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Rodrigo Franklin de Sousa

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Septuagint Studies in South America: Charting a Non-Existent Territory

RODRIGO FRANKLIN DE SOUSA

The study of the LXX is an academic field whose landscape is one of the easiest to delineate geographically. Though a rather specialized area, there are clearly distinguishable methods and approaches, and it is possible to connect this diversity with specific traditions of scholarship in places like Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Finland, and North America. Sometimes the peculiarity of each region is linked with the existence of a translation project in a specific modern language (one thinks of initiatives like the *Septuaginta Deutsch*, *La Bible d'Alexandrie*, and N.E.T.S.).

Cataloguing LXX studies by geographical region is an interesting exercise also because it reveals in which parts of the world the territory still consists mostly in virgin land. LXX research in South America certainly falls into that category. In fact, a better metaphor is to see South American LXX scholarship not as an uncharted zone of a planet, but as the void existing beyond the cataracts at the edge of a world drawn by an ancient cartographer. This is because there are virtually no LXX studies in that part of the world. Yet, I propose that by charting this nonexistent territory, the relief of the global map can appear in sharper detail.

In South America, the LXX has not drawn attention in any of the academic areas that circumscribe its research. Classical studies focus primarily on different aspects of the philology, history, philosophy and literature of Classical Antiquity. In the context of Biblical studies, scholars normally operate in the more basic areas of either Hebrew Bible or New Testament. In recent years, there have been developments in the study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, but this is also unlikely to draw scholars to the LXX.¹ Interest in the LXX is often ciliary, and the version is normally mentioned in relation to broader considerations in the fields of literature, language, biblical studies or

¹ See, for instance, the collected articles in P. A. de S. Nogueira (ed.), *Apocriçidade: o cristianismo primitivo para além do cânon* (São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2015).

history of religions.² Specific research on the Septuagint in its own right shows very few signs of life.

Spanish speaking South American countries may benefit from relevant academic material from Spain, but this has apparently had the negative effect of discouraging even further local production. In the case of Brazil, which represents about half of the South American population and a significant percentage of the region's academic output, the picture is also affected by the use of Portuguese.³ A closer look at the Brazilian context offers a good perspective on the state of research in the continent as a whole.

The first book on the LXX produced in Brazil was published in 2009, but rather than a proper academic introduction written by a specialist, it is a religiously oriented book written primarily with apologetic purposes.⁴ The few available academic books on the LXX are translations. To this date, students with an interest in the subject can consult Portuguese versions of *La Bible Grecque des Septante* by Marguerite Harl, Giles Dorival, and Olivier Munnich, and *Einführung in die Septuaginta*, by Michael Tilly.⁵ Another – somewhat surprising – publication is Conybeare and Stock's *Grammar of the Septuagint Greek*, which remains the sole linguistic tool for the study of LXX published in Brazilian Portuguese.⁶ The most recent addition is Emanuel Tov's *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*.⁷

To my knowledge, the first academic article on the LXX ever written originally in Portuguese for a Brazilian specialized periodical, appeared in 2008, offering a general introduction to the subject.⁸ A second article appeared in 2010, and consisted in a study of the translation of cultic and legal vocabulary

² A representative example of this approach is the article by J. P. Martín, "De la Septuaginta a Bizancio: transiciones en la historia de una lengua," *Circe* 8 (2003), 189-202, from Argentina.

³ The other national languages of South America (English and French in the respective Guianas, and Dutch in Surinam) are not part of our description, as there is no academic production in these contexts that is relevant to our study.

⁴ E. Soares, *Septuaginta: guia histórico e literário* (São Paulo: Hagnos, 2009).

⁵ M. Harl, et al., *A Bíblia Grega dos Setenta: do judaísmo helenístico ao cristianismo antigo* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2007); M. Tilly, *Introdução à Septuaginta* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2009).

⁶ F. C. Conybeare and S. G. W. J. Stock, *Gramática do grego da Septuaginta* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2011).

⁷ E. Tov, *A Bíblia Grega e Hebraica: ensaios reunidos sobre a Septuaginta* (São Paulo: BV Books, 2017).

⁸ P. P. A. dos Santos, "A Septuaginta (LXX): a Torá na diáspora judaico-helenista," *Arquivo Maaravi: Revista de Estudos Judaicos da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* 2, no. 2 (2008), 1-14.

in the Greek Pentateuch.⁹ After these two publications, articles about the LXX have conspicuously disappeared in Brazil.

The prospects for the growth of LXX studies in South America are, therefore, bleak. The lack of interest in the field in this part of the world has many causes, which include little information on the possibilities of research, and the need for a specialized set of skills, requiring command at least of Hebrew and Greek, as well as of modern languages such as English, French, or German.

Another significant element that discourages scholarship in the area is the high cost of research material. Primary and secondary sources in LXX and cognate studies can be prohibitively expensive, and in a context where libraries are considered privileged if they have access to databases such as ATLA or JSTOR, it is unlikely that you will find helpful resources like, for instance, the full corpus of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. It is considerably difficult to justify the costs involved in establishing a library with good LXX resources before governmental agencies and other funding bodies, given the prospective outcomes of research projects on the LXX. Therefore, researchers will most likely gravitate to other fields where funding is more easily available.

Scholarship in various fields of religious and literary studies is progressing in exciting new directions in South America. Yet, all evidence suggests that in the case of LXX research, at least in the current shape that the field assumed in the West, this region is likely to remain a blank spot in the global map.

RODRIGO FRANKLIN DE SOUSA
Faculté Jean Calvin
Aix en Provence, France
rodrigoeana@hotmail.com

⁹ R. F. de Sousa, "Considerações acerca do vocabulário cútico e legal na versão grega da Torá: tradução na fronteira entre judaísmo e helenismo," *Cadernos de Língua e Literatura Hebraica - Universidade de São Paulo* 08 (2010), 149-160.