

A REVIEW
by
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of
BERTIL ALBREKTSON'S
STUDIES IN THE TEXT AND THEOLOGY OF
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS: WITH A CRITICAL
EDITION OF THE PESHITTA TEXT²

This work is Albrektson's doctoral dissertation done at the University of Lund (Sweden) in which he acknowledges his indebtedness to Professors Gillis Gerleman, D. Winton Thomas, L. G. Rignell, and others. The book is divided into three chapters: (I) The Peshitta Text, (II) The Hebrew Text, the Septuagint, and the Peshitta, and (III) The Background and Origin of the Theology of Lamentations. A good bibliography and a useful index of biblical references are appended.

The book is a major contribution to the study of the text and interpretation of the book of Lamentations. This reviewer would cite the following contributions: (1) a handy critical edition of the Peshitta text and an adequate survey of the history of the Peshitta text of Lamentations, (2) a thorough presentation of the Greek, Syriac and Hebrew variants within the textual traditions, (3) a rather complete survey of all the significant opinions of the many commentators who have

¹ This review was published in 1966 in *Seisho to Shingaku*, which was the journal of the College of Theology of Kanto Gakuin University, Yokohama, Japan.

² *Studia Theologica Lundensia*, 21. Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963, viii/258 pages.

written on the text of Lamentations, and (4) a helpful criticism of Gottwald's views on the theology of Lamentations. Albrektson has put his finger on almost all of the problems and interpretations. This is, indeed, his major contribution, a work is a handy summary of problems and opinions. But whereas one may use Albrektson's study to find out what the problems are, one will *not* be able to use this work to find a solution or answer to these textual and interpretive problems. This is partly due to the nature of the study and in part to Albrektson's own methodology. While Albrektson establishes with tolerable certainty the underlying Hebrew text of Lamentations, this kind of versional study seldom offers any real help in clarifying the obscure passages once the text is established.

Albrektson's presentation reveals that his investigation of the text has been made with a very strong bias in favor of the Massoretic Text just as it stands. One of the recurring points of Albrektson's analysis of the versions is that the Septuagint translation is a literalistic and often slavish translation (see pp. 58, 87, 130, 154, 161, and 208–209). For this reason one would expect the LXX to be of assistance in establishing the Hebrew *Vorlage*, but nowhere does Albrektson permit the LXX to point to a more original or authoritative reading than the Massoretic Text. For example, his treatment of the textual variants in Lam. 2:19 is noteworthy. The MT reads *lērōš ʾašmurôt* but the LXX reads *eis archas phulakēs sou*, while the Syriac text has *bēriš maṭrētā*. Not only does the LXX add a suffix, but it reverses the plural/singular of the Hebrew, reading a plural form for the MT *rōš* and a singular noun for the MT plural *ʾašmurôt*. The Syriac reads both nouns in the singular. Despite the fact that the LXX is extremely literalistic, Albrektson wants to ascribe a certain freedom to the Greek translator ("Even if the translation is generally

extremely literal, one cannot presuppose that the translator was always fully consistent” [p. 119].) In the case of the Peshitta and Targum which has both nouns is the singular, Albrektson concludes, “there is no reason whatsoever to assume a different Hebrew text” (p. 119). It is one thing to dismiss minor variants in the Peshitta text as an expression of the translators “freedom” with the text, but the consistent use of this same reason to account for variants in the LXX reflects more of a subjective bias for the MT than it does of objective evaluation of all possibilities.

Another example of how Albrektson interprets the facts to serve his bias in favor of the Massoretic Text is his treatment of the pronouns in the Septuagint. For example in Lam 1:3 the LXX reads *apo tapeinōseōs autēs* for the MT *mē ʿōnî* and *douleias autēs* for the MT *ʿābōdāh*, i.e., the LXX has a pronoun although the Hebrew has no suffix. Albrektson accounts for these pronouns in the LXX by suggesting an internal Greek corruption of *autē* to *autēs*, the *autē* being the literal translation of the pronoun which starts the next poetic line in the Hebrew text of 1:3b. He states,

The *hîʿ* of MT has no equivalent in the LXX text, which is unexpected in view of the general literalness of the Greek translation of Lam. . . . It may at least be suggested that the *autēs* of 1:3a is in fact a corruption of an original *autē* which equals the *hîʿ* in 1:3b The resultant *douleias autēs* may have influenced a scribe to add an *autēs* after *tapeinōseōs* as well (in 1:3a).

Here Albrektson is quite clear—he expects the Hebrew pronoun to be reflected in the LXX; but he takes just the opposite position when it comes to dealing with the textual problems in Lam 3:42, where the Greek does *not* reflect the Hebrew pronouns. Here he states,

The personal pronoun ^o*attah* is thus not represented by a separate word in Greek, and accordingly it is not to be expected that *nahnû* in 3:42a should have been translated separately either. It is included in the endings *-amen* just as ^o*attah* in 42b is expressed by the ending of the verb” (pp. 155-56).

