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Jérôme, *Préfaces aux livres de la Bible*. Textes latins des éditions de R. Weber et R. Gryson et de l'Abbaye Saint-Jérôme (Rome), revues et corrigés. Introduction, traduction et notes réalisées en séminaire sous la direction d'Aline Canellis. Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf (coll. « Sources chrétiennes », 592), 2017, 530 p.

The *Préfaces aux livres de la Bible* is primarily a translation of the critical edition of the twenty-one introductions Jerome composed for his Latin translations of the biblical books, but this volume, prepared by a number of Jerome specialists under the direction of Aline Canellis over the course of fifteen years, is much more than a translation. The volume doubles as a modern introduction to the Vulgate. In fact, the Prefaces take up less than half of the five hundred pages of this dense tome. They are preceded by a monograph-length study of the history of the Vulgate. The result is a work of considerable interest and value for anyone engaged in biblical, Late Antique, or early Christian studies.

The introduction wishes to dismantle, in particular, two myths about the work of Jerome (p. 89). One of these is that Jerome was guided, from the beginning, by the principle of *hebraica veritas*, the “Hebrew Truth.” That is, Jerome only translated the books of the Old Testament from the Hebrew (where it existed) rather than from the Old Greek versions. The second myth is that Jerome translated the complete Bible into Latin. In fact, Jerome’s initial project was the selective revision of existing Latin translations based on the Greek text. He began with the Gospels, the only section of the New Testament for which he wrote a Preface. He then began working on Greek versions of the Hebrew Scriptures. Four of his prefaces, for Chronicles, Job, Psalms, and the Books of Solomon, are introductions to his translations from the Greek. At some point, the serious differences between the Greek and Hebrew versions of the biblical books led Jerome to formulate his famous principle, and the project received a new orientation—a Latin translation of the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible.

While he did translate all twenty-four books of the Tanakh, he refused to translate those books which he deemed apocryphal, including Ben Sira, Wisdom, and the books of the Maccabees (p. 332-333). His standard, in principle, was the existence of a Hebrew base text, but Jerome is not consistent in this matter, and this could be considered a third myth that the introduction eliminates. He hastily translated both Judith and Tobit, even though he believes that both are apocryphal (p. 368-375), but he did not translate Ben Sira or 1 Maccabees, even though Hebrew versions of both still existed (p. 332-333; 428-429).

Jerome’s comments about Judith and Tobit are especially significant because he claims that he translated both from Aramaic. Before Qumran, Hebrew and Aramaic versions of Tobit and Judith were only known from medieval copies, and some of these were translated from the Vulgate. Qumran furnished ancient, predominantly Aramaic, versions of Tobit. An ancient Semitic copy of Judith has yet to appear. The original language of this text is still a question that perplexes scholars, and Jerome’s claim that he translated from the Aramaic remains an important piece of the puzzle. It also suggests that the text played some role in Jewish culture, even though it was not considered canonical.

Yet another lesson drawn from the introduction is the idea that “the Vulgate” did not exist as a single book before the Carolingian era (p. 212-217). Much that is in the Vulgate is not the work of Jerome. In addition to Latin copies of the books which Jerome explicitly refused to translate—Ben Sira, Wisdom, and 1-2 Maccabees—one also finds 3-4 Ezra, Psalm 151, and the Prayer of Manasseh, plus a few additional Prefaces (to the Letters of Paul, for example). Furthermore, Jerome’s Prefaces make clear that he conceived the translation of each book or group of books (the Pentateuch, the Books of Solomon) as individual works. This explains one of the most curious features of the Prefaces for someone who conceives of the Vulgate as

an integrated whole: Jerome often addresses specific individuals and discusses personal problems. He only rarely introduces the work that he is translating in the manner that one would expect in a modern Bible. The Prefaces are more like letters than introductions.

The editors and translators are to be commended for making such an important text available to the general public and for providing such a thorough contextualization of Jerome's project and the subsequent reception of the Prefaces (by virtue of being attached to the Vulgate, the Prefaces form part of the Gutenberg Bible and so became part of the first printed book).

I have only two criticisms which are, in fact, problems endemic to biblical studies that are simply repeated by the authors. The first criticism is that Jerome's "apocrypha" are treated as books which the rabbis rejected from the Jewish canon. Of the deuterocanonical books, the rabbis only ever address one specifically, the book of Ben Sira, which they designate as one of the *sefarim hitzonim* (not *ritzonim*, *pace* p. 139). The rabbis never mention Tobit or Judith by name, although both have a prominent afterlife in medieval Jewish folklore. Furthermore, it is not clear that *any* Jewish group ever considered the Deuterocanon as sacred scripture. It is more correct to say that Christians added these books to their canon than that Jews rejected them. Jerome uses the language of rejection, but his perspective does not have to be our own.

The second criticism involves the *Vorlage* of the Vulgate, which the authors presume to be the Masoretic Text (p. 105). The Masoretic Text, complete with vocalization, is itself a product of the Middle Ages, although Qumran has shown that this text type is ancient. The question is when this text became dominant. The traditional position, repeated in the current volume, is that all divergent texts of the Hebrew Bible, of which there were several in the first century, had disappeared by the end of the second century. I find this position incredible. What if the "errors" attributed to Jerome (cf. p. 78-83) are in fact reflections of a different underlying Hebrew text? I cannot state for certain that this was the case, but the authors never even ask the question.

Again, these criticisms are directed at the field of biblical studies in general. They do not detract from the value of the current volume. It is a work of great erudition which has brought this reader enormous profit.

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