TRANSLATION AND SURVIVAL

The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora

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Contents

Abbreviations		xiv
	Introduction	1
	From Greek Bible to Septuagint	14
	The True Text?	16
	The Hebrew Hinterland: Torah and Beyond	20
1.	The *Letter of Aristeas* between History and Myth	24
	Ancient Translation Precedents	24
	Interpreting the Tradition	28
	The *Aristeas* Narrative	30
	Evolution of the Story	34
	Fact or Fiction? The Search for Historicity	38
	The Bible in the Shrine of Serapis?	43
	Reading *Aristeas* as Historical Myth	47
	The 'Meaning' of the Story	51
	Other Memories of the Early Ptolemies	55
2.	Going Greek: Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Alexandria	64
	Imperialism and Culture	67
	Describing the Jews	72
	The School of Aristotle and the Jews	74
	The Monarch and Judaea	79
	Graeco–Egyptians and the Jewish Narrative	82
	A Law Code?	84
	Jewish Needs and Choices	86
	Recipients of Patronage	88
3.	The Jewish Diaspora in Graeco-Roman Antiquity	92
	Diaspora	92
	Ideology	100
	Diaspora Locations and Populations	102
	Jewish Identity	106
	Religious Practice in the Diaspora	107

The Jewish Community 112
Interaction with Non-Jews 114
The Ruling Power 119
Conflict 120

4. Staying Jewish: Language and Identity in the Greek Bible 125
Understanding Septuagint Language 127
Translation Precedents and the 'Dragoman' 136
A Sacred Text 139
The Interlinear Theory: Knowledge of Hebrew 143
Language and Cultural Resistance 152
Vocabulary and History 162
Function and Evolution 172

5. Representing and Subverting Power 176
Talking about Kings 177
Wisdom at Court 181
The Vocabulary of Divine Rulership 185
The King's Anger 191
Toppling Idols 193
Literature and Subversion 204

6. The Uses of Scripture in Hellenistic Judaism 210
Preliminaries: Canon and Canonicity 212
The Hellenistic–Jewish Tradition 216
The Greek Bible and Jewish Literary Production 222
Text and Users: Scripture in Action 227

7. Parallels and Models 239
The Parallel with Homer 239
A Comparative Approach to Jewish Biblical Cultures 243
Situating Hellenistic Judaism 249
Philo and Josephus 251
The Biblical Culture of Hellenistic Judaism 255

8. The Bible among Greeks and Romans 258
Ptolemy's Legacy 259
The Exodus Controversies 262
Further Echoes: Alexandria and Egypt 264

The Roman Milieu 267
The World of Magic 270
Conclusion 276

9. The Septuagint between Jews and Christians 278
The Abandonment Theory 288
Aquila of Pontus 290
Competing Texts 294
Reinterpreting the Evidence 296
Jewish Attitudes to Translation in the Second Century 303

Bibliography 314
Index 367

Introduction

> The translators sit and recycle it all to another
> recycling plan that has no end, and the spirit of God
> hovers above with the whirring wing-blades of a giant fan
> whipping the air, the words whipped over and over like foam.
>
> The translators flee their burning cubicles
> Run out into the streets crying 'Help!'
> And make their way to other, calmer conferences.
>
> Yehuda Amichai (translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld)

The Septuagint was the first major translation in western culture. The conversion of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was a new departure for which new tools had to be forged. The size of the initial project alone, the rendering of the first five books of the Bible, the 'books of Moses', made it a very large enterprise already at an early stage of its creation, and the rest of the biblical books, the other three-quarters of the Bible, were to follow. The significance of this achievement was far-reaching: without a Greek Bible, European history would have been entirely different—no western Jewish diaspora and no Christianity.

This book, then, is a book about a book, or rather about a translated book and its impact; about its ancient creators, and its early users and receivers, all of them Jewish speakers of Greek; about its meaning to them; and about how it moulded their lives and their relationships with the world in which they lived. We shall soon discover, however, that nothing is straightforward about this seemingly simple statement. Even the name 'Septuagint', a Christian coinage, is a misnomer, as we shall see. The translation is in reality a massive collection of translations, and a collection which had vague and variable

limits in the Christian period.[1] We do not know who the translators were, although it is wholly clear that they were scholarly Jews who knew both Greek and Hebrew well, and that they were quite numerous, spread over time and probably over place too. We do not know their dates, not even for sure when the work really began, though there is a lively and persistent ancient tradition that it was initiated by one of the greatest of the Ptolemies. Would that we could know how the translators toiled, whether in teams or entirely individually, and how they were supported and rewarded.

The principles, assumptions, and purposes of the Septuagint translations are also often a matter of conjecture, for they are not transparent to us. Physical remains of the Greek Bible translations from pre-Christian days are rare in the extreme: the very earliest, of the second century BCE, are just minute scraps of papyrus or leather, impressive in their survival and in their closeness to the date of the translation itself. A handful of slightly later texts, from the late first century BCE, or the first century CE, offer interesting textual variants suggestive of scribal revision and therefore of Jewish care, already then, for the exact matching of Greek to Hebrew.[2] Among these, the Deuteronomy fragments of Papyrus Fouad 266 also contain an intriguing form of the tetragrammaton (Divine Name) as ΠΙΠΙ, inserted awkwardly into the text, which gives us perhaps an inkling of the scribes' sense of God and suggesting that here there is continuity with the later Jewish tendency to avoid expressing the Name.[3] The first biblical manuscripts of any length, in the Chester Beatty collection, are thought to be Christian and of the third century.

There is nowhere near enough from which to reconstruct the history of the material text of the Septuagint as a Jewish document. We have some idea, but not nearly enough, about what was done with the texts: Sabbath readings are perfectly well attested, but beyond that it is mostly guesswork. Parallels are hard to come by. Translations in the ancient world, while fulfilling many of the same social functions as in the modern world, naturally operated in very different circumstances and with different traditions behind them.

