Van Keulen’s book addresses the drastically divergent versions of the Solomon narrative preserved in 1 Kings and 3 Reigns. Since the full name of the book is Two Versions of the Solomon Narrative: An Inquiry into the Relationship between MT 1 Kgs. 2–11 and LXX 3 Reg. 2–11, one is tempted to comment right at the beginning that there is no such literary unit as 1 Kgs 2-11 or, for that matter, the unit indicated in the introduction (1) as beginning at 2:12 (in agreement with Lucian’s 3 Reigns) and ending at 11:43. Solomon’s reign runs through either chapters 1–11 or 3–11. At least, chapters 1–2 are inseparable. We will return to this issue later on.

The book has twenty chapters, including the introduction and conclusions. Chapters 2–15 are each devoted to a section in the Solomon narrative that shows substantial differences between the MT and the LXX. The remaining chapters are devoted to more general issues such as the relationship between 3 Reigns and Chronicles; the miscellanies in chapter 2 and the main text of 3 Reigns; the structure of the Solomon narrative; and the question of the representation of the Deuteronomistic text in 1 Kings compared with 3 Reigns.
At the very beginning of his introduction, van Keulen states the two questions that will constitute the core of this study: (1) the background of the discrepancies in the Solomon narrative; (2) the stage at which the changes took place (1). Van Keulen then describes the history of research quite extensively. He divides the scholarly approaches mainly into three: scholars such as Gooding and Talshir, who believe that overall 3 Reigns represents a later midrashic revision of a text close to the version that survived in the MT; scholars such as Trebolle-Barrera and Schenker, who argue for the priority of 3 Reigns; and, a middle position, taken by Auld and Polak (it should be said, however, that their point of departure and method is completely different), positing a common source underlying both the MT and the LXX. Van Keulen will later take a clear stand, but at this point the different opinions are presented without criticism, except when dealing with Lefebvre on whose method he rightly comments, “unfortunately … Lefebvre does not distinguish essentially between what he regards to be old materials …, exegetical developments in the Hebrew Vorlage, and exegetical developments in the translation” (17). I find the latter comment extremely important, since recent studies of both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Bible tend to neglect the fundamental diachronic nature of the research involved.

Van Keulen’s conclusion on the state of research is rather sad, as he puts it: “It is hard to resist the conclusion that to a certain degree the variety of opinions on the relationship between the LXX and the MT is due to subjective preferences and personal choices regarding approach, methodological principles, reference materials etc.” (21). I would certainly hope that this is not the case and that we do not come to conclusions on the basis of subjective preferences and personal choices but rather rely on acquired methods and experience in dealing with the leading practice of philology, that is, the comparison between texts. At least, it would seem that van Keulen adopts methods quite similar to those exercised in masterly way by Gooding and that guided my own work on Kings and beyond. Our working hypothesis should not include prior assumptions regarding the priority of one text or another but rather should examine each case in its own right and be ready to accept different results for different cases. The history of the text might be quite complicated and many-sided.

Van Keulen’s balanced study mainly argues against Trebolle-Barrera and Schenker. Indeed, Trebolle-Barrera has not succeeded, to the best of my understanding, in proving that 3 Reigns represents a stage in the transmission of the book that predates the Deuteronomistic redaction reflected in the MT (see below). As for Schenker, he places a great weight on details, ingeniously manipulating every difference to support the priority of the LXX. His explanations, however, do not in my view emerge from the text but are rather imposed on the text.
It is difficult to demonstrate the method of this volume without actually dealing with the materials discussed, but even one full example will exceed the boundaries of a review. Let us refer to one segment of the first text adduced by van Keulen: the account of Joab’s death in 1 Kings/3 Reigns 2:28–34. As with all the other sections that deal with text comparison, the author first provides a synopsis of the texts, arranged in parallel syntactical clauses (I used this arrangement in my books on 3 Reigns 12:24a–z and 1 Esdras and found it most convenient, since word-by-word columns demand precision that the texts do not easily allow and are space-consuming). The synopsis makes it easy for readers to follow the discussion and to consider the texts by themselves regardless of the author’s argumentation. The most significant difference between MT and LXX occurs in verse 29, including a substantial addition. At the outset, van Keulen argues that there are enough Hebraisms to support a Hebrew Vorlage. He thus objects to the general argument by scholars such as Thackeray, Montgomery, and especially Wevers, who tended to attribute the changes to the translator. His conjecture is proven correct by the straightforward reconstruction he offers (the reconstructed elements are set below in brackets):

(1) The first difference regards the information passed on to Solomon regarding the whereabouts of Joab. According to the MT, the king is informed that Joab is “by the altar,” while the LXX attests a reading, specifying that he “is
grasping the horns of the altar.” Van Keulen rejects the line of thought characteristic of Schenker’s method, that is, to find a reason that would explain why the MT neglects the exact information provided by the “original” LXX, such as to show that Solomon reacted as he did because he did not know that Joab was actually holding on to the horns of the altar and therefore did not realize that he was protected by the law of asylum. Rather, van Keulen argues, the LXX assimilates the formulation to the previous verse, where Joab is indeed said to have grasped the horns of the altar, יוחנן מבארו את. Another assimilation follows at the end of the verse where Solomon’s order reads in the MT קַלּ בּ (gp, while the LXX adds καὶ θάψον αὐτόν, that is, θάψον. A similar procedure is followed regarding other discrepancies between the versions of Solomon’s narrative.

