We do not lack studies of Matthew’s use of the Old Testament or of the formula quotations specifically, or even of the five formally introduced quotations of Scripture within Matthew’s infancy narrative. The book under review approaches this well-trod territory by applying skopos theory, a theory of translation developed by Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiß, although Chung relies more on the work of one of Reiß’s students, Christiane Nord. After an introductory chapter surveying research on the formula quotations in Matthew’s infancy narrative, Chung explains skopos theory in the second chapter, then the elements of this theory determine the directions of chapters 3–5, which are followed by a brief summary of results in chapter 6.

Perhaps it will occur to readers that the Gospel of Matthew is not a translation of a text, so translation theory might not apply. Chung handles this issue from two angles. On the one hand, he takes “translation” in a broad sense: “by means of a formulaic quotation, direct quotation, paraphrase, allusion, and echo, … the NT writers attempted to translate the meaning of particular OT texts into the world of the NT for their purposes of which the old passage is interpreted anew” (14). On the other hand, Chung argues repeatedly (but especially in ch. 5) that Matthew’s scriptural quotations—at least the five formula quotations in the first two chapters of the gospel—are not dependent upon the Septuagint but are fresh translations of the Hebrew text. This latter position is not new, and Chung
cites previous scholars who more or less take the same view. I would be reticent to argue this position in light of the evidence for Hebraizing revisions of Greek Scripture available in the first century. That is not to say that Matthew did not consult the Hebrew text directly, but I would not want to base my argument on that possibility. The alternative, that Matthew relied on a Hebraized Greek text, is not only possible but easily plausible and insufficiently considered by Chung. But this caveat does not invalidate Chung’s work; even if one is convinced that Matthew was not himself a translator in the usual sense of the term, one might still find Chung’s use of skopos theory valuable within the broader framework of translation that he advocates.

Chung explains the motivation for his work on page 3:

The goal of this volume is to attest that the way Matthew uses the formulaic quotations and allusion in his infancy narrative “can be” understood as “scientific exegesis” and that it “still can” make sense to the modern reader.

The words in quotation marks are from an article by R. T. France, an article mentioned repeatedly and with which Chung takes issue as representing the position that Chung wants to overturn. Chung seeks to show that Matthew’s use of Scripture does not boil down to random prooftexting but makes sense even through modern reading strategies, as long as the reader is willing to think with Matthew about the significance of the scriptural passages he cites and how that significance might find a reflection—or, better, a fulfillment—in the life of Jesus.

To accomplish this goal, Chung uses skopos theory, which he considers “a methodology that is comprehensive in scope” (9). After explaining the methodology in chapter 2, he uses chapter 3 to examine the New Testament context of each of the fulfillment quotations in Matt 1–2, essentially providing a commentary on these two chapters. Chapter 4 turns to the Old Testament context of each of the quoted passages, providing commentary on each of these passages. Finally, chapter 5 examines the relationship between the significance of the passages within their original contexts and the way that Matthew uses these passages to speak about Jesus. This last chapter provides the most interesting material. Chapters 1–2 are basically introductory, and chapters 3–4 offer little beyond what is found in many good commentaries. Chung acknowledges that some of this material “may seem superfluous” (21).

As an example of the usually benign nature of Chung’s commentary in chapters 3–4, I cite the conclusion of the discussion in chapter 3 regarding the fifth formula quotation, “He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt 2:23). Chung relates this obscure quotation primarily to Isa 11:1; remember that Chung believes Matthew is reading the Hebrew text. He concludes: “The fifth narrative unit with the divine instruction to return to Nazareth explains the logic behind his nickname. The fifth formulaic allusion, therefore, functions to confirm the prophetic significance of Jesus’ nickname” (114). Too often the level of commentary is no more insightful than this.

As I indicated, chapter 5 interested me most. In my judgment, Chung does a good job of showing how Matthew’s interests can be interpreted as aligning well with the original significance of his quoted passages. Particularly in regard to Hos 11 (both in Chung’s chs. 4 and 5), Chung demonstrates how the passage’s ultimate message of hope is encapsulated in the first verse of the chapter—“out of Egypt I called my son,” quoted in Matt 2:15—and how this message of hope resonates with Matthew’s purposes. I found this discussion helpful.

I did not find all of Chung’s suggestions in chapter 5 to be especially compelling, such as on the use of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23. One might balk at the translation of the MT Isa 7:14 with the future tense, “the young woman will conceive.” Whatever one makes of that issue, there are further dubious claims. Chung elucidates certain features shared between Isa 7 and Matt 1, including such items as a pregnant woman and a child named Immanuel and the fact that Joseph in Matt 1 finds himself in a situation similar to that of Ahaz in Isa 7: whereas the latter was involved in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, Matt 1 describes “the crisis of Joseph’s decision to break the engagement with Mary” (184).

It is a shame that Chung cites Rahlfs’s Septuaginta instead of the major critical edition, the Göttingen Septuagint, which covers the relevant books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve). The use of the larger edition would not have resulted in any substantial difference in the text form of the quotations (the main text is largely the same as in Rahlfs for these particular verses), but it would inspire more confidence that Chung has exerted the appropriate effort into the various textual forms available to Matthew. Such information can be gleaned from the two levels of apparatus in the Göttingen Septuagint, and this sort of information is especially crucial for the Twelve, since we have concrete evidence of a Hebraizing revision of this portion of Scripture from before Matthew’s time, the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever, made famous in Barthélemy’s preliminary edition.³ The discovery of this scroll reignited scholars’ interests in early Hebraizing

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³ Dominique Barthélemy, Les devanciers d’Aquila: Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophéton, VTSup 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1963). The official publication is Emanuel Tov with Robert A.
revisions of the LXX, and it is now clear that a variety of revisions encompassing many books of Scripture had been produced before the gospels were written. The work of these anonymous revisions was taken up later by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, though Theodotion may actually have been one of these earlier revisers, if scholars who argue for dating Theodotion to the first century rather than the second are correct. Unfortunately, the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll is not extant for Hosea, but Theodotion’s reading of Hos 11:1 is attested, and it is closer to Matthew’s quotation than is the LXX. There is no indication that Chung has considered these issues. One’s doubts in this regard are not allayed by a statement early on that Rahlfs’s edition “represents the Old Greek text in the third century BCE” (21 n. 80).

More directly related to Chung’s thesis is the issue of the provenance of the quotations of Scripture in Matthew and the New Testament as a whole. Chung’s entire work is bound up with the idea that Matthew read his quoted verses in their original contexts in the Hebrew prophetic books. He recognizes that he must refute the idea that these ancient writers took their quotations from testimonia collections (17–22), but his argument here could use some strengthening. He mentions the Qumran pesharim (19) but he does not seem to know that Qumran also yielded its own testimonia collection, 4QTest. Moreover, Chung’s use of the pesharim in his argument that some ancient readers respected the original context of Scripture will probably fail to convince anyone who has read the pesharim at all closely.

There is no preface, no list of acknowledgments, nothing to inform us as to the origins of this monograph. The back cover of the book reveals that Chung obtained his PhD in New Testament from McMaster Divinity College in 2017, the year of this book’s publication. The book itself gives every indication that it is a revised dissertation.