[1] This is explained below, p. 21.
[2] On all of these, see below, pp. 15–20.
[3] On P. Fouad 266, see Dunand 1966; Aly and Koenen 1980.

And last but not least these are translations of a very special type of texts. The Hebrew original texts were holy books, and the translation was supremely important, in some sense also holy for its users. But the connotations of holiness and sanctity changed through time, and we cannot assume that these are just the same for those who cared for the books then as in later Judaism.

The original core constituency for the translations was Greek-speaking Jews (including converts and perhaps also sympathizers with Judaism) inhabiting, mainly, the Greek cities of the eastern Mediterranean. That itself is a most elusive world, often not well documented. It is true that the making of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures is commonly associated with Alexandria, the city which epitomizes Hellenistic Judaism for us, and the translation indeed began there: its foundation myth, the legend of Aristeas, presents itself as quintessentially Alexandrian, fixed in the topography of the city. But the stage for our story is far larger, extending wherever Jews engaged with the Greek language. Some of the translated books beyond the Torah (the five books of Moses that make up the Pentateuch) may not have emanated from Alexandria at all and may be presumed to have been translated by scholars in other centres, perhaps Syria or one of the cities of Asia Minor. This was, in short, the Bible of the Jewish diaspora over half a millennium at least, and in some areas much longer than that. And yet the history of that diaspora is told without them. We are fortunate if the Greek Bible receives a passing mention there; usually, it is an invisible presence. Here, it will occupy centre stage.

For all that, there is much to be said about the significance of the translation in its own time and about its role over a very long period. We can look at what was written about and around it. We can devise different techniques for assessing the engagement of the translators with the worlds to which they belonged. We can look inside and consider how, through their interpretations of delicate or controversial matters, the translations might express the way translators and readers perceived their situation in the world and defined themselves. We can think about their choice of translation language: even where their grasp of the original Hebrew was partial, that in itself tells us something about them. And we can assess how later Christianization has distorted interpretation of the evidence.

Peter Fraser has reminded us that the Septuagint translation of the Jewish Torah 'forms a larger bulk of Alexandrian Greek literature than any other single item'.[4] Moreover, the translation language—sometimes so perplexing—in which the Septuagint is couched, embodies more of the common post-classical Greek language, the koine, than perhaps any other body of texts.[5] That the first great translation of the West was made at all owes as much to the particular role of Greek as the dominant language in the world of its making as to the particular role of the Bible among the people who used it. The simple fact is that the Septuagint is part and parcel of the history of Greek culture, if within that culture we allow their proper place to the minority groups that shared in it. The standpoint might be that proposed by Bowman and Woolf. Commenting upon 'the privileged role accorded, in general histories and syllabuses, to Greeks and Romans, as opposed to Etruscans, Carthaginians, Egyptians, Semites and others', they say that 'an authoritative critique and genealogy of the notion of a classical world, along the lines of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, is still awaited'.[6] Or, again, we might cite Fergus Millar's more recent words on 'redrawing the map':

> In a 'Western' culture based on a (very partial) fusion of Judaeo-Christian and Classical traditions, it is puzzling to reflect on how very few students of Greek will have been offered the chance to read a private letter on papyrus or an honorific decree put up by a Greek city—or the Septuagint, or the New Testament or Josephus or Eusebius.[7]

The Greek Bible translations are not quite what they seem. What began, when the translation started on its long road, as an unusually creative product of a period of cultural flowering at the dawn of Hellenistic civilization, and as the foundation text for a new Jewish diaspora, has ended up as the Septuagint, a part of Christianity. This cultural artefact moved far from its original habitat. That this is what happened is a part, a major part, of the story of Christianity's emergence, and its very laborious parting from Judaism. From one

[4] Fraser 1972: 687 ff.
[5] See now Lee 1983 and Evans 2001.
[6] Bowman and Woolf 1994: 14 (Introduction).
[7] Millar 2006: 506.

point of view, it is a story of appropriation and eventual loss. Along with the Septuagint, Hellenistic Judaism, a remarkable hybrid culture, was itself in part subsumed and absorbed into the Christian church. The existence of that culture was what made possible the spread and growth of the Church. But its transference allowed the recipients conveniently to sideline, to by-pass and sometimes even to forget the Church's original Jewishness and its intimate connection with Judaism. The Septuagint is thus a collection with a contested history.

The result of the Greek Bible's divorce from its primary users and generators has been its existence in a kind of vacuum, as a disembodied text. The great textual scholar of the New Testament, Eberhard Nestle, felt able boldly to state that about the Septuagint's 'pre-Christian times, we know next to nothing'. Restoring this great work to its position means, first of all, putting it back into the Jewish and the Greek worlds which produced it. The quest is to understand how for many centuries these translations enabled and governed Jewish life in the Graeco-Roman world. It was another great German scholar, Martin Hengel, who wrote: 'the Septuagint represents anything but a unity. Rather, it stems from . . . turbulent history, and represents the most important self-witness to Greek-speaking Judaism'.[8]

The Septuagint has a very marginal, if not invisible, place in contemporary culture, sharing, indeed, the fortunes of the Bible in modern secular societies, but suffering the same fate writ large. Despite its size, and its continuing significance to orthodox churches, the Septuagint corpus has a minor role even inside Christianity. For Protestant readers a few well-known narratives, which did not become canonical but which, in Greek, are part of the Christian Septuagint corpus, such as the stories of Tobit, Judith, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon, are familiar as part of the Apocrypha.[9] On the scholarly plane, the Greek Bible figures as the indispensable source of the New Testament. For specialists, the Septuagint has been a vast repository of textual data, giving access to a text of scripture earlier than anything known until the

[8] Hengel 2002: p. xii.
[9] Below, pp. 16, 21.

discovery of the Qumran fragments. There have been a few champions of Septuagint as a whole.[10] But the Septuagint translation could never have the seminal literary role that the King James version has had in England or Martin Luther's Bible in Protestant Germany or the translations of Moses Mendelssohn or Martin Buber for German Jewry in the modern age. The language of the Septuagint translation is a brilliant creation which served its purposes wonderfully well—social, religious, and ideological. To the reader of today it has its appeal, but it is characterized by a somewhat ungainly deployment of the common Greek, the koine, of the post-classical era. The density and reverberation of the original Hebrew is echoed, but in fainter form, by the essentially word-for-word translation technique.

