (1999:449, 451). An exception is Prov. 4,2 (νόμος). See Cook (1999:451).

¹³ See Cook (1999:451).

¹⁴ The English translation from the LXX is based upon the NETS-translation of Proverbs made by J Cook. See Cook (2007:621-647). The English translation of the Hebrew text is taken from the King James Version.

The same plus is attested in both passages, namely τὸ γὰρ/δὲ γινῶναι νόμον διανοίας ἐστὶν ἀγαθῆς (and/for to know the law is the sign of a sound mind).¹⁵ In Chapter 9, several warnings are being given against *i.a.* foreign wisdom and the devaluation of the Law.¹⁶ This warning against the devaluation of the Law was an important feature of the ideology of the translator.¹⁷ This is observed in Prov. 9,10 and 13,15 where he stressed the importance of the law.¹⁸ Cook ascribes these pluses to the historical milieu of the provenance of LXX-Proverbs.¹⁹ The LXX translation of Proverbs would have been written in a time where the influence of Hellenism was a threat to Jewish thought, which eventually led to a devaluation of the Torah by the Jews.²⁰ An example of an Alexandrian Jew who renounced his religion is Dositheos son of Drimylos.²¹ Some information about Dositheos can be found in the apocryphal book 3 Maccabees 1,3:

[...] Dositheos, called the son of Drimylos, a Jew by race, [...] who later had abandoned the observance of the law and had become alienated from ancestral teachings.²²

3 Maccabees does not depict a positive picture of the Gentiles. The aim of 3 Maccabees is polemical, apologetic, hortatory and etiological.²³ N Clayton Croy writes: “The author exhorts readers to faithful adherence to the Torah, devotion to the Jerusalem temple, and resistance to the imposition of Gentile religious practices”.²⁴ Taking the provenance of 3 Maccabees, *i.e.* Alexandria, into account, I want to argue, although cautiously, that it is possible that both LXX-Proverbs and 3 Maccabees reflect a similar context.²⁵

- (3) The LXX translator in Prov. 28,4 gives a specific interpretation of a central Jewish religious thought that is also present in Rabbinic literature; *i.e.* building a wall around the Torah.²⁶

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| οὕτως οἱ ἐγκαταλείποντες τὸν νόμον ἐγκωμιάζουσιν ἀσεβειαν, οἱ δὲ ἀγαπῶντες τὸν νόμον περιβάλλουσιν ἑαυτοῖς τεῖχος | עֲזָבֵי הַתּוֹרָה יִקְלְלוּ רְשָׁעִים וְשֹׁמְרֵי תוֹרָתִי יִתְגַּדְּרוּ בָּם |
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| so those who forsake the law praise impiety, but those who love the law build a wall around themselves. | They that forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them. |
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¹⁵ See Cook (1999:455). Cook correctly observes the difference in meaning between γὰρ and δέ: ‘the particle γὰρ introduces a final clause, whereas δέ has a paratactical function’. See Cook (1999:455).

¹⁶ See Cook (1999:456-457).

¹⁷ See Cook (1999:457).

¹⁸ See Cook (1999:457).

¹⁹ See Cook (1999:456).

²⁰ See Cook (1993:397); ID. (1994:473-474); ID. (2005:77); ID. (2016:64).

²¹ See Modrzejewski (1995:56), Feldman (1993:82) and Feldman (2006:68-69). Modrzejewski refutes the modern critique of the non-authenticity of 3 Maccabees 1,3. On the basis of an extensive analysis of multiple Greek papyri and a demotic document he comes to the conclusion that Dositheos son of Drimylos did exist. See Modrzejewski (1995:56-61).

²² See Croy (2006:3).

²³ See Croy (2006:xix).

²⁴ Croy (2006:xix).

²⁵ See Croy (2006:xiii).

²⁶ See Cook (1999:457); ID. (2005:75-76).

This passage shows some similarities with other Jewish writings *i.e.* Mishna, Talmud and the Letter of Aristeas.²⁷ Pirkei Avot indicates that a wall is being built around the Torah:

Moses received the *Torah* from Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things, “Be deliberate in judgment; raise up many disciples; and make a fence about the *Torah*”.²⁸

The same expression is found in Midrash Rabba (Num. 8:X):

From this you can infer that the Torah has put a fence about its ordinances. We have learned elsewhere: Be deliberate in judgement, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah. How shall a man make a fence round his own affairs in the same way as the Torah make a fence round hers?²⁹

In the LXX version of Proverbs, however, another interpretation of this theological tradition is found: the righteous have to build a wall around themselves.³⁰ A similar interpretation can be found in the Letter of Aristeas § 139:

συνθεωρήσας οὖν ἕκαστα σοφὸς ὢν ὁ νομοθέτης, ὑπὸ θεοῦ κατεσκευασμένος εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν τῶν ἀπάντων, περιέφραξεν ἡμᾶς ἀδιακόποις χάραξι καὶ σιδηροῖς τείχεσιν, ὅπως μηθεὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἔθνῶν ἐπιμισγώμεθα κατὰ μηδέν, ἀγνοὶ καθεστῶτες κατὰ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ ψυχὴν, ἀπολελυμένοι ματαίων δοξῶν, τὸν μόνον θεὸν καὶ δυνατὸν σεβόμενοι παρ’ ὅλην τὴν πᾶσαν κτίσιν.³¹

