

CONCLUSION

This study has proposed an inductive method for reconstructing the critical text of a biblical book, especially one for which versional evidence is important. The text chosen to illustrate the method, 1 Samuel 3, is a relatively brief passage, too brief, in fact, for the conclusions regarding specific readings to be treated as anything other than provisional. The same applies to the descriptions of the translation techniques characteristic of each of the secondary witnesses: specific conclusions must be regarded as tentative, pending the application of the method to a larger section of Samuel. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the method promises to provide a wealth of detailed information about translation techniques, which can then be used in a systematic way to retrovert versional evidence, so that data from secondary witnesses can be used with confidence alongside readings from primary witnesses in an effort to reconstruct a critical text. Of paramount importance to the inductive method is the identification in the secondary witnesses of significant variants, which can be identified only after a detailed study of the translation that includes an analysis of consistency in lexical choices and grammatical correlations, segmentation, word order, and quantitative representation. Much of the data from the foregoing analysis is presented in data tables for each translation, and the data in these tables allows the textual critic to describe the translation technique in great detail on the basis of solid data rather than vague impressions. General characterizations of a translation as “literal” or “free” may be set aside in favor of the detailed descriptions offered by the inductive method.¹

Summaries at the bottom of each data table offer an evaluation of the translation technique of the version with respect to the specific aspect of the translation being analyzed. These summaries do not tell the whole story regarding the literalness of the translations, however. For example, the tables dealing with the quantitative representation of elements in the Hebrew text for P and T (see below, Appendix 3) indicate that P deviates from its *Vorlage* about 20% of the time, while T deviates about 10% of the time. One can say, then, that P varies from its Hebrew *Vorlage* about twice as often as T does, at least in 1 Samuel 3. However, a closer examination of the data in the tables indicates that the deviations from the *Vorlage* characteristic of T for the most part fall into two broad

¹For a summary of the arguments presented in this study and a suggestion for the use of descriptive language to describe the translation technique, see James R. Adair, “‘Literal’ and ‘Free’ Translations: A Proposal for a More Descriptive Terminology,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 23 (1997): 181-209.

categories: theological “improvements” (about two-thirds of the total word count) and stylistic accommodations to Aramaic (most of the rest of the variants). In contrast, there are no obvious theological “improvements” in P. Rather, about two-thirds of P’s changes are stylistic accommodations Syriac, and the other third may be seen as other “improvements” to the text not dictated by Syriac idiom (e.g., specifying subjects or objects of verbs, explicatory additions). Similarly, if one were to calculate the individual deviation factor reflected in the Greek renderings of Hebrew participles (table 5, grouping the data as described there), the low deviation factor of 0.73 might be deceiving. The Greek translators are in fact quite consistent (in the chapter) in rendering Hebrew participles, but the way in which they are consistent is surprising: they rather consistently use full Greek verbs to render Hebrew participles. It is clear, then, that all the data in the tables, not just the summaries, must be considered when attempting to understand the way in which the translators worked.

Constructing critical texts of the secondary and partial secondary witnesses, analyzing the translation techniques of the secondary witnesses in great detail, identifying the significant variants, retroverting the secondary witnesses, evaluating the various readings (original and retroverted), and constructing a critical text in the source language: the inductive method—built on the foundation laid by Margolis and elaborated upon by Tov, Barr, and others—demands a great deal of effort (it is a “stupendous work,” according to Margolis), but it offers the clearest possible description of the work of the translators and thus enables critics to use versional evidence with a high degree of confidence. It is hoped that scholars will apply the inductive method to other portions of scripture, perhaps refining and improving the method in various ways. Above all, the inductive method is designed to be used to construct critical texts of Old Testament books that may be used by translators, exegetes, and theologians as they perform their various tasks in service of scholarship, the synagogue, and the church.