In Jewish tradition, the role of the translations was inadequately acknowledged, and often not at all, for a variety of reasons. The chief among them was the promotion of the Hebrew language, and therefore of scripture in Hebrew, as markers of national identity, both by Judaean nationalists—coinage and documents in Hebrew were associated with both the major revolts against Roman rule—and, later, by the Rabbis of Palestine. Moreover, the Rabbis, who came to dominate the record, did not write history for its own sake—what they did not need to know they allowed to lapse into oblivion. Early Christian appropriation of the translations was another factor, which cannot be entirely ignored in interpreting the Jewish reaction; but neither should it be over-estimated.[11] Finally, the Septuagint has suffered, in the Jewish milieu, from the symbolic and pejorative associations surrounding the notion of an essentialized 'Hellenism'. Whatever it has meant in the academy, this problematic concept has been viewed popularly and in traditionalist circles not just as a symptom but as a source of assimilation, epitomizing abandonment of the inherited tradition, the equivalent of whoring after strange gods.[12] Propaganda directed against the Greek translation emerged in the late rabbinic period, as we shall see, leading by a gradual but inexorable process to all but the most tenuous recollections of the translation's Jewish past.

[10] On a Victorian champion, Edward Grinfield, see pp. 286–7.

[11] As we shall discover in Chap. 9.

[12] For 'Hellenism' as metaphor and 'other' in Jewish culture, see Shavit 1997; Rajak 2000e.

The Greek Bible had served, however, as a bridge for Jews to the Greek cultural mainland, even if it was a bridge which most often carried one-way traffic. The existence of a Bible in Greek made possible the remarkable flowering of the diaspora in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean. These were the communities which determined the pattern of Jewish life outside Palestine for centuries, developing the synagogue as an institution, and modelling prototypes of relations with the ruling power, with the dominant culture, and with the peoples with whom they mixed. Foreign rule was the condition of life in Palestine too, for a large part of the period, and, there too, Greek cities stood, some of them with Jewish minorities. But for the Greek Bible, the diaspora, from the early Hellenistic period to the late Roman, constitutes the heartland. It is to its people that the Greek Bible in the first instance belongs and to this setting that I propose to restore it.

This great act of intellectual bridge-building on the part of Greek-speaking Jews served both to connect and to separate. By virtue of their close adherence to their source language, Hebrew—their high degree of 'literalism'—the translated books did not, on the whole, read as though they were making a bid to be part of elite Greek literature. Yet the translation technique was far more than a life raft, a makeshift access device to scripture for a world without Hebrew. We shall discover that in fact, and paradoxically, the Greek Bible, through its chosen linguistic vehicle, promoted continuing and close contact with the Hebrew language, rather than the reverse. Ownership of their holy scriptures in Greek could help to position the Jewish minority advantageously in relation to the Greek and Roman cultural imperialisms under which they fell; but it also enabled this minority to have things two ways, both to play and not to play the game, both to take account of the prevailing power-structure, engaging in a degree of measured acculturation, and at the same time, quietly, but most persistently, to assert their underlying independence. An important thread in the present study, informed no doubt by a post-colonial consciousness, and in keeping with recent interpretation of the social role of translation, is how the Septuagint worked to achieve accommodation for a colonized group, how the nature and uses of the translation enabled them to define their own hybrid identity, and to retain control over their essential values in relation to the powers-that-be. This recipe for cultural survival, and

even a degree of sly subversion, are inherent in the text-centred Jewish culture of the Graeco-Roman diaspora. This means that approaches to the Bible (in Hebrew) and its interpretation fostered by Jews in other contexts will be relevant to my study.

Those who have written about the Greek Bible have tended to overlook the Jewish side of the equation altogether. They have often relied upon a rather static understanding of the Judaism of the period. Old ideas about the sects of Second Temple Judaism (especially the Pharisees), about the meaning of the 'dispersion', the 'legalistic' character of the Torah, the closure of the canon and the early fixity of the text, about Jewish 'literalism' and the diminished position of the Hebrew language, still underpin theorizing about the Septuagint. But our picture of this period is now quite transformed, and still developing. In particular, the Jewish diaspora has in the past quarter century or so been revisited, intensively researched, and dramatically reassessed.

One element of progress is that 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' are no longer quite so regularly pitted against each other as those automatic polar opposites which could unite only through the birth of the Church. Furthermore, Jewish communities in the Greek cities of the diaspora have proved to be very different from their stereotypic portrait. They were not inward-looking fenced-off entities, closed to the outside world, standing rigid in their not-so-splendid isolation as they refused to join the great Hellenistic enterprise. It is possible to think about them and their communities in social and cultural terms, not simply as carriers of a 'faith'. *Ioudaios*, the standard designation of a Jew in Greek writing and in inscriptions, incorporates a bundle of attributes, refering to ethnicity (membership of a people with real or fictive genealogical links) and to geography ('originating from' or 'belonging to Judea') as well as to membership of a religious group (worshipping the God who resided, or had resided, in the Jerusalem Temple).[13] The *ioudaioi* of the diaspora were rather good at the arts of social accommodation and of cultural survival, and the Septuagint was their main instrument.[14]

[13] See now the effective arguments of D. Schwartz 2007 against Mason's position that *ioudaioi* in ancient Greek means only 'men from Judaea'.