Therefore the lawgiver, who was wise, contemplated each matter, being prepared by God for knowledge of all things, and he fenced us around with unbroken palisades and with iron walls so that we might not intermingle at all with other nations, being pure in both body and soul, having been set free from vain opinions, revering the only and powerful God above all of the entire creation.³²

The lawgiver that is mentioned in this passage and who has built the iron walls around the Jewish people is Moses.³³ Moses gave the Law, with moral regulations, to the Jewish people. This Law prohibited Jews to interfere with foreign nations. Cook and Wright recognise the shielding of Jews from pagans and other foreign nations.³⁴ According to Cook, this meaning is also conveyed in LXX-Proverbs.³⁵

Drawing on these three arguments, Cook rightly concludes that the Law of Moses has been given a prominent role in LXX-Proverbs.³⁶ The LXX translator had a high regard for the Law and tried to convince his readers of the importance of this Law. According to Cook, the translator’s target audience called the importance of the Law into question due to the influence of Hellenism.³⁷

²⁷ See Cook (1999:458-459).

²⁸ Gorfinkle (2003). See also Cook (1999:458).

²⁹ Cook (1999:458).

³⁰ See Cook (1999:459).

³¹ Meecham (1935:22).

³² Wright (2015:257).

³³ See Wright (2015:264).

³⁴ See Cook (1999:459); Wright (2015: 264).

³⁵ See Cook (1999:459).

³⁶ See Cook (1999:459).

³⁷ See Cook (1999:459); Id. (1993:397); Id. (2015:76-77).

The Role of the Mosaic Law in the Works of Philo of Alexandria

The works of Philo contain abundant references to the Mosaic Law. One of those references is, according to Naomi Cohen, taken from LXX-Proverbs.³⁸ In Philo's *On Drunkenness* §84 we find the following text:

εὖ μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἐν Παροιμίαις εἰρηῆσθαι
 “προνοούντων καλὰ ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ
 ἀνθρώπων”, ἐπειδὴ δι’ ἀμφοτέρων
 παντελής ἡ κτήσις τὰ γαθοῦ περιγίνεται·
 διδαχθεὶς γὰρ φυλάσσειν νόμους πατρὸς
 καὶ μὴ ἀπαθεῖσθαι θεσμούς μητρὸς
 θαρρήσεις ἐπισεμνυόμενος εἰπεῖν· “υἱὸς
 γὰρ ἐγενόμην κἀγὼ πατρὶ ὑπήκοος καὶ
 ἀγαπώμενος ἐν προσώπῳ μητρὸς”

καὶ προνοοῦ καλὰ ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ
 ἀνθρώπων (Prov. 3,4)

Υἱέ, φύλασσε νόμους πατρὸς σου
 καὶ μὴ ἀπόση θεσμούς μητρὸς σου·
 (Prov. 6,20)

υἱὸς γὰρ ἐγενόμην κἀγὼ πατρὶ ὑπήκοος
 καὶ ἀγαπώμενος ἐν προσώπῳ μητρὸς
 (Prov. 4,3)

Good also, I think, is that saying in
 Proverbs, Let them provide things
 excellent in the sight of the Lord and
 men, since it is through both of these that
 the acquisition of excellence is brought
 to its fullness. For If you have learnt to
 observe the laws of your father, and not
 reject the ordinances of your mother, you
 will not fear to say with pride: For I too
 was a son of my father, obedient and
 loved in the face of my mother.³⁹

and think of what is noble
 in the sight of the Lord and of people.
 (Prov. 3,4)

My son, keep your father's laws,
 and do not forsake your mother's
 precepts. (Prov. 6,20)

For I became a son, and I am obedient
 to

my father and beloved in the eyes of my
 mother (Prov. 4,3).

Cohen argues that the reference to Prov. 6,20 into Philo's *On Drunkenness* indicates Philo's emphasis to keep the Torah.⁴⁰ Cohen has a different understanding than Cook on the usage of the word νόμος in LXX-Proverbs. According to her, the noun νόμος denotes the Law of Moses, *i.e.* Torah.⁴¹ She asserts this without taking into consideration the different usage of the number of the noun in LXX-Proverbs and the difference in meaning that comes with it as is observed by Cook.

The prominent role of the Law of Moses in the writings of Philo is also observed by John W Martens in his monograph *One God, One Law. Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law*.⁴² In contrast to Greek culture, Philo claims divine authorship for the Mosaic Law.⁴³ For Philo, the written Law of Moses is in harmony with the non-written

³⁸ See Cohen (2007:165-166).

³⁹ Cohen (2007:165).

⁴⁰ See Cohen (2007:166).

⁴¹ See Cohen (2007:166).

⁴² Martens (2003).