One can only wonder what Albrektsson really expects when it comes to the LXX representation of Hebrew pronouns.

Albrektsson has many helpful suggestions with reference to interpretation and critical problems, but the reader must evaluate each one independently. This reviewer will cite several examples of how Albrektsson fails to consider all the factors in arriving at a solution. Lam. 1:7 contains four poetic lines instead of usual three line. Albrektsson, following Rudolph, states, “the third line must be deleted; it is possibly originally a marginal note on the difficult *wmrwdyh* of the first line.” Albrektsson might better have questioned Rudolph’s explanation, for can it be assumed that “marginal notes” were written metrically? Lam 1:7c is clearly a 3 + 2 metrical line. In view of the freedom which the writer(s) used with reference to the acrostic form, meter, and varying number of poetic lines in the different chapters, it seems better to retain 1:7d as another example of the poet’s freedom of style. The same would also be true, contra Albrektsson, for Lam 2:19 which also has four poetic lines instead of the usual three. To assume that the scribes who wrote marginal notes were at the same time poets, seems quite improbable.

A good example of where there may have been a marginal note incorporated into the Hebrew text is not recognised by Albrektsson. The MT *Qere* of Lam. 1:11b reads *maḥāmaddēhem*, but the LXX pronoun *autēs* reflects a Hebrew *Vorlage* that read *maḥāmaddēhā*, while the Syriac *reggathōn* reflects a Hebrew *maḥāmaddām*. The *he* and *mem* were frequently

confused, and one can easily assume that the *he* or *mem* of the original suffix on this word was confused, giving rise to a marginal note marking the variant. However, the MT did not chose between a *mem* or *he*, it probably incorporated the marginal note into the text, conflating the two letters into the plural suffix *hm*.

On page 84, Albrektson notes that the Greek translator failed to understand the difficult Hebrew construction of the asyndetic relative clause contained in the *qārāʾtā* of Lam. 1:21c. But Albrektson himself fails to note the same difficult construction in 1:21b where *šamēʿu* is part of a relative clause (without the relative particle) modifying *ʾoyēbay* which has *sāsū* as its predicate.

Another example of Albrektson's over-anxious defense of the MT against the LXX is his suggestion that in Lam 2:2c the Greek *basilea autēs* (for MT *mamlākah*) is due to an internal Greek corruption, namely, an original *basileian* corrupted to *basileia*. But this suggestion actually demands an emendation of the MT, for a Greek *basileian autēs* would demand a *Vorlage* reading *malkth*, not the *mmlkh* of the MT. This reviewer doubts that Albrektson really wishes to emend the MT on the basis of a Greek variant.

No serious study of the text and exegesis of Lamentations can be made without paying attention to the suggestions proposed by Albrektson; but at the same time, no serious student can afford to follow Albrektson without first re-examining the problems and possibilities involved.

In the last chapter of this book Albrektson presents his criticism of Norman Gottwald's views (which appeared in Gottwald's *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*) that the key to the theology of Lamentations is in the tension between the Deuteronomic doctrine of retribution and reward and the historic reality of destruction. This reviewer agrees with

Albrektson (contra Gottwald) that such a tension is not at all evident, for the writer of Lamentation emphasizes the fact that defiance and desertion have earned them their punishment. On the other hand, Albrektson's arguments for his own "key" to the theology of Lamentations seem as weak as Gottwald's. Albrektson states,

‘The key to the theology of Lamentations is in fact found in the tension between specific religious conceptions and historical realities: between the confident belief of the Zion traditions in the inviolability of the temple and city, and the actual brute facts (of the destruction)’ (p. 230).

As a basis for this statement, Albrektson seeks to show that the writer of Lamentations was reared in the temple traditions of Jersulaem, and particularly was influenced by the tradition of the inviolability of Zion. As evidence for this, Albrektson cites passages from Lamentations (namely, 2:15c, 3:35, 4:12, 4:20, and 5:19) which contain ideas and words found in the Psalms of the Zion tradition. But it is doubtful on the basis of the evidence which Albrektson gives that these or other verses must be restricted to the "Zion tradition" alone. But even if one were to admit that the poetic lines cited were indirectly related to the "Zion tradition" as proposed, it seems to be quite unlikely that one can reconstruct a "key to the theology" by calling attention to only *five* out of 246 poetic lines.

In conclusion it may be stated that Albrektson's work marks a milestone in the study of the text and exegesis of Lamentations. It will serve as a useful tool for any future study of this biblical book.