[14] My conception of cultural survival is close to that of Weitzman 2005 and we are concerned with similar modes of behaviour–absorption, resistance, finding friends–in short, the behaviour of the weak. But it is striking that even his study leaves the Bible out, focusing instead on the sometimes subliminal influence of the Temple cult.

These sea changes in our understanding allow us to position the Septuagint afresh. The interpretation offered here of the Greek Bible translations as a mechanism for cultural survival in the face of powerful forces is, I should stress, by no means a way of letting the old caricature of isolation and misanthropy in again through the back door. On the contrary, this insight facilitates the rewriting of a history which, remarkably often, and in a surprising number of ways, still tends to be presented as a Christian narrative—or at any rate as one influenced by inbuilt Christian perspectives.

My starting-point in Chapter 1 is the familiar one of the tradition of the seventy-two (later seventy) translators sent to Alexandria by the High Priest in Jerusalem by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. The story has it that he commissioned the translation for the great Alexandrian library. At first sight it seems surprising to open a historical study with what has often been dismissed as a pure legend; and it is perhaps even more surprising to initiate this presentation of the Greek Bible as an expression of diasporic cultural resistance with an exploration of the role of one of the ancient world's most illustrious and autocratic patrons. Yet a memory so persistent deserves a cultural historian's attention, and we shall discover that here, as often, memory and myth are intertwined and tradition is not wholly to be dismissed. We shall also discover, by means of a careful reading of the narrative of the Septuagint's charter text, the *Letter of Aristeas*, with its inseparable mixture of fact and fiction, and then through comparison of this with lingering memories of Ptolemy in Greek literature, that a fair degree of ambivalence towards the royal benefactor lurks within it.

In Chapter 2, the claim that the King commissioned the translation is found to be quite credible when set against the background of his ambitious cultural imperialism. In the early days of Alexandria, the legacy of Alexander the Great kept alive curiosity about other cultures. Aristotelians amassed and catalogued information, and the Jews and Judaism were within their purview. For the King, too, Judaea and the Jews were a part of his empire which demanded attention. As for the Jews of Alexandria, they tied themselves into the Ptolemaic project at an early date, and they showed striking prescience in their ready adaptation to Alexandria's dynamic recrea tion of the heritage of Athens by their immediate acceptance of the Bible translation. This represents a prompt recognition of the

indispensability of operating in the colonial language, the common Greek (koine) of the age. But the community also appreciated the value of standing back from that project and not forgetting Jerusalem.

This dual approach to the dominant power and to the prevailing cultural norms became the hallmark of the Jewish diaspora through the Graeco-Roman era. In Chapter 3, I seek to portray that diaspora on the basis of the primary evidence for its evolution, picking out the landmarks in its eventful history and stressing the continuity of its social, cultural, and religious structures, above all, the synagogue. The emphasis falls on the articulation of the Jewish community with the broader environment, expressed—sometimes in one and the same time or place—by a high level of individual and group integration into city life. We have evidence of interest shown by highly placed non-Jewish benefactors and sympathizers in the local synagogue. But at the same time there were repeated, sometimes widespread, manifestations of tension and even violence. That experience is both the background and the shaping influence for the Greek Bible which reflects the conflicts of life under an imperial power in a polytheistic world—uncertainty and dependence on the one hand, confidence and self-sufficiency on the other.

The technique of adaptation to the colonial language is the topic of Chapter 4, which depicts and accounts in social terms for the very particular Greek of the Bible translation and is the largest in the book. In Alexandria it was desirable to be Greek, not Egyptian. The koine was shaped by the translators in such a way as to make it possible both to 'go Greek' and to 'stay Jewish'. Their labours were made public in synagogue readings, but their work must also have been conceived with the needs of educators and students in mind. Their seemingly artless and 'literal' translation technique, oriented more towards the source than the target language (in the terms used by translation theorists), made a connection for readers, and above all for hearers, with the traditional language of the Jewish *ethnos*, biblical Hebrew. We can see how many of the distinctive linguistic features of the translations achieved this end. Their auditory impact turns out to play an important part in this. The durability of the translation language is one measure of its effectiveness, for, with limited variation and development, it continued in operation through successive waves of translation activity. It was also

deployed in original works that were written by Jews during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, some of which were, so it turned out, subsumed into the Christian Septuagint (as will be explained below). Semantic innovation, the coinage of new words and expressions or of new meanings for familiar words, is a hallmark of the Septuagint language, the very term 'diaspora' being one of them. This vocabulary, far from being a mere series of solutions to challenges of translation, represents the translators' intensely creative way of melding and contemporizing their different thought worlds. My emphasis in this chapter, and elsewhere too, falls less on Hebrew's formidable status as a holy tongue (an idea which was not fully to find its time until the rabbinic era) and more on its symbolic role as a cultural reference point, a source of unity and a preserver of tradition.

Continual reinterpretation, adaptation, and addition of the biblical text allowed it to be a repertoire for all seasons; and translation is also a form of interpretation. Chapter 5 shows how translations of late biblical texts, especially Daniel, and newer parabiblical texts, like the story of Bel and the great snake (also about Daniel), or the Epistle of Jeremiah, or the Wisdom of Solomon, could have worked as responses to external political authority, often markedly subversive. Twists and subtle modifications intensified themes that were already prominent in places in the Hebrew Bible, and only occasionally can a Hebrew original different from the Masoretic (standard) text be suspected as lying behind the changes. The denunciation of 'idols' and 'idol worship' had new force and point when linked with the vanity of rulers in a period in which manifestations of the imperial cult impinged on everyone. Representations of tyrannical rage brought together motifs taken from Greek political philosophy with those of oriental wisdom literature, all within the framework of a sharp contrast with the justified anger of the God of Israel. In the Hebrew Bible, a rich and distinctive vocabulary was deployed specifically for divine rage, ensuring that it was kept on a different plane from the human variety; this could not be replicated in Greek, but awareness of the distinction remained. For royal rage, translators who were evidently well-versed in the Greek philosophers incorporated themes and motifs from familiar Greek representations of tyrants which spoke vividly to the experience of subjects of the Hellenistic monarchs.