⁴³ See Martens (2003:95).

Law of Nature (νόμος φύσεως), which was the highest law in Philo's hierarchy of laws.⁴⁴ God created the Law of Nature and also gave the Law to Moses by divine power.⁴⁵ Although the Mosaic Law is a written law, it would be impossible to claim that the Law of Nature would contradict the Law of Moses.⁴⁶ There can be no contradictions between Mosaic and Natural Law since both laws are created or given by God. Any other written, material, law is not in line with the Law of Nature since they are not given by divine command.⁴⁷ In this respect Philo's respect for the Mosaic Law is clearly evident.⁴⁸ Martens asserts that the Law of Moses was so important for Philo that he rejected other codes of law that did not agree with the Law of Moses.⁴⁹

The importance of the Law of Moses in the works of Philo can be seen as apologetic. Philo stressed the importance of Mosaic Laws in a time when Hellenistic thought was winning the hearts of many Jews that were confronted with Hellenism.⁵⁰ Although he was also tempted by foreign wisdom, Philo remained strong and remained loyal to his Jewish tradition.⁵¹ He tried to elevate the role of the Mosaic Law by stressing its importance and trying to bring it to hesitating Jews and the Gentile pagan world.⁵²

Conclusion

In this preliminary study I have analysed the role of the Law of Moses in LXX-Proverbs and the works of Philo of Alexandria. Special attention has been given to the question whether or not these texts reveal a context where the Mosaic Law was devaluated by Jews and whether or not these works show an anti-Hellenistic stance.

Cook has indicated that the Law of Moses played a prominent role in the ideology of LXX-Proverbs. The LXX translator of Proverbs tried to convince his readers of the importance of the Mosaic Law by (a) adding τὸ γὰρ/δὲ γινῶναι νόμον διανοίας ἐστὶν ἀγαθῆς (and/for to know the law is the sign of a sound mind) in Prov. 9,10 and Prov. 13,15 and (b) by interpreting a famous Jewish religious thought, *i.e.* the building of a wall around the Torah to the exhortation for righteous people to build a wall around themselves to shield themselves from foreign wisdom (Prov. 28,4). The target audience of LXX-Proverbs was thus tempted by foreign wisdom and this led to the devaluation of the Law. This was a tendency to which the LXX translator reacted in his translation of Proverbs. An example of a Jew who renounced his religion and embraced Greek ideology and culture can be found in 3 Maccabees. This book informs us about a Jew called Dositheos, son of Drimyllos, who abandoned the observance of the law. Looking at the aim and the provenance of the book, I deem it likely that it was written in the same context as LXX-Proverbs. However, further research should be conducted on the relationship between both books.

Also in Philo the prominent role of the Law of Moses can be observed. Philo argues that the Law of Moses is close to the Law of Nature. Both are created by God: the one is a

⁴⁴ See Martens (2003:96).

⁴⁵ See Martens (2003:97).

⁴⁶ See Martens (2003:97).

⁴⁷ See Martens (2003:98).

⁴⁸ See Martens (2003:95).

⁴⁹ See Martens (2003:99-100).

⁵⁰ See Martens (2003:159).

⁵¹ See Cohen (2007:162-163).

⁵² See Cohen (2007:164).

written law given to Moses on Sinai, the other one came into existence during the creation of the world and dwells in nature itself. Contrary to Greek laws, the Law of Moses is thus of divine origin. Therefore, Philo rejects the Greek laws that do not correspond with the Mosaic Law. This means that Greek laws that are in harmony with the Torah are not being devaluated. In this respect we can trace on the one hand a call for Jews to keep the Law of Moses, on the other hand to merge this Law with some Greek laws that correspond with it. This way we can observe an anti-Hellenistic stance in Philo but on the other hand also a positive evaluation of certain aspects of Greek culture that do not harm Jewish religion and/or culture. In contrast to the context wherein the LXX-translation was made, Philo's context was less hostile towards Hellenism.

Having analysed these two ancient Jewish-Hellenistic sources I conclude that these works were indeed written in a context wherein Hellenistic thought challenged Jewish religion. It is known that some Jews, such as Dositheos son of Drimylos, were tempted by Hellenistic thought and no longer kept the laws as prescribed by the Law of Moses. Both Philo and the LXX translator of Proverbs warned their readers against the devaluation of the Torah by Hellenistic thought by putting the Mosaic Law in a prominent position. In a way we can detect an anti-Hellenistic inclination both in LXX-Proverbs and Philo although Philo is more tolerant towards Greek influences that do not damage Jewish culture/religion. This strengthens the hypothesis of Cook that LXX-Proverbs would have been written two centuries earlier than Philo.

In this limited study I only looked at the LXX of Proverbs and the writings of Philo and briefly touched upon 3 Maccabees. Still, there is other Early Jewish literature that needs to be analysed, e.g. Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides, Josephus' works, Letter of Aristeas, etc. Will further research on other Early Jewish literature exhibit the same anti-Hellenistic stance or will these sources be more welcoming toward Hellenistic culture?

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