

this phenomenon is due to Ezra-Nehemiah's ideology: it sees no contradiction between the law of the king and the law of God (154).

Chapter 5 analyses Ezra-Nehemiah in its probable context. Janzen argues that Ezra-Nehemiah contains a worldview of a very elite group (168). Unlike other post-exilic texts, Ezra-Nehemiah's community identity is rooted in the issues the governor and the elite think are pertinent (185). For instance, Third Isaiah accepts foreigners worshipping Yhwh in the temple (Isa 56:1–8) (184), but Ezra-Nehemiah does not. In fact, Janzen argues that Chronicles, Haggai, First Zechariah, Third Isaiah and Malachi are all compositions from various factions within the post-exilic community, some from the elite circles and others more in the margins (201). But the germane point is that “[n]one of these early Persian-period writings links the community's identity to their relationship to the empire ...” (191). If there was a group whose wealth and status were tied to the Persian empire, they would be the group that wrote Ezra-Nehemiah. The empire was vital to their identity, life and even their theology.

Janzen has contributed to an area of study that has a growing interest. Indeed, questions surrounding how exactly Ezra-Nehemiah's ideology regarding the Persian empire affects their identity has not been studied at this length. This monograph contributes greatly to that area. Although not all readers will be convinced, they will still be able to appreciate the meticulous thought put into trying to understand Ezra-Nehemiah in its proposed context.

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ELIZABETH H. P. BACKFISH, *Hebrew Wordplay and Septuagint Translation Technique in the Fourth Book of the Psalter* (LHBOTS 682; London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2019). Pp. xiii + 168. Paperback. AU\$59.99.

In this publication of her PhD dissertation, Elizabeth Backfish makes an important contribution to the discussion of biblical wordplay and how it is represented in Greek translation. There are three chapters plus a brief conclusion, beginning in the first chapter with Backfish defining and nuancing the language used to discuss wordplay, and then presenting the rationale for this project. The second chapter systematically works through all the psalms in Book IV (Psalms 90–106) which use Hebrew wordplay, describing, classifying and demonstrating the implications of the wordplays. The third chapter then delves into the Septuagint and discusses the methods and the extent to which wordplay comprised a role in translation. The concluding chapter summarises the findings and discusses those fields where this study has made contributions.

The opening chapter gives an impressive survey of the state of the field. The discussion of literary devices is often hamstrung by imprecise and contradictory

vocabulary, so Backfish's task is to decipher what her predecessors and peers have said and to then express that using more precise and consistent terminology. Her working definition is that *wordplay* is a broader category, while *paronomasia* is one type of wordplay (33), alongside *homophonic* and *polysemantic* wordplays (34–35). These various types of wordplay are present in other ancient Greek and Latin works. Other studies of the practice in the Hebrew Bible are also surveyed in this book. Helpfully, Backfish acknowledges the subjectivity present in such an endeavour, which she attempts to control as much as possible with strict guidelines of what may or may not qualify for investigation in the book (43).

For those not engaged in the wider discussion of wordplay, but more interested in what light can be shed on Book IV, the second chapter is where the action can be found. Backfish works systematically through all the psalms which display wordplay. Naturally, this means the section is quite uneven, with ten pages discussing Psalm 90, but none on 98–100. Due to her parameters, most wordplays identified are mildly interesting, such as שׁוּב in two different stems within Ps 90:3. More engaging are those much rarer instances of *double entendre*: for instance, the two lines of Ps 90:6 conclude with polysemantic lexemes, where חָלַף can be understood in context as “to be renewed,” but could also mean “to transgress,” while יָבֵשׁ in context describes the grass which dries, but could also be the lexeme בֹּיֵשׁ, “to be ashamed” (54–55). A similar polysemantic *double entendre* is described in Ps 102:11 where the “common secondary meanings or allusions” support the suggestion (84–85). Throughout this chapter Backfish works hard to justify her wordplay identifications and to walk readers through her logic (esp. 93). The chapter concludes with several summary tables, highlighting the number of wordplays per psalm. However, this should perhaps have been normalised for the number of words per psalm, with vast variations in psalm length within Book IV.

The third chapter arrives at the thesis topic, as it is now possible to investigate the LXX translation. Here there are four possible options. First, the Hebrew wordplay was replicated. Second, the Hebrew wordplay was not replicated but another wordplay was introduced. Third, the Hebrew was translated but the wordplay was not represented. Fourth, the Greek translation seems to have either mistranslated the Hebrew or translated a different *Vorlage*. I would have liked to know about a fifth category, where Greek wordplays were identified which were unrelated to the Hebrew, even if this was a null category (in the same way *homophonic* wordplay was described as a category despite its absence from Book IV). In any case, Backfish appropriately deals with what is there, finding only 25 out of a possible 76 wordplays in the Greek. Whatever we might hope for in our own translational efforts, Backfish finds the fact that a third of instances were translated to be “remarkable” (154), demonstrating the ingenuity of the translator(s) in overcoming the many difficulties (outlined on page 151). The categories of transformation should have been fleshed out a little here; it

was unnecessarily dense, and the eight categories were lost within three brief paragraphs (155). The summary of wordplays in Table 12 (158–61) was helpful, although it is unclear if the seemingly random order was supposed to serve a purpose.

The brief conclusion did not add much other than a further summary; however, some attempts at synthesising the results into a wider discussion of Book IV were offered. Backfish's (all too brief) suggestion is that various *Gattungen* are more prone to wordplay than others. Wisdom and lament, and those psalms associated with Wilson's "Mosaic Frame" displayed a higher-than-average use of wordplay (163), while wordplay in enthronement/royal psalms is sparser (166). This observation could be pursued more widely in the Psalter. Pages 168–69 describe eleven types of theological contributions through wordplay in these psalms. Apart from the technical descriptions of the book, this is the theological "take-home"; that is, the purpose of wordplays in drawing out the character and purposes of God, highlighting contrasts, connecting dots, offering hope, and so on. Wordplays are thus more than neat literary tricks but play a key theological role.

There were unfortunately a dozen or so minor errors in this book. Some were English typographical or word choice errors. Some were Hebrew errors (70, missing *patach*; 93, ה/ו confusion). Others appeared to be typesetting errors (75 random boxes appear across lines; 90, English translations are transposed; 139, the letters of עליון appear reversed).

In conclusion, I found this book to be a genuinely interesting investigation into the question, even if the results were not as invigorating as perhaps hoped for on beginning. I am also certain this study will be a helpful stepping-off point for a similar study into languages closer to Hebrew. The definitional clarity achieved through the introductory chapter will also be of use to those who pursue similar projects in other corpora. Through this study it is clear both that identifying wordplay is an excellent way into a deeper understanding of the theological purposes of the authors of Scripture, and that tracking wordplay through translation is also an insightful way of understanding ancient translation efforts.

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