In Chapter 6, I explore the role of the Bible among the people of the Greek-speaking diaspora in broad terms, asking how the centrality of their Bible text functioned in their lives and how far it made the Jews different from other groups. I explain why 'centrality', rather than 'canonicity', is the term I have chosen to use, discussing along the way recent ideas about the development of the biblical canon in this period, in Hebrew as well as Greek. The common text creates a unity across place and time, even if differently read in different milieux. The possession of a text produced continuity and it made a unit of the Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora, with implications for the future. Arguably, scripture was in this more important than the sensibility of Temple and homeland, since it was scripture that defined and established that very sensibility. Jewish culture was built upon the Greek Bible, as the collection was added to and the style was recycled in free compositions. The texts had multifarious uses, serving, as for Jews through the ages, as familiar friends rather than bearers of a remote sanctity. Pressing the evidence makes it possible to speculate a little about the impact of the Bible on the lives of individuals, but we can say far less than we would like.

In Chapter 7, the biblical culture of Hellenistic Judaism is further explored through the comparative use of different models of text-based communities. A comparison is commonly drawn between the role of the Bible for the Jews and the position of the Homeric poems among all the Greeks. This turns out to be more helpful in highlighting the differences between the two rather than the similarities. Comparisons and contrasts within different Jewish cultures take us deeper into the matter, and for this purpose I invoke two other, very different, worlds of Second Temple Judaism and I assess in some detail the role of the Bible within them. One of these two other worlds is that of the Qumran sect who (in the common opinion) gathered the Dead Sea Scrolls and wrote some of them, operating in the Semitic languages of Hebrew and Aramaic; while the other, reasonably deemed a Jewish environment for this purpose, is the mainly Greek-speaking world of the writers of the New Testament and their readers. Both of these represent a type of community of users that might be called 'Bible-soaked', who immersed themselves in biblical literature (or their preferred parts of it); the documents they have left show how their constant rereading and reinterpretation

of those texts was expected to pervade every aspect of their existence. But the lives of the majority of Greek-speaking diaspora Jews were not like this. Bible-centred as they were, they perhaps lived *by* but not *through* Torah. The Greek Bible was an incalculable resource for them. Yet looking as they did in more than one direction, it was important that it could operate as a bridge between their Jewish lives and their immediate surroundings. This was manifestly true for Philo and Josephus, two illustrious if unique individuals, whose closeness to scripture is manifest and whose writings give us access to something of that hybrid thought world.

Although traffic on the bridge was usually one-way, we find in Chapter 8 interesting evidence for sporadic movement in the opposite direction. At Alexandria, the first flush of Ptolemaic interest in the Jewish Law (*nomos*) died away quite quickly. It is perhaps surprising that we can detect any echoes of the Greek Bible at all in what survives of Hellenistic Greek literature. But knowledge and appreciation in philosophical and professional circles surfaces at a later moment, gathering strength in the Roman period. For all social classes, there was another kind of meeting ground in the realm of magic, where biblical quotations in Greek and biblical terminology, above all the Divine Name, were freely used by practitioners and were evidently welcomed by their clients, as we can see from recipes, spells, and curse formulae. These were handed down through the generations, and they survive for us in papyri from late antiquity. Whatever scenario is conjured up to explain the production and use of such material, some response to Jewish scripture on the part of non-Jews has to be implied. They at least knew what it was, and had a sense of what it sounded like; probably quite a lot more than that.

Such forms of contact assisted in the rapid scripturalization of Gentile Christianity which sets the stage for Chapter 9. The new religion was grafted onto Judaism, and Christians defined themselves as the 'new Israel', heirs to the covenant with Abraham and to the 'Old Testament'. For most Christians, that meant the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, on which the entire edifice of Christian discourse was built. The Jews themselves could be deemed obsolescent. The Christian narrative, dominating scholarship until recently, has it that at this point the Jews were goaded into discarding the old translations, which they felt unable to share, replacing them

with the even more 'literal' version of Aquila which could be triumphantly wielded in Christian–Jewish polemic. The abandonment theory can be easily dismantled and the evidence points rather to a growth of Jewish interest during the second century CE in a multiplicity of Greek versions, including their own 'old Greek'. By facilitating new translations, which are by no means a token of lack of interest in the old one, diaspora Jews more than ever expressed their culture through creative biblical translation. And they expressed their religion through their Greek Torah, just as they had been doing for centuries. The Christian appropriation of their heritage was a gradual and untidy process. Once our own narrative is de-Christianized, developments in Judaism can be understood in their own terms.

The Septuagint emerges at the end of my study as a member of a larger world of Jewish-Greek biblical translations. They in turn have the Hebrew Bible firmly behind them. The Greek versions are but part of the broader history of the emergence of Jewish scripture. In the rest of this introduction, I offer basic orientation in the immense complexities of the biblical corpus during its formative period. A range of terms and concepts has already appeared in my discussion and their full meaning is not easy to grasp. Sometimes, indeed, this is because they are in their nature imprecise. It will be useful, too, to understand how many questions remain unsettled about the formation of the biblical canon.

FROM GREEK BIBLE TO SEPTUAGINT

The term 'Septuagint' does not appear in the title of this book, and that is no accident. It is in fact an inappropriate description for the Jewish Bible in Greek. The problem is that 'Septuagint' is a term which evolved in the usage of the early Church and refers to the corpus created there as we find it in the great biblical codices of the fourth century CE.[15] It is precisely these layers of reception that we shall need to strip away, at any rate until the last chapter of this book. But even were we to resolve to stick with the name, as one of

[15] The evolution of this corpus is the subject of the studies appearing in English as Hengel 2002.

convenience, we would soon find that the ambiguities and complications of its usage outweighed that convenience.