As for the more general issues dealt with in the last chapters, let us first refer to the structure of the Solomon narrative as viewed by van Keulen. As mentioned above, he begins the Solomon narrative with 2:12–46, titled “Consolidation of Solomon’s Kingship” (281). Its counterpart is supposed to be chapter 11, titled “Decline of Solomon’s Kingship (ch. 11). However, while chapters 3–10 are certainly arranged in some sort of a chiastic order with the building of the temple in the middle, the surmised opening and ending are not part of this structure. First of all, despite the attractive titles, 2:12–46 and chapter 11 have nothing to do with one another, and their subunits do not correspond in any way. Moreover, 2:12–46 cannot possibly serve as an opening to a new and completely separate narrative, since it is an inseparable part of the preceding narrative. After all, verses 13–25 conclude the Adonijah story that runs through chapter 1, at the end of which the reader is left in suspense: “If he behaves worthily, not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground, but
if he is caught in any offense, he shall die” (1:52). How will things turn out for Adonijah? The answer is given in 2:13–25. The rest of the unit, 2:26–46a, is also tied to the previous, rather than the following, material, since it explicitly constitutes the fulfillment of David’s testament. Attempts to find a perfect structure to the Solomon narrative have failed time and again. The fact is that the reign of Solomon does not have a straightforward beginning. It was obviously constructed as a continuation of a different literary unit, mainly the story of the succession to David’s throne. The main part of 1 Kgs 1–2 is the end of this novel and belongs to the same genre as the stories in 2 Sam 9–20. The genre completely changes in 1 Kgs 3. The succession story and the account of Solomon’s reign were brought together by the testament of David and its accomplishment by Solomon. In spite of the concluding formula to David’s reign (2:10–12), there is no way to set apart the different sections of chapters 1–2.

Despite the considerable discrepancies between the versions, a similar structure is offered for the LXX version of the Solomon narrative. In my view, the inclusion of the miscellaneous additions of chapter 2 in the structure of the Solomon narrative is hardly acceptable. They are out of place, they repeat data extant in the running description of Solomon’s reign, and they are “appendices” by definition. The attempt to design a chronological setting also fails, since the major part of the units that constitute the reign of Solomon are not dated at all.

Regarding the Deuteronomistic revision represented in 1 Kings and 3 Reigns, van Keulen convincingly rejects the assumption, advanced mainly by Trebolle-Barrera, that the LXX reflects an earlier text, since some of the Deuteronomistic elements extant in the MT are not reflected in the LXX. First of all, one should not forget that “the vast majority of Deuteronomistic texts are represented in 1 Kings and 3 Regum alike” (294). Second, and this is very important, “none of the many Deuteronomistic layers proposed by redaction critics coincides with the Deuteronomistic materials … unique to 1 and 2 Kings and lacking from 3 and 4 Regum” (295). Moreover, “some of the elements prove to be tightly connected with Deuteronomistic passages that are actually represented in 3 Regum” (295). This would mean that the Deuteronomistic elements present in the MT and lacking in the LXX are circumstantial and do not combine to prove that the version used by the translator did not feature any of the recognizably late Deuteronomistic strata in the book. Furthermore, the evidence is hardly reliable, since some of the Deuteronomistic passages absent in the LXX are part of units that were reworked by the later reviser, and it must have been he who decided to leave them out, since they no longer fit the new design. I believe I proved this in regard to 1 Kgs 11:1–8 and the alternative story in 12:24a–z. It should be emphasized that the latest Deuteronomistic (or post-Deuteronomistic) elements detected in these units are nevertheless extant in the LXX as well (such as 11:2 and most conspicuously 12:21–24), which is irreconcilable with the context in terms of
terminology, structure, content, and concept), thus clearly showing that the elements absent in the LXX do not prove that the 3 Reigns version antedates 1 Kings.

Van Keulen’s general conclusions (300–305) are mainly in the spirit of Gooding’s work, despite some specific differences. He argues that “in almost all cases where MT and the LXX exhibit a different order, there is good reason to consider the arrangement of the LXX secondary to that of MT.” In addition, “the LXX reading seems to create a picture of Solomon more favorable of him than the corresponding MT reading.” Furthermore, in his view “the text subjected to revision was the Greek one, possibly the OG.” However, “though the reviser worked on the basis of the Greek translation, he must have drawn upon Hebrew texts for his revision.” I am not convinced that the main hand responsible for the major discrepancies between 1 Kings and 3 Reigns belongs to a Greek reviser who used extant Hebrew texts while reworking the OG. Why would a late reviser rework the OG translation that basically agreed with the accepted Hebrew text and adjust it to assumed divergent Hebrew “texts” that he had at hand? It is my view that the later revision reflected in the LXX was mainly the work of a Hebrew reviser; this later Hebrew revision was in fact the Vorlage used by the Old Greek translator.

The book ends with four items: (1) a short bibliography related mainly to the subject under discussion; (2) an appendix; (3) an index of authors; and (4) an index of scriptural references. The appendix presents a clear and accurate synopsis of the miscellanies in 3 Reigns 2 and its parallels in the running LXX together with the MT of 1 Kings as well as the relevant texts in Chronicles. It is an accurate and clear alignment that distinguishes between those parts of the miscellanies whose parallels in the LXX and the MT agree with one another, and other parts where the running LXX and the MT differ from one another. The appendix should have come first, being closely related to the material discussed in the book, followed by the index of references, while the bibliography and the index of authors belong at the close of the book.