At first sight, it might seem to be perfectly obvious what the 'Septuagint' is. It is the great product of Alexandrian Jewry, whose partly legendary creation story is enshrined in that remarkable piece of Alexandrian prose, the *Letter of Aristeas*. Once we begin to look further, however, we find that 'Septuagint' means several things.[16] 'Septuagint' indeed may refer to the Torah, the Pentateuch, as translated in Alexandria, probably in the late third century BCE, that is to say, the term refers to this Torah in the form in which it was originally produced, whatever that was. But what was it? First, most scholars now accept the view associated with Paul de Lagarde, that one single, original version ('Urtext') of the entire Pentateuch came out of Alexandria as the starting-point out of which all subsequent texts developed and which is in principle, to a greater or lesser extent, recoverable.[17] But there can be no certainty, and the challenging thesis of Paul Kahle, that more than one version existed from the very beginning, is showing signs of a revival in modified forms. Second, *Aristeas* is unequivocal that the Law was translated from gold-lettered Hebrew scrolls for the great new library of Ptolemy II Philadelphus by the seventy-two scholars from Jerusalem. He more likely meant the entire Torah, but the Greek formulation does not exclude the possibility that only a legal core was covered in the first instalment.[18] Third, while *Aristeas* speaks of the Law, the church fathers soon took to attaching the Aristeas story to the Bible in its entirety and subsuming the whole entity under the rubric of the Septuagint. This is what Augustine was referring to when he wrote: 'the custom has now become prevalent of calling their [the Alexandrian translators'] translation the Septuagint' (*City of God*,18.42). Jerome tried to correct this habit, telling his Christian readers, quite rightly, that 'Aristeas, Josephus and the whole Jewish school' say nothing about translation of the books outside the Torah.[19] Jerome

[16] The issues are disentangled in the various introductions to the Septuagint; but see esp. Dines 2004: 1–24 for a brief, authoritative, and clear analysis.

[17] See Dines 2004: 60 on the two positions.

[18] See further below, pp. 90–1.

[19] Jerome, *Quaest. Hebr. in Gen.*, prologue and *in Ezech.*, 2.5.12.

was not heeded, however, and the label continued to be current in a second sense, as the term for the entire translation. That then turned into a way of describing the Christian Greek canon, or indeed various different canons. The limits of the Septuagint, in this wide understanding, were not clearly defined. Included are the additions to some canonical books as well as the rest of the Apocrypha and usually a few further works. The early church, as witnessed by the great fourth- and fifth-century uncial manuscripts of the Greek Bible, included under the name 'Septuagint' various apocryphal or (in the Catholic Church's conception) Deuterocanonical books, selected somewhat arbitrarily from the heritage of Hellenistic Judaism. The very fact that the Septuagint as an entity is considered and studied, rather than just the translated Bible, attests to the ineradicable imprint of the early Church. The content of the corpus varies today between denominations. But in any event it is the Septuagint corpus, as it now exists in one or other of these forms, that dominates the scene. So deeply has this development stamped the history of the collection that it will often prove impossible altogether to avoid the Christianized term, imprecise and anachronistic though it may be.

THE TRUE TEXT?

The textual transmission of the Septuagint has been an immensely involved process. The Septuagint text, as it has reached us through the manuscripts, has received layer upon layer of alteration. This is apparently already true even of the three famous fourth- to fifth-century Christian uncial codices: Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and Sinaiticus. An active revision process in the second century CE by scholars ascribed to a Jewish milieu and known as 'the Three', followed by Origen's grand, six-column collations in the Hexapla, had already made the 'old Greek' invisible (even if Origen's purpose had been to salvage it).[20] Further recension in late antique Antioch,

[20] For more on Origen's work, see pp. 291 and 295–6.

ascribed to Lucian the Presbyter, left perhaps an even more significant mark on the text.

The texts that have come down to us reflect not only additional accumulated errors, but also conscious revisions and divergent traditions. The process of revision has been much studied, and it is widely accepted that there was active reworking of part or all of the translation from an early stage, often with a view to getting back closer to the Hebrew. The phenomenon is even visible within the Jewish pentateuchal fragments in Greek, on papyrus or leather, that have been found in Qumran, elsewhere in the Judaean desert, or in Egypt, amounting to a total of sixteen that can with certainty be identified. The two very earliest of these are thought to go back to the first half of the second century BCE and very little of textual interest can be discerned in them;[21] but by the first century BCE, signs of textual revision are evident in some remarkable extracts from an unknown Egyptian provenance (the 112 small fragments of P. Fouad Inv. 266 from Deuteronomy). In one case, the celebrated Minor Prophets scroll from Nahal Hever, this correction, which brings the Greek closer to the Hebrew, albeit sporadic, has been of immense significance to scholars.[22]

For John Wevers 'the textual history of the LXX is part and parcel of the LXX'.[23] Emanuel Tov envisages, rather, such extensive cor-

[21] The two apparent earliest fragments are Rylands papyrus gr 458 of Deut. 23: 8 from Egypt and, from Qumran cave 4, 4Q122 = 4QLXXDeut of Deut. 11: 4. The fragments of P. Fouad 266b and cDeut. and P. Fouad 266a Gen. are the only other known Jewish papyri datable prior to the Common Era. The earliest material is surveyed and analysed in Kraft 2003. Kraft's list of 'possibly Jewish' fragments from Egypt which appear to date from between *c.*1 CE and *c.*400 CE runs to some fifteen items (including one ostrakon) out of a total of some 120 known fragments. But the customary criteria for distinguishing Jewish from Christian scribal practices are challenged by Kraft. Hurtado 2006 accepts the demarcation established by Roberts (see Roberts and Skeat 1983)—principally, Jewish scroll v. Christian codex and Jewish tetragrammaton v. Christian abbreviated 'nomina sacra'. See also Gamble 1995. For the Greek Qumran fragments, see Tov 2003.

[22] The eight P. Fouad 266a Genesis fragments do not reveal any of this. There are also signs of textual revision on the first-century BCE leather scroll 4Q121 = 4QLXXNum. For the Minor Prophets Scroll, 8HVXIIgr, see below, pp. 225 and 301 n. 75. On material aspects of the text, see Kraft 2003.

[23] Wevers 1990: p. xviii.

ruption and alteration in the very early stages of transmission, when the translation resided in separate scrolls that: 'as a result of these corrections, so far as one can tell there were no two identical or nearly identical scrolls in existence for any book of the Septuagint'. His 'rather anarchistic' conclusion was that for 'data . . . created, not in the course of textual transmission, but at an earlier stage, namely that of the literary growth of the books . . . it is questionable whether textual evaluation has any application'.[24] However, Tov also believes that the extent of ongoing correction and revision was such that 'by the second and third century CE a recognizable unity had come about in the textual tradition of the LXX'.[25]

The inherent problems are much greater than those presented by most other texts, just because we are dealing with what is understood, one way or another, as Holy Scripture. This means that it was copied many more times and was much more in use than any standard classical manuscripts. Accuracy mattered more and therefore the text was also revised more—which could make things worse with the damage done by Origen's Hexapla. And still today that is a motivating force underlying at least some of the work done on the text of the Septuagint—to recover, tiny step by tiny step, the first Bible. Textual scholars use the term old Greek for the earliest stage of text that we can get to. Of course, this is still not precisely the original translators' work. A goal, more or less explicit, of so much modern scholarship has been the simple yet at the same time highly ambitious one of recreating the words of the original translation, the old Greek; and in fact it is not hard to find programmatic statements asserting that this is or should be the true purpose of all Septuagint study. So Albert Pietersma speaks of 'what would seem to be of necessity the fundamental and methodologically primary aim of Septuagint research, namely the recovery of the O[ld] G[reek] text'. And Sydney Jellicoe in similar vein decreed that the point of it all was 'the recovery of the Greek text as it left the hand of the translators'.[26] It is no exaggeration to say that Septuagint research

[24] Tov 1997: 261–3.
[25] Tov 1999: 1; cf. Bickerman 1950.
[26] Pietersma 1985; Jellicoe 1974, Prolegomona.

until recently was understood as essentially textual criticism—understandably, for there is work there for many lifetimes.

There are further complications: the text of the Hebrew Bible was pluriform through the crucial period. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed substantial deviation in the case of some books, with major consequences for scholarship. So we cannot be sure what Hebrew was originally translated. And we cannot know exactly what Hebrew was available to any revisers or re-translators. But we must assume that the Hebrew also continued to be in constant interaction with the Greek. Masoretic-type texts emerge early, but the Masoretic Text which is in standard use by Jews today dates back only to the sixth century CE.[27] Thus, an even more intricate task within the domain of textual criticism is the exploitation of the Greek as a route to our understanding of the development of the Hebrew text. The Qumran material has of course transformed what was a somewhat desultory activity into an all-absorbing investigation. It was interesting to find a distinct reserve over these purely textual goals evinced in a review by James Barr of a Lexicon to Aquila's Greek translation, back in 1967.[28]

And so, because of the complexity of its relationship with a range of Hebrew precursors, because of the sheer number of recensions which the Greek text underwent, and because of our lack of grip on the scope and purpose of these, the textual history is one of mind-bending difficulty. Naturally, then, the Septuagint has been a hunting ground for textual critics, and at times in the past it was virtually abandoned by scholars with other kinds of interests, to remain the exclusive preserve of the textual critics—probably without too much regret.

This then is truly daunting material. For anyone dealing with the Septuagint, the complications can be crippling. Indeed they have

[27] The standard work on text criticism of the Hebrew Bible is Tov 1997.

[28] Barr 1967 reviewing Reider-Turner's lexicon to Aquila's translation (1966). Barr identifies Turner's main aim as isolating, via Aquila, the effects of Origen's Hexapla on the Greek text, in order to achieve a purer Greek text—and thus to get to an earlier Hebrew text. He casts doubt upon whether much of this can ever be achieved by such means and he reminds us that Aquila's translation was important for itself, as a milestone in the history of translation techniques, of the Greek language and of Jewish Bible interpretation.

paralysed many. They are enough in themselves to make the Septuagint unapproachable, and to have rendered it so little known outside specialist circles. I venture to suggest that there is a great deal we can take out of the text without worrying about textual obstacles. In many places there are no variants. Broad tranches of wording stay constant across textual diversity. Another point on which I lean is that at any one place and time people had their own conception of the original work of the Alexandrian translators, whether or not they could be sure that the text in front of them was that text; and that conception is eminently worth discussing. Since the translation is just that, a translation, questions of faithfulness to the original inevitably arise. Since it is the translation of a holy book, the questions arise in an acute form. Because scholarship has to labour so hard to recover 'the text as it left the hands of the translators', and the Hebrew behind that, the text's immutability is itself an object of primary concern, as it already was in the early Church. Suffice it to say that here I do not foreground the issues which have dominated, at a guess, 90 per cent of Septuagint scholarship for the past century-and-a-half, and that have deterred even the more adventurous from entering wholeheartedly into other important and interesting questions.[29] One needs to be aware of the instability of the text and to understand how to handle it. But I contend that it is possible to write about the history of the translations without engaging in continual text-critical study—and without waiting another hundred and fifty years.

THE HEBREW HINTERLAND: TORAH AND BEYOND

The Septuagint has important differences from the Hebrew Bible. There is a substantially different ordering of the books. There are book titles for the books of the Bible—we owe many of the familiar

[29] Like all generalizations, this one of course is not entirely fair: as early examples of work which sought to advance our understanding of questions of wider significance by relating the Septuagint translations, however hypothetically, to Jewish practice, I would single out Thackeray 1923.

English names, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and so forth, to the Septuagint (though it should be noted that Alexandrian Jewish writing preferred the name *Exagogē* for Exodus).[30] Even more strikingly, there are extra books and there are additions to some translated books. What we describe as the Septuagint was put together in the early Church. The idea was once accepted that our Septuagint corpus represents a selection of Greek books, wider than the Hebrew Bible, already constructed by Alexandrian Jews into their own particular canon, out of which grew the Septuagint of the church; but the evidence is lacking.[31] Rather, a lack of definition about the precise constitution of the Hebrew collection, beyond the Torah, was shared by all branches of Judaism until well into the rabbinic period. The Greek-speaking Jewish world participates in the same process of development. In other words, not only is there no one thing which is 'Septuagint'; at the stage which concerns us, it is also not clear that there is such a thing as 'Bible', if we mean a defined, clearly delimited corpus—which is what the word 'Bible' implies. A 'canon' may have been forming, but was not yet formed in our period. Indeed, from the Jewish angle, there is no distinction between those books which are part of the (Christian) Apocrypha, and all the rest of Jewish–Hellenistic literature.[32]

We can at any rate hang onto the certainty that all Jews distinguished the Torah from the rest. True, the definition of Torah, too, can be elusive, referring to the ten commandments as a minimum (the core revelation from Sinai); or else including the Levitical laws as well; or perhaps the Pentateuch from the twelfth chapter of the book of Exodus onwards. At its most extensive, Torah for the Rabbis can comprise the entire written Torah together with the open-ended collection of oral commentary upon it, that is to say, Torah with interpretation. Seth Schwartz expresses this from the perspective of a modern theorist: '"Torah" was a set of negotiations between an

[30] Perhaps, as N. Cohen 1997 suggests, this was because of the strong theatrical associations of the word *exodos*.

[31] The Alexandrian canon theory was disproved by Sundberg 1964 to near universal satisfaction. See Barr 1983: 56. Barton 1986: 27–34 summarizes and endorses Sundberg. Detailed summary in *BGS*: 112–18.

[32] On which see Goodman 2001 and 'The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha' in Collins 2002: 55–61.

authoritative but opaque text and various sets of traditional but not fully authorized practice'.[33] But most often it is simply and obviously the five books of Moses.

In Greek, Torah vocabulary yields to a significant semantic shift. There are new connotations. But the reference continues the same. The five books stand out as a unit. Thus, for example, these books are the principal object of Philo's copious biblical exegesis. The Hebrew Torah, whose root meaning is 'teaching' or 'instruction'—commonly, in the Wisdom literature, of a father of his son or wise teacher of a disciple[34]—is generally rendered by the Greek *nomos,* with its cognates, whose root meaning is 'law' or 'custom'. This becomes the standard Jewish–Greek rendering.[35] There is no doubt that the word can operate from an early stage as a kind of calque of the word 'Torah', taking into Greek and to Greek readers much of the associative range of the Hebrew. So, while *nomos* means 'law', about seven-eighths of the Septuagint instances of the Greek word translate not Hebrew legal words such as *mitzvah, hoq*, or *mishpat*, as one might have expected, but Torah.[36] This amounts to as many as 250 to 300 appearances, above all in the Psalms and the prophetic books.[37] Interestingly, however, *nomos* is not used by the Genesis translator(s).[38] What has happened is that the semantic range of the term *nomos* expands, through frequency of Greek–Jewish use, rather

[33] S. Schwartz 2001: 68.

[34] e.g. Prov. 6: 20–3; 7: 1–4; 13: 14.

[35] On *nomos*, cf. Chap. 4, p. 165. Schechter 1909 provided the classic expression of the gap between these two semantic fields in the two languages. Note the sensitive discussion, written from a twentieth-century Jewish–Christian perspective, in Ellison 1983. Other occasional renderings of Torah in LXX are *logos, exēgoria, biblion, diagraphē, diathēkē, taxis* (once each), *entolē* (4), *prostagma* (3), *thesmos* (2, of parental teaching), *nomothesmos* (once), *nomima* (6), *deuteronomion* (2, for *mishneh hatorah*). Cf. Schröder 1996: 21–5.

[36] On the other hand, the relatively fixed translation of *mitzvah* is *entolē* and it is revealing that in two Jewish epitaphs from the city of Rome, *CIJ*, i, 203 and 205 (from between the second and fourth centuries CE) the deceased is described as *philentolos*, a lover of the commandments.

[37] There was no doubt, as Dodd points out, that the Septuagint translators knew perfectly well the Hebrew meaning of Torah. That they understood the semantic shift is clear from their rendering of the root *yod, reh, heh* and the *hiphil, horah,* by *didaskein, deloun, deiknunai, sumbibazein, anangelein*: Dodd 1935: 30–3.

[38] Genesis has *ta nomima*, once, for Torah: see Harl and Alexandre 1986: introduction: 54. *Nomos* does appear in the Exodus translation however.

than that of 'Torah' shrinking to 'law' alone. There is arguably some room for such growth in the semantic range of the Greek word.[39] The expanded use remains fixed in the usage of Greek–Jewish writers through the centuries. The more focused term *nomothesia*, 'legislation', appears in later texts, and is liked by Philo. The cognates of the Greek *nomos* include words like *nomima*—practices, customs—terms which again allow room for Jewish–Greek writers to build upon the original concept.[40] But behind all such developments lies the Mosaic code, as set forth in the five books, while the language of *nomos*, that catchword of Hellenistic Judaism, encapsulates in miniature the great task of preserving and adapting the code through the endless process of translation, re-translation, and active engagement.

[39] A recent tendency has been either to widen the scope of the Greek *nomos* or to suggest that the sense of 'divine law' was always a possible meaning of the Hebrew Torah, even if it encompassed more than law: see Segal 1987: 131–45 and Richardson and Westerholm 1991; but the gap remains.

[40] This is in fact is an interesting half-way house, because it is characteristically the word used in Greek ethnographic accounts. For example, see Bar-Kochva 1996.